

THE BOOK OF WANDS

Sample chapters featuring
Erfie and Chloe

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Author's Note:

This is a memoir and a recollection of some of the more notable events of my life from my youth to the present.

The names have been changed to protect the privacy of individuals as needed. Although the chronology of some of the events has been slightly juggled in a few spots to aid comprehension, with minor exceptions the stories in this book are literal and accurately reflect true events.

The Book of Wands

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Chapter 19

Follow The Erfie

Bobby began to work extra hard on developing himself as a good musician. Even though technique is not an end in itself, he devoted himself to developing good technical skills on his guitar. With as much direction as I was capable of giving, he also began to try to figure out what his own original sound was. But these were two very different and distinctly different things.

Being able to move ones fingers on the fretboard deftly, smoothly, and naturally is something that takes much repetitive and dedicated practice. Such mechanical perseverance pays off in the same way that any exercise pays off; by keeping you in decent physical shape.

But just jumping around from note to note as fast as one can without any original creative thought behind it, this is something any monkey can learn to do.

Just like wild howling gibbons swinging around like mad, expertly jumping from tree to tree, bending branches in the rain forest, likewise there are plenty of homo sapiens in the concrete jungle screaming and bending guitar strings in a similar fashion.

If they're fast enough in one place, they become Monkey Numero Uno. In the other forest, such expert gymnasts are universally proclaimed, "World's Greatest Guitar Hero".

Finding and creating something original, something that you can call your own is a much more difficult and complex task. Originality is the product of experience, ironically followed by rejection of much of what you've learned

"Why do I have to practice scales?" Bobby quizzed me one day.

"So don't," I answered.

"So why did you show me scales in the first place?" he quizzed again.

"It's so your fingers don't fall off," I replied. "It's so you don't have to think about where to put your fingers. It's so you can have more fun when you stop playing scales."

"Huh?" Bobby scratched his head. I was sure I had thoroughly confused him.

I called this method of teaching the Socratic Head Lice Method. It's where you answer your student's question with the answer they actually WANT to hear, something they certainly don't expect to hear from their teacher. This produces an effect in which they are confronted with little resistance from their instructor, akin to scratching one's head when it itches.

Nobody stops you from scratching when you itch- unless you've got the measles- and they shouldn't stop you from playing what you want to on your own instrument either.

"Can we learn "Putrid Ramifications by Green Puke?" Bobby asked me one afternoon.

"Sure," I said. "The E flat version or the D minor version?" I enquired specifically.

I have no problem with Punk, Metal, Classical, Grunge, Gypsy or anything else for that matter. It all leads to the same place, which is simply Going Somewhere Else. As a teacher, my job is to help my student Travel to New Experience, as opposed to Stagnating in the Same Moldy Place.

Music is a fine vehicle for this. This can be accomplished by learning something completely new, or even by learning to do something more familiar that one has seen or heard.

In either case, acquiring a skill of any sort beats sitting around and learning nothing new or nothing at all, which seems to be the premier occupation preferred by the largest segment of the population.

But I eventually felt that I had no business leading any of my students on a dog leash. Rather, I went where my students wanted to go. And we always made very fast progress in this manner.

I had twenty five years of practice figuring out how NOT to teach music. I figured out the least painful, the most efficient way fairly quickly because I have a very low tolerance for self-inflicted pain.

Certainly subjected to sixteen years of bad example in the public and university school systems, I finally learned that a surefire way to make yourself completely miserable is to try and push somebody into someplace they're fighting to avoid.

Conversely, the only way to keep yourself sane, and ultimately the fastest way to motivate students is to do exactly the opposite of what nearly all of my teachers had done with me.

This basic lesson of "How To Lead Others" was at last ultimately confirmed for good from my dog Ernie. One day I'll make a movie about it. I will call it, "Follow the Ernie".

As my dog grew older, he became more and more resistant to following me on a leash as we went on our afternoon walks. After 3000 miles of walks down our street, at a certain point he just didn't want to be led around any more. I would try to pull him down the street, but he was as stubborn as a mule.

Anyone watching us would see a tug of war going on between man and beast. Whichever way I wanted to go, Ernie would invariably look in the

opposite direction and insist going that way, stretching the leash tight in 180 degrees from where I had planned.

He would stop right in the middle of crossing the street and dig all four heels in, pulling my right arm taut behind me. Simultaneously Chloe would be pulling my left arm straight ahead as she was six feet in front of me. I was on a modern equivalent of the medieval torture rack, powered by two little furry white hounds.

Chloe was more than cooperative with me, but Erfie had a mind all his own. I realized that if he didn't go for walks, he wouldn't get any exercise and this was certainly not good for his health, and probably not for mine either. After nine months of going slower and slower and coming against more and more resistance from him, I was at my wits end.

Finally, one day in exasperation I just dropped the leash on the sidewalk and yelled at him, "Okay! Do whatever you want to do! You want to stand there and just smell that bush? Fine. You go where you want to go, and I'll follow you You're the boss."

I was convinced we wouldn't go more than two feet.

But after Erfie got through smelling the particular bush he was temporarily infatuated with, he trotted a few feet down to the next leafy rest stop.

After a few moments snuffling around like a domesticated French boar looking for truffles, he then RAN across the street to investigate yet another tree. I had to run after him. He kept going. He ran down the block and I had to run to keep up with him.

Bear in mind, this was a dog that I wasn't sure wanted to even walk twenty feet much less run down the street.

But suddenly, in this Zen moment of complete abandonment of my own stubborn reptilian nearsightedness and control, I finally allowed Erfie, a mere "dog" to become the Captain of his own Walkies.

On that first day of my own enlightenment, I spent an hour following him around the neighborhood, going where he wanted to go. I tested this theory of "Follow The Erfie" the rest of the week, and sure enough, he got more exercise and at a speed I hadn't seen him exhibit in years.

That's how it's been ever since. Granted, some nights he just doesn't feel like walking, and so, I let him have his way. But any more, that is the exception rather than the rule.

He has his own pace, and he stops and goes. If I try to get him to go at my pace, almost certainly I will be foiled and frustrated. I think he does it on purpose to show who is really in charge. "Okay," I cry uncle, "You're the boss."

If I let him lead the way, granted, we start and stop with unbelievable unpredictability, as if his brain and feet are connected to a random number generator. But similarly, we now frequently go at breakneck puppy-like speed-something I would never see at all if I try to pull him along my way on the leash.

At thirteen years old, and on eight legs only nine inches long each, Erfie and Chloe are now nearly back to doing an easy two miles every night.

I took me nine months to figure it out: Dog Walk Nirvana was just a matter of giving up control and Following The Erfie.

So it has been with my music students. I always encouraged students to study the music of people they admired. This is how everybody gets going. You imitate others first. You Travel to a hill that others have conquered before you.

You copy others to get some momentum going. This is natural and it's intelligent. Johann Sebastian Bach, perhaps the greatest composer in history, spent countless hours of his youth hand copying the music of other composers note for note in a candle lit attic.

Then he did his own thing.

But it doesn't end there. Bach quickly did his own THING. He expanded and created a new You-niverse..

You certainly wouldn't Travel anywhere new if all you did was to copy. And Traveling is what Wands is all about. I was ready to show Bobby at some point what Wands could do. I was just waiting for him to show me that he wanted to learn something unique. That day was coming.



Chapter 29

Good Erfie

Every morning I drag myself out of bed, kick Erfie and Chloe outside down the wooden back steps into the yard for a few minutes, pull on my socks, shoes, pants, underwear, shirt, not necessarily in that order, grab an umbrella or a cane, and the three of us (not counting the inanimate objects) march two blocks down to our neighborhood coffee shop. We've done this every day like clockwork for years and years.

Chloe still hops down our steep steps just like a bunny rabbit, hop hop hop. But lately I've had to carry Erfie up and down the stairs as he's matured as he's been reluctant to navigate these by himself. I think there's as much to this in his doggie frame of mind as anything: Erfie plays me for a sucker, but I humor him. He deserves some pampering after so many years as a faithful companion. After all, he's the best dog in the entire universe for all time and space.

Well, okay, Chloe is too.

But Erfie is quite the character, and I don't think he let's on half as much as to his real capabilities. Just the other evening, he took a little tumble ears over paws back down the stairs when I let go of his leash as I was unlocking the front door and my hands were full of groceries.

I glanced down at him, six steep steps down to the first landing (the steps go up to the porch in two sections), and fortunately he was just fine.

I always noticed that when my dogs accidentally get bonked on the head or something like that, they're over it as quickly as it happened. Not me. I howl in desperate and exaggerated pain if I as much as stub my tow on an acorn. I'm a wimp. My dogs are superhuman non-complainers next to me.

Anyway, I rushed inside to put my groceries down then jettied back outside to carry him back up the steps like I usually do if my arms aren't full. But when I got back out, he was nowhere to be seen.

I thought that maybe he had become disoriented and headed further all the way back to the sidewalk. I jumped down there, first looking one way up the street, and failing to see him, turned around and searched the sidewalk in the opposite direction. I didn't see him anywhere.

I ran around the corner of my building to see if he had headed up the alley, but he wasn't there either. Then, my heart pounding, I looked in the street; he wasn't there either. I quickly ran down past the front of my house to see if he was hiding behind my neighbors shrubs.

He was gone.

Oh man. Now I was starting to get worried. I thought I had better run inside and get my flashlight, it was dark outside, and he could have gone anywhere.

I leaped up my stairs like an over-anxious gazelle, knowing that a dog Wandering around alone at night is a disaster waiting to happen. As I ran inside not knowing what on earth had happened to my dog, the second I got two feet inside my front door, I saw Erfie standing right in the middle of the living room with a looking up at me, placidly enquiring as to what he was going to have for supper.

He had apparently immediately followed me and the groceries up the stairs without a pause from the very start without any problem at all. He had obviously gone up the steep stairs right into the house, apparently hiding in the blind spot two feet behind my ankles following the trail of delicious foodstuffs into the kitchen.

For months he had me fooled completely. The truth was that the stairs were no physical obstacle whatsoever, at least when food was leading the way.

While I'm on the subject, this reminds me of another missing Erfie incident.

Long ago I taught Chloe and Erfie to stay put when I let go of the leash. They were quick learners, and soon figured out that if I put down the leash and said "Stay!" they were not to budge an inch. In fact, before long I didn't even have to say anything at all. If I simply let go of the leash, they stayed glued to the spot until I picked up the leash again or loudly commanded them to "Come Here!"

This lesson was something that I learned was an extremely important lesson in dog survival, after watching several of my pets madly dash away when I accidentally let go of my end of their tether. Fortunately this never ended in dogastrophe.

One of the earliest and most disturbing and permanently etched visions in my memory is a photograph I gazed upon as a six year old while browsing through my sister's World Book Encyclopedia. Under the subject of emotions, in particular the emotion of "grief", was an captioned photo of a small boy kneeling over the still body of his ex-dog, crushed in the street by an automobile.

Unfortunately, during my adolescence I witnessed such a tragedy of a friend's dear pet with my own eyes. When I finally adopted my own dogs, I was determined never to let this happen. Thus, I trained my mutts to stay put when I put down their strap.

One early evening I was taking Erfie and Chloe for a walk down my street, their leashes loosely held in my hand, a book in the other, and my portable music player supplying a soundtrack through headphones, hence blocking any sound of the real world around me, such as the pitter patter of eight tiny feet..

Let me illustrate the risks of multi-tasking to you here and now.

I am three blocks from home and thoroughly engrossed in my novel, barely lit by the twilight sunset. I am a world away. For a moment I come back to the here and now and glance down to where I expect to see both of my dogs gleefully trotting alongside me. To my utter horror, there is only Chloe behind me. As I gaze at my hand, I realize I only have only one restraint in my grip, not two.

I look behind me all the way up the block, and Erfie is nowhere in sight. My heart drops down my pants leg and splatters onto the hard cement sidewalk.

I run full blast back towards home anticipating the worst. The visions of my friend's dog under the wheels of a car come flashing back in an instant.

Alas, fifty yards from my front door, there is Erfie, his leash plopped down limp next to him. He is sitting smack dab in the exact center of the intersection like one of those Japanese traffic cops in the bullseye center of the road.

He's just sitting there, doing exactly what I had taught him to do, not to move a muscle if I let go of the leash, and he is looking quite content.

"See, I did what you told me to."

Good dog.

You scared the living protoplasm outta' me.

These days, if I take a book with me on our walk, I staple the ends of their leashes to my knuckles.

But back to our usual morning stroll...

In the shiny red mailbox that hangs on the brick wall next to my front door I stash a long roll of disposable clear trash bags. As I leave, I tear off two, or in a particularly optimistic mode, three bags, and stuff them in my pocket-when I remember to, that is. Often, I am still half asleep for fifty yards out my door, and I get halfway into the street before I have to turn around hesitatingly to return for the forgotten bags. Alas, my guilty conscience commands me to, and I feel utterly compelled to do my neighborly doggie duty with the necessary and proper supplies at hand.

It is somewhat amusing that the mailbox now functions as a doggie toilet paper dispenser. I'm not sure if the mailman is in any manner disturbed

by this when he brings me my telephone bill, but likely not when he stuffs my mailbox full of junk mail.

We walk down the street, Chloe chewing, tossing, and playing with her end of the leash without fail, and myself, my cane or umbrella in hand, twirling it in a slightly more humanly manner

I learned years ago never to leave home with my dogs and without a long stout Wand of some sort. As good as a Wand is for Travel, it also doubles as a simpler and cruder deterrent against larger dogs who erroneously feel that my more diminutive pets would make a good snack for their aggressive appetites.

On the average, once a year I employ my cane or umbrella in a forthright application of little ambiguity, and rap an overly rambunctious and poorly disciplined Labrador or Golden Retriever squarely on the nose. This quickly lets them know that if Erfie and Chloe do not appear formidable enough, they are accompanied by a large ape carrying a long hard stick who certainly is to be taken more seriously.

I plead that I rarely employ my Wand in this manner with such brute force, but more commonly so in a deliberately conscientious fashion that rarely exceeds pointing it with sudden and alarming ferocity at an approaching adversary, which is usually enough to stop a saliva drooling potential combatant dead in it's tracks.

Over the years I've come to the unavoidable conclusion that invariably, people who have aggressive and/or obnoxious and poorly behaved animals as companions are poorly behaved animals themselves of parallel small discipline and guttural nature.

Alas, the shame of all of this is that it doesn't take much effort or time to teach a dog how to act well and kind. Most dogs, even rescue dogs from the worst of homes are more than willing and able to cooperate in changing previously badly acquired manners.

Unfortunately, I can't say as much for the malleability of more common big brained hairless adult apes.

We arrive at the coffee shop within five minutes. Out front are two tall black wrought iron light posts that remain from the turn of the century with their original sculpted glass gas lamp fixtures. The shop itself has served coffee under various name changes for as long as I've lived in the neighborhood, nearly fourteen years, and was it here even some before that.

The place is unofficially known as The Garage, as the building was originally constructed as a gasoline fill up and service station fifty years ago. Besides the new colorful paint and the coffee shop sign, it still looks like a gas

station from the outside. Now however, instead of filling you up with high octane and 10W30, they fill you up with high octane Columbian Supreme.

Also intact are the big two upward sliding garage bay doors. Unfortunately, the staff is inordinately fond of sliding up these big bay doors to cool down the place in the middle of November when they apparently think it's too hot for them behind the counter.

Of course it *was* exactly the perfect temperature for all of the patrons inside and in front of the counter. Even though a dozen people inside the place will suddenly begin putting their goose down ski parkas back on, it takes snowflakes landing on top of the espresso machine before the employees finally get the picture.

In the summer the big garage doors are a boon however, and you can't tell where the inside of the coffee shop ends and the outside begins. The squirrels as well as the brazen finches and sparrows that venture inside certainly haven't figured out the border yet. There's even one old gray neighborhood cat named George who has his own barstool at the counter, and he can be regularly seen sitting in his spot.

The business is a Russian franchise that can now be seen in various locations around town. The rumors that the place is run by a bunch of ex-KGB agents who jumped the Potemkin is totally unsubstantiated. They have done the best job of anyone so far of setting up a neighborhood coffee business under their own brand name, *Das Fog*. However, let it be said that the actual management and owner of this particular location is a Yankee named Bill. God Bless America, rah rah rah.

It is quite appropriate that foreigners from the former Soviet bloc took over the back side of the business. It's not that they are actually any more sinister than the guys on our side, but that's historically been the general perception if you live on this side of the now lukewarm war. I'm just saying, it fits the model, the stereotype. Think: Espionage.

You see, The Garage is not what it seems.

It is not just an innocent little java joint, what that the casual visitor will likely comprehend when stopping in to purchase a hot latte to go.

Instead, truth be known, sitting at a table mere yards away munching on a nonfat bran muffin, might very well be someone who is quite capable of destroying your life as fast and as easily as slapping flat a pesky mosquito on one's forearm.

The Garage is a big bright porch light from 7 A.M to 7 P.M., and around it gathers a cornucopia cloud of moths and other flying creatures seven days a week. If you join this quietly fluttering swarm, at any time you may find yourself next to someone as innocent looking as your next door neighbor, but who may be quite capable of turning your life around 180 degrees, in any

direction. And such a person could do this as easily as you watch them casually butter a toasted bagel sitting on top of a crisp white porcelain plate.

This little coffee shop is a neutral zone, a no man's land, a little garden where the opposing forces of north, south, east, west, and up and down have agreed to an unspoken truce during brunch. The praying mantis and the monarch butterfly convene here a civilized summit, quietly, over a cup of coffee with sugar and cream.

Alas, things are rarely what they appear to the uninitiated.

One particular summer morning I agreed to meet Bobby at Das Fog for a little caffeinated wake up. This was a few weeks before his trip to Nevada, and I thought we might tiptoe a bit more upon Wands before he left.

The episode with the umbrella had driven a further little wedge in his conventional perspective, and I was certain his trip away from home would be a good opportunity to build upon the momentum we had started. There's nothing like a break in the routine to build new ways of viewing the world.

Chloe, Erfie, and I took the regular walk down the street, past the long familiar houses on our street, past a couple of long familiar neighbors, and soon arrived at the point of rendezvous.

Erfie sniffed at the flower bed lining the patio outside the front door, and I patiently stood there and waited a few moments for him to do his thing. By this I mean that he was gathering information using his long and powerful shnozz to learn about what other visitors had been there over the preceding twenty-four hours. I suppose he was only interested in those visitors who used the flower bed for a bathroom and ignored those who did not. But you can never be completely certain what goes through a dog's mind.

Chloe had other things on her mind and didn't seem quite as entranced with the smells. She kept anxiously looking up at me as to ask, "What am I going to get to eat here?" Of this I am completely certain.

I glanced inside one of the big front windows and I could see Bobby and another friend already inside and sitting at a table. He was in there chatting with somebody I knew named Byron Gooseberry, who had apparently shown up that morning as well.

Byron was about thirty years old, twice the age of Bobby. I had met him a year earlier at the coffee shop. He was an attractive yet plump guy of my own modest stature that certainly wouldn't be a candidate for underwear modeling per his waistline.

Although we had not spent tons of time together, we had become good friends. We had gone to the park to throw a baseball around, talked politics and psychology, and he had even helped me clean out my basement on one occasion.. It turned out that Byron lived only a block away from me,

equidistant from the coffee shop, and it was easy to run into him in the neighborhood.

Bobby and Byron had met previously at my house on a couple of evenings when we had all gathered to watch a Hayao Miyazaki movie, a common point of interest for us all. Byron was an artistic type and a medical school dropout. His folks wanted him to become a doctor, but wanted to paint and write. And like a right brain dominant personality, he wasn't the most organized and disciplined person I knew. And he was a bit impulsive.

One time someone had smashed into the rear end of his car and he obtained an unexpected \$1,600 car insurance windfall. Rather than fix the relatively innocuous dent in his fender or save the money for a rainy day, he promptly blew it all on a spontaneous and gleeful road trip to Mexico.

On that occasion I found a box containing a big stack of notebooks filled with his sketches and poetry sitting on my porch with a note that read, "Please take care of these, I don't know when I'll be back."

Curiously, there was a Jar packed with notes in the box as well, with a note taped to it stating, "This contains some of my most prized possessions." Inside were a few scraps of paper with scribbles on it. I had seen that sort of thing before.

Maybe he understood Jars on the subconscious level. Later, he would fully come to witness what they were really for.

I wasn't sure why I was picked me to be the keeper of his verbal and graphic memories, but I suspect it was because he wanted me, a published author, to look at them and proclaim some sort of proclamation as to their worthiness or not. As if my opinion was worth any more than his own.

In any case, he was back in a week, as broke as before the dent had happened. Well, at least he then had some south of the border memories to write and draw pictures about. It was a pleasant diversion, but this didn't help his permanent financial prospects.

Inside Byron's skull, Van Gogh creative disorganization was continually warring with Bill Gates pragmatism. Alas, creative chaos was clearly victorious so far.

After giving the dogs a good chance to survey that morning's odors in the Das Fog's flower bed, I looped the dog's leashes up their usual spot right by the front door onto the patio rail. In this place they were happy to greet every single person who came by for breakfast and they easily gathered both frequent pats on their head and a good quantity of dog cookies.

Bobby and Byron were sitting at a little table by the wall. Bobby saw me and waved "Hi!" first. Byron had his back to me, but soon realized I had shown up, and he turned around and smiled, then waved as well.

At the counter that morning was Alex, a very pleasant red-headed girl who had been working there for many months. She approached and smiled. “Nile’eh?” she asked.

“Yeah, thanks,” I reply.

“One shot or two?”

“Um, two I think.”

I had been coming to this place for so long they eventually named a unique drink after me. This is a regular cup of coffee with a small amount of steamed milk and a shot of espresso. It’s not quite a latte or an eye-opener, so they named this one a Nile’eh, pronounced “Nile-aye”, like latte.

I regularly joke with the staff here in a manner no other customer dares, and I think that’s why I seemed to get such nice treatment. I offer a few moments of un-patron like entertainment and discussion each morning, where as most people just bore them to tears with a routinely order.

I’ve gotten more attention per the fact that I’ve been known to make my presence unequivocally known over such issues as “Why don’t I get a free refill on *iced* coffee? How much does ice cost anyway?”

It’s hard to miss me. You see, I wasn’t just a regular- I was an unusual regular. Fact be known, importantly, I was a decidedly *harmless* unusual regular.

This is an important distinction.

The coffee shop had its share of not so harmless unusual regulars, and they always got themselves banned quickly. You could be unusual as heck around this place, and there were lots of those kinds of people. But as soon as you made trouble; BAMM, you instantly got banned by Marcus the manager, no ands ifs or buts.

Although I’m totally capable of becoming invisible when it’s appropriate, I am also capable of making myself becoming unavoidable, like a gigantic goat. I just made sure that if I made a fuss, there was a good reason for it, and I could justify it, and I was reasonable about it. At least this is what I liked to think.

It didn’t take much to tick off Marcus, so I always made sure that I didn’t cross the line between saying my peace and disturbing the peace.

Some people around here didn’t seem to get the difference.

That morning there was a big stack of Russian candy bars on the counter for sale including raspberry flavored bars, dark chocolate, hazelnut and others. They had just got in a big shipment of new milk chocolate bars that were neatly stacked on end in a cardboard display. On the label of each bar was the picture of a cute little cherubic infant with a colorful scarf around its cute little noggin.

I held one of the bars in my hand and examined it, then held it up to show the barista who was trying to fix my drink.

In a voice loud enough for most of the other patrons to hear I asked, “Do they use real baby bits in this bar or artificial baby bits?”

I suddenly heard the clank of my Nile’eh cup being dropped behind the espresso maker. The place suddenly quieted down a notch.

Moments later I saw Alex poke her head back up and glare at me. “Don’t make me laugh in the middle of your drink,” she instructed. “Good thing Marcus isn’t here.”

Marcus ran this place like a tight ship, which was quite an accomplishment considering the cast of characters who regularly inhabited the premises every day from 7 A.M. to 7 P.M. when the city forced The Garage to close it’s doors.

Years ago the hours were extended as late as 10 P.M. But in a sneaky unannounced special hearing of the city council, the neighbors across the street managed to force the business to close shop no later than 7 P.M. every night.

The thing was, the neighbors knew something weird and strangely uncomfortable was going on, but because of the expert method by which the patrons operated- and I’ll get into this shortly- nobody could actually pin anything on anybody. I am certain that not even the FBI would be capable of that level of detection. The customers were THAT good.

For all intents and purposes, this looked exactly like nothing more than a friendly coffee shop, and the customers looked exactly like normal customers. Unless you came around enough, or lived fifty yards away.

But just like the old neon sign that used to hang above the front door with an eerie halo-like glow given off by the buzzing pretzel twisted neon bulbs, if you hung around the place long enough, and stared long enough, and listened carefully and long enough, you started to sense another eerie halo given off by a good number of the people sitting around sipping dark steaming hot java.

You could feel something was different. You could sense something was not quite right.

But you only ever got an inkling.

To see what was really going on, you needed a Wand.

I got my drink from Alex, dropped her a tip in the giant coffee tip mug, and walked over to the condiment cart by the front wall. I poured in a bit of half and half and grabbed a spoon and a couple packets of raw brown sugar. Then I headed over to my friends.

I went over and sat down next to Bobby and Byron.

“Hey.”

“Hey.”

“Hey. Que pasa, how’s your pasa?” I asked.

We all chuckled at the old George Carlin joke, although I was certain these young’uns had no idea about the origin of that particular line.

“Let’s go outside, E and C are here and it’s nice out,” I said.

My two friends stood up in apparent agreement with my suggestion.

“Where’s *their* coffee?” Bobby asked, straight as a pin.

“I told you, I won’t let them have more caffeine, they can’t get to sleep at night,” I answered without a blink.

“There’s decaf you know,” Bobby quickly replied, holding up his own cup.

I instantly rebuffed him, “Hey, there’s still caffeine in decaf, enough for a twenty pound dog to go bonkers.” I shook my head as if he should know better. “Sheesh.”

Byron looked at us like we were both crazy. He hadn’t really been around either one of us long enough to know how easily we slipped into this mode of completely absurd conversation. “What?” he said.

Bobby and I simply looked straight back at him as if we didn’t understand what the problem was.

“What what?” Bobby remarked.

“Huh?” I questioned.

This was a little game Bobby and I constantly played with each other, testing each other for quick smart response, trying to trip up the other first, like a staring contest. But we did it with conversation rather than unblinking eyelids. Anybody else listening in to our serious feigned banter would quickly think we were out of our minds. Byron got sucked into it without a pause.

Then he got it.

We had done it so convincingly and seamlessly from the get go, from the initial greeting of “Hey”, that he had been caught completely off guard.

“Funny. You guys are funny,” Byron chuckled. Bobby slapped him on the back as they both followed me to the door onto the patio.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” I continued, and held the door open for them both.

Byron looked at Bobby and Bobby winked at him.

“Welcome to the club,” Bobby quietly and matter of factly said.

Erfie and Chloe immediately began wagging their tails as they saw us come outside. “Hey there guys!” Bobby exclaimed as he kneeled down and patted both on the back. Erfie automatically sat down and began scratching with his back foot as a reflex in the way that dogs always seem to do when you rub them the right way.

“Why do dogs do that?” Byron asked.

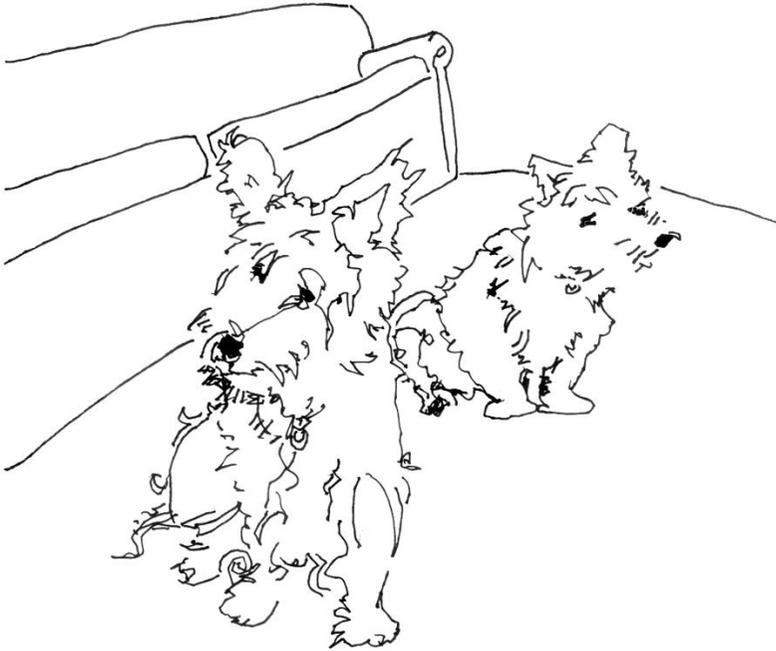
I shrugged my shoulders.

“Why do people keep voting for Republicans and Democrats?” Bobby asked.

I shrugged my shoulders again.

“Hmmm, good question,” Byron replied.

“Come on guys,” I said as I unfastened their straps from the rail and led them over to a nice shady table in the shade off in a corner of the patio, away from the rest of the creatures.



Chapter 30

Byron Learns To Use A Spoon

That morning the sun was out with a nice gentle breeze blowing across the patio, all scattered under the dense foliage of the many trees bordering the front of the coffee shop. The usual crowd was in attendance, spread out among twenty or so tables. A dozen of these at random had a big open black and red patio umbrella poking up through a hole in the middle.

We all sat down around our own table, and the first thing I noticed was that Byron looked different. Was something new going on with him, I could tell. But I couldn't tell exactly what it was. His hair looked ruffled, and more.

But even before anyone had the chance to utter a single word, a bird burst right past Byron's nose missing it only by about an inch.

"Man!" Byron lurched back as an automatic reflex kicked in. "That was close. What *was* that?!"

"Haha!" laughed Bobby. "It's a bird," he said.

"No, I think it was a plane!" came back Byron.

"No, guys," I said calmly. "It's Superomen."

There was silence from my two friends. They were having to sort that one out.

"Superomen," I repeated. "An omen, it's an omen. You know... a bird, a plane... super..."

"Ahh, I get it," Bobby admitted nodding his head.

"Clever, clever," added Byron.

"Was that the bluebird of happiness flying by?" Bobby wondered out loud.

"Maybe. Maybe something else altogether, and only an inch away too," I said as I slurped from the edge of my cup.

"Ooooo," Byron said.

Bobby jutted his index finger in the air, "The ornothoptoid of exceptional opportunity."

I sat up in my chair and simply looked at him for his unexpected utterance.

Bobby responded silently in kind, with a smug facial expression and his empty palms facing up offering the obvious, "So, what else should you expect from me?"

The fact was, he was always full of surprises, especially for a young guy. “Mom said I was born forty,” I heard him say more than once. “Yeah, well, maybe,” I would always bat back.

Sparrows and finches were abundant and making their usual rounds from table to table looking for scraps of any kind. The birds were quite unabashedly tame. If you set your pastry or bagel on a table and got up to fetch a newspaper for a few seconds, you would return to find that the birds had invited themselves to what amounted to their own Thanksgiving feast off of your plate.

Our table was in my favorite spot in the shade of a dogwood tree on the fringe of the patio, where we could see all of the other action going on.

It was a typical early morning crowd, some reading a newspaper, some poking at their laptop computers, and many engaged in animated conversation to the accompaniment of dozens of birds chit chattering away. I easily recognized at least a half dozen of the regulars, and several people also.

“You guys want to walk around?” I asked the dogs.

This was a rhetorical question, as letting them roam around was the standard practice. Erfie and Chloe were welcome regular guests roaming around the patio with complete free will, visiting everybody on their own treasure hunt for crumbs.

Just about everyone was happy to see the twin Westies poke their noses under the tables. And I wasn’t worried about problems. We had a vibe and a reputation going for us that no one dared trod on. If they did, they never came back.

One time a big drooling boxer with a stiff standing mane on his spine came loose from his strap that his owner had poorly fastened around one of the lamp posts out front. The dog made the mistake of mistaking my own pets several yards away for a morning tidbit and worked its way loose. It made a beeline for my dogs, and within seconds had picked a fight with them in order to proclaim himself Canine King of Coffee Bean Hill.

My friends and I were on top of things faster than you can say Irresponsible Other Pet Owner.

My friend Jarvis Troglobite had grabbed Erfie and Chloe and lifted them out of harms way in an instant while I simultaneously and instantly picked up this snarling sixty-pound mongrel by the scruff of his neck, all four paws helplessly dangling in the air.

He instantly turned into a sniveling and whimpering blob of short-haired dog flesh as I marched him to the front door of the coffee shop, opened it wide and yelled inside, “WHO’S DOG IS THIS?!”

Don’t mess with the Westies was the motto on that day.

This morning was considerably less confrontational, and the only other dog on the patio was a rich old lady's Yorkshire terrier about the size of a bag of peanuts by the name of Cookie, who had a big bark but a tiny bite.

"Stay out of the parking lot," I reminded my own dogs.

Bobby started the conversation. "You know, people think that birds chirping is them singing a happy tune."

Byron whistled.

Bobby finished his thought, "But nearly all of the time, it's really territorial signaling of a very aggressive nature."

"I think I've heard that somewhere," I said.

"I actually got an A in biology last semester," Bobby proudly added.

"So what are they saying?" asked Byron. "It sounds happy enough to me."

"That's because you don't speak bird talk. You hear that one?" Bobby cupped his hand up to one ear. "He's saying, 'Hey all you mothers, this is my branch and my tree, and unless you're a hot little two legged chickadee, stay offa' my bush.'"

Bobby then whistled for a second himself, then grabbed his own throat by both hands, choking and shaking his own head in wonderfully comic fashion. "Ackckckckckk!!" he barely squeezed out, then his head fell limp to the side as he stuck his tongue out.

Coincidentally or not, at that very moment two birds dive bombed onto the concrete patio nearly at our feet, flapping their wings wildly and making a fuss. They then took off like two fighter jets engaged in a dogfight.

"What'd I tell ya." Bobby said.

"Good timing," I added.

I then looked over at Byron, whom I hadn't seen in about four months.

"Byron, what's going on? You look... different," I suggested. "Did you get a haircut or something? Did you have a beard?"

"I've lost some weight," he admitted.

"Oh yeah. But there's something else," I was sure about it.

"Actually, yeah, I did get a trim, what do you think?" He turned his head sideways, and put his hand next to his head like a fashion model. He was hamming it up. "This girl I met did it, what do you think?"

It actually didn't look that great. It wasn't completely even on both sides, but I just nodded to be agreeable.

"This girl I met cuts hair."

"Oh..." Bobby and I said in unison.

I turned to Bobby immediately and asked him, "What goes up the chimney?"

“Smoke,” he instantly replied. We then linked our pinkies together and again in perfect unison said, “PEANUT BUTTER!”

Byron looked at us like we were completely out of our skulls. “What was that?!”

“Good luck charm, don’t you know?” answered Bobby. Whenever you said the same thing together at the same time.”

Byron just shook his head then said, “Anyway, I met this girl here and she’s finishing up at hairdresser college. She also does Astro-Smell Therapy.”

“Astra- what?” stammered Bobby blinking his eyes.

“Astro, not astra. Astro-Smell Therapy. It’s the science of Planetary Influence together with the science of what you smell. Haven’t you ever heard of it?”

Bobby and I just shook our heads side to side. “I don’t get it,” Bobby added.

“Well, the orbit of the planets have a direct influence on your life, that’s plain astrology. But by combining this with the correct smells of your Zodiac sign, it like, supercharges the effect.”

“Oh.” I said.

“Sure,” continued Byron. “Think about it. The time you’re born in the year has a direct smell associated with it just like the position of the planets. So, say if you’re born in the spring, not only does the orbit of say, Venus play a part, but so does the blooming flowers. What you smell is every bit as important as what horoscope sign you are.”

“Oh yeah, I believe that, for sure.” said Bobby a little too enthusiastically. I wasn’t sure I believed he was being entirely sincere.

“Anyway, this girl I met, her name is May, she prescribed some things I should start smelling in my life that will help me achieve my goals and help me get my life together.”

Bobby and I just shook our heads some more.

“Oh yeah, well I believe that,” I said. “I mean, your brain definitely is affected by what you smell, I learned that a long time ago at the brain lab.”

I actually was being honest because I knew that the brain was certainly affected in both a positive and negative way by odors. However, I wasn’t too keen on the concept that it had a lot to do with the date your mother announced your arrival on Earth.

I certainly was keen on the idea that people are a little to apt to believe anything they’re told, especially when it comes from a pretty face. People just tend to see what they want to see and hear what they want to hear. They don’t really THINK.

For example, if you passed Byron on the street and taking a look at him with your two eyes, you would have absolutely no clue that there might be

something going on in his life beyond the typical, beyond the expected TV tube stereotype that we generally have in mind as we look at a fit looking young adult.

Like many people, you could sit down at a table with him and chat over a cup of coffee, and have absolutely no idea- unless he specifically told you- that his life might bear little resemblance to your own.

You would look at this young and outwardly reasonably fit individual, and you would assume that here was a guy who got up each morning and went to work behind a desk somewhere, or drove a cab, or that perhaps he was a student in school studying accounting or another reasonably common vocation.

You would assume that he ate three square meals a day and probably slept seven or eight hours a night. You might think that he got together with his buddies every weekend to drink a couple of beers to watch a football game.

You might imagine that he went to the movies once in a while, that he liked to go on bicycle rides, and maybe camping trips. And like other people you know, you would assume that the chances were good that he spent Christmas with friends or relatives and every year ate a plateful of turkey dinner with cranberry sauce.

Any of these things could be true. But any of them could equally be as far from the truth as your grandmother is from the orbit of Mars.

The truth was that Byron, or anybody else for that matter could be anything and anybody. Anything he or anyone else told you could be an absolute fiction or not.

If you were like most people, you would have absolutely no way of knowing WHAT was really WHAT from the surface appearance of things. You couldn't know if the story they were telling you was reality or a fantasy in their own mind only, or a mixture of both.

Most people only see a thin little screen onto which is projected a paper thin slice of reality, like a Hollywood movie which everyone has bought into believing is real.

We are looking at the thin sugar frosting coating the real donut, and we have nary got a clue what the filling is like inside.

We are content to look at a Paper Mache mask sitting on the face of reality.

This happens far more than people will admit, or even know.

Nearly all of the time this is sugar coated mask is constructed by what people tell us what reality is. Or that the screen image we perceive is something we erroneously create ourselves based on thin expectations and previous experience.

Or because it's conveniently more comfortable than the truth.

Our perception of this thin superficial layer hitting our senses could be, and frequently is, completely wrong.

Often enough it is fatally wrong.

Add up enough people running around reacting to the sugar coated mask, like circus clowns on unicycles juggling bowling pins back and forth and you get a society in formidable disarray and chaos. You get a world hanging on by a thread, resembling a bobbing yoyo on the hand of an amused Greek god, rather more than a civilized modern planet.

Almost without exception, you can't really know what is what unless you have some other un-common resources, some other tools besides your regular eyes and ears, which are so easily tricked.

"Dude, I think you need to eat some more food," Bobby said, holding out the top half of his toasted bagel. "Here you want half of this?"

"No I'm good," Byron smiled back. "Really, I had oatmeal this morning."

I took another small gingerly slurp of my yet steaming hot Nile'eh.

"Hey look!" Bobby suddenly announced. "Look at that chick!" Bobby was eyeing a customer that was walking up the sidewalk to the front door of the shop. "Woooo hoooo! Hubba hubba!"

"Cute," I interjected.

Bobby turned to us in confidence, "I'd sure bet she'd be fun to talk to," Bobby confided.

"Really? You think so? Are you sure?" I asked as she disappeared inside the place. "Here, let me show you something," I said picking up my Coffee Spoon. I held it over the table, right in the middle between the three of us. "What do you see?" I asked as I slowly rotated the Spoon upright with my thumb and forefinger.

Bobby and Byron stretched their necks forward a bit and looked carefully at the bowl of the Spoon.

Bobby squinted his eyes, then took the Spoon from me. He slowly brought it up to his face, breathed on it, then carefully stuck it to the tip of his nose, and sat up straight.

The Spoon stuck there.

"Haha!" Byron laughed. "Let me try!" He did, but to no avail, and despite several attempts the Spoon kept dropping onto the patio.

Bobby sat back in his chair and laughed, "Your nose is too skinny! Let Niles try, he's got a fat nose."

I grabbed the Spoon from Byron and tried it myself. I could only get it to stick for a second or too. "Too greasy," I suggested.

I picked up the Spoon and wiped it off with the middle of my shirt. “Okay, this is serious, I’m not kidding, come on.” I held it in the middle of the table again. “Now, what do you *see*?”

Bobby and Byron stopped giggling and began to think about it, you could see it in their eyes. They knew me well enough that I had something on my mind.

“It’s shiny,” said Byron.

“What else?” I asked.

“Um... Like kind of a mirror,” observed Bobby.

“Very good,” I said.

Bobby and Byron high fived each other, “Dude!” said Bobby.

“Keep looking,” I insisted. “What else do you see?”

Both of them began to inch closer and closer until their eyes were mere inches away from the Spoon.

Byron asked, “Can I see it for a minute?” I handed him the Spoon, and he held it at an angle as he also tilted his head.

Then he looked up at the sky and noted the sun. He began to try and reflect the sunlight hitting the Spoon onto the table, like a magnifying glass.

“You’re getting colder,” I directed.

“Lemme see,” said Bobby holding his hand out. Byron passed him the Spoon, and Bobby held it in front of himself for a few seconds. Then he reached around and began scratching his back with it.

“Idiot,” I said. Byron and I had a good chuckle while Bobby kept scratching.

“What?” Bobby protested. He then brought the Spoon around to look at it again, and he stared at it quite intently from the rounded side. “Hey, I can see myself in it!” he exclaimed suddenly.

I smiled slightly.

“Let me see...” Byron took the Spoon from Bobby and began staring at himself in the dull reflection on the back of the bowl.

Bobby got up from the table quickly, “I’m getting my own,” and he disappeared back into the coffee shop. Byron continued to look at his reflection, tilting the Spoon one way then another, moving the Spoon closer and then farther away, and wiping it on his shirt tails to make it shine more.

“This is a mediocre Spoon, as far as Spoons go,” I said. “Everybody uses this one. You really need your own.” Byron shifted his eyes over to me trying to contemplate my meaning, but quickly went back to concentrating on his Spoon.

Bobby soon returned to our table with his own Spoon and held it up in front of his own face. It was huge, the size of a cooking ladle.

“Where you get that?!” I exclaimed. “That thing is huge!”

“I just asked them if they had a big Spoon I could borrow for a trick you were doing,” he replied as he scooted his chair up closer to the table.

I shook my head. Bobby had a way of delivering the unexpected – routinely.

“Let me see that,” I asked, and then examined his find.

“Now that’s what I call a Spoon,” said Byron.

“Ah, but size isn’t everything,” I said. “Sometimes big gets in the way.”

They both looked at me for a second, and I’m sure they thought I meant something else that I really didn’t mean, and that they missed a deliberately good hint. They then went back to admiring their own reflections.

“I wish I had a silver Spoon, these are kinda’ dull,” Bobby said.

“Yeah, you’re right. A silver Spoon has certain other properties,” I agreed. “My girlfriend gave me some silver Spoons, and they work really well. But these will work good enough for starters.”

Byron suddenly flipped his Spoon around and looked at himself in the convex side. “Whoa! Look at that!” He flipped the Spoon around from one side to the other.

“What?” Bobby said, as he flipped his own Spoon around to the soup side. “Hey, wow!”

“I’m upside down,” Byron nearly yelled. “That’s SO WEIRD!”

I watched as Bobby and Byron manipulated their Spoons every which way seeing how their reflections changed and didn’t change depending on how they held the Spoon, and where they held it.

“That’s rad,” Bobby went on. “It’s so weird how you’re right side up on this side, then you flip it over and you’re just the opposite. I never noticed that before in my life.”

“How long have you been using Spoons?” I asked.

“Actually, my father won’t let me touch Spoons in our house. He says it’s against our religion,” Bobby answered.

Byron looked at me, and I just smirked a little and shook my head.

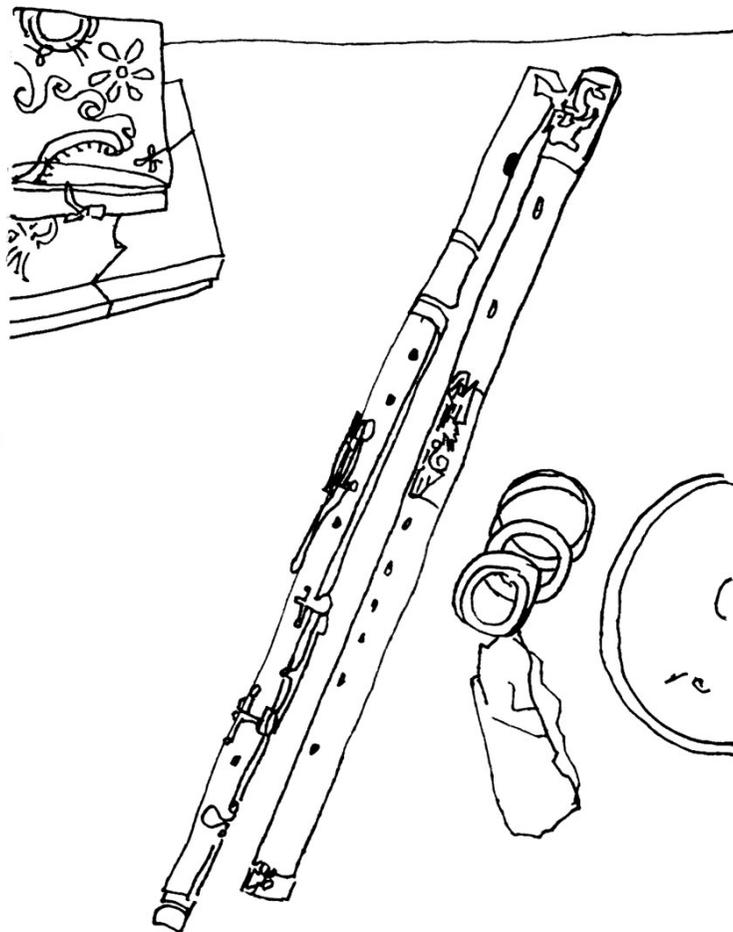
“This one’s too big, let’s trade,” Bobby said as he held out his Spoon to swap with Byron. They traded Spoons for a few moments, but Byron quickly offered the big Spoon back to Bobby.

“Nah, I’ll get another little one,” and Bobby headed back inside, returning quickly with a normal Teaspoon, sitting back down with it.

“Where’s the dogs?” I asked. I glanced over and saw Ernie and Chloe on the far side of the patio and got up to get them. “Be right back.”

As I returned to the table, Byron and Bobby looked just like two kids that had just discovered how much fun a cardboard box could be. I looped the end of the dog’s leashes under the table leg, and the sat down quite content that they had done sufficient crumb exploring for the moment.

“Okay, what else do you see?” I suggested. “You’re barely getting warm.”



Chapter 44

Two Big Jumps

Learning to use Wands is a gradual thing, like Brain Self-Control. You just don't read some instruction manual and then POOF! relatively speaking, you're a magician or the Einstein of Wands.

It's a matter of learning about yourself, developing a relationship with your Wands, then learning how your Wand works with YOU.

It's an exploration, like exploring space or a new undiscovered continent. There are no hard set rules or tracks to follow. What works for somebody may not work for you at all. Your journey is unique. If it's not, it's not Travel.

You can examine hints and clues left by other explorers on their own journeys, and there may be similarities to your own experience, but there will definitely be differences. No one but you can know what these are.

Your You-niverse is yours to explore, and yours alone. There is no other way.

My own Travels over the years was a mish mash of going here and going there with a very large assortment of Wands. You name it, I tried it. I have to admit, I might be guilty of having too many irons in the fire, or too many Wands in the air.

At times my life resembled utter disorganized chaos, with me rushing around and trying too many things, going here, then going there, then headed somewhere way over there.

Einstein was one of the greatest thinkers of the Twentieth Century, but lots of times he got lost just trying to get from his classroom lecture to his house. He couldn't remember what street he lived on.

I certainly was no better, and I certainly have never been an Einstein.

If Einstein liked to tinker with thoughts, I however did like to tinker with gadgets. One particular day my project was setting up the solar panel on my bedroom and kitchen exterior walls.

I made a phone call to my friend for some help, "Byron, do you wanna' help me get up my solar panel? I can use a little help"

"Sure Niles, why don't you come on over, I'm just cleaning up my paints."

Byron had begun not only painting in earnest, but had also started experimenting with his Pen in ink drawings, and had actually perfected the technique of using either hand. What was even more remarkable was to watch him do a drawing not with just one hand, but both on the same sheet of paper at the same time.

Byrons new found creative energy came about from what appeared to be a lot of new things he was incorporating into his daily routine, including keeping unwanted Cosmic Dust out of his space. He enjoyed using a variety of Wands with their accompanying Jars and Bottles, as well as creating a perimeter around his house with some of the Insulators that I had given him.

“Your place is starting to look pretty interesting,” I remarked looking around his little apartment.” He had really infused his place with a lot of personality, and enjoyed nosing around in all the corners wondering what I might find next. He had an astounding collection of Pens, Mechanical Pencils, and Brushes, the best of which were old and odd. “Hey, this looks like a nice Broom, where’d you get it.”

I picked up a nice old kitchen Broom with real straw bristles that was sitting in the corner near his kitchen cubby area. He had polished and applied some oil finish to the old handle which brought out the natural brown grain in the wood, and it looked strikingly beautiful, like an antique. I always admired it when one of my students or friends found something that had been discarded as worthless, and then gave it new life.

“I found it, right up the alley near the soccer field. It was sticking out of someone’s trash can,” Byron explained proudly.

“Wow, it’s a beauty!” I said. “The handle is amazing. What did you use?”

“Tung oil,” he said. “I probably put fifty coats on the thing.. I switch between the Broom I got at A’s Hardware and this vintage every other day. They keep each other company. What kind of animals do they get tung oil from anyway, do you know.”

“It’s not that kind of tongue, Bryon. It comes from a tree. You’re turning into a regular Mirror,” I said, referring to another girl that I had known about who had the ability to transform junk into beautiful and useful things.

We headed just up the block to the hardware store, just a few doors down from the grocery store. The hardware store was a small neighborhood place that I had been going to forever and I bought all my screws, nuts, bolts, tools, paint, and everything I could there instead of going to the giant hardware supermarket whenever possible, which was ninety percent of the time.

Over the years I had found that shopping at my own neighborhood corner store or a small independent business was in every way superior than going to these gigantic box stores that might have offered me a few cents

savings, but ended up costing me a bundle in lost personal service or bad advice. I made friends at every one of my neighborhood businesses, and in the end, not only did this save me money, but it saved me a huge amount of time because the people that were my friends helped me in a way that was often impossible when I got lost in a super store that was the size of Disney Land.

Just four feet inside the door I was instantly greeted by Darell at the key making machine, one of the five clerks who worked there. “Hey Niles, where’s Erfie and Chloe?”

“Aw, they’re home taking a nap. I’ll tell them they were missed,” I smiled. “I just need some plastic sheeting today,” as I headed down the aisle. I probably knew the store well enough to work there myself.

Darrel went back to his keys. “You know where it is.”

Byron looked around as I picked up the plastic sheet. “You know, all these tools look different to me now. They don’t just look like plain hammers and screwdrivers, and paint brushes anymore.”

“That’s right,” I said walking to the cash register.

“They all look like Keys to some doorway, to another dimension.”

We got back to my place and Byron held down the plastic sheet as I draped it over the wooden frame that I had attached to my wall as I hung over the edge of my roof. It was something I could have done myself, but four hands in this case was a lot better than two. Within twenty minutes the job was done and I bid Byron farewell.

I had considered myself lucky to have a lot of friends who lived close by and would come to my aid when I needed something. In return, I almost never turned down a reasonable request to come to their aid in return. Friends engage in a balancing act no different that playing on a seesaw: You push your friend up, and then after they go for a ride, it’s their turn to make you fly.

My solar wall contained the good will of my neighbors, and it helped keep my house warm every winter. The panel consisted of a large ten foot by ten foot frame covered with cheap clear plastic mounted on a black painted section on the south side of my house. It cost altogether about \$30 to make, and would save me five times that in my gas bill over the winter.

I had obviously not considered this solar panel to be a Wand of any type, that goes without saying. But sure enough, that solar wall would eventually lead me to a rainforest in my basement.

I had painted the bricks under the panel flat black to absorb the rays of the sun and heat up during the day. At night, the heated bricks would release the solar energy stored in them back into the house on the other side of the wall.

I had washed off my paint roller, and threw my tools into the drawers in the kitchen. But as usual, when I get going on a project I tend to let my

housecleaning suffer. Indeed, there were supplies everywhere. The house was turning into a mess.

The basement in particular was cluttered badly, and I didn't take the time to put all the things away as I should have.

That's me, in a reptilian brain rush.

Before long I was already onto the next project, which happened to be fixing up a radio controlled model plane that I had started messing with. I realized that the batteries for the thing were in the basement, and that's where I headed.

I opened the door to the basement that sits in the back of my kitchen and turned on the light just inside the door.

Then I took a step.

And where I put my foot was not on a nice flat wooden basement step, but rather on a new unused paint roller that was still in the plastic bag, sitting right on the top step. I had thrown it there not an hour earlier just to get it out of the way so I could rush back to my office and play with my plane.

As I stepped on this paint roller it wasn't my plane that took flight into the air, but your's truly. My foot rolled across the top of that plastic greased paint roller bearing, and I quickly levitated above the stairs like a ski jumper taking off at Lillehammer at the Winter Olympics.

But only for a fraction of a second. Then gravity took over.

All one-hundred and fifty pounds of my fragile flesh and bones descended at a terminal velocity of approximately 53 meters per second, or the same speed as a skydiver jumping out of a Cessna at three thousand feet.

Except my fall wasn't broken by a parachute.

Rather, my spine was broken by the sudden approach of the corner of the rock hard steps a mere ten feet down.

I had landed on my L4 and L5 spinal vertebrae, and it did not tickle.

After shouting a steady stream of expletives that quickly brought Erfie and Chloe to the top of the stairs to investigate, the first thought I had was, "Can I still feel my toes?" Fortunately the answer was affirmative. I crawled living room coach to nurse my wounds.

I was hurt, but okay. It had been a close call.

I could have died on those steps if I had landed on my neck. I felt supremely lucky, even if it meant hobbling around with a sore back for a few days.

Jua had taken off for China for three months to visit her sister, or I probably would have given her a call for some tender loving care.

As it was, I stumbled around by myself for a month, my back hurting more one day, and less another. I didn't really make the accident out to be anything serious. After all, I was still walking around, albeit a bit stiff.

It occurred to me that I simply needed to continue exercising. So, I took off one afternoon for a five mile bike ride thinking that a little strenuous physical exercise would be good for what seemed to be an increasingly limited ability to bend over.

After returning from my ride that evening, I further thought it would be good to supplement my ride with some yogic stretching. I got home and got down on the floor.

Then, I couldn't get up.

Not only couldn't I even get up off of the floor, but I suddenly experienced the most excruciating pain in my life. A pain that began in my lower back and continued down my right leg all the way down to my big unclipped toe nail.

I was in total painful shock, as I had never experienced pain like this before. I imagined that this is what it must feel like when you get shot. The world suddenly became the pain in my body, and nothing else existed except for how on earth I was going to stop it.

Somehow, I managed to get to a phone, and I called 911, as it seemed like the only course of action remaining.

What seemed like an interminable time later, the ambulance arrived along with two paramedics who let themselves into my apartment, but who then started asking me an irrelevant series of non-stop questions which to this day I can not remember what they were.

But what I can remember is that I got so tired of them asking questions instead of just simply putting me on a stretcher and taking me to the hospital, that I then just told them to "Get the hell out of my house and I'll get there some other way!"

At that point, the communication between myself and the paramedics began to disintegrate into a robust shouting match. They didn't want to leave because then they could be disciplined for leaving the scene of an accident or worse. I wanted them to leave because they were in fact interfering with my ability to make other arrangements to get myself some badly needed first-aid, and they appeared to be doing nothing but actually preventing me from doing just that.

The debate as to whether they would get out of my house or not continued for several minutes until a police officer and my next door neighbor Karl showed up. He began talking to both me and the paramedics, while the police officer seemed to be casing my apartment for who knows what.

I suspected that given my very vocal outbursts and anger over the lack of cooperation I was getting, the cop figured that I was behaving irrationally from the intake of something prohibited by law. Fortunately, that wasn't the case. I was just mad as a hatter because I was almost passing out from my spinal nerves being squeezed in a manner I was not accustomed, as well as my freedom of choice was being squashed as to whether or not I wanted these crazily inefficient ambulance attendances on my premises any longer.

I was somewhat relieved when Karl seemed to access the situation a bit more rationally than any of us, and finally convinced the paramedics to load me up on the stretcher and take me to the Emergency room post haste.

While being led through my front door I had to remind the officer that it was time for him to go as well, and I asked Karl to please lock the door to prevent any further invasion of my privacy and to prevent Erfie and Chloe from leading themselves on a walk in my absence.

After two hours of absolutely nothing being done in the University of Colorado Medical Center Emergency Room and that would include the delay of the administration of any pain medication relief for that period of time, they then calculated my bill for \$3500, thank you very much, and sent me home in my mother's car, finally sufficiently stoned into some measure of relief, and with a pair of grossly overpriced crutches in my grips.

By the next day it became apparent that I had entirely lost the ability to walk without these same crutches, and even that was a enormously difficult task. The pain continued to be severe, and in fact the mere pressure of my cloth pants leg against my shin was so bad that I had to cut the leg off of my pants so it wouldn't touch my skin.

There was only so much my level of brain self-control could do in this predicament. Thank goodness for Percoset.

My family physician, a wonderful man named Dr. Zuckelman, took a good look at me a few days later and ordered an MRI scan, which unfortunately turned into two, as the first one was too blurry to read. Do I have to tell you that they charged me for it anyway?

The second one was clearer, but the news that came into focus was not "You have won the lottery!" but rather exposed that I had two severely herniated lumbar discs and a nicely pinched sciatic nerve. That's what had rendered my right leg mostly decoration and was causing a bonanza of electrical pain from back to tender toes.

After examining the MRI photos, Dr. Zucklechuckle tapped below my knee with his little hammer. "Your reflexes have flown the coop," he confided to me. "You might need an operation. I hope you're not chicken." He was trying to cheer me up.

The fact was, he had been through a similar predicament, and had gone through back surgery himself. Dr. Z wrote down the contact information to his own surgeon on a prescription pad and handed it to me. . “Don’t let his name scare you, he’s the best there is.” I looked down at what he had written. It said, “Herman Frankelstein, spine specialist.

I arrived at Dr. Frankelstein’s office, a plush expansive area that I estimated at two acres and that seemed to take up the entire fifth floor of the hospital.

After getting yet another series of his special X-Rays, having already handed over my MRIs for inspection, I sat for twenty minutes dressed in a drafty open backed gown awaiting his verdict, with nothing to read inside the examination room except the latest issue of Ladies Home Journal.

Finally, the door creaked open.

“Hello Mr. Abercrumy, I am Dr. Frankelstein,” he announced, barely making any eye contact. His manner instantly seemed as cold as a fish under glass in a supermarket cold freezer. As he unceremoniously addressed me and my condition, I got the feeling that he viewed me similarly as another slab of meat as well.

“Here’s all I can do and what I will recommend. After administration of powerful narcotics that in most cases are safe, although there are known instances of serious complications and even death, I will slice open your back, and after removing large sections of the bone that makes up your spine, I will excise all of the damaged herniated discs tissue and throw it away like an apple pie that has been run over by a dump truck. I will replace the material with silicon donuts that cost approximately \$2000 each, non-refundable, which will remain in your body for twenty years, after which they will be completely worn out and when we will have to do this all over again. After the synthetic replacement donuts have been pushed in with my thumbs, I will then tear the muscles apart on either side of your spine, and drill ¼ inch diameter holes into your back into which I will then permanently fuse your spine with cold titanium rods, screwing them into your vertebrae with my five horsepower medically approved electric power drill.”

“There’s nothing else I can do or recommend. This procedure may or may not have any positive effect on your pain or your projected ability to walk, although I’m thinking there’s a good chance it might. In any case, this procedure will provide me with enough funds to take my entire family on delightful tour of first class hotels throughout Europe and Scandinavia for six weeks after I am done with you.”

Well, at least that’s what it sounded like.

I left with tears in my eyes, sufficiently depressed and without hope. Dr. Frankelstein didn’t provide me with any options except “We can do this at any

time that you're ready", and I could hear the friction of him rubbing his palms together as the elevator doors closed in front of me.

For several days my mind was foggy, I was dazed and confused. I hadn't hurt myself this badly since I had been in the fourth grade, when I was running with a pair of barber scissors in my hand, hoping to make a 45 RPM record holder out of a shoebox.

As my father stood next to me looking at the X-ray picture of the embedded point of the scissors and inche inside my knee joint way back then, he tried to cheer me up then by telling me, "This is your ticket out of the army, son!"

On this occasion I had not yet considered the silver lining to this incident and this injury, but I would in time.

During the next long couple of weeks, all of my friends began to come to my aid in ways that I had never imagined. My friend from college, Christine Bite-Ahmiller and her sisters Jennifer and Susan showed up at my door and were virtual saints. They cleaned my house for me, did shopping for me, cleaned my tub and kitchen and even more. I found it nearly incomprehensible that someone would actually volunteer to do this, friend or not. Jennifer in particular was amazingly generous as over the years, I barely knew her. In some ways I felt like these three gorgeous women were secretly humanitarian nuns who visited me incognito throughout the week, helping an invalid in his time of need.

One of my oldest friends, Susanna Del Velcro came and cooked for me and did my dishes. She was a world famous belly dancer that I had known for nearly thirty years. I was so overcome with gratitude after she washed my dirty pots that I started crying, although I think this outburst of emotions was in great part due to the massive amount of painkillers I was enjoying that were simultaneously cranking my emotions up to eleven.

My regular music students also did their part in cheering me up, bringing me videos to watch and books to read.

Jua Lee offered to come back to the states, but I insisted that she not interrupt her return to China, and I was satisfied with the calls of support I received from her twice a day. She had some advice about traditional Chinese medicine, but it didn't really sink in. I told her "Just bring me back some almond cookies."

Of course, I had other friends who were Travelers, like Jarvis, MarVel, and Shaun, and they offered plenty of support. To a man they told me, "We're working on it, bro, hang in there."

This was not a sprained ankle, and I realized I had gotten myself stranded in the Galaxy of a Serious Dilemma. As experienced as I was at Traveling, I could not see the Exit, or if there even was one. Only in retrospect do I see that my twisted back had twisted my mind every which way but lucid.

However, unquestionably I came to appreciate through my misfortune was how lucky I was to be surrounded by people who cared for me, and how they took time out of their lives to help me in any way that they could. This was a silver lining that made itself apparent as soon as word got around that I was flat on my back.

The main sticky issue was deciding whether I wanted to go through the surgery or not. The prospect of never being able to walk properly again was staring me in the face like a brick wall fifty feet high. I was in perpetual pain that was only relieved by significant quantities of Schedule II drugs.

It had been a week since my trip to the hospice and things looked bleak.

But one of the biggest helpers I had was a friend and an adult guitar student whom I had coached from time to time, even though he lived forty minutes away- Craig Porter Samsonite.

Craig and I had become friends after he first heard me conduct The Great Weather Experiment on Archie Bellpepper's radio show where I had the audience focus on making it rain in Florida. On that same show I also talked about Mind Motors- devices that you move with your mind, and nothing else.

A Mind Motor consisted of a little square of tin foil that you would carefully balance on a pin, and then place it under a glass Jar where the air wouldn't disturb it. I had successfully moved the foil on a couple of occasions in the privacy of my own home, but I wasn't particularly skilled at this type of paranormal abracadabra. Apparently telekinesis seemed best left to funny looking Russian women with bad haircuts tucked away in a secret laboratory run by the KGB

None the less, I received my first email from Craig where he told me about a big version of this device he made, and on the very next radio show we got the listening audience to concentrate on his house to get the darn thing to move.

We didn't get the Mind Motor to move very much, but it did inexplicably slightly change position over the course of that evening. But more mysteriously, his entire house, a solidly built brick bungalow that did not live on any geological fault lines, made disturbing and peculiar noises all night long, and kept him up and nervous until the sun came up the next morning.

Craig and I had a lot of things in common. We were both born tinkers, always building and taking things apart, like models and planes, computers, electronics, and guitars. And like me, Craig was completely fascinated with topics far off the fringe of conventional thinking, as implicated by his Mind

Motor construction and his faithful ear to Archie Bellpepper and the weird topics that were the norm on that show.

After a while, Craig came down to visit me from time to time where I showed him what I could do about regular guitar playing. But Craig was eager and ripe for learning about Wands as well, and it wasn't long before our discussions turned to all the things one might do with a Guitar besides playing Louie Louie.

The biggest surprise came was when Craig found out I had botched up my back, and he started driving a long forty five minutes back and forth from his home far northwest of Denver three times a week to help take care of me.

I was stretched out on my couch prone, with Erfie on top of my chest, his nose not six inches from my own.

Craig was sitting a few feet away on top of my old guitar amp, his Fender guitar in his lap, keeping me company as well.

"Look at this dog," I said to Craig. "Look how calm and peaceful he is."

"He looks just like the Sphinx." Craig remarked. "Just like a little Sphinx, pretty incredible."

"Erfie, you really love me, don't you?" Erfie had this look of total peace and compassion on his face. He knew I was hurt, and he was there for me too, solidifying my spirits. "You're my best friend Erfie, you know that? You're the best friend anybody could ever have." I wiped a few tears from my eyes.

Craig looked at me and didn't say anything. But I think he was wondering about the medication I was on.

"You know, a good dog is as good as a doctor. They're healers," I said.

"Ha, ha. Good one," said Craig.

I reached behind me and petted Chloe on her head. She was perched on the top of the back of the couch herself. And as soon as I touched her she put her head down and started licking me on the face. She is the world champion kisser, of this I have no doubt. "Enough Chloe, that's enough!" I wouldn't have to wash my face before bed that night.

"All my dogs have taken as much care of me as I did of them," I said pointing to all the pictures of my dogs that sat on the bookcase under my Insulators.

"Willo, Tammy, Homer, Voncie, Tippy, all of them. Sniff. I could write a whole book about my dogs."

"I've seen your home videos," said Craig. "They're pretty funny."

It was during that afternoon that Craig's personal history began to emerge, and it was unlike that of any other person I knew.

“So how did you get so interested in building stuff, and tearing it apart?” I asked him while he sat above the glowing GE 5751 vacuum tubes inside my old Fender Bassman amp.

“When I was a kid, my dad owned a hobby shop,” Craig began. “The place was called Hobby Lobotomy. Dad had another regular job, so he left me to run the place half the time, and I was only thirteen. It kind of set the pattern for my life, running stuff for other people, but it was pretty fun anyway. I got to mess with every cool toy in the world for free. It’s how I got started fixing things, seeing how things worked.”

“Oh man, that must have been great,” I said. “Whenever I go into one of those places, even now, I want everything on the shelves.”

“It was fantastic. But the problem was, I wasn’t interested in much else besides goofing around. I couldn’t imagine getting a real job when I got out of high school,” he explained.

I knew exactly what Craig meant. The closest I ever got to a regular job was when I was thirteen myself, and my dad hired me to work at the Fan Fair Discount Department Store men’s department. It had an extremely bizarre roof that looked like a giant egg carton, and Fan Fair was a huge hit before the bigger national chains ran it out of business. But for a while, inside Fan Fair I would stand at the cash register and put customer’s shirts into bags all afternoon, or I would go in back and spend endless hours untangling huge boxes filled with thousands of used coat hangers. Fan Fair wasn’t a circus, and it certainly wasn’t as fun as working in a toy store. “Boy, I get off track easy, What were you saying, Craig?”

He went on, “By the time I actually did get out of high school I didn’t know what to do. I was so used to following my dad’s orders, I just figured I might as well keep doing that and I joined the army. I didn’t have to think at all. No creativity necessary. Boy, was that an eye opener.”

“What do you mean? You didn’t like the army?” I asked.

“Like the army? Are you kidding? I went to Somalia. What does that tell you?”

“It doesn’t sound like a beach party.”

“I saw the absolute worst that a human being can become. People turned into pure animals. Animals with machine guns. That’s not a pretty combination. No thought at all of humanity. You want to talk about the Reptile Brain? Get stuck in a war someplace.”

“I never had any desire to put on a soldier’s uniform myself,” I told Craig. “Actually, a month before my eighteenth birthday, when everybody was burning their draft cards, I wanted to get in on the act, so I protested in my own way. I ate my draft car.”

“You ate your draft card?”

“Sure, you know me.” I said. “My number came up, and it was fairly high up on the list. I already had one huge scar on my knee from falling on a scissor, but I went ahead and had a second knee operation to remove torn cartilage as insurance. I thought that was my guaranteed ticket out of Nam. But when I asked the surgeon for a letter excusing me because of a physical disability, I didn’t realize that he was a staunch believer in the Domino Theory. So he put into writing on his doctor’s stationary for the draft board, “Niles’ knee surgery was a complete success. He’s in tip top shape and prepared to serve his country well, in any manner that you call upon him.”

“Oh man,” Craig sighed.

“Fortunately, Nixon surprised everyone and ended the draft a few days before my birthday. The closest I’ve ever come to having to serve my country is when I got a job serving hot dogs at the snack bar at the country club where my dad played golf.

Craig went on telling me his own story after coming home from seeing man not eat hot dogs, but man eating man in wretched combat overseas.

He came back to his own country where “Dog Eat Dog” didn’t mean thousands of soldiers in uniform occupying a foreign country, but rather thousands of workers wearing business uniforms occupying vast office buildings.

It was one meaningless job after another, programming and fixing computers for giant corporations. The change from the battlefield to civilian life didn’t seem as dramatic as he expected. He simply moved from seeing soldier ants mindlessly carrying out the orders of unseen generals on the battle field, to being one of an army of office worker bees mindlessly carrying out the orders of a unseen executive CEO queen up in a penthouse

“But, Niles, at a certain point, even my brain wouldn’t take any more of being just another cog in the machine. I quit and decided to let my hair grow out. I grew a beard. I flipped one-hundred and eighty degrees I rejected everything. I moved to San Francisco where I found a job working on old VWs bugs.”

In the tall shadow of the Golden Gate, Craig studied Kung Fu, yoga, and meditation, and soon married a health food store rep who traveled up and down the west coast hawking organic Vitamin E and battery powered vibrating rubber sandals that massaged reflexology points on the bottom of your feet.

“I finally started looking for some work that was more interesting then changing oil in a German flat four. I ended up with a bunch of freaks working on this new Internet company idea. That company turned out to be Earthfinks. I was one of the guys who started it.”

Earthfinks was the mother of all dot coms. It got in on the early days of the Web, and set the stage for Internet giants like Gaga and Yippie! “Working at Earthfinks wasn’t work at all,” explained Craig. “We just sat around and drank coke and ate pizza, and tried to figure out all the different ways that people could communicate and mobilize information in ways that had never been done before. It didn’t pay much, but it was like Romper Room for grownups. It was fantastic.!”

“So how did you get here?” I asked. “How did you get from sunny California to the suburbs of Denver?”

“Well, my wife Donna was working for the Holy Foods conglomerate, and they wanted her to relocate to Boulder. She was making way more money than I was, so it was either go where Donna had to go, or split up and eat pizza as a computer programmer for Earthfinks for who knew how long. When I left, nobody knew how wildly successful Earthfinks was going to get.”

Craig shook his head as if he had just lost his winning lotto ticket.

Boulder was in some ways Northern California re-located on the foothills just northwest of Denver. It was known for being a loose and liberal city, something of an oxymoron for Colorado, itself mostly a rather conservative state where the Democrats would be considered Republicans anywhere else.

“We got a dog, and a house in Lafayette. And then I had to get a job again. The only thing I could find that paid anything decent was maintaining the computer servers over at Big Bluenose, ICBM. So that’s where I am now. It feels like being in the army all over again, except I’m not shooting at anyone.” Criag hit a big discordant chord on the guitar. “At least that’s a relief.”

ICBM was the company that helped to start the personal computer revolution after they spied Steve Jawbreaker having great success with the small Pineapple computers he and Steve Woznacker were building in their parent’s garage. By adding an operating system designed by the kid genius now multi-gazillionair Bill Geeks, which virtually copied the cartoon character graphic user interface system which everyone had in turn stolen from the photocopy giant Xero, ICBM flooded the world with inexpensive personal computers that soon became known as PCBs, short for Personal Computer Baloney, mostly because Geek’s operating system ended up being as stable as a high wire walker during an earthquake, and was as prone to getting infected with computer bacteria programs as my dog is to prone to getting dirt on the bottom of his paws.

None the less, over the years, the brilliant marketers at ICBM made owning a PCB as easy and necessary as owning a toothbrush, so that now

ninety percent of the computers in people's homes are based on ICBM PCBs. And as such, the company had grown as big as the United States Marine Corp, and needed lots of willing employees to keep things running.

"I've been a worker bee for ICBM for three years now. Not really my cup of tea," Craig wistfully summed up his present position. "But that's my middle name, you know- Carry Somebody Else's Load Porter, Craig Porter Samsonite."

He sighed a sigh that sounded like a thousand pounds for a moment, then looked up and smiled.

"But you ain't heavy, you'se my brodder, Niles. That's why I'm here."
I wiped another real tear from my eye.

Craig started noodling around on the guitar, and I just lay back and listened to him play a few Johnni Flamexx riffs. He was doing pretty good.

"This Guitar is for me kinda like Erfie there is for you," Craig confessed. "After a day of plugging away at all those darn ICBM servers, I come home to this, and everything that was bothering me all day kind of melts away."

Me with Erfie on my chest, and Chloe with her head plopped down close to mine just listened to Craig serenade us with some simple melodies that he was making up himself right on the spot, spontaneously. He wasn't playing anyone else's music now, it was his own, completely. He suddenly seemed to be connecting deep inside himself. He was going to a level of musicianship that now was beyond the notes he was playing. I had never heard him sound like this before.

Then I heard something that almost sounded like a phantom Guitar string in between the low A and the low E string. It sounded like a spring. Very softly, almost thinking I imagined it, I heard a sound that went

paaaaaahhhhhnnnnnnngggggg

At that moment something happened in my living room that I will never forget.

I watched as everything in the room faded and retreated away into a hazy kind of fog, in the way that oil painters deliberately neglect the detail of their background behind their subjects.

Each of us, that is to say the living creatures in the room as opposed to the furniture, each one of us took on a soft orangey red warm glow as well, as if De La Tour had rendered our portraits in an interior landscape, illuminated

by the late afternoon light streaming through the small windows above my Insulators and Bottles.

I found myself, of course, in my familiar living room, but at the same time it was a completely different place of which I had somehow missed in all the years I had sat in that space. I felt like I had descended into a deep well, but not down into the ground, but deep within my own consciousness. And it was a place not of darkness, but of light.

As Craig played, if this wasn't enough of a stunning realization, I then began to perceive these slowly oscillating luminescent strands of light, like little cords about as thick as a pencil visibly crisscrossing the room. Each emerged from somewhere in the center of each one of our bodies while pulsing softly, perhaps like jump ropes in slow motion in time to the blood coursing through our bodies in time to our heartbeats. This pulsing seemed all synchronized with the notes that came from the guitar and amplifier. The cords connected each one of us to each other, in a surrealistic fourth dimensional sense.

Then I began to further notice that with each note that Craig played, a colored ball of light materialized and then traveled between us along the cords, each a glimmering translucent bubble with incandescent colors within and moving across its surface. As each ball moved along the cord it left vaporous trail of color behind itself and on the cords of light where it had just traveled, an indoor comet from person to person, and I include my furry companions in that definition, of course.

But most strange of all, each ball of light wasn't just an inanimate thing. It was as if these balls of light had distinct intelligence all of their own, and that they were messengers from each one of us to the other.

I watched these spheres, completely entranced.

Then I realized my error.

The bodies that which we always supposed that we were, those things that we saw whenever we looked in the mirror, those packages were really just like finger puppets or marionettes at the ends of long strings manipulated by who we actually were, what I now saw in front of me, the Evanescent Globes.

We all listened together as Craig played, and I was certain that as one we were experiencing this very same perception. I could tell that the dogs were hearing what I was hearing, and feeling what I was feeling.

However, bear in mind, these words that I convey to you now, at that moment what I saw and thought were perceptions and feelings beyond any trivial description that I might type out at some later date. This paragraph being largely only as fuzzy approximation as I can manage.

I turned my head to look into Erfie's eyes, just inches from my own. He blinked at me with a look of total serenity and understanding, and I realized he

was my brother, that we again shared time on this planet, again, as we had many times before. In this round, I was the guy who most of the time anyway, walked around on two flat feet and filled the dog dish. He was the one with the big furry ears who liked to bark at squirrels.

Although it had occurred to me many times before at a more intellectual level, at that moment it was beyond any measure of doubt, that not a one, two legged or four legged was superior to any other one. No amount of skill, dexterity, opposable thumb or not, job qualification, luck of the draw - none of that mattered. Behind the puppet, we each were an equivalent dew drop of energy, and pulling the strings for the costumed doll that it was our job to control in some little speck of timeless time that we call Life.

And there we were, globes trotting along the cords that connected us in my living room.

Craig hit one last Guitar chord, and the space was filled with this utterly incredible basket crisscross weaving of notes, a three dimensional sparkling warm chandelier that stretched from one corner of the room to the other. If someone could package what I saw at that instant and sell it for holiday home decorations, they would make a fortune.

Craig let his hand drop from the strings of his guitar, and in fact he dropped his guitar pick as well, which fell onto the carpet soundlessly. It was probably from his own startling shock of seeing what I was seeing for myself at that same moment. I couldn't hold on to any of my own preconceived notions, and I couldn't much less expect him to hold on to a plastic guitar plectrum at that moment either. I just laughed. We were both out of our mind, so it seemed, for this little slice in the afternoon.

All I could hear was the long reverberation of that last chord, which retreated into the distance. I surfaced back into the more familiar reality of my house, surfacing from this remarkable pool of color and sound.

Craig slowly raised his head towards us on the couch and quietly said, "What...what was that?"

There was nothing else to say.

Ernie third from right (big guy), Chloe on right.

Willo and Tammy on left











You can find more of my pals here...

The Book Of Wands

Erfie and Chloe.com

MirrorMovie.com

(E & C as major part actors in the movie...)

Neil Slade TV