



Discovering
Our
Self

*Workbook 2 in The Way to Change
Series for Men Who Have Abused
Their Women Partners*

Edward W. Gondolf

ISBN 1-55691-205-6

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Learning Publications, Inc.
5351 Gulf Drive
P.O. Box 1338
Holmes Beach, FL 34218-1338

Printing: 5 4 3 2 1

Year: 5 4 3 2 1

Printed in the United States of America

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Acknowledgments

The Way to Change is a compilation of ideas and efforts of many working to end domestic violence. The author would like to acknowledge the contributions of David Russell, founder of the Second Step program in Pittsburgh. Many of the goals were developed by David. Also, Craig Norberg-Bohm and Don Long, founders of the RAVEN program in St. Louis, formulated several of the exercises. Bob Foster and Paul Burchfield of the Domestic Abuse Counseling Center in Pittsburgh helped test and ground many of the ideas in the workbooks. Bob Ackerman, an expert in the working with alcohol-affected families, offered encouragement and guidance in the early stages, and Dennis Daley, who has authored several workbooks of his own in the alcohol and drug-treatment field, helped substantially revise and reformat the workbook series. Ellen Fisher and Barbara Hart are some of the many women who have alerted me to the women's issues inherent in working with men. Lastly, I am grateful to the men who have dared to face the issues raised in these workbooks and make substantial changes in their lives.

Workbook 2 in *The Way to Change* Series for Men Who Have Abused Their Women Partners

The way to change is a series of five workbooks for men. Each workbook takes men another step away from abusive behavior and towards better relationships. The workbooks together show men not only how to stop abuse but also how to change the thinking and attitudes behind their abuse.

Workbook 1: *Checking Our Behavior* focuses on monitoring one's behavior. It is designed to help men realize their ability to stop abusive behavior. **Workbook 2: *Discovering Our Self*** exposes the distorted notions of manhood that pull men down and shows what it means to be a "real man." **Workbook 3: *Appreciating Women*** is about respecting women more and not fearing their feminine nature. This kind of appreciation is the basis of healthy male-female relationships. **Workbook 4: *Reaching Out to Others*** points men toward their community and society at large. It shows how men can counter those social pressures that so often misguide them. **Workbook 5: *Relapse, Reuniting, and Progress*** addresses the stumbling blocks, like alcohol use, that often get in the way of progress. This workbook can be used with other workbooks or as a "refresher" along the way. (See the back cover for ordering information.)

These workbooks are meant to be used in a counseling program where response to the exercises can be discussed with other men. The workbooks can give direction to a group, increase participation, and deepen the discussion. The workbooks might also be used as homework to help keep men on track between counseling sessions. It is important for men to get some basic knowledge about abuse and how to avoid it, as soon as possible. The short book, *Man to Man: A Guide for Men in Abusive Relationships*, is a good place to turn for this. Also, men who heavily use alcohol or drugs, are severely depressed or have uncontrollable thoughts, have physically abused their children, or have been violent outside the home usually need extra specialized help in addition to these workbooks. They may need addiction treatment, psychiatric care, parent counseling, or additional restraint and supervision.

How to Use this Workbook

Discovering Our Self is the second workbook in *The Way to Change* series. This workbook will help you explore who you really are and how to be that person. Much of who we seem to be is the result of how we grew up. But who we are to become can be different if we work to be our real selves.

This workbook presents several goals to help you discover that real self. It will help you learn 1) your father's influence on your life, 2) the role your mother played in who you are, 3) who your heroes are and what they say about you, 3) the feelings you have about others and what you have done, and 4) the importance of a spiritual outlook in you life.

Each of these goals begins with something to think about — "think pieces." After each "think piece" is a place to respond. Write some comments about how the "think piece" applied

to you in the past, and what it says about your future. When you have finished the workbooks, you will have a diary to review, especially in tough times. Exercises of four to five questions are next. The exercises help apply each goal to yourself. There are no “right” answers to the exercise questions, just honest thoughts. An assignment at the end of each set of exercises will help you to put the goals into practice.

The activities for each goal are designed to be completed on a weekly basis. You may want to spend one day responding to the “think piece,” one day after that on each exercise, and the “assignment” on the next day. At the end of the week’s time, you can share your responses and assignments with others in your counseling group. Then take a day’s break before starting the next goal.

The Challenge of Change

Achieving the goals in this workbook will not be easy. You need to take them on as a challenge. As Abraham Maslow once said: “Self-knowledge and self-improvement are very difficult for most people. They usually need great courage and long struggle.” There may be some aches and pains along the way. But if you keep going, you will also discover a strength that you didn’t know you had. When you are finished, you will look back with a good feeling. Things that do not make sense at the start will make sense. And you will be a better person.

Change often goes against our common sense. It means looking at things in a different way. To get started, think about the statements below. They twist some of our “common sense” to show things in a new light. They can help open us up to the goals of this workbook and move us toward change.

Read through the statements and put a star (*) by a couple of statements that stand out to you. Write them on a card and keep them in your pocket to pullout and look at during the day. This will help bring a new way of looking at things and keep you moving ahead.

Knowing Our Self

- Hard work on our lives makes our lives easier.
- We find ourselves by giving up what we thought we were.
- To be happy one must risk unhappiness.
- Sometimes we have to go down in our own self-esteem before we can go up.
- Trying hard to become a man never made us one.
- Being aware of society’s impact on us helps us reduce it.
- We help ourselves the most when we begin to help others.
- Taking responsibility for your own behavior keeps you from over reacting to others.
- In being able to be alone, we grow closer to other people.

Discovering Our Self

Certainly there is more to life than acting as “traffic cop” for our behavior. We need purpose, direction, and inner strength to keep ourselves on track and headed in the right direction. Once we are in charge of our behavior, we need to see what is behind it. That means finding out a little more who we are as men and as individuals. There is a lot more than meets the eye. Most of us in our abuse, however, have been living on the surface.

This part of the workbook helps you explore who you really are, what your potential is, what you have left unsaid in your life, what you have ignored or denied. Much of who we seem to be, at this point, is a product of how we grew up. But who we can become can be a product of us having courage to be ourselves.

The struggle of the male to learn to listen to and respect his own intuitive, inner promptings is the greatest challenge of all. His . . . conditioning has been so powerful that it has all but destroyed his ability to be self-aware. —Herb Goldberg

No man can produce great things who is not thoroughly sincere in dealing with himself. —James Russell Lowell

❖ Goal 1: Finding Ourselves In Our Fathers

Something to Think About

*My father didn't tell me how to live; he lived,
and let me watch him do it.* —Clarence Budinton Kellard

Relationships with our fathers have been central in shaping our characters. We catch ourselves saying what we heard our fathers say, or doing something we know they did. Many of us have had pain and resentments in these relationships. We wanted more time than our fathers gave us, or we longed for praise but got criticism, or we were never sure we measured up to what our fathers wanted.

Some of us can change our relationships with our fathers. We can do it, not by asking them to be different, but by being our full adult selves. This new experience is the doorway to a new aspect of ourselves. Many of us cannot change our relationships with our fathers. However, being with our sons and daughters in ways that support their growth is another chance to redo for ourselves what we missed from our fathers. It also shows that we are more than our father's sons.

My father's importance to me is a fact I must admit; I will take what he has given me and grow with it.

Put Your Reaction or Comments Here:

☐ Exercise 1: Thinking About Your Father

All of us need to know our fathers better, since they are such a big part of our life — good or bad. Let's think about our fathers and try to do this. Picture your father in your mind as he was

while you were growing up. (If you did not know your father when growing up, think of another adult man in your life at that time.) Then think about each of the times below:

1. Recall a time when he was *angry*.

- What did his face look like?

- What was he doing or saying?

- How did you feel or react?

2. Picture a time when your father was *critical*.

- What did his face look like?

- What was he doing or saying?

- How did you feel or react?

3. Picture a time when your father was *sad*.

- What did his face look like?

- What was he doing or saying?

- How did you feel or react?

4. Picture a time when your father was really *happy*.

- What did his face look like?

- What was he doing or saying?

- How did you feel or react?

5. Picture a time when your father was caring or really *kind*.

- What did his face look like?

- What was he doing or saying?

- How did you feel or react?

☰ Exercise 2: Your Father And You*

Now it's time to look at the influence our fathers have on us and our lives. Think of yourself as an adult with your father. You and he are face to face. Then think about the questions below and answer them with what comes to mind.

1. In what ways are you the same as your father? (How about appearance, moods, or actions? How about in the way you treat women?)

2. In what ways are you different from your father? (How about appearance, moods, or actions? How about in the way you treat women?)

3. What would you most like to say to him? (Is there something you'd like to ask him to change about himself, to do for you or with you? Is there something you'd like to tell about yourself, about how you feel about him?)

4. What would you most like for him to say to you? (Would you like to hear about how he feels about you, what he likes about you, what he thinks about himself or his life?)

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Assignments

1. Find a picture of your father preferably that has you in it too. Place it on your dresser or on your desk. Look at it once a day and remind yourself that you are not your father and he is not you.
2. Write a letter to your father to tell him about some of your recollections and how you are different now from then. (You can make a tape recording if you don't want to write a letter.) Tell your father what you imagined you'd most like to say to him. Think about sending the letter (or tape). If you don't want to send it, ask yourself why the resistance or fear. Then decide whether to send it or not. (If your father is no longer living you can still imagine a letter you'd like to send him.)

❖ Goal 2: Being a Mother to Ourselves

Something to Think About

My mother was dead for five years before I knew that I loved her very much. —Lillian Hellman

Many men fall into complicated relationships with their mothers that we carry into our marriages or relationships. Our mothers did a lot for us, much of which we came to expect or take for granted. We felt, however, that we had to prove ourselves as men. This meant separating ourselves from our mothers, pushing them away, and even deeply resenting them at times. We enjoyed their attention and care but despised being “mother’s little boy.”

We get married in part to get away from our mothers and be on our own. Yet the care, attention, and service we got from our mothers, we now expect from our wives or partners — consciously or not. Our wives or partners are to cook for us, clean for us, and take care of feelings for us. Yet we don't want to be mothered. We often get angry when our wives or partners don't mother us enough or when they mother us too much. In a sense, we have to grow up and stop being “little boys.” We have to mother ourselves.

I will look for a chance to mother myself and not expect to be mothered by my wife or partner.

Put Your Reaction or Comments Here:

☰ Exercise 1: Remembering Your Mother

Our mothers play a big part in our lives whether they are present or absent. Even though we love or appreciate them a lot, it is not uncommon to carry grudges or resentments toward our mothers. These often play out in our relationships with other women. It can help our relationship with other women if we know better how we feel about our mothers.

1. Below is a list of the most common grudges we men have towards our mothers. Check the ones that apply to you. (If someone else raised you or your mother died when you were young, think of another adult woman who was important to you. Think of a grandmother, an aunt, a neighbor, or a teacher.)

- I resent the way my mother came between my father and me.
- My mother treated my father like dirt. No woman is ever going to treat me like that.
- My mother let my father push her around. I hated being around when that happened.
- I can never forgive my mother for letting my father treat me the way he did. I've never gotten over it.
- My mother never really grew up. I always felt like I had to be her "Little Man" and take care of her.
- My mother always took terrible care of herself.
- My mother worked too hard all her life and never took anything for herself.
- My mother could have been great at something. But she gave it all up to get married.
- My mother was much too protective of me. At times I felt like she was going to suffocate me.
- Other: _____

2. Make a list of the "debts" you have toward your mother. How did she sacrifice for you or help you? (Did she take care of you when you were sick? Did she take you places and show you things? Did she help you in school or when you got in trouble?)

3. In what ways have you expected your wife or partner to be like your mother? (Do you expect her to cook for you, clean the house, and wash your clothes? Do you think she should help you when you're hurt, or pay attention to how you feel?)

4. In what ways have you expected your wife or partner to be *different* from your mother? (Do you expect her to be beautiful, to give you sex when you want, not talk back to you?)

☐ Exercise 2: Mothering Others and Yourself*

Sometimes we expect the women in our lives to do all the “mothering” — all the caring, helping, feeling. Mothering is not just for women or our mothers. We all do helpful and caring things that we would expect from a mother. Let’s look at the mothering around us and in ourselves.

1. In what ways have you “mothered” others? Check all that apply.

- washing clothes for the family
- ironing or repairing clothes
- making coffee for guests
- preparing nutritious meals
- shopping intelligently for food
- washing dishes or pots by hand
- keeping the house clean
- keeping the kitchen clean
- cleaning the toilet and bathtub
- living within the limits of my income
- changing diapers and bathing an infant

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- reading to a child
- playing with a child
- tending a sick wife
- caring for a sick child
- giving first aid to my kids
- supervising my kids for several hours at a time
- helping my children with their homework
- other _____
- other _____

2. In the list above, circle all of the things you plan to do this week. Pick at least three.

3. Recall a time when your mother helped you emotionally.

- What was the situation?

- How were you feeling?

- What did your mother do or say that seemed to make a difference?

4. Think of a time recently that you felt that way.

- What was the situation?

- What could you do for yourself to make a difference?

- What could you say to yourself to make a difference?

Assignments

1. Call your mother and mention your appreciation for some specific things she did for you growing up. If you have no contact at all with her, write an imaginary letter to her expressing your appreciation. Also, admit to her at least one grudge you've had toward her. No need to discuss it. Then let go of it by comparing it to all she has done for you.
2. Remind yourself that your wife or partner is not your mother. Talk to your wife or partner about your mother and her. Tell her what "mothering" you are going to do in the next week and do it. Make a note below of what you do, how it felt after you do it, and what your wife's or partner's reaction is.

- Mothering activity:
-
-

- Feelings afterward:
-
-

- Wife's response:
-
-

✂ Goal 3: Having Heroes Worth Admiring

Something To Think About

Without heroes, we are all plain people and don't know how far we can go. —Bernard Malamud

It is useful for us to reflect on our heroes for a time. Who do we greatly admire? Are they men or women? Are they closely involved in our lives, or are they distant and beyond our reach? Can we feel hopeful enough about life to have heroes?

Our heroes inspire us to find new possibilities for ourselves. We see in another man or woman the qualities and values we admire. We find our own best parts, perhaps hidden or underdeveloped, in the people we hold as heroes. For example, if we admire a television personality or sports star, we can learn about our own values by asking what we admire in him or her. If we admire a friend, we may see a trait we hold dear in ourselves. As we grow and change, our heroes are replaced by others who fit our maturing values.

As I think about people I admire, I learn about myself from them.

4. It is also said that we usually fall far short of our heroes. How are you not like your heroes?

☰ Exercise 2: Your Heroes and Women

Our heroes are probably a bigger example to us than we realize — both good and bad. Most of our heroes tell us a lot about how to deal with women by the way they behave or act. Let's see if that is the case or not.

1. How do your heroes treat women — or how would you imagine they treat women? (Are they kind and caring? Do they listen to them? Do they use the women in their lives?)

2. Name a hero who treats women with respect and as an equal (maybe someone not on your list in Exercise 1).

- Person's name:

- How they act toward women:

- An example of how they act:

3. Mark Gerzon in his book, *A Choice of Heroes*, says we need heroes today who act as healers, mediators, companions, friends, and helpers.

- Why do you think he says this?

- Name a person that is this kind of hero.

4. What might you do in your life to be more the modern hero that Gerzon describes?

Assignments

1. Be on the look out in the news, on television, or in the movies, and among people you meet for a “real” hero.

- What do they do that you admire?

- What does your seeing them as a hero tell about you?

2. You are probably a hero yourself to someone, or could be some day.

- What qualities do you have that someone might look up to?

- What qualities do you need to change or improve to be a hero to someone?

✂ Goal 4: Speaking Our Mind With Our Heart

Something to Think About

It takes more courage to reveal insecurities than to hide them, more strength to relate to people than to dominate them, more “manhood” to abide by thought-out principles rather than blind reflex. Toughness is in the soul and spirit, not in muscles and an immature mind. —Alex Karras

We have often heard that it’s better to be men of action, not of words. In our relationships with other men, we have learned to do things together without letting down our guard, keeping a poker face, being “cool” under fire. To show our feelings is considered to be vulnerable and weak.

But in our relationships with women, we often see the other side of this coin. If we haven’t learned to express our thoughts and feelings, the women in our lives may request or demand that we learn how. There is nothing wrong with our not yet having this skill, and there is nothing wrong with women wanting to talk with us. It is wrong to be abusive in order to avoid communicating.

A close relationship promotes talking, and telling our thoughts and feelings. Honest words are ways of becoming clearer and being more personal. We have the right to stumble around with our words. We also have the right to feel unsure of ourselves or frightened of saying what we feel. That kind of fear comes with trying to be close to someone and be more true to ourselves.

Today, I will express my feelings and ideas so others can know me better.

Put Your Reaction or Comments Here:

☰ Exercise 1: Knowing How We Feel*

We all have a lot of different feelings. That's part of being human. Sometimes we are out of touch with our feelings — and may even think we don't have any — because we avoid them. Let's check out our feelings and what is going on inside us.

1. In what ways have you avoided dealing with your feelings in order to appear in control? Check all those that apply.
 - Said to myself, "It won't do any good to talk about it."
 - Played the role of boss so I could just give orders rather than communicate.
 - Told myself that my feelings would "pass" and just tried to ignore them.
 - Kept really busy to avoid facing my feelings or having to express them to someone else.
 - Got really angry to divert attention from my real feelings.

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- Dulled my feelings with diversionary tactics (like silence, tiredness, laughter) or with drugs or alcohol.
- Bypassed my feelings with logic, analyzing, or rationalizing.
- Tensed up so I didn't feel anything.
- Let a woman do my feeling for me.
- Avoided situations or people who raise certain feelings in me.
- Got sick, acted carelessly, or hurt myself to let out my feelings.
- Acted crazy or exploded so someone else had to take responsibility for my feelings.
- Other _____

2. In the list above, circle those things you have done in the last week.

3. It is often a challenge to state how we feel. It's a habit to say what we think instead. Change the following "I think" statements into "I feel" statements about an emotion you would feel in each situation. Example: "I think your calling the police was unfair." change to "I feel hurt that you called the police on me."*

- I think you are nagging me.

- I think you are trying to get me angry.

- I think you are blaming me for something I didn't do.

- I think that you are going to leave me.

- I think you're a no good _____.

4. Identify a situation or time during the past week when you felt each of the following:

- Sad:

- Happy:

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- Afraid:

- Angry:

- Calm:

- Confused:

☰ Exercise 2: Feelings of Dislike

The feelings that tend to get to us the most are the one's toward people we don't like. Identifying these feelings can sometimes help us deal with them, rather than letting the feelings run us — and lead us to do something that gets us in trouble. Let's look at these kinds of feelings.

1. Think of someone you do not like. How do you feel about that person? Complete this sentence: "When I think of (person's name), I feel . . .

2. What sensations, physical cues, expressions, or gestures do you have that let you know you feel this way (e.g., your fists get tight, you feel tension in your chest, you clench your teeth)?

3. What is it about the person that makes you feel this way? Is it something he or she did or said? Is it the way they look? Is it something about his or her background or lifestyle?

4. How do you usually respond to the person when you feel this way? What would you most likely say and do? Do you just ignore the feeling? Do you get up and do something or keep busy?

5. How might you respond instead? What might you say and do to express your feelings without being violent or abusive? Would it help you to take a walk, talk to somebody about it, or think differently about the person?

Exercise 3: Feelings of Like

There are positive feelings we all have, too. These feelings can give us a boost or make a hard time easier. Let's look at some of these feelings through a person we like — a person who brings us positive feelings.

1. Think of someone you do like. How do you feel about that person? Complete this sentence:
"When I think of (person's name), I feel . . .

2. What sensations, physical cues, expressions, or gestures do you have that let you know you feel this way (e.g., your chest and breathing are relaxed, a smile comes on your face, your heart goes faster)?

3. What is it about the person that makes you feel this way? Is it something he or she did or said? Is it the way they look? Is it something about his or her background or the way he or she treats you or others?

4. How do you usually respond to the person when you feel this way? What would you most likely say and do?

5. How might you respond instead? What might you say and do to show your feelings without feeling embarrassed or weird? Would it help you to talk to somebody about these feelings, write them down in a note or card, or do something for this person?

 **Assignments**

1. During the next week, take some time to stop and think about how you have been feeling. Write below when you felt each of the following during the week. What was the situation or circumstance when you felt that feeling?

- Sad:

- Happy:

- Afraid:

- Angry:

- Calm:

- Confused:

2. In #5 of Exercise 2, you wrote some ways you might respond to your feelings of dislike. Think about that person whom you dislike, or, even better, cross paths with him or her. Do all three things you listed in #5 as ways you could respond. Write down how you felt after doing those things. Did they help you any to deal with your feelings?

✘ Goal 5: Learning to Grow Spiritually

Something to Think About

*We cannot merely pray to You, O God, to end war;
For we know that You have made the world in a way
That man must find his own path to peace
Within himself and with his neighbor. —Jack Riemer*

Our contact with God can be called prayer. There are many forms of prayer for a man wanting a change. For some of us it may take the form of talking to God; for others it may be some quiet moments, observing nature, listening to music, or writing in a journal.

We have experienced the healing effect of this relationship. It has allowed us to move out of our willfulness. But we need to take action where we can make a difference. We cannot blame God for every bad thing that happens — or simply wait for God to provide all the good we want. Do we see the power we have to influence our lives? Can we give up our resentments against God for bad things that have happened? Can we let our lives be moved by spirit and shaped by peace?

I am grateful for what God has given me and more aware of what I can do.

Put Your Reaction or Comments Here:

☰ Exercise 1: Spiritual Moments

We all have had “spiritual moments” when we feel the presence of some force or power greater than ourselves. These moments give us a boost or settle us down. Most of us wish and need to have more such moments. Let’s try to do that.

1. Recall some moment when you felt a sense of peace and calm deep inside. (If you never had such an experience, why do you think that is?)

- What were the circumstances — when and where did this take place?

- Why do you think it happened — were you alone, were you thinking about something special, were you reaching out for some kind of help?

2. Recall a time when you had a clear, strong hunch or intuition to do something, and when you did it both you and others benefited.

- What were the circumstances — when and where did this take place?

- Why do you think it happened — were you alone, were you thinking about something special, were you reaching out for some kind of help?

3. What might you do to have more of these kind of “spiritual” moments in your life? (Take more time to be quiet and listen to thoughts, read some inspiring book, talk to a clergyman or other spiritual person, try to pray or reach out?)

4. What are the roadblocks that get in the way of such moments? (Are you just too busy? Do you not believe or have faith in God or some Higher Power? Do you not have or know how to have such moments?)

Exercise 2: Identifying Your God

We all worship or heavily value something or someone. In many ways, this becomes our “god.” Identifying this god or gods can tell us a lot about ourselves and where we are headed. Let’s take a look at our god or gods.

1. What do you value the most in life? (How important is money, sex, sports, friends, drinking, going to church, moments of peace and quiet?)

2. Would you consider these things your “gods?” Why or Why not? (Because they run your life? Because they take up lots of your time? Because they make you who you are?)

3. Write a 25-word sentence that describes your sense of God or Higher Power.

4. At what times or situations could you most benefit by calling on this sense of God or Higher Power? (When you are afraid, hurt, in trouble, or each day and each night?)

5. How much power does your God or Higher Power have to change you?

-
- Rate this power on a scale from 0 to 10 with 0 = no power and 10 = all power, absolute power. _____
 - What does this rating say about your faith in your God or Higher Power?
-
-

Exercise 3: Finding Spiritual Support

Getting closer to God or a Higher Power for peace and strength is not always easy. We need some help or guidance from others who have more experience. We also need reminders and new ways to think about God or a Higher Power. Let's explore how this might happen.

1. Think of a person you know that has some spiritual wisdom, experience, or strength.

-
- What is it about this person that makes you think of them as a "spiritual" person?
-

- What would you like to ask this person, get from this person, or do with this person?
-

2. Where are some places you can go or things you can do to become more spiritual yourself?

3. List three things or reasons that keep you from, or would make you stop, going regularly to a religious group or church.

4. List three things you might gain by attending a faith-based group meeting on some regular basis.

 **Assignments**

1. Find a poem, song, religious passage, or book section that shows your sense of God or Higher Power. Write it on a card and carry it with you during the week. Take time to read the card at least twice a day and spend a moment quietly thinking about it.
2. Attend a faith-based meeting and afterward note what you liked and disliked about it. List them below in the two columns. Do the “likes” outweigh the “dislikes”?

Likes

Dislikes

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