



Jim Taylor

A profile of one of Illuman's Weavers and Wisdom Elders

I've been on a determined search for meaning since I was six years old and still scared of the dark. That was the year that I promised myself that I would never live like my parents. Both abusive alcoholics, their chaos had spilled over with every drink creating a thirst in me for something more. Two years later, my mother took her own life and left me with a black hole in the space where she had been. With her death, I turned all my attention on my Dad. I needed for him to be proud of me, to love me, to tell me that I was a good son, but he was too busy fighting his own demons to notice mine and we missed each other in the process. So, with mother and father wounds, I started at an early age hoping I could run fast enough and jump high enough to leave it all behind. When that didn't work, I just tried harder!

Fortunately, I found God as a teenager, but Religion found me soon after and I started jumping through all its hoops thinking that's what God wanted. It took a long time and a lot of hoops before I finally outgrew hoop jumping. Now, I like to tell people that I'm a recovering Baptist. I'm not sure what that means, exactly, but they usually laugh with me and understand what I mean when I say, "I am looking for something more." Plato and Aristotle described this "something more" as the *summum bonum*—"the highest good." I imagine that's what good religion does at its best—opens the window to God and to the common good. Perhaps, all of our traditions have some of that to share. Unfortunately, I've experienced not-so-good religion along the way, too. I think that's what I'm really recovering from—bad religion. There's too much of that going around!

I crested the mountain of my first half of life around 2004. Serving on multiple boards and attempting to pastor a regional church had left me nearly burned out. I intuitively knew that the path of ascent would no longer take me where I longed to go. In a desperate move, I risked a Men's Rite of Passage (MROP) held in the desert of New Mexico at Ghost Ranch in 2006. It was the right time for me, and whatever happened out there, it took! I returned home to a fledgling group of initiated men associated with Men As Learners and Elders (M.A.L.Es) and, a year later, we decided to put on the first MROP in Texas. That was my introduction to men's work.

**" The Beloved sometimes wants
To do us a great favor:
Hold us upside down
And shake all the nonsense out."**

~ Tired of Speaking Sweetly by Hafiz

I didn't know it then, but I had begun the descent into the second half of life. I was not alone; however, now there was a band of brothers that would help me walk boldly into the mystery that awaited me. These were good men that I would soon be honored to call, "friend."

A real testament to our work is found in the approval ratings of my wife, Lynda, and our three daughters (18, 17, & 15). They have all readily made room for my treks out to the desert, wanderings in the Texas Hill Country, fire and drumming circles, monthly M.A.L.Es gatherings, our annual meeting: Soularize, and the couple of MROPs each year where I serve as Weaver. Not to mention the board service and Wisdom Elder work along the way. I am sure these four



With my wife, Lynda, and Abby, Megan & Emma!

women who share my life, and are closest to me, know I need it as much as I do! If they say we're doing something good; then I am inclined to believe them, and hope for more.

I have to say that, even with all the work I've

done on my Journey of Illumination,

I still feel like a novice every time I sit for centering prayer, every time I wander in Nature, every time I face another aspect of my own shadow. The elders assure me that this, too, is good. "A beginner's mind!" The goal is not perfection, but peace. And in that place, I'll know that love is the highest good. Today, I am not alone and I am no longer scared of the dark! Being a man among men is compelling. And it's the path that I now gladly walk—discovering the learner and the elder that is me. This is the best that I have to offer the world. For the rest of my life, I intend to invite other men to share this Journey of Illumination. I hope you'll join me.

"Anyone who moves on even a little, walks like Jesus on the water." ~ Antonio Machado

May it be so. Ho!

Jim Taylor is a Wisdom Elder and Weaver for Illuman. He also pastors Mosaic Community Church in Seguin, Texas. Mosaic is an emerging church with strong values for social justice and sustainability.



Leadership at the First Texas MROP ~ John Knox Ranch 2007