

## A Little Late to be Taking the Red Pill

Gary Vollbracht

3/26/10

### Prologue

A few days ago a Pathwork friend of mine laughingly referred to aspects of waking up into higher states of consciousness as “taking the red pill.” This reference was from the 1999 movie *The Matrix*, and while I had seen it long ago I had not quite gotten it. My friend’s reference intrigued me so I looked into it on Wikipedia and found: *“Borrowing from the movie, the terms **blue pill** and **red pill** have become a popular metaphor for the choice between the blissful ignorance of illusion (blue) and embracing the sometimes painful truth of reality (red).”* Once one takes the red pill and breaks the illusion, that is, breaks the matrix, one cannot go back to living in illusion, or living in the matrix of our conditioned, patterned, mostly unconscious world of beliefs and images that have framed and often become the basis of our worldview and entire life. I now have a better understanding of what my Pathwork friend was talking about.

### And so we begin...

Somehow growing up Vollbracht was special. Especially in our strongly conservative German church, St. James Lutheran Church, and its adjoining St. James Lutheran School, my school home through 8<sup>th</sup> grade. It was the largest of three Lutheran Churches in Quincy, Illinois, a river town of 42,000, on the western bellybutton of the state. The Mississippi River was the most significant geographic feature of Quincy, second only to the city’s isolation with the only towns larger than Quincy being over 100 miles away.

Dad, born and raised at St. James, was active in the church, and even more so was Mom, daughter of the great organist of the church, Grandpa Walter Ritzmann. From a kid’s view, Mom and Dad were big shots, playing leadership roles of every kind in this congregation of 800 or so. And Grandpa as organist just topped it off.

Values were etched into my and my younger brother Paul’s young minds from an early age. One of many examples stands out. At the age of seven or so I took it upon myself to dab paint on our neighbor’s garage. This wasn’t as malicious as it sounds. Or maybe it was. God only knows why I did it. Neighbor Westerbeck, a man in his sixties, was painting his garage and there were some green paint cans lying in the yard. I picked up a stick, dipped it into the green paint, and marked several of the freshly painted narrow white boards that vertically decorated the garage. Dad, outraged, insisted that I confess. That evening we walked to the neighbor’s house. Oh, did I say how angry my neighbor could get? I was in tears. Dad alongside me, I rang the doorbell. Mr. Westerbeck came to the door. In terror and tears, I confessed everything. To my amazement he smiled and was not at all angry it seemed. Later I would share this event with people, using it as an example of how my dad “raised me right.” The moral straight arrow! I was truly proud of Dad and how he raised us two boys.

But there are two sides of being a moral straight arrow. While I got along famously with parents, teachers, and other adults, my peers were not that impressed. And on my end of these peer relationships I wasn't sure how to relate to them either. Add the idea of a girlfriend to the equation, and yikes. My first kiss coming in my third year of college, well that sums up my relational life. I could play leadership roles like Mom and Dad had modeled for me, after all I was a Vollbracht, but I could not relate in an emotional or playful way with my classmates, nor was I at home in my body. All of this not relating was fine by me, because I'd rather be playing at home with books and trains and model airplanes.

Another trait I picked up from Mom and Dad seemed to be to do my best at what I did. Dad would openly express how proud he was of us boys. And of course Mom's being the valedictorian of her large high school class didn't dampen the message of the importance of doing my best. Getting my first B in Junior High resulted in tears.

Working hard could get one places in the 1960's. I got a nice scholarship to the University of Cincinnati, graduated tops in my mechanical engineering class, got the Herman Schneider Award for Engineering Excellence, completed my doctoral coursework in two years, and though I never completed my dissertation, I ended up, to my own dismay, as the Chairman, President, and CEO of the then \$30,000,000 company I joined out of college 14 years before, joining when the firm's employees numbered but seven of us. Like Mom and Dad, I also held down jobs of Chairman in our church congregation and Elder Board, and of several other non-profits of which I was a member. Like Mom and Dad, we had a nice house and nice kids, and were doing pretty well as middle class citizens in our Cincinnati community. Yes, being Vollbracht was special, you know. But something was not right, a fact of which my low-grade ever-present anxiety had often informed me.

Then there was the other side of the story. Borrowing from the movie *The Matrix*, I guess I took the red pill: Retiring from my job of 29 years, leaving the church after 57 years, leaving my wife of 34 years, and going into the wilderness to find out who I really am. In the wilderness being Vollbracht meant nothing special, and my life began again, only this time growing out of some of the more shadowy but unconscious influences Mom and Dad had on me, or, rather, reinforced in me. I had become entrenched in my life in the *Matrix*. The result of taking the red pill? Pain, confusion, mystery, but somehow feeling more real and more alive. But that's another story, a story I've been so wrapped up in for these past 15 years that I'm glad to take a break and look at the first 50 years of being a Vollbracht – living “happily” in the *Matrix* of my own story.

By the way, my brother took the Blue Pill, and we compare notes regularly, both being curious of all aspects of this thing called life, especially the lives of these two same but different Vollbracht brothers. And sometimes it is hard to say which choice is the better of the two. Seriously! Especially since I was at the ripe old age of 50 when I took the red pill. In the movie that is not an option allowed for people over 30, and I can see why! So can brother Paul! Glad we are both having fun with all of this and able to hold it with lightness. Finally.