

*The best way out is always through it*

- Robert Frost

When I go out for coffee with a friend I barely survive. There is something within me that dies every time. Why is that? A person comes up to a friend and that friend averts their eyes to somewhere else. Did you see that? They looked away. Did you see that? Their smile is strained. No, it's just you. There is nothing wrong, yet lurking in the shadows of friendship there is truly something wrong. Do I smell? Is their spinach in my teeth? Can't be that I had chicken. Maybe it's my teeth, that's it. Maybe that's not it at all. For some reason people are just people. Their motives for friendship and conversation are hidden behind the mask. Hard to tell when friendship is in the middle.

I have friends, and I have family. They are dear to me. Years ago, one of those friends call me and asked for my time. You see, he was going through a split-up and it was just too hard for him. At the time, I felt two different ways. For one I felt he should suck it up; be a man. The second, was that my marriage needed time too. Why give my time to the wrong marriage? His was broken. Mine was not. I was the guy averting my attention to somewhere else. I was the friend that had the fake smile. Never in a million years did my friend have my undivided attention. That is the real travesty of friendship. We wear the masks and pretend to be friends

Murphy has a law that says something like:

*What can go wrong at sea generally does go wrong sooner or later*

*whatever can happen will happen*

*Anything that can possibly go wrong, does*

This is interesting stuff. I guess we could say Murphy's law a hundred different ways yet here we stand, looking at the fallout of bad relationships. Funny thing is how vague this law is.

People don't really know the correct of saying Murphy's Law. The historians don't really know who said it. I think it comes down to a simple form "shit happens." That's what happens in your friendships when you're wearing masks. You ignore them and your friendship turns to shit. I get you *Murphy* (whoever you are) *and your crummy law*. I get it because when false and fake seeps into looks and smiles, then bad things will happen, shit happens. That's what happened the fateful day my friend called for some time with me and I gave none. As Murphy knows, six months later I was calling him for time. My wife kicked me out. Of course, he had the time because he was a real friend. What was I? I was slipping into the world of being dirty.

In my defense, which I have little. I did the normal thing, the seemingly right thing. Being around bad karma can rub off on you. A bad marriage is bad business for married people. I have found that people hate to go through bad stuff alone. A woman thinking of divorce will confide in friends to try and justify it. Sometimes that logic rubs off on the confiding friend. Partners in crime is always better and safer too. A guy who is cheating loves to brag to his male friends. *Try it, you'll love it*. Is it normal to wallow in mud or to avoid it? There is rarely one pig in the pigpen. I wanted to avoid becoming a bad karma pig. To me, the right thing was to avoid bad situations even at the cost of friendship.

So, my friend's bad situation was his bad karma. I didn't want any of that crud getting on my skin. It's like being in a dying person's hospital room. Searching for something to say. Adverting the eyes and using the weather as a conversation piece twice. Funny part is that dying people don't care what it's like outside. The storm is in the room. Yet, here we stand uncomfortable. Here people stand deciding how much dirt they are willing to endure. Yet, keeping a healthy distance.

It's what we do as friends. We seek those who make us look good. The ones that pump up our ego. Who wants Eye-ore from *Winnie the Pooh* in your life. All they do is bring you down. Friendship 101, smile, laugh, avoid, and repeat. That is what friendships usually are. I have heard so many people tell their tragedy. Time and time again they are quoted as saying *I lost family and friends because if it*. Sometimes in special moments one person is there for them. That is a rare person indeed. I thought I was a good friend until my friend became dirty. The stink and grime of divorce was on him. I ain't touching that. That was mud and I wasn't willing to roll it.

There were people, four thousand years ago, who had what is called Leprosy. It was considered contagious and most likely incurable. Those people had a disease that degraded their body parts. At the time, God had asked those infected people to stay out of the population. If someone approached you, you were to shout "unclean." Trust me, everyone knew what that meant.

A few years ago, there I was sitting next to friend in church. He and his wife had been there for me through my split-up and divorce. I felt dirty and I was the unclean. For so long it was me walking around like a leper. It was great of my friend and his wife to welcome me into their home. I was the unclean, yet they loved and cared about me regardless. That was true friendship. The reason I was sitting next to my friend that day was because he and his wife were splitting up. That was, and still is stunning to me. We were both the unclean now.

Was it my fault. Did my dirty life rub off on him? Maybe I should have shouted unclean a little louder. I was sitting in their living room, years before, admitting proudly *I was junk*. He looked me straight in the eyes and said "God does not make junk." I didn't believe him that day but over time I do believe that to be true. Yet, that Sunday morning at church I am looking into

this same man's eyes. He can't look me straight in the face anymore. He has the divorce stink and grime all over him now. I bet his heart was screaming "oh my God, now I'm one of his kind." One thing I know is that in church it's all about families. Divorced and single people are the lepers. My friend just got sucked into the world of the unclean and dirty. I bet that was horribly unbearable to a man who thought he was clean.

Now don't get me wrong. Divorced and single people are by no means dirty. Yet, if we could put the rest of us to a lie detector we would have to admit we think they are. I only bring up divorce because I was there. I have been on both sides. I have approached people and they have treated me with sorrow, like a leper. People love saying *sorry for your loss*. The worst thing you could say to hurting people is *sorry for your loss*. Hurting people are sorry too.

I have also been on the other end. Unwilling to give my time to someone in trouble for fear of catching something. That particular day in church, I decided to change my ways. Sitting next to my friend, I looked him in the eye and told him he is not dirty. I repeated "you know that don't you." I thought I'd return the favor for telling me I was not junk. Yet, in his eyes, I knew he did not believe me, just as I had not believed it years before. He felt dirty.

Realizing you are shunned by society is a cruel thing. I think most people want to be loved. There are a select few in our community who tend to live lives in recluse. We call them loners or lepers. Are they really loners? Weren't they loved as children at one time? Didn't they play with other kids. I find it fascinating that there is always one kid who ends up playing alone. Why? I'm no doctor or trained psychologist. I think it does not take a rocket scientist to know the answer. I write books that skidder along the intellectual. I don't have their piece of paper but I have lived in their clinical world as a patient. I understand why one kid retreats to the corner.

People can be cruel. I get why some retreat into the shadows. We feel dirty in the presence of others.

Meredith Brooks has a song called *Bitch*. She sings that she is all the things we see in front and behind our masks: a lover, spouse, and even a bitch. I can sing too. I am a jerk, sarcastic, friend, spouse, and probably an ass-hole to many. I am the leper, councilor, divorced, and recovering relationship addict too. We are many things. The problem is people don't always like certain parts of you. I think Meredith was saying were complicated. One side of society hates that, avoids that.

It's fascinating and sad that one segment of society avoids the other side. People who are avoided, feel dirty. I know because I live it every day as one of the dirty. We are the sum of our parts. People do judge who we are, where we've been, and what we do. It's not easy living in the public realm when we feel dirty in the eyes of many. We may be different or complicated, but we are people too.

Maybe the kid in the back of a classroom is the dirty and neglected? This kid is a lot of things to many people. First of all, he or she is misunderstood. I have read that many of them are very smart. Maybe even too smart for their own good. They think differently. Their answers embarrass themselves and others. If you sit in the back, then maybe nobody will ask and nobody will notice. I had a friend with big ears. He wore a toque in the summer just to hide the ears. He was bold in my eyes because he always sat in the front of the class. I did too because I don't hear well but I'm not that bold if I had big ears. I'd hide in the back. His toque remained on at all times. Kids are cruel and when they become adults they just become smarter at being cruel. At 51, I realize why people sit in the back. Abuse needs to be avoided but rarely is.

Sometimes I feel that I am floating on the top of the ocean. Just existing like a piece of drift wood. I had a less than stellar childhood. Yet, I gained humor and hard work from my parents. Those same parents are divorced and that has caused me some grief. Unfortunately, I know what happened because I got caught up in the middle of it. There is nothing like discovering a cheating parent. No fun that's for sure. I suppose I grew up in the modern family, just floating along. Bad parenting, divorce, and abuse unfortunately is normal in the modern family. There was nothing particularly odd or amazing about my upbringing.

I don't think I ever felt dirty because of my parents' divorce. You would think I would have because it was my family that was divorced. Divorce was rare in those days. I like to tell this story about a split-up of some good friends. One day the mother asked the daughter to accept her new boyfriend. The daughter replied "I don't have to, it's not my divorce. I guess that's the way I felt too as the divorced child. This is crud. Yet, this is what we have been given. Were just drifting along with the waves.

Finishing high school can be a good or bad thing. You either loved it or hated it. Does it matter if your parents were divorced? These days that is normal and your weird if your parents stayed together. It's perked my ears hearing people say they hated high school. I thought it was not that bad. The look in their eyes has touched me. I guess family life and school can make you feel dirty. I just thought that was life, the dirt we live with. Just floating along.

In many ways, the dirty and unclean world has become blurred. There used to be definite lines. I feel the leper has a badge of honor now. I held no axe to grind over my disheveled family upbringing. I was normal. I wanted to be normal. Yet, in many ways I was not normal. It's like yes, I'm drifting along, but I'm hard wood, so I should be sinking at some point. Today we love being the victim. It's the in thing to yell "unclean." Strange world we live in.

My life as a kid was a mess. No, I was not the kid at the back of the class. I was not the last picked at recess for baseball. Yet, I did things other people didn't do. I started a business in high school. I liked the music others hated. I had a long-term girlfriend. Things that weren't *the norm* always followed me. My Dad hated that part of me. My teachers hated that part of me. Why couldn't I just be normal like other kids?

I just had to be different, didn't I? Of course, I played odd-ball sports like lacrosse. Of course, I liked heavy metal and pop music at the same time. Of course, I bought my own equipment as a DJ while others guys bought cars. Of course, I was a hockey goalie. I am all those things that make someone weird. Ok, maybe I was not sporting a mohawk or goth weird but weird none the less. I did the things nobody was doing. Maybe I wanted to be a leper. Maybe I tried to be different. Somewhere deep in my soul I hated being told *no you can't* or *no you should not*. My heart screamed "Why not?" and "why not me." It's like I intentionally wanted to poke the bear of indifference. Being completely normal was not an option in my psyche.

Then there was the split from reality. After high school, you either motoring along the ocean in a high speed boat your parents paid for (university), or you floated along like a piece of drift wood like me. Just happy it's not raining but waiting for the storms. I must admit I was a deer in the headlights. You could see it in me. I froze. My dad commented once I should have traveled Europe or gone to university. I must admit I was lost in that moment. I screamed against what others were doing. That was normal and who wanted that.

I was not on the Titanic. Those people thought they were unsinkable. There were told they were perfectly safe. The experts said the boat was not junk. Now for the people resting at the bottom of the Atlantic 2.37 miles down it's a different perspective. Yes, I know there dead. Yet, sitting on those deck chairs with a clear view of the Atlantic Ocean (no life boats to block

your view) it looked good. That is a long way to sink only to change your perspective on the unsinkable. I too, floated on the ocean thinking life was ok. It was not perfect or unsinkable. I survived teenage life with only a few scars. I was unique but the same as everyone else. Life seemed safe enough. Yet, storms were brewing.

It's weird but I always wanted to be a number in my early years. I liked the idea of being part of the chain. I really wanted to work in a tall building and wear a suit just like many guys do in the big cities. I could get married and have 2.3 kids. Why do I feel like I was the .3 kid? Who wants to be that guy. The one always searching and never quite complete. Still, I was lucky. I married my high school sweetheart and gain the 2.0 kids for starts. Life was good.

Floating on the ocean can be fun. I recently went on a cruise and it rocked! I loved every bit of it. Sure, I thought of the Titanic from time to time, but boats are safer today. Isn't that what they said back then too? I don't want to tell my story in this book. Bin there done that. However, it's important to point out that I have experienced good times and bad. I never want to be accused of giving righteous advice without experience. I'll leave that to pastors and doctors that have never lived as the patient. I thought there was nothing particularly wrong with being the 0.3 kid. Yet, something was missing. I was floating on a doomed ship.

They all say that to be a hockey goalie, you have to be a bit weird or touched in the head. I loved getting hit with a ninety mile and hour puck. It was so fun. I wore an AC/DC jacket in a predominantly country music school (bad idea). I like all types of music from Black Sabbath to the Go-Goes. I went to the Go-Goes concert in my AC/DC jacket. Two girls ahead of me kept saying "why are you here." I sat at 42 years old in a university class on American literature with a room full 19-year old's. One guy kept asking "yes, I know you said you like literature, but why



are you here.” Years later I was in a councilors office in a church. He kept saying “why are you here.” If I had a dime for every time someone asked me that I’d be rich.

If being different is weird then I’m it. If that’s why I am considered dirty, then I’m it. I guess it comes down to this. I wanted a normal life. I got a weird one. If I wanted to be a number like everyone else, too bad. God chose to make me weird. It was not my choice. It’s like Babe Ruth being dang good at baseball. It’s like Geordie Howe being dang good at hockey. If you’re that good they call you Mr. Baseball or Mr. Hockey. I am not great at anything. Yes, that includes writing. However, I do have the gift of weird. You can call me Mr. Weird if you want. I’m dang good at that.

I can dabble in anything and do it well. That my friend is what puts the nut in meg. The ape in apricot. The trivial in pursuit. God put the weird in me. It’s what most people cringe at and hate to touch: the unsettled and unpredictable person.

I had a guy say to me “you’re an accountant on the side.”

I said “no.”

He replied “But you do taxes.”

I said “yes for fun.”

Again, he replied “nobody does taxes for fun, that’s weird.”

I smiled and said “I know.”

There are three types of people in my mind. Don’t get clinical with me I’m a patient remember. The first is the cool dude. They appear to have it together. That person knows stuff and feels confident. They wear the mask better than most. Behind the mask could be total chaos, yet they wear a pretty snazzy mask. The second is the weirdo, that could be several people. It’s those who wear stupid clothes. They hide in the back of the classroom. Their hair looks like it

was combed by a pork chop. I bet you can name one of those two guys in a split second from your high school days. Then there is me. I'm the one who is always there. I love the crap you love. I hate clicks but I'm always trying to get in one. I am known, but labeled as the rebel. I'm the *why are you here guy*.

Why did I chose the word *dirty* as the title for this book? I chose that word because it fits. The reason I did not visit my friend in his time of need is because his relationship troubles were dirty. I thought I was junk because of the dirt in my life. My church friend could not look at me because he felt shame and dirty. Under no circumstances did he want to be connected to me by divorce dirt. It seems people look off or ignore someone because they are uninteresting, disheveled, or dirty. Who wants to be seen associating with that person. Lepers are the unclean and dirty.

The other side is the one who shuns you. We know who they are. I find we try and try to get in their group. Maybe just maybe they could help us be clean like them. Yet, time after time we find ourselves feeling more dirty than before. It's like the story of a pig deciding to be a person. He tidied himself up and tried to live a clean life, but he missed the mud. One day he returned to the pen because it was home. Those that feel they need to break from who they are usually miss who they were. Just because someone says your dirty does not mean you are. Pigs don't think there dirty they just love mud.

The word *dirty* is a funny thing. I laughed and felt haunted as I read about this word. This is a simple one syllable word right? There has to be an easy description in Webster's dictionary. It *means unclean, tainted, corrupt*, and a host of other adjectives. I like it when the descriptions go just a little further. *Highly regrettable or likely to cause trouble*. A whore is one thing but a dirty whore is another. A word is easy but a dirty word is complicated. If you use a dirty word

towards another it becomes highly regrettable or likely to cause trouble. Dirty is a cool word. It's also a word you never want attached to your name.

I like the thesaurus. It goes deeper. Dirty can be *impure*, *defiled*, and *in disarray*. The opposite is *clean*, *unblemished*, and *virgin*. Wow, we can go places with that. Mary, the mother of Jesus was called a virgin. Add a pregnancy outside of her husband and virgin turns into defiled, and humiliation. Might even be highly regrettable and likely to cause trouble. The "C" word that describes a part of the female's anatomy is a volatile word. It invokes a little anger from most. Say the word *dirty* and who cares. Yet, *dirty* strikes deep into the heart. Once you think you are then you're going to own that badge for life.

I feel we all live in a fishbowl. We can see quite a bit in your life. It's weird because many never tell half of what they feel, think, or have done. There is a ton of crud I will take to my grave. Nothing too bad to report, but still that crud is mine alone. However, people can show me a lot by what they say and do. Equally, they tell me a bunch by what they don't say and do. I love to study people. They say successful people keep eye contact. I've noticed most people don't. I try to because it's polite. I hate people that look away while talking to me. I learn a ton about someone when we chat. Your body language is funny when your nervous. I can see you in your own fishbowl, did you know that?

I don't think fish care that people are watching. When is the last time a fish looked away or started to fidget when you peer in at them? I could yell at them and make funny faces and they keep on doing fish stuff. Tapping on the glass is a different matter. Fish don't like that. I can talk to my dad during a football game and I'm invisible. His wife raises her voice and he looks at her. Were just like fish. Find out what gets your attention and you have it. Conversely if they are not

interested in you then getting their undivided attention might require something more extreme like tapping the glass, yelling or being different.

There is a search in our lives for common people. Clicks exist because of that search. We gravitate towards what we like and who likes us. There are similar interests and similar styles. Opposites attract is just stupid. I am dirty in the eyes of some distinctly because I'm their opposite. At university, we had to do practicums. I chose to gain knowledge from the opposite character at my church. He was totally not like me. Actually, there was nobody like me there. However, I thought I could learn from different people who thought differently. One day I went in to chat with my mentor and found out he had given me away to someone else. Oh, God that stung. I guess nothing in common means just that, nothing in common.

The new guy was willing. I call it voluntold. That is where your volunteering, but ordered to do it. It works, sort of. In the end, he sent me to the church shrink because I think way too different than church people. Well get into that later. The shrink, after two sessions, asked me "why are you here." I get that a lot. His diagnosis of me was that I was in the wrong church. There was nothing wrong with me. Wrong church? That to this day seems creepy and weird. However, it was the being of a revelation. Maybe weird is ok.

Ah, searching for common people. I guess I am human because we all do that. I wasn't as totally weird or different than I first surmised darn it. What I have discovered is that people watch other people too. I guess I am more like people than I think. I'm not sure I like that. Finding out I'm more human than I care to admit scares me. In my pursuit of being a number or in click I've found that I like being different. However, many look in my bowl and wonder what the hell I am doing. When I look in your fishbowl I don't think that way. People are fun and interesting to me. I like looking at the common and the weird.

People are not weird, strange, unclean, or dirty to me. Ok, that's not totally true. One guy offered me his pork chop on a bus and that was weird. I ain't touching that because who knows where it's been. He might have combed his hair with it (just saying). I love people for who they are. Ok, that's not totally true either. Am I a liar? It's just that some folks look away when I talk or avoid me outright. That pisses me off because I'm people too. Who cares if I am dirty. Obviously, some do. I could not care less if your dirty, strange, or normal.

The problem as I see it is the judging. Gees, we all do this so well. Describe what is human. We have eyes, legs, hair, and blood to name a few bits. We hug, yell, cry, and spit. There are other traits like judging people. Oh, yes, we do. A fish is put in a bowl and does not care as far as I know. Sprinkle food in and they are fine. The fish does not look out and say "dam did that guy comb his hair with a pork chop?" Yet, here we are judging others by the clothes they wear, places they live, and the things they say and do. We have it covered. Entertainment tonight and CNN solely exist because we want to know and we want to judge. We love people in a fishbowl. It's so we can look in and judge, rate, and compare them with ourselves.

Recently this has become magnified with the presidential election. Social media has given us a playground to judge. It was easy to judge the dude in the back row at school. They were always there unless they couldn't take it and skipped class. They were never on the playground. It's really the ridicule playground ground. That's the game we played in the school yard. Social media is just a high-tech ridicule playground. We can berate anonymously; post untrue facts; bash and delete; and vent because venting is like owning another's persons fish bowl. We yell and make funny faces and supposedly the fish don't care. Donald and Hillary took it on the chin this election. But in regards to social media, we do care. In his acceptance speech, Donald Trump sighed and said *this was a lot harder than he thought it was going to be*. He said

that twice. Even after the election were still playing with those two. Does anyone know the election is over?

Judging me because I'm not like you is not nice. Just to let you know. It makes me feel dirty inside. Telling me you know better and I couldn't possibly know anything might possibly make me feel stupid and dirty inside. Just to let you know. Should you care if my hair looks like I combed it with a pork chop? No, but you do care. That makes me feel dirty too. I am a pastor, a keeper of the word of God. I have had people say that I don't act very Christian. Really? What should I act like? Most of those people don't even go to church. It makes me feel more dirty than I really am. You think I don't know. One of the reasons I like Taylor Swift's writing so much is the realism. In her song called *Mean* she says "*You have pointed out my flaws again, as if I don't already see them.*" She's bang on some people are just mean.

I want to run most of the time. Going for coffee with someone is intimate. There is about 24 inches of table and two coffee cups between touching them. That is not very much space. You are forced to look into their eyes. You are forced to listen. If they make you feel dirty, then it seems like that table is shrinking inch by inch minute by minute. The problem is I know what's going on. They insist you're crazy, yet, the eyes avert and the smile is mocking, condescending, and hauntingly righteous. It's either run, shrink, or both.

Those of us who think we're different: are different. Most of the successful people in the world are just a bit off. They think different. They invent different. People say "why didn't I think of that." It's because you're not one of us. We are those that continually think outside the box. Think about Michael Jackson, Tiger Woods, Bill Gates, and the likes of Howard Hughes. These are private people that by their quirky talent end up in the spotlight. They give us a better life by being different in how they live and think. We laugh with them and at them. Many times,

we read stories of how these types of people fall from grace. They are the weird, strange, and dirty people in the world. To them it's about the moment and not so much about what they look like or what was said.

That said, some of us feel dirty in the presence of others. It might come down to how we are treated. Being treated poorly might make one feel dirty. There are ways to be nice to others. Building people up is far better than tearing them down. A person might feel dirty around you because you make them feel that way. Is it a mental problem? Yes, it might very well be. Some people are self-conscious about themselves. A few nasty people bash others because they are self-conscious about themselves. We have the power to build up and tear down. It might get dirty in friendships.

I treated a friend going through divorce like he was dirty. I still regret that. I have been treated dirty because I'm different. My friend in church did not want to be associated with the dirty. There are messed up situations and lives. That does not mean their dirty people. They might just be misunderstood, different, sitting in the back of a classroom. It's a shame that some very good people were considered dirty or lepers. They could be diamonds in the rough.

This book is going to explore the world of dirty people. Who are they? Who hates them? Why call us dirty? Why do I feel this way? The cool thing about dirty people is that they never quit. I don't think dirty people ever consider killing themselves. That's for those who thought they were safe on the Titanic of life. Dirty people never stop thinking. Their so-called friends will never stop asking "why are we still here." You need us but you won't admit it. I hope by the end of this book that you and I might appreciate being dirty and embrace it. It's either that or run.