

The Veracious Other

By Art McKenna

In June 1992, I went to a conference at the Menninger Foundation in Topeka, Kansas. The conference was about the scientific laws of developing healthy relationships and friendships. They claimed that to maintain good relationships with others, we need to express our genuine feelings so that so we can free ourselves from falsehoods. Going into the conference, I believed that relationships are always in flux between telling the truth and lying, so we need to appreciate moments of perfect happiness. At the conference, I ran into Richard, who I knew from graduate school. Richard was a tall, heavy-set fellow with wavy light brown

hair, and he met me with his typical big hello. We talked about old times, and he spoke about his new life with his wife, Kathern, and his two boys, Jonathan and Daniel. Kathern was a tall woman with short dark hair. I was excited to see her again because I believed she was one of the happiest people I knew. After the conference, we went to Richard's house for dinner. While at dinner in their home, I told him about my new house and the joys of single life. Kathern, not believing I was delighted, suggested that I should meet her friend, Sandy. That weekend, I was to meet her at a local tavern.

A Meeting with No Exit

We were to meet for drinks – simple enough.
We were to meet around eight – a good idea.
Sitting at the bar, a pretty woman with short blond hair,
chatting with the bartender, and
appearing so sweet.
Turning her head and smiling she said
“You must be *Arthur*.”
Approaching her with a congenial smile;
Asking, “Sandy would you like to sit at a booth?”
Snapping at me, she said
“My name is *Sandra* not Sandy.”
I thought to myself – not a good start.
Barking she commanded, “Where are we going to eat!”
Inquiring, “Where would you like to go for dinner?”
Growling, she said “I don’t care – I’m hungry!”
I thought, “not a good beginning.”
I was wondering – where is the nearest exit?

Not finding an exit, I asked her out for another date, and that one date lasted two months. In those months, hiding our real concerns, falsely accepting each other’s flaws, maintaining a charade of caring, we kept a harsh façade of thoughtfulness — a

thoughtfulness confronted with anxiety, and anxiety that stirred criticism, and a criticism that hid us from the truth that words hide a truth. Our desires tumbled into haunted clichés, and a Shakespearean sonnet that was not to be found.

Broken Love Sonnet Number Negative 14

I knew love before *knowing such a word.*

I played with words, and they played with me,

But lust invaded our love with magical spells and *metaphors*

Trembling images would sneak into her memories.

“To forget them forever, *will they stay?”*

Stay to haunt her – stay to hurt her once again.

Haunting ghosts were casting spells and throwing *stones.*

I cast magic spells, she ignored them.

She threw stones, and I made sure they hit me.

Looming memories haunted our doomed *love affair.*

She tossed ghostly words into the trash - where they hovered.

I picked through such trash *hoping to find myself.*

Neither rhythms of our love songs *were detected,*

Nor a single moment of love was ever perfected.

Reflecting on my broken love sonnet with Sandra, I wondered how in the hell can anyone navigate through this bewildering ins and outs of friendships. I realized that I was in intimate relationships because I was

avoiding feelings of isolation and loneliness. I felt like a tiny, incredible shrinking man slipping into a cup, seeking the last few drops of coffee only to realize he could not get out.

Trapped

Covering myself up with bleakness and unhappiness;
surrounding myself with sadness and separation;
encompassing myself with friendless thoughts,
thinking self-reproach was my only reward,
believing I only had a few choices –
encasing myself with sadness,
feeling self-pity,
realizing–
I was not a good friend to myself.

Wanting to avoid my feelings of loneliness, I decided to look for some roommates. I put an ad at the Menninger Foundation Bulletin reading, “Needing two sensible individuals to share a comfortable home in Westboro.” I got a call about a week later from Mike, agreeing to meet at my house around 5:30 that evening. He was a handsome fellow, six feet one, or a little taller; about thirty-one years old, athletic build, with blond hair that he swept back. Mike was a clinical social worker at the Menninger. While showing him the house, he spoke about playing for the soccer club, but he was more excited about mountain biking. Mike presented himself as forthright, candid, and free of evasiveness, but I would describe him as a warm person who displayed his emotions carefully. He appeared sincere and honest without hesitation. He said he became a social worker because he wanted to work with teenagers and wanted to start a wilderness program for them. Mike often spoke about his dream of working with teens. I knew that a caring friendship takes time and effort, but I also experience that a true friendship could be in a single moment of perfection.

When Mike moved in, he would have a steady flow of women over to the house. I would laugh to myself in the wide variety of women that attempted to win him over with their charm, their kindness, or just sex. I enjoyed the women who would bring over food to entice him into a long-term relationship. Mike was honest with them and said he didn't want to get into a committed relationship because he was moving to Oregon within the next year. His warnings did not dissuade them a bit.

The more he was honest with them, the more they tried to win his affection. On a few occasions, one of his female friends would befriend me in hopes of impressing Mike; when he was frank and candid with them, they unfriended me. Because of his seriousness, forthrightness, and honesty, Mike moved back and forth between being a caring friend to a real friendship.

Mike was an outgoing person, and he liked to go out for drinks, dinner, or go to the movies. One evening, he and I met some friends to hear a new jazz group playing in town. Mike and I talked about growing up.

He grew up in California and me in Jersey City. He said he always had a dog when he was a kid. I told him

about when I lived in the 1970s in Pennsylvania, I bred and trained hunting dogs. Mike asked me, "How come you don't have a dog now?" I told him, "Too many responsibilities!" His question got me thinking about how I would like to have a dog around the house again. In the fall of 1996, I looked looking through the dog ads in the Sunday paper. I found a notice about golden retriever puppies looking for the right home. I called the number, took a drive, and came home with a female golden retriever wrapped up in her light brown fuzz. I decided to call her *Leilani* (lay-la-knee), which means

heavenly flower in Hawaiian. The idea of a heavenly flower is reflected in Khalil Gibran's statement, "Beauty is not in the face; beauty is a light of the heart." Leilani was pure of heart, and that purity of truthfulness encircled her loving friendship in that single moment of perfection.

From the start, I knew she would be a handful. I often played with her in the backyard. She was a pup, so I would sit while she chased a bug or jumped after butterflies.

Lost for Certain

Believing
she couldn't get out
Watching her play.
Thinking
she was safe and secure.
Knowing nothing could go wrong.
Appearing
safe and satisfied.
Sleeping on the back porch,
Deciding
to get dinner ready,
going inside.
Returning ten minutes later,
she was gone.

Looking everywhere — Mike and I went down the poorly lighted block; we jumped over fences; we went through every backyard — no sign of her; it was getting darker — still no sign of her. As if she knew the difference between a girl and a boy, I continued to yell, "Hey, girl! Where are you, girl?" with a flashlight in my hand, looking, calling, whistling, hoping, fearing. Sadly, no pup appeared. While running back to the house, we rechecked every yard; we were losing hope.

Growing anxious, we realized that there was nothing we could do that night, other than what would get us mistaken for a burglar. We thought she might have fallen asleep somewhere when she went looking for her littermates, so we decided to head home. As we walked back to the house, we couldn't figure out how such a small pup could get so far in such a brief time. When I got back to the house, it was driving me crazy, not knowing where she was. So, I thought I would give it one more look-see. I went in the back yard, and for some

unknown reason, I went to the air conditioning unit. There she was, sleeping under the unit like nothing was wrong. I picked her up in my arms, ran into the house, and yelled to Mike, "I found her! I found her!" He ran down the stairs as if a long-lost friend had returned. We had never been so happy to see our new friend, a new friend who showed us that a loving friendship could only be felt in a single moment of perfection.

Leilani was turning into a lovable dog; she was well-mannered and she showed her intelligence with great charm. She was easy to train, patient, and gentle; she was devoted, but not very self-assured.

She was energetic, affectionate, but competitive, and friendly with everyone. *Leilani* was true to her breed. To be happy, she needed to be around people who displayed leadership. She was exuberant, but on occasions, she was distractible and needed physical challenges.

I believed she needed a firm but calm leader, which wasn't me. As *Leilani* matured, her truthfulness revealed her vulnerabilities, and her innocence told of loving friends in a single moment of perfection.

She was one of the most fun-loving dogs I have ever owned, but she had her quirks. I had just finished cleaning the kitchen—wiping the counters down, scrubbing the sink, washing the floor, and replacing a trash can liner. I called *Leilani*, wondering where she was. She bolted through the dining room, suddenly stopping, wrapping her tail between her legs, lowering her head down and creeping away. I called her again, but she scrutinized the kitchen and ran off back.

I looked around the kitchen a few times to figure out what was wrong. I pondered: Was it the shiny floor? Was the smell of the countertops too strong? What?

I noticed that the trash can liner was hanging out a few more inches than usual. I tucked the bag farther into the trash can, and I called *Leilani* again. She ran into the kitchen, slipping and sliding, wagging her tail right and left, moving it up and down, and on a few occasions moving it in a circular motion as if to say, "*Scary gone. Thank you, thank you. Scary thing is gone. Thank you, thank you.*" Laughing and petting, I said, "You're a silly girl." She was often lovable and comical but always sincere and honest about her feelings. When she was happy, she showed it wholeheartedly; when *Leilani* was scared, she did not deceive you or acted bravely to impress you.

As *Leilani* became older, she loved running through the forest, and she loved going mountain biking with Mike. Whenever he was getting ready to go biking, she would run around the house like a whirlwind of excitement. She would go from the living room window — looking thrilled — running to the kitchen door in about a second with exhilaration and anticipation pulsing throughout her entire body — from the flopping of her ears to the tip of her whirling tail — and she couldn't wait to go with Mike. I would open the door for her, she would leap into the front seat of his truck, and off they would go—another moment of perfection.

In the early winter of 1997, I didn't find a second roommate, but while at tennis drills, I met Tom. He was about thirty-two years old, with short, dark, and wavy hair, and he presented himself as a friendly, outgoing person. Tom thought of himself as athletic because he enjoyed watching sports, especially KU basketball. Tom said he graduated from Kansas University, but I never

believed him because he never spoke about the ups and downs of college life.

I decided to take a chance, and Tom met with Mike and me. A few days later, we decided he would be a suitable roommate, but I was unsure what kind of friend he would be. Tom moved in about a month then, and everything appeared to go smoothly. Tom would often speak about how he worked with his father as a house painter. Although Tom was an excellent painter, he viewed such work as being beneath him. He often said, "I'm only doing this until something easier comes along." Lured by easy gains, he boasted that his goal was to make the most money by doing the least amount of work. While working for his father, he tried his hand at selling health insurance — but he would often lament about how he felt guilty about selling health insurance to people who couldn't afford it or didn't need it. At times, I had difficulty with him because when he used my washer and dryer, he would do small loads of wash, and proclaim, "It is not my washer and dryer, so I don't care if I use them a lot!" Tom presented himself as being insincere and hypocritical, but unfortunately, he was proud of being that way. He appeared not to be a good friend.

Tom was a friendly person, a forthright person, and he often spoke his mind without hesitation. For example, when all three of us ate dinner together, we talked about the people we were dating. Tom would often speak more about himself rather than the hopes and dreams of the person he was dating. I remember he once talked about a vulnerable woman that was confused about her sexual identity, and he spoke about how he could "fix" her with his charm and his "wonderfulness" (whatever that was). Tom talked about Tom, and his intention was not to inform or to connect with others. When Tom was Tom, he did not reveal his real goals, but he talked to bolster his sense of self-importance. It was challenging to be friends with him because he lived in an "as if" world. A world in which talking about his negative feelings and having foolish thoughts would be a sign of weakness. A world in which speaking to someone about his vulnerabilities and his ideas would bring about recriminations that would diminish his sense of self-worth. A world in which he did not talk about his true feelings because it would open wounds of the past. A world in which he did not speak about unwanted sensations because he believed such revelations would lead to conciliation and defeat. A world in which he did not show his true concerns because it would bring on an overpowering sense of strife. A world as if caring about

someone other than himself would result in a loss of pride that would not allow him to realize his true feelings, a dignity that would not permit him to accept the importance of being vulnerable.

I was afraid that Tom living in an “as-if” world would never allow him to see moments of perfection that life offered him, but living in Topeka went on.

Tom, Mike, *Leilani*, and I shared the house for about ten months. One day Mike returned home and showed us his new expensive mountain bike that cost about three thousand dollars. He was excited to try it out, so we all decided to go to a trail that wasn't extreme but challenging. Mike let me use his old bike, and we knew that *Leilani* would go anywhere outside the confines of city life. I never went mountain biking with Mike and Tom before. With three bikes in the back of Mike's truck and the rest of us in the cab, *Leilani* could not contain herself — she knew where she was going on an adventure, and there was a purity about her excitement that left all three of us laughing.

After a half-hour drive, we turned off the cold concrete highway to a road where the dust cloaked our presence. We parked in a self-made parking lot and got out of the truck; *Leilani* ran to the back of the truck. Mike commanded “Stay,” she waited, wagging her tail, sitting, and scooting around on her hind legs, appearing to say, “Come on, come on, don't you know what excitement is waiting for us?” I always believed that *Leilani* could restrain her excitement because she trusted Mike.

We unloaded the bikes and went down a small path about eight feet wide with no end in sight. *Leilani* was focusing on Mike, striding in synchronicity on his left side. Mike was riding ahead of me on a narrowing path; nearing the small trench we rode in unison.

Innocent and true to herself, *Leilani*, looking neither to the left nor the right, keeping perfect rhythm with the rider, sprinted to the next obstacle without hesitation, showing the truth of her intentions. We rode for about ten minutes on this smaller path; we came upon a large clearing in which several minor but challenging trails branched off into a dark forest, as if each entrance beseeched us to join its mystery of escape and encounter. There were other riders on the track, and this pathway had various impediments, such as fallen trees, ditches, and washed-out river beds. Many of the riders would approach these challenges with inhibitions. As we rode, Tom was telling me how I should approach certain obstacles, and how I shouldn't pedal this way and how I should change the gears that way. I didn't listen because I was admiring how beautiful this wooded hidden refuge brought happiness and delight to *Leilani*.

As Mike and *Leilani* rode through the mazes and the twisting trails, Tom and I followed. The path had several obstacles along a straightaway, a straightaway about the length of two football fields, and it sharply curved left into the forest, down to a gully. You either could choose to stay along the crest or go down into the ravine. If Mike went into the ravine, she stayed along the ridge watching every move he made. When he returned to the trail, *Leilani* ran next to his three-thousand-dollar mountain bike, running stride for stride, not missing the slightest beat, breathing in rhythm with every verse and rhyme of the rider, hoping the trail would never end — she never gave up. With each stride, she would seem to say, “Your ambition, your effort, your pace, cannot distract me from my devotion.” When she got tired, she would plunk herself down in a small shallow stream and wait for Mike's return. When he came around again, he would say, “Come on, girl,” and she would fly out of the stream and without effort she stayed by his side.

Graceful Moments

Gliding gracefully, she disclosed determination that out striped any challenge presented to her.

Moving with the riders, her faithfulness blinded her to any doubt or dishonesty.

Floating gently past obstacles, she scoffed at any fear that might retrain her passion.

Gliding and floating, she devoured any concern about success or failure.

Never waning, she was a genuine friend to all.

Never waning she showed and knew that a loving friendship

can only be known in a single moment of perfection.

When we finished riding, all four of us got into the truck to go home. *Leilani* slept on the way back home. I had a wonderful time but decided I didn't want to go mountain biking ever again. On this trip, I discovered that friendships are like bouncing back and forth on a mountain bike that you don't own and being on a path where you don't know where you are going. Still, *Leilani* showed us all that accepting our vulnerabilities is the first step in becoming a better friend.

When we returned home, Mike told us that Menninger was cutting back his program, and he planned to go to Oregon in two months. I was glad for Mike because he was always a good friend, but my thoughts went to *Leilani*. I loved her dearly, and the idea of her not doing the thing she loved broke my heart.

I asked Mike if he wanted to take her with him. He jumped at the chance and said, "Yes." I had to let her go. Two months later, they prepared for their new adventure, and off they went to Oregon.

Mike developed his counseling services in Oregon. He sent a picture of *Leilani* with a knapsack on her back and Mike looking over an expansive mountain range. Two years later I received a letter telling me that *Leilani* was

doing great and she participated in Mike's wedding. In the spring of 1998, I heard that Sandra married a lawyer and moved to San Francisco, and I was happy for her. As my mom always told me, "for every pot, there is a lid." Tom moved out, and now and then, I bump into him at the local supermarket. He tells me how he has secured a lucrative painting contract. I would say what I was doing, and then he would go about determining how I should do this and how I shouldn't do that. Looking back on my experiences with friends, I have learned that loving friendships are riddled with ambitions and ambiguities, and those desires and uncertainties never bothered *Leilani*. In essence, I bet you a nickel it never crossed her mind.

As long as you tuck the trash liner and she is keeping up with Mike, she's happy. As I learned in the conference in 1992, putting relationships under a microscope can be exciting, but I did not doubt that *Leilani* didn't need proof or have an understanding of the underlying laws concerning matters of the heart. She taught me that letting go of the very thing we love is not just about our feelings. Still, in a single moment that I free myself from pretense and free myself from lies of commission and omission, I can experience those single moments of perfection.

Discussion of the short-story “The Veracious Other”

In this story, the relationships move in and out of the degrees of friendship. I believe friendships move through a matrix of trustfulness. As in the T.V. series House, M.D., says, “Everybody lies,” but we also love the truth. I think to discover meaningfulness in your life, you want to experience the depth of sincerity, genuineness, and authenticity (going down the matrix), and you want to experience the breath (moving across the matrix). When all three dimensions happen at once, you have a single moment of perfection.

Frankl’s concept: Authenticity: All that a person has not yet become but could be, through active use of powers of awareness and decision-making; the human ability to surpass or transcend limitations that mitigates or seeks alternatives to the specific *facticity* (the quality or state of being a fact) of each person’s life; the given facts of a person’s existence over which he/she cannot have total control; physical statue, environmental resources, demands made by employers or teachers, and the inevitability of death. Semantics: (Authentic: real; entirely trustworthy as represented by the facts) (Genuine: true, actual, honestly felt, sincere; not counterfeit)

Authenticity: a subjective condition when you live in honesty and courageously manner, and you discover meaningfulness in each moment, you refuse to make excuses for yourself or others, and you do not rely on groups or institutions for meaning and purpose. (Allow to expand or restrict your uniqueness)

Inauthenticity: a condition that results when your nature and needs ignored, denied, and obscured or sacrificed for institutions, abstractions, or groups. (You are not allowed to expand or restrict your uniqueness)

Insincerity: a feigning to be what one is not or to believe what one does not; especially; the false assumption of an appearance of virtue.

Self-Realization – The striving toward the actualization of your potentials presupposes freedom of will. However, Logotherapy sees self-realization never as the ultimate goal but only as a side-effect of meaning fulfillment. Only to the extent that you fulfill your meanings do you realize yourself. When we do not direct our self-realization toward meaning, it may lead to the realization of negative qualities and even criminal qualities.

Good	Real	True
Authenticity: <i>You are free from hiding under a false appearance.</i>	Genuineness: <i>You are free from pretense.</i> Pretense: you profess rather than show your real intention or purpose.	Sincerity: <i>You are free from hypocrisy.</i>
True: <i>You are free to be true to yourself and others, so you are steadfast and honest.</i>	Actual <i>You are free from pretense.</i>	Pure: <i>You are free from hypocrisy, impurities and hidden motives.</i>
Accurate: <i>You are free from error.</i>	Forthright: <i>You are free from free from ambiguity or evasiveness.</i>	Honest: <i>You are free from deception.</i>
Trustworthiness: <i>Others are free to have confidence in you.</i>	Truthfulness: <i>You are free when you tell the truth.</i>	Total-Wholeheartedness: <i>You are free when you approach a task enthusiastically.</i>

Expressions of Friendship

Vision of Yourself – You want to be...	A Good Friends	A Real Friend	A True Friend
	Authentic express of feelings and beliefs	Genuine expression of feelings and thoughts,	Sincere expression of feelings, thoughts, beliefs
In times of stress, you can accept your vulnerabilities without getting caught up in your liabilities; Vulnerability is a universal aspect of the human condition; on the individual level, vulnerability refers to the ever-present possibility of harm, injury or biological impairment or limitation.	Authenticity: When you are authentic, <i>you are free from hiding under a false appearance</i> ; you are <i>not false or an imitation</i> ; <i>real, actual</i> Since You know your vulnerabilities refer to ever-present possibility of harm, injury or biological impairment or limitation.	Genuineness: When you are genuine, <i>you are free from pretense</i> ; You want to be genuine -open -truthful; <i>You want to show your real intentions</i> ; <i>Express desires, wants, and wish in a humble manner</i>	Sincerity: When you are sincere, <i>you are free from hypocrisy</i> ; You want to be sincere – honest, <i>You want to be honest with yourself as well be honest with others</i> ; <i>Having honest of mind involves being true to yourself and others</i>
promote truthfulness veraciousness	True – you are free to be true to yourself and others, so you are steadfast, loyal, honest, fully realized or fulfilled. since thoughts can be true or false, you want your thoughts to be true; true is being in accordance with the actual state of affairs; when you are true, you are steadfast; loyal; honest; fully realized or fulfilled	Actual: You don't <i>fabricate your feelings & beliefs to please others, or to con or trick people</i> ; Actuality: When you are open and truthful, <i>you are free from pretense</i> , You want to be genuine -open -truthful; <i>You don't want to fabricate your feelings & beliefs to please others, or to con or trick people</i> ;	Purity: <i>you are free from hypocrisy, impurities and hidden motives</i> ; to be pure in heart means to be blameless in who you actually am, being pure in heart involves having a singleness of heart toward to height values; a pure heart has no hypocrisy, no guile, no hidden motives. The pure heart is marked by transparency and an uncompromising desire to experience spirituality and meaningfulness; You want to be frank, candid of mind; not to present yourself as being two-faced, as being dishonest, duplicity (the belying of your true intentions by deceptive words or action)
be authentic- trustworthy-reliable and careful <i>you are free from hiding under a false appearance</i>	Accurate: When you are accurate, <i>you are free from error</i> ; conforming exactly to truth You realize thoughts can be true or false, and You can correct your thoughts and beliefs– based on accurate information, cognitive distortions can be transformed into realistic and rational thoughts; and mistaken beliefs are refuted and transformed into flexible rules and standards;	Forthrightness: <i>you are free when you express your thoughts, beliefs and feelings to a caring person.</i> sincere in expression and action; willingness to express thoughts and feelings; candid; being honest without hurting others; frank; open; Forthrightness: You are free from free from ambiguity or evasiveness	Honesty: When you are honest, <i>you are free from deception</i> ; adherence to the facts; absence of hypocrisy; no embellishment; earnest (serious); not hiding or using false appearance;
You want other people to trust you because Life Demands that you get along with others.	Trustworthiness: <i>Others are free to have confidence and faith in you.</i> <i>when you are trustworthy.</i> worthy of confidence; dependable (Trust: PART); according with the facts; taken in good faith	Truthful: <i>you are free when you tell the truth.</i> telling the truth without hurting others; (Trust: PART); <i>heartfelt</i> : depth of genuine feeling outwardly expressed	Total: Wholeheartedness: <i>you are free when you approach a task wholeheartedly.</i> You want to approach each task assigned to your wholeheartedly; You complete an activity wholeheartedly; (devotion without misgiving); completely sincere; enthusiastic; <i>hearty</i> : honesty, warmth and exuberance in displaying feeling; (not half-ass)