

# *On Life and Meaning*

MARK PERES

## **Episode 8** – John W. Love, Jr. – The Perpetually Pregnant Man

### *A Moment of Stage Fright*

And now a personal word,

When I hear John Love recite his poetry, I'm drawn back to my senior year in college standing on stage in fright.

Late in the spring of my junior year I was named Student Chairman of Orientation. Head of the O-Team. My job was to recruit and organize fellow students to be O-Team members who would greet incoming freshmen and help move them in, and to program several days of events on campus that would kick off the new school year. Leading Orientation was a big deal. It was a paid staff position over the summer. I would be the face of the campus at events and in all printed literature. It was a prestigious position, as far as these things go, because of the spotlight and because administrators would see me, at least for a moment, as one of their own. They saw in me the goods to work effectively with all the stakeholders on campus: deans, faculty, department heads, students, parents and the community.

I had earned my stripes for the position as president of the honor society and several other clubs and organizations on campus. I was perceived as a confident, well spoken, high achieving student, and a curious blend of a philosophical and pragmatic young man.

All of which brings me to my moment on stage. It was late August 1984. The O-Team members, administrators, faculty and staff had gathered for my opening remarks. There was energy and anticipation in the room as everyone was back on campus for the new year. I had my note cards in my hand, ready to climb the stairs to the stage, when I suddenly felt this overwhelming panic that I was uninteresting, that no one would like me, that everyone would find me a vast disappointment, that I would be a complete bore. I started to sweat. I walked on stage and looked out. Everyone became a blur. The crowd was one amorphous blob. My voice became cotton-mouthed. I mixed up my cards. I don't know what I said.

After a few moments, the next speaker came on stage and put his arm around my shoulder and smiled empathetically. I received polite applause. It was a disaster. I sat in my seat and wanted to hide.

The wheels of Orientation turned and the week went on successfully. I later received a letter from the president of the college saying it was the best Orientation he had seen. I had a particularly strong senior year, went off to law school, business and community work and education, and have led my life ever since. Since that day 38 years ago, I have spoken to hundreds of audiences, but the memory of that moment is still with me every time I walk on stage.

I still panic that everything I do is uninteresting, that my personality and talents and skills are all inadequate.

John Love invites us into a world of Yes. I think about what I say yes to even when all my nerves say no.

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