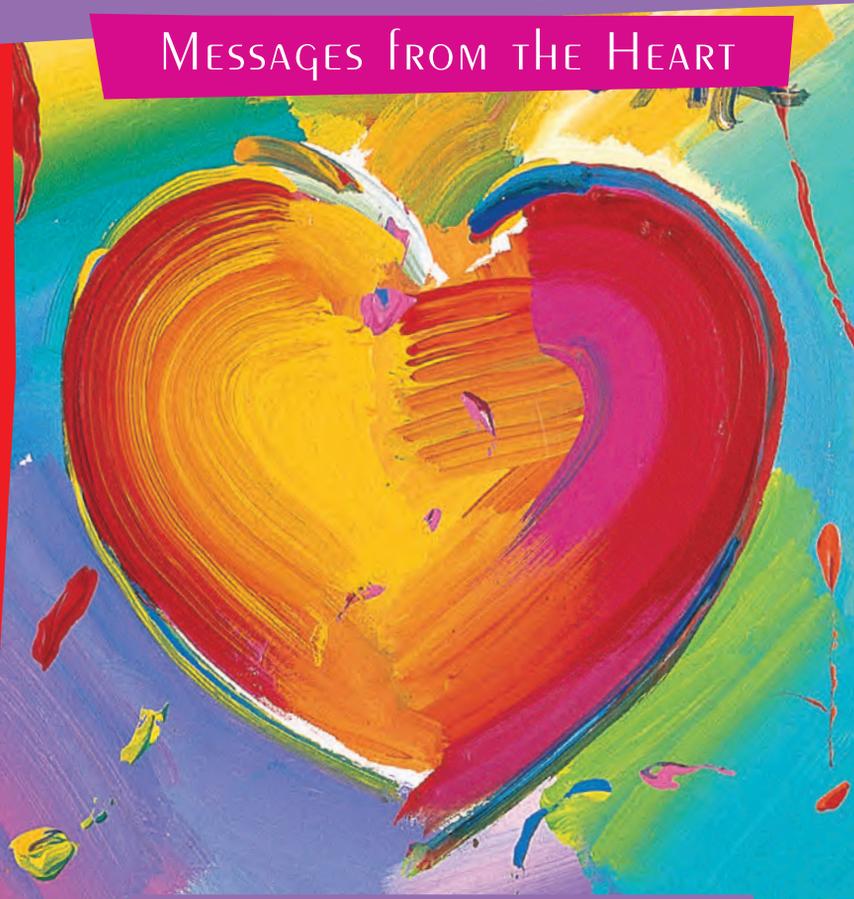


WHAT IS SPIRIT?

MESSAGES FROM THE HEART



LEXIE BROCKWAY POTAMKIN

With ART by PETER MAX

“Spirit is the essence of our being—love.”

Gerald Jampolsky, M.D.; and **Diane V. Cirincione, Ph.D.**

“Spirit makes you succeed when everything else fails.
(*I have some jokes in my files that could have used some Spirit.*)”

Bob Hope

“I remember that Jesus told Nicodemus that Spirit was like the wind,
in that we can't see it but can see its effects, which are profound.

I see the word representing the essence of a being or a thing,
whether it be God, another person, myself, evil, or goodness.

To me, the closest synonym is *soul*.”

Jimmy Carter

“The soul is the center of our being.

It is home to our goodness, our love,

our consciousness, and our compassion.

I believe Spirit is how we communicate these feelings.

Spirit is what connects us to God and to each other.”

Roma Downey

“Spirit is the essence and consciousness
of one's soul—dark and enlightened.

Both extremes are vital and should be left to flourish unrestricted.

For in that journey discoveries are made.”

Andy Garcia



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*Dedicated to Mickey, who taught me that it is more
important to be loving than to be right.*



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“Your vision will become clear only when you can look into your own heart.”

Carl Jung

This book would not have been possible without the love and support of my wonderful friends and family. Their unconditional love is one of my greatest blessings.

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Lexie Brockway Potamkin

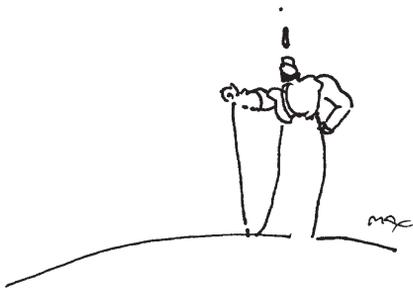
Introduction xi

What Is Spirit: Ask Yourself xix



CONTENTS

- Spirit Quotes and Inspirational Tales 1
 - What Is Spirit: Ask Yourself Again175
 - Parting Thoughts 176
 - Closing Blessing..... 180
 - About Lexie Brockway Potamkin 182
 - About Peter Max 183
 - Alphabetized Index 184





INTRODUCTION

“Do not wait for leaders; do it alone, person to person.”

Mother Teresa

As we're into a new millennium, everybody is busy—busy with work, busy with family, crazy busy just trying to get through daily life. Many of the people who shared their hearts and souls on these pages fall into that category—they are busy people. Some of them are famous for what they do; others quietly nurture their trade without public recognition. They come from different walks of life and hail from different cities and countries. They all have life stories, and together make up a melting pot of people, most of whom have never met one another. Yet they all have one very special thing in common: the word *Spirit* means something to them. It meant enough for them to answer these questions. And in that small gesture, we see a much larger picture unfolding—*Spirit* is a common bond between us all.

In today's fast-paced society, it meant a lot that so many busy people, often with complex lives, took the time to respond to two questionnaires. One form asked them to describe “What is *Spirit*?” and the other issued a second difficult challenge: to define themselves so that a brief biographical sketch could be written for the readers to understand the respondents' backgrounds. Some generously gave their time to be interviewed, graciously opening their hearts and sharing their lives.

People dove deep within for an answer and found that along the way, the process opened them to even more of what Spirit means to them.

“I must confess, it was a challenge to define what Spirit means to me,” wrote Joan Blackman, a former bank executive. “I went through several stages of thought while trying to put into words what is so personal, yet shared by every being. Just when I thought I might have an understanding, I would look a little deeper and peel off another layer, finding yet another interpretation. For a while, I had a nagging feeling that I *had* to find meaning—for myself.”

Even those who you might think would have it “figured out” took the time to search within themselves for the answer that most represented their feelings on the topic.

Richard Bach, author of spiritual classics such as *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* and *Illusions*, said he didn’t dare try to describe this ineffable force. “Thanks for the honor of your request,” he offered warmly. “When I can define Spirit in words, I shall have become so advanced as to never need words.”

“It seems like a simple topic, but for me it’s not simple,” wrote Gerard Schwarz, music director of the Seattle Symphony. “That’s probably why you are doing a book on it.”

“Spirit, in its essence, is challenging to capture and define,” wrote Robert White, Aspen-based CEO of an international corporate training company who is co-author of *One World, One People* and credited with founding the modern personal growth movement. “Ultimately, perhaps it is the only possession of real, lasting value.”

That idea resonated with many people: Spirit is hard to define. It’s valuable. It’s always there. It’s not a material thing. It is the source of

something bigger than we are. These are some of the concepts people played with while trying to answer.

A theme that came up repeatedly is that Spirit equals love, and love equals Spirit. As world-renowned author Gerald Jampolsky, M.D.; and his wife/partner, Diane Cirincione, Ph.D., stated: “Spirit is the essence of our being—love.” These two have traveled to 45 countries to serve in the name of love. Jerry is the author of *Love Is Letting Go of Fear* and many other books, as well as founder of the Attitudinal Healing Center; Diane has written several books including *Sounds of the Morning Sun*. They have seen the way love can heal and uplift the Spirit, and they make no distinction between the two.

Reading through all these marvelous responses prompted me to write my own answer to the question, “What is Spirit?” I found myself just as amazed as everyone else that there are so many layers to explore, so many petals to be opened.

Although the responses herein are nondenominational and inter-faith in nature, I realized that I, like many people, began my experience of Spirit through certain religious teachings that I have embraced in my life and in my heart. For example, when I first began to explore what Spirit meant to me, I thought of the Holy Spirit, which is available to everyone, no matter what religion. Christ spoke often about the Holy Spirit, saying that it’s available to anyone who asks. That’s why, in my spiritual practice, I am so drawn to the pure nature of the teachings of Christ. He emphasized unconditional love for others, and for self. He spoke about love, forgiveness, understanding, empathy, tolerance, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Spirit keeps me focused on love and teaches me that the greatest of all things is love.

And, I realized, Spirit is pure, unconditional love. Peaceful and free, it is available to everyone, anytime, anywhere. Tapping into this essence is, I believe, a choice we make, and *can make*, at any moment, because each and every one of us is free to choose love.

Love is the highest state of being, and from that vantage point, many of us have experiences with “Spirit in action” through the lives and contributions of people who embody Spirit. When I began to read the responses from people who very specifically singled out the Spirit they observed in another, I realized that for many people, that’s where it all begins. We are touched, moved, or inspired by someone, and we can’t figure out what it is about them that stirs something in us. Then the light bulb goes off: *Aha—that’s what Spirit looks like!* Spirit at work could be a child at play. Spirit is the child in all of us, the sense of wonder, the joy. And at the same time, Spirit is the common source of who we all are. And as Lao-Tzu, founder of Taoism, said, “When you realize where you come from, you naturally become tolerant, amused, kind-hearted as a grandmother, dignified as a king.”

Interviewing people I had never met before, yet feeling a very meaningful and deep connection with them, was “Spirit” connecting our souls. Meditating quietly with the Tibetan monks and then “experiencing” their chanting was spirited. It was Spirit in motion. And in that silence, that calm of meditation, I was illuminated. It is a silence in which the Spirit of God can enter us, heal us, and change our lives forever.

Spirit is my pets and their unconditional love. Spirit is my father’s love guiding me through every day of my life. Spirit is my connection to truth. It’s music, it’s nature, it’s a quiet night at home, it’s... well, every time I thought about it, another idea would evolve. It became

clearer and clearer that Spirit is a fluid, flowing, moving energy. The more we ask the question, the deeper we get into the question—only to find that there simply is no one answer.

As I continued to ask myself, *What is Spirit?* and to read other people's responses, a new world opened up. I felt uplifted and peaceful—more connected to people, places, life. I felt privy to the truth that there is one huge, gigantic, unfathomable source that is Spirit, and that there are millions of little pathways that lead us to it.

The late Dr. Lee Salk, a famous child psychologist, was a longtime friend. Lee believed that the demise of the family is the demise of society. He encouraged me with his beliefs about the Spirit of family. He told me that the most powerful motivation to live comes from family and the knowledge of being loved, wanted, and needed. One day at his home, I was inspired to ask his brother, Dr. Jonas Salk, for his response to the question, “What is Spirit?” At the time I was frustrated with my work in the human rights field, and he told me not to be discouraged. “Spirit is evolution, and we are an evolving species,” said this man who changed the course of history when he discovered the vaccine for polio. I was so awed by the consciousness in his answer. It gave me hope. Perhaps not everyone is interested in thinking about Spirit today, but maybe they will next month, or next year, or sometime in the course of a lifetime, because according to Jonas, we are evolving as a species.

When I told my friend Peter Max about this book, he asked, “How can I help?” As a man of Spirit and one who has long tread the path of spiritual growth, he wanted to be supportive. That, again, is Spirit at work! It is Spirit who brings you the right insights at the right time, brings you together with all those you are meant to meet on your path,

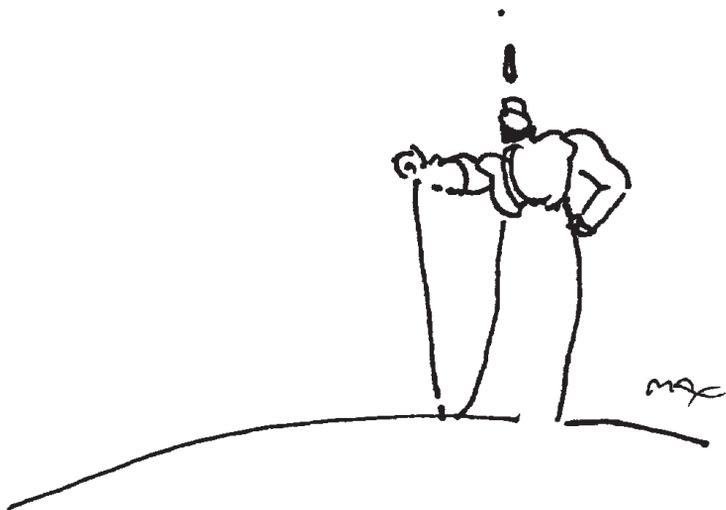
and helps you make things happen, all at the appropriate time.

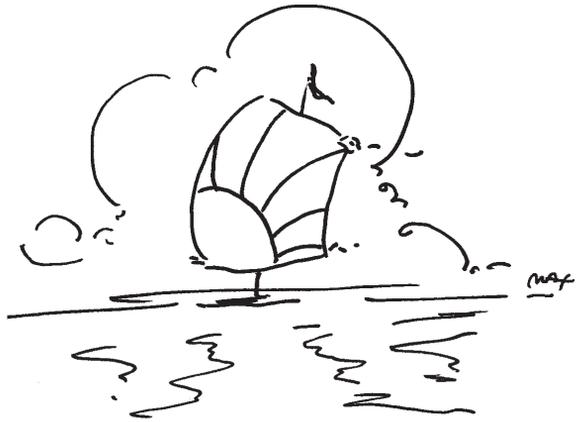
As the question of what Spirit is filtered into my counseling practice, I began to see how cathartic it was for people to look deeply into that question. I saw the question take many individuals back to their core belief system. As a therapist, it wasn't my job to tell them what to believe, but to facilitate their process of uncovering their own truth; tapping into that truth accelerates personal growth. One of the reasons I was so excited about doing this book is that it has that same wonderful, therapeutic effect on people. It helps people assess their reality and make choices about how they want their experiences to be. It helps people stay connected to themselves and their source. *I believe that discovering Spirit reminds us of who we are!*

When you pick up this book, you can turn to any page and find the very thing that will help in the next day—or next moment—of your journey. But before you begin, take a moment to answer the question for yourself: *What is Spirit?*

Use the next page to jot down your thoughts. When you are finished reading, challenge yourself to revisit the question with new spiritual eyes. In the space provided at the end of the book, write another definition. You may find that as you follow the path of Spirit, you will be shown a new aspect, a new possibility. Perhaps we need to begin each day by asking, “If I die, what will I be remembered for?” Then we can begin our daily journey by being the person we truly want to be and living in Spirit. As my dad always said, be careful and thoughtful how you live. You may be the only Bible some people will ever read.











SPIRIT QUOTES AND INSPIRATIONAL TALES*

“Spirit, for me, has almost nothing to do with ‘spirituality.’ It is simply energy—positive energy and love. The simplest, most humble being can be filled with more Spirit than a lifelong meditator.”

Patricia Aburdene, bestselling co-author of *Megatrends for Women*



“Spirit is something that is released once you’ve popped the cork.”

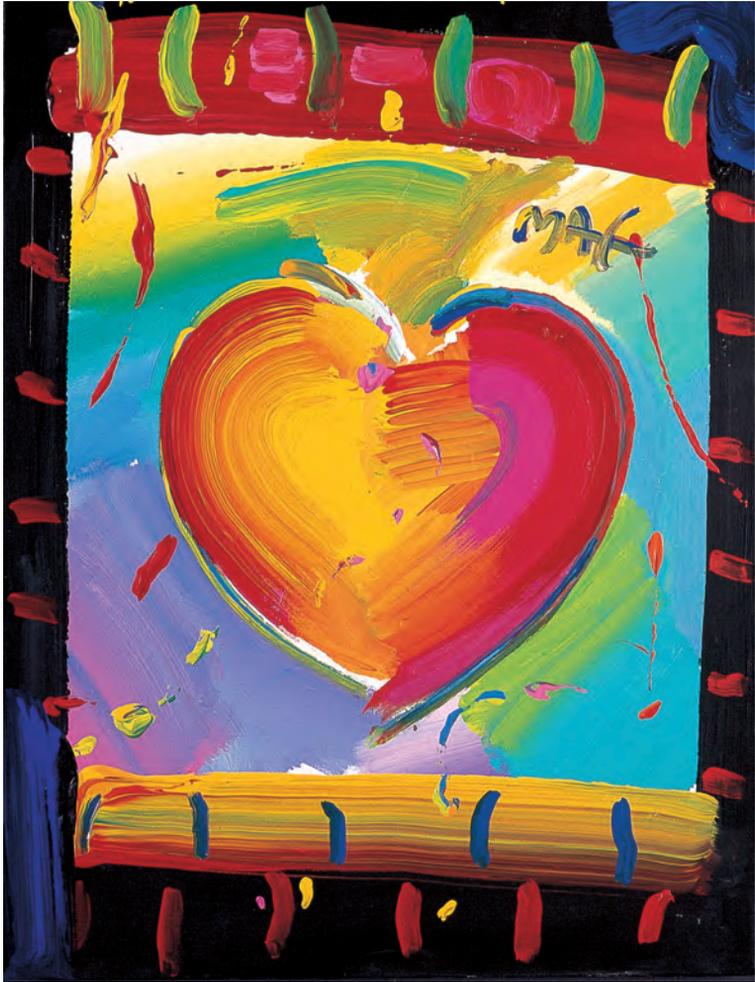
Dwight W. Arundale, celebrated artist



“Spirit is distilled pure love, in and out of eyes, from voices into ears, through every touch and every move, combining in a whiff of ambrosia; it is alive in every being.”

Lynne Arundale, writer

**The short quotes about Spirit are in each person’s own words. The longer inspirational tales are written about a particular individual by author Lexie Brockway Potamkin. All material in quotations has been edited by the author.*



Peter Max "Heart, Version 1, # 4" 1995, 20" x 16", acrylic on canvas

“SPIRIT MAKES YOU SUCCEED WHEN EVERYTHING ELSE FAILS.
(I HAVE SOME JOKES IN MY FILES
THAT COULD HAVE USED SOME SPIRIT)”

Bob Hope

“Spirit is the innate force that drives a person to pursue endeavors positively and enthusiastically, and to work tirelessly and creatively to achieve objectives—be they professional, personal, or for the good of the community.”

Sheryl L. Auerbach, senior law firm partner



“My spiritual odyssey began in 1961 and led me from a jet-set life, to the West, to the East, and finally to the knowledge that what I wanted most was to devote my life to the study of Buddhist teachings and to become a Buddhist nun. To do this, I returned to the source, India.

“I arrived at a special school set up to teach Western languages to young incarnate Tibetan Lamas. Situated on a mountain in Northern India was this monastic school and a nunnery about a mile away. In these two teaching centers, I found what I had been searching for—the teachings, a peaceful place to live, and the means to being useful. I also met a man who would, 20 years later, become my husband.

“Impermanence is the core teaching of the Buddha, so it wasn’t long before I was forced to leave, and return my vows. The year 1980 found me in London; one phone call changed my life forever. A Tibetan Tulku or Incarnate Lama whom I met 20 years earlier telephoned, and after identifying himself, asked if I would like to have dinner. We were married a year later in New York. I have no doubt that ‘Big Hand’ was/is there and that my task in this life is to care for my Tulku husband, as he does me.”

Jane Werner Aye, former Tibetan Buddhist nun





LAURA BROCKWAY

When I think of Spirit, two people come to mind: my mother, Laura Brockway, and my grandmother, Ethel Foster. That is why this first inspirational tale I am sharing with you is about my own family. Spirit—my grandmother had it; my mother still does. In these two powerfully spiritual women, I find the roots of my own understanding about what Spirit really is: It is an essence we can often see best when we observe and experience it in those we admire. How they face adversity and triumph, and in doing so, pass a gift of courage and understanding to those around them.

My grandmother was born and raised in Michigan. At the tender age of 17, she met and fell in love with my grandfather. He was from Idaho, so she packed up her entire life, said good-bye to her family and friends, and moved across the country to settle with him in his home state. The train ride from Idaho to Michigan was quite a long haul in those days, and hard on the pocketbook, so she did not see her family much. Instead, she had a family of her own and raised them with Spirit. She lived to see many grandchildren and great-grandchildren grow into wonderful beings. She lived a simple life, sometimes a rugged one, yet she lived it rich in Spirit. She was loving, giving of herself, and faithful to those she loved. I always felt that it took great Spirit—and faith in Spirit—to leave her family, her friends, and the life she knew to move

to a place she had never even seen to be with the man she loved. It took Spirit to make it work and keep it working. In my life, she was the role model and pioneer of Spirit in my family.

She passed her great essence along to my wonderful mother, Laura, who, after four major open-heart surgeries, still completely trusts in Spirit. My mother knows Spirit so intimately that she has maintained a strong and positive attitude throughout. Not only has she survived, but she has thrived—and she has amazed every physician who cared for her. Time and again she has bounced back from all she's been through. She gets me through every crisis in her life by saying: “God and the angels are with me, and my family is the wind beneath my wings.”

My mother lives in a constant state of grace, embracing Spirit and all of life with her warm, cheery, positive personality. “I just know everything's going to be all right, and I'm never afraid,” she says. “I think it's faith. I have this feeling that everything is okay. I don't know of anything to pinpoint it. It is just a lot of faith. You face a lot of things in your life that, without faith... I don't know how you'd get through it.”

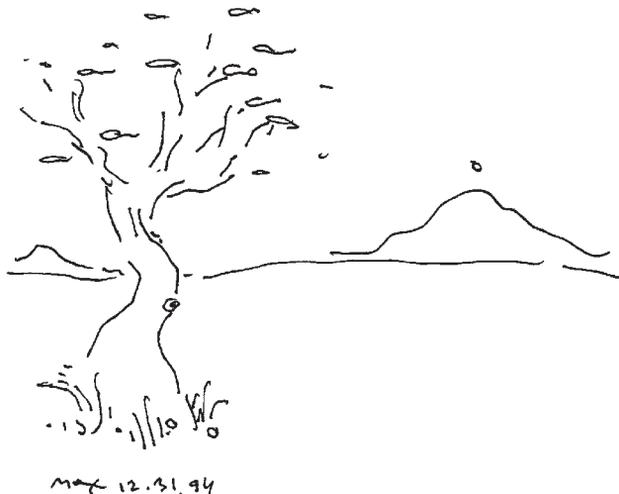
Even in the face of her greatest losses in life—the death of my dad, and a brother I never knew who died of streptococcus when he was just a year old—she gathered strength and courage. “You have to go on,” she says. “You can always look around and see someone worse off than you are. You cannot dwell on it.”

What is Spirit? “It's inside you; it's what keeps you going,” my mother says. “It gives you happiness. Without Spirit, you would hardly exist. It is the light of our life, the faith of our life. It is purity of thought. It is the very inner being of yourself—the inner world of

thought, feeling, love, light, beauty. It is the goodness that shines through as love for all others, a spiritual kindness, a gentleness, the inner being of joy and happiness. Without Spirit, we would not have faith. It is everything that guides us.”

My mother’s philosophy is that every little prayer helps. She has been known to get her doctors to pray with her before surgery—but, she says, “Do not wait until you are facing a medical emergency to start praying. Many people suddenly start when there is a crisis. There has to be something important in your life that keeps you connected—Spirit is what does that.”

The divine spark in my mother, and hers before her, provided the world view with which I was raised. And I am fortunate that both my grandmother and my mother have passed along to me their beautiful connection to the expression of Spirit!





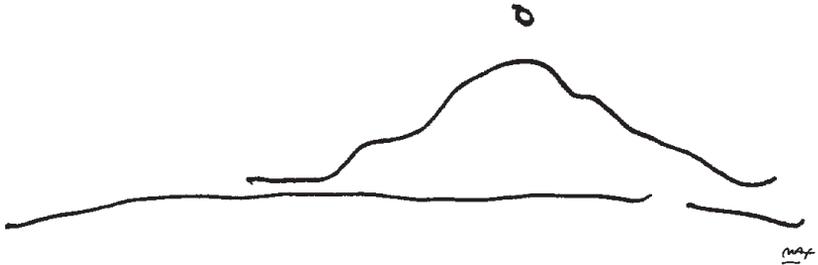
Peter Max "Day Dream, Version 1, #5" 1996, 30" x 40", acrylic on canvas

“Spirit is THE BREATH of God,
A UNIVERSAL ENERGY THAT, ONCE CREATED,
CAN NEVER BE DESTROYED”

Wynonna Judd

“What is Spirit? When one becomes a child of God through a personal relationship with the crucified, risen, living, and coming-again Son of God, then *Spirit* truly takes on significance. Beginning at that point, one’s words, attitudes, motivations, actions, desires, goals, and responses to disappointments and victories in life, as well as relationships with people, are all tempered and molded by a desire to bring glory to God...”

Ruth Babbitt, faculty advisor to the National Honor Society



“Spirit is eternal—it has always existed; Spirit is truth, for it exists on every level and in any context. Because of this, Spirit and truth may be thought of as one and the same. Spirit is, most of all, *being*...”

Peter Baterna, acupuncturist, massage therapist, portfolio manager





“Spirit is when your brain and your heart become one. When presented with a visual scene or experience, everything that you’ve learned in your brain stirs a powerful, uplifting emotion within your heart.”

Cheryl A. Beck, business development manager for a news radio station



“I had no Spirit while facing the cruelty and inhumanity of Castro’s prison. Today, Spirit is being born again with the chance to start over again, making a new life and being useful.”

Ramberto Berencen, former Cuban political prisoner, now 78





Richard Block

In 1978, Richard Block (co-founder of H&R Block), was diagnosed with lung cancer and told that he had three months to live. It was an awakening that led him on the journey of a lifetime—from an intimate and painful closeness to death, to emerging completely alive and reaching out to help others.

Before his diagnosis, Richard Block was living a typical Type-A lifestyle—working hard during tax season and playing hard during the down time. He smoked three packs of cigarettes a day, quitting just a year before this diagnosis.

Cancer completely shifted his life. “All of a sudden I realized that there are a lot of other things much more important,” he recalls. “Spirit sure had something to do with it. I’ve always been fairly spiritual, but cancer made me realize that the values in life were not what I always thought they were.”

Doctors gave him two paths: a chance for life, or certain death. The doctor who offered him life literally made him an offer he could not refuse. “First, I was told that I was terminal and there was nothing I could do,” Richard Block says. “I went to another doctor and his statement was, ‘Dick, you’re a very sick boy, and we are going to make you a lot sicker, but we are going to cure you... so you will be working.’ I said, ‘If you do, I will.’ He made me a lot sicker, but he cured me. And

ever since then, my wife and I have devoted our lives to helping others.”

In 1982, he sold his interest in H&R Block and began to devote his efforts to cancer research. “It is a very narrow goal. The next person who gets cancer has the best chance of beating it. It is less important to find a cure for cancer or to eliminate the cause of cancer, because we do not know anything about those things. But we do know something about treatments for cancer. So we are trying to help people who have it get a better chance of beating it.”

Richard Block and his wife, Annette, founded an array of free services for cancer patients. The Cancer Hotline in Kansas City, a volunteer organization, has handled more than 60,000 calls from newly diagnosed cancer patients since 1980. They instituted the now-standard procedure of getting a second opinion when founding the R.A. Block Cancer Management Center at the University of Missouri. From 1980 to 1995, the multi disciplinary second-opinion panel was staffed by over 100 physicians who donated their time. The center was closed only after the concept mainstreamed, and in 1988 the Blocks dedicated the grounds of the R.A. Block Cancer Support Center as a support and education facility. The couple has written several books.

You will not hear him speak of the more esoteric nature of his personal experience with cancer and the path that it put him on, yet it is clear that he approaches this work with great enthusiasm.

“My parents used to say that once you have three meals a day, you’d better do something for somebody else,” Richard Block says. “Everything we do is free. My wife and I pay for everything.”

He says that his wife of 52 years believes that he was given the experiences and resources to be able to help other cancer patients

increase their chances of survival. Some would say that this is Spirit at work. “My wife often tells me that this is my mission,” he says.

What is Spirit? “Spirit is the drive or will to excel.”



“The Human Spirit is the everlasting gift that God has given all of us. I believe it is the part of us that He filled with compassion, joy, peace, gentility, and kindness; I believe He did this with the intention that we call upon it when interacting with all living creatures.”

Joan Blackman, happily married to a corporate lawyer



“Spirit is a gift from God. It is uniquely different in every one of us. We are all born in the image and likeness of God. But it is that gift that makes us different from anyone else. Spirit is strength, love, and wisdom, and it keeps us whole as we travel through life.

“Without even realizing it, we give it to others through ourselves every day. And when the Maker calls and our body is no longer a part of this world, the Spirit of what we have given to others remains. The body dies, but our Spirit never does. It’s a gift, and it remains with everyone you have touched in your lifetime.”

Jerry Blavat, TV/radio entertainer credited with creating the oldies nostalgia-craze in 1962



“I believe that Spirit is the unique and ever-present Voice that resides in the center of us, whether it be still and small or resounding and clear; whether we wish to not hear and heed it, or wish to welcome its rightness and be guided by it. The Voice is God’s personal message to each of us, our guidebook for daily living, and our road map for life.”

Jimmer Bolden, lease administrator for video stores; professional vocalist





JIMMY CARTER

As 39th President of the United States, Jimmy Carter dedicated himself to restoring the tenet of compassion to government. He was architect of the 1979 Camp David Accords, in which he brought the nations of Egypt and Israel together in a historic reconciliation. As an elder statesman, he continues his passionate support of human rights and other humanitarian causes through the Atlanta-based Carter Center.

He is a hands-on activist—monitoring human rights issues in third-world countries, reaching out to help exiled Tibetans, traveling around the world to build homes for Habitat for Humanity, even helping his hometown build a community center. He has authored books on many aspects of life—from poetry to aging to his recent *Living Faith*.

“I really wanted to call the book *Faith Is a Verb*, since faith is an active rather than passive experience,” says Carter, a devout Christian who shares his thoughtful views on faith and Spirit in his book and in his Sunday Bible-study classes at the Maranatha Baptist Church in his hometown of Plains, Georgia.

For Carter, faith is to be placed not only in God. “I had faith in my mother, first, and then both my parents. Later in my life I had faith in my nation, and I was inspired by patriotism—by a willingness to give my life, if necessary, in a submarine force to protect the interests of my

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