

*"Life Is But A Dream"* is an intriguing compilation of insights learned during one man's life as he rowed down his stream on his first 50 years of his journey. Each of these seven short stories is filled with compelling observations on the definition of one's individual reality. They are presented in different, interesting, and entertaining plots and are woven around unique perspectives of what your reality is or might be.

*"Life Is But A Dream"* will leave you questioning, "Is mine, the only real reality? Do I create my own reality the way I live, when I go to heaven, even the people in my life? What is real and what has been created by my own perception of my reality? What can I do to create the reality I really desire?"

Row, row, row, your boat gently down your stream and experience these seven compelling short stories that at times may seem all too real when compared with your vision of reality. Understanding these insights might allow for change or create the life, and maybe the afterlife, you want.


Lon has founded six start-up companies, is a certified Real Estate instructor, marketing & PR for San Diego International Airport, Apple Certified Developer, professional speaker and is featured in *Entrepreneur Magazine*, *PC Novice* and *Popular Science Magazine*.

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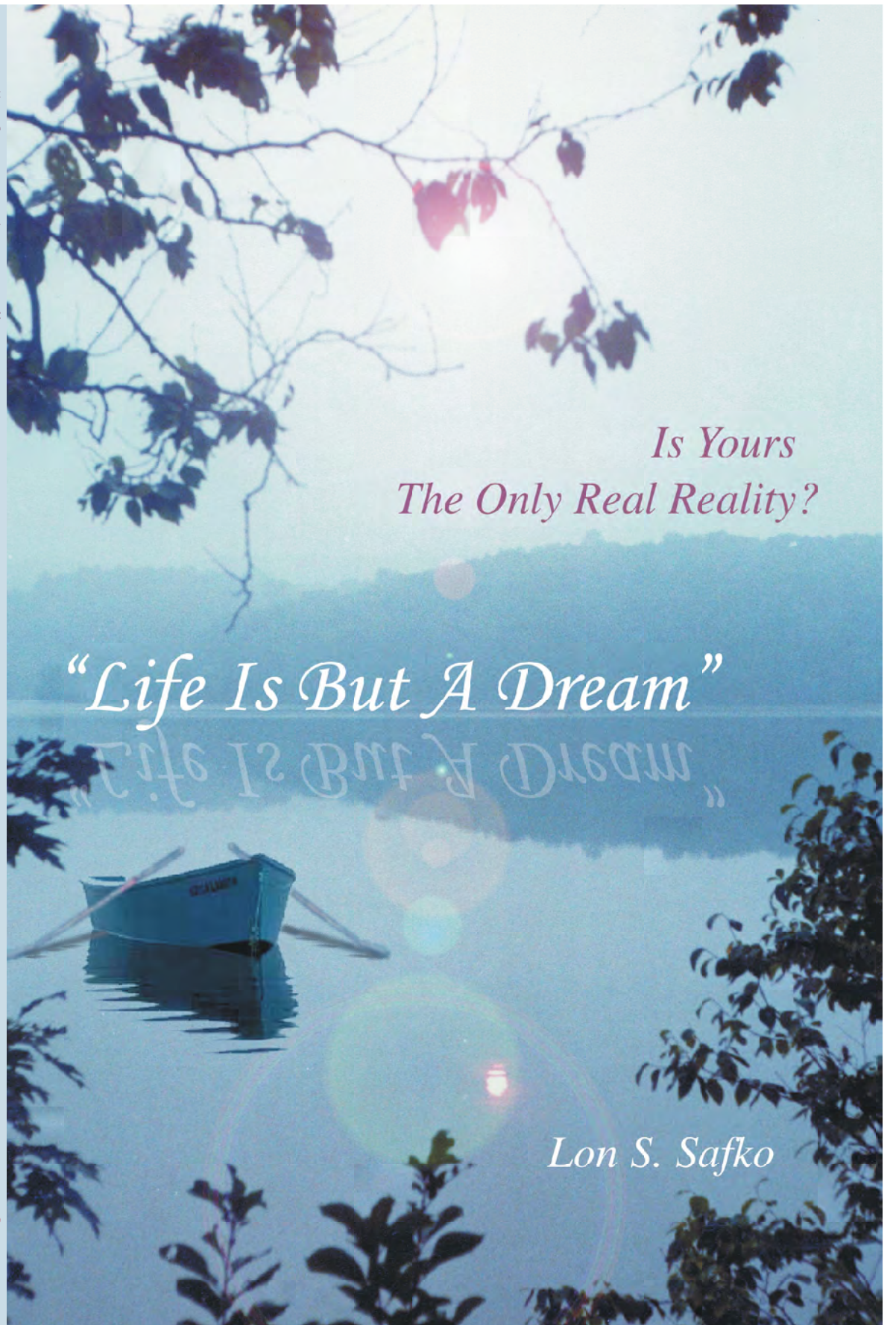
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Lon S. Safko



*"Life Is But A Dream"*



“Life is but a Dream”



“Life is but a Dream”



Is Yours the Only Real Reality?

*Lon S. Safko*

iUniverse, Inc.  
New York Lincoln Shanghai

**“Life is but a Dream”  
Is Yours the Only Real Reality?**

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This is a series of short stories that share life experiences and lessons learned. And explores possible answers to spirituality and the universe around us. I hope you find these stories informative, entertaining, insightful, and often intriguing.



To my loving wife Sherrie, without whose support and encouragement, I could never have realized and achieved my full potential.



Row, row, row your boat  
Gently down the stream.  
Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily,  
Life is but a dream...



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# Preface

“Life Is But A Dream” started as random insights I learned about life as I rowed down stream of the first 50 years of my journey. As I thought about these “what ifs,” I began developing stories around each to make the insight more understandable, interesting, and palatable. Each of these stories lived most of their lives on a hard drive moving from one CPU to another until the advent of the Internet.

The Internet afforded me the opportunity to compile each of these stories in what appeared to be non-associated individual stories. Then came iUniverse. This was the first “self-publishing house” I became aware of. I thought that if I could somehow tie these seven short stories into a theme, I could compile and publish them.

When I copied the seven stories into the first manuscript it became apparent that there was already an existing theme. There was a common truth that wove its way through each of the stories. The insights were “the same, only different.”

The basic question remains, “Is yours the only real reality?” Do you create your own reality, the way you live, heaven, even the people in your life? What is real and what has been created by your perception of your reality?

This book explores some of the possibilities through individual stories that exemplify different aspects of this idea.

I hope you enjoy these works and understand the true value of “I’ll see it when I believe it.” Or, the famous and unexpected quote from Caddy Shack’s Chevy Chase character, Ty Webb saying, “Danny, I’m gonna give you a little advice.

There's a force in the universe that makes things happen, and all you have to do is get in touch with it. Stop thinking, let things happen and, Be the Ball...

## Row Your Boat Mantra

### *A Buddhist Commentary*

by Todd Barton

*Row, row, row<sup>1</sup> your boat<sup>2</sup>  
Gently,<sup>3</sup> down the stream,<sup>4</sup>  
Merrily, merrily,<sup>5</sup> merrily, merrily,<sup>5</sup>  
Life is but a dream.<sup>6</sup>*

1. *Row, row, row.* In form and structure this triple repetition of the imperative, *row*, parallels the daily Buddhist invocation of the Three Jewels: “Homage to the Buddha, Homage to the Dharma, and Homage to the Sangha.” One could, for example, say, “Row for the Buddha, Row for the Dharma, and Row for the Sangha.”

Textually, however, the word *row* is more closely linked to the Sanskrit word *gate*, which means “to go”, and which begins the famous Heart Sutra Mantra:

*gate gate paragate parasamgate bodhi svaha*

Which translates as “Go, go, go perfectly and completely to build the path for enlightenment.” Thus, the word *row* in our text is shorthand for the Heart Sutra Mantra and may be construed as “I row towards enlightenment.”

2. *your boat.* It is *your* boat. You built this boat with your karma. It is nobody else’s boat. It is nobody else’s karma. You are rowing this boat toward enlightenment. It is your karmic stream.

3. *Gently.* This is a call to go toward enlightenment gently, without force. It is like the gentle observation of your breath in meditation. Furthermore, it beckons us to undertake all actions, thoughts and deeds in gentleness and pure awareness. It should also be mentioned that some Buddhist scholars believe this word to refer to the Taoist/Buddhist concept of *wu-wei*, “non-doing.”

4. *Down the stream.* The “stream of Life.” The daily dharma. The seemingly endless stream of death and rebirth. Your karmic stream.

5. *Merrily, merrily...* This is a reference to the “merry” or “happy” state experienced in meditation. As Thich Nhat Hanh says, “This happiness arises when we become free of incessant worrying and preoccupation, and from the fact that the body and mind are at ease.”<sup>1</sup> Thus, a direct result of meditation is the ability to row down the Stream of Life gently and merrily.

6. *Life is but a dream.* Of course, poetically, “dream” rhymes with “stream.” But we might also say that spiritually “dream” and “stream” rhyme. Stream, as we have seen, refers to this life, which is Maya—impermanent and illusory—which is ultimately a dream. Meditate on the impermanence of all Dharmas.

## The Paraphrase

Homage to the Buddha, Homage to the Dharma,  
Homage to the Sangha

Aware of your karmic stream,  
go along easily, completely and perfectly  
toward enlightenment in your daily life.

Happily, happily, happily,  
meditate on the impermanence  
of all Dharmas.

When chanted, this mantra is cyclical, its beginning and end are One. In form, it is like the Wheel of Samsara. In practice, it can be chanted endlessly until your boat reaches the Other Shore, the Shore of Enlightenment.

1. Reprinted by permission from *Breathe! You Are Alive: Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing* by Thich Nhat Hanh, Parallax Press, 1990.

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# Introduction

Even though there are many, many books you could read that try to explain life, the afterlife, and the supernatural, the really good authors are ones such as Wayne Dyer and Richard Bach. Though these authors are completely different in style and content, they are remarkably the same. Dyer's "The Power of Intention," "Manifest Your Destiny," and "You'll See It When You Believe It," and Bach's "The Adventures of a Reluctant Messiah" and "The Bridge Across Forever," are great examples of creating your own destiny.



# Echo



“Hi, Hon. I’m home!”

“Hi, Sweetheart; how was your day?”

“Okay, I guess. Friday’s always the worst day; it seems all week ya try to catch up, and then it’s Monday again, and you’re right back to where ya started. I’m tired as hell, I can’t wait to eat dinner, and just plunk down in front of the TV and sit and relax all night. Yea, by the way, what is for dinner?”

“Hon, have you forgotten? We promised to have dinner at Tom and Lorry’s house tonight! They’re expecting us to be there at 7:30.”

“Naw, not tonight! Why is it we always make dinner plans on Friday nights when I’m the most tired. Can’t we get out of it?”

“No. They went to a lot of trouble to fix dinner for us. I’m not calling to tell them we’re not coming. Just take a shower and get into some clean clothes, and hurry up we’re running late as it is. We still have to drop off some clothes at my mother’s, and I told her we’d be there at seven.”

I walked into the bedroom, mumbling as usual, to get ready to take my shower when I remembered I’d have to fill up the car before dinner. No problem. I’d stop on the way from her mother’s. The gas station’s on the road anyway.

“Hon?”

"Yes?"

"Why the hell are you always late?"

"Look, don't start on me tonight. I had a rough day myself, and I'm sure Lorry and Tom aren't gonna want to hear us fighting all night!"

"I'm sorry, but you gotta admit, you ARE always late?"

"Yea, but I'll just be another minute."

"Yea, I know YOUR minutes!"

"There, I'm ready. You got the clothes in the car?"

"Yes, let's go already!"

"Everything off, water, gas, lights?"

"Yes, everything's okay. Lets go!"

How long does it take to drop off some clothes? It's always the same thing. Every time she and her mother get together, she takes forever! I'm telling you, that girl's going to be late for her own funeral!

"What were you doing in there? What the heck took you so long?" I wondered why I asked that question. I know I'd never get an answer.

"My mother says, 'Hi and thank you!'"

"Tell her Hi and she's welcome. What time is it?"

"Aren't you wearing your watch?"

"Yea, I'm wearing it, but you know I can't read it when I'm driving."

"It's 7:30 now!"

"Nuts, I have to stop and get gas yet."

"Come on, we're late now. We're always late!"

“WE'RE always late!”

“Tomorrow's Saturday, you'll have all day to get gas.”

“I guess you're right. I'll get it first thing in the morning.”

“Well, ring the doorbell!”

“Okay! You never get off my back do...OH! HI! Tom, how are you? Where's Lorr?”

“She's in the kitchen. Come on in. Can I get either of you something drink?”

“Yea, I'll have beer and she'll have a white wine.” Turning to her, “Right dear?”

“Yea, that'll be fine.”

Tom got us both a drink; the women were in the kitchen while the two of us were on the couch in the living room busy talking about nothing.

By the time dinner and about three beers have passed, the conversation became somewhat stagnant. I respectfully made the suggestion that it might be time to leave. It always seems to be my job.

“Well, Lorry, Tom, thanks a lot for dinner. It was great, but I really think it's time we'd be leaving. It's close to midnight already, and I'm kinda tired after working today. Never can get used to working! Like I said before, I'll stop over tomorrow morning, I have a few things to do first, I'll see ya around eleven.

“Good night, Tom, Good night, Lorry.”

“GOODNIGHT, have a safe trip home!”

We walked out to the car in the driveway. It was a chilly night for this time of the year. I started the car and turned out of the driveway as I've done many times before. After about five minutes of silence, I remarked “That was a great dinner, wasn't it, Hon?”

“Hello? Are you asleep?”

She was asleep. Well, if she was half as tired as I feel, she was entitled to a little nap. I'll hate waking her in 10 minutes when we're home.

"Wake up, Hon! Wake up!"

"Hugh, what?"

"You awake?"

"Yea, what's the matter? Are we home?"

"How far is it from the Stephens' house to ours?"

"What? You woke me for that?"

"I'm serious, how far is it?"

"I don't know. About three or four miles. Why?"

"How long would you say it takes to drive it?"

"About 10 or 15 minutes. Why?"

"Because we've been driving for over a half hour!"

"What? How could you get lost? You've driven this road a thousand times! Have you had too much to drink?"

"No, of course not. I was feeling pretty good when I left Tom and Lorry's, but I'm stone sober now!"

"Wait a minute," she said raising herself from the car seat where she'd been sleeping as she always does on our rides home.

"You're not lost! I recognize this part of the road. We're half way home!"

"That's the problem, Sweetheart. This is the fourth time I've recognized this part of the road tonight!"

"Hugh?"

“Yea, that’s what I mean! I can’t explain it, but about every five minutes I’m back at the same place on the road!”

“What are you talking about?”

“I don’t know!” I felt the sweat from my hands making the steering wheel slip from my grip.

“Are you okay?” she said.

“No, I think I am going crazy. I can’t explain what’s going on, but I’m serious!”

I looked at my watch and noticed we’d been driving for close to forty minutes, and we’re not home yet!

“Okay, tell me again, slowly.”

“Okay, we left Tom and Lorry’s at 12:00. Right?”

“Yea.”

“I didn’t make any wrong turns or any turns at all for that matter! We’ve been driving this road STRAIGHT home!”

“Yea, so what’s the problem?”

“The problem is, look at your watch! It’s forty minutes later!”

“How can that be? It’s only a 10-minute ride.”

“Look, there, it’s the large old tree that’s close to the road. That’s the fifth time we’ve passed it already tonight!”

“That’s impossible!”

I sensed a tremor in her voice; she was becoming as upset as I was.

“You’re wrong! It’s impossible!”

“I know, but if that’s not the tree, what the hell’s going on?”

"I don't know! It's starting to worry me!"

"Let's get a grip on ourselves. There's got to be a logical reason for this; I just don't know what it is!"

Suddenly, the car started to buck.

"What's that?"

"I hope it's not what I think it is."

The engine bucked once more and died.

"Oh, God, no, we're out of gas! Get it tomorrow, Hugh?"

"Don't blame me for it. It's not my fault the damn thing ran out of gas!"

She raised her head until our eyes met. I've only seen that look in her eyes once before about a year ago, when her mother was very ill and we got that call from the hospital.

"What are we going to do?"

"I don't know. I suppose we sit and wait 'till a car comes by, stop him and get help!"

"WAIT? We can't just sit here and wait!"

"Well, what the hell do YOU want to do?"

"I DON'T KNOW!"

"Look. Relax, sit back and turn on the radio and wait."

I heard the knob click, but I didn't hear any music. I checked the key to see if it was on; it was. I put on the flashers then tried the radio myself. There was nothing, not even static.

"What's wrong with the radio? Doesn't anything in this damn car work?"

"Will you relax. It's probably just the fuse."

“Well, what are we going to do? We just can’t sit here all night!”

“Yea, I guess you’re right. Maybe we should walk and find a house with a phone. We can call your brother and he could bring us some gas or at least give us a ride home.”

“You know he’s not gonna like us calling him at this time of the morning. He’s probably asleep. He worked all day, too, you know!”

“What do you want from me? You want to stay in the car all night!”

“No!”

“All right, then, we call him! I’ll leave you the keys. Lock the doors and try to take a nap. I’ll be back as soon as possible.”

“What? And leave me here alone. NO WAY! I’m coming with you!”

“Okay. We’ll leave a note on the windshield so our wonderful police department doesn’t ticket the car. Where are they when you need them? Hand me the pen out of the glove compartment? It’s in the back.” As she fumbled with the papers and assorted odds and ends I’ve accumulated since I first got the car, I could see she was still as nervous and tense as I was.

“Thanks. You got any paper on ya?”

“What do I look like? Of course I don’t have any paper on me!”

“Okay, okay. Tear out one of my checks. They’re in the green plastic folder.” She handed me the blank check. I turned it over and wrote: “To Whom It May Concern. Out Of Gas. Went For Help. Be Back Soon.” I took the keys and the note. “Don’t forget to lock your door!”

“How many times you gonna tell me that?”

“Come on, let’s start walking.”

As I walked past the front of the car, I stopped for a second to strategically place the note under the wiper.

“If I remember correctly, there should be a house up here a ways on the right.”

“Yea, just keep walking, will you?”

“Well, I’d walk WITH you, if you didn’t walk so damn fast!”

“I don’t walk fast; you walk slow. Now come on!”

We were walking for what seemed like an hour—still no house, no cars, no lights, nothing but road, trees and darkness.

“How much farther do we have to walk? My feet are killing me and I’m getting cold.”

“Look, please, just be quiet, and stop asking questions. I don’t know how much longer we’re going to have to walk. I don’t know where the house is. I don’t even know what the hell is going on here!”

“What’s that?”

“What’s what?”

“I don’t know, I thought I saw a light.”

“From a house?”

“No, a red light, there it is again!”

“Come on, let’s see what it is.”

Thank God, I thought to myself, I still didn’t want her to know how nervous I was. It would just make things worse. As we came closer, we saw that there were two red lights flashing. It was another car stuck like us. Maybe they’d have a cell phone, or mechanic, or the police on their way. I felt a rush of joy. At that moment I was happier and more relieved, I think, than I had been before.

As we drew closer, my feeling of lightheartedness was replaced by fear. My eyes wouldn’t believe what we were seeing. We both paused, turned to each other as though ready to cry.

“It can’t be. It’s impossible!”

“Of course it’s impossible. It’s a, a coincidence. There’s plenty of cars on the road like ours.” As we approached the car the terrifying truth was forced at me. It was mine. She stopped before the rear of the car, I had just one thing to check, and it read: “To Whom It May Concern!”

# A Mystic Evening



It was spring. It was a bit warmer than usual for this time of year. It was another Friday evening with still another weekend ahead. The same old feeling of obligation came over me to plan something so as not to waste two precious days off.

My usual Friday drive home was as long as always, and I entertained myself with my favorite preoccupation—Kristen, my neighbor of two years. Kristin’s husband’s company, some electronics firm, temporarily transferred her and her husband here.

Kristen was somewhat older than me, but exceptionally youthful. I often recall the image of her golden hair as the sunlight caressed it as she walked to and from her car and home.

I had passionately longed for Kristen ever since the first time we met so many years ago. I was afraid to confront Kristen with my feelings since she was a married woman. I was afraid to confront myself for fear that I would realize the overwhelming desire that I had held for so long. I pulled my car into the driveway as I do every evening and proceeded to the front of my home. As I reached for the large brass doorknob, I remembered to back track to the mailbox for my daily allotment of bills.

As I approached the mailbox my heart was filled with anticipation. Kristen was approaching at the same time.

I could almost recite the mundane conversation that would entail, “How are you?” “I’m fine, how are you?” Oh, how I hate the reply “Fine”! As if to reply, “You don’t care, why ask?”

But, somehow I felt this conversation would be different; but maybe it was more hope than anything.

As we converged on the mailbox, it was obvious that we both wanted more than the usual conversation, but didn’t know where to start.

I greeted Kristen with my usual pleasant smile and she with hers. Then suddenly, our eyes meet one another’s and we were frozen in a soothing warm light. Neither of us could speak. I knew in my heart that Kristen felt the same way I did, but for how long? Why hadn’t she confessed to me? Why hadn’t I to her?

In this awkward moment, we both, not knowing what to do next, reached to the mailbox, I to retrieve my bills, and Kristen to place a belated birthday card to her mother. She was always terrible at remembering dates.

Neither Kristen nor I had been watching what we were doing as our hands met. There was an exchange of electricity. We held one another’s hands for what seemed like an eternity.

Our eyes met once more and Kristen spoke, “I need someone...to talk to. I mean, if I don’t talk to someone, I don’t know what I’ll do.”

I squeezed her hand tightly and assured Kristen that I was there if she needed me. “Lets talk,” I said. “Now if you would like.”

Kristen said that she had felt guilty even talking to me. Kristen’s husband was out of town again on business. We all knew what kind of business. Kristen’s husband had been seeing other women for several years. But Kristen remained faithful.

Kristen, while staring into my eyes asked if I could, or would, meet her, somewhere away from here. Someplaaace where we could talk without fear of being misunderstood.

Knowing I would travel to the ends of the earth, I replied, "Of course I would. Where? When?"

Kristen answered, "I'm not sure. I'll put directions in your mailbox at 9:00 PM tonight. With that, she quickly turned and went for her house.

I forgot why I was even standing at the edge of the road. I slowly turned and walked towards my own home.

Once inside, I could barely believe that conversation had taken place. I repeated both sides of the dialog as if by doing so I could get a better understanding of what had transpired.

I anxiously waited 9:00 PM as a child waits for Christmas. I walked to and from the window as if it would make the time go more quickly, or possibly Kristen might be early.

Nine o'clock arrived, but I had not seen Kristen at the mailbox. Did she change her mind, or did she not realize the time? By 9:15 I could stand the wait no longer. I rushed from the house to the mailbox just to be sure. And there it was, but how? My eyes never left the window. I rushed back into my house where, in my privacy I would drink in the information Kristen had given me.

I opened the envelope and began to read.

"Tom: For so very long I dreamed of our being together, to talk, to share. My husband has been unfaithful for nearly seven years; I have not shared a man's companionship since then. I need to share myself, share myself with you.

Please forgive me for my forwardness, my unfaithfulness to my husband. Please see me.

If you can, please meet me in the parking lot of the town hall in the small town of Williamstown. There's a map enclosed with the town circled.

Please meet me there at 6:15 PM tomorrow, Saturday. If you're not there by 6:30 PM, I'll understand.

Kristen"

I knew where Williamstown was. It was a small colonial village that had been restored by townspeople some time ago. It was quite a tourist attraction for a while. Six fifteen, just after dark. I thought.

That night, I could hardly sleep. I repeated every step I would take, every turn, everything I would say. Two years of frustration, two years of unrealized love.

Morning came. I had a whole day to spend before I could be with Kristen. The day went slowly.

The time came when I was able to leave. The weather appeared as if it would change. It had been clear but now it was getting windy and the clouds were rolling in.

By the time I arrived, it was dark and a storm was imminent. I turned into the parking lot of the town hall, but no one was there. My heart fell. Did I misunderstand the time, the place? No, I thought to myself, but where was she?

I pulled in, parked and waited. Within moments, I saw headlights. It was Kristen. My palms began to sweat with anticipation. All those rehearsed lines, what were they, what should I say?

Kristen opened the door of my car and climbed in. Our eyes met again, and we both realized there was no need for words.

Kristen said, "Pull out of the parking lot and head north on 95." Except for occasional directions, neither of us spoke. We held hands through the darkness.

After what seemed several hours, Kristen spoke, "We're looking for an Inn, a very old Inn. I read it was constructed before the Revolutionary War, and actually housed British soldiers. The Inn had been handed down through several generations. The family who runs the Inn is the same family that built it."

We were driving a winding road when it began to rain. It was raining slowly, not quite enough for the windshield wipers, and the wind was picking up. It was as dark a night as I had ever seen.

I suspected the ocean was on the right as there were no lights, and the smell of moist salt air was coming from the auto vents. I drove my car up a long, narrow driveway, until I approached the overgrown cul-de-sac of the Inn.

Kristen and I reached out for one another's hand in the darkness. We sat quietly, looking into each other's eyes, as the lightning flashed in the distance. The closed windows of the car muffled the sound of the thunder.

As if verbally communicated, we both turned, opened the doors and stepped out into the light, rhythmic rain. We held hands as we walked towards the Inn.

It was a majestic structure, but with a certain warmth. It rekindled a special, secure feeling I hadn't remembered since I was a child. It was the summer I spent at my grandmother's home in Springfield.

As we climbed the steps leading to the large double wooden doors, we noticed a small black wreath, with a sign that read, "We're sorry, breakfast will not be served, as there was a death in the family."

I reached for the large brass doorknocker to announce our arrival when the thunder crashed loud enough to upset us both.

Through the window of the Inn, I could see the shadows of the antique furniture dance along the flowered wall opposite the huge stone fireplace.

I knocked quietly and with mixed emotion. I wanted to let the Innkeeper know we were here, but I didn't want to wake any of the guests as it was past midnight.

Within a few moments, the door slowly opened. Standing in front of us, was a small, charming woman, holding a single candelabrum in each hand. She greeted us with a warm smile and a sincere "Good evening!" She asked us to come in out of the storm and assured us that she was very glad to see us. She was worried about us.

I told her we were sorry to wake her at such a late hour, but she said that she would not sleep until all of her guests were safe and accounted for. It was obvious; this kind old woman had been a mother of many children.

The old woman apologized for the dimness of the room, but said that about an hour earlier, the lights, without warning, had gone out. It must have been due to the storm.

With that, she handed me one of the candles, and asked us to follow her. The waxy surface of the candle was smooth and cool to the touch.

She led us to the base of the staircase, and said, "The other guests won't be arriving 'til morning, and you'll have the entire Inn to yourselves. Please have a pleasant night's sleep. If there is anything I can do to make your stay more comfortable, please call.

I took Kristen's hand and began to climb the long stairs. Anticipation, fear, and just a little guilt were in my heart.

The storm intensified. The lightning was more brilliant; the thunder was louder, and the rain was now falling harder.

We arrived at our room, and I placed the candle on the antique dresser. From the dim candlelight, I could see that all the furniture was antique, original, as if we had stepped back in time. I opened the window slightly. As the light flowed across Kristen's face, she appeared almost angelic. Her hair was golden; her eyes appeared turquoise in that dim light.

Suddenly, there was a flash of lightning. Kristen jumped forward into my arms. We gazed into each other's eyes. I felt love, warmth, happiness, and tenderness. I held her tightly.

As the lightning flashed, and the thunder roared, we fell to the floor. The wind blew fiercely against the glass panes. With a sudden gust, the wind consumed the candle flame. There was darkness.

The sound of the powerful surf thrusting itself against the rocks outside our window made our passions rise. We loved one another.

The wind blew with terrifying fury. The rain rhythmically beat upon the roof. The lightning flashed while the thunder crashed again, and again. Our senses were assaulted. The warmth we felt in each other's arms, our passion unleashed, the pounding surf, the driving rain, the lightning, and the thunder,

all coming to a climax simultaneously! With a final explosion of thunder, we collapsed into one another's arms.

Within several minutes, Kristen was asleep. I stood over her and watched while she slept. The storm had subsided now. Only the gentle patter of the rain against the glass and the waves breaking below could be heard.

I knelt down on one knee and placed my arm under Kristen's childlike head with the other under her legs. I slowly raised and carried her to the overstuffed bed where I carefully placed her and covered her with the hand made comforter so as not to wake her. I climbed under the quilt, reached for Kristen, and held her until I peacefully drifted off into a sound sleep.

When morning came, I was afraid to open my eyes. I was scared it was all a dream, and I might be again in my own bed at home. I carefully reached out to see if I were alone. Kristen was still there by my side. It was true; it really happened.

When Kristen awoke, we left the Inn. The village was cloaked with a post storm mist. It was a small fishing village, quaint, old, and picturesque. The surf was gently hurling itself against the rocks that were savagely battered the evening before. Seagulls were crying overhead. We walked together hand in hand through the mist along the shore for hours without saying a single word. There was no need for words.

I recalled to myself every detail of that evening before.

Kristen and I left later that day to drive back to Williamstown. I thought, "Back to reality." Then I realized, "This was reality, too! Thank God, but what now? What about us? What about her husband."

We drove back to that town hall in Williamstown. The church in the town square was packed to capacity. I turned into the parking lot and parked along side of Kristen's car. Once again we looked deep into each other's eyes for what seemed eternity. We held hands and gently kissed one another. Kristen turned and left my car.

I drove away to begin my long journey home. I was lost in the beautiful, now greening fields and meadows with grazing cattle. Fieldstone walls separated

the meadows. The hills were gently rolling with crystal streams flowing towards the road. I returned home with only the memory of that evening.

I never talked to Kristen again. Soon after that night, Kristen and her husband moved. His company again asked them to relocate, this time to somewhere in the northwest.

I had hoped happiness for Kristen but was never quite sure what had become of her.

I often look back on that mystic evening and wonder if it ever really happened at all.

## New Oldies



I can see the train traffic lights down the track turn red. This tells me that I have about a minute before the train arrives at the station. Night after night for nearly three years I've stood at the train station waiting for my evening train to take me from the city through hills and fields to the village where I retrieve my car to complete my journey home.

I can now hear the train whistle off in the distance. It's coming closer. The railroad gates up the tracks lower with the loud clanging of the warning bells. I can see the lights on the engine as it rounds the final bend before pulling into the station. It approaches with a thunder of its huge diesel engines and the squeal of its disk brakes. It stops with its doors immediately in front of my feet with clockwork precision. Set your watches; it's 5:25 PM.

The familiar white and blue colors of the train's exterior are a friendly sight. It's something I can trust to whisk me effortlessly home past the congested traffic on the freeway. I quickly enter and climb the stairs to my penthouse seat with a window view of all that passes by at 70 miles per hour. The train is unusually empty tonight and I am able to quickly find a seat at the end of the car next to a window. Once seated, I can start my ritual of getting comfortable. Take off my suit jacket and place it on the seat; put my Palm Pilot and wallet into my brief case, and put the briefcase on the seat next to me. This also keeps people from sitting there and talking to me or on their cell phones the whole trip.

For the first time, I reached into the front pocket of my briefcase to carefully remove the CD player I stored there early this morning. I borrowed it from my teenage daughter and brought my favorite oldies CDs along for the ride. I don't know what I'd do without CD burners. I was able to burn all my favorite oldies onto one CD.

Now, how does this thing work? CD's in, headphones on and adjusted, now press play. "*Look over yonder, what do you see...*", ah, "Crystal Blue Persuasion" by Tommy James and the Shondells, a classic. It's been a long week. This is great. The music sounds so good and it drowns out the chatter of the other passengers. All I am aware of is the music and the gentle rhythm of the train moving down the tracks.

After a few minutes, we glide through the rolling green hills. I listen to the music, and think about where I was when this song was popular. What was I doing? I was fourteen years old, living in a small hamlet along the Hudson River forty miles north of New York City. As I continue to listen and to remember, I begin to feel as though I were fading in and out of a light sleep, when I hear:

*"There'll be peace and good, brotherhood... Crystal Blue Persuasion... Crystal Blue Persuasion..."*

A few moments of silence, then: "*Why do you build me up... Buttercup baby just to let me down... and mess me around*" Another classic; "Build Me Up Buttercup," by the Foundations. About then, I could hear the conductor shout the name of the next stop. Then, as I slip into my catnap again, I could hear only the music.

I then noticed that my CD was finishing the last song, "*I, I, I need you... more than anyone, baby...*" "Welcome back! This is Cousin Brucey! That's right, it's your cousin, Bruce Morrow, back at you with 77 WABC's Top 40! 'Fill me up, Buttercup.' That song is number three on the 77 WABC countdown for the week of June 13th. It's 72 degrees here in New York with plenty of sunshine and plenty of music. And in Music News: The Beatle's Paul McCartney's marriage to photographer Linda Eastman on March 12 seems to be working out just fine."

"Next and last stop, Croton-on-the-Hudson. This is our last stop, Croton-on-the-Hudson. Harmon Station is our last stop!"

What the...! CROTON?! My eyes snapped open as I struggled to focus on my surroundings. I could see dark brown woven seats with silver chrome trim, not the multicolored blue fabric seat covers of my train. I looked around and saw the Penn Central sign. Penn Central? That's what the Hudson River train line from Grand Central Station to Harmon Station was called in the sixties before it became the MTA, Metropolitan Transit Authority. What the hell is going on here?!

I reached up with my right arm and slapped the headphones from my ears and looked down at my CD player. As I looked to the seat, all I could find tethered to the end of the headphone wire was a small rectangular plastic box. I reached down and picked up the box, turned it over and found that it was an AM transistor radio, the kind I had as a kid. Where's my CD player? What's going on here?!

As I looked around to try and figure out what was happening, I realized almost everyone had already gotten off the train. I suppose I should, too. I can figure this out from the station. I looked around for my briefcase but couldn't find it anywhere. I checked under the seat, in the seat behind me. It wasn't there. Someone must have stolen it while I was in music land. Damn it! My Palm Pilot was in there! Well, it's not here.

Just then a man trying to pass me in the aisle looked at me searching the seats and asked; "Lose something?"

"Yes! I can't find my CDs!"

"You lost your money?"

"No, damn it, I lost my CDs and briefcase!"

"Were your Certificates of Deposit in your briefcase?"

"No, I didn't lose Certificates of Deposit, I lost my music!"

"You lost your money and your eight tracks?"

“No, no, no, thank you. I’ll find them. I’m sure they’re here, thank you!”

I quickly gathered my thoughts, made my way to the door and stepped off the train onto the old wooden planked platform and into the warm, humid June air which always marks the beginning of New York’s summer, and I looked from one side to the other. The first thing I noticed was that the station was gone. The beautiful MTA station was gone. As I looked to my right, I saw the old two-story station with the old wooden steps leading up to the road above. What is going on here?

I saw a man in a suit standing at the bottom of the stairs fixing his briefcase and newspaper, getting ready for the two flights of stairs, he would have to climb shortly.

I tapped him on the back and asked him: “Could you please tell me the date?”

He smiled and answered: “Sure, it’s June 13th.”

“No, no! The year?”

“The year?”

“Yes, what year is this?”

“Are you kidding me?”

“No, what year is this?”

“Why, it’s June 13th, 1969.” He delivered it with just a stare and a somewhat confused look.

“1969?!”

“Yes, June 13th.”

I must have been staring at him at this point. I thought to myself, it’s not 1969! After unsuccessfully trying to understand this, I thought, home. I’ll call my house. The one I grew up in. Maybe I should start there. I broke my uncomfortable silence by asking; “Could I please borrow your cell?”

“My cell?”

"Yes, please, your cell."

"You mean like a jail cell?"

"No. I mean your cell! Your cell phone!"

"You mean like a jail telephone?"

"No, you're mobile!"

"A movable jail phone?"

"Look, please, it's a local call. I won't talk long!"

The man looked confused at me for a moment and turned and dashed up the stairs leaving me alone on the platform with only the sounds of the trains shuffling their cars off in the distance and the smell of the moist air coming off the Hudson River Wetlands.

I took my little transistor radio and headphones and headed up the two flights of stairs to the station above. As I turned halfway up the stairs to take a breath, I could see the station parking lot filled with classic cars. There were cars from the fifties and early sixties as far as the eye could see. I thought how much would this parking lot be worth today. All these classics! They're beautiful!

I got to the top of the stairs and felt light headed. Gees, two flights of stairs and I'm winded! I stood there for a minute to catch my breath and to look around and try to develop some kind of plan. I needed to figure out what was going on here and what should I do next. I needed to make that call.

I turned to the left to see a woman behind the bars of the ticket counter across a dark room with a well-worn linoleum tiled floor. Maybe she had a phone. I walked over and asked her; "Can I borrow your phone to make a local call, please?"

She answered, "I'm sorry, but I'm not supposed to let anyone use our phone." She pointed behind me and said, "There's a payphone in the telephone booth over in the corner."

I ran to the telephone booth and realized how long it's been since I've seen a public telephone booth. The kind with the bi-fold closing doors, cool! I

reached into my pocket for some change. I went all the way to the bottom of both pockets and found nothing. I suddenly remembered, I don't carry change. I either throw it in the console of my SUV or in my change bank at home. I don't have any change to make the call.

I walked back over to the woman behind the counter and asked her for change for a dollar. She opened her old metal drawer, reached in and began counting the exact change on the counter. I reached for my wallet to exchange it for a paper dollar. My wallet was gone! I must have lost it! Maybe someone stole it! No, I put it in my briefcase! The damn wallet is in my damn briefcase!

The woman just looked at me waiting for the dollar to complete the transaction. I leaned over and told her, "I'm really sorry, I have misplaced my wallet. Could I borrow 35 cents, please?"

"I thought you said you needed to make a local call?"

"I do."

"Then why do you need 35cents?"

"To make the call."

"Why would you need 35 cents to make a local call? It's only a dime."

I paused, not knowing what to answer the woman. "You're right. Could I please borrow a DIME?"

She looked at me for a moment, turned, reached to the floor for her purse. She opened her purse and rooted around in the bottom for a moment. She pulled her hand from her old purse and placed a dime and a ball of lint on the shiny metal counter in front of me.

She said, "Here, take it."

I wasn't sure if she was being generous or just felt that 10 cents was a small price to get rid of me.

I quickly walked back to the phone booth, pushed the door open, went inside, and struggled to get the door closed behind me. I placed my dime in the slot and didn't know what to dial. I don't remember what my telephone number

was 30+ years ago! Now what? Information, that's what! I do know my name, at least I think I do, and I do remember my old address.

I checked to see if the dial tone was still there. Good, still there. I placed my index finger in that old rotary phone and dialed what would give me information, 555.1212. I waited for the recording to ask "What city?"

Instead, the recording said, "I'm sorry, your call can not be completed as dialed." What! 5, 5, 5, 1, 2, 1, 2? The damn phone must be broke! I hung up the heavy black handset, heard the dime drop into the metal coin return and tried it again. I got the same response.

I dialed "O" for the operator and waited for her help.

"Operator, can I help you?"

"Yes Ma'am, I need Information."

"Just dial 4, 1, 1, sir."

"Damn!"

"Sir?"

"Ah, thank you ma'am!" 4,1,1, damn it! I then dialed 411, waited a moment and finally heard:

"Information, can I help you?"

"Ah, ah, I'm sorry. You caught me by surprise. Ah, yes, can you get me the telephone number for the Safkos at 16 Samstag Avenue, please?"

"Just one moment, please. That number would be WILSON, 1, 0, 4, 3, 6."

"I'm sorry, what was that number?"

"Yes, that number is WILSON, 1, 0, 4, 3, 6."

"Ma'am, I needed the telephone number for the Safkos, not the Wilsons, please."

"That IS the number for the Safkos. WILSON, 1, 0, 4, 3, 6."

“Ma’am, then who’s the Wilsons?”

“Sir, it’s not the Wilsons. Wilson is the exchange. You know, W, I, 1?”

“Oh yeah, I remember now. WILSON, 1, W, I, 1. I got it! Thank you!” This is too hard, and I’ve done it before!

I hung up the handset again and heard the dime drop into the coin return again. Oh, yeah, information used to be free!

I placed the dime back into the slot and dialed, let’s see, where’s the ‘W’? Then, ‘I’, then 1, 0, 4, 3, 6. Got it. It rang. It rang again. It rang again for a third time. I guess no one’s home.

Then I heard, “Hello! Hello! Hello? Is anybody there?” Pause, click.

Oh my God! It was her. That was my mother. There’s no mistake that was her! She sounded so young. I haven’t heard her voice since 1985, just before she died. That was her voice. I had the chance to speak with her again and didn’t know what to say. That was stupid, really stupid. And now I’m out of money again.

I really didn’t know what to do next. I stepped out of the phone booth and slowly walked towards the station door to the street. I reached the door and into the sunshine outside. I watched as every car that drove by was a classic, Rambler, Camaro, GTO, even the old Volkswagen, and station wagons everywhere, really cool.

The one thing I was sure of was that I was hungry. I needed to sit with a cold Diet Pepsi and a sandwich and sort this one out. I stepped off the curb and watched the oncoming car approach. It was a 1958, Oldsmobile, Super 88. Just like the one I owned so long ago.

I stuck out my thumb, but didn’t really expect him to stop. No one ever picks up hitchhikers anymore. He came closer and closer, and STOPPED!

I ran the few feet to the front door, sprung it open and jumped inside. You could smell the musty smell of the insulation and the cloth seats. The gigantic steel dashboard stretched across the car for what seemed twenty feet. The steering wheel was huge. The radio played “My Cheri Amour,” by Stevie

Wonder. "*La, La, La, La, La, La, My Cheri Amour, lovely as a summer day.*" It sounded tinny, without fidelity coming out of the one, front, center, certainly cracked speaker. There was only an AM dial! No FM! How strange!

The man driving asked: "Where ya going, Pal?"

I wasn't sure, but answered; "Down the road to the McDonalds."

"Sure, just tell me when to stop."

I got the door closed and fumbled around on the side of the seat until the driver asked;

"Did you lose something?"

"Yeah, the seat belt."

"Seat belt? There are no seat belts in a 1958 Olds! What are you a race car driver or something?"

"No, just checking." I felt really vulnerable and naked without my belt. I remember when I bought my 1974 Buick, brand new from Gus Buick; I had the salesman disconnect the seat belt warning light because I didn't want to wear the seat belts. I also remember how angry I was when New York State made it a law to wear them. Who did they think they were taking away my right to choose?

As we drove, I took in all the sights. I was surprised when he turned down the two-lane road where the highway was supposed to be. As we drove across the old concrete bridge over the Croton River, I could see on the other side of the wetlands that the construction had only just begun on the four lanes for Route 9. This is all very, very, strange.

As we approached the intersection where the McDonald's restaurant was, I noticed he wasn't slowing down. I said, "Here, here, this is it. At least I think so." He pulled over to the curb to let me out. I opened the door and stuck one leg onto the sidewalk, but didn't know where to go from there.

"Where's the McDonalds?"

"I'm sorry, Buddy, but I don't know that family. I don't know where they live."

“It’s supposed to be here! Where’s the Wendy’s? Where’s the McDonald’s?”

“I’m sorry, but I don’t know Wendy McDonald. Is there someplace else you would like to go?”

“No, I guess not. This will be fine. Thank you.” I then heard, *“How I wish that you were mine...La, La, La, La, La, La.”* “It’s Juicy Brucey back at you again. That was ‘My Cheri Amour’ by Little Stevie Wonder.”

“In the WABC news: In retaliation for the massive, coordinated assault against the major urban areas of South Vietnam which took both the United States and South Vietnam by surprise, the Tet Offensive has resulted in an estimated 40,000 Vietcong and North Vietnamese battle deaths. The American public does not support the Nixon administration’s policy in Vietnam...”

“I hope you find your Wendy McDonald friend!”

I stepped out of the car and closed that massive steel door, turned and stood motionless on the sidewalk as I stared at the two old single-family residences that stood where the McDonalds, the Wendy’s, and the Marine Midland Bank were supposed to be. I was confused, and still hungry.

About then, a woman passed by and I called to her; “Miss, Miss! Hello!”

“Yes?”

“Is there a Wendy’s or McDonalds around here?”

“I’m sorry?”

“Wendy’s or McDonalds?”

“I’m sorry, I don’t know that family.”

Frustrated, I asked; “Can you tell me if there is an A.T.M. nearby?”

“Auntie EM? I’m afraid I don’t know her either. Is Emily related to that Wendy McDonald you’re looking for?”

“No, no. Is there a fast food restaurant around here?”

“There’s a diner up the road.”

“I don’t want a diner; I want a fast food restaurant.”

“Fast food? They can cook it pretty fast if you tell them you’re in a hurry.”

“Not a diner, a fast food restaurant. You know, one with a drive through?”

“I’m afraid I don’t know of any restaurant you can drive a car through. Why don’t you try the diner?”

I thanked her for her help and headed back up the road towards the diner. I reached down and turned on my little transistor radio for some music. The disk jockey was Cousin Brucey, Bruce Morrow. I remember him and Dan Ingram were the two hottest disk jockeys in New York in the sixties. There were only two radio stations to listen to; 66 WNBC and 77 WABC. That was all. No FM! As I listened I could hear, “Smile a Little Smile for Me,” by The Flying Machine.

As I walked up the sidewalk, I realized that I didn’t have any money nor debit or credit cards. Not that I could use a debit or credit card in 1969, especially a holographic magnetic strip ATM/credit card. What was I going to do? I was still hungrier than ever.

I continued to walk towards where I remembered the diner was and I saw the small grocery store I used to work in when I was a kid. An old German man owned the store. His name was Charlie Kromer. I used to clean up, sweep the outside, stock the shelves, and stack bottles in the back. Bottles! That’s what I would have done in 1969 when I needed money for lunch or to go to the movies. Bottle money! Returnable bottles for deposit!

I crossed the street to where the store was coming up on my right. I approached the front of the store and carefully looked in the window to see where Charlie was. I peered through the dirty glass and saw him sitting in his favorite reclining chair in his living room just off the store. He seemed to be asleep.

I quietly crept around to the back of the store to where the storeroom was. And, if I remembered correctly, there it was—the key to the storeroom. It was

just where he used to hide it. Let's see, it was right over the back window on the right.

I carefully and quietly took the key and slowly unlocked the storeroom door. The hinges creaked as the door to the dark room swung open. The little sunlight that peeked through the open door was just enough to see inside. There on the right, against the wall, were the bottles. They were stacked high to the ceiling, just waiting for the soda distributor to load them onto his truck.

I sneaked in and grabbed two cases of the big ones and one of the small. You know, one case of the 16 oz. 2¢ apiece bottles, and two of the big 32 oz'ers. Those are the ones you get a nickel apiece for. Yea, two and one should do it.

I sneaked back around to the front door of the store and fumbled with the door latch. I found it, sprung it opened and tripped into the store with a bang. Still upright, I made my way to the counter past the penny Bazookas, the Good and Plenty, the Sensen mints, the Bonomo Turkish Taffy, the nickel full-sized candy bars, and the wax lips, to where I could put the cases of empties down.

Just then Charlie appeared. He looked just as I remembered him. I guess I was in my twenties when he died and his family sold the store to a mid-easterner who turned this place into a Quickie-Mart. I said, "Hi!"

He looked at me then at the bottles on the counter, and then looked at me again. He stared at my face and in his thick German accent, he asked me; "Do you live around here?"

"I used to."

"You look familiar, but I just can't place you. The face is somewhat familiar, though."

"Thanks for remembering me. That makes me feel at home. Could I just cash these in today?"

"You want to buy something today?"

"No, just the bottles, please." As he turned around the other way and hit the No Sale lever on his cash register, I could hear him mumble something in

German. I didn't know what it was, but I knew it wasn't very nice. Now I remember how grouchy he was.

He counted out the change on the old worn wooden counter top. When he was done, he just gave me a strange unpleasant look and turned and stepped back into the darkness of his living room with the shades drawn and only the light from the black and white television illuminating the room. I scooped up the coins in both hands, slipped them into my pocket, and yelled thank you, as I went out the door into the bright afternoon sunshine.

I turned to the right and headed up the street to where the diner would be to find some food. I then realized that during all that sneaking and lurking, the AM radio had been playing away. Some spy I am! "*Smile a little smile for me...Rose Marie...Rose Marie...*" "It's 75 degrees here in New York on this terrific June afternoon. This is your Cousin Brucey with a sports update. It's been an exciting week in baseball! Earlier this week, the Expos snapped a 20-game losing streak as Jerry Robertson wins 4-3 at Los Angeles. The White Sox trade Bob Locker to the Pilots for Gary Bell, and Mickey Mantle Day in New York saw 60,000 fans yesterday. Mantle's #7 is retired and plaques he exchanges with Joe DiMaggio will hang on the CF wall at Yankee Stadium. DiMaggio's plaque comes as a surprise to the Yankee Clipper..."

I turned off the radio and walked silently up the sidewalk until I reached the diner. It was a traditional Pullman Coach Diner. You know, the kind that used to be a train and they took off the wheels and built the kitchen out the back? The stainless steel front glistened in the bright afternoon sunlight. I walked toward the door in the center of the front and pulled the handle, opened the silver door and went inside.

I walked across the entryway and looked at all of the burgundy colored naugahyde booths with the formica tables with little boomerang shaped designs. There were jukebox stations on each table. The small sign on them said 10 cents per song, three songs for 25 cents. The catsup bottles and the salt and pepper shakers were perfectly lined up against the silver chrome napkin dispensers like little soldiers in an identical pattern on every table.

I walked over to the counter and waited until a man wearing a little paper hat came from the back through a swinging door and asked, "What can I get you today?"

“How ’bout a turkey sandwich on wheat with cheese, heated and a Diet Pepsi to go?” He just stared at me for a moment; then he asked; “Diet Pepsi? We don’t sell Pepsi, just Coke. How ’bout a Coke?”

“Okay, make that a Diet Coke, please.”

“Diet Coke? I’m not sure what you asking for. Do you mean Coca-Cola without sugar?”

“Yeah, yeah, that’s what I mean.”

“Then why didn’t you just ask for a Tab?”

“Tab? Oh yeah, a Tab. A Tab with Saccharin. That sounds great.”

The man wrote down the order, walked to the window counter between the front counter and the back kitchen and placed the little slip of green paper in the carousel overhead. He walked over to a glass front refrigerator, opened it, reached in, and pulled out a bottle of Tab from among the other Coke, Veep and Fresca bottles. He walked over to where I was standing and placed the bottle on the counter in front of me.

I sat down on the spinning stool and swung side to side while I waited for my sandwich and tried to figure out what to do next. The jukebox started up with “Time of the Season” by The Zombies. *“It’s the ti—ime...of the season...when love runs hi—igh.”*

I reached over for the bottle and grabbed it with my left hand. I placed my right hand on the lid squeezed it and twisted it counterclockwise, hard. The cap never budged. “YEEEEOOOOW! What the...!”

The man in the little paper hat came running over to me to see what the matter was. I told him I nearly ripped my palm open trying to open the bottle. He laughed and asked; “Who do think you are, Superman? Do you want a church key?”

“Do I want a what?”

“Church key, bottle opener?” He reached below the counter and his hand returned with a familiar stamped metal, round on one end, pointed on the

other, can/bottle opener. He dropped the tool and it sounded with a "ting" as it hit the counter. I reached for it with my sore hand and thanked the man in the paper hat. He just laughed, turned and went back into the kitchen through the swinging door. I placed the round end over the bottle cap and pried it up. It worked, just like it used to. The cap bent off.

Just then the cook in the back tossed the sandwich wrapped in wax paper on the counter between the two areas. The man in the paper hat burst through the swinging door and quickly scooped up the sandwich and with a snap of a paper bag dropped it in and handed it to me with a smile.

I reached in to feel the sandwich. It didn't look like they heated it; I like the cheese melted. I took the sandwich from the bag and instantly felt that it was cold. I called the man in the paper hat over to where I was and asked him, "Sir, could you please nuke this for about two minutes?"

He stared at me as if he didn't understand what heating a sandwich was. He looked at me and asked; "You want me to do what with the sandwich?"

"Nuke it for a couple of minutes, please."

"Nuke it?" "What's 'Nuke' it?"

I answered; "Mike it for a few."

"You want me to 'Mike' the sandwich? Who's Mike?"

I snapped the sandwich bag from his hands, grabbed by Tab, and asked the man in the little paper hat how much I owed him. He picked up the little green slip of paper and tried to add the numbers together. He tried several times and got different totals each time. I leaned over and suggested that maybe he should use a calculator. He looked at me strange again and asked, "Calculator?" "Never mind!" I said.

He told me the total and I reached deep into my pocket and pulled out all of my bottle money and tossed it on the counter with the pennies spinning everywhere. He counted the change and told me I was 8¢ short. We stared at each other forever, when he finally said; "Pay me the next time you're in here." This time, I laughed and said, "Sure, the next time, you got it!"

I headed out the door and I sat on the bench outside the diner to eat my cold turkey sandwich and drink that awful Tab. Yuck! I forgot how really bad saccharin tasted! I turned on my little AM radio and coincidentally, "Time of the Season" was just getting over, "*It's the ti—ime of the sea—son for lo—ving.*" Then, there was that great Hammond organ instrumental.

"We're back with Juicy Brucey with a WABC 'what's happening' at the box office this weekend. And of course, the top box office hit across the country this summer is the 1969 Academy Award winner, *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, starring Paul Newman, Robert Redford, and Katharine Ross. Followed closely by *Midnight Cowboy* starring Dustin Hoffman who was nominated for Best Actor, and Jon Voight who took Best Actor. These hits have been running neck and neck in the box office..."

I finished my sandwich and Tab and dropped the bag and bottle in the trash and looked through the window of the diner to see what time it was. If I hurried, I could get to my high school before it got out. While sitting there I remembered that on a weekday on the 13th of June, in 1969, I would have been in my first year of high school. That's what I would do. I would go off and find myself. Not metaphorically, really!

I walked down that hot concrete sidewalk listening as my toneless radio began to play "Stormy," by The Classics IV. "*You were the sunshine baby, whenever you smiled, but I call you stormy today.*"

A few moments later I could see the front lawn of the Harvard-Ivy League type high school building sitting high on that hill. It was big, brown, and filled with a lot of different memories. There were some good, and then some not good. I made my way around the north side of the building to see if the kids were still in class or getting on the bus by now. I got to the end of the bus pick up where I could see the kids standing around and getting onto the bright yellow school buses.

I watched closely at each child's face to see if there was one I could recognize, namely, I was looking for mine. The first kid I could identify was Bobby. We were close friends for most of my childhood. Oh, look, there's Fonda, and there, there's Earl. And over there, there's Gerry, and Joey, and Mary Ellen, and oh, yeah, Marty. Look how young they look. They're just puppies. Playing like puppies, too. Oh, I can't believe it's them. They're only fourteen!

Then I remembered things I wish I hadn't. I remembered what had happened to them all since this day, where they went and where they ended up. Marty went off to college and I think ended up in Dallas as some big time marketing person. I never saw him again after high school. Bobby, he became an alcoholic roofer and never left the town we all grew up in. Earl, he saved a child who fell from a two-story window by catching him, and then a year later drowned in a boating accident the day after we last double dated.

Fonda got sick in her senior year and had a kidney transplant that didn't take. When she died, I sat outside of the funeral parlor and just cried. I never made it inside. Mary Ellen was the Queen of the Prom and married the King. Boy, did I have a crush on her in elementary school. While in college, she and her husband went to prison for trafficking cocaine. Her husband sold some to an undercover narcotics agent in their apartment.

Gerry fell asleep on the Taconic Parkway one night coming home from work. His car went off the road and flipped upside down into a lake. They didn't find him until the next morning. And then there's Joey. He was my first and best friend. The last time I saw Joey was in 1993 when I visited him at his work. He was leaving for Montana to study fish and wildlife. Shortly after he settled in Montana, his wife left him with a lot of debt and he committed suicide by overdosing on sleeping pills. I found out while traveling on business in Oslo, Norway.

Oh, my god! Look what's happened! I need to tell them. I need to hold them. I need to tell them I love them. I felt a tear fall from my left eye, then another from my right. They need to be warned. They need to understand the consequence of their decisions, the courses they chose. They need to know. I need to hold them and tell them how much I miss them.

Suddenly, I felt a tap on my shoulder. I turned to see who it was. I couldn't focus through the tears. Everything was a blur. All I could see a blue shirt, then a silver badge. It was a policeman. He asked, "Can I help you?" I couldn't speak. He asked, "Have you registered with the main office?"

All I could do is point at the children and say between the tears, "All I want to do is hold them and tell them I love them."

He asked in a stern voice, "Are you supposed to be here?"

I answered, “No, I suppose not.” Sniff, sniff.

He said, “I think you had better leave right now!” I apologized, and turned back to get one last look at my friends. I could only see the buses pulling away from the curb. I could smell the diesel smoke and taste the salty tears. I turned again and walked away.

As I walked away trying to stop the tears, I could hear, “*Bring back that sun—ny day, bring back that sunny day. Oh Stormy...*” “Welcome back! You’re here with Cousin Brucey on WABC Top Forty hits every day just for you. Here’s a quick update on that rock festival they’re still trying to put together upstate. Ticket sales are slow, as they still haven’t booked any groups. Rumor has it, Hendrix, Joplin, Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young, Joe Cocker, are all lined up, but haven’t signed yet. It’s only sixty days away. For those who haven’t heard about it yet, it’s going to be called Woodstock Music and Art Fair, three days of music, scheduled for August 15, 16, & 17th in Bethel, New York...”

I found my way back to Highland Avenue (Route 9), and began to hitch hike again. The third car that came by actually stopped. I hopped in and asked if he would drop me off in Crotonville. Crotonville was the little hamlet where I grew up. As friendly as ever, he just said; “Sure! That’s where I’m heading.” The car radio started playing, “I’d Wait a Million Years,” by The Grass Roots. “*All of those lonely nights waiting for you to come running to hold me tight...*”

We drove the two or so miles to my neighborhood. I still couldn’t get over those cars. They’re cherry! I want a dozen to go! We arrived at my street and he pulled over to let me out. I stepped out of the car, and watched him drive away. I shook my head and walked off in the direction of my house. As I walked, I noticed all the houses had TV antennas on the chimneys. I never realized that I haven’t seen them in years. I just never noticed. Gees, I remember, there were only four television channels, ABC, CBS, NBC, and one independent, oh yeah, and PBS. Five channels in black and white, and we always seemed to find something to watch. I have hundreds of digital channels and complain every night that there’s nothing on worth watching. Boy, talk about perspective!

I crested the hill and walked the slight turn to the front of my home. As I did, I could see the front gate and can remember the summer day my grandfather

who was a carpenter, built that gate and the fence, and the steps, and the trellis. He taught me a great deal besides just working with wood. I've missed him since his death in 1982.

There it was, my old house, only it didn't look old. Not like the last time I saw it. The paint was fresh, the brown cedar shingle siding was in perfect condition, and the bushes were alive with flowers. I could hear children yelling “*Oly-oly-oxen-free*,” and the motorcycle sounds of baseball cards in the spokes of the boys' Sting Ray Banana Seat bicycles.

I continued past the house to the adjacent side street that had no name the whole time I grew up, that separated our property. Our house and backyard were on one side of the road and a large vacant lot we owned was on the other. The lot was covered with dozens of large mature locust trees. Their small circular leaves were arranged in parallel patterns, flickering the light coming through them into fractured designs that ran across the ground as the breeze gently blew.

There on the street alongside of my house were three young girls playing with their Hula-Hoops. They were good. I never did get the hang of a Hula-Hoop. Their little troll dolls were lined up along the curb as if they were the judges in the Olympics of Hula Hoop competition. The street was shaded by the huge sugar maples that surrounded my home and blanketed the ground with continuous summer shade. Their leaves were large and bright and fresh. It kept the house cool, but we were never able to grow grass in that yard.

There she was. Right there, in the middle of all that light and shade. Right there in front of me. It was like a fireworks show with the light flickering off her chrome. There it was, my two-tone, four door, white and cream, 1959 Ford Fairlane, fins and all. This was the first car I ever owned, and there it was! At fourteen, I would drive this beauty between the Locust trees, in and out, and around for hours. I would carry gas in cans from the gas station down the hill and drive it some more. All I could do was stand there and watch the patterns of light reflect from all that chrome and glass.

I slowly walked the rest of the distance to where she was parked until I could reach out and touch her. I reached my right arm out and slowly ran the tips of my fingers across the warm hood covered in intermittent sunshine. As if chan-

neling the spirit of that car, all of the pleasurable moments I spent in and around her flashed through my mind.

After what seemed hours, I remembered where I was and turned to face the back door of my childhood home. I walked across the street to the door of my house. This was the door we used most often. I stared at the door not knowing what to do next. It was as if I had forgotten how to knock. I just stared at the texture of the door. I really didn't know what to do.

I finally raised my hand to knock, but couldn't. I mustered all the courage I could and managed only two unconvincing knocks. Then I froze. I almost hoped no one would answer.

A moment later the door flew open and standing there in front of me was my mother. It was her all right. I stared silently not knowing what to say or being able to say it if I knew. She was pretty, and, she was younger than me! I drank in her image, as I had not seen her since 1982, three years before her death in 1985. There she was. Suddenly my trance was broken as if a rock had been thrown through a plate glass window, when she asked, "Can I help you?"

"Ah, ah, yes, yes, is Lonny here?"

"Do you know him?"

"Yes, yes, I do. We're old friends. Is he home?"

"No, I'm sorry, he had to stay at school for detention. He should be home soon. Would you like to come in and wait?"

"No. No, thanks. I'll just stop back. Thank you."

I walked away and wished I could think of something to say to her. There were so many questions after her death. So much I wanted to say. Now I couldn't think of a thing to say.

Just then I heard the AM radio again finishing its song. *"I'd wait a million years...walk a million miles...cry a million tears..."* "This is Cousin Brucey with another hit. Tonight's TV line up is looking good. We have "Gunsmoke," "My Three Sons," "Bewitched," and "Star Trek." Sock it to me! In the news, it was estimated today that the bombing of North Vietnam has inflicted an esti-

mated \$600 million damage on a nation still struggling to develop a viable, modern economy. Civilian casualties are running as high as 1,000 per week during periods of heavy bombing. American and South Vietnamese losses are also high. In the first two weeks of the Tet campaigns, the U.S. losses totaled 1,000 killed and South Vietnam 2,300. An estimated 12,500 civilians were also killed...”

I walked up the hill near my house looking at my friends, their brothers and sisters and their parents going about their daily lives as if nothing was happening. The children played, the parents sat in their lawn chairs and waited for the end of the day. I still couldn't believe all those old cars and young people. I noticed again as the AM continued to play. The song was, “And When I Die,” by Blood Sweat and Tears. *“I'm not scared of dying, and I don't really care...”*

I walked until the sun was nearly set on my old neighborhood and on my memories. I slowly made my way through the streets that were so familiar, but almost forgotten to me. I walked down the hills, around the curves and back up the hills until I was home once again.

I stood motionless and watched my home through the now dim twilight. I could see someone sitting in a lawn chair on our patio listening to the radio. I couldn't make out who it was. I did remember that this was my favorite pastime of the summer. I would just sit and listen to the top 40 on the patio and watch the cars and people's lives go by, watch the kids ride their bikes, jump rope, and watch the sun set as the sky turned from blue, to orange, to indigo, and eventually to the black of night. I would feel the tickle of the breeze and watch the fireflies light up the night sky, first here, then there, then over there.

It was then that I realized that it was me sitting over there in that chair, doing what I enjoyed and remembered so vividly. It was actually me!

I walked out of the darkness and over to the young man sitting in his chair listening to his Zenith—Radio Shack Short Wave/AM radio strategically placed on the wooden picnic table near his feet covered in worn out PF Flyers. He watched as I approached him, but never said a word. He seemed unconcerned, but curious. I sat in the chair next to him and said nothing. I simply watched the fireflies blink on/off in the night air. I could hear the music and the leaves overhead gently brush up against each other as the breeze blew through them.

Out of the corner of my eye I could see him shift his position in the chair as he turned slightly towards me. The silence was suddenly broken when he asked, "Well, you gonna tell me who you are and what you're doin' sittin' here?"

I sat quietly and gathered my thoughts. I really didn't know what I was going to say or what I was doing there. I had to have smiled when I realized that this was the first time I have ever had a problem talking to myself. In fact, I often felt I was a little too good at talking to myself. I turned to face him and answered, "My name is Lon S. Safko and I'm nearly 50 years old."

"Cool. You have the same name as me?"

"Well, not really."

"You said your name was Lon S. Safko, that's my name."

"I know. It's just that it's not only our names that are the same, so are we."

"We're not the same. You're old!"

"I know, but we are the same."

"I don't get it."

"I really don't either, but I can assure you, I am you."

"You are me?!"

"Yes."

"You can't be me! You're old, you're fat, and you're bald!"

"And you're a young smart ass!"

"How can that be?"

"I don't know why it is. All I know is that it is. I'm here."

We both just sat there not knowing what to say next. He broke the silence once again with, "Are you sure you're me?"

"Oh, I'm sure all right. I'm you."

"That's not possible! I don't believe it! Prove it!"

"I actually don't have anything to prove who I am, where I'm from or when I'm from. My suit is cotton, jewelry is gold, and my watch is analog. I wear my digital on weekends only. My driver's license, business cards, credit cards, and other I.D. are in my wallet in my briefcase, I guess on the train.

"Right!"

"Well, do you remember summer, two years ago, when the bomb exploded down the street and glass stuck in everyone's houses? Remember no one ever found out who was responsible?"

"So?"

"So, it was you! It was me!"

"You're guessing?"

"Am I? How 'bout you did it with a little dry ice you stole out of the back of the Good Humor truck while it was driving down the road. You put it in a glass Listerine bottle with a little water, capped it and ran like hell. How 'bout the piece of glass that you had to pull out of your right thigh after it went off?"

"Damn! You are me! No one knows all that but me! You're not gonna tell on me, are you?"

"No, I'm not going to tell on anyone. Remember, we're only talking to ourselves here. I guess what I really wanted to tell you was something I only realized for the first time today. The problem with telling you this is you won't understand what I'm saying. It will make no sense at all to you. I know that. If you could understand what I'm about to tell you, I would have already known it. It took until today to figure it out. Strange, huh?"

"I saw Gerry and Earl, and Fonda, and the others this afternoon getting onto the bus to come home. I wanted to tell them how much and how little life they had ahead of them. I wanted to tell them how much I loved them all. I wanted them to understand that who I am and who we are is because of who we were. My character and choices in life were guided by what I believed was right and wrong. My value system was calibrated by a combination of my beliefs and by

those of my peers. My life's memories are indelibly etched with their faces, their voices, and the experiences of us children.

"I need to make you realize that you WILL come to a point in your life when you look in the mirror and say to yourself, 'you ARE old, you ARE fat, you ARE bald, but that's okay.' One morning you will realize that for the first time in your life you have fewer days ahead of you than you do behind you, and the behind days went really, really fast.

"If I can get you to understand the value of just one day, the importance of every decision you make and how the seemingly small decision can change the rest of the course of your life...it can make it better or worse, easier or harder, even longer or shorter.

"If days were blank pieces of paper, you'd have an entire loose leaf binder filled with thousands of blank pages you can fill with anything you wish, love stories, stories of success, or stories of heartbreak and sadness. I can tell you though; most of the decisions you will make have been good ones, but certainly not all of them. Some have been very bad."

I paused to reflect on the many bad decisions and the far-reaching consequences. I heard a voice, quietly asking, "Which ones were the bad ones?"

I paused again and thoughtfully answered, "I'm afraid I can't tell you that."

"Why not?"

"Because unless the decisions are in context, you'll NEVER understand. And, I guess, maybe it's the right thing to do not to tell you."

"Why not?"

"Because, now that I have thought about it, it was the bad ones that taught me the lessons and made me grow. And, it was the good ones that gave me the strength to continue. Life, I guess is like a chain. It's a chain where all the necessary character strengths are represented as links in a chain, a chain that life continuously pulls hard on the links until the weakest link breaks.

"That link might be the way you handle money, or the respect you show your spouse, or a particular work ethic. The weakest link breaks and forces you to

forge a new link. You must analyze why the link broke and what you need to change in your life to assure that that link doesn't break again.

"The chain is once again repaired and life begins pulling on it again. And, it's pulled until the now weakest link breaks. Sometimes it's the same link some people never seem to fix, like their relationship link. It just keeps breaking, over and over. So, I guess the goal is to build the strongest chain with the strongest links as soon as you can. Build strong links of character. The less pain you have to endure, the more satisfying your life will be. I am truly sorry. I can't help you more than that."

"Can't, or won't?"

"I guess, won't."

We both sat silently on that dark patio with the warm breeze rustling the leaves to the rhythm of the end of the song playing on the radio, *"And when I die...and when I'm dead...dead and gone...they'll be one child born in a world to carry on...to carry on...yeah, yeah..."* "It's Dan Ingram here to usher in this beautiful summer evening. The WABC news update reports that construction that began on Walt Disney World in Orlando, Florida, on May 27, is on schedule, and NASA is also on schedule for the first man on the moon. NASA's Apollo 11 is scheduled to launch on July 16, at 9:32 a.m. EDT at Florida's Kennedy Space Center. Its crew consists of Neil Armstrong, commander, Michael Collins, command module pilot, and Edwin Aldrin, lunar module pilot. NASA is still planning for a picture perfect landing in the Sea of Tranquility..."

I closed my eyes and turned my face to the summer sky. I felt myself dozing as I listened to the music. It was Zager & Evans, "In the Year 2525." *"In the year 2525...if man is still alive...if woman can survive, they will find..."*

I sat there proud of that young man. Proud of all the decisions he has yet to make. Proud he made most of them right. I thought about that long day and all the things that had happened. I thought of all the realizations I had come to. I thought of all the insights I gained. I sat there and wondered how it might end.

*"In the year 2525 if man is still alive...if woman can survive, they will find...In the year..."* I heard someone speak; "North County Village our next stop, North County Village." I suddenly knew where I was. I knew I was back. I knew what year it was, but I still didn't know why what happened, happened.

I slowly opened my eyes, almost afraid to look. As my eyes opened I realized my surroundings were the familiar white and blue commuter train.

I stood up, collected my CD player and briefcase which were where I had left them all along. I deliberately made my way down the stairs to the door. I felt the train sway from side to side as I listened to the squeal of the disk brakes.

I stepped off the train, turned off the CD player and placed the player and headphones carefully into my briefcase. I crossed the tracks and walked to my parked car. I drove home, not knowing what just happened or how I would ever explain it to my family or to anyone for that matter.

When I arrived home, my wife was at work, my daughter at a friend's. I knew I would have several hours to sort this one out and come up with a rational explanation, if I was to say anything at all to anyone. I headed upstairs to change my clothes and get out of my suit and tie and into something more comfortable and appropriate for sitting around the house in the evening.

Once in the master bedroom, I began my routine by emptying my pockets onto my dresser, my wallet, my keys, my gold pocketknife, pen, and cufflinks as if nothing had ever happened. I headed for my closet where each day I'd hang up my suit and get into a polo shirt and jeans.

As I walked back through the bedroom to make my way downstairs to start dinner for myself, a small, red, circular, rough edged object sitting on my dresser in a pile of gold jewelry caught my eye. As I turned my head to get a better look, I noticed that it was a bottle cap. From where I stood, I could read the letters on it. It read T A B.

# The Same, Only Different



When I woke up, it was still dark. I expected the sun to be bright above the horizon by now. The plane's darkness was due partly to being pre-dawn, and partly because the window shades were mostly drawn.

What time is it? Where am I? I slowly moved to check the time. In the dim light, I realized I had slept for only under an hour, and during that time I had been nearly paralyzed by trying to sleep across two airplane seats. The time in my head was still rearranged because of the seven or eight time zones I had passed through over the last 24 hours.

I was where I should be, in a Pan Am 747 Clipper, making my way across the North Atlantic towards Stockholm, Sweden. I knew I needed the sleep so desperately. I had now been awake for over 28 hours, or at least I think that was the time, but which zone? The longer I was awake, the more difficult it was to concentrate.

I pulled the window shade open in my porthole. The sun was pushing up through the horizon like a giant orange creamsicle. The bright hue rose over the North Atlantic from the east as silent and as powerful as one could imagine. The only sound was the subtle continuous hum of the four huge GE jet engines.

After I was awed by the sunrise, I again realized how much pain I was in. It was like a hangover I had once back in high school. I painfully reached for my

briefcase. I always keep aspirins in there for just such an emergency. I am prone to migraine headaches, and this situation was the perfect precursor. After three extra strength aspirins and a few cups of airline coffee, I was now ready for anything.

After our breakfast was cleared, the captain announced that we have begun our decent into Arlanda International Airport just north of Stockholm. I returned my tray table and my seat to their original upright positions and made sure that my seat belt was fastened tightly across my waist like a good passenger. I'm sure the airline "seat belt" was a leftover from the Inquisition.

As we approached Arlanda, the sky was thick with clouds. Visibility must have been a foot or less. As we descended and broke through the cloud layer, I thought we had landed in the wrong location. This was not Stockholm; it was the countryside. Was Arlanda in the wilderness? I had never been to Sweden or out of the States for that matter. Oh, maybe Mexico, and Canada, but that doesn't count 'cause they're attached. But, this was not what I expected. There was no city in sight, not like New York, Los Angeles, or Chicago.

As the ground became visible, I noticed that the Swedish countryside looked like Portland, Oregon! If I didn't feel like I had been hit by a plane, let alone been riding on one for a day, I would be sure I was in Beaverton, Oregon, or perhaps just outside of Seattle, Washington, or maybe even Lake George in upstate New York.

We landed uneventfully and I deplaned. What a ridiculous term! Customs was as unexciting as the flight across the Atlantic. I expected maybe guns, or guards, or jail cells, but then again, I suppose not. I also realized that Sweden was a country just like ours and we don't have these things at our airports. I guess I was a little disappointed that the other side of the world looked like the side I lived on.

The area surrounding Arlanda resembled the area surrounding the San Francisco airport, or the continuous countryside surrounding New York. complete with its granite stone outcroppings, maple trees, pine trees, and gentle rolling hills. I felt at home. I realized I felt more at home in Sweden than I had felt in most of the U.S. cities I had traveled in, even New York where I was born and raised.

An hour and a half later (or was it the next day?), I arrived at my hotel. The village was a small fishing community on the Baltic Sea. It was, shall I say, quaint. Outside my hotel, I could see the water and land about a mile across the straight, the commuter train station to Stockholm, and the main road we came in on. Probably the only road to and from Stockholm from here.

The bed, which resembled a cot in an American jail, looked wonderful. I actually had four hours where I could sleep. I showered, and ran for the cot. I tossed and turned for an hour but gave it up. I was in Sweden; I couldn't sleep, even if I hadn't for over a day. I finally got dressed and walked to the village.

The people were charming. They didn't have two heads or anything like that at all. There was no sex in the streets, or the shops or the theaters for that matter. I expected sex everywhere—it's Sweden—but then, again, I really didn't. The Swedish people have morals too, and children, and laws, just like us.

The remainder of that day went along quietly until about 10:00 PM Swedish time or is that 20:00 Swedish time, or 1:00 PM U.S. time, or? I made my way back to the hotel and I tried to sleep but to no avail. I can't understand how I could be so over tired. I took my usual hour catnaps through the remainder of the night and awoke for the last time today about 5:00 AM. I knew I would regret it, as it would be another long day without sleep.

The taxi picked me up at the hotel right on time. We drove through the village and out into the countryside to the office where I was to work for the week I would be there. The landscape was beautiful, rolling fields and meadows, cows in the tall grass, mist in the lowlands, and the many small cottages littered the hillsides. The homes were gathered in small clusters and all were barn red with white trim except for the barns. I was amazed that the buildings were so similar to what I was used to seeing. Everything was the same, only different, somehow.

I reached the office location and found it much as I expected, and when I entered, there were even familiar faces. In January of this same year, I had the pleasure of meeting several of the people I would be working with. However; some faces were new and different. One other thing I must remark on, was that everyone spoke English, and very well. This seemed odd.

After twelve short adrenaline-filled hours, it was time to return to my new home, the hotel, at least it was home for the rest of the week. I headed straight for my cot in the corner, but again, I couldn't sleep. Oh, maybe a few one-hour catnaps again, but no real sleep. It was really starting to affect me now. My concentration was nearly gone.

The next morning I awoke about the same time as the morning before, even more exhausted than ever. A 30-minute hot shower did little for my condition. I thought about the twelve hours ahead of me today and didn't know how I would accomplish this feat.

The taxi was right on time as usual and we drove my now familiar route to the office. I anxiously awaited the meadows and farms with camera in hand. It all seemed new again. There were things I saw this morning that I must have missed as I drove there the past two mornings. The meadows were not exactly as I remembered them. The houses were a little different too. It just wasn't as I had remembered, but how could I trust my memory. It was in shambles; I was exhausted.

As I expected, twelve hours later I arrived back at my hotel cell and prayed that tonight I could finally sleep. As unbelievable as it might sound, no sleep tonight either, just naps. I didn't think it was possible to go that long with as little sleep as I had, but I did.

When the 6:00 AM wake up call startled me to my feet, I hit the shower. It was getting to be a regular routine. When I left the bathroom and reentered the living area to get dressed, I noticed that the color and fabric of the furniture in my room had changed. Did someone change it the day before and I just hadn't noticed it last night in my exhaustion? No. Why? I dismissed it as a trick my mind was playing on me, my very tired mind.

Just like clock work, the taxi arrived. These people are punctual. As we drove the 30 minutes or so to the office, I paid particularly close attention to the scenery. Everything seemed to be in order, the barns, the cottages, even the cows. No, wait. I am sure that the old church was on the right side of the square; now it was on the left, and with two steeples, not one. Am I going insane? Suddenly, I remembered that the hotel had a postcard of that little village including the church. I would simply check its location tonight when I arrived back at the hotel.

I could barely stand waiting for the day to end. When it did, the taxi drove me back to the hotel and when I arrived, I jumped from the back seat and headed for the desk in the lobby. On my way, I noticed that I had left my briefcase in the rear seat of the taxi. I decided that the briefcase could wait until tomorrow; the church could not wait another second.

I got to the desk, out of breath, almost yelling "hey," "nigh," "tack," or "hello," "no," "thanks" or some combination I'm sure no one understood. I grabbed at the postcard rack, pulled the card with the village, and more important the old church, and what do you think? The damn thing was on the right, just as I saw it this morning; but I'm sure that I saw it on the left yesterday!

I slowly walked up the flight of stairs and down the long corridor to where my room was, room 206. I reached for the key, and inserted it into the lock and turned it, well almost turned it. The damn thing wouldn't turn. I was getting angry now, and did not want to mess with a faulty lock. I removed the key to inspect that it wasn't my truck key from home, and found #208 on the fob. I needed some sleep.

Once undressed, I ran my head under hot water for what seemed like eternity. It felt great. After I toweled off and made my way to the living area, I noticed there was a couch where the chair had been just this morning, and more astonishing, there was my briefcase on the couch.

I became upset, almost panic stricken. I was sure there was a table there this morning, and I know I left my briefcase in the back of the taxi. How could this be? I lay down on the bed to try to sort these facts out and to try to make some sense of all this. One thing was certain, I was beyond tired.

Maybe that's why. No real sleep for so many days, but what was real? Was the church on the right or on the left? Was there a chair or a couch? I'm sure of nothing but my need for some well-deserved sleep. I closed my eyes, rested, and thought. A few moments later, I opened my eyes to check that all was as I remembered it. I was almost afraid to check.

I looked around the room and all was well; it had remained the same. I was excited. Maybe I'm not losing my mind. I became reassured that everything was as it should be. I got up to prove it to myself. I walked around the room, touching everything as I passed it and it was all okay

On my way back to the bed, I paused to reflect on my new sanity as I looked out the hotel window. I saw the familiar train station, the road to and from Stockholm, and..... Where's the water, where is the damn water? The parking area that ended at the sea wall now extends to the island. It's simply a hill now. I threw myself on the bed and shut my eyes in fright. Maybe I am losing my mind. I'm alone here and I am losing my mind.

I lay there shaking, trying to make some sense of this, but could not. I decided to get up and reassure myself that the room was the same. Could I open my eyes? Yes. Well, maybe not yet. Yes. I opened my eyes to find that the room was the same, but what about the sea? Was it there now or not?

I rose from the cot and walked to the window. My eyes were closed. I was afraid to see what might be there. I slowly open my eyes to find that the sea was there as I had remembered it. I lay on the bed again hoping I could understand what had been happening to me.

As I lay there and thought, I seemed to have an insight, a revelation if you would. I realized there was a connection between my subconscious and my conscious. The connection was breaking down. The information was not flowing properly, maybe because of my lack of sleep. Was what I saw reality or not? I felt for the couch, but now I felt the chair the same way I had days earlier. Everything was the same only different. What was real?

As I lay there, my mind, for the first time, opened itself to thoughts I have never been able to think. I had an understanding of the world around me unlike anything I had heard or read about. It became clear that my reality was how I alone perceived it. Not my perception, but my reality.

Sweden looked different but similar to New York. The cows were the same, the people, but of course they were. There could be nothing drastic about this place, these people. It wouldn't make sense. My subconscious wouldn't allow it. It couldn't be the same either. I am on the other side of the world.

So there are rules. I expect it to be different, therefore it is, but not too different. I couldn't deal with that. That explains it, the furniture, the church, the sea, everything. Why? Why is this the first time this has ever happened to me? And then it came to me, sleep. The subconscious is very powerful. It is most powerful when we sleep, and the conscious isn't bothering it with all its con-

tinuous input. The subconscious needs time to "reset," and it resets when it's asleep. That's it! That's the answer! Sleep, or the lack of it!

If I deprive my subconscious of sleep, it can't reset. It can't reset to normal. It can't, because it determines and creates what is normal. If it creates something that the conscious won't accept as normal, it must admit that it is abnormal, and that's self-destructive.

Self-destructive? What is self-destructive? I quickly jumped up, put my clothes on, and ran from the hotel. Self-destructive! I determine what is self-destructive, not my environment. I can control my destiny. I can control my life. I don't need to die, not ever. I die because I am old or sick and think that it's time to die. If I don't ever think it's time to die, I won't. I can prove my theory. The next car that comes roaring down this roadway, I'll simply throw myself in front of it and I won't die.

I waited for the next car. Wouldn't you know it; the next one was going way too slow for my experiment. I waited a while longer and here it comes. I was going to time this perfectly. Wait, wait and jump. As the time drew near, I could hear my heart beating in my ears. The syncopated sound got louder and louder, in step with the sound of the approaching auto. As the automobile got closer, my muscles became tight with anticipation. The car was upon me. Now was the time to throw myself in front of it. It will have no time to swerve! Now! Now!

Just as I sprang into the oncoming lane of traffic and into the 3,000 pounds of speeding steel, I caught myself in mid air. I threw my body weight around and came crashing down on the wet sidewalk. As I laid face down on the wet cement, I could hear the sound of the car's horn blast at first and fade into the evening. What the hell was I doing?

If I threw myself in front of that car, my subconscious would create a reality that would coincide with the reality my consciousness created. My subconscious would have no choice but to make me die. My consciousness would not allow me to be hit by a speeding car and not die. I would need to create a reality that I could accept.

I walked slowly back to the hotel, brushing myself off with each step. I didn't want to explain my new concept to the desk clerk. I reached my room. It was

still #208. I guess there was some comfort in that. When I entered my room, the furnishings were completely different again.

I checked the closet to be sure that all of my clothes were still there. They were, but not the same two suits I had brought with me. There wasn't a shirt I recognized either. My wallet? What about it? I ran to open my wallet. It was the same. I was who I was and everything was in order. What about my passport? I went to the dresser drawer where I had hidden it under the Gideon Bible, and it was also the same, the same picture, the same address, but...? It seems that I had been to England a year earlier. How terrific! I have no recollection of being in England, but why not?

If sleep was the secret ingredient, or the secret missing ingredient, I needed more of it. I mean less of it. I would stay awake all night, and see what effect it had on my reality.

When morning came I was a mess, but couldn't wait to start my day. What did this day have in store for me? Most anything I suppose. The taxi never did come that morning, so I decided to try a little more experimenting. I went to the rear of the hotel and found several small cars parked there, most probably where the employees park. I looked for an object to break the window but could not find one. Then it occurred to me, close my eyes!

I closed my eyes for a few moments, opened them, and there it was in the grass, a small pipe. It was just the right length. I took the pipe in both hands, and swung it with all my might. The window instantly shattered. I unlocked the door and got inside. There were no keys. Was this a problem for me? No!

I closed my eyes for a moment, opened them again, and there they were in the ashtray. I started the car and drove out onto the roadway. I headed for the village that I had seen on the earlier trips to the office. When I arrived at the village, the church was not to be found. There were, however, many small shops. I parked the car and ran into one of the shops. With steel pipe in hand I demanded the money from the till. What the hell, this was my reality; I could do what I want. The shop owner handed the cash to me rather reluctantly and very surprised.

I ran from the shop and towards the shop across the street. As I approached this shop I realized that if this were in fact, my reality, let's make it a bank and

not just a shop. I closed my eyes, counted 1–1,000 a few times and opened my eyes to find a bank, just as I had imagined it.

I ran into the bank with my pipe in hand. As I entered the bank I looked down to realize that I was actually carrying a gun. Of course, a pipe would be silly. Why would I be carrying a pipe into a bank? I ran to the teller’s cage, almost laughing inside. I yelled, “Give me all your money.” If this worked I really could control my destiny, my reality around me.

At that moment I heard someone yell behind me. I could not understand what he said as it was definitely in Swedish. I quickly turned to see a man pointing a gun directly at me with his finger ready to pull the trigger. A reflex within me snapped the trigger on my own gun. Suddenly, I heard a loud noise, a gunshot. Was that me who pulled the trigger? Impossible! I’m not the kind of person that could shoot another human being! Impossible.

Then a feeling of relief came over me. Of course it was me, but only in this reality. If I closed my eyes, I could invent a more plausible reality, one I could relate to more easily. I was getting good at this by now. It had been nearly a week since I had slept, and that was the key. I was tired but could control everything around me, is sleep. Everything would reset itself to normal. Just close my eyes.

I closed my eyes, and began to...to...to count. One, one thousand, two one thousand, three one thousand...I was ready to open my eyes, I was sure that I had now created a reality in which I could not have killed anyone. It wasn’t in me, never in my reality.

When I opened my eyes. There were five men in what appeared to be uniforms, soldier uniforms, and a man in a uniform standing at my left side. They were all speaking a foreign language. It wasn’t Swedish, maybe Spanish. They were all laughing and talking, but what was I doing there among these strange men in a place I had never seen before. I tried to motion for them to come closer to speak to me when I realized that my hands were tied behind my back and I could not move from that position. I also realized that the five soldiers had guns at rest at their sides.

Oh, my God, they were a firing squad! But, I didn't do anything wrong. I didn't really kill anyone. I couldn't! It's not in me! Not me! As the fear of the reality became overwhelming, I realized the tired; headache feeling had gone, but why? Why did I feel so good when I knew I was in such grave danger? Where was I?

Instantly, I realized what had happened. When I closed my eyes to reset, I fell asleep. I fell asleep! I slept! No, this can't happen. If I slept, I would not have control over my reality. I could try it anyway. I closed my eyes and counted. Nothing happened. I tried it again. Nothing again. The men in uniform were still there, standing, smoking, and speaking in Spanish.

If I slept, then why am I being punished for a crime I committed in a false reality, or was it a real reality? Is this a false reality or is this the real one? It must be false. I could not commit this crime, but I did. How do I stop this? If they pull the trigger, my rested, reset subconscious will understand the reality of the bullets, and I would have die, like when I nearly threw myself in front of the car the night before. I closed my eyes again and waited.

In the background I heard "Ready..... Aim....."

## Is It Really Important?



You would think that if I can program most any computer on the face of this planet, I could at least set a radio station on this car radio. Well, at least I can listen to it until someone changes the station again. It was 105 degrees Fahrenheit, not bad for this time of year. Last year about this time, it hit 122 degrees.

I wonder if all this talking to myself is healthy? I wonder if singing to myself is any better? I wonder what heaven is like? I wonder what's for dinner?

*"You never close your eyes, any more when I kiss your li—ips, and there's no tenderness....."* "Blue Eyed Soul." I'm glad I got the car with the A.C. today. I can't imagine how'd I feel in this heat without it. I really don't feel that good with it. I must have pulled a muscle in my chest while swimming yesterday. I have had a pain in the left side since I woke up this morning, and it has been getting worse. It's getting worse even now.

I think I'll get over into the right lane; my exit's coming up in..... three and a half miles anyway. I wonder if I should pull over for a minute. Na, I'll be home in five. Oh Gees!

It was very quiet and dark, and still quite warm. What happened? My mind seemed to wander. I couldn't concentrate, couldn't focus. It was dreamlike.

My vision was now coming back to me, and I could make out a light on the horizon, the rest was dark all around me. It was discomfoting. I rose to my

feet, a little shaky at first, but was able to walk. With black in every direction and a light in only one, it wasn't very hard to figure out which way to walk. I walked for what seemed like hours, never really getting closer to that light or to anything else for that matter, when I heard a voice mention my name. Not really calling it, just mentioning it. I turned to look behind me to see where it was coming from when I noticed a figure at the edge of the darkness. It was speaking my name.

As I began to walk towards him, he began to walk towards me as if to greet me. I wasn't sure if I wanted to be greeted or not. In fact, I wasn't really sure about anything.

As the figure and I came closer together, a warm but upsetting feeling came over me as I recognized who it was. It was Joe, my first friend. I guess my oldest friend. That explained the warm comfortable feeling I had. He died about three weeks ago. That was the real upsetting part.

It's one of those mixed emotions. I was so glad to see him and talk about the whys and the how comes, but if this was truly him, it meant that I was in more trouble than I had imagined.

He asked that we not talk for a little while and that I walk with him for a short distance. I felt that the best thing I could do at that time was to do just that. We walked for a few minutes; and all the time I was thinking about the last time we talked.

We were at the world headquarters of PepsiCo in Somers, New York. We got to spend an afternoon together while I was passing through John F. Kennedy Airport en route to somewhere in Europe. I realized that the somewhere lost all of its importance. Did it really matter? I wasn't sure what was or wasn't important right now. I wasn't sure of anything.

That afternoon was the first day of the rest of Joe's life. He had quit his job to follow his life's dream, to go to the University of Montana and study fish and wildlife. He wanted to live a cabin, and to leave, once and for all, the New York metropolitan area lifestyle, much as I did in 1985. We spent the day together buying his new truck for the trip. What a coincidence it was that I should think to meet with him on that day and at that time.

We walked a little further, when I realized that we were on the grounds of PepsiCo in Somers, the last place we said good-bye. How could this be? We walked to a bench at the entrance, and he motioned me to sit down.

Ironically, he asked how I was, probably the toughest question I could be asked at that moment. My answer was "I'm not really sure, I was hoping you could tell me." Joe explained that he was glad that I chose him to greet me. This confused me even more. How could I choose him to greet me when I didn't even know where I was? At least, I hoped I was wrong about where I thought I might be.

I asked him about his statement. He explained, "This is your new reality, and you have the power to shape it anyway you wish." "Shape what?" I asked abruptly. "Well, do you remember when we were kids in Catholic school, and we'd try to figure out what all this religion stuff was all about? We would try to understand Heaven, Hell and what was in between." Of course I did, and I told him so.

"Do you remember how we would concentrate on the Heaven part assuming we were good Catholics and didn't really need to understand the Hell part?" "Well, yes." I answered. "Good." he told me, but I didn't think we were getting anywhere.

He then asked me if I remembered how I worked with my dreams back when I was in college. "Do you remember how you could 'program' yourself to have any theme dream you wanted? And how you could control the dream even while you were asleep and dreaming it?" I did, but I don't recall ever telling him about this. In fact, that was during a period of time when we lost touch with one another for nearly ten years. I'm sure I never mentioned that to him.

I asked him how he knew it, and he answered, "I don't, but you do." Now I was more confused than ever. "What do you mean? What are you telling me?" Joe explained, "I don't need to know anything about you or about this place or about what we were talking about. Only you need to remember."

I had to get at least one straight answer to a now very important question. "Was I..., I mean, where we..., well, are you...?" He patted me on the back and with a great deal of sarcasm, and laughed, "You catch on quick. Yes, you are, and so am I, but you didn't need me to answer that one did you?"

Well, I was hoping that I was mistaken, wrong, confused. This seemed so dreamlike. “Couldn’t it be, maybe a dream?” He exclaimed, “Not likely. No you are, and so am I.” “Then, what the hell are we doing here in Somers, of all places?” “Well, first off, I’d watch that word. It’s pretty powerful, and we don’t say it much around here.” “You mean HELL?” “Yep, that’s the one. For the time being, let’s not use it until I have, or you have, explained everything.

“You see, all this has been with you all of your life. I’m not really here, or I guess I should say to you that I am really here. To me, I may be somewhere else, or maybe I am here, you see.” “Are you kidding? The more you explain the worse it gets.”

“Okay, okay, bear with me awhile. I guess I need to get right to the point. I thought this was going to be easier. Yes, you died on the freeway; it was your heart. Your wife tried to tell you about all those cheeseburgers and fries.” “Oh, my God, my wife!” “She’s okay, but there’s nothing you can do about it anyway. Stay with me.

“You, deep in your soul, subconscious, psyche, or whatever you want to call it, at the time of your death, spent the last few moments of oxygen that your brain had left, analyzing where you were going. Up or down, if you will. You know how everyone who faces a life threatening experience or is about to die? Well, at that last moment, your life passes in front of your eyes. It’s so that you can see it again. It’s so you can see every last detail, the good and the bad. And when it’s over, you must decide, up or down, based on what you just saw. Only you can make that determination. Only you understand the motives behind your actions, noble or not so.

“The sum total of your life is the last thing you calculate. Add up all the positives, and subtract all the negatives. It’s kinda like balancing your checkbook. When you’re done, if you have a positive balance, you write out your last check, and go here. However, if your last check bounces, well, you know the rest.”

“Why did you use a simile, if you know how much I dislike them?” “You jerk, to make you understand.” “Get to the part why I’m here, and not somewhere else with someone else.” “I suppose it’s because I was on your mind. You create your own reality, or, if you can stand it, your own Heaven. Do you remember when we tried to figure out what would happen if someone who was married

twice and wanted to spend eternity in Heaven with his first wife, but his second wife wanted to spend it with him?"

"Yea, it didn't work out; everyone would battle." "Do you remember when you and I wanted to know if there was beer in Heaven?" "Yea, there certainly wouldn't be any beer in Heaven if the Catholic Church had anything to say about it. I like beer and wine, in moderation. How about, the S word?" "You mean 'sex'?" "Sure."

"Anything you want, that's what Heaven is all about. You earned it." "What about how it effects others?" "You still don't get it; you are slow. It doesn't affect others. This is your Heaven. You can be anywhere you want, with anyone you want, at any time you want and do anything you want to do. It doesn't affect anyone but you."

"I still don't get it. How can I be with anyone I want or do anything I want, without affecting the others I am with?" "Let's take it slow. When you dream, can you be anywhere with anyone?" "Well, yes, of course." "Well that's it! It's like one of those 'vivid' dreams you used to have every now and then, but this one lasts forever. It's real to you, just as it's real to everyone else. That's what makes it Heaven! It's anything you want it to be. All you need to do is realize it. That's what realize means, 'real-ize'!"

"It's that easy? All I have to do is think about it, and it's real?" "Yep!" "Are there any restrictions?" "A few, but they're your restrictions. Like you can't kill someone, but you wouldn't have done that anyway, that's why you're here. Anything you would do while alive, you can do here. Anything you wouldn't do while alive, you can't do here, but you wouldn't have dreamt it either."

The only other restriction is that you know some of your family is here, and some are still alive. You can't be with someone that hasn't died yet. Your subconscious or soul won't allow it, because it contradicts your logic." "What if I want to be home with my wife and family?" "You can be home, but not with anyone living. It just won't work." "What if I try?" "Hey, you can always try!"

"What about Hell?" "It works the same way. It's not always fire and brimstone. It's what you perceive Hell as. If fire and brimstone is what you fear most, that's what you make it. I recommend that you don't concentrate much on that subject; your subconscious is more powerful than you might think. Hey, it

created all this and me. I got to go now. I'll see you again, any time you wish." Joe quietly walked away across the grass and out of sight.

I sat on the bench and thought about the concept. I thought about how it works and how I might use it. I closed my eyes and thought about spending an afternoon with my grandfather, and there we were, on my deck back in 1982 just as I remembered it. This is great. But I wanted to go home, to see my wife and family. But how?

Joe reminded me, or did I just remember that I practiced dream control back in college. I could think of any dream and have it come true and even change the dream while I slept. If this was the same part of my subconscious, could I really control what was happening, and where I was?

I tried to see myself in my home. It worked, but when I tried to be with someone that I knew was still alive, it wouldn't work. Maybe I was afraid that if I tried hard enough, it might actually come true. I didn't want anyone in my family to die, just so they could be with me. But how could I be with them?

I pictured the last time I was with my family. I could see the park, I could even feel the sun, but they weren't there. Maybe it's the wrong approach. Maybe if I can't bring them here, maybe I can put myself there, maybe in my car, maybe that day, that last day. How long has it been, a minute, a day, a year? If this really was like dreaming, then all of this could have been in just a few seconds. If it has taken only a few seconds, then maybe I have only been dead for a few seconds, and if that's true, then...

I concentrated on being in my car on that day at that very last moment. I heard the music; I saw the dashboard, now I can see the sun, the highway markings moving by. I can actually feel the seat against my back, the wheel in my hand. It's working. But, what do I do now? Pull over, pull over. I never would have survived blacking out at 65 miles per hour, but what if I was parked when it happened?

Concentrate, concentrate. I'm over. Put it in park. Now, to relive the pain. I don't want to. Try, come on and try. Oh Gees! Not again! Please!....

Beep,...Beep,...Beep,...Beep...

What the....?

I didn't realize this. "Where am I?" "It's okay, you're going to be all right. You gave us quite a scare. It's a good thing you had time to pull your car to the shoulder. If this would have happened while you were moving, well...."

"How are you feeling?" "Okay, I guess. Where am I?" "You're in St. Luke's Hospital and the doctor said you can go home in a few days." "Was it my heart?" "Yes, but it was minor. With the right foods, and a little exercise, the doctor says you'll outlive us all."

I lay there thinking, was all that conversation with Joe real? Was this real? What if this wasn't real? What if it is? Was it really important?

# The Swath



It was evening. The warm, moist air of late summer hovered over the forest with an almost oppressive weight. The birds were singing their twilight song, anticipating their night's sleep. The grass was tall and green. The aroma of fresh berries filled the air like a sweet perfume.

It was time for them to awaken, to begin their nightly search for food. They were not able to begin too soon as even the faint light of the setting sun was offensive to their eyes. They awoke.

“Our son has been preoccupied ever since we could remember. It’s all he ever talks about. It’s affecting his gathering. It’s affecting his friendships. All his friends are tired of hearing about the ‘Special Forest.’ I’m worried for him.”

“He’ll grow out of it, I’m sure. Winter is soon approaching. His attention will have to be on his gathering. His need for food will direct him.”

The Younger One slept soundly, as he usually does until his mother woke him to begin his search for food.

“Why don’t you ever listen to me? Food gathering is the single most important task in your life! I’m afraid by the time you learn, it will be too late. Winter is coming.”

The Young One complained as he left their hollow tree to satisfy his mother’s request to begin his search.

His heart just wasn't into the endless search. He wanted to find the Special Forest where he would not have this continuous nightly task. He would think and rethink about all the fragmented stories he heard over the years. The stories the elder ones would discuss when they thought the Young Ones were asleep.

When he asked the elders about the Special Forest they would get angry and scold him for not following the laws of the village. The Special Forest was not to be discussed by the Young Ones. The elders felt it would breed discontent and disrupt the continuity of their society.

The Young One was not satisfied. He grudgingly set out one evening on his search while all the while his mind was filled with the Special Forest.

He decided to forego his duties of the search and question the Eldest of the village. His fear of scolding and being reprimanded by the elders and, even worse, his parents, had always stopped him from even approaching the Eldest in the past, but not tonight.

The Eldest was the wisest and most revered of the village. He was also the oldest. To live that long in such a dangerous and difficult society was, itself, an honor. “The Eldest would give me the wisdom I need,” he thought. The search for the tree the Eldest lived in was long.

When the Young One reached the towering old oak tree the Eldest lived in, his heart beat in his ears. Although his fear had mounted, it would not allow him to return to his search. He came too far to stop now; he was committed.

The Young One slowly began to climb that mighty oak. So proper a place for the Eldest to reside, he thought to himself.

When the Young One reached the top of the tree at the opening of the den of the Eldest, he called. “Sir!” He waited. “Sir! I must speak with you!” He paused once more.

The Eldest slowly peered out into the warm darkness. “Who might you be, disturbing me like this?” the Eldest shouted. The Young One was terrified. I am the Young One; I need some wisdom.”

“Wisdom is not something someone can give you; it must be earned!” the Eldest retorted. There was a very long silence. The Eldest spoke again, “You are very brave to come like this to me. Your request must be very important to you.”

The Young One could not speak. The words were in his head, but his mouth could not utter them.

The Eldest asked the Young One, “What wisdom would you like me to share with you tonight?” The Young One stumbled over his words. “I would like to learn about the Special Forest.”

The Eldest was visibly angered by this request. He replied quickly, “Of practical things I can share. Of gathering, of hiding, of fighting, of mating, of society, of our history, but not of such a trivial topic will I discuss with you.”

The Young One was saddened. For the Eldest was the only one who knew of these things. The Young One quietly requested again with a “Please?”

The Eldest asked, “Why is this so important to you?” The Young One retorted with “It’s the only thing I have thought about for as long as I can remember. The Special Forest is a place that holds so many mysteries for me. I hear it is a wondrous place, with food and warmth, and no predators, and friends, and, and....”

The Eldest understood the passion the Young One had for this Special Forest, much like his own when he was young, and interrupted, “It is true, the Special Forest, according to legend, is a beautiful place filled with everything your heart could desire, but the journey is dangerous, and you can never return, not ever!”

As the Eldest concluded his sentence, he raised his right arm from out of the darkness of the hollow tree into the light of the moon. The young one was surprised to see the Eldest had lost his paw.

The Eldest spoke quietly and slowly, “This is the result of many years ago, when I tried to learn about the Special Forest for myself. A large and dangerous beast protects the Special Forest. This creature has received all that have tried to enter this place. None has returned, but myself, with this to show for it.

The Young One was terrified; this was the intent of the Eldest. The Eldest continued, “This beast is called the ‘Roarer.’ No one has lived to describe it, and my recollection is vague at best. My heart quickens only to recall that night.

“The Roarer lives at the edge of the Special Forest. It protects it from trespassers with a deadly vengeance. It was summer and the night was much like this.

“I walked many nights to arrive at the Swath where the Roarer travels. The Swath is a strange path, similar to the paths we make here in the forest. But, the Swath is many times wider than any we could ever make, wider even than the stream at the edge of the meadow. The Swath is very straight and seems to go on forever.

“The Roarer must be a very large and powerful beast indeed, as the ground is very hard and the stones have been crushed solid into the path by its weight. But, despite its tremendous size, the Roarer is extremely fast. Faster even than the gray rabbit that lives in the meadow. This powerful beast is responsible for the loss of my paw.

“I remember how cautiously I crossed the Swath, my adrenaline made my muscles contract almost without control.

“Then, in the far distance I saw the Roarer’s eyes. They were small and white. I was riveted to this sight. The sound of the Roarer was faint at first, but with incredible speed, the beast approached. My eyes were becoming larger even larger than an August moon on a summer’s evening.

“The roar of this beast increased until my ears were ready to explode. I was frozen by the beast’s hypnotic powers. At the very last instant, when I knew my life was over, I leaped back, but as my arm would indicate, not quite soon enough. I returned here to the forest and never saw the Swath or the Roarer again.”

There was a stillness in the forest as never before. The Young One was frozen by the hypnotic powers of the Eldest One’s story. The Eldest continued once again, “Take my advice, and return to your search and to the safety of your village.”

The Young One, more intrigued than ever, asked, "Where is this Swath and the beast that protects it?"

The Eldest was distraught by this question and realized the fate of the Young One had been cast. The Eldest asked, "Why do you hunger for such a perilous place?"

The Young One replied, "I want to live in a place where I would not have to search or be concerned by the chores of daily life. I want to live in a place where life is easy. I want to live..."

The Eldest interrupted, "You want to live! That is the point of this discussion. Live! Live as the others do! Don't take a chance of losing it all for some silly and dangerous dream of grandeur! You came to me for wisdom; I will give you some! Stay in your village; be happy with the life you have. Young One, life is a journey, not a destination. It is important how you live your life, not where. When you arrive at your final destination, it means your life is over. Enjoy the trip, make the most of it."

Being as wise as the Eldest was, he realized that this would not satisfy the obsession of the Young One. The Eldest told the Young One of the location of the Swath and sent him on his way. The Eldest lowered his head and, with sadness, returned to his den.

The Young One was excited by the stories of the Eldest and of his journey to the Swath. Fear and doubt entered the mind of the Young One, of the beast and his danger. The Young One started his journey for the Special Forrest in spite of the Eldest's warning.

It was nearly dawn and the Young One found a resting place that would be safe to last out the heat of the late summer day.

When the Young One slept, he dreamed of his life in the Special Forest. His dreams were more real than ever. He dreamed of happiness, of warmth, and friendships. He dreamed and dreamed, through the day and well into the night.

When the Young One awoke, he realized he had overslept again and hurried on his way to his new destination.

It seemed as though he had been traveling forever. He thought this journey was endless. The Young One had traveled the remainder of the evening until dawn was about to break.

The Young One's excitement rose. He arrived at the edge of the Swath. The night was dark, and much cooler than the previous nights had been. There was a strange odor in the air, a smell that the Young One did not recognize. It burned his eyes. Smoke, but not like that of the fire that had consumed a section of the forest last fall.

He cautiously approached the edge of the Swath. The story of the Eldest was correct; it was a very strange path indeed. The ground was hard and the stones have been crushed flat by the beast.

The Young One, relying on his past experiences, thought, "If this beast is really this large he must be very slow and easy to out run." The Young One recalled the time when he was younger and had successfully outmaneuvered the old owl. This experience was a mixed blessing. It taught the Young One to place confidence in himself and not rely on the cautions taught him by his father.

The Young One approached the edge of the Swath and placed his front paws on the still warm stones. It was actually smooth. He then began to slowly cross the endless sea of smoothed stones while all the time looking both ways, but never looking back.

The air was filled with silence, dead silence. With this silence, also came a sense of confidence. The Young One had made it this far and no one could stop him now.

Just as his confidence rose so did his carelessness. The Young One continued when suddenly the his ears detected a faint sound. It was on his right side. He turned to view the two glaring white eyes of the Roarer off in the distance. The Young One knew the Roarer could never catch him from that distance.

The Young One watched the Roarer approach with amazing speed. He had never seen any beast move with so fast. The Roarer approached ever closer. His roar became louder and louder and his terrifying eyes became larger.

“Don’t look into his eyes, don’t look,” the Young One repeated to himself. He repeated it faster and faster as the Roarer came closer and closer. The Young One was hypnotized. He could not move no matter how hard he tried.

His heart was pounding in his ears. His muscles were locked stiff. His breathing was shallow and swift as the Roarer came closer.

“It can’t be, no beast could run that fast! I must run! I must! I can’t!” The Roarer was on the Young One. At that very last instant, the Young One broke free from the hypnotic spell of the beast and threw himself forward into the air. He felt himself hit the ground with a thunderous crash. His ears were ringing with the roaring; his sight had vanished with the flash of the white-hot eyes of the beast.

Suddenly, all was calm. The Young One lay there on the far side of the Swath. His ears were beginning to sense the subtle sounds of the forest once again. His eyes were detecting the silhouettes of the trees against the night sky.

The Young One lay there, almost afraid to move, studying himself for injury. He slowly checked to see if all his limbs were still intact. They were. He felt even better than he had earlier that evening, most likely due to his successful maneuvers to free himself of the Roarer.

The Young One raised himself to his feet. He felt light headed and happy, happier than he ever had for he had reached the other side of the Swath, all the way to the Special Forest.

It was true. All the stories of the Special Forest were true. It was warm, unlike the cool evening air on the other side. There were berries, more than he had ever seen. More than ten villages could consume. He would never have to search again. His dream of the Special Forest had come true.

The Young One then knew why no one had ever returned from the Special Forest, why would they ever go back?

The Young One had reached his life’s destination, his journey was over. Only now could he be totally content.

The outline of the Young One faded into the darkness as he wandered off into the Special Forest.

"What was that noise?" "I heard it too! Kind of a thunk?" "Yes! I told you not to drive so fast on these backcountry roads; you never know what will run out in front of you..."

# The Future



I saw the future. It's right there in front of us. When you look in one direction, you can see ahead; when look in the opposite direction, you're looking back, really. I suppose I should digress.

There are many things happening around us that we are not aware of, such as when you're talking while the television is on, you can't hear what is being said on the TV. When you are at a party and everyone is carrying on a conversation with each other, you can "tune in" or "tune out" any specific conversation you wish to hear.

Sound is only one example. We are constantly surrounded by radio signals, television, microwave transmission, mobile phones, digital pagers, ultra violet and infrared light, but we can't see, feel or hear them, unless we "tune" into them.

Have you ever been looking for something and you've checked everywhere? You decide to check a second time somewhere it might be, and you suddenly see it. Where was the first time you looked right at it?

It happened just the other day. I was walking along a secluded area of my neighborhood when I saw it. It was right there in front of me, the future. It was as if I were a microscopic being, maybe only one cell high. At first I could see as far as I could to the right, left, front or back, but not up or down. There was no up or down. Everything around me was like paper cut outs. I could

walk around them, but they had no height. It's because I never thought there might be an up or down. So I decided to turn my head in a direction no one has ever done before, UP.

And there it was, UP! And it is incredible! It was a whole other dimension. All you need to do is look in its direction and all that information is right there in front of you. The future is there, too. Just look in its direction.

I was overwhelmed with excitement. The vision blurred as I turned my head, and it was difficult to remain focused. But, I saw enough to know that it was real. We live each day with the future; it surrounds us just as the present does. Feel the present now? It's ever changing, but always with us. Same, too, the future.

As I view this new scene, all that was around me entered my head as though I had always known what I was seeing, only now I was able to remember it. Can you recall the last time you tried in vain to remember that certain someone's name, or the title of that song or movie, when all of a sudden, something flashes, and it's right there, you knew it all of the time? It was only obscured.

I saw it and suddenly remembered many things. The future holds a lot for mankind, for you and me. Some scenes remembered were not as I wished, but most were better than I had hoped. I feel compelled to relay them to anyone interested, and to catalog them for prosperity.

I saw socioeconomic changes, as well as styles, mores, traditions, and habits. There were changes in governments and attitudes, ecology, and lifestyles. I will try to summarize as many as I can recall.

The eating habits of the populace have changed. Although no one was being nourished by Soylent Green, there were new attitudes. All of the foods were processed. All the meats were from domestic animals raised under laboratory conditions, sterile, with scientific diets and vitamins. All of the new meats were nearly fat free as well as low in cholesterol. The finished food products available in the stores were all processed.

All of the fat had been removed; vitamin and flavor supplements were added. The thought of eating steak with the bone visible, or a piece of chicken on the bone was considered barbaric and repulsive. No reminder of the animal it

came from was visible anywhere. The eggs were the same. Sure they came from these genetically designed, laboratory chickens already low in cholesterol, but they, too, were processed and placed in plastic type cartons.

Yes, plastic, at least of some sort. All plastic type containers were of two types. This was an international law that all manufacturers of containers had to meet global specifications. This was done to ease sorting when recycling, each with its own distinguishing color.

Recycling was a law and not just a voluntary measure. All paper products associated with medical or food preparation were virgin, but processed on the front end to be easily recycled later. All other paper uses were from recycled paper.

It seemed that when problems, such as Desert Storm or Somalia, affected everyone on the planet, the U.N. was called upon more and more and became stronger and stronger. Every stable nation was represented in the Unified World Organization. Any law or decision that may have global consequences, had to be reviewed and approved by the U.W.O. It was all voluntary and it was working.

Pollution and political issues, health and food, even space exploration became a cooperative effort by all nations. The programs were paid for through the contributions of each country. It was similar to each individual contributing to the federal government, that then supervises all of the programs that are necessary to sustain the United States today. But this was on a global scale and it was working.

Each country was allowed to select its form of political system within the guidelines set out by the U.W.O. Of course there was no room for dictatorships. Different levels of democracy were working everywhere. Oh, yes, Europe had completely united.

The ozone was intact. Still slightly damaged, but intact. A global ban on C.F.C.s was initiated (It was a primary reason that expedited the formation of the U.W.O.). It seemed that the ozone layer had fluctuated many times in the earth's history with little effect. It was found that on the earth, as with many individual members of our ecology, natural selection compensated even on a global level.

I saw that automobiles were still being used. I guess I should say that personal transportation vehicles were as popular as ever. They were not fossil fuel driven, and I'm sorry to say, not solar either. Solar never did become efficient enough to power vehicles. The main source was D.C. electricity. Battery technology had greatly improved. Just a very small cell could store and release an amazing amount of energy. The PTVs, as they were called, were all synthetic, made from that plastic-like material. They were very strong, safe, very light, didn't rust, and could easily be recycled.

Clothing was still made of cotton and wool, but was mixed with the synthetic used in packaging and PTVs. When a garment was ready to be discarded, it, too, was sent to a recycling center. It was chemically separated and made new.

Even house paint had changed. The exterior of homes were painted with a heat sensitive paint. When the home was cool, the paint color would darken, allowing the exterior of the home to absorb heat. As the home warmed, the color would become lighter, reflecting more heat away from the home and keeping the home cool and at a constant temperature; thus reducing energy consumption.

The interior paint had changed, too. This paint now contained microscopic crystals that phosphoresce or give off light when subjected to a small, low voltage current. Simply by adjusting the 12v D.C. current, you could adjust the brightness of your room. The entire walls and ceiling lit up in a soft, warm glow.

Medicine was the most fascinating. Heart disease was greatly reduced, as were stroke and other such diseases. A cure for cancer was found and it became as rare as polio is today. The life expectancy of an average person was nearly 100! That's the good news. The bad news is that viruses became ever more intense and elusive.

I saw a medical device for dispensing medications that looked like an ordinary watch worn on the wrist. The back of the watch had sensors that continuously monitored your blood chemistry and dispensed the exact amount of medication needed through something called “micro-droplets” into the skin. Each month the pharmacist would simply replace the cartridge in the device with the specific mixture of medications for you based on the history downloaded from the device.

As the city and suburban populations increased, new forms of quickly mutating viruses ran rampant. The medical community could not keep pace. The virus would mutate from one patient to the next. As quickly as an effective vaccine was discovered, the virus would become immune. It was spread through a cough or a sneeze. It would start as the flu does now, but would eventually become pneumonia and lead to death. Approximately one third of the world population was infected by it so far. The new occurrence rate seems to be diminishing.

Another surprising change was childbirth. Natural childbirth was considered archaic and barbarian. All births were C-Section, using a new laser scalpel. The incision cauterized itself with very little pain. The surprising fact was that there now was a mandatory, Two-Child Maximum (TCM) per female.

This TCM, was monitored by the C-Section scar. If the female had one when admitted to the hospital for child delivery, while she was open, after the removal of the child, the doctor, by law performed a reversible tubaligation. This prevented future pregnancies beyond the TCM. The reason for reversible tubaligation, was in the event of the death of a child, the procedure could be reversed for a replacement pregnancy. This law, too, was supervised by the U.W.O., but highly supported by everyone.

If each couple had two children, then they could only replace themselves into the next generation. With the population nearly doubling every 35 years, we each must do our part.

This was one of the most difficult legislations passed by the U.W.O. But the results were dramatic. It helped reduce the exploding population while reducing the need for food crops. This was at a time when most of the fertile land uses were changing from agricultural to living and working uses. It also contributed to reducing pollution.

Pollution was by far the most difficult problem to be faced by the U.W.O. It still has not been solved to the satisfaction of its members.

All in all, I liked what I saw. Some of the changes seemed dramatic to me, but I suppose that given enough time and reason, I could agree. The results were convincing. There was world order, population under control, pollution at bay, medical care, education, and food for everyone.

This was a society to be proud of. I am proud to have set the groundwork for it. It is unfortunate that I will never be a part of it, but I can look ahead from a distance, and know that there is always hope.

I can't tell you exactly where to look for the future. I know if you look just right, you, too, will see it. Have no fear. It's okay if you can't see right now, you will see it in the future.

# Epilogue



I truly hope you both enjoyed and learned from my labors of love. It's difficult to always remember that we do have control over our lives no matter how overwhelmed we may get. If you can remember the examples within these covers and understand that by realizing where you want to be, then, working towards "real-izing" your goal, the reality you realize will become real.



# About The Author

Lon S. Safko

Has been founder and Chief Executive Officer of six different start-up companies from engineering to computer design, from home building to on-line marketing, from professional speaking to 3-dimensional paper models for education.

Lon is a certified Real Estate instructor, has been the number two person in marketing and public relations for San Diego International Airport and the Port of San Diego.

Lon has been speaking professionally for nearly two decades and has been featured in Entrepreneur Magazine, PC Novice and Popular Science Magazine. He has been recognized for his innovation by being the recipient of the Westinghouse Entrepreneur of the Year, the Arizona Innovation Network's Entrepreneur of the Year, The Arizona Software Entrepreneur of the Year, twice nominated for the Ernst & Young/Inc. Magazine Entrepreneur of the Year, and the Public Relations Society of America's, Edward Bernays' Mark of Excellence, Best in Class.

Lon has been decorated by the Department of Veteran Affairs and recognized by the Phoenix Mayor's Office and has been a Certified Apple Computer Developer, NeXt, IBM, and Hewlett Packard Business Partner. As president and CEO of Safko International, Inc, a high tech company, Lon was responsible for the first commercially available voice recognition, environmental control, head movement computer control for the physically disabled, Balloon Help, and the archetypes for the Apple Newton and Microsoft's Bob Operating Systems. Lon directed a high security project for the United States Department of Energy, Westinghouse Electric Company, Hanford Nuclear

Reservation, Artificial Intelligence Computer System for Nuclear Trend Analysis & Quality Assurance.

Lon grew up and spent 30 years in Sing Sing, (hometown, Ossining-on-the-Hudson, New York). He is a certified member of the Mensa I.Q. Society, scoring in the top .5% in the world, and is a published author.



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