

Me and God

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A modern version of the Story of Job

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No one believes this story when I tell it, but it's as true as a black cup of coffee on a winter morning. I'm used to weird looks and I know what they're thinking, but it doesn't matter to me, although, I'm not sure what I'd say if somebody told me they were personal friends with God. I was fifteen when we first met. I hated school. I was shy. I had a face full of pimples and a crush on Barbara Cushner, who didn't know I existed. I knew her schedule in school and always tried to be in the hall when she came out of classes so I could see her. I tried to get up the nerve to speak to her, but I was afraid I'd make a fool of myself. She had a boy friend, Bruce Johnson and I'd see them hold hands and leave school in his '55 red Chevy convertible. I was jealous and wished I could get her to know me. I had a feeling if I could get passed the shyness and she got to know me, she'd have a crush on me, too. One day, when I was sitting on the steps in front of school, knowing Barbara would be coming out soon and I'd be able to see her, I saw an old man walking towards me. Actually, he looked like a bum. He had baggy brown pants, a wrinkled tweed sports jacket and white sneakers. He had long grey hair and needed a shave. He came right up to me and sat down. At first I thought he might be a pervert or a drug dealer. "Nice day," he said, looking out at the parking lot in front of the school then he turned to me. "So you have a crush on Barbara Cushner," he said. "What?" I asked. "You know, the girl you're afraid to talk to." "How did you know? Who are you?" "I'm God," he said and shook my hand. "God!" I said, stunned. "How can you be God?" "Don't ask stupid questions!" I looked at him and said, "But you don't look like..." "Trust me," he interrupted. "I'm God. I created everything a long, long time ago and I know what you're thinking. It's a mess. What can I tell you?" I didn't know what to say. "But look at those trees and the lilac bush over there and listen to the birds. I'm proud of my work," he said. "It's you humans I'm not so sure about." He shook his head and shrugged his shoulders, "Oh well, it's a work in progress." I didn't know what to think about the old guy. He didn't act or talk the way I imagined God would, but then he said, "Listen, Joe. I like you. I always have and ever since the day you were born I've kept my eye on you." He reached into his pocket and took out a pack of chewing gum. He unwrapped the paper and put the gum in his mouth. "Here, Joe, have a piece of gum." I took a piece and for a few minutes we were quiet, just sitting there chewing, but my mind was wondering what was going on. He turned to me, a smile on his lips, "You and Barbara Cushner will get married and have a family." "What!" How can you say that? She doesn't know I exist." "I'm God. That's how I

know," he said. "You're going to have three sons and you will be a successful and highly respected businessman." I stared at him and had no words. He smiled, looking me in the eyes then stood up, slowly. I heard the bones in his knee crack and he put his hand on his lower back. He shook his head, "Oy, am I out of shape." He shook my hand. "Joe, it's not everyday I take the time to talk to one of my creations, but you are important to me." "Why?" "Let's just say I'm counting on you to help me with a bet I have with this guy, Satan." "A bet with Satan," I said. "What are you talking about? Why are you betting on me?" "It's a long story," God said, "and I don't want to say more. Let's just say I'm counting on you to help me win this bet with Satan." He walked down the steps. When he got to the bottom, he turned, waved and said, "Don't worry about your pimples, they'll be gone very soon," then walked away and that's when I saw a bright glow around him like the sun was reflecting off his body. It was the most brilliant light I've ever seen and then he disappeared, just like that. My, how time flies. That day was sixty two years ago, but he was right. I did marry Barbara Cushner. I had three sons and made a lot of money with my department stores. I ended up having four stores and sold them and was set for life. But let me tell you what happened. Right after God left that afternoon, my face miraculously clear of pimples, I got up the nerve to talk to Barbara. We ended up in the same history class and our teacher assigned me a project with her and two other students, something on the American Revolution. We started talking. Don't ask me how I got the nerve, but I really believed if she got to know me, we'd click. I just knew it, like it was destined. But something else happened. On the day we were married, just before the wedding, I was standing outside the synagogue and noticed the old man across the street. He was wearing the same wrinkled tweed jacket and baggy pants and white sneakers. He came over to me and stood next to me. "This is a happy day," he said. "I told you it would happen, but I want you to know your life will not be easy. You will face great hardship. It's part of the bet." I had no idea what he meant, but we shook hands and when he walked way, I noticed the bright radiant light glowing around him. I never forgot God's words, even though everything good came my way. My marriage was wonderful. My boys were healthy and got scholarships to top colleges. I made a bundle. I was highly respected in the community and sat on many councils and boards. People always came to me for advice and I was given several awards for different projects I worked on. When I gave speeches in response to my awards or spoke to people who asked what was the secret of my success I always said, "God and I are good friends. He likes me and has blessed me." I even tell people about the day he sat with me on the steps and told me what would happen. I tell about the chewing gum. That's when I get the funny looks. But in all the years of everything going well, I always remembered that God said life would not be easy. I would face great hardships. I wondered what he meant because the fact is I was having a great life. Then when I was fifty-five, I got skin cancer. I had chemo and radiation and lost my hair and most of my teeth. A year later, my dear Barbara was killed in a car crash and I was devastated and grieved for months. Some drunk driver smashed into her and she died instantly. My oldest boy, Michael got sick with MS and ended up in a wheel chair. He died after five years of suffering. It was horrible. My middle boy, Jerome, was a gambler and got into debt, more than he could pay back and one day, I got the terrible news from Las Vegas he had been murdered. My youngest son, Isaac, had a heart attack while he

was jogging. He had just turned forty. Suddenly, I had no one. Within six years, I had lost my entire family. And then my investment company that was handling my stocks and bonds called and told me I was broke. My stocks were now worthless. All I had was my house and thank God it was paid for. But then one night it burned to the ground. They said mice chewed on the electric wires and started the fire. I got out but stood there in my robe and watched my beautiful house and all my pictures and possessions, everything I had in the world go up in flames. My so-called friends would often invite me to dinner and ask if I still believed God was my friend and how could I not be angry for how my life turned out. Wasn't I bitter, they asked. I have to admit they had good arguments, but I could not forget how Barbara came into my life and all the good years and the wonderful family. My only response to their questions and statements was that God and I were still good friend, even though I hadn't seen him for years. I'd say, I can't explain it. I only know I've had a good life and now I'm having a hard time but maybe things will change for the better. My friends just shook their heads at me, called me a fool for still thinking God was my friend. I baffled them. I didn't feel like getting into arguments, so I'd just listen and say, "I understand how you think I'm crazy but so what. This is what I think so leave me alone. If I'm crazy, it's all right with me." I decided to get a fresh start and moved away. I had insurance money from my house and so I bought a small farm in Maine. I learned to garden and started growing my own food. I got some chickens and enjoyed getting fresh eggs in the morning. I learned to bake and loved the way the house smelled when bread was in the oven. I made soups and stews, took walks with my dog, Charley and sat at my window in the morning watching all the birds come to my feeder. A woman came and helped me keep the house clean. Her name was Jean and we'd have tea and good conversations. Her husband died and we quickly became close friends, had dinner together, took walks, made love and it became a nice romance and we make each other happy. One day, I was sitting on my porch steps. It was sunset and I was enjoying a glass of red wine. I looked up and saw an old man walking up the path. It was him, God. He sat down with a heavy grunt and a sigh. He reached in his pocket and took out two sticks of chewing gum and handed one to me. "Joe, I want to thank you." "Me. Why? What did I do?" "I won my bet with Satan," he said and smiled, "You're a good man. You never lost faith in me or in yourself so thank you." "You're welcome," I said, nodding. He then stood up, groaning slightly, his hand on his back. We shook hands and he smiled then walked away and the golden light around him was brighter than the sun.