

A Very Strange Life

By Chip Cook



**Paranormal Experiences:
From Skeptic to Explorer**

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...scientific reasoning explores a paranormal universe...

A Very Strange Life is the true account of an Agnostic forced by circumstances to become a reluctant explorer. I believed in scientific rationale as a basis for my understanding. I had planned for a promising future teaching mathematics. Nevertheless, a series of unusual events altered everything.

As a young student, I overcame a learning disability. In college, I worked hard to earn a masters degree in mathematics. However, unexpectedly, I was rocked to my philosophical core by a troublesome telepathic fourteen-year-old girl. At the same time my heart was shattered by a puzzling woman. Years later, I was again confronted by something that should not have been possible. Could there be a hidden informational platform demonstrating intent and control? I was not prone to paranoia or exaggerations. However, the evidence was undeniable. Something had been influencing me. How could this be? Why was this happening?

This mystery needed solving. Somehow, I had received detailed and accurate information about past, present and even future events. Undeterred by what should have been impossible, I entered these rabbit-holes. There I collected the illogical clues. This was during a period when physicists were working on a Theory of Everything.

My perspective suggested science was ignoring something very important. Human consciousness wasn't just a by-product of a theorized self-organized bio-machine. Life had not just accidentally evolved. I found mankind's imagination had influence and function beyond what science accepted. Clearly for me, additional philosophical structure was needed to explain our complex emergent reality.

This narrative is a puzzling tour of mind, imagination and hidden places. It is a modern-day Odyssey complete with the killing of a Cyclops. Regardless of your beliefs, my journey will challenge your view of our being and our role in it. A Very Strange Life sounds unbelievable. I assure you it was not. This is my journey crossing into the unknown.

Unusual challenges forced me to question, accept and change my old philosophical views.

Memoir ~ paranormal v science



Dear Reader,

I never intended to become an explorer. Though the subject matter is controversial, what follows is a personal account centered on the existence of a psychic platform. The strange events I experienced truly happened. Throughout this narration, I have done my best to preserve the accuracy of relationships between people and events.

My original notes were scribbled like those of a disorganized detective rough, fragmented, and cryptic. Some of the dialogue you will read is quoted exactly as it happened; other parts have been carefully paraphrased to maintain clarity while staying true to their meaning. I tell this story from the standpoint of reason even though, by scientific standards, what I discovered should not be possible.

To protect the privacy of those involved, I have had to omit certain compelling parts of the story. Still, what remains is no less intriguing. Most names including my own have been changed. Any resemblance between names used here and real individuals is purely coincidental.

I was merely the observer, the navigator, and the storyteller. Yet, each person I encountered whether directly or indirectly offered a glimpse into the unknown. Together, they allowed me to assemble fragments of a puzzle and form a different way of seeing things.

Human beings are often described as compulsive communicators, and I agree with that view. With knowledge comes responsibility and I believe what we struggle to learn should be shared. This isn't just a story about me; it is a story about the deeper mystery we all share. In the end, I believe we are defined by how we respond to life's challenges. My hope is that, by reading this, you will be inspired to ask new and unexpected questions.

Chapter 1

Frankenstein, the Wolf-man and the Mummy

(Strange Event #1)

"Truth is stranger than fiction, because fiction requires being possible. Truth does not."
— Mark Twain

Sometimes, life can flip in an instant. Without warning, something happens that shakes your entire belief system. What kind of impact could a bratty fourteen-year-old girl possibly have on a twenty-two-year-old graduate student studying mathematics? You'd be surprised. To protect the privacy of those involved, names have been changed—but the events remain unchanged. My story begins in a northern suburb of Detroit, Michigan, during the fall of 1971.

It was a cool Saturday night, and I was walking arm-in-arm with a new girlfriend. Sue and I had just seen a scary movie—the kind that guarantees close cuddles once you're parked in a dark, deserted spot. I was feeling a wolf-man awakening in me. But instead of the romantic night I'd imagined, I ended up catching a glimpse of something that would forever change my understanding of logic and science. Our conversation veered straight into the Twilight Zone.

As we pulled out of the theater parking lot, Sue turned to me and asked, "So... what do you think of the occult?"

I was still mentally scanning places we could go next, so her question caught me off guard. "What do you mean?" I asked.

"What are your feelings about the paranormal?" she said, resting her head on my shoulder.

I was tempted to crack a W.C. Fields-style pun about the word "paranormal," but thought better of it. Instead, I said, "Well... about the same as I feel about Frankenstein, the Wolf-man, and the Mummy. Why do you ask?"

"So... you don't believe in things like E.S.P.?" she asked.

Still unsure where this was headed, I resisted the urge to joke about redefining E.S.P. "You mean like telepathy?" I asked.

"Yes... exactly!" Sue replied, lighting up with excitement.

That's when I knew the night had taken a turn I hadn't expected. I tried to keep up. I recalled reading about telepathy research at Duke University. It hadn't impressed me. They used five symbols—a square, circle, triangle, some wavy lines, and either a plus sign or a cross. The test involved flipping cards with these symbols face down and asking subjects to guess which one was showing. With five options, guessing correctly was a one-in-five probability. That meant, out of one hundred tries, twenty correct guesses could be expected just by chance. If someone

got thirty-three or more, it might suggest something unusual. But to me, it all seemed sketchy—nothing to get excited about.

I told Sue I'd never seen anything I'd call paranormal. Magicians pull off some amazing tricks, but they're still just tricks. "As for ghosts, fortune tellers, and mind readers," I said, "I'm always amazed at how gullible people can be. Thank goodness science has replaced witch doctors, voodoo queens, and priests of hidden knowledge with a system that actually reveals how the universe works."

I said it with all the righteous confidence of a budding science zealot. The mood had clearly shifted, but Sue just looked at me with a sly smile—like the cat that ate the canary.

"What if, Mr. Scientist, I could show you someone who can tell you exactly what number you're thinking?" she teased, grinning like the Cheshire cat.

"Oh, come on. You don't mean that," I said.

"I'll bet you a hundred bucks, or something like it, that I can," she challenged.

"You're on—but if I win, can I choose something else?" I asked, full of confidence and youthful optimism.

"Deal! I'm not going to lose. I can't wait to see the look on your face when Laura shows you what she can do."

"Laura? You mean your fourteen-year-old brat of a sister? Oh, come on. You must want to lose this bet. Well, who am I to turn down a sure thing?"

"You'll see. And when I win, I want you to take me to The Vineyards for dinner," she said.

"Hey! You haven't won yet," I said.

"Oh... you don't know it, but I have!" she answered, beaming.

At that point, I was sure I had the upper hand. How could I lose? No one could do what she claimed her sister could do. If they could, they'd be famous—probably living in Las Vegas betting fortunes. This had to be a setup.

The drive back to her house flew by. I fully expected her to jump out of the car and yell, "Sucker!" But instead, she calmly said, "Come on in... I'll wake Laura." That got my attention. Could this really be legit? Maybe it was some kind of number trick that relied on math. I was curious.

In their living room, a groggy Laura was led to a chair opposite me. She wasn't thrilled about being woken up. Sue dashed off and returned with paper and a pencil.

Laura slouched forward, rested her elbows on her knees, covered her eyes with her hands, and said, “Okay... write any number you want. I’ll see if I can get it.”

“Any number? Not just one through nine?” I asked, stunned.

“Yes... no tricks. Write down a number, and she’ll tell you what it is,” Sue said.

Still in disbelief, I quickly scribbled down a five-digit number: 72451. That gave Laura 1 chance in 100,000 to get it right. Pretty good odds for me.

“Trace over the number again, please,” Laura mumbled, still covering her eyes. She was sitting twelve feet away. I was in the corner with the pad on my knees, shielding it with my hand. My pencil was short—no chance she could see it moving. I carefully retraced the number.

“Seventy-two thousand, four hundred and fifty-one,” she said calmly.

I was stunned. What just happened?

“Did I get it right?” she asked, half-interested.

“Yes... you got it right. Can you try another one?” I asked, trying to sound unfazed. Sue, meanwhile, looked like she was already planning her outfit for The Vineyards.

Laura guessed eight more numbers—flawlessly. Finally, she got bored and wanted to go back to bed. Her score? Nine for nine. The odds of guessing those correctly—each a number from 0 to 99,999—was 1 in 10^{54} . That’s a one followed by 54 zeroes. You’d have better luck winning three national lotteries in a row.

This wasn’t luck or guessing. Something else was going on. I couldn’t deny it—telepathy had to be real. Sue was getting her dinner.

That night was unforgettable—though not at all what I’d hoped for. Laura said she’d be up for showing more another time. I kissed Sue goodnight, patted Laura on the head, and drove out of Bloomfield Hills trying to make sense of what I’d seen. My logical mind had been knocked off balance. It wouldn’t be the last time either.

On Monday at Oakland University, I was itching to share the story. I told fellow grad students and even a few professors. The jokes about drinking and hallucinating rolled in. But they all knew I didn’t drink, didn’t do drugs, and wasn’t a joker. I saw myself in their skepticism. It was understandable—but the event had happened.

That was a lesson: the scientific mind, like any mindset, only sees what it’s trained to see. I had to confront my own overconfidence. Belief systems can be dangerous when you’re too sure of them.

Then I had an idea. Why not invite Laura to Oakland for a demonstration? That would prove telepathy exists. But another hard lesson was coming.

That evening, I called Sue to arrange our dinner. I asked to speak to Laura. I thanked her and asked if she'd show her ability to some students and professors.

"No! I can't! They'll think I'm a freak!" she said, clearly upset.

I was stunned—and disappointed. I had just run into a wall called a fourteen-year-old girl.

In the weeks that followed, I met the rest of Sue's family. Friday nights became card night—a fun break from studying. Her father worked for American Motors, but he didn't fit the corporate mold. He had long salt-and-pepper hair and a matching beard. Her mother wore the same trendy outfits as her daughters—and looked great doing it. Even their dog, Bruce, ate at the table like he belonged there.

During those evenings, Laura's story unfolded. I learned she was born with an abnormal mastoid bone, not discovered until she was five. I wondered if her telepathic ability had developed as a way to compensate for hearing loss. Just a theory.

In some tribal cultures, boys undergo sensory deprivation as part of manhood rituals to open their minds. Maybe Laura's ability came from something similar. Whatever the reason, her gift was undeniable. She never missed. Once, she correctly guessed 64 numbers in a row—odds of 1 in 10^{64} . It wasn't just me. Others had seen it too.

I asked her father when he realized she was telepathic.

"One of her teachers would ask the class, 'Who can guess what number I'm thinking?' Whoever came closest got to go to the library first. After Laura went first every time for a week, the teacher called me and said, 'Sir, your daughter is telepathic!' I told him, 'I didn't know, but nothing surprises me about Laura. Both my daughters are gifted—after all, I'm their father.'"

His confidence filled in any gaps in logic.

But I saw Laura's gift as far more than a parlor trick. It was groundbreaking. If a young girl could prove telepathy, it changed everything.

More experiments followed—and they revealed even more.

During one of our evenings together, I asked Laura, "What exactly do you see when you get the number?"

“I see the number being written on a blackboard in my mind. All I have to do is read it off,” she replied.

“So... I write the number and rewrite it over and over. Is that when you see it appear on your mental blackboard?” I asked.

“Yes... I guess so,” she answered indifferently.

That gave me an idea for the next test. Without explaining my plan, I changed how I presented the number. This time, I didn’t write anything at all. I just concentrated on the number in my head: thirty-one thousand, two hundred and nineteen—repeating it over and over in my mind.

Laura frowned. “This is strange. I can’t see a number... but I think the number is thirty-one thousand, two hundred and nineteen.”

BINGO! I thought. That was it. A light bulb flashed in my imagination.

I kept my reaction neutral and said, “Very good.” Inside, my mind was racing. Could it be that she couldn’t see the number because of my dyslexia? Maybe the written number gave her a clearer image. I had to find out.

The next test was to write down a number—without looking at it—and try not to think about any numbers at all. I chose 701.

“Something is wrong,” Laura said. “For a second, I saw a seven, a zero, a one... maybe another number. But now I can’t see anything. Maybe I’m getting tired or something.”

“No... you got it right. Do you feel up to a few more?” I asked, feeling slightly guilty.

“Sure. A couple more. But something’s off,” she said with a frown.

This next one was a big test. I was buzzing with anticipation. “Are you ready?” I asked.

“I guess so,” she replied slowly.

I wrote down 99,201, and as I looked at it, I concentrated instead on a different number: 341.

Laura shook her head. “Nothing is going right. The number I see is ninety-nine thousand, two hundred and one. But I don’t think that’s the number you’re sending me. I think the number is three hundred forty-one.”

She gave me a look like, *what are you doing to me?*

“Last one. You’re doing really well,” I said, pushing my luck.

“No. I’m not doing anymore until you tell me what’s going on,” she insisted.

I begged her, “Just one more and I’ll explain everything. Please.”

“Just one more. Then I’m going to bed.” Her tired eyes said it all.

This time, I blocked my view of the number I wrote—651—and filled my mind with random thoughts: friends at school, dinner with Sue, anything but the number.

“I’ve had it! I’m not getting anything, and I’m going to bed.” Then she paused and asked, “What did you and Sue have for dinner the other night?”

I had been using the memory of that dinner as a distraction. Interesting—now she was thinking about the food. I quickly uncovered the number and focused on it.

“Six hundred and fifty-one,” she suddenly exclaimed, sounding surprised. “What is going on here?”

I told her about the trick I had just played. But instead of being amazed, she said, “You gave me a headache. I’m going to bed.”

I had just witnessed what felt like the Rosetta Stone of telepathy—and no one else knew but me.

On another occasion, we tested her abilities over the phone. The idea came from a story her father told during one of our card games. He recalled a time when Laura called him to talk about something personal. During the call, she sensed he wasn’t paying attention. Instead of scolding him, she began reading the business letter he had been silently reviewing. This was long before video calls existed.

That story gave me an idea. What if we tried sending numbers by phone? If she could still guess them, what were her limits?

It was almost twenty miles from Bloomfield Hills to her father’s office. But for our experiment, the distance between our homes was less than ten. When we were on the phone, she was able to correctly tell me the numbers I was thinking. But when we tried it without a phone connection, she couldn’t do it.

Logically, this meant the phone helped bridge the connection. But the brain’s electromagnetic field is incredibly weak. It barely extends past the skull. Machines that detect brain waves have to amplify them a million times just to register activity. No 1971 telephone could transmit signals that faint.

There was no answer to this mystery. And I had so many more questions—questions that might’ve been answered if Laura had been willing to go public.

Years later, magician James Randi and a group of scientists, later known as The Skeptical Inquirers, offered a \$10,000 prize to anyone who could demonstrate any kind of paranormal ability. Even that didn’t convince Laura to come forward.

I could never persuade her to see how important her ability was. To this day, hers is the only clear case of telepathy I've ever encountered. While working at MIT's Lincoln Lab, I searched for anything similar using their advanced resources. All I found were references to Duke University's ESP experiments, which were widely discredited. Chapter Four of Chris Carter's *Science and Psychic Phenomena* (2012) gives a detailed look into the controversy. His book offers an important account of how divided the scientific community remains over the paranormal.

Sue and I stopped dating in the winter of 1971, and the experiments with Laura came to an end. I visited the Detroit area again at Christmas in 1973. Sue had married an old friend of mine. Laura was now a young woman, showing little interest in her past abilities.

In the summer of 1975, James Randi appeared on the *Today Show*, offering a million-dollar reward to anyone who could demonstrate paranormal powers. This was serious incentive. But for me, it wasn't about the money—I wanted to change how scientists saw the world.

I called Laura's father and offered to cover the costs for them to take the challenge. They could keep all the money. He appreciated the call, but he was pretty sure Laura wouldn't be interested. Deep down, I knew he was right. I had to try, but it didn't work.

In late October 1980, I returned to my hometown with a girlfriend to catch up with old friends. We visited Sue's family. It felt like old times—cards and conversation until midnight. The only one missing was Laura, now married to a policeman and living nearby. I asked if we could visit. Her father arranged it for Monday night.

Laura, now in her twenties, looked great. During a lively part of our card game, she got annoyed with her father. She accused him of deliberately sending her false mental images about his cards. Apparently, some habits never died.

Later, I asked if she'd be willing to demonstrate her telepathy. "Oh... I haven't done that in years. Okay... sure." The stage was set.

My girlfriend had always mocked anything psychic-related. Finally, I could prove something to her.

We sat at the kitchen table. I had paper and pencil ready. I wrote the number: 22.

"Twenty-two," Laura said.

My girlfriend frowned. "This pencil is too noisy. Do you have another?"

Laura stood up and snapped, "If she doesn't believe I can do it, then I won't!"

The demonstration was over before it began.

After that visit, I lost touch with the family. Even with the arrival of the Internet, I found little about them.

Then, on New Year's Day 2007, I got a strange email from a company offering reminder services. Subject line: *Say Happy Birthday to Laura*. I didn't recall Laura's birthday being January 1st, but it got me curious. I Googled her name. One site she had visited still listed her email address.

We started corresponding. Sadly, both her parents had passed away. Laura was now a devoted mother to two wonderful children. That summer, the whole family visited Maine. I asked her again to show her gift. But she still refused to go public.

Her reasons may have been valid. It wasn't just about what people might think. She feared being studied by the CIA. At the time, I dismissed her concerns as teenage paranoia.

But later, I learned about **Project Star Gate**, the CIA's classified research into psychic abilities. The U.S. feared the Soviets had more advanced programs. (If you're curious, Google *Star Gate Project*.)

In the early 1980s, I read *Mind Reach* by Russell Targ. It explored something called "remote viewing"—a way of perceiving distant places without being there. It was fascinating, but different from Laura's ability. Her skill was precise—black or white. Remote viewing was more abstract and harder to measure. That may be why science avoided it.

In 2006 and 2007, the Discovery Channel featured **Daniel Tammet**, known as the "Brain Man." His mind worked in unimaginable ways. He could learn languages in a week and calculate pi to 20,000 digits. He described his thought process as seeing numbers as shapes or blobs that combined into new visual forms. He didn't solve problems—he just read the answer off a mental screen.

His story proved Laura wasn't alone. Science couldn't explain him either. (See *Our Mathematical Universe* (2014) for a possible framework.)

For me, telepathy wasn't such a big deal. It was just another curious form of communication—one I couldn't access. Even if science ignored it, I believed logical answers were out there. My worldview wobbled, but didn't collapse.

But that would change in 1977. That year, 840 miles from Michigan, in the state of Maine, my entire philosophy would be shaken. The paranormal became personal. Something—or someone—seemed to be orchestrating events. And it didn't feel amusing. You could say Laura's abilities sparked my transformation. I was becoming a scientific heretic. I knew what I had seen was real, even if it couldn't be proven. The lesson was clear: the paranormal had at least one real phenomenon that science had overlooked.

And maybe... just maybe... there were more. But that would have to wait. First, I had a life to live.

CHAPTER 2

Setting the Stage for Rabbit-holes

"I never made one of my discoveries through the process of rational thinking."
—Albert Einstein

From December 1971 to September 1977, nothing paranormal happened from my point of view. Still, as I focused on finding a romantic connection during the 1970s, my life became filled with several unusual situations. To give proper context, a few personal details from that time are necessary. A brief summary should provide enough background to prepare for the next paranormal experience that occurred in September 1977.

From January 1972 to May 1973

I completed my master's degree in mathematics at Oakland University. During this time, I taught math through an assistantship program, spent summers building tractors, and worked as an usher at the Meadowbrook Music Festival. By May of 1973, I had managed to pay for all six years of my education and still save five thousand dollars. Financially, I was off to a strong start.

It was at Meadowbrook where I fell in love with another usher named Diane. The first time I saw her, I thought, *Who is this girl? How can I make her part of my life?* She had a charisma that drew people in. Sadly, I found out she wasn't available. Diane hadn't dated much, and her first and only boyfriend was the head parking attendant—who happened to be working with us. I watched their interactions all summer and didn't like how he treated her. He had a habit of pointing in her face while talking, which struck me as disrespectful. He graduated that spring and joined the Peace Corps, leaving for Egypt in the fall of 1971.

Meanwhile, Diane needed help with her calculus class, and tutoring was one of my duties. She worked in the season ticket section of Meadowbrook and was beloved by regular patrons. That Christmas, she received 126 holiday cards from guests—most of whom were strangers. I was impressed. We began spending time together outside of work, and I saw no reason our friendship couldn't grow into something more.

But Diane was, in many ways, a woman out of her time—a throwback to the 1950s. She believed in saving herself for marriage. In the early 1970s, that mindset was rare. Still, I loved her enough that I didn't care. I respected her, and her values became our guide. However, I knew she and her Peace Corps boyfriend had plans to reunite at the 1972 Munich Olympic Games in Germany.

If Diane's values came from the 1950s, then mine were shaped by the 1960s. Something got lost in translation between those two worlds, and it ultimately caused a rift. A man from the 1950s would've said, "Don't go—I want you here with me." A man of the 1960s might say, "Go, see how you feel. If you come back to me, wonderful—because I love you." I sensed Diane was conflicted, but she went to Munich anyway.

She returned wearing a gold engagement ring. Her warmth had vanished. Throughout the fall and winter of 1972–1973, she couldn’t even look me in the eye. Whenever she saw me, she’d turn and walk away. That was my answer. I was crushed. My emotional devastation felt disproportionate, but it was real. I threw myself into my math studies. I finished with a 4.0 GPA but skipped graduation and didn’t pursue further graduate work. As soon as I could, I packed my car and drove to our family cottage in Maine to escape.

The last few paragraphs may seem personal, but they’re essential to understanding the next strange event, which would take place in September of 1977. Please mentally bookmark them.

From May 1973 to May 1977

Maine became a symbol of freedom for me—emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. I was determined to move on from Diane. I wasted no time finding work and landed a job as a scientific programmer at MIT’s Lincoln Labs. I started in July and moved into a rooming house in Waltham, Massachusetts. Whenever I could, I drove the seventy miles north to Maine.

Though my family was still in Detroit, they were planning to relocate to Maine. I was the first one to make the move. My dad worked in the jewelry supply business. He planned to sell his half of the business to his partner and then sell our family home in Michigan so they could move into a beautiful house on the Maine coast that we had recently remodeled.

My weekend job was to represent their interests by supervising the transformation of a small cottage into a large, elegant home. Throughout the fall, winter, and spring of 1973–1974, we spoke every weekend. They moved in by May, just one week after I bought a home of my own in Lexington, Massachusetts. Both houses turned out to be excellent investments.

Soon after, we began renovating an old theater building in town—another promising venture. The location couldn’t have been better. At the time, we felt confident we couldn’t lose.

Emotionally, however, I was still in a fog. Between 1974 and 1977, I dated three wonderful women, but none were the right fit. We just didn’t click. I still found myself thinking about Diane. Every Christmas for a few years, I sent her a card. I told myself it was a general update on my life, but really, it was meant just for her. After three years with no reply, even my thoughts of her began to fade—but the emptiness didn’t. It may sound unbelievable, but in September of 1977, that lingering memory would prove surprisingly significant.

By the summer of 1977, our projects in Maine were moving fast. The family was entering both the movie theater and restaurant business. I had left the world of high-tech behind—a heretic of sorts—but I had no regrets. I wasn’t alone in that feeling. Many in the scientific field were turning away from technology in search of something more meaningful. I wasn’t afraid to take risks and explore new directions. What I hadn’t anticipated was that becoming your own boss would be the hardest job of all.

In the Spring of 1977

I sold my house in Lexington for a good profit and moved in with my parents in Maine. We finished building out the old theater and opened the new restaurant. I designed the menu, trained the staff, and hired twenty-five employees. Launching two businesses within weeks was an enormous challenge. You often don't know what you need to know until you run headfirst into it. For everyone involved, the learning curve was steep. It wasn't always pretty—but we got it done.

All of us—family and partners alike—worked nonstop, 24/7, for four straight months. It wasn't just about work, of course. The wild and free-spirited nature of the 1970s added its own flavor to our lives—but that's a story for another time.

For now, this chapter sets the stage for what came next: a completely unexpected and truly strange event that would shake my entire understanding of the world.

CHAPTER 3

September 1977

(Strange Event #2)

"You can't depend on your eyes when your imagination is out of focus."

— Mark Twain

I had made it to September, and I was still breathing. After Labor Day, business finally slowed. For once, I had time to relax and even read the local paper. I picked up a newspaper someone had left behind in the restaurant. On page two was a long article about a local psychic. Judging by the tone, the reporter had been impressed. There was even a photo of a striking young woman beside a large spinning wheel. Her name was Ann, and she was new to the area.

The reporter gushed. He'd seen her ad on a local bulletin board and, as a skeptic, set out to prove how people could be duped into wasting money on nonsense. But after testing her, he left convinced. According to the article, her abilities were nothing short of astonishing.

Since my time with Laura, I hadn't spent much energy thinking about the paranormal. While Laura had faded into the background of my life, the memory of her abilities remained sharp. My written records of her telepathy still puzzled—and frustrated—me. Once I left Detroit, I entered a world that didn't include anything mystical. Still, curiosity got the better of me, and I clipped the article about Ann.

Surprisingly, her phone number was printed in the article. By late September, both the theater and restaurant would shut down for the season. If boredom set in, maybe I'd look into this new phenomenon.

Three days later, I called her. A voice in my head said, *Just do it. What have you got to lose?* I booked an appointment for the following Monday at 11:30 a.m. Her house was on the way to the harbor—easy to find. The reading cost five dollars. Even if it turned out to be nonsense, it wouldn't break the bank.

The day before my appointment, I was cleaning up at the restaurant when the side door suddenly flew open. In walked a condo saleswoman I'd worked with earlier in the summer.

"You saved me twenty-five thousand dollars!" she shouted. "I owe you dinner! Are you free tonight? How about The Inn at seven?"

Caught off guard, I stammered, "Sure... but really, it's not necessary."

"Oh yes, it is! I'll see you there," she smiled before quickly heading out.

Even by 1970s standards, it was bold—but I was intrigued.

Dinner turned out to be great. She spoke non-stop, explaining how she'd followed my advice and contacted the people on the list I had given her. She decided not to reinvest her commissions in the condos she was selling. "The developer was furious I was the only salesperson who didn't invest," she laughed. "Two days ago, everything collapsed. Thanks to you, my money's safe in the bank. I don't know how I'll repay you... but maybe I will think of something," she grinned.

She expressed her gratitude—until 3:30a.m. Monday morning.

When the sun rose, I wanted nothing more than to stay in bed. I was wiped out. But I had that appointment with the psychic. Ann's house was twenty minutes away, and I barely arrived on time. The sun on this side of the bay was blinding, bouncing off the ocean. Her home sat beside a river, with a scenic view toward the sea. Though charming, the old place seemed a bit too close to nature's wrath. It was lucky it had survived.

I climbed onto the wraparound porch and knocked on the first door I saw. Through the glass, I spotted Ann holding a young child. She opened the door in a flurry and gestured for me to enter, pointing toward the living room.

"What would you like in your tea?" she asked. "I always drink tea while reading. Please, sit anywhere on the floor."

Not wanting to be rude, I replied, "Just a little sugar, thanks." She disappeared into the back.

A few minutes later, she returned carrying two old mugs and a pot of honey. "Is honey okay?"

"Sure... thank you," I said, smiling.

She placed everything on the floor and sat cross-legged. Following her lead, I joined her.

Trying to break the ice, I said, "This is my first psychic reading. Do you need any information before we begin?"

"No. The less I know, the better," she replied, handing me the tea and honey.

Then she picked up a deck of playing cards and began to shuffle. Several minutes passed. Then she asked, "Did you bring a tape to record the session?"

"No... I didn't realize that was an option."

"It's okay," she smiled. "I can sell you one for a dollar."

"Yes—thank you," I replied. Still, I wondered if this was part of a trick. But having a recording seemed like a smart idea.

"People often get a lot of information during a session," she said, as if reading my thoughts. "They like to replay it to catch the details."

That made sense.

She dealt the cards into a square, placing one in the center. The layout looked random. She studied them, turned on her recorder, and began to speak.

For the next hour, she spoke in broad generalities. Her words could have applied to me—but just as easily to anyone else. My thoughts drifted. How did a pretty woman and her daughter survive doing this?

When the hour ended, I must've looked disappointed because she asked, "Is there anything specific you'd like me to focus on?"

I figured the reading was a dud. She hadn't picked up that my love life was a complete disaster—or that I'd had a surprise evening with the real estate agent. I even thought sarcastically, *If she doesn't pick up on last night, she's in the wrong line of work.*

Still giving her a chance, I asked, "Do you see any complications I might have in my love life?"

Let me step out of the story for a moment—imagine a Greek chorus interrupting the scene. What you're about to read leads straight down a rabbit-hole—*Alice in Wonderland*-style. Everything was recorded on tape. I listened to it many times. The details were hard to accept—but impossible to ignore. Eventually, I transcribed everything into my notes.

Her predictions raised profound questions about the nature of reality. The problem? I'm the only person who witnessed them unfold. For years, their anecdotal nature kept me silent. But the implications never left me. What happened next launched me into my own wonderland—and transformed me into a full-blown scientific heretic.

Back to the story.

She looked distracted. I repeated, "Do you see any complications I might have with my love life?"

After a long pause, she said, "I see something connected to a school, about five or six years ago."

Finally, something clicked with my past. I kept my face blank. Diane, the girl who broke my heart, was buried deep in my mind.

"There's a woman you were very much in love with," she said.

That could apply to many college students.

"She had a certain smile. In a photo, she'd look pretty—but it's more than that. Did she receive over one hundred and twenty Christmas cards from strangers?"

"Yes," I replied, still stone-faced.

That number—126—was a statistical anomaly. No one could guess that. Ann might have some of Laura’s telepathic ability.

“Do you know she still loves you?” she asked.

“No,” I said. “I didn’t know that.”

I couldn’t believe what I was hearing. My emotions stirred, even though I tried to remain calm.

“Yes... she does love you. You’ll see her in a month and a half.”

“I have no plans to see her,” I said.

“You will,” she said confidently.

“Will she be glad to see me?” I asked, remembering how Diane used to run away when she saw me.

“Yes. She’ll be very glad.”

That prediction didn’t seem likely.

“She’ll touch your hand while you’re talking,” Ann continued, “and say, ‘I was sorry when you stopped sending me Christmas cards telling me what was going on in your life.’”

Only Diane and I knew that. No one else.

I was stunned.

Ann went on, “When you say goodbye, something will stir up a can of worms.”

She wasn’t wrong. I was already knee-deep in confusion. Was this a tea party in Wonderland?

Ann earned her five dollars—and the extra dollar for the tape. I left her house more baffled than ever. The things she shouldn’t have known were undeniably accurate. The things I couldn’t yet verify seemed just as impossible.

And this was only the beginning.

The very next day, I got a call from Bill, a childhood friend I’d known since we were ten. We hadn’t spoken in years. He’d heard about the changes in my life through his mother, who had spoken with mine. But he didn’t know the half of it.

While I had moved to Maine and started over, he had gotten married and taken a job at Ford Motor Company. They were living about five miles south of Oakland University in Michigan.

We caught up in a long, lively conversation. At no point did I mention the psychic reading. In fact, I hadn't told anyone.

Toward the end of the call, he asked when would be a good time to visit. He suggested the first two weeks of November.

Aha! That was exactly one and a half months away—just as Ann had predicted.

I tried to see if I had somehow influenced the timing, but the date was all Bill's idea. I had said nothing that could've steered him toward that suggestion. Still, I had to admit that by choosing to follow the path laid out by Ann's prediction, I was affecting the outcome. My curiosity about her reading had made this entire scenario possible.

With our family's businesses now closed for the winter, time flew by. Before I knew it, I was packing for my trip to Michigan. The drive felt longer than I remembered. I arrived at Bill's on a Friday, an hour after he returned from work. It's funny how easily old friends can reconnect—like no time had passed.

That weekend was filled with catching up, meeting his wife, and revisiting his version of Detroit. At some point, I played Ann's taped reading for him. I didn't expect it to blow his mind—and it didn't. But he was intrigued that the visit's timing had matched the prediction exactly.

I needed to distance myself emotionally. If more of Ann's predictions came true, it would raise serious questions about the nature of reality itself.

Science fiction writer Isaac Asimov once said the most exciting phrase in science isn't "Eureka," but "That's funny." Given what I was experiencing, "funny" didn't feel right. For me, "strange" was the better word.

On Monday, while Bill was at work, I decided to visit Oakland University. I wanted to see what, if anything, I could find out about Diane. It had been over five years since I last stepped foot on campus.

Physically, much was the same—except for a new building that threw off some of my spatial memory. Most of the people I'd known were gone, which was no surprise. I looked everywhere but found no trace of Diane. I even combed through dozens of phone books in the library. Nothing.

As I wandered through the university bookstore, I remembered the last time I'd seen Diane—running away from me. Then, a book caught my eye: *The Crack in the Cosmic Egg*. The back cover intrigued me, and I bought it. It was the first time I'd shown real interest in metaphysics. My understanding of existence needed to expand—quickly. I was trying to hold onto my agnostic stance, the philosophical equivalent of sitting on the fence. But it was getting harder.

Emotionally, I was unraveling. I felt like I was back in Boston during my job hunt—sensing something big was coming without knowing what.

By the end of the day, I felt like I'd been chasing ghosts. No signs of Diane. It was getting dark when I returned to the parking lot. I was getting into my car, head down, when I heard a voice from the shadows.

"Chip... Chip Cook!"

I stepped out of the car to find Dr. Joy, Diane's former advisor. We'd met maybe six times, and not in the last five years. And now here he was—calling my name out of nowhere?

"Dr. Joy... how have you been?" I asked, startled.

"Good! I haven't seen you in years. How are you doing? What have you been up to?" he asked with an uncharacteristically warm smile. His tone felt a bit too friendly—it caught me off guard.

"I moved to a suburb of Boston and worked for MIT's Lincoln Labs in radar research. This past summer, I joined my family in a seasonal business. I'm just back for a short visit." I didn't mention anything about a psychic or a rabbit-hole. But I couldn't help thinking: *What part are you playing in this psychic script?*

"I remember you were very interested in Diane," he said, his voice tinged with concern. "It must've been a shock when she got engaged to John."

"Did they ever marry?" I asked, hoping the answer would be no.

"Yes, when John came back from Egypt," he confirmed.

"Did she ever become a veterinarian?" I asked, suppressing the ache in my chest.

"She's working on it now—she's studying at Michigan State," he said.

That ended our conversation. After exchanging goodbyes, he headed to a late meeting. I drove back to Bill's house and shared the bizarre encounter.

The odds of that meeting felt astronomical. Was I part of some scripted play? Diane was married. She had fled from me in the past and ignored all my letters. What was I doing?

Even Bill agreed it was weird, but we were both too curious to look away. Objectivity was gone. I felt like a character in a drama I didn't write. Just like the book I'd bought—*The Crack in the Cosmic Egg*—the shell of reality was beginning to splinter around me.

Over the next day, I read the book. As thought-provoking as it was, it didn't provide a guide for my situation. That night, I debated whether to just drive back to Maine. Bill understood but had no advice.

Wednesday morning, I surprised myself by waking at six and starting the 100-mile drive to Michigan State. I had no plan. I didn't know how I was going to find her.

Once off the expressway, the campus opened up before me like a small city. I pulled into a gas station for a fill-up and saw a campus map on the wall. In the center was the veterinary building. A few quick turns, and I was there.

The parking lot was full. But as I pulled up, a car started and left—I slid into the spot directly in front of the building. I walked up the steps and entered.

At the front desk, a young woman was reading. “Excuse me,” I said. “I’m looking for a Diane M. Could you help me find her?”

She looked up. “There are two thousand students here. I don’t have a detailed class roster. You’ll need to check with Enrollment across campus.”

Just then, another student walked by.

“Excuse me,” I asked again. “I’m looking for a Diane M. Do you happen to know where I could find her?”

To my amazement, the student replied, “Yes... she’s my roommate. We just walked to class together. I can take you there in a minute.”

I was already deep in the rabbit-hole. Ann’s second prediction had come true: *Your finding her will seem like a miracle to you.*

I couldn’t think—I just followed.

We rode the elevator to the third floor and approached a large lecture hall. Her roommate asked me to wait and entered the room. “Who should I say wants to see her?”

“Tell her an old friend, Chip,” I said, heart racing.

Moments later, Diane emerged.

“Chip! What are you doing here? Wait—I need to get someone to take notes. I’ll be right back,” she said excitedly.

Ann’s third prediction had landed: *She will be very glad to see you.*

As it turned out, this was a lecture she had already heard and just wanted to revisit. It was midterm week, and her free time was limited, but we had a few hours to talk.

Our conversation stayed light. I told her I ran into Dr. Joy. She took me on a tour of the labs. At one point, she showed me a cow with a window in its stomach—a hunter’s bullet had led to the unusual modification. The cow had become a teaching tool.

Everything felt surreal. As we walked, she casually mentioned she had season tickets to hockey games with her girlfriends.

That struck me as odd. She was married. So, I gently asked how that arrangement worked.

“We only see each other during the summers and holidays,” she said. “I have to study constantly. It’s not easy.”

That matched Ann’s fourth prediction: *She is married, but there is something distant about the marriage.*

Later, we sat at a table in the student lounge. While I talked about my life, she suddenly reached across the table, touched my hand, and looked into my eyes.

“I was sorry when you stopped sending me Christmas cards telling me what was going on in your life,” she said.

Word for word, Ann’s fifth prediction had just come true. I froze.

Was free will even real?

I don’t remember what I said next—just that I managed not to scare her off. We talked a little more. By 11:30, she had to return to her routine.

As we approached the empty lecture hall, I started my goodbye speech.

“Let me walk you out,” she offered.

There were two exits—one busy, one quiet. She chose the quiet route.

As I spoke, she walked over, wrapped her arms around me, and gave me a real goodbye kiss.

Ann’s sixth and final prediction had just come true.

A metaphorical can of worms burst open right then. I was overwhelmed. Ann’s predictions weren’t just guesses—they were pieces of information. They had to come from somewhere.

Was there a psychic information network?

I needed answers. The obsession had begun.

On the drive back to Bill’s, I cried. Hard.

I couldn’t stop picturing the whole scene, wondering if the ancient Greeks were right—maybe the gods really did toy with us. In my mind, the sky opened and I saw strings attached. Diane and I were puppets.

Bill wasn't home yet, and I didn't want to talk to anyone else. I stopped at a movie theater and bought a ticket for *Looking for Mr. Goodbar*. It was dark, the film was heavy, but I just needed to escape. Afterward, I returned to Bill's and told him everything.

He listened quietly. Then he asked, "What are you going to do next?"

"I don't know. 'Next' doesn't mean what it used to," I said.

"You can't just go back to Maine. Nothing's resolved. Call her. See if she'll meet you again."

"She's married. She's in school. She's overwhelmed. It wouldn't make sense," I said.

"Nothing about this makes sense. What do you have to lose?" he pressed.

I'd said those exact words once myself. Now, the universe felt like it had turned on me.

I called her the next day.

"Hi, Diane. It was great seeing you."

"Chip... it was such a surprise. Thank you for thinking of me," she said softly.

"Would there be a time when I could take you and John out for dinner?"

"No... I don't think that would be a good idea."

"Well, would there be a time when you and I could have dinner?"

"I think that would be an even worse idea."

"Well... you can't blame a guy for asking. Thanks again for today. Good luck with exams."

"Thank you," she said. And we hung up.

Bill and I talked long into the evening, trying to make sense of it all. But we couldn't. Ann's reading had created a deeply personal and unresolved philosophical mystery.

Maybe—just maybe—she could give me more answers.

I decided I would head back to Maine the next day.

Bill understood.

CHAPTER 4

Returning to Maine

I remembered little about the drive back to Maine. My body was at the wheel, but my mind was elsewhere—searching for meaning, grasping at connections. Diane had been both the best and worst part of my life. As Ann’s final prediction had warned, *something will happen that opens up a can of worms*. And now it felt as if Diane had been used as bait.

After our last embrace, I was flooded with unanswered questions. Something—or someone—seemed to have led me here. Was the universe actually watching? Toying with me? Was this some elaborate joke? And what could possibly be next?

I knew my heart had taken another hit, and my mind wouldn’t stop spinning. I needed a way to escape the pain. I felt driven to channel my energy toward understanding, toward solving the mystery. If the universe was determined to create a heretic, then I would become the best heretic it ever produced.

It was time to examine my belief system. How did these experiences fit into the new reality that Ann’s reading had unveiled? What was the simplest framework that could hold all the puzzle pieces?

One troubling realization struck me: Diane and I had clearly lived through two entirely different versions of the same experience. Her personal reality and mine couldn’t have been more different. This divergence made me deeply sad. We had shared the same physical encounter, but we hadn’t truly shared the same event.

And if our interpretations were so different, then how could anyone really know what “happened”? If Diane ever read this account, she might not understand it at all. If I suggested her free will had been compromised, she’d probably take offense. But that’s the issue—our meeting raised serious questions about the very nature of free will. If our choices during that moment weren’t truly our own, when else might we be playing the part of puppets?

Our five senses only take in a tiny fraction of reality. Like a painter selectively choosing colors and subjects, each of us builds a personal interpretation of the world. If you’ve ever reconnected with old high school friends and reminisced about the past, you’ve probably experienced this. Our most important memories are often unique to us. This divergence of perspective can become a real problem when telling a story. People might dismiss my experience as delusional. Historically, explorers like Lewis and Clark and artists like Vincent van Gogh saw things that were far ahead of their time. They often felt isolated and misunderstood.

So, should I stand on a soapbox and declare that Wonderland is real? Would that earn me a place in history next to the man who wore a wire pyramid on his head and claimed to have returned from a galactic UFO tour? That guy was actually on TV in the 1950s—one of several making the same claim. Clearly, going public needed more thought.

In my opinion, the puzzle was still too incomplete for public display. Other than my personal experience and the certainty of its truth, what evidence did I have? For now, maybe it was best to leave the soapbox alone and continue exploring these rabbit-holes privately.

So how do you deal with strange events like this? Since I knew they really happened, I had to ask: *What's the minimal set of conditions that would allow them to occur?*

A purely physical universe with evolved beings and five senses wouldn't be enough. Even if telepathy were real, it still wouldn't explain what had happened. And later tests with Ann showed no signs of telepathic ability. The big mysteries remained. What hidden platform was behind this? What powered Ann's psychic knowledge?

Those questions would have to wait. For now, I focused on what Ann's reading had caused—my meeting with Diane.

I had played a conscious part in setting the wheels in motion: I went for the reading, willingly entered another rabbit-hole, and became an active observer-participant. Ann, however, had no involvement before or after the event. She just did the reading, took her six dollars, and that was it. Yet her words—especially the one about the Christmas cards—had come from somewhere.

How did Ann access that kind of future-specific information?

The only explanation was that some organized and intelligent informational field existed—something Ann's mind could access like a search engine. Each part of her reading seemed to offer a piece of a much larger puzzle about how this unknown part of the universe functions.

To help myself make sense of it all, I kept imagining the whole thing as a stage play. I asked again and again: *What are the minimum staging requirements?* People like Bill, Dr. Joy, and Diane's roommate were all actors. They had small but essential parts. Without them, the continuity of the play would have broken down.

Just like a real production, this one had a stage, a backstage, a script, actors, and direction. Most importantly, it required total cooperation to appear seamless. The actors had to play their parts—even if they didn't realize they were acting. In a strange way, they were like puppets. But who were the puppet masters?

Ann's informational platform seemed to involve intelligent direction—something capable of interacting with the physical world with purpose.

Neither science nor religion offered satisfying answers. If God or the Devil was behind this, surely they had more important things to do than play tricks on me. From a scientific point of view, no known law of the universe could be this detailed or personalized. A natural law created just to mess with Chip Cook? Unlikely.

Yet something big was happening—something that had escaped scientific detection. I knew it, but how could I prove it? I wasn't foolish enough to try, not yet. The whole situation felt like a dead end intellectually. Still, it had become intensely personal.

In cosmology, there's no concept of a black hole devouring a person's love life and spitting it out as a joke. But that's what this felt like.

As I continued to analyze everything like a play, the complexity became more apparent. Maybe the convoluted nature of the event was part of the point—a demonstration of the unknown workings of the universe. Ann's reading had offered a backstage pass to a scene playing out in another time and place.

That meant some kind of intent was involved. I didn't want to believe it, but randomness didn't cut it. The odds were just too long. No "monkeys with typewriters" theory could explain it. (See the chapter titled *Monkeys and Typewriters*.)

We were actors following a script—and there was an alarming amount of coordination involved. Yet my fellow actors were completely unaware of their roles. That was deeply unsettling.

What kind of invisible directing force could pull this off?

Psychically, Ann had described specific stage directions with accurate timing. Yet she didn't seem to know the whole story. Once her role ended, she disconnected.

Then Bill entered, inviting me to Michigan—setting the time and place for the next act. That led me to Dr. Joy, whose appearance seemed just as contrived. He pointed me to Diane. And despite my own doubts, something inside me pushed forward.

I ended up running into Diane's roommate by pure chance. But it wasn't just chance, was it? I had to leave at just the right time, park in a perfect spot, enter the building at the precise moment her roommate walked by—all to casually ask a stranger if she knew Diane. And that stranger had to be the one person who did.

Diane's roommate and Dr. Joy were both connectors in this vast web. On a campus of over 60,000 students and in a school of 2,000 veterinary students, I found Diane in under twenty minutes. The odds of that happening by accident were minuscule.

Yet Ann—eight hundred miles away and a month and a half earlier—had predicted it all. From a stranger, no less. It bordered on miraculous.

I define a miracle as an event where natural laws appear to be suspended. Science has no explanation for that. But I knew what I saw, and I knew it was real.

Next came the unlikeliest part: Diane didn't run away. She acted like her old self.

Then, as if on cue, she touched my hand and delivered her line—*word for word*. That alone triggered a philosophical crisis. I don't believe in fate—not in the pure sense. But my disbelief didn't make it false.

If everything was fated, then reality would be static. Dead. Like a movie film, composed of frozen frames. Nothing changes unless something reflects on those frames.

That realization may have been the point.

Without a viewer—or something capable of reflection—even the illusion of change wouldn't be possible. This idea became central to what would later be my theoretical model of emergence. Science considers emergence foundational, yet it's not fully understood.

Looking back, I'm sure Diane had no clue she was part of some psychic performance. The audience was small—just me and maybe a few who believed I wasn't making it up.

But who orchestrated this? Who wrote the script?

Was it fate? Was it manipulation?

Welcome to my Wonderland.

What would *you* have concluded? What obvious clues did I miss?

I started to feel depressed by these big, unanswered questions. I felt like I was chasing my own tail. Then two quirky thoughts came to mind.

1. Back in the day, when mapmakers didn't know what lay beyond a certain point, they'd sometimes label their maps with, "*There be monsters here.*" It was their way of warning explorers to turn back—or at least to proceed with caution. But some adventurers might have been intrigued by that warning. They would go forward. In my case, I wanted to be honest about what was happening and separate real experiences from imagined ones. But as my story continues, the role of imagination in reality becomes more complicated—and more powerful—than I could have guessed.
2. Maybe the ancient Greeks were right. My psychic drama echoed their idea that the seen and unseen worlds could be in conflict. The Greeks—and even the older Sumerians—had a saying: "*To him whom the gods would destroy, they first grant clarity.*" On the drive home to Maine, I wondered—was I being too dramatic? Or was my subconscious warning me?

Thankfully, the agnostic in me brushed it off with a shrug: *What will be, will be*. I didn't want to start imagining watchers or cosmic boogeymen. So far, the worst thing I'd encountered was another broken heart—and the growing fear of being part of some cosmic joke.

Speculating about this psychic stage play was exhausting. I pushed back against the feeling that we were being controlled by something invisible.

But then again, puppets need puppet masters.

This suggested a “higher self” or “oversoul”—depending on your choice of words. (See Chapter 6 – *Higher Self or Over Soul*.)

Whatever the term, the implication was the same: some kind of lesson was unfolding—one that pitted man against himself. That idea isn’t new to philosophy, but it was brand-new to me.

Then again, maybe it wasn’t so new. My dyslexia had always pitted me against myself. At first glance, being dyslexic and being a puppet seem completely unrelated. But maybe they’re not.

The real questions I needed to answer were simple: *What is this? How does it work? Why is it happening?*

Ann was the only person who might be able to help me figure that out.

CHAPTER 5

Monkeys and Typewriters: Randomness as a Reasoning Tool

The simplest way to explain the concept of “monkeys and typewriters” is that it offers a clever way to think about events with extremely low probabilities. The idea suggests that an outcome—even one with almost no chance of happening—*could* occur, given enough time and opportunity. Imagine billions of monkeys, each given a typewriter. Each monkey randomly presses keys. Eventually, one of them might accidentally type something readable. If given enough time—possibly even an infinite amount—these monkeys could eventually type every book ever written, all without intent or intelligent design. Though simple, this concept has surprisingly deep implications, especially in physics.

Maybe my seemingly scripted experience with Diane was just one of those rare chances—like a monkey hitting all the right keys in the exact right order. But I doubt it.

The real challenge lies in figuring out whether we’re seeing true intelligence at work in the universe—or just random events that, by coincidence, appear to be intelligently designed. To me, the Diane event seemed far too precise to be random. It would be like just a few monkeys typing out a specific, predicted passage in a short period of time. Not likely. In my view, Diane’s appearance in my life—and how it unfolded—suggests something more intentional.

A Deeper Look at "Monkeys and Typewriters"

Throughout human history, as we’ve tried to understand reality, our thinking has split into two paths. Religion explained existence as the work of God. Science argued that mathematical laws govern the universe and that mathematics—not a deity—is the ultimate truth.

With the advent of powerful computers, scientists discovered something curious. The mathematical models used to explain how the universe evolved to support life required precise fine-tuning. This posed a philosophical dilemma. A finely-tuned universe seemed to imply an intelligent designer.

To avoid this implication, some scientists turned to a wildly creative mathematical explanation. Enter the concept of infinite multiverses—a kind of mathematical sleight of hand sometimes illustrated using the “monkeys and typewriters” analogy. According to this thinking, there’s no need for a God or cosmic Mathematician. Instead, if enough random universes are generated—an infinite number, in fact—then one of them (ours) was bound to turn out just right.

If our universe hadn’t been so precisely tuned, life couldn’t have emerged at all. So of course we’re here to observe it—it’s only in a universe like this one that beings like us could exist. The idea is that our existence is the outcome of excess—a kind of cosmic lottery win. No intelligent design is needed. It’s the ultimate free lunch.

But I have a problem with that.

How can a dynamic, creative universe emerge from a purely mathematical model that is, by its very nature, changeless? Something seems to be missing from this explanation. There has to be more underlying structure we haven't yet considered. (I explore these ideas further in *Book 2 – Making More Waves*)

The “monkeys and typewriters” analogy is a helpful generalization. It captures the potential outcome of random events that only *appear* to be the product of intelligent design. Mathematically, it explores the interaction between randomness and an unimaginably large (possibly infinite) number of relational events.

Imagine again: infinite monkeys, infinite typewriters, hitting keys at random. The resulting output would be a stream of meaningless characters. But somewhere, buried in the chaos, would be every imaginable sentence, paragraph, and book—including this one. Even the complete works of Shakespeare would be typed... eventually.

This is where mathematical magic happens. It's the illusion of intention created by randomness and infinity. According to this line of thinking, there's no need for a God or Mathematician—if the conditions of randomness and infinite trials are physically possible.

But that's a big “if.”

Here's the catch: infinity is a concept, not a number.

In mathematics, infinity is very real. But in the physical universe, we don't see literal infinities. When we talk about infinity in the context of the real world, what we actually mean are unimaginably large numbers—not endless ones. There's a big difference between the mathematical universe and the physical one, and we need to understand which one we're dealing with before drawing conclusions.

So, how many events does it take to simulate the illusion of intelligent planning? Because in a real, physical universe, you can't have an infinite number of anything—not even “mathematical magic.” If intelligent intent were actually at work, it could easily be overlooked or dismissed.

Still, we must consider the possibility of purpose. At the same time, we have to acknowledge that our brains are constantly bombarded by massive amounts of random input every day. So much so, it would be surprising if we didn't occasionally come across a coincidence that *seems* too perfect to be random.

This is where people often see the hand of divine intent. But “monkeys and typewriters” alone can't prove that everything we experience is the result of randomness. Unintended patterns are part of life, and we must consider them when asking whether something was planned—or not.

The hard question is this: *When are we actually seeing intelligence at work in the universe?*

Religious traditions see the hand of a Creator everywhere. Science, on the other hand, tends to brush off intelligence in favor of mathematical chance. Personally, I believe the truth lies somewhere in between those extremes—on a spectrum that spans both randomness and intention.

CHAPTER 6

Higher-Self or Over-Soul

The Diane experience created a need for a deeper explanation—specifically, how such an extraordinary level of coordination could have occurred. That’s when the idea of a *higher-self* or *over-soul* began to take shape in my thinking.

It seemed possible that my higher-self—or over-soul—had somehow worked in concert with the higher-selves of others to orchestrate the Diane sequence. In some belief systems, every person has a higher-self or over-soul that guides them throughout life. This over-soul communicates subconsciously with the individual’s soul and may also coordinate with the over-souls of others, or perhaps with an even higher collective identity.

In this case, there were seven players: Ann, Diane, Bill, Dr. Joy, the driver who happened to vacate the parking spot, Diane’s roommate, and me.

Ann and I had only just met in September of 1977. She knew nothing about me, yet predicted that finding Diane would feel like a miracle. At the time, I had no plans to go to Michigan. Bill, an old friend I hadn’t spoken with in years, called the very next day. He invited me to Detroit and set the timing for the visit.

After searching for Diane at Oakland University and coming up empty, I was getting into my car in the dark when Dr. Joy called out to me by name. I had given up the search. I had met Dr. Joy only a handful of times, six years earlier, through Diane. Yet he knew exactly where to direct me.

Later that night, I seriously questioned whether it was wise to pursue a married woman. After all, my last memory of Diane was her running away from me. And yet, two days later, there I was—driving a hundred miles without a clear idea of where I was going or what I hoped to find.

At Michigan State’s Veterinary School, I asked the receptionist for help and got nowhere. On a whim, I asked a passing student if she knew Diane. Astonishingly, she was Diane’s roommate—and she offered to take me right to her.

Was this a miracle? At the very least, it was something highly unusual.

Based on how Diane had reacted six years earlier, I didn’t expect a warm welcome. But she was genuinely happy to see me—just as Ann had predicted. And then it happened: Diane repeated Ann’s exact words from a month and a half earlier, spoken over nine hundred miles away. At that moment, Ann’s use of the word *miracle* no longer felt like an exaggeration.

By some definitions, this event had broken what we assume to be the natural laws of the universe—and that would qualify as a miracle.

If humans are capable of organizing this kind of real-world “play,” I’ve never heard of it. This was the most extreme form of precognition I had ever encountered. It required the cooperation of seven people—none of whom, besides myself, seemed consciously aware they were involved in anything unusual. That led me to speculate: how could something like this be possible?

Thinking of the entire event as a play—or a staged performance—was helpful in making sense of it. We were actors, with the world as our stage, to borrow from Shakespeare. Except for me, no one realized they were hitting their cues. If they weren’t consciously involved, then perhaps their higher-selves were. The seven-person play seemed to require coordination at a level above our everyday awareness.

Looking at the whole event, and comparing it with other strange, well-organized experiences, the idea of an over-soul became a logical possibility.

The relationship between an over-soul and the individual soul might be similar to that between a parent and a child. Take a child growing up in a neighborhood. Most of the time, the child is unaware of how much the parents are shaping the environment—the schools, the parks, the home life, the financial support. The child is simply living. But behind the scenes, the parents are making all the big decisions.

In the same way, an over-soul might organize and influence life’s key lessons while still allowing a degree of free will in how we respond to those lessons. This could explain the precise organization that allowed the Diane event to unfold exactly as it did. I was given a backstage pass to see how it worked. Judging by the control and coordination involved, I can only assume that the intended outcome was achieved.

And clearly, that outcome wasn’t for Diane and me to end up together. Even my bond with Ann seemed to lead nowhere. The real purpose appeared to be to launch me into a personal quest—a deep search for answers.

That, in itself, was a success. My obsession with understanding these strange phenomena had officially begun.

These puzzle pieces—though limited—were enough to get me started. But the idea of over-souls raises even more possibilities, including karma and past lives. It gave me new ways of thinking about those ideas. Could past lives be something like sibling lives—different incarnations overseen by the same over-soul?

If that’s true, it might explain why some people feel as though they’re remembering a past life. Maybe it’s the over-soul—or the psychic platform itself—using past-life imagery to emphasize something in a current relationship. That could easily be misinterpreted as a literal past life.

If so, then it’s another example of the psychic platform blending current experiences with old information to create something new and meaningful—something greater than the sum of its parts. And if *that’s* true, then the psychic platform also demonstrates intent.

My understanding of higher-selves and over-souls didn't come from faith—it came from observation. From trying to make sense of what I had witnessed.

CHAPTER 7

Looking for Answers: A Can of Worms

"Question with boldness even the existence of God; because, if there be one, He must more approve of the homage of reason, than that of blindfolded fear."

— Thomas Jefferson

I pulled into my parents' driveway in Maine around 9 p.m. They were surprised to see me, completely unaware of how complicated their son's "time off" had become. To be honest, even I didn't realize how tangled my life had gotten. My discomfort with the whole psychic ordeal kept me from telling anyone about it—not even my parents. That said a lot about how guarded I had become.

After the usual small talk, I turned my attention back to what mattered: finding answers. And the only place I could think to start was with Ann.

Despite the thirteen-hour drive and the late hour, I called her. It had been almost two months since my reading, so I had to reintroduce myself. She didn't remember me at first, which wasn't surprising—she mentioned she had done many readings since the newspaper article came out.

"Listen," I said, trying to sound composed but firm, "I know it's late, but I really need your help. It's important. I promise it won't take long. I'll pay you thirty dollars for your time. I can be there by ten-thirty."

She sounded irritated by the disruption to her evening, but eventually she agreed.

Right at 10:30 p.m., I knocked on her door. She led me to the small living room on the left, lit some candles, and got straight to work. Her face looked tired, even sad, but the tea was already poured and waiting on the floor.

"I usually don't do readings this late," she said, "but... oh! Now I remember you. How have you been?"

"I've been better," I said. "Your reading came true—exactly as you said." But her face didn't change.

"I hope that was a good thing?" she asked. "I never remember what I say during readings. Once it's done, I let it go. The information doesn't belong to me anyway."

Her words made me feel even more isolated. The more I thought about it, the more I realized how disconnected everyone else was from this psychic play. Ann had started the whole thing, but now she was completely out of the picture. Diane had no idea what had happened, and I was the only one who seemed aware that something strange had occurred. I was not just an actor in this play—I might've been the only one in the audience. Or was I?

That raised the real question: If I didn't create this event... and if Diane didn't... and if Ann didn't even remember the reading—then who, or what, was behind it all? Who was writing this story, and why?

"Don't you care whether your readings are accurate?" I asked.

"Of course," she replied. "But I don't care about the details. I go down to level, and the information flows. It belongs to the person I'm reading for. If I got caught up in the details, I wouldn't be able to receive clearly. Right?"

I had no idea how she did what she did, but I was sure of one thing—it wasn't just her. She was tapping into something incredibly complex and unfathomably large.

"So how do you know your readings are accurate?" I asked again.

"People come back," she said. "They send their friends and family. I figure that's a good enough indicator, don't you think?"

"Fair enough," I said. "Do you stay busy?"

"Since the newspaper article, my phone hasn't stopped ringing. I can only handle four readings a day, and I'm booked for a month." She looked exhausted.

"Thanks again for seeing me tonight. I'm trying to make sense of what happened since our first session. Something strange—really strange—has happened. You predicted it in detail. I just need help figuring out what to do next. Right now, I feel like I'm trying to sail without any wind."

"Okay," she said. "I won't use the cards. I'll just go down to level and see what comes through."

She closed her eyes and went quiet. I noticed her facial expressions shift slightly, like she was reacting to something invisible. A part of me wondered what I was doing—sitting in a stranger's candlelit living room, waiting for a message from the unknown. But another part of me thought, *She nailed it once. Maybe she can do it again.*

After a few minutes, she opened her eyes. "I'm sorry," she said. "I'm not getting much. The only message I'm receiving is that you should write her. Tell her how you feel."

That was it?

I was stunned. After the accuracy of her last reading, this felt like a letdown. It was vague, generic—something any casual friend might suggest over tea. It was as if I wanted more from the play than the playwright was willing to offer.

All I could say was, "Thank you." I paid her and left.

Driving home, I wasn't angry with Ann—I was angry with whatever had orchestrated this strange play. Why set all this up just to leave me dangling?

(It would take another eighteen years to get a possible answer. The story continues in 1984... and again in 1994. But to make sense of it, the events must unfold in their proper order.)

Even though Ann had encouraged me to express my feelings, I wasn't sure writing to a married woman—especially one as conservative and church-going as Diane—was a smart idea. I put everything on hold. I had a family trip to Sicily coming up in early December. The letter would have to wait.

Sicily was amazing. I loved the history, culture, food, and scenery. But on the flight home, I got sick. I spent the next two weeks in bed.

During that time, I wrote the letter to Diane. Looking back, it was poorly written—not very diplomatic or subtle. If there was a higher power guiding me, it must've had dyslexia too.

Diane waited a week to reply. Maybe she hoped her letter would arrive after Christmas. But it landed on Christmas Eve, 1977.

Inside the envelope was my own letter—returned. Written boldly on the back were the words:

I NEVER WANT TO SEE OR HEAR FROM YOU AGAIN.
—DIANE

The rejection hit like a sledgehammer. I was instantly transported back to the moment I'd first seen the engagement ring on her hand. But this—this felt even more cruel. I felt utterly betrayed. Why had I been led down this road?

The old Greek proverb echoed in my head: *He whom the gods would destroy, they first grant clarity.*

More than ever, I needed to know what was happening to me. It didn't make sense. How could Ann be so spot-on in her first reading—and then miss so completely in the second?

But like it or not, Ann was still the only link I had to the mystery.

I called for another appointment. I didn't mention anything about what had happened. She didn't remember me again, but wrote my name down for January 1, 1978 at 3:00 p.m.

Then she paused. “You’ve been here before... haven’t you?”

“Yes,” I replied—and hung up.

That summer, my sister and her family had moved from Michigan to Key Biscayne, Florida. After scheduling my appointment with Ann, my parents invited me to join them on a winter

vacation to visit family. The timing was perfect. I could keep the appointment and then escape the cold of Maine for a while. Honestly, I needed it. I was teetering on the edge.

On New Year's Day, I knocked again on the door of that old grey house by the river. I had sealed Diane's letter inside a larger envelope. Ann answered the door looking more rested, though still a bit sad.

"Happy New Year," we both said, smiling awkwardly.

We sat down on the floor, our usual mugs of hot tea beside us. This time, I tried something different.

"I'd like you to hold this envelope," I said, handing it to her. "Just feel what's in it, if you would."

She looked puzzled. "I don't usually get much from paper—just images of leaves, branches, and trees. But I'll try."

"That's all I ask," I said.

She pressed the envelope between her palms. Almost instantly, she reacted.

"Wow. There's something in here someone really didn't want to see. I get this flurry of hands pushing it away."

That was interesting—but still vague.

Eventually, I asked if she would open it.

As she unfolded the envelope and saw the letter, her expression changed. She seemed to understand more.

"Oh... Chip. I'm really sorry. Diane is like a box within a box. The outer box is the face she shows to her family, husband, friends, church, and society. Anything that doesn't fit that world, she locks deep inside her inner box. I've been reading her love for you from inside that inner box. But I'm afraid her feelings will never be released—unless that inner box grows so full it bursts open the outer one. That may never happen. I'm so sorry."

I didn't know what to say. I paid her and left. I don't think she even read Diane's letter with the bold print.

It felt like this entire psychic play was written by the Greek gods—and meant to be a tragedy. Sarcastically, I thought, *Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to you, too. Bah humbug. Thanks for nothing... and f** you, too.**

My Wonderland had teeth—and now I had the marks to prove it.

As for whether this qualified as a true “can of worms,” I’ll let you decide that for yourself. At the time, though, it just stank.

(A Note Out of Sequence)

You might think this second strange event ended here. That any future connection to a mysterious playwright was just my imagination running wild. But in 1984—six years later—another bizarre event occurred. It didn’t involve psychics, but the outcome chilled me. I told my story... and then just watched. It showed me that my Wonderland had a long reach—and a dark sense of humor. Be sure to read *Diane... Revisited* when we get there.

(From my 1978 Notes)

Let me recap Ann’s original prediction. She said, “*When you say goodbye, something will happen that will open up a can of worms.*”

What started as an intriguing series of predictions had suddenly become far too personal.

After paying six dollars for what seemed like a useless reading, something truly unusual had happened. A stranger—Ann—had shared specific details about my past and future. Some of those predictions were for events that wouldn’t happen for another six weeks—and would take place over nine hundred miles away.

More astonishingly, she quoted Diane word for word—and described her uncharacteristic action of touching my hand.

The Diane Reading raised real questions about fate and free will. Ann’s psychic insight suggested that high-level information could be shared across space and time—something not accounted for by any scientific model.

Even more concerning, the reading seemed to show not just foresight—but *intent*. In science, the only kind of “intent” allowed is nature’s intent to follow laws. But even that’s a stretch, because intent implies intelligence. The idea of a disembodied, organizing intelligence would make most scientists extremely uncomfortable.

As an agnostic, I wasn’t thrilled either. But the events happened. I couldn’t ignore them just because they didn’t align with my beliefs.

And there was something even more disturbing.

The Diane Reading implied that this invisible intelligence had the power to manifest physical change across space and time. I came to think of it—half-jokingly, half-seriously—as *the puppet master*.

Was I part of a scripted puppet show?

The deeply personal nature of what happened forced me to ask a harder question: *Why?*

I seemed to be the only audience member. If that's the case, then any answer to "Why?" must be rooted in the effect these events had on me.

Here's what I know about myself: my greatest strength—and my biggest weakness—is that I'm tenacious. These strange events latched onto that trait, especially through the pain of my broken heart. Whoever or whatever the puppet master was, it felt like he was also a fisherman—and he had baited the hook with a can of worms.

And let's be honest—if the puppet master has a sense of humor, picking me was a bold choice. A brokenhearted, tenacious, agnostic, dyslexic heretic? Probably not anyone's first pick to go unraveling the mysteries of existence.

But here we are.

CHAPTER 8

Miami, Florida – 1978 – The Arthur Ford Academy of Parapsychology (*Strange Event #3*)

The warmth of the Florida sun was a welcome relief after the snow and ice of Maine. My sister's house was big enough that it was easy to avoid typical family friction. Spending two months in Florida gave me time to read—and my imagination was hungry. I wanted to explore this new world of thought I had been thrust into, but nothing I read came close to explaining what had happened before I left Maine.

Still, it felt important to read how others tried to understand their corners of the universe. I especially liked the physicist Dr. Paul Davies. His book *Space and Time in the Modern Universe* rekindled my interest in physics by explaining complex ideas in an accessible way. I also started reading philosophy books from the New Age movement. But the more I read about science and the paranormal, the clearer it became: the bridge I was looking for—the one between my strange experiences and rational understanding—just didn't exist. Not yet.

Then another rabbit-hole opened up—once again, in an unexpected place.

I had shared some of my strange experiences with Mom. She trusted my judgment but remained skeptical. One day, knowing I was curious about the paranormal, she showed me an article in a Miami newspaper about the Arthur Ford Academy for the Study of the Paranormal.

The article described the academy's purpose and how it came to be. They offered psychic readings for a fee, but healing sessions were free. At the time, I was struggling with allergies and asthma made worse by Florida's endless growing season. My six-hour medications weren't lasting more than five hours. I needed more relief just to breathe. Despite not having any faith in energy healing, my curiosity was piqued. A reading and a free healing? Why not? I figured I had nothing to lose and called to book an appointment in late February.

The appointment was set for 10 a.m. on a Friday. The academy was located just a few miles south and west of the Key Biscayne Causeway. I wasn't sure what to expect, and just finding the building proved difficult. The neighborhood was filled with typical 1950s and 60s-style ranch homes on tiny lots with barely any trees. The main roads were wide and flanked by two-story commercial buildings with flat roofs—none particularly attractive.

After driving past the address several times, I finally spotted a single glass door with the academy's name and address in gold stencil. It was next to a drab gravel parking lot. So far, I wasn't impressed.

The door opened to a narrow hallway with a steep staircase leading to the second floor. It appeared the Arthur Ford Academy shared space with a Spiritualist Church upstairs. Not exactly what I had pictured, but I figured I might as well see it through—we'd be back in Maine in a week. I wasn't signing up for anything long-term.

The hallway stretched the length of the building, dimly lit by windows at either end. It looked like it might've once been a dentist's office. All I could see were dark, closed doors with frosted glass and gold lettering. It was exactly 10 a.m. There was no one around. I picked a door at random and knocked.

To my surprise, it opened. A professional-looking woman greeted me. She introduced herself as my reader and invited me in. No tea. No candles. Just two straight-backed chairs facing each other. This was a different vibe from my previous experience with Ann—but at least it was clean and orderly.

She dove into the session immediately, talking at a rapid pace about seemingly trivial things. Her gaze stayed fixed just over my right shoulder, and she seemed distant—like she was watching something invisible behind me. For the next 30 minutes, nothing she said made sense, but I smiled politely anyway. This wasn't working. I was ready to hand her forty dollars and go back to the beach.

Finally, she paused. I hadn't said a word.

As an afterthought, she added, "You would benefit from a healing. I felt something in your chest. Your lungs are tight—you're having trouble breathing."

Maybe she heard something in my voice, but I was fully medicated and hadn't felt short of breath. Still, I was going to pay the fee regardless. A free healing? Why not. The room was cool with air conditioning, and I appreciated the break from the heat. I agreed, mostly out of politeness.

"One moment," she said. "I think two healers would be better than one." Then she left the room.

Even though this wasn't "psychic" in the traditional sense, things were starting to feel a bit bizarre. She had a robotic politeness that didn't feel entirely genuine.

A few minutes later, she returned with a younger woman. Without any further small talk, they got started.

"Please stand up," she said. "I'll work on your front. Betty will work on your back."

My inner smart-aleck wanted to make a joke, but I kept it to myself.

"What should I do?" I asked, feeling awkward.

"Just stand with your arms at your sides and try to relax," she said. "We're going to direct healing energy where it's needed." For the first time, she smiled.

"Okay," I said, closing my eyes. I felt silly standing there, but after a few moments, I began to feel heat moving along my face and body. It was as if their hands were only an inch away, trapping warmth between us.

Curious, I opened my eyes—and was startled to see the healer in front of me standing three feet away. Still, I could feel intense heat on my face as her hands moved in rhythm. I even felt warmth through my clothing. That surprised me.

The session lasted about ten minutes. Then, just as abruptly as they'd started, they stopped.

“What’s next? Do I get flipped over?” I joked.

Neither healer cracked a smile.

“You have a dark area in your energy field over your lungs,” she said. “We tried to redirect the flow of your energy to clear it. That kind of blockage can lead to respiratory problems—like asthma or chronic inflammation.”

“I have both,” I said.

“It was very clear to us,” she replied.

Now I was intrigued. “Should I stop taking my asthma medication and see what happens?”

“No,” she said, her tone sharp. “We’re not doctors. Keep taking whatever your physician prescribed.”

“Then how will I know if this helped?” I asked.

“You’ll feel better,” she said. “Your medications will work more effectively. You’ve been having trouble with their duration. This healing should help with that.”

She was right. I hadn’t mentioned anything about that specific issue. Was it a lucky guess? Or was she a better healer than psychic?

As I left, she said, “If you think it helped, come back Sunday night after our service. We do free healings for anyone in need.”

Once her shift was over, her robotic demeanor faded. She actually seemed compassionate.

“Thanks... I might,” I said.

Over the weekend, I skipped my medication. No symptoms. Whatever they had done—it had worked. My parents were amazed. For nearly two months, they had heard me start wheezing like clockwork an hour before my next dose. Now—nothing.

Mom wanted to see the healers herself. My 11-year-old niece Liz was curious, too. So, Sunday night turned into a family outing.

We climbed the stairs of the Spiritualist Church. I knew little about their beliefs, and I was curious to see what would happen. We could always leave if it got too weird. But the fact I'd been symptom-free for over 60 hours gave me plenty of reason to stay open-minded.

The hallway was still dim, but one door halfway down was open, spilling warm orange light into the corridor. We stepped into a large, softly lit meeting room. Pairs of people were scattered around the space, engaged in what I assumed were healing sessions.

My "reader" greeted us at the door. She seemed genuinely pleased to see me. Liz and Mom joked they were there for moral support, which I found funny—but the woman didn't smile.

She led us to folding chairs in a corner, then introduced me to my healer: "Henry will be working with you tonight."

Henry looked like a tall farmer straight out of central casting—bib overalls and thick horn-rimmed glasses.

I thought, *Where's the pretty girl? I get Mr. Green Jeans?* But before I could say anything, he launched into his script.

"Take my hand," he boomed. "Prepare to receive the healing power of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior."

I wasn't trying to be rude, but this pushed the limits of my curiosity. I considered excusing myself, but he was already deep into his sermon.

"Think of me as a conduit of His grace and healing powers," he continued. "He holds my right hand, and you hold my left. ...I feel your problem began in early childhood. First grade. You were five or six. There was someone in authority—maybe a teacher. She beat the other children but left you alone. You were filled with rage. You cut yourself off from her. That rage turned inward. It caused problems—from learning difficulties to health."

That stopped me cold.

Few people knew about Miss Gordon—my first-grade teacher. Fewer still knew how much I hated her cruelty, especially toward the Black children in our class. How did he know that? Could my dyslexia, my asthma, and my buried anger be connected?

He continued, "You don't need this disease in your chest. You can let it go. You carry too much fire in your heart. You must release it."

"How?" I asked.

"In your heart, imagine a garden," he said. "With two benches and a gate. One day, this person walks by. Invite her in. Sit together. Talk. When it's done, say goodbye—and both of you say: *I forgive you for the wrongs you've done to me.* Do this every night, until your heart heals."

I thanked him. I smiled, though I wasn't sure what to make of it all. I wasn't converted to Spiritualism on the spot. I couldn't even process what had just happened.

I almost missed this rabbit-hole. If I had walked out, I would've lost a valuable piece of the puzzle.

We stayed for a demonstration of "aura drawing." All three of us participated. The line between novelty and a genuine strange event was razor thin. Like old mapmakers scribbling warnings in the margins, I was tempted to write in my journal: "*There may be nuts here.*"

Dante's Inferno, *Alice's Wonderland*, and my own strange journey all shared one thing: a descent into the unknown.

Truth shouldn't be relative. But I was beginning to question even my most basic beliefs.

I had a lot to think about. The next day we were heading back to Maine, and I needed clarity.

The drive home was an adventure in itself. The 1978 snowstorms had battered the East Coast. Maine was still digging out. I-95 was closed all the way to Washington, D.C. We spent an extra day with Aunt Lois and Uncle Frank in North Carolina.

The next day, the weather channel reported that I-95 was open again from D.C. to Connecticut. As we continued north, the snowbanks grew taller.

Meanwhile, my asthma acted strangely. From Friday through Monday, I'd been fine. But as we drove, the symptoms returned, then disappeared, then returned again. It felt like the healing was fading, even though I was meditating nightly in my "garden."

I couldn't see how my imagination could influence something as physical as asthma. The idea seemed like science fiction.

But within six months, I'd start rethinking that—along with a lot of other things.

Why would puppets need imagination? It didn't make sense. Still, I couldn't shake the feeling I was being watched. Not paranoia—but a conclusion drawn from logic, not fear.

After four long days, we finally made it home.

I knew what I had to do next.

I needed to call Ann.

CHAPTER 9

Ivy and Peter – A Tale of Two Ghosts (*Strange Event #4*)

"The unexamined life is not worth living."
— Socrates

Returning to Maine with four feet of snow on the ground didn't exactly lift my spirits. After Florida, I needed someone to talk to—someone who wouldn't think I was crazy for saying I'd experienced a healing. Four months earlier, I had called Ann late at night, and on impulse, I did it again.

Although we had only met three times for readings, I found her easy to talk to. This time, she remembered me. She mentioned that midwinter was a slow time for readings. As the hours passed, we talked and talked—about our lives, our thoughts, our histories. Neither of us stopped to ask, *Why am I telling a stranger all this?*

Ann was married to Tom, a computer operator stationed at Pease Air Force Base in New Hampshire. They had a daughter named Mary. Ann had moved around a lot growing up because her stepfather worked for IBM. She spent most of her teen years in southwestern Connecticut. She and Tom had met in high school. She was technically a British citizen—born abroad and never having changed it. Her parents had divorced, and her real father, who had remarried and lived in Canada, was kept from having a relationship with her because his new wife was jealous of Ann and her mother.

Ann had always felt different. From a young age, she “just knew things.” Her mother and stepfather were heavy drinkers—especially when dining out. These weren't pleasant meals. She'd sit silently for hours while they drank. Occasionally, a kind waiter would sneak her something to eat. With nothing else to do, she would stare at people and imagine their stories. Oddly, the stories just came to her. As a teenager, she began focusing on friends and soon discovered that what she saw in her mind often turned out to be true.

After Tom was transferred to Pease, Ann wanted to live in Maine, where she and her mother had spent joyful summers. But money was tight. She began doing psychic readings to help with household expenses. Aside from the newspaper reporter, I was one of her first paying clients.

As I shared my story, I reminded her about the Diane reading and also told her about my experience at the Arthur Ford Academy. She didn't comment much on Diane, seeming mostly unfazed. She did apologize for not picking up on Diane being emotionally trapped. However, the part about the healing caught her attention.

I mentioned how the effects of the healing had faded. “Florida’s a bit of a commute for follow-up sessions,” I joked.

“That’s really interesting,” she said. “I’m part of the Unitarian-Universalist Psychic Symposium. Last week, we had speakers from the Old Orchard Spiritualist Church. They sound similar to the group you visited in Florida. They offer psychic readings for a fee and free healings to anyone who wants them.”

“Well, it’s closer than Florida,” I said. “But what do they actually believe?”

“They’re Christians, but with a twist,” she explained. “They believe communication with the dead is proof that Jesus survived the crucifixion, and they incorporate this into their services. They also hold séances after services to help people connect with loved ones who’ve passed on.”

“I don’t know... ghosts might be a bit much for me,” I admitted. “What time do they do the healings?”

“Usually after the séance. The whole thing starts at seven on Friday or Sunday nights. They said anyone is welcome to attend just the séance and healing, no pressure. A few of us are going tonight. Want to come?”

It was already past midnight. “Sure,” I said. “Maybe another healing will help with my asthma. Worth a try.”

“Great. Meet me at my place. We’ll carpool—it’s not easy to find with all this snow. Let’s say 6:00.”

“I’ll be there. Goodnight—it was great talking to you.”

“It really was. See you later... Goodnight!”

It was now 2:00 a.m. Our chat had felt completely natural—but also a bit surreal. Nothing about it stood out as strange, yet everything about it was.

What were the odds? An agnostic like me, involved with not one but *two* Spiritualist churches within the same week—one in Florida, the other in Maine. Statistically, that couldn’t be zero, but the chances were undeniably small.

We all live inside countless overlapping relationships. Most of the time, we’re unaware of how many are happening around us. Occasionally, these chance connections appear so precise they feel planned. It’s a lighter version of the “monkeys and typewriters” effect—random combinations creating what appears to be order. The problem is, with infinite time and infinite monkeys, *everything* becomes possible. But at what point does this kind of reasoning become excessive rationalization—mathematical magic that hides a deeper, more intentional complexity?

As coincidences pile up, it starts to feel less like randomness and more like a coordinated series of rabbit-hole events. But for now, I set the thoughts aside. It was time for bed.

The next day I caught up on mail and business. Maine was still buried under snow—now with a thick crust of ice. Living on the ocean might sound romantic, and for the first few years, it is. But like buying a painting, over time it fades into the background. You have to go to the beach, walk the shoreline, actively engage to find the beauty again. People spend millions for a view they eventually stop noticing. Winter at the ocean has its own personality—cold, gray, and often brutal.

That evening at 6:00 sharp, I knocked on Ann’s familiar door. Chaos stirred inside. Ann answered quickly, looking rushed. “Sorry! I’m running late. Please introduce yourself to the ladies.” She vanished before I could respond.

Inside the living room sat two women, bundled up and quiet, purses on laps as if waiting for a bus—or planning a fast exit. It felt more like a wake than a Friday night event.

I smiled and introduced myself. Both women responded at the same time. I caught only one name: Hilda. Her accent matched her strong German name.

“So... tonight should be interesting,” I said, trying to spark conversation.

I got small nods. No eye contact.

“I’m mostly here for the healing,” I continued. “What about you? Curious about the séance?”

The unnamed woman replied first. “I’m the recording secretary for the U-U Psychic Symposium. I’m just here to take notes. Ann wanted a better turnout.”

So... this was no party.

Turning to Hilda, I asked, “And you?”

“I’m a hairdresser. I did Ann’s hair this morning. She told me about the séance and said I could come if I wanted. So... here I am,” she said, not sounding too sure.

We made an odd little group of inquiring minds.

Just then, the front door burst open. Ann reappeared in a whirlwind of motion, muttered something to the secretary, and disappeared again. A man’s voice called out from the back: “No, I did not poke you in the back!” It sounded like an argument ending—or just starting.

Moments later, Tom and little Mary entered the room. Everyone except Mary was smiling. She, however, looked like she was seeing something no one else could. Tom had a classic strong build

and a confident, salesman-like demeanor. Mary had a piercing gaze that made you feel like she could see right through you. The three of them looked like a modern-day version of *American Gothic*.

“We’re finally ready,” Ann said. “This is my husband Tom, and our lovely little Mary. Let’s go. We need to drop Mary off with the sitter first.”

Everyone moved quickly. Ann asked Tom again if he had poked her in the back. He denied it. Again.

We split into two cars. The secretary drove alone. The rest of us squeezed into Hilda’s big Cadillac. After dropping Mary off, we made the icy drive to Old Orchard Beach.

The destination: an old 19th-century farmhouse connected to a series of outbuildings. It looked massive—and mysterious. We parked alongside six other cars and climbed a set of back stairs. Through the window, we saw about ten people already gathered in a darkened room, seated in a circle around a single candle.

A sign beside the door read: *Old Orchard Spiritualist Church*.

We were five minutes late.

“Sorry! The roads were really bad,” Ann apologized.

The circle of people stared silently. We found spare chairs and slipped into the room. I ended up next to a window. Ann sat beside me, with Tom on her other side. Hilda sat a quarter-turn away from us. I didn’t see where the secretary went—likely in the back, taking notes.

As my eyes adjusted, I focused on the lone candle. It sat atop a large Bible, both resting on a small stool in the center of the circle. Most of those in the room were well over sixty. Only a young girl across from me appeared to be in her twenties.

The minister cleared his throat and continued from where he had left off.

“We invite any spirit of our loved ones to come forward and speak to us this evening.”

Time passed. I started to wonder if this was all a mistake.

Then Ann flinched.

She looked behind her. Then at me. Then at Tom.

She leaned over and whispered, “I’ve felt someone poking me in the back all day—and it hurts.”

I had no idea how to respond.

Just then, the woman next to the minister pointed to Ann. “There’s a spirit with you. She’s on the porch of a house next to a river. She’s in her thirties, with long brown hair and two children. She’s worried about her daughter and wants your help...”

Ann jumped again.

“She’s been poking you in the back all day. I just saw you feel it.”

I was stunned. This couldn’t be staged—could it?

Then an older man, who resembled the TV character Charlie Weaver, leaned forward and pointed at Hilda.

“To rid yourself of the horror lurking in that room, you must confront it. Only by facing it will it go away.”

Ann, Tom, and I watched Hilda’s reserved reaction. She gave a small, uneasy nod.

Then the young girl across the room leaned forward and pointed at Ann.

“Whatever you do... don’t let go of the cross. Keep your hand on the cross. It will protect you against evil. Remember what I say.”

It was surreal. This wasn’t physics class—it was the Mad Hatter’s Tea Party.

I no longer wanted a healing. We politely stayed for tea and cookies and made a quick exit.

Back in the car, I asked, “So... anyone get anything meaningful?”

Ann shrugged. “Not really. I’m not Catholic, so the cross warning doesn’t apply. The woman on the porch—no idea. The poking? That was weird, but maybe she saw me react and guessed.”

Skeptical Ann—now that was interesting.

“She knew you’d been poked *all day*?” I asked.

“True...”

“Oh! You didn’t get your healing!” Ann suddenly remembered.

“I got better,” I said dryly. “What about you, Hilda? I saw you nodding at Charlie Weaver’s warning.”

She hesitated. “I came hoping to get help for my sister-in-law, Molly. She believes her mother Ivy is haunting her. It’s been getting worse.”

“What about the room? Any idea what that was about?” I asked.

Hilda nodded. “We inherited Ivy’s house last year. Tried to renovate it ourselves. Some college girls rented it for the summer. After two weeks, they fled. My son tried staying there—same thing. Creepy feelings. Then Molly started sensing hate directed at her—from her dead mother. Her priest and doctors haven’t helped.”

“Do *you* get any weird feelings there?” I asked.

“No... nothing out of the ordinary.”

“What if the message was for Ivy’s spirit?” I suggested. “Maybe the psychic picked up something meant for her—not you.”

That gave Ann an idea. “Let’s go check it out. Maybe Ivy’s spirit wants us to understand.”

Everyone agreed. So, we changed course—and headed straight toward “the horror that lurks within that room.”

We arrived at a small one-and-a-half-story Cape just south of the town center on High Street. The snow there was even deeper. The house looked dark, quiet, and uninviting. The secretary had vanished somewhere along the drive back. We lined up behind Hilda, stepping into a set of old tracks that led onto the side porch.

Once Hilda switched on the kitchen light, the mood improved a bit. The place was cluttered with boxes, furniture pushed to the center of rooms, and half-painted walls—but nothing about it felt unusual. A long hallway off the dining room led to the front door. Doors lined both sides of the hall. A staircase to the left led upstairs. We paused in the dining room, near the base of the stairs.

Ann spoke first. “I feel an older woman with a walker. Let me go down to level and see what I get... She’s very kind and friendly. I don’t feel any hatred here. She’s heading to her room and wants us to follow.”

We entered the room to the right of the hallway. I went ahead and turned on a lamp next to the bed.

The room was painted deep oxblood red. Each wall had two crucifixes hanging at different heights. In the far corner stood a three-foot cement garden statue of Jesus, cloak extended. A string of rosary beads lay on the nightstand beside the bed. On the lower shelf of the nightstand sat a Ouija board.

I later looked up the word “Ouija.” It’s a blend of the French and German words for “yes”—*oui* and *ja*. I also came across a skeptical experiment involving the Ouija board. If people think they’re contacting spirits through it, try blindfolding them. If no coherent messages come

through, then they're likely just tapping into subconscious motor reflexes—a feedback loop, not a ghost.

I'm not an expert in Catholicism, but I knew enough to recognize the contradiction: a rosary and a Ouija board side by side. Spiritually, those two things don't go together.

I asked, "Is this room the same as when Ivy lived here?"

"Yes," Hilda replied. "It's the only room we left untouched."

I remembered Ann saying she could read energy from objects—psychometry. I hadn't found that word in a dictionary, but considering the other unexplained things I'd seen, it didn't seem out of place. Keeping that in mind, I picked up both the rosary and the Ouija board and handed them to Ann.

"See what you get from these," I said.

That's when things got weird.

Ann closed her eyes and began to speak. "Ivy was sick for many years before she passed. She had a degenerative illness and was housebound. She's entering the room with a walker—but now I see her getting younger. The walker is gone. She's healthy again. I wish you could see her. She has long, brown hair."

I glanced behind Ann. There on the wall was a picture of a younger woman, just as Ann described. She also resembled the woman seen on the porch during the séance.

Then Ann suddenly jolted forward.

"What just happened?" I asked.

"She poked me in the back again! There seem to be two versions of Ivy. One I'm reading—and another one that's been nagging me all day. That second Ivy just poked me again. I really wish she'd find another way to get my attention," Ann said, glaring toward the empty dining room.

Now we weren't just talking about communicating with a ghost—we were dealing with *two* representations of the same person. One ghost that could change age and form. Who would believe this?

Still, I wondered: Could these two Ivys serve different purposes? Ivy #1 might be like a memory imprint attached to this place. Ivy #2 seemed more concerned—actively trying to help her daughter Molly. One felt passive, like a shadow. The other, purposeful. A fragmented consciousness? Two functional layers?

It occurred to me that my “wonderland” was becoming dominated by non-physical relationships—each layered, complex, and at times, capable of manifesting intent. Ivy poking Ann physically seemed to support that.

Ann continued, “Ivy married in the mid-1920s. Her husband worked at the shoe factory. They had two children and were fairly happy until he was killed in an accident. There were no safety nets back then—no family, no money. Then she met Peter. This was originally Peter’s house. They moved in but never married. That caused a lot of problems. Ivy raised the kids Catholic, but the kids saw her relationship with Peter as sinful. They left home as soon as they could. Despite that, life was good—until the 1960s when Ivy became ill. She passed away last year.

“Peter was devastated. He started drinking heavily, she was terrified he’d burn down the house with her inside. She turned to her priest. Peter spiraled. He drank himself to death in the early ’70s. His room was upstairs. Ivy feared it. She wouldn’t go near it.”

I looked over at Hilda. Her head nodded in agreement like a bobblehead. Her face showed shock. Even Tom had gone quiet. It was getting intense.

“You’re saying Ivy was terrified of Peter’s room upstairs?” I asked.

“Yes,” Ann confirmed. “She saw Peter as a dangerous drunk.”

I paused. “Think back to tonight’s séance. A psychic pointed to you and described a woman on a porch asking for help. You have a similar porch. Then you were poked in the back—same as earlier today, and now again tonight. What if there are two Ivys? Ivy #1—a memory-based ghost, and Ivy #2—a concerned spirit trying to help Hilda and Molly?”

“Go on,” Ann said, intrigued. “Where are you heading with this?”

“What if Ivy #2 came to the séance and shifted from you to Hilda? Maybe Charlie Weaver’s message wasn’t for Hilda, but for Ivy. *‘To rid yourself of the horror that lurks within that room, you must confront it.’* That wasn’t directed at us. It was meant for Ivy’s spirit.”

I had no idea what I was saying. Was I completely off the rails?

“You might be right,” Ann said. “Let me see if Ivy will go upstairs with us.”

We headed for the stairs. Ann still held the rosary and the Ouija board.

“Ivy won’t come,” she said, “but we’re here—let’s check Peter’s room.”

Something about this felt... wrong. I couldn’t place it.

The room was narrow with a sloped ceiling and a single window at the far end. There was an old couch and two folding chairs. Ann immediately gagged.

“Oh God—what’s that smell? It’s awful. Urine. This room smells worse than a gas station restroom,” she said, covering her face.

“It took years to get the smell out,” Hilda added.

The rest of us smelled nothing but cold air.

Ann continued, “What I see through Peter’s eyes is different from what we see. To him, it’s summer. The window’s open. A breeze is blowing. He’s in the chair—and he’s furious we’re here. He doesn’t see our reality, but he senses our presence. He sees Ivy as a scolding churchwoman, always telling him he’s going to hell. She sees him as a drunk and a demon. They loved each other, but they became trapped in their own distorted views—locked in a destructive cycle.

“Molly feels guilt for condemning their relationship. That guilt is why she feels haunted. Peter’s angry about the rosary. Can you get it out of the room?”

“Sure,” I said, taking the rosary and tying it to a pull-chain in the next room.

Then I heard Ann scream.

The rosary had a cross.

Suddenly, the girl’s earlier warning hit me like lightning: “*Whatever you do... don’t let go of the cross.*” And Ann had.

I ran back into the room. Tom and Hilda were literally climbing the wall behind the couch. Hilda was crying out, “It’s Peter! I knew him! It’s definitely Peter!”

Ann’s face twisted with rage. Her voice slurred drunkenly: “Why don’t you all get the f*** out of my room—and take the bitch with you!”

It wasn’t Ann. It was Peter—speaking through her.

I had to act fast.

I sat down beside her and launched into a mock prayer: “Dear Lord, let us pray for the salvation of this sinner Peter. Save this poor spirit from eternal damnation...”

I don’t even pray, but I remembered enough from others. Apparently, it was enough—Peter left.

Ann came back to herself, shaken. “Having Peter in my head—that was a violation. It’s not happening again.”

We picked up Mary and drove home.

On the ride back, my thoughts raced.

My wonderland needed to include what I had just seen. It was less about fate now—and more about influence.

The girl had predicted not to let go of the cross. We had. And something had foreseen it. We had deviated from the play.

Why was Ann needed to untangle Molly's guilt? Surely this "wonderland" had other tools.

Had this whole night been staged for me to witness?

The sense of intentional design was hard to ignore.

In the end, I narrowed it down to three possibilities:

1. I was subconsciously orchestrating the events.
2. The puppet master was showing off.
3. Those damn monkeys and typewriters were still banging away.

Given how poorly I'd managed my love life, I doubted I was directing anything.

And the monkeys... well, they were running out of excuses.

That left one possibility: something in wonderland was watching, coordinating, and interacting.

But the more pieces I collected, the more questions emerged. I needed structure. Maybe a thought-experiment could help. In a swirling sea of relationships, I needed a way to think clearly—without forcing a puzzle where there might only be a collage.

CHAPTER 10

The Fallout

(Excerpts from my 1978 notes on my analysis of the Ivy and Peter event)

After the Ivy and Peter experience, I barely slept. My mind raced through the strange details of that unsettling night. So many disjointed pieces had come together to form a complete story—it was impossible not to speculate. Something didn't add up. But what?

To remain objective, I decided to take what I call the “two-hat approach.” It's my nature to question everything, including myself. Writing down my questions in black and white helped me see connections more clearly.

Question #1: Could Ann have orchestrated the entire event?

Hat #1: Yes, she could have. But if she did, it would have required meticulous planning—an intricately staged performance with props and well-rehearsed actors. I counted seven co-conspirators performing for an audience of one: me. But why? What would be the motive? I wasn't important. How could Ann have predicted that I would even call her? My call after returning from Florida was entirely impulsive.

The fact that my path crossed two different Spiritualist Churches in such a short time was completely outside Ann's control. I had chosen to visit both the Florida healing center and the Old Orchard séance—or did I? Oddly, Ann was invited to the Old Orchard church *before* my mother showed me the article about the Arthur Ford Academy. That timing felt too coincidental to ignore.

Hat #2: Maybe the event was real and should be analyzed that way.

It's definitely strange—my involvement with two Spiritualist Churches in two different states, within the same week. Could it all be coincidence? Possibly. Ann's invitation to Old Orchard seemed to stem from my story about the Florida healing. The goal, at least on the surface, was another healing—not ghost hunting. Still, I couldn't rule out the possibility that something—or someone—at a higher level was coordinating all of this.

Of course, humans are capable of hoaxes. But staging an elaborate hoax with seven people, all for a minor payoff? That seems unlikely. There was no real motive, especially for Ann, who had no way of predicting I'd call. Even in the boredom of a Maine winter, this would've been an extreme effort.

Also, I was the one who suggested visiting the house. I was the one guiding Ann's actions there.

Later, Hilda told her husband about what happened. He was outraged. The next day, they called their priest, who in turn advised contacting the police. Her husband even threatened to take out a

restraining order to prevent Ann from ever reaching out again. Meanwhile, Ann was so exhausted, she stayed in bed and had no interest in returning. She didn't even collect the ten-dollar reading fee.

Despite all this, I couldn't stop wondering if it had been a hoax. I continued attending the Old Orchard séances for nearly a year—purely as an observer. I never witnessed anything remotely like the February event again. Aside from that night, Ann and the Old Orchard Spiritualists didn't appear to have any connection at all.

Curious, I even asked the “don't let go of the cross” girl to lunch. I wanted to know if she knew Ann. She said she didn't. That February séance was the only time in two years she'd ever spoken up. She wasn't a resident psychic, just someone intrigued by the phenomenon.

Once again, I felt the undeniable presence of intent. But why?

Question #2: If the event was real, what can we conclude?

Hat #1: Maybe I was deluding myself. Maybe ghosts aren't real, and even if they were, this could just be another mystery without an answer. A “monkeys and typewriters” situation without enough time for that statistical magic to play out.

Hat #2: But... if ghosts *are* real, then what do we make of the two Ivys?

A thought-experiment might help.

Imagine a caveman seeing television for the first time. Lacking any modern context, he concludes there must be little people inside the box. He interprets what he sees using only the limited worldview he knows.

Could our modern understanding of ghosts be riddled with the same kinds of errors?

The existence of two Ivy representations might suggest a much deeper structure to reality—one we're not equipped to understand. Maybe these kinds of ghostly phenomena are clues, pointing toward the architecture of what I call my “wonderland.”

I believe nothing in the universe exists without reason. These fragments—these strange moments—may be puzzle pieces that explain why the universe *needs* wonderland woven into its fabric. The two Ivys challenge my basic understanding of identity. Perhaps identity, at its core, is a structure of relationships.

Question #3: What was the meaning of the “Charlie Weaver” reading?

The psychic’s message to Hilda seemed to have little direct meaning for her. As the night unfolded, it felt more like the message had been intended for Ivy #1.

Typically, a psychic would say the message is coming from a specific direction. So even if Ivy #2 had moved from behind Ann to behind Hilda, why would the psychic receive information for Ivy #1?

Still, the message fit. If all of these informational threads exist in wonderland, why involve us at all? Why not communicate directly within that realm?

Maybe that’s not possible. Maybe there’s a dependency between these levels of reality—a co-dependence. Or maybe, this entire experience was designed as another lesson for me. As much as it conflicts with my beliefs, I can’t rule that out.

Question #4: What do these events suggest about how relationships are maintained within my wonderland model?

Peter’s environment was different from ours, yet he was aware of us. That alone suggests something.

Could imagination be a structural element of personal reality in wonderland? Could it function as a creative organizing force?

Peter’s possession of Ann is what psychics call being “jumped”—a temporary invasion of someone’s consciousness. It’s another example of wonderland interacting with the physical world.

In Peter’s view, it was a sunny summer afternoon. The curtains were blowing in a breeze. Even the pungent smell of urine—part of *his* world—was perceptible through Ann. Not physically, but psychically.

Was the smell a kind of symbolic placeholder—something used to express his emotional state? Possibly.

Ann could even feel how Peter saw Ivy—an image completely different from her own perception. From *our* perspective, it was a cold winter night. But Ann’s sixth sense tapped into another realm. It’s possible reality isn’t a singular truth—but a layering of interactions, memories, and projected meaning.

And imagination might play a far greater role than we’ve ever understood.

Question #5: My friends often ask: “Why do these things happen to you? And why don’t they happen to us?”

Fair questions.

Writing this at age sixty-nine gives me a wider perspective than I had at twenty-nine. But even back then, I wondered if a puppet master was behind all this. Between Ann’s reading about Diane and the coincidental timing of the two Spiritualist church experiences, the evidence suggested some kind of design.

Add up all the so-called “coincidences” and you no longer have enough time to rely on “monkeys and typewriters” as an explanation.

It’s hard not to see the possibility of an orchestrated lesson. And that idea still makes me deeply uncomfortable. I never thought such a thing was possible—but it happened.

To my friends, maybe the difference is simple: I was more willing to follow the rabbit holes. Maybe they didn’t look. Maybe I did.

My 2018 Conclusion

Decades later, not much has changed.

I didn’t find a traditional God. But I also didn’t find the kind of blind, mechanical universe described in modern science lectures. I remain an agnostic—and a scientific heretic.

But I haven’t stopped thinking.

What I’ve uncovered is a hidden dimension of reality—something missed by science entirely. While science teaches that the universe blindly follows laws, my wonderland shows evidence of consciousness at multiple levels.

This hidden aspect of reality seems to support identity, express intent, and at times, exert control over physical events. Maybe our individual consciousness is just one point on a spectrum—a node in a nested system of self-awareness.

The concept of emergence becomes essential here. (I’ll explore this more in Book 2.)

Perhaps each layer of existence has its own form of self-awareness. And maybe—just maybe—those levels can clash. They can cooperate. Or they can collide in confusion.

Think of the two Ivys: could they represent a case of one hand not knowing what the other is doing?

I'm not writing as a scientist. I'm just a tenacious—if reluctant—explorer. A guy with a broken heart, a skeptical mind, and a compulsion to chase strange clues.

This is what I've found.

Ignore it at your own risk.

My wonderland is still just a crude, hypothetical map. But I believe it points toward something big—and something worth understanding.

CHAPTER 11

Ann – A New Friend

After the Ivy and Peter event, I wasn't sure how Ann and Tom would react to seeing me again that Sunday. But to my relief, I was warmly welcomed—as a new friend. The events at Ivy and Peter's house never came up. I was now one of many visitors drawn to the little grey house by the river.

Their door was always open, except when Ann was doing a reading. On many days, the house buzzed with activity—people coming and going, conversations flowing. The kitchen table, with its view of the ocean, was the central gathering place. And of course, there was always a pot of tea ready. Just off the kitchen and front hallway, a rarely used dining room acted more like an extension of the hall. In the picture window sat Ann's signature spinning wheel. But no matter how much space there was, everyone preferred crowding around the kitchen table.

The conversation was casual, but always interesting. Ann presided with warmth, sincerity, and a genuine care for others. I wouldn't say she had “followers,” but there were certainly a few true believers in her psychic abilities. Tom, bless him, would've had to be a saint not to feel at least a little jealous of the attention she attracted.

Until March 1978, I had only ever spent weekends in Maine, thanks to my job at MIT's Lincoln Labs. Aside from that, I hadn't spent much time here not working. My previous relationships were over, and most of the people I knew were summer residents or occasional visitors. This budding friendship with Ann turned out to be exactly the kind of social connection I needed.

With plenty of time on my hands, I dove into books—and Ann had no shortage of recommendations on the occult. She made it clear that the word “occult” simply meant “hidden” or “unknown.” It wasn't about demons or evil or anything dark. Still, even with all the reading, I couldn't find any scientific explanation for the things I was encountering.

During one of our first Sunday chats in the kitchen, I had the chance to ask Ann more about her abilities.

She didn't share my curiosity about *how* it all worked. For her, it was like breathing—automatic, and not something you question. I asked her why.

“If I think about it, I can't do it,” she explained. “The more I know about the person I'm reading, the harder it is to connect psychically. My own thoughts and opinions start to get in the way. I can't tell if what I'm getting is psychic or just mental noise. That's why I forget the details of readings right after I finish. The information isn't mine—it's often very personal, and it belongs to the client.

“I also can't read for myself or for my family. It's like a doctor treating their own kids—too much emotion, not enough objectivity. But reading someone new... it's like falling in love. You get to see the beauty behind the skin.”

She paused, then added, “Can you guess why I use cards when I read?”

“Is it because the patterns help you find meaning?” I asked, unsure.

“Not exactly,” she said. “There are two main reasons. First, the client watches me deal the cards. That gives me a chance to slip behind their mask and reach the real person underneath. We all wear masks to protect our inner spirit. But in order for me to read someone, I need to get in. That moment of connection—it feels like falling in love.

“Second, the cards keep me grounded. I can’t just float around. They act like a road map, giving me a place to start. That’s why the same cards laid out for two different people will feel completely different to me. If everything aligns, it’s magical—information just flows from somewhere inside me. I don’t even think about what’s happening.

“I can’t always answer questions, either. Sometimes the answer comes, sometimes it doesn’t. Whatever happens feels like it’s out of my hands.”

She spoke with real humility.

“What about psychometry?” I asked. “You’ve said you can get information by touching objects. How does that work?”

“That kind of reading is different,” she said. “When someone hands me an object, their intention influences what information comes through. Sometimes I pick up on the object’s history—its connection to other people, places, or events. Every object has its own unique psychic identity, and I can sometimes read those details.

“But people are different. They’re dynamic. They express rich emotions and complex ideas. Just like we’re all physically different, we’re also psychically different. But everything has relationships—even objects. Nothing is static in nature. Every single thing in the universe has a unique set of relationships. That’s what defines its identity. And those relationships are always evolving. That’s what I’m reading.”

I was getting a front-row seat to how Ann experienced her own abilities.

It had only been two days since the Ivy and Peter night, and she still wasn’t feeling quite like herself. The warning call from the police, passed along at Hilda’s husband’s request, didn’t seem to shake her. After all, we hadn’t broken any laws. If Hilda’s family didn’t want help anymore, that was fine with Ann.

Interestingly, the sensation of being poked in the back—something that had plagued her for days—stopped after that night. And Ann didn’t miss it.

CHAPTER 12

Charlie Chaplin's Body (*Strange Event #5*)

That first Sunday kitchen conversation with Ann ended up lasting half the day—we'd been talking for at least six hours. Just as I was saying goodbye and about to open the kitchen door, I suddenly remembered a news brief I had heard earlier. It was about Charlie Chaplin's body being dug up and stolen somewhere in Switzerland.

On impulse, I turned around and asked, "What are they doing with Charlie Chaplin's body?"

I didn't expect Ann to have anything to say. But she looked puzzled and replied, "That's strange. I see a group of men... they've got him laid out on a table and they're doing something to him. Didn't he die a while ago?"

I stopped in my tracks. "Did you hear the news today? His body's been stolen."

"No, I didn't know that," she said. "I wonder why anyone would want his body?"

"Good question," I said. "What else do you see?"

"They're making him up to look like a dead Hitler," she said. "Why would anyone do that?"

I suggested, "Maybe they're Neo-Nazis? Chaplin mocked Hitler in *The Great Dictator*. That supposedly put him on Hitler's hit list. Maybe it's revenge. Or propaganda. I really don't know."

Ann went down to level and described what she was seeing in detail—talking about the setting, the people involved, and even quoting their conversations in German. Tom, who spoke some German, quickly wrote everything down.

It felt like we were entering another strange event. But this one was strange in a different—and far more confusing—way.

Everything Ann described turned out to be completely false.

In reality, a Palestinian group had dug up Chaplin's body in Switzerland, reburied it in Austria, and demanded \$600,000 in ransom. There were no Neo-Nazis, no makeup, and no German connection. None of it matched what Ann had "seen."

She had been completely wrong.

I tried to laugh it off—no pun intended—but I was genuinely puzzled. Ann was too. She stood by what she had sensed, insisting it had come from a psychic source. To her, it *felt* right.

In mathematics, even dead-end results are sometimes important. And for me, Ann's incorrect reading stuck with me for months. While she dismissed it as just a strange miss, I kept thinking about it.

As it turned out, I was right to pay attention. That psychic misfire ended up playing a key role in a thought-experiment I would conduct later that year—in September 1978. That experiment would become known, cryptically, as *The Cyclops Experiment*. It offered a surprising reinterpretation of Ann's error and opened a window into a little-appreciated aspect of reality—one largely overlooked by science, skeptics, and even psychics themselves.

Before I dive into that experiment, more strange events would unfold, each offering new pieces to the puzzle.

The Tragic Story of Mary Catherine

Meanwhile, Ann's reputation was growing. Her popularity earned her speaking invitations throughout the Portland area. March was packed with public events, and a group of us went along to offer support. It gave me a chance to meet new people and connect with others exploring similar experiences.

Southern Maine is full of fascinating year-round residents, and one of the psychics I met was Shirley Harrison from West Buxton. She wasn't just interesting—her results spoke for themselves.

In 1970, I was still a college student. Summers were spent working at a local playhouse, sailing, and enjoying the company of usherettes. Our coastal village would swell from under a thousand full-time residents to over sixty thousand summer visitors. I didn't know the Olenchuk family, but I later learned their 13-year-old daughter, Mary Catherine, shared my love of the ocean and dreams of the future.

On August 9, Mary disappeared only a few blocks from her family's summer home. For weeks, the entire community searched the surrounding woods. I joined the efforts, searching the southern end of town. But no one found anything. It was as if she had vanished without a trace. The authorities were tight-lipped. Then, weeks later, they issued a statement: Mary's body had been found in a barn on a private estate in southern Maine.

At the time, I had no interest in anything psychic. But I remembered hearing that a Maine psychic had been involved in the case—and I filed that detail away.

Years later, I met her.

It was Shirley Harrison.

Talking to her directly gave me a chance to hear her account. A few years after the case, she wrote a book with Lynn Franklin titled *The Psychic Search* (1981), which includes a chapter about Mary's case, titled *The General's Daughter*. Shirley's abilities were startling in their specificity. She focused on locating the dead—and she had a record of success.

She told me her story about Mary Olenchuk. As best as I remember, it began like this:

“I was at home in West Buxton on the evening of August 13 when the phone rang. An elderly woman introduced herself as Mary Olenchuk's aunt and asked if I could help. I told her I'd try. She said she had gotten my number from an FBI agent.

“I spent about twenty minutes concentrating on the girl's consciousness. I asked myself, *Where is she?* The name of a town came to mind. Then I asked, *What is her situation?* And I saw it—she was dead. She had been hanged.

“Next I asked, *Where is she now?* I saw an unpainted building—on the estate of a wealthy family. The estate had three roads that came together to form a perfect Y. I saw hundreds of little trees—a tree farm. I passed the information to the police. They weren't thrilled. Psychics always made them uncomfortable. But they didn't have much else to go on, so they looked into it.”

She continued:

“The estate matched the description. The only unpainted building was a barn. The police had already searched it twice—but hadn't found anything. Still, they decided to check again, just to cover all leads.

“This time, they searched the back of the barn and found Mary buried two feet down in the hay. A second autopsy revealed a piece of lobster warp embedded in her neck.”

Police later admitted, “We didn't even know it was a nursery until years after the murder. But there it was—on the estate. When we found the body, there were already several acres of seedlings, barely taller than the grass. But it was there. Just like Shirley said.”

Not long after the body was found, the barn was destroyed by arson.

Oddly, Ann never picked up anything about the case, even though the barn was just across the river from her house.

Shirley's story stayed with me. Her insights were incredibly detailed—and yet sometimes seemed only tangential to solving the case. That tree farm detail stuck with me. It was as if she had tapped into a dense web of related information—not a direct answer, but something drawn from a larger, messier archive.

More and more, I was meeting people connected to Ann who were equally fascinating. I was quickly becoming part of Ann's unofficial inner circle. Each person had a unique story, and every one of them believed their experience was true.

Despite the mountain of books written on psychic phenomena, mainstream science continues to look the other way. To many scientists, my story would just be one more for the bonfire. But I believe my account—like so many others—shines a light on mysteries science chooses to ignore.

CHAPTER 13

The House by the Sea

(*Strange Event #6*)

It was early April 1978, and I was beginning to think seriously about finding a place of my own. I was still living in my parents' large oceanfront house, enjoying a relatively easy life with no bills. While we were partners in several business ventures, our family dynamic remained solid. But deep down, I wanted more—my own space, a future family, independence. And that meant it was time to leave the nest.

The family businesses were thriving, but dividing profits three ways while managing multiple loans left me with limited income. My parents were financially secure with other income streams, but I wasn't quite there yet. In winter, job opportunities in Maine were practically nonexistent unless you had a snow plow.

Still, independence was my next big goal. When I left my job at MIT's Lincoln Labs, I had assets worth over \$50,000. I didn't see money as something to spend—I saw it as a tool. There's an old saying: *Nobody ever got rich working for a salary*. I needed to put my skills to better use than just trying to understand the psychic universe. It was time to optimize what I had.

I'd overcome dyslexia, taught myself to sail, graduated with a perfect GPA in a mathematics master's program, taught myself programming at MIT, and learned to run a restaurant and movie theater—not to mention making a great pizza. With all that under my belt, surely I could figure out what to do next.

Fall through spring gave me time and flexibility. I had some capital, physical strength, and a location advantage—our area was a bustling summer resort. Real estate was in high demand. The answer seemed obvious: property development. I would start small and scale quickly. Prices were rising, and good deals were everywhere. I knew the mantra—location, location, location—and we had that in spades. If I could teach myself to build a house, it might become my future home. Budget constraints would keep the scope modest.

I kept the idea to myself, scanning real estate listings and picking up a copy of *How to Build Your Own House*. Oceanfront land was surely out of reach, I assumed. But inland land was still within budget. Then, unexpectedly, I found a listing: a large house on six acres with the same ocean view as my parents' house—right next to our existing cottage lane.

The asking price was \$150,000. Broken down, that equaled roughly \$50,000 for the house on one acre, and \$20,000 each for four additional one-acre lots. In other words, a potential return of three to four times the investment. Of course, there would be closing costs, taxes, roadwork, surveys, and other hidden fees. This wasn't a solo project—I'd need partners. But the deal was strong. The Baby Boomers were making money and looking to spend. And these lots? Prime ocean view property.

I had questions. Naturally, I turned to Ann.

And her readings now cost ten dollars an hour.

Over tea, I asked, “Do you see a business venture in my future?”

She went down to level and said, “I see you involved in multiple projects—building houses, fixing buildings, land speculation. One stands out. There’s a large house set about 800 feet from the ocean. I see a stone front porch that wraps around the side. Inside, there’s a large dining room with exposed wood beams and a stone fireplace at one end. To the right of the fireplace is a swinging door leading to a butler’s pantry. But there’s something strange—cheap paneling covering the pass-through to the kitchen. Why would anyone do that?”

My jaw dropped.

I hadn’t told anyone about the property. “I’m not sure what you’re talking about,” I said. “I haven’t seen inside the house yet.” But she had described it perfectly.

She continued, “You’ll divide it into four rental units—two upstairs, two downstairs. It’ll be profitable, but the real money is in splitting the extra lots.”

She was describing my plan exactly. “When do you see this happening?”

“I see the closing happening in June 1978.”

“How would I finance something like this?”

“You’ll have help from partners. It’ll be an easy sell.”

“Can you see who the investors will be?”

She paused, closed her eyes. “I’m not getting anything more, sorry.” She surfaced from level. “Hope I was helpful.”

“You’ve been *very* helpful,” I said. “Thanks. I need to go check on something.” As I left, I added, “I’ll call you later.”

I rushed home, parked, and made my way to the neighboring property. I slipped through a gap in the old fence and stood on the stone porch, peeking inside. There it was—the wood-beamed dining room, the fireplace, the swinging door. If that pass-through was covered with cheap paneling, I’d be jumping with excitement.

I needed to get inside. The property was listed with a local realtor we’d worked with years ago. This time of year, it was easy to schedule a showing. I called, and despite it being late in the day, I booked an appointment for 9 a.m. the next morning.

As Dad walked in, I seized the moment to pitch the idea—but kept the psychic part to myself. That was still a private chapter.

Dad loved the concept. But he said, “Great ideas are everywhere. You still need money. Every cent I have is tied up in our other ventures. This is too big for either of us to handle alone right now.”

He was right. But I couldn’t shake the vision. I needed to find those partners.

I called Ann again, asking for help identifying potential investors. She tried but came up blank.

“I think I’m too close to it,” she said. “But I’ve heard good things about a psychic in Old Orchard—Mr. McGee. Some of my clients say he’s helped them. It might be worth getting a second opinion.”

I looked up his number and called. He gave me a 1 p.m. appointment the next day. If I moved fast, I could still make it after the walkthrough.

The next morning, I met the realtor on the stone porch. He handed me a flyer with details and a lot sketch. Inside, the house was structured to support four large units—two on each floor. It had dual entrances front and back, and the layout was solid. Little renovation would be needed. Each unit had a perfect ocean view.

We walked into the dining room, and I opened the swinging door. Just like Ann had described—it led to a butler’s pantry. And sure enough, cheap paneling covered a wall. Behind it, on the kitchen side, I saw a refrigerator blocking a visible passthrough. I was stunned. Everything checked out.

But I still needed investors.

I drove to Old Orchard for my meeting with Mr. McGee. His house was hard to find—I passed it twice. It was old, poorly kept, painted white, with a glassed-in porch and located just a few feet from the main road. Mr. McGee was a thin man in his late sixties, wearing a white shirt and an old, worn jacket. The missing tie added to a kind of “I’ve stopped caring” aesthetic.

We got right to it. I said nothing about my plans. His style was very different from Ann’s. He looked as though he were speaking to someone just over my shoulder. Like other psychics I’d met, much of what he said didn’t apply to me—or couldn’t be confirmed.

Then, suddenly, he switched to real estate.

“I see your name all over southern Maine on property signs. You run a business now, but you’ll do very well in real estate. I see two men helping you with your first big project. One’s a doctor. The other... surrounded by cars. This will happen soon—within days.”

“Can you give names or more detail?”

“No. But when it happens, you’ll know exactly who they are.”

The rest of the reading drifted off-topic. But I had what I came for. I headed straight to Ann's house to report what I'd seen and heard. She simply smiled and said, "Interesting, isn't it?"

My mind couldn't stop calculating the odds. Could this really be random? The "monkeys and typewriters" argument just didn't hold up. Too many monkeys, too little time.

The psychic information seemed to come from *somewhere*. Cryptic at times, yes—but undeniably precise. If an intelligent source was behind it, why be vague? And if it was just random fishing from a sea of possibilities, then what does that say about how psychic information is stored or accessed?

That Friday, the weather was perfect. As I read by the window, I heard a car pull in next door.

It was Allan, back for the weekend—and he had a friend with him. Allan owned a car dealership in New Hampshire.

A man surrounded by cars?

I dashed outside. "Hi, neighbor! Long time no see."

"Hi, Chip! Long winter. I'm just checking on the house," he said, then introduced his friend: "This is Dr. M. He just sold his place on Long Island and is checking out the area."

A doctor. And a car dealer. Together.

I kept quiet. This rabbit-hole was getting deeper than I imagined. But first, I had investors to talk to.

I let them settle in and then said, "You know, I've been working on a potential investment right next door. Interested in seeing it?"

They were.

We didn't sneak through the fence. I led them up the long wooded drive, cresting the hill to reveal a wide ocean view. The large house sat high, with four future lots sloping gently to the rocky shore. I handed them the brochure. We walked the grounds and looked through the windows.

I pointed out how the property could be split into three equal parts—one for the house, two with double lots. Each share would cost \$50,000.

It was a strong pitch, and they were clearly intrigued. I left them to think.

A week passed. No word.

Then Dad returned from his usual breakfast with the fishermen. “Bad news,” he said. “The land next door—it’s been sold. Mel saw people on the porch, called a neighbor, and they jumped on it. Closed yesterday. You were right. It was a great deal.”

I couldn’t speak.

To make it worse, Allan called that weekend. They *were* interested. I had to give them the bad news.

They were disappointed—but they had no idea how devastated I was.

Two Costly Lessons

This experience taught me two things.

First: In real estate, don’t share your plans until you have control. Always lock it down before talking.

Second: In the psychic realm, the future seems more scripted than fated. Just like in the physical world, there may be competition in the psychic world—over outcomes.

One question lingers: If this psychic information came from an intelligent source, why wasn’t I warned about the risk of being seen by the neighbor? It should have been an easy message to relay. Compared to Ann’s details about the paneling and pantry, this would’ve been simple.

I couldn’t shake the feeling that there was a disconnect between our physical reality and the psychic one. But this strange chapter gave me yet another glimpse into the complexity of psychic information. And it wouldn’t be the last.

From My 1978 Notes: Puzzle Pieces from Two Strange Events

1) The Charlie Chaplin Reading:

- Ann had no prior knowledge of the news but accurately saw that Chaplin’s body had been disturbed.
- Her psychic reading had nothing to do with what actually happened—or so it seemed.
- But then I remembered: her vision matched *my* speculation about what *might* have happened. My imagination may have influenced her psychic experience.
- Ann didn’t recognize that what she received might have come from me. She was not telepathic, based on previous tests.

2) The House by the Sea Reading:

- Two unrelated psychics gave a mix of accurate and inaccurate information.
- Ann accurately described the house layout—including the porch, beams, pantry, and paneling—before I ever went inside.
- She couldn't see why the paneling was there, suggesting a limit to the information or lack of intelligent assistance.
- Mr. McGee's predictions about "a doctor" and "a man surrounded by cars" came true. Yet the investment didn't happen.
- Ironically, the psychic information may have triggered the sequence of events that led to me *losing* the deal. No warning was ever given.
- Ann predicted I'd close on the house in June—the same month I had in mind. Was she picking up on my imagination?

3) Key Conclusions:

- Psychic predictions are not fixed—they can change. The future isn't fated. There may be competition even in the psychic realm.
- There may be two types of psychic information: intentional (purpose-driven) and random (data fishing).
- Could my thoughts have corrupted the otherwise authentic psychic information? This influence wasn't telepathic—but something more subtle.
- Perhaps imagined and real data can mix. I want to study this more closely.

Proposed Experiment:

Imagine something completely outrageous about an object—something clearly false. Then, have a psychic read it. If the imagined information shows up, it may help differentiate imagination from genuine psychic data.

These insights eventually led to *The Cyclops Experiment*. But before that, a few more strange events must unfold.

And now, we return to the story.

CHAPTER 14

The Brooch

(Strange Event #7)

It was early May 1978. I was busy getting our family businesses ready for the new season. By now, I had collected enough compelling psychic experiences to finally share some of them with my parents.

Dad remained skeptical. He had rejected his fundamentalist religious upbringing long ago and wanted nothing to do with anything that resembled belief in Heaven or Hell. I understood his reluctance, but I couldn't resist joking, "Don't worry—I haven't met God yet." He wasn't amused.

Mom, on the other hand, listened quietly. She was particularly curious about what Ann could do. What I didn't realize was that Mom had something on her mind—and needed help.

She explained a problem she was having, and I called Ann. In less than ten minutes, Ann—over the phone—guided Mom step by step to a valuable, long-missing gold necklace. It was buried in a travel bag under other bags in the attic. Mom was stunned. I was used to Ann's unusual skills by this point, and honestly didn't even consider this episode a "strange event."

Mom wanted to meet Ann in person to thank her. What I didn't know was that she also had an old family mystery she hoped Ann might help solve.

At the time, Ann didn't have a working car, so I picked her up myself. I had no idea another strange event was about to unfold. I simply thought I was introducing two important people in my life. They'd never met. My world had become so compartmentalized that I hoped this moment would help unify things a bit.

Ann quickly saw that we served tea—but Mom did things her way. She brought out her silver teapot and served dessert on fine china. Ann felt honored by the gesture.

After tea, we moved into the living room and chatted about Ann's abilities. Mom said she'd love to witness a short reading sometime. Ann, now relaxed, said that would be fine—anytime. I didn't expect it to happen right then and there, but it was no longer up to me.

After clearing the dishes, Mom handed me an old brooch and asked if Ann could pick up anything from it. I didn't ask questions. I later learned the brooch had belonged to my great-grandmother, Mary Louise Walker—my grandfather's mother.

Ann sat on the floor in front of the fireplace. I took a seat on the couch. Mom sat to my right, taking notes. I asked Ann if she'd mind reading the brooch.

"Sure," she smiled.

She held the brooch in her lap with both hands, closed her eyes, and slowly began to rock. As she slipped into her psychic level, she spoke:

“Did the woman who owned this have stomach problems... or a cyst on her ovaries?”

“I don’t know,” I answered honestly.

“I see a very large house by a lake. There are rowboats on the water... People stay there to enjoy the countryside. Down in the basement, there are large wooden tubs for washing linens. They’re always washing linens.

“There’s a woman here with four children. One little boy and three younger girls. The youngest has dark, sparkling eyes. The mother... she has stomach pain. It feels bad.”

She rocked faster.

“If this is too much, we can stop,” I offered.

But Ann didn’t respond.

“Her husband is away on business. Maybe Chicago. She’s very upset about something. She doesn’t want another child. She thinks she might be pregnant again.

“Oh no... she’s taken something—a potion—to induce a miscarriage. But it’s killing her!”

Suddenly, Ann screamed, fell to her side, clutched her stomach, and cried out in pain. I rushed to her and took the brooch from her hands. She was visibly suffering. Mom ran to the kitchen and returned with a cold washcloth and a glass of water. After about fifteen minutes, Ann began to recover, though now she had a severe headache. She was done for the night—and understandably just wanted to go home.

We left right away. I drove as fast as I could without attracting police attention.

Neither of us said much until Ann finally joked, “Well, you really know how to show a girl a good time. I don’t know which was worse—being poisoned or having Peter in my head.”

“Sorry about all this,” I said. “I’ll try to be more careful.”

But what could I have done differently? The whole thing came out of nowhere—or did it?

Back home, Mom was still up, concerned about Ann and visibly shaken. We sat in the kitchen with reheated tea and talked.

“What was that all about?” I asked. “What do you know about the brooch?”

“Ann might have solved a 90-year-old family mystery,” Mom said, her voice heavy with emotion.

“You can’t give a psychic something tied to a death without a warning,” I told her. “There’s probably emotional residue attached. You saw what happened—she got slammed.”

“I didn’t think it would be that intense,” Mom said, clearly rattled. “But here’s what I know...”

She continued.

“As your grandfather remembered it, it was always a mystery. The year was 1888, and he was ten. His father was away in Chicago on business. They lived in New Haven, Connecticut. While he was gone, his mother took him and his three sisters to a country hotel in central Connecticut for a weekend getaway. It was on a lake, and guests could go rowing.

“To him, everything seemed fine. Then one morning, a hotel staff member woke him up to say his mother had died.

“Back in 1888, people didn’t understand illness the way we do now. The cause of death was listed as ‘acute indigestion.’ But really—who dies of indigestion? It sounds like the true cause was kept from the children, maybe even the entire family.

“Ann mentioned the youngest daughter’s dark, sparkling eyes. That’s accurate. And what she said about the miscarriage... it might explain everything.”

Mom paused. “We’ll probably never know for sure. But what Ann described might finally be the missing piece.”

To say I was stunned would be an understatement.

Here are a few observations I jotted down in my journal:

1. I was the one who handed Ann the brooch. By all logic, *my* energy should have influenced the reading. Yet it clearly connected to Mom.
2. Of all the possible owners and events tied to the brooch, why did Ann focus on the one event that mattered most to Mom? It felt like something—some intent—was guiding the psychic flow. Could it have been Mom’s higher self? Or her focused imagination?
3. Ann wasn’t just seeing the event—she was *in* it. She experienced someone else’s pain from 90 years ago. How does the universe store emotional pain for that long? And why?
4. At this point, I was more fascinated by *how* psychic information was stored than whether it existed. That question now felt settled. But where—and for what purpose—is century-old information stored? Was Ann accessing the very architecture of some hidden universe? It was starting to feel more religious than scientific, and that made me uncomfortable. Still, I had to stay open-minded.

Summer was coming, and I knew I'd soon be too busy flipping pizzas, making popcorn, and training a new batch of teenagers to serve tables. Fall couldn't come soon enough.

Almost a year later, new evidence surfaced.

Mom received a letter from cousins in Connecticut. They had found some old family letters, one of which had been written by Mary Louise Walker just before she died.

In it, she wrote:

“I am concerned I am with child again. I cannot bear the thought of having another child. May God have mercy on me.”

It wasn't proof—but it was powerful support for what Ann had seen.

CHAPTER 15

The Safe

(Strange Event #8)

Summer was already halfway over, and our businesses were a complete madhouse. As usual, I was working every day from 6 a.m. until midnight. While things were running smoothly enough, I was always bracing for the next disaster. Most of our employees were teenagers—and naturally, they had their fair share of drama. Thankfully, several of our best workers had returned from the previous summer.

Among them were four standout girls I jokingly referred to as my “Pizza-Ettes.” Yes, it was corny—but we were in the middle of the disco era, and no behavior was too over the top. The girls ranged from playful to all business. My precocious niece Liz was one of the four. I did my best to treat them all fairly, but I naturally favored the harder workers.

Our operation had a routine. Dad and I opened up early. Our business manager, Jim Seeley, handled the books, paid bills, made deposits, and processed payroll. Mom sold movie tickets, while Dad tore them. I manned the concession stand for about 30 minutes before each screening—selling popcorn, candy, and soda.

This was a golden era for movies. On many nights, we sold out both 300-seat evening shows. The line would stretch a hundred yards down the sidewalk. Business was booming, but I was already counting the days until September.

Then, one hot Sunday morning, Jim pulled Dad aside. Soon after, they called me into the back office.

There was a problem.

Jim had tried to balance the safe’s cash bank and discovered it was short by \$81. Only Dad and I knew the combination. This wasn’t a simple mistake—it was too much money to write off as human error.

Dad admitted he sometimes left the safe dial set to “A” for convenience. That shortcut left the safe nearly unlocked—just a three-quarter turn away from opening. It saved time compared to spinning through all seven letters of the combination. The office was always locked, so it didn’t seem risky—until now.

The dollar amount was odd, too. The safe usually held \$1,000. If someone had taken money, why only \$81? Why not more—or all of it? We were baffled.

I couldn't stop thinking about it. All morning, I mentally combed through possibilities, trying to figure it out. By noon, I was going in circles. So I called Ann.

She agreed to help and said she'd come by around 3 p.m. to see what she could pick up. I was grateful.

At 3:15, we stood together in the office, staring at the big old green safe. I didn't think it wise to involve Dad or Jim—better to keep things quiet. Ann went down to level, but didn't get anything—until she placed her hands on the safe.

Then, everything changed.

"I hear someone at the door. She has your keys. She's coming in to grab supplies for the front. As she passes the safe, she gives the dial a spin—just randomly. She hears a click. You and your dad aren't here, so she checks... it's open. She panics, but quickly grabs five bills off the top of a stack of twenties. She puts them in her pocket and shuts the safe.

"She thinks she took five twenties, but one of them was a single. It was out of place. Later, she was mad at herself for not checking. She did this for two reasons: she needed money for school—and she was mad at you for favoring the other girls. This was mostly revenge," Ann said.

I was stunned. "When did this happen?" I asked.

Ann closed her eyes again. "Last Tuesday, late afternoon. She took time off that week to enroll in college."

I had a strong suspicion about who it was—but I wanted to be sure. I asked Ann to give me a sign if she saw the girl in person. We agreed: she would say, "It's late. I have to get home," if she recognized the culprit.

Later that day, I arranged for Ann to casually meet all the girls. After greeting seven employees, she gave the signal when she met the one I had suspected.

I checked the time sheet. Sure enough, she had taken Wednesday through Saturday off for college registration and back-to-school shopping.

As Ann prepared to leave the office, she paused and added, "There's something else missing—hundreds of things, actually. I don't know what they are, but you'll figure it out."

She made a curious motion with her hands—cupped palms pressing together repeatedly. I noticed it, but my mind was still on dealing with the theft.

I handled the situation discreetly—no accusations, no explanations. But the look on the girl's face said it all. I just wanted her gone. It was one of many firings that summer.

Two years later, Jim was reviewing our inventory and stumbled on something odd. The amount of hamburger we had ordered in 1978 was off by 100 pounds compared to every other year. Yet our pizza sales had remained the same.

Then I remembered Ann’s parting words—and her hand motion.

We used to portion the bulk hamburger into patties for easier pizza prep. A hundred pounds of beef would yield more than 200 patties.

The girl—and possibly her friends—must have been stealing and eating our hamburgers all summer.

That realization led me to a bigger question: why did Ann seem to psychically pick up on the *action*—the pressing of patties—rather than the abstract idea that hamburger had been stolen?

Was it because the girl used her hands both to open the safe and to form the patties? Maybe those actions were more “psychically connected” than the item itself. Perhaps it’s easier to sense the *doing* rather than the *thing*.

Could it be that psychic information, like data on a computer, is organized by proximity—grouped by functional relationships? In other words, actions taken in close sequence or through the same method may be easier to access psychically than abstract facts?

If so, this suggests that my “wonderland” might require a sense of dimensionality—an internal logic to how relationships are stored and retrieved. Ann’s inconsistent access to psychic details could be a clue to the underlying structure of the psychic platform. It may be based not on facts alone, but on pure relationships.

My rabbit-holes were becoming more complex.

As Alice once said: things were getting “curiouser and curiouser.”

CHAPTER 16

The Cyclops Experiment

(Strange Event #9)

“Philosophy can make people sick.”

—Aristotle



The Cyclops Experiment explores the relationship between imagination, creative process, and how real and imagined relationships may exist on a shared psychic platform. By “psychic platform,” I mean the elusive place from which psychics appear to retrieve fragments of information and relational insight during readings. They often access parts of a truth, but not the full picture. Current scientific models of the universe can’t even begin to explain this phenomenon. This is new and unexplored ground.

The summer of 1978 had finally come to a close. I could breathe again. It had been another successful season—bills paid, profits earned, and everyone still talking to each other.

With life returning to a manageable pace, my mind was free to focus on other things. At the top of my list: reconnecting with Ann. I had only seen her once during the summer—when we dealt with the mystery surrounding our safe. Even then, we were too preoccupied to really talk. Although we’d spoken by phone, I missed seeing her and the ever-colorful characters passing through her kitchen.

It had been one full year since our first reading, and what a year it had been. I wanted to thank her properly for helping with the employee situation. It was also an excuse to do something nice for both of us. Ann had become a major presence in my life. Over the past year, we’d shared more unusual experiences than most people encounter in a lifetime.

She had, in many ways, turned me into a true scientific heretic. I was now exploring realities that no one—not even Ann—had dared to imagine. She still had no interest in dissecting how or why her abilities worked. She simply wanted to help people. We were, in a way, opposites: I needed to understand. She didn’t. It was a philosophical Mexican standoff—but it worked for us.

I decided to surprise her with a picnic. It was off-season, so I picked my favorite quiet spot—Narrow Cove, just down the cliffs from the family house near the boat harbor. I had grown up playing and swimming there. For me, it was one of the most beautiful places in the world. I packed a basket full of things she loved and picked her up.

When she opened the door, she seemed sad. Something was clearly wrong at home, but I didn't ask. I just wanted to give her a joyful afternoon. To change the subject, I told her I'd come up with some new psychic experiments during the summer and insisted I would pay her for participating.

She smiled faintly. "What kind of torture this time?"

"No torture," I grinned. "Just following up on questions from spring."

She sighed. "Okay. What about tomorrow night after Mary's in bed?"

"Perfect." I was already making mental notes. For now, I just wanted to enjoy the day. The sun was perfect, the breeze light, and Ann—despite the sadness in her eyes—looked more beautiful than ever. I tried to push away the thought, but I was falling for her.

She was married. I knew that. But still—I wanted to make her smile, to give her a break from whatever pain she was hiding.

Ann loved the picnic.

Emotionally, I'd survived a few minefields in my life and come through mostly intact. Even though my grandmother had died thirteen years earlier, I could still hear her voice: *"All your life, you'll think you were lucky in everything but love. And in the end, you'll realize you were lucky in love, too."* I had been fourteen when she said it—too young to grasp what she meant. I'd never even had a real girlfriend. Now, at twenty-nine, I hoped she'd been a little psychic herself.

Ann had taken me on quite the emotional journey—from heartbreak over Diane to something new with her. I just hoped she wouldn't become another Diane. I wondered when she realized how I felt. At least for now, everything felt right.

The next day, I worked on refining my experiment. I had noticed earlier that my imagination seemed to influence parts of Ann's readings. I wanted to test that more formally.

The idea: I would imagine a vivid, absurd event and mentally link it to a random object. If Ann read the object, I hoped the real psychic information would stand out from the imagined details. My goal was to test whether her reading would pull in anything from the fantasy I had created.

Time was running out. It was already 7:00 p.m., and I hadn't found an object or come up with my imaginary scene. I rummaged through closets until finally, on a top shelf, I found something: an old, altered fencing épée. It had belonged to Dad during college, but over time it had been bent, shortened, and stripped of its hand guard. I'd used it as a throwing dart as a kid. Now, it

resembled the broken gearshift of an ancient tractor. I even capped the point with a wine cork for safety.

It had no real name or identity. That made it perfect.

Next came the story.

I imagined Narrow Cove—the same beach I had taken Ann to the day before. As a child, I used to play pirate there, defending against imaginary invaders. But pirate fantasies were too typical for a sword.

Then I remembered the 1958 movie *The Seventh Voyage of Sinbad*. That Cyclops had terrified me as a kid. I decided to pull him from memory and change him—smaller, hornless, but still monstrous.

The scene played out clearly in my head: on a sunny day at Narrow Cove, the Cyclops emerged from behind a large boulder and charged at me, ready to tear me apart. Just as he reached me, I leapt off the rock and drove my “sword” straight into his single eye—killing him.

Perfect. Short, vivid, and absurd. The psychic bait was set.

That evening, I drove to Ann’s. The familiar grey house greeted me. She smiled at the door and brought out our usual mugs of tea. We took our usual spots on the floor.

Before we began, I reminded myself of something important: Ann had no telepathic ability. We had tested this thoroughly—hundreds of times—with no success. I had even dubbed her “telepathetic.” Statistically, she never guessed right—not even once out of a hundred. That was actually good. It meant I could rule out her reading my thoughts.

I handed her the object. “Before we start,” I said, “tell me *everything* you sense—no matter how strange.”

She turned the object over, immediately holding it like a weapon. Then she went down to level.

At first, her reading was slow. “I see your father... in college. This was his sword. He used it in a sport.”

She was right—Dad had fenced in college. She went on: “In the early ’40s, there were race riots in Detroit. Your dad had this with him when he moved there. He shortened it and carried it under his coat while riding the bus to work. But he never had to use it.”

She continued: “You played with this. You had a target. You tried to throw it to hit the center.”

Again, accurate.

For the next hour, Ann read the object’s history—shifting between my dad’s and my own connection to it.

It was all fascinating, but expected. I had seen her retrieve this kind of detail before. What I really wanted was a glimpse into how imagined and real information might coexist on the psychic platform.

Time was running out. I was feeling disappointed.

I asked, “Is there anything else—something you haven’t mentioned?”

She hesitated. “Yes... actually. It’s been here the whole time. I’ve been trying to ignore it, but it won’t go away.”

I leaned forward.

“There’s a giant—sitting cross-legged in the corner behind me,” she said cautiously. “You *told* me to tell you everything.”

My jaw dropped. “Describe him,” I said, doing my best to hide my excitement.

“He’s ten feet tall. He has three eyes. One in the center of his forehead...” She pointed. “The other two are sealed shut.” She dragged her hands down over each of her eyes.

“What does my dad’s épée have to do with a Cyclops?” I asked.

“It was used to kill him. Someone drove it into his eye.”

“Who?” I asked.

“I don’t know,” she replied. “I can’t see who it was.”

“Where did it happen?”

“I’m not getting anything else. I think that’s all I can see,” she said.

I paid her double. “You did a great job. We’re both tired—I’ll explain everything tomorrow.”

Driving home, I was exhausted—but elated. My mind buzzed with excitement. The test had worked. Ann had unknowingly accessed my imaginary scene. The phrase “*it’s just your imagination*” suddenly felt profoundly ignorant.

The Cyclops Experiment had shown something extraordinary: our imagination connects to something real. Not metaphorically—but structurally.

My short, invented story had somehow left a psychic imprint. It was accessed the same way “real” information had been.

The Cyclops Experiment revealed a powerful truth:

Imagination is non-local.

It does not exist only in our brains. It connects to a broader system—an external, organizing structure that embraces creative thought. This structure is influenced by imagination and seems to reflect information back to us. Thought flows both ways.

We are not just observers—we are co-creators.

Your imagination is far more powerful than you’ve been led to believe.

It may be one of the most fundamental organizing forces in reality.

CHAPTER 17

The Thinker's Two-Cents

(The Cyclops Experiment Analysis from my 1978 Notes)

The Cyclops Experiment uncovered surprising connections between human imagination, the creative process (what I call emergence), and how real and imagined relationships may be stored and accessed on what I call the psychic platform.

By “psychic platform,” I mean a barely understood realm where psychics appear to retrieve relational data during readings. They often access fragments of truth—bits of related information—without seeing the full picture. According to modern science, explaining this through the standard model of the universe is impossible. This is uncharted territory.

After I told Ann what she'd accomplished during the Cyclops Experiment, her response was simple: “I'm just glad I could help you.”

She wasn't interested in the implications. To her, her role was to sense and interpret impressions for others—not to question where the information came from or why. The experiment was just a small blip in her journey. But to me, it was a massive turning point. As the psychic, she was the channel; I was the thinker, the analyst—and I couldn't ignore the rabbit-hole.

Ironically, the mathematician in me found comfort in this new way of seeing things. Our minds can build landscapes made entirely of relationships. Through imagination, we can travel these landscapes, engineer new realities, and explore pure structures—just like gods. But unlike in the physical world, there are no laws or constraints. Science deals in theories supported by mathematical proofs. The psychic platform, like imagination itself, allows for relationships to exist even if they're not physically possible—like my Cyclops.

It's important to note: the physical universe is just a small subset of the total realm of mathematically defined spaces. Physics and cosmology attempt to uncover the “natural axioms” or laws of our physical reality. Scientific advances and technologies exist thanks to reflectively modeling these relationships—by understanding how things interact.

(Note my use of the word “reflectively.” It's at the core of how we process everything.)

Yes, I accept that I'm a scientific heretic.

I'm using logic—but I don't apply the scientific method's strict requirement for empirical proof. That one omission alone pushes me to the edge of mainstream science—into what many would call the “lunatic fringe.”

But after all I've experienced, how could I turn my back on the mystery staring me in the face?

I can't emphasize enough: the paranormal is real. But its truths are buried beneath a sea of misinformation, ignorance, and hoaxes. Most scientists don't even look.

Sometimes I felt manipulated by these experiences. I can't describe it any other way. Like a lab rat in a maze. I've asked myself: am I chasing windmills? Am I lost in fantasy?

Even so, here is my full analysis of the Cyclops Experiment. What follows sits at the crossroads of physics, psychic experience, and philosophy.

Lessons from the Cyclops

1. **My imagined story didn't return to me the way I had designed it.**

The mental "film strip" I had created wasn't what Ann accessed. It was as if the idea took on a life of its own—becoming a category of "Cyclops" with reflective properties that evolved. Some details I imagined were embellished by Ann's reading. Others were missing completely. It was unexpected.

2. **She sensed the 'what'—but not the 'who' or the 'where.'**

This surprised me. I thought those would be the easiest details for her to catch. At first, it felt random—like pulling information from a grab bag. But on closer inspection, the psychic impressions were highly interconnected and localized: the sword, the giant, the eye, the killing—all central to the imagined event. The sword, physically present, acted as a focal point for those relationships.

This ties back to *The Safe* (Chapter 15): Ann picked up the hand movement of forming hamburger patties, but missed that hamburger was being stolen. Again, information retrieval seemed to be influenced by proximity—what the psychic touches, what actions are repeated—not necessarily abstraction or detail. It suggests there may be no intelligent assistance in organizing the data.

3. **Ann's hand gestures—the three eyes—were not from me.**

I imagined a one-eyed Cyclops, like the one from *The Seventh Voyage of Sinbad*. Mine had no horn. Ann's version had three eyes: one open, two sealed shut. Her hand motion exactly matched an actor's gesture in another Cyclops movie—one neither of us had seen. Later, I even found a Roman statue showing the same image.

This may indicate a cross-linking of psychic categories—once "Cyclops" was activated, related imagery entered her reading, even if it was unrelated. This unintentional embellishment revealed how psychic information might organize itself.

It also hinted at something profound: on the psychic platform, the boundaries between real and imagined blur.

Ann couldn't distinguish between the relationships I imagined and those based in reality. If true, this would explain her errors in the Cyclops reading, in the Ivy and Peter case, the Chaplin event, and the House by the Sea. They weren't mistakes—they were blended truths.

4. My dad confirmed a private detail Ann retrieved.

He told me, for the first time, that he had indeed carried the sword under his coat for protection during the 1940s Detroit riots. Only he knew that.

He had always been skeptical of my involvement with Ann, but this experience shook him. Quietly, he went to see a psychic named Nora in Biddeford, Maine.

During his session, Nora said, "A friend of yours who passed over wants to be remembered. His name is Joe. He had a bad limp."

Dad replied coldly, "I don't know a Joe."

She tried again—twice. Still, he denied it.

Finally, she snapped, "You're making Joe and me mad. He *was* your friend. This reading is over."

Later, Dad admitted: he *had* worked with a Joe in the 1950s. Joe had a limp and died in the 1960s. Dad hadn't expected the psychic to stand her ground—or to be right. He didn't understand what happened, but at least he no longer thought I was crazy.

5. The psychic platform is not just an informational archive.

It's not a bookshelf. It seems to support *vitality*—living energy that expresses relationships across imagined events, real memories, past and future moments.

Recall Diane's reading—how psychic details appeared to shape future physical events. The same platform might support dimensional "fields" where memory and imagination coexist.

This could explain the two ghosts of Ivy. And it may shed light on Ann's inaccurate Chaplin reading.

On the Nature of Imagination and the Psychic Platform

Science typically sees imagination as a byproduct of brain activity—something that evolved to help us survive. My experiences suggest something more radical.

Imagination may not just be mental. It may interact with a living, organizing platform that supports both psychic and physical reality.

Here's how I frame it:

- The **psychic platform** is the source psychics draw from.
- It's not "out there"—it's all around us.
- Psychics reach into it and pull fragments, rarely full stories.
- All people are likely in contact with this platform constantly—but we're unaware of it.
- The platform connects relationships dynamically—like a universal imagination.

In my Cyclops experiment, the imagined one-eyed monster gained *three* eyes because the "Cyclops" category linked to other psychic data. That's how this platform works: creatively, fluidly, without hard edges.

By contrast, the physical world has rules. It imposes consequences. You can't be magical. You can't hit 100 home runs just because you want to.

But on the psychic platform—you *can*. There are no consequences, no restrictions.

That's why we learn faster in the real world—mistakes have cost.

Psychics, though, access more of the platform. Some use guides to navigate its vastness. And I believe there's a two-way feedback loop: as things change in the psychic platform, they influence the physical—and vice versa, as much as natural laws allow.

This feedback is a creative, emergent force. It might help explain what's missing in science's theories.

Complexity and Emergence

The physical universe is organized in layers.

Humans are made of limbs, organs, and tissues. Tissues are made of cells. Cells contain molecules. Molecules are made of atoms. Atoms contain subatomic particles, and those are built from quarks and strings.

Each layer behaves differently. The whole becomes more than the sum of its parts.

The psychic platform seems to follow a similar hierarchy. When relationships are formed and linked on the platform, they gain complexity and vitality.

That complexity reflects back and forth between the psychic and physical realms—as long as the relationships can exist under physical rules.

I believe this reflective interaction explains emergence, synergy, and evolution—both in the material world and in my wonderland.

This leads me to a provocative idea.

A Living Universe

What if the universe itself is alive?

Not metaphorically—*actually* alive. Changing, learning, evolving. Not ruled by a static, all-powerful God—but by something dynamic. A universe that *is* god-like in its creative capacity.

This is what I call the **Interactive Binary Reflective Field Theory**: the psychic and physical platforms reflect one another, giving rise to increased complexity.

This living universe might be the closest thing we have to a God model. It grows. It reflects. It *becomes*.

Stephen Hawking and many physicists claim that God isn't needed to explain the universe. They envision a self-contained system with no external intelligence.

I'm not so sure.

My findings point to something bigger—something constantly changing, not all-powerful or all-knowing, but very much alive. This isn't the unchanging God of organized religion. It's a god-in-the-making. Creating, strategizing, evolving.

That's what my notes from 1978 led me to conclude.

Final Thoughts

It's naïve to think all the puzzle pieces would fall neatly into place. They never do.

To paraphrase Robert Browning, "*Man's dreams oft exceed his grasp.*"

Now I understand why. Dreams have no consequences. But the physical world does. That's what shapes our reality.

This chapter is filled with ideas and speculation. I don't offer them as scientific proof—but as food for thought.

Every discovery starts with wonder. And wonder begins with puzzlement—curiosity about how things connect.

That's the essence of rational thinking.

Until something can be tested, modeled, and mathematically predicted, it remains a philosophical model. But that doesn't make it meaningless. Philosophy is the seedbed of science.

Speculation and exploration are essential. They're what separate *discoverers* from *practitioners*.

Below: A Roman statue of a three-eyed Cyclops, similar to the one Ann described—though not the version I imagined. On the left: my own sketch, based on my childhood memory from the movie *The Seventh Voyage of Sinbad*. Note the difference.



CHAPTER 18

The Icarus Effect

In Greek mythology, Icarus dared to fly with wings he crafted himself—held together by wax. Ignoring warnings, he soared too close to the sun, and the wax melted. His wings failed. He fell to his death.

To the Greeks, the story was a cautionary tale for those who tried to rise too high—to enter the realm of the gods.

The forces that brought Ann and me together carried the seeds of our undoing. What began in discovery and wonder was ultimately consumed by misunderstanding, jealousy, and emotional complexity. By 1979, the bond that allowed us to work so closely—and possibly love each other—was broken.

I won't go into all the details. Much of what happened is personal. But some of it—caused by others—was undeniably malicious. It took me ten years to piece together the full story. By then, our lives had diverged too far.

Ann and I, like Ivy and Peter, were bound by love but torn apart by deception and confusion. The irony wasn't lost on me—especially considering Ann's psychic gifts. Through it all, we remained friends. That gave us enough time and space to explore a few more rabbit-holes. But emotionally, for me, Ann became another Diane.

Even psychics struggle when their personal worlds collide. During the winters of 1978 and 1979, Ann's world and mine became deeply entangled. Psychics have difficulty reading for themselves, family, or close friends. I fell into that last category. After the Cyclops Experiment, our psychic work stopped. Ann wasn't a lab rat. She wasn't just a pathway into Wonderland. She had a beautiful soul—but a difficult life.

As with most people, when we love someone, we want to fix their problems. I was no exception.

Ann had no desire to understand why she was psychic. She just wanted to help people and live in peace. She could have commercialized her abilities, gained fame, and made money—but she chose not to. I knew then I would have to continue my exploration with other psychics. She pointed me in a few directions, but something between us had changed.

Not all the results were tragic—some were outright comical.

One night, members of the U-U Psychic Symposium gathered to explore “earth-spirits.” I was skeptical but needed a place to start. We sat around a candle and stared into it. Suddenly

someone shouted, “There’s an earth-spirit!” Another person pointed in a different direction. Then another. It was like popcorn—everyone seeing spirits.

I couldn’t help myself. “I think we’re just seeing after-images from the candle on our retinas,” I said.

I was never invited back.

Another time, Ann and two other local psychics appeared on a local TV show. Each of them looked polished, sounded credible, and gave a quick plug for their services. One of them, Jim, offered a psychic development class. I signed up. Eight classes for eighty dollars—held on the last Sunday of each month at his house in Portland.

From the first session, I was disappointed. There was no “development.” We sat in a circle while Jim rambled about ghosts, spirits, UFOs, and ETs. I stayed out of obligation. After each class, I’d vent to Ann over tea. She found it hilarious.

But eventually, Jim crossed the line.

One night, mid-monologue, he stopped and said, “I see a small, invisible spacecraft entering the room. It’s hovering over Cleo’s head. A beam of light is coming down... It’s rearranging the molecules of her brain to remove her ego.”

My jaw dropped.

Cleo—a local artist—replied, “You know... I feel better now that my ego is gone.”

That was it. I excused myself and left. Jim’s “spaceship” had gone too far.

After I told Ann, she laughed so hard tea came out her nose. But the bigger point stuck with me: the paranormal was being buried in nonsense. And that nonsense was exactly why most rational minds avoided it.

Still, I clung to a single truth: I had experienced something real.

I couldn’t prove it to anyone else. My ideas and theories were mine alone. And that became a very lonely place to be. I tried sharing with friends. They cared, but I’m sure they thought I was a little crazy. Maybe I needed my ego removed, too.

With no one to talk to, I poured myself into reading about unexplained phenomena—anything that didn’t fit the scientific mold. I documented everything I could before those experiences slipped away. And I found comfort in a single idea: if my theory was right, *nothing* is ever truly

lost. The universe works too hard to build relationships. It doesn't casually discard them—not even the past or its potential.

Meanwhile, my personal life was as complicated as ever.

Ann's relationship with Tom needed to play out—for Mary's sake if nothing else. Life never travels in a straight line, and mine was no different.

I had 26 girls working for me. Some relationships became romantic, others didn't. Ann was married, and truthfully, she would've hated the life I was living. Our business styles clashed. Even though I loved her deeply, her carefree spirit would have made her a disastrous business partner. My structured life couldn't bend that far without breaking.

Then came the knockout punch.

In spring 1979, as our season was gearing up, a new girlfriend of mine—without my knowledge—called Ann and asked to meet. They agreed to talk at a local bar.

I wouldn't find out about this for years.

When they met, my girlfriend cut straight to the point. "We're both in love with the same man. Since he won't decide, we'll decide for him."

Ann described it later as a punch to the face. My girlfriend played the guilt card—reminding Ann she was married. Then, for the finisher, she twisted a few things I'd said about Ann's mistakes into a vicious lie, pinning it on me.

Ann left the bar in tears, feeling betrayed.

The chaos of summer left little room for conversation. Later, Ann told me, "I spent a lot of time thinking. I decided your friend was the better partner for you."

By August, everything had changed.

I had no clue. I was thrilled when Ann walked into the restaurant—until I saw the kid with her.

She smiled, walked up, and introduced me to Charles.

My face froze into a dumb smile. Inside, I was stunned. They walked to the beach, hand in hand.

That was the end of us—as whatever we had been.

My girlfriend—now working beside me—was doing everything she could to make herself indispensable. I was unknowingly kissing the author of my heartbreak.

Tom and Ann's marriage had ended. Charles had moved in. They were roleplaying fantasy personas I couldn't understand. Everyone was quiet. Ann seemed happy. I fell into default mode with my girlfriend. My parents, who had feared I'd marry Ann, now admitted she might've been the better match.

Unfortunately, the relationship I had now turned into a nightmare. My girlfriend was critical of everyone—including herself. Psychic research had taken a backseat. Instead, I shifted focus to physics, reading everything I could find about emerging theories. Writers like Paul Davies and Stephen Hawking were asking bold questions. It became my escape.

But I couldn't talk about Ann's work. My girlfriend didn't believe any of it. I had no way to prove it.

And Ann refused to read for her. In hindsight, she had good reasons.

Then I had an idea: *Laura*.

Telepathy is black and white. My plan was to visit Detroit and introduce my girlfriend to Laura's gift. (See Strange Event #1.) Maybe that would prove something.

But it didn't go as planned. The whole trip ended in failure.

Going back to spring 1978, I had quietly continued the meditation exercises suggested by the healer at the Arthur Ford Academy. Though the healing wore off, the meditation worked. I had been asthma-free for over three years.

Then a good deed ruined it.

A girlfriend asked if we could drive an elderly woman from church to visit her grandchildren in Washington, D.C. She'd pay for the ride, and we could turn it into a vacation.

Money was tight, so I agreed.

The drive went fine—except for constant bathroom breaks. The old woman used a pad instead of a diaper. At one point, she proudly showed it to my girlfriend.

That was it. I could feel the fuse burning. We got back in the car. I was swallowing saliva repeatedly. Finally, I had to pull over on I-95. I ran behind the car and threw up.

But something was wrong.

I couldn't breathe.

My lungs were shutting down. I was panicking. My girlfriend drove, racing to a hospital.

We followed the "H" sign to Washington Adventist Hospital. A team of nurses and a doctor worked on me for two hours. I was shaken. But I survived.

The grandchildren picked up their grandmother. We drove straight back to Maine.

My body had betrayed me. After three and a half years without medication, I was back where I started.

Breathlessness is pure torture.

My doctor was shocked I'd gone so long without meds. I explained the healing and compared it to a hypnotic suggestion. He referred me to a counselor who used hypnosis. That treatment didn't help, but talking to someone about everything *did*. That counselor would guide me through many future challenges.

In the meantime, I bought land and started building a house. I followed the book *How to Build Your Own House* and got to work. Aside from renovations on the theater and restaurant, I had no carpentry training. Dad helped when he could. We joked about reading instructions carefully—so we didn't miss a step by turning two pages at once.

It was a pay-as-you-go project. The lot was within walking distance of the family house—no ocean view, but peaceful.

It would take years—not due to the work, but because of lack of money.

When done, it would be a 2,100-square-foot, three-bedroom, two-bath cottage with a big kitchen, living and dining rooms, and a full basement. A short walk in either direction led to the cove or the ocean. Best of all: no mortgage.

Meanwhile, Ann and Charles weren't doing well. He was questioning his sexuality and spent weekends in Portland with other men. I saw them once a month. It wasn't easy—for anyone.

Despite the rotating cast of people in her life, Ann seemed lonely. She lived reading to reading. Even charging \$50 per session, she struggled. They shared rent, sometimes with roommates. I still cared and kept an eye out. But I didn't have much money myself.

Life moved on—a mix of successes and heartache.

My new girlfriend ran the dining room like a drill sergeant. I managed the kitchen. It worked. Business thrived, but our three mortgages were killing us. My house was nearly finished, but I had to care for my aging parents. My relationship was rocky.

By summer 1983, Dad and I began exploring the idea of renting the restaurant space. Strangely, we could earn more from rent than running the place ourselves. People were offering serious money.

In the fall, we decided to stop. It wasn't worth the nonstop grind.

We formed a new business: **Cook & Cook**. We sold the restaurant equipment and leased the space for more than we'd ever made. No more cooking for the crowds.

I sold my house and bought a new one—for the same price. The deal was solid. I expected its value to double in a few years.

Dad and I found land on the coastal road, two miles from the beach. I designed the house, got the permits, and the foundation was poured. If we stayed on schedule, we'd list it by spring 1984.

I needed a break—from dating, drama, and trying to fit square pegs in round holes.

Technology was changing fast. Film projection was evolving. And we owned the biggest building downtown. It was prime rental real estate. I had a 10-year plan to rebuild it completely—without a mortgage.

I could see the plan clearly—like a map.

Paraphrasing Browning, “*Man's dreams oft exceed his grasp.*”

As for my personal research into the nature of existence—it was taking shape. Slowly, I was developing a model. A private wonderland. It incorporated anomalies in physics, results from my psychic experiments, and a lifetime of strange events.

Whether it was *real*, or just a model... I still didn't know.

CHAPTER 19

Diane Revisited

(Strange Event #10)

“For every solution, there is a whole new set of problems.”
— Henry Weller

A strange epilogue to the Diane story unfolded in the spring of 1984—seven years after that second strange event. This new incident placed both Ann and me firmly on the sidelines. We weren’t participants this time. We were only witnesses, and I wasn’t sure what to make of it.

(Reader feedback would be welcome on this one.)

This experience, though centered around Diane, involved several others—none of whom were psychics. What made this event so unusual was the remarkably coincidental, almost scripted nature of the sequence. Again, I felt the presence of some kind of intent.

To me, this scenario points to one of three possibilities:

1. **The universe responds to thought.**
But if that’s true, why has my love life been such a disaster?
2. **The universe has its own agenda or intent.**
It organizes events purposefully—and perhaps with a dark sense of humor.
3. **It was pure coincidence.**
A random outcome, like a dice roll. But to believe that, we’d have to call in the “monkeys and typewriters” argument again—and an almost inconceivable stretch of time.

You’ll have to draw your own conclusions. As for me, I believe my “wonderland” is shaped by thought, intention, and a wicked sense of humor. It watches. It participates. And sometimes, it plays.

The Coincidence Chain

In spring 1984, my seventeen-year-old niece Liz and some of her high school classmates planned a senior road trip to Maine. I offered them my house on Pine Road for the week. Unfortunately, the weather was miserable—cold, rainy, and windy for most of their stay. Bored out of their minds, they even resorted to doing homework.

One day, desperate for entertainment, Liz asked if I’d come over and share some of my psychic stories. I agreed.

Since they were all from the Detroit area, they especially related to the Diane story. It sparked their imagination—and became a hot topic of conversation.

The next day, they asked more questions, particularly whether I'd ever tried contacting Diane again.

I answered honestly: "No. I respected her last words—'I NEVER WANT TO SEE OR HEAR FROM YOU AGAIN!'"

They looked at each other and replied in unison, "Yeah, but... aren't you curious?"

"Of course I am," I said. "I tracked her through the phone book over the years. Same address, same number. But that's as far as my stalking ever went."

Then came their idea.

"What if we called her, pretending it's for a school survey?" Liz suggested. "We'll say we're conducting a random survey on modern marriage. Just basic questions. Nothing personal. Totally anonymous."

The girls were beaming with pride.

I shrugged. "Sounds harmless enough. Go for it, if you want."

A month and a half passed. By then, I was immersed in setting up our businesses for the summer and had forgotten all about the plan. I assumed the girls had too.

Then the phone rang one evening. It was Liz.

"You're not going to believe what just happened!" she said, barely containing herself.

"Try me," I replied, sensing something unusual from her tone.

"We've been busy, but we decided to follow through on the Diane call. Remember the plan?"

"Let me guess—she's not married?"

"No... she's still married. But what happened is way weirder."

"Okay," I said. "Tell me."

"After school today, we drew straws to see who'd make the call. Ellen got the short straw. She's captain of the debate team and had just come back from a school match. So she made the call. A man answered."

"May I speak to Diane M... please?" she asked.

The man replied, “Is that you, Ellen?”

Ellen dropped the phone.

Liz picked it up and handed it back to her.

“Yes... this is Ellen,” she said.

“My name’s Mr. V. You debated my team earlier today—and unfortunately, you did a great job. Congratulations. Diane’s my wife. What’s this about?”

In a panic, Ellen replied, “I’m writing a paper and picked her name at random for a survey.”

“Well,” he chuckled, “what are the odds? Hang on, I’ll get her.”

He had no idea just how astronomical those odds really were.

Diane came on the line.

“Hello, this is Diane.”

Ellen asked the pre-prepared questions. Diane gave all the right answers about having a happy marriage. Ellen could sense her husband listening in.

“Thank you for your time,” she said and hung up.

The plan didn’t achieve anything directly, but it felt like the universe had delivered a message. What that message was, however, remained unclear. A cosmic slap in the face?

Let’s break this down.

What were the odds?

Too small to calculate—smaller than winning three consecutive lotteries. Yet the odds weren’t zero. It happened.

Some might argue that this was all just chance. That we’re imposing meaning after the fact. And in fairness, two arguments are worth exploring:

1. **The Anthropic View**

The event seems meaningful only because it happened. If it hadn’t, we wouldn’t be discussing it. We assign meaning after the fact.

2. The Pattern Recognition Argument

Every day, we interact with our environment in countless ways—billions of micro-moments and connections. Our minds filter and forget most of them. But when a rare string of events stands out, we remember—and assign significance.

This is known as **matrixing**—our evolved tendency to find patterns in chaos. It explains how people see images of Jesus or Mary in a bag of cheese puffs or a condensation smear on a window.

Our imagination fills in the blanks. And we forget the patterns that don't lead anywhere—but never forget the ones that do.

This is where the “monkeys and typewriters” argument creeps back in. When randomness alone explains the coincidence, the meaning only emerges because we *choose* to assign it afterward.

Still, this didn't feel like one of those moments.

This event deviated too far from normal life. It felt too contrived. There were too many unlikely factors all lining up just right.

To me, this felt like an example of **intent**—a conscious interaction in an interconnected universe. A universe with a sharp wit and a long memory.

Skeptics may call it chance.

But I'm not so sure.

How does this event fit into the larger story?

Either my wonderland has a wicked sense of humor... or this was pure happenstance.

Still, I include it here because it belongs. It's one more strange event in a growing series. There's a thread of interconnectedness running through these experiences—a pattern not easily dismissed.

Whatever the true explanation, I can't shake the feeling:

Something's watching.

And sometimes, it's playing.

Chapter 20

A More Normal Life – 1985 to 1994

(Strange Event #11)

Art is never finished, only abandoned...

~ Leonardo da Vinci

Building Houses and Traveling

From 1985 to 1994, life finally settled into a relatively normal rhythm. I focused on buying land, developing each site, designing the homes, and doing all the construction work myself. Dad and I were able to finance each project without ever involving a bank. I'd pay him once a property sold, and he earned more this way than he ever could from bank interest. I reinvested my profits into purchasing future building lots. Often, I'd have a new house on the market and my own house for sale at the same time. When one sold, I kept the other. But this building-and-swapping cycle only happened after our seasonal businesses were closed.

Dad and I made money the old-fashioned way—through hard work and brains. In the fall of 1987, after lifting a wall during construction, I sensed something was off. Later in the shower, I checked myself. Instead of two, there were three lumps. This was not something to ignore. I immediately called Ann.

"I've got a medical issue," I told her. "Can you see anything?" That was all I said.

She tuned in and, laughing, replied, "I've been asked to read crystal balls before, but this is ridiculous."

At least I knew she was focusing on the right area. "Why are you laughing?" I asked.

"You need to see a urologist, but you'll be fine. He'll operate, but what I see is a buildup of white flakes—layers—covering an old injury. You'll be okay."

By now, I trusted Ann's psychic abilities. Still, with lumps under my skin, I wasn't going to take chances. I called Dr. Lane, a urologist at the local hospital, and he saw me immediately. His assessment matched Ann's exactly.

"It's probably nothing—just plaque—but I'll have to operate to be sure. Have you had any injury in that area recently?" he asked.

I couldn't recall anything at first. Then it hit me—the damn cat! Over a year ago, as I stood up, it dug its claws into my groin.

"That could've done it," the doctor said. "Your body responded by laying down layers of plaque, like a bandage. That's what the lump is."

"What color is it?" I asked.

He looked at me oddly. “Whitish. Why?”

“Just curious,” I replied, not wanting to explain why I asked.

The operation went smoothly. It was just plaque. A weekend of minor discomfort, and I was back at work. Once again, Ann had come through for me. Over the years, she helped with many such issues, offering insights that often proved invaluable. I never made a big decision without first running it by her. Together, we made a great team.

But my life wasn’t just about work, paranormal adventures, or an unpredictable love life. Between projects, I traveled to Europe every spring and fall—usually on a Globus or Cosmos tour. This routine served me well for years. Financially, I was doing fine. I owned a one-third share of the family business, a \$300,000 home, three building lots worth around \$400,000, and had taken over 70 trips abroad. I also helped others with their financial troubles. No one would call me rich, but I had everything I needed. By my definition, that was success. Still, love remained elusive—a bigger mystery than any paranormal event I’d encountered.

As time passed, I tried to ignore the six-hundred-pound gorilla in the room—my strange paranormal journey. I kept rough notes about the bizarre events but, being dyslexic, the idea of writing more than a journal seemed far-fetched. That imaginary gorilla remained with me for over three decades. What finally pushed me to start writing my story was hearing Dr. Stephen Hawking’s adamant rejection of any intelligent influence in the universe. Was I still agnostic? I wasn’t sure. But I’d become a heretic in many other ways. Questioning Dr. Hawking might be audacious, but I felt a responsibility to explore science’s blind spots. After years of editing, I began telling my story in 2019.

On Painting

During slower winter periods, I returned to reading science books. But since few friends shared my academic interests, I had no one to talk to. That’s when I decided to explore painting—particularly how reflective fields interact. I’m not sure why I chose seascapes. Other forms of creativity can also explore the idea of fields of relationships. Watching a movie or TV show, for example, is also a form of field reflectivity. The fixed field of each image interacts with the viewer’s imagination to create an illusion of life.

To me, it seemed that existence must emerge from some kind of dynamic structure. Change doesn’t occur in a void. For anything to change, there must be relationships—and those relationships exist within a fixed field. So, existence must “float” on an ever-shifting, interactive structure. Either there is being, or there is nothing. But maybe there are in-between states?

This led me to revisit the concept of synergy—how parts can come together to create something greater than their sum. (Google: Synergy.) I began to imagine that awareness could be present at all levels, anticipating and manifesting change in the physical world.

Over time, painting became more than an intellectual exercise. It became a passion. Once I started, I couldn't put down the brush. The process started as a study but evolved into an obsession. I had always worked alone—first as a student, then a programmer, then a builder. My interests in science and the paranormal isolated me further. Painting only intensified that isolation. So I set rules: I'd paint for three years, no more than 100 canvases a year, and then I'd quit cold turkey. I painted only between construction jobs.

My home, The Tower, is now filled with my artwork. Many friends have pieces on their walls. I never sold any of it. It was for love, not profit. I painted whatever inspired me and gave pieces to those who truly appreciated them. Putting a price tag on that felt wrong.

Painting, I realized, is a deeply reflective process. The blank canvas is one field of relationships; the artist's mind is another. With the first brushstroke, the dance begins. Every new stroke changes the remaining possibilities. When the artist stops changing things, the painting is done. It's a manifestation of imagination interacting with a fixed medium. For me, painting existed on three levels: a learning tool, a psychological addiction, and pure fun.

Ann Tells Me the Truth

In 1989, I finally learned the truth about my 1979 girlfriend and Ann. Ten years had passed since their fateful encounter at the bar. The details of Ann's life are hers to tell, not mine. But I had made a mistake—one I deeply regretted. I had shared personal things Ann told me, and I did so without her permission. My so-called girlfriend took those words, twisted their meaning, and used them to her own advantage. That was my second mistake—underestimating just how far she was willing to go to get what she wanted.

Once I understood the damage, I went to Ann and asked for forgiveness. Without hesitation, she gave it. But the damage to our lives was done. Some lessons are just cruel, and this was one of them. A few more like this were waiting for me in the future, almost as if I were repaying some kind of karmic debt. Ann and I remained close friends, but our paths had diverged too far. Still, she was never far from my heart.

Meeting Rupert Sheldrake at the Rowe Center in 1989

I'd long admired Rupert Sheldrake's theory of morphogenetic fields. His ideas closely paralleled my own, and I believed his model could help support my reflective field theory. So I jumped at the chance to meet him. The Rowe Center, a New Age retreat in Massachusetts, was hosting a seminar. Rupert's wife was teaching a Tibetan Toning class, while Rupert presented on his research. I simply wanted to share the Cyclops Experiment with him and explore how his ideas might extend into areas of modern physics—and perhaps, the paranormal.

Sheldrake was everything I expected: brilliant, soft-spoken, thoughtful, and scholarly. A Cambridge academic, a Frank Knox Fellow at Harvard, a Royal Society research fellow, and an

expert in tropical crop physiology—he was the only intellectual I believed might actually listen to my strange story without dismissing me as crazy. We were, in many ways, speaking the same language, even if from slightly different angles.

The weekend unfolded as expected. On Friday night, we reviewed his theories. Saturday morning was dedicated to his new book and research. That afternoon and evening were reserved for discussion. By 8:00 p.m., everyone else had spoken, so I asked if I could share some of my findings. He politely agreed. I gave him a condensed version of my journey and then presented the Cyclops Experiment, emphasizing how it aligned with his published ideas.

I expected curiosity—at least a few questions. Instead, he responded, “That’s interesting,” and moved on to another topic. I was stunned. “Disappointed” doesn’t begin to describe how I felt—I was furious.

The next morning, over breakfast, I pulled him aside.

“Mr. Sheldrake, I have to say I was really disappointed in your reaction to my Cyclops Experiment. I believe it validates your theories and pushes them into a new direction. ‘That’s interesting’ felt like a brush-off.”

He responded calmly. “Do you have any idea how hard it’s been to get the scientific community to take me seriously? My friends have begged me to come back to reality. They say, ‘Rupert, morphogenetic fields sound like fairy tales.’ And then you—someone I don’t even know—ask me to endorse a theory that explains the paranormal? What if you’re a reporter? Imagine the fallout if I said my model supports psychic phenomena. And modern physics? I’m not a physicist—I can’t speak outside my field. I’m sorry, but ‘that’s interesting’ is all I can say.”

I understood then. His whole career was on the line. He couldn’t risk it—not even for a theory that mirrored his own. In some ways, I was the lucky one. I had nothing to lose and total freedom to explore. Still, I knew my own ideas would face even greater resistance. I continued writing anyway—knowing full well my audience might be just me.

(As a side note, Sheldrake did later explore psychic abilities in animals, arguing they were less prone to manipulation than humans. I admired that.)

Building My Sister’s House (1989–1990)

My parents were nearing 80, still active in the community and our theater, but I sensed they were slowing down. My sister and her family, living in West Bloomfield, Michigan, also wanted to retire to Maine. It was agreed she’d inherit the large family home on the ocean, while I’d receive Mom and Dad’s two-thirds share of our business. Everything else would be divided equally.

She asked me to build her a house inspired by one she liked in Michigan. I visited it and saw potential—good floor plan, plenty of room for improvement. I found a beautiful wooded lot and drew up the plans while she prepared to move. Within a year, construction began.

My niece Liz, between graduate school terms, wanted to help. Dwight—our former cook—needed winter work. The three of us built the house, battling heavy snow the entire time. I was responsible for everything up to the interior finish. They would hire out the rest. They used my plumber and electrician, but their own contractors for heating and finish carpentry. That's how I met Steve—one of the finest carpenters I've ever worked with. That made the whole job worth it.

By then, I had the theater to run, so the timing worked out well. Despite some manageable hiccups, the house was finished, and my sister's family moved in. For the first time in sixteen years, the entire family was together. Just in time.

That summer, our oceanfront house developed a serious problem. Nature always takes a toll. Coastal homes are built to withstand downward rain—not wind-driven storms. After sixteen years of New England weather, the front of the house was rotting. What started as a faulty sliding door became a full structural rebuild. With the theater taking most of my time, Steve and I tackled the repairs as fast as we could. I don't put much stock in signs, but I was grateful we got it done when we did. Bigger problems were just around the corner.

The Halloween Storm of 1991

In addition to my paranormal journey, I was an avid traveler. After a long trip through the British Isles, our plane landed in Boston just ahead of a massive storm. My friend John and I said our goodbyes, unaware of the intensity of the storm barreling up the coast.

But I was about to face an even bigger storm—one within my family.

When I got home, I found out Dad was very sick. I rushed him to the hospital. Unbeknownst to me, he had been waiting for my return. As the infamous Halloween Storm of 1991 (also called *The Perfect Storm*) ravaged the New England coast, I was focused entirely on my father's worsening condition. I barely noticed what was happening outside.

Soon, the doctors gave us the news: lung cancer. A specific type called oat cell cancer—named for how it looks under a microscope. It had already spread throughout his body. Although he had quit smoking six years earlier, the damage was done. The cancer was eating away at his bones, causing his calcium levels to spike. The excess calcium was being absorbed into his brain, creating a coma-like state.

The doctors said there was a drug that could reduce the calcium levels, but it would only work for three to four months. Not that it mattered—he wasn't expected to live that long. It took two weeks for the medication to kick in. Later, Dad told me, "I could hear everyone speak, but I couldn't respond. It was... hell."

During this time, John called to check in and asked me to look at his beach house. It was a welcome distraction. The storm had pushed in the front foundation, destroying the furnace, washer, and dryer, and filling the basement garage with three feet of sand. After I reported back, John came up, and we spent three weekends digging it out. The physical labor was oddly

therapeutic amidst all the emotional chaos. Insurance covered the damage, and I got a brief mental break.

Fortunately, I function well under stress. It might seem like I was being emotionally distant, but in truth, I was just doing what I had to do. I compartmentalized so I could focus and be strong for Dad. He spent all of November in the hospital. We both knew we were fighting a losing battle, but we were in it together.

In December, we brought him home. We set up a hospital bed in the living room overlooking the cove and the ocean. Meals became a routine—breakfast, lunch, and dinner together. I slept upstairs in my old room with a baby monitor next to his bed. My sister looked after Mom. She was angry—angry that he hadn’t quit smoking thirty years ago. Stress affected her in the opposite way it did me. She couldn’t hold it together. Dad, for his part, didn’t understand her reaction. Once again, I found myself as the glue holding everyone together.

It’s hard to imagine how a weak and dying man could become a hero, but he did. Friends came by to lift his spirits—only to find themselves cheered up by him. He called all his old friends, even those who had cheated him. “God,” he said, “I’m a lucky man. I get to dot all my i’s and cross all my t’s.” I was proud of him.

That Christmas was one of our most meaningful family celebrations. It stretched into January of 1992.

Then came the beginning of the end. One day, while helping him into bed, I held his upper arm—and his humerus snapped like a dry stick. At the exact same moment, we both said, “Shit!” I called 911. The EMTs arrived quickly, but they couldn’t give him anything for the pain. So I grabbed a tall glass of liquid morphine and handed it to him. What was it going to do—kill him?

The next two weeks were all about keeping him comfortable. I did everything I could. Death finally came, and it was a mercy. He passed on January 31st at 5:20 p.m. I slept for days afterward.

He and I had agreed that a funeral wasn’t necessary. But Mom and my sister had other plans. I had my own idea, too.

Ann’s Zuni Service

As Mom and my sister held a traditional Baptist/Catholic service, Ann drove up our lane. I had asked her to conduct a small service for Dad at the house—just the three of us. She felt a traditional Zuni ceremony would be appropriate. I had no idea what that entailed, but I trusted her.

She brought feathers, incense, four driftwood pieces, and some shells. In front of the fireplace, she began with some Zuni words of wisdom. On the floor, she arranged the items to form a compass. Then she lit the incense—bad news for my allergies—but I kept quiet. I wasn’t sure where this was going, but I soon found out.

As she spoke about a great white horse arriving to carry Dad into the West, I wondered what he would make of this.

“Sam,” she called, “it’s time to get on the horse and ride into the West... Sam! You have to get on the horse!”

Apparently, Dad wasn’t cooperating.

“What’s wrong?” I asked, trying not to laugh.

“He won’t go,” she said. “He says he’s waiting for you—because he thinks you know more about that place than he does.”

“Tell him I’m just theorizing,” I said.

Speaking for him, she replied, “It’s better than nothing.”

“You got me there, Dad,” I said. “Are you okay? No pain, I hope.”

Through Ann, he answered, “The pain is gone. But I’m worried about your sister. She’s not handling this well. I spend a lot of time at her house.”

We talked a while longer. It was exactly what I needed, whether it was real or just my imagination. I thanked Ann deeply. But I sensed a profound sadness in her—one that went beyond empathy. She was carrying her own sorrow, and I couldn’t ease it.

Pushing Mom Around Paris and London

Three weeks after Dad died, we were in Paris. At first, I wondered if the trip was too soon. But people grieve in different ways, and deep down, we’d been mourning for months. Mom felt her time was short and wanted to see London and Paris one last time. She was right—time is always limited—so I did everything I could to make her feel happy and comfortable.

We stayed at my favorite little hideaway: Hotel du Palais Bourbon, on Rue de Bourgogne, just down the street from the Rodin Museum. Every corner of Paris has its own subculture. Ours was quiet, and it felt like a second home to me. My main job was pushing Mom around in a wheelchair. This was before Europe had embraced accessibility. It was physically demanding work, but thankfully it was February—cool and uncrowded.

There were five of us on the trip, most seeing Paris for the first time. I led the way, and the others followed like a slow-moving parade. We visited the major museums, walked everywhere, and even witnessed the latest street protests—Paris being Paris. I’d been here four times before, but this time, I was there for Mom.

One afternoon at a popular Left Bank bistro, my sister and I ordered spaghetti and meatballs. Something about the meat’s sour smell reminded me of the dog food from my childhood. Then it

hit me—the French still eat horsemeat. If the menu doesn't specify beef, it's probably horse. My sister was chewing away when I casually mentioned this. Her face turned pale as she swallowed in horror. All day, I neigh'd and tapped my foot like a hoof. She wasn't amused. She almost called me a horse's ass but knew better—it would have only encouraged me. Still, everyone had fun in spite of my antics.

Later that year, I had to take Mom to London along with two of her old friends. The plan was to meet her college roommate—now in her eighties—at her daughter's flat. We would tour the countryside. Though Mom's eyesight was failing, that didn't stop her from being a backseat driver. Letting go of control was hard for her, and she didn't intend to go quietly.

We drove through Salisbury, Stonehenge, Land's End, the Black Moor, the Cotswolds, and up into Snowdonia in Wales. We stayed in charming B&Bs—where a “new wing” meant anything built after the 1600s. One such place, just south of Shrewsbury, dated back to 1492 and had only three rooms. We took two of them. The floors slanted so much, I kept an arm on Mom at all times—it felt like a funhouse.

At four o'clock, we were invited downstairs for tea and to meet the other American guests. A well-dressed couple was already seated. Something about them felt oddly familiar. After introductions, we realized the connection: the man's mother, Harriet Smith, had owned the house we rented every summer in the 1950s. It had been part of their grand hotel.

What are the odds? It was a small world... or was it? This wasn't paranormal—it was just one of those strange but natural coincidences. With all the people we interact with, it's surprising these moments don't happen more often. Maybe they do—we just don't always notice them. Evolution, after all, is driven by random connections. This wasn't quite like the monkeys-with-typewriters scenario, but it was close. Sometimes we connect dots that seem meaningful but aren't. Matrixing—seeing patterns where none exist—can trick us. It's a reminder that not all things that go bump in the night are ghosts... sometimes it's just the cat.

In the end, our travels went well. Mom enjoyed herself. But she told me she never wanted to travel again.

Ann's Nurse Fuzzy-Wuzzy

Over the next two years, Mom stayed at home, looking out over the ocean. I hired friends to visit and keep her company—just an hour here and there. They would have done it for free, but I wanted to treat it professionally. As people age, they often grow more eccentric. Mom was no exception.

Growing up during the Great Depression left its mark. Like many of her generation, she hoarded food. We had a chest freezer in the basement, so I decided to check expiration dates. It felt like an archaeological dig in Greenland. Some of the items were over ten years old—twenty-two massive roasts, frozen solid. On top of that, Mom had fifteen cats. They were everywhere—and always hungry.

As strange as it sounds, the problem solved itself. For six months, I cooked roast beef for the cats. Carving it kept me in shape, and at first, the cats were fat and happy. Eventually, they got bored of beef—just like humans. It was a waste of money, but I made the best of it. From then on, I did all the grocery shopping.

Since rebuilding Mom and Dad's house, I hadn't taken on any major projects. Looking back, I realized how lucky we were. If we hadn't fixed the house before the Halloween Storm, we might have lost both Dad and the house. In addition to running the theater, I was now both doctor and nurse. I reminded myself that the only way to eat an elephant is one bite at a time.

By 1994, Mom—then 83—began to slow down. Her ability to absorb oxygen deteriorated. She once told me she liked Mark Twain's thoughts on death: *"I don't mind dying... I just don't want to be there when it happens."*

On September 14, 1994, at 2:00 in the afternoon, Polly Walker Cook died in the arms of her two children. Her last 24 hours were frustrating. She was angry about the indignities of needing care in the middle of the night. Her attitude toward dying unsettled me. I wanted to help her somehow. So again, I called Ann.

She arrived less than an hour later. Sitting beside Mom's bed, she tuned in. She described the room as resembling a hospital wing. An officious spirit nurse—whom she called "Nurse Fuzzy-Wuzzy"—was bustling about. Though Mom had passed, Ann said, "She's asleep now. She doesn't know she's gone. There's anger to work through. But old friends and family are here to guide her."

I wanted to believe it. I really did. But even Ann's vision couldn't fully convince me. It all seemed too neat, too peaceful. Death, in my experience, wasn't that civilized. If it were, we'd all pass in our sleep. But who was I to judge the universe? I had been fortunate to have such loving parents. Maybe—just maybe—Ann was right.

CHAPTER 21

Heather and Natalie

(Strange Event #12)

I loved both my parents deeply, but their time had come. Death is the cost of life—sooner or later, everything pays. With their passing, a strange shift occurred inside me. It felt like a karmic debt had been repaid. I had kept my unspoken promise to them, and now I could finally turn my attention to something that had waited for twenty years: my reconstruction project.

Everything felt right. I had done my homework. I knew the scope, the vision, and the steps I needed to take. Even though a new seven-screen movie theater had opened just five miles away, our attendance held strong. My old business wasn't dead yet. The tears had dried. It was time to build.

I planned to completely rebuild the entire building—from beneath the foundation up. I wanted to use all 12,000 square feet, including the mysterious back tower. That tower had always intrigued me. Standing forty-eight feet tall, it was built in 1933 and originally used as fly space to raise and lower painted stage backdrops out of view.

When I replaced the tower's roof back in 1980, I realized just how stunning the view was. The Atlantic curled along the coastline and ended in our stretch of white sand. I knew it would be worth the effort to convert the tower into a living space. To finance the project, I'd have to sell my house and some other holdings. I wanted to avoid a mortgage—we'd just paid off three of them, and I didn't want to start another.

But the original tower was in terrible shape. Years of storms had taken their toll. When my architect and structural engineer saw it, they both shook their heads in disbelief. They agreed it shouldn't have lasted a year—yet somehow, it had stood for 64 years. I had a massive job ahead.

I envisioned four floors in the new Tower. I also planned to reorganize the existing theater and storage areas into two larger rental spaces and a smaller, 200-seat theater. The Tower's ground floor would become a two-car garage and workshop. The second floor would hold a backstage area, two dressing rooms, and a poolroom-library. The third floor would offer storage and a bathroom for off-season actors. The fourth floor would be my home—a 12' x 12' x 12' living room with a glass wall facing the ocean, a galley kitchen, pantry, porch, an 18' dining room, a bedroom, and a bath.

The bids came in. They ranged from \$1.5 to \$1.75 million—far more than I expected. Access was an issue. To keep the tower and stay within property lines, we had only a narrow thirty-foot entrance for deliveries and machinery. I thought the bids were too high. Maybe I could save money by doing the work myself.

Since our town was a bustling summer resort, construction couldn't start before November 1st and had to wrap up before May 1st. I figured I could divide it into phases. In year one, we'd complete the foundation, framing, and exterior. In year two, we'd finish the interior—assuming my other properties had sold. After that, we could start work on the rest of the building the

following November. It was ambitious—maybe too ambitious. It would be like building four houses at once while running businesses in each one. I needed guidance.

Steve, the master carpenter who had worked on my parents' and sister's homes, agreed to help—but with caution. "This is your money," he said. "If anything goes wrong, it's your problem." I had never backed down from a challenge, but the scale of this one made me nervous. I needed an edge.

So I called Ann.

She agreed to do a psychic reading of the project but warned me that no one had ever asked her to read a construction site before. Still, I had relied on her for years, and this didn't seem too far outside her range. Seventeen years had passed since her first reading about Diane—exactly to the day. It was September 20, 1994.

We met in my old theater. I suggested she "read the building from its heart." She agreed. We sat together on the stage. She closed her eyes, went quiet, and shifted her vibration.

Waving her hand around the space, she said, "Boy, this is a big project. We may have to take it in stages... no pun intended. Let me focus on this year. There's an electrical issue—over my right shoulder. It's been there a while, but all this upheaval might trigger it. It's a real fire hazard. Get it checked first."

"Can you be more specific?" I asked.

"No, just that it's in a small area over there. An electrician will find it." Then she smiled. "Hi Sam! Your father's here. He's very interested."

She paused, focusing. "There's something outside. Very important. It's plumbing-related. Sam! I need to help Chip. Please let me concentrate. He's showing me his pipe and a glass of red wine... very proud of it. That's great, but I really need to focus—he wants me to help you."

I asked, "How's Mom?"

"She's still mad—about the loss of dignity—but surrounded by family and friends," she said, still speaking as my father.

"Stay close, Dad. I need the help."

"He's going, but he likes being near you," she said with a smile. "Now... back to the building. There's something else I can't shake. It's not construction-related. I'm getting early June of next year. You're going to fall in love. In the lobby, of all places..."

I interrupted, "Not interested in love problems right now. I need help with the tower!"

“Okay, okay,” she said, smiling. “Back to plumbing. Something’s going to happen, but it’ll be fixed easily next May.”

“What kind of problem? Can I stop it?”

“I’ll try, but that might be all I’m getting today.”

After our session, the electrician found a loose screw inside an old electrical box—just as Ann had warned. It could’ve caused overheating and a fire. Problem solved. Thank you, Ann. But the plumbing issue was still looming.

Steve and I started rebuilding the tower. It was a beast of a job. The tower measured 26 by 40 feet and was 48 feet tall. The original foundation was only five inches deep—no wonder it swayed in the wind. A backhoe had to work inside the already fragile structure. I had to remove the stage to create work space, further weakening it.

We dug inside and outside, poured new foundations, and were lucky to have mild weather. By early 1995, the foundation was complete. Keeping Ann’s prediction in mind, we made sure to carefully reconnect the sewer line.

In April, the water was turned on. Everything seemed fine. Construction continued, and our movie season was scheduled to start on Memorial Day weekend. A massive cleanup was needed before we could open.

Then—one hour before showtime—the women’s toilet backed up. A camera inspection revealed a mass of roots and paper. We’d used that bathroom for a month with no issues. Apparently, the limited use of toilet paper hadn’t triggered the blockage until opening day.

The excavators came and uncovered the problem: two sewer lines. One was old and unused, while the other had been added later. By mistake, we had connected the new outflow to the abandoned line. It was an easy fix once discovered.

Ann had been right—again. But even with her warning, I hadn’t prevented it. Why? What was the point of these psychic glimpses if I couldn’t act on them properly? I felt like I was being tested.

And then I remembered the other part of Ann’s reading—falling in love.

Meeting Heather and Natalie

Summer began quietly, as it usually did. We ran the theater seven nights a week, but early-season attendance was light. One evening, a tall, pretty blonde walked up to the box office and asked for two tickets. I sold them and watched her walk away. Something about her made me pause. She turned, hesitated, and came back with a broad, toothy smile.

With an unmistakable Irish accent, she asked, “Excuse me, sir! Would you happen to know where we can meet some kids our own age?”

Her demeanor stopped me. There was something about her presence. I felt it—something oddly familiar. Who are you? Why do I feel this? Then a brown-haired girl joined her, and I felt it again. It was the same feeling I’d once had with Diane—an overwhelming sense of love. Not sexual—more like the love a father feels for his children. I was forty-five. They were maybe nineteen. And yet, my heart opened.

I answered, “Yes... I have some ideas... but who are you?”

The blonde replied, “I’m sorry. This is Heather, and I, myself, am Natalie. We’re from Cork, Ireland, working at The Hill Inn this summer. Who may you be?”

I extended my hand. “Hello, Heather and Natalie of Cork. My name is Chip Cook. I’m pleased to make your acquaintance.”

Ann’s prediction came flooding back. Early June. Fall in love. In the lobby. I had completely dismissed it—and yet here it was.

I handed them a list of places to meet people. After the movie, they left—but returned later that night during the second showing. We talked until closing.

Their connection to each other was just as unusual. Though both straight, they had met at Heather’s birthday party at the University of Cork on October 9th—only months earlier. They clicked instantly, spending all their time together. Planning to work that summer on Nantucket, they both had vivid dreams just a week before their departure—dreams telling them to go to Maine instead. They took it as a sign. After arriving, they wandered through downtown and discovered my theater. This was just two weeks after Ann’s reading.

What was this? Coincidence? Fate? Again, I felt like a passive observer in a life that was unfolding with eerie intention.

We became friends. They often dropped into the theater to chat. They didn’t find other young people to hang out with—instead, they worked three jobs each and were constantly exhausted. I suggested that, once their work season ended, I take them on a tour of the “real” Maine. They liked the idea—but then disappeared for over a month.

I spiraled into depression. I functioned at work, but each afternoon before my shift, I’d sleep for three hours. The thought of them leaving the country crushed me. I couldn’t explain it. My friends thought I had gone off the deep end—and I couldn’t blame them.

Then, at the end of August, Heather returned as if nothing had happened. She explained they’d been working nonstop and sleeping every spare moment—but now they were tired and ready for a break. She asked if I still wanted to show them around. I was thrilled.

I told her about my favorite places: Foss Mountain on the Maine–New Hampshire border, whitewater rafting on the Kennebec River, the Bar Harbor area, and hiking on Monhegan Island. She was sure Natalie would love it, too. As she turned to leave, she asked, “Would it be all right if another guy came along?”

“Sure... who?”

“Kevin. You know him—he’s the projectionist at the other movie theater.”

“He works on my equipment too. Great idea.”

After she left, I felt like dancing. My spirits lifted instantly. But I still wondered—what was the meaning behind this strange psychic drama?

About a week before the trip, Kevin came by to fix a minor equipment issue. He used the opportunity to tease me. “So... which one do you want?”

I laughed. “Hate to break it to you, but I’m ninety-nine percent sure I’m your date—and I don’t kiss for at least a month.”

His face said it all.

Before our road trip, the girls moved from The Hill Inn into my parents’ house. It was a perfect temporary arrangement. They slept for hours—typical for overworked teens. Even during the drive to Foss Mountain, they napped in the back seat.

The final hike to the summit was short but steep. The reward was a breathtaking 360-degree view of New Hampshire’s White Mountains. We had a picnic, soaked up the sun, and embraced the serenity. Foss is peaceful, remote, and rarely marked on maps. Locals like it that way.

After a few hours, we drove northeast toward the Kennebec River. The next day, we were going whitewater rafting at The Forks.

We found a quirky 1960s U-shaped motor court. That evening, we tossed a beat-up orange Frisbee around—the same one Diane and I had used years ago. I had kept it for sentimental reasons. This trip, however, I let unfold on its own. No plans. No expectations. Just being in the moment.

Dinner was at the town’s only open restaurant—a rustic spot filled with moose heads and a Western-Alaskan vibe. Exhausted, we slept deeply. Kevin and I in one room, the girls safely next door.

The morning was foggy. As we drove, the girls snoozed again. We arrived at the rafting company by 8:30 a.m., changed into wetsuits, and sat through the usual scare-the-hell-out-of-you safety video. I’d seen it countless times, but the girls were focused as if preparing for finals.

As our bus bumped along the dirt road to the dam, Heather suddenly began smacking Natalie on the shoulder. “This was your idea. This was your idea!”

Natalie grinned nervously. “I know. We’re going to die... somewhere in Maine.”

Kevin and I tried not to laugh. I leaned forward and reassured them, “You’re not going to die. You’re going to love it.”

At the river’s edge, we launched our rafts. The first set of rapids—Taster—hit fast and hard. Screaming with joy, the girls shouted, “That was fantastic! Let’s do it again!”

I was overjoyed. They were alive with excitement.

We paddled fourteen miles downriver—five of those in roaring whitewater. One rapid, Big Momma, could hit Class 5 or 6 levels. It demanded respect. Later, as the water calmed, we floated at eye level with the river, playing and splashing like kids.

Then Natalie suddenly said, “Oh... Kevin! I’m terribly sorry. I peed in your wetsuit!”

Kevin’s stunned face was priceless. “That’s okay. Happens all the time.”

After the river run, we enjoyed a hearty cookout—salmon, steak, burgers, salads, chips, desserts. We watched our trip video, and the girls bought a copy to take home to Ireland. I purchased a photo of us crashing through a wave. We were all high on adrenaline and laughter.

Next stop: Bar Harbor.

We made it to Bar Harbor just in time to catch the sunset from the top of Cadillac Mountain. Still full from lunch, the girls wanted to explore on their own. Kevin and I wandered through the tourist shops—it felt just like our own resort town back home. But this trip wasn’t for us. It was for them. I wanted to give them a taste of freedom—of being travelers instead of just seasonal workers. Even Kevin started taking on a protective, fatherly role. He kept checking his watch, wondering if the “kids” were okay.

We regrouped around ten. Rather than stay the night in town, I decided we should drive an hour south toward Port Clyde. We found a motel just north of Rockport and collapsed into bed.

The next morning, we headed to one of my favorite places in the world—Monhegan Island. Visiting it was like stepping back in time a hundred years. The island had two distinct faces. One side was home to a small fishing and artist community. The other faced the open Atlantic and featured 164-foot cliffs and raw natural beauty. The Island Inn, a grand hotel from the 1800s steamship era, still stood as a reminder of a different world.

After breakfast in Port Clyde, we boarded the mail boat at 10:30 a.m. The wind was high, and the sea was rough. As we set off, I went to find the girls—only to discover them seasick, leaning over the stern of the boat. I hadn’t expected that. Kevin and I took care of them, helping them

move to the center of the boat, where they curled up in our laps and tried to pretend they were still on solid ground. They had loved the river waves—but the ocean was another story. I felt guilty for not thinking to ask if they got seasick.

Monhegan's beauty was undiminished. But the girls were sick all day. We checked into our B&B and put them to bed. Kevin and I hiked the cliff trail and checked on them periodically. By late afternoon, they were up and hungry, and we walked together through the quaint, century-old village.

I had hoped to impress them with "wild Maine," but Heather had had enough of my tour-guide routine.

"Chip," she said, "We're from Ireland. We're surrounded by ocean and views. One hundred and sixty-four-foot cliffs are nothing. We've got the Cliffs of Moher—eight hundred feet—and even the tallest one in Europe."

It was a fair point—from a testy, recovering seasick girl. She also knew the return trip would be just as bad. In her mind, I was to blame.

Kevin and I tried to lighten the mood, but it was clear our realities were very different.

The next day, the ocean calmed. The ride back was smooth, and the girls didn't get sick. They were quiet in the car at first but eventually returned to their usual selves. They talked about going to Boston for a few days, then to New York to visit Heather's cousin, and finally a trip to the Caribbean.

But their big travel dreams didn't account for their enormous pile of luggage. Trying to be the helpful dad, I said, "I'd be happy to drive you to Boston, but... what about all your stuff?"

There was a long pause.

Heather finally said, "From New York to Ireland, there's no problem. My cousin can hold our bags while we're in the Caribbean."

I had an idea. "What if I drive you to Boston and drop you off for as long as you want? Then, I'll return, pack your bags into my car, and drive you both to New York City."

They looked at each other, discussed it, and then answered, "We accept your offer. Thank you."

I almost laughed. What was there to discuss? Maybe they were still holding a grudge from the island ordeal. Who knew? But their moods improved.

On our way south, I made a quick detour off I-95. I wanted to introduce them to Ann. It wasn't out of the way, and I figured she wouldn't be home anyway. But she was.

We exchanged pleasantries, and Ann was her usual polite self. She didn't give anything away, but I planned to call her later to ask what she could sense about these two young women. After all, she had predicted this relationship even before the girls had met.

What stunned me was how similar my feelings for Heather and Natalie were to what I had once felt for Diane. I had believed no two relationships were alike—like fingerprints. But this... this felt the same. I hoped Ann could offer insight.

In Boston, I surprised them with tickets to a matinee of Cirque du Soleil. They were thrilled. I dropped them off at the YWCA, made sure they had my phone number, and drove home to an empty house.

My friends were silent. They'd long accepted my eccentricities, but this new "super dad" persona was a new one—even for me.

The days dragged until I returned to Boston to drive them to New York.

Before picking them up, I called Ann. I could tell she was dealing with her own struggles, and I offered to call back.

"No... it's fine," she said. "I may not be able to read them, but I'll try."

Her voice hinted that she had already tried and failed.

"You have a strong connection to them," she finally said. "There's a bridge to Diane. But for some reason, I'm not allowed to see the details."

"Not allowed?" I asked. "Not allowed by who?"

She had no answer.

"Thanks for trying. Maybe someday... someone will let you see more."

I hung up more confused than ever. I thought about the entire year and couldn't make sense of it. These girls meant something to me—something deep. But what?

I knew I'd see them one last time before they left. The thought of it wrecked me. I cried. I tried to brace myself for the emptiness that was coming. I'd felt it before—after Diane, in both 1972 and 1977. But this was different. Or was it?

They weren't Diane. They were just two girls from Ireland. It was 1995. I had a building to rebuild. Emotional attachment wasn't a replacement for real life.

Get a grip, Chip.

In Boston, I picked them up right on schedule. They'd loved the Cirque show and were excited for New York. On the way, we stopped at my favorite deli—Rein's in Vernon, Connecticut. They devoured their food, clearly unimpressed by Boston's cuisine.

That night we stayed in West Hartford with my friend John. He was curious to meet them—he had heard the stories. He welcomed us warmly. We talked briefly and all turned in early. I was surprised by how easily everyone connected. John could be a bit of a recluse, but he genuinely enjoyed their company.

The next day, we drove into Manhattan without trouble. At 11:00 a.m., I dropped them off at Heather's cousin's apartment on West 55th Street and Broadway. We hugged. They kissed me on the cheek. I got in my car and drove back to Maine.

And I cried.

I was in trouble. I could feel the pain already shattering my soul.

CHAPTER 22

A Viking's Life

(Strange Event #13)

(Transcribed within two hours of the experience)

Heather and Natalie made it safely back to Ireland, but the winter of 1995–1996 hit me hard. Emotionally, I was a wreck. Though I threw myself into rebuilding the tower, my heart stayed with the girls. I kept asking myself: Why did I feel so deeply connected to them? Over a year had passed since Ann first gave me that unsolicited message—her prediction that I would fall in love. And I had. But what did it mean?

Ann tried to help. She attempted to “read” the situation at least six or eight times, but each time she was blocked. It was like a locked door with a “do not enter” sign posted firmly on the other side. Who—or what—was preventing her from seeing more?

Logic and emotion are rarely allies. But just like with Diane years earlier, my emotional response to the girls felt disproportionate to reality. I couldn't shake the sense that some kind of intent was behind it all—an intent that refused to explain itself.

Still, I wanted to keep the lines open. I called the girls on Christmas. Later, for their graduation from the University of Cork, I sent them gold necklaces. In my mind, I wasn't just an old friend—I was a proud father.

Then, concerned about possible import taxes on the gifts, I called Heather to let her know I'd cover any cost.

She answered softly, “Hello?”

I said, “Hi... I just wanted to let you know—if there's any tax on the package I sent, please don't worry. I'll pay you back.”

There was a pause. Then, through tears, she said, “Chip... my father died of a heart attack last night.”

I was stunned. There I was, worried about postage, and she was reeling from her father's death. I didn't know what to say. I felt completely out of place—and ashamed for having called at such a moment.

In the weeks that followed, I called just to check in on her. It became a regular thing. Heather now had a boyfriend named Derrick, and Natalie remained a close friend. I was relieved she wasn't alone.

A month later, Ann told me she'd received some information—but what she gave me felt like a detour. She said I needed to meet with a woman named Kathleen, a counselor in Cape Elizabeth, Maine. Most of her clients were gay women. She rarely worked with straight men. But, as a

favor to Ann, she agreed to see me. I'd never heard of a psychic referring someone to a counselor before. What was this about?

Still, I trusted Ann. She'd been right too many times to ignore now.

Kathleen and I met for three sessions. She used hypnosis and regression techniques to access deep parts of the mind. I was skeptical of past-life regression. To me, it seemed more like guided imagination—an expressive form of therapy rather than a window into history. But I stayed open.

In two of these regressions, I “lived” uneventful lives—once as a math teacher in Germany, and once as a family man in France. Boring. But the third session was different.

In this story, I was a member of the English landed gentry in 1850. I lived in a U-shaped house: my wife in one wing, my mistress in the other. We had no children, and the two women despised each other. I didn't like myself in this life. I was cold, selfish, and viewed both women more as objects than as people.

Oddly, the woman playing my wife resembled a former girlfriend from this life. My mistress could have been played by Ann. If my imagination was in charge, it wasn't painting a flattering portrait.

In the story, I came home one night from the village pub. The house was dark. No candles, no servants. I stumbled through the shadows and tripped over something soft. I struck a match.

There she was—my mistress, dead in a pool of blood. My heart stopped. I ran upstairs and found my wife pretending to sleep. Rage surged through me, but I couldn't bring myself to kill her.

As I turned to leave, she hissed, “I killed your child too. You know she was pregnant.”

Frozen in horror, I left her there. That night, I buried my lover and unborn child beneath the stone floor of the cellar. At dawn, I rode away—forever.

Friends of mine were joining an exploratory mission to southern Africa, and I joined them. I thought it would be a fresh start. Instead, I found more death.

As we crossed vast open grasslands, our group was ambushed by a native tribe we had been sent to “hunt.” Tall grass hid everything. Spears flew. Men screamed. I turned to fire but saw no target. A spear struck me from behind, spinning me into the air. I saw nothing but sky—and then blackness.

Kathleen gently brought me back. She said I had twisted and clutched my back during the session. My face and body mirrored pain, though I felt none. I only felt overwhelming sorrow. What was my mind trying to tell me?

Later, Ann remarked, “Seems like this isn’t the first time a woman of yours tried to get rid of me. I’ll have to be more careful.”

Was she joking? I wasn’t sure. But it was clear she had no problem imagining herself as my mistress.

Still, none of this explained my deep connection to Heather, Natalie, or Diane. After another session with Kathleen, I felt more frustrated than ever. She reassured me, “We’re getting closer. There’s something further back. We’ll work on it next time.”

That evening, I returned to the theater, set up the cash drawers, and started making popcorn. Then it happened.

I was suddenly pulled back against the wall—or perhaps I fell. In just seconds, I was flooded with what felt like a full lifetime of memory. It took me hours to process and write it all down.

This was nothing like the sessions with Kathleen. It didn’t feel symbolic or imaginative. It felt like something I had actually lived.

I know how that sounds. I’m not saying I “believe” in past lives. But what happened next shook me to my core.

The full memory—of life as a Viking chieftain—came out of nowhere.

My first memory in that life was brutal.

I was an infant, swaddled in a heavy shawl and propped up in a basket near a stream. My mother was nearby, washing clothes on a sunny day. Two other women were further downstream doing the same. Suddenly, one of them screamed and bolted. My mother looked up just in time to catch a spear to the neck. She collapsed—half in the water, half on the rocks. Her blank, lifeless eyes stared past me. I screamed in terror—and everything went black.

When I came to, pain shot through me as I was yanked up by one arm. A man stood over me, sword raised. He would’ve killed me if not for a woman’s voice stopping him. I couldn’t see her. Darkness returned.

Later, I awoke with a wet cloth over my head. The stench told me I was tied to an animal. It was hot, suffocating, and terrifying. I drifted in and out of awareness.

Eventually, the cloth was removed. A woman lifted me from the basket and set me down on a cold stone floor. I was too weak to stand. Time jumped. I was no longer a baby—I was a child, now a slave to a powerful warlord.

He beat me for any reason. I think he enjoyed it. His woman was equally cruel when he was around, though oddly gentle when he wasn’t. They kept me locked in a windowless hole above the gate tower. In summer, it baked. In winter, it froze. I wished I could die.

Years passed in this daily routine of pain and boredom. I grew into a young man.

Eventually, the warlord's woman started treating me with kindness. She was lonely. The village women feared her. Most of the men were off fighting; only I remained.

One day, she told me the truth. I had been born the son of a Viking chieftain. Her warlord had killed my father, destroyed my village, and murdered my mother. Two fishing boats had been out to sea and escaped. I had nearly been killed, too—until she suggested I'd make a better trophy. Enslaving a Viking prince sent a powerful message.

More time passed. I was thirteen. The warlord neglected his woman completely, and she brought me to her bed. I didn't resist. I was learning to survive. I studied her, the village, everything I could. I knew the ocean lay west. I'd heard the survivors of my village had moved north, fishing and trading in secrecy.

One day, after we had slept together and she was cleaning up, the warlord returned unexpectedly. I was still in bed, hidden under the covers. I was a dead man.

Luckily, I had hidden a knife in the straw. As he leapt onto the bed—thinking I was his woman—I struck. The blade went through his right eye and into his skull. He died instantly, soundlessly.

I dressed quickly and ran—west, toward the sun. Eventually, I reached the ocean and followed the coast north. That year on the run made my slavery look easy.

Eventually, I reached a new territory ruled by another warlord. He wasn't allied with my former captor. I disguised myself, traded work for food, and stayed inconspicuous. Rumors swirled of a Viking "bastard" who had killed a warlord. It seemed they were talking about me—but I let the story grow without correcting it. I had learned not to get noticed.

After several years, I reached a hidden fishing village. When I entered, I was cautious. I didn't speak their language, but they spoke mine. I didn't know my real name. They only knew me as "The Viking Bastard"—the slave who'd killed his master.

Eventually, older men recognized me by my father's features. They knelt before me. I knelt back. Their leader was my older brother. I was finally home.

Over the next three years, I learned everything I could: village history, fishing, fighting—the Viking way. Our community was seventy-four strong, mostly women and children. Our survival depended on two boats and secrecy. We moved often. We were Vikings, and that meant we were hated and hunted.

Our longhouse was a marvel of ingenuity. Trees were bent and tied together to form arches, covered in hides to make a waterproof shelter. Men slept on the outside edges with weapons; women and children inside, under layers of warmth. A central fire burned under a vent. If

attacked, invaders entering through the ends would be funneled into the fire as our men struck from the sides.

In theory, it was brilliant. But none of the old men had ever seen it tested.

I trained hard, became second-in-command, and had at least three daughters—no sons. We all knew the village mattered more than the individual. Even affection was regulated. I loved my girls fiercely, but from a distance. Everyone did the same. To show favoritism was dangerous.

Our secret weapon was an old wise woman. She could read danger in fire. One day she told me, “You have a son. Neither of you knows it. You must kill him while he’s weak—or he will destroy us when he’s strong.”

I didn’t understand her meaning.

Years passed. Our village grew stronger. We traded dried fish and gathered intelligence. News came: the brother of the warlord I had killed was at war. Eventually, we learned a new warlord had taken power—claiming to be the son of the man I killed. That made no sense. I had killed him before he had children. Unless... the son was mine.

My bastard son.

A girl from a nearby village warned us: the warlord—my son—was camped just over the southern hills, planning an attack at dawn.

We had to move fast. The weather was turning. We packed our boats and prepared to strike first. The women and children waited on board. I led the men into the woods, under the moonlight.

We found the camp. It looked deserted except for bedrolls near campfires. No guards. We circled, crept closer, and attacked.

It was a trap.

They were waiting. They had double our numbers. It was a massacre. Only one other man and I escaped. We raced back to the river to warn the others.

By dawn, we had reached the boats. The enemy jeered from the shore. The sea was rough, but we had no choice. As we struggled to row away, the waves overwhelmed us. Many drowned—especially the youngest.

The rest of us were captured.

I was dragged before the new warlord—my son.

He leaned in close and whispered, “You’ve escaped much. But not today. I can’t kill you—but I can kill those you love.”

I pleaded, “Take me. Spare the others. Kill me.”

He smirked. “On her deathbed, my mother told me the truth. You’re my father. I can’t kill you. But I can make you wish I had.”

He ordered me staked out—naked—to witness the horror. The women were systematically raped, tortured, and executed. I watched every moment. My daughters were among them. I couldn’t react. If I did, he’d know, and they’d suffer even worse.

The pain shattered my soul.

Then came my punishment. They shattered my knees, castrated me, shoved the remains in my mouth, and burned out my eyes with a hot iron.

Still alive, I was left in the sun to die.

One of the girls, a former member of our village, kept me alive. She fed me. She ordered me to survive. And I did—for two more years.

Eventually, I died a broken man.

Back in this life, I was left shaken. The emotions were overwhelming—too raw, too specific. Could this explain my connection to Diane, Heather, and Natalie?

I suddenly knew: they were my daughters—slaughtered before my eyes. In that Viking life, I had failed to protect them.

No wonder the feelings in this life were so intense.

Had all these strange events been guiding me toward this realization? Maybe. Maybe not. I could only speculate.

But at last... it made sense.

CHAPTER 23

A Viking's Life... Revisited

"I dream my painting. I paint my dream."

~ Vincent Van Gogh

(Transcribed notes from a recorded counseling session)

I told Kathleen, my counselor, about the Viking life memory. As I relived the vivid flash, it was difficult not to break down emotionally. My biggest question was simple but overwhelming: "Did it really happen?"

"Does it matter?" Kathleen asked gently.

"Well... yes, it does," I answered. "If it really happened, it could explain so many disconnected things."

"And if it was just your imagination creating a collage of possible connections?" she asked.

"Then it leaves me back where I started. With no real answers," I replied. "Still, I can't help but wonder—why would my subconscious go to such elaborate lengths to invent this?"

She tilted her head thoughtfully. "What if you can never know for sure—real or imagined? Does that change anything you can do about it?"

"There's another layer to this," I said. "Do you remember the Cyclops Experiment?"

"Yes... that was with Ann, right? But how is that connected?" she asked.

"It could be everything," I said. "Just like the Cyclops, the Viking story could either be a genuine recollection or something my mind created. But if a memory becomes more than the sum of its parts—if it forms a kind of pseudo-reality—then it can create emotional baggage that feels just as real as any actual trauma. Whether it happened or not, I'm stuck with it all the same."

Kathleen nodded. "Assuming your understanding of reality is correct."

"I can't prove it," I admitted. "But that was my conclusion after the Cyclops Experiment. That imagined or not, the baggage still weighs the same."

She asked, "So let's go over the connections. Do you really believe Heather, Natalie, and Diane were your Viking daughters?"

I paused. "I have to wear two hats. One hat believes in past lives. The other sees this as my subconscious constructing a symbolic story. But either way, both hats tell the same tale: the three Viking daughters and these three girls are emotionally linked. So... maybe."

Kathleen leaned in. "Why do you feel that?"

“Because my feelings were the same for each of them. That shouldn’t be the case. Every relationship should be unique. But these three... they evoked the same depth of emotion. Before the Viking memory, it made no sense. But after Diane ended our relationship, and again after Heather and Natalie left for Ireland, I fell into major depression both times. The emotional pain I felt was way out of proportion—except it matched the emotional devastation from the Viking story. If that story is real, it could explain the connection. It’s like a scar on the soul. Maybe all of this—everything I’ve gone through—is part of a healing process. If it’s not real, then maybe my mind just created a story to make sense of the pain.”

Kathleen said, “But even if it’s imagined, that’s still an answer. Whether the story is historically accurate or symbolic, the question becomes—can you release the baggage, real or imagined? And I know what you’re thinking... life is dramatic enough without adding more tragedy.”

“That’s exactly what I was thinking,” I said. “If the universe loves drama, it got it. But from a storytelling perspective, the Viking saga feels too elaborate for something I just made up. The scale tips toward it being real. What do you think?”

She sighed. “To us, it feels real. But what is time to the universe? I think you should keep both hats on and continue viewing it from both angles. Accept that you may never know the full truth. You’re dealing with the unknown, and anything that comes from the unknown is, by nature, uncertain. This might be as close to clarity as you’ll ever get. Who else from your current life did you recognize in the Viking story?”

“Lots of people,” I said. “My mother and father were the same in both lives. Maybe that’s why it was so important to help them pass peacefully in this life. In the Viking life, I was too young to help them. My mother hated cascading streams, and in that past life, she died in one. I hate the feel of wet cloth. In the Viking life, they used it to cover my head. The warlord’s woman reminded me of a contentious ex-girlfriend. She keeps turning up and causing disruption across lifetimes.”

“My friend John? He was my brother. And that fits—our dynamic in this life is just like feuding siblings. The old wise woman was clearly Ann. She’s been my advisor here, too. Bill, one of my closest friends now, was the only other man to survive the village massacre. And the girl who took care of me as I lay dying? That was Sally—a close family friend today.”

I paused. “It might also explain my love for sailing, even before I had a chance to do it. I’m building a tower on my rental property, and the structure has a feudal feel to it—like a seat of power. In Viking days, a tower meant strength. Now, it’s the core of my modern livelihood.”

“And there’s more. I’ve always had a hard time forming male friendships. That was true in both lives. And I’ve never really felt the need to marry. Those themes keep repeating. Most of the Viking characters have clear counterparts in this life. But a few don’t—the warlord, the monster son, and the three mothers of my daughters. And maybe that’s a good thing. I’m not sure how I’d handle recognizing them now.”

Kathleen’s voice was firm. “If you ever do, call me first. Promise me that.”

“I’ll try,” I said. “But you’re right—I never met my father in the Viking life.”

“Then how do you know who he was?”

“I had two viewpoints,” I explained. “One was living the memory. The other was like reviewing the story from a distance—filling in the blanks. That dual perspective helped me piece things together. And the funny thing is—it all still works, no matter which hat I’m wearing.”

But deep down, I knew there was one person I couldn’t face. If I ever met my Viking son in this life—the monster—I honestly didn’t know what I’d do. For that reason alone, I needed to know whether the story was real.

Kathleen believed there was more. Something deeper still buried. Was it in my subconscious—or just in my imagination? In our next session, she planned to take me back even further.

The memory of that Viking life continued to haunt me. According to Kathleen, this kind of sudden recollection wasn’t unusual. She’d seen it happen before. Her thought was, “Maybe you’re opening your mind to your larger self, and it just emptied out.”

I wasn’t sure what she meant. As an Agnostic, I wasn’t sure I wanted to know.

But it did make me wonder—why did that memory return while I was doing something as simple as making popcorn? Imagination, I had already learned, is more powerful than most of us think. And whether these experiences were real or invented, one thing was clear:

On some level, we truly become what we believe ourselves to be.

CHAPTER 24

A Greek's Life

"All men desire to know."

~ Aristotle

(Transcribed notes from a recorded session)

During our next session, Kathleen once again led me into a regression. She gave only one instruction: "Go to a place that holds a strong karmic connection to the Viking life."

Almost immediately, I found myself in the role of a frightened young boy. I was hiding—terrified. The stench of death filled the air. In the suffocating heat and darkness, I tried to vanish into the shadows. Suddenly, the door was torn from its leather hinges, and blinding light flooded in. I had been found. There was nowhere to run.

At that point, I felt I was describing emotions more than truly experiencing them. It was like watching a film in my head.

"Who has you?" Kathleen asked.

"The Spartans... They've killed everyone. Now they're going to kill me!" I cried—too dramatically for comfort. Part of me stood outside the experience, thinking, *Spartans? What's next—dinosaurs?*

"Go to the next safe place in this life," she encouraged.

I settled a bit. "I'm being taken prisoner with other children from my village. We're being marched to Sparta."

And so it began again. I could already sense that this life, like the Viking one, would not be filled with joy.

"Jump ahead to a better place," Kathleen suggested.

"I'm working in a field like a slave. But to them, it's called training. We work all day. If they decide we've done enough, they let older boys attack us—for entertainment. Our masters watch it like a sport. This isn't play. A friend of mine was killed. We have to fight back with everything we've got. It's brutal—but it distracts me from the pain of labor. I've learned how to fight... and if I have to, I'll kill." Even as I spoke, I felt uneasy at the raw aggression in my tone.

"Tell me about Sparta," she prompted.

"It's set in a long valley, surrounded by steep, straight mountains. The city is a military camp divided into classes. Slaves are at the bottom. The farming class is made up of retired soldiers and men unfit for war—they feed the population and produce the next generation of warriors. At the top are the soldiers. One or two rulers make all the decisions."

“Why did they keep you alive?” she asked.

“They didn’t keep us alive—we kept ourselves alive by fighting harder than anyone else. They respect strength, not the person. If I kill one of them, they don’t punish me—they see it as helping remove the weak. My reward is survival... barely,” I said with a bitter pride.

“So... you’re fitting in?” she asked.

“No. One way or another, I’m already dead. Either they’ll kill me, or I’ll become a monster. There’s no escape. I can’t win,” I said, overwhelmed by hopelessness.

“Go to when you’re ten years old. What do you see?” she asked.

“I’m no longer a slave. The children who survived have been shaped into a training unit. We’re still at the bottom, and we have to keep fighting. There’s no love here—just competition and pain. Our bond with each other is the only connection we have... but even that, they try to use against us.”

“And five years later—where are you?” she asked.

“I just killed three soldiers during training. It wasn’t supposed to happen, but it got out of hand. One of them accidentally killed my friend—he struck his head on a stone. We were using short wooden swords. They’re blunt, but if you drive one into someone’s chest just right, it kills. That’s what happened. Three times in a row. All accidents. No one said a word,” I recalled coldly.

“What did they do to you?” Kathleen asked, carefully.

“They put me in charge of a unit of young soldiers. Then they sent us to attack a small city that had broken its allegiance to Sparta and joined Athens. We were to ‘teach them a lesson.’ Our orders were to cause maximum damage—in the name of Sparta,” I said, my voice detached.

“Were you successful?” she asked, although I sensed she didn’t want to know.

“Yes. We killed all the Athenian soldiers and badly injured the city’s council members. They voted to return to Sparta. We lost only two men. Back home, I was celebrated as a hero.”

“You referred to it as ‘home.’ Is Sparta home to you now?” she asked.

“If a monster gives birth to another monster, does that make them a family?” I replied. “No. They live only because they fear each other. Sparta made me a monster, and I want to destroy it. Until I can, I’ll live as a Spartan—or die as one.” I barely recognized the voice I was speaking with. These didn’t feel like my words.

“What happens next?” she asked gently. “Go to a moment when things become clearer.”

“I’m twenty. I’ve destroyed too many innocent lives. I can’t take it anymore. Some of my men are like me—disillusioned. Others just love to kill. We’ve been sent deep into Athenian territory to ‘observe’ a city. But tonight will be different.

We stood in two rows at the back of a council meeting. Fear filled the room—everyone believed Sparta would win again. I told my men to draw their swords. Then, on my command, the back row cut the throats of the front row—our own soldiers. The council froze in shock. We’d just betrayed Sparta. We pledged allegiance to Athens. So did everyone else in the room. It was political theatre—and it worked.

I was summoned to Athens and given an advisory position. I was introduced to many daughters of important men. They wanted to make me a weapon against Sparta.” I paused. “But where were these brutal words coming from? They didn’t feel like mine.”

Sensing the weight of the moment, Kathleen shifted the focus. “Go to the next major event.”

“I’m part of Athens’ military now. We’re planning to destroy Sparta’s navy in Syracuse. It’s risky. The plan is to trap them in their own harbor. My wife disapproves, but marriage here is more political than personal. I will go—and either win, or die trying.”

“Go to the day after the battle,” she said softly.

“We were defeated. Spies betrayed us. Syracuse knew we were coming. They laid chains across the harbor entrances, trapping us. We were slaughtered as we tried to land. Some of us made it ashore, but it was a trap—a swamp. We had no chance. Now, we’re slaves. They’ve put us to work in a narrow quarry, intending to work us to death. We’ve failed.”

Kathleen’s voice turned gentle. “You’re coming back now. I’ll count you out—20, 19, 18... 3, 2, 1. Open your eyes. Take a moment to rest.”

Her voice felt kind. “How do you feel?”

“Not good,” I said. “It was awful. I hurt so many good people. But I was pretending. I only played the monster to survive. I wasn’t one.”

She replied, “Monsters are made, not born. And what’s made... can be unmade.”

There was hope in her voice, but I wasn’t sure I believed it. I desperately wanted to know where these visions were coming from. Were they just products of my imagination—or were they real?

If that identity was supposed to be me... then I had changed a lot. Either way, it was time to put both hats back on: one for belief, one for doubt.

And I was relieved this session had ended.

CHAPTER 25

A Greek's Life – Revisited

"The soul never thinks without a mental picture."

~ Aristotle

I couldn't stop thinking about the Greek story. At first, I tried to analyze it while wearing my "this is real" hat. Then I switched to my "this is symbolic" hat. I wore both hats so often, I was beginning to wear them out. Kathleen and I continued with our sessions, and slowly, more pieces of a much larger puzzle began to fall into place.

In that Greek life, there was only one person I recognized: my former girlfriend, Ricky. She was my wife—though our marriage, like in this life, was loveless. I wasn't any better of a husband than she was a wife. But what haunted me more was the amount of horror I had witnessed—and caused. "Monster" is not a word I use lightly, but we were monsters. I had a suspicion—just a feeling—that the Spartan whose throat I slit might have been my son from the Viking life.

If the universe operates on some sort of karmic balancing system, maybe that explains the symmetry between the Greek and Viking lives. Maybe there's an internal order to the chaos of my "wonderland." But before diving into the idea of karma, I had a major protest: if a child can suffer savage abuse as part of some cosmic debt, then something about this system feels profoundly wrong.

After a lot of soul-searching, I began to suspect that karma might not apply just to the individual soul. Perhaps it has more to do with a larger entity—what might be called the over-soul. In biblical terms, "The sins of the father are visited upon the son." If my new understanding is correct, then the over-soul injects life into each of us, and we inherit its karmic ties—fair or not.

(For more on the over-soul, see the chapter titled *Higher-self or Over-soul*.)

This idea changes how we view past lives. They may not be our own in the traditional sense. Instead, they might be experiences drawn from a shared over-soul. That could explain why these lives feel familiar without being directly ours. It could also explain the subtle influence of the over-soul in our lives. Maybe I first sensed this during the Diane reading. It's as if we're children living under some form of parental guidance. If over-souls can cluster, perhaps the people brought into our lives aren't random. They may be part of a pre-existing network—a group carrying shared history and, possibly, shared emotional "baggage." We might inherit that baggage without ever understanding why.

That concept, if true, presents a problem of fairness. I don't like this picture any more than anyone else might. Still, I can only report what I've experienced and try to interpret it as best I can. Drawing hard conclusions is dangerous, but it's human nature to seek patterns, to try to make sense of what we feel. I encourage readers to do the same.

Looking at both the Greek and Viking lives, I can't help but notice a kind of karmic symmetry. In the Greek life, I was an unfeeling monster who destroyed lives. In the Viking life, I was the victim—I lost everything and everyone I loved. If the Spartan I killed was my Viking son, the

cycle becomes clear: first, I inflicted unbearable suffering; later, I had to feel it. It was a brutal, but possibly balanced, equation.

Further regressions with Kathleen revealed more connections. Ann, Diane, and Heather had all been lovers in past lives. Natalie, on the other hand, had only ever been my daughter. No additional links were uncovered. That might explain why I've had such confusion in this life trying to make sense of my feelings for them. It was clear that the emotional intensity I felt was not mutual. They didn't share my memories—or my baggage.

From my perspective, I carried a deep scar—guilt that stayed with me. But from their perspectives, the connection may have been far less significant. Each of us lives inside our own subjective reality. We may share relationships, but never in the same way. The subjective lens offers no loyalty—it serves whatever lesson our over-soul wants to explore.

It might even be... well, Shmoo-like. (Yes—Google “The Shmoo.”)

At this point, I'm speaking as if past lives are real—or at least real in some form.

But what are the alternatives? Could this just be my subconscious stitching together unrelated events and questions from daily life?

Human beings have a built-in tendency to “matrix”—to connect dots even when no connection exists. It's a survival trait. According to Darwin, our ancestors didn't have time to wait for the full picture. Their lives depended on making fast decisions with partial information. Natural selection favored those who could quickly jump to conclusions—even if they were wrong.

So... what can we really conclude from all this?

Honestly, not much. There's no definitive answer. Are these regressions and memories literal past lives, or simply creative fabrications? The real problem—revealed by the Cyclops Experiment—is that these “memories” might generate emotional consequences, whether or not they're real.

They create pseudo-realities in my wonderland. And with them, pseudo-baggage.

I've felt that baggage. I still do. Whether these stories are factual or fictional doesn't seem to matter. In my subjective reality, the emotional weight is real. It influences me. It shapes me.

Maybe that's the most unexpected consequence of how my wonderland operates. In this place, all drama has meaning. Even imagined events leave real scars.

It's a strange conclusion: we may never be able to prove whether past lives exist. But the emotional fallout they generate—whether physically lived or psychically felt—becomes a genuine part of who we are.

CHAPTER 26

Heather... Revisited

(Strange Event #14)

(Transcribed from Ann's taped reading)

"It is better to have kept a few women happy, than one woman miserable."

~ Henry Weller

My story with Heather didn't end when the girls returned to Ireland. Perhaps it should have. But, like many stories, it became a tangled, bittersweet tale of love, perspective, and mismatched expectations. No one was at fault—it was simply the case of trying to fit a square peg into a round hole.

I've come to understand relationships are like dances. You hope they last forever, but when the music stops, the kindest thing you can do is thank your partner, wish them well, and move on. I should have followed that wisdom with Heather—but I didn't. I clung to a dream: two people perfectly in sync, melting into eternity. That fantasy only made our ending more painful. What follows is the story of our dance—from my side of the floor.

After Heather's father died from a heart condition, we stayed in touch. We talked or emailed every week for a while. It felt good. She appreciated my friendship. In my mind, I played the role of a substitute father figure. But Heather didn't see it that way at all. To her, I was just a trusted friend. That difference in perspective would define everything that came next.

Around this time, I began my sessions with Kathleen. Her therapy helped me better understand my feelings—but it also added complications.

By the summer of 1998, Heather was dating Derrick. She and Derrick made plans to visit me in Maine that September. We planned to go whitewater rafting and take a trip to Boston. Derrick seemed like a great guy, and they made a strong couple. We had fun together, and I was happy to see Heather becoming a confident, capable woman.

One evening, I opened up to Heather about my work with Kathleen. To my surprise, she didn't think I was crazy. She, too, had sometimes wondered about the nature of our bond—and even her friendship with Natalie. Both relationships felt a little unusual to her, as well. Since she hadn't experienced the emotional intensity I had with the Viking regression, it was difficult for her to fully understand what I felt. Still, she didn't dismiss it. Given how differently we perceived things, her open-mindedness was the best I could have hoped for.

Their visit went beautifully. When they left, I turned my attention to the final stage of rebuilding the Tower. My house had sold, the money was in the bank, and I was ready to start. Timing was everything. If I had sold the house a year earlier, I would've ended up building an expensive white elephant of a theater. My original plan involved a small theater and three stores. But by 1998, the local multiplex had severely impacted my business. I pivoted to plan B—all retail shops.

We had a narrow window: November 1998 to May 1999. That was the only stretch when Steve, my carpenter, and I could complete the 12,000-square-foot rebuild. After the movie season ended, I stripped down the theater myself. We had some close calls during the bitter winter, but we made it. Since I acted as the contractor, I saved about a million dollars and, more importantly, avoided a mortgage. All my business properties were fully rented, and I hadn't missed a single month of income. Financially, I had finally arrived.

But emotionally, I was once again caught in Heather's orbit. By early 1999, her relationship with Derrick had ended. She was devastated. They were in grad school together, and she had to see him often—usually with someone new. I wished she could be with Natalie, but Natalie was working in Paris. Knowing how hard it was for them to connect, I wired Heather the money for a weekend visit. I even sent enough for a dinner at my favorite restaurant on Île Saint-Louis in Paris.

During that dinner, Heather bumped into an old friend who worked in her field. The friend encouraged her to apply for a position. Heather applied—and got the job. I was thrilled. It felt good to have played a small part in something so life-changing.

Before she left for Paris, Heather invited me to visit her and her family in Ireland. The Tower was complete, and I had moved in. I was finally free to travel. But something felt off. I couldn't shake it, so I called Ann for a reading.

Ann went into her usual meditative state and said, "This trip will be good for you, but there are some things to be aware of. First, I'm seeing three tornados—or dust-devils—all under one roof. They'll be competing for your approval. Listen to each of them, but don't take sides. Second, Heather's friends and family have misunderstood your reasons for visiting. Be clear about your intentions. And third—this is odd—but don't be afraid of your roommate," she laughed.

"Roommate?" I asked, concerned.

"I don't know what it means, but it won't be a big problem. Oh—and you might not feel well during the trip. Sorry."

Ann was right on all counts. Before I even met Heather at Shannon Airport, I was sick. Cabin pressure from the flight had pushed a mild infection into my ears, making it hard to hear. Add the Irish brogue, and communication was going to be tough.

Heather's mother, Marge, was my age. From the look on her face, I could tell she questioned what I was doing there. Heather, too, seemed uneasy. Their home looked like a typical American ranch-style house, but the colors and décor were distinctly Irish. The garage had been converted into a preschool classroom. Marge introduced me to a dozen wide-eyed children lined up in her kitchen like little dolls. They were obedient and visibly nervous. Marge ran a tight ship.

My room was off the front hall. Heather smiled and said, "Oh, don't mind the big spider. He's a pet." I thought she was joking—until I saw it. Halfway through the week, a black spider the size of a quarter's body appeared. We gave each other space. Was this Ann's "roommate"? Probably.

The three “dust-devils” turned out to be Heather, Marge, and Heather’s sister, Deirdre. The only male was fifteen-year-old Pete, who had to take orders from all three women. He was smart and sweet but stayed out of sight. Marge was the alpha. Heather was in training. Deirdre was the rebel. They each tried to win my sympathy. I remembered Ann’s advice and listened without judgment. Oddly enough, my hearing loss helped.

Marge and Heather planned my schedule—in that order. My first night, I accompanied Marge to a house christening. I’m not Catholic, so the idea seemed strange. Heather had other plans. I realized I was being shown off to Marge’s curious friends. They each took turns talking to the half-deaf American. Meanwhile, the priest looked miserable. I was the only other man in the room. The women buzzed around me like bees, ignoring him completely. When he finally began the blessing, his “Oh... God” sounded more like a plea for rescue. I nearly laughed.

The event ended quickly. So did the dessert. Marge and I returned home—but not alone. Two uninvited girlfriends tagged along. We all chatted over drinks before I excused myself and went to bed.

The next morning, Heather made breakfast, though Marge still held center stage. Later, Heather and I visited her grandmother in Cove, the harbor nearest Cork. Her grandmother was lovely—and clearly more of a mother to Heather than Marge had been. Heather told me, “I got my flair for drama from her. She used to do the dying swan for me when I was a child.”

But she was also sad. “I’m leaving for Paris, then Africa. I don’t know if she’ll still be here when I return.”

She wasn’t.

Later that day, we visited the museum in Cove, dedicated to Irish emigration. My friend John once said Ireland’s greatest export was her people. The museum echoed that sentiment. Heather clearly wanted me to see it—it reflected her own story.

She had a lot going on. I could sense her emotional struggle. She needed to talk, so I opened the door.

“You seem weighed down,” I said. “You’re torn between home and your future in Paris. And maybe... worried about why I’m here?”

She nodded. “Well... yes. I am. We’re friends, and I hope we can stay friends.”

“I agree,” I said. “But to me, you’re more like the daughter I never had... at least not in this lifetime.”

“Chip... I had a father. He died. You can’t replace him. I had a boyfriend. He left. You can’t replace him either. You’re my friend.”

“I’d never try to replace your father—or your lover. I know I’m 26 years older than you. But the love I feel for you isn’t romantic—it’s the love a father feels for his child. It can be even stronger than the love between lovers.”

“I don’t understand!” she snapped. “Why can’t friends be enough? Why do you have to pretend I’m your daughter?”

I tried to explain. “Yes, we’re shaped by our relationships. But my feelings are more layered than most. I know they’re mine—not yours. I’m not asking you to pretend. It’s just the only way I can explain how I feel. If it causes discomfort, I’m sorry.”

I think that moment marked the beginning of the end.

She pushed back. “My cousin married a man 27 years older. They’re happy.”

“I’m glad for them. But we’re not them. I’m not asking for a relationship. I care for you deeply. If anyone says I came to woo you, tell them they’re wrong.”

She looked unsure—but slightly relieved.

The rest of the week was a group tour of southwest Ireland. Family secrets surfaced as the dust-devils competed for my attention. One day, Heather caught Deirdre with a lighter in her pocket. She told Marge, who canceled Deirdre’s 18th birthday celebration. Deirdre didn’t argue—she obeyed without a word. I’d never seen such immediate compliance.

Marge was a master of control. Somehow, in my final days there, she got me to agree to accompany her to a niece’s wedding in the U.S. the next June. Since I’d been her guest in Ireland, I invited her to stay at my place in Maine. The exchange was only fair. (If I may jump ahead: the wedding went well. Marge had a new boyfriend, and there were no complications.)

Back to the story—I said my goodbyes to the family, including the spider, and flew home. I felt heavy with sadness. Heather was moving on. Still, I hoped to stay in touch.

And I did—through email. That, at least, could reach her in Africa.

Over the next few years, I learned something unexpected: it might not be a good idea to accomplish all your life goals too early. We're defined by how we respond to our challenges. If we check off all the boxes too soon, what's left? Just waiting to die? That idea unsettled me.

So I made a new plan—to help people who were overwhelmed by their own challenges. I chose friends who were struggling and offered advice or support. At first, it felt rewarding. But in time, I discovered an uncomfortable truth: there's a big difference between helping someone and enabling them. That line is thin, and I crossed it more than once. Still, I learned a lot. Sometimes you win, sometimes you lose. The risk is worth it.

Alongside that lesson, I realized another flaw: I had a habit of getting romantically involved with women who were better suited to being just friends. These “dances” often ended badly—both the romance and the friendship would vanish. To fix this, I invented the *Uppity Women's Club*. It wasn't a real club—just a tongue-in-cheek label for a group of women I admired and supported as friends. We had meaningful, platonic one-on-one relationships. None of these women were romantically involved with me. Some knew of each other through my stories, but they weren't connected. The name came from a Maya Angelou poem about southern women marching for the right to vote. In it, a man yells, “You women should be at home working. You're nothing but a bunch of uppity women!” And the poem ends with, “...and may we all be uppity women!”

For me, the club was a way to prove I could be a true friend to women—without expectation. Maybe, on some subconscious level, I was trying to recreate the Viking village. That possibility wasn't lost on me. In truth, I don't think that was the case—but who can ever be sure?

I lived alone in my Tower and kept in touch with Heather by email—usually twice a week. First she was in Africa, then back in Paris. The next milestone I expected was her falling in love again. Eventually, she did. Jerald became her boss—and her lover. She seemed truly happy. And I was glad.

Around that time, I was doing a lot of traveling. One trip brought me to Paris. Heather and I met up and had dinner at the Musée d'Orsay. It was like no time had passed. She had grown into a beautiful, confident, and graceful woman. I missed her.

My love life, on the other hand, was a series of long dances—each with a beginning, an end, and a final goodbye. Though we all tried our best to make things work, in time familiarity would breed resentment. That was the pattern. My great indulgence was travel. With each new partner, I often repeated my favorite trips. I never minded playing tour guide. Each journey still felt fresh.

But Heather remained a central figure in my heart. I knew I needed to place our relationship into proper emotional perspective. Ann, having heard me go on and on about Heather for years, recommended I visit her friend Nancy, who practiced Energy Psychotherapy.

Energy Psychotherapy? I thought. Another kind of healing?

It didn't seem any stranger than what I'd already tried. The premise was that emotional baggage—real or imagined—could be addressed through a kind of chakra “tune-up.” I didn't even know I had chakras, let alone ones that needed tuning. The best part? You didn't have to believe in it for it to work.

Nancy focused on removing any karmic debt I might still be carrying around regarding Heather. At least it wasn't voodoo—I'd done stranger things.

By January 2003, after five sessions, Nancy declared me “clear.” I remained skeptical—but something shifted. I no longer felt compelled to email Heather twice a week. When I did receive a message from her, I enjoyed it but replied briefly. For the first time, our dynamic felt balanced. Emotionally, I felt calm.

That lasted until April 2003.

One day, I received a scathing email from Heather. She was furious. The message began: “Friends don't treat friends this way...” and went downhill from there. I was stunned. From my perspective, nothing had changed—except that I wasn't living vicariously through her life anymore.

Wanting to handle things carefully, I drafted a thoughtful response. I even ran it by four friends—and Ann. Everyone agreed it was kind, clear, and appropriately apologetic if anything had been misunderstood.

I sent it.

Her reply was immediate—and brutal. It was as if I had written a sarcastic insult instead of a gentle reply. She was even angrier. I called Ann.

“What the hell is going on with Heather?” I asked.

Ann read her and said, “Oh... our little Heather has her knickers in a knot. This is more about Jerald than you. You don't fit into her new life. She doesn't know what to do with you—or how to explain you to Jerald. So she's put you in a closet and locked the door. Maybe, when she becomes a parent, she'll see things differently. You might hear from her again someday. But there's nothing you can do now. I'm so sorry, Chip.”

It felt like Diane's rejection all over again.

I was heartbroken. But I knew Ann was right. It wasn't really about me. Oddly, Heather stayed in touch with my friend John for a while. They had only met briefly—but in the Viking life, he had been their uncle. Strange how these connections echoed through time.

John later told me that Heather and Jerald got married the following year. They had three weddings—one in Portugal (Jerald's homeland), one in Ireland, and one in Paris. Neither John nor I was invited. She sent John some wedding photos—but not me. I was glad she looked so

happy, but I also felt a profound sadness. I emailed my congratulations, but never received a reply.

In the spring of 2006, I almost died. By chance, doctors discovered I had a severe arterial blockage—what they call the “widow-maker.” It was nearly 100% blocked in two places. Finding it while still alive was extremely rare. The surgery was successful. The doctors said I could’ve died anytime within the next six months. It felt like I had been given a second chance.

I called Ann to share the good news. She was happy—but she also had news of her own. Her medical tests had come back. The results were not good.

Feeling the fragility of life, I wanted to travel. My girlfriend at the time suggested a riverboat trip up the Rhine and Mosel. We’d start in Belgium and end in Switzerland. By then, Heather and Jerald were living near Antwerp. John had told Heather about my surgery, and she sent me a kind email afterward. I was surprised. I replied without mentioning her long silence. I told her we’d be in Antwerp and asked if she’d like to meet.

She agreed. We arranged to have lunch the day before our cruise.

The lunch was pleasant. We brought gifts for the newlyweds. We made an effort to speak kindly to each other’s partners. Everyone was polite. But there was still a certain edge to Heather. She was as beautiful as ever—while I was greyer, older. Jerald was full of self-importance. For the first time, I saw Heather defer to someone else. She let Jerald lead every conversation. It reminded me of how she once deferred to her mother. But this was her life, not mine. I hadn’t been asked for advice.

We said our goodbyes and agreed to email. I did. She didn’t.

Five years passed.

Then, on my 62nd birthday—February 22, 2011—I received an email. It had nothing to do with my birthday. But the tone was unexpectedly warm.

Heather's email came out of nowhere. After five silent years, I wasn't expecting anything. But her message was full of life, warmth, and reflection:

*"How are you? Well... if you want news of the baby boom in Belgium, here is some. Sadly, Jerald and I separated in 2007. He wanted to keep traveling, and I didn't. He sounds very happy now. That's good. A very difficult time followed for me—living alone in a tiny apartment in Brussels with my loyal little dog, Ruby. I picked myself up, dusted off, and got involved with the Irish Theatre in Brussels. In two years, I performed in five shows and was named Best Actress for all Brussels Amateur Theatre groups in 2009. I got my mojo back. On a personal level, I was given another chance by the higher forces and met John (a Belgian doctor). It was something of a whirlwind romance. He's wonderful—he lets me be myself and encourages me in all my endeavors. John didn't come alone though. I suddenly became a stepmom to two beautiful girls. They're caring, and we've developed our own special relationship. But being a stepmom is one thing—becoming a mother is a completely different kettle of fish. I gave birth to my little princess on June 28th. She's fabulous—beautiful, joyful, and full of personality at just eight months old. She brightens every day for me, for John, and for her big sisters. Ruby has appointed herself as her personal bodyguard—and woe to anyone who approaches while Ruby is on patrol! Natalie got married last October to her fiancé Carl, a lovely guy she met six years ago. She made a stunning bride. I was so proud to be there with her. It marked 17 years of our friendship. Did you get married? Are you still living in the Tower? How is John? Send a line when you can.
—Heather xx"*

I was ecstatic. I immediately forwarded it to John and wrote back with heartfelt joy and congratulations. She replied again, including a photo attachment of Natalie's wedding. I forwarded that to John as well and responded positively, asking about her family in Ireland.

And then... silence.

I heard nothing more.

Ann's last prediction had been half-fulfilled. Whether past lives are real or simply Cyclops-style constructs, one truth had become painfully obvious: karmic baggage is both joyous and heavy. This chapter in my life with Heather had always carried that duality—beauty and heartbreak, clarity and confusion.

I include this story not just because of its emotional weight, but because it's interwoven with so many strange events. It speaks to the layered nature of our lives—not just psychically, but personally, emotionally, and spiritually. Relationships aren't confined to the linear, logical path we expect.

I still hope, even now, that a genuine friendship between us is possible—if not in this life, then in some other form, in some other time.

CHAPTER 27

Ann... Revisited

(Strange Event #15)

At this point, readers may have realized that one person has been central to my life's story—Ann. She's appeared over and over again, always at pivotal moments. At every twist in the road, she was there to help. While some parts of our early relationship remain private, our deep friendship was no secret. It was strong, loving, and rare. I was lucky.

My relationships with Diane and Heather ended tragically. But my relationship with Ann ended catastrophically. This is the abridged story of Ann—especially after the moment when my girlfriend tried to sabotage what we had.

Let's go back to 1983. After divorcing her first husband, Ann had a complicated relationship with a man named Charles. Even after he moved out and came out as gay, he remained a constant presence in her life. He may have been her brother figure, her sister, or simply something else entirely—but at the very least, he was her soulmate. While Ann worked hard to survive as a single parent, Charles was busy pursuing his own interests.

Even after Ann had ended our romantic involvement, I kept watch from a distance—just in case she needed help. But I wasn't the person who could give her the life she wanted at that time. Besides, I was already deeply involved with someone else. I chalked it up to bad timing, but looking back, maybe a healthy relationship had never been part of our script.

One day, a friend of Ann's ex-husband came into her life unexpectedly. As a psychic, she couldn't read for herself—a limitation I always found fascinating. That meant she never saw what was coming. The man seemed like her knight in shining armor. After a whirlwind long-distance romance, they were married in the summer of 1984 and moved south.

In her new town, she continued giving readings to make ends meet. Just like her first husband, Tom, her new husband worked in computer operations. But things quickly deteriorated. I stayed in touch—calling her monthly to check in—and what I heard wasn't good. He constantly belittled her. "I'll take care of it," became his catchphrase. And eventually, he did take over—everything. Even the cooking and cleaning. Intimacy turned into rage.

By that fall, I was doing everything I could to get Ann and her daughter Mary out. I begged her to come back to Boston. I offered to pay for their flights and pick them up. I would move back in with my parents so she and Mary could live in my house, rent-free, until they got back on their feet. It was the only real escape she had.

In March of 1985, she agreed to leave—but by then, it was too late. She was pregnant. Still, she flew back. Even though I was building houses and still in a relationship, I made time to care for my broken friend. For several months, she and Mary lived free of her second husband. Later that summer, they moved in with one of Ann's old girlfriends. Her business began picking up, and by November, she was back on her feet and living across the street from her old home. She was now very pregnant—and finally happy. In December, she gave birth to a healthy baby boy.

She divorced again. Husband number two was gone. Not long after, a new man entered her life.

She met Samuel during a reading. I liked him immediately. He was smart, charming, and had a good job. I hoped her luck had finally changed. Within a year, they were married in a small ceremony. For personal reasons, I wasn't able to attend.

I tried to be friends with Samuel—but you can't force chemistry. We weren't going to connect. That winter, we went skiing together, and I shared my wonderland theory. His response surprised me: he had just read Rupert Sheldrake's *A New Science of Life: A Hypothesis of Formative Causation*, and he saw similarities in our ideas. We were coming at the same topic from different angles. That conversation became the high point of our friendship.

Over the next two decades, our connection faded. The descent was slow and awkward.

During the 1990s, I was dealing with my own emotional chaos. I wasn't in a place to support Ann. Still, I found ways to help. I'd purchase multiple reading sessions from her—ten at a time, even—just to help her financially. Her sessions were now \$120 for 90 minutes.

Once, I gave a gift reading to a young receptionist at my doctor's office. She was excited about the experience and talked about it a little too loudly in the waiting room. Another patient overheard and asked if I'd ever seen a psychic named Donna in New Hampshire. I hadn't. She handed me Donna's card and explained she used both Ann and Donna to “cross-check” information—like a psychic version of double-entry bookkeeping.

Curious, I saved the card.

By spring of 2000, the theater project was complete, and I had moved into my Tower. I was ready for new experiences. Eventually, I made an appointment with Donna. It was the first time in over a decade that I had tried a new psychic.

I had an idea: I wrote down the first names of friends on index cards and asked Donna to see what she could pick up. She bristled at being told how to do her reading. Later, she told me she'd been ready to tell me where I could shove my “f***ing cards”—until a little voice said, *He's just experimenting with the phenomenon*. Thank goodness for that voice.

Donna was South End Boston Irish—tough and direct. She'd grown up rough and hadn't had it easy.

As she began reading the cards, she was surprisingly accurate—but only told me things I already knew. Then she pointed to Ann's name.

“This person needs to see a doctor immediately,” she said. “She'll benefit from hormone replacements.”

Later, she added, “You know a young girl will be moving in with you—on June 28, 2000?”

“No,” I said.

“Well... yes, she will. But only for the summer.”

I was mystified.

The next day, I hosted a dinner party. Ann and Samuel attended. I told her about Donna and mentioned the part about needing to see a doctor and hormone replacements.

Ann was puzzled. “I’ve got great bloodwork. I don’t need hormones.” That was the end of it—for the moment.

Three days later, a tearful Ann called.

“I found a tumor the size of a grapefruit in my abdomen. I’m scared.”

“Come over,” I said. “I’ll call a hospital contact. Maybe you can be seen today. And I’ll call Donna for a phone reading.”

She came right over, and we cried together. I pulled strings at the hospital. Donna agreed to a call.

Donna asked, “Does this need to be cancer? Or did you get the message?”

Ann answered, “No. It doesn’t have to be cancer.”

“Good. They say it doesn’t have to be.”

I was stunned. Cancer didn’t *have* to be cancer? Who were *they*? Still, Ann seemed calmer.

Her surgery revealed the tumor was self-contained and attached to her uterus. A hysterectomy was performed, and three labs reported it wasn’t cancer. A fourth lab in California confirmed it.

It was unusual—but wonderful news.

Mary wanted to come home to care for her mother. With no space in their house, I offered her a guest room in the Tower. She moved in on—yes—June 28. Exactly as Donna had predicted.

By August, Ann had recovered. Mary stayed until September.

Looking back, the connections are too precise to ignore:

1. Donna’s message about Ann seeing a doctor and needing hormones came as a single sentence. But in reality, it was two separate statements. Both were accurate, but the format confused everyone—including Donna.

2. Donna's prediction about someone moving into the Tower on June 28 was spot-on, yet she saw no link to Ann.
3. Ann herself had given a reading to Mary in early May, saying, "Something will come up, and you'll have to quit whatever job you take." She was right—but missed the bigger picture. Her own illness would be the reason.
4. The fragmented nature of psychic information remains a problem. Sometimes it feels like pulling partial sentences from a fishbowl. It's less like guidance and more like a puzzle missing key pieces.
5. The idea that cancer could be "negotiable" stunned me. Still, I have to report it as it happened—even if I don't understand it.
6. The psychic platform often feels like it's trying to deliver a message. In this case, the message came with the threat of cancer. Who or what was behind it? An oversoul? A higher power? That question became more important later in Ann's life.

Ann never fully understood what lesson her 2000 health scare was meant to teach her. Time passed, but she continued enabling her sons instead of pushing them toward responsibility. One day, after working with Steve, I drove by her house and saw her outside raking leaves—despite having a broken foot.

Her sons' cars were parked out front.

I stopped and scolded her. "Why are you raking leaves with a broken foot? Why aren't those boys helping you?"

She looked on the verge of tears. "Because... they won't do it! I can't get them to do anything."

I got out, sat her down, and raked the leaves myself. I was furious—but helpless. I didn't know what else to do. I was worried enough that I called Donna for another reading.

By then, Donna and I had become friends. Both she and Ann were members of my imaginary *Uppity Women's Club*. In her gentle Irish way, Donna told me, "Ann was warned. If she didn't get the message about her boys, her oversoul will take her out of play."

That warning chilled me.

I called Ann and said, "In three years, I don't want to be standing at the foot of your grave, watching your boys finally learn their lesson the hard way. Your death is too high a price for that."

Near tears, she answered, "Chip... what am I supposed to do? I'm their mother. I can't turn my back on them."

I didn't know what else to say. I offered her a home in the Tower, rent-free. I could take care of her for the rest of her life. But I couldn't go any further unless she was ready.

In the winter of 2003, Ann called in a panic. Their house was in danger of collapsing into the basement. I had spent the past few years helping people fix their homes—how could I turn my back on her? I sent Steve and his crew. They saved the house.

But enabling her to stay in that house... I've regretted it ever since. If only I had known how it would end.

That same year, Ann asked me for another favor. She wanted me to drive her and her mother, Ruth, to Montreal. Ruth was elderly and wanted to retrieve her savings from a Canadian bank. Why not? I'd done stranger things.

What mattered most on that trip wasn't the banking—it was what happened between Ann and her mother. They had lived in Montreal before moving to the U.S. Something powerful happened that weekend—an unspoken reconciliation. I witnessed a quiet soul-healing. I think Ann had already forgiven Ruth. But being there, in that shared space of memory, brought their past into focus. Forgiveness finally became real. Their healing ran deeper than words. I was glad to be there.

Two weeks later, Steve called with the final invoice for Ann's house repairs. But he was furious.

"I'll never work on that house again," he said.

"What happened?" I asked.

He explained that he was removing the exterior covering and needed someone to hold the ladder because of the ice. He asked for help and got a shrug. No one came. He took the risk himself—and thankfully didn't fall. But that moment sealed it for him. He had taken on the project as a favor to me, and now he was done.

I couldn't blame him.

I continued to have readings with Donna, focusing on Ann. For a while, nothing changed. Then two readings stood out.

In the first, Donna saw Ann moving in with me by September 2006.

In the second, she still saw Ann wanting to move in—but something would prevent it. Donna said I'd have a choice: to be with her or not.

At the time, I took it one way. But looking back, I realize now how different the message truly was.

Ann had long been searching for spiritual meaning. In the '90s, she began the process of converting to Catholicism. I joked that she was the only witch I knew trying to become Catholic—without fear of burning at the stake. She attended the Franciscan Monastery, where she found a kind Brother who became her advisor.

It was going well—until she attended a meeting. One of the Brothers began ranting:

“...the hospitals are letting Reiki witches treat patients! For every witch we see, ten more are hiding in the community.”

What century were they living in?

Ann realized this wasn't her path. She drifted for a while, still searching. Eventually, she discovered a spiritual group in Portland and began studying to become a chaplain. When she was ordained, it was a proud moment for everyone who knew her.

In 2004, Ruth passed away. Ann conducted a beautiful service in Portland. It was heartfelt and full of love. I hope that both of them found peace and closure.

From that point on, I lost track of some of the day-to-day details. I saw Ann at dinner parties. I knew Mary had graduated from Wellesley and gotten engaged to Mike. She had achieved everything on her own. I was proud of her.

In September 2005, Mary and Mike were married in the mountains of northwestern Massachusetts. It was a stunning outdoor ceremony. Ann's ex-husband Tom and his wife were there. Ann had decorated beautifully. Her whole family was proud. The bride was radiant. For a moment, everyone was happy—oblivious to what lay ahead.

Earlier, Steve had warned that Ann's basement might be full of toxic mold. He suggested professional cleaning, but his advice was ignored. Ann spent months scrubbing it herself. By Christmas, she had developed a persistent cough. Their minimal state-run insurance didn't help—and I feared her doctors weren't paying close attention.

In April 2006, I traveled to Ireland. When I got back, Ann and I met for lunch. We talked about someday traveling together. But her cough had worsened. I urged her to see a doctor again. I pleaded with her to move in with me—to escape the mold if nothing else.

This time, she agreed. She brought over furniture and even started decorating her apartment in the Tower. She wanted to move in.

On June 22, 2006, I had my heart surgery. It was a success. That night, I called Ann with the good news.

She responded softly, “That's wonderful, Chip. I wish I had as good a report for you.”

Less than an hour earlier, her doctor had told her she had a rare, incurable form of lung cancer. She had six months to live.

I was devastated—and angry. Furious. Donna had said Ann and I would be together. But she hadn't said it would be “on the other side.”

It was clear now: Ann's health was no longer negotiable.

Mary, now pregnant, lost her baby early in the pregnancy. Still, she threw herself into trying to save her mother. Friends rallied to raise money for experimental treatments in California and Mexico.

On the way to the airport with Mary, Ann and I met one last time—in a park-and-ride lot off I-95 in York. I gave her a red glass heart from my collection. She had always loved it. We confirmed her plan to move into the Tower after her treatments.

We kissed goodbye.

I knew it was the last time I'd ever see her alive.

Despite everyone's efforts, Ann died in Mexico in September 2006. Her body was returned home and buried in a memorial cemetery. Mary told me Ann wanted to be buried holding the red glass heart I gave her.

I stood at her feet as her body was lowered into the ground. Her boys stood at her side, tossing flowers into the grave. I couldn't help thinking—this was the lesson they were finally learning. Too late.

After everyone left, I remained. I stayed until the burial crew finished. I cried—deep, soul-wrenching tears. It felt like the first time I had truly cried in twenty-nine years. Donna had predicted the year and the month—exactly.

If I had made a different choice—if I had chosen to join her—Ann and I might have been together.

But I chose to live.

It had been twenty-nine years to the day since my first reading with her, in September 1977.

Thirteen years have now passed since her death. Her grave remains unmarked. That still troubles me, though there's little I can do. I visit often. I bring symbolic gifts—pebbles, trinkets. On one trip to Egypt, I brought sand from the base of the Great Pyramid at Giza. I never got to take her there.

So instead, I brought Giza to her.

A psychic postcard: *Wish you were here.*

CHAPTER 28

The Gift of Joan

"Nature does nothing uselessly."

~ Aristotle

After Ann's passing, my relationships became even more difficult to navigate. Comparing relationships is rarely helpful, but I couldn't help feeling a growing sense of emotional displacement. I was even engaged for six months to a beautiful woman named Linda. But deep down, I sensed she didn't really want to be married.

Not every strange event in life is paranormal. The subject of relationships can be just as baffling—and far messier—without any need for psychic explanation... I think. Oddly enough, exploring the unknown had become more comfortable for me than examining the wreckage of my own heart. My life felt surreal. Everywhere I turned, I was reminded of the beautiful spirits from my past—some still living, others now gone. It had nothing to do with the psychic platform. It was simply the natural result of outliving too many friends and old loves.

I had to start over, again.

I felt the need to explain my long, strange history of non-paranormal relationships to my newer circle of friends. That effort became my third book, *Forty Dances*. For a variety of reasons, my soul often felt like that of a time traveler—wandering, searching. It was a lonely existence. I was tired of hauling around karmic baggage—real or imagined. But apparently, the puppet master wasn't done with me yet. I still felt manipulated.

After things ended with Linda, I met Joan. Who would have thought I'd connect with my doctor's new receptionist? Our first real conversation happened during a phone call about a medical issue. Somehow, our mutual curiosity flared.

We both said, "You think your life was rough? Wait until you hear this one."

That first conversation flowed effortlessly. We agreed to trade war stories over Thai food. Her life experiences were almost as painful as mine. Joan was beautiful and nineteen years younger than me. The age gap could've been an issue, but after the roller coaster I'd been through, it barely registered.

I worried that my strange past might scare her off. So, after our second date, I laid it all out—everything. I braced myself for rejection. But to my surprise, she didn't flinch. She listened with genuine interest and asked questions as if we were talking about something perfectly ordinary. Once the bizarre parts of my life were out in the open, we just enjoyed dating. The relationship brought new energy and meaning into my life.

I decided to introduce Joan to Donna, my longtime psychic friend. At first, Donna was cordial. But things went downhill quickly. It felt like she was challenging Joan's right to be there—as though Joan had entered my life too soon after Linda. Joan stayed composed, but later told me that Donna had nearly brought her to tears.

Donna and Linda had never met. So what was behind Donna's aggression toward Joan? Why that kind of intensity? Was it territorial?

Just before I got engaged to Linda, Donna had given me one of her more disturbing readings. She said she had tuned into a supposed past life shared by me, Ann, and Linda.

In her version, my wife in that past life was a blend of Ann and her mother, Ruth—a woman Donna described as a real shrew. Somehow, we had a daughter, who in this lifetime was Linda. According to Donna, the Ann–Ruth character died in her early forties. Only then were my daughter and I free of her cruelty. My daughter—Linda—became my inseparable companion. She never married or had children. We traveled together for the rest of my life. After I died, she was left alone and brokenhearted, devoted to me to the end. Donna said this was the karmic link between us now.

It wasn't exactly the glowing endorsement you'd hope for before getting engaged.

Still, I moved forward with the engagement. That was a mistake.

When I later told this story to Joan, she got visibly angry.

"She's trying to control the playing field," Joan said.

"What playing field?" I asked, confused.

"Don't you see? Donna tried to tarnish your memory of Ann by linking her to Ruth. Then she framed Linda as your poor little girl. It was a setup. If you had stayed with Linda, that reading would make you feel like you were committing emotional incest. And now? Now she's trying to push me out of the picture. If you hadn't warned me about her reading, I might've walked away. But she didn't succeed. I think Donna's trying to eliminate all competitors."

Joan didn't hold back. "That bitch wants you to see her as the next Ann!"

Now I had two competing narratives—and I wasn't sure which to believe. Donna's story felt off. Joan's interpretation, although fiery, carried more truth. Even if her reaction was colored by Donna's abrasiveness, her insights struck a chord.

In the end, I let Donna fade out of my life.

That decision was mine... I think.

CHAPTER 29

The Closeted Psychic

(Strange Event #16)

“Nature does nothing uselessly.”

~ Aristotle

It was the summer of 2008. Joan and I had gotten hooked on the HBO series *Rome*. One evening, we were settling in for the next episode, anticipating another hour of history and drama. Just as we were about to press play, Joan suddenly exclaimed, “Linda is emailing you—right this second.”

I glanced at the digital clock on the cable box. It read exactly 6:55. I turned to her, stunned. “What?” I asked, not fully processing what she’d just said. Still confused, I joked, “Are you telling me you’re psychic or something?”

Looking sheepish, she replied, “Yes... actually, I’ve been an empath, a sensitive, and occasionally a medium for a long time. But most people think you’re nuts when you say something like that, so I don’t talk about it.”

I was floored. “After everything I’ve told you about my crazy past, you never mentioned this before?”

“I didn’t want to scare you off,” she said. “It’s scared off others before. I usually try to ignore it. But this time, the message came through really strong.”

“Well, this is easy to test,” I said. “Linda and I haven’t emailed in over a month. We’re done. Let’s see if anything’s there.”

I booted up my computer. My inbox loaded—and my jaw dropped. There it was: an email from Linda. The time stamp read exactly 6:55 p.m.—the same time on the clock when Joan had spoken. We opened it and read the message. It wasn’t earth-shattering. In fact, it was something I would’ve read eventually. But that wasn’t the point.

Joan hadn’t asked for this information. It served no practical purpose. Nothing would change because we received it sooner. So why had it come through so clearly, so suddenly? The only conclusion I could draw was that someone—or something—wanted me to know, without any doubt, that Joan had psychic abilities.

It felt strangely familiar. In my second strange event, the “Diane reading,” there had only been two possible outcomes: either I was beginning to ask the right questions—or someone was nudging me toward Ann.

“Did you ask for any information about Linda?” I asked Joan.

“No, we were just talking about *Rome*,” she said. “Then, suddenly, I saw Linda in my mind. She was crying in front of her computer, trying to decide whether to hit the send button. Then she did. It all flashed into my mind’s eye.”

“How did you know it was Linda?”

“You showed me a picture of you two at a wedding. I recognized her.”

“And how did you know she was crying?” I asked, wondering if this vision was an emotional projection—a way to paint Linda in a sympathetic light.

“I didn’t just see her. I felt her. That’s how it works. I’m an empath.”

“And this mental picture—where were you seeing it from? What perspective?” I asked.

“I was looking through a window. She was sitting on the left side of the room at a computer in a closet. Directly in front of me was a couch or bed, and a picture of a forest.”

That was correct.

I tried to make sense of it. “There’s one problem. That window is on the second floor. You’d have to be floating in midair to see through it.”

“I don’t know. I just saw what I saw,” she replied.

I couldn’t help but start connecting the dots:

1. Someone—or something—wanted me to know Joan had psychic gifts. Joan herself wasn’t planning to tell me.
2. The vision required a floating vantage point—outside a second-floor window, fifty miles away.
3. Ann had introduced me to Linda in the early 2000s. Linda had gone to her for a reading. Ann liked her and asked if she could give me her number. Linda agreed.
4. That was the only time Ann had ever played matchmaker during our 29-year friendship.
5. Joan didn’t go looking for the information. She just received it. There was a clear intent behind the vision.
6. Ann was the only person—living or dead—who had a connection to both Linda and me. If spirits do exist, Ann would’ve been the most likely one to send that image. Perhaps, seeing that Linda and I weren’t a good match, she wanted to show me that Joan had the gift—that Joan was special. Maybe this was Ann’s way of giving us her blessing. It’s a beautiful thought, but I can’t say for certain. That’s a step beyond my comfort zone.
7. It’s also possible the vision came from my higher self. Maybe it was my own subconscious guiding Joan. But that possibility didn’t sit quite right either. Still, it’s worth noting.

Regardless of the source, Joan and I grew closer. It was now fall of 2008. I was fifty-nine, and the economy was beginning to slide. Thankfully, all of my rental shops were still paying rent. If life had taught me anything, it was that nothing good lasts forever. The idea of “golden years” was an illusion. You have to live in the now—not in some fantasy future. I wanted to grab hold of life while we still had time.

Joan had to keep working, but she was entitled to two weeks of vacation. We weren’t about to let the opportunity slip by.

That Christmas, we took a river cruise down the Rhône in France. We visited Christmas markets along the way. It was only a week, but it was magical. Too short—but better than nothing. For both of us, it felt like a glimpse of what life could be.

I wanted to give her more. I started making plans for Italy.

CHAPTER 30

Knock, Knock... What's There?

(Strange Events #17–21)

In January of 2009, a small but curious event occurred. Winters in a summer resort town can be summed up in one word—bleak. With the cold closing in, Joan and I spent a lot of time watching old movies. One Sunday night around ten, we were on the third floor of the Tower, watching *Topper*, the original black-and-white version starring Cary Grant. Years earlier, Ann had told me it was one of her favorite films.

The building was completely empty. No one else was in the Tower or any of the surrounding shops. We were the only people in the entire complex. The movie had just reached the scene where the ghosts of Mr. and Mrs. Kirby first appear to Mr. Topper. Right then—at that exact moment—there was a loud knock. Actually, three loud knocks... coming from the metal door just eight feet away from us.

“Come in!” I blurted out instinctively. Then, turning to Joan, I said, “Wait—what the heck? Come in?”

“Who could that be?” she asked.

“No one!” I said, jumping up. I opened the door. The hallway light flicked on from the motion sensor as I stepped into the corridor.

Both of us had clearly heard the knocks. It sounded deliberate—like someone trying to get our attention. It was unsettling. Was it a ghost? I couldn’t find a logical explanation. If it was a spirit, why the dramatic timing? Why not just show themselves?

Joan had experienced many ghostly encounters in her life. But for me, this was the first physical manifestation since Ivy and Peter. And even then, we hadn’t heard anything like three loud knocks. This was a new kind of experience—and not the last one that would happen in the Tower while Joan was there.

That winter, Joan faced some serious health challenges. She had dental problems and, less than a year earlier, had undergone a uterine ablation. Harvard Dental School removed her upper teeth and began crafting dentures. Joan’s boss—my medical doctor—wasn’t particularly sympathetic about her appointments, which frustrated me. I encouraged her to quit. She did. I was relieved.

Now that she was free, we decided to go to Italy between dental visits. Rome was beautiful. But the trip took a sharp turn. Joan began experiencing serious abdominal pain. We never made it to Capri. Instead, we landed in what felt like a scene out of a Stephen King novel—a chaotic Italian ER. The diagnosis: she needed an emergency hysterectomy.

We were shocked. One look at the surgical conditions made it clear this wasn’t going to happen in Italy. We rushed home and scheduled the operation locally. It was successful. But as she

recovered, Joan received more devastating news: one of her close friends had taken his own life—by hanging.

I could only imagine the emotional pain that compounded her physical suffering.

That summer wasn't easy for her. Her friend's ghost appeared to her every morning, just standing in the stairwell, silently pleading for help. He carried heavy shame and felt undeserving of forgiveness, but he desperately wanted to cross over. I never saw him. But I believed her. Joan wasn't one to make things up.

By the end of summer, she helped him move on. It had taken a toll.

To lift her spirits, I proposed another trip. Before Joan found a new job, I wanted to take her to Greece. She needed a break.

But a month before the trip, we visited Monhegan Island—one of my favorite places in the world. We took the mail boat from Port Clyde. As a large wave hit, Joan lost her balance and fell hard on her tailbone. She was in severe pain. X-rays confirmed a broken coccyx—and, unexpectedly, revealed advanced arthritis in both hips.

It was shocking. I was nearly twenty years older, and yet she was the one needing major surgery.

Despite the pain, we went to Greece anyway in October. We took it easy. She rarely complained, but I could see it on her face. She was hurting. Still, she pushed forward.

In December, we traveled to Malta and Sicily. Because recovery from surgery was unpredictable, we chose to join a tour group made up mostly of people in their eighties—so we could move at a slower pace. With careful planning, it worked.

We made it home for Christmas and celebrated the 99th birthday of Betty, the eldest member of my imaginary *Uppity Women's Club*. She was delightful, always surrounded by loved ones, and famous for her parties. Sadly, a cold claimed her life just two weeks later. She had hoped to make it to 100. Still, ninety-nine is a remarkable run. We all loved her. We all missed her.

Strange Event #18

Three weeks later, we were in the Tower. I was paying bills in the dining room while Joan busied herself in the kitchen just around the corner. The bedroom was only fifteen feet away. Suddenly, the bedroom door slammed shut with a loud bang. Even Joan's cat jumped and bolted for cover.

"Did you slam the door?" Joan called.

"No—I'm right here!" I said.

We both went to the door. Joan opened it, peeked in, and smiled. “Hi, Betty... we love you too.”

“How do you know it’s Betty?” I asked, already feeling silly.

“I heard her giggle. No one else laughs like that,” she said, as if it were the most natural thing in the world. “She was just saying hello.”

She returned to the kitchen. I spent the next thirty minutes trying to replicate the door slam—but couldn’t. I opened and closed other doors, checked for drafts or vacuum effects. Nothing explained it. The house was sealed. No wind. In nineteen years of living there, that had never happened before.

Was it Betty? I’d like to think so. But why visit us and not her beloved granddaughter, Alice? She would have given anything for a sign like that. But ghosts are anything but predictable. I never imagined writing these words. But if spirits do exist and try to communicate, they seem to do it in strange, capricious ways.

If I become a ghost someday, I’d want to give a full, detailed report—not just knock on a door and vanish. But maybe our understanding of these things is like a caveman trying to figure out how people live inside a TV. Maybe we’re just misinterpreting something logical we don’t yet understand.

By the summer of 2010, Joan had undergone both hip replacements. Once she was recovering well, I booked more trips. In the fall, we visited England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales. Before Christmas, we spent time in Las Vegas, enjoying six incredible shows. In early spring 2011, we flew to Paris for a week, then drove around the French countryside for another two.

Occasionally, Joan would let me push her in the wheelchair. But she could feel one of the titanium rods shifting in her femur—something that happens in a small percentage of hip surgeries. The healing process can take up to a year.

Back home, we turned to our elliptical trainer. With regular use, the rod seemed to settle deeper into place. We hoped it would stay that way.

Joan’s Small Strange Events (#19–#21)

Joan only had three unusual experiences during our travels.

The first occurred in a Roman catacomb. She said the spirits there were deeply upset—angry that their burial site had become a tourist attraction. A young couple with a baby girl was walking ahead of us. Joan, visibly disturbed, spent most of the visit imagining a protective white light

surrounding the child. She said it was shielding the baby from the agitated spirits. I had no way to verify it—but the intensity of her focus wasn't for my benefit.

The second event happened in Delphi, Greece, in an old hotel. Joan couldn't sleep. She said the spirit of the hotel's former owner kept walking through the room, making faces at her. I slept fine. My skeptical side was still intact.

But the next morning, two other travelers, unprompted, shared that they'd seen an old woman working in the moonlit garden. They claimed she was transparent. Later, the tour guide, chatting with Joan, admitted she normally had restless nights there—but had slept better than ever. She even thanked Joan.

I quietly retired my skeptic's hat.

The third event was both bizarre and a bit humorous. We were in a late 1800s resort high in the Scottish Highlands. Joan was showering. I was reading. I heard her talking—but assumed it was nothing urgent.

Later, around 11:15 p.m., we both prepared for bed. We checked her alarm clock against our watches. Everything matched.

In the morning, the alarm rang at 5:45. Joan got up first. At 6:20, she went to the front desk to ask why we hadn't gotten our 6:15 wake-up call.

The clerk looked confused. No one else was up. The hotel was still dark.

She returned and said, "That was strange. The place is silent."

I checked my watch: 5:30.

Her alarm clock read 6:30.

We hadn't touched the clock.

When I asked who she was talking to last night, she replied, "The ghosts. I told them to stop bothering me in the shower. I needed sleep."

"Nice of them to sabotage your clock," I joked.

"They've got a twisted sense of humor," she muttered.

Joan's abilities remain largely private. She doesn't enjoy readings. She doesn't want to use her gift to explore my psychic interests. Unlike Ann, Joan is a reluctant psychic. But I accept her for who she is. We've had our ups and downs, but we've been good for each other.

Best of all—there's no karmic baggage between us. And that's a relief. I'm tired of cleaning up old lives.

Over the years, I've dated more than forty wonderful women. None of those dances lasted. At some point, a reasonable man must ask: What's my problem?

I reviewed what they'd all said. Thirty-nine women. Thirty-nine different reasons. Not one repeated. That got me thinking.

What's changed in relationships over time?

Before the 1960s, relationships were shaped by rigid roles. Men were this. Women were that. Society defined the script. It was like the old Yin-Yang symbol—perfectly complementary, but not very realistic.

The '60s changed everything. Stereotypes—racial, gender-based, economic—began to fall. We transitioned from an industrial age to an informational one. Identity emerged as individual, not prescribed. Ability and intention replaced roles. People were free to be who they really were.

And that freedom came with a cost: complexity.

Now relationships are less about fitting traditional molds and more about finding emotional compatibility—like keys and locks. And my key? It doesn't fit most locks. That's not a judgment. It's just reality.

But with Joan, I've found something that works. We don't need to "fit" perfectly. We just support each other. No pressure. No expectations.

Maybe that's the secret. Maybe love is just the willingness to make it work.

Ann once said, "Wow—you're definitely a late bloomer." At seventy, she wasn't kidding. The bloom is fading, but the roots are still strong.

Since Heather and Natalie, I've tried to shortcut the whole marriage thing by jumping straight to fatherhood. After my heart problems in 2006, I unofficially adopted two Polish newlyweds, Magda and Greg. They lived with me in the Tower for two years. They called me their "American dad." When they returned to Poland, I felt like an empty nester.

That's when I turned to Alice and Missy—two women I've known since they were infants. Now grown, with husbands and children of their own, they've become like daughters to me. I cherish our extended family.

And after all those failed engagements, I received the gift of Joan.

We're engaged, but already function like a married couple. On weekends, Alice and Missy join us at the Tower. It's a chance for them to step out of motherhood and just be themselves for a while.

And for me? It's a small taste of the family I always hoped to build.

CHAPTER 31

Getting the Point

(Missy's Two Strange Events #22 and #23)

After hearing so many stories from Joan and me about strange events, Missy once confessed, “I wish something unusual would happen to me.” I remember smiling and thinking—be careful what you wish for. Life always delivers consequences, and sometimes, they’re not what you expect.

Her first experience came not long after we’d all gone out to dinner one night. We hadn’t been drinking. We were heading up the stairs to the Tower’s first-floor landing. Joan led the way, followed by Missy. I was about five feet behind her, carrying two bags. Luckily, I looked up just as Joan reached the landing and turned around—we made eye contact.

Suddenly, Missy jolted upright, spun around, and grabbed her rear end like she’d been zapped. Her reaction was instantaneous. And if looks could kill, I’d have been dead on the spot.

“Did you just poke me in the ass?” she snapped at me, glaring.

With both hands full and still five feet away, I had a solid alibi—plus Joan as a witness. “No! How could I?”

Missy’s confusion and disbelief were genuine. Her reaction was too spontaneous to be staged—Missy’s no actress. The moment carried a playful energy, and it immediately reminded me of my father’s mischievous sense of humor. Joan didn’t feel anything herself, but she agreed—it seemed like something Dad might have done from the other side.

Who—or whatever—delivered that well-placed poke had definitely made their point. Missy had wanted a strange event. Well... she got one.

About a year and a half later, Missy had another experience.

Earlier that spring, a dear family friend named Henry Weller had passed away at the age of 86. He had been like a second father to us after Dad died. He joined me and various girlfriends on more than ten trips and remained a trusted advisor to the whole family. One of Henry’s little quirks was the way he knocked on our door—with the unmistakable rhythm of “shave and a haircut... two bits.”

One Sunday morning, Missy asked Joan and me if either of us had knocked on her bedroom door that morning at 5 a.m.—using that very same rhythm. But she didn’t mention the “two bits” ending.

Joan and I looked at each other immediately. We both thought the same thing: it had to be Henry. Still, we didn’t connect the final dots until later that night. At 2 a.m., Joan burst into laughter and woke me up.

“Henry must think we’re really slow,” she said between giggles. “He was making a joke. ‘Shave and a haircut!’ Don’t you get it? Missy is a hairstylist!”

It made perfect sense. Even more fascinating—Missy had no idea what that knock meant. She hadn’t known it was a familiar cultural reference. That made the joke even more poignant.

To me, both of Missy’s events offered a kind of hope. Whatever piece of us lingers in this wonderland, it still seems capable of humor. No, it’s not scientific proof. But why should a lack of proof get in the way of a good, true story?

In the winter of 2014, I had an idea. Many of my friends hadn’t experienced anything psychic. So, I decided to give each of them a reading for Christmas. Since I was no longer connected to a practicing psychic, I went online and searched for one in southern Maine. I chose someone purely based on intuition and customer reviews.

Before spending nearly a thousand dollars on five readings, I wanted to check her out first. I kept my mouth shut, said nothing, and let her do all the talking.

Her name was Sara—and she was the real deal.

To my shock, she said that Ann was one of her spirit guides. Through Sara, Ann urged me to finish this book. That’s right: if you’re reading this now, it’s because of Ann—once again influencing me from the other side.

As for the Christmas gift readings, my five friends were blown away. For the first time, they truly understood what I’d been talking about for years. If I could, I’d give every reader of this book their own personal reading. Obviously, that’s impossible. But online reviews can be surprisingly useful when searching for a reputable psychic. If you’re curious, I encourage you to explore.

Originally, I titled this manuscript *Rabbit-Holes of Wonderland* and planned to include every strange detail I could. But after Sara’s reading, I realized it needed to be more than just a catalog of odd events. Eventually, I revised it into this more polished version—*A Very Strange Life*

Sara’s reading gave me the motivation to rewrite and organize *A Very Strange Life* into a publishable memoir. Its companion, *Making More Waves*, presents a rational theory that attempts to explain the irrational events described here. Whether these ideas are embraced or rejected, I’ll find out eventually.

I know my story won't be accepted by most skeptics. Some may see me as a modern-day Don Quixote, tilting at the windmills of science. But not everyone is closed-minded. And I hope that readers will see these books for what they are—an honest, rational attempt to make sense of extraordinary things.

This strange journey has been my personal Odyssey. It shaped much of my life. It has pointed to a larger, more intricate framework than our current thinkers are willing to accept.

And this memoir? It almost went untold.

—Chip Cook

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