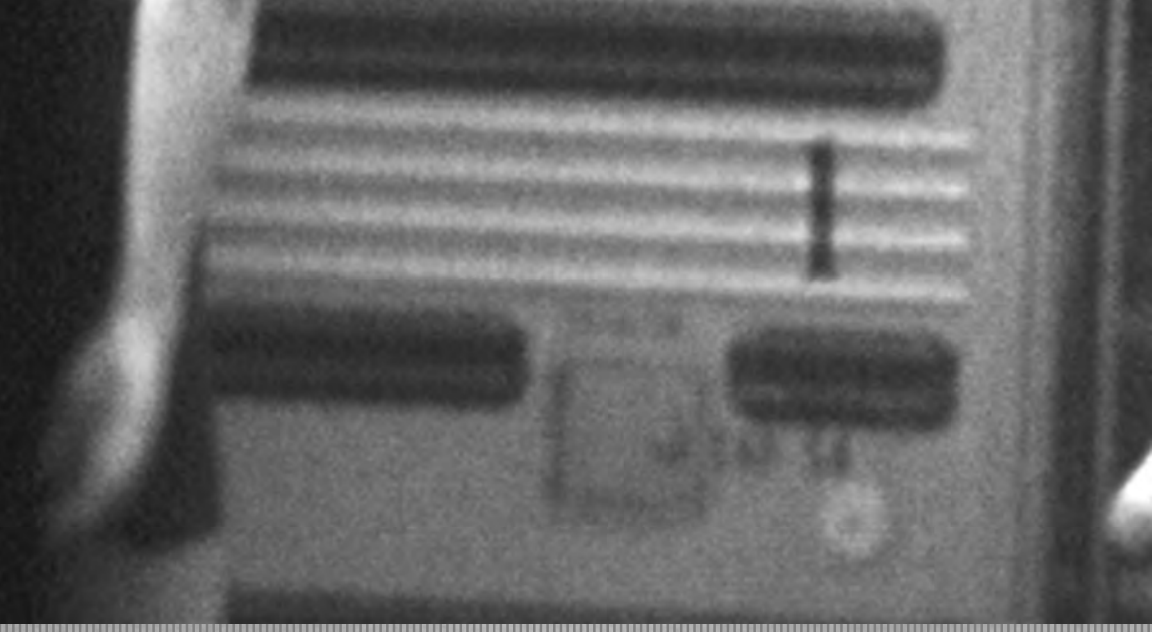
WHAT YOUR CHILDHOOD MEMORIES SAY ABOUT YOU

(AND WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT IT)



WHAT YOUR CHILDHOOD SAY

DR. KEVIN LEMAN

MEMORIES ABOUT YOU

{ *And What You Can Do About It* }

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What Your Childhood Memories Say about You . . . And What You Can Do about It

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To protect the privacy of those who have shared their stories with the author, some details and names have been changed.

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Dedication

Affectionately dedicated to
my sister, Sally Leman Chall,
who endured such things as me waking her up
by dangling a juicy night crawler in front of her nose,
and to my brother, Dr. John (Jack) E. Leman Jr.,
whom I referred to as "God" when I was in junior high
because he acted like God.

Do you remember the time we took a bus to the plaza
(the archaic name for a mall)
and went to the five-and-dime W. T. Grant Store,
which had a luncheonette in the back?
When I looked at the menu, I really wanted a turkey sandwich,
but that cost an exorbitant 80 cents,
when hamburgers were only 20 cents and cheeseburgers, 25 cents.
I'll never forget your response, Sally: "Kevin, get what you want."
And you meant it.
I couldn't help thinking, *She must really love me.*
That's how you make me feel, even today, decades later.

Jack, you pounded me many a day, but you also stuck up for me.
I'll always remember you allowing me to wear
your #12 football jersey to school.
That meant a great deal then—and it still does now.
Not to mention the 1965 Mustang convertible you gave me.

You two are still my heroes,
and I love you.
Thanks for putting up with your lastborn brother's antics
through all the great growing-up years
in western New York state.

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Think Back . . . Way Back

What's locked away in your mind?

What are your earliest childhood memories?

In all my years of private practice and in conversations following weekend seminars, I've asked people tens of thousands of questions about themselves, their relationships, and their families. I've probed parents about their greatest challenges in raising their kids, addressed corporate bigwigs about the psychology of doing business, and heard enough about married couples' sex lives to turn anyone's face seven shades of red. But of all the questions I've asked in those interactions, no single question gets minds working across the board like the one about early childhood memories.

You see, the answers I receive from six-year-olds to seasoned CEOs earning six figures reveal more about the people answering than any other question. "Why is that?" you ask. Because those answers provide a priceless glimpse past all the facades and defenses, straight into the core of who a person is. They are a master key that unlocks all sorts of entries into what makes a person tick. All the money in the world can't buy what you can learn from your early childhood memories, just like spending years trying to figure yourself out can never uncover what you can learn by exploring those memories.

Maybe you picked up this book because you're intrigued by what life-changing insights your seemingly mundane childhood memories might reveal about who you are. Perhaps you already have a few memories in mind, and you're wondering what they might have to say about

you. If that describes you, read on, for this book is about precisely that—how your childhood memories reveal who you really are.

Or you may be thinking, *But Dr. Leman, childhood was such a long time ago. What can my random memories possibly have to say that would be of any value now that I'm a grown-up? Why dwell on the past when there's nothing I can do to change it?*

But what if your childhood memories aren't random? What if they are there for a reason? And what if understanding who you are, revealed through those memories, has everything to do with how you live in the present and how successfully you are able to take control of your future?

If you don't listen to who you are, you may always find yourself reliving a history you'd rather not repeat. While you can't change your past, you can change the way you understand it and move forward in light of that understanding. Do that, and it will make all the difference in not only your life, but in the lives of those around you—your friends, relatives, acquaintances, and colleagues.

While you can't *change* your past, you can change the way you *understand* it and move forward in light of that understanding.

I'd also like to say a word to all you guys who picked up this book or had it handed to you. In my experience, we men are much more hesitant, by nature, to embrace "all this memory stuff" and the process of "digging into our feelings." So if you're a guy, it's likely you'll want to change channels on me before hearing me out. But while you're channel surfing through the beginning of this book, consider two things:

1. If you want tools to help you get where you'd like to go in your marriage or dating relationship, in the parenting of your kids, in your career, or in life in general, hear me out for one chapter. By

then, if you can't see anything that might apply to you, use the book for kindling on a cold winter evening.

2. Even if you're hesitant to delve into your own childhood memories, I challenge you to learn to use these tools as you listen to the memories and feelings of your loved ones. They'll thank you for it . . . whether now or down the road.

What if, through one simple question, you could get inside the head of someone you're close to and find out exactly what makes them tick? how they see themselves and the world around them? I'm not exaggerating when I say that you could avoid years, if not decades, of misunderstanding by considering the themes of your loved ones' childhood memories.

You may have terrible memories from your childhood . . . horrific memories that no one should ever have to live through. Especially a child. If this has been your experience, and you've placed those memories in a vault, locked them away, and buried the key, who could blame you? But, by doing so, what else—besides your memories—have you placed in that vault?

May I gently suggest that perhaps you've climbed in there yourself, closed the door, and locked it behind you? If so, you may be effectively locking out those who could help you. If this book can, in any way, begin to free you from the hold those memories have on you, there's nothing I'd rather accomplish.

Whether you are curious, skeptical, excited, bruised, or in pain, your childhood memories hold the key to understanding who you are right now so you might find freedom and fulfillment.

After decades as a psychologist, I've seen enough evidence to offer you as close to a Midas-muffler guarantee as possible: Tell me three of your early childhood memories, and I'll tell you what weighs you down and what motivates you forward, what causes you to lose sleep at night with worry and what keeps you up with excitement—in short, what makes you you.

It's a tall order, I know. But consider just a handful of examples as we start:

- Civil rights activist Martin Luther King Jr. remembers his father walking confidently out of a shoe store in segregated downtown Atlanta when the clerk said the two had to move to the back of the store before being helped.[1]
- Real-estate mogul Donald Trump, who now owns large portions of Manhattan but loves the thrill of the deal as much as making money, remembers gluing together his brother's building blocks because he was so pleased with the building he had made.[2]
- Mother Teresa, one of the most well-respected saints our generation has seen as she reached out to the poor and dying in Calcutta, recalls her family gathering together each evening to pray and her mother bringing the poor and hungry into their house for meals.[3]
- Computer whiz and entrepreneur Bill Gates, now the richest man in the world, remembers negotiating a written contract with his sister for five dollars, giving him unlimited access to her baseball mitt.[4]
- Evangelist Billy Graham, who has introduced millions to a relationship with God, recalls his own father calling to him from across a grassy field, saying, "Billy Frank, come to Daddy. C'mon to Daddy."[5]

Out of the hundreds of thousands of possible memories that those individuals could have had growing up, why did *those* particular memories stick out and stay with them for decades? Could it be that during their early childhood years, which psychologists agree form the most critical years of our development, the pieces of who they would be for the rest of their lives were already coming together and beginning to create a picture, revealed in those memories?

I firmly believe so and maintain that the childhood experiences

you remember—and the particular way in which you remember them—reveal who you are. By identifying and understanding those memories, you can gather invaluable information.

What if your memories *could* decode the mysteries of who you are?

Do you sometimes wonder *why* you do the things you do? why you find yourself repeating certain mistakes or bumping up against the same obstacles time after time? What if your memories could decode the mysteries of who you are? What if you were able to understand why you think, feel, and respond the way you do—and to use those revelations to take steps toward positive changes you'd like to make for your future? Changes that would help you become who you really are, instead of who you may be trying to be? Think of the stress that would take out of your life!

Let's face it. It's taken years for you to learn to be the person you are, so you're not going to change overnight. But the good news is that you can unlearn those aspects that you want to change and chart a new path in life. And it's never too late to start, whether you're 20, 40, 60, or 80!

Early childhood memories are simply a tool to help you understand what makes you tick. They don't have anything to do with slipping into a googly eyed trance because of some hypnotist's swinging pocket watch. Exploring your memories simply involves looking at the pieces that you've stored in your mind and asking, *Why do I remember those particular events? Why not others? Do those memories reveal anything about who I am?*

Ask yourself, *Why do I remember those particular events? Why not others? Do those memories reveal anything about who I am?*

You may be surprised how much of a treasure trove your

childhood memories really are. You may discover things about yourself that you might never have discovered otherwise: how you perceive yourself and the world around you, your fears and aspirations, even your strengths and weaknesses. In fact, your childhood memories also hold keys to

- how you relate to others;
- your interests (including hobbies and possible careers);
- whether you're more comfortable working with people or things; and
- how you deal with emotions.

So think back—way back—to your childhood. (Okay, for most of you it's probably not as far back as *I* have to go.) I'll ask that million-dollar question again: What are *your* earliest childhood memories?

Have you got one? Do you find more surfacing as you begin thinking back to your family, your childhood friends, and the schools you attended? Even if you're thinking, *Dr. Leman, I can't remember where I left my keys five minutes ago let alone what I was thinking or feeling decades ago*, stay with me and I'll help jog your memory in the chapters to come.

Together we'll look at why you remember what you remember. We'll explore some of the common themes that emerge and how those themes reveal the kind of person you are. And because many of us also have painful memories, I'll reveal how you can "change" them through confronting the lies you tell yourself about them. Finally, we'll look at how your discoveries about your early childhood memories can help in your relationships and in your work. We're in for quite a journey!

But first, let me show you how all this works by telling you some of my early childhood memories.

I Made a Fool of Myself . . . and Liked It!

Why your private logic shows in public

Once when I was eight, my older sister, Sally, got the idea to dress me up in my billy-goat sweatshirt as the mascot for her varsity cheerleading squad. My task was easy. I was supposed to run onto the court with the cheerleaders in front of the crowded hometown gymnasium bleachers during a time-out to perform the five-second Williamsville Billies cheer, complete with hand motions. Decades later I still remember that cheer: "Basket, basket, score, score, score. Williamsville Central, we want more!"

Five seconds and a few hand motions—it wasn't exactly Shakespearean acting. Any joker could have pulled it off.

But somehow I managed to mess it up. It was the most itty-bitty part you could ever have, and I got the hand motions wrong. When I realized what I'd done, I froze. Row upon row of kids and adults began laughing at me, turning to their friends and pointing, then elbowing other friends to get a look at the fool up front. In that instant I felt the sharp sting of embarrassment.

But what happened next defines the memory for me . . . and perhaps for reasons other than what you might expect. The most memorable part of those seconds on the gym floor was not the initial embarrassment. It was the much stronger—and surprising—feeling that followed. The entire school body was pointing at me and laughing, but as I looked around I thought to myself, *Hey, this really isn't so bad.*

Believe it or not, I didn't care that others thought I'd made a fool of myself. What was so much more important to me was that I had made people laugh. And not only was playing the part of the joker not so bad, it was great. I loved it! I felt so good giving all those students a laugh at my expense that I probably would have taken my botched Williamsville Billies cheer to the *Ed Sullivan Show* on TV, if they'd invited me.

In that moment, burned so vividly into my memory that I can still clearly recall it over half a century later, I identified a vital part of who I'd always been and who I would always be: Kevin Leman the Joker. Far from being an ace student like my sister or a star athlete like my brother, I was different all right, having seemingly emerged straight out of the little clown car in our family's three-ring circus.

It wasn't long after that botched cheer on the basketball court that someone egged me on at another home game to attack Williamsville's rival mascot—the Amherst Tiger of Amherst Central High School. I ran up behind the dumb cat, ripped its tail completely off, and went prancing around our gym twirling that tail above my head, whipping the home crowd into a frenzy. I was having the time of my life! Shortly after that game, our school newspaper ran a good-size headline that read, "Demon Leman Defeats Amherst Tiger in Half-Time Bout."

I was different all right, having seemingly emerged straight out of the little clown car in our family's three-ring circus.

That was me: Leman the Demon. I had found my calling. I was making a fool of myself . . . and loving it!

Is What's Private Showing in Public?

You may read that memory of mine and be completely unable to relate to it. In fact, you may even have a similar childhood memory of

thoroughly embarrassing yourself in public—yet the way you reacted to your circumstances was completely different from how I reacted to mine. You may remember that same sting of embarrassment upon realizing that you'd messed up a line in the school play, a violin solo at your recital, or a pirouette during a ballet performance. But instead of feeling the euphoria of having people chuckle at you, you were horrified. If that's one of your childhood memories, you may never want to step in front of another crowd again. Comedian Jerry Seinfeld jokes that people are generally so scared of public speaking that they would rather be lying in the coffin at a funeral than in front of the crowd delivering the eulogy![1]

I once read that Michael Jordan said he was never as comfortable as when he was on the basketball court. I can't fly through the air like Jordan (although I do have a three-inch vertical leap), but I can relate to his feeling of stepping into a well-defined comfort zone. I'm completely in my element the instant the blinding stage lights go on, the floor director of a TV show points at me, and I "go live." In fact, I once stumbled into our kitchen in the early morning hours, opened the refrigerator door, and when the light inside went on, I launched into a monologue before realizing I was there for a glass of milk!

Today, when I stand in front of a crowd of five thousand adults or prepare to walk onto the set of a TV show before a viewing audience of millions, I get a twinkle in my eye and think, *Hey, this looks like fun*. As amazing as it might seem, I can't wait to get up in front—and the larger the crowd the better. You, however, might look at that same crowd and feel a wave of nausea, break out in a cold sweat, and think, *Before I get in front of those people, I'll hang myself with my own shoelaces! There is no way I'm going to do that . . . ever!* One of my greatest pleasures may very well be your worst nightmare. And vice versa.

But when you think about it, that shouldn't surprise you, because when two people are in a similar situation, there are a zillion and one ways they will not see the world precisely the same. That unique

perspective is called "private logic," a term coined by psychologist Alfred Adler. Your private logic encompasses the way you see yourself and your view of life; it includes the way you seek attention or handle conflict. It's revealed through how you complete the phrase "And the moral of my life's story is . . ."

Your private logic is revealed through how you complete the phrase "And the moral of my life's story is . . ."

It suggests how you are inclined to respond when a waiter spills a drink down the front of your shirt or when you suddenly come upon the rear bumper of an elderly person driving a blistering 43 mph on the freeway. Do you respond by acknowledging that accidents happen and that elderly people are to be shown grace? Or do you see those incidents as direct affronts against you or maddening obstacles that cause you to push back? or, even further, as events in a world conspiring against you?

In short, your private logic is your subjective interpretation of the people, places, and things around you—a perspective that changes over time but that's built upon the solid, immovable foundation of your formative, early childhood years.

As the youngest child in my family, I accepted early on that my role was to entertain people, to have fun, and to push limits whenever possible. The only way I could stand out from my scholarly sister and athletic brother was to cut my own path, which was by being a goof-off. Some children strive for attention in positive ways; others strive for attention in negative ways. But one way or another, all kids strive for attention. And getting a laugh at all costs—even if it meant getting to know the principal a bit better—was how I "logically" understood my role in life.

If you grew up living to make people laugh, as I did, then you'll see yourself as a clown with the world as your three-ring circus. If

you grew up as a martyr, believing that everyone in the world is part of some secret underground society sworn to overthrow your success, then you'll continue to view life that way. Your private logic is shaped both by who you innately were when you were born and who you became through your family environment. Even children within the same family—as much as they may adopt similar values, speak a common body language, and understand the same inside jokes—will view the same moment in childhood differently. One might remember Dad's admonitions not to play near the street as overbearing and distrustful. Another might remember Dad's watchful eye as lovingly protective.

The way you respond to each and every moment in your life reveals how you see yourself and the world. And as you examine your collection of childhood memories, you'll begin to discover themes—themes that reveal your own private logic as clearly as the grain in a piece of wood.

Going against the Grain

Did you ever take a woodshop class in school or sit around at summer camp whittling a stick? If you did, you know that if you ever try to carve against the grain, all you'll get is a pile of chips and a handful of splinters. You'll have much better luck if you carve along the grain. Then you can create different shapes, sand it to soften its feel, stain it to change its color, varnish it to protect it, and polish it to make it shine. But guess what? No matter what, the grain of the wood remains the same.

That wood grain is a lot like your personality. Whatever your strengths and weaknesses, you can sand what you've been given to soften your rough edges, add stain and polish to make a beautiful first impression, and varnish it to protect yourself from corrupting influences. But living a life that goes completely against your natural personality will ultimately give you "splinters."

Living a life that goes completely against your natural personality will ultimately give you splinters.

Here's a great example. I should never become an accountant, for the only figure I'm interested in is my wife, Sande's. If I had to spend an hour, let alone my entire working life, with a spreadsheet, I'd give up and join the circus, where my chances for success would be much greater. Numbers are great things, I admit. They help me identify my favorite college basketball and football players during game time and are very useful in assessing how much weight I'm gaining by my pants size. But beyond that, I have little use for them. It's simply not in me to spend hours crunching numbers. By knowing myself, I avoid the splinters of going against my grain.

It's not enough to simply know my grain, though, because we can "go with our grain" in both positive and negative ways. I can go with my grain in positive ways by helping people laugh—I love doing that when I speak, write, or run into some of you in the grocery store line. In some ways I really do see the world as one big stand-up comedy stage. But I can go with my grain in negative ways as Leman the Mischievous Demon, first cousin to Dennis the Menace, getting into all sorts of trouble and occasionally looking at the line drawn in front of me and stepping over it just for fun.

Let me show you what I mean by telling you two stories from my life.

My wife, Sande, loves antiques. This past Christmas she bought some antique ornaments that are beautiful but costly! After I'd gotten over my sticker shock, I couldn't help but chuckle because where Sande saw them as works of art, I remembered target practice. You see, those antique Christmas ornaments took me back to when I was a kid, perched on the living-room steps like a sniper with my BB pistol. It wasn't exactly a high-powered firearm. In fact, the BB's trajectory

even had a bit of a lob to it. But I saw myself as the Delta Force point man on *Operation Tinsel* and made it my mission to pick off as many Christmas tree ornaments as I could. And because I did it from across the room, no one could see me, so they blamed it on the family cat. Who knows how many dollars' worth of ornaments I picked off as a child . . . ornaments that would have survived to become antiques but for my sharpshooting practice!

It sounds terrible, I know—just the sort of thing Dennis the Menace and I might dream up in a brainstorming session—but when I chose to follow my fun-loving grain in mischievous, rebellious ways, I sometimes stepped across that line of what is appropriate. And that propensity to play the rebel has surfaced again and again throughout my life.

For example, when I was working as a janitor in the Tucson Medical Center, I met the love of my life, Sande, who was a nurse's aide at the time. I was completely smitten with Sande's beauty, grace, and class, but her boss there told her not to associate with me because "I wouldn't amount to much."

Years later, after I'd advanced at that same university to become an assistant dean of students and gotten the woman of my dreams to marry me in spite of her boss's advice, I was helping with registration one day. I spotted that very same woman, Sande's former boss, standing in line. Out of the thousands who were there on campus registering that day, she had coincidentally appeared in my line to sign up for some ongoing education. I couldn't believe how the tables had turned! Thankfully there were seven people before her in line so I could consider my response to her. As the minutes ticked by, I could feel the little angel and demon on my shoulders locking halo and horns, wrestling it out as to whether I'd be gracious to her or get even!

When she stepped to the front of the line, she clearly didn't recognize who I was. She told me what classes she was registering for, and I looked thoughtfully over her registration cards.

"Sorry," I said as I frowned and shook my head. "You'll need to go to the TBA building to get signatures on these cards. It's located at the very far end of campus." As I handed her back her cards, she thanked me and headed off on her long trek in search of the TBA building . . . which didn't exist. I had simply glanced at one of the papers on my table and seen the letters T-B-A—To Be Announced—beside one of the classes and had made the whole scenario up on the spot!

I know, I know. It wasn't a very kind joke. Like all of us, I have my weaknesses. Part of my grain—my propensity to certain ways of thinking or acting, if you will—is to take my fun-loving grain and put a mischievous twist on it. I do this much less today, however (except for tapping on the brake from time to time when someone is tailgating me), for as I matured I came to find that being a rebellious joker began to work to my detriment.

After my run-in with the Amherst Tiger mascot, I took to my role as Leman the Demon with reckless abandon. I threw water balloons in class. I crawled out of a classroom on my hands and knees while the teacher was teaching just to get a laugh from my peers. I carried a dictionary through the hallways with the pages cut out to conceal a water gun that I could whip out, squirt a teacher, then hide. I even set fire to the wastebasket in English class. That was my idea of fun!

But fun only got me so far.

You see, getting people to laugh was an important part of who I was and still am. Kevin Leman was both innately wired and nurtured growing up to be a comedian. But I was also telling myself a lie back then: that I didn't matter in life unless I was making others laugh. With all the brilliance of a frog refusing to jump from a pot of slowly boiling water, I maintained my trickster persona with my crazy antics—and slowly it was killing me.

Finally my high school geometry teacher, Ms. Eleanor Wilson, pulled me aside. "Kevin, I've watched your behavior. I've seen the way you act at school and how you relate to your peers. And do you know

what I think? You could really make something of your life if you used the skills you have. I see your potential, but applying yourself is up to you. I can't make that happen."

I was stunned. She was the first person—other than my parents, and parents are supposed to say things like that—who had dared to speak the truth. That interaction with Ms. Wilson literally changed the direction of my life.

Are You Being Deceived?

I've told that story about Ms. Wilson many times before, but I mention it briefly again here because it touches on one of the most important points of this book, which we'll examine in more detail in later chapters: There are all sorts of lies you tell yourself over and over until you accept them as readily as you do your own skin. And it isn't always easy to recognize them as lies. Sometimes it takes a Ms. Wilson, a friend, or a book like this one to reveal the truth.

There are all sorts of lies you tell yourself over and over until you accept them as readily as you do your own skin.

That's where your childhood memories come in, pointing to what makes you you and providing clues to your strengths and weaknesses. What my memory of botching the hand motions to that cheer and making the student body laugh tells me is that I love the spotlight. I enjoy being in front of people so much, in fact, that I've made a living of it, while helping others learn a thing or two about themselves and their relationships in the process. If I ever forget that lesson and sign up for a career in accounting, I'll quickly degenerate into a miserable jellyfish of a human being. But there's also a flip side to my love of the spotlight: Too much attention may not be a good thing for me. If I hadn't confronted the lie in my life years ago that said I only mattered if I was making headlines in people's

days, I might have continued to revert to that negative-attention-getting clown that my early childhood memories reveal I can be.

And that's another lesson that has literally changed my life.

We all walk around with lies. You might relate to the lesson I learned from my memory—that drawing too much attention to yourself may not be a good thing—in a different way. You might tend to draw inappropriate attention to yourself by the way you act, the way you dress, or by the car you drive. The lesson for you, then, could be that to have a healthy mental state in the present and in the future, it's more important that you notice others instead of seeking to have them notice you.

You see, lies drive a wedge between who you really are and who you act like you are, and the greater the distance between those two, the greater the dissonance in your life will be. Let's say you tell yourself that you're in shape because you once played college volleyball and ran a mile and a half every other day 11 years ago. Or that even though you haven't exercised since before the Berlin Wall fell, you still see yourself as athletic. Why do you think so many middle-aged men hurt themselves playing pickup games of football? Could it be that, in spite of the fact that their bodies have gained well-padded front and rear bumpers, they still live as legends in their own minds? They haven't yet learned to see themselves as they really are. But as you recognize the truth and work toward embracing it, the gap between the ideal and the real closes—and the closer the distance between these two, the better.

Many of us look at the grain of our wood and decide that it's good only for throwing into a wood chipper or mashing into pulp. But that's not at all how Almighty God sees you. He can work all things together for good, we're told.[2] All things! Even your flaws, your imperfections, the grain that seems unworkable—somehow he takes even those aspects and works them into his ongoing creative masterpiece. The Renaissance artist Michelangelo carved his famous statue *David* from a block of marble that had been already rejected by two other

sculptors because of an imperfection.[3] You may be all too conscious of your own blemishes and feel like that imperfect, rejected block (or an imperfect blockhead), but the Master Artist, who knows what you're made of better than you do, takes your worst flaws and incorporates them into the beauty of his creation—you!

Truth is, you're one of a kind. And that's a very good thing.

One-of-a-Kind Memories

You've probably heard that age-old quip of the psychologist saying to a client, "Tell me about your mother." The reason we shrinks ask that question and others like it is because asking about dear old Mom helps reveal patterns, and psychology is a science of recognizing patterns in human behavior.

If you and I were to sit next to each other on an airplane and we began making small talk for a few minutes as the crew revved up the engines, by the time we were taxiing down the runway I could tell you some things about the way you see yourself, your family, and the world around you. If I were to ask you a few probing questions as we rocketed through the clouds, I could tell you even more about yourself. Why? Because I've spent decades exploring patterns in human behavior.

You can learn an awful lot from family environments, parenting styles you were exposed to as you grew up, and your birth order. Your unique, innate, God-given traits and your family environment both contribute to who you are. Your birth order and your personality type contribute to who you are. The circumstances you faced as a family in your childhood years and the way people have related to you over the decades contribute to who you are. All of these provide entry points to describing patterns of human behavior, but what they can't describe are certain other aspects, such as whether you're more apt to be a homebody or an adventurous world traveler, or whether speed thrills or terrifies you.

What makes exploring your childhood memories so wonderful

is that memories target who you are specifically because you yourself stored them. They give you unique insights into the tough challenges of your life, into what you do well, into your comfort zone, and into your fears. They reveal your strengths and weaknesses, what you like to do, and what you don't like to do.

Take this memory of mine, which provides unique insight into my personal interests. I was five years old, lying on my bed, bored in that midsummer way that only kids can be, with the last day of school a distant memory and back-to-school sales a long way off. Then I heard a buzz. I was so bored it could have been coming from inside my head—static on the brain! But as I lay there on the bed listening, I realized that it was a single-engine airplane buzzing slowly across the sky over our house. And as I listened, something within me was ignited and burned into my consciousness.

There's no way that John and May Leman's parenting style or my birth order could have predicted that I would love to travel, since we as a family didn't travel much at all when I was growing up. But today it's a truism that Kevin Leman is a traveling man. These days airplanes seem to serve as my home away from home. I've flown nearly four million miles on American Airlines—that's eight round-trips to the moon! Not that I'd move into a 747 and set up the family photos on the armrests, mind you, for the sake of living in a metal tube with claustrophobic bathrooms. It's what airline travel opens up to me that I love: flying around the country, meeting wonderful people in new places, and talking with them about their families. I love encouraging them that they can make it in life, that there is something they have to offer the world that no one else does.

I believe that memory stuck in my mind because I wanted to travel even as a young child. As I lay there on that bed, I remember feeling a desire to explore other places, to see what lay beyond our own little town.

In a world where we compare everyone to everyone else, the bot-

There is no other you. There never was. There never will be.

tom line is that you're one of a kind. There is no other you. There never was. There never will be. Even identical twins have different fingerprints. God broke the mold when he made you. And hidden within your childhood memories are the secrets to your unique traits—traits you may not even know you have.

You now hold the key. All you have to do is use it to open the door.

A thrilling, life-changing journey awaits!

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