

Human Kindness Foundation

a little good news

Christmas 2006

A FRESH LOOK AT THAT OL' TIME RELIGION

Dear Family,

As I walked through the hall of one prison in the midwest recently I overheard one inmate saying to another in an anxious, worried tone of voice, "But is Bo a *Christian*? Is this a *Christian* program?"

That was not the first such conversation I heard along those lines. In more and more institutions I encounter a very worried Christianity, as if Christians might immediately go astray if they found themselves listening to a few words from a spiritual elder of another faith.

My, oh my. Where do we begin with the Good News that puts all that worry to rest? First of all, my dear sweet Christian brothers and sisters, the Christian faith is not so frail and weak as that. It is strong. It is a mighty force. It is supposed to fill us with a powerful love that can go anywhere and mingle with anyone who wishes to "eat at the Father's table." Believe me, you will find Muslims and Jews and Hindus and Buddhists and Wiccans and Native Americans and all the rest of humanity at that table. No religious identity cards are checked, just the goodwill in our hearts. Jesus *told* us this. He said, "Many will come in my name [calling themselves Christians], but don't be impressed by that. Look for those who do my Father's work." The Father's work – feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the prisoner and the sick, love our neighbor as ourselves. "ALL are welcome at my Father's table."

Again, this is a *strong* force, not a fragile identity that can be polluted or shattered by a person of faith from another tradition. **In fact, try to understand that it is virtually impossible to be a good Christian without also being a good Jew, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Wiccan, etc.** In this holy season of Christmas, let's finally embrace the heart and reality of religion itself.

Religion – before it splits off into different names – is simply about two things. Every classic religion on Earth is a simple two-sided coin. There is an inward teaching and an outward teaching, that's all. The inward teaching says there is a Divine force that is absolutely real. It is beyond all limitation and description, it is Holy, much greater than we are, yet mysteriously it exists within each one of us, and we are supposed to spend some time being quiet and humble in order to turn inward and commune with it. This is why Jesus told us to "go pray in *the closet*." Moses goes up to the top of Mt Sinai, Mohammed goes into the darkness of a

cave, Jesus goes out into the desert, Buddha sits under a tree and vows not to move, Native Americans go into the wilderness and sit in a little circle on the ground. All the traditions stress turning inward, alone and in silence, to commune with this great force inside of us. That's the inward teaching of all religions. Call it Communion.

The outward teaching is just as simple: When we come *out* of the cave, off the mountain, back from the desert, when we stand up from our spot underneath the tree and open our eyes and put our feet on the ground, we are supposed to love and respect each person, creature, flower and rock that life places in front of us. This is the outward teaching of every great religion. Call it Community.

Communion and community. I have written about them before, but we seem to need a reminder these days. There is no religion that does not stress these two principles at its very core. Before the religions differ in any way, all people of faith are told to turn inward toward the Divine, and turn outward to love our neighbor as our self. You can't really be a good *anything* if you don't practice these two fundamental principles. And if you do practice them, you're basically a good *everything*. So relax and enjoy the profound simplicity of your religion. How's your own balance of Communion and Community in your everyday life?

There is no religion that is being practiced very well by the masses. That has always been true. That's why Jesus warns us about the "broad way that leads to destruction" (the way most people are following), and the "narrow way that leads to salvation" (really following and *becoming* our faith). When CS Lewis, who is considered one of the greatest Christian writers of the 20th Century, was asked why he was always criticizing the church, he responded, "I have nothing against Christianity; I'm just waiting for someone to *try* it!"

You and I are invited to try it. We are invited, especially during this Holy season, to become strong, calm, kind, quiet and humble followers of the Great Way. Not loud and proud, "*Jeezus* this and *Jeezus* that," not shoving His name down people's throats. Instead of shouting "*Thank you Jeezus*," we could better express our thanks to Him by devoting ourselves to comforting the afflicted, raising up the poor and downtrodden, sheltering the homeless, treating our brothers and sisters of other faiths with respect and love.

Contrary to popular opinion, Jesus actually does not want us to beat others with His name like a baseball bat. He wants us to love others as He loves us – without first asking

whether they are saved; without first asking whether they are Christians.

Imagine someone who has never heard of Christianity or of Jesus. Their only exposure to Him is through you. What will give them a deeper, more positive impression of Jesus and His church – you being aggressive and loud and assailing them with the urgency of taking His name, or you being a strong, calm, quiet, kind, humble person who genuinely cares about them? Imagine the conversation with their families after meeting you:

- a) “I met a person today who told me that there’s this wonderful savior called Jesus and if I ask Him to be my savior I’ll be okay, but if I decide not to, I’ll be left behind to suffer throughout eternity.” A family member might say, “Hmm, that sounds strange. What was this person like?” “Well, he was a little agitated, even though he told me that Jesus gives a peace that nothing else can give. He said he was worried about my salvation if I don’t take Jesus’s name. He wanted me to do it right there on the spot. He seemed a little smug about himself being saved and me being in terrible danger.” “Hmm, do you look forward to seeing him again?” “No, I don’t think so. I have a hunch he’s always worried about something or other.”

or, the conversation might go like this:

- b) “I met a person today who hasn’t left my mind. He was so calm and kind, and his soul felt quiet and humble. He had an inner strength that drew me toward him, and when I asked him to tell me a little about himself, he said he follows Jesus Christ, the source of all his strength and love. I think I want to find out more about this Jesus.” A family member says, “That sounds so interesting. Will you see this fellow again?” “I hope so, and I hope you get to meet him too. You’ll feel calmer just being around him. I definitely want to find out more about Jesus if He is the source of this man’s peace.”

Contrary to popular belief, Jesus does not want us to be out hustling up believers like Amway salesmen. He wants us to **BE** the religion of loving our neighbor – and everyone is our neighbor. People should be drawn toward Him by our example, not by our loud, proud, cheerleading for Christ.

Ahh, it’s always so much easier to talk the talk than to walk the walk, especially when Jesus’s walk requires us to *give our lives to others*. Our modern consumer culture urges us constantly to think of ourselves, and Jesus tells us to do exactly the opposite – think first of others, and let Him take care of our own modest needs. We can’t do both. Popular Christianity tells us to be proud we are Christians, but Jesus tells us “Blessed are the *poor in spirit*.” We can’t do both – we can’t be proud and poor in spirit at the same time.

We must sometimes choose between Jesus and the church, as Jimmy Carter did recently. After painful reflection and much prayer, he cut his ties with the Southern Baptist Convention because it has become so narrow and stubborn and un-Christlike. I can imagine what a difficult decision that must have been for our former president, a lifelong Southern Baptist. And I am proud of him for choosing Christ over the Church. He is an example to all of us of what it means to be a Christian. We mocked him and slandered him and ridiculed him in politics, yet he has never turned his back on us. He truly devotes his life to “the Father’s Work” – helping the poor, being a man of peace in a violent world, and following his Savior’s teachings. He is a strong, calm, quiet, humble and kind person, and that is what we are all invited to practice in *every* religion. One Jimmy Carter is a better advertisement for Christianity than a hundred televangelists who shout Christ’s name all day long with their limousines parked out back.

In this Christmas season, regardless of what anyone else is doing, and regardless of modern Christians warning you that you’re going to hell, why not try **REAL** Christianity? Wake up with a prayer to serve your Lord through loving His creatures. Respect and care for *everyone* who crosses your path. Spend a little time in silence and humility, a little time “in the closet,” turning inward toward Him. This is not rocket science. It’s simple. It’s religion. *Every* religion.

Happy Holy Days,



REAL BIBLE STUDY

There's an old Native American saying that I quoted in *We're All Doing Time*: "If you seek to understand the whole Universe, you will understand nothing. If you seek to understand yourself, you will understand the whole Universe."

This principle applies in a related way to Bible study and the study of any religious principles. If we seek to memorize chapter and verse, if we seek to discuss and argue about abstract passages that have endless interpretations, we will understand nothing. But if we take a few words of any bible and pray on them, wrestle with them, struggle over them for *years*, however long it takes to *experience* their meaning in our hearts, then we will understand the whole bible from which those few words come.

For example, if you are interested in being a real Christian, you could make your entire study of Christianity the following thirteen words spoken directly by Jesus:

**Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's, and
render unto God what is God's.**

Or the following nine words, also spoken directly by Jesus:

Be in the world but not of the world.

Or if even nine words are too many, try the following five, spoken by a *Hindu* saint:

Everyone is poor before Christ.

What I mean by making one of these passages your entire study of Christianity, is: Just take one of these sentences and pray every day for God's help, for Christ's help, in experiencing the meaning of that brief passage. Not an intellectual understanding, but the *experience* of the passage. Struggle with it as you walk through your day. Muse over it, make it your hobby to mull it over while you're driving or jogging or falling asleep. Write it out thousands of times in a little notebook. Devote yourself to one brief passage for *years*, begging the Lord to give you the experience of what it means. One day, your prayers will be answered and you'll be given that experience. And when you know the one brief passage, you will know the whole bible, and you will know what it means to be a Christian. But if you memorize chapter and verse from all over the bible, and have intellectual understandings about their meanings, you can spend your whole life "studying" that way, and you may know nothing of the bible or of Him.

This is true of the study of any religion. General rule of thumb – study fewer words and teachings, and take them more deeply. There is an old Sufi story about a first-grade class on the first day of school, and the teacher says "We're going to study the numbers, and we will take one number a day. Today we will learn about the number 1." She teaches the students all sorts of things about the number 1, and next morning says "Is everyone ready to move on to number 2?"

One small boy raises his hand and says "I am not finished yet with number 1, teacher." The teacher says he'll have to move on with the class anyway, and she goes on with the next lesson. As the class goes to 3, 4, 5 and so on, the boy raises his hand every morning and says he is still working on the lesson for number 1. Finally she gets so annoyed she sends him home and tells him not to come back to school until he is ready to move on to the other numbers.

About six weeks later he returns to class, and the teacher asks him sarcastically, "Well, I see you have returned. Have you finally learned all about the number 1?" The young boy says "Yes, I think so, teacher." The teacher says mockingly, "Well, then come up to the blackboard and show us what you have learned."

The boy walks to the blackboard, picks up a piece of chalk, writes a '1' on the blackboard, and the blackboard cracks and falls to the floor at the power of his touch.

This is what we constantly miss in our practice and study of religion. Religion is not about just being a nice man or nice woman, it is about a force and power that is bigger, deeper, more wonderful, than anything the mind can understand or the world can reward or punish. Every religion is about the Mysterious, the Eternal, that which can never be threatened or harmed. But it is a quiet force that remains forever out of reach of the mind. We must practice, study, and follow religion from the Heart. There's no shortcut. The broad way most people are taking truly is leading toward destruction. In this Holy season of Mystery and Birth, let's take the narrow way, let's become strong, calm, quiet, humble and kind, and then see whether we have any problems with our friends of other faiths. (We won't!)

LETTERS

Bo,
Hopefully this letter finds you in good health. Actually, I hope it finds you period. I am currently in jail. My charge is 1st degree murder and I feel like I am fighting for my life. I am in a writer's workshop here and while in the library, I came across your book, We're All Doing Time. To say I was touched would be a gross understatement. I just finished it and plan on starting my meditation and yoga practices immediately.

As much as your book has helped me I feel completely lost. Part of me feels like I'm evil for taking my wife's life. The drug and depression demon had been tearing me apart for a good 10 to 15 years. My only escape was self-mutilation. One morning my wife had had enough, grabbed a knife and came at me, I got the knife away and the rest is a little blurry.

But I know she's gone thanks to me.

Is it ever too late for someone? I feel like the damage has already been done for me. A lot of what I have read indicates,

also, that it's a good idea to have a teacher along the path of enlightenment. I know there is no teacher here in the psych ward of this jail, and I feel if I have to wait until I get to prison it will be too late. My mom and brother have been by my side as well as a beautifully warm friend. They have all tried to help me but thoughts of giving in and taking my own life won't go away. I will serve a sentence of probably 10-20 years. What I am really looking for is some proof that I deserve another chance. Looking at her family at every court date reminds me of the pain I have caused them and my own family. Maybe death is the only thing that will bring closure. My wife never deserved that, she was just fed up with my habits. Cocaine and booze have been my lonely companions for most of my life. Man, what happened to me? Please help.

Peace and love from the short one, M

Hey M,

Sorry to hear you're having such a rough time that you're considering taking yourself out. At least I can answer a few of your questions, whatever you decide to do. First, no, it is never too late for any of us to turn things toward God, toward the spiritual journey. If there were such a thing as being too late, ALL of us would be too late and no one would ever have become a saint.

The truth is, some of the greatest saints have started out as murderers; it is not an uncommon thing. There's something about having taken a person's life – so irreversible, so regrettable – that can give you both the humility and motivation needed for the hardest work of the spiritual journey. It wasn't until Simon Peter betrayed Christ that he then possessed the humility necessary to become the rock of the church.

You can't bring your wife back, but you can make sure her death counts for something. Let her death mean there is one more committed fulltime spiritual seeker in the world attempting every day to live unselfishly and with compassion. That's a lot better way to atone than to kill yourself, creating one more tragedy for your loved ones.

God led you to *We're All Doing Time* and the writing project. Use them. Use them deeply. Become Holy. Strip yourself of selfishness, that's the key. Talk to your wife and promise her you're going to become a TOTALLY kind and caring person to honor her life and tragic death. And then never go back on your word.

It's hard, M, but everyone's life is hard right now. You can do hard. You can become a blessing instead of feeling like a curse. And you do have teachers already. What do you think this letter is?

You don't have to wait for a thing. Devote your life to the good. You can do this, M. Now devote yourself to it.

Blessings, Bo



Dear Bo & Sita,

I'm not in prison—I've never been incarcerated—but I'm living in a homeless shelter. I see the parallels to being in a monastery.

I don't know what I want to say to you! I'm in pain and it's been going on for decades. Despite years of therapy, meditation, reading (Be Here Now chief among others) and reflection I still feel hopeless, lonely, and unloved. I've never had a lover. My few (5 or 6) attempts were disaster. It never happened that 1) I wanted him and 2) He wanted me. It was always one or the other. One of us was there because he liked the other person but wasn't attracted to him. We tried but it didn't work. I was always impotent.

Now that I am 55, I have lost hope of ever having a lover since I'm attracted to only men half my age. I'm thoroughly stuck in my 20s when I came out and tried to connect with others on a deeper level than BSing in the Student Union. I'm disgusted with my shallowness and youth and beauty obsession—but it remains true. I also have a bad body image and a neurotic fear of rejection.

I didn't expect to write about this—there's a lot more shit in my life. I guess that is where I'm at this afternoon.

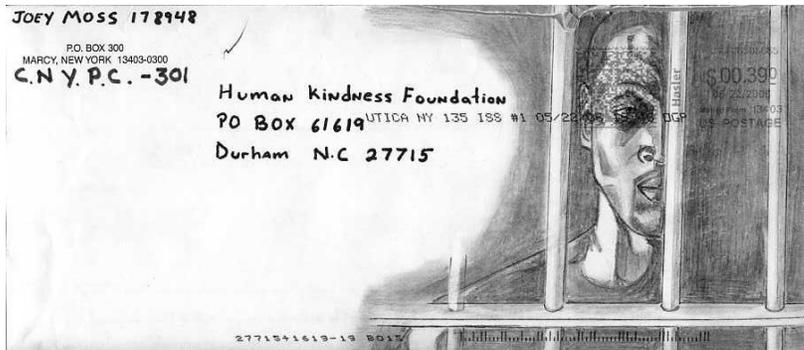
Your answer to convicts' letters show a remarkable ability to see beyond what they say to what's really going on. I'm hoping you can see something that no one else has and then help me see it.

Thanks, N

Hi N,

There's an old Chinese saying that I quoted in *We're All Doing Time*. It goes something like "Why are you unhappy? Because 99% of the things you do, say, and think are about yourself. And there isn't one!"

That's our deepest dilemma. Focusing our lives around a non-existent self's desperate search for personal happiness is a lose-lose-lose proposition. That's why our affluent culture has the greatest number of anti-depressant prescriptions



of all the countries on Earth. The more we focus on self-centered happiness or fulfilment, the more it eludes us. It's like the rabbit at the dog track: The game is rigged; the dogs never get to catch it.

Negative self-centeredness, like yours, is just as problematic as the positive self-centeredness we see around us. It's all a form of culturally-induced narcissism and it's doomed from the start.

You've spent a lot of years feeling bad about this non-existent self, my friend. What you may consider at this point is turning in a whole other direction of faith and devotion. That may sound sappy to you but I assure you it's relevant. Is your life dedicated to anything greater than yourself? Does your day serve anyone else's needs or the needs of the poor struggling planet? If you're so miserable, why not at least be miserable while you're serving someone else? Maybe there might be some surprises in store for you.

Your problem is not young men or sexuality. That's a convenient distraction from the serious issue of feeling valueless. If you are to be a lover or have a lover, life will bring you into that circumstance if you are simply following your natural path. And if you are not destined to be or have a lover, then that is just your lot in life, and your happiness will come in other forms if you merely follow your natural path. This is the sort of faith I'm referring to -- faith in your LIFE.

One thing I have discovered in years of extremely painful retreats, practices and reflection, is that God (or Life) doesn't ever cave in from our tantrums. My tantrums have been of the intense variety like going without food and water past human limits. Maybe your tantrums are of a different variety -- living like an unloved, valueless pathetic creature instead of the radiantly beautiful human being you really are. But I want to caution you -- God's Love is not sentimental, and He never blinks first when we try to stare Him down or hold our breath until we turn blue (which I have also literally done!).

Oh N, look around. Nearly everyone you see is desperately unhappy or confused or unfulfilled. We happen to be living in the saddest age the world has known in many centuries. This is not personal or unique to you. Life is lonely, life is sad, and life is also mystically beautiful and

precious, We each have to bear our portion of the cross -- the sadness, the lack of connection, the loneliness -- in order to experience the other side of the coin -- the exquisite perfection of it all.

This misery of yours is not about wanting a lover. Think BIG, my friend! A lot bigger than that. The best way to take up your time is to serve all creatures and creation while keeping God in your heart. You'll have good days and bad days, harder times and easier times, maybe lovers, maybe not, and all the pairs of opposites that eventually motivate us to seek something huger than all of this petty, transitory shit.

If I had to sum up this letter in two words, they would be this: WAKE UP. Most of what you wrote in your letter was written in your sleep. Wake up and at least begin approaching the right problems instead of wasting all your energy in dream-problems. That's the opportunity we all share. You can look around for some practical ways of getting your shit together in mind, body and spirit -- getting healthy enough to function -- and find some way to earn your livelihood while contributing something positive to the world. We are your friends in this world if you want friends who are doing the same thing -- not friends who feel sorry for you because you're not getting what YOU want. None of us gets what we want, N. Thank God that's not so relevant!

Your Friend, Bo



HKF, Bo Lozoff,

A fellow inmate loaned me his copy of, We're All Doing Time but he's been moved and had to take the book with him. He provided me with your address and I'm writing you in hopes of getting a copy so I can finish it. What I've read of it is outstanding!

I've been down 10+ years with 6 left. I'm suicidal at times and often wonder what if anything lies ahead before and after my release date. Is this life journey worthwhile? Often I've doubted it. Been in suicide units as my mind often goes there. I'm retired medically from the Navy (Vietnam) due to injuries

Well I euthanized my wife who was suffering from an irreversible head injury. Played God I guess and ended her life of suffering. My charge is 1st degree murder. That's O.K. I'd rather spend the rest of my life in one of these

places than see her on a life support machine. I've heard that murderers go to hell, so be it, so long as she is in heaven.

My PTSD is rather severe, guess I am grasping at straws in order to find a reason (just one will do) to keep going on. Why bother if hell is waiting, I'm already in hell here. The other is awaiting if that's my fate, so be it! Get this incarnation over with and meet my fate. Thought your book might open my eyes some, like to read it through. I'm certain you have others in need more, so if you can get me a copy later on that's fine.

Thanks for the consideration, R

Hey R,

Sorry I missed meeting you when I was at your prison last month. Had a good discussion with a bunch of guys.

R, you've certainly had a rough road, but it's hard to believe you really accept the simplistic "murderers go to hell" kind of nonsense you quoted. C'mon...

Some of the greatest spiritual giants in history, from Moses to St Paul to Angulimala and Milarepa and Valmiki, were killers before they became saints. You say you often wonder what, if anything, lies ahead for you. Well, how about the entire range of human experience on the journey to Holiness? That's what lies ahead for you, same as for me and everyone else. No one is counted out, R. Which also means every one of us has some responsibility for taking that journey.

You certainly have the right to kill yourself. But forget all the justifications for doing so. Especially if you feel you did the right thing in ending your wife's misery, then you have to trust there is something deep, something profound for you to discover in this difficult path you courageously chose for yourself out of compassion for her. You took an unusual turn, now keep going! Dedicate yourself to the classic teachings and practices that help us let go of all selfishness and unkindness. You'll find plenty of meaning and healing for your life if/when you do.

Your books are on the way, brother. I wish you every good thing.

Blessings, Bo



BO LOZOFF ON TOUR

Dear Bo,

With great respect and love, I welcome you with all my heart. I am just writing a brief note to thank you, once again, for coming to Northeast Correctional Center here at Bowling Green, Missouri, and what a tremendously positive effect your visit had, not only on me, but on all the guys who had the pleasure of attending. Honestly, there was a huge buzz all over the prison about how great it was.

This is an article I wrote for Inside Dharma, our newspaper, and I'll be including it in the prison newspaper, "It's About Time." Oh, and we hope you liked our song, "Written on the Wind."

Peace and bliss, brother

John Bradin



Bo Lozoff visits Northeast Correctional Center

An Afternoon with Bo by John Bradin – Bowling Green, MO

Monday, Labor Day 2006, was a beautiful sunny day with fat, puffy clouds. Our VICs, Carol and Kalen, came down the walk with a tan good looking man dressed in black and carrying a guitar case. Due to the holiday meal taking longer than usual, I was still in the cafeteria line waiting to eat as they came down the walk to the chapel. They waved to me as they went in, so I rushed through my meal and hurried over to the chapel as quickly as I could.

Our dear friend and Muslim brother, Chuck X, already had our special visitor, Bo Lozoff, getting his guitar and microphone set up. Bo (pictured above in black, center row) was conducting his sound check when the rest of the large group of inmates and I came in and took our seats. After I gave him a brief introduction, Bo opened with his rendition of Bob Dylan's "Knockin' on Heaven's Door" and we sang along. Then he did one of his original songs, "Johnny and Me" about how people compared him to Johnny Cash because he has a deep voice and wears black. It was a great song, and quite amusing.

After gently laying down his beautiful, well aged martin D-28 acoustic guitar, Bo took a few moments of silence, and then began his fascinating, illuminating talk. He began familiarizing us with the fact that he spent three years in seclusion, thoroughly reading the "bibles" of all the world's major religions and philosophies and how, in all those great books, it doesn't tell you that the Kingdom of Heaven is on sale at Wal-Mart, and it isn't

available with no money down and easy payments. He said, "The scriptures say that the Kingdom of Heaven is within you," and that the great religious beings, such as Buddha, Jesus, and Mohammad, found the truth by turning within, by self-examination. While Oprah says, "Learn to say 'I want,'" it doesn't say that in any of the great books. Bo said that we might feel deprived because we are not able to connect to the Internet, or because we are not caught up in

buying, selling, trading, breaking, fixing, or getting rid of material things. But we are actually able to have time to turn within ourselves and get "deep" by experiencing who we really are, and changing ourselves – not to be bigger consumers, but to love and help our fellow human beings, and to place their well-being ahead of our own.

Bo went on to tell a story about a friend of his. After 18 years in the joint he was paroled and became a drug counselor making \$27,000 a year. A few years went by, and he was offered a job driving over the road trucks, starting at \$70,000 a year. He thought about it a lot but then he turned it down because to him giving back and being able to help others was more important than just being able to buy more stuff.

'Its up to us, the people in prison, 50,000 of whom are released each day, to be "real men and women" who are willing to help others and devote our lives to helping those less fortunate and less enlightened than ourselves.'

Bo then led a lively and honest question and answer session, with many in the group asking deep, personal questions and receiving open, insightful answers. We then went into a peaceful, regenerative meditation. The afternoon ended with the jazz/rock group Blue Pearl (Rudy Hampton on bass, Willie Little on rhythm guitar and John Bradin on lead guitar) performing "Written on the Wind."

We would like to thank Bo Lozoff for his visit, and we hope he can come again. We would also like to thank Superintendent Jim Moore and Chaplain Tommy Barnhart, without whose kindness and help this would not have been possible.

From *Inside Dharma*, Vol IV, Issue 5, September-October 2006



For up to date information on Bo's tour, check out our EVENTS page on our website.

www.humankindness.org

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Bo's newest musical offering is a stellar collection of 14 original songs recorded live in July of '06. His love of storytelling and life pour through simple and true. Bo threads images of memories like diamonds on strings of crisp, beautiful sounds. This is heartwarming folk-meets-country that makes you want to get out of your seat and swoon and croon along.

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and Stumbling Toward the Light

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