

== PIECE WE NEED ==

== THINKABOUTS ==

## THINKABOUTS for PIECE #1

### A QUIET BACKGROUND

Where can we find inner strength? How can we grow it? Our life cannot be successful if we are unsure of ourselves, without a solid footing. More and more, the news tells us that we need inner strength.

I can only answer those questions for myself, out of my experiences. Strength is not hiding, but it certainly is quiet. I see strength around me, obvious and impressive. But in me? I'm no superhero. Where is my strength? I find it in the feeling of my body staying alive, the comfort simply being myself, and my breath. It is quiet but very present. It's quiet, constant, and easily forgotten.

Strength is already residing inside us. It is subtle and must be felt. It is like a constant hum, quiet and not heard. It is subtle like the fragrance of surrounding blossoms. Sometimes, I feel that hum easily; other times, it's forgotten. That feeling is important because it enables healing and supports contentment.

On the other hand, noise comes from every direction around me. It is multiplied by my own internal chatter. Whether that noise is external or internal, it consistently distracts me from my own qualities. Piece #1 is a fitting metaphor, with many people coming, going, dancing, talking, shouting, and laughing. I forget the background music that is playing. Hearing the background is like feeling the background of strength that I have.

### ThinkAbout Questions—Piece #1—Silent Solo

What current events might bring serious challenges?

What background sounds are happening around you right now?

Have you ever discovered special things about yourself?

Do you feel ready to discover more?

Do you ever feel strength that's quiet and unseen?

Would you say that inner strength is already a part of you?

What unique treasures show up in small ways?

What is most constant in your life and never changes?

Showing strength or having strength ... Which is more important?

What is the message in this Piece?

What does the phrase “Knowing Yourself” mean to you?

Can you think of more questions? (Challenging ones, that is!)

More questions for any piece are welcome.

Send them in, and they might be added to the book!

## THINKABOUTS for PIECE #2

### BORN INTO STRENGTH

We all think highly of the possibility of living fully. This is not a single skill to learn, stuff in our backpack, keep walking, and forget about. A person who lives a full life is a person with many skills. He is comfortable with varied aspects of themselves. That person does not spotlight one source of strength and ignore others. That’s why PWN has different Pieces, each focusing on a different aspect of living fully. The running thread throughout the book is inner strength because this is the quality we all need.

Different people feel strength in different ways. What are the similarities in how we find strength? One universal characteristic is the fresh and exciting feeling of life when it is pure and just beginning. Both a tender plant shoot and a newborn infant shine with that divine miracle. This feeling has little to do with what we may hear or what has been taught. It is a feeling in our bodies. It lends itself to metaphor and poetry, with meanings beyond literal words.

The puzzle in Piece #2 is not difficult to put together. The first two puzzle pieces show the magical beauty of newborn life. The next two talk about the power of that magic. I revere this beauty and always seek to find it. It is important to remember that this strength and magic do not leave when chaos strikes.

### FINDING HELP

Let’s talk about practical solutions to serious challenges. If crises happen, talk to people who know your specific situation. Prepare for changes.

This is important.

Don’t delay making things safe and secure.

## ThinkAbout Questions—Piece #2—Jigsaw Puzzle

Here is a list of tools for growing inner strength. However, the list is not complete. What would you add?

- Visualizing the outcome and feelings you want
- Taking baby steps and having patience
- Identifying the people who love to help others
- Being a helper and supporting people you love (and strangers, too!)
- Finding those who easily give concern and care to others
- Keeping in touch with the feeling of basic aliveness
- Tapping inner wisdom and gut understanding
- Reaching deep and checking into your feelings
- Seeing the differences between what is real and what is feared

How would you describe the picture made by the four puzzle pieces in the video?

How is strength related to newness and freshness?

What are the elements of inner strength?

-- Health? -- Humor? -- Being alone? --Being active -- Patience?

Why are simple solutions often best?

Can you think of more questions? (Challenging ones, that is!)

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## THINKABOUTS for PIECE #3

### THE DIRECTION FORGOTTEN

Yap! Yap! Chatter! Chatter! There is so much noise around me, I can't hear myself think ... and then, when I do hear myself, often I hear only more noise. Random thoughts come in, zip out, push me, and pull me every which way. The influence of mass media and other people is constant. It is easy to forget that there is another direction.

A different direction? With a comforting voice? Yes, coming from territory that is close to home: myself! It is a quiet voice with little to say and a very simple message. Personal experience is

often given little value. Our educational system sometimes gives it little credence. Mass media largely ignores it.

But this is an area that is close to everyone. We can know our feelings, no matter how subtle or repressed they are. We all have them, so they deserve to be known and given attention. Knowing oneself leads to comfort in being oneself. It generates greater purpose and success. It allows me to know myself as a solid unit, complete wherever I go and whatever I do.

Even more importantly, we can feel life's constant and comfortable momentum moving inside of us. This feeling is usually subtle and quiet, always peaceful and calming. Piece #3, Two Directions, points to this area that's often ignored: inner experience. However, the realm of feelings is close to everyone and accessible by anyone. For myself, I find great discoveries here that bring growth, clarity and strength.

### ThinkAbout Questions—Piece #3—Two Directions

How introspective are you?

Have you ever changed in ways that only you can see?

Have you seen people go through crises and react very differently than you?

How much of your focus is self-involved?

How do introspection and inner strength relate to each other?

Which of your feelings are most enduring?

What do you have and are glad you have, but often take for granted and forget about?

Where do you find inner strength if big obstacles come into your life?

What is quiet and in plain sight?

Can people take care of themselves and be generous at the same time?

How does your relationship with yourself impact your relationship with others?

Can you think of more questions? (Challenging ones, that is!)

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## THINKABOUTS for PIECE #4

### WHERE NEVER PREDICTED

In *Totally Unexpected*, a famous astronomer discovers a colorful man dancing on the moon's surface. Let me describe how I came up with this story:

Life is a biological process always happening inside me, which is the background of the entire movie called *My Life*. I usually considered this regular, automatic, unchanging process to be a background hum, like a grey rock in an uneventful vacuum. That reminded me of the rocky and barren surface of the moon.

But I also feel life happening inside of me. With careful attention, it becomes an amazing breath of fullness. So, I pictured a guy miraculously dancing the jig in the middle of the vacuum, obviously out of place. All it needed was the discovery by a goofy scientific nerd. Totally unexpected!

This moon dance is a demonstration of metaphor. We see a stage in a vacuum, and the dancer has no spacesuit. Colored lights shine. There's no attempt to make it seem like a true story.

Here, a colorful dance is unexpected and impossible. But it is happening anyway! And the setting is a grey, lifeless vacuum. But it is a lively jig! And the message is about life itself having strength that can't be silenced. But we rarely feel it!

To me, the message is, "Be Ready!" I often ignore life as if it is a mundane given, a blank slate of monotony. I assume it will be there again tomorrow, just like today. Chances are very good that it will be. But one day will come when it will not be. This clearly speaks a message: "Don't assume. Be ready!"

### ThinkAbout Questions—Piece #4—Totally Unexpected

In what ways does your body stay alive whether you think about it or not?

If you put together all those ways, how much power would you have?

Which of those ways are ever-present and subtle?

Is inner strength a quality that you can always use more of?

What is the difference between looking at yourself and feeling yourself? (That is, using a mirror or feeling inside your body?)

Details make you who you are, and the basics are the same for everyone. Do you agree?

When do you ever objectify things instead of getting close and feeling them?

Why does the act of Opening Up require courage?

You might stay closed sometimes to protect yourself. When is that protection unsafe?

What do you lose by staying distant and hidden?

Can you think of more questions? (Challenging ones, that is!)

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## THINKABOUTS for PIECE #5

### BURSTING INTO EXISTENCE

Think about this miracle... a baby is born, and life begins. Six million years of evolution went into making that person. Thirty trillion cells work together; eight million breaths are taken yearly to animate 78 organs. This starts with a single microscopic cell containing all the information needed to build this life of years, breaths, and organs.

What I wish to highlight here is not the numbers but the force that drives it all to happen. This is magic that can't be grasped or defined. However, it can be felt in a simple, quiet, and introspective way. That feeling can easily be demonstrated: feel the pull of air as your body repeats the rhythm of aliveness. That magic shines in the beauty of every newborn baby. The purity of a newborn is unmistakable and flavors the atmosphere around it. The power of life empowers that baby's body and the entire lifetime of the person who lives it.

This core offers a feeling of home that is enduring and never lost. It is always my center point. However far I travel, this remains my starting place. It is my security. When I reach to feel life itself, I recognize and love this core feeling.

Piece #5 explains how we can see our lives as a mixture of good and bad. Often, serious challenges force people to see a background core that is constant and quiet. This core is consistent strength. I feel it in my center, and my world revolves around it.

### ThinkAbout Questions—Piece #5—Hidden Home

In your life, what has not changed since you were a baby?

What would remain if everything was taken away from you (things, people, identity)?

--- How would you continue living your life?

--- What would you talk about if you met someone on the street?

--- What would the two of you have in common?

In what ways is inner strength flexible?

What is most consistent for you? (What doesn't change day-to-day?)

In what ways are you a single whole unit?

Do you have a core that is common to everyone and always constant?

Which little things do you appreciate more as you grow older?

In what ways is it amazing and special to be here and alive?

Can you think of more questions? (Challenging ones, that is!)

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### THINKABOUTS for PIECE #6

#### THE LAST PLACE LOOKED

Sometimes it is very difficult to see things that are obvious. Maybe a bold, colorful sign points them out. "Big!" "Important!" "Right Here!" ... but we still miss them anyway. My own history

proves that big pointers do not always get my attention. I realize sometimes: “I just missed something important!” This is an unfortunate truth, and I need to work on it.

Inner strength is a great example. I frequently need this important asset, but it usually seems to be hiding, and I quickly get used to feeling weak. Even careful attention may not help because it may be hiding in the most secret place of all: plain sight!

Yes, in plain sight. I am learning to embrace strength by being aware of myself and accepting what is here. “Seeing what’s in plain sight” refers to embracing things as they are, noticing what is obvious, and not taking things for granted. It encourages us to set aside differences and live without expectations.

My observational skills are not always the best, even when I am very concentrated and careful. But something else is always on target: sincerity. When I’m sincerely dedicated to discovering my strength, then strength becomes a powerful and available tool. Sincerity brings humility and appreciation of my strengths, even those only I see. When eyes become glazed and gloss over treasures, it is as if those treasures were never received. I developed the metaphor in Piece #6 because I consider that the aliveness in me is amazing and powerful, yet I rarely give it attention. The game Plain Sight is a perfect example.

### ThinkAbout Questions—Piece #6—Plain Sight

Take a good look at what is close in plain sight.

--- How many obvious and trivial things can you name?

Does having an easy life make someone take things for granted?

Can you think of things that are close but forgotten?

--- Ignored?

--- Dismissed?

What things are very valuable and easily found?

What things are very valuable but difficult to find?

Can you think of any challenges that make hidden things become obvious?

Can you think of more questions? (Challenging ones, that is!)

More questions for any piece are welcome.

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## THINKABOUTS for PIECE #7

### BIG RESULTS / SMALL ACTIONS

The importance of sharing gratitude is not small. People who feel grateful want to express it, leading to more sincerity and generosity. When generosity is nurtured, a person grows larger in heart. Self-esteem and acceptance grow. One proceeds with purpose and without hesitation. If someone feels weak and lacking, they have little room for giving and no room to gather wealth.

When somebody starts caring about others, they are happy to work hard for them. They make sure that everyone has what they need. They readily express their concern. Such an expression seems to come from nowhere and is always a welcome surprise. Gratitude that is real is never expected. It has no expiration date. A little expression goes a long way.

In times of challenge, gratitude is often one of the first emotions that become scarce. Everyone ensures they have what they need, and little attention is given to return graciousness to others. In challenging times, almost everyone is stressed and needy. This is when gratitude, generosity, acceptance, and caring become treasures.

In Piece #7, Remember Always, I tell a simple story about gratitude. The story might seem trivial, but the humility of the poor man is big and obvious. The message communicates clearly: The power of gratitude can pierce through walls of mistrust and deceit.

### ThinkAbout Questions—Piece #7—Remember Always

We forget, then remember, then forget, then remember. Therefore, we must carefully look at what we have.

--- Think about this.

--- Now, what shows up that you missed before?

How does the feeling of gratitude relate to strength and health?

Is generosity rare?

Can you think of times when generosity was common?

Have you ever felt empty because you gave to others?

What are some ways to build your ability to have compassion?

Does humility require strength?

Saying thank you to someone is like giving a gift in return! Have you experienced this?

Can we feel gratitude without identifying the person or thing we are thankful for?

(This is a tricky question. Don't just say only what you think you're supposed to say!)

To whom or to what do you give thanks?

Can you think of more questions? (Challenging ones, that is!)

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## THINKABOUTS for PIECE #8

### THE PATH THAT'S TRUSTED

A driveway is a simple direct road with no turns or detours. Is there a driveway to inner strength? Speaking for myself, there certainly is! I feel a direct route, a driveway, that goes to inner strength.

I am happy with the simple things I have, so I created this Piece to praise the simple feeling of aliveness. The feeling of simplicity is essentially important to me. This feeling has always been a direct route to where I want to go, so I can proceed without any detours. It takes me to the feeling of beauty and peace. I am not bragging or comparing myself to anyone. I am painting a bright image and hearing it declare: "Here!"

A metaphor can communicate an abstract feeling, and a metaphor is important whenever words do not communicate well. Sometimes, words distract the reader. This Piece is an example of a metaphor that is important because it talks about the personal feeling of clarity.

I can go where I want when I am clear about my direction and destination. And then I can move in a straight line to get there. Clarity is vital. What do I want? Where am I? Where do I want to go? When I become clear about my destination, the path can appear, and the most direct route can be found. I can live with the strength to be myself without detours or hesitation.

Where I want to go is the feeling of simplicity ... so I am delighted to be on a simple path.

## ThinkAbout Questions—Piece #8—Driveway

Here are some steps:

- 1. Know yourself
- 2. Be true to yourself
- 3. Find inner strength

Does that seem like a natural progression to you?

How would you describe that progression in your own words?

What do you think are the steps to achieve your own aspirations?

Can you give more examples of how greater clarity makes a path easier?

How close to you is nature right now?

Can you think of more examples of driveways? (Simple actions that always take you where you want to go)

Is the feeling of life itself something that you can touch?

Is life itself an expression of nature?

In what ways can you feel the current of life?

So now, after answering those last four questions, ask again:

How close to you is nature right now?

Can you think of more questions? (Challenging ones, that is!)

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## THINKABOUTS for PIECE #9

### HONEST APPRECIATION

In addition to my direction and destination, a third element is needed: Knowing where I am!

This video points to the importance of honestly engaging with what is right here, in front of me, rather than at a distance, the labels and impressions I think about.

Things and labels: there is a big difference. Can I tell the difference between facts and feelings? My feelings are close at hand. The words I use are labels. This may seem obvious, but confusion is easy. Indeed, the subject is like a minefield because one can only talk about words by using more words. So, we need to reacquaint ourselves with the feelings we experience.

Standing on outer appearances is fragile, professing falsehoods is deceitful, and not knowing the difference is difficult. I prefer being simple and unpretentious, authentic and direct with others. It is always strongest to be simple and honest, and the most difficult honesty is with myself. I want to be truthful about the motives for all my actions. I want to live without embellishments.

*Really Swimming* is about our need to paint pretty pictures instead of honestly seeing reality. The feeling of inner strength is a simple fact. It does not need to be hyped up. If I tell myself that I am strong, I am already distracted. Instead, I only need to feel what I have.

### ThinkAbout Questions—Piece #9—Really Swimming

How would you describe the ocean to someone who has only seen the ocean in photographs?

How do our judgments complicate things?

What are some differences between inner strength and outer strength?

Have challenges in your life ever changed things from trivial to essentially important?

What are the differences between a label and the thing being labeled?

Sometimes, I hear the phrase “Ice cube versus waterfall.”

--- What do you think it means?

Sometimes, our attitudes are so subtle and old that we just accept them.

--- Can you identify some thoughts you have like that?

A word you might often hear is “self.”

--- How would you define that word?

When our lives change, in ways that are big or minor, what things always stay the same?

How would you define simplicity?

In what ways is life itself special?

Can you think of more questions? (Challenging ones, that is!)

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### THINKABOUTS for PIECE #10

#### TRUSTING FROM THE HEART

Lost in the Woods is a simple story about a man lost in scary woods. The surroundings seem dangerous, and he must have trust without thorough understanding. He accepts the guidance he receives without knowing whether it is safe. He questions a guiding light, and that help proves true and leads him home.

I am like that man in the story, because sometimes I need to trust guidance before knowing it is worthy of trust. Maybe all I am sure of is that I need help. Maybe I have only a distant light to follow. Maybe all I can see is that the light is not coming from darkness and confusion. Maybe I'm in totally unfamiliar territory. Maybe all I can do is invite guidance and see what shows up.

When I hear the word faith, I think of religion and external morals that sometimes do not seem right to me. But that is not the real meaning of faith. For me, a better definition is seeing the direction that things are moving, trusting that momentum, and heading off where it points.

Faith and trust are keys to strength. But faith and trust are not automatic. They are not blind to what is real. I can't bring them on by making a quick decision. Instead, I may need to work hard to find answers that ring true. Trust allows me to stand tall, continue moving, and build momentum.

Faith is not an unseeing, hopeful assumption of a good outcome. Faith isn't a stiff belief in a light that I cannot see. Faith is clarity that understands the forces that affect my world, both positive and negative. Real faith is intelligence that clearly perceives where things are headed. When my vision is clear, then I'm glad to see that there is a lot on my side. I've got friends!

### ThinkAbout Questions—Piece #10—Lost in the Woods

How important has guidance been for you?

Where do you find a voice of guidance that you can trust?

What allows you to trust that voice?

What does returning home mean to you?

Are you able to distinguish guidance from thoughts and logic?

--- How are they different?

Does guidance ever come when you don't expect it?

--- Or from a direction you don't expect?

What are the differences between "spiritual" and "religious"?

How is your sense of direction?

How is your sense of direction—in a moral or spiritual sense?

Can you identify the overall direction for your emotions and feelings?

What helps you find direction in your life?

--- Time alone? Time with others?

--- Being active? Resting?

--- Things changing? Things staying consistent?

Can you think of more questions? (Challenging ones, that is!)

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR, MY STORY

Changes! Challenges! Not just talk and theory. Things happen to us, actual events in real life. *My Story* tells the details of a period in my personal history: a drunk stranger sped into my car at the combined speed of 120 mph (over 190 kph). A true story!

But I am not trying to draw out your sympathy. I am telling my story as an example of multiple severe changes suddenly striking someone from many directions at once. The cause was a random stranger. Anyone could have been the victim. Even you!

This book is filled with many color pictures and little text. The writing is simple, and the letters are big. These are images anyone can understand, and they examine areas common to people of diverse ages, locations, cultures, and backgrounds. A casual reader could easily think, "What is this? A book for little kids?" But *Piece We Need* examines important areas that are difficult to describe and outside of everyday conversation. Yes, the talk is simple. But trivial? Not!

I am talking about my history for a reason: everybody on earth needs to harness inner strength. Inner strength grows out of self-acceptance and rightful living. Such comfort with existence is nurtured by love for the life one has. A deep love for one's life comes from a love for life itself, where one recognizes the beauty of that basic and consistent process inside us. This recognition requires that I downshift from my usual mode of skimming the surface. I find myself standing firm in appreciation!

## More ThinkAbout Questions (and some to look at again)

When have you most felt inner strength?

Have you had serious challenges in your past?

What qualities are most important to you?

--- How do they bring out your strength?

Can inner strength be learned?

What challenges do you face every day?

Can you think of some role models for inner strength?

Why is inner strength needed to have courage and face challenges?

What current events call for strength? (social, environmental, news, family, personal?)

What's the difference between theories and thoughts? Between ideals and practical tools?

What does the term "inner" mean to you?

How do you think you would be in a major catastrophe?

What does the word "challenge" mean to you?

Do you know the wisdom of being a compassionate leader?

Can you become a helper when asked?

Are you ready to show inner strength to others?

How extreme can challenges become?

What are the differences between challenges on a personal scale and big social issues?

Have you ever experienced a significant catastrophe? How did you do? How did others do?