

# **Becoming an Advocate**

Challenges at home, school, and  
work bring out the advocate in me

**A**fter I finished all the sections of this book, I looked back on everything I have done in my life and wondered how I became an advocate. And more importantly, why did I become one? Were advocacy skills something I was born with? Was I destined to be an advocate? Or was it simply a choice I made, like the choices I made regarding where I lived, or whom I dated, or what music I listened to? How deep was this strain of advocacy within me? And why did I choose the causes, issues, and projects in which I became involved?

Perhaps if I could determine the origins of my advocacy propensities and interests, this might help me better understand who I really am. It might also help me to understand why I have taken my path in life. I think that part of the purpose of life is for us to discover “the real me.” That discovery can be enhanced by looking back to “follow our footsteps” and see where we have been, what we have done, whom we have associated with, and how we have spent our time and resources. Either our actions are manifestations of our true inner selves or, if not, an examination of our lives’ activities may reveal that we have betrayed our inner sources, our souls, or our true beings.

I started to write this book for my own edification. I wanted to retrace my footsteps over the past 40 years or so, to remember where I have

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been and what I have done. I hoped to revel in my victories and learn from my mistakes. If I could better understand who I am by taking a close look at what I have done, then perhaps I might not only understand myself better, but those with whom I have interacted over the years might also go beyond the surface of our relationships and appreciate who I am and what I have done with my life. I would like to leave this world feeling a sense of self-awareness and satisfaction. I also hope that people who know me or love me, and even those who don't, will themselves gain a greater awareness of who Thomas Frank Coleman really is.

One thing I have learned in life is that one person can make a difference. I remember once in my childhood when I saw a drunken man swimming across the lake near my grandparents' country cottage. I was about 10 years old at the time. He was heading in my direction. I wondered if he were going to make it to shore. I stood there shivering in anticipation. Then I noticed that he was having trouble. He started to gulp in water. His hands were flailing. I could tell that he was going to go under. He was only about 20 feet from shore, but the water was still too deep for him to stand.

I knew I had to do something and immediately thought about my dad. He was a few houses away, mowing the grass at the cottage. I knew that he was a strong man and a good swimmer. If anyone could save this drowning man, my dad could. So I ran to my dad. I pleaded with him to help. He was not sure whether to believe me or not. I started to cry. "Please, Dad, believe me," I begged, "the man is drowning." I showed him blood that was coming out of my foot. "Look, I ran so fast to get you that I cut my foot on something sharp."

My dad jumped into action and ran toward the lake, as I went to the neighbor's house to ask her to call the rescue team. I then ran back to the lake and saw my dad pulling the man out to shore. Apparently, the man had gone to the bottom, but my dad dived deep and searched until he found the guy. He pulled him onto the sand and gave him CPR. Water started gushing out of the man's mouth. He finally started to breathe. My father had saved the man's life.

I learned several things from that dramatic episode. One thing I learned was that my dad was a hero. Sometimes people try to save others and then lose their own lives in the process. But that did not stop my dad

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from rescuing this stranger. I also learned that one person can make a difference. Life-and-death options often depend on the decisions and actions of a single person. I never forgot the power of one – the power of discretionary choice.

Fast-forward about 20 years. David Rosenbaum, the first gay law student I ever met, introduced me to Bob Redmon, a friend of his who was a dentist. When Bob was not working at the veterans hospital, he loved the outdoors. Bob introduced me to Yosemite. For several years I would go with Bob and a few friends to spend a week at this spectacular place. One year, we ventured out of the main park to experience some private waterfalls that were off the beaten path. We got to the top of one waterfall, rested a while, and then started back down. We were walking very close to the granite over which the water was flowing. We knew we had to be careful because one false step could result in a real tragedy.

As the four of us were slowly descending, we were grabbing onto the branches of nearby bushes to keep us steady. Bob was about 20 feet above me. He grabbed onto a branch and moved forward. The branch broke and his feet went onto the watery granite. He started to slide down the waterfall, coming near me. I had a split-second decision to make: reach out to grab his hand to try to stop him, or stand near the edge in personal safety.

Although I had only a moment to think, I knew what I had to do. I reached out to Bob. His hand clasped mine. For a second I thought we were both safe. But then I lost my footing and we both started to slide down the waterfall. I looked forward and noticed that we had only a few seconds before we reached a spot where the granite ended and the water tumbled down to a pool about 50 feet below. I wondered if we were doomed.

But then a miracle happened. As we were sliding down together, my foot hit a small piece of granite that was protruding from the slope. It was enough to stop me, and since I was still holding onto Bob's hand, it stopped him too. Our friends rushed to the side of the waterfall and threw us a short rope to grab onto. They pulled us back to the side and to safety. We were OK.

This experience with Bob brought back memories of my experience with my dad's saving the drowning man's life. Truly, one person can make

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a difference. That was a principle I carry with me to this day. Ultimately, we are responsible for our own actions. We make personal choices each day which affect the lives of others. We should not blame others or hide behind others or wait for others to act. We should make our own choices and take full responsibility for our own actions. We, as individuals, do make a difference in this world.

Although individual responsibility and solitary action are attributes of an advocate, this knowledge does not answer the question about where my tendencies toward advocacy came from. Was I born with an “advocacy gene” or was this something which I acquired through life experiences? My intuition tells me that the seed of advocacy was there all along, but that it was nurtured and it developed as a result of challenges I faced in my youth – challenges presented at home, in school, through the church, at work, and by society at large. These challenges were the fertilizer, the catalyst, to transform an obedient and passive boy into a strong-willed and unyielding advocate for liberty and justice, especially for the oppressed and downtrodden.

I went to Catholic school from the time I started first grade until I graduated in 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Our teachers were nuns who belonged to the Sisters of Saint Joseph. My life in elementary school was rather routine. I would attend school five days a week. Each day we attended Mass prior to starting our class work. I joined the boys choir. I also became an altar boy, helping the priests at Mass. Whether I was serving Mass or not, I would usually attend church on Saturdays in addition to the Monday-through-Friday Masses prior to school. I got good grades and often helped the nuns on Saturdays with special projects. Around the age of 7, I announced that I wanted to be a priest.

When I turned 11, I wanted to earn extra money so I became a newspaper delivery boy for the *Detroit Times*. By then, my routine was attending church, serving at Mass, singing in the choir, going to school, delivering newspapers, and, of course, doing my homework. I also had chores to perform around the house. There was no need for advocacy. I was obedient and dedicated to the agenda of others, an agenda which I had embraced.

Then I became a teenager. I started to discover that I had sexual feelings. I had urges to act on those feelings, but I felt guilty for even

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**My friend Ronnie Schott (left), his mother, and me visiting his brother at a Catholic seminary. We had just finished 8<sup>th</sup> grade.**

thinking such thoughts. I would go to confession to seek absolution for impure thoughts and impure actions. The fear of God had been put into me, not by the Bible but by the catechism and strict teachings during religion classes in school. My intention to be a priest faded. Priests had to be celibate and abstain from all sexual activity. Since a lifetime of sexual abstinence was not for me, then the priesthood was not for me. I announced that I wanted to be a dentist when I grew up. Since my parents had nine children, including me, and since their dental bills were enormous, the idea of eventually having a dentist in the family sounded good to them.

It was in high school when my obedient ways were replaced by my questioning ways. My acceptance of authority was superseded by my

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challenge of authority. Respect for power was replaced by scrutiny of power. Church, school, home, and work presented challenges that were too obvious to ignore, too powerful to resist. I started to flex my intellectual muscles and started to use my communication skills as I stood up to those in power whom I felt were abusing their authority. I started to become an advocate, mostly an advocate for myself and an advocate for the truth.

My dad worked as an insurance salesman, going door to door in a working-class neighborhood in the inner city of Detroit. He would come home tired at the end of his workday, only to have to deal with the demands and problems of a house full of kids. By the time I was 16, there were nine of us children in the house. My father would have stopped having children after four of us were born, but my mother was a devout Catholic who had been taught that birth control was a mortal sin. So they just kept having babies.

By the time he got home from work, my dad was often intoxicated or well on his way. This brought out his verbal aggression. He would often say things that I felt were untrue or that did not make sense to me. I would speak up and we would argue. My mom often pleaded with me to keep quiet, but I felt that someone had to stand up to my dad's nonsensical statements. I guess I can say that my dad taught me how to argue, or perhaps I taught myself how to argue as a way of challenging an abuse of parental authority.

My skills at arguing were also honed at school. Most of my high school teachers did not mind, and perhaps even liked, challenging questions and assertive propositions made by students. But that was not true for religion class. I would ask hard questions and my religion teacher would refuse to answer. I was told not to question religious authority. "But religion is also an academic class," I would reply. "Questioning things is part of the academic process."

My developing advocacy skills were put to the test a few times in my senior year. A new principal took the helm that year. Sister Nathaniel really got me riled up when she recalculated the grade-point averages of all seniors, in preparation for sending them out to colleges to which we would be applying. I knew my cumulative grade-point average at the end of junior year. I also knew what my grades were in the first semester of my senior year. My overall grade-point average should have been listed as 3.875. But

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she had me down for 3.375. How could that be?



**I argued with the principal to get correct grade point averages for our senior class**

I checked with my friends. Their scores were also listed as much lower than they should have been. I went to the principal to question her methods but she would not budge. So I went to each of the teachers. They were sympathetic, but none of them seemed to want to challenge Mother Superior. These nuns had to live with her. So I went to the parish priest. I went to the parents of my friends and asked them to send letters to the principal. I kept the pressure up. After all, this was my future at stake. I worked hard for these grades, so why should I allow someone's mistake to deprive me of my high scholastic standing? Eventually, the principal relented, admitted her error, and revised the grade-point averages. My advocacy skills had paid off, not

only for me but for all of my classmates as well.

These skirmishes with my father and with the nuns at school were nothing compared to what I experienced with my employer. The *Detroit Times* had sold out to the *Detroit News*. By the time I was 16, I changed jobs from being a newspaper delivery boy to being a station captain for the *Detroit News*. Newspapers were delivered by truck to a local outlet, a garage of sorts, called a paper station. Delivery boys would go home after school, change clothes, and come to the paper station around 3:15 p.m. to pick up the newspapers they would deliver to the homes of subscribers on their assigned route. As a station captain, I was in charge of the paper station. I opened it up and locked it when we were done. I handed out the papers to the delivery boys, who would fold the papers and then deliver them. While they were all there inside this rather small structure, I would supervise them and keep them in line. That was no small task considering that I had about 40 boys under my supervision.

The working conditions for these boys got progressively worse during the two years I was station captain. The newspapers used to come to the station in one piece. Now they were often coming in two sections, and the boys had to put the sections together before they could fold them and deliver them. This took extra time. But there was no extra pay for the extra work. The papers used to be delivered to the station by a truck which would arrive about 3:15 p.m. This would give the boys time to deliver the papers and get home for dinner by 5:30 or so. But by the time I was a senior, two or three times a week the truck would not get to the station until 5 p.m. or later, and so the boys would not get home until after 7:00 p.m. They had to sit around waiting for the truck. This was wasted time for which they got no extra pay.

When I was 16, the delivery boys would be required to insert advertising supplements into the newspapers periodically, perhaps once a month. They did not get paid anything for this extra work. By the time I was a senior, these supplements were coming once or twice a week. Again, extra work without extra pay.

The paper boys would have to make the rounds to the homes of their customers once a week to collect the subscription money. They would turn in this money on Saturday morning at the paper station. But they had to collect other money as well. The *Detroit News* sold life and accident insurance to subscribers at a very low rate. Many customers paid for this product. But the newspaper boys did not receive any of these proceeds. They got nothing for their efforts in collecting insurance money.

I was fed up with the way the *Detroit News* was treating these boys. The situation had deteriorated over the years. These kids were being taken advantage of by corporate executives. I decided to organize the newspaper boys into a union. I contacted a representative of the Teamsters and told him my plans. He gave me a thumbs-up and presented me with his business card. "If the company ever hassles you for what you are doing, give me a call," he said. I kept his card, just in case.

The public was not aware of the abusive working conditions and the financial mistreatment of these newspaper boys. Since there were 40 at my paper station, there had to be 3,000 throughout the Detroit metropolitan area. Perhaps I could get the media to inform the public about how these boys were being treated. An enlightened public could put pressure on the owners of the *Detroit News*. The editorial department of the paper would certainly not carry a story about this problem. So I would



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have to entice television news to broadcast the story to the homes of our subscribers. But how would I get that to happen?

“We need a visual event,” I thought. Perhaps we should picket the headquarters of the newspaper company in downtown Detroit. So I developed a plan and enlisted the support of most of the paper boys at my station. We created picket signs to highlight the various abusive practices. The boys rubbed their faces with charcoal to help conceal their identity. We were afraid of repercussions if our bosses found out who the picketers were. To further conceal my identity as the protest organizer, I put on a motorcycle helmet and sunglasses. There was a bus stop at the corner where the paper station was. So about 30 of us got onto a bus for a seven-mile ride to downtown Detroit. The look on the bus driver’s face was one of astonishment. Earlier that day, I called the newsrooms of all the local television stations to alert them that we would be picketing the *Detroit News* at 3:30 p.m.

When we arrived at our location, we all got off the bus, walked to the entrance of the *Detroit News*, and started our picket line. The camera crews were there. Some of us were interviewed on camera. People entering and exiting the building were shaking their heads. Newspaper boys picketing the *Detroit News*? We handed out literature to anyone who would take it. Then, about a half-hour later, we got on a bus and rode back to the paper station. We washed our faces, dumped the picket signs, and the boys started folding the newspapers which had been delivered by truck while we were gone. We turned on the television for the 5 p.m. news. There we were on three channels. Some of us were still at the paper station at 6 p.m. We were on the news then as well. We made our point. We shamed the *Detroit News* and let their subscribers know how uncaring and greedy the paper’s executives were.

A few weeks later, I was summoned to a meeting at corporate headquarters of the *Detroit News*. Somehow they were able to piece things together to find out that I was the ringleader of this protest. They did not want it to spread to other paper stations or other news delivery boys. So they called me in for a meeting.

When I got there, I was sitting at a conference table with a bunch of men in suits and ties. They asked me why I led this protest and what specifically it was that I wanted. I explained that the boys should get extra

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pay if the truck delivered the papers to the station more than an hour late. They should get a penny for each paper when they have to put two sections together before they fold and deliver them. They should earn a penny for each advertising supplement they have to insert into the paper prior to delivery. And they should receive some compensation for collecting the insurance money.

“Do you have any idea of how much your demands would cost the *Detroit News*?” one of the men asked. I explained that I did not know and really was not that concerned about the cost. “These demands are fair and that’s all that matters to me,” I blurted out.

One of the men estimated that it would cost the newspaper company about \$1 million per year to do what I was suggesting. “We will fire all of the newspaper boys before we will give in to these demands,” I was told. One of the executives explained that adults deliver the newspapers in California. “We can use adults here in Michigan, too,” he said. “Do you really want to be the one responsible for all of these boys losing their jobs?” I knew they were trying to intimidate me. They were trying to make me feel guilty. They wanted me to back down. “I’m not backing down,” I told them as I got up and left the room.

A few days later, my parents received a phone call from the management at the *Detroit News*. Company representatives wanted to meet with my parents at our house. So a meeting was scheduled. Before the men arrived, my dad asked the father of my best friend who lived down the block from us to come to our house to be a witness. My dad wanted some moral support. The men came in and explained to the adults the same things they had discussed with me at company headquarters. “I’m not going to back down,” I reiterated. “These demands are fair.”

One of the men started to explain to my dad about problems that sometimes occur in labor movements. “People sometimes get hurt,” the man told my father. “You don’t want anything to happen to your family.” My dad got up out of his chair, pointed toward the front door, and told the men to get out. “No one threatens me or my family in our home,” my dad said in anger. “But, but . . .,” the man said, as my father spoke over him saying “get out.”

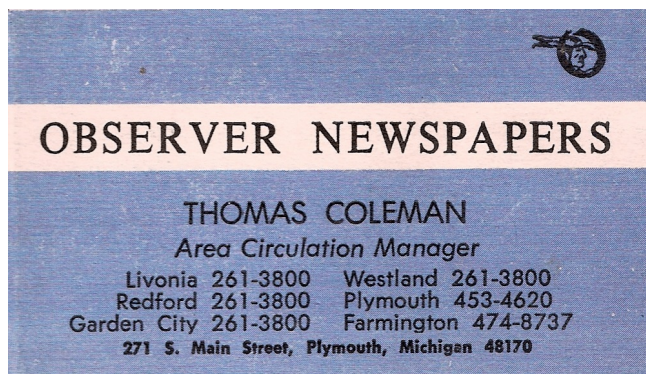
When the men left, my dad had a heart-to-heart talk with me, after he yelled at me, “I would like to kick your butt.” “Do you have any idea of

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what you have gotten us into?” my dad asked. He explained that with \$1 million a year at stake – which was a lot of money back then – it was not unthinkable for someone to do harm to me to put me out of commission. Without me, this whole thing would fizzle and the boys would back down. He was concerned that I could become a victim of violence. Things like that sometimes happen.

About two weeks later, I was fired. So I found the business card of the union representative I had spoken with months earlier. He had me visit his office, where we prepared my affidavit about what had happened and how I was fired for trying to organize newspaper boys. We filed a complaint with the National Labor Relations Board. Several months later, after I had entered college, I got a response from the Labor Board. I won my case. They ordered the *Detroit News* to reinstate me with back pay. I cashed the check, returned to work for one day, and then quit. I knew it was time to move on.

A few months later, my former supervisor with the *Detroit News* contacted me. He knew of a job opening with a chain of suburban



newspapers. They needed a circulation manager for a large area servicing three suburbs. He asked if I were interested. Apparently, my fight with the *Detroit News* had

not turned him off. Instead, he gained respect for me and thought I would be a good manager for this other newspaper chain. I interviewed for the job and was hired. Here I was, a 19-year-old “rebel” of sorts, managing more than 200 delivery boys, and supervising eight adults who were at least 20 years older than me.

By this time I was in college. I attended Monteith College at Wayne State University in Detroit. Monteith was an experimental college,

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which promoted independent thinking and required lots of writing. There were no exams with true-or-false questions. We had to write essays for our exams. Each course I took had two components. There was a lecture each week, attended by about 200 students. Then there was a small class, which consisted of a full professor and no more than 10 students. Most of my small classes involved only three or four students. We had lots of personal attention.

During my first three years of college, I was not sure what my career path would be. By the end of my freshman year, I dumped the idea of being a dentist. The science classes were not enjoyable. I was more interested in history, logic, social sciences, and psychology. But I just could not figure out what career I would choose. Not knowing my career path was one of the most difficult experiences of my life.

Then, in my third year, it suddenly dawned on me that I would make a good lawyer. I liked research. I was a good debater. I loved writing. I wanted to help people. I would also benefit from a career that gave me protection, one that would help me defend myself and others against oppressive tactics of corporate or political bullies. Law school classes would be exercises in self-defense. I did not want to do another year of undergraduate school. Now that I knew what I wanted, I did not want to waste any more time on general studies. I wanted to get into law school right away. But how could I do that?

I asked around and found out that Monteith College had a program that would allow students with good grades to skip their final undergraduate year and to move directly on to graduate school. The first year of graduate school would count as the last year of undergraduate school. The only catch was that I would have to find a law school that would cooperate. I searched around and soon discovered that Detroit College of Law would allow me to start law school without finishing my senior year of undergraduate school first. What a miracle!

I had only one semester left to finish at Monteith College. As the semester ended, however, I found myself in a predicament. One class was on “Mysticism and the Arts.” The dean of the college was teaching the class. Only five students were enrolled. The readings, discussions, and interactions with the dean and the other students were fascinating. The subject matter and the mystics I studied were inspiring. I was so moved

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that I felt if I reduced this experience to writing, the experience would be shattered. My spirituality had been revived by this class.



**Woodburn O. Ross, Dean of Monteith**

paper about why you can't write a paper," he suggested. It was a brilliant solution. I took him up on it, wrote the paper, and passed the class. The next semester, I enrolled at Detroit College of Law.

By this time in my life, I had a boyfriend and we were living in a three-unit apartment building which we had jointly purchased. Our first year together, we lived in a small one-bedroom rental unit. We paid \$80 per month, including electricity. I kept thinking about how we were wasting our money on rent. We should buy something for ourselves. So we devised a scheme to enable us to buy rental income property.

He got an unsecured loan and we used that money as a down payment to purchase a three-unit building in the northwest area of Detroit. To save money, we lived in the basement in a makeshift unit we created, and rented out the three other regular units. Then we did the same thing again with another building. Then we did it again. Within a year, we jointly owned three properties. One was the building we lived in. Another was a duplex which had a single-family home in the rear. The third was a

The final exam was a written paper. What was I going to do? I did not want to write a paper for fear of destroying my own mystical experiences. But if I did not write a paper, I could not pass. If I did not pass, I could not move on to law school. But I passionately wanted to enter law school. These two passionate forces had me paralyzed. So I explained my situation to the dean. I was amazed by his sensitivity and his wisdom. He obviously believed my sincerity. So he offered me an option. "Write a

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four-unit apartment building with a little house in the rear. Altogether, we had 14 units. This meant having to deal with 14 furnaces and 14 water heaters. We had many repairs since the properties, other than the one we personally lived in, were old buildings in a working-class neighborhood.

My involvement with all these properties, and all these tenants, helped me improve my business skills. I also learned a lesson about a dimension of advocacy which I had never really considered: when to back down from a fight.

One day we showed a vacant unit to a married couple. The wife was pregnant. They signed the rental agreement and paid the first month's rent and a security deposit. About two weeks after they moved in, we noticed a lot of people coming and going from that unit. A few days later, I went to the apartment to inquire what was going on. The woman had given birth. There were 16 people inside the unit. Apparently, this was a group of Gypsies. They had rented the place under false pretenses. They just needed a place for a few weeks for the baby to be born. They were now ready to move on.

I tried to explain to the male tenant about the rental agreement and that they would forfeit the security deposit if he did not give me a 30-day notice. But they wanted a full refund. Now! As we stood outside on the sidewalk discussing the matter, he summoned all his people out onto the front porch. There they were. A group of Gypsies. "Do you realize how much damage we can do to that property as you are going to court to get us evicted?" he asked. I saw the light. I had a choice. Give back the security deposit and they leave today, or withhold it and they destroy the place. It was time to back down.

I had learned a valuable lesson. Being an advocate does not mean blindly pressing forward regardless of the consequences. Sometimes a technical victory can mean a practical loss. Winning sometimes requires surrendering.

My first year of law school ended in June 1970. I returned to Monteith College for graduation ceremonies. As much as it seemed too good to be true, I received my college diploma and also managed to finish my first year of law school at the same time. But where was all of this headed? What would I eventually do when I got my law degree? Where would I live? What type of law practice would I have?

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I knew I was a gay man and that I was living in a gay relationship. I felt that Michigan was not a very hospitable place for gay people. I knew someone who had moved from Detroit to San Francisco. I decided to take a vacation that summer to visit my friend. I found out he had a friend in Los Angeles. So I arranged to spend a week in Northern California and three days in Southern California.

That vacation proved to be a turning point for me. People seemed so open in San Francisco. There was lots of street life. Gay people were so open, showing affection in public and having a good time. But Los Angeles had a much warmer climate. If I was going to move 2,000 miles, it was going to be to a warm climate. I decided to move to Los Angeles as soon as I could. I felt in my heart and soul that I was destined to do great things there. Political and social movements have started in Los Angeles. It is rich with diversity. I wanted to make Los Angeles my home.

After I returned to Michigan, I started to send out applications to law schools in California. But even if I was accepted to one of them, what was I going to do with all of the rental properties that my boyfriend and I owned in Detroit? We would have to sell them. But that could take months to accomplish. And many of them had repairs that needed to be done. Where would we get the money for the repairs?

I started telling everyone I knew that we would be placing all our properties up for sale. I prayed that maybe someone we knew might want to buy one or two of them. Then one day I approached Shirley Beaupre and explained to her my situation. Shirley had been a lay missionary in Africa for several years. She had returned to the United States and was now the head of the catechism program at St. James parish in Ferndale, Michigan. St. James was the school I had attended when I was younger. The catechism program was designed for students who went to public schools. They would come to religion classes once a week. I was one of the catechism teachers in her program.

My mother had introduced me to Shirley when Shirley was trying to recruit teachers for these religion classes. When I first met with Shirley, I told her something that I thought for sure would cause her to reject me for a teaching position like this. I told her that if she selected me, I would not push Catholicism and that I would not even push Christianity. Rather, I would encourage students to develop their spirituality. I would expose

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them to a variety of options and let them decide how they wanted to interact with God and develop their religious beliefs.

Much to my amazement, Shirley told me that I was just what she wanted. So for a year I taught catechism classes to 10<sup>th</sup> grade students, including my sister Maryann who was attending public school. We used music that triggered emotional and spiritual feelings: *Tommy*, the rock opera; *Jesus Christ Superstar*; the folk music of Phil Ochs and Joan Baez. We went to the Hare Krishna temple. We attended a Quaker meeting.

Now it was time to leave Michigan and to start a new life in California. But what about the sale of these properties? I was utterly surprised when Shirley told me one day that she wanted to buy all of them. She wanted to be an inner-city missionary and to help poor people in an urban setting. Could this be true? Was this really happening? Yes, it was. Within a few weeks, the deeds were signed, escrow closed, and we had our money. I was free to move on.

I was accepted as a student at Loyola Law School in Los Angeles. I would study and learn and develop my skills as an advocate. I would someday be a lawyer. During my first semester at Loyola, I was not quite sure what type of law I would practice. I studied and hoped my specialty as a lawyer would present itself to me at the right time and place.

It wasn't long until I got my chance to prove I was worthy of the title "advocate" and could take my rightful place in the world as a full-fledged adult and contributing member of society. Advocacy was something that was part of my nature. Effective advocacy would require me to use and enhance my communication skills. It would also require strategic planning. And most importantly, ethical advocacy would occur if I kept in touch with the spiritual dimension of myself.

In retrospect, I believe that I was born to be an advocate. But being effective does not necessarily come with the territory. It requires constant attention to detail. And being ethical in my advocacy has required me to continually listen to my heart.

This book is an account of where my head and my heart have taken me along this long and winding path of advocacy. It explains how my initial quest for gay rights eventually turned into a much broader set of issues and goals. It also tells the stories of the background activities and



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behind-the-scene negotiations associated with a long string of achievements, and a few defeats as well.

Hopefully, others may benefit from reading the details from this slice of history. And who would those others be? Perhaps college students trying to find their place in the world can find some inspiration from this book. Older gays and lesbians may relish my recollection of the last four decades of gay rights,. Or a younger generation of would-be activists may gain insights into the differences between then and now by reading these tales from the trenches. Single people who feel they are still not getting a fair shake in our couples-oriented society may be pleased to learn that their issues have been made more visible. People who have formed families that don't fit the traditional model may take some solace in knowing that family diversity is here to stay.

This book is not just for historians or political science buffs or lawyers. It is for anyone who has ever taken up a cause as well as those who feel they might have some political activism hidden somewhere inside of them which is trying to burst out to the surface.