

66 Tom Sullivan

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M: Now on tape this is Tom Sullivan in here in Saranac Lake. Tell me about yourself Tom, what you wanted to do, why you're here? Just what you've been saying.

Tom: Well you mentioned about the--going into a monastery, you know. I've always wanted to be a monk in a monastery because I realize the potential for the spiritual awareness and contrary to the belief that many people have about monks, they think they've isolated themselves away. But it's typical of the hermit life. If you go into the hermitage or you go into a solitude with love, that's what you take in with you. If you go into solitude with anxieties and hatreds and bigotries, these are the very things you take in with you. And of course you climb the walls, you become a raving maniac. People don't realize that in solitude the person who is going into solitude actually has a more unique, loveable and human relationship with people. We become more conscious of the humanity and of the integrity of the people and so when a person goes into solitude they're not necessarily leaving people they're just retiring a short distance so they can better love people.

M: Tell me something about your own decisions about yourself. You know why you're sort of a semi-monk but you're still in the world. I don't know, whatever it is.

Tom: Well like I say, I've always wanted to be in a

monastery but I realize that for whatever purposes the creator had--has I should say--I have certain aptitudes, I have certain qualifications and I don't think I'd have been able to muster them and fashion them in the sense that I am able to really justify what I--might be, you know, of a better use of the talents. But I realize that I need to be around people some of the time because what I really think that I'm called to do, either, you know, quite possible in a prophetic stage or attitude is to challenge the bureaucracy. Challenge the lack of justice, challenge the lack and the inability of people to deep down and wholeheartedly care about somebody else. And caring is an art. Many people say well I care about this. They care about their car--sure they don't want to lose it. Care about the house--don't want it to burn down. I care about the bike. But there's a kind of caring that is comes out of the inner being of a person. So much so that real true caring, a person finds himself anticipating. Constantly anticipating someone's needs. This is of course the vives that we spoke of at one time. The vives allow us to identify with our surroundings and, of course, you know, I'm a little antagonistic because like I say I haven't perfected this type of association. I'm aware of it and I'm working at it, you know. But I can identify with where people are at. Because the structure of our bureaucracy is really creating an individualism.

Probably the worst disease known to mankind is not the physical diseases, not the mental diseases, but the disease of self importance. This self importance, by and large, can devastate our whole environment and people are doing that.

We--

M: Read and all that business?

Tom: Yeah. But the self importance--get into the I trip, where I so important that we try and dictate and relate to people according to I. My own personal little quirks, my own personal ideas. So much so that I think that self importance can create an attitude in a person that they become overly anxious. That people do not accept what they're saying. Well it took me a long time to realize that you don't really teach anybody anything. There are no teachers. All we really do is enable a person to perceive an idea, cultivate an idea, pick up a good habit. We are actually trying to intimidate and--not by our words, which are good, but by our actions. Aquinas has a great thing that's been a favorite of mine for years. "Your actions are so loud I can't hear a word you're saying." You know it really has a lotta substance to it.

M: Tom, in your own lifestyle what are you doing to get out of yourself and to help others sort of act out what you believe?

Tom: Well, like I said before, I work at it. Every

day is a constant challenge for me to stay on course with these ideas. I can get up in the morning and I can say well Lord I hope I will succeed in being a good citizen today. And I can go to bed at night and say, well you know you didn't do too bad today, Tom. But then a couple of times you might act like an ass, you could have done better. The thing is I have to be constantly aware of my shortcomings. I have to be able to identify with them. Say well you know I could have done better. But I can't run around with a guilt trip. Anybody that has a guilt trip is lost. There's no joy in the world. They don't even enjoy themselves. I think we have--so for me this is what it is. It's a constant effort to spend each day practicing this art of caring. I do care about people. I anticipate quite, most of the time I anticipate people's--

M: So _____ you bring Bertha to church?

Tom: Yeah, I walk her to church. I'm concerned about Bertha because Bertha and I are very close friend. Actually, if you really--probably it's a laughable situation in the bureaucracy, but Bertha and I are like two monks. Really, we have our daily prayer schedule, we eat our meal at noon, we thank the lord for our food, and we're constantly sharing. We don't have any--we don't share out of our want--well most of our sharing is out of our excess. Because we have a lot of stuff people give us, and so we

just constantly share, you know, what we have. So we're practicing the art of caring.

M: That's good. Do you think the Adirondacks is a good place to do this? You can do it anywhere of course, but why did you choose the Adirondacks?

Tom: Well I am--in the back of my mind I--some of the reading I've done and some of the men or women or people of great stature down through the ages--somehow they seem to be born in an area and then they'll leave. And they'll go around and around, but quite often they're drawn back to the very place where they started. And of course I was born in New York City, I came up to the Adirondacks at 11 years old and I went to school here. I quit school, went in the service, I came back I stayed around for a while and then I left for 20 years. I was gone. I traveled around the country. I got involved in different situations, I went to Alaska. And then I was advised by a very close priest friend that I should see my folks that I hadn't seen for 20 years. Well I left everything in Alaska and came down in 80 just before the Olympics, to see my folks. I've been here ever since. And I'm wantin' to go back to Alaska everyday. But I'm still here.

M: Maybe you're meant to be here.

Tom: Well I kinda think I am. In the Adirondacks, you know, of course is one of the unique places in the United

States. Beautiful country in Montana. Beautiful country in the high rockies. Or up along the Chinese wall in Montana or down through the great mountains there is. But I think for accommodate there to deal with people and to deal with nature, think the Adirondacks has a very, very nice offering for somebody who really wants to combine kind of a meditative life, a contemplative life, and an active life. And I kind of see myself trying to do that. Combining the active and the contemplative.

M: That's good. Tell me do you work ever or do you get money from home?

Tom: I work whenever I can. I haven't worked for some time now. When I had my land down in Bloomingdale that I gave away, I just felt that I--it was the wrong place at that particular time. But right now I'm living more on providence. I put in for some help from social service and--but I'm looking for work. Soon as I find something I'll give that up. And Bertha and I live together. Bertha has her social security so we combine our incomes and we're able to--we're able to get by real well. Televisions and telephones are something we learned to do without. We live very simple. You can see we still--we moved in in October in this place--everything is still in boxes. We could care less.

M: You met Bertha in Bloomingdale?

Tom: No, I was in--living in my place in the woods and I went up every day to see Bertha and I cooked lunch for her and we meet every day. Here we're able to walk over to church, whereas in Bloomingdale it was impossible. Psychologically and physically Bertha needs the activity of getting out. She can do that here. She couldn't do it in Bloomingdale. At her age she still has a very good mind and she has good physical coordination. So she really needed exercise and she couldn't get it out there. And that was one of the things that created the problem. Bertha usta spend an awful lot of time up in the hermitage. And some of the people thought it was terrible a 80 year old lady stuck out there in the woods. I'm only 55.

M: You're a bit older than me.

Tom: I spent, you know, all of my time--most of my time there. And then quite often Bertha'd stay 4 or 5 days. Spend a couple of days at her place in Bloomingdale, I should stay over. The facilities were big enough where you could accommodate, you know, the two of us but people were uptight about it. They couldn't understand it. Well, you can't really convince people to believe anything. You have to allow people to be who they are, and think the way they do. And the people who are going to challenge the bureaucracy are constantly gonna be getting abused and tensions. Because the people in the bureaucracy, actually I

think people who live a simple life based on some kind of religious conviction, what they are they're challenging the people so much so that in order to re--for the people to retain their status quo they almost are compelled to dislike another person for living in solitude, you know.

M: Tom, I'm running out of tape, but I think you gave me--