

In that place between wakefulness and dreams, I found myself in a room. There were no distinguishing features save for the one wall covered with small index card files. They were like the ones there used to be in libraries that list titles by author or subject in alphabetical order. But these files, which stretched from floor to ceiling and seemingly endlessly in either direction, had very different headings. As I drew near the wall of files, the first to catch my attention was one that read “Girls I have liked.” I opened it and began flipping through the cards. I quickly shut it, shocked to realize that I recognized the names written on each one.

And without being told, I knew exactly where I was. This lifeless room with its small files was a catalog system for my life. Here were written the actions of every moment, big and small, in a detail my memory could never have matched.

A sense of both wonder – and curiosity – coupled with horror, stirred within me as I began randomly opening files and exploring their content. Some brought joy and sweet memories; others a sense of shame and regret so intense that I looked over my shoulder to see if anyone was watching. A file named “Friends” was next to one marked “Friends I have betrayed.”

The titles ranged from the mundane to the outright weird. “Books I have read,” “Lies I have Told,” “Comfort I have given,” “Jokes I have laughed at.” Some were almost hilarious in their exactness: “Things I’ve yelled at my siblings.”

Others I couldn’t laugh at: “Things I have done in my anger,” “Things I have muttered under my breath at my parents.” I never ceased to be surprised by the contents. Often there were many more cards than I expected. Sometimes fewer than I hoped.

I was overwhelmed by the sheer volume of the life I had lived. Could it be possible that I had the time in my 67 years to write each of these thousands or even millions of cards? But each card confirmed this truth. Each was written in my own handwriting. Each signed with my signature. When I pulled out the file marked “Time I have spent on the Internet,” I realized the files grew to contain their contents. The cards were packed tightly, and yet after 2 or 3 yards, I hadn’t found the end of the file. I shut it, shamed, not so much by the quality of what I had watched, but more by the vast amount of time I knew that file told me I had wasted.

When I came to a file marked “Lustful thoughts,” I felt a chill run through my body. I pulled the file out only an inch, not willing to test its size, and drew out a card. I shuddered at its detailed content. I felt sick to think that such a moment had been recorded.

An almost animal rage broke on me. One thought dominated my mind: “No one must ever see these cards! No one must ever see this room! I have to destroy it all!” In an insane frenzy I yanked the file out. Its size didn’t matter now. I had to empty it and burn the cards. But as I took it at the end and began pounding it on the floor, I could not dislodge a single card. I became desperate and pulled out a card, only to find it as strong as steel when I tried to tear it.

Defeated and utterly helpless, I returned the file to its slot. Leaning my forehead against the wall, I let out a long, self-pitying sigh. And then I saw it. The title read “People I have shared the gospel with.” The handle was brighter than all the others around it, newer, almost unused. I pulled on its handle and a small box not more than 3 inches long fell into my hands. I could count the cards it contained on one hand.

And then the tears came. I began to weep. Sobs so deep that the hurt started in my stomach and shook through me. I fell on my knees and cried. I cried out of shame, from the overwhelming shame of it all. The rows of file shelves swirled in my tear-filled eyes. No one must ever, ever know of this room. I must lock it up and hide the key.

But then as I pushed away the tears, I saw Him. No, please – not Him. Not here. Oh, anyone but Jesus. I watched helplessly as He began to open the files and read the cards. I couldn't bear to watch His response. And in the moments I could bring myself to look at His face, I saw a sorrow deeper than my own. He seemed to intuitively go to the worst boxes. Why did He have to read every one?

Finally, He turned and looked at me from across the room. He looked at me with pity in His eyes. But this was a pity that didn't anger me. I dropped my head, covered my face with my hands and began to cry again. He walked over and put His arm around me. He could have said so many things. But He didn't say a word. He just cried with me.

Then He got up and walked back to the wall of files. Starting at one end of the room, He began to sign His name over mine on each card. "NO!" I shouted to Him. All I could find to say was, "No, no," as I pulled the card from Him. His name shouldn't be on these cards. But there it was, written in red so rich, so dark, so alive. The name of Jesus covered mine. It was written with His blood. He gently took the card back. He smiled a sad smile and began to sign the cards.

I don't think I'll ever understand how He did it so quickly, but the next instant, it seemed I heard Him close the last file and walk back to my side. He placed His hand on my shoulder and said, "It is finished."

I stood up, and He led me out of the room. There was no lock on its door. There were still cards to be written. I have the chance to begin again. (sent to me in 1999, from the internet, by (then) Major Charles M. Thomas)

As we begin the most Holy Week of the Year, this is what we are given. A chance to begin again. What a gift! What a gift! Amen.