

My PhD Life Thesis!

PENNING MY LIFE

BIL. ALVERNIAZ

*"ving been some days in preparation,
a splendid time is guaranteed for all."*

The Beatles,
Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Heart's Club Band

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Or, just "turn the page" and start
reading ... the words will carry you
along and whisk you away ...

生日快乐



Penning My Life!

My PhD Life Thesis ... and Lifetime Achievement Award!!



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Bil. Alvernaz



Penning My Life!

My PhD Life Thesis ... and Lifetime Achievement Award!!

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ABSTRACT

Life is making the most of so many otherwise lost moments in time.

Daring the risks and odds.

No holding back!

Facing fears to stop being afraid.

Sense of presence (and purpose) in every possible moment.

Making a difference.

This is my life. What it means. Why it is noteworthy.

I started writing this as birthday essay well over 20 years ago. I now know it is my **PhD Life Thesis** as well as my self-granted **Lifetime Achievement Award!** This is my life, outlook, feelings, deeds, actions, accomplishments, successes (over letdowns), and, most importantly, all of my happiness. The point simply is **"opening doorways."** Be who you want to be. Do what you want to do. It doesn't matter where you are in life. You can change things in the blink of an eye. It's that simple. **Be yourself.** Spend time with people you like. **Life is simple and effortless.** More so than you could ever (or never) imagine if you just stop making it all so complicated.

It's the Universe!

Pay attention! That's how you can expand and stretch time, tied closely to your potential! Look at (and do) things in new ways. The Universe takes care of the rest.

How you "play the cards" on the table is what matters most.

So much of what you want is all around you. It has been all along!

You already know what you didn't even know you knew ...

It isn't the years in life that matter. The life in your years is what really counts!



On the matter of #26,000+ days/daze

<Thousands of weekdays and weekend “breaks in the action”>
<and, if you want to get technical – 600,000+ hours!>

Words to phrases, paragraphs to pages ...

I have a story to tell you ...

To do that, I’m stepping out from behind these words, instead of looking through them at you while you look back at me looking at you. That way these words can easily flow up your “line of sight” to your intellect’s epicenter.

PhD Life Thesis? Yea! I got a BA degree in Journalism and did my Graduate/Master’s Degree work in “readable writing” and Mass Communications. Next I opted to live my life and “do things.” While I always thought about getting a PhD, I’ve decided to award myself both a PhD in Life and a Lifetime Achievement Award, for living my life (and for all the countless unsaid “thank yous”). It has been a life of writing for me and always will be. The Personal Computer in the early 1980s revolutionized how I write (and think and work). That “gismo” changed everything – for which I am grateful. I honestly don’t feel the need for an educational institution to “award” me a PhD (i.e., “Philosophiæ Doctor”). I’ve “put on paper” here what has been in my head for so long now ... thus **granting myself a PhD**. So that’s that. It’s done, with me also matter of factly, boldly, though deservedly, bestowing myself a **Lifetime Achievement Award**.

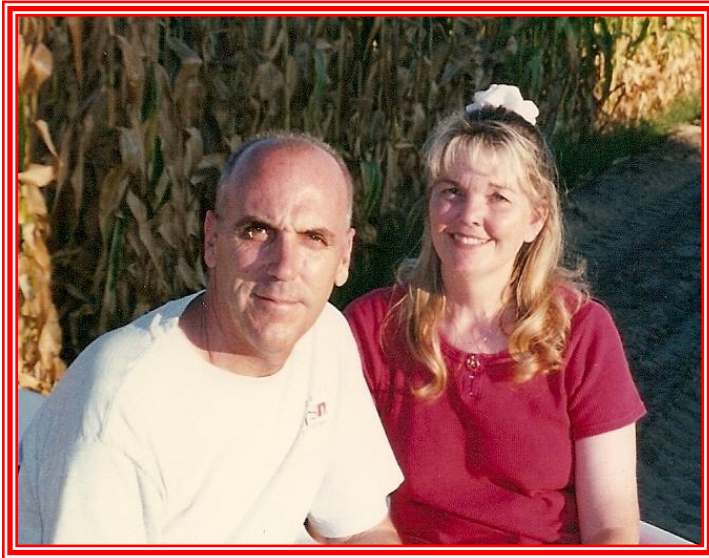


This is a “further expanding upon” of my original birthday essay I started writing in 1994 when I was part of Microsoft’s global Windows95 Team. We were about to radically “change the world landscape” with something that would become known as the worldwide web, now the Internet of All Things (and then some). Every computer (and all of the other connected devices to come) forever became linked. We pioneered the online world (greatly enhancing your consciousness – i.e., how you think!). With it came “electronic mail.” Up to that point, I had been using MCIMail’s email service since 1983 (it cost 45 cents for each email you sent and received). With the Internet, email (and so much more to come) became free, easier to use, and much faster ... more intuitive, thanks to Human-Computer Interaction.

Another thing before we get started ... and it is of the utmost importance. All that I have done and accomplished for the better part of my life, all comes back to Diana. We’ve been together since mid-1960s when she was still in high school. And, yes, while I did things before Diana “entered the picture,” my most impactful triumphs



and achievements all have been with and because of Diana being there for me each and every step of the way. We are a team and each day things still just keep getting better. Our lives together are magical and enchanting – every day! If you want to read the whole story of Diana and me, I wrote a [tribute to Diana](#) in 2010. There is also a copy of that tribute included in a section of this PhD Life Thesis ... [HERE](#).



While I'm updating what and "how I said it" in my original birthday essay, there are certain things that need to be said to "set the stage." Be forewarned that this is NOT a "quick read." It is, in fact, cerebral, meaning it will require the exertion of concerted mental effort on your part. That said, I hope this discourse will become a blueprint for YOU ... to closely examine and document your own life and times. Hey, I'm a writer! But, I think you, too, could "write it all up" about your life, based on the "template" or pattern herein to

grant yourself a PhD in Life ... through all that I've "put down on paper" here. It's YOURS to use! At least thing about doing that before you dismiss it.

I do have a lot to say that might very possibly be of interest to you, enough so to even change your life (radically or in many small, impactful ways). Or, maybe not. The only way to tell for sure is to invest some of you unlimited mental horsepower to twirl and whirl your way among my multi-colored, collected combination of words. I don't mean to be blunt (well, okay, I intentionally want to be perfectly frank), but I really don't care if you read this or not. This is **my story** about who I am, the person I always will be, and being a worthy writer ... always damned good at whatever I do.

This is my life. I'm a writer. That's it. Everything to me is in the words!

I am, first and foremost, a writer, constantly (and patiently) unobtrusively observing and processing data ... researching and examining so much of what I "come across" daily ... then stringing together collected blends of words "poured" into anything and everything I have "penned" ... all about what I see, what needs to be done, what I am doing, or ever will do! **Words to phrases, paragraphs to pages.** It is all the sum total of what I have done and am most proud of, with much more yet to come. I've always known the best is yet to come, based on all that has brought me to this exact point in time ... thanks to the guidance (and nudging) of the Universe.

Look at this as me dispatching to you all that is my life, my mind, my individual perspective, and my uninhibited metaphysical outlook. This is how, countless times, I got from Point A to Point B on life's serpentine pathways seeking the least amount of



heartache and headaches (for me and others). I'm not going to limit myself "in words" as I have had to do so often in so much of what I have penned for newspapers, publications, and so many of my job-related circumstances, conditions, situations, and serendipitous happenstances. I'm "laying it all out" right here, right now ... for YOU!

This is what I have to say. You may, if you like, choose to read it or not. The Universe will best guide you no matter which way you decide to go at this point.

I'm most happy when I'm writing as the drumming and strumming of my fingertips on the keyboard are an extension of and release point for what I see in my mind "coming to life" in the *play of words*. It all comes together in the simplicity of this: Thinking, blinking, winking, and "inking," pounding the keyboard, not wearing shoes, all with the mental impulses and impetus from my muse Diana, who I am most certain is one of the nine daughters of Mnemosyne and Zeus, as I look for so many new hues to "fill in the colors" of ordinary combinations of words, connecting the dots, in just such a way as to **tweak your intellect**, moving you in ways you never (or ever) imagined possible. That's what writing (and my life) is.



That's it. That's all my life is, ever has been, and ever will be. It's been that way from the moment I first remember "pen to paper." Actually, it was a pencil. I was very little (I don't remember exactly how old I was). My mom gave me a pencil and some paper. This was in Oakland, California, when we lived in an upstairs apartment on 17th street, before moving to 14621 Union Avenue in San Jose and I started Kindergarten. So, if I had to guess, I was probably somewhere around two years old.

As I took that pencil in my hand, it was a profound moment. I somehow sensed that it meant something special ... this was **IT** (whatever "it" was). I had seen people writing, not really knowing what they were doing. But, as I held that pencil in my right hand (I did eventually become left-handed ... that's a very long story for another time and place), I just started scrawling squiggles and lines. I knew this was what I was supposed to be doing in this entire lifetime (as in past lifetimes). That feeling of the



movement of my hand, making marks on paper ... that was (and became) my destiny. **Writing. Writing. Writing.** That's all I ever wanted to do (and have done).

And, I remember my mom's reaction to some of what I had "put on paper" that day when, after her "yacking on the telephone" for what seemed like a long time (at least to a little kid it seemed like an eternity, but I didn't care because I was really "working" that pencil). She stared at my penciled paperwork. I had made a crude circle with rudimentary "images" of the wall clock's numbers. She kept looking at me, at the clock, back at me, and the rest of my scribbled papers. Then she said, "Hmmm. That's really something." I'll never forget that. And, yes, I do have recollections from my early childhood ... even to a specific point when I was only three weeks old.

A baseball crashed through the window above my head. Shattered glass, along with the well-worn baseball, fell down upon me in my crib, with the ball coming to rest by my right hand. I didn't get hurt, not even a cut. No scratches either. I remember my mom and some other woman (maybe an aunt or neighbor) panicking. I was okay. I just had no way to let them know that because I didn't yet know what words were or how to use them. But I somehow understood or sensed the concern in their faces.

Now that I think about it, there might have been more to it than just a plain 'ole "beat up" baseball crashing through a window on that bright, sunny, early August afternoon. That baseball landing next to me, near my hand, might have been carrying a symbolic message from the Universe that would lead to a mystic, life-long passion for baseball. Who NOSE? My mother was amazed that I remembered what happened.

NOTE: There will be plenty of side tangents like this, along with an abundance of photos, this time around for my birthday essay which has morphed into my PhD Life Thesis, because it all just seems to "fit right in" ... all the better to "*tell the story.*"



So let's get on with it ...

I have much to share with you ... but that will only matter or make a difference in the life you are oh, so carefully and sometimes carelessly (as I, too, have done and



still am doing at so many different points) etching out as an existence on the fragile slate of life ... if you care to "listen."

I started doing what I called birthday essays three years going into "hitting" the age of *cincuenta años* (50 years old). Up to that time I had been helping people who were having "life crisis melt downs" in relation to "hitting certain ages" or just "somehow trying to survive" their 40s and/or many other "things in life." I helped people work their way through all of that so they could see just how special their lives really were and that their lives could be even more special. I helped a lot of people get through what seemed like the end of the world, when it really wasn't! I also helped them look forward, too, to all the "things yet to come."

I did that by having them list all of the things they had done that they were proud of accomplishing and also ways they had made a difference in other people's lives. I also had them list things they still wanted to do. And, as I worked with people on all of this, I started looking more closely at my own life and all that I had done.

The closer I looked at my life and who I was, I stood back and said, "Wow!" I was really proud of the person I had become and so much of what I had done ... and, most importantly, I liked who I was, the life I was living, and who I was spending my life with. And, it wasn't just all of the things I had done, but all that was yet to come. Mainly, I looked at my life as something to be quite proud of – **an accomplishment!**

And, now, more than two decades later, as I revisit (and update) all of this (and that), I feel more special, even more so because of how much more I have to go on to do and accomplish! I looked at turning 50 as an incredible achievement that pleased and satisfied me. I still feel that way about my life and what I have managed to do and "pull off" up to this point. I made a difference in my life and the lives of a lot of other people. So "way back then" I decided to write about how I view my life, as well as to list and document the significant measures, milestones, accomplishments, and "points of view" about so many different special moments and aspects of my life. I also wanted to talk about pending Millennium and how significant that would be.

From that point on I have updated this missive from time to time, at points when my birthday "rolled around" – sort of a birthday present to myself, putting my life further into perspective. Over time, as I continued doing this (and thinking about it throughout the year, making notes for how much more I wanted to "add in"), I then realized that I couldn't really write about my birthday and life without including Diana, mainly because she is so much a very important and vital part of my/our life.

So in the 2010 edition of this birthday essay, henceforth to forever "beknownst" as my **PhD Life Thesis**, I wanted to write something specifically about me and Diana. Since our wedding anniversary is July 11th and my birthday is July 15th, well, it just seemed a natural to combine the two for whatever it would be that I would write about our "life & times." That, of course, would be in addition to the words "penned" here. But, the more I looked at it all (and tried to "smoosh" the two together), I felt that the tribute to Diana really needed to be done separately. So, in 2010, to mark and honor our 40th wedding anniversary (as well as my upcoming birthday), I wrote a



tribute to Diana about our life and times together. There is a copy of that tribute included in a section [HERE](#) ... or, you can find that tribute at alvernaz.com:

<http://alvernaz.com/townesquare/html/diana1.html>



The BIL. CHANNEL is always ON!

I've always been writing ... any chance I got. In the third grade, I couldn't wait to start diagramming sentences ... and, all writing ... any kind of reports, homework assignments, or writing down thoughts, feelings, and story ideas. I just love the "play of words."



I had a little printing press, cheap and quite crude though it was, in the 4th grade. I wrote and "printed up" a neighborhood newsletter. I sold it for 5 cents a copy. And, I sold a lot of copies, with ink-stained hands (the printing press was a mess to work with). All this before I even knew what a Journalist was (or that I was already being one)! And, hey, at that point, I had my eye on a typewriter – I had to have one!

We got a typewriter at some point in grade school (mostly for my older brother, but he never touched it). I then taught myself to type. Using butcher paper that I cut to the width of regular paper, I made rolls of paper, so I didn't have to keep putting in sheets of paper as I repeatedly did those painstaking typing exercises in the beat-up "Teach Yourself to Type" book I got from the tiny satellite library across the street from our house on Union Avenue. Also, I didn't have the money to buy "typing paper." The butcher paper was free. From that point on, I typed all of my homework and even my brother's homework (there always were fees involved for that, of course).

In high school, I landed a coveted spot in Mrs. Polack's Journalism class and then there was really no looking back. I was a writer ... for the school newspaper, the yearbook, and anything else, including a daily journal that I still have.

I made it through college with a manual typewriter, but ultimately got an IBM Correcting Selectric (the one with lettered-ball). Right out of college I started working on dedicated word processing machines. I got my first computer, an IBM PC (dual disk drive – no hard disks then) in the summer of 1982, with an Epson dot-matrix printer (all for a cost of just over \$4,000 we managed to "scrape together").

The advent of the personal computer really was life changing in so many ways (including the point where I taught myself programming), including writing for PC Magazine. Then came desktop publishing (in mid 80s), followed by the Internet (in the early '90s for those of who knew about it). So here we are, right in the middle of any and all things connected – smartphones, computers, and all of those other connected devices, including smart TVs (and "other things" like Roku, which is one of the most amazing innovations for "killing" cable TV).



My life as a series of TV shows

When I really stop and think about my life ... anyone's life (especially including YOUR life) ... it is all really like a series of TV shows with drama and comedy "all mixed in" ... only there is no script for all of the spontaneous, ad-lib episodes of each season where it is all just "make up as we go."

I can easily see (and list) my life very much like a TV series, where there were several different shows I "starred in" (with plenty of other people, good and bad, of course), all running for series of seasons. My first TV series was me being born and living in Oakland, California. That TV show ran four seasons with an abundance of "growing up" episodes. The next TV series ran for a little over 16 years, in San Jose on Union Avenue, until I left for the Air Force in July of 1967.

The Air Force TV series took me to Amarillo, Texas, then to Syracuse, New York, then off to Madrid, Spain. The episodes for that series lasted [three years, five months, and twenty-one days](#) (but who is counting?!). During the final season with all of the Madrid episodes, the really "big show" of Diana and me getting married in Buitrago de Lazoya (60 kilometers north of Madrid) got the highest ratings (in my book).

Next came my TV College series of episodes which lasted four years. But that series was a series within a series in Fresno, California, that lasted for six years total. Then the Ukiah TV series came along, where the really BIG episode was our son, Ian, being born (that, too, got very high ratings, along with my newspaper column and other writing). That series lasted a little over two years. Next came the Santa Cruz TV series that was very short lived – less than a year.

The Salinas TV series premiered, then fizzled after just a couple of years. Ah, but then came what easily was the TV series we got the most Emmys for – the Santa Barbara series that lasted five seasons, with many highly rated episodes including my book publishing, learning and writing about computers, meeting the President of the United States, and so many other things that led to us looking at that series as the "Golden Age" for all of our TV series shows. Our Bellevue, Washington, series was a total flop (though I did learn a lot) ... it bombed in less than two years.

Our Livingston TV series of 14 years was almost as long as my San Jose series. The Livingston series was highlighted by all of the episodes with building the TurboTax, Peter Norton, and Microsoft (pioneering the web) empires. This was also when I built the most amazing [tree house](#) for Ian (and, well, me, too)! Trixie, our first Australian Shepherd, who lived for 17 years, came into our lives during the early episodes there. We sadly said "goodbye" to my mom on that TV series. Then came our "cowboy phase" TV series in Austin, Texas. That lasted a decade, including Motorola and Overwatch, along with our dogs Sparky and Sheba coming into our lives within hours of losing Trixie. Then the next episode came where we escaped back to California in 2010. Our current Valley Springs TV series is in its eighth season and has gotten very high ratings for several episodes (especially the Aerojet and book publishing seasons). This is also when we lost both Sparky and Sheba ... but along



came Lucky and Max within 48 hours of losing Sparky ... they, just like Sparky and Sheba, somehow "found their way" to us.

The BIL. CHANNEL

So now the "Bil. Channel" is always ON (with LOTS going on non-stop) ...

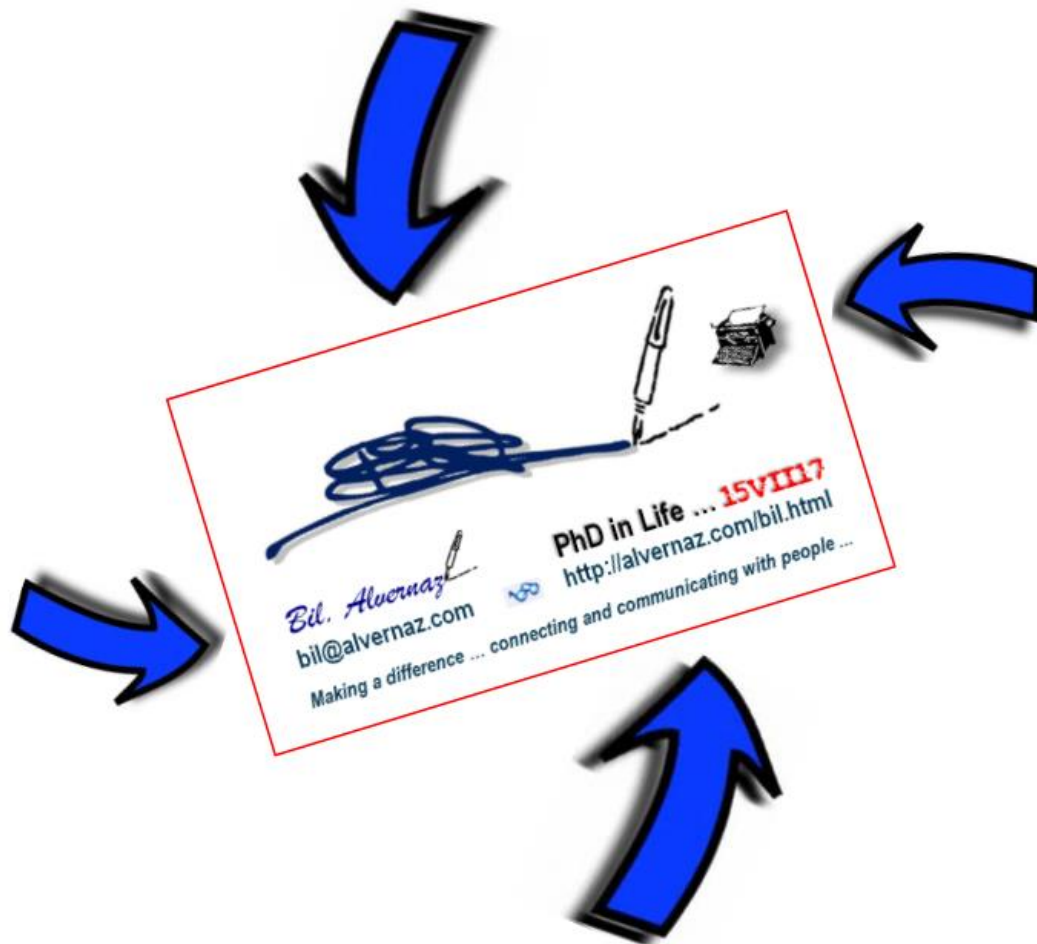
<http://alvernaz.com/> ... my personal web site (for well over two decades).

bil@alvernaz.com ... my email address since the early '90s.

[Online Profile](#) ... online profile (in case you might need my help on something).

[Communications Model](#) ... one of my [Infographics](#) to show what I do best!

[Towne Square America](#) ... a place to hang out (especially the Blue Moon Café).

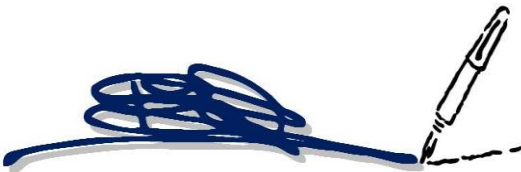


The Oath!

I, William James (Bil.) Alvernaz, do solemnly swear, as well as affirm (and uphold, even), that I will support and defend the characteristics, countenance, physiognomies, and aura of having a PhD against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; and that I will continue to follow the "rule of law" of the Universe, according to the mystical, magical, enchanting, and fascinating ways of just how the Universe so effortlessly works ... especially in all of the many things Universe does to help me (as long as I stay out of my own way).

So, help me God.

Further, I promise to not become one of those "snobby individuals" who thinks she or he is more special, more entitled, or more deserving just because they have a PhD. You earn a PhD and then you show why you earned it by being a good, respectable person, making a positive difference each and every day of your life ... and the lives of others!



Time Piece

I feel strongly I need to make a statement about time. When I told my good friend, Candy (who lives deep in the Heart of Texas), about wanting to “make a statement” about the most important thing in my life (or anyone’s life) – **Time**, she said, “Oh, a time piece” ... as a play on words about time, a watch, and keeping track of it ... so I couldn’t start writing anything without first thanking and acknowledging the one and only Candy, as well as to document the fact that she came up with a great title for this time piece!



So why the big deal about time?

Is time really that important?

Uh, yea! **Time is EVERYTHING!**



What really matters most in life is what you choose to do (carefully as well as so often carelessly) within the open-ended bandwidth of whatever it is that time is. Time that we try to measure, synchronize, harness, and dance with. Time that we think is actually somehow moving, when really it is each of us, individually, crisscrossing, in a tip-toeing kind of way across the landscape of our lives (and future) that we so artfully create within our all of our self-imposed constraints of the ticking or digital blips of watches, clocks, and timepieces.

Everything seems to be tied, measured, and very often orchestrated to time. And, thus continually so many precious moments that we let slip by wasted, overlooked, or completely ignored are all of what time swallows up to forevermore be “lost in time” (wherever that might be).

Looking at time from a physics standpoint, it is just what the numbers or digits show on a clock or watch or phone or



computer. Time is one of the seven **fundamental physical qualities** in both the International System of Units and the International System of Quantities – those being:

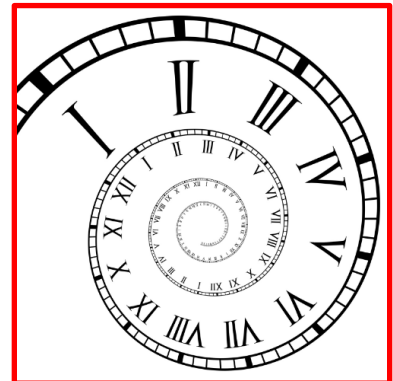
- Length
- Mass
- **Time**
- Electric Current
- Thermodynamic Temperature
- Amount of Substance
- Luminous Intensity



We can go on and on with theories, definitions, and quantifications, but the key point here is EVERYTHING has to do with time ... and how you use or lose track of it.

And, quite simply put, OUR life (mine, yours, and everyone else's life) all comes down to what you do (and don't do) with and how you use (or waste) each of the precious moments of time that the Universe has allocated for you to spend for as long as there is a breath in your "beating heart" body.

I've always taken time seriously. And, that is how I have accomplished so much (though I still strongly feel I could and should have done more ... I always feel like I can do more, MUCH more). In college I studied and perfected limiting my hours of sleeping so I could get to and out of the REM state of sleep (where your body does whatever it does to replenish itself during deep periods of slumber – the fourth stage of sleep).



You really only need a maximum of 90 minutes of REM sleep each night. The "issue" there is that it usually takes a lot of time going into and coming out of that REM stage. What I have done is just minimize the time "coming and going" in relation to REM. That has allowed me countless extra hours of time, especially in college and at so many other points in my life when I needed to maximize, stretch, and expand time (actually, just enough to move faster though time in what simply amounted to me increasing the otherwise same amount of time that most others have in whatever it is think they are doing with time ... and, that's assuming if they even ever considered what they were or were NOT doing with time).

The Egyptians around the 1500 B.C. timeframe had a bent "T" shaped device that "measured" the passage of time by the shadow cast on a cross-bar. That then eventually became the sundial, though there are many versions of just how the sundial, as well as the hour glass, came about. The point here being, there was always this need to keep track of time, whatever time is. You can go on and on forever (in time) studying just what time is. The way I look at it, what really matters is



what you do with your time. Also, I've always felt if you can't be "on time," then **be early** for whatever it is you have something "timed to."

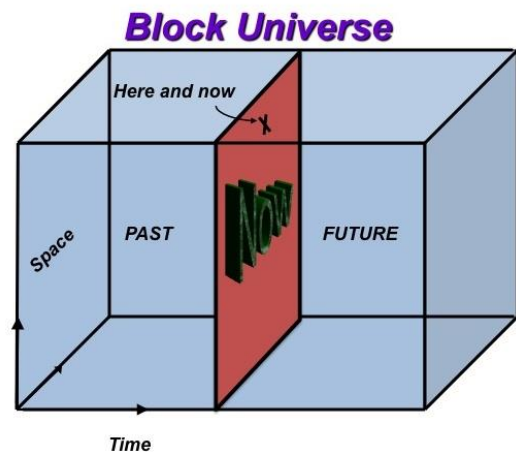
What I'm really getting at here is that I see so many people wasting time. Watching too much TV. Spending way too much time on the Internet, especially with the "look at me" realms of social media cults ... and, that is what social media is – a cult. The same goes for online gaming that, just like an addiction to drugs, is "hits" of dopamine rushes. Sadly, so many people just pick whichever one (or however many) that they want to "get lost in."

But, let's go back to time. That's all you have in your life. Time. And, what you choose to do with it. So often, people are just "killing time" (TV and the Internet, home of gaming that really causes the "wheels to come off the train" of the time span continuum anyone chooses to traverse, or, to be more correct, just get lost in).

About time, Albert Einstein said:

"People like us who believe in physics know that the distinction between the past, the present, and the future is only a stubbornly persistent illusion."

Einstein's Block Universe is a philosophical view of time as a block which has "already happened," and we are merely "traveling through it," seeing snapshot after snapshot of whatever it is we are (or aren't) choosing to do (or not do) at any given point in time - **NOW**.



So here is another way to look at all of this. Many physicists do not believe time flows from past into the future. Instead, they accept the idea that events merely exist in something called "Space Time." That's what the "Block Universe" (a term coined by William James that Einstein furthered the cause of) is all about.

Space Time exists in a four dimensional structure where there are no longer any sections which represent "now" objectively, the concepts of what is happening and to become are indeed not completely suspended, but yet complicated. It appears, therefore, more natural to think of physical reality as a four dimensional existence, instead of the evolution of a three dimensional existence.

So with Einstein saying "Time is only an illusion," there is no difference between the past and the future in the 4-dimensional Space-Time-World. The present, then, is only an illusion. That said, my main point here is that YOU should not waste any time (whatever time is). Make as many moments "in time" right now count for something. DO THINGS! Make a difference in your life and the lives of others. The simplest way to do that is for you to not passively observe your life "passing you on by." If you want to do something, do it. But never ever NEVER "kill time" because you have nothing better to do. Click [here](#) to see how you can maximize, expand, and even stretch time.



NOW – that’s what time is all about!

No matter how you look at time ... or don't look at or even consider time ... and even if you could care less about any aspect of Einstein's Block Universe, there is one "fixed location" you simply can't argue with or ignore.



And, that simply is **NOW**. That's exactly where you are in time! Right NOW. Here. NOW. Right here, right now.

When I talk about the importance of time, I'm speaking about the exact now where you are, where you want to be, and, most importantly, what you want to see happen in your life. It is all about NOW and what you do with it ... not wasting it.



So it all comes down to **now or later** in terms of what you do with time. Things happen (or start to happen) if you "seize the moment" NOW, in time. So often you hear the "woulda, coulda, shoulda" lamenting of people, because they didn't grasp a) the importance of time, and 2) they let NOW slip on by. Thus, later just never quite seemed to happen.

Since you live in the NOW, you must "take action" **NOW**. It doesn't matter if time is moving or not. YOU have to move and that means, do things in the now. You want to make something happen, then you start right now. Even if it is nothing more than taking out your notepad, making some notes, a checklist, and/or a timeline. Or, going out and doing whatever it is you want to do.



All that matters is what you are doing this very minute. All those times you plop down into a comfortable spot to watch TV or get lost on the Internet, those are the points in time – NOW – that you should be active as opposed to passive when it comes to what you are doing or not doing, as in "missing out on" things in your life.

So, back to the concept of time (howsoever you want to look at it), make as many moments and minutes count! Do something with time. You will be astounded at what you can accomplish! And, it all happens in the now – not the past or the future.



All you have is **here and now** so DO SOMETHING, anything. But just be sure you make your time count for all the things you want to happen in your life. And, it is for sure, that so much of what you want cannot be found (or made to happen) on TV or "out there" on the Internet. It's all right here in front of you - NOW! Just waiting for you!



It's all in the words

*"When a defining moment presents itself, you either **define the moment** or it defines you."* ... Kevin Costner as Roy McAvoy, in the movie Tin Cup

"If you have a problem that can be fixed, then there is no use in worrying. If you have a problem that cannot be fixed, then there is no use in worrying."

... Buddhist proverb

*"**Ninety percent of the game is half mental**, and the other half is physical."* ... Yogi Berra, Yankee's baseball great – catcher (with 10 World Series Rings)

*"**You may be right, I might be crazy**, but it just might be a lunatic you're looking for!"* ... Billy Joel – lyrics from "You May be Right"

*"Some men see things as they are and ask why? I dream things that never were and say **why not?**"* ... Bobby Kennedy's quote that is a variation of the George Bernard Shaw quote of: *"Some men see things as they are and ask why. Others dream things that never were and ask why not."*

"Many of life's failures are people who did not realize how close they were to success when they gave up." ... Thomas Edison

"The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second best time is now." ... Chinese Proverb

*"Sometimes I think **life is just a rodeo**. The trick is to ride and make it to the bell."* John Fogerty – lyrics from "Rock and Roll Girls"

"I am patient with stupidity, but not with those who are proud of it!"
... Edith Sitwell

*"**Real friendship is shown in times of trouble: prosperity is full of friends.**"*
... Author Unknown

"The quickest way to double your money is to fold it over and put it back in your pocket!" ... Will Rogers

"The quality of a person's life is in direct proportion to their commitment to excellence, regardless of their chosen field of endeavor." ... Vince Lombardi

*"**Imagine the possibilities** ... if isn't was, maybe would be!"* ... MY quote!

*"Never give up! Never give up! **Never give up!**"* ... MY quote!

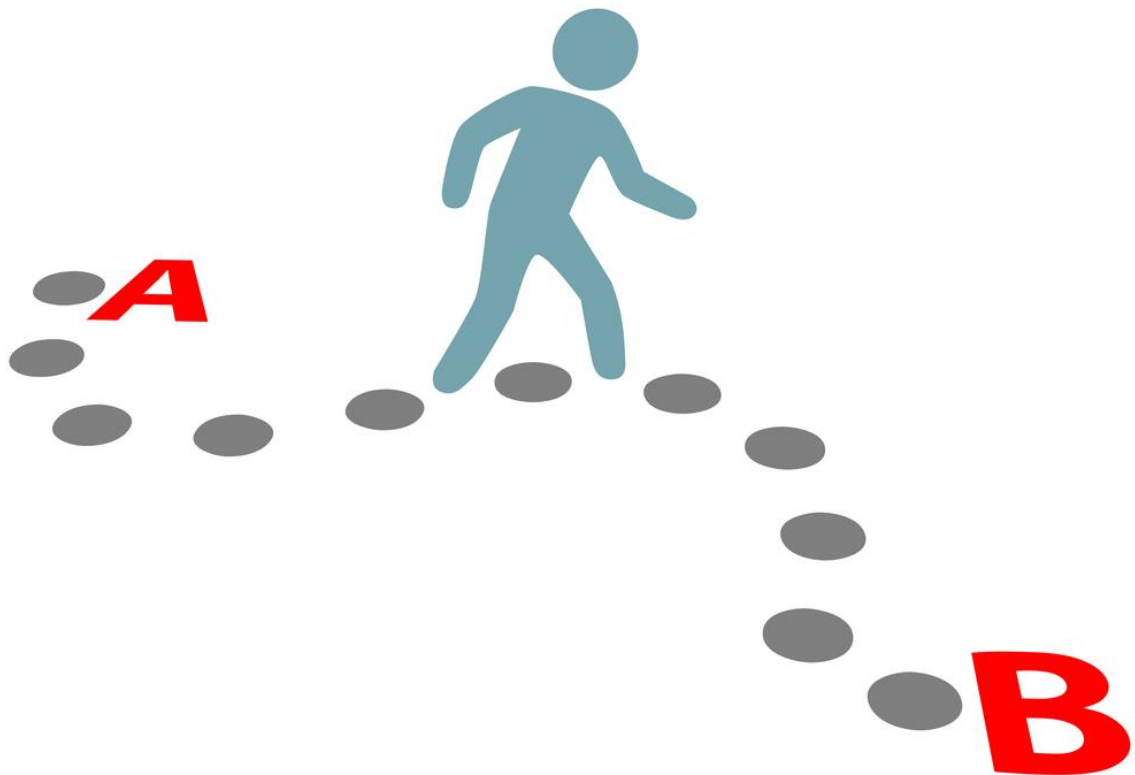
"There are a lot – A SIGNIFICANT NUMBER – of stupid people breathing the air we could otherwise be putting to good use!" ... MY quote!

"I've never acted my age and I don't intend to - EVER!" ... MY quote

*"**But what if it wasn't?**"* ... Rob Lowe as Dean Sanderson from the TV Show, "The Grinder," in questioning something stated as "matter of fact."

*"And, **stand together yet not too near together**: For the pillars of the temple stand apart, and the oak tree and the cypress grow not in each other's shadow."* ... Kahlil Gibran, "The Prophet"





"It's all in how you connect the dots on life's serpentine pathways to get from Point A to Point B with the least amount of heartache and headaches." ... MY Quote

"Here is how I take each day. Expect the unexpected. Do what you can to make things happen and give it all you've got – 110 percent! Are there things I would like to have had work out differently? Yes. But, things happen the way they do for specific reasons and all of that is what you have to look at to learn from. Would I change anything that has happened? NO! Do I have regrets? NO! You just take each day, one at a time, hour by hour, giving it your "best shot" at whatever you are doing for what you want to happen ... all based on all of the information, data, resources, intuitive feelings, energy, and enthusiasm you have at the time, along with the greatest amount of inventiveness you've got ... the Universe will then take it from there. But, be sure to stay out of your own way so the Universe can do its job! That's when the truest of true mystical and amazing magical things happen!" ... MY Quote

"I don't think it is so much that I can predict the future, with things having worked out pretty much the way I expected they would ... I honestly feel that I did what I needed to do to make the future be what I wanted it to be!" ... MY Quote

"You have to look for happiness, within yourself. And don't go chasin' thinkin' that it is somewhere else." Van Morrison – Lyrics from "I'm Not Feeling It Anymore"

*"No use complainin', **don't you worry, don't you whine.** Cause if you get it wrong, **you'll get it right next time** (next time)." Gerry Rafferty – Lyrics from "Get It Right Next Time"*



Stats, Info, and Stuff

Now back to what we are doing here. In writing that initial birthday essay, I recorded certain stats about my life. I wanted to document where certain “markers” were ... mainly so I would stay focused on being fit and keep eating smart (Diana and I work on that together every single day). So here is a look at then and now:

Bil. Alvernaz Personal Stats, Info, and Stuff		
ELEMENT	1994	Now (on average)
Weight	158	156
Percentage Body Fat	16.7 %	14.6 %
Body Strength	Ten Women	Twenty-Two Women
Cholesterol Count	118	112
Blood Pressure	116/70	118/68
Happy Index(1-10)	3,426	8,652
Thinking Level	There is no box!	Imagine the possibilities!
Inspiration Level	Extremely high!	Off the charts!
Creativity Level	Immeasurable!	Inter-galactic!
Enthusiasm Level	Intoxicating!	Infectious!
Genius Switch	Always ON!	Brighter than ever!
Exercising (for over four decades, averaging five days a week)		
Stationary Bike	45 – 90-minute sessions	45-134 minutes
Strength Training	Three times a week	Three times a week
Ab Crunches Sessions	1,200	2,500 to 4,000
Rowing	Not very often	Regularly (55 minutes)
Walking	Dog walking (and more)	A lot more now



If isn't was, maybe would be ... or so it would seem!

Over everything else in life, I have always had the truth on my side, where it still is right this very minute. It's just that simple. And, that makes everything so much easier, more effortless in so many ways.

This is my life. How I see it. How I live it. And, how absolutely wonderful it is ... mainly because of the truth!

When I first wrote this essay, I was already thinking about the millennium. People seemed to be indifferent to the fact that one millennium was about to end and a new one was about to begin. We would all be writing the dates completely differently. From the early 1990s, I started writing the date in a 2000 "minus" format that I just "whipped up." Thus, I wrote 1990 as 2000-10. I continued doing that, changing the last digit each year, of course, to correspond with the correct "minus number." A lot of people asked me, "What is with the dash after 2000?" Once I explained it, then people got it. Some even started writing the date that way, too. For the most part, no one really seemed to "get it" about a new millennium – at all.



I used that date format right up to the arrival of the year 2000, amidst all the news media induced panic of the "Y2K issue," which turned out to be, as Bill (Shakespeare) would have put it, "*much ado about nothing*." It was a matter of programming and coding using only two digits versus four digits for designating the years. It finally all got fixed without any planes falling out of the sky or any other "doom & gloom" disasters. How the computer programming geeks and techno-weenies from the 1970s onward missed that simple date matter to begin with, I'll never know.

So here is how I was looking at things in 2000-6 (for my first birthday essay), as the year 2000 was looming ever larger and larger on the horizon ...

The millennium always seemed to be way out there, far off in that convenient place we all stuff oh, so many different things (wishes, hopes, dreams, and so much of everything else we shouldn't be "putting off" for when we get around to it) ... all of it "out there" in what we call the future ... whatever that is, because isn't right now the "future" that was/is waiting for us from yesterday ... or even a minute ago?

That's why I wasn't too surprised by the reaction I got in 2000-10 (i.e., 1990) when I started writing the date of the current year as a specifically intended and



purposely planned for "Millennium Countdown." People seemed uninterested about the rareness of "being there" for a turn of the century and a new "thousand year period." As with most milestones (especially "doing taxes"), people chose not to think about them until the last minute, only to be seized at some final point by thought-provoking anguish (mixed with the media hype that the "sky was falling"), with a healthy dose of self-inflected torment, seductively dressed up in potentially debilitating panic.

Birthdays and other annual "events" are notorious for doing this. You "take stock," usually beating yourself up over what you have done and, especially, what you haven't done – "woulda, coulda, shoulda" moments, what you should be doing, disappointments, missed opportunities, expectations, compromises, deceptions, insincerity, and things you wish you could somehow go back and change (or that somehow they hadn't ever been done in the first place).

It's no wonder we so often feel something is lost or missing, but we just can't quite put our finger on exactly what the "what" is that should or shouldn't be there. We've become numbed by the mundane, redundant normalcy of our repetitive, day-to-day lives that have muffled our senses ... and obscured anything that could even come close to being happiness (or so it would seem, maybe, kinda, sorta).

Except for rare instances of serendipitous, lucid reasoning, it is so easy to be overwhelmed by an entangling panorama of distractions, distortions, and nonsense, with so much of it all wrapped up in "being lost" in whatever is on TV or out there on whatever that entity the Internet is (or isn't). We've accepted it all as "*a part of life*" and tolerated it without so much as a second thought or an acquiescent whimper.

And, as time keeps slipping through our fingers like grains of sand, each of us etches out an individual existence on the fragile slate of life where there is never enough time or money (both of which we waste and dispel a considerable amount of)!

To understand what seems to be a conundrum (that isn't), let's look at just what a day is and how we, each of us completely on our own (like so much of the "other stuff" in our lives) have complete control over how well (or bad) each single day – moment by moment, hour by hour – can be (and, if we want, how much of a difference we can make every single day). What you are about to read is an excerpt from my book, "[What a Mess?](#)" This particular piece of work says it all about how the simplicity (or, if you so choose, the complexity) of but a single day. And, that is today, right now. The only solitary day (yet so significant – and potentially the absolute most important occurrence of your life) you have that matters oh, so very prominently and significantly in your life ... all in terms of what you will (or won't) do with all of the "gifts of so many hours" you have been given the privilege, here on earth, to "spend" in a day ... or just, like so many countless others do, only to be left "killing time."

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Each day is a fresh start. A new beginning, to do with whatever you choose to do with it. Whether you realize it or not, from the moment you wake until slumber



encumbers you, you make (consciously or otherwise) decisions about so many different things to do (or not to do) in whatever it is that your life is (or isn't).

The day begins and the sun rises as then each of us "gets going" (at whatever point that so individually happens).

We each make our way through the day, foraging, finding what we think we seek, plodding (and plotting) our way, thinking we're doing what we're supposed to be doing (or so it would seem, sorta, kinda, maybe).

Shadows (including our own that constantly follow us ambiguously, despite us constantly stepping on them) continue to lengthen until the sun sets and we seek shelter wherever (and with whomever) we can find it.

Darkness (all around us, as well as in our minds) shrouds everything until the sun rises one more time and each of us starts yet again for another day, most often in nothing approaching whatever happiness is supposed to be (or what we thought it should be ... that is, if we even think finding happiness is remotely possible).

It is upon that basic simplicity of how each day happens that each of us "piles on" the totality of everything else we choose to compound (or free up) what has (and is to become and will continue to be) our lives. No one's life needs to be complex or confounding. We just sorta do that each day as we synthesize and complicate our lives with so much superfluous bullshit and things oozing with so much of nothingness – all of which never even approaches self-satisfaction or, dare I say it, "happiness."

Then one day the burden of it all rests so heavily right on top of who each of us thinks is "me," that we blink and think, "What a mess!" When really the exclamation point should be a question mark. **"What a mess"** really shouldn't be a declaratory statement. If you had the right perspective (and perception) it would be a statement ending with a question mark.

Why? (Notice that's another question!)

Because it all comes back to how badly (but not irreparably) distorted and damaged your point of view of yourself, along with the dim quality of your vague (if that) imagination, has become. Most of the time, you don't even know what to state or ask. If you don't believe that, then tell me who you are and what you want out of life in a thousand words or less! Go ahead. I double dog dare you to do that (if you even have any idea where to begin ... or end).

By continuing forward in this intellectual expedition you easily will be able to "knock out" that definition of yourself and all your intents in ten words or less. And, just so you know I'm not "blowing smoke up your dress," and so you will have an example of what I'm talking about, here is my life-long focus, resolve, and direction ...

To write and be happy.

That's only five words, but therein lies the **golden key** to all of this. First, you have to uncomplicate your life (which isn't that hard to do). Then you can start paying attention (which is really very easy "ta dew"). That's when you'll tap into [Thought](#)



[Streams](#) (that will become so obviously visible and distinct ... as just how all of your thoughts move within and throughout the Universe). Start reading clouds (which borders on magical and reintroduces you to so much you left behind – and lost somewhere – in your “transition” from childhood). Only then will you know exactly who it is you are (the person who has been “in there” all along, right behind your nose and directly on top of your shadow); and who you want to be which will give so much meaning and depth to your life and that of so many others. It absolutely, undoubtedly, unquestionably, positively, categorically is that simple (with or without any additional adjectives to “make the point”).

It all comes back to what you do with (and how you invest your time in) each single day as it happens, moment by moment. And, that is because (get ready for it as echoed redundancy is required here) **you haven’t been paying attention.**

What you do with time, money, food, and opportunities (if you happen to figure out a way to “connect the dots”), all depends on your perception (or lack thereof) of the truth and, above all else, trusting in yourself. And, that is something you really need to start doing MUCH more of ... once you truly start believing in yourself! And, that, quite simply, is the truth.

The real, absolute question, the truthful question, at the end of the day is, “Did I make a difference?” I ask myself that question every single day ... often, many times throughout the day.

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Okay, so now that we have established that premise of how I look at life, day by day ... let’s continue on, as I tiptoe ever so cautiously within the “central processing expanse” of that gray matter deep inside your head, directly behind your laser-focused eyeballs that are herein absorbed with such intensity that if these words were printed on paper, the power of your concentrated “view point” could quite actually ignite what is presented here before you! WHEW! Take a breath and let’s move on ...

Because time, in the blink of an eye, zips right on by us, milestones are logical “stopping off points” to take closer looks at where we are (and aren’t), with the focus usually centered on how we got sidetracked or lost along the way (all of which relatives and “friends” are quite good at pointing out so frequently, far too many times ... and all too often, in vindictive, “meant to be hurtful” ways).

While there have been times when my individuality has been a casualty of that “relative” school of thought, most of the time my perception has been carefully aimed on life’s grid, beyond self-limitations, toward the boundless capabilities of the mind, vision, and inventiveness. “Imagine the possibilities” is how I now look at everything! And, that is why I think my perspective “strikes a chord” with so many people I talk to and get to know. I also think it is why so much of what I have written has touched so many people, igniting “certain things” deep within their intellect and understanding.

I’ve noticed that a lot of people have overlooked, ignored, or completely forgotten that each of us has the ability to “alter our perception.” It all has to do with



perspective – how you choose to look (or not look) at what you think you see. So much of what we let get to us (and what we worry about the most) is nothing more than the residue of negative thoughts and wasted mental energy, like a fully/fooly charged battery being drained for no good reason, all without the lights being left on.

My life has ranged from quite ordinary to exceptionally extraordinary, with flashes of brilliance and fits of stupidity freely sprinkled amidst the headaches and heartaches of having to live with so much of superfluous stuff “after the newness wears off.” I know my positive, optimistic perspective is what has made a remarkable difference in the quality and uniqueness of my life ... allowing me to do so much more (going farther and further) than I (or anyone else) ever could have imagined.

As the millennium approached and we have now “forged ahead” to this exact point in time, my diurnal odometer “rolls over” to day number **25,568**, I think even more about my life. I looked at turning 50 as quite an accomplishment in and of itself. Now, 20 years later, I’m even more impressed with what I have gone on to do and the extraordinary things/feats I continued to do –with Diana right by my side. As I continue zooming through this still relatively new millennium, I can honestly say I am extremely pleased with my life and how interesting it continues to be. I look at it all - who I am, what I have done, where I am, where I am headed, what I know, what I have learned, how I have helped people, and how people have helped me - and I just smile, knowing I have lived an astonishing, enchanting life on my own terms and without regrets. The key point in all of this is that I have done it all with (and because of) Diana. She is always right there encouraging and helping me ... as I do with her.

I don’t claim to be an exfoliated expatriate with all the answers, but I do know chance, fate, Lady Luck, and destiny, combined with all of our “cosmic orders” from the Universe, are the major aspects in me having been in a lot of the right places at the right times ... which I was perceptive (and smart) enough to take advantage of. All of that, combined with [a White Horse called Reason](#) and following logical headings on compassion’s compass, caused so many of the seemingly (but not) disjointed pieces of my life to fall right into place – exactly where they were/supposed to be.

Life, though it can be harsh, unpredictable, distracting, and, most certainly, seemingly unfair, is completely free form. Each of us chooses to (or not to) make it complicated and confusing. It just all depends on perspective and attitude (“altitude,” too). You can’t take anything personal either. Shit happens, folks – GET OVER IT! Take things one step at a time and then go on from there, knowing you have to be flexible, ever adapting, quick to change, and able to laugh at yourself (A LOT) - all while looking ahead, focusing on exactly what it is you want to do! Don’t ever let anyone distract or sidetrack you from where it is you want to head. Only YOU know best where you are going (you really do, if you search deep enough into your intellect and dreams). And, remember, as George Harrison wrote, *“If you don’t know where you are going, any road will take you there.”*

The true quality of life is measured in all of the “little things.” Those moments of being with someone, making a person smile, being with your favorite animal pal,



watching, observing, discovering, creating, doing, and absorbing all you can into the intellect – yours and others. People and personalities will come and go. Kids will grow up (even if they promised not to, as our son, Ian, sincerely did with all the innocence of a three year old). This life we live is transitory and the “good stuff” is really right there in front of us (even though so much of it gets overlooked or just plain missed). All we have to do is look around and reach out for it all. That’s where a razor sharp perspective comes in so handy ... **you just have to PAY ATTENTION.**

Being aware of, watching for, and grabbing hold of all those special moments is what makes life so rich. Of the now close to two billion seconds in my life, I feel wonderful about having defined who I am by making the most of so many precious moments that might otherwise have been lost. I simply took the time to participate in what was happening right in front of me as it was happening ... and I continue to do so (even more so). All of those “little things” have added up to the totality of my life and I’m extremely proud of who I am, as well as all that I have done.

The real essence of life, holding everything together, is intellectual stimulation – those circumstances and situations that spark cerebral passion, putting the true luster in life and making whatever we accomplish shimmer, glimmer, shine, and sparkle. The gold key to it all is **YOU**. Before you ever get to philosophy, religion, politics, money, sex, fame, personalities, aspiration, guilt, and/or coping with the “good intentions” of manipulative relatives and friends, you need to take care of and, more importantly, be exceptionally nice to yourself. You need to always make sure to take care of YOU!

Your mind, your health, who you are, what you want, what you like, where you want to go and what you want to do – those, all rolled up together, must be given first consideration. Everything else is secondary.

Each individual is a multifaceted prism through which all the vivid colors of life are formed by the refracted light of inspiration, brilliance, and harmony. There are varying degrees to which this happens ... and a person’s life “blossoms” or not. It all has to do with how “finely tuned” the individual’s perspective is. And, while there are those who would dismiss the importance of exercising and fitness, I know that my life has “effected itself” on a much, much higher level because of my personal (obsessive) commitment to the all-purpose Elixir in life - exercising and staying fit as well as eating smart, too. Doing all of this together with Diana has been extremely important. If you don’t take care of yourself (and each other), what good are you to anyone else?

Through all of the episodes, eras, and transitions that create the fabric of your life, it is absolutely essential that you not only like yourself, but also that you sincerely believe in yourself and all that you can and will accomplish. The opportunities and apprehension that come with change and the associated decisions must be tempered with reason, foresight, and, most important of all, common sense.

Over the course of more than 613,632+ hours, I’ve learned (thanks in many ways to Bernie Sheperd) being patient is definitely worth all of the waiting (no matter how hard it is to wait – rule of thumb: the greater the degree of difficulty in waiting, the greater the reward/happiness/rush will be). You get exactly what you want that



way (most of the time). When things don't work out you can't ever let bitterness seep into all of those various areas where disappointments should instead be saturated with optimism and looking ahead ... and learning from such experiences. Sure, you need to look closely at why certain things didn't work out or didn't fall into place as you saw them in your mind. However, instead of looking for someone to blame, take a deep breath, learn from whatever has happened (or mis-happened), and see what you can do about "fixing things" (or "let it be"). Then just move on.

But therein lies a fundamental problem in life. A real big problem! Being afraid to "give it a try." Most of the time it isn't even a question of failing or succeeding. It all comes back to a person not so much as even making the attempt. Why? It all has to do with that familiar companion who stalks us all - fear! That, of course, brings up the whole issue of risk. It also has to do with how we have been programmed to do things in "certain ways" ... like there is a rulebook somewhere outlining why we should "play it safe." **There is no such rulebook!** Make it up as you go! Take risks - LOTS of risks!

You can't live life without risks being ever present – taking risks or passing on the entanglements associated with them. Taking a risk and then having things work out is absolutely, intoxicatingly wonderful. Of course, there is a downside to risks. That is the ultimate gamble and where the excitement comes into play. The rush from beating the odds and "winning" (whatever it is you are risking) is waaaaaaaay "up 'der" on life's meter of very cool things.

Risk's downside is "losing." We all know that, but it isn't really losing anything. The smiles are broad and toothy when we succeed. The brow is so furrowed when we don't. I have taken a lot of risks – both large and small – and have experienced the resulting "ups and downs." I would rather live with the consequences of whatever happened from having taken risks, than not to have given my "best shot" each time!

Not "beating" a risk or things not having worked out is where all of the second-guessing and so many of those unanswerable questions enter the picture. While asking questions in life is important, you just can't interrogate yourself "to death" with questions like "Is this it, the rest of my life?" "What am I supposed to accomplish here?" "Why is it such a struggle just to get through the day and make ends meet?"

Questioning life is most often rooted in change that rides, crowded in tandem, with fear and death. Fear, real or imagined, leads us all to do unusual things or even engage in the practice of avoidance, which is a very bad thing. Death, while it is always peering up at us from our own inseparable shadows, is something none of us can quite get a handle on. We do know we have to accept it, but most of the time, as with milestones, we just choose not to think about it.

Change can have the aura of death, because it is permanent and has its own distinguishable, stinging "bite" ... but only if we let it. Fear can feel empty like death, because the unknown nature of it has the capacity to consume and debilitate us. Change, fear, and death are there just taunt you ... as much or as little as YOU choose



to let them do so. This is much like the power people have over you. But, know this ... **people only have as much power over you as YOU allow them to have.**

You can do all the planning you want, but life has so many 2x4s waiting to blindside you, smacking you right between the eyes or the back of your head, as well as all of the curve balls that can really SMACK you (if you aren't paying attention in the batter's box), that your world can easily crumble down all around you (especially when you least expect it). Life is really about making it all up as you go and simply doing the best you can to build upon what you do have to work with at any given time – play the cards you are dealt, instead of “a hopin’ and a wishin’ for a better hand.” Pacing yourself is critical, because the “moth to the flame” syndrome is always waiting to entangle and ensnare each of us in a big ‘ole net of obsession and preoccupation.

I do have to admit to NOT pacing myself a good percentage of the time. “All out” is how I do most things. Though I am careful and calculating when I need to be, I am otherwise “all in” 110 percent. I look at it this way ... you give it all you’ve got. That way there is no looking back, wondering if you should have done (or given) more. And, yes, as Diana has told me so many times, I am quite guilty of the “moth to the flame” syndrome. That said, so much of what I have accomplished never would have happened had I not “gone for it all!” You just have to read each situation to see which way to go (or not go).

The drama of life is made up of people. I admit to wondering at times if I got off at the wrong planet (Diana feels the same way). For the most part, my life has been peopled with an amazing variety of individuals, many who have made my life special, some who made major differences, some whose impact was minor or forgettable, and those who I would otherwise dismiss as “they just didn’t get it.” But, I know my life was peopled exactly the way it was supposed to be so I could be the person I am ... so the good and bad were all extremely important.

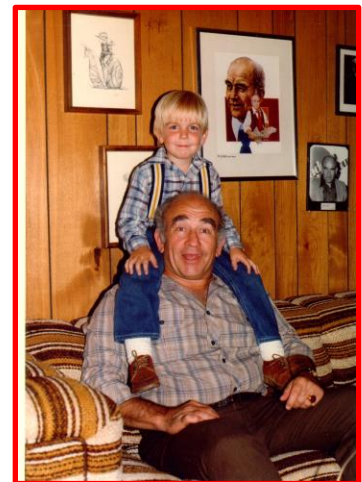
People are the substance of the moments you live which then become the memories you re-live (many of which are captured in photos). However it may be that the “mechanism works,” the brain is always taking “snapshots.” We have no control over this and there is no way to tell which images and experiences will be more permanently engraved for recollection and retrospection than others.

So, PAY ATTENTION!



Those who have profoundly impacted my life ...

- **Diana** - However it happened that I am lucky enough to be able to spend yet another lifetime with Diana, for that I am grateful. She is always there for me, as I am for her! We know we have spent several lifetimes together ... and, that there are many, many more to come!
- **Dorothy** - My mom played a significant role from the early part of my life by always encouraging and supporting me. That allowed me to be who I wanted to be, despite all of the distractions and "baloney" from so many by-standers. She was my biggest fan and I still miss her. You definitely want to have a look at [Dorothy's Treasure Chest](#).
- **Frank F. Alvernaz**, my grandfather - He was the single biggest influence on my life, the person I would become and how I would do things, not ever holding back and "going for it all." I have his pocket watch right on my desk that I look at every day! Oh, yea, and I got his outlook on life, too. That was something he always smiled about knowing there was someone to "carry on the tradition" of not letting people get away with things. I treasure the amount of time I got to spend with him.
- **Bernie Shepard** - One of the kindest people I've ever met. A journalist, professor, mentor, and friend, he played the biggest role in shaping me as a writer, as well as helping me work my way through the institutional intricacies of getting my University degree and graduate studies. He also got me "hooked" on collecting first editions (Steinbecks and Hemmingways especially). Most important of all, he was always there as a "voice of reason" for me.
- **Edward Asner** - At a time when "Lou Grant" was the #1 show on TV, his support and him being my "biggest fan" (of America's Premier Unknown Writer) motivated and inspired me. He being Ian's honorary grandfather was pretty cool, too! All of our visits to CBS Studio City, with Ian, were absolutely amazing!
- **Herb Caen** - Who, famous as he was, always took the time to encourage me, right up to his winning the Pulitzer Prize (just before he died).
- **Philip Roth** - His writing, books and brilliance showed me the pure joy of the play of words, writing ... and reading.



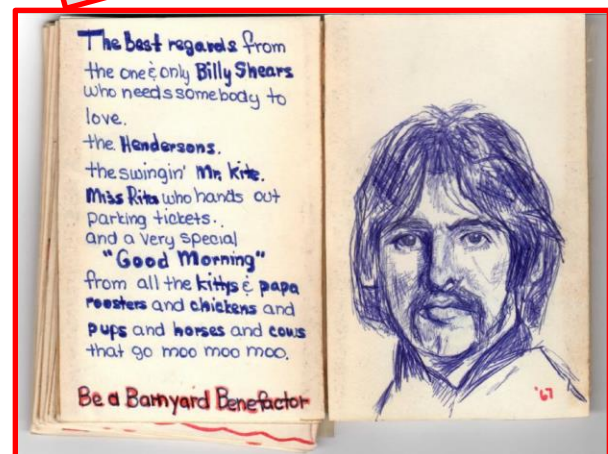
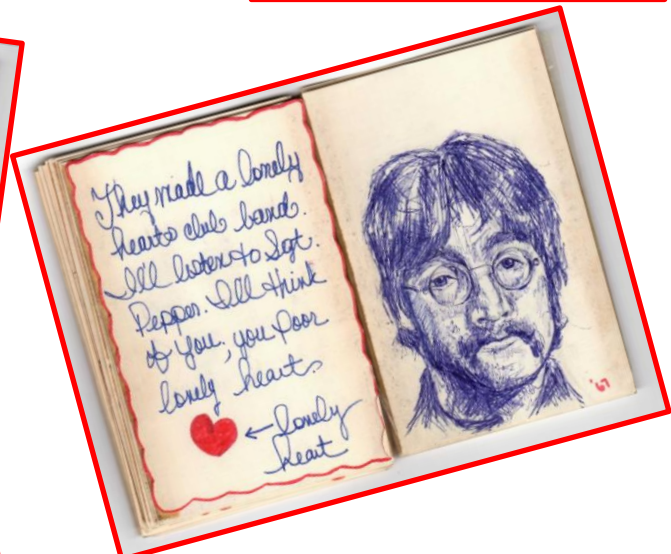
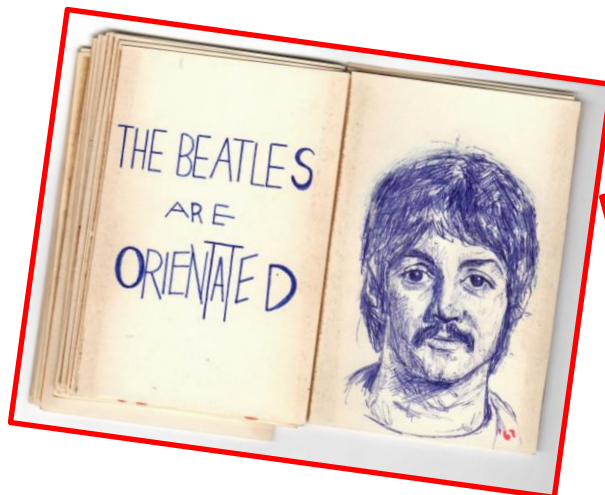
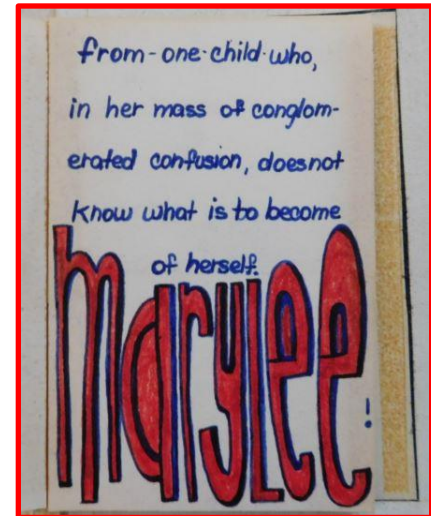
- **Mrs. Pollack** - Always smiling and the first person to really ever push me (really, really hard) as a writer. She would never accept "just writing something" ... she wanted all I had intellectually and then some, which I am so grateful for because her "prodding and pushing" significantly shaped the way I write, as well as do research and observing so much what most people otherwise overlook. This all happened in my high school journalism classes. There is no way I could ever have "let everything out" to develop my style and voice were it not for Mrs. Pollack.
- **MaryLee Ehrlich** – This is a person who encouraged me, as a writer, and I encouraged her, as an artist. MaryLee and her mom were regular customers at the grocery store where I worked in Willow Glen, just before I went into the Air Force. MaryLee always told me I would be a famous writer and I always told her she would be a famous artist. We were in touch through the early 1970s. After that, we somehow lost touch. Below is some of the art work she did for me which clearly shows MaryLee's incredible talent. We inspired each other. She knew I loved the Beatles and so I have these amazing "works of art" MaryLee did for me.

I've searched "over the years" to find MaryLee to see what she has done which I am certain is A LOT. I know that for sure because, well, I know!.

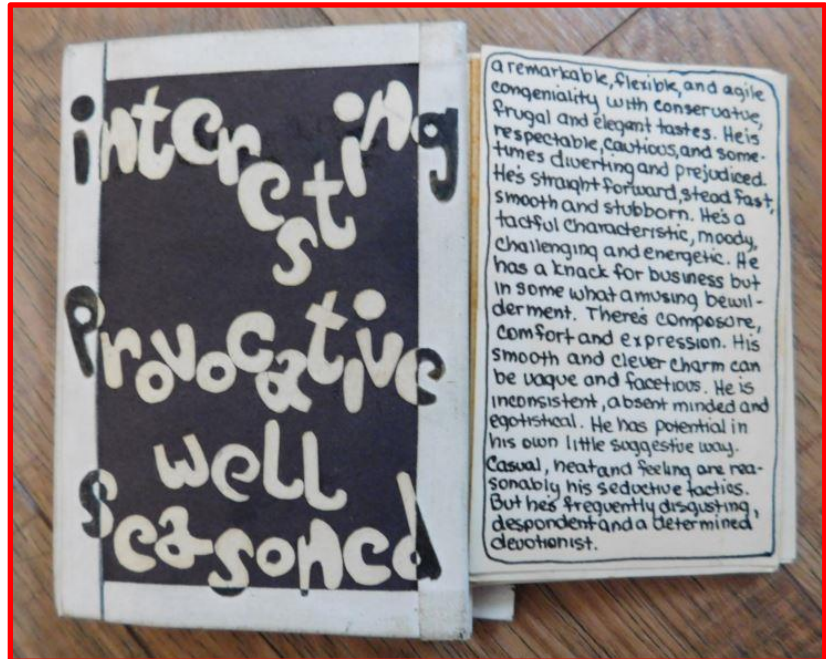
Wherever you are, MaryLee? I can't thank you enough for being the person you are, amazing, talented, and adding a *special touch* to my life!



MaryLee has this "one of a kind" talent, not just drawing and painting, but "seeing what is right there in front of us all." She writes well, too, bringing so much of life to life and everyone around her!



MaryLee and I got to know each other well. And, in a "clever little book" she put together for me, while I was in the Air Force at Hancock Field in Syracuse, New York, she absolutely "nailed it" in terms of who I was – then and still now. The Beatle images on the previous page are also from the "little book."



One other thing about MaryLee ... this painting by our grandfather clock I made (October of 1974) was done by MaryLee. It is called Lorraine. We had this painting for years, but, it was completely damaged during one of our many moves.



My Dedication (Addiction) to Exercising!

If there is just one thing you take away from reading any (or all) of this, I would hope (strongly encouraging you!) that it would be this: **Exercising is EVERYTHING!**

Taking care of me is the #1 single most important thing, aspect, facet, and essence of my life. Is that egotistical, self-centered, or even selfish? NOT AT ALL! Exercising, fitness, and eating smart comes before anything and anyone else (even Diana). Eating smart and fitness (read that as exercising my arse off – **SWEATING**) is the single biggest reason I have made it this far ... and that includes giving me an edge when I battled and beat the crap out of cancer. The reason I'm making such a big deal about this is that if you don't take care of YOU (i.e., doing all you can to stay healthy as well as mentally fit), then you won't be much good to anyone else.

I just can't imagine my life without exercise, fitness, and eating smart. It all comes back to what I'm always asking people, "Who is in control? You or the food?" That's the ultimate question. Food is fuel. And, yes, you can enjoy it, but you have to be oh, so careful with what "goes in there." Because the basic rule of thumb is, "If you eat it, you wear it!" And, pounds most certainly do not come off as fast as they "pile on" ... if they're ever going to come off (which, sadly, for most people, they never do).

Me being in complete control of food (and exercising), well, that's how I (Diana, too) keep food "in its place" as "**food is fuel.**" But, there is much more to it than that. A life focused on fitness as the #1 priority is important for many reasons, especially when it comes to your brain ...

It all comes down to a protein called Cathepsin B. This protein is known to help sore muscles recover, in part by helping to clear away cellular debris (including those in your brain – which I also refer to as "cobwebs"), but it had not previously been considered part of the "chain" linking exercise to brain health.

To determine whether Cathepsin B might, in fact, be involved in brain health, there has been much research done where protein in living neurons was added in with brain cells in petri dishes. The studies found that those brain cells started making more proteins related to neurogenesis ... this being the process by which neurons are generated from neural stem (and other) cells. Through precise genetic mechanisms of cell fate determination, many different varieties of excitatory and inhibitory neurons are generated from different kinds of neural stem cells. All of which simply means exercising your ass off is very, very, VERY good for your brain!



Cathepsin B also proved to be abundant in the bloodstreams of mice, monkeys and people who took up running, scientists have found. In experiments undertaken in Germany, researchers had mice run for several weeks, while rhesus monkeys and young men and women took to treadmills for four months, exercising vigorously about three times a week for approximately an hour ... many times even longer.

During that time, the concentrations of Cathepsin B in the jogging animals and people steadily rose. All of the runners performed better on various tests of memory and thinking.

Most striking, in the human volunteers, the men and women whose fitness had increased the most (i.e., those exercising with the most intensely) not only had the highest levels of Cathepsin B in their blood but also the most-improved test scores.

My point here is that any time someone has said Diana and I exercise too much (I admit to being addicted to and obsessed with exercising) or that we take “too many pills” (those being all of the vitamins and nutraceuticals that we take multiple times a day), I just smile and say nothing, knowing I’m healthy and fit ... and, most of the time, those who “make a big deal” out of what Diana and I do are most certainly and without exception NOT in good physical health (which they either don’t know about or are completely ignorant to the fact that for them, the food is most certainly in control; and, ultimately, going to kill them, as it does to several hundred thousand people each year).

I’ve put together everything you need to know about fitness and nutrition, all in one source, a manifesto:

[CALORIES: Manifesto ... About your weight – It’s all on YOU!](#)

You don’t even need to buy the book at Amazon.com. Just click on the cover of the book at and you can read the first five percent of the book for free. I specifically wrote the book (as I do with all of my books) so you can get all of the key points in the first five percent without having to buy the book. Sure, there is much to be gained from buying the whole book (including lots of tips and pointers), but everything you need to know to lose weight and keep it off forever more is right there FOR FREE to read! And, it ain’t rocket science either. It’s all simple, basic things you can do to lose weight and keep it off. Of course, the “main ingredient” is will power and self-control.

WARNING: It will require lifestyle changes, MUCH in the way of self-control (on a permanent basis), and breaking/ending all of those bad habits you have for snacking and “snarfing down” whatever just happens to be there (anywhere) to be devoured. The only person who can say “NO!” to you, is YOU! Oh, and something very important is to a) not eat between meals; and 2) not eat or snack while watching TV. And, forget about the over-priced (and over-salted) popcorn (as well as other “things to eat”) at the movies, too! Just watch the movie and enjoy it. Or, better yet, just become a NetFlix person ... you’ll save a lot of money that way, plus you won’t have to put up with all of the people in movie theaters who don’t know how to behave!



Dogs ... ah, dogs ... I can't imagine life without them ...

Harry Truman had a famous saying when he was President, "If you want a friend in Washington, D.C., buy a dog!" There's also the good 'ole standby about a dog being man's best friend (women are included in that, of course).

For me, it's as simple as I just can't imagine life with dogs.

From that first day that furry little creature comes into your life, through all that then happens (including those initial days and nights of everyone adjusting to being together), right to the end (which eventually comes, like it will for all of us), I wouldn't trade a moment of it all for anything. And, when you do lose a dog, GET ANOTHER ONE RIGHT AWAY ... not to replace the one you've lost, but just because you need a dog (one, two, three, or more) in your life. Life is so much richer and fuller with a dog.



You'll read much more about the importance of dogs in our lives if you click on the link below to read my Dog Story. But the key point is simply that I can't imagine our life without dogs being a part of it. Most especially, Sparky. He was that once in a lifetime dog. He and I had a mental connection that was like nothing else I'd ever experienced. He was always by my side, as was Trixie (and now Max & Lucky), too, but Sparky was usually on the floor by my side of the bed. He was always right there on the floor behind my chair (snoozing) whenever I was "on" the computer. During my cancer episode, he never, ever left my side. And, when lymphoma hit him hard and fast (he only lasted five days), I was there on the floor by his side in the days and nights leading up to us losing him. And, Sheba, well, she was a sweetie ... so gentle and kind, right to the very end when we had to say goodbye to her (as her time had come).



Sparky was still pretty much himself during that "final ride" to the Vet late that sunny afternoon on November 5th, 2014, with the windows down and him "taking in the air." I don't think he ever licked my face as much as he did in those final hours. I know he sensed what was happening and he just wanted to let me know it would all be okay (even though the emptiness of him being gone would never be okay, not even to this day). With my heart breaking, I knew we were doing the right thing as we were there with him at the Vet, looking in his eyes, as he faded away. He is gone now and that still makes me sad. I think about him every day and I probably always will ... if you want to read more about our dogs, just read [A Dog Story](#).



And, now we have Lucky (on the left below) and Max. Two amazing dogs who carry on the tradition of "dogs in our lives" ... so special, with each one being so unique in their own way ... and, always, always, always lots of fun just to be around, having them with you from early morning until late evening.



Instances & Occurrences - that stand out the most ...

There are those special, amazing moments, adventures, escapades, accomplishments, events, happenstances, serendipitous quirks, aspects, hopes & dreams realized, and so many seemingly random (but they definitely weren't) manifestations of me within the Universe that are the sum total of who, what, where, when, how, and why I am who I am ... **all of which got me from there to here.**

All of this (and so much more) are what overflows from within the treasure chest of my mind. If I had to pick the single best moment of my life, well, I honestly don't feel it has happened yet. Each new day holds so much potential and magic. And, it is always in that new day that, together with Diana (and our dogs), that I plan to continue making great things happen as well as definitely **making a difference** in many ways and on many different levels. Not just for me, but for others, too. Actually, I'm just getting "warmed up" so to speak! These are the standout "points of emphasis," prominence, feelings, perspectives, perceptions, "matters of importance," and "stand out" highlights of my life:



-
- ✓ **No Regrets** – There isn't a single thing I would change in my life if I had it to do all over again. The good times, the bad times, the ups & downs, the low points, the high points ... and even those "evil ones" who did everything they could to create problems in my life. It all happened for a whole lot of reasons to bring me to exactly where I am. Oh, sure, would I like to have had the personal computer sooner (especially for "doing things" in college)? Yea, sure. But even if you don't "see how it all fits together" at the time, everything happens for a reason to create the fabric of your life. Even the teachers I thought I didn't like (or I felt who were "too tough" on me), I realize now they were pushing me to be more of the person I could be ... especially Mrs. Pollack, my Journalism teacher in high school. She PUSHED HARD and even told me the last day of class I had with her, she summed it all up this way, "You have so much more potential and talent than you realize, so you have to do all you can to be your best." And, right there, that



day, I realized that was my Life Mantra, always giving it everything I've got. I know that's why I have no regrets. Because I did all I could do at the time, with the information, insight, talent, and hunches (gut feelings, too) I had. So I'll take the good with the bad, like I always have, because it all shapes you into the person you are supposed to be. That's how the Universe works, while it is always helping you move forward (even as you keep getting in your own way, which I have done countless times), as I constantly kept learning and growing to become who I am.

- ✓ **Making a difference** – That is (and always has been) the main focal point of my life, each day. That perspective is what makes life, for me and others, so special and magical ... you just never know what you can "conjure up!"
- ✓ **Breathe** – no matter what's happening or whether you are overcome in a variety of different ways, breathing will "get you through it" ... whatever it is. And, make sure you take slow, deep breaths at stressful as well as happy points. Breathing is also how you burn off most of your calories, too, ya know! What follows are details from my book, "[CALORIES: Manifesto](#)" ... because it isn't what you think in terms of how you burn off most calories ...

Plain and simple, you breathe out (as carbon dioxide) over 70 percent of the calories (FAT) you burn off, either through the metabolic process of your body or from exercising. That's why exercising (even just walking) is so important. If you really want all the details of how this works, you can find them in my book, or just check it out by doing a search on the Internet. But take my word for it, you breathe out most of the calories your body burns off. And, yet again, we come back to the importance of YOU exercising your ASSets off to get rid of those extra pounds you are so obviously "carrying around" everywhere you go for all the world to see!

- ✓ **Beginning, Middle, End** – Everything in life (and even death) has a beginning, a middle, and an end. Many times, death being one of those, the "end" really just leads to yet another beginning.
- ✓ **It's the Universe!** – That says it all about just "how things work" (especially, the "Beginning, Middle, and End" for everything). I was compelled to write a book about how extremely important the Universe is in taking care of each of us ... if you just stay out of your own way and let the Universe help you accomplish what you never (or ever) even contemplated. This book helps you think in new ways that you didn't know you already knew how to do. You can read the first five percent of the book for free by going to this Amazon.com link [HERE](#) and then clicking on the cover.
- ✓ **NO! It isn't what it is!** All too often, people accept so much as "it is what it is." I'm here to tell you that is just NOT true (if you only look close enough). To me, when someone says, "It is what it is," that's really just giving up and accepting there is nothing you can do about whatever it is that seems to be "what it is." Ah,



but if you look hard enough, you just might see that **it ISN'T what it is** (or seems to be). No matter what, don't accept that "it is what it is," because no matter what "it" is, it doesn't have to be what it is. Far too many people live their lives just accepting things as they are, when, really, if they were to pay attention more often, EVERYTHING might look (and thus turn out to be) much different. It all comes back to attitude and perspective ... plus never, ever giving up!

- ✓ **Keep Moving** – no matter what, you gotta keep moving. No matter how sick or tired or fed up or frustrated or exasperated you are (even if things seem hopeless) you simply must keep moving! The best example of this for me was when I had cancer. From my initial diagnosis, my perspective was to a) keep moving; and 2) kick cancer's ass, which I did ... so much so that even during radiation, I worked a full-time job and exercised 60 to 90 minutes every single day during the ten weeks of radiation. Yea, it was tough, but I didn't accept cancer as "it is what it is" ... I fought HARD on my own terms and I beat cancer ... simply by "keep moving!"
- ✓ **Positivity** – that's the real key to life. Always focus on the positive (I think I can, I think I can) and never ever NEVER let negativity "eat you up!" Positivity is how you be who you are and do what you want to do. Absolutely amazing things happen when you stay positive, no matter how bad things seem to be (and keep moving!).
- ✓ **How bad do I want it?** That's just one of my life mantras. Things don't happen in life unless you really work for them ... doing all of what you want to do, being who you want to be, and, most importantly, achieving so much that otherwise would NOT have happened. It all has to do with the question I constantly ask myself, "How bad do I want it?" That goes for losing weight, too ... especially losing weight and keeping it off. Of course, the tandem question when it comes to that extra poundage so many people "carry around" for all the world to see is simply this: "Who is in control, YOU or the food?" Tie that to "How bad do I want it?" mixed in with self-control, determination, and "sticking with it." Then and only then, you can't help but be successful, no matter what!
- ✓ **Fitness** – exercise and eating smart. This is the single most important aspect of my life, because it has allowed me to stay healthy and fit. I've always looked at it all from the perspective of this: if I don't take care of myself and feel well and am healthy, then what good am I to anyone else? I detail all of what has worked for Diana and me to stay healthy and fit (as well as to be strong enough for me to beat cancer) in [CALORIES: Manifesto](#). Just click on the link at Amazon.com ... click on the cover of the book and you can read the first five percent of the book (for free) which has ALL of the information you need. Sure, the rest of the book has more details, but that first part gives you all you need to know!



- ✓ **After the newness wears off** - this is something I specifically want to make a point about, because it is how I have made so many decisions in my life. When I look at something I think I want to get, I look at it in terms of "What happens after the newness wears off?" In other words, I'm looking at not only how badly do I want something, but also the novelty factor of it all. Because so often, we all look at "I just gotta have it" kinds of things without really thinking about what happens after the newness wears off. That's why so much stuff ends up in buried in drawers or closets, or worst of all "stored somewhere" where we won't ever touch it again. All too often we look at things the wrong way. Do I really need it or just want it? Why do I want it? Is it "cool" so others will admire it? And, so on and so on. So, I always stop and ask myself that question about after the newness wears off ... and I have saved a lot of money (and heartache) by "waiting and seeing" ... then, more often than not, I don't buy what I absolutely thought I just needed to have, or I would die!

And, you know what I'm talking about! We are induced, seduced, nudged, pushed, cajoled, persuaded, hoodwinked, fooled, and conned into buying so many things that we will only use a very short period of time, if at all. This is especially true of children's toys, too. It all comes back to the marketing weasels making us think we just have to have something. How else do you think Apple or Starbucks branded themselves to be the powerhouses they are? Especially with Starbucks ... IT'S COFFEE! Yet, people line up at the drive through every day to get their way overpriced coffee (with fancy names and scents attached to it), in the special Starbucks cup for all the world to see!

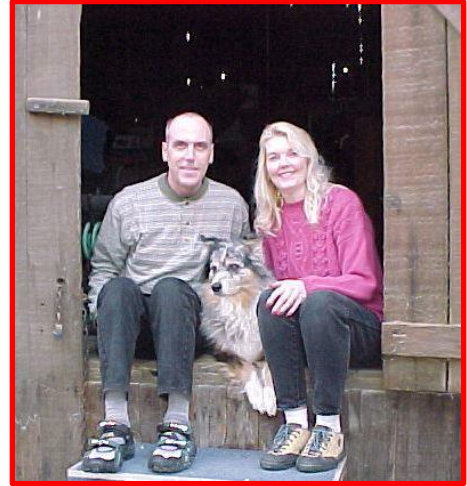
- ✓ **Diana** – having Diana in my life, getting married in Buitrago de Lozoya, Spain (60 KM north of Madrid) 7/11/70, and all of the amazing things we have both done together as a team. I never could have done what I did without Diana always being there for me ... as I am for her.



- ✓ **THE MARRIAGE CONTRACT!** - Diana and I have always kidded people that we never really got married (we did and you can see all the paperwork in my [tribute to Diana](#)) ... There is also a copy of that tribute included in this section [HERE](#). Instead, we have always talked about a One-Year Marriage Contract:



Here's how a Marriage Contract would work. You each sign a contract to be together for one year, with the details about how things will be divided up if you don't renew the contract the next year. And, each year as you renew the contract (if you decide to do so), you would then add in new details to cover the distribution of new things and stuff that was "added to the picture" in the previous year (you know, like dogs and kids ... stuff like that). That's the basis of how it would all work. Thus, if either of you decided not to renew the contract, then you'd know how to divide up everything and then go about your merry, separate ways.



There would be no need for lawyers. PLUS, the added benefit would be that always knowing your contract might not be renewed, well, heck, each "party involved" would do more - MUCH MORE - to "keep things going ... and alive" so to speak.

There were actually people who thought we were serious, but the key point in all of this is that Diana and I have, indeed, "renewed our contract" each year on July 11th. It's a fun tradition of something that doesn't really exist, but clearly points to just how much fun we always have together ... and just how uniquely we look at the world and other people (many of whom really do need such a contract for what amounts to nothing more than their tolerating each other, in quasi roommate-relationship, if that, "marriages").



We've seen so much bickering & "picking" at each other by couples (married or otherwise) as well as them seemingly competing with each other to get your attention ... and, we think to ourselves how sad it is that so many relationships are contentious and argumentative ... one person always correcting (or attacking) the other person. In effect, so many marriages amount to something on the order of "oh, hell, just tolerate the other person," where it is mostly watching TV, not really paying too much attention to each other, hardly saying much to each other (beyond "pass the salt" kind of phrases), and certainly NOT "being there" for each other."

With Diana and me, things just keep getting better and better with each new day, as has been the case over several lifetimes (and so many more to come).



The best part in all of this is that we just simply enjoy being with each other and doing things together - EVERYTHING together. Plus, with our dogs, well, each day is a wonderful gift to do with as we please! For you see, we just keep "writing our contract" in so many amazing (and unwritten) ways, day by day!

- ✓ **A life of writing** – from the very beginning, scrawling with a pencil on paper when I was two years old in Oakland, California, I just knew that meant something. For me it has always been the "play of words" ... words to phrases, paragraphs to pages. Early on, I imagined myself being a novelist like Phillip Roth



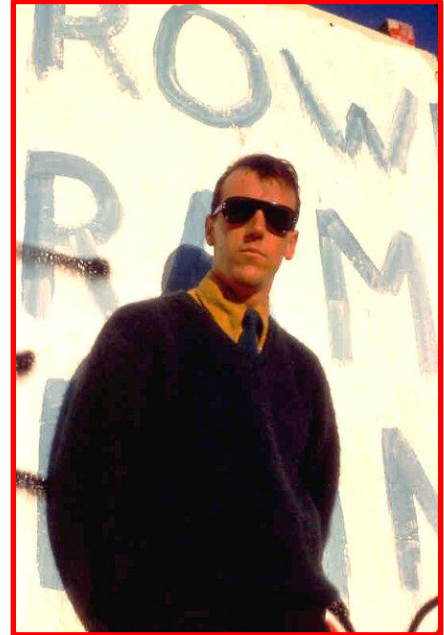
or Robert Nathan. Things didn't quite work out that way. But, I did write my ass off, no matter what job I had or what I was doing. And, since 2010, I have published eight ebooks (counting this PhD Life Thesis) for the Amazon Kindle Reader ... and, I plan to write more, too. I write the books so you can "get 'em for free" ... by that, I mean that at the Amazon.com web site, if you click on the cover of any book, you can read the first five percent of the book for free. So I cram as much of the "good stuff" I'm writing (the story I want to tell) in that opening part of the book. That way people can "hear what I have to say" (and, most likely, benefit from it) without even having to pay for it ... though most people do buy my ebooks. I hear from people all over the world who have truly been inspired and encouraged by my books.

- ✓ **A Life of Photos** – I have always loved taking pictures, as you will see by what I have "sprinkled in" here among the play of words in my PhD Life Thesis. There are so many photos I'm proud of, as I carefully "shot people" (and other things, including a lot of critters) to make the pictures something special. But, more than anything, "[the kid](#)" are my most favorite of all, when our son, Ian, was little (the point where he promised me he would never grow up!) ... so if you'd like to see



just some of my favorite shots of Ian, click [HERE](#) as they are in the Supplementary STUFF section. Diana and I are “mixed in” with many of them.

- ✓ **The Playboy Interview that never was** – In late 1975 I came close to getting an amazing break as a writer. I had pitched an idea to Playboy Magazine of doing an interview the average reader of Playboy. Of course, I would be that “average reader.” So I put together the interview, complete with the three photos and “mocked it up” just like what you would see in the magazine. And, while it almost worked, on the final review (this “process” went on for months), the editor with whom I had been working, left the publication ... and my idea (and all of my work, effort, and writing) died a quick, silent death. <Sigh> ...



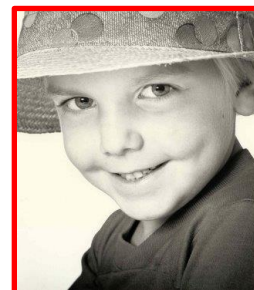
While I came close to “pulling off” what definitely would have been a HUGE breakthrough for an unknown free-lance writer ... that was that – no deal. But, I kept that interview and now have included in the “Supplementary Section” of this PhD Life Thesis. The reason for that is because that was four decades ago, how I looked at things, what I said I would do and planned to do ... which is exactly how things worked out ... see/read for yourself by clicking [HERE](#). In many ways, I think that somehow, without me really knowing it (though the Universe definitely knew what was going on), my writing that interview of Playboy interviewing “America’s Premier Unknown Writer” (a moniker I used at the time) was the beginning of what ultimately what would become my annual birthday essay ... some twenty years before I wrote my first birthday essay in the 90s. I just don’t think it is a coincidence that the Playboy Interview “fits in” so well with this PhD Life Thesis ... basically, me at that point in time (then in the mid-1970s) “talking to me” (and you) now, here all these years and decades later ... it just all fits together in such an amazing way! I couldn’t have planned it any better! But, then that is how the Universe works ... always at play, whether or not you are paying attention!

- ✓ **Writing Short Stories** – I’ve written a lot of short stories over the years. Some for contests, but mostly just to take ideas and “tell a tale” of what I saw and/or felt (it all goes back to Mrs. Pollack in my Camden High School journalism class when she said there are stories all around you ... you just have to look for and feel them). I’ve included some of my favorite short stories in the Supplementary Stuff section of this PhD Life Thesis ... click [HERE](#) to read them. You can read a collection of my short stories in [Worded Emporium](#), available at Amazon.com for the Kindle Reader. One other thing I need to say about writing is that when I come up with an idea, I can see the entire “piece of work” – then I just have to



"put it all down on paper" ... which brings me back to the keyboard being an extension of my mind with what I see all at once "exploding" through the pounding of my fingertips on the keyboard! Typing 90 words per minute isn't fast enough to "get it all out," but I work within and around such things!

- ✓ **The moment I first heard our son**, Ian Wesley Alvernaz (6:28 a.m., 5/23/76), cry out at his moment of birth in the World War II era Ukiah Hospital (that only had six beds); and then so many special moments as he has lived his life on his own terms. We raised him to be his own person and that is exactly who he became. Climbing Half Dome in Yosemite with him (on August 6, 1995, just before the release of Windows95, as I wore my Windows95 t-shirt) and our five days together in 2012 for Christmas in Santa Fe, complete with a gentle snowfall beginning on Christmas eve as we went out for dinner at a historic restaurant in the downtown Santa Fe Plaza Those are just some of the magical moments in our life.
- ✓ **BA Degree in Journalism** (1/24/74) and then graduate studies (Master Degree) in readable writing and electronic communications (1974-76) at the University of California in Fresno. It is important to note that I was the first "kid" in our entire family to get a college degree. I'm extremely proud of that. I'm also proud of having been trained and certified in Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) at Stanford University (April 2000). From the standpoint of Journalism, PR, and writing, as well as encouraging me, Bernie Shepard was an important factor in all of this as an advisor, coach, and, most importantly, friend. And, I most certainly have to mention Mrs. Pollack, who as my Journalism teacher in high school, really helped me "kick down the door" (her words) for my writing style and just how I would "put words together." She truly was one of my biggest fan and true source of inspiration and constant encouragement ... in honing my craft of writing.
- ✓ **My Life-Long Addiction (obsession?)** – From the first time I ever experienced endorphins while running 440 yards on the track during PE at Camden High School (in the early 60s), I have exercised my ass off. "Sweating like a pig" – there's nothing better! Together, Diana and I have been fitness oriented and eating smart for over five decades. We always make sure that working out is part of each day (including a lot of walking). I try to average two hours of "working out" every day (with the most important part being cardio as in sweating). Many days I hit that mark, others I don't. But I still "hit it" to stay fit. It's important to me. And, yes, I will admit to an addiction/obsession with exercising. Most days I just feel like I haven't done enough (even on those days where I do up to four hours of "hitting it"). There are a lot of days when I'm completely exhausted. It's always been that way (no matter what age I was); and, looking back (and forward) there isn't a thing I would change (except trying to exercise even more). I know I will always feel that way. Oh, and the endorphins are worth the "price of admission." There's no better feeling than "being spent" from really working your



body. And, hey, exercising is good for your body AND your mind ... it's all about keeping everything working! This all ties to my book:

["Calories: Manifesto ... about your weight, it's all on you!"](#)

- ✓ **When it comes to politics and religion** – I've always looked at myself as a "Pedestrian" ... just walking my through it all! And, I don't really discuss much about politics and religion. You can believe whatever you want. That's fine with me. I just don't want anyone "shoving anything down my throat" ... and that goes for so many "issues" and causes people get all wrapped up in, too!
- ✓ **Sprouts** – Diana and I have always liked to "mix in" sprouts for sandwiches, salads, and a variety of other dishes. But, in the early 2000s we started growing our own sprouts. Since then we have sprouts on just about everything. If you want to know all about sprouts and how to grow them, click [HERE](#). In fact, if you want to see a wide variety of our "sprout-licious" offerings, then mosey over to Diana's [Blue Moon Café](#). It is open 24 hours a day, serving virtual meals that will knock your socks off!
- ✓ **Never Giving Up!** – My attitude about anything I do is "never give up." I wrote about the importance of believing in yourself and going after what you want in a piece I wrote about the 2011 St. Louis Cardinals – click [HERE](#) to read it at Towne Square America. And, speaking of never giving up, I would never have been able to arrange my presentation to President and Mrs. Reagan if I had given up. There is a link in the next item if you want to read all about that.
- ✓ **Meeting President and Nancy Reagan** (1:37 p.m. 8/23/83) to present him with the chain of title on Rancho del Cielo, their Santa Barbara ranch. At the moment you shake the President's hand you can actually feel your heart beating. August 21, 2003, Diana and I revisited the Reagan Ranch, by invitation of Nancy Reagan, to mark the 20th anniversary of my presentation to him. You can read all about the day I met the President ... [HERE](#). And, if you want to see my tribute to President Reagan, which includes photos from that day in 2003 that Diana and I spent five hours at the Reagan Ranch ... click [HERE](#).
- ✓ **The amazing, wonderful, "they make life great" dogs:**
 - ✓ **Trixie** – a wonderful creature who brightened our lives and was so smart. She was our first Australian Shepherd. Though hobbled by time, as she became an "ancient dawger," she lived for seventeen years. We got her in July of 1989 and she lived until October 18th, 2005.
 - ✓ **Sparky & Sheba** – two days after we lost Trixie, Sparky and Sheba came into our lives. Sparky got hit with lymphoma in November of 2014 (in less than five days, on November 5th, we had to "let him go"), and then Sheba



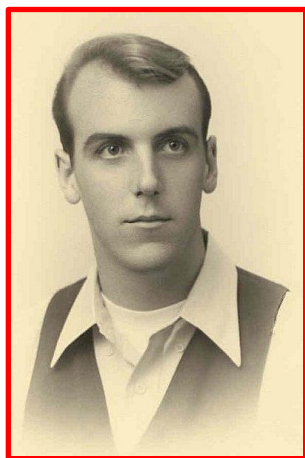
was gone on Father's Day in June of 2015. They were brother and sister ... and simply amazing dogs. We have so many photos of them (and all of our dogs), but it is still hard to this day to look at their photos without tears welling up in my eyes.

- ✓ **Lucky & Max** – after we lost Sparky, two days later we got Lucky and Max. Sheba became their surrogate mom. In the tradition of Australian Shepherds, Max and Lucky, just like Sparky and Sheba (and Trixie), they are remarkable dogs. Just so much fun and full of life. Lucky is the happiest dog we've ever seen. Max has some of Sparky's mischievous traits ... both Max and Lucky are a joy to be with and have "hanging around."
- ✓ **Pasha & Amy** – these were the first dogs we got - Dachshunds. I got Pasha as a Christmas present for Diana in 1971. And, Thanksgiving of 1972, Pasha had a litter of puppies ... we kept the cutest one and called her Amy. Pasha lived 13 years and Amy 12.
- ✓ **Brownie** – My grandfather's dog. I was the only grandkid the dog liked and it was my first real-world experience of "death" when Brownie died. Same thing as when Molly, my grandfather's workhorse, was sold by my grandmother after my grandfather died. I loved both spending time with that horse and dog at my grandparents' place as I grew up.
- ✓ **Toodles** – The dog (Cocker Spaniel) next door as I grew up. The family who owned him pretty much ignored him, so he always came over to see me. He bonded with me and would always sneak over to our yard to be with me. Then one day he was run over by a car – I actually saw it happen. I got to say goodbye to him at the Vet's office, just before the "end."
- ✓ The hardest loss of any of the dogs in my life was Sparky. I had a mental bond with him. He communicated with me on a whole different level ... I don't know how, but he did. And, he was right there by my side all the time. He was the "dog of dogs" in a person's life time. I think about him a lot, even to this very day ... I even see him at so many different points, too. I look so often to that spot behind my chair, when I'm working on my computer, where he use to just "plop down" there waiting for me ... I hate that he is no longer there ...
- ✓ If you want more details about our dogs, read [A Dog Story](#) ...
- ✓ **Baseball** – I can't imagine my life without it. Life is baseball. Baseball is life. There couldn't be a more perfect game – you throw the ball, you hit the ball, you catch the ball. I was a Yankees fan forever, but that all changed in 2016 as I followed the Chicago Cubs. For years I had been disenchanted with how poorly run the Yankees were. And, I honestly didn't like many of the players, except for Jeter. In 2015, I followed the Kansas City Royals ... I even picked them early on to win the World Series, just like I did with the Cubs in 2016 (I picked 'em to win it



all from Spring Training). I loved the St. Louis Cardinals story from 2011 ... you can read about it right [HERE](#).

- ✓ **The Beatles** – all other music (and groups) are secondary, though there is so much music that I love, especially the songs I listen to on my MP3 player while working out and exercising. But, here's the thing about the Beatles. When they came along in late '63, they changed EVERYTHING. And, finally, when you bought an album, ALL of the songs were good. Plus, the lyrics were (and still are) incredibly amazing. After all these years, the Beatles are still the standard in music for me. The Beatles LOVE show at the Mirage in Las Vegas is an incredible tribute to the band of bands! There will never EVER be anything like the Beatles again! They changed EVERYTHING! And, I'm glad I still have [MaryLee's Beatles artwork](#).



- ✓ **Computers and technology** - Getting an IBM PC and all of the new worlds it opened up for me, completely changed my life (August 1982). From the early 1980s onward, technology wrapped its tentacles around my intellect and I have absolutely no doubt this lifetime was (and is) supposed to be all about expanding my knowledgebase through microcircuits all wrapped up in the Internet (whatever that is). And, it was the personal computer that opened the door for me to become a PAID writer. I wrote volumes about technology for USA Today, PC Magazine, newspapers, InfoWorld, and many other publications, as well as my syndicated newspaper column, too. I syndicated a national newspaper column myself that showed people how to adapt to

technology. I did that for three years and the column was in more than a hundred newspapers.

- ✓ **This Week** – That was my three-times-weekly newspaper column for the Ukiah Daily Journal. I wrote it the entire 2+ years we lived there. It was one of the best writing experiences of my life. And, getting daily feedback from readers, well, that was the frosting on the cake, because everyone loved the column and all that I wrote about ... including me giving out the weekly Rose Award to people who lived in the area (the people who never really got "thank yous" for all the wonderful things they did). I brightened many people's days with those Rose Awards. Of course, giving people flowers has always been one of my things!
- ✓ **Alvernaz.com** – Not long after I started working with Microsoft in 1994 as part of the Windows95 team that would go on to pioneer Microsoft's presence on something called the Internet, I snagged the domain name **alvernaz.com**. And, ever since, I have had my own presence on the world wide web, including the email address: bil@alvernaz.com ... alvernaz.com is my "presence in this world" for all to see ... [Towne Square America](#) (where, among other things, you can find the [Blue Moon Café](#), serving up fabulously great "virtual meals" 24 hours a day, 365 1/4



days/daze a year), my [online profile](#), and a whole lot more. It means a great deal to me to have this presence on the Internet ... now for well over two decades. Once Microsoft paid for me to get trained at Stanford University in Human Computer Interaction (HCI), I have continued to experiment with my “no menus” project called “Towne Square America” (the link is just above in this same paragraph). Though I don’t update Towne Square America as much as I should (too many other things constantly going on!) ... you might want to have a look/see because there is some really cool stuff there including [Plantation Mansion](#)! See if you can find your way around “in there.” Oh, and, of course, there is my QR code that I have on my resume and many other documents. Using a smartphone, the QR code takes you right to my online profile.

- ✓ **Naan** – Diana and I have made bread several different times over the years, but in July of 2016 we stumbled upon making Naan. Then we completely reworked and refined the “formula” into such a creation that we now can’t stand any other kind of “bread.” The Naan we create is whole wheat, loaded with a wide variety of seeds, and requires no butter. We make it about three times a month and absolutely love it!



- ✓ **Infographics** – you can find examples of the kind of Infographics I do in the Supplementary Stuff section of this PhD Life Thesis under [Infographics](#). They are good examples of the many different ways (with words AND graphics) that I manage to “*tell the story*” of who I am and how I can help you.
- ✓ **Email** – I will never take it for granted. I’ve used email since 1983 with MCI MAIL when it cost 45 cents for each email you sent or received! Then when I got the alvernaz.com domain, I’ve had bil@alvernaz.com ever since (in the mid-90s).

- ✓ **Reaching the top of Half Dome** with Ian (1:37 p.m., 8/5/95). We used 22 of 24 hours on that one day to pull it off. We got up at 3:00 a.m. that morning, drove to Yosemite and were then on the John Muir Trail just before day break. From the Valley Floor we ascended over 5,000 feet to the top of Half Dome (just under 9,000 feet in elevation) ... after resting up, and having a snack on the top of Half Dome ... as well as spreading crushed pukka shells and roses in my mother’s honor (she had died eight days earlier), we then headed back down the Indiana Jones style cable “ladder” on Half Dome. We got to the Valley Floor in darkness where we found granite rocks (exactly like the ones we grabbed at the top of Half Dome for souvenirs). On the way home, we stopped in Mariposa for



triple burgers and two orders (each) of fries. I lost just under 10 pounds that day and eventually four toenails (from my toes pounding against the tip of my boots on the way down). This was one of the best days of my life. I was so happy to do it with Ian. We finally crawled into bed at 1:00 a.m. ... it was already the next day!

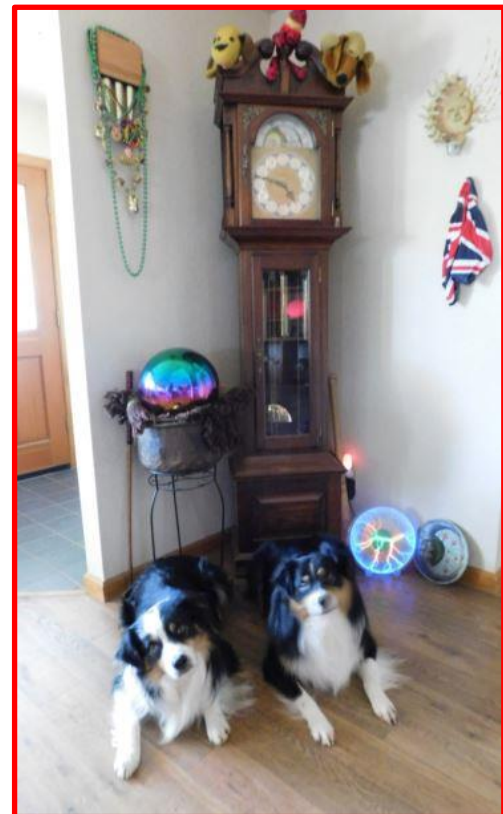
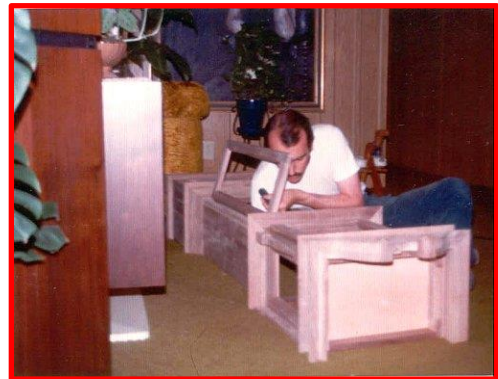
- ✓ **Teaching myself to type** (March 1957) and knowing how important this skill would be in my life. My parents bought a typewriter for my brother ... to do his homework on. He never used it, so I went to the branch library across the street from our house and got a "Teach Yourself to Type" book. In no time I was doing my homework and "writing stories" (I'm not sure whatever happened to those "masterpieces"). Just as with the pencil and paper, as little kid in Oakland, I knew this act of knowing how to type would play a singularly important role in the rest of my life ... this was long before the personal computer came along!
- ✓ **XM Satellite Radio** – got it in 2005 for in the house and the car. Can't imagine not having it. Music – gotta have it! Music just gives life to the house and life!
- ✓ **NetFlix** – This changed EVERYTHING for entertainment. We started our subscription in May of 2004 and have hardly gone to movie theaters since (and each time we have "gone to the movies," it just reinforced why we love having NetFlix, watching movies on our own terms and not having to deal with all the morons making noise and talking ... oh, yea, and no germs from the seats!). And, with online streaming (which I helped NetFlix beta test), why would you ever want to go to a movie theater again! We've got an 80 inch TV with an awesome home theater surround sound. It's better than a movie theater experience ... and it isn't outrageously expensive ... our popcorn is much more heavenly (with NO salt).

And, in February Of 2018, I was interviewed by Netflix for their 20th Anniversary celebration. Read more about it [here](#). That web site on alvernaz.com has all that I wrote for Netflix about the celebration and it includes videos of me.

- ✓ **VoIP** – Known as the Internet phone, we got 8x8's service in the early 2000s when it was \$19.95. It hasn't gone up much since then. People thought we were nuts getting a phone tied to the Internet, though now so many people have VoIP.
- ✓ **Writing for USA Today.** (1984-1985) – This was the point where I truly felt I had made it as a writer. I had just published my first book ("Expanding your IBM PC"), I was writing for PC Magazine and other publications ... as well as writing a nationally syndicated newspaper column (where I managed the writing and everything else, including distribution, completely on my own ... with Diana's help, of course). But to be a writer for USA Today ... that was (and still is) the best!
- ✓ **Writing for United Feature Syndicate.** (1979-1983) – This started with me writing a feature article about Jim Jones and the People's Temple, because we lived in Ukiah just as the People's Temple "operation" was moved to Giana. This turned out to be the most popular/most read of any of the articles I wrote for them. And, then there is the whole other story about me meeting Jim Jones!



- ✓ **Writing for PC Magazine** (1982 to 1985) – this was a magical period in my life. The IBM PC had just changed EVERYTHING ... and it didn't take long for me to realize I had been waiting all of my life for this "writing device!" I got my IBM in August of 1982 and by fall I was programming in Basic (the "UFO Adventure" was my first coding project). I was also writing for PC Magazine as well as teaching WordStar (one of the first BIG word processing programs that had been ported over from CPM) classes for \$500 a session. So I was making money writing about PCs and how to use them, as well as teaching classes ... all while I was still Executive Director for the Santa Barbara Board of REALTORS.
- ✓ **Nationally syndicated newspaper column** helping people do more with personal computers (1983 to 1985).
- ✓ **Building our grandfather clock** (October 1974) and it still is keeping time for us as well as being a constant "heartbeat in the house" in our lives. Though it stopped ticking in late 2016, I got it to come back to life in March of 2017. This clock is so much a daily part (and the history) of our lives and times. It truly is the heartbeat of and so much a part of our lives. So many events and aspects of our lives over the years are all tied to many memories within the constant beats and chimes of that wonderful (and I think magical) clock tic-toc. This is me building the clock, which we call "Frank" (in honor of my [grandfather](#)); and where it stands today (notice wooden floors) with Lucky and Max "standing guard" in front of the clock that continues to "tick away time."
- ✓ We updated/upgraded that clock to a triple chime movement on Christmas Day in 2018. You can see all the photos and details [here](#).



BEFORE

AFTER



- ✓ **Ian's Christmas train** (1976 to 1986) ... it was the centerpiece of our Christmases from Ian's first Christmas and then for ten years thereafter as I added new train cars each year. This is one of the projects for which I am most proud of having in our lives ... tied to so many memories. I had plans for making even more cars, but "other things," including Ian "moving on in life" to other interests (and toys, especially Legos and Star Wars related), just sort of pushed off building plans ... never to be resurrected again. I did invent some pretty amazing train cars, including one with a puzzle. I made a similar six-car wooden train set for Diana's sister, Linda, too. I built a tiny wooden train set for Bernie Sheperd, too.



- ✓ **Killing Cable TV** – (August of 2012) ... and we never have looked back! Our TV is now actually a monitor used to access different inputs for viewing. We now have an antenna for digital signals (if we want to watch regular TV ... mostly we watch PBS and BBC news - no commercials). And, speaking of commercials, that is one of the best parts (besides saving a whole lot of money in cable fees which now totals close to \$10,000 in savings since we "cut the cord"), because without cable there are no commercials to offend your intelligence.
 - ✓ **Roku** – and watching things on the web, along with NetFlix. There just isn't any need to waste money on cable TV. Life is so much better without cable TV ... now when we "watch TV" it is with a sense of purpose to watch something we want to watch. No more "flipping around" just to see what is on TV (when there really never is anything anyway in the "vast wasteland" of cable TV that you simply waste too much time and money on). We now watch what we want to watch with hardly any commercials! And, the only time we have to endure stupid, "insults to our intellect" commercials is when we switch over to the digital antenna to watch something on "regular TV." But that isn't very often at all. Streaming movies with Roku, too!
 - ✓ **Laptop** – we have the laptop connected to the TV (via HDMI) so we can watch anything on the web as well as all of the movies on my hard drive via Windows Media Center (which Windows10 killed, but that's okay, because we now use Roku to stream movies in .mkv formats). We've had our TV connected to a computer since the 1980s!
 - ✓ **USB** – we can also hook up any USB device to our TV, too.
 - ✓ **Pairing/Mirroring** – we can hook other devices, including the smartphone via Bluetooth, to the TV.
 - ✓ **MLB TV** – this is how we watch baseball all season long. And, I make sure I watch all the free games during April. Then, going into May, they send me



an email to get the annual subscription for half price! So then I get to watch the rest of the season (FIVE MONTHS worth) without having spent much.

- ✓ **NetFlix** – no one can touch the quality and quantity of this phenomenon! We started our subscription in May of 2004 and have hardly gone to movie theaters since (and each time we have “gone to the movies,” it just reinforced why we love having NetFlix, watching movies on our own terms and not having to deal with all the morons making noise and talking ... oh, yea, and no germs from the seats!). And, with online streaming (which I helped NetFlix beta test), why would you ever want to go to a movie theater again! We’ve got an 80-inch TV with home theater surround sound. It’s better than a movie theater experience ... not outrageously expensive and our popcorn is heavenly (with NO salt).

Being part of the Netflix 20th Anniversary celebration in 2018. You can read more about that [here](#).

- ✓ **Sony 80” TV** – (September 2014) – this really changed EVERYTHING. It truly is BIG (like you’re in a movie theater), and the home theater with an incredible sound system knocks your socks off ... the way home theater entertainment should be. It’s awesome and the only way to go.
- ✓ **Commercial Free TV** – once you kill cable TV (which anyone can easily do), you then no longer have to deal with commercials ... well, very few when you consider at points you “link in” via the digital antenna for “regular TV.” But to have a Commercial Free TV “existence” is the only way to go.
- ✓ **Cars over the years:**

- ✓ **Gale Parish’s 1962 Corvette** – I didn’t own it, but she let me drive it just a few days after I got my driver’s license. We took it out into the country and she said, “Let’s see what it can do!” That was the first time I ever drove over 100 MPH! And, I just knew that someday I would hafta have one ... and, I did, indeed, get one!



- ✓ **1965 Corvair** – (silver) got it my senior year of high school.
- ✓ **1967 Corvette** – (fastback, marina blue) got it at 19 and had it until 2001 when I got an Audi TT.
- ✓ **1979 Volvo** – (cinnamon “box”) great car that we had for almost ten years.



- ✓ **1996 Jimmy** – (marina green) our first SUV – we really loved that car.
- ✓ **2000 Jimmy** – (navy blue) 30th anniversary edition. Good, solid car.
- ✓ **2001 Audi TT** – (RED!) fun car, but I only kept for a couple of years.
- ✓ **2007 Honda Element** – (gunmetal grey) we hated to get rid of it!
- ✓ **2015 Honda CR-Z** – (metallic grey) so very, VERY much a “fun ride.” A hybrid, six-speed (probably our best, most sleek looking, favorite car)! Oh, yea, and it gets more than 40+ miles to the gallon, too! (*My personal favorite*)



✓ **Gigs (those being the places and joints at which I “did things”):**

- ✓ Washing windows throughout the neighborhood (15 cents per window) to make “spending cash.” Mid 1950s ... this was the same period I had a weekly neighborhood “newspaper” ... a one-pager that I sold for nickel ... and, people were always asking about when the next issue would be coming out. This was the point I just truly knew I wanted to “be in print” and see my by-lines!
- ✓ Bottle boy at Phil Kiper’s grocery store. Mid 1950s to early 1960s.
- ✓ Selling my neighborhood “Read all about it!” newsletters (5 cents a copy). Mid to late 1950s.
- ✓ Bubblegum machine (and sticks of gum) to “make some cash” ... got in trouble with my third-grade teacher, Mrs. Leats, for selling gum at school!
- ✓ Running the concession stand (for a single day) at the Parker School “Hole in One” tournament that got me my first baseball glove (1957)
- ✓ Working in grocery stores during high school (and after), running the “speed lane” check out (1963-1967)
- ✓ US Air Force – Admin and the Legal Specialist for the Staff Judge Advocate’s Office (in many capacities, including court reporting) (1967-1971 – three years, five months and 21 days) ... From boot camp in Amarillo, Texas, I went to Syracuse, New York – Hancock Field. Then right after we landed on the moon in 1969, I headed to Madrid, Spain. I worked at the American Embassy and Torrejon Air Force Base ... May 5, 1970, Diana landed in Spain and then on July 11, 1970, we got married in Buitrago De La Lozoya.



- ✓ Fresno Chamber of Commerce, which started with an internship (1973-1974). This is the first "real job" I ever had. The internship led to a fulltime position. So, once I got my BA degree, I started working immediately, while continuing with my Graduate Degree Program. Worked on the Port of Entry program.
- ✓ Council of Fresno County Governments (COG) – (fall of 1974 to April 1976). This was an interesting job in downtown Fresno. The organization was on the fifth floor of building and the entire time I worked there, I always used the stairs, NEVER the elevator. I co-wrote the grant that got the first Dial-a-Ride system in the United States.
- ✓ Ukiah Chamber of Commerce – (1976-1978) I loved this job and learned much about running a non-profit (based on all that I had learned at the Fresno Chamber of Commerce). I wrote a column for the local newspaper. This is where our son, Ian, was born on May 23, 1976.
- ✓ Dominican Santa Cruz Hospital – (1978) I worked there for less than a year in Community Relations. It was a horrible work experience, but I did learn a lot, especially working closely with building the Hospital Foundation.
- ✓ Salinas Chamber of Commerce – (1979-1981) this was a fun job, with the biggest challenge being the Firestone Plant closure. The largest employer in the County. Working with Congressman Leon Panetta and having been appointed by the President of the United States to work on a task force, we brought in more business and industry to "fill the hole" left in the local economy with Firestone leaving. I also got to work with the Steinbeck Foundation and co-wrote the first grant that got things going for the Steinbeck Center. I also got to look at, touch, and go through many of John Steinbeck's handwritten papers and manuscripts.
- ✓ Santa Barbara Board of REALTORS – (1981-1985) this was probably my most life-changing job. The personal computer came along at this point, so it allowed me to improve office automation for the Board of REALTORS and that became a national model for Boards of REALTORS and MLS's across the country. I worked at the local, regional, state, and national levels. The main highlight of this job was making a presentation to President and Nancy Reagan on behalf of private property rights.
- ✓ The TurboTax Empire – helping build and grow that from the ground up.
- ✓ Peter Norton Computing – being a part of all of that as well as a friend of Peter Norton in the early days of the PC revolution (1980s), well, nothing is ever going to top that.
- ✓ Microsoft – being part of the Windows95 and subsequent teams from 1993 to 2000 ... literally changing the world with the introduction of the Internet. And, then working in that realm ever since. I loved being part of the whole "PC Revolution" and I not only got paid very well, but I constantly got bonuses for "outstanding performance as well as inspiring others."



- ✓ Private Industry Council in Merced – I revolutionized how they did everything by introducing internal and external communications via the web; plus I handled marketing and PR. I created the first web site in the United States that was in conformance with the Workforce Investment Act of 1998.
- ✓ Motorola – working on a global scale and winning the Bravo Award for improving the way people work.
- ✓ Overwatch Systems (also known as AIS) – I handled communications (internal and external) as well as all things web for close to five years. This is where I really learned about SharePoint, databases, and information management.
- ✓ Aerojet – Communications (internal/external) across the enterprise & Web/Dev, making movies & preparing presentations/speeches. (2012-2015)
- ✓ Working/Writing/Consulting on so many different projects. This has been a lot of NDA (Non-Disclosure Agreement) projects that I can't talk about!
- ✓ Writing ebooks for the Amazon.com Kindle Reader ... in a word ... AWESOME!
- ✓ In all that I have done, writing has been the central focal point that allowed me to "change the way people work, improving effectiveness and efficiency." Those are the exact words that the President of Motorola used to describe me when I was given the Bravo Award at Motorola (which came with a hefty cash prize).
- ✓ **Living in Madrid, Spain** (7/69 to 1/71). The only word to describe my time living in Spain is enchanting, including that Diana and I got married in Buitrago De La Lozoya. Diana joined me in Spain, via an almost day-long trek that included riding on one of the first jumbo jets on May 5, 1970 (right during the Kent State shootings). This photo is the day in Buitrago that Diana somehow managed to eat fish pudding! She smiled all the way through it! This was on Suzanna Barrio's patio overlooking the lake, high above the village where we would get married.
- ✓ **Moving to Austin, Texas**, reinventing our lives, and loving every minute of it (October 2000 to June 2010). Though I must say we were glad to move (escape) back to California in 2010 (see next item).
- ✓ **Moving back to California** – (June 2010) ... home again! We're never leaving ever leaving again!
- ✓ **Surprising Diana with a charter sunset flight** over Lake Travis, in Austin, Texas, that quite literally put everything into perspective (5/2/01). And, on her birthday, no less.
- ✓ **Our first house in Texas** with the wide variety of creatures that frequented the green belt behind our house. They became our "kids!" And, we bought a lot of 50-



pound bags of deer corn (as well as lots of bird seed) to feed them all! That is truly one thing we do miss about living in Austin, Texas (but not much else).

- ✓ **Implants** – The “reconstruction project” (as I called it) began in the summer of 2008 when one of my front teeth just broke off. This after having a couple of crowns and a root canal. So that led to my first tooth implant process that covered the time period of July 2008 to May of 2009. But the end result of having a tooth “implanted” ... it was/is awesome. I’ve had more implants since then and I truly feel implants are the only way to go. They cost a lot and it takes 10 to 12 months for the entire process, but it is well worth it (including the \$4,000 or so per tooth it costs to do it).
- ✓ **Doing jigsaw puzzles** (for over four decades) ... there is just something magical about “putting the pieces of a puzzle together.” So much like figuring things out in life. And, then we “goo” ‘em and put the puzzles up on our walls!
- ✓ **Moving a 700-pound palm tree in our back yard** (April 2015) – we had, for a long time, looked at that tree “buried” in a far corner of the yard behind a big tree and shrubs ... then we finally decided to move it! And, actually figured out how to do it! The tree is thriving in its new spot just outside our bathroom window.
- ✓ **Doing our first landscaping “job” with rocks** at the house in Buitrago, Spain (Oct 1970) ... the place where we were married.
- ✓ **Fisher Space Pens** – I’ve had a lot of ‘em and I just love ‘em. So versatile and they always work, no matter what!
- ✓ **Completing the Human-Computer Interaction, Web Master** training/certification at Stanford University (Sep 99 to Apr 01).
- ✓ **Winning Motorola’s Bravo award** for work I did in creating the MSD (Multi Media Systems Division) Ultra iPortal ... and how all of that changed the way people work and communicate in our group/division as well as throughout all of Motorola worldwide (061301). This was also about the time I got my Audi TT.
- ✓ **Getting the All-Star award at PITD** – (August 2000) – the Merced Private Industry Training Department had nothing for internal communications until I set up an Intranet to share information, documents, and data. And, the web format I created (internal and external) is still in use to this very day!
- ✓ **Getting the Mission Success Awards at Aerojet** – (2013 & 2014) – both awards were for helping people better communicate, internally and externally. I started out just doing HR Communications and in a short period of time I was handling enterprise-wide communications, managing the fitness center, and helping many different divisions with communications, presentations, and a whole lot more. I also got the Jack Weil Award for inspiring and helping people.
- ✓ **Playing cards and games with Diana** – it’s all a part of being together! GIN, Scrabble (one of my most favorite games of all time), Yahtzee, Monopoly, Sudoku, and so much more. Mostly, just being together ... that’s what really matters.



- ✓ **Scrabble** – This has to be mentioned separately because it is my most favorite game EVER ... that we still play on a regular basis. From the time I was a kid, I've played Scrabble, so much so, that even when our family went on vacation, I took our Scrabble game with us (when Scrabble was in a purple box and had wooden pieces).
- ✓ **Being listed in Who's Who** in the Media and Communications 1998-1999 Edition. (Summer 1997).
- ✓ **The entire 36-hour moon marathon** of watching man go to, land, and walk on the moon (7/21/69). And, just a few days later, I left for Madrid, Spain! Little did I know how much "going to Spain" would change my life ... that is, until Diana stepped off the plane on May 5, 1970! This after my skiing accident the previous December ... which led to "knee problems" that were finally fixed in December of 1984 in Santa Barbara at the Sansome Clinic.
- ✓ **Writing for the Ukiah Daily Journal** – features and a regular, three times weekly newspaper column (76/78). I loved every minute of doing this!
- ✓ **The Pulitzer Prize winning stories** on the gambling initiative in Lake County and Jim Jones & the People's Temple that I "passed on." (77/78) I have no regrets about destroying all my notes and not getting involved in either of such matters. All of which is way too long of a story to go into here! But it did involve the Mafia!
- ✓ **Working on the Windows95 and other Microsoft teams** (1994/99) – we quite literally changed the world. I loved being on the various and assorted teams on which I worked during my time with Microsoft (in 47 different sections and/or divisions ... due to constant reorgs). Long work days/daze, indeed, but so fun!
- ✓ **Being at "ground zero" on the Microsoft Campus** for the launch of Windows95 and doing the cyberspace interview with Jay Leno (8/24/95).
- ✓ **Running the MSN Windows95/98 Forums** (1995/99) worldwide.
- ✓ **Building and running the Computing and Internet Communities** on Microsoft's MSN (1999/2000) worldwide.
- ✓ **Getting a Marina Blue Corvette Stingray** (1/13/67) and then selling it (061501).
- ✓ **Getting the Amulet Red Audi TT Quattro** (6/15/01) and then selling it (050103).
- ✓ **Getting a Metallic Honda Element** (8/16/2006) – great vehicle that we really hated to part with. The five speed was so much fun!
- ✓ **Getting a Metallic Honda CR-Z** (11/26/2014) – best, most fun car ever, with a 6-speed! Great gas mileage (40+ MPG) – it being a hybrid.
- ✓ **Carpooling with Diana** and just having one vehicle. Riding to/from work together (plus having lunch together whenever we could – while working).



- ✓ **The “bag full of money” episode** in Ukiah! (Fall '77). I have no regrets about “turning it in!” This was a bag full of money outside the Redwood Savings and Loan in Ukiah. I had gone to see the Mayor who ran the bank and when I backed out to leave, I ran over a “bump” ... when I got out to see what it was, it was a “deposit” bag (a BIG bag) full of 20s, 50s, 100s. I didn’t even hesitate to take it in to the bank and turn it in. Who knows what was going on? But, I was sure I didn’t want to “get involved” other than turning the bag in.
- ✓ **A Mont Blanc Meisterstuck Edition** “Hemmingway” signature pen #AM9599 (a birthday present from Diana, July 1994) – best pen to write with ever! It is still my favorite pen that NEVER leaves the house ... it means so much to me!
- ✓ **Giving people Flowers** – At the age of 14, I opened my first “credit” account at Foothill Florists in San Jose ... that’s when I started giving flowers to people. What I really like to do is just show up and hand someone a bouquet of flowers (from roses to all kinds of different flowers) for absolutely no reason whatsoever. I’ve done this for people I know personally as well as people I have worked with. It’s just so cool to hand flowers to someone for no particular reason. It always makes that person’s day ... many times, there are tears of joy. My main intent with flowers is to say “you are a nice person and this is for all of the ‘thank yous’ that never seem to get said!”

I have always gotten Diana flowers at least once a week. Many times, twice a week. Flowers not only brighten up the house, but the best part is Diana’s smile when I get flowers for her.

- ✓ **Silver letter opener** (birthday present from LaMott Fisher, July 1984) for, as he put it, “Author! Author!” LaMott and I became good friends. And, though he was misunderstood by so many people, he was a true professional and an all-around nice guy. We had lunch once a week on a regular basis when I was running the Santa Barbara Board of REALTORS.
- ✓ **Royal typewriter** (1996) – classic model I had been looking for all my life, made in 1928, complete with beveled glass on the sides so you can see the “inner workings.” And, it still works. Rick McMillion found this for me ... he was my #2 guy when I was running the Windows95 online presence for Microsoft.
- ✓ **Publishing my first book**, “Expanding Your IBM PC,” foreword by Peter Norton – Brady Books (1984). This was really a BIG MOMENT in my life. My first book. By the time this was published, I was already writing for USA Today, PC Magazine, and many other publications and newspapers.
- ✓ **Publishing, with Diana, The Art of Life** directly to CD (Aug 02). This eventually became [Life 101](#) (for the Amazon Kindle ebook reader) ... my first book published for the Kindle reader. You can read the first five percent of the book (which is the heart of the book) for free by clicking on the cover.



- ✓ **The Play** – This still stands as one of my most favorite things I have ever done/written. I finished writing it in May of 2010 before we moved back to California. I had all three acts completely done. But, during the move, I'm not sure what happened, but the folder where I had the finals (including the backup folder copies, too) only had the first complete act and the outline which is quite detailed, so I reconstructed the other two acts of this three act play from memory working with the detailed outline. This all happened for a reason, a good reason, because now, the reworked and COMPLETED play, that is included as part of this PhD Life Thesis, came out so much better ... and more in-depth!

I started many, many years ago writing a one-man play, "Light at the Keyboard," about this guy being out of work who is looking for a job. A man sitting at a sophisticated computer work area, with several computers and monitors, talks throughout the play to the audience about his quest and the "process" (or lack thereof) of finding just the right job. This man tells his story by talking about a play he is writing about a man talking to the audience about a play he is writing about a man trying to find a job who is talking to an audience he sees as a reflection in a computer monitor (which is really the stage itself that he imagines as a two-way portal for him to look through to the audience and for the audience to look back at him). This tilting twist on perspective engages the audience right from the start, pulling them into a unique and inventive experience.

"Telling the story" by engaging the audience adds fun to an encounter where the audience quickly figures out how (and when) they will participate at certain points throughout the play. And, that is what makes this play definitely "not the same old story."

The audience, as part of this interactive experience, helps carry the plot line right to the very "you'll never it see it coming" end. This three-act play is intermixed with humor and irony, while the audience is kept "on their toes" to figure out what they need to do next, all while gaining insight and perspective about life and finding a job! The main character isn't just telling his story. This is their story, too.

You can read the first act [HERE](#) in the BONUS section.

- ✓ **Beating Cancer** – For most of 2013, cancer imposed itself on our life. First, there were so many "things" leading up to prostate surgery May 31 (right after going to Kauai). Then getting ready for and going through radiation (which still has, and probably always will have, lingering effects ... thus, I still feel broken in many ways). I beat cancer which led to me writing the [CANCER: Naked Truth](#) about having, fighting, and pushing through it all (despite doctors and so many others trying to bully me into doing things ... many of which didn't really need to be done and which I most certainly DID NOT do), and surviving cancer. And, know this, doctors don't know everything. BEFORE you let them do anything, always do your homework. I did and it really paid off in that I became the one "in charge" and



nothing was done until I had thoroughly researched it!

Most important of all, I could never have made it through the entire ordeal without Diana and Sparky (our Australian Shepherd who was right by my side every single minute ... he and I just had this mental connection like nothing I've ever experienced ... and, even though he has been gone since November 5, 2014, I still think about him every single day!). The thing about cancer is that it is 100 percent attitude – you have to stay mentally focused and constantly “up” through it all. I continued working AND exercising through it all, including all of the radiation treatments. And, sure, it was tough, but you can't ever let it get you down. There wasn't a single point where I gave in to kicking cancer's ass. And, that's exactly what I did!

Doctors played an important role in me getting through cancer, but I have to go back to an old joke that relates to doctors, because they are NOT the final answer, even though they want you to believe that. Here is the joke: A guy is at the Pearly Gates talking with Saint Peter when this a man walks by wearing a long white lab coat. The guy asks Saint Peter who that man is and Saint Peter replies, “Oh, that's God. He thinks he is a doctor!” Keep that in mind the next time any doctor tries to PUSH you into doing something you really don't think you need to do (after doing your homework, arming yourself with knowledge).

- ✓ **Writing books for the Amazon Kindle reader** – this changed everything. No hassles. You just write the book and publish it. And, you get great royalties, too! It's so much better than working with mainstream book publishers (who mostly get in your way as a writer). With each of my books (or any book at Amazon), you can read the first five percent of the book (where most of the “good stuff” is – I wrote them that way) for free.
- ✓ [That's it!?! And, you know it!](#) (February 2019)
- ✓ [Batsh*t Crazy! Digital Dementia Dystopia](#) (September 2018)
 - ✓ [Web-based-free-to-read version](#) (September 2018)
- ✓ [Light at the Keyboard – a Three Act Play](#) (February 2017)
- ✓ [It's the Universe! Notations & Cyphers](#) (November 2016)
- ✓ [CANCER: The Naked Truth!](#) (August 2016)
- ✓ [Calories: Manifesto](#) About your weight ... It's all on YOU! (December 2015)
- ✓ [Worded Emporium](#) (September 2015)
- ✓ [What a Mess?](#) (September 2015)
- ✓ [Project: Naked Truth!](#) (February 2012)
- ✓ [Life: 101 \(The Art of Life\)](#) (October 2011)



- ✓ **Becoming knowledgeable in all things web** and how significant that has been in changing my life in so many ways (1993 to present). It turns out I was waiting my entire life (up to that point) for the Internet to come along, even though I didn't know it. Just like I was waiting all my life for the personal computer ... so these two, together, well, they are and always will be a very big part of my life (professionally and personally).
- ✓ **Alvernaz.Com** – having this web site, complete with bil@alvernaz.com for my email (4/5/93). Completely rebuilding/redoining this web presence from scratch for Alvernaz.Com Interactive (7/15/03) ... and, then again, over and over, ever since, I look at it as a work in progress. [Towne Square America](#) came along in 2007 (with another major "upgrade" of alvernaz.com) as my way of showing that you don't need menus or much of anything else for a strong, unique presence on a web site; and that includes the mystical [Plantation Mansion](#) adventure game I built into [Towne Square America](#) ... just like the [Blue Moon Café](#) that is always virtually open for business with tasty delights for everyone!
- ✓ **Mastering desktop publishing** (DTP) to enhance the overall writing process – ***presentation is everything*** (1986). I was in heaven with Ventura Publisher (1987) to begin with. I even create "Ventura Boulevard" that was an all in one manual so you could "find things" in the four different (cumbersome) manuals that came with the program. I also had several templates so all you had to do was "fill in the blanks." This was long before templates were "the thing" like they are today. I sold a lot of these packages, too. But, eventually I "moved over" to Microsoft Publisher which I still use to this day (which comes with over 8,000 templates!).
- ✓ **Putting together the 25th Wedding Anniversary** remembrance for Diana (7/11/95). Here is the heart of what I said ...

"We know each other so well,

We can easily read each other's _____.

"We can finish the words

in other's _____.

"So now we can spend less time

_____ and more time _____."

- ✓ **Publishing the book "Gravity"** that Diana and I wrote and published to the web to celebrate our 30th wedding anniversary (7/11/00). Much of this book "gravitated" into my other works/writing projects ... and, still to this day, I always



say, **"I am in complete control of gravity!"** That means so much more than the words imply! Are YOU in complete control of gravity? Think about it!

- ✓ That morning, just before dawn, **leaving home to join the Air Force**, knowing I would be completely on my own (and glad to be doing it) ... knowing everything would be changed forever more. (7/19/67). Though I didn't know it at the time, I would only return to that house I grew up in on Union Avenue one more time – at Christmas that year, 1967. Then my parents sold the place. So, it must be true that "you can't go home again!"
- ✓ **Being sworn in** the Air Force (9:22 a.m., 7/20/67). Oakland, California, Induction Center. I actually stepped over Joan Baez (the singer) who, with hundreds of protesters, was sprawled out all over the ground to keep us from "going to 'Nam to kill people." And, actually, my group didn't leave for boot camp that day, like we were supposed to. There was a meningitis outbreak at Lackland Air Force Base in Texas (where we were headed). So they gave us "spending money" and set us up in a hotel in Oakland for two days ... I didn't call home or let anyone know I hadn't left yet. Instead, along with Jim (and all of my other new friends I would go through boot camp with), we all just traveled around Berkeley (using public transit) to all of the hippie-oriented places. Then, the next day, we got on a plane for Texas, ending up in Amarillo where we had three guys to a room in barracks that were for officer training. We had no drill sergeant either. Because this was all "make-shift" because of the problems at Lackland (where boot camp is usually done), we actually goofed around for six weeks, going to the movies in the afternoon and "marching around" a little bit ... just to keep busy.



It was pretty much a joke from the standpoint of "getting trained," but it was great because we got to do whatever we wanted ... though they did chop off all of our hair (as in shaving our heads ... that, they did do). Then, going into Labor Day weekend, I was given orders to go to Syracuse, New York – Hancock Field, where I would spend almost two years ... and, it was in Syracuse where I discovered and learned so much about Origami ... and flourishing (a way to write "fancy").

- ✓ **That LONG day when Ian moved out** on his own and the emptiness Diana and I felt (8/31/97) in the finality of it all ... which also happened to be the same day Lady Di was killed in a horrible car accident. I wrote about that [here](#).
- ✓ **The honor and privilege to serve my country** for three years, 5 months, and 21 days (honorably discharged 1/9/71). To this very day, I'm proud to have served my country!



- ✓ Coming so close to being appointed to the **White House Honor Guard** (August 1968).
- ✓ **Court reporting school** at the Naval Justice Academy, Newport, RI (early 1969), and graduating #2 in the class (out of 90), despite having two broken fingers (typing on manual typewriters!).
- ✓ **Seeing Diana step off the plane** when she arrived in Spain (5/5/70). We got married over two months later in Buitrago del Lozoya, Spain (60 kilometers north of Madrid) ... first Americans married there in village's 2,000-year history!
- ✓ **That first time walking on to the set of Lou Grant** to see Edward Asner (March 19th, 1979) and all of the visits after that with Diana and Ian to watch the filming, as well as "hanging out" with Ed and his pals.
- ✓ **Hawaii and Kauai** – the only places on earth to spend vacations (July of 1983, July of 1988, May of 1989, May of 1999, May of 2005, and May of 2013).
- ✓ **Para-sailing** with Diana and Ian in Hawaii (Jul '88). The entire trip was the best visit ever to Kauai. This is the one that stands out in my mind the most.
- ✓ **Remodeling my grandfather's house** – yet one more project where Diana and I, as a team, amazed people! (Spring/Summer '89)
- ✓ **Santa Barbara** – of all the places we have lived, Santa Barbara is the "jewel" of them all, though sadly now it is pretty much a "foo-foo" kind of place where you need a bag of money to live there. Our house on Montrose Drive, in the foothills, looking out over the city and coastline was awesome. The view constantly took our breath away. I still look at Santa Barbara as the "golden age" for us, with Ian "still a kid" and, well, everything was just perfect living there. The detached cottage with our house on Montrose Place was so perfect for writing and guests.
- ✓ **Mardi Gras 2001** – it was one of those "times of our life!" Mind boggling and amazingly enchanting with a million of our "closest friends," but once is definitely enough. It was mostly standing all day long, "fighting for beads" thrown from the moving floats. And, with all those people (more than a million), we really felt completely safe.
- ✓ **Moon Palace in Cancun** (Jul '01). It has to be said that as nice as this trip was, it didn't come close to touching the magic of Hawaii. Seeing the Mesoamerican culture ruins of Chichen Itza, also known as the Kukulkan Pyramid. We climbed the stairs all the way to the top, as well as explored all the surrounding areas. The pyramid is now closed to the public because of vandalism. But we got to see!
- ✓ **The rainy afternoon Ian first discovered the ocean** (our ruined shoes were worth it!) (Nov 78). It was the lowest tide in 30 years and we found so many sea shells and even starfish.
- ✓ **Arranging for Santa** to "drop by to see Ian" just before Christmas. (12/18/80). I worked this out with a close friend of mine. And, seeing the look on Ian's face



when he answered the door and there stood Santa ... well, it was one of those very special "once in a lifetime" moments!

- ✓ **Orthoscopic knee surgery** (12/14/84) and how much difference that made in improving my life (not to mention no longer needing ace bandages).
- ✓ **Getting the 1996 GMC Jimmy** (11/16/95) and then selling it in December of 1999.
- ✓ **Getting the 2000 GMC Jimmy Diamond Edition** (1/18/00). Sadly, this one started falling apart after just five years.
- ✓ **Picking up Ian's Blazer** (7/06/96). This was his first car!
- ✓ **Meeting and getting to know Peter Norton** (1982-1992). Helping him build his empire and legendary status.
- ✓ **Helping Mike Chipman build the TurboTax Empire** into the #1 tax software program (1983 to 1992). And, TurboTax today is still the best program. I worked closely with the IRS team to pioneer electronic filing, too. I did the same thing for Peter Norton's computing empire and then worked closely with Peter for years after that.
- ✓ **The Microsoft-Timex Datalink Watch**, how useful and "leading edge" it was to have phone numbers on your wrist (August 1995). It did "get old" FAST!
- ✓ **Getting a Spyderco pocketknife** (April 1994). It was my favorite knife of all time and I still have it, along with lots of other pocket knives. I still have!
- ✓ **The first Sony Mavica digital camera** that changed everything (Sep 98). It was so cool to have instant .jpg picture files the moment you took the picture.
- ✓ **Sony CD Mavica digital camera** – The "ultimate" (at least for then) it even did movies (as they, and smartphones, all do now)! (Jun 03)
- ✓ **Mobiles** – we've had them "hanging around" wherever we lived forever ... and, we always will, with the extra visual dimension "up there" they add to anything and everything. I have always had a mobile or two wherever I worked, too. There is just something captivating and entrancing about the constant, ever so gentle movement and flow of mobiles. I've made mobiles, too.
- ✓ **Beginning the photo scanning project** of all of our photos so they don't "get lost" in boxes. This project continues and continues and continues (I really need to devote more time to this!) (Summer '97). Sadly, I never did "finish this up." Maybe I still will. I have the boxes of photos and slides still left to do. Too many other things and life just got in the way of digitizing thousands of photos and slides.
- ✓ **Dancing & Record Hop** – I even won trophies dancing with Roxanne Boatwright in high school. I was also the rep at Camden High for anyone who wanted to get tickets to be on Channel 11's Record Hop show (where Roxanne and I won first prize in their annual dance contest). Roxanne and I were dance partners at the



"What's It" (a place to dance and hang out on Friday and Saturday nights). This was just from sophomore to senior year of high school ... then "other things" came along, like jobs, cars, and a whole lot of more of finding out what life was really all about. But, man, oh, man, I did love dancing! And, I was good at it!

- ✓ **Producing and publishing The Daily Bulletin** – this was the "voice" of Hancock Field in Syracuse, New York, when I was there in the Air Force. I was an admin at the time (before becoming a court reporter) and one day, Sgt. Shaughnessy didn't have time to "knock it out" (he really hated putting together news and updates for the military base), so I told him I could do it for him. My "first edition" was such a hit that he then had me write, produce (typing it all up on mimeograph paper), publish (I hated that ancient, always breaking down mimeograph machine!), and distribute it every day after that! Oh, yea, though I complained about working with that cantankerous mimeograph machine, I loved it. But, ink stained hands and all, I put out that daily "base newspaper."
- ✓ **Watching baseball** – any time. I've been following the Yankees since Mantle and Marris (1961) ... but, now, thanks to MLB.TV, which I've had since 2004 (as well as listening to games online since 1998 ... and watching them online since 2004), I just follow the stories and hot teams. That way the Yankees can no longer break my heart! I do like the Cardinals, the Oriels, the Blue Jays, the Royals, the Indians, and especially the Cubbies (who became World Champs in 2016). I've never been a fan of either the Giants or Dodgers (even though I grew up in San Jose).
- ✓ **The Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, NY** ... Several visits over the years. I still want to take Diana there ... this ties to our goal of visiting every major league baseball park.
- ✓ **Jigsaw puzzles.** Diana and I love doing them. The harder the better. Mona Lisa (1,500 pieces was tough – six weeks to get it done in Jan 03) and Views of Ancient Rome – 5,000 pieces ... we did that in 2003. It was a killer, but we loved the challenge! The Garden of Earthly Delights. That 9,000 piece puzzle took us 18 months to finish, but it is now "up on the wall," along with many of our other favorite puzzles. For some reason, we never "goo-ed" Views of Ancient Rome.
- ✓ **Helping my mom "let go"** and writing her farewell tribute (July/Aug 1995). And, also saying goodbye to her from the top of Half Dome August 5, 1995, when Ian and I climbed Half Dome. I never could have made it through all of that without the help of Hospice. Those people are amazing.
- ✓ **Building Ian's Christmas Train** over a decade of Christmases (Christmas '76 to Christmas '86).
- ✓ **Building Ian's rocking horse** (Jewelbelly) for his 4th birthday (Mar-May 1980)
- ✓ **Building Ian's tree house** (Spring 1988).
- ✓ **Building our grandfather clock** (Nov 1974).



- ✓ **Building my rolltop desk** (Jun 1975).
- ✓ **Discovering woodcarving** and that I somehow had the ability to “release objects from within the wood.” (1980 to present)
- ✓ **Researching, writing, and publishing our [family history](#)**, Windmill Perspective (Nov '73 to Aug '76). This was all timed to my grandmother's 80th birthday in 1976 (the year Ian was born). A decade later I would pay to have my grandfather's name inscribed on the Wall of Honor at Ellis Island.
- ✓ **Designing and creating “Sunset Falls”** and the whole new courtyard (June 1997). One of my last major projects in Livingston. I put in this fountain where the orange tree used to be next to the tank house. And, then I built a water fountain in Molly's “old horse” cement water trough.
- ✓ **The David Letterman Show** – he always made me laugh because you never knew what he was going to do (including growing that beard after he retired). Things just aren't the same since he quit doing his show. The only other show I liked was Jon Stewart's Daily Show, but he stopped doing that in 2015. Now, late night talk shows are just “noise” with everyone trying to get attention (mostly in stupid, childish ways), instead of having some fun and just talking to people (without the “hidden agenda” of promoting movies, products, politics, and/or personalities).
- ✓ **Producing and hosting radio/TV shows** in Monterey County (1979 to 1980). I did this while I ran the Salinas Chamber of Commerce. It was a public access show and we had quite an audience. I did a weekly radio show, too.
- ✓ **Testimonial in Bioenergy Nutrients catalog**, complete with a photo with Trixie (Spring 1997). I got to go to Salt Lake City and we filmed all of this, including the testimonials, in the old “Donnie & Marie” TV studio out in the middle of nowhere!
- ✓ **Playing tennis** ... any time, any place. It has been a long time since I played, but I would play again in a heartbeat!
- ✓ **Origami** and how it has touched so many lives. Diana and I even folded 1,000 cranes for a couple who got married in Texas, though we knew the marriage was doomed).
- ✓ **The magic of learning to juggle** (Christmas 1980). And, still to this day, I'm juggling ... and, I have taught many others how to do this wonderful and magical ability. I learned to juggle while recuperating from having a vasectomy. When the doctor asked on a follow up visit how things were going, I said, “Well, doc, before this, I couldn't juggle and now I can!” He laughed and said he had never heard than one before!



- ✓ **Creating wooden objects.** My amazement (and pride) of being able to make writing pens, Xacto knives, magnifying glasses and so much more out of wood. I still do wood carving, mostly many different variations of butter paddles.
- ✓ **A 752-day stretch of continuous workouts!** Combining the significance of vitamins and herbs with eating smart and daily workouts (6/1/92 to 6/22/94 – a 752-day string of continuous workouts). I didn't miss a single day, no matter what! And, there were several days where I was ill, but still exercised!
- ✓ **Continuing to exercise and eat smart with Diana** ... this is the #1 priority in our life! It's all about calories. Our focus is on the stationary bike (we have had and broken many of them over the years), rowing, ab crunches (with the "rocker" and the ab wheel – which is still a killer), and the Bowflex (strength training). The medicine ball is an excellent workout, though we don't do it enough. Oh, and walking, too. LOTS of walking.
- ✓ **Waterbed** – I first slept on a water in Syracuse, New York, in 1968 at a friend's place. I finally talked Diana in us having a waterbed in the fall of 1975. So I built the frame, headboard, and the works. That took about a month and then we bought a waterbed and have slept on waterbeds ever since. We've had several of them because they don't last much longer than seven to ten years, despite the "guarantees." On that very first waterbed, we felt the "ripples in the water" from when Ian was kicking in Diana's stomach. We had pictures of little girls everywhere that we hoped would somehow influence us having a girl. But, Diana kept saying, "With so much kicking, this has to be a boy!" And, as a side note, when Ian was born, as soon as Dr. Cook saw Ian's ears, he told Diana, "These are the ears of a little boy!" Dr. Cook died just weeks after Ian was born – heart attack!
- ✓ **Getting Re-Married by Elvis in July 1997**
 – When I called to "set things up for this, they asked me if I wanted the fat or thin Elvis. I chose the thin Elvis. So the short "ceremony" last about 20 minutes, where he sang Elvis songs, including me promising to be "her teddy bear, with a big hunk of burnin' burnin' love" and Diana promising not to "return to sender." We even bought the video they filmed, complete with bubbles!
- ✓ **LOST – the TV Show** – Of all the movies and TV shows we've ever watched, nothing comes close to LOST, which aired on ABC from September of 2004 to May of 2010. The shifting, unpredictable, weird, flash forward, flash backwards, flash sideways, alternate dimensions, time traveling, and people being people, doing what people do ... it is all there in LOST. You were always guessing, "What next?"



WTF!"

When the show first aired, we didn't watch it. We couldn't believe people could be so invested in a TV show and talk about it so much. Seinfeld was definitely a show everyone talked about, but people on an island? Come on! That just seemed so stupid. But, people were fanatical about it and always, always talking about it. Not only what they thought would happen next but what it all meant. So, in 2010, after the show's finale, we figured, hey, it's on NetFlix online, so let's just watch the pilot and see what we think. Within the first five minutes we were hooked. So we binge watched it over a five week period. We've re-watched it more than once!

And, well, the only thing to really say about LOST is just watch the pilot. If that doesn't get you hooked, nothing will. There are so many bizarre things, unbelievable plot twists (that you believe), and just so much inventive, creative "goings-on" that nothing will ever be able to touch it. I think they tried with "Stranger Things" (a NetFlix original in 2016), but it didn't come close to "grabbing your intellect" the way LOST did. Nothing ... NOTHING will ever come close to the phenomenon that was LOST. It is plain and simple a "fun ride" that keeps you guessing and wondering.

- ✓ **The Main Thing I Will Always Struggle With – Stupid and coniving people!**
It's one thing to not "get it," but there just so many completely dumb people that I just have a hard time tolerating them. Then there are the coniving, as well as jealous, people who have always worked hard to "make things tough" on others (including me and Diana). These are the same people who always take credit for the work of others. I have run into this over and over again, so I'm convinced that it's just some sort of aberration in that people who so badly want to be something (someone) else, they have this need to attack, get back at, and "pick apart" others. My approach to all of those "types," well, I "kill 'em with kindness," because tomorrow when I wake up, I'll still be me, happy with who I am, as I always have been. As for them, they'll still be "doing what they always do," with no clear identity, completely lost in their lack of self-worth.

Oh, and the other thing I struggle with (read that as tolerate the best I can up to a certain point) is people who are both stupid AND arrogant. That's a deadly combination, because while when the normal person (me included) realizes she or he has said or done something not quite right (or missed the point), that person knows enough (is smart enough to see something ain't right) to back off, shut up, and regroup. Whereas the "deadly mix" of stupidity and arrogance leads to such persons "continuing on" a) without even realizing what they are doing or saying is stupid (almost as if they are proud of being completely dumb); and 2) "adding on" with more "dialog" or actions that make things even worse, while clearly showing



everyone involved that this person clearly doesn't "get it."

Sadly, for some reason, many of those types of idiots, morons, and dunces seem to somehow "rise in the ranks" of management. Which brings me to one of the key points in my life ... while I know very well how to "play the game" in the corporate world, there is only so much I can take and then I just find something else to do.

Also, I find that many times, the stupid "element" is mixed in with evil propensities. I have an entire section of [Evil People](#) (the section following this "listing of things," actually) because I just felt it "needed to be noted" that there are, indeed, evil people in this world! And, that topic deserves its own "set aside" section. You know, like they need to be set aside, too, in real life!

- ✓ **About Awards** – I've always felt that awards should go to the people who "do things" because they needed to be done, NOT because they might get an award for it. And, so in granting myself a [Lifetime Achievement Award](#), I truly feel that fits into this perspective, because all that I have done, I did because someone needed to do it ... not to see what I could get out of it. That said, for all the myriad of the unsaid "*thank yous*," I just felt my life and accomplishments deserved a lifetime achievement award! So, that's that!



- ✓ **Opportunities, "luck" and risks** – everything happens for a reason. You just have to pay attention. Fate, destiny, chance, and "Lady Luck," well, I can't say enough good things about those topics, but the key thing about opportunities (which come in the form of fate, destiny, chance, and "Lady Luck") is that they are all presented to you for you to do with them what you will ... and, that's why you have to pay attention. Because if you don't pay attention, then you're going to miss out on a lot, a whole LOT!

If you're just coasting through each day, killing time, STOP IT!

I've been able to do all that I have done, not because I'm that extraordinary (well, maybe I am a little bit ... or a lot ... honestly, I can't really tell), but because I've paid attention. I've done that since I was a kid and just saw opportunities where other people completely "missed the point." I don't know. Maybe I have this vision or, most likely, it is common sense, as well as the Universe always being there for me (and I have always paid attention). But, here is what I do know ...

- ✓ I never would have been a part of building the TurboTax and Peter Norton Empires if I hadn't seen the opportunities (combined with "luck" and all the risks).



- ✓ I never would have been a part of the Windows95 team, as well as the subsequent work I did for Microsoft, if I hadn't "dived in" the instant the door was cracked open just a teeny tiny bit.
- ✓ I never would have become Executive Director of the Santa Barbara Board of REALTORS and MLS, if I hadn't been paying attention and taken yet another "big risk" (that's how other people saw it). I did a lot of incredible things in that job, including making a presentation to the President of the United States. It was also where I discovered computers and starting "changing the world" by using computers and technology.
- ✓ There are a lot more examples I could give, including just picking up and moving to Austin, Texas, in 2000 to go to work for Motorola on a global scale, but my point in all of this is so much of the incredible, amazing, pretty much unbelievable things I have done ... none of it ever would have happened if I hadn't been paying attention ... and, then, despite pretty heavy-duty risks, I took advantage of opportunities and "luck" (which really boils down to the Universe always being there to help ... if you let it).
- ✓ Know this, though, taking risks doesn't come without a price. And, there are points where risk-taking didn't work out well at all (horrible in some cases, but nothing that we didn't "bounce back" from). But, hey, I wouldn't change anything. The risks come with very "highs" and exceptionally bottomed-out "lows," but you figure out ways to get through it all. And, you are constantly learning each step of the way. The one thing you don't ever want to be is "afraid to take a risk." You have to make great things happen by paying attention and then going "all in" for the prize! That means risks, sometimes BIG risks, but, believe me, it is all worth it ... more than you could possibly ever imagine (which is why you should just simply "do it" and never look back!)
- ✓ Life is too short to just passively "work your way through it." Go out there and get what you do, do what you want, and be who you want to be.

It's all really that simple!



Evil People!

I had this as the last item on my list in the previous section, but I decided it needed to be in and of itself (just way evil people are). The subject of evil people needs to be addressed separately because, well, they are a separate breed of individuals who didn't start out evil, but somehow, some way, through a series of circumstances (or Karma from past lives), they just ended up disgustingly evil. I honestly don't think there is any hope for such wretched, tragic individuals, but, then, you never know. Anyway, this is my take based on the evil people I have encountered.

They spout and spurt from the boiling, gurgling Cauldron of Hell, only to be further damaged by what is clearly evident in Dante's *Inferno* as well as all that you see in the right panel of Hieronymus Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights*.

No, that's true. Evil people didn't start out that way. Actually, they were just like all the rest of us at one time. But, somewhere along the way they tripped over far too many happenstances that warped their lives into distorted, convoluted messes. After that happened (howsoever it did manage to happen), they plopped right into the main category of "Evil People" also known as "People of Pure Evilness!" Over the years I have managed to turn some of them away from their nastiness and vicious habits, but, sadly, sooner or later they reverted back to what they knew best for wreaking havoc on as many other people's lives as possible.

I've left this element and observation for "last on my list" because that is exactly where it belongs in terms of "putting things in their place." I honestly otherwise wouldn't have mentioned it, but I felt compelled to do so because far too often all of us, more often than not, have encountered (and had to deal with) these dreadful, unpleasant rascals. This "category" just has to be mentioned, because everyone at one time or the other has to deal with evil people (while also pitying, as well as wondering, them ... to some extent, if at all possible).

I've come across my fair share of such dubious individuals. And, from what I can tell, these evil people, who have a penchant for finding their way into management positions (because so many other evil people reside in such varied circumstances, statuses, and prominences – most often, undeservedly so ... which is a big part of the problem, because they are all in over their heads), it really all comes down to self-worth issues stemming from being encumbered, burdened, overloaded, and laden in



totally, without exception or exemption, shitty lives (all of their own doing or undoing, of course ... that, for some reason, they keep working so hard to keep things all screwed up ... mainly because they are working tirelessly AGAINST the Universe ... thus, not letting the Universe help them ... they are also not paying attention at so many points when they really should "take a look at what is and isn't going on around them!").

But, yea, I've had to deal with them, their jealousies of me, their being irked and annoyed with me, mainly because of who I am and what I do (and don't do), which draws people to my enthusiasm, positivity, ability to have fun (and, yes, laugh at myself), and infectious optimism. Hey, at work or anywhere, everyone wants to "lighten things up a bit" ... and these evil people can't stand it. Actually, evil people just don't know how to behave unless they are making life miserable or imposing their will on underlings to make themselves look and feel more important ... or seemingly "in charge," when we all know who is really getting all of the work done. Oh, yea, and these evil people excel at taking credit for other people's work.

But, you know what? I've "cracked through" the seemingly impenetrable shells of fortified façades evil people are so good at "building up" (while, in effect, tearing themselves down) and found that the "good person" hidden inside of them really wants out. That said, I've seen very few of the well-hidden good persons "make it out" for all the rest of us to see ... and, even when that did happen, it didn't last for long.

There are only two ways to deal with such people: a) tolerate 'em (while tormenting 'em as much as you can ... most often without them even noticing it); or 2) removing yourself from the situation (which I have done many times). Life is too short to let "someone in control," who has it "out for you" (most often for the stupidest of stupid reasons), make your life miserable (which is what evil people thrive on, mainly because it is a power thing). And, what I have found is that those points where I did remove myself from the situations (i.e., find another job or not "playing the game"), it always worked out for the best. Oh, yea, and the sweet part in all of this, is that when I have left jobs, those evil people quickly found out how much of what I did they took for granted and thus were left trying to "fill gigantic holes" in the workload for all of the things I had done that they thought just automatically or magically happened.

Oh, and each time I have "moved on," it always led to something else so much better. Again, the Universe was there for me, helping me, moving me forward, onward, and upward in my life. That said, wherever I have gone, you guessed it, there were yet more evil people "waiting in the wings" to enter stage right (or left) in the drama (and comedy) that is my life. They're everywhere so you never really can escape evil people. You just have to deal with them as best you can. "Killing them with kindness" is the best way to go because, just like in the Wizard of Oz when Dorothy throws a bucket of



water on the evil witch, evil people start melting when you're nice to 'em! Well, not really, but wouldn't that be great if things worked out that way.

One key point about evil people. Only give them as much information they need to know, especially about you. Because anything they "have on you," you can rest assured they will use it against you. So don't trust 'em. Don't confide in them. And, even if you see them "mired in something," don't help them ... they'll just drag you down into the muck and sludge that is their lives!

The best thing you can do is be you and be happy.

Your best weapon against evil people is to be yourself, because no matter what you do (or how much you try to please them), nothing will come of it, for they are so evil they don't even like themselves! <Sigh>

Just be sure you ALWAYS "keep your guard up" when around and/or working with such personages.



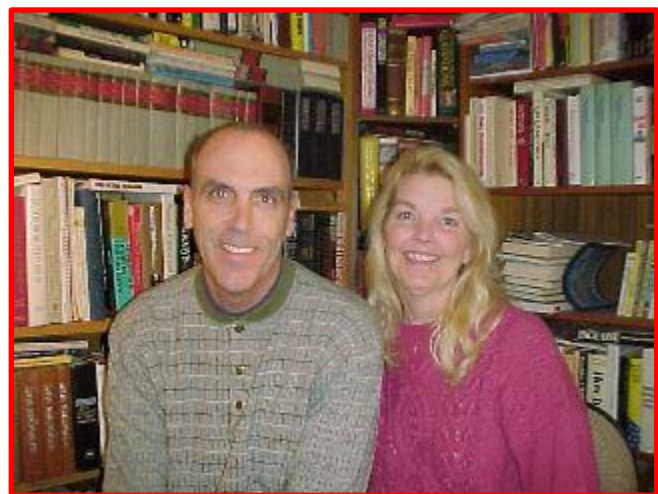
The future isn't here ... or is it?!

Standing here, center stage, in the production of continuing acts, episodes, and interludes of my life (with a constant stream of varied interruptions, interferences, and distractions "along the way"), there is much warmth in all of the shimmering, glimmering Kodachrome brilliance of 70 keg lights. As I look all around me, across the panoramic expanse of my life, I am pleased with what I see (and have done). That view definitely includes YOU, who "plays a part" in all of this ... as much or as little as you want.



Happiness, self-satisfaction, confidence, optimism, enthusiasm, and full of love best describe how I feel as I look at both what I have accomplished and all that is yet to be done ... for my own efforts as well as all that I have done (and will continue to do) with Diana. Looking ahead, all that we will yet do is most definitely based on what has catapulted us to this exact moment in time (within so many of the synapses, even the ones covered in cobwebs) of my (and your) intellect.

When writing anything about my life (especially at these special birthday-milestone-check-point-essays, this PhD Life Thesis being the biggest one ... so far), it really isn't even a consideration not to write about Diana and our life together. In looking at my life – our life – it is all so much a part of our having been together for so long now ... the sweetest of sweet moments mixed in with all the rest (including many, many challenges, WTF moments, frustrations, and exasperations), making it all up as



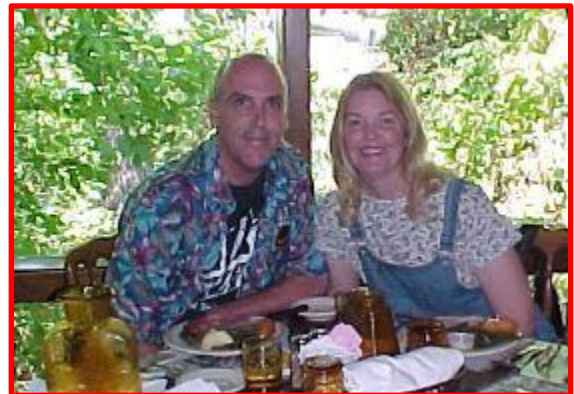
we traversed the serpentine pathways (many that didn't provide any clue as to where they led). And, yes, there have been the heartache and heartache aspects throughout it all (including those "big surprises" that slam you like 2x4s right between the eyes) ... but the two of us, together, have always "found our way" though it all ... knowing the Universe was "pointing the way" (all the times we realized it ... or not).



Everything Diana and I have done has led us right up to here ... now ... the future (which always manages to stay a step or two ahead of us in oh, so many unpredictable ways). Of course, the future really isn't "here" nor "there." The future turns out to be this handy place we all "put things" we otherwise choose not to deal with for whatever reason(s). Diana and I have lived our lives seldom ever using the future as a convenient catchall "storage facility" for what could have or should have or would have been. We have lived our lives **doing things in the now**. Sure, the future is always "out there" about to unfold, but Diana and I honestly believe all you really have is **NOW**. So we have always taken advantage of that and have DONE THINGS "in the now" instead of "waiting until later" to do them. We honestly feel by doing that we have completely eliminated the "woulda, coulda, shoulda" aspects of life. The reason for that is simply because instead of "talking about doing things," we have just done them, planning things out to make whatever we wanted to happen actually happen ... which has directly resulted in so many amazing, incredible, unbelievable (but true) things happening (that otherwise surely would NOT have happened).

That's why we have not a single regret "looking back." We have lived life, making the most of things at the time they happen (as well as having made so many things happen that otherwise wouldn't have – for us and other people) ... and we continue to do so. The future pretty much takes care of itself, because it is based solely on what you are doing (or NOT doing) while "*en route*" to whatever it is that you want your future to be. It is completely up to YOU to "map it all out" and then do it! YOU control exactly what is going to happen, except for the "wild cards" of chance, fate, destiny, and "Lady Luck" (all part of the Universe working in your favor) ... and all of which definitely happen for a reason while presenting opportunities all wrapped up in a big pink bow JUST FOR YOU. And, hey, you can play all of those to your best advantage, too, if you pay attention and let the Universe help you each and every step of the way.

You can't even discount or ignore (well, you can, but you'll definitely miss out on so much if you do) the fate, chance, Lady Luck, and destiny factors that are wild cards in life. Diana and I subscribe to the theory that the individual (and people working together as a team) maps things out for what the future will become ... all tied closely to the Universe and how it is always trying to help you (if you just let it).



Too many people stay tethered to the same "safe" place that tends to seem somewhat comfortable (even though most of those same people constantly complain a lot about where they are and aren't), experiencing flashes of brilliance "mixed in" with an excess of fits of stupidity as the same day basically repeats itself over and over again until the weeks drip, like wax, into undistinguishable puddles of months with very few milestones (none of which even come close to approaching anything



impressive or memorable). And, then those same people wallowing in their own self-generated self-pity grumble about the way things are! Well, the easiest way to resolve such issues is to stop observing life, start paying attention, and participate in what is happening – good and bad! Adventures await, you just have to understand that the carnival of life certainly isn't going to come knocking on your front door so they can put on a show in your living room!

Okay, so where am I (where are we) on this “day of birth” celebration thing?

Life so often seems like a roller coaster ride, but you can easily take a deep breath, assess what's going on (or not going on) and then proceed from there, based on the information you have at the time. Leading up to the Millennium, I “put in an extended stint” with Microsoft, pioneering the web as part of the Windows95 team while also “doing things” for the Merced Private Industry Council (leading the charge to create their web presence that was the first one, out of 670 such government entities nationwide, to be in conformance with the Workforce Investment Act of 1998). Then Diana and I headed to Austin, Texas, for the first decade of the new Millennium where I worked for Motorola and Textron Overwatch Systems. My focus was on all things web (on a global scale) as well as internal and external communications (read that as writing my arse off). Consulting was “mixed in” during those ten years. Thankfully, we gravitated (read that as “escaped”) back to California in June of 2010.



In moving to Austin, Diana and I took a collective “deep breath” and then a gigantic “leap of faith.” Was it all risk filled? You bet your ass it was! Was either of us worried that it might not work out? Not for a single second – ever! And, actually, part of our long-term plan included the fact that we pretty much figured Motorola would NOT be a “permanent thing” ... we figured Motorola would last a year or two and then we would move on to something else. The main point was that Motorola allowed me grow so much by working on a global scale (even more so than what I did at Microsoft) ... so much so that I won Motorola's prestigious Bravo Award for “improving how people work, find data, and communicate” (that included a BIG cash award). But, coming back to California led to me landing a “plumb of a job” at Aerojet ... which turned out to be the absolute best job I've ever had ... handing communications on an enterprise scale and a whole lot more. Aerojet being such an iconic company in the realm of space, well, every single day was an amazing experience.

Many sections and “pieces” of my original essay I first wrote two decades ago as I was about to turn 50 are still embedded (edited and enhanced) of this PhD Live Thesis. They have been significantly reworked and incorporated into all of this. I have been going over, revising, reworking, and adding to that text on a regular basis. This year I thought I would make it an official, certified, authenticated, adjudicated, bona fide, and, of course, qualified “permanent amendment” to who I am, thus proclaiming it to be my **PhD Life Thesis – Penning My Life.**



In many respects, I suppose this could be looked at as a biography of sorts, or a cataloging of who I am, what I believe, and what I have done. I would also like to add that it needs to be further (and farther) stated that my ultimate, definitive, decisive, and conclusive penultimate goal in life, as it has been for so long now, is to be **a Renaissance Man**, one who constantly strives hard “to do many different and varied things, exceptionally well ... close to perfection,” and to make a difference in life itself for me and in the lives of others, too ... on a daily basis. I’m still, as I always will be, working on that!

For me, the question at the end of each day is ...

Did I make a difference?



Three Years, Five Months, and 21 Days!

I joined the Air Force on May 4th, 1967, as part of the "delayed enlistment" program. While I was sworn in on that date, I didn't actually go into the Air Force until July 19th, 1967, four days after my 20th birthday. It's a rather "long story" about how I managed to get into the Air Force, because I joined on a Texas "AF" number. It all came down to the fact that there were no more Air Force "staffing allotments" for people in California, so we "worked things out" for me to get that Texas "AF" number.

I was about to be drafted because I had a low Selective Service "lottery" number. And, I certainly didn't want to go into the Army, which pretty much meant boot camp and then you "shipped off" straight to Viet Nam! **No thanks!**

There was a meningitis outbreak at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas, where the Air Force's boot camp was located. So, for only three days, new recruits, of which I was one, were sent to Amarillo, Texas, for boot camp. And, that actually turned out to be like Boy Scout camp because they really weren't set up for boot camp. So we were housed three guys to a room in what used to be officer's quarters, complete with A/C and other "niceties." We didn't do much in the way of training, though our one day at the rifle range "blowing the hell out of everything in sight" with M-16s was actually fun. And, we all somehow got ribbons for "qualifying" as sharp shooters (however that happened, I'll never know).

Six weeks was all it was and, yes, they cut off all our hair, so we did get that part of the treatment for "boot camp." From there I went to Syracuse, New York. I worked in administration, managing documents and "typing up orders." Then I lucked my way into qualifying for Court Reporting School. That took me to Newport, Rhode Island, where I graduated #2 in a class of 91. I was highly motivated to graduate in the top ten percent of my class, because the rest were going to Viet Nam!

Then back to Syracuse, New York, where I worked in the Staff Judge Advocates Office (all things legal). Just a few days after Neil Armstrong walked on the moon in July of 1969, I was off to Madrid, Spain, to spend the rest of my time in the Air Force (working at the American Embassy and Torrejon Air Base). I luckily got a six month "early out" from the Air Force ... that ties to an "intriguing" story for another time!

On the following page, you'll get a look at my discharge papers. This is the actual document I used at the many places where I had to "process out" of the Air Force, including McGuire Air Force Base which was the final step in getting discharged. I even typed my own DD-214 form, because there was a shortage of admin types. So I volunteered to help speed things up ... the only time I ever volunteered for anything!

REQUEST AND AUTHORIZATION FOR PERMANENT CHANGE OF STATION - MILITARY			
The following individual will proceed on Permanent Change of Station			
1. GRADE, LAST NAME, FIRST, MIDDLE INITIAL, SSAN SGT ALVERNAN, WILLIAM J.		2. SHIPPING ADDRESS 70550	3. <input type="checkbox"/> OVER 4 YRS SERVICE (By only)
4. PURPOSE OF PCS		5. HOME ADDRESS	
6. DATE		7. TDY REPORTING DATE	8. SECURITY CLEARANCE
9. UNIT, MAJOR COMMAND, ADDRESS, AND PAS OF UNIT TO WHICH ASSIGNED Assigned duty stn 438 AB Gp (MAC) McGuire AFB, NJ 08641 (PAS: MNOCNJ) (FOR SEPARATION)		10. UNIT, MAJOR COMMAND, ADDRESS, AND PAS OF UNIT FROM WHICH RELIEVED 40 Cmbt Spt Gp (USAFE) New York 09283 (PAS: TJDMVR)	
11. TDY 10 JAN 71 <input type="checkbox"/> PCS WITH PCA (FSCA)		12. WITHOUT PCA	
13. REPORT TO COMD, NEW ASSIGNMENT ONLY UPON ARRIVAL		14. ADDRESS	
15. INDIVIDUAL SELECTED TO SERVE <input type="checkbox"/> ACCOMPANY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER <input type="checkbox"/> DEPENDENT PROHIBITED WITHIN OVERSEA AREA		16. TRAVEL OF DEPENDENTS IS AUTHORIZED	
17. <input type="checkbox"/> CONCURRENT <input type="checkbox"/> TO A DESIGNATED LOCATION		18. TRAVEL PERMITTED <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO	
19. VOLUNTEER STATUS <input type="checkbox"/> NON-VOLUNTEER <input type="checkbox"/> VOLUNTEER FOR		20. TO REJON AB SPAIN	
21. AIR MOVEMENT DESIGNATOR TOJ WRI 3 Pu		22. DELOCATION ALLOWANCE CATEGORY	
23. DEPENDENTS (Last names of dependents)		24. DELOCATION ALLOWANCE CATEGORY	
25. PCS EXPENSE CHARGEABLE TO 5713500 321 P577		26. TDY EXPENSE CHARGEABLE TO	
27. 4 5 14 5776 5037		28. AUTHORITY AND PCS CODE AFM 39-11 and MDN 413, PTI 903	
IF PCS IS WITHIN THE UNITED STATES, THE FOLLOWING INDIVIDUAL WILL REPORT TO THE BASE HOUSING OFFICE/HOUSING REFERRAL OFFICE SERVING YOUR NEW DUTY STATION BEFORE ENTERING INTO ANY RENTAL OR LEASE AGREEMENT FOR OFF-BASE HOUSING.			
29. REMARKS Items 1, 3, 8 and 9 reverse side apply. Home of Record and Future Mailing Address: 11581 Walnut Ave., Livermore CA 94534. Place of Enlistment Oakland CA. Discharge Status "HONORABLE" Reenlistment Eligibility "1".			
30. DATE 27 Oct 70	31. TYPED NAME, GRADE AND TITLE H.S. HERD, SGT 1, USAF	32. DATE 2 Nov 1970	33. SIGNATURE JAMES E KOZAREN, Capt, USAF
34. DESCRIPTION AND LOCATION OF HEADQUARTERS HQ 401 CMBT SPT GP (USAFE) APO NEW YORK 09283		35. AUTHENTICATING OFFICIAL JAMES E KOZAREN, Capt, USAF Chief of Administration	
36. DISTRIBUTION 6 - 438 Air Base Gp (C) McGuire AFB, NJ 086		37. PLUS "A"	



The Answer to Life!

Contrary to what Douglas Adams wrote in "The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy," 42 is not the answer to life, even if Elvis did die at age 42. Okay, Fox Mulder's apartment in the TV series "The X Files" was, indeed, the number 42. And, yes, the element Molybdenum (mainly used in alloys – steel, cast iron and super alloys) has the atomic number of 42 and is also the 42nd most common element in the Universe. Sure, Lewis Carroll's famed "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" has 42 illustrations.



I could go on and on with all of what people have come up with to prove that 42 is the answer to life. BUT! I won't! There's no need for it ... 42 is just a number!

There are a lot people, beyond those who believe Douglas Adams was right, who have devoted way too much time trying to prove 42 is the answer to life itself.



That said, my take on all of this comes down to life simply is that each of us, individually, is one piece on a very confusing and constantly changing game board that stretches out to infinity with an endless number of "moves to make" ... all of which are of our own choosing as each minute of each hour of each day (and night) unfolds.

Once you realize YOU are completely in control, to decide for yourself, what your answer to/of/in life will be, positioned in just such a way with all of the wildcards and conundrums life will be "hurling your way" (many at close to the speed of light without much time to react), only then will you completely "get it" that life is exactly what you want it to be ... with the Universe "always there" in so many ways for you, trying to help you every step of the way, but only if you pay attention and work hard at making a difference.

So stop asking questions and just start mapping out your plan to get to exactly where it is you want to go, along with what you want to do. Only YOU can determine what is best for you. You already know what you didn't know you somehow knew.

There is a quote about a famous woman who was dying and in her last lucid moments, she responded to someone asking what the answer to life was. And, in her last breath, with her final words, she said, "**What is the question?**"



A decade in Austin ...

We arrived in Austin late in the day on Saturday, October 14th, 2000. We took our stuff over to the temporary housing Motorola had arranged for us. Then I started working at Motorola on Monday, the 16th.

The new Millennium's first decade was us living in Austin. And, while Austin is an amazing place, it really wasn't where we wanted to spend the rest of our lives. We got there with one dog, Trixie, and left with two other dogs, Sparky and Sheba. What an amazing decade to start the new millennium.



Moving to Austin

The moving guys showed up on October 10th, 2000, and got everything ready for the next day when they loaded up the moving truck. We had already shipped our cars a few days earlier. So on October 11th, we watched all of our stuff "head out" for Austin, Texas. We would be flying out of San Jose to Austin on the 14th.



I started working at Motorola on Monday, we signed the papers for our house on Wednesday, and Thursday the moving van showed up at our house on Arden Ct.



And, as if that wasn't a whirlwind of enough happening in such a short period of time, when I started working at Motorola, I found out they "ran things" on a UNIX platform ... something I had never worked in. So right in the middle of so much else going on in the way of major life changes, I went on a three week crash course (all while working and "getting the job done") to learn the "ins & outs" of UNIX. And, I did, so much so that within six months of starting at Motorola, I received the Bravo award for "vastly improving the way people communicate and share information." I then became a "knowledge Champion," managing over four million documents and data files ... this in addition to handling communications and web content/development for our entire Multimedia Systems Division. Also, in a very short time, I was working directly with and for the Chief of Staff of our division – on a global scale!



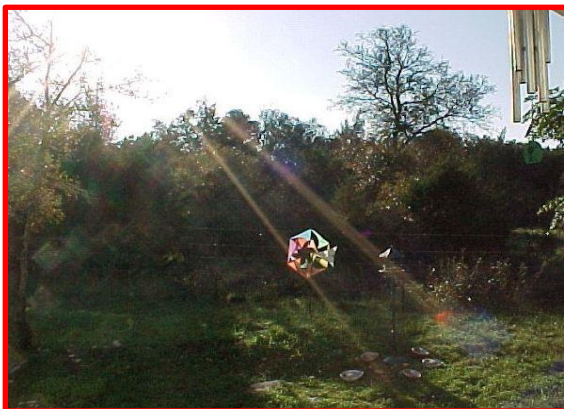
Here are more photos from our first week in Austin ... where there are clouds like we had never seen before (or since).





We loved the house. It was BIG (3,600 square feet, not counting the garage). But the house was “just us” (and Trixie, of course).

It was like the house had been made just for us ... comfortable and it suited us and Trixie perfectly. Her favorite spot was by the front entry door, where there was a window ... you know, so she could “keep guard” on the homestead!



This is the house we lived in for the decade we were in Austin. The “backdrop” for our backyard was a greenbelt where there were cows, deer, LOTS of birds, and other critters, including a Roadrunner and Armadillos, who “wandered on through” all the time. There was always something to watch as we sat at our kitchen dining table. We loved the “show” every time we sat down to eat – morning, noon, and night!



One of the first things we bought for the yard was a bird feeder ... that we still have to this day! The place where you see Trixie in this photo was right behind the bird feeder that was less than five yards from our kitchen dining windows. Behind Trixie is the green belt that made you feel like you lived “out in the open” (when really, we were right near shopping and access to all the major roadways and highways).

When we first moved there, I only worked four miles from home. After I left Motorola, I then worked at the far south end of town ... 22 miles (usually more than a 45 minute drive ... traffic, north and south, was ALWAYS a train wreck in Austin). But, we really loved this house and the location ... and those clouds!



In and Around Austin



Perhaps the best starting point about Austin was the gas prices when we first got there ... the likes of which we'll never EVER see again. But, I mean, really, come on ... 89 cents a gallon for gas in 2001 not long after we got there! People, to this day, say that I “manipulated” or “touched up” this photo. But, NO! That is what it cost for a gallon of gas in 2001. You could “fill up” for around ten bucks!

Gas wasn't the only thing we liked about Austin. There was much we liked and, to be honest, there are still “things” we miss about living there ... though I have to say, Diana and I are so happy to be back in California (as crazy as things are in this State, especially with the liberal government and so many do-gooders!)

Our Backyard Sanctuary ...

When I first saw the house on Arden Court, as we drove up to “look at the listing,” I just knew this would be where we lived. As Diana and the real estate agent fiddled with the lockbox, I walked around the back of the house and saw the greenbelt that “extended our yard” off into trees and the nature-space where cows, deer, and so many other creatures would provide a “daily show” for us. As Diana was opening the front door, I said, “I don't even need to see the inside. This is OUR house!”

That was the last Saturday of September. We made the offer that night, the owners accepted it on Sunday. We did the paperwork for the offer and then headed back to California ... it was a mind-numbing whirl-wind of a gazillion things from that point on, but on October 19th, about three weeks after we first saw the house, we moved in!

And, it is here that I must say it again ... It's the Universe!



Castor Beans have always been a part of our lives. We've grown them wherever we lived. This is how the Castor Beans looked by our back door. They only grew this big the first year we were there. After that, they never got bigger than five or six feet. Some of the places we have lived, the Castor Beans got to well over 20 feet tall.

Castor Beans provide a very tropical look and they grow in virtually any kind of soil, even bad soil, which was the case in Austin.



Our backyard evolved over the decade that we lived in Austin.

There were two problems with trying to grow things in Austin. First, the HEAT. From the March to October timeframe, you had severe heat. Like HOT, HOT, and HOT. The A/C was on all day and night most of the time and you could never have the windows open at night. And, then, there were the ice storms in late January and early February. So, all year long was tough on any plants and trees in your yard.



The cows. Ah, the cows. We had so much fun with them, because they, as well as the deer, were always coming around to "snarfle up" the deer corn I tossed out over that barbed wire fence. On average, with my little tin bucket (that I would tap on to let them know it was "dinner time"), we went through between 50 to 100 pounds of deer corn a week!



The cows and even the deer always brought along their "little ones" and they got so tame we could pet them. And, I swear they understood everything we were saying to them!



We had so much fun with those cows. The deer never would let us get that close. They weren't spooked as we just stood there watching them eat.

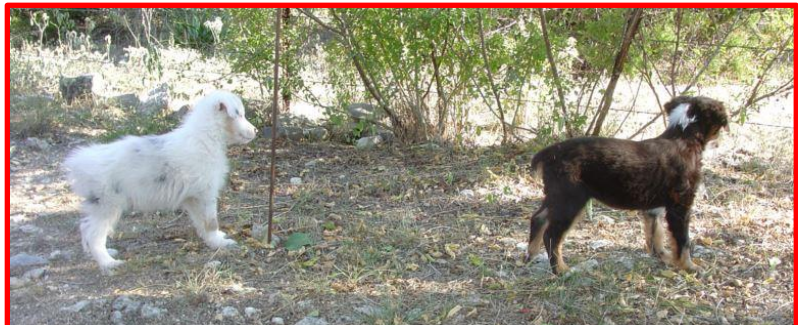


Each spring, we would get to see the "little ones." Both from the cows and the deer.

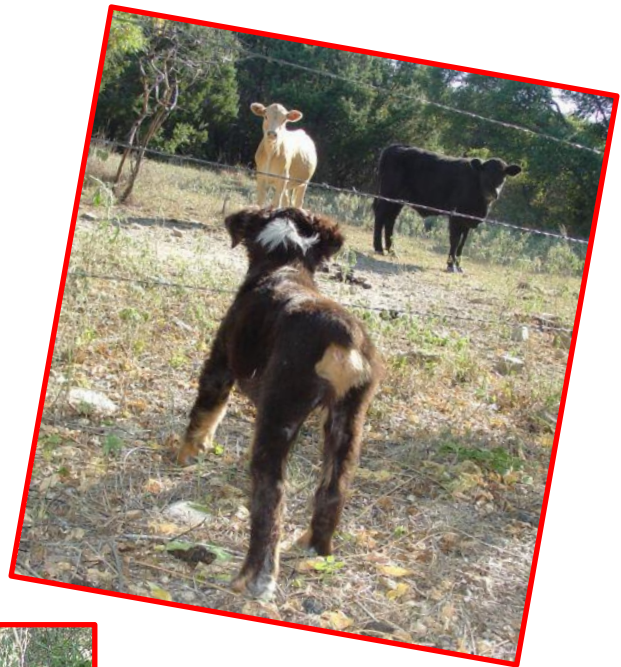
But, before we get to the deer pictures, there needs to be a word or two said about that one special day, right after we got Sparky and Sheba. They were only nine weeks old. They were fascinated by the cows.

And, one day, late in October of 2005, not long after getting Sparky and Sheba, I found out two things: a) just how interested Sparky and Sheba were in those cows; and 2) just how good Australian Shepherds are at herding!

From the very first day we got Sparky and Sheba, they were always like this whenever the cows came by, watching them intently.



I thought, hey, "Gotta get some pictures of this with our little dogs watching the cows!" But, here's the thing ... it quickly went from Sparky and Sheba keenly staring at the two cows, to the two dogs scurrying under the barbed wire fence and then actually herding the cows around. And, I mean, those two little dogs with much inherent know-how, nipped at the heels of animals that each easily weighed a ton. So I went from "snapping some photos" to dropping the camera, getting a ladder, hopping over the fence, and getting our two dogs back in the yard. I was horrified in that I thought the puppies would get crushed, but the cows were actually afraid of them and scampered off. Sparky and Sheba, easily scooted back into the yard and I could tell they were very proud of their adventure (which almost caused me heart failure! Yikes!). After that episode, there was fencing so Sparky and Sheba never got another chance to go after cattle (or anything else). Or, so I thought!



After we put up the fence, we did have one "episode" where Sparky figured out how to wiggle under the green, plastic fence we put up. We always watched them in the yard, but I went into the house for just a brief moment. When I came back out they were gone. Luckily, I found them out on the green belt (after 45 minutes of looking for them). Muddy and full of dirt, they seemed quite happy walking home. I'm sure they were out looking for those cows!



The deer were always “hanging around” (mainly because of the deer corn, plus they knew it was safe near our place) so we got to watch them quite often, morning, noon, and night! One mama deer, year after year would always bring her little ones by for us to see. She got hit by a car, but survived with a broken back leg that was just “hanging on.” With our help (and lots of deer corn) she made it through the winter and somehow her leg healed. The next spring, she was fine!



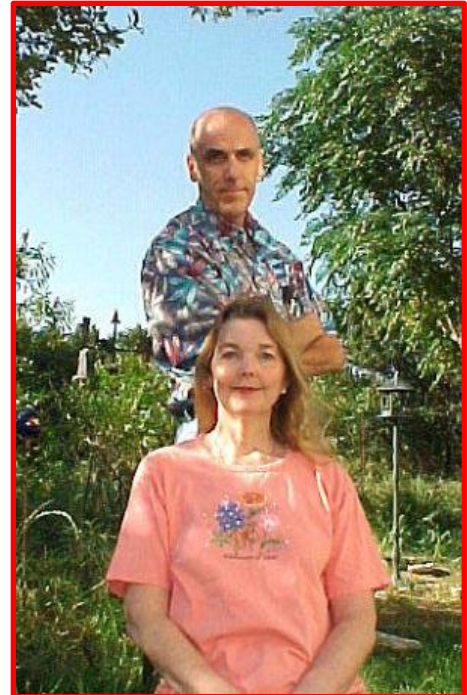
And, there were the birds. LOTS of different kinds of birds. This is one of the many dozens of Cardinals as well as many other species of birds who frequented our yard – both in the bird feeder and in the Abalone shells (all of which were my grandfathers).

The squirrel was always “in the mix” for bird seed. But, the Cardinals were the only ones to “take him on.” While most birds

fluttered away whenever the squirrel decided he wanted to “munch away” on bird seed, the Cardinals either let him be or shooed him off!

And, then there was the Road Runner. Yep. Just like in the cartoons, only this boy (we only ever saw one) was almost two feet tall and while they can run fast, they do fly. We came home one day and when I opened our bedroom blinds, there he was, dancing in front of our window ... he saw me and he jumped up and put his claws out at me! That scared the crap out of me ... but then he just flew away.





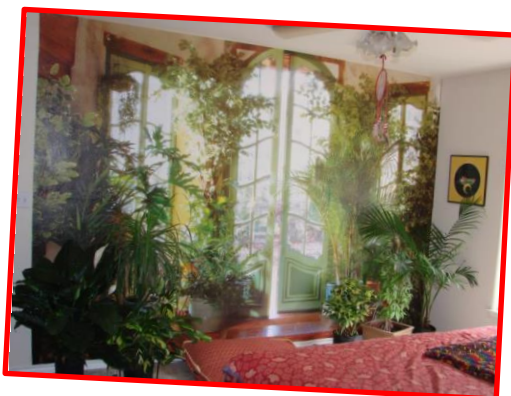
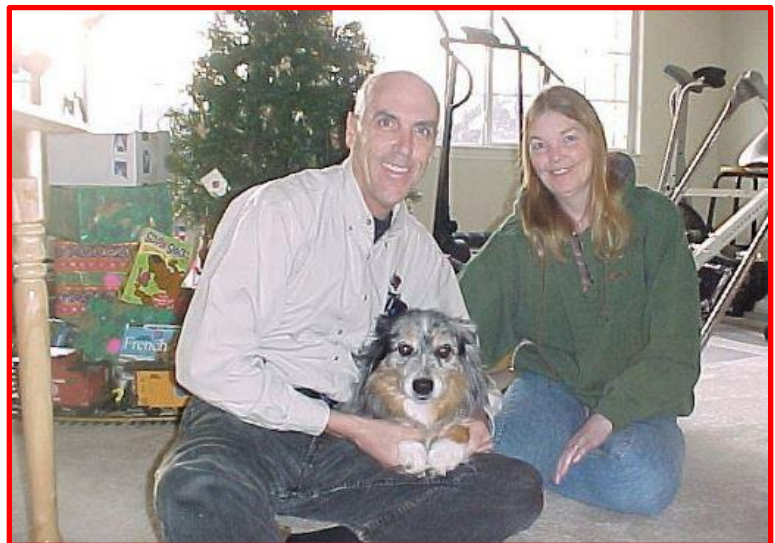
We took lots of photos in our backyard!

Some inside shots!

These are just a few of our favorite inside shots!

This photo to the right was our last Christmas with Trixie (2004). We had our tree upstairs in the big room where we had all of our exercise equipment!

These murals were in our bedroom and living room.

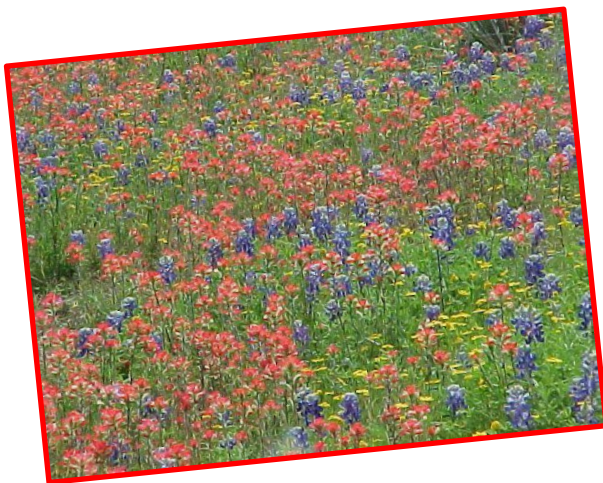


The Blue Bonnets

Each spring, some point in April, we would ride out to the Hill Country to see the wild flowers ... Blue Bonnets and Indian Paint Brush (which, having no roots, would attach themselves to the Blue Bonnets).



This was an annual tradition for us the entire decade we lived in Austin. And, we usually ended up in Llano at Cooper's Barbecue, where there was always a line to get in! It was family style place where your food was "plopped down" on butcher paper. No plates! We still have the set of steak knives we bought at Coopers!



Baseball ...

I can't tell you how many times we attended AAA baseball games at Dell Diamond while we lived in Austin. But, I can tell you we attended games several times a year the entire time. Tickets cost \$8 to \$10 and you could buy them online.



The only time we had a hard time getting tickets (the stadium held 14,000 people) was when Andy Petite was doing a "rehab" assignment there. This when he was pitching for the Astros (the Round Rock Express team was the Astro's AAA team).



Other things ...

There was Rudy's ... truly a Texas "experience." You could get anything from steak to breakfast tacos there ... all while "filling up" for gas! We went to Rudy's all the time as it was not far from our house. The food (and experience) was always great!



And, of course, Taco Cabana. That's one of the things I still miss most about Austin. No place, before or since, has come close to having such great Mexican food, especially the chicken soft tacos! Oh, yea, and I never did quite get used to a fast food joint offering alcohol! But, hey, it was all part of the experience!



The Oasis! Now here is a dining experience “perched on a cliff!” And, you could watch the sunset while enjoying a terrific meal. And, as the sun set, they would always ring a ship’s bell. Then everyone would applaud. You know, like the sun had just put on a show for us ... and the sunsets never failed to take your breath away! IT was always something you looked forward to ... just being at the Oasis. This is also where we had the chance to see Lady Bird Johnson one night when she was there. You just never knew who you were going to see there ... or just how fabulous of a meal you would have. They always outdid themselves – ALWAYS!



While it isn’t really “in Austin,” I simply must include this photo from Mardi Gras in New Orleans. Yep! Diana and I were THERE, in the heart of it all in early 2001. And, yes, we got a lot of the beads they threw from the floats (without Diana having to “show anything” ... she did get better beads than I got). We still have lots of those beads, too. We were there for four days. It was an amazing (*once is enough*) experience.



Thirty-One Days

It all started out with my crazy idea of, "Hey, for the 31 days of December, let's take a different picture every single day!" Actually, it was right around Thanksgiving, as I was thinking about how happy I was with my life. And, then it hit me that it would be interesting to just "shoot" every day, "ordinary" kinds of things in our life. That idea fermented in my mind and by the end of November, I talked Diana about it. She liked the idea, so we embarked on "Thirty-One Days" of photos ...

So here is what unfolded in our "Thirty-One Days" for all of December, 2003.

This first shot is taken in our living room, with our dog, Trixie. I was working on my laptop and thought, "Well, this is probably the best place to start our month long photo quest. I worked a lot on that laptop, though I had three more computers upstairs in my writing room.

I was also just beginning to work with using an older computer connected to our large screen TV. It was just a few months later that I would start working with NetFlix as a beta tester for their online streaming service! We were already no longer going to movie theaters because of NetFlix. I knew online movies would be BIG!



This is our kitchen dining area. To my right were the windows where we “watched the show” in the green belt behind our house ... on a daily basis. You can see our dog, Trixie, in the lower right corner (in her bed), ears perked as critters were coming in to eat the deer corn I had just tossed out ... as I did in the mornings and evenings.



While we both had computers upstairs, we “played around” on the computer while sitting on the couch in our living room. The living room, kitchen, and dining area were all one huge space with no dividing walls. It was very “comfy” layout!



Taco Cabanna. Ah, Taco Cabanna! We loved that place (and still miss it).



This is in our 2000 Diamond Edition Jimmy. We put in our order for it in the summer of 1999, while we still lived in California. We got it in January of 2000. There were only 500 of these "grill guard" models made!

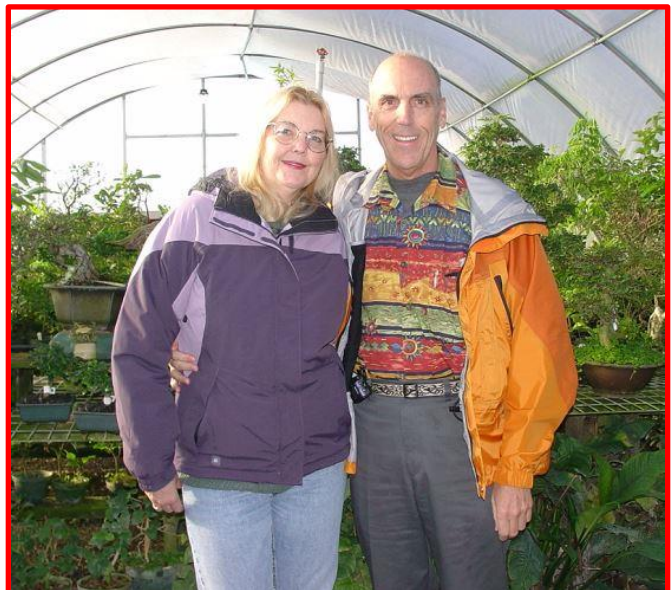
The little bear you see on the dashboard was our "Texas mascot" who was always "on guard" in that car!



Our Thirty-One Days project focused on “around the house” kinds of things to begin with ...



Then we “branched out” to places we were going to on a regular basis. This was taken at the place where we took Bonsai lessons. And, while the instructor was quite good, the Bonsai we created in the classes, they all pretty much died in a short period of time. Maybe it is just that we never got the “hang of it” for how you water the plants (in the kitchen sink!). We did get some cool things for our yard, which we still have!



A week into this photo project, it was already getting to be “interesting” (as well as annoying), because no matter where we were doing the photos, we had to set up the tripod, then arrange the “angle of the photo” and everything else, all while making sure things were the way we wanted them to be. And, it included “little things” like making sure the sun was in the right spot behind us. Lots of things you really wouldn’t think about until you do it!



We were always doing between the holidays/daze “mailings” ... we didn’t send out Christmas cards. So what we did was prepare things like letters or updates or “Adventure Mail” ... well, a whole of different “things” ... the point in all of this was that we didn’t want to “get lost” in the bulk of Christmas cards everyone gets, so we would get things ready for whatever it was we were doing. Then we would send them out the week between Christmas and New Year’s.





These were \$1,000,000 dollar bills we had created with a photo of us, with our Australian Shepherd, Trixie, in the "center photo."



This is a shot of the Longhorn Bull sculpture near where we lived which just happened to be on the actual, no-kidding, really ... Chisholm Trail – yes, that famed Chisholm Trail the wagon trains followed westward!



This was taken right near our most favorite Taco Cabana. You can see our 2000 Jimmy off to the right in the parking lot! And, again, I have to say that at this point in the Thirty-One Day project, it was really becoming a chore to get the tripod set up, get the right angle for the sun behind us ... oh, yea, and to be sure we used the "fill in" flash just right. For each shot, we took, on average, more than a dozen photos. It was great to have a digital camera, because we always knew when we got the shot just right!



Okay, so I had this idea of taking a photo of us in a mirror. But how do you actually do that? You know, so you don't have the camera (and the flash) getting in the way or in the middle of things to spoil the shot? It took several attempts (and I mean A LOT of attempts), but finally we got this one that actually came out pretty good. The odd looks on our faces are because of what we had to do to get this shot (but I'll never tell you just what that was that "did the trick!").



We actually got someone to "shoot us" for this photo. No tripod necessary. And, it was, indeed, a tasty meal in Austin!



No one does Christmas lights the way Johnson City does!



Every December we visited Johnson City, first having dinner at the Silver K restaurant ... and then "taking in" the lights! All 3+ million of them!

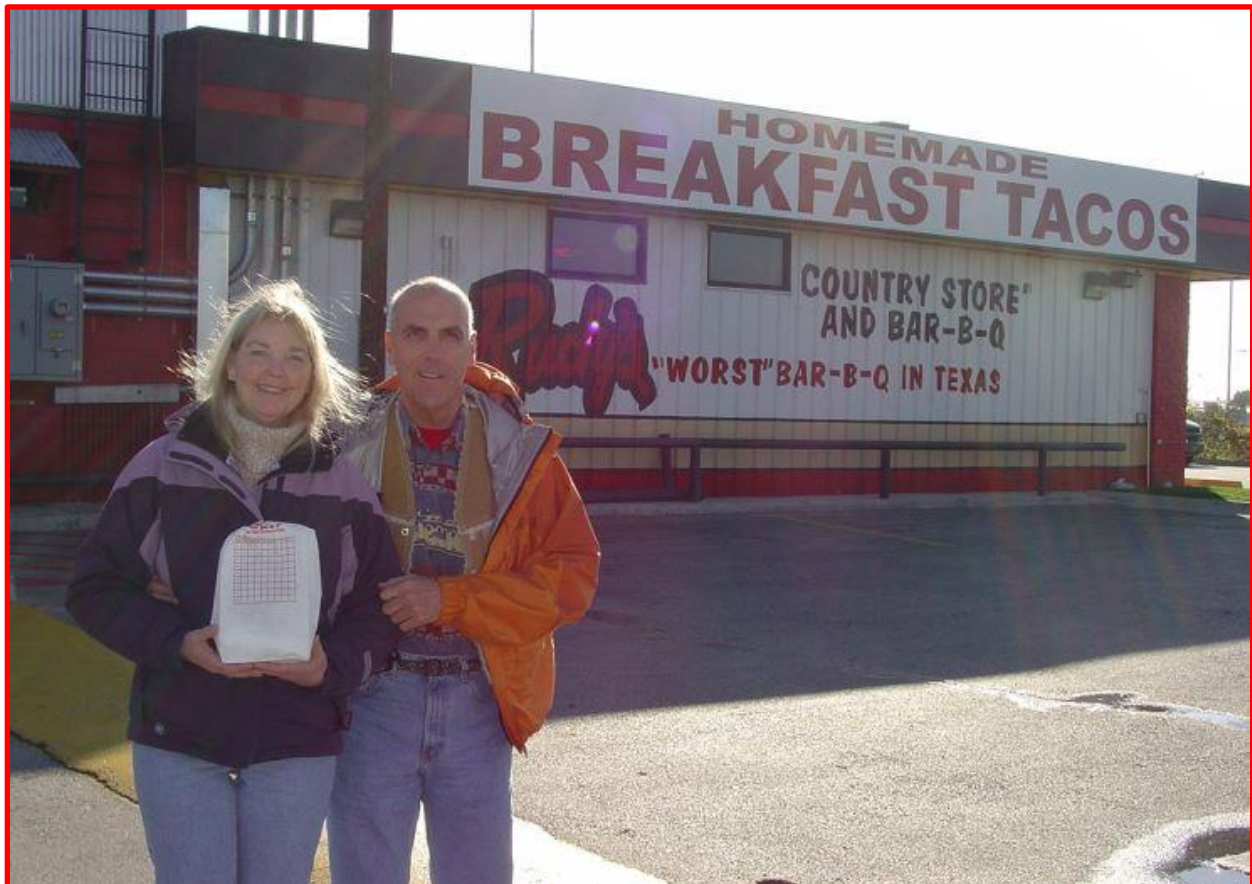


There is no way we could ever “account for” just how many Rudy’s breakfast tacos we had over the course of a decade in Austin. This particular Rudy’s was less than a mile from our house. Thus, a “perfectly good explanation” for why it was always so easy to grab something to eat there.

We not only had our fair share of breakfast tacos (man, they were so great!), we also had many lunches and dinners there. Meals were “served” on white butcher paper. No plates. And, “all the fixings” were great, too, as they had plenty of “sides” to order with your meals. And, it wasn’t just brisket they served. You could get all kinds of steaks, chicken, lamb (never tried that EVER), and a whole lot more.

Their main marketing slogan was the “worst Bar-B-Q in Texas!” Of course, it was just the opposite, because while Bar-B-Q joints were a dime a dozen in Austin (and so many other places in Texas), you just couldn’t beat Rudy’s for great food. It wasn’t cheap either, but it was well worth the “price of admission!”

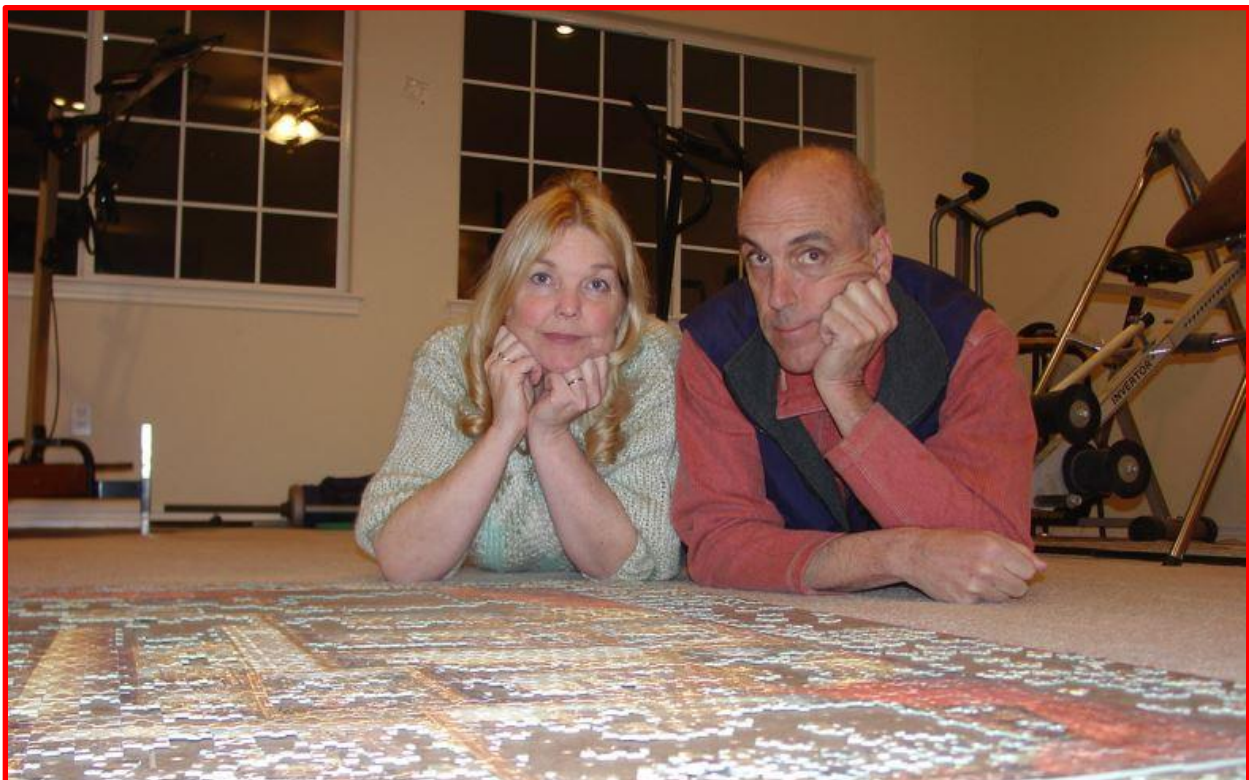
To this day, we still miss Rudy’s (along with Taco Cabana).





We had these crazy glasses that turned any lights into shimmering and glimmering "sights to see!" We mostly used these glasses during the holidays, but we "drug 'em out" every now and then!

And, of course, we have been always working on jig-saw puzzles, this one being our first 5,000 piece puzzle. 9,000 pieces is the biggest one we ever worked on – "The Garden of Earthly Delights" which is still in our living room.





This was one of the single most difficult photos to take for our Thirty-One Days project. Even having the timer delay on the “max” of ten seconds, it was still not easy to get in place while keeping Trixie from running off somewhere in the house. She thought we were playing a game!

Trixie was already going on 15 years old at this point. She was still sharp as a tack, though her hearing and eyesight were starting to fail her. She would go on to live another two years. Then Sparky and Sheba would enter our lives. Trixie was our first Australian Shepherd and she was definitely THE Frisbee dog, flying high in the air to snag those Frisbees ... and she was always “ready to go” whenever I got the Frisbee out!



I did a lot of writing on the laptop you see in this photo. But, for this shot, we put my 1928 Royal Typewriter (complete with beveled glass on the sides so you can see the "inner workings" of it), next to the laptop. Sort of a juxtaposition of two "word processors" ... one being from an age gone by, but one that still works perfectly fine! And, I still have that Royal Typewriter to this very day! I'm not sure what Trixie was doing in this photo, but we managed to work her into as many shots as we could!



So we were visiting the Texas State Capitol in Austin, as we did many, many times ... there was always something new to see. And, there were times when the legislators were in session (they didn't meet very often as Texas doesn't function like most other states), so when there were meetings, we would "sit in" to see how it all works ... of course, it never made any sense. And, to be honest, when has government made any sense?!

Diana said, "It's the state troopers!"

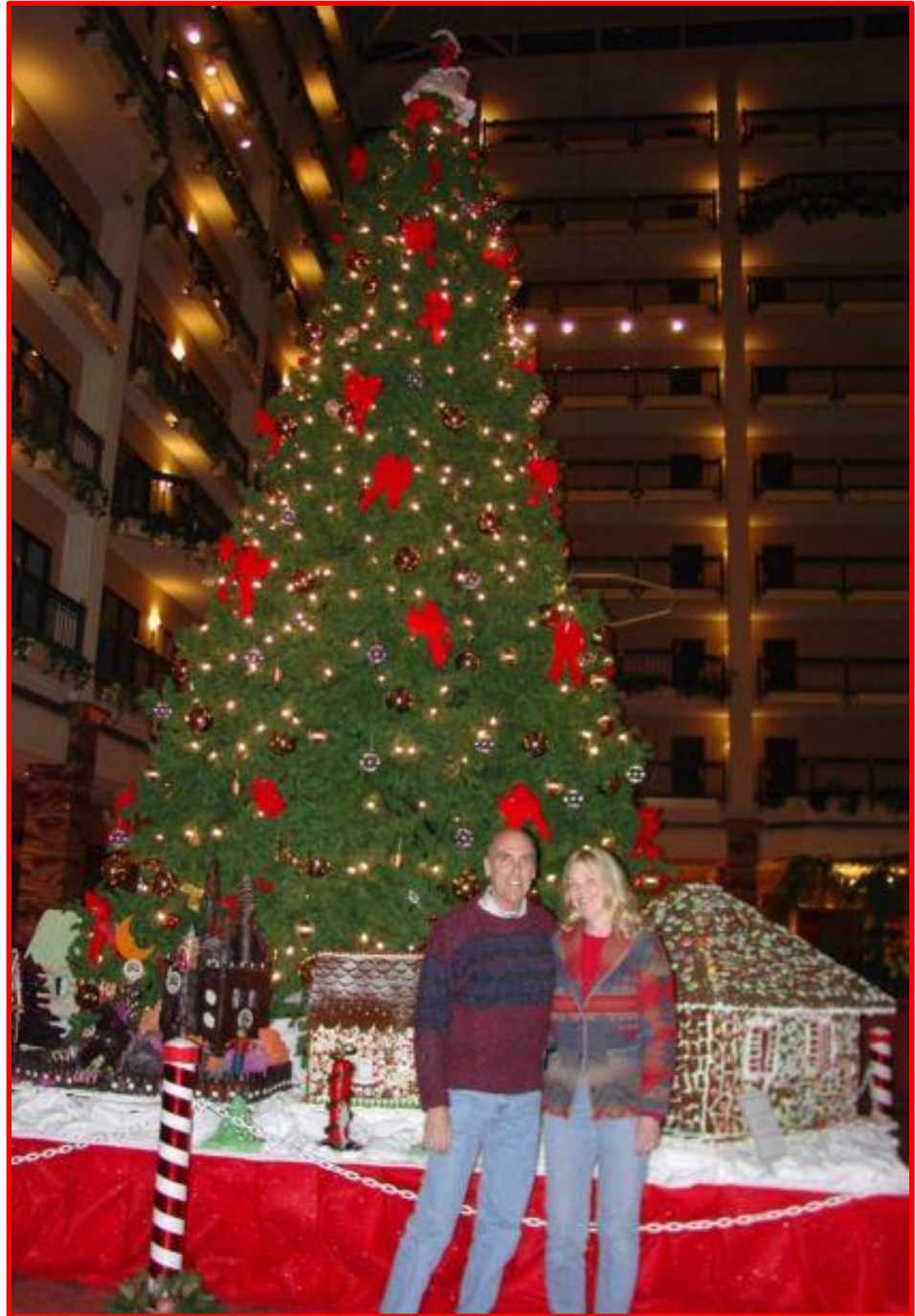


So it came to pass that Texas implemented "toll ways" for new highways. We had one of those stickers at the top center of our windshield ... and, once the new roadways were built, we did, in fact, start "paying our way" to drive around Austin. It made an incredible difference in the amount of time (MUCH LESS time) you spent "on the road" because traffic was always BAD (very bad) in Austin. What you see in this photo is what they were building right near our house!



December was the month for horse drawn carriage rides down Congress Avenue towards the state capitol building. We went for several such rides ... in Austin and also when we did our annual trek to Johnson City to see the lights!





This was taken at one of the hotels in the Arboretum area of Austin. Every year this hotel would have this amazing tree that was over ten stories tall! And, those are real gingerbread houses you see behind us!





Having dessert at the Iguana Grill.



After eating at the Oasis, one of our most favorite places to eat in Austin!

**And, that is
that for our Thirty-
One Days ...**



PhD Life Thesis? Maybe. Maybe not ...

You can decide for yourself whether or not this is too bold or audacious of a “move to make” on my part. I already most certainly have made up my mind about it ... or you wouldn’t be reading this.

As you have read in all of this, Diana is right in the middle of it all with me. When I write about my life, it really turns out to be a dissertation about Diana and me.



What I am most proud of in my life, when I stand back and take an objective look at things, it is that I am who I set out to be – a writer, “**telling the story**” in so many different ways about so many different things ... including, herein, ME.

My life is writing. Writing is my life.

Nothing more, nothing less.

My life has been the play of words, using familiar words, newly framed, in easy to understand, collected combinations, not as weapons, but, instead, to spark the intellect, pulling you through phrases and paragraphs as pages turn without even being noticed. If it is done right, when **words work**, you just get carried away on a soaring carpet through something far beyond your imaginativeness ... to a place so enjoyable to get “lost in” you just don’t want to ever leave the chromatic, illuminated sphere of words wrapped snugly, 360 degrees all around you and your intellect.

It’s called “readable writing” ... a craft you really have to work at to “string words together” in such a way and with a sense of purpose so as to seduce the reader into “following along.” Bernie Shepard first introduced me to “readable writing” when he told me I was already doing it! The built-in feature in Microsoft Word uses the Rudolf Flesch “readability formulas,” combined with the “Gunning Fog Index,” to help you write better, more concise sentences, avoiding three and four syllable words and passive sentences. I’ve introduced hundreds of people to readable writing and am so glad it is built right in to Microsoft Word. I like showing people how to get more out of Microsoft Word and Microsoft’s other Office products, including Outlook, and OneNote.

I knew I wanted to write from the time I was a little kid, scrawling with a pencil on a piece of paper, making lines, squiggles, and crude images. Something inside of me just clicked and I knew what my future would be.



My words honed into form and intent, pulsating with meaning and speaking in a fresh, soothing voice. The impact and effectiveness of what I write comes from making lifeless words leap right out from the page into your intellect as readable and understandable – in a crisp page layout. Though I do tend to “break the rules” a lot.



There is a revealing prismatic image clearly reflected from the monitor I sit in front of hour after hour each day. It captures what I do when I write and is best summed up as “**Light at the keyboard**” (which is the title of and sums up my play that you can find [HERE](#) as a bonus). It all emanates from the clicking keys on my trusty ergonomic keyboard, serving as a natural extension of my mind to release the play of words, which are then placed in a specifically sequenced order. The

computer takes care of the “mechanics” (formatting, headers, footers, lining things up, page numbering, and all of that), while I climb right through a direct passageway to the juxtaposition of your intellect and reason, where it all pleasantly explodes into a plethora of thoughts and ideas. You aren’t supposed to agree with everything I say. My entire point in anything I do is to inform as well as make you think about what you think you think. That’s intellectual stimulation ... the main ingredient in my existence!

My ultimate goal, beyond having something to say, is to wrap these words around your intellect, tucking them into the deliberative nature of all thoughts and notions. Look at it as me igniting and sparking your brainpower of which you have so much more than you ever imagined ... but it is all there ... you just have to mentally reach for it ... then start putting it to work so much more often than you have been!

The Tree of Life

We are all born in the shadow and unlimited potential of the great **Tree of Life**. Right from the beginning we are always looking upward to see where we want to go, what we might be able to find, what we can somehow learn, and what we want to do. It is how we find ourselves (even if we don’t know that’s what is really going on).

As soon as we can, each of us stands, wobbly at first, as we begin to reach for low hanging branches (and so much intellect) of the Tree of Life. We crawled before that, then quickly learned to walk to the wide trunk of this monstrous tree. Even though it takes a while to “get the hang of it,” sooner or later we all figure out a way to start climbing. Those who don’t even attempt to climb the Tree of Life are doomed to mediocrity and a blank life of maybe something close to averageness, anchored to the ground (with a sad, sinking feeling of “being safe” which is all an illusion or worse).



Along the way, as we climb up the Tree of Life, there are branches to rest on (some weaker than others). At times the growth is so thick it is impossible to see which way to go next (with sometimes “going sideways” being the best option to ultimately continue upward). Limbs break and there is a lot that can get in the way. Scratches, bumps, bruises, and even scars are all part of constantly climbing onward and upward, “reaching for the stars” at so many of the seemingly impossible points (which really aren’t).

There are those who find “comfortable spots” and just stop climbing the tree right there, never knowing what could be found further up or near the top. Others fall completely out of the tree, never to venture upwards again; worrying more about getting additional bumps and bruises, then to be mired in a life of “playing it safe.”

Though I’ve got plenty of “marks” (large and small) from the Tree of Life, I have managed to make it through the really tough spots. The key has been not backing off or down when things looked to be impossible. And, sure enough, there was always a way to continue up ... I just had to look really hard for each seemingly probable approach! Even at the points where I slipped or lost my footing and grasp, I managed to catch hold of a sturdy limb and right myself. Then I climbed right back up to where I was, more than ready to go on from there. I know for sure that what is up ahead for me (especially way, way, way up at the top) will be incredible. And, I’ll keep going, too!



As I look out from where I am in my Tree of Life over to where YOU are in your Tree of Life, I can see you looking back at me looking back at you. Though perils are ahead (some obvious, many not) and questionable, confusing, confounding obstacles are sure to get in the way (as they always do), I can see exactly where I want to go.

Can you see what’s ahead for you? And, will you keep going upward?



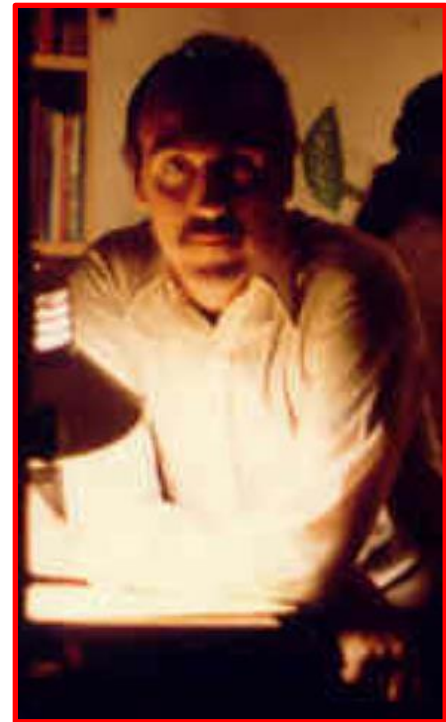
Keep moving and stay focused on being happy ...

Once you stop moving in life, it's over. To keep moving, you have to stay focused on exactly what it is you want to do and who you want to be. Forget what anyone else thinks about what you should do or be.

Just keep moving! Never stop moving forward!

All you need to do is constantly zero in on and at whatever it is – all of your dreams and hopes – that will make you happy. And, **keep moving!**

It isn't your job to make anyone else happy. Once you're happy, who you want to be, and doing what you want to do, things will function in a magnetic way. Those drawn to you for who you are will be the "right fit" in your life. Those magnetically repelled away from you, well, just look at that as self-correcting situations taking care of themselves (and, YOU). Thus, you won't have to be bothered with any people you otherwise wouldn't want in your life to "muck things up" anyway. They'll just drag you down and under!



That's what I am sure of about the Universe and how it works ... how I look at things and why I am living an enchanting, magical, fulfilling, and, most important of all, happy life!

And, I'm really just getting started.

The best is yet to come!

Next up is meeting the Dalai Lama, snagging a Pulitzer Prize, winning the Nobel Prize (hey! Hemmingway got both of them), perhaps "walking on the moon," meeting the President, of course ... to mention just some of things I'm looking forward to. I plan to keep helping and encouraging people, and, well, always working on "the play of words" ... more books and even my [one-man play](#), too. Oh, and I plan to ride in the Tour de France (which I have done a lot of already on my stationary "Tour de France" bike – 15,000+ miles so far!), but that might be part of the plan for so much that will be happening in the evolution my coming lifetimes (which it all goes without saying will be with Diana right by my side as she has been for this and so many previous lifetimes).



So what have YOU got planned?

You know, in terms of “**keep moving**,” and doing what it is you know you really want to do.

And, it really is that simple ...



Unplug And Really Connect!

From my book, "[It's the Universe!](#)" ... I want to share this with you ... and this is all about doing more with TIME.

Here are suggestions for moving forward, closer to who you really should be (and being much happier) in your life:



- **Get a notepad or a notebook** to carry around with you ALL THE TIME! You'll need a pen, too. Use that notepad or notebook to jot down ideas, notes, things to do, stuff you surely don't want to forget. DO NOT put this kind of information into your smartphone or computer. At least not initially. You need to "write things down." The act of actually writing something out, and thinking about it as you do it, will jumpstart your brain into thinking what you really think. Yes, putting this information into digital form at some point will most certainly take place. But the act of using a notepad or notebook on a regular basis, well, you can write in it, doodle in it, draw in it, scribble in it – any time day or night (and keep it by your bedside for those middle of the night flashes of brilliance you don't want to "just let go of"). Do anything you want with pen and paper. But, just try it for a few days and you'll quickly see this is an important thing for you to do. It's the Universe! And, you need to work your brain by hand-writing things out ... you'll see what I mean when you actually do it! It's the Universe!
- **Talk to people.** Really talk to them. If your phone rings while you are talking to someone, don't "break the link" by seeing who is calling. There is such a thing as voicemail you can check later. Interact with people by doing things with and for people. Texting and chatting online DOES NOT count here (remember, they are tools and only tools). The real world is NOT online. The real world is all around you, so get back more to living and participating in everything that is all around you (and inside of you)! It's the Universe!
- **Go for a walk!** It's the Universe! Moving is good, very good!



- **Exercise!** And, that means you have to sweat your arse off. Oh, and no TV watching or reading while doing so either. You can listen to music (the beat really helps keep your feet moving). It's the Universe!
- **Make people smile!** Do that by doing "little things" unexpectedly for people. Surprise people with spontaneous, fun things. Take someone to lunch or dinner ... or out for ice cream. Buy flowers for people to show them just how special they are (you won't believe the incredible impact flowers have on people). The more you do for other people, the more dopamine you will produce in a good way in your brain! It's the Universe!
- **Writer letters** – you know, with a pen, paper, envelope, and postage stamp? You will not only surprise people by doing this, but you'll then reconnect in an old fashioned, fun kind of way. And, too, you'll actually be writing out words on paper! It's an experience you'll enjoy ... and, you just might get a letter in return! Think of it. Something worthwhile in the mail! The Post Office isn't just for junk mail, NetFlix, and Amazon Sunday deliveries, ya know! It's the Universe!
- **Send cards** – this is similar to writing letters, but a little more special. Let someone you know you care. Even someone you live with or near. Send a special card and write a note inside ... date it, too. It will not only make that person's day, but, again, there will be something worthwhile in the mail for them ... and perhaps someone will then send you a card, too! It's the Universe!
- **Playing games** – board games, card games, puzzles, take up a new hobby like nurturing a Bonsai tree, or Origami, or any of a gazillion other fun things – whatever interests you. Just do something beyond spending time watching TV or "lost" on your computing device or smartphone. It's the Universe!

Sure, there are many other things you can (and should be) doing.

So ... do `em! The technology side of things will always and forever more "be there" when you need to use any of them as tools (but only as tools, NOT obsessions). But don't ever make technology a deep-rooted preoccupation in your life that gets a stranglehold on you and CONTROLS YOU.

The simplest way to look at it all is that when the electricity and/or battery power goes out, or you get separated from your electronical "toys," and there isn't anything "there" ... none of that "excessive" stuff will function (or matter). You'll be staring at blank screens. So take out your notepad and WRITE!

At such points, what do you really have?

YOU! YOU! And, YOU!



The beginning, middle, and ending ... it's all you and only you ... with every single ending really harkening a new beginning ... and it goes on and on just like that into infinity.

It's the Universe!

You know exactly what you want. And, while it might be something that you didn't know you knew (until now), NOW is the perfect time to do and be whatever happens to be what it is that you know you wanted do and be.

Really.

No kidding.

It ALL is that simple ...



Why, when, how, where, and what purpose this is ...

I needed to “have my say.” If you want to know who I am, it is all right here!

That’s what this PhD Life Thesis is all about ... it started out as what would become my annual birthday essay over two decades. Even in my [Playboy Interview](#) four decades ago, though I didn’t know it at the time, I actually started what would become all of this - my life and how I look at things – then and now. All of it, it’s all what I have to say about being happy with my life ... and who I am.

My whole life, I’ve never felt like I “fit in.” Not with my family and especially not with the multitude of relatives I got “stuck with” (including the “inherited” ones). Not with “friends” (who really weren’t) at school and those I met “along the way.” It is a very strong feeling of lastingness that I must have gotten off at the wrong planet. My grandfather, my mother, and Diana, those are the ones who were (and are) always there for me, no matter what. My grandfather, Frank, was wise, so wise and smart. He taught me so much about being my own person. My mother encouraged me to be me. And, with Diana, it is just so effortless for us to be together, her being who she is and me being me. So many of the people I’ve looked at as friends, well, to be blunt, they really weren’t. They all fell into the category of so many people I’ve met and known, in that they are “there for you” but only when it is convenient for them. So many of what I believed to be “friendships” came down to simply this: What could I do for them? I don’t resent that. I just know that people are people and they are going to do what they are going to do. So I always, always, ALWAYS have had my guard up.

I know I look at things differently, more realistically than most people. Even as a kid, the questions I asked irritated so many people, including my parents, because I was told so often that “kids shouldn’t be asking such questions!” But it was just that so many “things in life” didn’t make sense or seemed wrong and convoluted, as if purposely set up with such confusing complexity and illogic that the deck always seemed “stacked against me.” But I always “pushed onward” HARD, was dedicated to accomplishing so many things (that I successfully accomplished), despite lack of encouragement and people betting, as well as working, against me.

When I came upon the word “existentialism” early on in life, I felt that was exactly what the “issue” was. Then, happily, I discovered the ZEN outlook in life. That’s when I turned everything over to the Universe, trusted the Universe, and became part of how the Universe functions effortlessly and mysteriously. And,



ultimately it all “added up” in my book “[It’s the Universe! Notations & Cyphers](#),” that says it all.

Once I “tapped in” as well as “tuned in” to the Universe, everything changed. People are people and they are continually going to do the good and bad (more often than not, bad) things they do. That’s just the way people are. It all comes down to YOU. YOU being YOU. And, that is what I always have been and still am – me for me to be the me I knew I should be. I’ve not been close too many people, because, well, I just don’t trust people. And, I refuse to let people let me down. I have always had the truth on my side, because that’s really all you have, beyond illusions, myths, fallacies, false impressions (which people are so very good at portraying, holding up masks, hiding behind the facades they want you to so badly see and believe), delusions, deceptions, and, worst of all, lies (which are the fabric of so many people’s lives).

A life of writing has been my salvation. *Words to phrases, paragraphs to pages.* I first wrote that so very LONG AGO in high school (even before I knew the powerful impact of it) and have never found anything else that “sums it all up” more perfectly for me as to just who I am ... who I really am and always will be.

When Diana came into my life, for which I am so thankful (though I know the Universe made it all happen for both of us for form a perfect juxtaposition of lives), and being with her ever since, ah, well, that’s the sweetest part of my life – this life, past lives, and all the lives to come ... it will always, forever more, be me and Diana! It’s just that simple ... and beautiful!

It’s the Universe!



My Original Birthday Essay - 1997

As I have mentioned at different points in this PhD Life Thesis, it all started out as a birthday essay for my 50th birthday.

Then, in the May/June timeframe of 2016, I was starting to update my birthday essay, as I had done so many times over the past twenty years. It quickly became obvious I wasn't going to have it done – all written - for my birthday in 2016.

But, then, it hit me like a bolt of lightning ... why was I rushing to put a whole new slant on what I was writing. Because, unlike previous years, I was doing this newest revision of my birthday essay in a much different way. All along, my birthday essays were me putting things into perspective for my life. Only this time, I was doing more than that. I was "putting down on paper" how I felt about a wide variety of things. Plus, I was adding in photos that just seemed to fit in.

Then I realized that what I was now writing (or rewriting, using much of the same material and wording as in previous revisions) was and is my **life thesis**. The more I thought about it, it occurred to me that this is like putting together a PhD ... one for "living life," not the typical "institutional effort." So whether it is egotistical or delusional ... or, maybe, just maybe, a stroke of genius ... I then decided to title this "***My PhD Life Thesis ... Penning My Life.***"

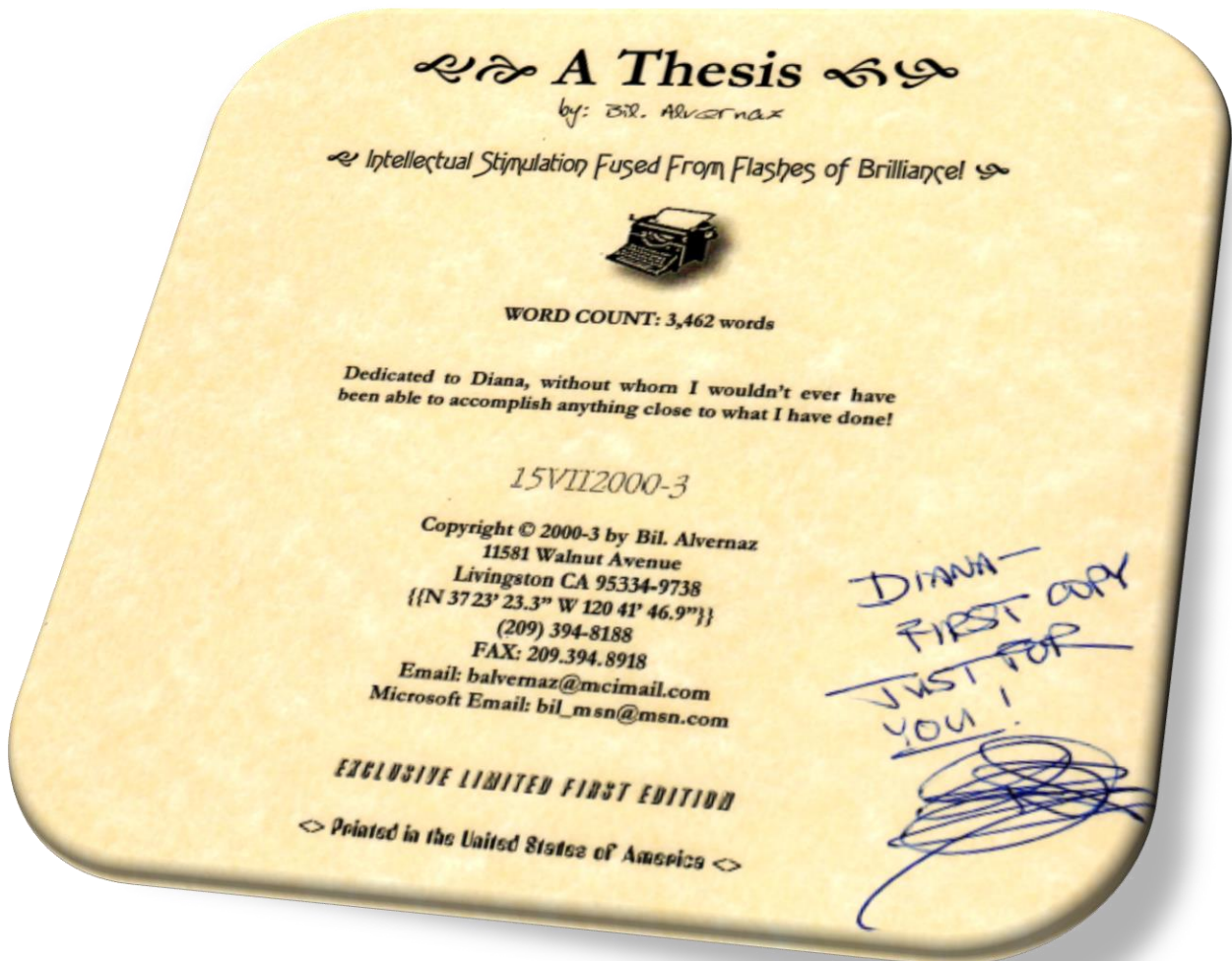
So here we are.

As I was putting everything together, writing, updating, unearthing so much of what I had written over the years, I came across my journal from my high school Journalism class. I found another journal I had started in Spain. And, it completely astounded me that I found a printed copy of my first birthday essay – the very first printed copy I had given to Diana, complete with my handwritten note to her.

So what follows here is that copy of my first birthday essay. I just figured that since I've included my [Playboy Interview](#) that never was (but certainly, not that I knew it at the time, was the beginning of all of this "putting my life into perspective"). It's uncanny, that somehow, over the years, while so many other things get lost in time, I was able to find and "pull together" all of what is including in this PhD Life Thesis. And, that includes finding boxes of stuff my mother had kept – things she had always intended to "put together" in a book or somehow for me. You can read about that in [Dorothy's Treasure Chest](#). So much of what my mom had kept about my life was like finding a time capsule. I'm so glad she kept all of that. And, like so much of everything else in all of what you are reading here, **this is my life!**



Let's get on with it ... here is my original birthday essay from 1997 ...
(that I started working on and writing in 1994)



If Isn't Was, Maybe Would Be!

Or so it would seem ...

By: Bil. Alvernaz

The millennium always seemed to be way out there, far off in that convenient place we all stuff too many things ... the future.

That's why I wasn't too surprised by the reaction I got in 2000-10 when I started writing the year as a millennium countdown. People seemed uninterested about the turn of the century and a new "thousand year period." As with most milestones, people chose not to think about them until the last minute, only to be seized by thought-provoking anguish, seductively dressed up in potentially debilitating panic.

Birthdays and other annual "events" are notorious for doing this. You "take stock," usually beating yourself up over what you have done, what you should be doing, disappointments, missed opportunities, expectations, compromises, deceptions, insincerity, and things you wish you could change (or hadn't ever done).

It's no wonder we feel something is missing at times. We've all become numbed by the mundane, redundant normalcy of day to day life that has muffled our senses.

Except for rare instances of serendipitous, lucid reasoning, it is easy to be overwhelmed by an entangling panorama of distractions, distortions, and nonsense. It has all become accepted as "a part of life" and tolerated without so much as a second thought or an acquiescent whimper.

And, as time keeps slipping through our fingers like grains of sand, each of us etches out an individual existence on the fragile slate of life where there is never enough time or money (both of which we waste a lot of)!

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Because time zips by us, milestones are logical "stopping off points" to take closer looks at where we are, with the focus usually centered on how we got sidetracked or lost along the way.

While there have been times when my individuality has been a casualty of that school of thought, most of the time my perception has been carefully aimed on life's grid beyond self limitations toward the boundless capabilities of the mind and vision.

I've noticed that a lot of people have overlooked, ignored, or completely forgotten that each of us has the ability to "alter our perception." It all has to do with perspective – how you choose to look (or not look) at what you think you see. So much of what we let get to us (and what we worry about the most) is nothing more than the residue of negative thoughts and wasted mental energy, like a battery being drained for no good reason.

My life has ranged from quite ordinary to exceptionally extraordinary, with flashes of brilliance and fits of stupidity sprinkled amidst the headaches and heartaches of having to live with so much of the superfluous after the newness wears off. I know my perspective is what has made a remarkable difference in the quality and uniqueness of my life.

With the approach of the millennium and my diurnal odometer "rolling over" to day number 00225, I thought a lot more about my life. I look at turning 50 as quite an accomplishment in and of itself. As I zoom towards the millennium, I can honestly say I am extremely pleased with my life and how interesting it has been. I look at it all - who I am, what I have done, where I am, where I am headed, what I know, what I have learned, how I have helped people, and how people have helped me - and I just smile, knowing I have lived my life on my own terms and without regrets.

I don't claim to have all the answers, but I do know chance, fate, Lady Luck, and destiny all played a part in me having been in a lot of the right places at the right times. That combined with riding a white horse called Reason and following logical headings on compassion's compass caused the pieces of my life to fall into place.

Life, though it can be harsh, unpredictable, and distracting, is completely free form. Each of us chooses to (or not to) make it complicated and confusing. It just



all depends on perspective and attitude. You can't take anything personal either. Stuff happens. Take things one step at a time and then go on from there, knowing you have to be flexible, ever adapting, quick to change, and able to laugh at yourself (a lot)!

The true quality of life is measured in all of the "little things." Those moments of being with someone, making a person smile, being with your favorite animal pal, watching, observing, discovering, creating, doing, and absorbing all you can into the intellect. People and personalities will come and go. Kids will grow up (even if they promise not to). This life we live is transitory and the "good stuff" is really right there in front of us. All we have to do is look around and reach out for it. That's where a razor sharp perspective comes in so handy.

Being aware of, watching for, and grabbing hold of all those special moments is what makes life so rich. Of the 1.57 billion seconds in my life, I feel wonderful about having defined who I am by making the most of so many precious moments that might otherwise have been lost. I simply took the time to participate in what was happening right in front of me. All of those "little things" have added up to the totality of my life.

The real essence of life, holding everything together, is intellectual stimulation – those circumstances and situations that spark cerebral passion, putting the true luster in life and making whatever we accomplish shimmer, shine, and sparkle. The gold key to it all is YOU. Before you ever get to philosophy, religion, politics, sex, money, fame, personalities, aspiration, guilt, and/or coping with the "good intentions" of manipulative relatives, you need to take care of and, more importantly, be nice to yourself.

Your mind, your health, who you are, what you want, what you like, where you want to go and what you want to do – those, all rolled up together, must be given first consideration. Everything else is secondary.

The individual is a multifaceted prism through which all the vivid colors of life are formed by the refracted light of inspiration, brilliance, and harmony. There are varying degrees to which this happens and it all has to do with how "finely tuned" the individual's perspective is. And, while there are those who would dismiss the importance of exercising and fitness, I know that my life



has been on a much higher level because of my personal commitment to the all-purpose Elixir in life - exercising and staying fit.

Through all of the episodes, eras, and transitions that create the fabric of your life, it is absolutely essential that you not only like yourself, but also that you sincerely believe in yourself and all that you can and will accomplish. The opportunities and apprehension that come with change and the associated decisions must be tempered with reason, foresight, and, most important of all, common sense.

Over the course of more than 430,000 hours, I've learned being patient is definitely worth all of the waiting. You get exactly what you want that way (most of the time). When things don't work out you can't ever let bitterness seep into those areas where disappointments should be saturated with optimism and looking ahead. Sure, you need to look closely at why certain things didn't work out or fall into place as you saw them in your mind. However, instead of looking for someone to blame, take a deep breath, see what you can do about "fixing things" and then just move on.

But therein lies a fundamental problem in life. A real big problem! Being afraid to "give it try." Most of the time it isn't even a question of failing or succeeding. It all comes back to a person not so much as even making the attempt. Why? It all has to do with that old companion who stalks us all - fear! And, that of course, brings up the whole issue of risk.

You can't live life without risks - taking them or passing on the entanglements associated with them. Taking a risk and having things work out is absolutely, intoxicatingly wonderful. Of course, there is a downside to risk. That is the gamble and where the excitement comes into play. The rush from beating the odds and "winning" (whatever it is you are risking) is waaaaaaaay "up 'der" on life's meter of very cool things.

Risk's downside is "losing." We all know that. The smiles are broad and toothy when we win, but the brow is so furrowed when we don't. I have taken my share of risks - both large and small - and have experienced the resulting "ups and downs." I would rather live with the consequences of whatever happens from having taken risks, than not to have given it all my best shot!



Not "beating" a risk or things not having worked out is where all of the second guessing and so many of those unanswerable questions enter the picture. While asking questions is important in life, you just can't interrogate yourself with questions like "Is this it, the rest of my life?" "What am I really supposed to be accomplishing here?" "Why is it such a struggle just to survive and make ends meet?"

Questioning life is most often rooted in change that rides, crowded in tandem, with fear and death. Fear (real or imagined) makes us all do unusual things. Death, while it is always peering out at us from our own inseparable shadows, is something none of us can quite get a handle on. We do know we have to accept it, but most of the time, as with milestones, we just choose not to think about it. Change can have the aura of death, because it is permanent and has its own distinguishable bite. Fear can reek like death, because the unknown nature of it has the capacity to consume us. Change, fear, and death are the wildcards in life.

You can do all the planning you want, but life has so many 2x4s waiting to blindside you, in between all of the curve balls that can really SMACK you (if you aren't paying attention in the batter's box), that your world can easily crumble down around you (especially when you least expect it). Life is really about making it all up as you go along and simply doing the best you can to build upon what you do have to work with at any given time. Pacing yourself is critical, because the "moth to the flame" syndrome is always waiting to entangle each of us in the big net of obsession.

The drama of life is made up of people. I admit to wondering at times if I got off at the wrong planet. For the most part, my life has been peopled with an amazing variety of individuals, many who make my life special, some who made major differences, some whose impact was minor or forgettable, and those who I would otherwise dismiss as fitting into the category of "they just don't get it." People are the substance of moments you live which then become the memories you relive. However the mechanism works, the brain is always taking "snapshots." We have no control over this and there is no way to tell which images and experiences will be engraved for recollection and retrospection.



Five individuals have profoundly impacted on my life.

Mrs. Pollack – always smiling and the first person to really ever push me as a writer in my high school journalism classes.

Philip Roth – whose books and brilliance showed me the pure joy of writing ... reading.

Herb Caen – who, famous as he was, always took the time to encourage me.

Bernie Shepard – one of the kindest people I've ever met, as a journalist and friend he played the biggest role in shaping me as a writer.

Edward Asner – at a time when "Lou Grant" was the #1 show on TV, his support and him being my "biggest fan" motivated and inspired me.

The moments and memories are what overflow from a treasure chest in my mind. If I had to pick the single best moment of my life, well, I honestly don't feel it has happened yet. Actually, I'm just getting "warmed up" so to speak! There are some incredibly amazing highlights in my life though. Here are just some of them:

- ✓ Meeting President Reagan (1:37 p.m. 8/23/83). At the moment you shake the President's hand you can actually feel your heart beating.
- ✓ Marrying Diana in Buitrago del Lozoya, Spain (60 KM north of Madrid) 7/11/70, and all of the amazing things we have gone on to do together as a team.
- ✓ The moment I first heard Ian (6:28 a.m., 5/23/76) and then so many moments as he has lived his life.
- ✓ Trixie, a wonderful creature who brightens my life and is much smarter than a lot of people. (July 1989)
- ✓ BA Degree Journalism (1/24/74) and then graduate studies in electronic communications.
- ✓ Being listed in Who's Who in the Media and Communications 1998-1999 Edition. (Summer 1997)
- ✓ Reaching the top of Half Dome with Ian (1:37 p.m., 8/5/95). The toughest feat I've ever pulled off.
- ✓ Living in Madrid, Spain (7/69 to 1/71).
- ✓ The entire 36-hour marathon of watching man go to, land, and walk on the moon (7/21/69).
- ✓ Getting an IBM PC and all of the new worlds it opened up for me (August 1992).
- ✓ Getting a Windows CE hand held computer (6/5/97).
- ✓ Working on the Microsoft Windows95 team (1995/96)



- ✓ Being at "ground zero" on the Microsoft Campus for the launch of Windows95 and doing the cyberspace interview with Jay Leno (8/24/95).
- ✓ Running the Windows95 Forum on MSN (1995/97).
- ✓ Getting a Marina Blue Corvette Stingray (1/13/67) and still owning it after 30 years!
- ✓ A Mont Blanc Meisterstuck Edition "Hemmingway" signature pen #AM9599/1.0 (birthday present from Diana, July 1994) – best pen to write with.
- ✓ Silver letter opener (birthday present from LaMott Fisher, July 1984) for, as he put it, "Author! Author!"
- ✓ Royal typewriter (birthday present from Tom, July 1996) – classic model.
- ✓ Teaching myself to type (March 1959) and knowing how important this skill would be in my life.
- ✓ Publishing my first book, "Expanding Your IBM PC," foreword by Peter Norton – Brady Books (1984).
- ✓ Writing for USA Today (1984).
- ✓ Writing for United Feature Syndicate (1979).
- ✓ Writing for PC Magazine (1982 to 1985).
- ✓ Nationally syndicated newspaper column helping people do more with computers (1983 to 1985).
- ✓ Mastering desktop publishing (DTP) to enhance the writing process – *presentation is everything*.
- ✓ Putting together the 25th Wedding Anniversary salute for Diana (7/11/95).
- ✓ That morning, just before dawn, leaving home to join the Air Force, knowing I was on my own. (7/19/67).
- ✓ Being sworn in the Air Force (9:22 a.m., 7/20/67).
- ✓ The honor and privilege to serve my country for three years, five months, and 21 days in the Air Force.
- ✓ Coming so close to being appointed to the White Honor Guard (August 1968).
- ✓ Court reporting school at the Naval Justice Academy, Newport, RI (early 1969), and graduating #2 in the class, despite having two broken fingers.
- ✓ Seeing Diana step off the plane when she arrived in Spain (5/5/70).
- ✓ That first time walking on to the set of Lou Grant to see Edward Asner (Mar 1979) and all of the times after that going with Diana and Ian to see him.
- ✓ Hawaii – the only place on earth to spend vacations (July 1983, 1988, and 1989).
- ✓ Para-sailing with Diana and Ian in Hawaii (Jul 88).



- ✓ The rainy afternoon Ian first discovered the ocean (our ruined shoes were worth it!) (Nov 78).
- ✓ Arranging for Santa to "drop by to see Ian" just before Christmas. (12/18/80).
- ✓ Getting the 1996 GMC Jimmy (11/16/95).
- ✓ Picking up Ian's Blazer (7/06/96).
- ✓ Meeting and getting to know Peter Norton (1982).
- ✓ Helping Mike Chipman build TurboTax into the #1 tax software program (1987 to 1992).
- ✓ The Microsoft-Timex Datalink Watch, how useful it is to have phone numbers on your wrist (August 1995).
- ✓ Getting a Spyderco pocketknife (April 1997).
- ✓ The Canon Elph camera and the truly amazing images it captures on APS film (Christmas 1996).
- ✓ Watching the New York Yankees play ball – any time.
- ✓ The Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, NY.
- ✓ Helping my mom "let go" and writing her farewell tribute (July/Aug 1994).
- ✓ Building Ian's rocking horse (Jewelbelly) for his 4th birthday (Mar-May 1980)
- ✓ Building Ian's tree house (Spring 1988).
- ✓ Building our grandfather clock (Nov 1974).
- ✓ Researching, writing, and publishing our family history, Windmill Perspective (Jan 74 to Aug 76).
- ✓ Designing and creating "Sunset Falls" and the whole new courtyard (June 1997).
- ✓ The David Letterman Show – he makes me laugh.
- ✓ Producing and hosting radio/TV shows in Monterey County (1979 to 1980).
- ✓ Participating in Bioenergy Nutrients infomercial, filmed in Utah (Jan 1997).
- ✓ Testimonial in Bioenergy Nutrients catalog, complete with a photo with Trixie (Spring 1997).
- ✓ Orthoscopic knee surgery (Dec 1984).
- ✓ Playing tennis ... any time, any place.
- ✓ Origami and how it has touched so many lives (especially the dollar bill folds).
- ✓ Carving wood and wood working – pure creative joy.
- ✓ Building Ian's wooden train set (December 1976) and adding to it for ten Christmases.
- ✓ The amazement of making writing pens, Xacto knives, magnifying glasses and so much more out of wood.
- ✓ Combining the significance of vitamins and herbs with eating smart and daily workouts (body fat = 12.6%,



cholesterol count = 112 ... 6/1/92 to 6/22/94 – a 752-day string of continuous workouts).

✓ The magic of learning to juggle (Christmas 1980).

What I most proud of is I am who I set out to be – a writer. Nothing more, nothing less. My life has been the play of words, collected combinations of words used not as weapons, but, instead, to spark the intellect, pulling you through phrases and paragraphs as pages turn without even being noticed. If it is done right, when *words work* you just get carried away on a flying carpet through something far beyond your imaginativeness ... a place so enjoyable to get lost in you just don't want to ever leave the chromatic sphere of words wrapped snugly all around you.

I knew I wanted to write from the time I was three years old, scrawling with a pencil on a piece of paper, making lines and squiggles. Something inside of me just clicked and I knew what my future would be.

The words I write are honed into form and intent, breathing with meaning and speaking in a fresh voice. The impact and effectiveness of what I write comes from making lifeless words leap out from the page as readable and understandable – in a crisp page layout.

There is a revealing prismatic image clearly reflected from the monitor I sit in front of hour after hour each day. It captures what I do when I write and is best summed up as "Light at the keyboard." It all emanates from the clicking keys, serving as a natural extension of my mind to release the play of words, which are then carefully placed upon each page. The computer takes care of the "mechanics" while I climb right through a direct passageway to where your intellect and reason intersect.

Looking out from behind the intent of these words I can see your determined eyes piercing back at me with such a degree of interest and intensity that this very page could easily burst into flames at any moment. A lingering fixation there from beneath your furrowed brow would have much the same effect as a magnifying glass, with its carefully focused beam of blinding, bright, white sunlight, igniting a piece of paper.

My ultimate goal, beyond having something to say, is to wrap these words around your intellect, tucking them into the deliberative nature of all thoughts and notions.



We are all born in the shadow of the great tree of life. Right from the beginning we are always looking upward to see where we want to go and what we want to do.

As soon as we can, each of us stands and begins to reach for low hanging branches. We crawl and then walk to the wide trunk of this great tree. It takes awhile to get the hang of it, but sooner or later we all figure out a way to start climbing. Along the way, there are branches to rest on (some weaker than others). At times the growth is so thick it is impossible to see which way to go next. Limbs break and there is a lot that can get in the way.

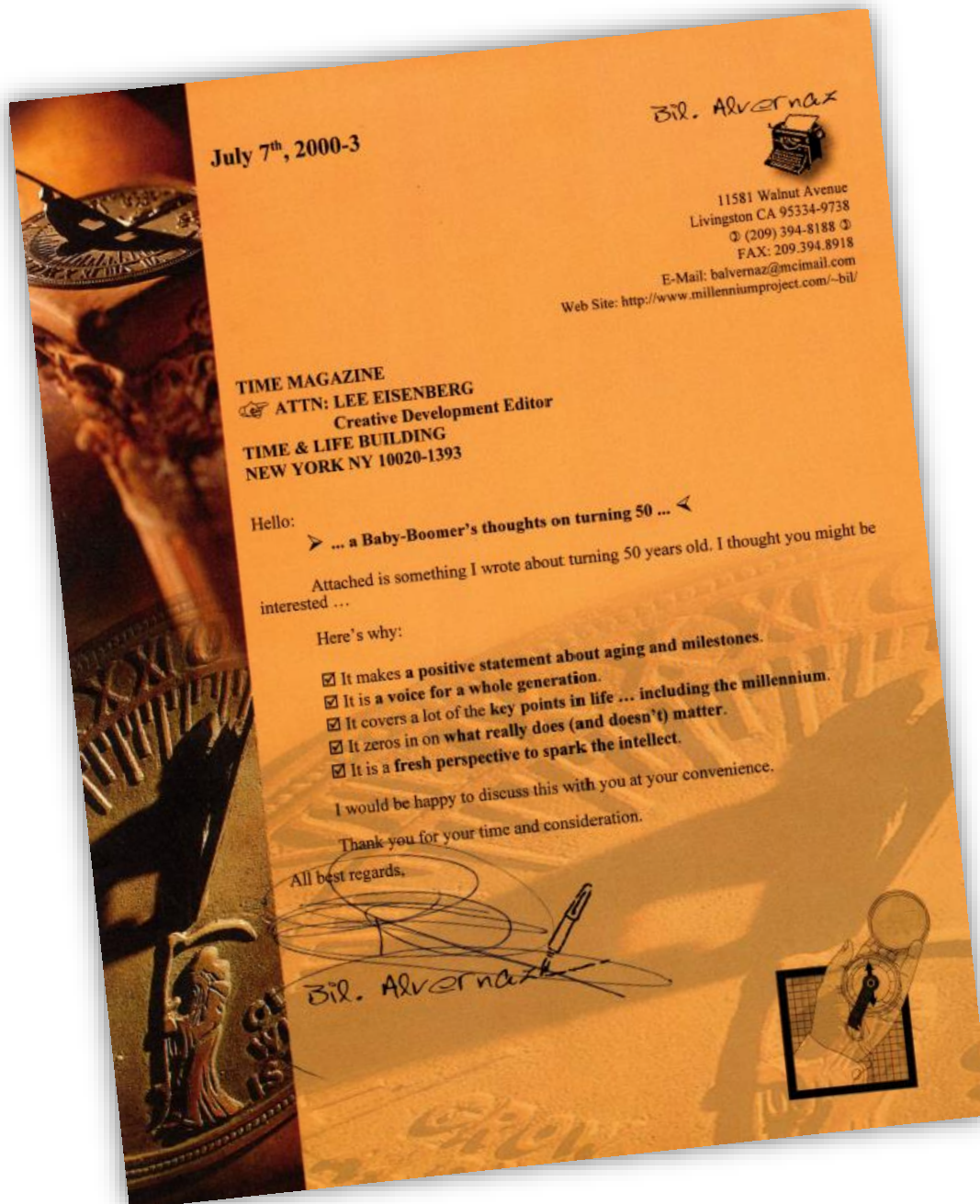
There are those who find comfortable spots and just stop climbing the tree, never knowing what could be found further up or near the top. Others fall completely out of the tree, never to venture upwards again, worrying more about getting additional bumps and bruises.

Though I've got the plenty of "marks" from the tree of life, I managed to make it through the really tough spots so far. The key has been in not backing down when things looked to be impossible. And, sure enough, there was always a way to continue ... I just had to look real hard for it! Even at the points I fell, I managed to catch hold of a sturdy limb and right myself. Then I climbed back up to where I was, more than ready to go on from there ... I know that what is up ahead (especially way up at the top) will be incredible.

As I look out from where I am in my tree of life over to where YOU are in your tree of life, I can see you looking back at me looking back at you. Though perils are ahead (some obvious, many not) and questionable obstacles are sure to get in the way, I can see exactly where I want to go. Can you see what's next for you?



And, this is my cover letter for my birthday essay that I sent out to several magazines, newspapers, and other publications that year, timed to publishing this piece of work ... but I never heard a word back from anyone. But, hey, that's okay ... I did all of this for ME and only me. Yes, I thought it was (and still is, even more so) a news worthy story/article/feature. Still, above all else, I'm proud of who I am, all that I have done (including, now, this PhD Life Thesis), and of all the things yet to come!



Journals ... the beginning of it all ...

I started writing at a very early age. My earliest recollection of getting recognition for my writing was in the fourth grade, Mr. Rose's class. He told me that I should seriously consider becoming a writer, because I had "such a flair with words."

I always loved writing "reports" for class assignments, as well as all the stories I wrote. The good news is that my mom kept everything I ever wrote in school. The "bad news" is that even though I have box fulls of stuff from my mom, the particular boxes with "certain things" seem to be missing. When my mom died (July 29th, 1995), I was able to intercede when my dad was moronically about to throw out so much of my mom's stuff, including items I brought back from Spain for my mom. So I took and have kept boxes of my mom's stuff (probably not all of them). Now, going through it all was like finding a time capsule. Like so many other "past things of life," they now permanently reside in the "archives" of boxes ... with some stuff "ending up" herein!

Luckily, I was able to unearth my journal from my junior year of high school, Mrs. Pollock's Journalism Class, 5th period, every day. She had all of us in the class keep a daily journal. I loved it and have included herein the cover (front and back) as well as a few snippets of my entries complete with her comments ... including one of her comments where she said I should one day be a columnist, which, indeed, I did become at several different points, as well as managing web content on a daily basis that you could easily say is the same as being a columnist ... and, of course, there is alvernaz.com, my personal web site, where I have running commentaries and a whole lot more (for over two decades, from the beginning of the Internet). Mrs. Pollack "nailed it" about what I would go on to do – just one of the many things I would do.

I also came across (in that high school journal) the "records" I kept when I was teaching Diana to drive in 1966. And, I also have the beginning pages of what was to become my journal that I started keeping in Madrid, Spain, not long after the first U.S. moon landing in July of 1969. I kept a daily journal in the mid to late 1970s, but those are all "buried" in boxes in the garage, too. I still have them, for whatever reason(s).

So, I'm including some journal entries and "writings" here in this section. They add to the overall feel of this PhD Life Thesis ... which all started with the publication of my first 10-page birthday essay for and on my 50th in July of 1997. Well, and, the [Playboy Interview](#) that never was ... that's an important piece of this puzzle, even though at the time I created it, I had no idea it would ever "materialize" to be such an important part (and measure) of this PhD Life Thesis.



Journalism – 5th Period ... my high school journal

<Copyright © 1964 by Bil. Alvernaz>

High school was the turning point for me that “opened the door(s)” for what I wanted to do with my life. I had always had a passion for writing, but, up to that point, never could or did quite “put the pieces together” to see how it could be possible that I could make a living from writing. It would be in those “simple” high school journalism classes where I really started to develop and sharpen my writing skills (“my voice”), plus knowing I was going to do something important in writing.

High school would also be when I connected with Herb Caen, an infamous columnist for the San Francisco Chronicle. I read his daily column all the time. I just wrote him a letter one day and, to my surprise, he wrote back. From then on we corresponded and he was always encouraging to me about becoming a “famous writer.” He inspired me and reinvigorated the necessary “sparks” I needed to write!

It was really my high school Journalism class that changed everything. And, I had to fight hard to “get a slot” in Mrs. Pollack’s Journalism class. From the first day, she had us keep a daily journal. So I’m including some entries here, along with the front and back cover, from 1964 that Journal in my junior year at Camden High. It provides insight to “the beginning of things,” how I felt about baseball, and even Mrs. Pollack’s scribbled notes in the margin, including giving me an “A” for my writing in the journal ... and, I might add, the only A she had ever given out for student journals.

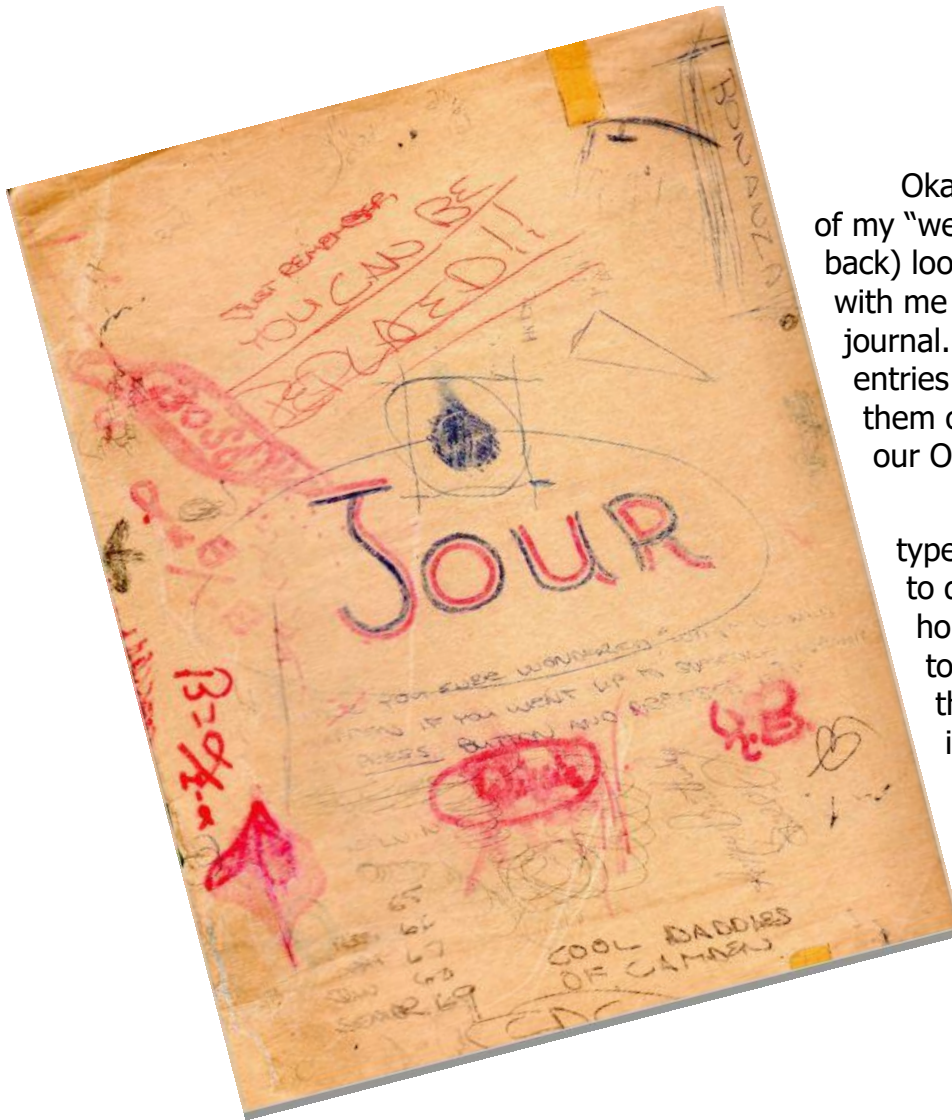
She made a point of mentioning that when she said to the class, “All of you need to look at writing the way he writes, because his passion for stringing words together, writing, shines through in anything he does. His journal, writing for the school paper, the yearbook committee, and even student bulletins from the Dean’s office.” I’ll never forget that, because it was that recognition that sparked and fueled the inspiration I needed to make me absolutely sure all I ever wanted to do was write!

So we’ll start with the cover (front and back) of my journal. That’s insight to a high school kid’s persona and outward identity to the world. And, of course, we always “covered everything” with whatever was on our minds. This was also the beginning of me discovering self-expression through what you put on the page, beyond words, carefully “scripting” and drawing each letter. It was how it all looked ... something that today (and for the longest time) I look at simply as “**presentation is everything!**”

Then after the covers, there actual journal entries with commentary to put it all into perspective ... the words and thoughts from over half a century ago! Following my high school journal stuff, there will be my journal entries from the records I kept while teaching Diana to drive in my 1965 Silver, four-speed shift Corvair. And, the final piece here is the beginning of the journal I was going to “do every single day” while I was in Spain ... sadly, that “effort” fizzled as I was too busy doing things in and around



Madrid. And, not long after I got to Spain (well, about ten months later), Diana flew to see me and then we got married ... and, life "carried us along" on from there.



Okay, so this is what the cover of my "well-worn" journal (front and back) looked like that I carried around with me every day. This is the actual journal. Though I only did my entries at night, first hand-writing them out. Then typing 'em in on our Olympia manual typewriter.

At school we had manual typewriters, too, but I preferred to do my journal entries at home where it was much easier to concentrate better. Even then, writing was of such importance to me, I just "had to get right, no matter what!



I honestly have to say that I don't have a clue as to what some of what you see on these covers meant, especially "Yet Kanish" ... which even Mrs. Pollack asked about in a comment she wrote in my journal. But, I just love that I still have this journal. And, somehow it survived all these years. It's the Universe!



This is an October 1964 entry where I talk about getting "extra hours" at the Purity grocery store where I worked, including two nights a week until midnight. I talk about when I will turn 18. Also, even though I was a Yankees fan, I talk about having bet against them, and picked the Cardinals to win the World Series, which they did in seven games. Being a life-long Yankees fan, **it is the game that matter to me!**



October 15, 1964

The want of sleep hangs heavy over my weary eye lids this crisp October day. I find it very hard to believe that not too long ago I was only working four hours a week at Purity. Now I work seven times that in a week.

Nine months from today I will be eighteen years old. Then I'll have just three years to endure until I become twenty one. Well, that's still three years from now, so why even talk about it.

The Cardinals have done it! I must confess that I was on the verge of giving up. I'm glad the Cards didn't feel that way, too. Now I'm about five or six dollars richer. I'm not too sure how much I won yet, because I haven't collected my money from the people who owe it to me. People have a funny way of forgetting things like that.

Next is an entire page from my journal entry, covering four days in November of 1964. It starts off with me "finishing up" an entry from November 9th, where Mrs. Pollack's comment in the margin says, "Wonderful imagery." She also writes "Oh?" about my comment in relation to Lawney, one of my pals, who had complained about getting a C- for his daily journal. Lawney was a great guy, but he pretty much "phoned it in" on anything he did. He only took the class because he thought it would be an easy grade. But, here's the thing, it was certainly NOT an easy grade. Mrs. Pollack had us constantly writing ... exercises to hone our skills, articles, features, and so much more for the school newspaper and other bulletins, along with so many posters that were plastered all over school, letting everyone know about the "goings on" around the campus. This is long before the digital age, so everything was printed out on paper!

For my November 12th entry, I talk about the new color TV we had just gotten. Yea, it sounds like a million years ago ... and, well, it seems like it. But, getting a color TV was a big deal in 1964. NBC opened every show with its famed peacock with a voice over of "brought to you in living color." I always wondered what "dead" color would have looked like!

Next to my Friday the 13th entry, Mrs. Pollack wrote that I should be a columnist. That week's grade was an "A" ... I always got A's for writing. I loved every minute her class, as well as talking to Mrs. Pollack about the craft of writing!



As I begin to day dream I can see and almost hear mighty waves coming from the sea, crashing down on a lonely beach that is to be peaceful no more. Whenever I think of winter I think of what I have just told about. I don't know why I always do, but I guess I always will think of winter in that way as being so cruel and unmerciful just like that wave crashing down on that beach.

wonderful
imagery.

Right now I'm listening to Lawney complain about the grade he got in Journalism. He's saying words I've never even heard before. He started out by yelling in profane splurges, then he began to cry and now he's banging his shoe on the desk shouting, "What the grab, eh?"

ah?

November 10, 1964

No school tomorrow. It's a holiday. At least I'll be able to sleep late, because tonight I work until midnight.

Kitty got a job yesterday. She works as a receptionist for a dance studio in San Jose. Now that she's making money, she can take me out!

One of these days Kitty is going to have to buy a starter. I'm tired of pushing her car every day after school. The other two guys that help me every day after school are getting tired of pushing, too.

November 12, 1964

Tuesday night, before I went to work, our new color T.V. was delivered. Actually, I shouldn't say the T.V. was ours, because it wasn't. This set is ours only until the set we ordered arrives at the shop.

7:30 P.M. last night, my parents and I watched "The Virginian." This a cowboy show that runs one hour and thirty minutes. Watching T.V. wasn't the same dull drag as usual, it was different, new, and in color. I even enjoy the commercials, now that they're in color, too.

Tomorrow is Friday The Thirteenth. God, help the world! What have I got to worry about? I'm not superstitious, but I sure wish I could just stay home tomorrow and not set one foot out of the house. You never know when a black cat might come along!

November 13, 1964

Again Friday the Thirteenth plagues me. It's not that I'm superstitious, but I'm just suppressed by the truth. Each Friday The Thirteenth turns out to be one of the worst days of my life. From the minute I get up in the morning, til the end of the, "Watch out world, here I come!!!"

as usual -
very entertaining
reading. your
columns make a good
what's yet comic

A

Those Journalism classes and Mrs. Pollack, for my junior and senior years of high school, well, they were the real turning point for me when it comes to writing. I had never "put it all together" about writing, what it meant, how much I loved it. It all came together, to propel me forward for all that I would go on do with and in writing!



My record of teaching Diana to drive

<Copyright © 1966 by Bil. Alvernaz>

The best point to bring up first here is how I met Diana. I went steady with her older sister, Kitty, in high school. Kitty and I had a stormy relationship that didn't last too long. Not long after Kitty and I broke up, I was in Santa Cruz during the Easter Vacation "thing" that always went on in Santa Cruz. And, right near the rollercoaster, sitting on the grassy knoll was Kitty's younger sister, Diana, with her friend, Terry. Diana and I have been together ever since. Many nights I would pick her up after I got off work and we would do things together, including hitting "Me 'n Ed's Pizza" joint.

What amazed me right from the beginning, even when I was seeing Kitty, was just how much in common there was between Diana and I ... how we thought, how we did things. And, our relationship just grew from there.

This entry is all about me teaching Diana to drive, because we had been seeing each other on a regular basis long before I got my 1967 fastback Corvette ... my trusty 1965 4-speed, Silver Chevy Corvair was what Diana learned to drive in.

This entry speaks for itself as well as highlights my, even if I do say so myself, excellent penmanship. This also shows how I liked to write about EVERYTHING!



- Diana's Driving Progress Record -

October 4th, 1966 : First time out driving and much better than I expected. She got the idea of how to work the clutch and gas pedal together. Killed the engine quite a few times, but that's to be expected. Now all it will be practice and more practice and more practice. She had a little bit of trouble backing out of the driveway - she hit the fence along the driveway, but didn't hurt the car much. With alot of practice, she'll be a great "WOMAN DRIVER" but only because of her fabulous, daring, dashing, lovable and modest driving teacher!

Miles Driven - 8

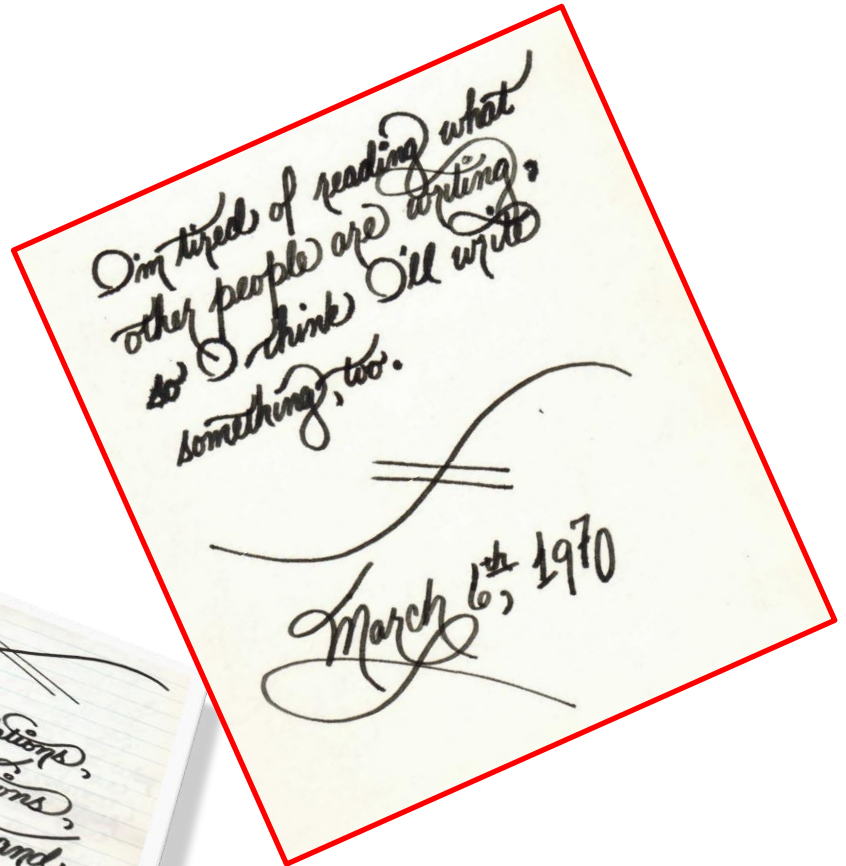
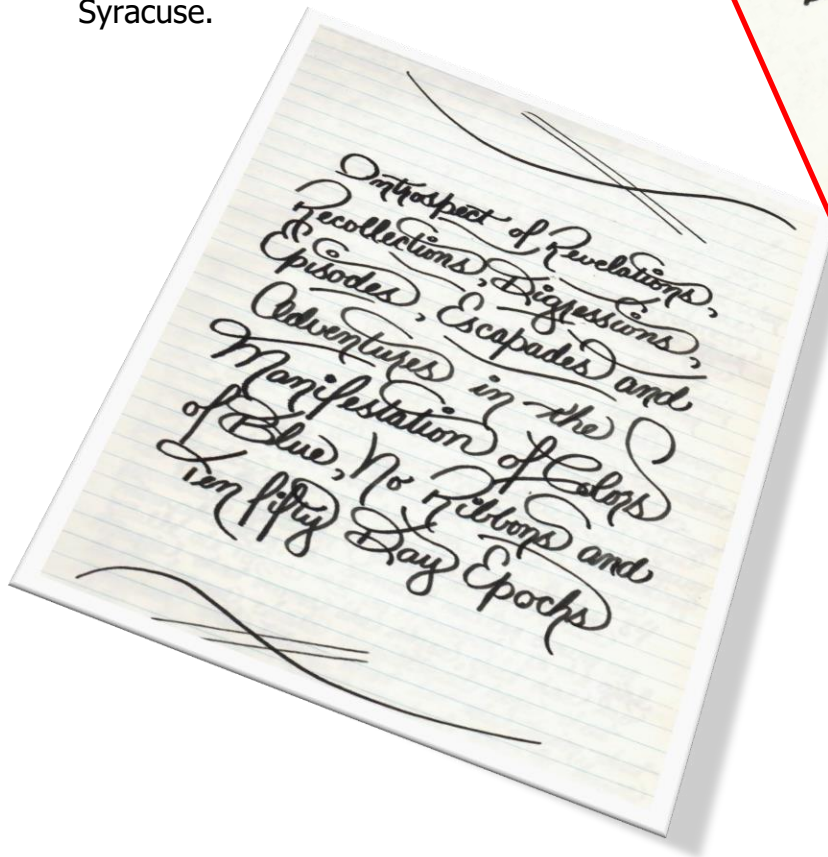
My Journal from Spain

<Copyright © 1970 by Bil. Alvernaz>

When I first got to Spain, my plan was to keep a daily journal. I didn't get around to doing that until months after I got there, and, even then, the "daily effort" of keeping a journal quickly faded, mainly because I was taking advantage of every minute I could just "being there!" These two initial entries speak for themselves!



What's so important about this is that both are my statements that I'm going to "write my ass off!" And, that's exactly what I did from that point on! These also show my Flourishing abilities that I learned in Syracuse.



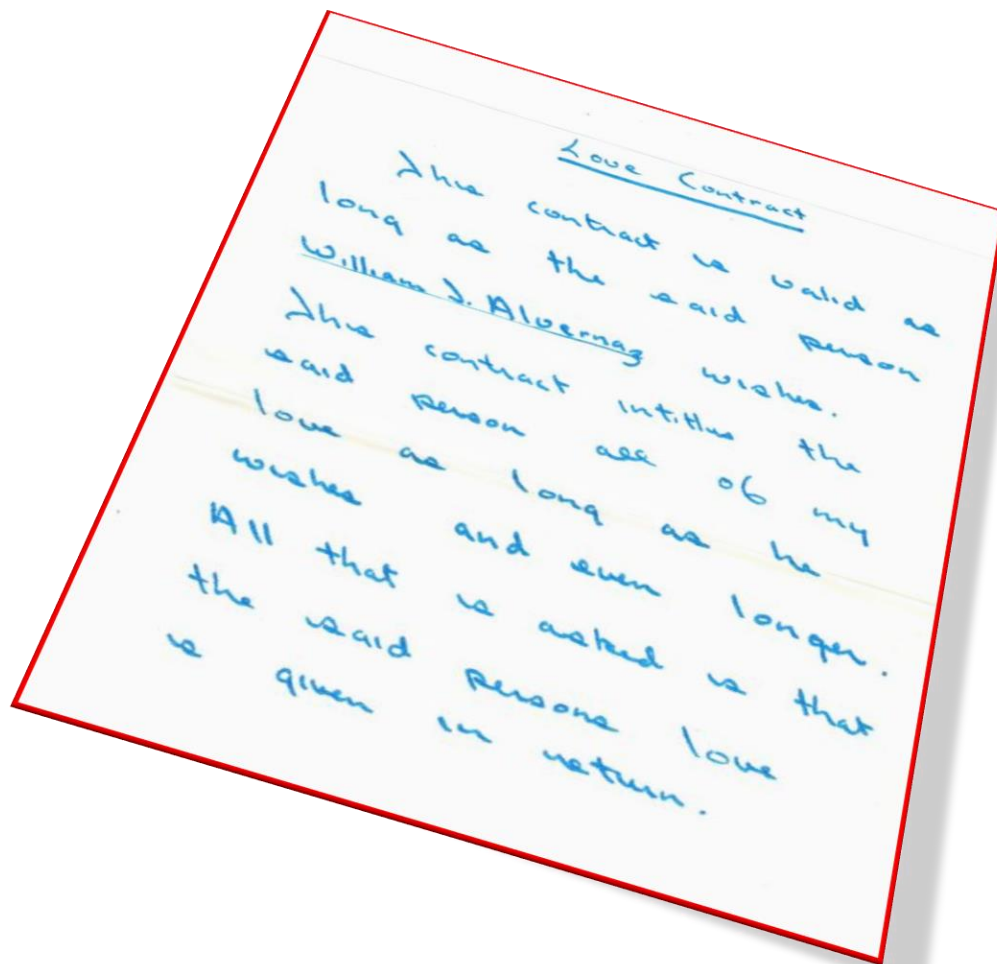
Diana's Initial Love Contract

<Copyright © 1969 by Diana Alvernaz>

There is a reason that something Diana wrote is in this section of my Journal entries.

First off, finding this letter (and envelope) revealed something that both Diana and I have no recollection of. That said, it ties very closely to something Diana and I have joked about for years ... and, that is that we aren't really married, but, instead, have an annual "Love Contract" that we can either renew (to stay married) or not renew. Of course, we have always "renewed" our contract each July 11th, the day we actually got married in 1970.

But, now is where this story really gets interesting, because in that letter, postmarked August 18, 1969, the last page of that letter was the "Love Contract" you see here.

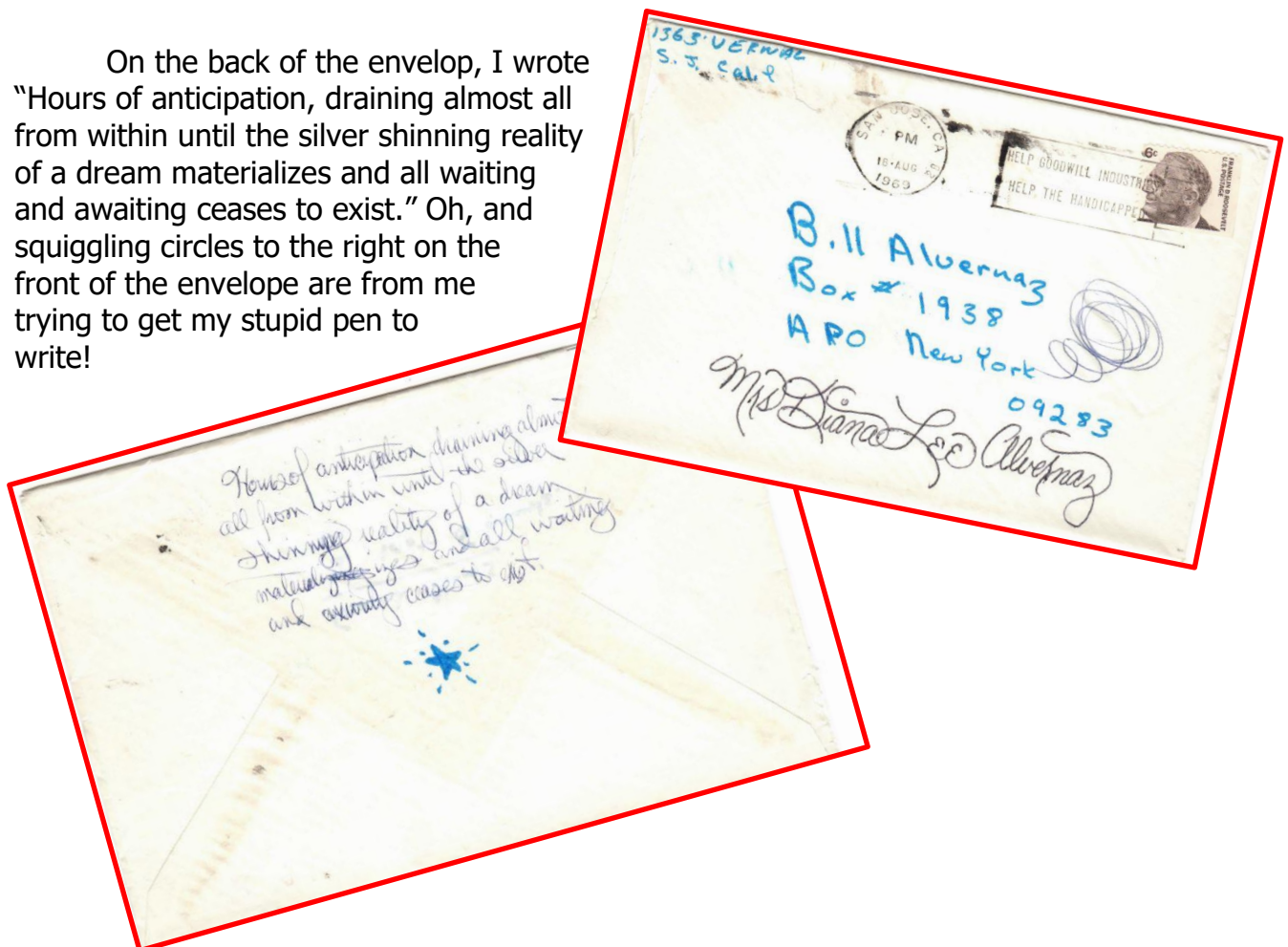


But, that's not all of the story here.

First, you'll notice a first class stamp cost 6 cents! Yikes! The letter was addressed to my APO address because that how things worked for mail to get to me in Spain, through the Air Force Base and then to the American Embassy where I was working at the time. The key thing to notice here is that I wrote "Mrs. Diana Lee Alvernaz" on the front of the envelope.

There are two other factors here, which have to do with the back of the envelope. First you can see the star Diana had drawn. That stood for "Operation Star" ... that was the code name for her coming to visit me the following year. We had talked about her coming to Syracuse, New York, where I had been stationed before going to Spain, but then I got orders to Spain so we changed plans for her to come just after her 21st birthday in May of 1970.

On the back of the envelope, I wrote "Hours of anticipation, draining almost all from within until the silver shining reality of a dream materializes and all waiting and awaiting ceases to exist." Oh, and squiggling circles to the right on the front of the envelope are from me trying to get my stupid pen to write!



Tribute to Diana ...

You can read the tribute I wrote to/for Diana here on the Internet:

<http://alvernaz.com/townesquare/html/diana1.html>

However, I also wanted to include a copy of that tribute here ... for a couple of reasons ... you might be reading this without Internet access or this PhD Life Thesis just might "outlive" where I have it at alvernaz.com (or me, in which case, someone else might have alvernaz.com by then). So I wanted to "cover all the bases," because what I wrote for Diana about us and our life together ... well, I just want to be sure it is all "saved somewhere" (that being this PhD Life Thesis).

So what I did was take screen shots of the web pages, and I'm going to present them here. It isn't most ideal, because you can't click on the photos to see the large images. That's about the only real drawback, because the entire 10,000+ word tribute to Diana (and an overview of life together) is what follows.

And, a "word of warning" is in order here ... these are screen shots of web pages, things might seem a little bit "chopped up." But, I include it here anyway.

Towne Square America™ ... A grand experiment in Human-Computer Interaction - In its tenth year - as a compendium of reportage and stuff that seems like news, but is really not matter of "fact!"

Towne Square America™

Wednesday, March 08, 2017

[<Front Page>](#) [<Tribute to Diana>](#)

Tribute to Diana ...

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A Celebrating a Life Together

by: Bil. Alvernaz (05/02/2010)

What follows is my twofold gift and tribute to Diana for her **birthday** on May 2nd and our **wedding anniversary**, coming up on July 11th ... both stories really do just fit together in a perfect juxtaposition ... and, especially now, with everything "in transition" as far as what comes next for us, it just seemed like a great time to "put it all into perspective" ... who Diana is, how insightful, perceptive, clever, intuitive, realistic, caring, helpful, creative, and nice she really is, and how, together, we are having this most amazing journey together "as one" in a relationship that, to me, sets the standard for the way two people should walk together, finding their way, hand in hand, on the serpentine pathway of life.

And, so on your birthday, Diana, I give to you this **Rosy Bouquet of Words** (all ten thousand of them), brimming with our most favorite photos, right here, smack dab, in the middle of the **Towne Square America Pavilion Bandstand** (which also happens to be the exact Center of the Internet and the interaction of the "play of words" in your intellect) for one and all to see ...

"ving been some days in preparation, a splendid time is guaranteed for all!"
- Being for the Benefit of Mt. Kite - The Beatles





I first heard her name on May 2, 1964, in San Jose, California. It was her 15th birthday. I was going steady with her older sister, Kitty, and she said her family was going to be "celebrating Diana's birthday" so we couldn't go out that night. I had heard the name Diane before, but never Diana ... **It just had a ring to it.** Then, after I was no longer going steady with Kitty, I saw Diana at the **Santa Cruz Beach Board Walk** late one afternoon during Easter Vacation Break. The multicolored lights of the merry-go-round back lighted her silhouette in a golden glow. Her blue eyes seemed even brighter in the fading light of day. And, that smile ... if there is one special aspect of Diana, it is that warm and wonderful smile. We talked there at the Board Walk for hours, just walking around, and **from then on, we were together all the time.**

From grabbing Me-n-Eds' Pizzas after I would get off work from Purity Grocery Store and being together on the day of her graduation from high school in June of 1967 to the 36 hour nonstop marathon of driving from San Jose to Disneyland and back (700+ miles), just in time for me to get to work (and go nonstop for another 24 hour straight hours that including going out with Diana and taking her to the movies), Diana and I spent as much time together as we possibly could ... until I headed off for the Air Force (on a military Texas serial number). From that point on, we wrote letters to each other all the time and, because I had "connections" with communications guys in the Air Force for WATTS lines, I was able to call Diana two or three times a week from Syracuse, New York (at no cost) ... to talk for hours on end (thanks to the local Air Force "installation" at Monte Umunum in the Los Gatos Foothills where I was "linked in" to local phone lines).



I went into the Air Force on July 19, 1967, after spending two straight days with Diana. Her cousins dropped me off at the Alameda Induction Center (near Oakland, California) where those of us "going in" that day had to step over Joan Bias and her group of war protesters. I was then processed and ready for my first ride on a jet airliner (TWA), but there was some sort of issue about where we were going to be sent for basic training. There was a meningitis outbreak, so we were delayed a day in leaving. But, the very next day we were on our way, late in the day, landing in Austin, Texas. We then got "herded" on to a bus and headed to Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas ... we arrived late in the evening where we were promptly put on another bus and then shuttled way up to Amarillo, in the northern panhandle of Texas. Because of the Meningitis problem, we ended up at an officer training facility where we were "bunked" three guys to a room with air-conditioning (something unheard of for basic training). Actually, we never really had basic training. It was more like Boy Scout Camp where we usually watched movies in the afternoon. I still look at this "turn of events" as the real beginning of this enchanted life I have led.

And, that's where Diana truly enters the picture as that special of all special people in my life. When I was finally able to "call out" after settling in to the "grueling schedule" of slapstick-like "Army training" in the mornings (if you have seen Bill Murray's movie "Stripes," then you know exactly what my "training" was like), **the first person I called was Diana.** And, when I heard her voice after not seeing her for what seemed like a million years (when only it had been less than a week), **I just knew she would be a part of my life from then on.** The key point here (and probably of my entire life) is that I knew at right then and there that Diana was "the one" ... that special person you can only hope to find in a lifetime (if you're lucky and I know I was definitely the lucky one) ... that one person you know you were meant/fated to spend the rest of your life with. From what I've seen, so many people either "blow it" in their opportunities to be with "the one" person for them ... or they just never are lucky enough to find that special person. And, over the years, Diana and I have come to believe that we have been together (and always managed to find each other) again and again, **over several lifetimes.**

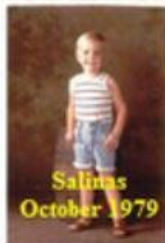


Diana is one of those rare individuals whose gentle spirit warms your heart, mind, and soul. She can ease your mind just by smiling when she knows something is bothering you. And, when the sun backlights her hair, she is a vision of the **Greek Goddess** that she once was (and still is). Diana is a **Crossword Person**, something I somehow just can't "grasp hold of" or understand ... although I can do just about any crossword puzzle in less than a minute by simply scribbling in any combination of letters (even though Diana scoffs at that, it still makes her laugh). I have always made sure Diana has all of the Crossword Puzzle magazines and books (as well as the required monster dictionary) that she needed, so she never runs out.

Before we go any further I need to explain that most certifiably **Diana is, in fact, a witch.** Well, actually, the reality is that all women are witches. Some just don't know it or even have a clue about how to use such powers. Many women, however, use their special Witchery Craft Powers for evil, sinister purposes tied to "C" word (i.e., Contemptuous, Condescending, and Crappie all rolled into one package of pure, unmistakable evilness). Now, as for Diana (along with a certain select few, including her sister, the Lovely Linda), **Diana is most certainly a Good Witch** who uses her powers in special, magical, mystical, mysterious, enchanting, intoxicating, and simply, delightfully, wonderful ways! Once you meet her, you are under her spell ... and that is definitely a good thing!



Diana and I have forever loved doing jigsaw puzzles together, spending hours just talking and "finding pieces" to go into place. We have exercised and **worked out on a regular basis** since the 1970s, and we truly believe that is why we are haven't had any health issues. We loved living near **Yosemite National Park** for two decades, where we trekked "less traveled" areas so many times I couldn't even begin to count them. The thing about Diana and me is that we have always worked together on whatever we do. We're such a team that we intuitively know what each other is going to do ... without the need for even "planning things out" or much discussion ... and we always, always, always work together instead of against each other (like we have seen so many people do, many who feel marriage is more like a competition than working hand in hand with each other). When I needed my spirits picked up, Diana was right there to lead the way ... just as I did those times she needed to be uplifted. I never let her down and she never, ever let me down. We've never worked against each other. Everything we have done and accomplished has been a team effort!



Here's what I wrote to Diana when our son, Ian, was born:

May 23, 1976 ... On the matter of having a baby. Yes, I wanted a girl. No, I am not disappointed.

Ian is our baby. You and I made him, like everything else we do together. And, that's beautiful!

He is healthy, happy (though a bit grumpy looking, but I'm sure that will pass), and he is, quite simply, the joy of our life. What more could we ask for?

So much of that Monday morning, on May 24th, 1976, in Ukiah, California, when I drove home from the hospital with Diana and "a bundle" of Ian on her lap, is still vividly etched in my mind. First of all, the "hospital" was a house that had been converted into a hospital in the 1930s. There were six beds. Forty hours or so earlier when I had driven Diana to the hospital after her water had broken on Saturday evening, the 22nd, it was just the two of us (with Ian inside of Diana, ready to take "center stage"). Now there were three of us! We wondered how our two dogs would react to a "newcomer." It was interesting that one of the dogs, Pasha, wanted nothing to do with "the kid." Amy, Pasha's daughter, who was somewhat of a grumpy dog (the one we thought there might be some problems with), she took up permanent residence near Ian and became his "protector!" She carefully watched every move anyone made anywhere near Ian.



The Friday before Ian was born, Diana had gone to see Dr. Cook for a checkup. She had told him that according to the biorhythm calculations I had done, my prediction was that Ian would be born Sunday morning, the 23rd, at around 8:00 a.m. Dr. Cook just laughed and said, "Having a baby is like when fruit ripens on a tree. When it is ready it will drop off. And, well, it looks to me like you have two more weeks to ... at least."

Diana hardly slept Friday night ... she didn't get out of bed Saturday, because she just felt so bad. By evening, she felt like getting up so Annette who worked with me brought over a Mexican Casserole. Diana ate a little bit of it, but you could tell she just wasn't feeling well. So just after Annette and her logger boyfriend, Wilber (who could eat a dozen eggs for breakfast in one sitting), Diana was sitting on our sofa ... and she quietly said to me, "My water broke!" I still get goose bumps thinking about this moment because it was right then and there I knew, "This is frickin' it, folks! We're

having a baby!!!!!"



So I called Annette and she and Wilber met us at the hospital ... Diana would then "go through the night" in labor; all while Annette, Wilber (who absolutely hated "playing this game," but was a good sport and just kept playing with us), and I played Scrabble ... we played until 6:28 a.m. when Ian's screams ran out as the first rays of sunlight penciled their way across the floor in the waiting room. There had been another "father to be" waiting that evening with us, but he was nervous as a cat and hardly talked with us. He said, "NO!" to joining us in Scrabble and really kept to himself (we just looked at it like it was his problem, not ours!) ... oh, and it was the best Scrabble night of my life. I had a seven letter word (worth 50 extra points) in three different games. I think we played about a dozen or so games, all while I kept going back and forth to see how Diana was doing ... or, as the nurse said, "resting!" Yea, right, that was a point in time where Diana could really rest!



So when I saw Dr. Cook right after Ian was born, I said, "So, my biorhythm prediction was right on money, only 90 minutes off target, huh?" He just scoffed and, as he scurried down the hallway (without even looking back at me), said, "Lucky, lucky guess!" Maybe it was luck, but I now have a track record since then of predicting births by charting biorhythms.

Sadly, six weeks later on the 4th of July, Dr. Cook died instantly of a massive heart attack that no one saw coming. He was in his late 30s, playing basketball on the holiday (the first holiday he hadn't been "on call" in a long time). This was just a few days after the new Ukiah General Hospital was opened. The one Ian was born in was demolished shortly thereafter. I was fortunate enough to run into Dr. Cook just a few days before the tragic day he died and he went out of his way to say, "You know, I've looked into Biorhythms and there just might be something to it" ... and, I thought that was pretty cool that he did some "homework" to find out more about something I had done that pinpointed the exact day our son would be born. I was also glad to have had a conversation with him about, well, just life in general ... he was a great guy and I'm so glad he was the one who brought into this world ... well, Diana did most of the work!

I took the very first photo of Ian at 1:38 p.m. the day after he was born. He was in the bassinet I had made out of reeds. I mean we are talking about soaking the long strips and then forming them to make the bassinet. It just added yet one more special touch to everything about Ian now being a part of our lives. We still lived in Fresno when I made the bassinet. We had moved to Ukiah not long thereafter, just after Diana's birthday in 1976 (she had a kidney infection during the final month of her pregnancy so that made the 300 mile move a very interesting experience of making sure we could find "pit stops" when we needed to!). Less than three weeks after getting to Ukiah, Ian was born.

Our life together, for Diana and me, is the essence of a love story ... that is how we both look at it. But, that doesn't really say it all, because all that we have accomplished and done together, well, we both feel each of us could not have done what we did without the other one being "right there" with **support, encouragement, enthusiasm, and optimism every single step of the way**. Our life together has been extraordinarily "ordinary," in that we have done incredibly amazing things, but still we have stayed grounded in "just being happy together," living life one day at a time and thankful for each additional day given to us as **one more gift of yet another day to be together**. I truly feel I have led an enchanted life, because of being in the right place at the right time to do so many things most mere mortals never get the chance to do ... but I couldn't have done any of it, from meeting the President of the United States and being part of the Windows95 Team that quite literally changed the world to helping make TurboTax #1 and the voice of income tax software, without Diana being right there with me.



And, so, on this occasion of Diana's birthday and our upcoming 40th wedding anniversary in July, I wanted to "say a little something" about Diana (and us, our life together). I wrote some of what follows for previous anniversaries, but I felt I needed to "fill in some gaps" (as well as "dig out" a bunch of amazing photos) that would then put it all into perspective, here in one place, complete with lots of our **most favorite, fabulous, and some even infamous photos**.

The bottom line is that I am nothing without Diana ... and I feel so fortunate to have gotten to live my life with this most amazing and incredibly wonderful person (and enchanting, charismatic Witch) ... who is definitely "the one."



So, then Diana headed to Spain ...



It was one of the most unlikely and probably one of the bravest things Diana Lee Brinkerhoff ever did in her life ... but if she hadn't shown such bold determination, there is no telling what would have happened - for her or "that guy" she was going to see in Madrid, Spain.

On Monday, May 4th, 1970, just two days after celebrating her 21st birthday, Diana boarded one of PanAm's brand new jumbo jets at San Francisco International Airport (after a "wild ride" on the way to make the flight). Twenty hours later, after a long layover in New York and a quick stop in Lisbon, Diana stepped into the **bright sunshine in Madrid, Spain** ... and into what was about to be a whole new, completely unplanned for life. It was close to noon on Tuesday and I was there to meet her. This just happened to be that infamous and tragic weekend of the Kent State



National Guard shootings where four students died.

Just a little over two months later we would be married. But, there is MUCH more to this story in terms of how a marriage that would endure got started ... even from the minute I first saw Diana step off the PanAm jet at the Madrid Airport (there was no jetway). As soon as I saw Diana I **just knew I didn't want her to leave**. I wanted to be with her. It was like a bolt of lightning hitting me ... one of those moments in life that you just know exactly what you want, along with what you just know you need to do, even though you have no idea how you will make it happen ... and the odds were definitely against us to "pull off" just having Diana stay in Spain, let alone all that had to be done to "put the pieces of the puzzle together" to get married ... but we figured it all out each step of the way.



A couple of days after Diana arrived we were driving to Torrejon Air Force to have lunch with some friends of mine. We were riding in Jim Crow's 1968 Power Blue Mustang and that is when I matter of factly said, "Diana I want to marry you." I realized, as I looked over to see a look of shock on Diana's face (her mouth open just enough for her lips to form a perfect "O" shape), that I hadn't really asked her to marry me. So I said, "Is that what you want?" She turned to face me, smiled warmly, blinking a few times, and said in the strongest, most convincing and determined voice I've ever heard her use (before or since), "Yes, absolutely." With the help of Susanna Barrio, we found a

cozy, furnished apartment in Madrid (for \$85 a month that included everything including all utilities, except the phone which we never used).

Now at this point I need to disclose that there are two versions to this story ... you can choose whichever one you want to believe. One version is that I kidnapped Diana so she would have no choice but to stay and marry me. The other version is that Diana got off the plane with a mattress on her back ... I'm sure you can figure out just who is telling which version of the story. But, anyway ...

During all of the planning for Diana's trip, we had arranged and calculated things for Diana's visit to be three weeks. Olga, who worked with me in Air Force's Staff Judge Advocate's Office (where we worked in offices at the Air Base as well as the American Embassy in Madrid), had told me for weeks that she just knew I wasn't going to ever let Diana go home once she got here (somehow Olga just knew this!). Perry Foster, one of the lawyers I worked with and became good friends with, immediately "jumped in" to help make everything happen ... it was amazing, because between Perry, me, Diana, and Susanna, we just made it all happen.

And, then I'll never forget when Perry looked at me, paused, and then said, "You two simply must get married in Buitrago!" It was the most perfect of perfect ideas! Now, Buitrago Del Lozoya was a tiny village in the mountains 80 kilometers to the north of Madrid. Perry rented a house there where we spent weekends and holidays. It was a picturesque, ancient place where everyone got their water from the fountain in the town square. So, to me, it seemed like just the thing to do ... for Diana and I to have a wedding that, to this day, we still feel no one can touch in terms of how magical and unforgettable the entire experience was. Anyone who attended our wedding still talks about it to this very day. And, any wedding Diana and I have ever attended, well, we don't really say it out loud, but we just know nothing could ever come close to just how storybook-like and amazingly incredible our entire wedding day was.



We were going to be the first Americans to be married in this village that was over 2,000 years old. And, we were going to be married in the **Church of Nuestra Senora del Castillo** (built in the 12th century) that was right next to the Roman castle in the heart of the village. And, this scene looked out over the **Lozoya High Basin River**, across to where many of the bulls were raised for the bull fights in Madrid.



But, in early May of 1970 there much work ahead of us, if we wanted to get married on July 11th (which was the only day the church in the village was available. First, we had to get Diana a visa so she could stay. Fortunately, working in the Legal Department for the Air Force made that task an effortless breeze!. There were several major paperwork obstacles against Americans wanting to get married in Spain, but we tackled and overcame each one. The most interesting aspect of the entire **"Diana, stay here and let's get married in Spain"** saga was the final step at the Office of the Bishop of Madrid. I had gotten notarized permission from Diana's mother to married her. Diana had just turned 21, but the legal age for women to get married in Spain (without parental permission) was 22. I also had to have a notarized statement from my parents saying (and this is the truth!) that they had known me more than ten years and that I had never been married. It would have been effortless to get married at Torrejon Air Base or at the American Embassy in Madrid, but we were determined to actually get married in Spain ... in Buitrago del Lozoya.



Okay, so we're at the **Office of the Bishop of Madrid**. All of the paperwork has been approved and accepted (and rubber stamped several times). So this Brother (or Monk or Priest-in-Training or whatever/whomever he was) with big bushy eyebrows, dressed in an uncomfortable looking brown robe looks at Susanna Barrio over the wire rims of his glasses and in a very animated way, with bushy eyebrows almost dancing above his eyes as he talked, goes into an extremely

long explanation about something ... something that Diana and I have no idea about because we didn't speak Spanish. Susanna, who was helping and interpreting for us finally turned to me and said, "All of your paperwork to get married has been accepted and now all it needs is approval from the Bishop of Madrid. So he wants to know how much you are going to donate to the church." Susanna smiled and then looked to the bushy eyebrowed man and then back to Diana and me. This guy just kept smiling politely as he awaited our response to the "matter of the money."

I actually took a step backwards (and I even think some of the air in my lungs found their way out in a long sigh) as I contemplated the fact that our paperwork had been accepted, that we had done everything we needed to do (in such a short period of time) ... and, yet, it came down to the question of money. So, I said, "Okay, well, ask him what he thinks we should donate."

Susanna smiled again, turned to the man behind the counter with the caterpillar eyebrows, who controlled our destiny at this point and asked the question for me. Again, with bushy eyebrows moving in an "up & down" manner (we were captivated by those eyebrows) like waves as he took his time to explain what he had to say.



Here is what it came down to for us to get the **Libro de Familia** ("Book of the Family") which would be our official record of getting married (one that made it really interesting for me to get the GI Bill once I got out of the Air Force, along with the official document of our marriage that was labeled "Certificacion en Extracto de Inscriptcion de Matrimonio" ... The VA had a real problem translating this Certificate of Marriage Inscriptcion that would allow me to get the GI Bill, but I finally was approved for the \$210 per month ... but that would be many months "down the road"). We were then told that the man we passed on our way to this desk as we entered the room had just gotten his paperwork. He had waited three weeks to get it ... he had only donated 50 Pesetas to the

church - roughly less than a dollar. Now, to put this all into perspective, this was the Friday before the Sunday that Diana and I were going to be married. There was no room for margin of error at all! But, it turns out, Susanna was told that a man earlier in the day had brought in his paperwork and gotten it approved while he waited. That man had donated 1,000 Pesetas (close to \$20.00).



It didn't take me long to "get the point" so to speak and quickly "calculate" exactly what I needed to do so there would certainly be no doubt about us getting our paperwork taken care of right then and there. I looked at Diana and then Susanna in a sly, whimsical kind of way, then leaned over the counter and in my best Spanish (which was really "American-BAD," but quite understandable) told the man, while moving my eyebrows up and down, Groucho Marks' style, that we would donate 2,000 Pesetas to the church and handed a "stack of bills" over to him.



It was the biggest grin I had ever seen in my life that he flashed as he quickly pounded one more rubber stamp on our paperwork, signed it with a quite elegant signature, and handed it to me, saying in perfect English, "God bless you, Senior!"

But, it turns out we weren't quite done yet. Right there at the very last minute we found out (from the dude with the enchanting eyebrows) that we would also need to "take care of things" for the Civil Ceremony. We hadn't heard anything about this. But, since we were getting married in Spain, we would be having a religious and a Civil Ceremony. That meant one final stop to the Provost Marshall's Office where we paid the outrageous sum of 50 Pesetas to have a state official attend our wedding as a witness to validate it (for which he handed us this pink official looking certificate, hand typed to the point of the "o" letters actually poked holes in the paper). And, it is worth noting, that right after our wedding ceremony, we had to go into the Priest's Chambers at the back of the church, BEFORE doing anything else, to sign the paperwork to "seal the deal" for the Civil Ceremony that this man, of course, witnessed to make it all legal ... and which, we were told, there was no "getting out of it" after that point. The real upside of having this state official attend our wedding (besides him being the life of the party at the celebration "up on the hill" at the Meson Inn after our wedding) was that he offered to bring our wedding cake from Madrid.

The four layer wedding cake, by the way, cost \$6.00 and it was enough for the big crowd of people who attended our wedding (including many from the village and surrounding area who came to see "what those Americans were doing getting married" ... it surprised us just how many people were interested to see just what was going on ... and, they certainly enjoyed the feast, too). The cost to feed everyone a hearty meal with the definite medieval touch we "added in" to make things even more special (we had beef, chicken, venison, pork, and everything else you could possibly imagine, along with all kinds of heavenly, tasty, tasty breads) came to a whopping \$137! The owner of the Meson apologized for the "cost overruns," because he had originally told us he could do it for less than \$100 ... when I gave him the equivalent of \$200 and hold him we were very, very happy, I swear at first he almost had a heart attack, but then as he thanked us (complete with a kiss on the cheek and a bear hug that quite literally took my breath away as he shook me like a rag doll), he shook my hand so vigorously that I was sure he was going to dislocate my shoulder ... all as he quickly stuffed the money in his pocket and offered to pour us a glass of wine! Diana's miniskirt, laced wedding dress (that had come from the most expensive Bridal Shop in Madrid and that Father Don Francisco absolutely loved!) cost the grand total of \$12. My handmade Edwardian suit was the "outrageous sum" of \$45.

When I asked what Father Don Francisco wanted as a fee for the wedding, he said only that we wanted us to send him post cards from "around the world" ... which we did!

But, I'm getting a little ahead of myself in this story ... let's get back to the "real deal" about this wedding in Spain, 60 kilometers to the north of Madrid in Buitrago del Lozoya ...



Tribute to Diana ...

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Part Two of Celebrating a Life Together.

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A Marriage in Spain ... Two Lives Become One

by: Bil. Alvernaz (05/02/2010)



The wedding, July 11th, 1970, was performed by Father Don Francisco in Buitrago Del Lozoyo, the 2,000 year old village in the mountains, sixty kilometers to the North of Madrid, Spain. Susanna Barrio interpreted the 6:00 p.m. ceremony that was conducted in Spanish in the **Church of Nuestra Señora del Castillo** that was built in the 12th century church. Not far from the Church were the ruins of a Roman castle (the owner of the tobacco shop had the keys - BIG, 2-foot in size, keys!) that looked out over the river where Diana, I, and members of the "wedding party" had been swimming for most of that memorable day in July. I was still in the water until about a half hour before the wedding, much to Margaret Crow's chagrin ... and I do have to now admit that I did love "rocking her somewhat uppity English boat" on a regular basis.

Across the river was one of the largest bull ranches that raised bulls for the bull fights in Madrid and other major cities throughout northern Spain. During the day while "floating around" in inner tubes, we would get close to the shore

where many of the bulls were standing right there in the water only but a matter of a few feet from us, but we never risked getting too close. I mean these were huge bulls weighing in at 1,000 kilos or more! Just as we were heading up the hill from swimming, on our way to get ready for the wedding we ran into four Americans, three girls and one guy, named Greg. We asked them what they were doing for the evening and found that

three girls and one guy, named Greg. We asked them what they were doing for the evening and found that they had no real plans, so I invited them to the wedding ... which they did, indeed, attend. It wasn't until later at the reception that I learned Greg was a draft dodger that led to many, many "interesting conversations" with people from the American Embassy as well as the others who were in the Air Force with me! But, everyone got along together just fine and that was probably because of the Sangria, wine, and Champaign that flowed freely on into the wee hours of the morning "loosing up" the tightest of uptight individuals (and there were definitely a few of "them folks" in attendance, all of whom were eventually dancing on table tops before all was said and done ... some even were found skinny dipping in Perry Foster's swimming pool in Madrid later as dawn was lighting up "the next day" in crimson red).

This particular Saturday had been a warm and beautiful summer day. The sky clouded over towards evening as the reception (which would go until well past dawn) got under way in the courtyard of the **hilltop MASON Inn overlooking the village**. As this day would mark the beginning for Diana and me, it provided somewhat of a spectacular "argumentative knock down, drag out, showdown" of a drama that culminated in a spectacular, hard-to-not-miss screaming match the pretty much ended Greg and Donna Culley's five year marriage ... so as one marriage was beginning another one was in a nose dive. Greg was the guy who let me drive his 1969 British Racing Green Porsche 911 all the time (that he had bought for less than \$6,000), because I has taught him how to drive a manual six-speed. Greg was also the guy who was legendary (and proud of it) for teaching his three year old daughter a variety of colorful curse words (many of which Donna Culley herself used during their "show" late that evening, just as she abruptly exited the festivities, taking that Porsche and leaving Greg to find his own way home)!



Just before Diana walked into the church for the ceremony she wasn't sure she would be able to walk or even stand because, as she told Jim Crow, who "gave the bride away," and George Dunn, who had been my roommate, that her knees were "like jelly." And, her legs were visibly shaking all through the ceremony that was conducted in Spanish as Susanna interpreted just as she had done so many times up to that point for us ... no one really noticed Diana's legs shaking, but what they did notice was Larry Elmore, the Best Man (my roommate from Hancock Field in Syracuse, New York, who came over for the wedding by "catching a hop" on a military transport flight from his new duty station in Florida), fumbling through his pockets trying to find what he did with the wedding ring for Diana. Now this is a really interesting part of how our marriage would be "tied together." First of all, while it would have been very affordable, bordering almost on stealing, to buy Diana a diamond wedding ring (this was before the devaluing of the dollar as a slap in the face to President Nixon, so



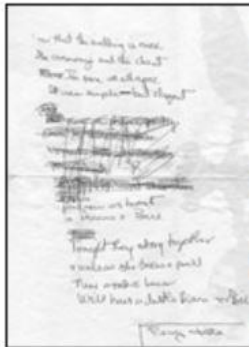
you could get great deals on everything ... especially if you knew the right people), and I mean we're talking a "big, 'ole fat" diamond ring that would have cost less than \$100 ... but, Diana wanted a **plain gold band** (which really set the tone for the unpretentious nature of who Diana and I would be "as one"). Diana had that pure gold ring inscribed on the inside of the band with, "*Buitrago del Lozoya, Julio 11, 1970.*" The engraving added "much" to the cost that ran the total up to a whopping \$11.00. But, that's not the end of the ring story. I didn't want a wedding band. My feeling (then and right up to now, this very minute) was/is that I don't need a ring, because in my mind I would always know Diana is the only person for me.

Well, Father Don Francisco felt otherwise. "There will be no marriage without you putting on a ring," he declared. And, even before Susanna translated what he said, I had pretty much figured out what the deal was. So, I borrowed a ring from Dave Simpson (the guy taking pictures of the wedding for us) ... and, finally, after much fumbling around, Larry did manage to retrieve both rings so the ceremony could go on. At this point, we need to back up to earlier in the day on this wedding day for one other interesting "interlude" in all of this. Diana and I went with Susanna to the Church that morning to make sure everything was all set for the wedding that would take place at 6:00 p.m. as we had planned. We ran into the Father in the town square, near the church ... when Susanna started talking to him about the wedding, he asked, "Oh, is that today?" And, although he had completely forgotten about the wedding (which caused a few missed heartbeats for both Diana and me, he assured us, that there would be no problem "arranging things" for the wedding to take place ... and, sure enough, just like Susanna had also assured us after talking to the Father, everything magically fell into place for our wedding to come off without a hitch. This is the singular moment where I learned (and have believed so ever since) that "**these things have a way of working themselves out.**"

Diana had just turned 21 and I would soon be 23 (four days after the wedding). We didn't know what the future would bring, but we did know our wedding's theme of "**simple, but elegant**" (that came from a poem written for us - see below) would guide us through life and all of fate's twists, turns, and surprises. And, over the years, the fabric of our lives together has been interwoven with that tenant, along with these incredible lines from Kahlil Gibran's insightful masterpiece, *The Prophet* ...

***"And stand together yet not too near together:
For the pillars of the temple stand apart,
And the Oak tree and Cypress
grow not in each other's shadow."***

THE PROPHET, Kahlil Gibran



But, there was another poem written specifically for us. Perry Foster penned it the day of the infamous "Fish Pudding Episode." We'll come back to the Fish Pudding "thing" in a bit.

Here is what Perry wrote:

"Now that the wedding is over. The ceremony and the Chant. I'm sure we all agree, it was simple - but elegant.

And, now we toast to Diana and Bil. Tonight they stay together and unless she takes the pill.

Nine months hence, we'll have another Diana or Bil."

We spent as much time as we could in Buitrago before and after our wedding, including an entire week in October (for Halloween ... no one in the village could figure out what we were doing by carving up a pumpkin). The day that Perry wrote the poem for our wedding involved the **Fish Pudding Episode** that happened a few weeks before we were married. Susanna had a house not from from the one Perry rented (from two Professors at Oxford). So after picking wild berries on the side of the hill near where Perry's place was, Susanna called out to us that she had prepared a meal especially for Diana and me ... a meal she was known far and wide for because of the culinary delights (those weren't her words, but the words of everyone who had ever experienced it). So, we showed up with bunches of blackberries for dessert.



This would turn out to be the exquisite lunch Susanna boasted about (and then some, except for one "small thing"), in our honor, of course, and it truly was, indeed one of the most amazing meal experiences ... except for that one "small, big thing"). While we were finishing dessert, Perry wrote the poem for our wedding and then shared it with everyone to cap off the meal ... he agreed to read the poem at our reception following our wedding. Now, about this lunch. The centerpiece entree was, it turned out, was Fish Pudding, something Diana absolutely did not want to eat, because she didn't like fish. But, because Diana didn't want to hurt Susanna's feelings, Diana "downed" a rather large scoopful of the lumpy, rather fishy smelling pudding that Susanna "plopped down on her plate." Diana did all of this quite gracefully and elegantly, actually, without anyone knowing that she was extremely close to gagging and/or "losing it all." No one ever knew, except me,



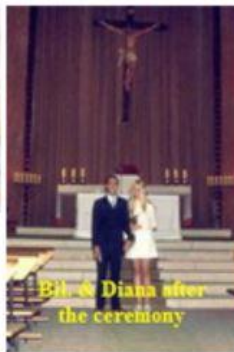
that it was probably one of the worst "centerpiece" meals for Diana, smack dab in the middle of everything else that was **absolutely, perfectly delicious** ... all of which was topped off with the most heavenly Flan we've ever had (before or since) ... with the incredibly, sinfully, wonderful blackberries topped with fresh whipped cream. And, yes, we were all ready for a midday siesta right there, looking out at the river, on Susanna's patio as soft breezes danced and swirled all around us!

Now, back to the wedding. Below are pictures that are among our favorites from that day. Somehow, some way, we didn't manage to get a photo of Leon, the enormous, gigantic ... I mean really, really big (bordering on close to the size of a pony) Saint Bernard. He wandered all around outside the church while we were getting married (almost like he was waiting for us), and then he followed everyone up the hill to the Meson where he lapped up wine, Champaign, and sangria from whomever would oblige him, while also gobbling up as many table scraps as he could con people into giving him (no wonder he was so big!). And, he was there until the last of us left at dawn!

There is really no way to put into words just how fanciful and storybook-like our wedding was, that we did in our own way. It was so, so incredible and both Diana and I remember so much about all of what unfolded the July day so long ago in Spain ... these pictures do, however, capture much of what words fall far short in conveying about that single, significant "first day" that has now led to so many others, as of July 11, 2010, totaling 14,620 days!



Jim Crowwalking Diana in



Bill & Diana after the ceremony



Cast of Characters!



Speak now or forever ...



Stepping out into the sunshine of a new life!



The ceremony



Putting the rings!



Raining rice!



The bride!




Ah, Susanna!




We can still taste that cake!







Margaret and Jim Crow



Perry Foster (the poet)
and Susanna Barrio



Greg, the Draft Dodger!




Cutting the cake!

Tribute to Diana ...

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Part Three of Celebrating a Life Together.

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Snow Creek Canyon
Yosemite 1998

It All Worked For Many Reasons ...

by: Bil. Alvernaz (05/02/2010)

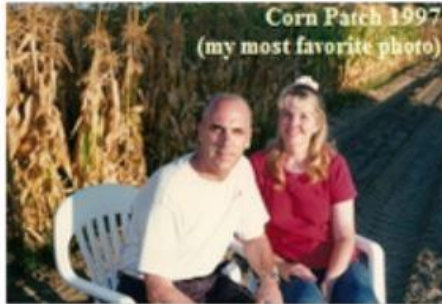
What follows is a collection of "bits & pieces" of the varied works Diana and I have put together about how we look at marriage and being together ... and all of this is what became a part of "Gravity," the collected "works" we put together in celebration our 30th wedding anniversary in 2000 ... so it is all right "here," unabridged and complete with a ton of our favorite photos!

Spanning five decades (not to mention two millennia) and seven Presidents, this marriage began when the average income was less than \$10,000 a year. A new house was in the \$30,000 range and leaded gasoline was 30¢ a gallon. In 1970 the war was still "on" in Vietnam. M*A*S*H and Patton were popular movies.



30th Anniversary 2000





Corn Patch 1997
(my most favorite photo)

It was a year when the Dow Jones Average reached a record high of 663.20. Unemployment hit 5 percent (the highest since 1965). Postal workers went on strike in March as the Army attempted to deliver the mail. Auto workers started a 67-day walkout in November. **Baltimore beat Cincinnati in the World Series.** This was also the year the first electronic editing terminals for newspapers were introduced (and they were not "well received" by hardened newspaper reporters). This would become known as **beginning of the "computerization revolution"** of how people would write and how information would be prepared, stored, as well as retrieved, and delivered. No one had any idea of what this "computer stuff" would ultimately lead to ... and neither Diana or I had any inkling that I

would end up right in the middle of it all helping build the TurboTax empire (making the program an enduring #1 favorite and the voice of tax preparation software) and helping Microsoft pioneer the Internet ... all as I became specialized in Human-Computer Interaction, web development, content management, and communications (internal and external) ... while always being **"the writer"** at heart, first and foremost.

Over the course of more than a quarter of a century leading up to the end of a Millennium and now ten years into the new Millennium ... and after watching the rise and fall of so many marriages and relationships, Diana and I truly feel we have (and continue to) set an **example** of what makes a marriage work ... we like to think of it as "the standard!" It isn't about money, status, owning things, making yourself look better at someone else's expense, or even sex. Marriage is so very much about the key elements of **respect, sincerity, and trust** – and, most important, **doing all you can to be there for the other person** as well as making the each other feel special. You need to always, always, always be right there for each other – just like the vows say,



Half Dome, Yosemite
Fall 1998



Yosemite 1999

Father Don Francisco put it this way when he said to Diana and me during our wedding ceremony, **"You must now eliminate 'I' 'me' and 'my' and replace them with 'us' 'we' and 'our'."** That creates the atmosphere for two people to work together to lift each other up and not let anyone's spirit get trampled upon. Diana and I have approached everything as a team (as one) - never competing, having one common "pot" (money-wise, no separate bank or bed accounts), and doing

what we always felt was best for us, not what other people thought (or insisted or tried to bully) should be done.

Here is a quote we really like:

"Marriage is a boat ride with barely enough room for two where you can glide peacefully when the waters are calm. What you have to watch out for are all of the unexpected rough spots, amid raging torrents, with no end in sight. The secret to making it is all in paddling together in the same direction."

As of July 11th, 2010, it will be 14,610 days we have had together ... while looking forward to all of the days yet to come that we get to spend together!

Someone else once said, **"Marriage is like a long, dull meal, with dessert served first!"** Well, for us, we're still having dessert ... **LOTS OF DESSERT** every single day!

Here's another quote:

"Chains do not hold a marriage together. It is threads, hundreds of tiny threads which sew people together through the years. This is what makes a marriage last - more than passion or sex!"

FRENCH ACTOR, Simon Signoret



Ian typing
Summer 1978





Ian 1978

And, though, because everything came off so flawlessly and seemingly effortlessly, everyone thought Diana and I had quietly and carefully planned to get married, we were the first to admit things just sort of happened. Despite a chaotic pace to do "a million things" in such a short period of time, we pulled off a memorable event ... one still being talked about all these years later by those who were there. The theme of "simple, but elegant" carried on from our wedding to become one of the binding threads in the rich, textured fabric of our lives.

Before and after the wedding we lived in a one bedroom apartment at Calle Nicaragua No. 17 (fourth floor) in the heart of Madrid. We lived there until December when Diana headed home to California ... I would be getting out of the Air Force not long thereafter. By January we were in Fresno where we would live until May of 1978 when we would move to Ukiah. During that same month, from Diana (and the "heart" of her name) came Ian on Sunday, May 23rd - early in the morning hours.

Ian reading
Ukiah, 1977Ian, age 2 - 1978
"light at the keyboard"

We moved to Santa Cruz in 1978 and then to Salinas in 1979. In the Spring of 1981 we moved to Santa Barbara. November 1985 saw us moving to Bellevue, Washington. In February of 1987 we moved to Livingston, California. In October of 2000, we moved to the Austin, Texas, area.

We're proud of all we have done in reaching yet another milestone. And, we are certain many of the **best vignettes in Life's Theater** are yet to come.

"Two such as you with such a master speed
Cannot be parted nor be swept away
From one another once you are agreed
that life is only life forevermore
Together wing to wing and oar to oar."

THE MASTER SPEED, *Robert Frost*

Gravity!

We had talked about it for a long, but it wasn't until the summer of 1999 on our vacation in Kauai that we started jotting down notes. We just wanted to **put down on paper what we have learned** about each other, life, and, well, everything else in between. It was just a coincidence (or maybe it really wasn't) that we ended up deciding to publish something we would call "Gravity" to <http://alvernaz.com> to celebrate our 30th wedding anniversary. We had had alvernaz.com since I first snagged that domain name in the "early days" of the Internet (before anyone had any idea what to do with web sites) ... and I'm so glad I did because ever since then Diana and I have had the **same email address** which is our first name and last name with a "@" symbol in between. And, along with that we have always had our online presence at alvernaz.com.

Moss Landing, CA
Spring 1998

The reason we chose the word "Gravity" is because we look at being together as some kind of force (i.e., gravity or strong enough to be like gravity) magically holding two people together. And, in life you are drawn to or repelled from people based on whatever that force might be (howsoever it works or doesn't work or could or should work, whatever that means). People will be drawn (pulled in) to who the two of you become as your relationship evolves. The most important factor above everything else is that the "gravitational pull" that holds the two of you together remains in tact. And, trust is the single biggest thing binding it all together enter twining all of what happens into the fabric of your life. Once you lose gravity in your relationship, it is over. And, together, the people you "pull in" because of the dynamic force fields of your gravitational properties, well, those are the people you want to spend time with. The people who "come and go," not really being attracted by (and, well, really repelled by) the force of your gravitation, well, that's really a self-correcting/adjusting situation, because you are probably much better off without them being around to muck things and your relationship up!



Whatever combination of factors, fate, chance, and Lady Luck, brought Diana and me together, we both know we are quite **lucky to be living the life we have lived**. And, just as we did when we wrote "Raising a Child People Will Like" (when Ian was five years old), we now want to share what we know and have learned about spending a lifetime together. We don't think we have all the answers, but we do know we **our perspectives and attitudes** have made a difference (not only for us, but others). We aren't putting all of this information "out there" for everyone to agree with us, but



we feel all of this information and perspective will lead to discussions that people just might not otherwise have had ... and, hopefully, it will lead to one of the things we think is most important in life ... and that is to **pay attention!**

As we have zoomed on through the first decade of this sparkling, brand new Millennium and then on to that special day marking a major milestone, we wanted to share "elements" of what we call "GRAVITY." We first did this in honor of our 30th wedding anniversary. We were going to wait until the actual date of our anniversary to do this, but then we decided that there was no reason not to start launching "Gravity" in November of 2000-1 ... and then, from thereon out, we continued publishing the elements of "Gravity" to alvernaz.com as we wrote them. It is important to note that we were so ready for the Millennium that all through the 1990s we wrote the date as "2000-" however many years it was until the Millennium would "hatch upon us."

I wrote something for our 25th Wedding Anniversary in 1995 that we still feel is more relevant than ever. This was at a time when I was working as part of Microsoft's Windows95 and MSN (Microsoft Network) Teams. I couldn't be with Diana on the exact date of our 25th anniversary because I was working at Microsoft as we were getting everything ready for the worldwide launch of Windows95 that would be coming up in August. Diana and I both agreed it was too much of an opportunity for me to miss, because it would be an experience most mere mortals wouldn't ever get to participate in (and learn from). So we celebrated our 25th anniversary the week before and after the actual date.



Here is what I wrote to Diana in a special card I created for her:

*Diana, We know each other so well
We can easily read each other's _____.*

*We can fill in the words to
to finish each other's _____.*

*So now we can spend less time
_____ and more time _____!*

And, now, what follows are the key components of "Gravity" ...

Two people together should be a love story that doesn't fade or flicker once the newness wears off. While things will definitely change over the course of a collected combination of the hours, days, and months all totaling up to years, without exception, if you have found true love - **that one special person** - then everything else will always remain secondary.



When the right set of circumstances comes about, being together is effortless and so enjoyable you want time to stand still. Being apart makes your heart ache, so much so you can't wait to be together again. The intensity of such love gets stronger and better, glowing brighter, with each new day ... mainly because it has more to do with passion instead of lust. Whenever you have "free time," it shouldn't even be a question of what you are going to do, other than be together. Why waste time "doing other things" or being pulled and pushed toward what amounts to diverse distractions by others, when you can spend some time together doing what you want to do in the company of each other?

Ignited by infatuation, fused by love, tempered by "finding the way" together, strengthened by trust and carefully honed over time, the union of individuality grows to become one. Each person maintains distinctiveness, while continually reinventing and shaping a togetherness into an evolving force capable of overcoming any and all impediments. Each person's strengths bolster the other person's weaknesses (neither of which should ever be exploited, used for gain, or "played to").

Marriage (or any strong, solid relationship) is, without exception, "being there" for each other ... taking care of each other, making the other person feel special (especially at the most unexpected times). It is somehow knowing what is needed without a word being spoken. It has been said that there is that one person - a soul mate - for you in life. You just have to somehow find that person, all in sync with that person finding you ... and when you do find each other, it is magical to the point of being intoxicating.



The framework in which the "business" of a marriage is conducted



alternates between six reference points: **a ballet, an opera, the symphony, interludes, center stage**, and so much of what goes on (or doesn't go on) **behind the scenes**. All of this is interspersed among various and assorted headaches and heartaches (most of which are self-induced, but most often not "owned up" to) mixed in between flashes of brilliance and fits of stupidity.



Butterfly Gardens
Piedra Blanca, 1996

Just as a ballet is a series of movements, so is a marriage. It is that special cadence and rhythm you develop walking together or how you can so easily (and instinctively) hold hands (most of the time without ever looking). It is even the carefully synchronized turns and choreographed roll-overs during a long night's slumber - all without so much as a poke in the eye or a punch in the nose (well, most of the time, anyway). All of the dozens and dozens of combined movements in a marriage should effortlessly provide a momentum to constantly propel the two of you forward together to reach the same destination ... as opposed to people who work against each other pulling in opposite directions.

The symphony aspect of a marriage is all about the harmony of intellect and mutual interests. Sour notes are bound to occur, but the single most important operative in such instances is looking closely at what didn't work (or should have worked), NOT looking for where to place blame. Fix whatever is wrong and then move on without being a sponge to "sop it all up" personally. It is the intent of your sincerity that matters most, not what seems to "look good" solely for the sake of appearance to others so you'll

feel better about yourself.

Conflict enters a marriage in the form of the most dramatic opera where the interplay of relatives and friends (right down to the "singing" in overpowering tones) almost always seem to be right, smack-dab in the middle of something you a) are doing; b) are about to do; c) don't want to do; d) want to do; or e) should have done. A simple equation that resolves any ensuing "issues" is that of simply removing the "relative" factor(s) while simultaneously ignoring an avalanche of "friendly advice!" You know in your heart (and "gut feelings," too) what is specifically and exactly right for the two of you ... what is right, fair, and honestly true. If you go with what you know is right, you'll do just fine. And, you'll eliminate so many of the regrets (*woulda, coulda, shouldas*) that manifest themselves as the end result of doing what others talked or bullied you into doing. And, you know at any point "things go bad" (most often from what others told or ordered you to do), it will be

those same individuals who will immediately throw their hands up in the air and let you, completely on your own, deal with whatever resulting circumstance(s) occur!

Interludes and Center Stage are the heart of a marriage (and your life) and they are the determinant factors in the "making or breaking of things." All of the private moments together are the interludes that combine to reinforce the strengths of a marriage ... or they provide the sum total for it unraveling (especially when the interludes become few and far between). Whatever you have together during interludes is greatly magnified at those points where "all eyes are upon the two of you" center stage in the Theater of Life.



Remarried by Tony
Las Vegas 1997

Taking center stage isn't an everyday occurrence (if it is, that can thrust upon you a humongous negative force with the single intent/result of driving two individuals in completely opposite directions), but whatever is right (or wrong) in your marriage will be greatly magnified and accentuated at those moments.

And, even when things are going great for the two of you, there will be those individuals lurking in the shadows (more so than you think) who are jealous of who you are and what you have. Such characters, who are mostly sinister and devious, will "work hard" in various and assorted ways to "undo things" any way they can. Rule of thumb #1 in life: those who pretend to be the most innocent (most often shrugging their shoulders as they defend themselves with the all-purpose statement of, "I don't know anything about it.") are definitely the culprits, best described as "reprobates with multiple faces."



Hawaii (Big Island)
July 1988

The "behind the scenes" aspect of any marriage or relationship could be looked at as the undercurrent or undertow that is a combined set of forces (usually manipulated by people who say they are looking out for your best interests, but really are, more often than not, seeing what they can get out of the deal) in an interplay of so many things that just go on in your life (whether you are aware of them or not). And, it is the behind the scenes stuff that usually results in either serendipitous things that can be incredibly good or horribly bad. All six reference points in a marriage are in a constant state, swirling all around you. The secret in dealing with all of it (even what you don't even know is going on or might happen) is to **PAY**



ATTENTION!

Over the course of "being married" there will be countless interludes, center stage, and behind the scenes moments randomly sprinkled across a memoried collection of slightly complex scenery and subdued landscapes spattered and splashed amidst episodes of flashes of brilliance and fits of stupidity. The trick to surviving it all (and thriving) is in always, always, always doing what the two of you know is right for both of you. Forget what everyone else says (or tries to bully you into doing). Doing things to please others sets the stage for court rooms and lawyers (at which point you can definitely forget about "working things out" ... you see, by then it won't be in any certain party's interests to resolve things ... and, well, Gravity will have ceased to exist ... at least for that relationship).



Time, sex and money are three critical components of marriage. There will never be enough of any of them (and we won't even get into how much of each gets wasted). That's where the "balancing act" comes into play. Remove one or more of those numerators from the equation and you are doomed. Time is the toughest one of the three to "manage" or get a handle on (whatever time actually is that we so arrogantly think we can manage, manipulate, or even figure out what it is, should be, or can really be used for). Money will turn out to be like the tides, ebbing and flowing. And, then there is, well, you know, SEX. That's the wild card in all of this. Once it becomes a weapon or tool of manipulation, you can pretty much "turn out the lights" when you leave the room of marriage for the den of affairs, the backyard

sideshows, and other "get even" distractions ... all while you slowly, but surely lose complete control of Gravity ... to the point of needing to sit down on a regular basis so you can try to catch your breath to maybe handle all of the incidents you'll need to deal with that you never even imagined would happen!

Sex is really the cornerstone that solidifies everything and "holds it all together" in certain ways that all have to do with "urges." When sex disappears (or reaches the point where you can't remember the last time it happened) everything else that made the marriage special will have dissolved (whether you want to admit it or not ... or even realize it).

That said, a marriage "shored up" with underpinnings of just sex and/or money will, over time, become unstitched. The substance that bolsters a marriage comes most certainly from sparking the intellect - *intellectual stimulation*. When things click between two people that intellectual stimulation will be obvious (just as obvious as when there is no "there" there in a marriage or relationship). The glimmering, shimmering residue from a marriage fused on two intellects in harmony is where the wit, whimsy and fancifulness combine to create a noticeable standard for the way things ought to be with two people ... and all without so much as even trying. You can't make this happen. Effortlessly, it just happens to happen when it happens ... and, you'll just know, on several levels (conscious and otherwise) when it is (and ISN'T) there.



What makes a marriage work is also what can cause it to disintegrate. All of the magic and intellect that makes things come together - if that isn't there, then there is no marriage. What you have instead is an illusion of marriage that really becomes nothing more than a convenience when necessary for either or both parties to a) be used as needed, but b) not be bothered with when one or the other chooses not to be inconvenienced. We've seen it all where marriages deteriorate into "roommate status," because it would involve too much or just be an inconvenience to do anything about whatever it is that is no longer there.

It's a delicate balance of dozens of factors (some large, some small - the small ones being those that really come back to bite hard on your intellect ... and arse).

Listed below are what Diana and I feel are the most important aspects of what makes a marriage work. Remove one or more and there are sure to be problems - all of which eventually "add up" to simply nothing, totally the complete dizziness and disorienting loss of control over Gravity.



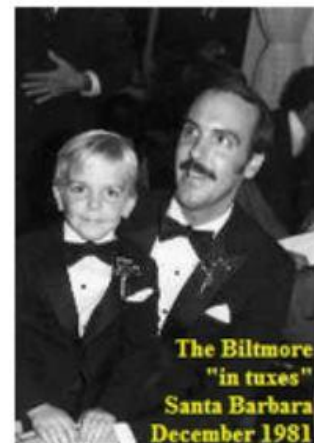
The factors that need to "be there" for everything to click in a marriage:

- Communication (stop talking and it is over).
- Trust (single most important factor – you should be able to trust your life to the other person, without the slightest hesitation)
- Respect
- Honesty
- Working together
- Doing things together
- Making decisions together
- Helping and supporting each other
- Mutual Interests (and needs)
- Passion (without this, forget about it!)
- Making the other person feel special
- Spending as much time together as possible
- Romantic getaways
- Vacations (getting on a plane, flying far, far away, and going somewhere for an adventure)
- Flowers, surprises, and laughing
- Fun - lots and lots and lots of fun stuff
- Unpredictability (as in spontaneously doing special/fun/crazy things)
- The "little things" that you never seem to have enough time to do together

If you start wondering what's wrong with your marriage (this is true for any relationship) that is the same as a loud buzzer letting you know "something just ain't right!" It might already be too late to do something about it at that point ... especially if you have been "wondering about it" for a long time. And, forget about counseling ... that only makes the person you let muck up your life even more so get rich while draining your emotions (and bank account). Remember, if you don't continue to have problems, "those people" won't have you "on the hook" to keep coming back and coming back. And, whenever "hanging out with the guys" or "girls night out" gets to be too "regular of a thing" then you need to start looking for where things went wrong in your relationship ... and it never ever a one-sided situation (remember "it takes two people to tango!"). This is true any time there are regular and extended absences – for whatever reason(s).

Perhaps the best format for marriage would be a one year contract, that is renewable at the end of the year, provided both parties agree to it. There would be provisions for everything in terms of "dividing things up" and "what happens with the kids, pets and property." That way, if it does all come to an end, you'd never need to visit the nastiness and insanity of "Lawyer-Land" - an amusement park of "wild rides," nightmares, and despondency, all wrapped up in obscene lawyer's fees. Also, by knowing a marriage would be renewable annually, it would tend to motivate individuals to "do more things" to stay together. The fact that a marriage could so easily be "evaporated" would make the ones that last all the more special. If true love is involved, then you really don't need any kind of "binding paper" or certificates (except for the "legal matters" aspect of the real world). And, as a matter of fact, each year going into our anniversary, Diana and I do have "discussions" about whether or not we want to renew our wedding contract ... so you see, we're setting yet one more example for how things should work! Oh, and, we have, indeed, **decided to "give it a go" for yet another year - #41!**

And, as I mentioned above, when Diana and I got married the priest said, "You need to replace I, me and my with us, ours and we." That, combined with a theme of "simple, but elegant," set the tone for how we would live our lives together. We both feel those two things pinpoint the single most significant factor in being together - looking at things from the perspective of **one entity**.



**The Biltmore
"in tuxes"
Santa Barbara
December 1981**





We also set a basic rule of "Holidays at home" when our son, Ian, was born. Anyone was more than welcomed to visit us for the holidays, but we always got to enjoy such special days without the need to travel anywhere beyond our living room. Looking back now, Diana and I both feel this was one of those "smart moves" on our part and it had great impact on creating annual traditions, improving the overall quality of our lives. There was always a consistency to holidays and richness in our lives (that lives on now all of our memories and photos). Instead of being nomadic gypsies, traipsing around to various and assorted relatives' houses, we set down roots wherever we lived and we were a family together. That made a high difference in our **Art of Life**.

But what is the real, true secret of a marriage working?

It is, quite simply, the two individuals being and working together for each other.

It is the interplay of maturity and wisdom. It is caring about each other and being able to express those feelings in as many possible ways, unconditionally and whenever needed. When one is down, the other one "picks spirits and things up."

A marriage is belief in each other and expectations of knowing the other person will always be there ... no matter what! As each hour, day, week, month, year, and decade goes by, you both build upon that solid foundation.

There are no excuses, no reasons, and no exceptions. A marriage that works is a direct result of two exceptional individuals who have come together to honestly share their lives (and everything else that happens - good or bad). It is simply nothing more and nothing less.



Working together is what provides the "staying power" of a marriage. Approach everything as a team - never competing, having one common pot (money-wise), and doing what you feel is best for the two of you, not what other people think (or insist) should be done.

Two people come together, bringing diverse backgrounds that are then blended into one, maximizing their intersecting paths and then converging to head in the same direction. **Heading in the same direction** (as simple as that sounds) is a critical factor in terms of people "ending up" together and growing together. It is sharing your lives. It is being together. It is the comfort of solitude together. It is the warm feeling of making each other feel special. It just is - and it is priceless because of that. If it is a true marriage, then each one knows that without the other person there would be unbearable emptiness.



Marriage isn't a way of life - it IS life!

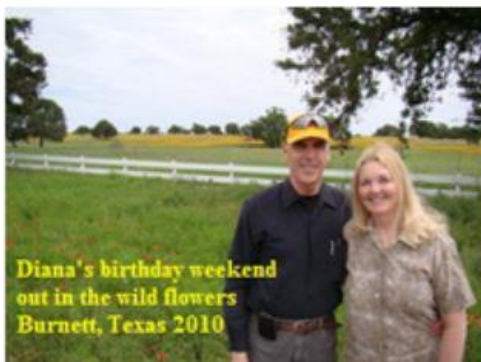
Oh, and one last point: Forget about a plan! Direction and goals, yes. Hopes and dreams, yes. But a plan? NO! There will be far too many factors "at play" to ever have a "full (fool?) proof" plan. Unexpected "things" and "little surprises" will seem to come from out of nowhere (not really ... mostly because you just weren't paying attention). Being flexible, innovative, inventive, and creative along with improvising, will be required to "head in the general direction" you were looking to go. Once you come to understand that (and it takes a LONG TIME to "get it"), then the two of you - together as one - will be able to handle anything at all.



Oh, and there is much more to come, because we will soon be leaving Austin for who NOSE where ... stay tuned/tooned!

You can email Diana at diana@alvernaz.com ... and you can always, any time, any day (or night) email me at bil@alvernaz.com ...

Diana, Diana, Diana ... you are simply the absolute BEST!



One final, very important note ... while all of this was written as a tribute for, to, and about Diana on her birthday, it is dedicated to the nicest, caring, most sincere, helpful, kind, genuine, "real deal" person who is always, always there for us ... Linda Ash, Diana's sister. It is such an absolute joy to have Linda in our lives! She is there for us whenever we need her (just as we are there/here whenever she needs us) and we love our visits with her ... and we look forward to all that is yet to come in our solid gold relationship with her and Bob.



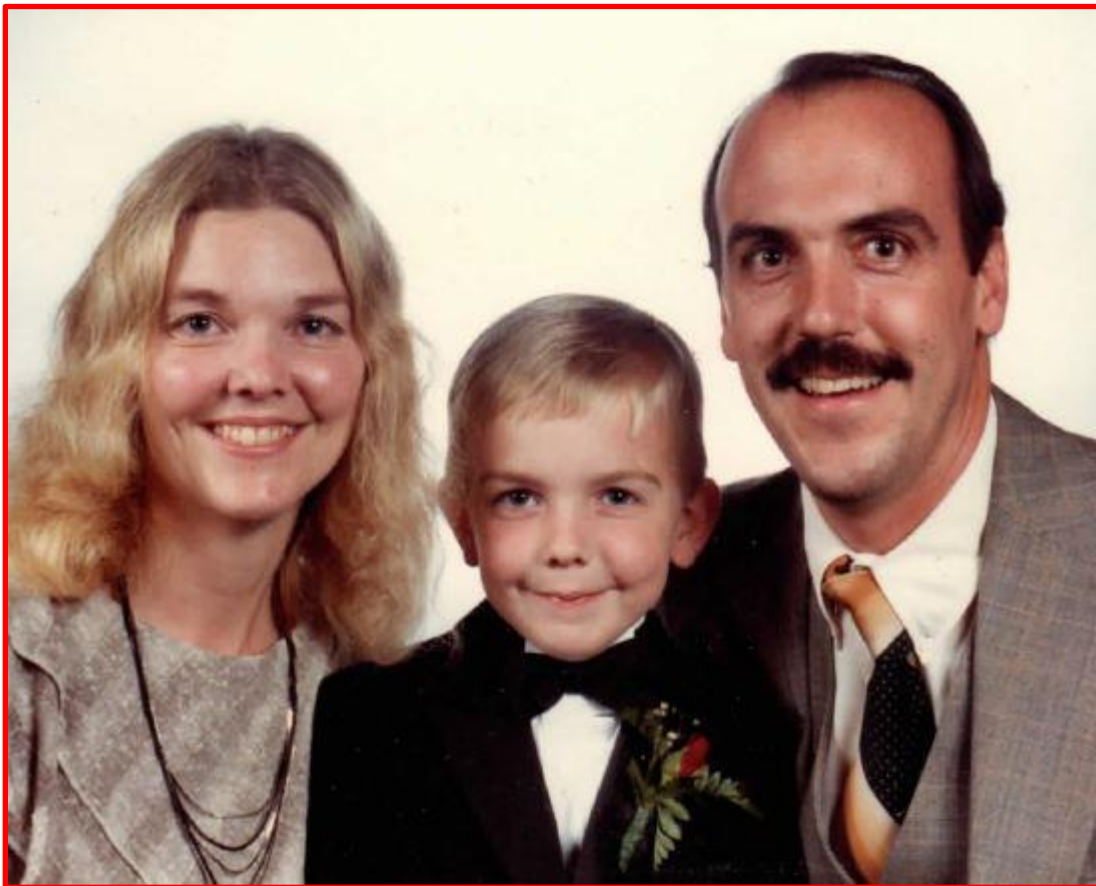
So, there you have it. It is a much "better read" on the Internet, but I wanted to be sure it is "recorded" here in my PhD Life Thesis. To find this on the Internet, just go to:

<http://alvernaz.com/townesquare/html/diana1.html>



The Illustrated Diana and Bil. ...

The purpose of this section in my PhD Life Thesis is to provide just one example (and a very recent one) of how Diana and I work together on everything, no matter what we do. And, this was especially true in being a family and raising our son, Ian, too ... Diana and I worked together, as a team, on everything. This is a photo of us in December of 1985. Ian was still wearing his rented tux he had worn the night before (I had one just like it) to the Santa Barbara Board of REALTORS annual dinner.



In late January of 2017, we started “checking things out” for putting down new flooring in our house – laminate hardwood floors ... to replace a horrid green rug!

I’m including this “episode” out of so many hundreds and thousands during our life together (including before we got married) because it is such a perfect example of how Diana and I have done everything, as a team, over all these decades, together.



We had talked and talked about it for a long time before actually “getting down to it,” as we considered all options for doing hardwood floors. We got three different bids and chose Lowe’s. Not just for the best price, but because Lowe’s never ever NEVER lets us down. And, Lowe’s certainly came through this time, too.

So the flooring and other supplies were delivered in early February and the actual work of “getting ready” for the flooring started in late January of 2017. The key point here is that going into the “guys getting here to do the job” (on March 8th), we worked to get the living room and my computer work room (it is really the front bedroom of the house) “emptied out.” But, here’s the thing. We still needed to “live our lives” while all this was going on, so we mapped out a plan (like we always do) for where to put everything ... and it all worked out perfectly. We could even find anything we wanted during the time that all of our stuff was crammed into the garage, an extra bedroom, the screened in patio, and the kitchen dining area (which is where our 80 inch Sony TV and our couch, along with Diana’s computer desk, all resided on a temporary basis. Yes! It was a “tight fit,” but it all worked just fine, including the reception for our digital antenna (no cable TV in this house!).

And, the end result is that we have wooden floors that are just so awesome. There was a “hitch” once they ripped up the rug. The living room cement base, from the house shifting, had a rise of ONE INCH right in the middle of the room that had to be “grinded down” ... that took most of Wednesday (the first day they were here) and ALL of Thursday – for a total of over 15 hours of grinding. Then they poured 300 pounds of floor leveling material (basically, it was some kind of cement). But, even despite that “bump in the road” of the entire process, they still finished on Friday, March 10th. And, that included them running my speaker wires along the walls under the baseboards. So now our sound system for SiriusXM radio, as well as our home theater sound system for the TV, is even more awesome ... especially with my nearly 50 year old JBL air suspension speakers. They sound great, better than ever after all these years (I got them when I was in the Air Force in Madrid, Spain).

Overall, putting in hardwood floors led to revamping, streamlining, and just making everything “work” so much better. Feng Shui “flow” is the best way to describe how much more “live-able” our house is. Even my computer room, I completely reworked EVERYTHING, including placing my desk at more of an angle and it is, in a word, perfect! I work with four computers “run” by a single keyboard and mouse. I created that “magic” using an ancient KVM switch that I managed to configure to handle all of my computers with two running Windows 8.1, one running Windows 10, and one “still flying” on Windows 7.

So here are the photos, with some narration along the way, that perfectly illustrate and demonstrate how Diana and I do things together. And, so often, as we work together, we don’t even use any words, because each of us knows what the other one is doing (or going to do) ... perfect harmony, always in sync with each other!



Living room (& Lucky) – **BEFORE.**



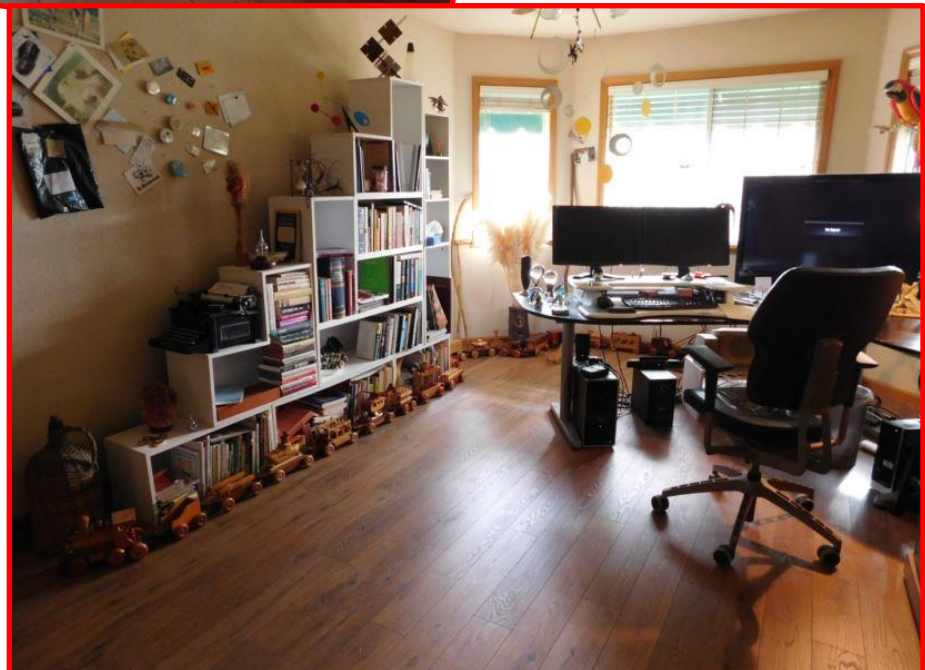
Living room – **AFTER.**



My writing/computer room – **BEFORE.**



My writing/computer room – **AFTER.**





Hallway, "dog-guarded," **BEFORE**
and **AFTER**.



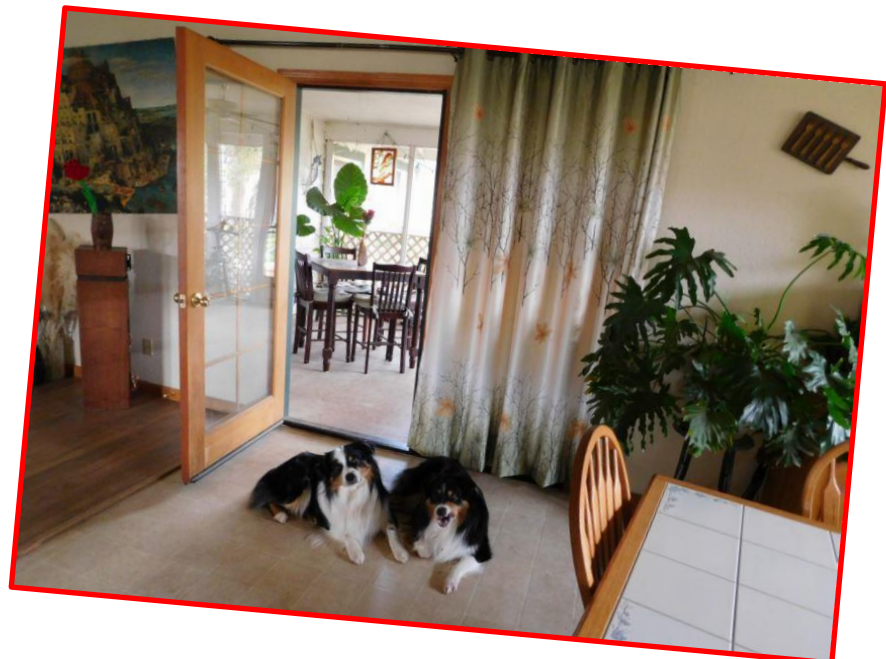
Even though they “finished the job” on late Friday afternoon, we didn’t do anything at all about “putting things back in place,” until starting on Sunday. It had been such a flurry of “getting things ready” for a 6+ week period leading up to the job actually being done. Diana and I were completely drained of energy. So, on Friday afternoon we sat in the corner of our living room with Max and Lucky (his head on my knee), where our large screen TV usually resides and “snapped a photo.”

The photos below show the massive “rising” crack that needed “grinded down” before they could “level the flooring” to put in the hardwood floor.





And, then one thing led to another. What started out as “just putting in” new hardwood floors, quickly became an all-encompassing “re-org” of every single room in our house! We reworked how we had everything in our kitchen dining area, where my grandfather’s 1928 Majestic Radio sits atop an antique “ice box” I built ... this is also where Diana’s parrot roosts! We rearranged our patio area, the other rooms in our house ... and even the garage, because we went through every single “box of things” long-stored in the garage. And, it was in many of those boxes that I found so many of the photos and images included in this PhD Life Thesis! It definitely was the Universe “at work” for all of this to come together at one single point in time!



Dorothy's Treasure Chest and Time Capsule ...

Going into my 30th birthday, my mom started talking about "doing something special for me." Year after year she kept saying that she had a surprise for me that I would really like. By my 40th birthday, she told me that while she had been planning for years to do something special for me, she had all of what I would want, but that she wanted me to help her "put it together."

Well, we never got around to doing whatever it was she had planned to do for me. I had a pretty good idea that it was a collection of things about me, which, indeed, it all was. Sadly, I never "put the pieces together" while she was alive so I could work on the project with her. But, after she died, I came across boxfuls of "stuff" ... photos and so many things from over the years.

So, now, all these years later, as I'm putting together this PhD Life Thesis, I started going through all of Dorothy's boxes. And, wow! I couldn't believe all the stuff about me that she had kept over the years. There will only be a very small "collection of things" here, but they are the ones that, to me, really stand out.

I took this photo of my mom, Dorothy Ruth Harris, born April 8th, 1921, on her birthday in 1965, as she sat next to the roses I got for her. Pink roses. She loved 'em! "You always know just what to get me," she said that day. As she sat there, I told her to NOT MOVE. I got my camera and took this photo. In the boxes of stuff she had been saving for me, this photo was right on top ... it was almost as if, when I opened the first box, she was saying (and I could actually hear her voice all these years later) with her sweet smile, "Well, you finally got around to putting this all together!"

As with unearthing my high school journal, Diana's driving record that I kept while teaching her to drive, and my journal from Spain, when I found all of this stuff from my mom, it was such moments of joy. My mom was always my biggest fan! And, the best part in all of this is that it all fits just perfectly as part of this PhD Life Thesis!



Going through all of the boxes of stuff my mother kept, I found so many things. I'm only including select items from the massive amount of "artifacts" my mother kept. So many photos, letters, class photos, and so much more. Once I started to "dive in" and go through it all I realized that my mom kept just about everything. And, while going through it all, it brought back so many memories of growing up as well as so much about after I left home, especially photos and letters I sent home while I was in the Air Force at Hancock Field in Syracuse, New York, and also from Spain.

So what follows are a random selection of "stuff" from Dorothy's Treasure Chest which really turned out to be a time capsule. All of what I'm presenting here is in no particular order (by date, topic, or anything else) ... it pretty much worked out that as I found "treasures," I just put them in here. So, nothing close to a systematized order, but that makes it all the more interesting and fun! I'm still astounded that my mother had so many photos that Diana and I either lost track of in time or somehow just, for some reason, didn't save them ... all of that being in the days before digital photos.

To get things started for this section, here is a photo of just some of the "mess" as I went through all of Dorothy's Treasure Chest/time capsule boxes. I originally planned to include things in a specific order, but since my mom basically "threw things in a box" (those were her words) ... I'm just going to present what's included here in the order that I came across different items (from photos to everything else). There will be a running narrative that has now become an important "piece of the puzzle" for my PhD Life Thesis. (Photo taken 02III17)



So, without further ado or ta-dew, I present artifacts from Dorothy's Treasure Chest ... the best place to start is with Dorothy photos and a smattering of narrative.

She was an artist!

I knew from an early age that my mother was artistically talented, because anything she did, there was always a special touch. From birthday cake designs, to so many other things, especially her drawings.

And, one day when I told her I could see things in clouds, she said she could see things in rocks. So, in addition to her always drawing and sketching (which my father, for whatever stupid reason, always tried to stop her from "wasting time"), my mother would pick up a stone or rock and then what she saw would come to life. Below is an example of one rock (front and back) that my mom created for me. The brilliance of the work speaks for itself!



My mom always included her drawings in all of the cards and letters she sent to Diana and me, as well as to our son, Ian. If my mom had had the support and encouragement of my dad (she always had it from me), who knows what she could have done! Sadly, she never got the chance. But, still, she always kept drawing and sketching.



FRANK (my grandfather)

It is uncanny the first photo I found in Dorothy's Treasure Chest was the photo I opened this section with. Well, the next photo I found was of my grandfather and me, taken in 1955. A group family photo was being taken and one of my uncles who was "arranging things" for who would be where in the photo. I was positioned in a somewhat obscure spot (my uncle did that on purpose). So my grandfather, who was known as "Frank," said, "Stop. I want him (pointing to me) up here by me." As my grandfather sat me on the railing next to him, he then whispered to me, "I can't have my favorite one down there."



I was always "the one," out of all the grandkids (and there were a lot of 'em), that he was always drawn to. I spent summers at the 40 acre ranch with him and my grandmother ... with no TV. But, there was always plenty to do. We went to bed early because I would always get up at dawn with Frank to start "working the farm." My grandfather never owned a tractor. He did everything with his horse, Molly ... and I loved that horse. Despite being scolded by my grandmother, I would sneak out carrots and apples to Molly. Whenever Molly saw me, she always came "a running." My grandfather's take on me doing that was always a smile as he said, "Apples and carrots are her favorites. Your grandmother doesn't need to know. It will be our little secret."

The photo just above is with me and Frank by the orange tree next to the tank house. In the upper left corner of the photo, you can see the door to the second floor which was my dad's bedroom as a kid. That room also contained the levels and wheel for controlling where all the water flowed and went from the 3,000 gallon tank on the third floor. But here's the incredible part in all of this. In 1987 when we moved in to the house my grandfather built, that second floor door led to what became my computer work room in all of what I did as part of the Microsoft Windows95 team.

These two photos are of me with Molly, in August of 1961 and at about a year old. I loved her from the first day I saw her. I





spent so much time with that amazing horse, including, once I got older, putting on her harness and getting her ready to work. She was a working horse! And, yep, my grandfather let me “hold the thick leather reins” to “drive” the carts, wagons, and plows that Molly pulled with such great might! She was such an amazing creature!

To the left here is me with Frank’s dog Brownie, my other favorite critter “at the ranch” (which was how people referred to my grandfather’s 40 acre working farm). He had everything from pigs and cows to goats and chickens. I loved feeding the chickens and gathering the eggs, of which there were so many. My grandfather sold them.

I spent a lot of summers and many other times (lots and lots of weekends) there with him and my grandmother. When he died December 19th, 1961, I upset everyone in the family because I refused to go to the funeral. I told everyone I wanted to remember him the way he was, not “fitted in the casket” in a blue/grey suit without his trademark glasses that he was forever cleaning ... he wore a suit when he got married, but never after that. He even said he wanted to be buried in his work clothes. After the funeral one of my uncles told me, “It’s good you didn’t go. They took off his glasses and it didn’t even look like him in a suit.” Not long after he died, my grandmother sold Molly without telling anyone so all of us never got to say goodbye to that wonderful horse who had been “at the ranch” forever!



Frank and Helen Alvernaz clowning around in the 1940s in their back yard area.

Things were never the same after my grandfather died. It just wasn’t the same there, but I could see him everywhere around the place. But, with him and Molly gone, things just never did feel right there – so much a great presence was missing (but he was still there ... I could always somehow feel it). That period after the death of my grandfather was truly a turning point in my life where I somehow got a crystal clear, objective look at who I was (which had a lot to do with spending so much time with my grandfather and all of his encouragement). I know my grandfather (wherever it is that death takes you) was somehow guiding me, along with the Universe, of course. All I know is that from that point on, it was very clear to me who I was, what I wanted (and didn’t want) ... and EVERYTHING was different after that ... including tolerating the complete ignorance of my father and brother who just “didn’t get it” about who I was. But, my mom, Dorothy, definitely knew ... and I honestly think she kept all of my stuff because she knew, as she always said, that I was very special.



This is one final part of the story about my grandfather and me. Though he only said it a few times ... and, really, he never needed to say it, because it was so obvious by his actions and deeds that I was, indeed, his favorite of all the grandkids. And, the one moment that really demonstrated that was on the Sunday before he died, I was by his side, talking to him. With all of the drugs, he was no longer himself, but there was enough of him "still in there" that we could have fairly decent talks.



I sat on his bed next to him and he held my hand (the same room that would become our bedroom when, in 1987, so many years later, we moved into that house he built). Though he could speak English quite well, he always talked to my grandmother in Portuguese. At one point he "barked orders" to my grandmother and I could tell she wasn't happy, but she did what he told her to do, in that she went into a closet and brought out small "strong box" that was locked. She opened it and handed a small cloth pouch to him. He asked her to leave and close the door (there were a lot of other people in the house). He carefully pulled the drawstring on the very old looking pouch and then poured all of these gold coins out into his hand. I honestly can't say how many gold pieces were in his hand, but it was a lot! If I had to guess, I would say 20 to 30 or more.



This is the same pouch from which he took two ten dollar gold pieces to buy his 40 acre farm in 1918 (when the barn and house were built). During the 1920s when the government was going to the gold standard, they were confiscating ALL gold coins. But, what I loved about my grandfather, which I think he "handed down" those same stubborn genes to me ... he never turned in his gold coins.

He said he wanted me to have one and that I should say nothing about it to the rest of the grandkids, because they weren't getting one ... except for my brother. So I started to snatch a coin and he tapped my hand. "No," he said. Then he carefully looked the coins over, picked one out, and handed it to me, saying, "This one. This is the special one and I want you to have it. Grab one for your brother, but give it to him on your way home.

I still have that 1908 five dollar, Indian Head gold coin. My brother eventually sold his (soooooo stupid, but that was the kind of stuff my brother did). Still having this gold piece AND my grandfather's pocket watch, the pocket knife we all watched him use so often (he could peel an apple or peach "in one move" ... it was so cool!

Whatever happened to all of those other gold coins? I have no idea. It was just a few days later that my mom and uncle came to get me out of school, because it had finally happened – my grandfather had died. I was sophomore in high school. And, this was my first real encounter with the specter of death. But, I knew my grandfather had had a great 80-year life ... he was born July 3rd, 1881, on the island of Pico in the Azores. He died December 19th, 1961.



Here are two pictures of the house and barn on the three acres, where we lived from 1987 to 2000. I took the black and white photo of the barn in August of 1961 (the same day I had my cousin take a photo of me sitting on the fence feeding Molly a carrot).



The closest corner of the barn you see in this photo, that's where Molly always was (her entire life).

I also have my grandfather's last "batch" of wine that he made in 1960. It's in a "braided" glass cask that came from "the old country." I have my grandfather's pocket watch and his pocket knife, too. These treasures are like the 1921 silver dollar my mom gave me. She always had it and then gave it to me. It's the year in which she was born.





Frank F. Alvernaz in Selma, California (Circa 1914).

These two shots are of my grandfather, from the Family History, "Windmill Perspective," that I wrote. It wasn't until I saw this photo that I realized what a "handsome and dashing" young man my grandfather was! I got these photos, along with so much else, from my grandmother as she was "going through things."



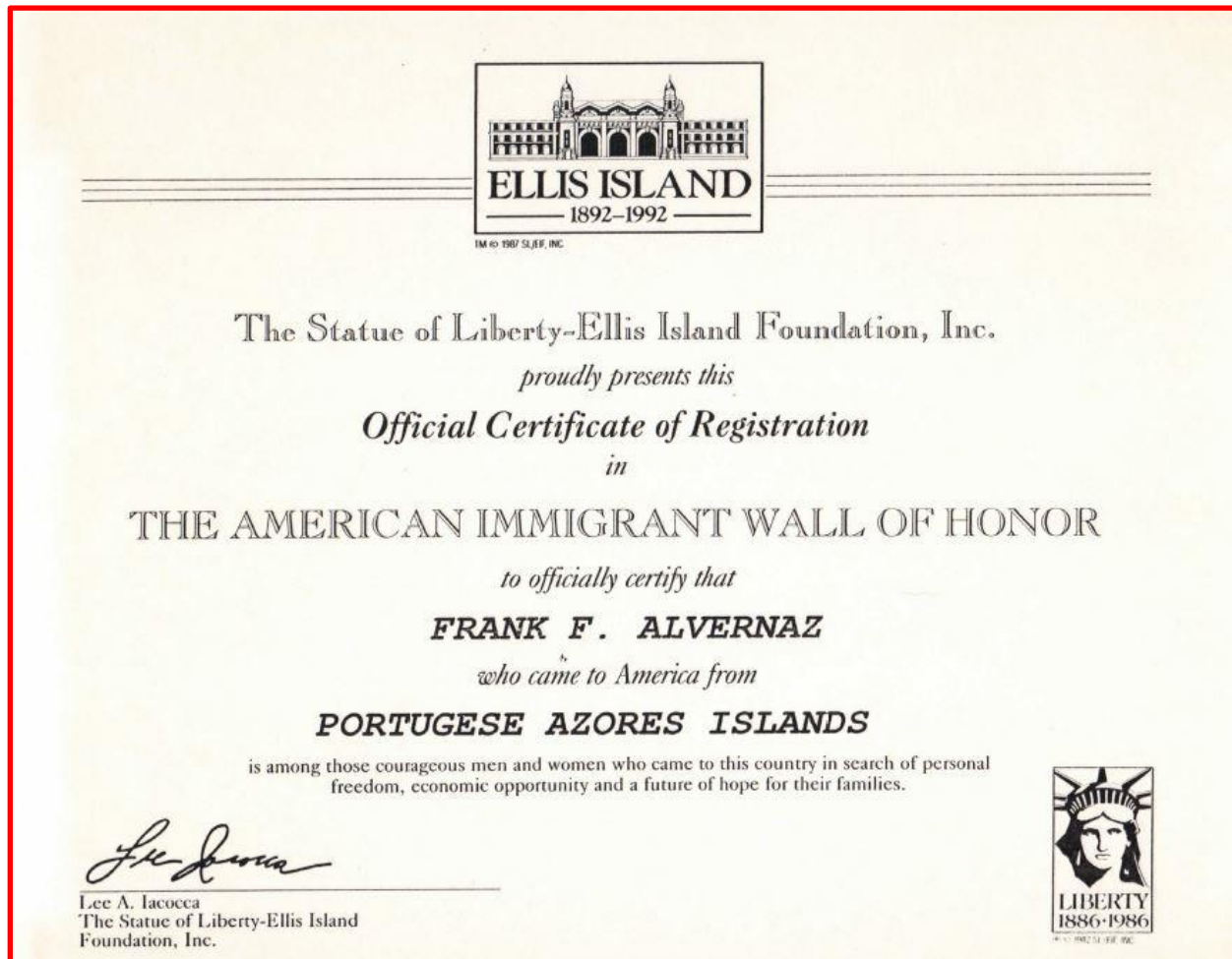
All I know is simply that Frank was one of the greatest influences in my life and I'm so glad I have things of his. And, that five-dollar gold piece – no one is ever getting that! Best of all, I have so many memories and experiences of a lifetime with a "common man" who was always himself. No pretense or bullshit. He was just Frank!

Oh, and I almost forgot to include the prize of prizes from my grandfather. And, that would be his Majestic Radio. The family got it for the grand sum of \$6 in the late 1920s. Everyone in the family would gather around the radio to listen to news and radio shows. I won't go into the details of just how I got my hands on this radio, but I do know that for years after I had snagged it, a lot of people were asking questions about "Where is the Majestic Radio?" I would always move my eyes back and forth, looking upwards towards where I know my grandfather was happily "looking down, smiling," and I would say, "I know nothing."

We now have the Majestic Radio (and, yes, I found a guy who "had tubes" so it does still work) in our kitchen dining area, residing atop the antique ice box I made ... and, the day I was putting the finish on that ice box, my mom was there talking to me, telling she and my father once had an icebox just like it!



Below is the certificate to acknowledge that I "bought a spot on the wall" at Ellis Island that will forever have my grandfather's name on it. This was during 1986 when Ellis Island was completely remodeled.



This is everything that matters to me!

Before I continue in this section, I need to make a statement about something I realized as I went through Dorothy's Treasure Chest. Over all the years and decades of doing my birthday essays (and so much other writing, including, most importantly, all of my books I have published to Amazon.com for the Kindle ebook reader), and now writing this PhD Life Thesis ... everything came into absolute perfect clarity in terms of what I now know I had really been doing all along. And, that simply is "making a statement" that *this is my life ... **this is who I am** ... and why I really like who I am*. So the revelation/epiphany in it all was that all of this "piece of writing" (complete with photos) encompasses all of the things I like and how I feel about everything.

The fact that the last thing I "came upon" while "wrapping up" this project was Dorothy's Treasure Chest, it couldn't be more perfect, because it isn't that it fills in



missing gaps (which it really does somewhat) More so, it is the frosting on the cake, complete with pictures and other items (and artifacts). It's a narrative to go with all of that and it truly does put my life into perspective, especially because you get to see so many things that occurred "along the way," with photos that have sparked so many memories and recollections of so many aspects of my life that have all added up to me getting to be me ... the person I, alone, wanted to be, independent, autonomous, and, well, just me being absolutely me! Frank Sinatra summed it up best, "I did it my way!"

At this point ... as I'm "unearthing" things from Dorothy's Treasure Chest, I have to say that there is just SO MUCH STUFF ... letters, short stories, drawings from Ian, even cards and notes we sent to my parents before Ian was born, signed, "Bil., Diana, & Briana." You see, the plan was that with the power of positive thinking (and with pictures of little girls pinned up all over our house), we were going to have a girl. But, on May 23rd, 1976, just three weeks after we moved to Ukiah, California, Ian was born. And, from the first moment I heard him cry out at dawn that morning in the hospital as he was being born, I "switched gears" from planning to make a doll house to building a wooden train set. We had a healthy baby boy and that was that. Though, for years, we always talked about our invisible daughter, Molly, who traveled the world. Any news event we would read about, we'd say something like, "I'm sure Molly was there doing something to cause it all to happen." Then, over time, Molly "faded away."

But, back to my point about just how much stuff Dorothy had saved, well, it was pretty much everything. Going through it all has brought back so many memories, but I'm only including a teeny tiny portion of all that she kept for me ... the best of the best. My mom was my biggest fan ... and, I still miss her and her wonderful smile.

Dorothy and me!

You're going to find a certain kind of "organized randomness" to what follows. The reason for that is because with so many different aspects (and times) of my life all "crammed into boxes" over the years by my mom, well, there just wasn't any real straight forward way to include all that I wanted to be sure "showed up" here. So, while it might seem like there is no rhyme or reason to this, there is, sorta, kinda, maybe! The most important thing is that whatever was supposed to be in here ... is!

And, again, I can't thank my mom, Dorothy Ruth Harris Alvernaz, for all that she did for me ... especially "coming through" with all of these treasures and artifacts, just at the exact point in time I would need them to be included herein. The only way to explain that is simply ... It's the Universe!

So here we go ... continuing on ...

School photos ...

I know my mom had all of my class photos, but somehow, over the years, many either got lost or my mom "stored them" somewhere other than in the boxes of stuff she was keeping for me. Also, in this section, I have included the photos I have



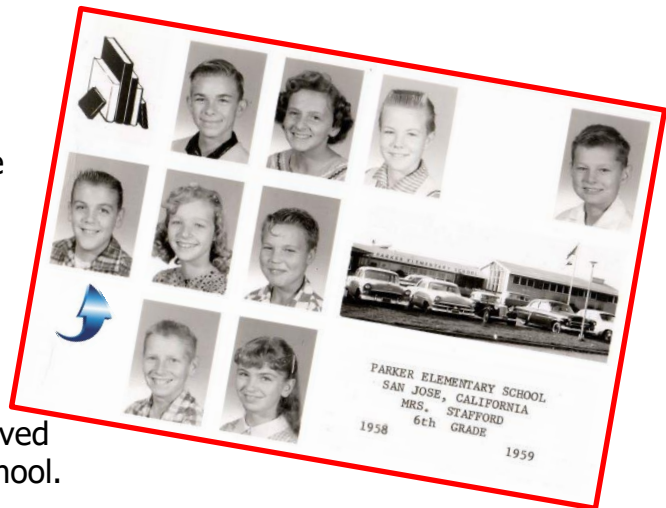
of Diana from her senior year of high school, as well as her high school graduation ceremony for her Class of 1967. Yep, I was right there, taking photos of Diana!



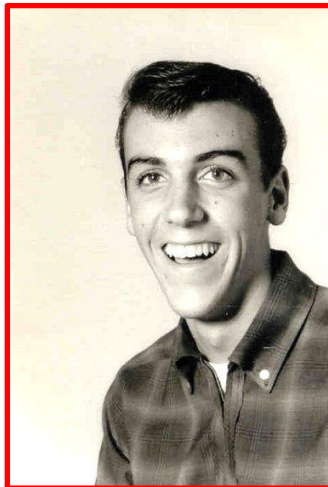
This is my third grade photo. Mrs. Moore's class of 23 students. I liked this teacher very much because she was the first to notice I had "this thing/ability" for words and writing. I couldn't wait for the points where we diagrammed sentences or worked on essays or reports.

I even told Mrs. Moore that all I wanted to do was write. And, she encouraged me, always with a smile, and making sure I could get extra credit for any and all writing that I did ... and, it was a lot.

I really liked school until the 6th grade. I won't even use the name of the teacher, because I really hated her. I don't like to admit that, but this was a woman who had her favorites/pets in the class and I wasn't one of them. I don't know what her problem was, but I have to admit I went out of my way to annoy the crap out of her. Then I moved on to 7th grade ... Union Junior High School.



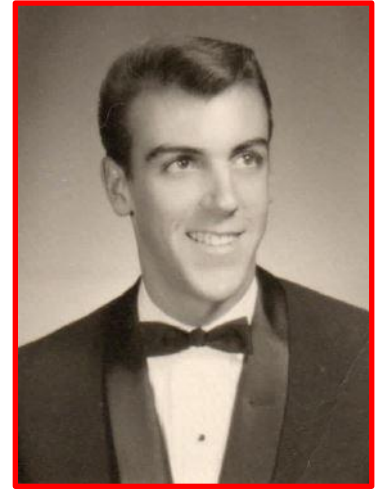
Then came high school.



This is my sophomore photo. I was already a high school "rep" for the local TV Show "Record Hop." And, dancing was one of my most favorite things to do, besides writing and playing tennis. I was even on the tennis team. We went all the way to the California state championships in my Junior year.

Writing was a "full time thing" for me at this point. And, though I wasn't yet in Mrs. Pollack's Journalism Class, I was working on the school yearbook committee and writing as much as I could. This photo was taken just a few weeks after I got my braces off. The photo on the right is my graduation "shot." I really hated to see high school end. It was a very positive life experience! And, I wonder ... whatever happened to the Class of 1965! As with so many other things in life, everyone went their own way. Me, too!

And, here is my 1965 high school graduation, group photo (500+ graduated), not counting the French Foreign Exchange Student we sent home pregnant – I had nothing to do with that!



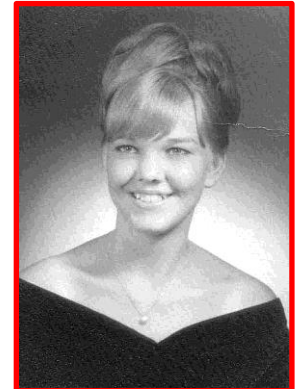
Okay, so here is something that is very cool. What you see below are photos I personally have of Diana's graduation photo, her graduating (the actual ceremony), and a shot of her in my 1967 Corvette, the day we used a 24 hour period to drive from San Jose to Disneyland and back ... where I then showered and went to work the very next day! No sleep!



With
my



mom ...



There were a ton of photos of me with my mom, but I chose just these few to include ... two when I was less than a year old and then one with my mom, my brother, Tom, and me (we have no date for that photo, but I would guess I was 8 to ten years old). The photo on the right was taken in front of my grandfather's house that Diana, Ian, and I would move into in March of 1987.





This photo to the left is a great example of how my father somehow always managed to “cut off” the top of a person’s head whenever he took photos (he was a terrible photographer!).

This was taken in the backyard of our house in San Jose on Union Avenue, near the back porch area. I don’t know why, but my mom always liked us to wear the same patterned shirts! Yikes!

Hancock Field,

Syracuse, New York

I left for the Air Force in the early morning darkness of July 19th, 1967. I sent home a lot of photos ... and my mom kept them all. So here are just a some, including one with me holding the paper Maché, green rat that MaryLee Ehrlich made for me. This rat was a mascot for my group we called the “Rat Pack.” I made up this mythical green rat who could climb walls and ceilings with his suction cup feet, to spy on people. When MaryLee, who had done Beatles drawings and paintings for me, heard about this (she and I regularly exchanged letters during this period, while she was at the University of Oregon), she decided to create a real “live” green rat for us!

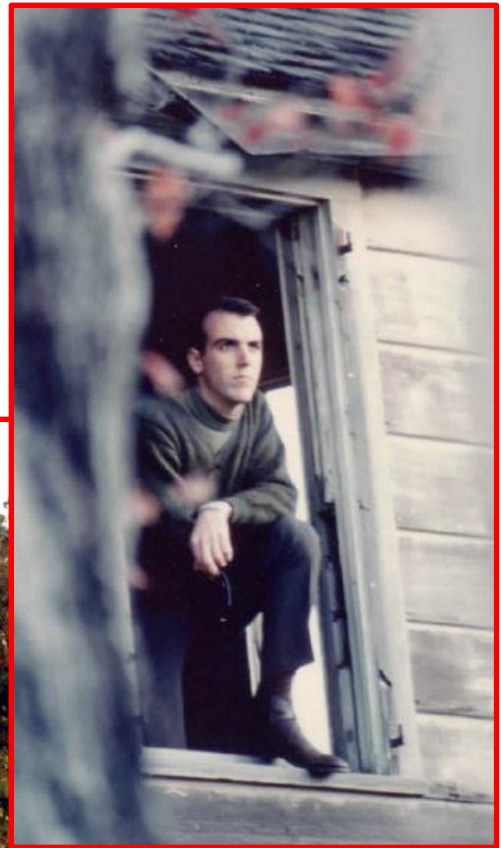
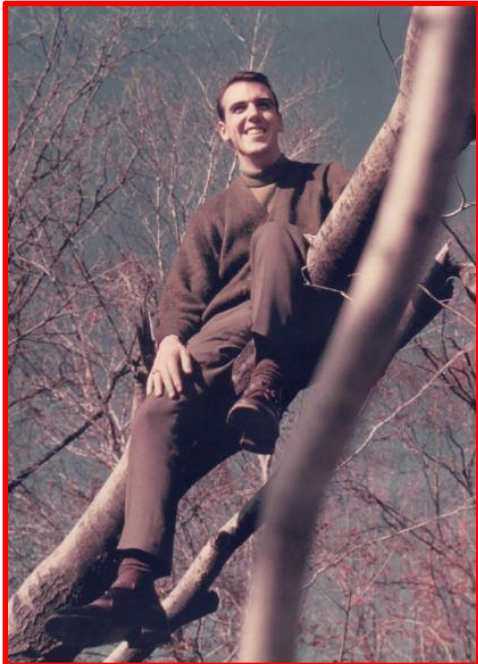
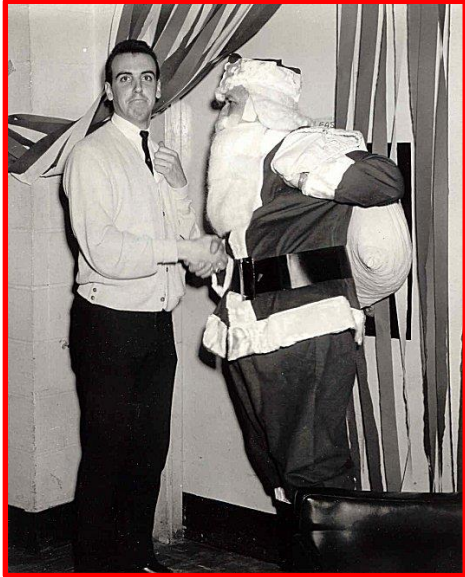


The rest of these photos were taken in and around Hancock Field. Oh, and there is the only shot of me in boot camp (me in the center). The photo of me with Santa was taken at the Christmas Dance (Mr. Palmer, the base safety officer was dressed as Santa) ... this would also be the night that I became one of the first people in the United States to get the Hong Kong Flu (but that story would take hours to tell).



Oh, yea, it snowed A LOT in Syracuse, New York!





The Beanie!

Going through all of the stuff my mom had saved for me, I never expected to find one of my most favorite "items" from "being a kid" (and, there was a lot of stuff I liked). Well, it was two things, actually. And, they were in the very bottom of one box, one sitting on top of my the dish my mom used to feed me as a baby. It's in this photo that shows my beanie with all of the trinkets my mom sewed on it for me.

In the 1950s, one of the fads was wearing beanies. The whole idea was you would have some trinkets on the beanie. Well, as I have done my whole life, I went "all in" on getting trinkets ... dozens and dozens of them. And, my mom sewed every single one on that beanie for me. The best trinkets came from Cracker Jacks ... this being in the days when there were actual, real, incredibly nice prizes each the box!

My mom also made my marble sack. I played a lot of marbles and was pretty good at it, too ... so much so that I snagged several "rare" marbles from the guys I played marbles with. We just drew circles in the dirt and started "shooting!"

I had completely forgotten about the beanie, though not the marbles. And, while I don't remember the baby dish, I do remember my mom talking about it.



Santa Barbara

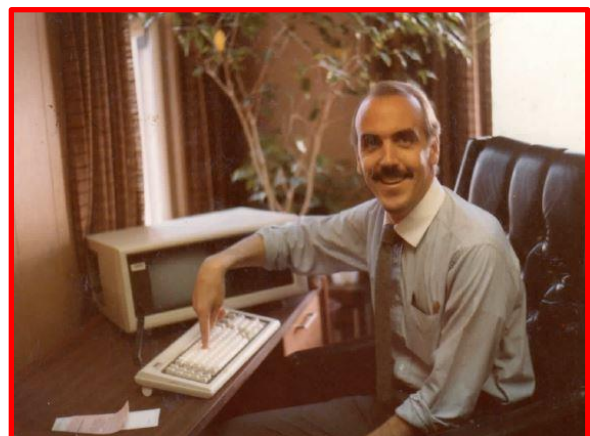
The Golden Age for us was living in Santa Barbara from the early to mid-1980s. I say that because not only was Santa Barbara an amazing and enchanting place to live, it was also when Ian was "still a kid." We have so many fond memories of Santa Barbara. And, that is where everything started for me with computers and truly becoming a **professional writer** (i.e., getting paid for it). The personal computer changed my life forever more in so many positive, wonderful, magical ways. I had been waiting all my life for the personal computer to come along (without even knowing it). While my mom had a lot of these photos, so did we, plus I've added in a few, including some shots from Ukiah (that only my mom had).



The Chase Bar and Grill in the heart of downtown Santa Barbara was a favorite hangout of ours. Everything on the menu was great. And, Angie, the owner, had two specialties - seafood chowder and cheese cake that was so heavenly.

Angie took this photo during Fiesta Week. That was the annual celebration and parade where you "cracked eggs" on people's heads. The eggs were filled with confetti (usually!). There was always something going on in Santa Barbara and we loved going down to the breakwater and harbor area for sunsets!

This is me at the Santa Barbara Board of REALTORS. I was the Executive Director. I incorporated using personal computers into the entire operation of the Board and MLS. And, what I did became a national model for all other Boards of REALTORS. I traveled around the country showing other Boards how to "work in" personal computers not only to their daily operations, but also for their members to



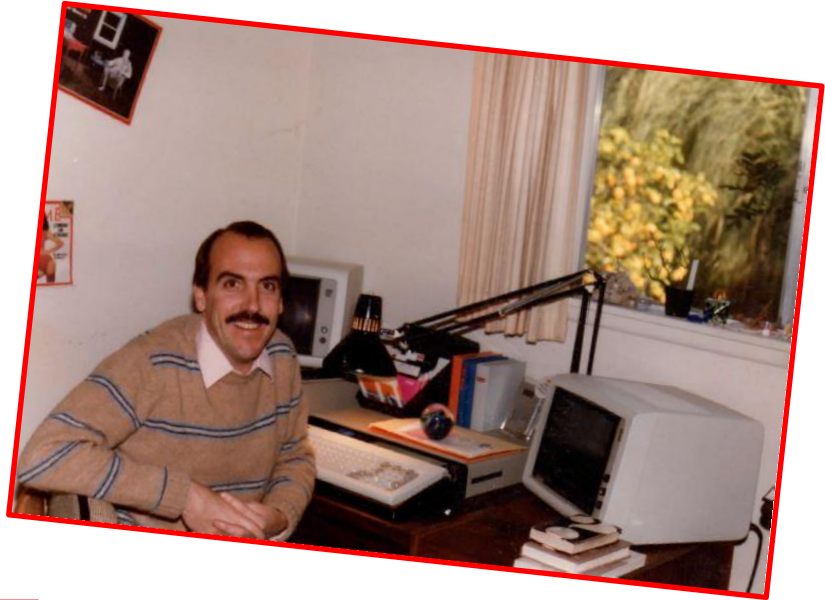
access Board and MLS data, as well as doing real estate deals.



One of our all-time favorite shots of Ian (in our crazy driveway) when we lived “up on the hill” on Montrose Drive, overlooking the city and Pacific Ocean/Harbor area.

My computer “work and writing” at home ... Time Magazine’s cover with the personal computer as “person of the year” is on the wall!





These two photos are in Ukiah (1977 and 1978 timeframe). This photo to the left is of Diana and Ian on our front porch in the summer of 1977.

This photo below is all of us, with our dogs, Amy and Pasha, on our front porch steps. 1978

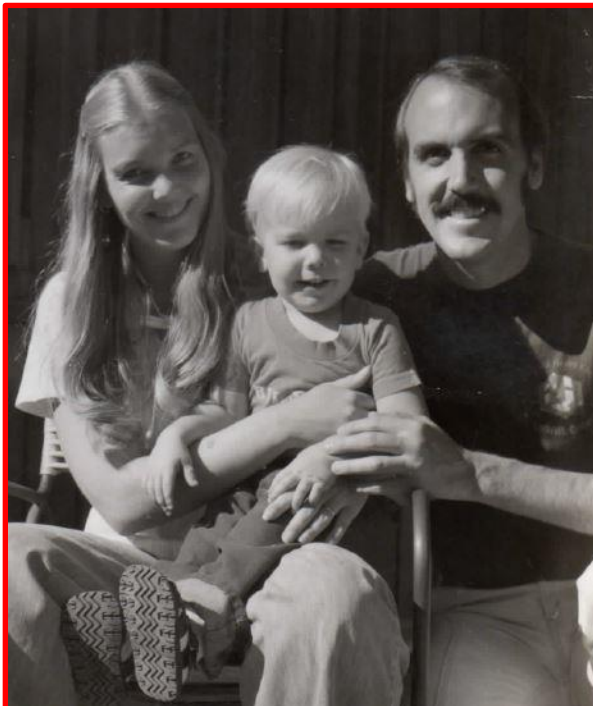






This is Diana and Ian in 1985, just before we moved to Bellevue, Washington. This photo was taken in Montecito where we lived for a while before moving.

This is Diana and Ian on our deck (that I built) in Livingston, when we lived in the house my grandfather built. The timeframe for this is the late 1980s. That's Trixie, our first Australian Shepherd with them.

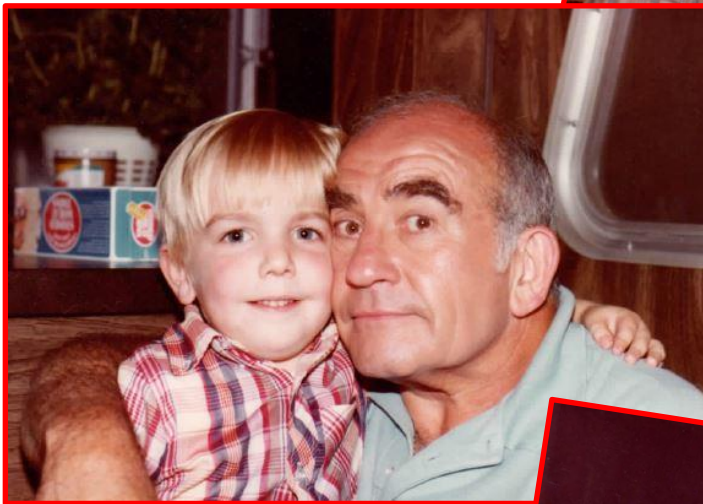


And, this is the three of us in the 1978 timeframe. Ian had on his favorite pair of sandals!



Edward Asner

Having Edward Asner as a friend and great supporter (as well as providing lots of encouragement) of my writing career, well, that was incredible enough. But, Ed also became Ian's second "grandfather." We were on the set of Ed's TV Show "Lou Grant" many times. This was all during the time we lived in Santa Barbara ... we saw him often. It was all part of Santa Barbara being the Golden Age in our lifetime!

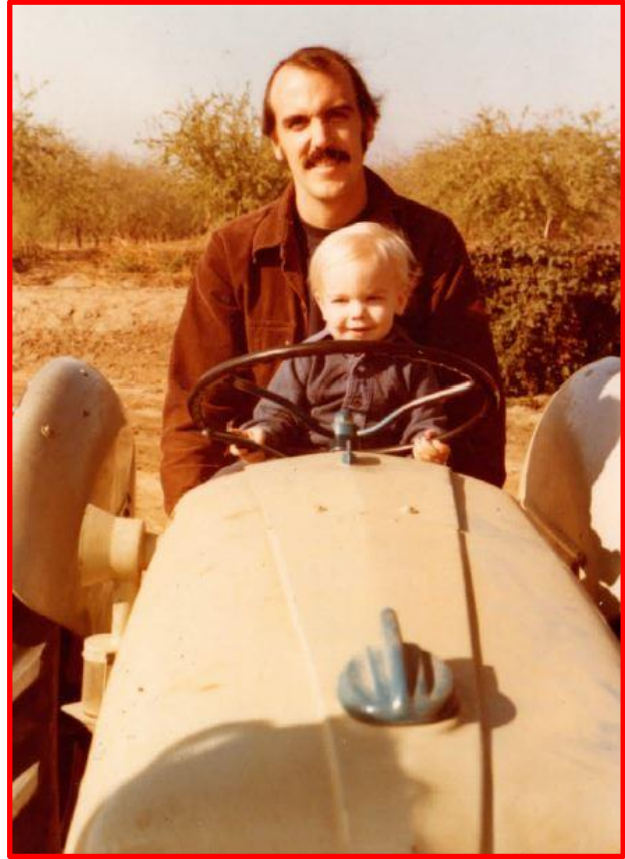


The Tractor!

During the time we lived in the house my grandfather built, we worked with a 1948 Ford Tractor. We had three acres and that tractor, though it wasn't as much fun as Molly, my grandfather's horse, we still had great times on that tractor!



Ian was "behind the wheel from an early age, though I still drove it.



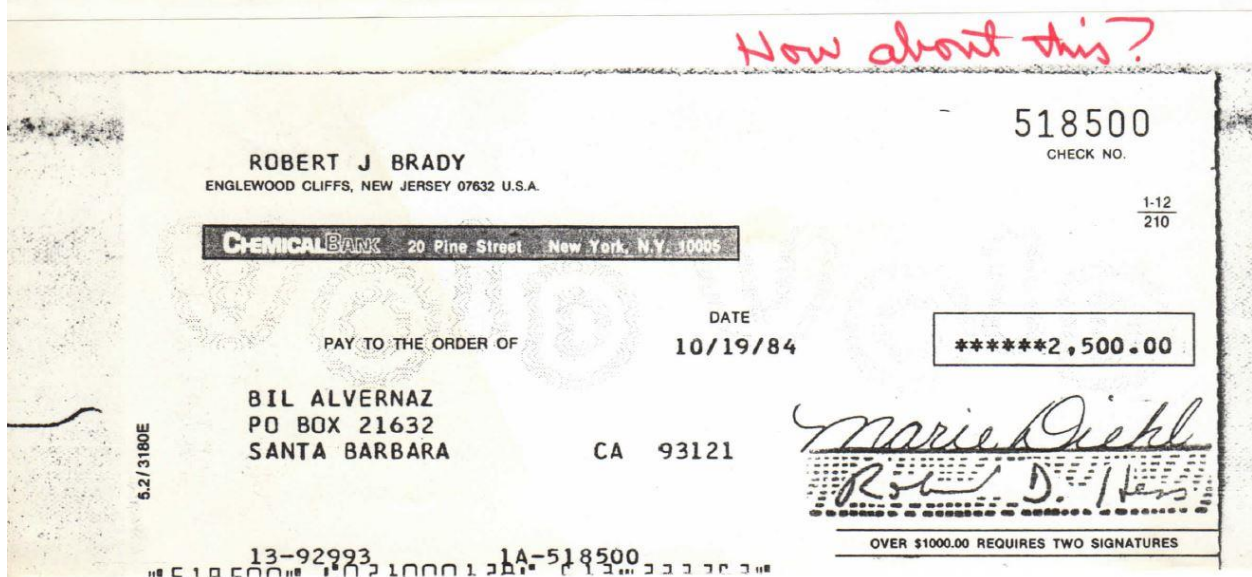
Then came the time when Ian could hop on the tractor, start it, and drive it. He did great, too!



My first royalty check!

I didn't even remember sending this to my mom, but, there it was ... my first royalty check from the first book I wrote – "Expanding Your IBM PC" (Brady Books, 1984)!

Again, Santa Barbara was the Golden Age for us. I sold my first "hard copy" book. I was writing for PC Magazine (getting from \$900 to \$1,500 for every article or feature I wrote). I was writing for United Feature Syndicate, InfoWorld, Byte Magazine, and a whole lot of other publications. Plus, this was also the point where I wrote a nationally syndicated newspaper column that showed people how to get the most out of "these new" personal computers. I wrote that column for three years.



The column I loved writing the most was the local column I wrote in Ukiah. It was called "This Week," and, as manager of the local Chamber and Visitor and Convention Bureau, the column was all about life and living in Ukiah. The most popular column I ever wrote there was titled (and you should be able to figure out that it was all about our son, Ian ... Diana came up with the title) "If he dances without music, it means he has to go potty!" Everyone loved that column. So much so that they cut it out and even framed it!



Supplementary STUFF

This section is here so you don't have to "go looking elsewhere" for certain things I want you to permanently have ...

A Dog Story

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Trixie



If you're lucky, special creatures come into your life becoming extensions of your very existence. For us, we've been lucky enough to have five remarkable dogs "spend time with us." Australian Shepherds. After Trixie, we knew that was the only kind of dog we wanted. The first one was Trixie, a blue merle who found her way into our lives in the summer of '89. We brought her home at eight weeks old for our son's birthday. But, from the first day, Trixie bonded with me. She was a constant companion of mine, so much so that I often called her "Shadow."

Australian Shepherds are smart, really, really smart. Trixie had a "vocabulary" of 400+ words and she knew hand commands, too. I also feel she could communicate with us just by looks or maybe even mental telepathy. She just always knew what we wanted her to do, even before we asked her to do it.

The one instance that best illustrates how smart Trixie was took place early one summer's morning. We always went for a walk in the mornings before I left work. Well, instead of jaunting along with me to head out into the orchards where she loved to run, this one day Trixie sat down by where we had our garbage cans just behind the old barn on our ranch. I tried everything to get Trixie to move. All she did was keep looking at the garbage cans and then out to the county road at the end of our long driveway. She wouldn't budge. I finally had to pick her up and take her into the house. Then I headed for work.

Well, that night when I got home, I realized I had forgotten to put the garbage cans out by the road for pick up. It had been a holiday week and I had lost track of the days. Then it hit me about Trixie's strange behavior that morning! Trixie had sat by the garbage cans and kept looking back and forth between the cans and the road to where I usually put the cans. I said to myself, "Nah! Couldn't be." But the next week on Thursday (garbage pickup day) I pretended to forget again and sure enough,



Trixie did the exact same thing. Then, as I took the garbage cans out to the road, she darted all around me, in her sheep dog, herding style, like she was saying to me, "See, this is what I was trying to tell you last week!" 🐾

We have dozens of stories like that from a life time with Trixie. Above all else, she was always "there," just happy to be with us ... until one day, when we got home from work and saw that obviously something was horribly wrong. Trixie was trying to get up and couldn't. She had been hobbled more and more by age as each month went by over the previous two years. We had started noticing things about her then, when she was 15 years old. But she always seemed to then go back to her "old self" so we just chalked it all up to aging.



Lately, though she had been eating less and losing weight. Helplessly, we watched the sparkle in her eyes fade day by day. Sadly, she became an "old dog." But still, she was our sweetheart and we helped her do whatever she wasn't able to do for herself. Things had reached the point where she would wait for us to help her get up or down and we were always glad to do that.

On this day of October 19th, 2005, things were different. After all of the times, over several years, when Trixie always managed to bounce back from adversity, this time Trixie was in dire trouble. I could see it in her eyes. Her two front legs hung were limp, with her unable to move them. I found that out when I tried to help her stand. She couldn't. This, the Frisbee dog who so many times during her life had "flown through the air" to snag Frisbees with her body twisted sideways ... then she would quickly bring the Frisbee back to do it all over again. Now, she just looked at me, her face lost and empty. That's when the "end of the road" revelation hit me like a freight train. This would be the day we just hadn't ever wanted to think about.



On the way to animal hospital we stopped at Trixie's favorite park, a place we had been to so many times with her where she would run, chase ducks, and just have a grand time. I carried her to one of her favorite spots by the lake and put her on the grass. She sniffed at the breezes swirling all around us. Then she looked at me with a look I'll never forget. She just looked forlorn and it was like she was saying, "It's time to go." I think I went by the park just on the hopes that something might change. I was glad I did, because somehow it just seemed like the right thing - the last farewell thing - to do. Once at the animal hospital, the Vet examined Trixie as she lay on her side, pretty much unable to move. She weighed only 32 pounds, down from 43 pounds a year earlier at her last annual examine when we had gotten medication for her hip problems. Diana and I felt sick, empty feelings into the depths of our souls. There was no doubt what now needed to be done. 🐾



Diana and I knew what was going to happen before we even walked in the door to the animal hospital. Roxanne held open the door for us as I carried Trixie in ... a place she had always loved scampering in and see what treats she might get. The Vet examined Trixie said that he could give her IVs and help her be comfortable, but there just wasn't much else that could be done. I knew Diana couldn't find the words, so, amid the tears, I managed to say, "We need to let Trixie go."

The Vet nodded in agreement and from that point on everything happened in a surreal slow-motion kind of way. As the Vet first shaved a spot on Trixie's leg and then gave her the final shot, a certain calm came over me. There was nothing bad or terrible about what happened next. Trixie was then set free to run in the bright, white sunshine of eternity.

What stands out most for Diana and me when we look back on this was how peaceful and beautiful those last moments were with Trixie. There really wasn't much of a decision to make about being with Trixie to the end, as hard as it was, because we knew we had to be right there looking into Trixie's eyes as she slipped away, finally free of all the pain.

We just kept petting her and looking into Trixie's eyes in those last final moments. We wanted to be right there with her. We petted her and saw her looking at us as we said farewell, without any words, to our old friend, after almost seventeen years together. After a few minutes, she let out a sigh and that was it, as a drop, almost like a tear, fell from her nose. We stayed with Trixie for a long while.



There was sadness in our hearts, but Trixie lived a good, long life. She was a Frisbee Dog and always loved to play with a ball and so many different toys. There was so much of a life time with Trixie that flooded my mind, even up to now ... but in an instant, she was gone.

It seemed like the end of the world, like nothing I have ever faced (or probably ever will). But I know we would be heart sick if we hadn't been with Trixie to the very end. In the days that followed, we reflected on those last minutes which turned out to be so precious and meaningful ... mainly because we were there to the end with Trixie who had always been there for us. 🐾



So we walked away, leaving Trixie behind for the first time ever, and we headed home to an empty house that screamed out in deafening silence ... someone was missing. Just three weeks earlier Trixie had wandered off one evening. It took hours to find her in a wooded area. I wasn't going to stop looking that night until we found her. She always came home with us. But not this night. Everything was so empty and different.



Trixie had been with us over sixteen years and all of a sudden (even though we were expecting her “time to come” and had thought we were ready for it) now she was gone. And, we were definitely NOT ready for it. The finality of Trixie not being there left a gigantic hole in our hearts. We watched baseball, trying not to think about it. Then, less than an hour after the chapters in our life with Trixie ended, the phone rang. 🐾

Sparky and Sheba

Diana and I were watching baseball, trying not to think about Trixie when the phone rang. It was a guy named Earl. We had met him a year and a half earlier on the side of the road where he was selling Australian Shepherd puppies. By the time we stopped that day, he had sold the entire litter. So I had given him my number and told him to call me the next time he had some puppies. Well, on this night, his comments still reverberate in my mind. The first thing he said was, “You wouldn’t know anyone looking for registered, pedigree, Australian Shepard puppies, would you?” I just paused and looked over at Diana.

I took a deep breath and told Earl we had lost Trixie an hour or so earlier. Earl said, “When that happens, you gotta get right back on the horse!” The next day we met Earl at an Exxon station in Salado, about 40 miles north of Austin, near the Stage Coach Inn. He had told me he had two puppies and I told him we just want one. After Diana and I had talked it over, we figured we might want two dogs, so we took enough cash in case we bought both puppies. As soon as we saw his two eight-week old puppies, Diana and I knew we wanted both of them. Thus, Sparky (the white male) and Sheba (the brown tri-colored female) became part of our lives. And, all less than 24 hours after we lost Trixie. 🐾



However it came about that Earl called us on that first night without Trixie, and that Earl just happened to have two puppies for us, well, we didn’t ask any questions at all. The only way to explain what happened that night is it that was meant to be. The Universe was at work for us to find Sparky and Sheba, and for them to somehow find us and become part of our lives. Not to replace Trixie, but just be our dogs. 🐾

We had been thinking for a long time about getting another dog (knowing we would lose Trixie at some point), which is how we met Earl in the first place. However, we just never “got around to” getting another dog. We had mixed feelings about how a new dog or puppy would affect Trixie, even in her old age. But when you look at the sequence of events, of how Sparky and Sheba found their way to us, you just have to believe there were “other forces” at work.





Sparky and Sheba didn't replace Trixie. Actually, Trixie lived on in our hearts through these very dogs, because we could see so much of Trixie so often in Sparky and Sheba. I think about Trixie a lot. She was a special dog. Sparky turned out to be my "best pal." Sheba bonded with Diana. And, in an instant, they both wiggled their way into our hearts.

There is so much to say about Sparky and Sheba, because, just as with Trixie, we went through so many things together. But in a blink of an eye, almost ten years passed, and then came the day I saw that Sparky's right hind leg was swollen. We were already helping Sheba a lot, because she had become hobbled with age and no longer even went for walks with us (and Sparky). That night I discovered Sparky's problem, my heart sank. Here we go again! And, both Diana and I had been thinking Sheba would be the first to go. 🐾

So once again, there we were with a Vet and I'll never forget her words. "You have a very sick dog." Lymphoma came from out of nowhere and smacked Sparky. We had noticed he had been panting a lot and it turns out that the glands around his throat were the size of golf balls. This had all happened so fast. And, though Sparky was still himself, or seemed like it, we knew what we had to do so he wouldn't suffer.

The Vet said that he had maybe three to five weeks and that it was going to be ugly. Somehow I heard myself say, "Let's let him go so he doesn't suffer." This was even harder to say than for Trixie, especially because Sparky just kept kissing me the whole time we were there. It was like he was telling me everything was going to be okay. It wasn't okay. He was soon to be gone ... and then he was.

Sheba whined and cried, as did we, that entire night and for several days. I've never been so devastated in my life. Sparky was gone. And, it still makes my heart ache to think about him just not being here. He and I had this mental connection like nothing I have ever known before or since. I'm so glad we were there with him as he slipped away that night. And, he was HIM right to the end. No suffering. 🐾

Max and Lucky



With Sparky gone, Diana and I decided that NOW was the time to get two new puppies. We knew Sheba's time was "closing in" on us, so this way, Sheba would be a good influence "showing 'em the ropes." And, as it turned out, this was yet another example of how Universe works with a true miracle in how we found the puppies and they found us. We lost Sparky on Wednesday, November 5th, 2014. By Friday, Diana had found an ad in the Modesto

Bee for two Australian Shepherds. They were 13 weeks old, but that didn't concern us at all. We fell in love with Max and Lucky the minute we saw them and they saw us on that Friday (just two days after Sparky was gone). Max is the one on the left. Lucky is



the one with more white markings. We brought them home less than 48 hours after Sparky was gone.

Sheba, at first, wasn't quite sure what to think, but it didn't take long for Max and Lucky to "adopt" Sheba as their surrogate mom. And, it did Sheba a lot of good, too, because she seemed to come back more to life with the puppies running around and even crawling all over her. It didn't take that long to house break Max and Lucky (it had been much more of a chore with Sparky and Sheba). And, in no time, they were all sleeping in what had been Sparky's and Sheba's beds in our bedroom. Max and Lucky would either curl up with Sheba in her bed or just take over Sparky's bed. During the day they would all take naps together outside and in the house. But, there were those points where Sheba had had enough and would just go off into the bedroom by herself.



The day before Father's Day in June of 2015, Sheba wouldn't eat, so we headed out for our usual morning walk with Lucky and Max. When we got back, we could tell something was wrong with Sheba. She had thrown up and continued to do so throughout the day and then the night. She would drink water, couldn't hold it down, and didn't even want any treats.

Diana and I both knew it was time, so on Father's Day we met the Vet at the clinic. This was same Vet who had put down Sparky several months earlier. She examined Sheba and said that Sheba was in really bad shape and that it "was time." We all knew what was coming next. And, just as we did with Trixie and Sparky, Diana and I held and petted Sheba as the shot was administered. And, then she was gone. It isn't easy to be there when you put down a dog, but at the same time isn't that hard either. You know you're doing the right thing to be there right to the very end.

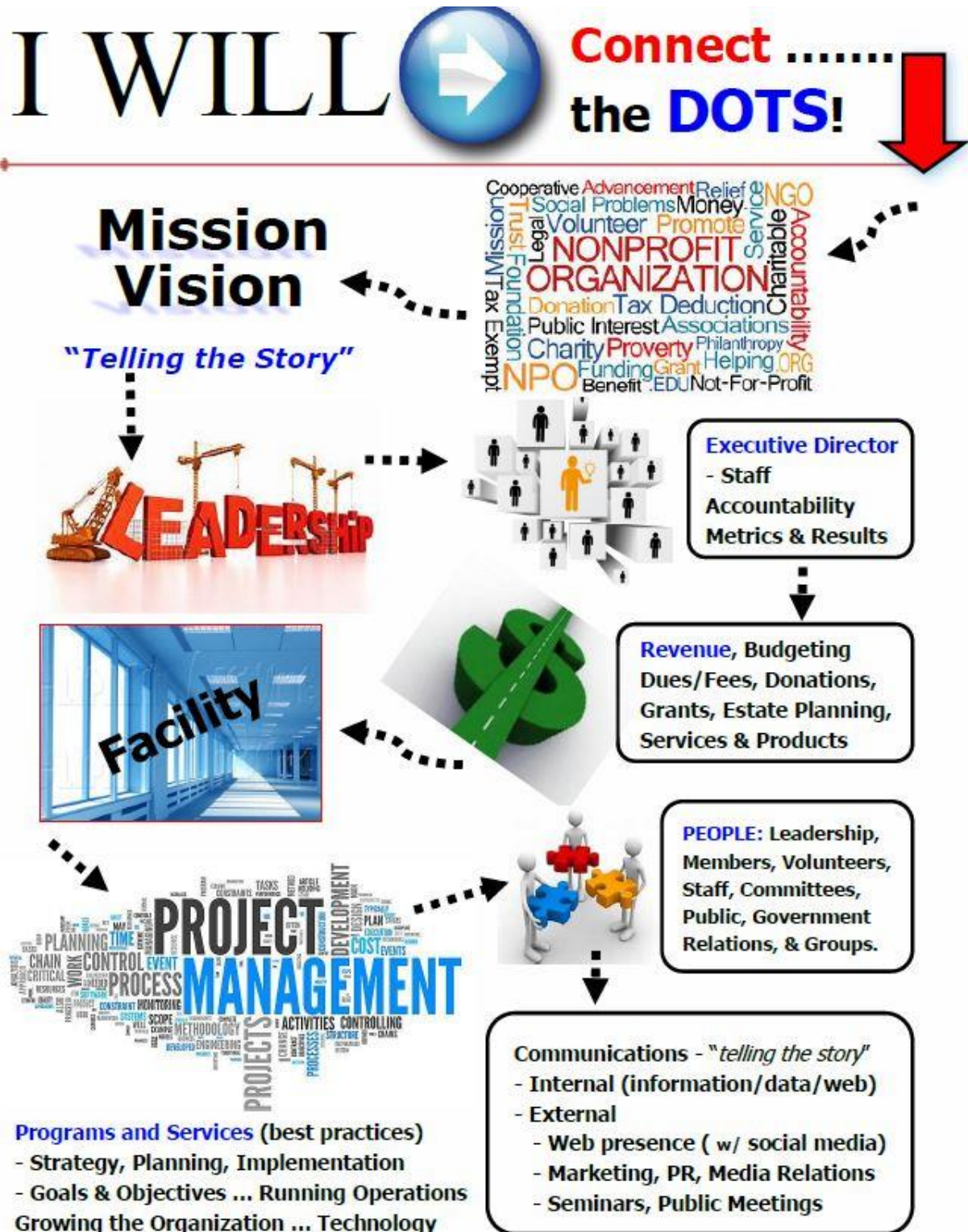
We have been fortunate to have five amazing critters in our lives over the past three decades. There's just so much more life and fun in the house when you have dog magic every day. Max and Lucky looked for Sheba for several days, but then they adjusted as did Diana and I. One thing I know for sure is that I wouldn't trade not a single minute of time I've had with all of these dogs. They were each so different and, yet, in many ways so similar. I still struggle with Sparky being gone. He was so special in such a different way that words can't come close to expressing just



what an amazing sidekick and pal he was (and always will be). I miss him ... every day.



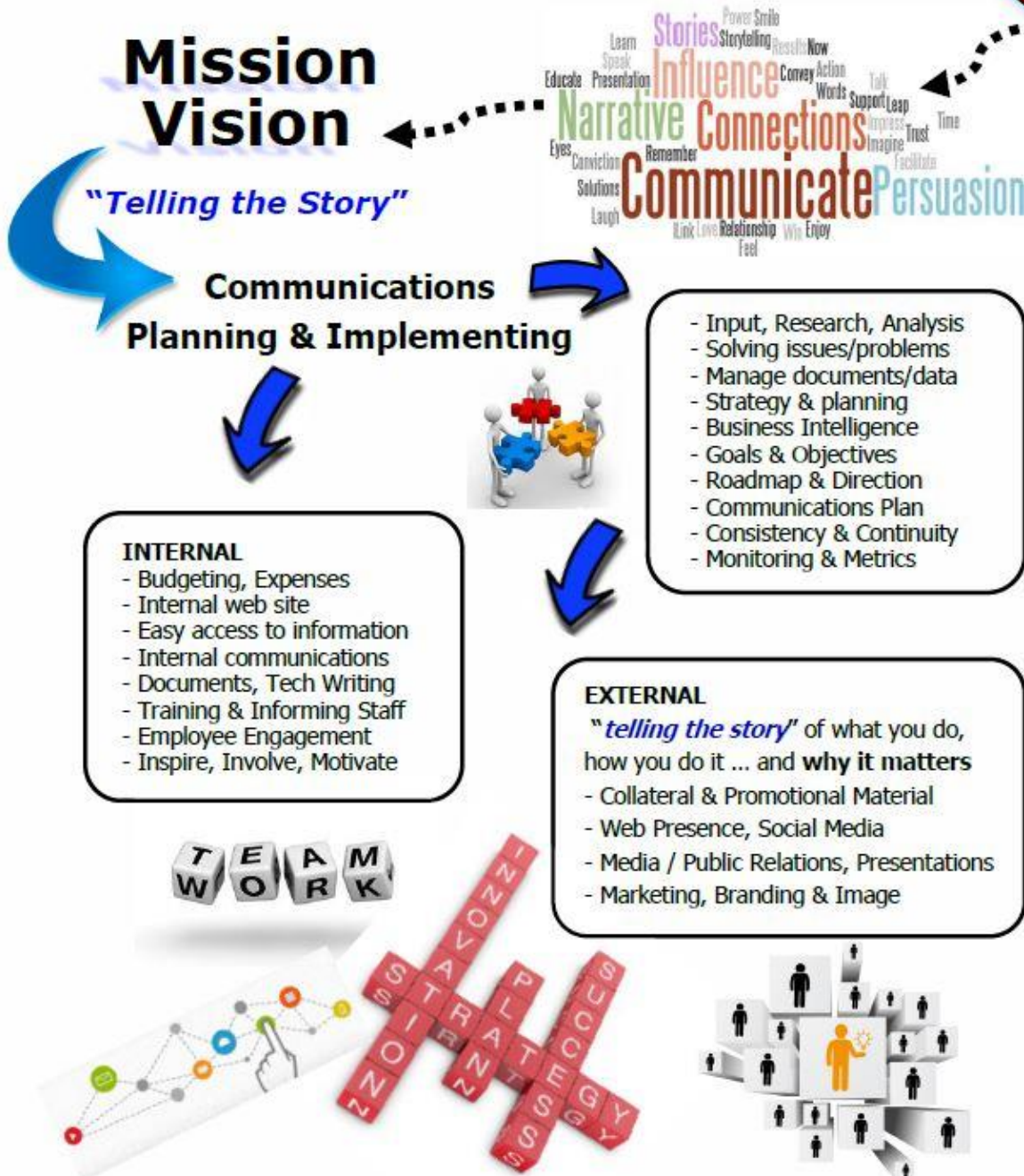
Infographics



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I WILL **Connect** **the DOTS!**



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The White Horse of Reason

Ah, but to really “get it” when it comes to the Universe and how it is always trying to help you in so many diverse and dissimilar ways. There in it all rests on an, oh, so delicately balanced fulcrum that can pivot your thinking, and your very purpose of existence in any of many “which ways.” That is unless you have something “on your side” you didn’t know was already constantly “hard at work” for you ... something that you all too often didn’t take advantage of, completely ignored, or, worst of all, didn’t have a clue as to what you could, in fact, so easily do ...

... understanding leads to wisdom and knowledge, but it all hinges on something that can “put it all together” and conclude, in a truthfully determined and logical kind of way, just what it all really, really, REALLY means ... not just what so many others are hoodwinked into trusting and believing in, thus then basing so much of their very lives upon deceptions, falsehoods, and untruths. Reading clouds, tied very closely to [Thought Streams](#), well, all of that hinges on a very good friend of yours (and mine and everyone else’s, for that matter) already freely romping about and roaming around inside your head that you probably didn’t even know you already had “somewhere in there.” The White Horse of Reason is truly your secret weapon in all of this. But, be forewarned, he can also cause incredible headaches when you disregard his perceptiveness and lucidity.

The only way I can really explain the significance of the White Horse of Reason is by telling you how I came upon grasping it all ... thus completely then being able to move forward and further in my life than I had ever imagined possible ... all because of the [White Horse of Reason](#).

Here’s what happened, just how it happened ...

#####

I was afoot having been thrown from my horse.

It had all happened so fast. Hitting the ground with a paralyzing thud, I landed flat on my back, severely compressing the vertebrae in my neck. For a moment, I couldn’t feel anything. Then I raised my head just enough to look up through the swirling ground mist to see the surreal vision of my white stallion, Reason, looming above me. Reason was so huge his shape blotted out almost everything else. I remember the whites of his eyes, and then his saddle fell away to reveal black markings that had been hidden. To be honest, I had never noticed those marking before. But, I was soon to learn much about what those marking meant. For now, I quickly realized something not so good was about to happen!



Rearing his hooves high in the air, with puffs of frozen breath bursting outward from his flaring nostrils, Reason was about to come down on top of me. I squeezed my eyes shut, gritted my teeth, turned my head away, covered my eyes with both arms crossed above the bridge of my nose, and held my breath.

Eyes squeezed shut tight, I waited for the impact of Reason coming down upon me.

Nothing happened! I had expected to be crushed instantly from the impact of those two black hooves and the force of all Reason's weight coming down upon me. As I opened one eye I could see Reason had turned and was prancing away from me, blending into an opaque, menacing fog that was consuming everything along with nightfall. Trees and shadows darker than death dissolved in the dusk, empty and cold.

The prospect of being lost in the dark didn't scare me as much as I thought it would. I couldn't imagine what had caused Reason to first throw me and then act so harshly against me. I was sore with stabbing PAIN surging through my body (especially in my neck) as I cautiously stood up. "Damned horse," I said as I realized my right foot was throbbing. Reason must have crushed it.

The chill of night didn't seem to bother me at all. The burden of having to carry the heavy saddle did trouble me, especially now that I was limping so badly. Thinking about those black markings where the saddle had been made me realize there was something odd, yet quite familiar about them, but why hadn't I ever seen them before?

As I attempted to pick up the cumbrous saddle, I heard the sound of thunder rumbling from behind me. The sky flickered with quick, stabbing strokes of lightening. The thunder became deafening and the ground rumbled and shook, almost knocking my feet out from under me.

I was midway into turning around, looking for the lightening, when I saw Reason charging directly toward me. It hadn't been thunder shaking the ground. It was the sound from his hooves pounding and shredding the earth. I didn't even have time to let out a peep as the steed clobbered into me full force. I heard my bones snapping and cracking as intense pain exploded inside of me. Mouth wide open, but unable to utter the slightest whimper, I toppled backwards like a marionette whose life supporting strings had been severed.

I only remember seeing the enraged intensity in Reason's eyes as he charged into and then over me. Those black markings where the saddle had been, well, I couldn't quite make them out, but there was a sequence or pattern of some sort to them. Then everything went blank as I plunged into blackness, choking, and gasping for air.



I'm not sure I was even trying to breathe. The thought of being dead crossed my mind because things were so still and dark wherever I was in my consciousness (or lack thereof). There wasn't a sound or a breath of air for what seemed like the longest time. Then a soft voice spoke to me from outside of this suffocating void, "What are you doing?"

I didn't move or open my eyes, still holding them tightly shut, to the point of being painful. One minute Reason had crushed my body by slamming into me and then this sweet voice. I noticed I was breathing normally now and all sensation of pain was gone ... even the excruciating pain in my neck. I felt relaxed, actually.

Finally recognizing the voice, I opened my eyes to see that it was my wife, Diana, calling me. Somehow I had slept in that morning and now Diana was waking me.

For the rest of the day (and many to follow) I couldn't stop thinking about that dark forest and the magnificent, white stallion. I thought several times about the moment of impact when Reason slammed into me HARD. It had all seemed so real! I also had several flashes of the instant his saddle fell away. Finally, I was able to piece together what those black markings were. They were words! As I leaned closer into one of my visions for a better look, I could see those words were similar to the ones you are now reading here.

For quite some time after that vivid experience (it was so real, it had to have been more than a dream or something in another dimension), I drifted away in quiet daydreams to that forest. The White Horse of Reason was always there, mostly out of my reach, but close enough for me to be aware of him. What I came to realize over time was that he was having an impact on my day-to-day logic and outlook. It was about this time I started to make the connection between this symbolic "beast of reason" and the actual process (or, at many points, the lack thereof) of my own reasoning and cognitive abilities! It became so obviously obvious that everything does happen for a reason. Also, that there was definitely something in the clouds that there seemed to be many more of each day ... or, maybe it was just that I seemed to be more aware of clouds and that there could possibly be something meaningful in those clouds. Just what? Well, I wasn't quite sure at that point, even though "behind the scenes," in my mind, I was already "connecting the dots" to understand it all.

One afternoon, in an unusually boring meeting with my board of directors, I drifted off once again to wherever that realm was where the White Horse of Reason resided. Then, looking out the window of the conference room, I spotted Reason just outside on the lawn. He just stood there nodding his head up and down, which I somehow interpreted to mean that I should agree with what was going on in the board of directors meeting. This was just crazy! When my eyes locked on to Reason's fiery



eyes, my head moved slightly left to right and then right to left. Reason stomped disapprovingly at the manicured lawn with those very, very familiar black hooves. Divots of putting-green lawn shot upward and outward all around the horse in clouds of dirt and grass.

I leaned forward in Reason's direction, still shaking my head as if to say "NO!" At the same instant Reason immediately bolted towards me. He crashed through the incredibly huge plate glass window, shattering it into twinkling shards of shimmering glass. This time, this dream, this vision, whatever it was, Reason came to a stop on the Oak table inches from me, where I sat still, heart pounding. His hooves had left deeply embedded marks where he skidded along the table right up to me. I think I was breathing, but I couldn't be sure. No one in the room moved. Standing sideways in the silvery glow of iridescent glass somehow spinning and circling all around us, that splendid creature reared high in the air and then motioned with his head to the black markings on his side.

I then got another good, long look at those black markings - the essence of these very words now fusing into your intellect. The words all began to rotate and spin, increasing in velocity, mixing the letters and punctuation in with extensions of all the words' meanings until it all bubbled outward to form a shimmering, glimmering sphere in which I could see myself in a chrome-like, slightly distorted, but quite clear image.

What I saw was ME finally seeing things, clearly and unobstructed, without the slightest dream (or nightmare) anywhere within distractible distance. Then that White Horse of Reason vanished. I mean, he simply disappeared into thin air. I knew that Reason was now clearly and distinctly embedding in consciousness, as well as a solid and ever present part of my life and that he would "be there" whenever I needed him. I was absolutely sure of this because now that the meeting was continuing on (as if never interrupted - at least for everyone else), the clearest of clear visions of that White Horse of Reason allowed me to grasp the knowledge that that glorious white Horse is really the manifestation of my conscience whose lead I should follow.

The essence of my existence - my thoughts, words, actions, and potential - rides with that White Horse of Reason, emblazoned in all of those ever changing, but oh, so emphatic black markings on his sides and underbelly. The markings are what hold the clues and, in most cases, the answers to the true meaning of life specifically for each individual. Mainly, because each of us, in fact, has our own White Horse of Reason (which is stirring within your intellect right this very minute).

It all comes back to paying attention and then taking action in relation to what you most certainly know is the right thing to do. Whether we refer to it as the voice inside each of us, or the compass pointing us each in the right direction, the White Horse of Reason does exist and he manifests himself in quite literally every single thing



we do (or don't do). Whether or not we realize it, well, that's a whole "horse of a different color," don't you think?

This phenomenon of a White Horse of Reason is there for all of us to be one with or, as is the case all too often, to just "not pay attention to." This applies, most certainly, to and holds true for YOU, too. If you don't think so, then the White Horse of Reason has been muted within you, for whatever reason(s). But the White Horse of Reason, he IS definitely there all right. You just have to dig deep enough within the hallowed, numbed, and subdued hemispheres of your cerebellum to intellectually "thump" every fiber of your brain where ultimately your life's drama gets structured and shaped to flow freely from thoughts, ideas, perceptions, perspectives, and, ultimately, actions. Whenever you ignore the White Horse of Reason, you can most certainly expect some sort of pain in your head (or intellect).

The key to everything ties closely to ACTION. Lack of action (i.e., doing nothing which, sadly, is so often the case with so many people, YOU included) creates the deepest roots of regret and self-pity! Keep moving - doing something, anything - and you can't go wrong, for it is when you sit on your ass and do nothing that life and what really matters quite literally passes you by. That's why the passivity of Television and so much of what seems to be "out there" on the Internet (mostly distractions, especially social media and gaming) is so evil. You just submissively tend to observe while being a receptor for mindless, stupid input (and, ultimately, manipulation from the endless advertising that "fill in the gaps" while insulting your intelligence) whenever you plop down to sit in front of that monolithic screen (TV, computer monitor, or smartphone) that blurs away so much of what you should be paying attention to in the real world.

And, all of that chases the White Horse of Reason into the further (and so hard to find) depths and nadirs in the furthestmost points and portions of your mind. You know, where all of the cobwebs "clog things up" in your thinking ... and what should be carefully measured, but unrestricted reasoning.

There is an untamed (but ultimately somewhat tamable) creature of Reason within each of us. Whether we realize it or not, we are faced with either following this creature as it boldly leads our way to the brilliance of success, accomplishment and self-fulfillment, as well as making smart decisions. Or, we can sit back and "wither away" intellectually (which is where television, the Internet, and smart/dumb phones all play a major role, just like the epidemic of all those addictive computer-based games). Sadly, too many people spurn their magnificent White Horse of Reason to reluctantly (and aimlessly) wander, with not-clearly-thought-out footsteps on a serpentine pathway (there are so many to choose from) of misadventures and foolish, doomed distractions.

That creature, the White Horse of Reason, is different for each person, but no less powerful and compassionate ... and magical with so much potential. Each one has



the black markings, which can be changed and/or read at will, based on an individual's actions or inactions. In other words, YOU control what ultimately gets etched in the sequences and patterns of the black markings. Like it or not, your life is completely yours to do with what you will (or, sadly as is the case so often, won't).

Look at life as a completely white landscape where you "fill things in" with an infinite abundance of colors ... or leave it as a bleak and mostly empty backdrop that becomes a life ebbing and flowing with so much regret, punctuated by countless "woulda, coulda, shouldas." And, as for the completeness (emptiness) of the white landscape that becomes your life, well, that is completely up to you to do with as you will.

All of this is a powerful dynamism that interplays with the senses and intellect deep inside each of us. It all leads far beyond the unanswerable (and unnecessary) questions you keep tormenting yourself with (and wasting time on). If you are worthy (and even those who don't think they are ... ARE) of a gift such as the White Horse of Reason, you will find it isn't that hard to harness and control this amazing and mystical creature. Sadly, too many people never even so much as attempt to work with the creature known as the White Horse of Reason, except in rare, fleeting, lucid moments, let alone even grasp anything close to the ability to work with him, control him, and then watch an abundance of wonderful things happen – all of the things you always wished for, including so much of what you never even imagined possible. For reasons unknown, many who do sense the White Horse of Reason, choose to ignore or fight him, instead of discovering the enchanted way he can so greatly enhance life.

Put the White Horse of Reason to work for you and you won't believe the impact. How do you do that? Just listen to what you know is there ... and has always been there inside your head all along! Look more at the clouds all around you. And, start opening your mind to Thought Streams (as they will find their way in ... they already know the way out, whether you do anything with them or not). If you listen closely enough, you'll hear that inner voice ... and then clearly see your very own White Horse of Reason ... right there in front of (and inside of) you.

No one else will be able to see your White Horse of Reason, but that doesn't matter. He is just there/here for YOU. The White Horse of Reason will start to reveal himself in very low decibels at first (that you have to really look for to hear). But don't worry about that, even if everything isn't quite that clear. Because, over time, once you start looking more at clouds and opening your mind to Thought Streams, then, and only then, the more you listen to "see" what that White Horse of Reason is conveying to you, the louder his input and output will get, becoming more and more understandable (and powerful), with so many important messages in all those black markings on his side (both sides and under his belly, too ... you just have to look hard enough to see and understand them all).



It all comes down to making a choice about what the truth really is. And, the truth is unmistakably the truth. It doesn't bend or waffle either. If you want your mind to work and function in a somewhat mechanical, Industrial Revolution-like fashion, then you are doomed to be burdened with mental pulleys, levers, cogs, and winches where ideas and inspiration are all strung out like laundry on clothes lines with cracked, wooden clothes pins barely holding them in place. A "stall" or momentary lapse of rationale (like so much of what can or most often doesn't happen in your life) and one by one the clothes lines, loaded with all of those wonderful ideas and "could have beens," all crash down into the dust and debris way down at the very bottom of your intellect, losing their freshness and coherence. Is it possible to find lost thoughts and inspiration? Maybe, but why risk it? Transforming thoughts and feelings as they ignite is what the White Horse of Reason is all about. And, why you need to carry a notebook around with you ... so you can jot down so many of those thoughts and ideas fluidly streaming within your consciousness ... because therein lies all of the "good stuff" that will become the fabric of your life ... all of which the White Horse of Reason will take automatically take care of ... including YOU.

Oh, and that notebook you will be using to write down ideas and thoughts in then becomes an important resource for you ... a reference point as well as a source of inspiration. Most importantly, with it, you won't lose track of so much of what you really don't want to let go of. Don't put such information in digital formats (on the computer, tablet, smartphone or anything else) either. Get back to "working a pen or pencil," because it will help your brain and the White Horse of Reason function more effectively. If you do a "little bit of writing" now and again, you'll then reconnect more Thought Streams that need to flow "in and out" of your brain as it functions ... actually, the simple "exercise" of "writing things out" helps to clarify so much that you otherwise would have just "let go" to wherever it is lost ideas and concepts disappear to (usually finding their way to reattach themselves to other people's Thought Streams).

It isn't hard to reinvent (and reinvigorate) how your mind works, but you have to want to do that. Let go of the rigid reality you (and your friends, relatives, others, and marketing weasels) have mortared around yourself. Only then will the White Horse of Reason roam and romp through your mind as a whole new world unfolds right before your eyes (as well as inside your most ever clearly operational brain power)! Once you decide that your brain is so much more than a mechanical, one-dimensional, fully functioning apparatus, that revelation will propel you to such heights you won't ever be able to look back (or down) at the way things (and fears) used to be.

At the exact point that happens (and you will definitely know when it happens) all you have to do is seek out the White Horse of Reason and, sure enough, that creature will be there waiting for you in the masterpiece of a fresh, new intellect that you can create, continually molding and shaping into whatever you want it (and YOU)



to be. Eventually, you will be able leap onto Reason's back (no saddle is required) and he will take you anywhere you want to go! And, all the while so many new black markings will be etched into his constantly, ever-changing sides and under belly, too.

The more you let the White Horse of Reason run free and unbound, the closer you will get to discovering just who YOU really are. Whenever you catch quick glimpses of Reason, charging electrically through your intellect, pay close attention, because Reason doesn't reveal himself unless there is something of importance he has to impart to you.

It all comes back to paying attention ... and YOU have to start doing a whole more of that! Once you do, Elementary Trace Strands will then "tie things together for you" as it all then makes perfect sense ... so much so that you'll amaze yourself at all the incredible things you'll start doing and accomplishing, making a difference in your life and the lives of so many others!

And, just what are Elementary Trace Strands? Just keep reading and you'll see what you shall see (and probably should already have been seeing and hearing) ...



Thought Steams

You know they are “there.” You’ve always known it, but, for the most part, you haven’t quite been able to “touch them,” let alone tap into them.

Thought Streams change everything ... once you “get the hang” of how they work. Ah, and once you grasp hold of “locking in” on Thought Streams, it’s going to be a whole new world!

Clouds aren’t as random and free form as you would think. Clouds form patterns, all tied to intricate mental messaging and extradimensional pathways. All of what you are thinking, along with everyone else’s thoughts, becomes etched in those pathways known as Thought Streams. All of that incredible mental energy and concentrated intent stays in those pathways forever ... to be used by those can tap into it all ... at any point they so choose. While clouds can be ‘explained away’ in science and “weather patterns,” there really is much more to clouds than the unknowing (including you, that is until now) ever realized. Clouds show us exactly what we need to know (and should know or ever have to know). If a cloud ever touches you with its shadow, make a wish quick because such moments are beyond magical. Don’t worry about it or ask how it can this be? Just know that you want to find the magic clouds’ shadows ... much like all of the magic, mystery, and, yes, even death cloaked in your very own shadow that you so often carelessly “cast about” without even thinking about it (including all of the times you step right on top of your own shadow).

Clouds provide a direct link to our minds with velocity waves known as “Thought Streams.” Thought Streams are (and always have been) constantly circulating in, through, and around everyone and everything. Thought Streams allow you to tap into the ultimate cosmic database. Thought Streams bind all of us together. That includes the present with the past and what is yet to come, as well as the living with the dead.

Reading clouds is the closest you are ever going to get to God (or whatever you believe in as a higher power, though it is all really just the Universe at work/play). Because of the inter-laced Thought Streams tied to clouds, there are frequencies, channels and mental pathways that can take you directly to whatever it is you believe in – here on Earth, in the present, the past, the future, Heaven (whatever that might happen to be ... or whatever you think it is), and even Hell (whatever that could or shouldn’t be, all conjured up from a white landscape of nothingness in your mind).

The “power in clouds” ties together our energy and strength that is constantly circulating around us at the speed of light in little known about until now wavelengths called “Thought Streams.” Harnessing the power of Thought Streams, by connecting with the clouds, gives you a direct tie in to all of the information and data there is, ever was or will be. Everyone and everything is an integral and essential part of it all (that



being the Universe), connecting the living with the dead, the present with the past and to all of what is yet to come. And, yes, Thought Streams are truly what allow for time travel, but that is “high level” info embedded in Rootstock Contentions ... and, definitely a topic for another time (and piece of writing ... mainly because of the tens of hundreds of pages it takes to “fill your head” with such commanding and authoritative insight, awareness, and knowledge).

Actually, all of what you think is part of the Thought Streams that are interspersing in and all around you (and all of us) right this very minute. Beyond intuitive feel, the basis of all ideas and thoughts are Thought Streams, which are constantly “at flow” around us, as well as tied to the clouds. You can choose to “tap in” to it all or not (which is basically what you have been doing up to this point whether you realize it or not).

You will only be able to access Thought Streams once you redefine Gravity (even though the Thought Streams are available to freely use right this very minute. You have been using them, from time to time – many times, actually – all along without even realizing it or taking full advantage of them). Those who can finish your sentences for you or who know what you are thinking before you say it have the ability to pull bits and pieces of information from the infinite number of crisscrossing Thought Streams in motion at any given point in time – and all at beyond the speed of light.

And, just so you can begin to see the significance of Thought Streams, think about this: Thought Streams tie closely to all that ever was, including death, the ultimate prestidigitation, far beyond sleight of hand, and bordering on a true mystical experience. Thought Streams even allow certain individuals the rare chance to step back and forth through death, as well as travel around in time using Thought Streams (assuming you already know how to read clouds). It’s all interconnected ... if you just look closely enough.

And, more than anything else, you need to PAY ATTENTION. Something you just haven’t been doing enough of ... that is, until now, as you are beginning to finally “see” as you were always meant to “look into things.”

The proper term for “seeing” what you really should be seeing (that is reading clouds and all that is beyond such endeavors) is to become someone known as a **Watcher**. Watchers originated from the Travelers who long ago first used Thought Streams on an inter-galactic scale. If you ever gain access to Rootstock Contentions, then you will learn all there is to know about the Travelers (including how to become one) ... and, who knows, you might just discover that YOU, yourself, right now, indeed, might already be one of the Travelers. If all of this is quickly “making sense” to you, then you very well could be a Traveler. But all of that is to be read in the book of “Rootstock Contentions.”



You have the potential to be one of the single most important **Watchers**, traveling through this Universe, as you have done so many times before (and, will, yet again, many more times), in a variety of complex, multifaceted ways, times, places, dimensions, and areas of minute variations, potentials, promises, and possibilities. Though many people don't know it, they are Watchers (maybe even Travelers), those being the people who actually "get it." Those who aren't Watchers (or just can't quite grasp it all) are just sort of "there," but really nowhere ... though their ultimate potential is still "there" somewhere to be "snagged" right out of Thought Streams and Universe.

Ah, but YOU ... you are, indeed, a Watcher. Otherwise the Universe would not have brought you here to these very words "lighting up" your intellect, stimulating millions of your brain synapses like never before. That's why you'll be able to start reading clouds again (because you already have without even knowing it).

It's all in light, colors, and clouds ... sequences and patterns are everywhere, if you just "let them in." It's not like you're going to see words. Maybe images, but ignore those. Just look, really look. Your mind, like it does so often when it is "working behind the scenes the background" (far in the inner reaches of the grey matter behind your pupils) while you are doing other things, will decipher all of the codes that are right there in front of you (including many of the notations and cyphers encoded within the text of this book). Like the Universe, you don't need to know how it works with clouds and Thought Streams – it just does. What's important is that once you "tune in" to the Universe, ah, that's when things really get interesting ... so much so that you'll find yourself constantly saying "**It's the Universe!**"

Thought Streams held together the very framework of life in Mesopotamian and many other ancient civilizations where a great number of citizens selected by the Travelers knew how to utilize Thoughts Streams (as well as reading clouds). The Mesopotamians, more than any other civilization, made sure the secrets of Thought Streams would forever be hidden from future cultures and they did this with hidden messages carefully "tucked in" with the symbols in their various and assorted "written languages" – there for those who knew how to decipher them, but "lost" for anyone just roughly translating or trying to interpret what they thought was written in the symbols.

One other "little thing" you need to know is that much of what we think we know about ancient civilizations, well, that's all misinformation and disinformation. It was all "planted there" to be found by those of us in these current times who think we are so smart. When really, all of what we truly needed to know was hidden, so it wouldn't get into the wrong hands. Well, what you now have in your hands is quite a bit of all of that "hidden information" that has been so obviously obvious all along, directly right under everyone's noses.



Dogs and Thought Streams

One final thought about Thought Streams and it applies mostly to dogs (other pets/domesticated animals aren't as "highly tuned in" to Thought Streams as are dogs). All those times you just knew your dog knew what you were thinking, well, that dog did know exactly what was on your mind. The reason for that is because dogs, more than any other animals, have always been mentally wired to read our thoughts. And, now, because you are on the verge (or are already there) to tap into Thought Streams, you will better connect with your four legged pal. Not to mention just how many other amazing "connections" you will be making in so many different ways on a multitude of levels ... especially with other people.

So, now, when you really think about it, don't Thought Streams really explain so much about how your dog "reads things" about you. Oh, sure, dogs are predatory by the very nature of being an animal, with keen senses of awareness and always watching for sequences and patterns (again, we come back to those two key words), but dogs have always used Thought Streams ... not just for "tracking" you, but for communicating with each other, too.



The Kid

These are just some of our favorite shots of the Kid!



Ian's Christmas Train

First, I need to state that Diana and I were using the "power of positive thinking" to have a girl. But, that all changed at sunrise on May 23rd, 1976, in the World War II era, six bed "hospital" in Ukiah, California, when, as the first sun rays of the morning dawn brightened up the rooms, I heard Ian cry out as he was born. It had been an all-night labor for Diana. I was with her a lot of the time, but there were points where she just "needed to be" during labor, so I was playing Scrabble all night long with some friends. I also had three seven letter words that I was able to "put down" in the numerous games we played through the long night. And, then Ian was born.

Diana and I immediately "switched gears" to having a boy, who was healthy. Visions of a girl quickly melted away. The thoughts of building a doll house and other "little girl" things quickly gave way to me building other things ... my first thought was a wooden train set ... but, I really didn't know what all my "wood working efforts" would lead to me creating for Ian.

And, that brings us to this section that starts with Ian's Christmas train. From 1976 to 1986, I built more cars for the wooden train (that everyone, as soon as they see it, wants it!). I missed 1985 "adding on a train car," because we had just moved to Bellevue in the State of Washington ... which was a continuation of work I had been doing for a "little company" called Microsoft. My first project with them was in 1983 on Microsoft Word and then I continued, off and on, working with Microsoft until I was picked to be part of the Windows95 team in the early 1990s. Anyway, we had just moved to Bellevue in November of 1985, from Santa Barbara, so even though I had started what would be the final train car, I didn't get it finished until Christmas of 1986.

It should be noted that I did build one other train set. It was for Diana's sister, Linda. She loved the train (6 cars) and all of her grandkids played with it all the time. I built wooden "antique" cars, along with little wooden airplanes that I sold for a while, but, to me, building something just to sell it, that didn't "do it" for me ... so my wood craft business didn't last long. But, I had requests for years to build more train sets and other things.

I did build a smaller wooden train set for Bernie Shepherd and he loved it. He was Ian's second grandfather. Things started out with Bernie at University of California, in Fresno. He was my counselor, advisor, and instructor for many journalism classes and independent studies. But, he quickly became a good friend. I also made a mobile for him, too. Most of all, Bernie was always there for me ... I was there for him. Like even when he moved from Fresno to Santa Cruz (where he always "loaned us" his beach house there) ... of all the people Bernie knew ... there was no one there to help



him move. So I took off from work (I was running the Salinas Chamber and Visitor and Convention Bureau at the time) ... and I, alone, loaded the U-Haul truck (which I rented, too) and got Bernie moved to Santa Cruz, where we continued our relationship for many years.

Here is a list of the entire Christmas train set, followed by photos of the train that I now have in my "writing/computer" room. They have all survived "over the years" ... kept mostly in boxes. But, now, they are all out and I love being surround by them:

- 1976 – (Oak Street, Ukiah CA)
 - Train Steam Engine (with two "little people" driving)
 - Coal Car
 - Flatbed Car
 - Caboose
- 1977 – (Oak Street, Ukiah CA)
 - Passenger Car (eight "little people" in the car)
 - Crain Car
 - Crain "supply" Car with thread spools
- 1978 – (30th Avenue, near the beach, Santa Cruz CA)
 - Log Car
 - Oil Tanker
- 1979 – (Acacia Street, Salinas CA)
 - Giraffe Car (with his head sticking out of the cage)
 - Pullman "pumper" Car
 - Freight Car (complete with a "little person" bum)
- 1980 – (Acacia Street, Salinas CA)
 - Helicopter Car
 - Car & Truck Transport Car
- 1981 – (Montrose Place, Santa Barbara CA)
 - Semi-Truck on Flatbed Car
 - Barrel of Monkeys Car
- 1982 – (Montrose Place, Santa Barbara CA)
 - Yellow Submarine Car
 - Dragon Car (caged, of course)
- 1983 – (Calabria Drive, Santa Barbara CA)
 - Steam Shovel Car
- 1984 – (Calabria Drive, Santa Barbara CA)
 - Barrel Car (small one, double stacked)
 - Barrel Car (flat bed, single stake)
 - NOTE: Each barrel had letters on it for Ian to figure out how to put them in the right order for a Christmas message.
- 1986 – Flying Saucer Car (that was a game to get rings on pegs)



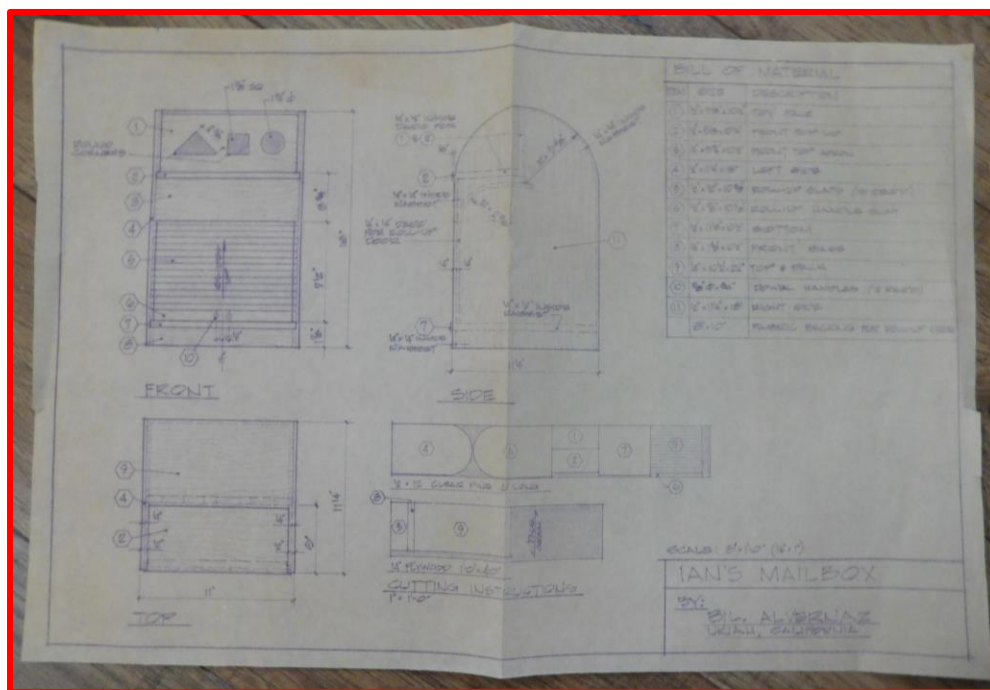
Here are the photos of the train where it now "resides" in my writing/computer room, all 21 cars, along with the steam engine. I love looking at the train and being around it every day!



Ian's Mailbox (1st birthday)

Going into Christmas, 1976, I was working on what would become known as Ian's Christmas Train that I would add on to each Christmas for ten years. While working on those first three train cars and the engine, I came up with the idea of a Mailbox that Ian would "deposit" square and triangle blocks, along with balls in different slots on the top part. I had seen different toys that did similar things, but it struck me that it would be something really special to have this wooden mailbox "toy" that Ian could learn from. Not just where to put what shape, but the square blocks would have letters on them and the triangle blocks would have numbers. There would be little balls to go in the slot that was round.

Most of my woodworking "projects" I did over the years, I approached in the same way I write ... I could "see things" in my mind and then just "brought them to life" on paper (for writing) and in wood for things I was building. Somehow I could just see what I needed to do. Then I would start measuring things out and "put the pieces together" so to speak as I built things. This is what I was doing with Ian's mailbox and it was working out fine. I had an architect friend, Victor Lopez, in Ukiah, who, after I showed him what I was doing, created what became the "detailed plan" for Ian's mailbox. I was just getting started on the mailbox, so with Vic's plan, I had more of a clear idea how things would fit together. It was very helpful.



Now the really, really, REALLY interesting part of the story about Ian's Mailbox is something I had no idea would happen. On his first birthday, we gave Ian the Mailbox and he loved it right from the start. He played with it and very quickly figured out which pieces went where, including determining that the triangle blocks could easily go in the square block opening. The first time I saw him do that, his whimsical smile spoke volumes in terms of, as he looked at me, him implying, "Oh, look, this one will even fit in here!" But, he usually put the triangle blocks in the triangle opening. I truly believe that even at that age, without yet talking, he was showing me what would become his analytical approach to EVERYTHING.

So here is what I wish I could take credit for with the mailbox, but it just happened. Once Ian realized he could stand up and hold on to his mailbox, he would anchor himself (balancing), holding on to the mailbox and walk around it. That was how he started figuring out how this "walking thing" worked. Next he realized that he could move from the mailbox to the couch or the coffee table in a step or two. And, wobbly as it all was, he definitely was in the process of learning to walk.

Today we have Ian's Mailbox with all of the stuffed animals who "protect" our large screen TV. And, we still have all the blocks and the three balls!



There is one more aspect to this "mailbox story." And, that is the Ukiah Daily Journal did a story on Ian's Christmas Train and his mailbox. I had a newspaper column in that paper and when people heard about and saw what I had made for Ian, they wanted to do a story.

The article was published on October 16, 1977. It shows me working with my jigsaw that I used for so many woodworking projects. It shows Ian standing next to his mailbox and also me and him with the first four cars of his wooden train set. I "penned" the title that they used, "Christmas train due for additions."

So here is the article:



Ian's Tricycle (2nd birthday)

This was the point where Diana and I realized Ian was going to be a wizard of engineering. We bought Ian a tricycle and the way things worked out, I just didn't have time to build it before his birthday. So we thought it would be fun to just give him the



"trike in a box" and then we could all work together building it. So that's what we did, but, like with the surprise aspect of his mailbox becoming a "prop" Ian would use to learn to walk, the "trike in a box" allowed us an amazing glimpse into how Ian's mind worked ... and, at that young age, just how incredible his cognitive skills were.

Why? Well, I got a phone call just as he opened his birthday present. When I came back into the room, he had put all the pieces of the trike into a specific order and went about assembling it! This at age TWO! Diana and I just stood back and watched Ian work. It was amazing. After that, anything we bought for him, we just gave it to him in a box and he would build it ... all without ever looking at the directions or plans for assembly. In fact, until he left home, he built all of our exercise equipment and anything else we bought that needed assembling. And, never once did he look at the instructions or guides. He just organized the pieces and put stuff together perfectly!



Ian's Rocking Horse - JewelBelly (4th birthday)

We had a huge birthday party with more than 30 people crammed into our living room on Acacia Street in Salinas, California, for Ian's third birthday. I didn't make him a birthday present that year, or I should say that I was in the "planning stages" of what would become his birthday present for his fourth birthday – JewelBelly, a rocking horse.



I had put a lot of thought into the idea of a rocking horse, but couldn't find any plans that I liked. So I went to the library and looked through books of rocking horse projects. Finally, I found four different types of rocking horses I liked. Let me point out that this would be for his fourth birthday and I combined four different "looks" of antique rocking horses to make what would become JewelBelly ... I didn't even draw up plans. I just measured and cut the wood proportionately to "fit" the size of Ian (I actually measured his stance and how he sat). Then I added in the "growth factor" so that for at least three or four years, he could "ride that horse" that we had told so many stories about.

JewelBelly started out as an on-going story that we would make up as we were riding in the car. We never had the radio on. We were always making up stories – Ian, Diana, and me. So very early on in our story telling "episodes," we were driving in the mountainous Pacheco Pass area of Central California where there was one particular "small" mountain where stage coach robbers would "hold up" stages, take the gold strong boxes, and bury them "up on the hill" in what was known as Robber's Roost.

Thus, the story telling of JewelBelly the horse, who had a penchant for eating the jewels the robbers had gotten from their various and assorted stage coach heists. So, in addition to building the rocking horse (while I was building it), I wrote "How JewelBelly Not Only Saved the Day by Starring in Ian's Birthday Story, But Also Led to Making That Day Unforgettable ..."

I had an artist do a "cover drawing" to go with the story. So on the pages that follow, you will find that drawing (of Ian on JewelBelly, with all of the characters from the story) ... the story that we told and retold and added on to over the course of three or four years. First, the photos of building JewelBelly. And, then the birthday story is included, too.

Ian loved that rocking horse, along with the cowboy boots and hat that we bought to go along with it. I spent more than 100 hours working on that rocking horse. It was the single most difficult, complex wood working project I've ever done (even over building Ian's treehouse (we'll get to that in the next section). The main issue or perplexing part of creating this magical rocking horse was building it from scratch. And, I did have to recut and rework several of the "interlocking" pieces. I mean, I just made it all up as I went, looking at four different sets of images. I know that's probably not the best way to make something, but that's how I did it.

And, for three or four years, Ian and JewelBelly were inseparable. He would drag JewelBelly into his room at night. The next day he would bring JewelBelly to wherever he was. He watched TV sitting on that rocking horse. He ate snacks "riding" that horse. It truly was magical. Then, one day, JewelBelly sat in Ian's room, no longer ridden by



the kid, just as JewelBelly now sits in our bedroom, with those cowboy boots a "little kid" once wore. But JewelBelly is waiting and ready, just in case the kid returns.

In writing the story for Ian's birthday, I incorporated this drawing into the story line. That's how the artist knew where to place all the creatures who resided in the mythical "Forest of Creatures" ... where the stories always took place. And, of course, there was the gigantic, magical BOTU Tree where all of the creatures "hung out" most of the time ... all waiting for Ian and JewelBelly. The drawing was framed and Ian had it in his room for many years.

One other part of the story that really isn't explained in the Birthday Story has to do with the BOTU Tree. I made up many, many stories about that BOTU Tree where the initial character was Sudden Gutter, the flying squirrel. That character came about from the flying squirrels (they really did fly) in the huge redwood trees across from our house in Ukiah (on Oak Street). From our dining table, Diana, Ian, and I watched those incredible flying squirrels leap and fly from tree to tree. It should also be noted that BOTU stands for "bowels of the Universe" ... which was part of many of the story lines.







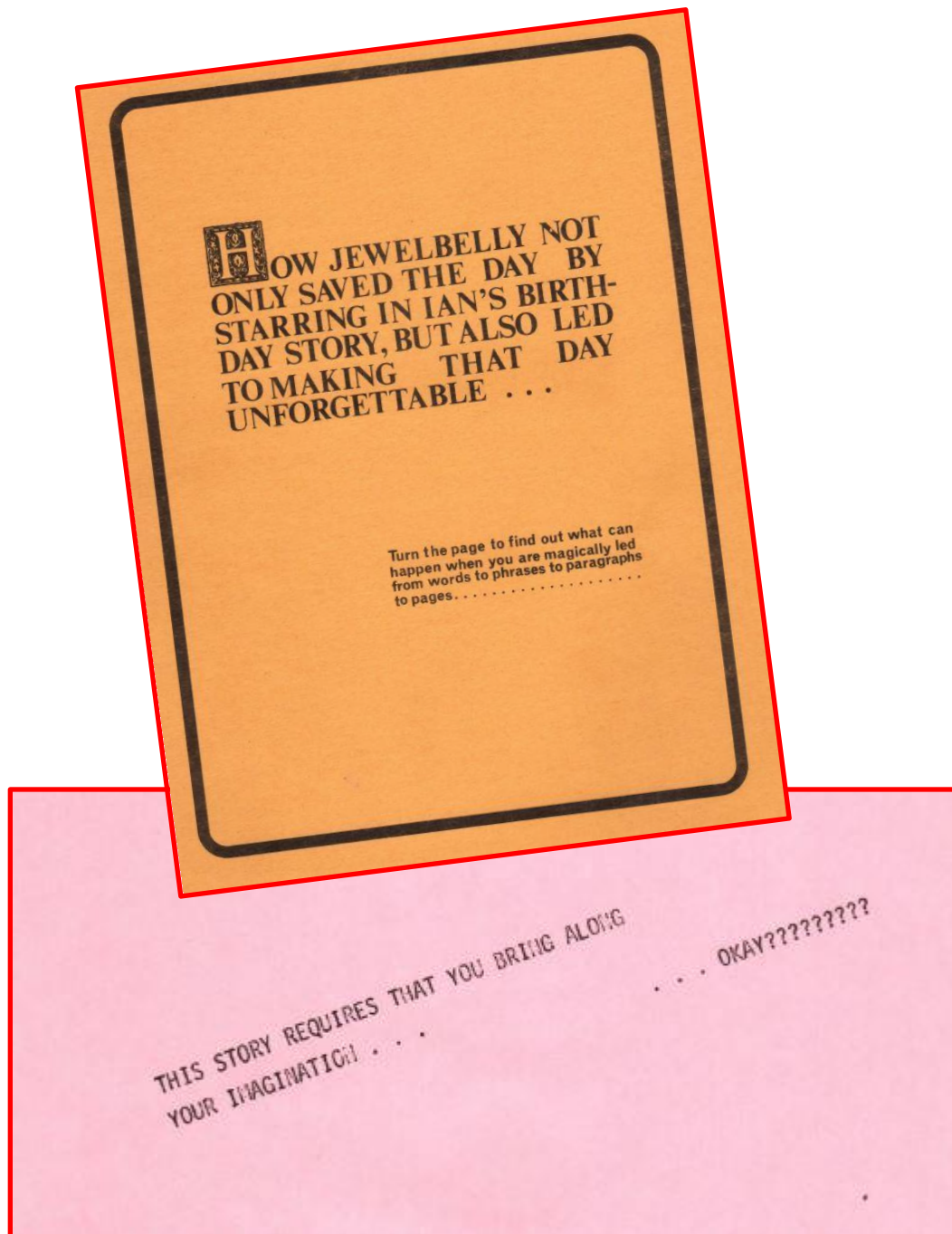
JewelBelly, **THEN**, on Ian's birthday, May 23rd, 1980.

And, JewelBelly, **NOW**, all these years later, "ready to go" (the boots around his neck and all) ... waiting, just in case the kid comes back!



And, now, the JewelBelly story I wrote for Ian ... it should be noted that this was all typed on an IBM Correcting Selectric typewriter (the one with the twirling ball), with painstaking "detail" to "count out spacing" for justified margins. There were no spell-checkers in those days, so the typos "found their way through" the proofing process.

The “pink part” you see was an entire page that served as a “lead in” to the story. There will be a second page like this towards the end of the story. That one is also “trimmed a bit.”



Birthday number four is, perhaps, the best birthday of all . . .

. . . and that's just what Ian Alvernaz found out early on the morning of May 23, 1980.

It was just before dawn when everything is still and quiet. The dew drops glistened in the moonlight as the eastern sky slowly lightened up.

Snuggled and snoring in his waterbed Ian opened his big, blue eyes at the sound of tapping on the window pane in his room.

"Who's there?" Ian asked, rubbing his eyes.

He heard a horse whinny and then the words, "Ian? Ian Wesley Alvernaz? Is that you, Ian?"

Cocking his head to one side and frowning just a bit, Ian replied, "Yes. I'm Ian. Who are you?"

Ian heard laughing and snorting somewhat, then this, "Open up this window and see."

-1-

"But WHO is it?" Ian insisted, wondering if he should call his mom and dad, who were sound asleep in their room just down the hallway.

"Don't bother your mom and dad. You'll be surprised when you open the drapes . . . so come on over here and open 'em up. Get up and over HERE! Quick! We've got lots to do on this special birthday number four of yours." This statement was, of course, followed by more snorting, laughing and whinnying.

By this time Ian was grinning. He had a sneaking suspicion who might be at his window, but couldn't believe it might really be true. Excitedly he hopped out of bed, straightened his yellow pajama bottoms and rushed to the window. After pulling open the drapes and blinds, Ian's mouth then dropped open in surprise, joy and enchantment at what he saw.

There outside the window, through all of the many panes, stood Jewelbelly, the famous horse from out of California's old west. Ian's dad had told Ian

-2-

dozens and dozens of stories about Jewelbelly and the famous bandit, Ian, who robbed stagecoaches more than 100 years ago. . .

. . . or so the legend goes.

Just like in all the stories, Jewelbelly was a light colored red horse, standing tall outside that window. Jewelbelly pressed his nose up against one window pane, fogging it up as he snorted and laughed some more.

Putting his hand to his mouth, Ian said, "Oh, my goodness! Is that really you, Jewelbelly?"

"You bet," replied the horse with a big smile.

Ian scratched his head, saying, "Your saddle is empty. Where's Ian the famous bandit?"

Snorting yet once more, Jewelbelly said, "That saddle is just for you today, Ian. And, besides, your name is Ian, too, is it not?"

Before Ian could answer the question Jewelbelly

-3-

continued with, "Come on, now, get your clothes on. We gotta get on our way if we're going to do all I've planned for today.

"But . . ." Ian stammered.

Jewelbelly interrupted with, "No 'buts' about it. Get your riding clothes and cowboy hat on . . . and let's get going."

At that moment the sun inched up over the Gabilan mountain range. Quickly jerking his head toward the red-sky-sunrise and back Jewelbelly said, "Ian, times a wasting. Let's get going."

Within minutes Ian put on his shirt, levis, sandals cowboy hat and the red bandanna. Securing the bandanna around his neck, Ian then quickly raised the window, with Jewelbelly helping on the outside by pushing up with his nose. All the while the horse giggled and laughed as Ian kept saying, "SHUSH," in a whisper, of course. Jewelbelly was quite a playful horse and Ian had no idea of the wonderful, fun day he was in for.

-4-



Ian carefully stood on the window ledge, trying not to fall and wondering how to get way up on the leather tooled saddle. Jewelbelly took care of the problem with a swift, but gentle nudge of his long nose. The next thing Ian knew he was up on that marvelous saddle. The fit was perfect, just as if it had been made especially for him. The saddle was comfortable, the way he had always imagined it would be.

"Hold on to the reins," said Jewelbelly. With that he galloped off down Acacia street, heading for places a four-year-old like Ian rarely ever sees. But, then again, this was birthday number four and that, of course, added the necessary magic to it all. Ian had a huge smile on his face as he then settled in with the movement of the gallop. His house got smaller and smaller in the distance behind them.

Ian took one last, quick glance over his shoulder at his house as Jewelbelly made a hard right turn on California street.

Trying to stay in the saddle through the turn, Ian

-5-

said, "Jewelbelly! Be careful on those turns!"

Before Jewelbelly could say anything Ian realized the landscape had somehow changed from the streets of Salinas to a forest.

"Where are we, Jewelbelly?" Ian asked, holding on tightly to the reins as they seemed to be going both faster and slower at the same time.

Jewelbelly jerked his neck a bit, then stated, "There's no need to pull so hard on the reins. Fact is, we're not even moving at this point."

Looking around him, Ian said, "It sure looks to me like we're moving."

"We're not moving at all, Ian," said Jewelbelly. "We're in the very same spot constantly. It's the ground that's moving beneath us! Oh, never mind that. You asked where we are, right?"

"Right," said Ian. "But, what do you mean we're not moving and the ground is? I don't think you,

-6-

yourself, realize . . ."

"Look over there," Jewelbelly said quickly.

Not far off, Ian spotted a gray flying squirrel, gently soaring downward from a tall Botu tree toward them. It wasn't just any flying squirrel either. It was Sudden Gutter, the squirrel Ian's dad had also told him stories about.

Sudden Gutter landed gracefully on Jewelbelly's saddle, right in front of Ian.

Crimping his neck as far back as possible, Jewelbelly said hello to Sudden Gutter, then looked at Ian. "Welcome to the Forest of Characters, Ian."

Now seeing Jewelbelly come to life outside of his bedroom window was one thing, but for Ian to be seeing yet another of his dad's characters in such a beautiful forest . . . well, that was almost too much for Ian to absorb.

If that weren't enough, at that very moment from

-7-

out of the Botu tree came more characters and creatures Ian's dad had told him stories about.

From the very tip top of the Botu tree came Plato the Owl. Then, a little further down, near the spot Sudden Gutter had taken flight from, into the air with an up-start went Jake the One Legged Crow. One by one the animals headed for Ian and the horse. Branch the Chipmunk quickly scampered down the tree. In doing that he tapped Vicinity the Opossum hard on the tail to wake him up. When Vicinity saw Ian from that up-side-down position he, too, scurried down the Botu tree.

From behind the base of the tree came Records Raccoon, Daisy the Skunk, Glove the Fox, Berry Bunny and Caboose the Moose.

All of them gathered around Ian, who had dismounted Jewelbelly. Ian patted, petted and hugged all of them, then let out a big sigh, saying, "I can't believe this. This is really neat."

"It's true, alright," said Jewelbelly. "But, wait

-8-



a minute. We can't stay here all day. Let's find a stagecoach and take a ride to the Boardwalk in Santa Cruz."

Everyone agreed enthusiastically, except for the opossum, Vicinity, who felt he could use a few more snoozes. However, he was quickly persuaded to join them at the prospect of his most favorite treat - fresh, crisp, fried bacon - being available at the Boardwalk.

Perking up his ears, Jewelbelly said, "QUIET!" Then everyone listened.

Ian cupped his hands to his mouth and whispered to Sudden Gutter the squirrel. "What are we listening for?"

That question was then asked of each animal and bird in the circle and no one knew the answer. Before they could ask Jewelbelly, the horse hoisted Ian up to the saddle, saying, "Come on, Ian. The stage is coming. Just right over there." He pointed beyond the meadow.

-9-

"BUT . . . BUT . . . BUT . . ." Ian said.

Jewelbelly laughed and snorted again. "We're going to hold up the stage. Only instead of grabbing the strongbox we're going to take the stage, itself, to go to Santa Cruz. I'm sure we'll have enough room for everyone."

"But, I don't know anything about robbing a stagecoach, Jewelbelly," said Ian.

"Haven't you listened to your dad's stories long enough to know what to do, Ian?" Jewelbelly was still laughing and giggling; and, of course, ready to go.

Ian thought for a moment, then said, "Uh. Well, I guess so. Will anyone get hurt?"

Jewelbelly paused, saying, "Has anyone ever been hurt in any of your dad's stories?"

"No," replied Ian, matter of factly.

"Well, then. There you have it," said Jewelbelly.

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"Case closed. And, remember, this is the Forest of Characters, so we can do just about anything."

In a cloud of dust Jewelbelly raced off toward the stagecoach. And, yet another surprise awaited Ian when he found out his mom and dad were driving the stagecoach. There were no other passengers.

"You won't even need your gun for this one," Jewelbelly quietly said with a huge amount of confidence.

What made it all the easier was that Ian's mom and dad stopped the stagecoach by a stream. When they got off the stage with their picnic lunch, Ian and Jewelbelly made off with the stagecoach.

Before long all the animals and birds were loaded onto the stagecoach, and on the way to Santa Cruz. It was a beautiful day and they rode the Ferris Wheel, the Fire Engine and Cars, the Sky Way and, of course, the Red Airplanes.

In the arcade Jewelbelly gathered everyone together saying, "Let's all get our picture taken with Ian."

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It was there that Jewelbelly, Sudden Gutter (right in Ian's lap), Plato the Owl, Jake the Crow, Branch the Chipmunk, Vicinity the Opossum, Daisy the Skunk, Glove the Fox, Berry Bunny, Caboose the Moose and Records Raccoon all squeezed in around Ian for a "family character creature portrait." Ian proudly displayed the biggest smile in the entire world.

Following the popping flashbulbs, which froze those special moments in time, Jewelbelly looked at Ian and said, "Well, my friend, it's time to head for home."

Ian hesitated, then agreed, because it had been a fantastic experience. He, too, was ready to go home. He knew that he would never forget this fourth birthday - the magic of it all.

In what seemed like an instant, again with the ground rapidly moving beneath them, they returned the stagecoach. Sudden Gutter and all of his friends disappeared back to the comfort and safety of their Botu tree. They, too, had thoroughly

-12-



enjoyed the day.

And then Ian and Jewelbelly were on East Acacia street again, coming up to the white house at number two, two, two.

It had been a busy, wonderful, magical kind of day. But, instead of the sun setting in the west it was still rising over the Gabilan mountain range in the east.

Ian noticed this and commented, "Jewelbelly, we've been gone all day and the sun is still where it was when we left this morning. How can that be?"

Jewelbelly came to a stop softly in front of Ian's bedroom window which was still open. "Well," said Jewelbelly, "It's kind of hard to explain, but let's just say that this adventure didn't consume as much time as it did magical energy. Besides, now it's time to spend this special day with your mom and dad."

Jewelbelly didn't let Ian ask any further questions,

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Is your imagination still working?

The best part is coming up!

but, instead, helped Ian back in through the window. Ian stood close to the window patting Jewelbelly's nose. For the first time all day Jewelbelly wasn't laughing or giggling.

"Jewelbelly, I don't want you to go." Ian said sadly.

Suddenly Jewelbelly snorted, startling Ian. Then Jewelbelly said, "I'm not going to leave. With the help of that magical energy from our day together and your imagination I think we can come up with a way for you and me to have adventures like this any time you want to. And right here in your room."

Ian cocked his head to one side, puzzled by what this horse, outside of his window, meant.

Jewelbelly continued, "Now close your eyes and rub your hands together, up and down, under your nose."

His eyes opened wide, Ian asked, "What is that going . . ."

"Just do it," interrupted Jewelbelly.

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Ian closed his eyes tight and slowly rubbed his hands together under his nose.

"Now," said Jewelbelly. "Think real hard about how much fun today was and think of all the adventures and episodes we will have together. Okay?"

"Okay. Got it," Ian said.

Jewelbelly took a long, deep breath and carefully placed the "family character creature portrait" on Ian's dresser. A tear trickled down Jewelbelly's cheek as he cheerfully said, "Now blow into your hands and spread your arms wide. Count to five. Then open your eyes."

Ian did exactly as Jewelbelly had instructed him, saying, "One. Two. Three. Four. Five."

Ian heard his mom and dad getting up as he opened his eyes. There in front of Ian was the biggest rocking horse he had ever seen. It looked just like Jewelbelly. It was even the very same color.

Ian rushed over to the rocking horse as his mom and

-15-

dad walked into the room. Ian hugged the rocking horse, because he knew it was Jewelbelly. He knew it was Jewelbelly because of the magic of this birthday number four.

Ian's dad, Bil., looked at the rocking horse and said, "Ily, my. What have we here?" Bil. then smiled at Ian's mom, Diana.

Ian then hugged Bil. and Diana, and said, "It's Jewelbelly! It's Jewelbelly! He is here now to take me on adventures forever and ever. Right, Jewelbelly?"

Jewelbelly winked in agreement at Ian, as Bil. and Diana looked at each other smiling.

And, it was true, from that day on, Jewelbelly really did take Ian on hundreds and hundreds of marvelous adventures - to the Forest of Characters and beyond. All it took was the magical energy from birthday number four and Ian's active and vivid imagination.

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Ian's Tree House

My grandfather always wanted a lot shade around his house (and the barn), so any tree he planted, he made sure it would "bear fruit." There were walnut trees (very BIG trees), Loquat trees (*Eriobotrya Japonica*, native trees of China), Redwood trees (they were the tallest ... though they didn't provide fruit, my grandfather still liked the shade from those massive trees that he had brought back from Yosemite National Park as seedlings), Apricot trees, Plum trees, Pomegranate trees, Lemon trees, and Fig trees. And, it was in one of those Fig trees, near the house where I built Ian's treehouse. This during the 14 year period we lived in the house my grandfather built.

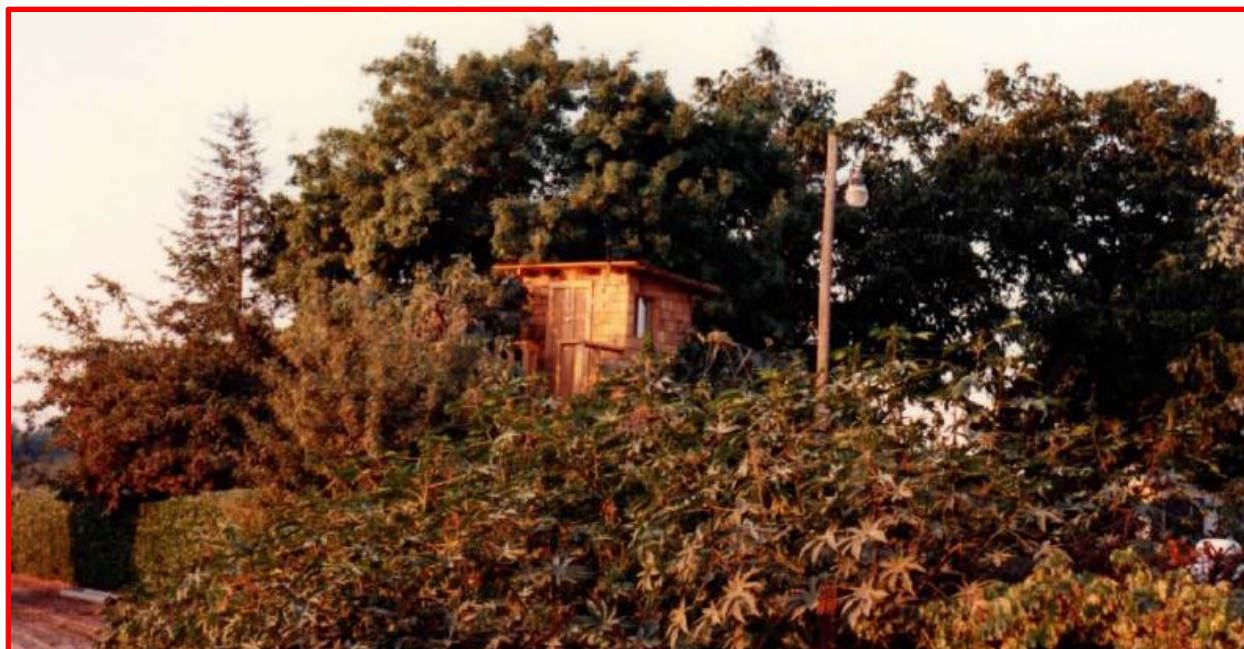
I started out to just build a "platform" in the Fig tree so Ian could have a "fort" of some sort "up there." Well, I started in February of 1988 and just kept "adding on" to what would become the most amazing (and "enchanted") treehouse. Once I went from the idea of platform to turning that into a treehouse, it was an 8-month process of designing (all in my head ... nothing was on paper ... though I could "see" what it was all going to be as I progressed) and building the treehouse, complete with a skylight, two windows (that you could slide open – there were even screens to keep the bugs out), electricity (yes, really! Electricity!), and running water. We got a tiny sink that was designed for motor homes. It cost in the hundreds of dollars, mostly for all the wood and even singles!).

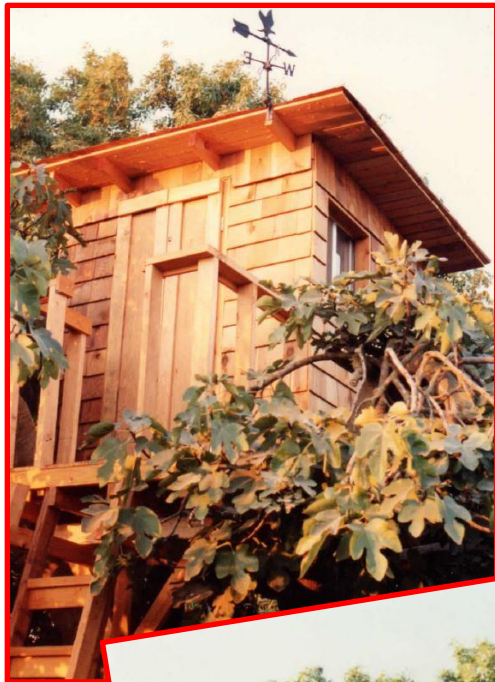
I knew nothing about constructing a treehouse, but I could always "see it" in my mind in a process that simply came down to "building it as you go!" And, just as with JewelBelly, Ian's use of the treehouse spanned about a four year period. During that time, he slept up there many nights. But, there came a point when Ian actually said, "The treehouse is shrinking in size."

I replied that "NO! You're growing so that is what accounts for the size "issue." The floor was six feet by eight feet, then on one side, facing the yard, there was a two feet by three feet spot where I "built in" a desk area that jutted outward from the main area of the treehouse. Ian and one other person could sleep up and so many times, when he would have friends spend the night, they "roosted" up in that treehouse. It also had a weather vane and a very clever (even if I do say so myself) rope and pulley system "tied to a large bucket" where Ian could easily hoist things up. That way he didn't have to do a "balancing act" going up the ladder.

One of the things that stands out in my mind the most about that treehouse (and there are many things, especially, how did I ever even know how to do that?), was the first day I proclaimed it was going to be a treehouse. Ian looked up in the tree and then back to me saying, "You're the best dad in the world!" That was so special!



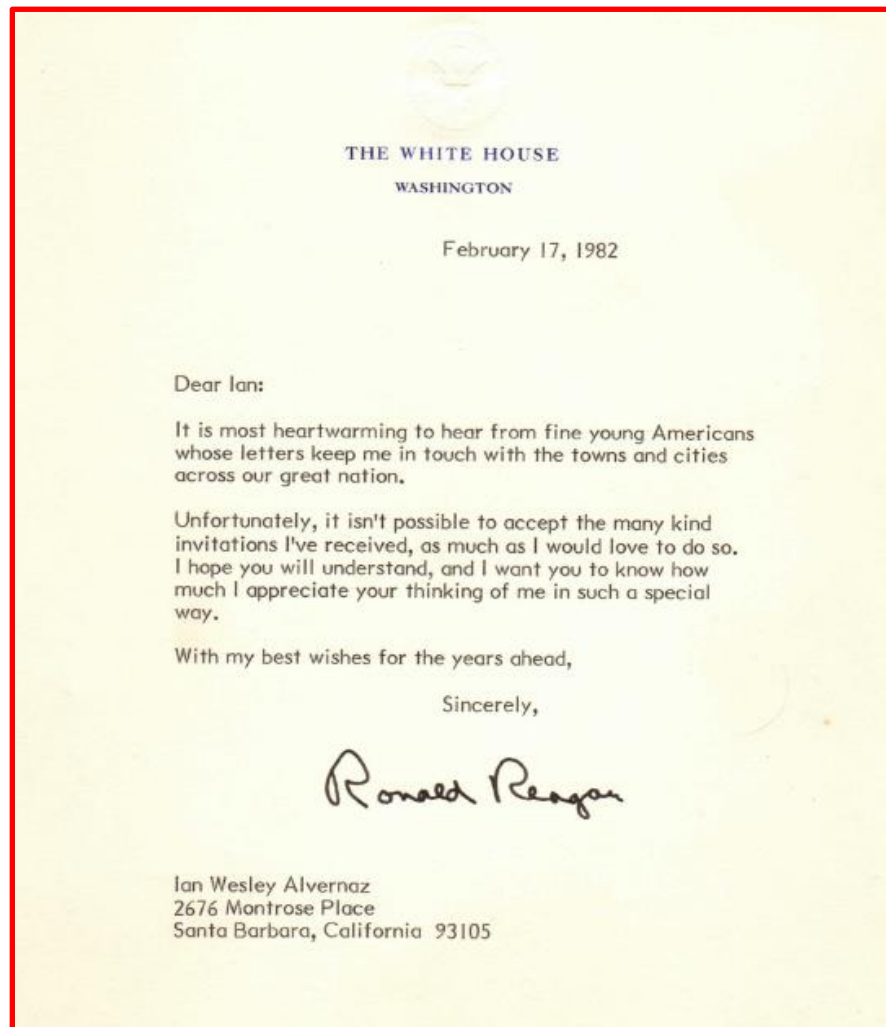




Ian's Letter from President Reagan

A year and half or so before I made my presentation to President Reagan, Ian had written to the President, inviting him to come visit Ian's school on one of his visits to his ranch in Santa Barbara County (the Western White House). In fact, where we lived on Montrose Place in Santa Barbara, we could see the President and Nancy Reagan as they flew over in a helicopter on the way to Rancho del Cielo (which Diana and I would actually visit in 2003, twenty years after I made the [presentation to the President](#) ... at the invitation of Nancy Reagan).

So here is the letter Ian received from the President. Ian was designated as the class representative to "write to the President." No one ever expected a reply! But, guess what? Ian got this letter! That was a BIG share and tell day ...



Ian's Graduation Bill

When graduated from Livingston High School in 1994, I presented him with a bill for "parenting services." And, I didn't make up "what it costs to raise a kid" either. I just thought it would interesting to "keep track of things" in terms of just what do you need to spend over the course of a child's life time. These "fees" are all real!

June 9th, 1994
Graduation Day
Livingston, California

Ian,

In but a moment a child is born. The record of a life begins. Minutes turning to memories then constantly flow from an hour glass which seems virtually endless, etching a personal definition upon the fragile slate of time.

Though time zooms by without so much as a whisper, we find ourselves here today at this milestone of milestones - that point where you stand, optimistic and confident, looking toward a promising future and reflecting on the importance of the past.

It is with pride and respect that we acknowledge your accomplishments on this occasion of your graduation from high school, as well as the great things we know you will go on to do in your life.

And, really, there isn't much more to say, because what is most important right now is what brought us to this day - what we have said and done as you grew up, helping you when you needed us, knowing when to stay out of your way so you could be your own person, and, more than anything else, just being there to encourage you and do whatever needed to be done.

On this special day, our gift to you is a gold watch (your choice), which is not only to be used to keep track of time, but also so you won't lose track of time ... to make the most of all the moments, milestones, and memories yet to come.

The monetary aspect of what we give you today also marks the significance of this memorable day's events.

*With Love,
Diana And Bil.
(a.k.a. Mom and Dad)*



D&B Parenting Services*KID RAISING IS OUR BUSINESS*

11581 Walnut Avenue

Livingston CA 95334-9738

☎[209] 394-8188 Fax 209.394.8918

e-mail: alvernaz@ins.infonet.net

STATEMENT**ACCOUNT NO:** IA001**DATE:** June 9th, 1994**TO:** Ian Alvernaz, 18-year-old High School Graduate**Terms:** Due and Payable IMMEDIATELY ...✂ PLEASE DETACH AND RETURN THIS PORTION WITH YOUR REMITTANCE • MAKE CHECK PAYABLE TO: **MOM & DAD**

Year	Description	Charges	Credits	Balance
	BALANCE FORWARD:			\$ 0.00
1976	Birthing related STUFF (including Dr/hospital)	1,900		\$1,900.00
	Formula, food, clothes, misc.	2,400		4,300.00
	Medical checkups and shots	500		4,800.00
	High Chair, Crib, Stroller, and attachments	450		5,250.00
1977	Medical checkups and shots	400		5,650.00
	Food, clothes, misc. (Including first walking shoes \$80)	2,200		7,850.00
1978	Medical	200		8,050.00
	Food and clothes	1,250		9,300.00
1979	Medical	200		9,500.00
	Food, clothes, misc.	1,275		10,775.00
	Pre-school	360		11,135.00
1980	Medical	100		11,235.00
	Food, clothes, misc.	1,325		12,560.00
	Pre-school	360		12,920.00
1981	Medical & Dental	875		13,795.00
	Food, clothes, misc.	1,400		15,195.00
1982	Medical & Dental	450		15,645.00
	Food, Clothes, misc.	1,475		17,120.00



1983	Medical & Dental	500		17,620.00
	Food , clothes, misc.	1,525		19,145.00
1984	Medical & Dental	300		19,445.00
	Food, clothes, misc.	1,450		20,895.00
	IBM Pcjrr computers & software	2,250		23,145.00
1985	Medical & Dental	800		23,945.00
	Food, clothes, misc.	1,450		25,395.00
1986	Medical & Dental	250		25,645.00
	Food, clothes, misc.	1,550		27,195.00
	Pre-braces work, plus yanking out teeth	1,100		28,295.00
1987	Medical & Dental	375		28,670.00
	Food, clothes, misc.	1,575		30,245.00
	Pcs Limited 286 computer	2,995		33,240.00
	Trade-in on Pcjrr computer		[49.00]	33,191.00
1988	Medical & Dental	200		33,391.00
	Food, clothes, misc.	1,650		35,041.00
	Braces	3,200		38,241.00
1989	Medical & Dental	100		38,341.00
	Food, clothes, misc.	1,650		39,991.00
	Dog (Australian Shepard - 1 each)	350		40,341.00
	Martial arts training & materials	600		40,941.00
1990	Medical & Dental	325		41,266.00
	Food, clothes, misc.	1,725		42,991.00
1991	Medical & Dental	100		43,091.00
	Food, clothes, misc.	1,725		44,816.00
	386 33Mhz PC	1,750		46,566.00
	Trade in on Dell computer		[750.00]	45,816.00
1992	Medical & Dental	100		45,916.00
	Food, clothes, misc.	1,825.00		47,741.00
	Golf clubs	450		48,191.00



	Drivers Ed Training	110		48,301.00
1993	Medical & Dental	200		48,501.00
	Food, clothes, misc.	2,275		50,776.00
	Washington DC Trip (Congressional something or other)	3,800		54,576.00
1994	Food, clothes, misc.	875		55,451.00
.....	Interest over the years (variable rates)	12,582.59		68,033.59
.....	Advice and consulting fees over the years (past/future)	20,000		88,033.59
.....	Parental responsibility stress factor (life time stint)	25,000		113,033.59

**Pay last
amount in this
column**

Thank you for your business!

So, there you have it!

And, just for the record, we never "got paid" for any or all of these charges!



Short Stories

These are some of my most favorite short stories, from my book [Worded Emporium](#):

Where Stories Come From

<Copyright © 1994 by Bil. Alvernaz>

I turned off the main highway, passing a sign pointing the way to a town called "Inspiration."

Following a long dirt road I came upon a tiny town - one I felt certain couldn't live up to its name. Old, wooden buildings held together what was barely left of a long forgotten municipality.

The general store, complete with an old, but still working, Coke machine out front, anchored this quaint cluster of weathered store fronts, wooden sidewalks, and bleached white railings - the kind horses would have been tied to.

Just as my Coke bottle clunked to where I could grab it, I spotted what looked like a used bookstore. There was no name of the establishment on the building. I took a long swig of the Coke and walked over to have a look.

The door creaked loudly as it opened. I looked up at the top of the door when a bell jingled. The wooden floor was waxed and free of any scuffmarks. An antique, brass cash register, polished to a shiny luster, sat prominently on an oak counter that had a special sheen and luster to it.

An elderly, bespectacled gentleman in a tweed suit sat behind the counter. He said not a word, nor did he even look at me as he thumbed through piles of what looked like contracts and legal papers.

I nodded in his direction anyway and I think I heard myself quietly say, "Hello." This wasn't a book store, even though there were stacks of books piled in the windows facing the street. There were no bookshelves. Only ornate, glass display counters.

I carefully put down my Coke bottle on the first display case I came to. With outstretched fingers pressing down on the spotless glass, I leaned over to get a closer look. Dozens of elegant pens were neatly arranged on crimson velvet, with hand written labels next to each pen.

There were no prices on the labels, only letters. My concentration was so intense that I jumped when, from right behind me, the old man said, "Nice pens, huh? You mind stepping back and removing that bottle?"



"Sure," I said. Then I quickly asked, "These pens for sale?"

Smiling as he used a cloth to erase the circle left by the bottle and any trace of my fingerprints, the man said, "Not in a manner of speaking. These are special pens for writers."

"I'm a writer," I heard myself say.

"That right," he said looking at my slightly distorted reflection in the once again clean beveled glass of the counter top. "Would I know your name or any of your books?"

Pausing, I then said, "Well, I, ah, I've written articles and features, mostly local stuff. Oh, and short stories, too. Lots and lots of short stories that I think I'll publish in a book one day."

Turning to face me, the man leaned against the counter and said, "As a writer, you've never heard of this Worded Emporium?" He continued as I shook my head left and right, "Well, you see, these are extraordinary pens, made exclusively for specific writers."

Not sure what to say, I said, "Sooooooo. Then. Can I have you make one for me?"

"Doesn't quite work that way, though I think I just might have something for you in the back," he said as he pointed to the far end of the store.

He continued with, "You must understand, this establishment is unique. It's a one of a kind place. Nothing else like it anywhere. Our sole purpose is to be of service to writers ... real writers. And, as it always has been, true writers must seek out this place before we can do anything for them.

"Each of our pens is precisely crafted with a contents so distinct that only one, selected individual can benefit from what we have packed into each writing barrel. You understand what I'm saying?"

Furrowing my brow, I said, "I'm not sure. Are you saying you actually put what it is that writers will write into these pens?"

"That would be one way, though rather crude, to put it," he said, smiling broadly. "But you have the basic idea. The bottom line is 'worded excursions' and 'sentencing masterpieces' all stemming from the simplicity and charm of words to phrases, paragraphs to pages."

Putting his arm around my shoulder, the old man steered me toward the back of the store where he had pointed. The back door at the far end of the store had two large, bold words above it: "Intellectual Stimulation." He motioned for me to open the door, saying, "I do have something back here I think you'll find quite useful since you did manage to somehow find your way here."

I put my Coke bottle on the floor next to several other empty ones and opened the door wide. The air was still and somewhat musty smelling. I wasn't surprised to



see more display cases, although these were smaller and much plainer looking. We walked all the way to the back of the room where we stopped in front of a case filled with an assortment of quite ordinary looking pens.

Pulling a magnificent key ring out of his pocket, the old man selected a worn, gold skeleton key and opened the case. Lifting the lid, he said, "Grab that blue pen. The one next to the label with your initials on it."

My mouth dropped open as I picked up the pen. Though it appeared to be nondescript, I could feel this was no ordinary pen. What I felt when I picked it up was the noticeable literary weight of what I was sure would become memorable written words. I knew this pen was a tool made specifically for me to create collected combinations of words.

Smiling kindly, the old man took a contract out of his inner coat pocket and handed it to me, saying, "You can get a feel for the authority and impact of this pen by filling in the blanks on this long-term agreement and then signing it."

Then, looking over the rims of his reading glasses directly into my mind through my wide-open eyes, the man continued, saying, "With this pen, you simply write, the way all writers do. This pen allows you to shape words definitively, stirring reader intellect in new and exhilarating ways. This pen is an excellent one to start with because it is packed with a good, solid volume of smooth flowing words - enough to write several good short stories. You'll know when you're ready to come back for another pen as you work your way up to the more elegant ones out front."

I quickly filled in the blanks and signed the contract. As I walked out, pen in hand, the old man put my contract in the pile with all of the others at the front desk. I left and headed straight home to write!

I was pleased with the words I crafted using that pen, the first of many pens I would get from that store. One of my first short stories I particularly liked. It was called "***Where Stories Come From.***"

The Bull Fighter, or so it would seem

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He stands there, carefully posing before anything happens.

The crowd in the stands is quiet, awaiting his movement as he looks at his adversary.

Then just a swishing sound as he twirls to a position with his back facing his foe.

The crowd roars.



He does it again. The "victim" paws at the dirt with his foot, waiting for what comes next.

The crowd is silenced once again.

He poses yet again, about to go in for "the kill."

Suddenly, the pitching coach comes running out to the mound from the dugout.

In a gruff voice, the coach says, "Okay, kid. Twenty-six down and one to go. Just one more strike and you'll have a perfect game. Go with the fastball one more time. It's a three-two count. I know you can do it."

The coach disappears into the dugout.

He poses yet again like he always does, only this time he leans even farther in to look at the signs from the catcher. He shakes off the fastball. He shakes off two more signs until he nods his head for a slider.

The crowd makes not a sound as all eyes follow the swishing sound of the ball.

I Met the Devil Once

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I met the devil once, but I'll come back to that.

I mention that encounter because I thought about it as I just sat there in a surreal stupor, blinking and thinking, while the doctor calmly said what he said.

I had been anticipating bad news, really, really bad news. But when I heard exactly what I was expecting to hear (or thought I heard), I realized what I really wanted or had hoped against hope for was good news. I think we all hope, secretly or otherwise, for uplifting news no matter how disheartened we get (even if we won't ever admit to having those pangs of optimism surging inside of us).

I had become numbed and drained from being so tired of feeling bad. I wanted to get back to being my "old" self. It had been so long since I had felt like me I almost couldn't remember what that was like.

Suddenly I was sitting there facing my doctor as my heart skipped a beat. Finally, I would find out what was going on. In an instant I was okay ... READY! There on the doctor's desk was my patient record file, bulging with all kinds, colors, and sizes of paper from my countless exams and tests of prodding and "poking around" - all of which I had endured (uncomfortably and otherwise) to get to this politely strained, hard-to-catch-a-breath moment. And, I never could figure out why my doctor and so many other doctors and labs were still using paper files instead of electronic medical records. But then that's a discussion for another day ... maybe.

Without hesitating or taking the slightest breath, my doctor tilted his head slightly sideways and said, "I'm sorry to tell you this, but you have an affliction that



more than likely will be fatal. It cannot be treated. However, we are quite certain about the eventual ..." he paused, then said, "... uh, outcome."

My mouth dropped open. I let go of my grip on the chair and limply slipped into a slouched position ... like I had just been shot.

Still not seeming to take a breath, the doctor said, "As we reached the millennium and then in the subsequent years, there has been an amazing number of cases like yours. Hundreds of thousands, millions worldwide, actually. You know of this mysterious malady, right?"

Bobbing my head up and down I attempted to sit up straighter. The doctor's lips kept moving as phrases, statistics, and anecdotes tumbled out of his mouth. Looking at him in an odd sort of way, I felt hot and was sure I would throw up as my face either flushed with or drained of all color - I couldn't tell which. I heard sounds, barely recognizable as words, all strange and muted.

This is when I realized hope was actually coursing through my entire body which brings me back to when I met the devil. After all, hope is how the devil markets his "services," isn't it?

But, before we get to the story of how I met the devil I need to say that I threw out all of the prescriptions the doctor gave me. I started exercising more and eating better, being smarter about the choices I made for what goes into my body. And, do you know what? I started feeling better and better. Oh, and I never went back to that or any other doctor either! And, that was years and years ago. So now let's get to what I wanted to tell you.

I met the devil in the medical clinic where I was waiting to do the final blood tests before that episode with my doctor that I was telling you about. It was a dark, rainy afternoon. I had seen several doctors at this clinic and also had most of my tests done there. I signed in at the registration counter and was pleasantly surprised to see a place to sit down. The empty chair was in a row of chairs by the wall, directly opposite the entryway.

I liked this spot because it was close to a gigantic aquarium. I liked the fish, but mostly I loved to watch the African Frogs darting all over, oblivious to their confines ... much like those of us who sat there waiting, suppressing anxiety and urges to scream, with worry feeding on dread, and, yes, somewhere in the middle of all that were traces of hope.

I didn't feel like reading any of the tattered magazines I had already thumbed through several times. Instead, I leaned my head back against the stone wall. I let out a long sigh and quickly nodded off into an unexpected, but welcomed catnap.

The deafening sound of thunder and rattling windows instantly snapped me out of my pleasant snooze. I quickly sat up in a crooked sort of way. Yawning and blinking, I saw the devil walk in - right as lightning etched a monstrous zigzag pattern in the darkened sky, back lighting him in strobing flickers of black and white. I had



absolutely no doubt this man was the devil. I have no idea how I knew that as he stood in the doorway for a moment surveying the room.

The lightning's glow around the devil dissolved like glittering pixie dust as he walked in my direction. I was absolutely sure this man was the devil, because it was obvious this wasn't your average person. There wasn't a drop of water on him, nor was a strand of hair out of place on his head of thick, gray hair.

Tall and muscular, there was no doubt the devil was in excellent physical shape. He wore a black turtleneck sweater and stone washed jeans. The well-worn Reeboks - laces untied - seemed out of character on this distinctive man with piercing eyes, accented by high cheekbones.

Then he was right in front of me, without having seemed to walk a single step. Pointing to the empty seat next to me he asked, "Okay if I set here?" The voice was velvety, soothing in a way I had never heard vocal chords resonate. Each syllable was uttered with such sincerity that "heavenly" is the only word to describe the aural sensation.

I briefly looked at one of the frogs zooming downward in the fish tank, spooking all fish who happened to be in the way. Then I made eye contact with the devil, saying, "Yea, sure. No one is sitting there. Help yourself." I stretched my lips over my teeth, producing a civil smile – all without showing any teeth.

There wasn't any color in his eyes. They appeared to be all pupils, just black and captivating while at the same time compassionate, surrounded by ultra, bleached white. One look into those eyes and you couldn't help but feel like you could easily tell this man anything ... and that he would listen. I had the strongest feeling that he wanted to help me somehow. It was just something emanating from him that made me feel that way. But, hey, this was the devil! The bad guy, right? He was so much different than I ever expected the devil to be. While I had never really dwelled much, if at all, about meeting the devil, this was not what or who I thought the devil would be.

I did know one thing. This was, indeed, the devil ... and, he was sitting right next to me!

Again, without seeming to have moved, the devil was sitting with one leg crossed over the other. He let out a long sigh as he put both of his hands on his knees. He looked deep into my eyes, saying, "Yea, it would be great if more people did, wouldn't it?" That voice. It was wonderful.

Puzzled and frowning, I asked, "Be great if more people did what?"

Smiling curiously, the devil said, "What you said about sitting down. 'Help yourself.' I believe that is what you said when I asked if I could sit here." I could have listened to anything he had to say forever! He carefully emphasized each sound of each word and knew exactly when to pause for maximum emphasis.



Realizing he was making conversation, I took a quick breath and said, "Oh, I see. I was talking about you taking the seat, but, yea, I know what you mean about people helping themselves." I winced, wondering if what I had said made any sense. I don't know why but I sensed he had sought me out specifically. It didn't take long for him to get to the heart of his intentions.

"Look," said the devil, leaning closer to me, "You know as well as I do that most of these people are here because of their own doing ... or un-doing. Instead of helping themselves, they have done or not done certain things to reach this point in their lives. And, now each one of them, like YOU, has turned their lives and souls over to doctors."

I pulled back slightly. The devil didn't budge from his imposing position facing me as I thought for a moment and said, "Sure, some people create their own health problems, but most folks are here to get help for conditions over which they have no control."

"Ah, but that is where you are wrong," snapped the devil, shaking his head slowly left and right. His voice, though stern, still sounded comforting.

Before I could so much as blink in disagreement, the devil continued, "Listen. Doctors do NOT have any answers? They experiment through trial and error, like car mechanics, until they hit on something that seems to work - all the while lulling the masses into passivity with chemicals ... and charging them through the nose for it. People have elevated doctors to 'God' status despite a phenomenal failure rate!" His voice was slick, soothing, and believable.

I butted in with, "So you're saying it's a waste of time to be coming here?" The devil didn't flinch as he immediately played his cards in this poker match he knew he was sure to win. I felt like I was in a poker match with nothing to play, except for maybe a bluff.

Sitting back in his chair and folding his arms, the devil said, "I'm simply saying everyone has an alternative. YOU have another option." My interest was obvious as he carefully enunciated the next words he spoke, "An ... option ... that ... will ... most ... definitely ... work." His voice now was lyrical and enchanting. Eyebrows raised, he added, "Are you interested?"

I heard myself abruptly ask, "Interested in what?" It was like I was observing myself verbally joust with the devil. At that moment I had no doubt the devil was offering me some kind of deal ... a solution ... a resolution ... an answer. I was sure it was something no doctor had could ever have come up with! This situation was like something right out of a movie, only it was really happening!

Leaning closer to me, giving him just enough time to read my mind (which I have no doubt he was able to do), the devil smiled in the most captivating, hypnotic, charming way, saying, "Suppose in an instant you could be back to your old self, feeling like you did before all of this started? If I could make that happen, what would it be worth to you?"



There it was - HOPE - coursing through my body again, ready to explode out of my lips in the form of me screaming, "YES! YES! YES!" The devil definitely had my attention now and he knew it. I stated what I truly felt in my heart, "It would be worth whatever it cost. I would find a way to come up with the money, no matter what the price."

Nodding his head up and down like a gambler about to show four aces and sweep the table, the devil slowly said, "So, you're saying you would gladly pay the price? No matter what!"

"If I had it to pay, yes," I said, titling my chin upward in an unsteady, self-assured way.

Smiling broadly, the devil softly said, "And, you would be prepared to effect such a bargain this very instant?"

"Any point, anywhere, anytime, anyhow," I said matter of factly, wondering if I really was in complete control of what I was saying and thinking. Instinct told me the devil could easily deliver on anything he promised, and that his word was as good as gold. Somehow I just knew that. At the same time, I just had a feeling that this was all wrong and just not quite right.

The devil grinned, let out a sensual sigh, and said, "Well, then, you ..." his words trailed off as his expression hardened. He pursed his lips and squinted as he looked towards the doorway. Thunder boomed and lightning bolts etched the sky one more time. I could swear I felt heat coming from his body. A lot of really, fiery, scalding heat! I mean HOT!

I looked towards the door to see what was going on. A nun just outside the entry way was snapping her umbrella inward and outward, almost in sync with the thunder, to shake off the rain. When she glanced in my direction the expression on her face became a look of horror. The nun dropped her umbrella and ran towards me, holding a silver crucifix on her necklace outward.

I had no time to react other than blink as I wondered what the hell was going on.

Falling to her knees as she reached me, the nun quickly produced a rosary and started praying. At the same time she took off her necklace with the crucifix and shoved it into my hands, clasping her warm hands around mine. Wishing I could be invisible I wondered, "Why me?" Everyone in the clinic was looking at us. Then it hit me! The nun knew it was the devil sitting next to me!

I turned to the devil. He had vanished! There on the center of his chair, spinning furiously, was what looked like a business card. The nun spotted it at the same time I did. She grabbed for it first, dropping her rosary and knocking the necklace out of my hands into my lap.

The nun screamed as she quickly jerked her hand back to her chest, both hands covered in blood that was now soaking into her white habit. It looked to me like



the spinning card had slit open her fingers and thumb in much the same way you get a paper cut - only from all the gushing blood, it looked like she had been slit with a butcher knife. Before I could react or say anything, a nurse rushed up from out of nowhere and whisked away the sobbing nun. I crossed my legs to hide the necklace and crucifix. After a moment I grabbed the necklace and slipped it into my coat pocket.

I knew I had to get that card before anything else happened. I wasn't reluctant at all to pick up the still spinning card. As soon my fingers touched the card, it stopped spinning - and no cuts either. I carefully tapped the card with my index finger before picking it up. The card was warm, almost hot. I picked it up before anyone noticed and quickly shoved it into the same pocket where I had put the necklace. It wasn't long before the police showed up. After they interviewed me for what seemed like an eternity, I went in for my blood tests. I never did see the nun again and nothing came of my conversation with the police. Of course, I didn't tell them much either. I mean who would believe that the guy I was talking to just disappeared as the nun reached me.

It was too late to return to work, so I went home where, before doing anything, I lit a fire to make the living room cozy. Much to my surprise, it took right off. "Must be that new cord of oak wood," I mumbled to myself as I sunk down in my favorite spot on the sofa by the fire and started going through my mail. I had completely forgotten about what was in my coat pocket until I felt heat coming from it.

I slowly reached into my pocket and felt the card. It was still warm, but there was no necklace. Then I touched what felt like powder. In somewhat of a panicky reaction, I emptied the pocket into my hand. The card tumbled out along with blackish, gray dust. My mouth dropped open as I suddenly realized the card had disintegrated the necklace and crucifix. I heard myself slowly utter, "Jesus Christ! Holy shit! This is just too weird!"

The thick, shiny business card was embossed with bold, black letters:

**FLAME SUMMONS HOPE
A SEAL IS EXCHANGED
ASSESSMENT EXACTED**

***> You Have More To Gain Than You
Will Ever Know And Nothing To Lose <***

I studied the card, wondering what each line meant. I was intrigued, but a voice inside of me cried out, "GET RID OF THAT CARD NOW!"

With a flick of the wrist I pitched the card into the fire, the same way I toss playing cards into a hat ... which I am very good at doing, by the way.

The card erupted into orange and blue flames amid crackling sounds. A puff of black smoke formed a tiny human figure that grew ever larger, expanding towards me



until it was life size. Suddenly the devil emerged quite naturally from the quivering, vaporous silhouette like a celebrity stepping through a stage curtain.

"Geeze-us!" I shrieked and reacted by pulling backwards, knees to my chest, arms around my curled legs.

Brushing off soot and a few embers from his arms and chest, the devil smiled wickedly, saying, "Not quite."

Handing me the card I had just thrown into the fire, the devil said, "Here. You better keep this." The card was very warm but didn't show any signs of damage!

I sat there stunned, trying pointlessly to sort out what had just happened. I couldn't think of anything to say or ask. The devil sat down on the sofa next to me and said, "Yea, yea. I know. It's all pretty hard to take, isn't it?"

All I could do was nod my head up and down.

"Look," said the devil in that most wonderful, soothing voice, "Your best bet here is to not worry so much about the, oh shall we say, 'mechanics' of how all this works. What is important is that I can resolve ALL of your problems - the ones you have now and all of those that will happen in the years to come."

After blinking several times, I managed to say, "Okay. Look. I have no doubt who you are, but I ..."

He held up his hand, the same way my doctors did whenever they wanted me to stop talking, and said, "I'm not so sure you really do know who I am, but that is beside the point. Here is the deal. I'm prepared to offer you perfect health, along with amazing physical strength for the rest of your life. And, what a long life it will be, where money will never again be a problem for you. Additionally, for any other unforeseen problems you encounter, just summon me with the card and I will come resolve things instantly."

He paused, obviously waiting for me to speak.

"For what?" I asked.

Showing a toothy grin, the devil said, "For a very, very small price."

Raising my eyebrows, I said, "Why is this so important to you?"

"You don't have the capacity to understand," said the devil with the saddest tone I've ever heard in any voice.

Shaking my head I said, "I understand more than you think. You think just because of who you are you can get whatever you want in exchange for someone's soul."

The devil scoffed saying, "You think this is about your soul! First of all, I don't want your soul. Second, Hollywood and organized religion don't know what's really going on. Third, and, this is the most important part, what I want is something called a 'seal'."



I dared not ask any questions as I just sat and listened.

The devil talked at great length about things from creation onward and how there was no good or evil, just circumstances and free will constantly at play in the Universe. He explained what happens after you die and that there is no heaven or hell, only passage ways to wherever individuals freely select to go next within and beyond the Universe.

When he finally stopped talking, the devil looked at me and said, "Be honest now. Did you understand?"

I bit my lip and said, "Honestly? No."

The devil smiled warmly, saying, "I see doubt and questions in your eyes."

"I don't get it," I said, "None of this makes any sense. I want what you are offering me, but something inside of me says this is all wrong."

Letting out a long sigh, the devil said, "No one gets it. The fact that you did and do believe in me is the starting point for you trusting me, but I'm not who you think I am. Know that I would never hurt you. The seal I want from you is what your soul is balanced on and together all seals are the fiber holding together the Universe. You carry your soul for eternity, but for each lifetime you get a new seal upon which to balance your soul in relation to the all that is happening in the Universe. My role in all of this is to claim your seal at the time of your last breath or it will be lost forever. And, I can't take the seal without your permission."

"That's it?" I asked.

Nodding in agreement, the devil said, "Yep. That's it. So? Do we have an agreement for the exact exchange?"

I looked at the devil, his business card I still held in my hand, the fire, and then back at the devil again. Then I looked down at the floor, thinking there had to be more to all of this, because things just couldn't be this easy. Hearing the faint beating of a drum that I realized was my own heartbeat, I swallowed hard and said, "I'll have to think about it."

Hiding his obvious disappointment, the devil forced a cavalier smile and said, "You know how to reach me. And, just for the record, I'm not who you think I am. Not in a million years." And, with that his image dissolved from view.

So if that wasn't the devil, who was it?

I put the card in my sock drawer and never took it out again. I do look at the card from time to time. But, I just don't think I will ever do anything with it.

Perhaps YOU would like to have it?

The Window

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It was one of those things I didn't think much about it at the time. It was something that just happened.

We had just come home from the hospital after my wife, Roxanne, gave birth to our son, Brad. After opening the back door to our house Roxanne quickly put Brad, in his bassinet, on the dryer in our laundry room and then zipped into our tiny, back bathroom. I was standing there with our Kodak Instamatic camera and snapped the first picture of Brad in our house. Brad's tiny hand moved upward as the shutter flicked, almost like he was intentionally waving.

We had taken pictures of Brad in the hospital, with the other babies, with Roxanne, and even one with me holding him. However, on that roll of film, the best picture was the one in the laundry room by the window. The late afternoon sun coming through the window cast an orangeish glow on everything. Plus Brad had the cutest smile on his face and that semi-waving hand made the picture. Of all the baby pictures we showed to people, Roxanne and I always seemed to come back to that one by the window as our favorite.

When Brad turned a year old, we found ourselves by that window in the laundry room again for what turned out to be another great picture. This particular episode had started when I had put Brad's birthday cake down on his highchair to set things up for a picture I was going to take with the three of us. The camera was all set up on a tripod so I could use the timer (something I would do a lot over the years to make sure I got all three of us in photos).

Brad was excited, waving his arms and shrieking in glee. All of a sudden he came down with both hands, pounding out his excitement. He hit the edge of the cake, causing it to flip back towards him, landing right in the middle of his face! This all happened just as the timer clicked the camera's shutter. I instinctively took several more pictures with my Nikon motor drive camera ... all the while as a frowning Roxanne just kept repeating, "Damn! Damn! Damn!"

Brad thought the whole thing was wonderful! He laughed and giggled, scrapping cake from his face and then licking it off his fingers. And, really, it was hilarious! I continued snapping pictures, including when Roxanne sat Brad on the dryer by the window that was all steamy from a rainy day. Brad had such a serious look on his face as Roxanne stripped him of his cake covered clothes. He sat there, completely nude, with cake all over his face and head. Then he looked right into the camera, as if to say, "Can you believe this really happened?"

And, that photo became THE picture for that year!

That was when I kind of had a hunch this was the beginning of what would become a tradition, odd though it seemed to be. We had yet another priceless picture of Brad by the window in the laundry room. Of course, Roxanne and I forgot all about this until Brad's second birthday when we ended up snapping yet another classic picture by the window.



The day Brad turned two we had his first big party with all of the relatives. Neither Roxanne nor I had even thought about taking a picture by the window, that is, until all of a sudden we found ourselves in there trying to catch the parakeet his grandparents had given him. The poor bird had fluttered all over the house for what seemed like an eternity. No one could imagine how the little bird had any energy left to keep fluttering around. Finally, we trapped the exhausted bird in the laundry room by closing the door. It was at that moment I thought of taking a picture of Brad, who was standing on the dryer, holding out an outstretched index finger, hoping the panic-stricken bird would land on it.

I grabbed the camera and snapped a picture at the exact instant the bird crashed into the window just above Brad's head. Fortunately, the bird would be okay and we did get him back into his cage (after carefully explaining to Brad how important it was to NOT open the cage door as he had done to start the whole "wild bird" episode).

When we got the pictures developed we couldn't believe the amazing picture of Brad, mouth forming a perfect "O," with the little green bird appearing to be stuck, feathers all outstretched, against the window. It was such a unique picture, we even entered it in photo contests (none of which we won, of course). However, we had yet one more picture for our collection of pictures by the window. Both Roxanne and I had no doubt this had now become a tradition.

For Brad's third birthday we actually tried to stage a picture of Brad on the dryer holding one of his stuffed animals. No dice! He didn't want any part of it. We had tried that first thing in the morning and quickly realized there would be no picture worth having by the window that year. Brad was just NOT cooperating. You know how kids can be! <sigh>

We spent the rest of that day playing and celebrating. It was just the three of us. The weather was warm, but all of a sudden it started raining. This was just as Brad wanted to play with the gigantic glider plane we had gotten for him. Before too long we were all soaked, the plane was pretty much a wreck, but as the sun was setting, breaking through the clouds, there was no doubt Brad had had a ball playing with the glider in the rain. We all did! We decided to throw the wet clothes in the washer. As we were doing that, I grabbed Brad and hoisted him up and into the washer, pretending that I was going to wash him "in there," too.

All of a sudden Roxanne disappeared and when she came back, she had the camera. Brad was hamming it up as he stood in the washer. I got the box of Tide and pretended to be "pouring in soap" as Roxanne snapped what we hoped would be yet another classic photo. The flash didn't go off. Roxanne tried a few more, but the flash wouldn't work (the batteries were low! Yikes! Why does that always happen at the absolute worst time?).

We had written off those pictures until we got the film back. It turned out that the late afternoon sun, breaking through the rain clouds had caused just enough light through the window to create a surreal glow in the pictures - much like the effect we



got for the first pictures we took of Brad when we brought him home from the hospital. And, as if that weren't enough to create an incredible picture, there was a rainbow perfectly framed in the window. Roxanne and I looked at each other after we saw that picture, amazed that somehow the window tradition had continued. Oh, and the mischievous expression on Brad's face added a perfect touch!

As each of Brad's birthdays came and went, we somehow managed to keep the tradition going of getting pictures by the window. Some were absolutely great and others were, well, not so great. But, this tradition, as we came to see whenever we would drag out the photo albums, really proved to be a wonderful way to see how Brad was growing and also how much we all changed over the years (Did we really wear such goofy clothes when he was little!?). The laundry room was also where we had Brad's grow chart where we made marks on the doorframe. You could even see those in some of the pictures.

When Brad reached his teens we went through the "I don't want my picture taken" phase, but still, no matter how much bribing we had to do, we got at least one picture by the window in the laundry room. Even the cameras changed over the years. I got the Nikon motor drive camera when Brad was four and I used that camera (and a whole LOT of film) until I got a Sony digital camera when he was in his teens.

However it came to be, we always referred to all of these pictures in the laundry room as the "window pictures." Even though we got lots of pictures by that window at different points throughout each year, it somehow just worked out that we got pictures of Brad there on his birthday, even the year he didn't want any part of a picture "in there" (I'll come back to that a little later on, because even that episode led to yet another unique window picture).

We noticed, as Brad got older, we took less pictures. Of course, that made the ones we did manage to get all the more special. I don't know what it is, but at the time you think you're taking lots of pictures and then, years later, when you're going through the photo albums you see that the gaps between pictures many times stretched for months! Time does have a way of just slipping by us without anyone really noticing. And, even though you swear that you will make it a point to take more pictures (this is usually when you are looking through the photo albums), for whatever reason(s), it just doesn't happen.

Over the course of Brad growing up, we got so many great pictures by that window in the laundry room. Pictures with the dog, several cats (that seemed to come and go on a fairly regular basis), girlfriends, friends, neighbors, the mailman, Brad in various and assorted sport uniforms (the little league shots were some of my favorites), and even poster board cutouts of movie stars (we hammed it up in those shots, too). There was such a wide variety of them.

We had some quite unique pictures, too; like furniture being squeezed through the door with someone (usually Brad) sitting on it and some amazing shots Roxanne got. There was one Roxanne took from outside to capture Brad and I horsing around inside by the window. What was most unique about this picture was that in addition to



both Brad and I smiling (and no closed eyes), you could see Roxanne's reflection in the window – her pink sweater, the sun backlighting her hair and her body turned slightly sideways like she was using body English to get a perfect shot. It was almost like she composed it that way so the three of us would be in the picture. Now that I think about it, there weren't many shots of the three of us together by that window.

There were plenty of the pictures where Brad either turned his face away from the camera or his back to the camera just as the shutter would click ... most of those were during his "I don't want my picture taken" phases (of which there were many).

Even the pictures where you couldn't see Brad's face provided a montage of hair styles and interesting looks in clothing styles. We never looked at a single picture as wasted, no matter how "bad" it was. There was always something of interest in the pictures we took by that window in the laundry room.

And, then, all of a sudden (not really), a day finally came where there was the final picture by the window. It was when Brad was moving out to his first apartment. All three of us were way too serious on that day – no clowning around at all. All of a sudden I realized that I should get a picture. As I rushed to get the camera Brad let out a long, deep sigh and said, "Awe, geese, one last picture by the window, huh?"

Later that evening, in a house that seemed all too empty, when Roxanne and I talked about what Brad had said, we both felt it was at that moment we realized the finality of Brad leaving home. It was Brad's idea to use the timer so all three of us could be in the picture which was taken outside with the window in the background. What a picture it was, too! All three of us with empty, half smiles. But it was a good picture – the final picture.

It is interesting what you remember over the years – what sticks in the way of memories and moments you think back to. So much of what I reflect on about our life centers on the photos we got framed by that window. You can even tell the seasons based on what the snapshot captured – trees green, no leaves on the trees, frost on the window, and steam from the dryer distorting everything outside.

At the time a child is little and you're snapping pictures, I don't think you truly grasp that it will all one day just be memories and photos in albums, buried away in closets or drawers. And, it seems like it will last forever. You don't realize – until it is all over – that like so many other things in life, the rich, full moments in your life are oh, so fleeting and scattered.

* * * * *

Standing by the window in a now empty laundry room, I was thinking about all of those pictures and moments as Brad pulled up in the driveway. I even had several of my favorite pictures in my coat pocket, just in case Brad wanted to see them. I stood there, trying not to let go of so many special moments from the past and dreading what I knew would now be happening. I knew what Brad had in the bag he carried and just with the thought of that, all of the memories evaporated.



With a somber tone and serious look on his face, Brad said, "Hi, dad. You ready to go?"

Just as I started to respond I could hear the haunting sound of an oboe, from a concerto Roxanne so loved. "Yea. Ready as I'll ever be, I guess," is what I heard myself say.

I locked the door one last time and then we walked to Brad's car. We got in the car and just as Brad was backing out of the driveway, the real estate lady pulled up in front of the house. I got out and talked to her for a moment. She had more papers for me to sign. I signed them on the hood of her car and then handed them to her, saying, "Thanks for everything you've done."

"Oh, sure," she said, continuing with, "This sale was a breeze. It's such a perfect house."

I stretched a polite smile across my face, and then trying not to let out a long sigh, I said, "Yea, it sure is ... uh, was."

I was now in a daze, knowing where Brad and I were headed. I heard myself then say to the real estate lady, "Well, I just couldn't live here any longer, not without Roxanne."

Seeming to be sincere, she said, "I understand. Again, I'm sorry for your loss."

I couldn't say a word and I struggled to not lose my composure, though tears were welling up in my eyes. I nodded my head to signify farewell and then took one last look at the house before getting in the car. In that instant I caught quick flashes of Brad on his trike, Brad with so many different kids who dropped by over the years, Roxanne and I doing yard work, the high speed chase that went down our street on Brad's third birthday, and all of the nights we waited up, wondering where Brad was (he always made it home at some point). This was all in an instant and I'm sure it was almost like what happens when people experience their life flashing before their eyes.

Once in the car I did let out the longest sigh, but said nothing. A tear rolled down my cheek and I wiped it away. The real estate lady waved as Brad drove off. Patting my knee, Brad then said, "We should be to the coast in a couple of hours. I think once we spread mom's ashes at her favorite spot, we'll both feel better."

"I'd like to believe it was that simple, Brad," I said.

We didn't say a word the rest of the way. Neither of us wanted to talk about it, but we both knew things would never be the same. Roxanne was always the one who knew what to do and say in situations like this. Now, as the reality of life without her set in even more so, I realized yet one more aspect of my life where there was a monumental void.

While memories are significant, I realized that it is the photos we take that are most important. I only wished I had taken more photos and I had been able to be in more of them. I touched at my coat pocket to be sure the pictures were still there, knowing it would now be countless times that I would get lost in the wonder of just



how much of our lives those "windows pictures" captured. And, even though Brad didn't seem too interested in those pictures, I knew that one day he would be.

I pulled the pictures out of my pocket and smiled as I looked at the one on the top of the pile. It was the shot Roxanne took of Brad and me from outside the window where you could see her reflection. There we were, all three of us, together, just the way it seemed like it would be forever. I remember buying her that pink sweater she was wearing that day and for the just slightest instant, I sensed the scent of her hair.

Looking at the picture again, it struck me that Roxanne's image reflecting in the windows was almost ghost-like. And, somehow I just knew that at this very moment, she was watching us through another kind of window.

A Matter of Stuffing

<Copyright © 1993 by Bil. Alvernaz>

I started noticing the small clumps and shreds of white, fluffy cotton stuffing in various places wherever I went. This was about the same time I sensed something wasn't quite right in my life. I didn't feel ill. It was an empty, lost feeling.

Those odd bits and pieces of stuffing kept showing up everywhere. And, the odd way I felt just didn't let up. Dizzying, sick sensations made it hard for me to concentrate or even think clearly.

People at work noticed the tufts of stuffing material, too. I pretended to be surprised when anyone pointed them out. A good friend of mine said, "How could you NOT notice this stuff? It's all over the place. And it is everywhere you have been. It's more than just lint from your clothes!"

As we both looked around, it was obvious there weren't any traces of the stuffing, except where I had been and was now sitting. I could tell by the look on my friend's face he was thinking the same thing I was, "How could the stuffing be coming from or out of me?"

He jokingly said, "Life isn't knocking the stuffing out of you, is it?"

I feigned a smile and then we got down to working on budget projections.

The mysterious stuffing plagued me the entire day. I was so light-headed by the time I got home I could barely focus my eyes. I managed to inspect my clothes in the hopes of finding a logical source of the stuffing. I went through everything else, too, including the couch where I had found the most stuffing. NOTHING! There wasn't the slightest hint of a source for where the white, fluffy material was coming from, except ME!

The next morning I woke up with a skull splitting headache and a gigantic gob of stuffing in my mouth. After raking my tongue with my fingers to get every last cotton fiber out of my mouth, I dashed to the mirror for a closer look. My mouth



seemed okay, but when I pulled off my t-shirt I gasped at the hideous indentations in my stomach and upper chest. And, my cheeks seemed drastically sunken in.

The next few hours were a surreal blur. I was sure the intensified aching inside of my head would lead to my brains exploding out through my eye sockets. Having rushed to the hospital emergency room in a panic, I told them I had a sore throat. During the slow motion, eternity waiting in the tiny, hot examining room my mind raced through an obstacle course of throbbing pain as I tried not to think about those places on my face and body where the bulk (stuffing?) was missing!

The doctor finally dashed into the room, breaking through my haze of bizarre thoughts. It had startled me the way the door had popped open. Also, the doctor was a woman. I don't know why I was expecting a man, but I was actually glad it was a woman, because she just might be more understanding of my malady (or whatever it was that was plaguing me). I just blurted out, "Please help me. I think I'm going nuts!"

"Let's have a look at that throat first," said the doctor as she crammed an unusually over-sized, wooden tongue depressor down my throat.

Gagging, I spit out the words, "Not. The. Throat. Chest! Stomach!"

The doctor pulled back, saying, "Throat looks fine. Just what IS wrong here?"

I ripped off my shirt and pointed to my chest and stomach, saying, "Does that look normal to you?"

Eyebrows furrowed, she asked, "Just WHAT doesn't look normal?"

"Look there and here," I said, pointing to my stomach and chest again.

Eyebrows now raised, the doctor zipped her index and middle fingers back and forth across my midsection, tapping certain points. Then she abruptly said, "I don't see anything unusual here."

Looking down I was surprised to see that I had to agree. The indentations had vanished. I noticed more stuffing on the examining table and the floor. My eyes darted back and forth as I uttered, "Uh, well."

The doctor interrupted with, "Look, I just don't see anything wrong here. And, I DO have other patients."

"WAIT!" I blurted out. I didn't know what to say next. I picked up a piece of the stuffing and softly said, "Doctor, I think this is coming out of me?"

"What? From your shirt or pants?" she asked, dumbfounded.

Taking a deep breath, I said, "NO!" With my head pounding and eyes squinted, I told her what had been happening lately, as well as my friend joking about the stuffing coming from me. A spur of the moment theory popped into my head that seemed logical at the time so I asked the doctor if she thought maybe the reason the



two indentations had disappeared was because the stuffing had shifted and settled inside of me, thereby somehow smoothing things out.

The doctor's attitude completely softened. She was instantly more caring and understanding. Although I didn't realize it at first, the other white-coated doctor she immediately brought in for "consultation" was a psychologist.

There was no doubt this guy was a "shrink" when he asked me if I thought I had a firm grasp on reality. After that, with his hands buried in his coat pockets, he slowly walked me to his office in the "quiet wing" of the hospital. As we walked, I looked behind us and, sure enough, there was a trail of bits and pieces of my white stuff!

We finally reached his office where we both sat down to continue our conversation. What followed was his lengthy discourse about how we all need something he kept referring to as "reality anchors" to keep us properly buoyed so we can deal with this future of ours which many people feel hasn't turned out the way it should have. I kept smiling and nodding my head in agreement so he would feel I was benefiting from all of what I felt was just psychobabble.

Finally, he stopped talking and said, "Well? What do you think?"

I paused and stood up, saying, "Well, that's all very nice, Doc." Picking up some stuffing from the chair, I continued with, "Do you see this? It's stuffing and it wasn't here when we came in. Only AFTER I came in and sat down, did it appear. How do you explain that, here in this future of ours you were talking about?"

Before he responded, I took out my pocket knife and slashed open his designer chair. Picking up the foam material and showing it to the doctor, I said, "The stuffing certainly didn't come from your fancy chair, Doc. Where did it come from? Huh? Me maybe?"

Then, before the doctor could even respond, and to definitely prove the stuffing really was coming from me, I cut into my wrist. Much to my surprise, blood gushed out of the gash in spurts. Coward that I am about seeing "blood and guts," my eyes rolled upward and I passed out. The last thing I remember seeing was the doctor's eyes widen and his mouth form a perfect oval.

I floated peacefully in warm, toasty, secure sensations until the loud, harsh words "HOW ARE YOU FEELING?" abruptly shattered their way into my consciousness. Opening my eyes, it was hard to focus in subdued, bluish light. I was in a hospital bed with my arms and legs tied to restraints. A man in a white coat stood close by studying me while constantly looking back and forth between me and his clipboard.

I heard myself say, "Hey, Doc. What's going on here?"

Stretching his lips into a polite smile, he said, "Don't worry. We'll take those off your arms and legs soon. I want to discuss your stuffing." He plucked a few pieces from the bed as he continued. "You're not the only one with such a problem. Look



here." He held out a handful of colorful cogs, gears, wires, springs, wheels, pulleys, and rubber bands.

While feeling a twinge of relief mixed with pangs of doom, I asked, "You mean those are from other people?"

He nodded his head in agreement, saying, "Absolutely. Your condition isn't all that unusual. Loose and short circuited wires are the most common reasons folks end up here, but we see just about everything."

"How can this be?" I asked, still staring at all of the things in his outstretched hand.

Pausing for a moment, as if listening for something, he turned his head slightly sideways and said, "People get pretty edgy. The biggest reason it happens is because of the mundane predictability of life and a failure to adapt to change. Then, of course, there are all those wrong decisions in life which melt over time into regret and lamenting, as you certainly seem to be doing, don't you think?"

A nurse stormed to my bedside from out of nowhere and shooed him away as she encircled my bed with the pull-around curtain. I then heard the strangest clinking sounds of objects hitting the floor, but I couldn't quite make out what they were or where they were coming from.

I said, "Hey! That's no way to treat a doctor!"

Speaking in a scolding tone she said, "He is NOT a doctor. He is a long-term patient just like you will probably be."

I heard more peculiar jingling sounds on the floor as she pulled up my sheets. Lifting my head and looking over the side of the bed, I got a look at several shiny, sparkling, stainless steel nuts and bolts scattered about her white shoes. I blinked twice in disbelief when a few more tumbled downward from under her skirt as she gently brushed more stuffing from my blanket.

Lost Looking at the Weathervane

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Our son, Ian, at age three, promised me that he would never grow up or get any bigger.

I was thinking about that wonderful moment as Ian, now 21, drove away from our house in a rental truck headed for his new apartment. Ian being a part of our daily lives was already feeling like a million years ago. At the same time, it really didn't seem like very much time at all had gone by ... not twenty-one years anyway!



Throughout that day so much of what filled in the distance from Ian being born to him leaving home erupted in my mind as flickering, rapid-fire images. We had worked all morning, on that beautiful Saturday in August, helping Ian load the truck.

What we carried and lugged into the truck sparked even more memories of different times and places that had been so long ago relegated to wherever it is that things you hope you never forget try to occupy permanent, but obscure space amidst so much other mental clutter. But on this day, lots of memories were welling back up, vivid and quite detailed.

Looking at the brown, well-worn hide-a-bed squeezed in among boxes, I thought about a little kid at age one, leaning against it and holding on to it as he walked and wobbled along it. There were so many times, after his baths, Ian would sit on the cushions looking at his favorite books.



As we tossed the beanbag “chairs” on top of the hide-a-bed I thought about a time before Ian was a part of our life - when we couldn’t even afford regular furniture. Somehow those beanbags had survived Ian’s childhood and were now going to be back in the limelight again. I couldn’t count how many times we came so close to taking those beanbags to the dumps!

More than anything else, it was our old bookshelves we gave to Ian that brought back dozens and dozens of memories from his childhood. I think the reason for that was because from the time he could sit up, books were all around him.

We always read to Ian (Dr. Seuss was our favorite) and Ian knew he could take any book down from the shelves and look at it whenever he wanted. Right from the beginning, he knew how to handle books mindfully and he loved to look at the pictures as well as carefully thumb through the text, eyebrows raised, and lips moving as he pretended to read ... though it was long before he could read and we couldn’t buy books fast enough to keep up all the more books he wanted to read.

All of a sudden, even though we had helped him plan for it, Ian was no longer part of our lives. A child leaving home is the one moment, no matter how much you think you are ready for it, that you suddenly are jolted with the realization that you are, most certainly, NOT ready for it.

Even though Ian protested, I took yet more pictures as his final day at home unfolded. When I took a picture of the truck in the driveway I noticed that the truck was partly in the shadow of Ian’s tree house. It had sat there empty for years, but I thought back to a time when he was “up there” daily (and nightly).

I think that instant was the biggest jolt of the day for me. Ten years earlier I had started out to build a platform in an ancient fig tree my grandfather had planted so Ian could have a lookout spot. However, as the project progressed, up went the



walls, then the roof, then sliding windows with screens, and even a skylight. None of it was planned. It just happened as we kept building and building!

There was a point where I came to understand that what I was really doing was building the tree house I had always wanted. Ian just happened to be in the right place at the right time, so to speak. By the time I was done, the tree house had electricity and running water, complete with a sink (tiny though it was).

Now as I stood there, having just snapped a picture of the moving truck near the tree house, I was transfixed, thinking about the hours and hours, over several years, Ian had spent up there in that tree house (including many, many nights with his friends).

I blinked several times as Ian then called out to me, asking for help to get the final stuff on the truck. It was only a matter of minutes before he was gone.

As Ian drove out of the driveway, I stayed behind to snap that one last picture of the truck heading away from the house. Then I looked up again to the tree house and I noticed the weathervane pointing in the same direction that Ian headed as he drove off to whatever was to come next for him.

I took a deep breath and noticed this lost feeling in the pit of my stomach. Indeed, I was truly happy for Ian, as he now ventured out into the world on his own to etch out an existence on the fragile slate of life, but I couldn't help but feel something always would be missing in our lives.

And, I knew things would never be the same. Oh, it wasn't like it was the end of the world, but truly, a new era had begun – for him and us!

All the Red X's

<Copyright © 1975 by Bil. Alvernaz> - 1,371 words

The new arrivals were milling around, exchanging small talk. A little butterball of a man, completely bald, with a red X on his chest meekly said to no one in particular, "Hurry up and wait, hurry up and wait! This is the third time now that we have had to wait in successive rooms. This is no different than where we came from!"

A tall, handsome man with two red X's on his head (one on the side and one in the back) replied, "To tell you the truth, I didn't know what to expect, but this is far beyond, or maybe much less, that anything I ever could have expected after hearing about this place our entire lives. And, why is it so dimly lit in here?"

A not so handsome woman with a loud, raspy voice, and a horrid smoker's cough had multiple red X's on her back. She coughed as she spoke, "Either of your got a match?" She looked around and then said, after coughing yet again, "Anyone got a match?"



A figure appeared from out of the shadows. No one had seen him until this instant. With a wave of his arm, the cigarette disappeared. The woman's eyes widened in an evil kind of way as this man who seemed to materialize from out of nowhere firmly said, "There is no smoking here, lady. I can't imagine how you managed to carry cigarettes along with you on the passage to here."

Now that this man had everyone's attention, he motioned for them all to gather around him. He spoke again, enunciating each word like their lives depended on it, "The others will be here soon. Then we can get started. Now, please, just be patient and as calm as possible. You're almost there."

He faded into the shadows, seeming to disappear, and was gone!

Everyone just looked at each other. It was now obvious that each person had at least one red X. Some of the X's were brighter than others. Some were so faded, you could hardly see them.

Before long another group arrived. Same thing. Every one of them had at least one red X. It was hard to detect some of the red X's, but just like the first group, each of them had at least one red X somewhere on their body. As both groups mixed and became one, talking to each other, examining each other's red X's, trying to figure out what was going on, the mysterious figure appeared again. Just like the first time, he seemed to just reveal himself so everyone could see him. He was very tall and stood well above everyone else.

"All right, everyone, let's form a single line here in front of me. I will then motion for each of you, one at a time. You will then slowly walk down this corridor to that golden door."

They all looked to where he pointed and saw a long silverfish corridor with a golden door at the far end just appear much the same way the figure had appeared. No one said anything as they jostled with each other in forming a very crooked, winding line.

The figure spoke said, this time in a more soothing voice, "It doesn't matter where you are in line. It doesn't matter at all." He smiled politely. Then he continued with, "When I tap your shoulder, you will walk down the corridor, knock once on the golden door, and then enter it, shutting it behind you. Everyone got that?"

They all nodded their heads up and down.

The tall figure, walked up and down the line, tapping individuals on the shoulders. There seemed to be no particular order that he chose who he would tap next. No one said a word. All eyes were on the figure.

One by one, they each slowly walked down the corridor, some looking around and up as they moved toward the golden door. They could all hear the knocking sound as each person knocked on the door, some just once, some louder than others, and then they entered what appeared to be a room glowing in bright white light. The door would then automatically shut behind them.



The last one to go was the little butterball of a man. The figure did not tap him on the shoulder, but, instead, just motioned for him to go – it was his turn, of course. The figure disappeared as the little man made his way along the long corridor. He felt like he was floating, but looking down, he could see his feet were moving across what looked like a highly polished marble floor. He was indeed walking, but it was completely effortless to move.

He tapped on the door, then tried to open it. But the door would not open. The tall figure appeared from out of nowhere, saying, "I hate when that happens."

The tall figure took a small tube out of his pocket and took the cap off of it. He then put the tip in the keyhole and squeezed. "There, that should do it. Graphite always does the trick," he said, putting the tube back in his pocket.

The golden door then just opened.

Once in the brightly lit room, the little man noticed a woman with porcelain skin sitting behind what looked like a desk. But there was only a desktop. There were no legs for the desk. It just seemed to be floating and didn't move in the slightest.

As the little man stood in front of desk, facing her, the woman spoke in a velvety voice without even looking up at him, "Heaven or Hell?"

The little man was dumbfounded. He just looked at her without saying a word.

She now looked up at him. She had no pupils. Where her eyes would have been, all the little man could see was a reddish coloration. She repeated herself with an irritated tone in her voice, "HEAVEN OR HELL?"

The little man began to sweat and stuttered as he said, "I ... I ... I don't understand. What do you mean?"

She cocked her head to one side, still looking at him with those empty, reddish, devilish eyes, "It's merely a simple matter of choice, sir. Heaven or Hell?"

The little man then notice two doors, the one on the right was labeled, "Heaven." The one on the left was label, "Hell."

The little man pursed his lips and frowned as he said, "Well, if it is really up to me, then I'll take Heaven." He smiled, not really knowing what his decision meant.

The little man then started to walk towards the door marked "Heaven."

The woman immediately stood and then stepped in front of him to block his way. She then slowly said, "You're sure?"

The little man nodded his head up and down.

She smiled wickedly and then said, "You'll have to turn in your red X before you go any further. Once you do that, there is no turning back. Do you understand?"

Confused and frowning, the little man now realized he could have taken the red X off at any point. He handed his red X to the woman as he realized it was burning his fingertips.



She just smiled, putting the X in the pile with all of the others, and said, "You may proceed."

The little man stopped and thought. Then he asked, "So this is the door everyone else picked, right?"

She flashed her wicked smile again as her eyes seemed to glow even redder now. Then she said, "They all picked the other door. Would you like to change your mind? Or, do you think I'm trying to trick you?"

The little man looked back and forth between the two doors, then at the woman. His eyes kept darting back and forth as he thought for a moment.

The woman then said, "Once you open the door, there is no turning back. You won't be able to change your mind at that point." She smiled slyly, holding her chin up ever so slightly.

The little man rushed to the door marked "Heaven" and opened it. He couldn't believe what he saw as the woman pushed him through the door, slamming hard it behind him!

The Playboy Interview That Never Was

<Copyright © 1976 by Bil. Alvernaz>

NOTE: As a struggling writer, right out of college, I tried a lot of different things to get published. I ultimately would write for United Feature Syndicate, USA Today, and many technology magazines, including PC Magazine and InfoWorld (once the personal computer came along). I would also write one of the first how-to books for the IBM PC, too, in 1984 (Expanding Your IBM PC, Brady Books). But this was in the mid-1970s, and the idea I came up with was for Playboy to publish an interview with the "average" Playboy reader who just happened to be "America's Premier Unknown Writer" (that would be ME).

An editor at Playboy liked the idea and said he would be interested to see it, including a mock-up, complete with the three photos at the bottom on the first page. Of course, there was no guarantee it would be published, but, as all writers do, when you find the tiniest of leads, you go for it. Sadly, by the time I put together what you are about to read, well, the only kind way to put it is "things just didn't go my way." Two years later, I would write a United Features article about Jim Jones and the People's Temple that would open many doors for me as a writer. That exposure then led to a sequence of events for me to be writing so many articles, features, and newspaper columns that I even had to turn down writing assignments.

I originally envisioned that I would be a novelist. That didn't happen. But, what I did go on to do the rest of my life (including right up to this very minute) was write, write, write. It didn't matter what job I had, writing was the major factor in anything I did.



Well, the jobs I have had were really in the realm of Communications, Media Relations, Public Relations, Marketing, and Community Relations (to mention just some of them) ... and all of those involved writing where my job was to "tell the story." After being part of the Windows95 team, helping Microsoft pioneer the web, from that point on I pretty much "took my traveling writing show" to the Internet – a realm in which I have continued to work in, handling internal and external communications for many companies. Microsoft even paid for me to get certified through Stanford University in Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) ... which is the study of why and how people "work in and around" not just on web pages and with computers, but all technology.

Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) is the "heart of the matter" on the Internet and also with whatever you are trying to do with a computer or technology, including smart phones and tablet computers ... whether you realize it or not. Each of us has adapted, over time, to computers and many forms of technology being a part of our daily lives. How we work with computers and technology is really what Human-Computer Interaction is all about. We have learned to how to use as well as "live with" technology. The Internet has seduced us and, in the process, wrapped itself tightly around our consciousness. We now think in terms of the Internet - to find information, to play games, to buy things, to connect with others (the vast wasteland of social media), and to "get lost" when it seems there is nothing else to do.

Okay, so enough about that, which is where writing has taken me, among many other places, spaces, things, and locations.

So even though writing didn't turn out to be exactly like I thought it would be, I have spent my entire life in and amongst the "play of words." I wouldn't have had it any other way. It should also be noted that this what follows is most of the text from that Play Interview that never was. The reason for that is because I picked those sections from the interview that best represent and show I knew exactly where I was headed with writing and my life. And, what I'm most proud of is that I did exactly what I set out to do ... most importantly, I am happy, thriving, and still writing.

So, the next page is the actual mockup of the cover page I did to go with what I submitted to Playboy ... so they could see exactly what I was proposing. Following that is the interview. And, to me, what is most amazing about that interview is that it really turns out to be me then (at that place and time) talking to me now (here where I have journeyed to over the four decades since I put together that Playboy interview. It provides great insight to who I was then, who and what I expected myself to become, and, well, it just uncanny how it ties right into being an important "appendage" to this PhD Life Thesis ... that was "there" twenty years or so before I started writing my annual birthday essays. My point being, that it all ties together so incredibly well, even though I didn't plan it that way. I could not have planned it any better for how well it all fits together.

But, then I do have to give myself some credit (well, most of the credit goes to the Universe, because the Universe has been there helping me find my way all these



many years) for “pulling it all together” ... and, oh, yea, even though I didn’t turn out to be a full/fool time novelist, writing has been exactly what I have done in and with my life!



PLAYBOY INTERVIEW:

BIL. ALVERNANZ

a candid conversation with an 'average' playboy reader, who just happens to be America's premier unknown writer

Over the years the Playboy Interview has gained the reputation of being the most in-depth look at interesting people. From the Beatles to Muhammad Ali—just about every kind of person has been interviewed. Every kind of person, that is, except the 'average' person who reads Playboy each month.

When it comes right down to it, that 'average' reader of Playboy is the basic reason for Playboy Magazine. The 'average' readers keep the magazine in demand month after month. Not too long ago a Californian named Bil. Alvernanz brought to light the fact that maybe an interview with the average reader of Playboy wouldn't be such a bad idea. The immediate problem was—just what constitutes an average Playboy reader? Playboy considered several people, but they were all far from average. The two questions were: 1) Who is the average reader? 2) Where could this person be found?

To get the answers Playboy went to the source of the idea—Bil. Alvernanz himself. After talking with Bil, a decision was made. Since such a monumental hardship would be involved in determining who is the average Playboy reader, Play-

boy decided to interview the person who originally came up with the suggestion. This is another first for Playboy.

Bil. Alvernanz lives in Fresno, California. He spends most of his free time in San Francisco and Santa Cruz. He and his wife, Diana, rent a house on Palm Avenue in the miniature dachshunds, Pasha and Amy. Bil. handles public relations for a regional planning agency and Diana works at Gemco, a discount department store. They are expecting their first child in May. Both are sure it will be a girl.

Sound pretty average so far? Well, the averageness stops right there. Bil. Alvernanz, in any given week, spends a minimum of forty hours writing. This is all on his own time, after working eight hours a day, five days a week. There's usually one night a week Bil. goes without any sleep at all. The reality of it all is he manages to squeeze in time for his public relations job, which brings in the money to pay the bills.

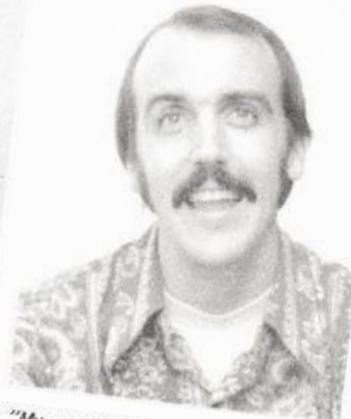
Labeled by his friends as America's Premier Unknown Writer, Bil. writes on and on, week after week. In a typical week he submits ten to twenty

manuscripts to different magazines, publishers, and people he thinks might be able to help him get a break in writing. During the last two years Bil. has completed three books, dozens of short stories, and several articles. The constant barrage of rejection slips hasn't discouraged Bil. Instead, he is all the more determined to accomplish what he has set out to do—become the hottest writer in America. Asked about his collection of rejection slips, Bil. laughs and starts to name off people like Hemingway, Steinbeck, and Fitzgerald, who all went through periods of rejection-depression-determination-and-then-finally-made-it.

Bil. Alvernanz was born William James Alvernanz in Oakland, California, July 15, 1947. His father, Alvin, was a retail clerk in the grocery union and his mother, Dorothy, was a housewife. At the age of four, Billy moved, with his parents and brother, to a bustling little town called San Jose. Writing constantly got Bill in trouble as he grew up. He always had trouble conforming and expressed his ideas and anger through writing. His high school journalism teacher told him to forget about writing. Other teachers agreed.



"I look at college like pissing down a rat hole. You invest four years of your life, time, and money in something to eventually find out you might have been better off doing something else."



"My contribution to the bicentennial would be to buy the biggest Cadillac I could get my hands on, then blow that fucker up. That's no more bizarre than some of the crap being marketed in the name of America's 200th birthday."



"By interviewing the, quote-unquote, average Playboy reader you can reach people and say, 'Hey, it's okay. Look at this guy. He's like most of you and his thoughts are as interesting and valid as any celebrity's.'"



PLAYBOY INTERVIEW: BIL. ALVERNANZ **January 1976 Issue** (that never was)

Over the years the Playboy Interview has gained the reputation of being the most in-depth look at interesting people. Choosing from a wide variety of backgrounds and interests, Playboy has picked the newsmakers, including the Beatles, to see what they think about different things. Every kind of person, that is, except the “average” person who reads Playboy each month.

When it comes right down to it that “average” reader of Playboy is the basic reason for Playboy Magazine. That “average” readers keep the magazine in demand month after month. Not too long ago a Californian named Bil. (yes, that’s the correct spelling, with one “l” followed by a period) Alvernanz brought to light the fact that maybe an interview with the average reader of Playboy wouldn’t be such a bad idea.

The immediate problem was – just what or who constitutes an average Playboy reader. Playboy then considered several people. The two questions were: Just who is the average reader? Where could this person be found?

To get the answers Playboy went to the source of the idea – Bil. Alvernanz himself. He lives in the central part of the state of California with his wife, Diana. They are expecting their first child. Both are sure it will be a girl. Bil. works for (as a writer) a regional transportation planning agency. Diana works in a discount department store.

Writing has always been a passion with Bil. His BA degree is in Journalism and graduate studies (that he is still working on) are in Mass Communications and “readable writing” at University of California in Fresno. Bil. credits his high school Journalism teacher, Mrs. Pollack, as the one person who really worked with him to shape and focus his writing skills.

Bil. writes constantly, submitting articles and ideas (like the one he did to us here at Playboy) to magazines and newspapers. He also writes books and proposals for books. As of yet, according to Bil., he hasn’t “hit the big time” in writing. But he knows he will and that his will be a life of writing.

Here, then, is the Playboy interview of the average reader of Playboy, Bil. Alvernanz:

PLAYBOY: When you suggested the idea for Playboy to interview the average Playboy reader, whomever that is, did you have any idea the interview would be with you?

ALVERNANZ: Aren’t you going to turn on your tape recorder?

PLAYBOY: Oh, yes. So what’s the answer to the question?

ALVERNANZ: What question? The sound level meter isn’t registering. Are you sure the recorder is working?



PLAYBOY: Yes, it's working. The needle is broken.

ALVERNAZ: You're sure it's working?

PLAYBOY: (after testing to be sure the recorder is working, which it was). Now we know it is working. Did you think YOU would be the person we interviewed for the average reader?

ALVERNAZ: Yes! That was my plan all along. Look, as a freelance writer and unknown author, you do whatever you can to "get ink." That is get attention. I refer to myself as America's Premier Unknown Writer. But that is going to change soon!

PLAYBOY: America's Premier Unknown Writer?

ALVERNAZ: Yea. That's how I billed myself for the first book I self-published and then sent out to everyone I could think of who might be "connected" somehow. That is anyone who might "open a door" for me. I was lucky that Edward Asner read my book, contacted me, and he has been helpful in opening some of those doors.

PLAYBOY: So would you consider Asner your first big break in becoming a known writer?

ALVERNAZ: Yes. But there is a long way to go yet.

PLAYBOY: Do you think Playboy readers will be interested in what you have to say?

ALVERNAZ: You tell me? You wouldn't be talking to me right now if Playboy didn't think so. But, I do think many readers will be able to relate to my viewpoint, because everyone has hopes and dreams. I'm doing something about mine. I don't think most people are. Maybe what I have to say will jumpstart some readers to start to go after their dreams. Because, let's face it, most people work, come home, eat dinner in front of the TV, go to bed, and then get up and do it all over again. We watch very little TV because Diana and I do things together, including exercising our asses off. We are careful about what you eat, because if you eat it, you wear it. Back to writing. It isn't my dream, it is what I'm actually doing, living, eating, breathing, sleeping.

PLAYBOY: So you write in your dreams?

ALVERNAZ: Yes. I do. In fact, I truly feel I'm using that large percentage of the human brain that they say most people don't use. I tap into that extra energy and potential on a regular basis. It is how I go one or two nights a week without sleeping. I'm driven to write. I live to write. I write to live. Writing is what I'm going to do with my life. I know that. And, I'm going to do that. Even the job I have, writing is a major part of it.

PLAYBOY: Let's get to the most basic question. Who is Bil. Alvernaz?

ALVERNAZ: Now that is a good question! I never know who I'm going to be or what I want to wear until I get up in the morning. I don't like the day pre-planned the night before. Once I get up I start reacting to the stimuli from the world around me,



just like everyone else does. Only, I would have to say I look at things differently. My main focus for each day is to "make a difference," no matter what that is, large or small. You touch more people's lives that way. We have our own individuality, but so many people let that get crushed by the weight of everything happening that particular day. I like to buy flowers for people to make them smile. I like to talk to people and ask them questions to see what they think about things, but mostly just to get them to see for themselves how they feel about things. And, not stuff in the news. I'm talking about what's really going on in the Universe, philosophy, religion, even. Though I think religion is just dogma geared towards generating revenue. If God is everywhere why do we need to go to a building to "see" God. You can talk to God, whatever that is or whatever you believe her or him to be, anywhere, any time. I guess Bil. Alvernaz is basically a dreamer imagining the possibilities and developing his own potential. We all have dreams and goals. But what I see so often is that people just talk, talk, talk about "woulda, coulda, shoulda." But they do nothing to head in whatever direction they should be going. If you don't know where you are going, any road will take you there. I just think it is sad that so many people just seem to have given up on life, so they go through the motions, kind of like they are in a state of suspended animation, interacting with each other like cartoon characters without a script to follow.

PLAYBOY: Are you saying then that if we don't achieve our goals we're kind of like robots without any purpose?

ALVERNAZ: Well, that's one way to look at it. But, I'm just saying if we give up or don't even try to achieve something, anything, then we are goners, doomed to a life that is basically the same day repeating itself over and over again until you die, most likely from sheer boredom. All of us fall into day-to-day patterns of existence. I like to look at it, and I have written it this way, "etching out an existence on the fragile slate of life." So many days are monotonous, to say the least. We fall into set patterns. If we don't break up those patterns with humor, wit, fun, and compassion, then we are just doomed to the book "1984" actually becoming our daily lives.

PLAYBOY: So what's the answer then?

ALVERNAZ: The answer is different for each person based on what each person wants. I've asked lots and lots of people what they want. Most think for a moment and then say, "I don't know. What do you want?"

PLAYBOY: So what do you want?

ALVERNAZ: Five words – TO WRITE AND BE HAPPY. In fact, I ask people all the time to tell me in 50 words or less what they want. I hardly ever get any coherent answers. People just seem to have become numbed. And, it drives me crazy when I hear people talking and most of the conversations are references to TV shows or something someone read in a tabloid newspaper. When I ask people when was the last time they actually read a book, I never get any answers other than "in high school or college." Sure, some people read, but TV is rotting people's minds. What was that expression from the 1950s that "TV is a vast wasteland?" That is true even more so



today. Here's a perfect example of what I'm talking about. I walk up to someone sitting behind a pile of paperwork and say, "Hey, let's take a break. Go for a short walk." The response is automatic, without any thinking involved, and almost in slow motion. The person raises her or his head while blinking several times, looks at me, and then as if a string had been pulled on side of their neck like those Chatty Cathy dolls, the response that you know is coming and it is always the same, "I can't. I'm too busy. Gotta get all of this stuff done. I think it is even a law that you can take a break in the morning and afternoon. So I go for a walk on my own. It recharges my solar batteries, so to speak. I come back and feel energized as I pass that person's desk who is still lost in work.

PLAYBOY: Do you have some magic beans or answers to help those of us trapped in such situations?

ALVERNAZ: Yes, yes, yes. Take time for YOU. Take breaks. Exercise more than just walking. Diana and I exercise every day. That's how you keep trim and fit. Plus, taking a break and especially exercising recharges your brain. You're not going to get paid anything extra to sit at your desk and kill yourself. It is the executives and "big shots" who are going to get the raises and bonuses for doing basically nothing. They are also the ones not walking or exercising, who are getting fatter and fatter as each year goes by, all until their arteries clog up and they have strokes and heart attacks. That's not something I'm ever going to get caught in.

And, when it comes to food, I have a basic rule, eat less, exercise more. And, the more you exercise the better, because your body is designed to store fat. So if you don't burn off the excess calories you consume, your body is going to store those calories in all of the ugly, sloshing places for YOU to carry around for all the world to see. One obsession I have is that I will never get fat, ever! Oh, and take the stairs instead of using an elevator. Park your car as far away from the store as possible so you walk more. Your car doors will get dinged less that way, too.

PLAYBOY: Sounds like you're afraid of getting caught up in the world we live in.

ALVERNAZ: I will admit that Diana and I live in our own world. I think most people do. But you don't have to surrender to everything that numbs your brain. You have choices, hundreds of them every day. If you don't make a decision, then things will just happen anyway, no matter what. If I have to deal with society, it is going to be on my terms, as much as I have control over. That's another point. People need to focus on what they can control. The rest will take care of itself. Do everything you can, giving 100 percent for the things you want and then let the Universe take care of things after that. The Universe will help you, if you just stay out of your own way. Figuring out different ways to break up the day is a challenge, but it is fun, too.

One other point needs to be made about people not taking breaks, not having any idea where they are headed, and even those people just killing the day at work until it is time to go home and watch more TV, the truth of the matter, according to yours truly, is that there are a lot of lazy and or stupid people. Oh, and, one more thing about exercising more, much more, and eating less, much less. If you eat it you



wear it. Also, people need to look closer at the amount of sodium they are consuming. Salt is in everything and all that extra salt is killing people, giving them high blood pressure and heart attacks. You never need to put salt on anything because salt is already in whatever you're eating.

PLAYBOY: Let's talk about your writing.

ALVERNAZ: Okay. What would you like to know?

PLAYBOY: You say you're committed to writing. To becoming a successful writer. The Premier Writer in America. You're channeling all of your creative energy in that direction. You're obsessed with making it as a writer. Why? Why not stick with communications and public relations, the kind of jobs you have had and now have? What does writing really mean to you?

ALVERNAZ: Writing is EVERYTHING! It is words strung together that hold the essence of everything we know together. Words are how we communicate, by talking and, you guessed it, writing. Most people hate to write. They avoid it at all costs. Me, I love it. The play of words. From the time I could scribble with a pencil on a piece of paper, something my mother gave me as a little kid to keep me occupied, I just knew that it meant something. That it was something I wanted to do. I would do swirls and designs which later turned into words when I first started learning how to read and write. And, I was the kid in grammar school who couldn't wait to diagram sentences and write, write, write. In high school and college, I made money writing papers and homework assignments for people. I knew early on that writing had to be monetized if you were going to make a living at it. As a kid I even wrote and published a neighborhood newspaper that I sold for a dime. And, people actually paid me for the newspaper, either to read it or just because they were impressed that I was publishing a single-page newspaper. I even had my own little printing press that I bought with money I made from washing windows in the neighborhood, along with my allowance.

I have always known exactly who I was and what I wanted to do. I know so many people who are living their lives without any specific direction to head in. No focus or goals whatsoever. I know where I'm going and I'm going to do it. You just turn things over to the Universe after you have done all you can and the magical things happen. And, it is going to happen for me in writing. Of that I am sure.

PLAYBOY: If you just want to make it in writing then why do you want to go from America's Premier Unknown Writer to America's Premier Writer, the hottest writer in America?

ALVERNAZ: I don't. You set your goals high so you head in that direction. You do everything you can, heading in that direction. It keeps you focused, also so the quality of your work is always, always, always top notch, the best. Then, if you get anywhere close, you're somewhere in the ball park. It's like baseball. Instead of swinging for a homerun, yea, I want to hit a home run, but you just make sure you put the bat on the ball and the rest – the Universe – will take care of itself. I'm looking to make a living by writing, howsoever that happens. Being a novelist would be great,



but even the kind of work I have already done and am doing now, I'm writing and getting paid for it. Also, what I'm most proud of is that I don't just tell the "what" part of the story in anything I do, I also zero in on "why it matters." So I am basically "telling the story" no matter what kind of writing I'm doing. And, I'm damned good at it, too! People come to me all the time for me to edit and create work. And, as I said, even in high school and college people knew I was the writer and that I could write for them, for a price, of course.

PLAYBOY: Which brings us back to the question of what writing means to you. Is it just dollars and cents to make a living?

ALVERNAZ: Not at all. Well, just as much as the next person, I have to eat, pay rent, and stuff like that. Sure, then it is about the money. So, in that sense, yes, I am concerned with "making money." But the key point here is that I'm making money doing what I love to do. I have a job I really like and I enjoy the work I do. Not many people can say that. John Lennon, of the Beatles, hit this "money thing" right on the head in 1968 when he said, "Money only means something until you have enough of it. Then it becomes a burden." I mean, what good is having all kinds of money and worrying about tax loop holes for this and that, if you're in a job you hate, doing something you'd rather not be doing? I want to write and make money. And, I'm doing that. The Universe takes care of the rest.

PLAYBOY: Then would you . . .

ALVERNAZ: I'm not through answering your last question. Beyond the money end of writing, I think the most important point to consider here is what can be done with or through writing.

PLAYBOY: Which is?

ALVERNAZ: I'm getting to that. I look at writing as a mirror of sorts. Through any particular piece of writing, I'm taking frozen moments of time, life, thoughts, ideas, feelings, and information, and speaking directly to the reader. I'm talking to the reader, saying, "Look at this. Think about it." I want to move people mentally. Intellectual stimulation, something that is missing from so much writing that is just "pounded out" without any purpose or determination. At work, I'm "telling the story" for the company or organization I'm working for. In my personal writing, I'm letting the reader look at a picture that I've created deep within their intellect. Through my stories I show the ironies and absurdities in life. Back to holding up a mirror, of sorts, so people look a little bit differently at something that has been right in front of their nose all along. I also hammer away at "PAY ATTENTION" which most people really don't do. So while I have someone's attention, in that they are now looking at things a bit differently, I weave in a lot of the stuff they probably already knew they didn't know.

PLAYBOY: What, exactly, does that mean?

ALVERNAZ: Simply that I honestly feel too many people have been numbed and subdued into living life, accepting things as they are. I'm just tweaking their intellect a



bit to help them look at things in new and different ways. And, much of what I'm doing "playing with words" is things people have already been thinking or known, but just really never seriously considered it, or ignored it completely. That's the power of writing. To move people intellectually to think about thinking. That's really what I'm doing with words. You know some people use words as weapons against each other. I use words to move people, even in the writing I do on my job. Back to "telling the story." I also feel that people feel trapped in their lives and they don't know why they are or how it happened or how they can escape it. They feel trapped and they don't need to be trapped.

PLAYBOY: What do you mean "trapped?"

ALVERNAZ: Exactly that. Trapped. Once you get out into the world on your own, after college, and whatever you do after that, things just sort of happen. Some of it you plan for, most of it just happens because you're not paying attention or you're lazy or stupid. So one day you reach the point of not being happy, and being happy is extremely important. And, I'm here to tell you there are a lot of unhappy people in this world. Okay, so for whatever reason, people are trapped in the lives that have been created for them, however that has happened. What I'm doing with my writing is trying to make people think. For those who are happy, my writings reinforce what they have done. For those who feel trapped, and probably don't even know it, I'm opening doors in their mind to help them see they have choices every single day, no matter what their age is, to make changes and do exactly what they want to do and be exactly who they want to be. The real issue is that too many people let others and noise influence their lives, keeping them from where they really should be headed in life!

The "trap" is very seductive. You advance in your job, you get raises, you have a certain standard of living and image to maintain, or so you think. What are you doing all of this for? Yourself or because it is what you think others think you should be doing. It all comes back to what do you really want and who do you really want to be?

PLAYBOY: Many people would say that a good position in the business world is one of the rewards of graduating from college.

ALVERNAZ: A college degree is just a piece of paper that opens doors. You need it. I have needed and am sure it will make a difference in everything I will do. But I don't write any differently than I did before I went to college. But, you can't not have a college degree unless your defined goals take you in some other direction. College isn't for everyone and it isn't a golden ticket to success either. You do learn a lot in college in terms of making deadlines, dealing with impossible personalities, that would be professors and instructors, many who basically hate what they are doing. You meet a lot of great people, too. There is value in college.

PLAYBOY: Let's talk about the writing process.



ALVERNAZ: Writing is a process. You start with ideas. You create an outline. You then start filling in the gaps. You write the first draft. Then you re-write and re-write. I look at it all like pounding on an anvil. You have to shape the words to fit what you want to say. It is like the public speaking class I took where you couldn't use any notes when you gave a speech.

PLAYBOY: Just how does that work?

ALVERNAZ: It's great. And, the public speaking class was the single most valuable experience of my writing life. Here's how it worked. You only need to do four things in a speech and this ties to writing, too. You start with your assertion. That's what you're going to talk about, the topic. Then you have an opening statement to "state your case" of what you are going to talk about. That's where you grab hold of your reader's attention. Then you provide supporting information. That means you do your homework or research or whatever else needs to be done to make your point(s) or to "tell the story." The last and fourth part of this process is your conclusion, which reinforces your assertion and what you have talked about. This is also the point, in writing for companies that you induce people to do something such as call for more information, buy the product, or whatever.

So if you approach writing, as well as giving a speech, this way, it makes it simple to tie everything together. And, it really is true that you don't need a single note to make the speech or presentation. It all flows in a logical order, so people can relate to that. Oh, and for a speech or any presentation, you only have five to seven minutes to "get to people." After that, attention spans rapidly deteriorate. So "hit 'em hard," say what you have to say and don't take too long to do it. It is the same with meetings, too. The shorter, the better.

PLAYBOY: It is obvious you like to play with words.

ALVERNAZ: It's more than that. I like to take perception and perspective and turn it every which way. Let me put it this way. When you walk down the street, are you staying in the exact same spot or is it just that the sidewalk is moving underneath you or are you really moving in relation to the sidewalk. When you ride in a car, is the car stationary with the road moving underneath it or is the car actually moving. And, my best example or assertion is about airplanes. My theory is that the plane never moves. The earth is lowered beneath it, then the earth spins however much "distance" is needed, then the earth comes back to where the planes wheels can touch it, but the plane hasn't moved an inch. Or, so it would seem!

PLAYBOY: That could easily lead to the question – Are you crazy?

ALVERNAZ: That all depends on your definition of crazy. It's like I said earlier, I never know who I'm going to be until I get up in the morning. Nor do I know what I'm going to do throughout the day. I can tell you whimsy, wit, and fun will be "mixed in" with whatever I will be doing. But, to really answer your question, yes, I'm crazy, and no, I'm not crazy. It all comes back to how you look at things and I think a little bit of crazy mixed in with everything else is healthy. And, hey, just look around you. This



world is already pretty crazy. And, I'm not even going to get into the subject of politicians.

PLAYBOY: Does being a little crazy help in writing?

ALVERNAZ: Absolutely. Attitude and perspective. Or, as I sometimes call it "altitude." I just don't think you can take the world as it is without "turning things around" a little bit or a lot, depending on the situation. There is so much in life that can easily get you down, if you let it. On the other hand, there's a lot in life, A WHOLE LOT, that makes it all worthwhile. It all comes back to how you look at things. If you break your shoelace first thing in the morning and say, "Oh, today's going to be a bad day," guess what kind of day you're going to have. As opposed to, so the shoelace broke, get out another pair of shoes for the day and replace the lace, or, heck, wear your shoes without any laces!

PLAYBOY: Do you ever get to the point where you're so discouraged you want to give up writing?

ALVERNAZ: NEVER! No. The important thing about writing, any kind of writing, is that you are using your mind. I know I put my brain through a workout pretty much on a daily basis. Diana and I do jigsaw puzzles. We play a lot of Scrabble – more play of words, so to speak. And, I am forever making notes about writing, either for something personal I'm working on or for what I'm doing at work. Writing makes you think. Best of all, because of writing, you're using your mind in a creative, innovative way and I love that. I wouldn't trade the satisfaction and enjoyment I get from writing for anything. I thrive on my writing impacting people, hearing back from people about what I have written. The fact I have made them think. You don't have to agree with what I write. I just want to engage your brain so you think about thinking.

There is a downside to writing that I look at as the "price of admission." Writing is a solitary pursuit. You do it by yourself. You might work with people for ideas and input in relation to something you're writing at work, but no matter what kind of writing you're doing, when it comes down to "putting it all on paper," it is just YOU and a blank page. So when I'm writing I'm not with Diana or doing anything else. But I love writing and it is truly who and what I am – a writer. I believe in what I'm doing and so does Diana. She is my proofer and sounding board. I couldn't do what I have done without her.

Frustration and disappointment is almost a daily routine when I find rejected manuscripts in the mail. But, that doesn't stop me. A writer writes. Then the Universe takes over. Look at the writers who have made it and you'll find they plastered walls with rejection letters. I just throw them away or I follow up with yet one more query letter and an outline for something else I propose. And, really, rejection just makes me all the more determined. Sooner or later I know and believe I will get a break when it comes to my personal writing.

PLAYBOY: How do you think it will happen, when you do get your break?



ALVERNAZ: Well, this interview is definitely a break for exposure of America's Premier Unknown Writer to the world. But, how getting a break will actually happen, I really don't know and don't care. There are only three possible ways it can happen. Through the mail, by phone, or someone knocking on my door.

PLAYBOY: And, when you do make it?

ALVERNAZ: Nothing changes. I'll still be me and I'll still be writing. The best thing would be that I would no longer need a job, so I could spend more time with Diana. She is the main, driving force, encouraging me in writing every step of the way. I say it over and over, but I couldn't do what I'm doing without her. And, I know it will always be like that. We work together as a team, me helping her, her helping me.

PLAYBOY: You talk a lot about Diana being a driving force in your life. Are there any other driving forces in your life?

ALVERNAZ: Mrs. Pollack, my high school Journalism teacher. She helped me refine and hone my writing style. Dan Ozier taught the public speaking class I talked about. He was really good at making sure you said what you meant and meant what you said. Bernie Shepard, my college counselor who became a good friend, he, probably more than anyone else in terms of "putting words on paper," helped me see that you need to choose words carefully for impact. Ralph Gleason, the music critic for the San Francisco Chronicle, I just love his writing and how he gets his point across. Herb Caen, the three-dot columnist for the San Francisco Chronicle, I can't get enough of how he plays with words and people's name. You just can't help but smile starting your day by reading Herb Caen, who still uses his trusty, manual Royal typewriter. Phillip Roth, his books and writing has greatly influenced me because of how he can zero in on life's ironies with such great specificity. Nothing tops "Portnoy's Complaint," to just mention one of his many books I've read and re-read.

Probably more than anything, I would have to say the Beatles, their words and music, continue to drive me and I'm sure they always will. They changed everything in the world when they came along and also as they evolved. Just the Beatles, though, not anything any of the four have done since, because the magic was gone. But the Beatles legacy lives on, continuing to inspire and move me. I listen to their music the most while I write. Oh, and I do have to mention one other person who has definitely had an impact on me. Lenny Bruce. And, he was all about "the play of words." Set aside the junkie part of his life and you have pure genius in what could be done with words, what you said and what you didn't say. And, that is a key point, because my writing focuses on what is and isn't there. What could and couldn't be. What you see and what you don't see, mainly because you're not paying attention or just ignoring something you really should be paying attention to.

PLAYBOY: You made what could be considered a negative comment about politicians. Why is that?

ALVERNAZ: There just isn't anyone I would register to vote for.

PLAYBOY: You don't vote?



ALVERNAZ: I don't want to encourage politicians. And, really, it doesn't matter what they say they are going to do while trying to get elected. They just all go on to do whatever they feel like doing, with only one mission in mind – to keep their jobs. It's the ultimate gravy train. That brings me to my most favorite expression which best sums them all up – Sons a bitches!

PLAYBOY: Let's talk a little bit more about Ralph Gleason.

ALVERNAZ: When Ralph died last summer, it was like someone in my family died. I never had met him, but I felt like I knew him so well, because I loved reading Ralph's columns and articles. He said what he felt, no matter what the consequences. When Lenny Bruce first broke onto the scene, it was Ralph and Herb Caen who hailed Lenny's pure genius and brilliance. Everyone else would not say what they felt. Ralph always did. Ralph was a constant force in helping people who couldn't get help, support, or exposure any other way. The Chronicle just isn't the same without him. And, Sunday mornings, there is something missing to read in the Chronicle.

PLAYBOY: So just what is it about Lenny Bruce that so many people just don't get?

ALVERNAZ: With Lenny Bruce, it is just so obvious that he is, has become, and always will be a voice that blazed trails for everyone else. Look at any comic today. They all have Lenny Bruce to thank for their open freedom to say whatever it is they want to say and to use whatever words they want. It wasn't like that before Lenny Bruce. Lenny was ahead of his time and he hit a chord with people. Through him everyone could see we all have similar thoughts and there is nothing wrong with bringing those thoughts out into the open. Ultimately, his "act" was him just taking the daily newspaper or a weekly magazine, like Time, and commenting on all the crazy things that were going on, saying the things no one else would say, but everyone was thinking it. He openly discussed VD when that kind of thing was hush-hush, because it only happened to dirty people. No, it was happening to a lot of people. What I liked best is that Lenny never compromised on anything. He was him. I feel I'm me, so I can relate to that, plus he was so funny. What he had to say was valid enough to surface and once it surfaced there was no turning back for him.

PLAYBOY: But Lenny Bruce bothered a lot of people.

ALVERNAZ: Sure he did! But before Lenny came along, comedians really were restricted and they were all the same. Lenny shared his views with people. And, like the Beatles, he did so many different things with the same words everyone else had been using. It comes back to him and especially the Beatles being a refreshing new voice echoing across the landscape of America. Lenny always said that if you take away corruption, war, dirty politics, and all of the other sick aspects of society, he wouldn't have had anything to say. He was just pointing out what was right there in front of us, using language that offended some, but, hey, it was and is the same language you and I use all the time. He was just doing it in public for the first time. Lenny was acting like a mirror, the same kind of mirror I was talking about in



describing writing, showing people the absurdity of things like prejudice, censorship, and so many other things.

PLAYBOY: So, coming back to the Beatles, which one of them do you like the most?

ALVERNAZ: Separately, none of them. They're all still doing pretty neat things, especially George Harrison. Paul McCartney has pretty much settled in to formula bubblegum music that will sell. But the magic of the Beatles is gone. When I talk about the Beatles, I'm referring to the aura or the mystic that was the Beatles, as a group, and how they changed everything. As individuals they don't even come close to what the Beatles were and still are. Together they created a supernova entity, which alone none of them could even come close to. That supernova went beyond just the world of music. It permeated philosophy, vocabularies, lifestyles, and just about everything else. I can't imagine having grown up without the Beatles or not having their music still in my life and in my head.

PLAYBOY: It almost sounds like you're talking about philosophy or religion when you talk about the Beatles.

ALVERNAZ: The Beatles go beyond all of that. And, on the subject of religion, well, I minored in philosophy and comparative religions. I really feel that all helped shape me, who I am, and what I write. I wanted to look at the spectrum of religions and philosophical thoughts. I know there is something. The Universe, but as far as just what God is, I just don't "get it" with the guy in the white robe and neatly trimmed beard. What "it" is, I keep coming back to just calling it the "Universe." And, I think we created God, or whatever you want to call her or him, in our image so we could relate to her or him. But, that brings you straight to dogma and all organized religions. How come God or Buddha or whatever is such a poor money manager that you need to keep giving him (or the church) money each week? If God is everywhere, why do you even need a church or building to go to? And, does God really keep track of all the details that each religion forces upon people in the way of rituals and ceremonies? There is much more to it than that, but if I had to hang my hat on anything it would be, plain and simple, the Universe. We're all a part of it. And, we should all be helping each other.

PLAYBOY: So are you saying you lean toward Eastern thoughts, religion, or philosophy?

ALVERNAZ: Let me put it this way. I view myself as a Pedestrian, just walking my way through. I help people when they need help. I don't need to belittle other people to make myself look good or feel better. I look at each day in terms of did I make a difference. I think that's how things should work. I don't think you need to go spend an hour, all dressed up, on Sunday morning, or whatever day of the week the service is required, to learn about, see, or talk to God, whatever God is. I think God is in each of us, so we should help each other make it through the day. To me, this going to church once a week is really like you believe in this "insurance policy" so you can get into Heaven. Then the rest of the week, you can do whatever you want. I was



raised as a Catholic, so you could do whatever you wanted all week, go to confession once a week, have all your sins absolved and forgiven. I just never bought into any of that. Instead of doing something you need to be forgiven for, just don't do it. And, the idea of a priest, minister, pastor, vicar, or even the Pope. Those individuals, what? They have a "direct line" to God? I just don't buy any of it. My religion and philosophy are in one word, the Universe. Everything is all tied together. We're all part of it. So I just think we should make a difference each, helping each other and helping ourselves. You do what you can do, then you turn everything over to the Universe to take care of the rest.

PLAYBOY: So, in a way, that's praying isn't it?

ALVERNAZ: It is whatever you want it to be. We have control over certain things, so we should focus on those. I look at it like you give it your best shot, doing whatever it is you do. Then, just let go and the Universe will take care of the rest. And, I do believe in Karma which ties to making a difference. You get exactly what you deserve in life, nothing more, and nothing less. You have put forth an effort in living your life, but the Universe has a certain balance and that is where Karma comes in. Be deceitful and cheat people or just be a bad person, even cruelty to animals. It all adds up, so if you're doing good things with your life and helping people, as well as yourself, that all counts towards your Karma, too. So whatever you put "out there," Karma is the leveling factor that will either play in your favor or smack you with a 2x4 between the eyes or up the back side of your head. And, really, it all comes back to the golden rule. Treat others as you would want to be treated.

PLAYBOY: So what do you do beyond writing?

ALVERNAZ: There are periods where I don't write at all. But I honestly believe somewhere in my brain, things are churning. There is no other way to explain how I can just sit down at points and knock out something I really like in no time at all. It is like I'm watching myself write, like the words and ideas are all packed into the pen itself. I write with a Bic pen and lined, yellow tablet. Though they somewhat scare me, I liked dedicated word processors where you basically work with a supercharged electric typewriter that is combined with some kind of computer processor. IBM has a Mag-Card machine. Think that is probably where we're headed for writing, but it would be hard for me to get away from the "pen to the page." Though I do love having an electric typewriter. But what do I do beyond writing? Diana and I play a lot of Scrabble and Yahtzee. We do jigsaw puzzles and we both read a lot, too. We go to movies every week. And, yes, we do watch TV, though not that much. We really like Santa Cruz and hope to live there someday. Santa Barbara is nice, too, but you need to own a bank to live there. We just got back from New Orleans and that was a fun place. Though I hear it is too hot and humid in the summer. I like to build things, too. I built our grandfather clock and my roll top desk. I also built our waterbed frame, too. And, I'm making a bassinet for our baby. I enjoy woodworking projects. If we have a girl, which we are sure we will, then I'll build a dollhouse to begin with and maybe someday a life size doll house she can play in. If it's a boy, then I'll start with a



wooden train set and, ultimately, a treehouse. Well, I'll probably build a treehouse at some point, boy or girl. I live my life in terms of imagining the possibilities.

PLAYBOY: So one last question. Where do you see yourself in five or ten years?

ALVERNAZ: I don't look at things in terms of years, which I guess brings us back to me leaning towards looking at things from an Eastern Religion standpoint, Karma and the whole thing. For the rest of my life, I see myself writing and being a writer, the person "telling the story." The person moving people with words. The person making people think. You don't have to agree with what I'm writing, I just want to "put it out there" so you think about it. Think about thinking. So in five years or ten years or whatever, I will be doing what I have always done – writing. I can't tell you specifics, because what I can control I will. And, that is writing, writing, writing. The Universe will take care of the rest.

PLAYBOY: You won't be happy to hear this. It seems the tape record hasn't been working, just as you suspected.

ALVERNAZ: Don't look at me. I'm not going to say it. Oh, hell, I told you so!

PLAYBOY: (fidgeting with the tape recorder) Nope, It's dead. Must have been the batteries. I don't know what to say. I guess . . .

ALVERNAZ: When I thought it wasn't working I hit this foot pedal, which turned on my tape recorder.

PLAYBOY: You mean you bugged this interview?

ALVERNAZ: No, I'm saying I saved your ass, because I always make sure I have a backup of everything. So I thought I would make my own copy of this interview.

PLAYBOY: But you did record this without me knowing, right?

ALVERNAZ: Whatever I do, I always make sure I have a backup of whatever I'm doing. I use a tape recorder to "sound things out," especially for plays I'm writing. And, really, how could you say I taped this without you knowing? I figured your tape recorder wasn't working right, which it wasn't, so I just made sure we were recording all of this. So, now you have a recording of everything, even though your \$500 tape recorder didn't do the job.

PLAYBOY: Well, at least we do have this all on tape. Can I have the tape?

ALVERNAZ: Yea, sure. But are you really going to use it?

PLAYBOY: You'll just have to wait to see if this interview ever hits the light of day! Is there anything else you'd like to add before we stop?

ALVERNAZ: Yes. While I'm not sure if this interview sounded like all of the other Playboy interviews, I do feel good that, at least for me, in case this never gets published, I have a record of how I look at life and things at this point in my life. You never know, somewhere down the road this interview just might be a "window into



the past” for me to see that I did, indeed, do what I see out to do in terms of what all I talked about in this interview, and that I am, most certainly, still writing. But, then, that’s just a futuristic matter of perspective sort of way to look at all of the words we have here. Who I am, what I have done, and all that I will go on to do speaks LOUDLY for itself all as a matter of record for all of the fact checkers out there, including me at whatever point somewhere in the future that I’m looking back at me looking from now to then at me. You know what I mean?

PLAYBOY: I have not a clue what you are talking about?

ALVERNAZ: Oh, that’s okay, because I will now and then, far off at whatsoever point in the future, unearth all of this, a) understand exactly what I was saying then/now; and 2) it will be perfectly clear that I did exactly what I said I would do and I continued to be the exact person I wanted to be, no compromises, no games, and no pretenses. Just me, being who I want to be, writing and spending my life with Diana. And, you can quote me on that.

PLAYBOY: Oh, don’t worry, we will!

All Women Are Witches

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NOTE: This story is an excerpt from a still being written book called, “The Book of Wizards.”

Part One

... and men usually just don't get it.

The blazing fire cast a gold tint all around the cave as mesmerizing shadows flickered and twitched across the irregular contours of the cave's stone walls. Glowing cinders and sparks rose from the crackling, popping embers amid bluish, white flames, stretching upward into the smoky haze, disappearing with the light into the darkness high above the cave's eerie subterranean fissures.

The fire's glow also fluttered across the body of Breanna, the Sorceress, projecting her reclining shadow up on the wall and revealing her shapely features larger than life. Having just opened her sky-blue eyes, Breanna sighed as she moved her head ever so slightly. Stabbing pains pulsed throughout her body, throbbing with each beat of her heart.

Breanna didn't know how long she had been out from having been knocked senseless, but her most immediate concern was the discovery that she was bound by leather straps at her wrists and ankles, tied to wooden stakes firmly anchored in granite. Her arms were stretched outward causing her back to arch, thrusting her chest upward and highlighting her ribs pressing outward against her golden skin. With her legs also bound and pulled wide apart, Breanna dared not move because of



another wooden stake positioned between her legs, protruding like a fist deep inside of where intimacy resided.

Breanna's long, dark hair and her body were caked with mud. Stinging cuts and scratches covered her flesh. How this had all happened was coming back to her now, flashing through her mind in stark, rapid images. There had been the evil looking, dark figure chasing her in the lowlands, past villages in the moonlight. It had been an otherwise ordinary day where Breanna had somehow lost track of time gathering an abundance of herbs, roots, and flowers that filled her basket to overflowing. By sunset she was riding her horse, Reason, back to the comfort of the campsite that had been a temporary home for several days. Breanna's plans for the evening included mixing up a legendary potion of roots and herbs she called the "Elixir of Life" which she was sure would alleviate the strange cravings she had been experiencing lately. She also shared the Elixir with many people to help them with all kinds of maladies. She was known far and wide as a Sorceress ... the best of the best!

Breanna sensed something wasn't right as she approached her hidden encampment under the light of a full moon. She caught the scent of a stranger just as he lunged out at her and tried to pull her down from her brown stallion. Kicking at the stranger gave Breanna enough of an edge to back kick her heel into Reason's underside and yank on his reins. The horse reared upwards, knocking the assailant away so they could flee.

Breanna looked back to see the man swing his large frame amazingly fast up to a full mounted position on his huge, dark horse - one she could instantly tell was trained for running long distances. The rider immediately took up the chase after her, closing ground swiftly. Reason valiantly raced through the moon lit valley to elude the pursuer. Once they reached the low-lying foothills, Reason zigzagged in and out of the trees and shrubs, making their trail almost impossible to follow. That tactic proved to be their undoing, however, because such maneuvers, while they gained distance also greatly drained the horse's energy, most of which had already been spent. Eyes wide with fear, Breanna looked behind her once again and was relieved not to see or hear anyone.

The figure on the midnight black steed chasing them seemed to have slowed a long way back. It did seem odd to Breanna that Reason had so easily outrun the danger, especially since he was no match for the larger, stronger horse. Breanna continued to listen for any sounds as she slowed her magnificent creature to a trot so he could cool down. Reason gasped for air as the foam ringing his mouth dripped to the ground.

Breanna patted Reason on the head saying, "Good boy. Good boy. Rest easy now." She was looking behind her again when she heard the distinct snapping zing of a crossbow being fired from in front of Reason. Reason's body instantly tightened and then went limp as he made horrifying sounds. The horse pitched to his right side and collapsed under Breanna. Breanna didn't even have time to turn to see what was happening.



As she tumbled from atop Reason, Breanna saw where the silver arrow had ripped open a gash, clean through to the animal's heart. Breanna shrieked as she frantically slapped her hands over the gaping wound, trying to hold back the bleeding. Blood gushed and spurted out of the animal through Breanna's fingers onto her clothes and the ground all around her. Sobbing, Breanna felt heart sick when through her tears she saw the animal's wide open eye staring at her. Reason's front hoof twitched as a final breath slowly escaped from his contorted mouth. The hideous sounds stopped. Reason's eyes slowly closed as his head gently came to rest on the ground.

Listening closely for Reason's breath and hoping to hear it, Breanna was suddenly overwhelmed by clods of dirt hitting her in the face amid the thundering gallop of horse hooves. With sod flying all around her, Breanna felt the noose of a coarse rope cinch in around her neck. She instinctively grabbed at the rope with both hands and somehow managed to curl her fingers around the thick rope, protecting her neck and keeping it from being cut open. The hard kick of a boot smashed against the base of Breanna's skull rocking her senses and numbing her reflexes. The man terrorizing Breanna was now behind her and well in control of subduing her.

Breanna was so dazed it was a struggle to fight the rope around her neck. Before she could lift the rope up over her chin, the rope jerked tight pulling her back, forcing Breanna to rapidly take several tiny steps backward. Then stumbling, Breanna crashed to the ground flat on her back. The wind knocked out of her, Breanna was now completely defenseless. She knew she had to get to her feet, but fighting to gulp some air in the dust and blood next to Reason, she just couldn't manage to even lift her head. The black horse bolted, dragging Breanna through the dirt and underbrush. Breanna fought for as long as she could against being pulled while the rocks and ground shredded her thick satin clothes and under garments, tearing at her skin.

Finally, the rope closed in so taut around Breanna's neck, numbing her fingers that her dusty, choking, torturous vision of the night disappeared as her eyes rolled upward and closed. She did catch one last fleeting glimpse of Reason, who now was a dark, shadowy heap fading in the distance. Breanna briefly awoke a few times, now tied securely over another horse, during the long journey to the cave. She had been draped like a straw doll across the back of a galloping horse, her head bouncing around on one side and her feet dangling on the other. She had no strength to fight or do anything as her consciousness was fleeting and dreamlike.

Fear and pain clouded Breanna's mind now as she lay in the cave naked and bound. She could feel her heart racing, as well as the noose of the rope still around her neck. Breanna felt the squeeze of that rope on her badly bruised neck all the more with each breath as her chest heaved upward and then down. Her fingers throbbed from where the rope had left its cutting burn marks and her body ached all over from the ordeal. More than anything else, Breanna could also feel the pointed end of that stake rammed inside of her tearing tissue with the slightest movement of any part of her body.



Breanna carefully turned her head to search the warm cave with her piercing eyes, not really sure what she was looking for beyond surveying the area to see if there was any way out of this nightmare. She was at a loss for why this had happened or what she might have done to deserve it. All of her life she had helped people with her potions and spells. Not one person had ever even tried to harm her. People knew she had special powers and, until now, people had sought her out for help and assistance. For whatever reason, she was now in grave danger and Breanna knew her very life was hanging in the balance. It seemed her only hope was to be rescued by Logan, her longtime companion and defender.

Breanna wasn't worried that Logan would be able to find her by tracking her scent, because such a skill was only part of his (and her) unique nature. The sick, empty feeling of dread inside of Breanna stemmed from not knowing if Logan would make it in time to save her and then, even if he did, whether or not Logan had the physical strength to overcome whomever had done this to her - a man who, by the looks of the cave, surely had the powers of a wizard-extraordinaire at his command.

The cave appeared to be more for magic and sorcery than anything else. The immense, raging fire in the center of the cave was ringed with various sized boulders, some used for sitting, others that were flattened for work areas. The fire itself emanated from a deep pit. Breanna figured her distance from the fire to be about fifteen paces, with the entrance to the cave being an equal distance from the fire, opposite from where she was. Through the elongated entrance to the cave Breanna could see the full moon and the large, reddish star she and Logan often used to find their way when journeying through this remote, hostile region to find the ingredients and extracts for her potions and brews, as well as for Logan to hunt.

All of what Breanna saw spread out around the edge of the fire and outer rim of the cave intrigued and also terrified her. Leaning against the walls were numerous metals rods, swords, skewers, lances, spikes, and several types of striking weapons topped with deadly, spiked, metal balls. There were also several whips and a big crossbow complete with ample bolts, silver points shining and shimmering in the firelight. Breanna thought of Reason, who she was sure had a bloodline that predated unicorns, as she realized this was probably the same crossbow that had been used to senselessly destroy that wonderful creature she had ridden for so many years. A tear rolled down her cheek as she realized she would never again see that horse she loved so much. Then it hit her that this was probably the end of her life! And, for what reason?

The tips of many metal rods and long knives and daggers resting at the edge of the fire glowed molten red. Many of the wooden handles on these weapons were inlaid with jewels, gold and silver and, like so many other things in the cave, they were all adorned with strange writings - odd shaped letters and symbols Breanna had never seen or heard of in all of her years of spell casting and soothsaying. Leather bound volumes of manuscripts with red ribbons marking pages were scattered in piles around the cave along with scrolls, parchment paper, quills, and ink wells.



Not far from Breanna was a low, long, and narrow, neatly organized table made of oak. On the table were bottles, vials, and flasks along with more old books. Almost hidden behind the books was what looked like a jar of leeches feeding on something bloody. Flower petals were strewn all over the surface of the table, along with shredded leaves and several elegant seedpods from the unicorn plant, which was thought to be magical. Breanna often crushed such seeds into a fine powder and had found them to be quite magical and more powerful in their healing properties and passion stimulants than anyone had ever suspected.

In the middle of the table's odd collection of items was the biggest crystal ball Breanna had ever seen. Breanna could see a clouded vision of herself in the fisheye reflection of that huge glass sphere which had not the slightest imperfection. The vision Breanna saw of herself faded out of the crystal ball for a brief moment and she saw a man falling freely in a darkness speckled with flecks of light. It looked more like a reflection than an image within the crystal ball, but it disappeared from view as quickly as it had appeared. At the same instant lightening flashed in what had been a clear sky as thunder struck.

Breanna had seen and used many crystal balls, but there was something extraordinarily different about this one here in the cave. The ornate, carved wooden stand supporting the crystal ball towered over a magnificent marble mortar and pestle. Next to that was a golden scale with one side weighted down by several round, coin-like measuring units. When Breanna saw the other side of the scale contained the sure sign of a wizard - a glimmering, glittering blue powder - her mouth formed a perfect "O" shape as she heard herself say, "Oh, no."

There was no doubt in her mind now that this was, indeed, the cave of a wizard. Not just an ordinary wizard, but probably THE wizard of all wizards. That blue powder of wizards was known to exist, yet very few had ever seen it. This was the powder that only very, very special wizards used for secret rituals and ceremonies. Those who saw the powder never lived long to talk about it much beyond sharing what they had seen before their demise. Breanna was now sure she was doomed (not knowing why), and she feared it would be the end of Logan, too, when he did manage to find her. For the strength of such a wizard could not be matched ... or so she thought. She didn't know what to think, actually. It was just fear that overwhelmed her.

Breanna's fears became all the more intense when she noticed a huge wooden club resting just beyond where she was pegged to the ground. She could see it by lifting her head and looking downward over her body. The wide, striking end of the club was chipped and well worn, obviously from pounding stakes like the ones holding Breanna and, worse, probably soon to be used on the one already partly inside of her.

Watching the shadows from her body ripple back and forth on the wall, Breanna's only hope was Logan finding this remote cave. Bound like this, without any clothes or access to any of her spell books, potions, and elixirs, Breanna was devoid of most of her powers, except her will. And, with her will, she could, indeed, make



certain things happen. She had no doubt the wizard knew that and was sure that for whatever reasons he had captured her, he wanted Breanna to be stripped of any and all advantages she might have over him. It was common knowledge that a sorceress, even though most were no match for a wizard, could inflict severe harm on anyone. And, Brianna was no ordinary sorceress. Everyone knew that.

Ignoring all of her pain, especially from the leather straps digging into her skin around her ankles and wrists and the tormenting stake inside of her, Breanna slowed her breathing to almost nothing. She then concentrated every ounce of her second sight and mental energy to ignite her thoughts into small puffs of light, which started bursting outward from the brightest flames of the fire. Breanna then channeled those eruptions into a brilliant white glistening strand of light in a direct line to the crystal ball where it was intensified and reflected with pinpoint accuracy to the leather strap on her right wrist. Smoke rose upward from the strap as the blinding beam of light quickly sliced through it. Just as the strap snapped apart and before it cut into her skin, Breanna channeled the light strand to the strap on her other wrist, the one furthest from the fire. With her level of concentration starting to waiver, Breanna realized the extended distance was just a bit too far for the light beam to cut through the strap. So, instead, she then focused the light on freeing the straps from both ankles, slightly blistering one foot before the strand of light dimmed and then completely faded out of the crystal ball.

Letting out a big sigh, Breanna realized that she now had to carefully raise the upper part of her body and ever so delicately, work to remove that stake from between her legs. Breanna knew that the mental process of creating such a beam of light was at the fringe of her abilities and in doing so she had not only just about drained her mental powers, she had temporarily eliminated the possibility of conjuring up any other powers - at least in the short term for when she would, no doubt, have to face the wizard.

The dizzying, fuzzy sensation clouding Breanna's mind started to ease up. Knowing it would soon pass, Breanna opened and closed her free hand, stretching her fingers in curling motions to get the feeling back. She puffed out her cheeks and slowly let out another breath, realizing for the first time since all of this had happened that she just might have a chance to escape. She was about to reach over and try to undo the strap from her other wrist so she could completely free herself. Such thoughts quickly vanished when she looked over to see an imposing figure standing just inside the entrance to the cave.

There stood the wizard. She knew this was the same dark figure who got her and had brought her to this cave. One of his eyes was clouded over in bluish white swirls, but despite that there was a distinct, fiendish glint twinkling in it. His other eye, the one he was using to look at Breanna, was black and penetrating, and ringed in a soft orange hue. Breanna had no doubt now this man was the wizard of all wizards. She could just sense it and she didn't move as he inched his way to the fire.



The wizard dropped a large leather pouch and two smaller ones he was carrying and, in a swift motion beyond the ability of most humans, he picked up a long knife whose tip glowed reddish orange. The wizard's intense one-eyed stare was highlighted by a thick, black, arching eyebrow. He locked his sight on Breanna's bright eyes that showed not a trace of fear now, but clearly reflected the glowing tip of the knife.

This man, this wizard then took in the beauty of Breanna's body. Scrapped, scratched, and battered as she was, Breanna knew that one overpowering eye framed by a sweeping eyebrow was caressing every inch of her flesh, most notably where the stake entered her. She fought to not be pulled into his magnetic trance. She hadn't noticed him move, but he suddenly stood over her, casually holding the knife whose tip had turned to a smoking, tarnished black just above her face. Breanna couldn't tell if there was a smile of satisfaction on his lips or a menacing grimace. His eye kept darting back to the stake between her legs.

Breanna boldly spoke first, saying, "Who are you? What do you want? And, why am I here?"

Still hiding his true expression, the wizard pointed to his shadow on the wall and politely replied with, "I am known to most as Shadow." He nodded his head in a noble way and continued with, "It is most impressive that you have partially freed yourself from all of the straps, but one."

Shadow then let the knife drop without warning. Breanna was quick enough to twist her head sideways so the knife only nicked her cheek and then struck stone in a shower of sparks which stung the back of Breanna's neck and her shoulder. A droplet of blood oozed slowly from Breanna's cheek as she winced at the pain from the stake inside of her which, with her sudden movement to avoid the knife, had jammed and ripped more tender tissue inside of her.

Raising both his chin and eyebrows, but still disguising his true expression Shadow said, "Ah, the burden of that stake you so perilously ride. You saved your pretty face, but at the expense of, well, shall we say that other sight of such pleasure." He was obviously pleased by his own wicked wit.

Breanna refused to show any other signs of her discomfort as the pain erupted inside of her between her legs. Another blood bead trickled down Breanna's cheek as she slowly said, "I say again, what do you want of me and why must you do this?"

Again Shadow moved blindingly fast, now to stand just past Breanna's legs which were still outstretched because of the stake. He picked up the wooden club and positioned it near the other end of that stake which held Breanna like a skewer. Then Shadow said, "I have only one purpose and that is to destroy the wizard's seed you carry inside of you. I will fulfill that purpose with one swift swing of this club."

Breanna frowned and was at a loss for words. It wasn't just dying that perplexed her or the way in which it was about to happen. Realizing now that her strange cravings lately had been because of a new life growing inside of her, she now



feared for the baby, too, who was even more defenseless than her. But, how could she be carrying a wizard's baby if she didn't know any wizards? It just didn't seem possible from what she knew of Logan that he could be a wizard. There hadn't ever been the slightest hint of such a possibility and she had known him for so long. But she had been with no other man, so, obviously, Logan had to be a wizard ... one this wizard, for unknown reasons, feared!

Before she could speak, Shadow continued, "You looked in my crystal ball, I trust, and you, indeed, saw yourself. Did you not?"

Breanna nodded her head up and down before realizing such movement caused more stabbing pain from the stake. Shadow paid no attention to her grimace as he said, "I have searched you out for a long time - ever since the crystal ball first showed you to be the one with this wizard's seed. And, now ..."

"Wait," Breanna interrupted. "Perhaps it is true that I will bear a child. But, you have made a mistake. This child did not come from a wizard! How could I possibly have a wizard's baby, if I know not of a single wizard?"

"Ah, but you do know a wizard and you have for the longest time shared his bed, fair one." said Shadow, appearing to be losing his patience.

Stunned by such an amazing revelation that Shadow was most certainly talking about Logan, confirming what she suspected to begin with, Breanna said, "Logan? Logan, a wizard? True, Logan has impressive talents, but there are many in this region who do."

Shadow dropped the wooden club in disgust, letting it strike Breanna's blistered foot, and moved near Breanna's waist. As Breanna bit on her lip to suppress yet more pain, Shadow said, "You nomadic bohemians are pitiful, thinking your tricks are anything even approaching the wonder and true magic of a wizard such as me."

Shadow closed his hand into a fist, turned towards the fire, and then, pointing toward the pit of fire, opened his hand and moved it quickly upwards. Fireballs exploded up from the flames in great booming sounds. Shadow turned back to Breanna, folding his arms in satisfaction at his display of power. Breanna purposely froze her expression and showed not a sign of surprise other than blinking several times as the fireballs kept popping and bursting.

Shadow then continued, "This Logan is not just a wizard, he is 'the wizard' though not many people, including you and probably him, know it. He is a direct descendant of the first wizard, known as Brimstone, from the very beginning of time and creation. This line of wizards can move back and forth in time, they command the balance of things, including the wind and fire, even some measure of death, and they have the ability to use words as weapons. This wizard Logan and his seed inside of you stand in the way of me taking my rightful place as the wizard I am capable of being."

Eyebrows furrowed deeply enough to point towards her nose, Breanna said, "This cannot be. After being with Logan for so long I would know if he was a wizard."



Shadow leaned against Breanna's hip, putting his index finger on the soft mound of flesh rising around where the stake entered her. Breanna noticed the strangest object on Shadow's index finger. If it was a ring, it was the most unique ring she had ever seen. It looked like an oddly shaped piece of shiny, black lava with irregular pockmarks that caught and reflected light in sparkling rays. Watching his every move, Breanna forced herself not to flinch or react at all to the way Shadow was touching her.

Gently moving his cold finger in a circle, Shadow looked at Breanna with that one menacing eye and said, "Oh, your Logan is the wizard and one even more powerful rests deep within you. I know this all to be true. My crystal ball has foretold it."

Shadow again looked at the stake where it entered Breanna. Breanna didn't show her repulsion of his icy stare as she looked first at him and then seductively said, "Is that what you want? You hunger for tingling, quivering passion?"

Breanna smiled coyly because she knew if she could get Shadow to remove the stake - no matter what she might ultimately have to do - she at least would have a fighting chance to break free and combat the wizard (if that was even possible). Breanna knew, too, the slim prospect of her success depended more on luck than anything else, because she just wasn't sure how much of her powers she had left to combat or outsmart this wizard. Either way it would take a miracle.

With his voice laced in anger, but showing no change in his facial expression, Shadow said, "You think I am after the charms and enchantment from someone who is nothing more than what a gypsy is?"

That word "gypsy" infuriated Breanna, but she didn't show it, saying, "And, you think a gypsy could have cut these straps the way I did? Let us talk of what you want or what I can do to bargain my way out of this."

Shadow thumped the stake hard with his fist, watching Breanna flinch in agony. Then Shadow said, "There is nothing to be bargained for here even if you are something other than a gypsy. You most certainly will not escape this stake by offering what it penetrates. It is beyond that where I wish to go - to where the now tiny, but, in time, mighty wizard hides. This stake will destroy that wizard and all of your tantalizing appeal with it."

Shadow moved swiftly again and picked up the wooden club. Breanna, now up on one elbow, pulled herself in a backward crawl away from Shadow as quickly as she could, dragging the wooden stake with her as it tore again inside of her. Breanna knew she wasn't going to get away from the club fast enough, but she had to try, hoping luck, fate, or even Logan might somehow intervene. Shadow pulled the club upward, turning his head to one side for the best look at the stake with his good eye, and started to swing the club downward to destroy the wizard and Breanna in but an instant.



Breanna watched the club coming down. With her elbow now bloodied and hurting like so much of the rest of her body, she just couldn't move any further, no matter how much she desperately wanted to. The club was about to pound the stake with such force that it was sure to hurtle through her like an arrow splitting open a melon. Thoughts of a baby - a wizard - she would never see flashed through Breanna's mind. Without realizing she was doing it, Breanna briefly focused her mind just enough to send out a frantic mental plea for a miracle. Exhausted and resigned to her fate, Breanna squeezed her eyes shut and focused all of the special powers within her on the mallet.

* * *

Somewhere in time and other dimensions, bound together by Thought Streams, other action was taking place that would soon come into play. Breanna had no way to know this. Nor could one individual by the name of Trent Stone, who, though he lived many centuries in the future, was about to play an extremely important role in all of this. The fact that Trent was about to find out he, too, was a wizard, let alone be assisting Logan, well, that was yet one more example of how dimensions and time are all tied together through Thought Streams! One other individual named Mike Row was about to enter this drama, too, to also play just as important a role, only this would affect Logan's brush with death!

Part Two

Without even realizing she was taking what amounted to her last breath, Breanna caught the scent of Logan. This was just as she channeled her powers to pulverize the mallet into dust before it could strike the stake that was meant to destroy her. Opening her eyes Breanna saw Logan standing at the cave's entrance, confidently nodding his chin ever so slightly while he glared in Shadow's direction.

Logan, too, was concentrating on the mallet and the stake, to reduce them both to powder. At the instant Shadow's wooden club came in contact with the stake inside of Breanna, both the club and stake dissolved into dust. Shadow almost fell down, but quickly righted himself. He knew that only together the other two could have pulled off such a feat of trickery. Looking down at his hands, Shadow opened and closed his fingers as hot, wooden dust slipped through them. Shadow, seething with rage, spun around to face Logan, knowing Breanna was still tethered by the one leather strap so she couldn't get to him. Logan put his hands on his hips and stood definitely ready. Breanna let out a long sigh of relief and closed her eyes.

Breanna felt a rush of adrenaline as she watched the two figures now staring each other down from opposite sides of the cave. She pulled the rope up from around her neck and then over her head. Logan looked rather common, like a peasant wearing an ordinary hooded cape that came down to about his knees. There wasn't one feature about Logan befitting a wizard, and Breanna felt that in looking at the two of them together, Shadow most certainly appeared to be the more overpowering of



the two. This was even more accentuated by the shadows of the two men cast on the cave wall. Shadow's silhouetted profile loomed upward, curving over them toward the fire, dwarfing what presence of a shadow Logan did project. But that was just an illusion created by where each of them was standing.

There was no denying, however, how Logan simultaneously with Breanna had pulverized the heavy wooden club and stake with a simple nod of his head. It was obvious to Breanna that the effort required on Logan's part to do that was much less than what it took out of her. While it seemed most unlike Logan, Breanna was grateful to see this new side of him.

Logan didn't move at all, standing his ground as if he was frozen where he stood, and he continued his stare down with Shadow. Logan's caring brown eyes were so penetrating and overpowering Shadow was spooked into breaking the silence.

"Ah. Quite the wizard, are you not? I am sure you have impressed this bohemian mistress here who had not the slightest notion you are a wizard in disguise." Shadow was now moving toward the leather pouch he had dropped earlier when he entered the cave. His eyes constantly darting to the pouch let Logan know there was something of importance (and dangerous) in that pouch.

Still motionless, but watching Shadow's every move, Logan said, "Better to be a wizard unknown to most than to be a wizard impostor." Logan was ready for the hostile reaction he was sure would come from such a statement.

Shadow seemed to rise upward without leaving the ground as he thrust his open palms towards the fire and then raised his arms up over his head. More of the same fireballs Breanna had seen before popped and exploded out of the fire causing deafening echoes in the outer reaches of the cave. Smoke billowed upward into the darkness and lost sounds above the cave. Shadow folded his arms in obvious satisfaction, saying, "Would an impostor have such control over fire itself?"

Logan smiled for the first time, showing the warmth of those brown eyes Breanna so loved. But his smile quickly turned to a sneer when Logan carefully enunciated each word he spoke for greater emphasis, "That is not wizardry, but, instead, a trick of illusion and false magic. Anyone can toss drops of water on flames and get much the same medieval circus effect."

Before Logan could say another word, Shadow lunged for his leather pouch but Logan, in another move that surprised Breanna and even Shadow, moved so fast he could not be seen as he first snatched up the pouch and then came to a stop next to Breanna who now stood after freeing herself from the final strap. Breanna and Shadow had only heard the sound of rushing air as Logan stood in one spot and then instantly appeared in another. Logan opened the pouch and pulled out a small device made of copper that had become tarnished green with time and age. A noticeably alarmed Shadow turned to face Logan directly.

Dropping the rope she still held, Breanna looked closely at what Logan held in his hand. The device was adorned with many of the same strange symbols she had



seen in the cave and on the weapons. A moon, sun, stars, and planets were also most notably engraved on it. Logan quickly flipped up a gold piece on the device that then made it almost look like a tiny sundial. It was obvious Logan knew exactly what he was doing as he next pulled and positioned other tiny, moveable pieces made of silver to enclose the device in an elaborate, mechanical orb. There was no doubt Logan not only knew what this device was, but also how to use it.

Shadow was taken aback by these unexpected moves on Logan's part, especially the way Logan appeared to be readying the orb for activation. As Shadow gathered his thoughts, Logan realized he had a temporary edge over Shadow. This gave him the extra confidence he was sure would allow him to overpower Shadow. However, Logan knew Shadow wasn't quite ready to give up.

With what seemed to be a conciliatory tone in his voice, Shadow said, "I see you know how to work the time compass that controls Thought Streams."

Logan spit out his reply, "You took this from my father long ago. You have no right to it, especially since you are not even close to being a true wizard."

Nodding his head, Shadow said, "Ah, but he who has the wizard's tools is close enough to being the wizard and commanding all of the wizard's power and Universe."

Just as Logan was about to speak, Shadow continued with, "And, while you possess but one of those wizard's tools, I have the most important one of all." Shadow held up his index finger so Logan could clearly see the black chunk of a ring sparkling and shimmering in the firelight.

Stunned, Logan uttered, "The Ring of Creation and Regeneration!" Logan knew that ring contained all of the forces of the Universe and that even in the hands of an impostor the Ring could be used to wield devastating powers.

Breanna, now leaning back against the cave wall, looked back and forth between Logan and Shadow, not sure what to think of all of this. There was no doubt that if Logan had had the upper hand in this matter, the look of distress on his face now gave the advantage to Shadow.

Shadow smiled and said, "I am pleased you were so quick to rush to your lady's side, because now I can incinerate the two of you where you stand."

Shadow squinted his eyes almost shut, arched his wrist slightly, and pointed his index finger at a downward angle toward Logan and Breanna, unleashing the ring's force in a bright, shimmering blue bolt of sheer destructive power.

At the same instant, because he had anticipated Shadow's predictable action, Logan held up his hand as he threw a single word at Shadow with the force of a weapon, "LINGER!"

The moment and all motion were frozen in time. Only Logan could now move about freely. Shadow, Breanna, and even the flames in the fire didn't move. Most important of all, the blue bolt shooting out of the ring and heading right for Logan and Breanna was frozen in midair about half way between them and Shadow.



Logan studied the time compass settings and then when he saw that the specific frame in time he wanted had already been somehow locked in place, he turned a knob at the very top of the time compass orb and disappeared.

Part Three

Fingers furiously pounding away on the computer keyboard entering another flurry of commands, Mike Row was again running his simulation program to test it yet one more time. Again, he ran it without any walls of scenery so he would be "riding" in a see-through sphere surrounded only by the grid lines and flashing banks of numbers. None of this would impede his vision, because he set the grid and all numbers to be displayed in soft, pastel colors. No one knew of his experimenting like this and what he was doing would change everything in the realm of technology and computing.

What Mike had managed to do was create a three-dimensional world all around him, using his computer. There was no need for a monitor either, because his programming used static electricity to create a reality that wrapped itself all around the user. This would have major implications for gaming and even movies, because now instead of just watching a movie, you would be IN the movie. This was programming wizardry that no one else had ever even considered or tried to develop it. Now Mike was mastering and harnessing it. He did know he was tapping into intra-dimensional realities and ecospheres. Mike just thought it was cool, but he had no clue just how powerful his programming efforts were or even what they would lead to. One thing he was sure of and that was that he was going to make "tons of money" once he perfected this way-ahead-of-its-time computer coding and programming.

One thing Mike didn't know or quite understand was that he had also tapped into the fluid energy of Thought Streams which are all around us. Thought Streams are how information is channeled back and forth between individuals who know how to control them. All information, data, and thoughts are what make up Thought Streams.

Mike wanted to see if he could return to where he had seen those shadowy beings from the last time he traveled through time and dimensions. This time, the way he had configured and retrofitted his program, he would be able to literally take digitized snapshots of anything which he felt might help him figure out what was going on. Mike had also rigged up one of his old joy sticks for controlling movement. He quickly found out the joy stick made movement almost effortless, definitely working much better than moving about by tapping on the arrow keys or moving a mouse.

It didn't take long for Mike's apartment to once again disappear and the ink black void filled with bits and pieces of lights to reappear in the sphere surrounding Mike. This time for some reason the ride was a lot more bumpy and jerky. There seemed to be even more lights and the swishing sounds of air seemed to be much louder. Mike looked back to see the vapor trail behind the sphere and, sure enough, it was there, only now it had increased several times in size.



All of a sudden the sphere was bouncing back and forth off of the interlacing support structure beams of the Thought Streams where Mike had seen a person tumbling through the last time he ventured into this realm. Mike's sphere glanced off of beam after beam of Thought Streams, much like a pin ball, turning Mike upside down as well as spinning him around in circles. Luckily, he didn't experience any vertigo. The banging noise and crashing sounds were incredibly loud, but the sphere showed no ill effects from any of the repeated battering. There wasn't even a nick or crack in the thin outer shell of a computer generated sphere's surface.

Mike noticed illuminated hand holds and railings trailing off as far as he could see, but he had no idea what they would be used for. For that matter, he had no idea what purpose anything served wherever he now was. As quickly as the bouncing and spinning had started, it stopped. Actually, it was the sphere that stopped moving and Mike had no idea how to start it moving again. This was because there was no propulsion system built into his program and pressing the "+" key or moving the joystick didn't produce any thrust. Mike considered the option of trying to program in that feature of this software program in subsequent testing.

While Mike thought about ways to propel the sphere in and through this strange Thought Stream realm he now occupied, he just happened to be looking up when a man wearing a hooded cape started materializing from out of nowhere along a row of hand holds above the sphere. What intrigued Mike was that the person he was watching come into view as a multitude of sparkling pieces came together to form the man.

As the man came into full view, Mike watched him swing along from hand hold to hand hold in much the same way children hang and sway their way along on monkey bars. Then the man noticed Mike's sphere with Mike peering up at him. The man let go of the hand holds and dropped in a controlled, slow-motion glide down to the sphere landing with the softest touch on the top of the sphere. Mike initially reacted by moving downward and away from where he thought the man would fall through.

The man, now down on one knee with both hands resting flat on the sphere, almost touched his nose on the outer edge of the sphere as he looked in at Mike. Frowning and with his mouth slightly open, Mike looked up sideways at the man. This moment reminded Mike of visiting an aquarium when a fish just happens to be looking back out of the tank, making direct eye contact with someone.

"Who ... are ... you? What ... are ... you ... doing ... in ... here?" the man asked through the sphere, looking at Mike and then the keyboard and the joystick.

"In here?" thought Mike. Mike now knew he had gone beyond computer simulations and had somehow really tapped into an alternate universe or most likely another dimension. Heck, maybe even somewhere far off in the outer reaches of time. Mike initiated the snap shot sequence of the program to be sure he captured all of this. "This is too weird," he thought to himself as he looked directly into the man's brown eyes and loudly asked "Who the hell are you?"



The man didn't respond. With a worried look on his face, as if he had just remembered he was late for an appointment, the man stood up and took out of his pocket what looked like an ornate, antique gyroscope. Mike just watched as the man began swiftly moving little silver pieces on the outer edges of the device into different positions. The man tapped twice on the side of the device and then studied it as if he was taking readings from it. Looking back down at Mike the man nodded courteously and carefully put the device in his pocket.

The man eyed numerous handholds and railings near the sphere. Before Mike could say anything else, the man leaped up to grab hold of a railing several yards away. Pulling himself along by moving one hand over the other, the man quickly faded from view in much the same way he had appeared.

Mike moved his head from side to side, trying to see better or at least catch a glimpse of the man who had vanished in a way that was not humanly possible. Mike looked and looked all around him, but the man was definitely gone. Mike hit the key on the keyboard to stop the snap shot sequence of his program. "At least I captured it all in digital form," said Mike, proud of himself that he had thought of the idea of recording what happened.

Feeling he had had enough for now, Mike said to himself, "This is just too unbelievable! No one is ever going to believe any of this ... wherever this place is that I've managed to stumble into." Mike hit the Escape key to end the program.

* * * *

Logan knew it would be taking a big chance and that such an attempt was more than a long shot at best, but he had to risk it because of the urgency of the matter at hand. He now only had minutes before the cessation of the "Linger" time freeze he had set in place in the cave. If time were to set itself in motion before he returned to the cave the result would be a horrible death for Breanna.

As for Logan, he would not only have set off an imbalance in the nature of time, he would be smothered in the absence of time. Such of imbalance could either be minor and not even noticed or it could be significant enough to end all life on earth. Knowing this is what caused Logan to make the risky, and possibly deadly, decision to travel as fast as possible through time and dimensions using a shortcut known to all wizards simply as "blurring" through time using Thought Streams.

Because of the task before Logan, he knew that normal time travel would have been too slow, especially considering the distance he needed to travel spanned several centuries into the future. Traveling through time was normally fast enough for most wizards, but these circumstances were unusual. The shortcut technique of "blurring" through time meant that Logan would blaze across the depths of time by moving through Thought Streams that linked together other dimensions and even death itself. This was the fastest way to transverse time. Being experienced in time travel, Logan had cut through other dimensions on previous occasions. However, this would be only the second time he worked his way through the outer fringes of death.



While dimensional, Thought Stream travel was much more complex than stepping in and out of time, it still wasn't too hard to figure out your way so long as you paid close attention to what was and wasn't happening. Death, on the other hand, was a completely different story because the nature of death has always been veiled in a numbing deception. Unlike moving through the currents of time where there were plenty of hand holds, railings, and easily found paths, dimensional movement through death was a very tricky business because many times things were presented backwards, upside down, even inside out, or not at all. Death was the worst place to travel because of the blinding white lack of sensory input or sensations of any sort, other than what the traveling or traveler generated. In either case, the benefits of traveling through other dimensions and death resulted in movement through time at extraordinary speed. The tough part was that this all had to be done without the aid of any directional markers or navigation beacons.

And, while the free flowing specs of light within the bounds of time made it easy to find one's way (coming and going), dimensional travel was difficult and confusing, mostly because what you saw most often wasn't what you thought you were seeing. The interlocking framework structures and beams of time clearly functioned as locational signposts, provided you had a Wizard's time compass and knew how to compute the corresponding coordinates. Dimensions looked much like time, but things never worked quite the same in dimensions and they were constantly changing, so there was always some experimentation and plenty of trial and error involved. There were even illusions of illusions in different dimensions, some of which were only empty space appearing to be empty space. Some dimensions were fairly easy to traverse, but no wizard had ever conquered certain ones.

All of this was on Logan's mind as he stood at one of the familiar edges of time, which he often used for juncturing off into other dimensions and time frames. Logan paused for a moment, thinking again about the man inside of the strange bubble whom he had seen moments ago moving through time. The man obviously was not a wizard, so Logan wondered how he and that bubble could have ever found their way into the flow of time and Thought Streams. Even though Logan knew the routes of time well, he was never surprised at such new discoveries and he knew, sooner or later, he would find out more about this man and his bubble in what seemed to be an attempt to circumnavigate time.

What boggled Logan's mind in all of this was that the first wizard had somehow managed to plan out all of the details to accomplish what he was now doing. Things like the limitless, overlapping dimensions - many of which butted up against time and daily life where most people could easily walk into any one of those dimensions they chose if they only knew such dimensions were quite accessible by simply getting lost far enough in daydreams and then hopping on Thought Streams which are readily available to anyone. Logan figured that somehow explained how he had seen that person with a confused look on his face in that strange spherical orb.

Logan took one last look around him on the vista in time where he stood looking out over millenniums, utopias, and lost civilizations. He loved the power of



being a wizard and knew that the true power of being a wizard was in NOT using his powers. At times like this, he savored being able to exercise some of his powers, though what he was doing hardly scratched the surface of what he was capable of doing. As far as Logan knew, only one wizard had ever really "let loose" with his powers and that was at the time of creation.

Logan vaulted from the height of the vista further up to grab hold of more of time's familiar handholds. Seeing the first dimension he wanted, Logan then let go of the handholds and smoothly moved out of time into the first of four dimensions he would need to cross. Before he could even look behind him to watch time disappear from view, Logan noticed that what he saw directly ahead of him appeared to be where he had just come from in time. Looking up he saw the same thing. Looking down was the same view, too.

Logan started running and when he was charging ahead at full speed he leaped into what looked like the free flowing movement of time. As he expected, Logan crashed into a well-displayed illusion that shattered like a mirror and exploded with all of the other illusions simultaneously all around him. Logan closed his eyes momentarily and when he opened them he wasn't surprised to see where he really was - it was one of infinity's many dimensions and he had been here before. Only this time, he was hanging at the very top of infinity, holding on by digging in his fingers to mathematical linings holding the fabric of infinity together. Knowing he shouldn't look down, Logan did anyway to see forever out beyond his dangling feet.

"Better not drop anything here," Logan said to himself as he worked and clawed his way along to where he had memorized the next dimension to be. There was no way now to look at the time compass so Logan had to be sure of himself, because he didn't want to stumble upon a dimension different from the one he was expecting next, even though things might appear that way.

Moving along for what seemed like a long time, although he had no sense of time here in infinity, Logan looked up to see the overlapping opening for the next dimension he wanted. His fingers ached from supporting the weight of his entire body in infinity. Swinging his feet upward, Logan slipped up and through the opening into the next dimension.

This second dimension didn't look like Logan had expected. He hadn't ever been here before, but still he had heard about the dimension of lines and points. Everywhere he looked Logan saw far extended lines of every color imaginable, crisscrossing each other, bending, moving, shifting, and twisting amid a black backdrop of Thought Streams. The points were nothing more than dots, millions of various sized dots, all white. With a background color of black in this dimension, the effect was overload on the eyes and Logan was already squinting. He looked at his time compass just to be sure he was on track.

"This all seems to look good," said Logan, satisfied he was exactly where he needed to be. He knew, however, that the time compass readings often were skewed



and warped (just like a compass at the North Pole) which he took into account, making the proper adjustments to the bendable silver stems on the time compass.

Grabbing hold of one of the bigger lines, Logan wrapped his arms around it and slid along it to the end of the line, at which juxtaposition Logan was right where he needed to be. Seeing the very large opening for the next dimension, Logan casually walked through it to the dimension of deception, thinking things were all going too smoothly so far.

This third dimension was going to be the toughest one to pass through, other than death. Everything here would be laced with fraud and deceit, all among field after field of brightly colored flowers. This dimension would surely be a true test of Logan's wizardry skills and perception.

The first thing Logan did was rub his hands together until they generated a glowing warmth. This was part of a wizard's talent reserved for times such as this when nothing was as it appeared to be. Holding his hands out in front of him, the radiance from his palms had the same effect as a torch on the flowers, only these weren't flowers. What had appeared to be flowers were really the sum and substance of this dimension. Thus Logan was able to cut a clean path right to the edge of the dimension where the tiny entrance to the fourth and final dimension in this journey awaited. When Logan got to the dimensional opening, he got down on his stomach and squirmed his way through. Before he could get completely through, Logan felt what appeared to be claws, digging, and cutting into his ankles.

Instead of panicking, Logan made his feet appear to be smaller than the tiniest moment in time. His strategy of deceiving deception with deception worked. The painful sensation instantly ceased and Logan quickly pulled himself through the rest of the dimensional opening and all not a moment too soon because the opening compressed itself into the appearance of disappearing! While it seemed like the opening no longer existed, Logan knew if he had to, he could find it. However, Logan wasn't about to start fooling around here by checking to see whether or not the opening still existed. He had made it through and now he only had one more dimension to go.

When Logan finally stood up and looked around he was immediately concerned. This fourth dimension was supposed to be hollow, but instead it was now a void with no meaning. Before doing anything else Logan checked his time compass once again. The fact that he got no measurable readings confirmed he was definitely in a void. Logan, like all wizards, preferred to move through hollow dimensions because they were still fairly easy to find your way around in, provided you knew what irregularities to look for (and to avoid). Voids were a whole other story and not a pleasant one at all.

Logan was sure he had taken the right path to this dimension so he assumed the hollowness apparently had recently fallen outward to produce this fresh void. The problem now would be to find his way out without anything to go by. Logan sat down so he could rest his chin on his knee. He had heard stories about how wizards had



conquered voids, but since he hadn't planned for this, he was truly at a loss for what to do next; and he knew time was running out.

While he was thinking, Logan noticed wavy lines scattered throughout the void that meant it was still forming. That was exactly what he had been looking for. Now all he needed to do was wait for the irregularity he knew would come. As Logan watched the constantly shifting lines he saw a spot where nothing was happening. That was the opening he was looking for to find his way out.

"Thank you, Lady Luck!" said Logan as he shot to his feet and bolted for the opening.

Straight ahead beyond this void was death and Logan could smell it. He had no doubt about the perils and pitfalls that lie ahead in death. Before he entered death in this final part of the shortcut to get to his destination in time Logan wanted to make some adjustments to the site bearings on his time compass. This would allow him to gauge both direction and duration for his travels through death. Then, all he would need to do was tip toe his way in a straight line for a brief period of time and he would make it across death without any consequences (or even being noticed). What made this task so treacherous was that there would be the absence of all sensory sensations in the eerie, white stillness of death. That, combined with all the elements of time and dimension missing, added up to a situation where even a wizard needed to rely on gut instincts (even though it was much more than that, considering he was a wizard's wizard).

Logan boldly moved right to the edge of death's opening, showing no fear as the fuzzy perimeter of this void kept rapidly changing. The readings on the time compass were fluctuating wildly and he hadn't expected that to happen. Reaching out in front of him and touching what felt like a mirror, Logan saw this was only a reflection of the entrance to death. The real opening to the shortcut through death's dimension was right behind Logan and he didn't realize it until it was too late. Logan wasn't even aware he was drifting backwards, almost floating, right into death. The opening to Death swallowed up Logan in a heartbeat before he even knew what had happened.

Logan reacted quickly enough and managed to grab hold of the opening's edge, hoping he could straddle both dimensions while he frantically tried to position things right on the time compass with one hand. In trying to do all of this, the time compass slipped out of Logan's hand. As he reached down to catch the time compass, Logan let go of the opening and felt death's outer zone of blinding, infinite whiteness engulf him. Luckily, Logan snatched up the time compass, breathing a sigh of relief. Logan knew he was completely in death's grip now and that getting out was going to be even more difficult. As long as he treaded ever so cautiously here on the disproportionate matrix of death, Logan figured there was, at most, the slightest of possibilities he could cut across back to time.

Not sure what to do next, Logan figured that if he had backed into death his best bet was to keep moving in the same direction, continuing to back up as he



moved. This was easier said than done, because without anything from which to gauge his movement, Logan couldn't be sure if he was still moving backwards, even though his body movements seemed to indicate that. After moving awkwardly for what seemed like the proper amount of time, Logan looked over his shoulder and spotted two openings out of death.

Suspicious, Logan said, "Could this be it? Or, did I err?"

Logan now turned to face both openings. He knew he hadn't needed to go very far in his shortcut through death, and, even though he roughly figured he had gone the right distance, Logan knew whatever you might be able to see in death almost always depended on how your mind chose to interpret or not interpret what seemed to be right there in front of you. Being a true wizard, Logan knew of death's traits to mislead and seduce people. Death has always been known to not easily let people out of its embrace, so Logan knew he was standing on "thin ice" so to speak and that it was about to start cracking open underneath where he stood. He needed to make yet one more decision and quick.

Directly ahead of Logan, standing out rather prominently in all of the overexposed whiteness of death, were the two large openings, identical in size, but mirror images of each other. Each opening appeared to be the time corridor of Thought Streams Logan was looking to slip back into. This was no time for guesses, but Logan had no choice. Just as he was about to step into the opening on the right, Logan dived through the one on the left. He guessed correctly, too (but he knew it was more instinct than guess work). The opening on the right burst into raging flames as Logan fell through the left opening, tumbling through time until he righted himself and continued on with genuine ease, feeling quite good about having beat the odds with death yet again.

Now Logan could only hope that he still had enough time to finish what he had set out to do. Logan had dropped invisible travel markers along the way, like breadcrumbs, so he could then use them to create a time twist to speed up his return trip to Brianna and the cave. This would allow him to instantly get back to the cave without having to tediously retrace his steps. Instead, when Logan was ready to return to the cave, all he would need to do is walk his way through a vertical Thought Stream shaft in what was known as a twist in time, bypassing most distractions in the other dimensions and death. In a snap Logan would be able to get back to Breanna's side. None of that would matter, however, unless he was successful in what he had yet to accomplish.

Looking at his time compass, Logan could tell he was almost to the frame in time he wanted. Balancing on another edge of time Logan's mind flashed back to that person in the protective bubble. Would he see the man and the bubble again on the return trip through time? As Logan thought about that he looked out over time and the exact spot he was looking for. With precise control of his body for maximum flight within time, Logan hurled himself through the outer stratosphere of time and glided himself in controlled free-fall to what he expected would be a precise landing in Trent



Stone's bedroom, next to the dresser. Logan's brief encounter within death had taken more of a toll on his perception than he was aware of and that threw off his time frame landing abilities ever so slightly.

Having misjudged his landing, as his feet touched the carpet, Logan lost his balance, falling against the dresser making enough noise to wake up Trent.

It was an automatic response for Logan to say, "Damn!" as he fell to the floor. Trent sat up in bed and turned on the light.

Sitting up straight in bed after seeing Logan as an intruder, Trent then stood up right on his pillow in a panic, saying, "Who? Who are you? What do you want?" Even though it wasn't true, Trent weakly added, "I have a gun, you know."

Logan was dazed from striking his head on the floor, but as he regained his composure he calmly said, "I will not harm you. There is no time to spare and I am not sure it would be possible for you to understand what is happening, at least not at this point." Logan spotted what he had come for and moved towards the dresser to pick up an antique hand mirror Trent's mother had given to him.

Trent immediately sensed what he thought was going on and said, "Is that what this is? You broke in here to rob me?"

Logan grabbed the mirror and tucked it in his waist band under his cape. By now Trent was studying Logan and how he was dressed. Trent sensed the odd nature of all of this especially the fact the intruder carried no gun or knife. Also, Trent started wondering how this guy got into his bedroom!

Reading Trent's thoughts, Logan responded with, "I have no weapon and neither do you. I need this mirror back where I come from. We dress much differently in that time."

Trent was at a loss as to whether he should be afraid or interested to find out more. "Listen," said Trent, "that mirror has been in my family for generations and, I'm told, even several centuries, so ..."

Logan interrupted him with, "I know. And, now it must be moved back in time and return to complete the circle so it can come back to you in this time. So, in effect, it will be here when I come to get it, as I have now done." Logan held up the time compass and studied it as he walked towards Trent.

Not understanding anything at all of what Logan had said, Trent pressed himself against his bed's headboard and the bedroom wall, wondering what would happen next. Trying to appear brave, Trent said, "Look, I do have a gun and I won't hesitate to use it, once I get a hold of it. If that mirror is all you want, take it. There's money there on the dresser, in my wallet. Take that, too."

"I mean you no harm," said Logan. He continued examining the time compass and saw that he needed to leave.



Taking two gold coins from his pocket and tossing them on Trent's bed, Logan said, "I give you these in return for the mirror. You will soon be able to put them to good use as they have now been moved in time for your purposes. Remember this, too." Logan held up the time compass, almost touching Trent's nose with it and then Logan carefully tucked the time compass into his pocket.

"Wait!" said Trent. He continued with, "What's going on here? And, just who are you?"

Logan took a deep breath and after he puffed it out, he said, "I am Logan. I know this will be hard for you to understand, but the stallion, Reason, you already know quite well is and always has been part of your consciousness. It all comes with the powers steadily growing inside of you." Trent started to speak, to ask more questions, but Logan held up his hand, saying, "These powers, as well as the white horse of Reason, have always been within you. You just were not aware of them until now. This is the case with all wizards of your stature. The time is almost at hand when you will be called upon to serve your destiny and fulfill your rightful purpose. Rest assured that you will know what to do when the time comes, just as I now know what I need to do with this mirror."

With a very anxious look on his face and still trying to make sense out of what Logan was saying, Trent was about to say something, although he wasn't sure what. Logan turned from Trent and after making circular motions with his outstretched arms, reached out directly in front of him at what appeared to be nothing. Trent's mouth dropped open when Logan reached further out, putting both hands together, palms facing out, and then like he was opening drapes, Logan pulled apart the very existence of Trent's bedroom to reveal a Thought Stream opening.

Looking back at Trent, Logan said, "This will all soon make sense. I wish I had time to explain. Alexander will, however." Logan then leaped through the opening that was already starting to close as bits of sparkling dust fizzled all around the entire opening as it closed. Trent dove to the bottom edge of his bed for a better look as the opening sealed itself leaving nothing but a quickly fading thin vertical red line with minor twinkling and sparkling bits of light and dust. Trent blinked and the bedroom was back to normal. He reached over and picked up the two gold coins which he suddenly realized were worth much, much more than the mirror, at least in terms of dollar value.

Eyebrows raised, Trent clutched the coins and mumbled, "What just happened here? The mirror my mother gave me and told me never to lose is gone. Alexander? Who the hell is Alexander? And, these coins. I can't handle this. No more going to bed with an Anne Rice novel! My imagination is outta control here, folks. God! Who the hell am I talking to?" He looked down at the well-worn coins in his hand. It looked like the first two of four numbers on one of the coin's date was a one and a four. Considering for a moment that meant this man called Logan was from a year somewhere in the 1400s, Trent shook his head and raised his eyes in disbelief saying, "Yea, right!"



But how else could all of this be explained? And, Logan knew all about Reason, too, thought Trent. When Trent finally calmed himself, he didn't know what to do. How could Trent logically explain to anyone that a man dressed in medieval costume opened another world or realm out of thin air? The exact same place Trent had dreamed about (or, did he really experience it?). And, how could this guy from another world or time just leap into an opening to who knows where with the opening neatly sealing up behind him - all without the slightest trace? And, the coins?

This was all just too much to absorb. Could it all have been a series of dream after dream after dream? Clutching the coins one more time, Trent knew this was only the beginning of something. Just what? He had no idea. And, why was Trent the one destiny had picked for a horse named Reason to constantly rampage through his thoughts, mind, and possibly even his immediate reality? As Trent drifted off to sleep yet one more time, the last word to slip out of his mind was, "Alexander."

Part Four

Logan walked briskly at first, then he broke into a full out run in the vertical shaft of the time twist on his return to the cave and Breanna. The shaft was a perfect cylindrical shape reaching a height of about 15 feet and appearing to be lit indirectly by soft yellow light that increased in intensity with each passing second. The light in the time twist emanated from friction sparked by the disintegration of compressed time segments which had strayed out of their normal order of seconds, minutes, and hours - all of which Logan knew he had caused by both freezing time and traveling within it. With the time twist's light now getting brighter, Logan knew that could only mean the balance of time was in jeopardy and also that he was almost out of time. Logan also knew that the size of the shaft would soon begin shrinking as the light intensified. That was why he was running faster than he had ever run before.

Logan's speed and his actually seeing Breanna in the cave straight ahead at the far end of the time twist shaft numbed his sense of smell just enough so Logan didn't catch the scent of death until he tripped over an invisible filament from Death's dimension which had probably overlapped into the shaft of the time twist as the barriers between the two were now beginning to fragment.

As Logan fell forward, sliding on his chest and scraping skin from his chin on the rough surface of the steadily growing smaller time twist shaft, he saw he was headed straight for a rapidly enlarging tear which led directly into death's domain. There wasn't any room for margin of error here. There was no way Logan could possibly stop his momentum towards death and he feared if he did start to fall through the opening, he might not be able to somehow catch on to the edge to stop himself so he could then climb back out.

Inches from the now wide open tear leading to death, Logan knew he didn't stand a chance. Right where he would have started falling downward Logan smashed face first into the bubble with that same strange man, Mike Row, in it again. Like before, the bubble had popped into view virtually from out of nowhere that Logan could imagine. The bubble was big enough to block most of the opening to death,



which allowed Logan to instinctively back away from the bubble which appeared to be hovering over death's opening. Logan was bleeding from his chin and also from a cut over his right eye where he had banged into the bubble.

Mike Row looked all around at the time twist's shrinking shaft and then at Logan, saying, "You again? What the hell is going on here? Where are we?"

Holding his fingers over the gash above his eye to stop the bleeding so he could see better, Logan managed to stagger to his feet and say, "Thank you. Thank you. I am indebted to you."

Mike's mouth dropped open as he sat there speechless watching this man who was bleeding profusely from the chin and above his eye, thanking Mike for "popping up" and doing damage to his face.

Logan held up his free hand before Mike could say anything else and said, "Do not move your bubble. I must go. But I must also tell you that you have saved time and infinity. And, if I was you, I would get to another location as quickly as possible so you are not swallowed up by death!"

Before Mike could say anything, Logan carefully inched his way around Mike's sphere, literally squeezing himself through the small opening near the time shaft's shrinking, curving wall and the sphere. Logan managed to squeeze through, thus avoiding death's dimension completely. However, after Logan got to the other side of the bubble, he noticed that the weight of the bubble now forced the opening to death even wider, and that the man and his bubble were slowly sinking down into death.

Mike knew something was dreadfully wrong by the look on Logan's face, so before Logan could say anything Mike made the smartest move of his life by pressing the Escape key on his keyboard. Mike's sphere instantly disappeared at the same time Logan was already limping as fast as he could back toward the cave. He didn't have far to go now, but the time twist shaft continued to shrink in size. Logan had to hold his head down so as to not bump the time twist shaft. The light was a blinding glare. Logan didn't bother to wipe away any blood as he forced himself to keep moving despite the dreadful pain and blurred vision. He reached under his waist band and grabbed hold of Trent's mirror.

Logan dived out from the time twist shaft into the cave, just as the shaft imploded in a bright, melting burst of crimson light. In one swift motion, Logan smashed onto the rock of the cave's floor and rolled over on his shoulder right to a standing position in front of Breanna - in almost the exact spot where he had stood before he had left. The bright blue bolt coming from the wizard's ring on Shadow's finger was now in full motion again, as was all of time in the cave.

With split-second timing, Logan held up the mirror to reflect the deadly blue bolt. The impact of the ricocheting blue bolt on the mirror slapped Logan and Brianna back against the cave wall, knocking him out. At the same time, the blue bolt shot back to hit Shadow dead center, vaporizing him in a popping flash of ultraviolet light. Breanna thought her eyes were going to pop out of her head as she looked first at the



ashes and dust where Shadow had just stood and then at Logan laying lifelessly near her. She looked back to Shadow's ashes and saw the wizard's ring sparkling in the glow of the fire.

Breanna reached down and took the beautiful mirror from Logan's hand, wondering how it had appeared out of nowhere. Logan stirred, shaking his head as Breanna knelt down beside him.

Looking into Breanna's bright blue eyes, Logan said, "The ring?"

Pointing to Shadow's pile of ashes, Breanna said, "There."

"I must get it," said Logan, as he attempted to get up. Then his eyes closed and he passed out once again, exhausted physically and mentally from pushing the limits of wizardry and having beat the odds once again as he always seemed to do. Then Breanna, worn out from her ordeal, too, lay down by Logan and rested her head on his chest. Comforted by the strong beat of Logan's heart, Breanna closed her eyes to a dreamless slumber. Bruised and battered, the two of them slept and recovered by the warmth of the fire.

Over time the cuts and scratches healed, with only minor scars leaving their mark, as so many things in life do. While their wounds healed and they regained their strength, Logan told Breanna what he had not revealed to her about his history and wizardry, as well as the future and an individual named Trent Stone who would ultimately be one of the most powerful wizards who ever lived. What Logan emphasized was that a true wizard's main charge was in not using his powers and, more importantly, seeing that no one else subjugated wizardry for corrupt means. That was what the on-going battle with Shadow had been all about.

Counting the episode with Shadow, Logan had only engaged in wizardry a limited number of times. And, he was almost certain he probably wouldn't ever use wizardry again after this, unless it was absolutely necessary. That prompted Breanna to ask, "How does a wizard know what to do? How will a person even know he is a wizard?"

Logan went on to explain that when the time comes, if a wizard is called upon he will know what to do. There had been far more wizards during the course of time who never once exercised their powers or had even known about them. To lead the way for a wizard there is a War Horse known by the name of Reason who is impressed on the very consciousness of those who would be true wizards. Reason and the ready to use skills and abilities of a wizard are all deep within each wizard, passed on from father to son, of course.

"From the time of creation," said Logan, "Wizards have existed, though it is rare for a real wizard to use his powers. What most people think they know of wizards is really that of impostors like Shadow. And, most of them have no powers at all, using illusions and false magic to dupe people, especially kings and barristers."

"Wizards were present when all of the earth was created?" asked Breanna.



Shaking his head from side to side, Logan said, "No." Then pointing out to the stars, he continued with, "When EVERYTHING was created! And, there is only one acting wizard at any given time."

Logan carefully and in great detail then told Breanna how the very first wizard, known as Brimstone, had been there from creation's inception when a sheer force of free flowing energy of the Universe, in an instant, was transformed into light, motion, thought, and time, from which all else emanated. Prior to that, Brimstone had existed on a different plane as an apprentice, but with creation came his elevation to wizard. From that point on, he and all of the wizards to follow, including Logan, were charged with keeping a natural balance and harmony for all that exists.

The flame and fire of creation has always dwelled in the fire pit of the very cave where Shadow had tried to embrace and strain the powers of wizardry. The power of that fire is what all of creation and the Universe was spun from. And, part of the wizard's charge is to keep the fire quelled, because it is from this fire that the power of wizardry grows, for good or evil.

That there would always be two basic forces - good and evil - pushing and pulling against each other on the dynamic elements within the Universe, this was the wizard's main responsibility to keep in balance. Neither good nor evil could exist without the other and at such points as an imbalance occurs with evil far overshadowing good that is when the wizard must act to restore harmony and balance to the Universe.

For a wizard, evil can be easily spotted, lurking in the shadows and depths of darkness along with our fears and dread. Good, on the other hand, can be most often found by anyone in bright sunshine and the radiance beaming from one's heart and in so many warm smiles. The need for wizards came about because from the very beginning evil could so often and easily appear to be good and good sometimes masks itself in evil.

Because good is so easily shrouded in evil and what is deceptively evil more often than not can look to be good, there is only one mortal who can sort it all out, bringing about as well as maintaining harmony and balance. For as it always has been, the one true wizard reigns to bring about a balance for triumph and victory over wickedness and iniquity.

All of this amazed Breanna, but what she found to be most fascinating was the wizard's ability to step in and out of time. Logan explained that the process of moving within time was accomplished by a channeling of mental perspective known as "in liquis" which literally made time a fluid channel where a wizard could easily move forward and backward within the Thought Streams of seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, years, decades, centuries, and millenniums. He was quick to point out the dangers of "in liquis" which he had so narrowly avoided more than once. Also, without the time compass, a wizard couldn't accomplish much or zero in on specific points and locations in time, dimensions, and death.



When it came time to leave the cave, Logan lit a torch and walked around the outer edge of the cave's fire, where Shadow's ashes lay still and lifeless. Logan picked up the black chunk of a ring, which had been created from within the exact point and center of creation. He closed his fingers over the ring so he could feel the great power almost burning his hand one last time. In a swift outward move of his arm, Logan opened his hand, thrusting the ring into the fire. The flames immediately died. There were no smoldering embers. The pit was black and quiet, almost as if no fire had ever burned there. The wizard's ring would now lie hidden in the ashes until there came a time that a future wizard would need and use it.

"Why not destroy the ring, if it is so dangerous?" asked Breanna as they hid everything in the far reaches of the cave that they could not take with them.

Logan pursed his lips as he dragged weapons and balanced the torch, saying, "You cannot destroy the ring, because upon it is balanced the harmony of things. It is kept in the ashes so evil will not find it. When the ring is removed from the ashes, the fire springs to life, intensifying the wizard's powers. If an impostor, like Shadow, somehow learns of the ring, then he will possess most of the powers of wizardry. Luckily, the impostors never discover the full force they possess when they have the ring as the flames dance and spellbind individuals."

Logan and Breanna then gathered up their possessions to leave the cave. Before they walked out of the cave, Logan grabbed a handful of the blue powder of wizardry. When they stood outside, near the entrance to the cave, Logan sprinkled the blue powder all over the ground.

Motioning Breanna away, Logan said, "Move back." Logan raised his arms high in the air. Moving his hands in circular motions, Logan fluttered his fingers rapidly. As he did this, trees started sprouting out of the ground, growing at accelerated rates. It didn't take long for the trees to become gigantic in size, completely blocking and hiding the entrance to the cave.

Walking away from the now hidden cave, Logan and Breanna both noticed the full moon. Looking up to the moon and then into Breanna's eyes, Logan said, "Do you want to see the true sign of a wizard?"

Breanna skeptically nodded her head up and down, thinking she had already seen enough. Now she had a big surprise in store for Logan. Before he could say anything, Breanna looked again at the moon and ever so slightly nodded her chin. The full moon at once was covered in an eclipse, with only a small sliver shining around outer edge.

Putting his hands on his hips, Logan smiled saying, "How did you do that? I thought that was something only wizards could do!"

Breanna smiled with all of her feminine charm and said, "While doing something like that might be the true sign of a wizard, it is only child's play for a sorceress." Continuing to smile even more so, she said, "Remember that whenever you see the moon eclipsed, there is a sorceress afoot."



Logan took her hand and they walked away from the cave. Breanna went on to have a baby boy. Even though he had the special powers of a wizard combined with those of a sorceress, there was never a need for him to exercise them. It would be his son, as well as many other wizards to follow who would each be called upon to perform wizardry for a variety of reasons, all for the greater good of humankind. However, it would be centuries before a wizard would need to return to the wizard's cave of creation. Logan knew this to be true the moment he had seen Trent Stone who would indeed return to the cave in his own time aided by a trusty assistant named Alexander.

* * *

So what have we learned here in this brief story in time about the whole man/woman thing?

Women, as do men, have special and extraordinary powers.

Power can be intoxicating and all too often used for ill purposes.

Sometimes the simplest of tasks can get extremely involved (as when Logan ventured off to get the mirror). The key to his success was staying focused and not wasting any time. He had a plan, too!

Time can be deceptive and tricky, no matter how much you think you are in control of it.

No one really can get a handle on death, until facing it directly when you can get a better look at (as well as contemplate it).

Success comes from working together as a team.

Coincidental factors just might not be coincidence, but, instead, timed to benefit all of those involved (but only if you are paying attention).

Women definitely have an edge over everyone and anything on this planet when it comes to astonishing powers. No doubt about that. There is no other way to explain all of the things women can do. From intuition to uncanny instincts, it is amazing what women can do (especially if one is paying attention). Most women use their powers for only good purposes (part of this has to do with the "eyes in the back of their heads" that allow them to see so much that "goes on" with husbands and kids). However, there are those women who (this is where "C U Next Tuesday" comes into!) use and abuse their powers in evil and sinister ways, with harmful intent that goes way beyond vengeance.

Men also have amazing powers, but most don't even realize it (as in they just "don't get it"). The reason for that is because men tend to focus on mechanical, sports, games, and "handling the TV remote" kinds of things. And, while the "P" word (i.e., 'pig') does most certainly apply to a substantial number of men, there are those male individuals who do tap into mystical, Logan like powers. The real magic is when a man and woman work together, as we saw so well illustrated in the preceding story.



That was the key point in all of this. Breanna and Logan working together in perfect harmony as they turned the club and the stake to dust that would have destroyed Breanna. It would have been the end of everything (and the story) if the Shadow had succeeded in pounding the stake into her. Was it more Logan's powers, because Breanna was weakened, that caused their success? Was it Breanna mustering all of her resources from deep within her to actually make it happen a split second before Logan could do anything? It seems most likely that it was both of them, working together as a team, using their powers for good purposes. That illustrates the importance of working together and what can be accomplished if you put your mind to it – anything for that matter. Something that all too often gets lost in this fast-paced world we live in is simply that people need to work with each other instead of against each other.

Far too many people end up with relationships where they compete with each other. Instead of working together for common goals, they each want their own identity and usually "all of the credit" for things. There is no need for this, because each person has strengths and weaknesses. Ideally, where one has weaknesses, the other's strengths compensate for it. And, visa versa. All too often, what happens is that the weaknesses get exploited and are then used for manipulation and bullying. The reasons for relationships souring and wilting are many, but probably the biggest cause is in the very beginning not recognizing the difference between lust and love.

That brings us to the sports bars and gentlemen's clubs (you know what kinds of places I'm talking about). Before we "go there," the point needs to be made about communication, because once the conversation dwindles to minimal mutterings, a relationship is dead (the average "couple together" today only speaks, on average, to each other a grand total of about one hour per week, and that includes, "Please pass the salt!"). Sure, people stay together and endure it (for whatever rationalized reasons based on convoluted logic), but all you have at that point is something for convenience and appearance. But, when something starts "lacking somewhere," you can be sure something else will appear to fill the void.

Okay, so what is the appeal of sports bars and other such places? If you have to ask, I can only say, "Duh!" It is obvious what's going on. And, here is the order of priority in terms of "the draw" of such places:

Lots of TVs, all positioned so no matter where you look, you can "watch what guys watch."

Fairly tasty food and "reasonable" prices, as well as beer and drinks (at not-so-reasonable prices ... hey, this is where they make a lot of money)!

Last, but certainly NOT least, the girls ... to "fill in" where attention that has been lacking in "other areas."

The minute you start hearing a guy's reasons for why he goes to such places, it becomes obvious what's really going on. He desperately feels the need to "go somewhere" where he can feel like he fits in (no matter how much "the price of



admission" will be). Then, this all starts getting into bashing women and usually something like "the old lady" and blah, blah, blah ... it becomes a standard routine.

For women, well, they have the equivalent "places to go" if they want, but they are quite literally "screwed" (figuratively, too) because they usually have to stay home with the kids to take care of things. When women do get out together "on the prowl," they are just like (as bad, or worse than) the guys needing "somewhere to go."

In all of this there is, of course, constant bashing and the "blame game" as to who did or didn't do what and, the ultimate question of what led to all of this over an extended period of time. Again, we come back to not being able to distinguish between lust and love from the very beginning. Once a couple gets to the "girl's night out" and "boy's night out" stages, it is pretty much over (if you are paying attention).

The real sign there is something wrong in any relationship has to do with the location of your TVs. A TV in the living room, game room, or kitchen is fine. A TV in your bedroom means there is more "zoning out" going on in bed than something else (you know what I'm talking about!). Oh, sure, there are rationalizations about why a TV is needed in the bedroom. It's all twaddle! At the end of the day, as things wind down, just before you are drifting off to sleep, you should either be reading a good book (which is good for keeping the neurons firing in your brain), talking with your mate, or, well, engaging in unabashed lustful activities. The minute lust and passion are removed from the bedroom (which TV has a way of murdering), that's when the issue of sports bars and the gentlemen's clubs become part of the equation and lack of drama.

This is all somewhat of an oversimplification, but, really, the point at which you remove communication and passion from a relationship, what you have is two people moving in completely different directions, completely out of sync, with no destination in sight. This is usually the point that a woman's powers can start leaning away from "good intentions." And, at whatever point deception and lying (many times tied to affairs and "other things") enter the picture, WATCH OUT!

It's a two way street and it isn't just the man or only the woman to blame when anything goes wrong. Not to mention "other factors" like well-intentioned friends and relatives who "have all of the answers." When lawyers finally enter the picture (and they most likely always do at some point or other), that's when things get ugly, VERY UGLY. Both the man and the woman then resort to channeling all of their "dark side" powers (read that as "negative" and anything but positive) toward the undoing of the other person.

But let's stop right here and look at what can make a difference in all of this. The simple fact of treating a person with kindness and dignity could and does change everything. There are many relationships that go through rocky, rough spots, and they somehow work out, but only if the two people work together. The determinant factor is how each person treats the other person. Respect and courtesy are extremely critical factors. And, again we come back to passion. If two people concentrate more on each other and their relationship than so much else that is "out there" in the big,



'ole, fat, stupid world, then there will be much less in the way of insurmountable problems.

And, get the TV out of the bedroom! Because, before you get to the need for communicating and so much else, there is one thing we all need more than anything else (whether or not we want to "own up to it"). The ideal conclusion here to wrap up all of this is best stated in a parable ...

A man came to town one day with an odd looking contraption of a machine. Actually, it looked more like an oversized outhouse. Everyone in town was intrigued and one by one they each visited the quiet, empty field on the edge of town where the man had set up his machine.

"What do you call this thing?" someone asked.

The man smiled and replied, "Well, most folks just called it the 'Oh!' Machine."

Everyone soon found out why it was named that, too, because once you got strapped inside of it, on the specially shaped, extremely comfortable, welcoming chair, and the door was shut, the only word to come out of your mouth from the experience most often was, "Oh!" Or, an extremely loud, "OH, MY!"

People in town started visiting the man and his machine on a frequent basis, paying the small fee he charged. One by one he would fasten them in place with velvet straps around their chest, close the door, and then wait a relatively short period of time until he heard repeatedly the moans and even screams of, "Oh! Oh, yes! Oh! Oh! Oh! Oh, my God!"

This flurry of activity resulted in more people smiling. Their temperaments were so much better. Courtesy and kindness abounded as people went out of their way to help each other.

Then, one day, the field was empty again. The man and his machine had disappeared in the night. Later the townsfolk found out that a religious "organization" from the neighboring "big city" (where the man had come from) had gotten a court order and run off the man and his amazing machine, because they felt what he was doing would have a bad influence on the town.

Well, things deteriorated very quickly, resulting in crankiness and weirdness, until someone tracked down where the man and that wonderful machine had gone. It was a very far distance, but they dutifully made the trip quite regularly, because they just had to experience that machine. All except one couple in the town, that is. They had never even tried the machine.

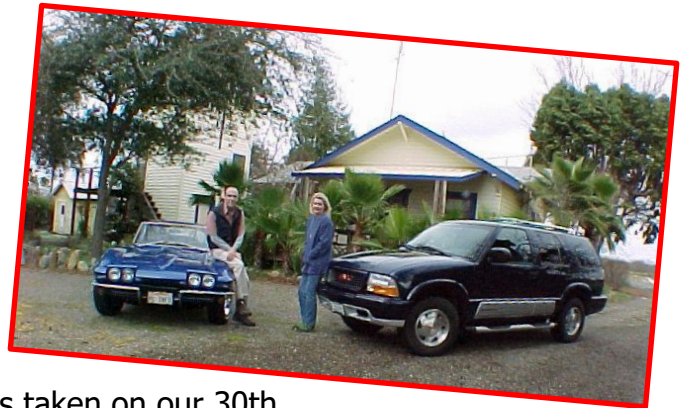
One day someone questioned this couple about why they had never tried the "Oh!" machine. Looking at each first with much ardor and then back to the person, they both beamed and simultaneously said, "Well, we have each other!"



A Distinctable Assortment of Reminders ...

Well. Hmmmm. Gosh. I put all of this together up to this very point in time (and your mind), but, still, there was a disparate grouping of photos that I couldn't "work in" anywhere else. So, since I do want these photos to be a part of "what I have to say here," I've included this "assortment of sorts" that will contain photos (of moments in time) that I just gotta make a part of all of this ... somewhat randomly.

There will be some narrative here, as the photos speak for themselves.

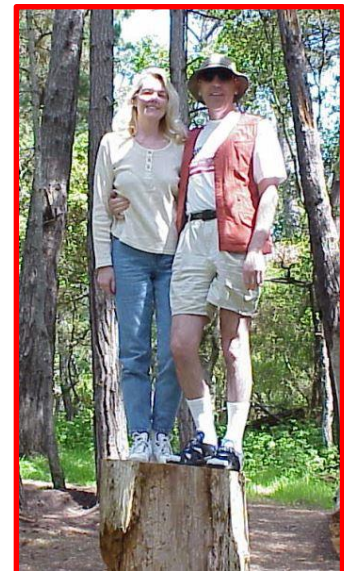


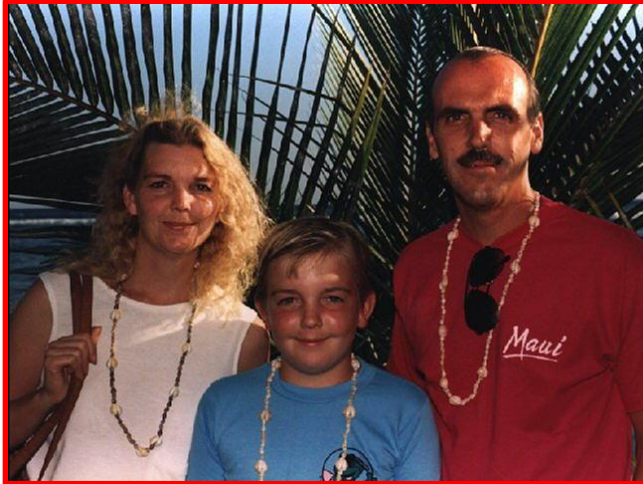
This photo on the left above was taken on our 30th wedding anniversary in 2000. The photo on the right was taken in our yard (the house and tank house my grandfather built) in January of 2000, just before we got the grill guard on our Diamond Edition Jimmy. My 1967 Corvette (that I bought brand new at age 19) looked great as ever!



The photo on the left is in the early 90s timeframe, in front of the tank house.

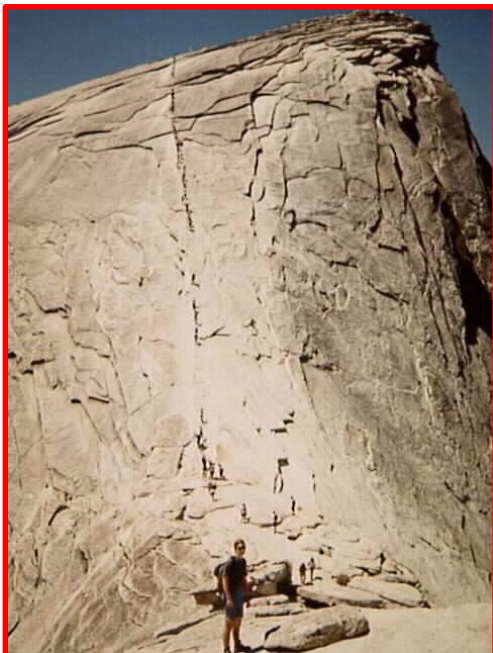
This one on the right is Diana and me in Butterfly Grove in Monterey.



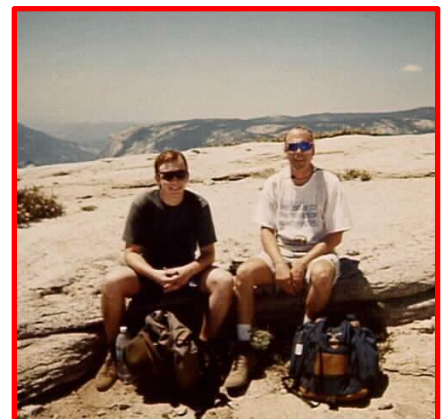


The three of us at a Luau on Maui in August of 1989, just before we got Trixie, our first Australian Shepherd.

Diana and I have no idea where this photo was taken, but we figure it was the late 1980s. This shows Ian's winning smile, as well as us as a happy family! We did a lot everything together!



August 6th, 1995 – Ian and I climbed Half Dome. It took 21 hours out of a 24 hour period, from leaving the house and getting back home (all in one shot). Such an amazing day/experience!





Ian learned the alphabet and numbers, as well as actually typing his name on my IBM Correcting Selectric typewriter. This was taken in my writing room in Ukiah in the spring of 1978.

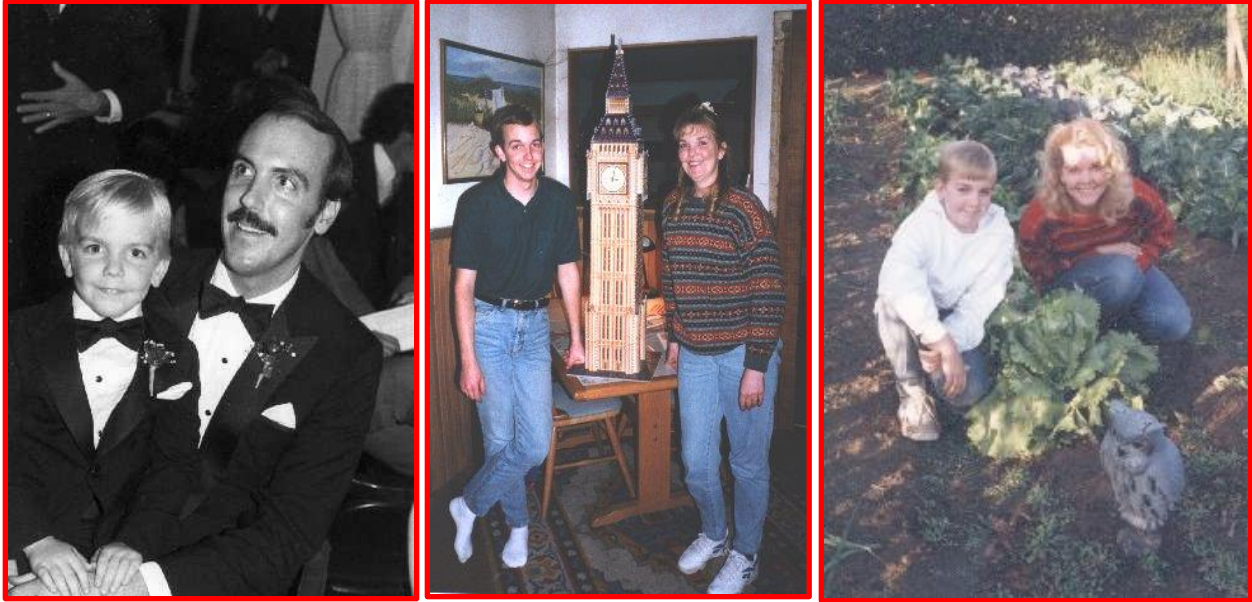


I had a Nikon, motor-drive 35mm camera and I shot A LOT of film when Ian was "a kid." Yea, I went through rolls and rolls of film (this in the days/daze before digital cameras), but I got great shots because in the "blast" of 5, 10, or more "shots" in the fast-changing, kid always moving, sequence of events as the camera kept "snapping away," I managed to get so many HUNDREDS of amazing photos!



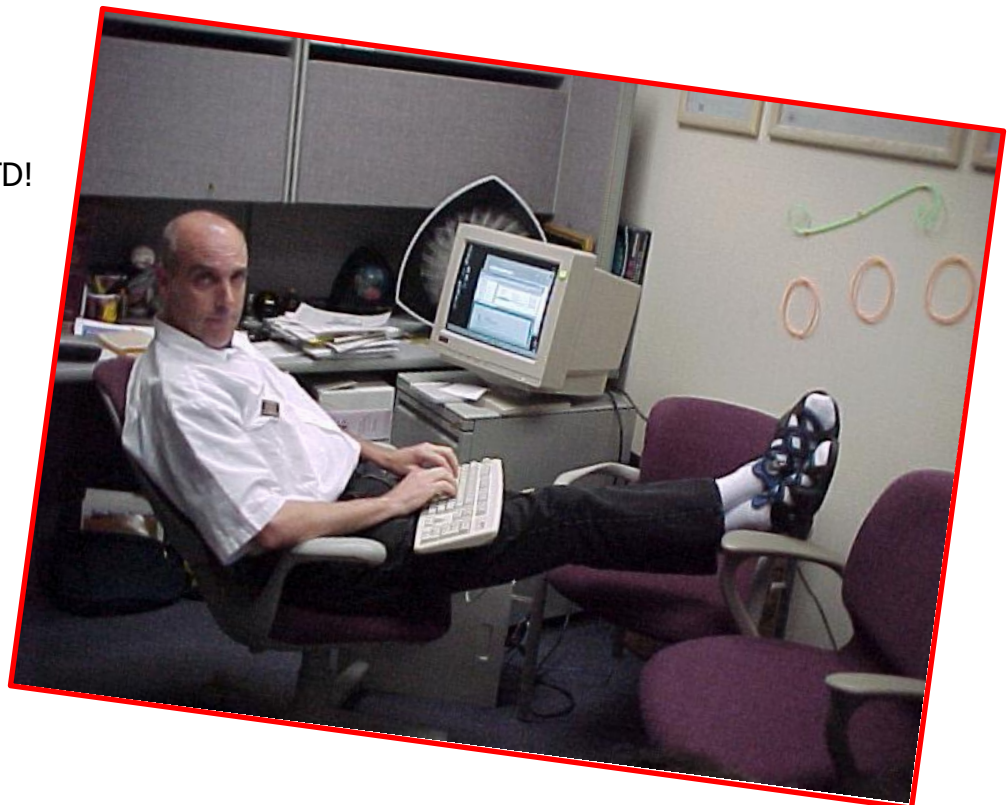
I'm not sure that Ian really ever knew how lucky he was that I wrote for several computer related magazines as well as for USA Today, all about technology. So we always had LOTS of computers and software that I was "testing" and writing about. I love this shot, because it shows Ian's famous mischievous grin! At this point (circa 1988), he had two computers, as well as one of the first Nintendo gaming consoles!

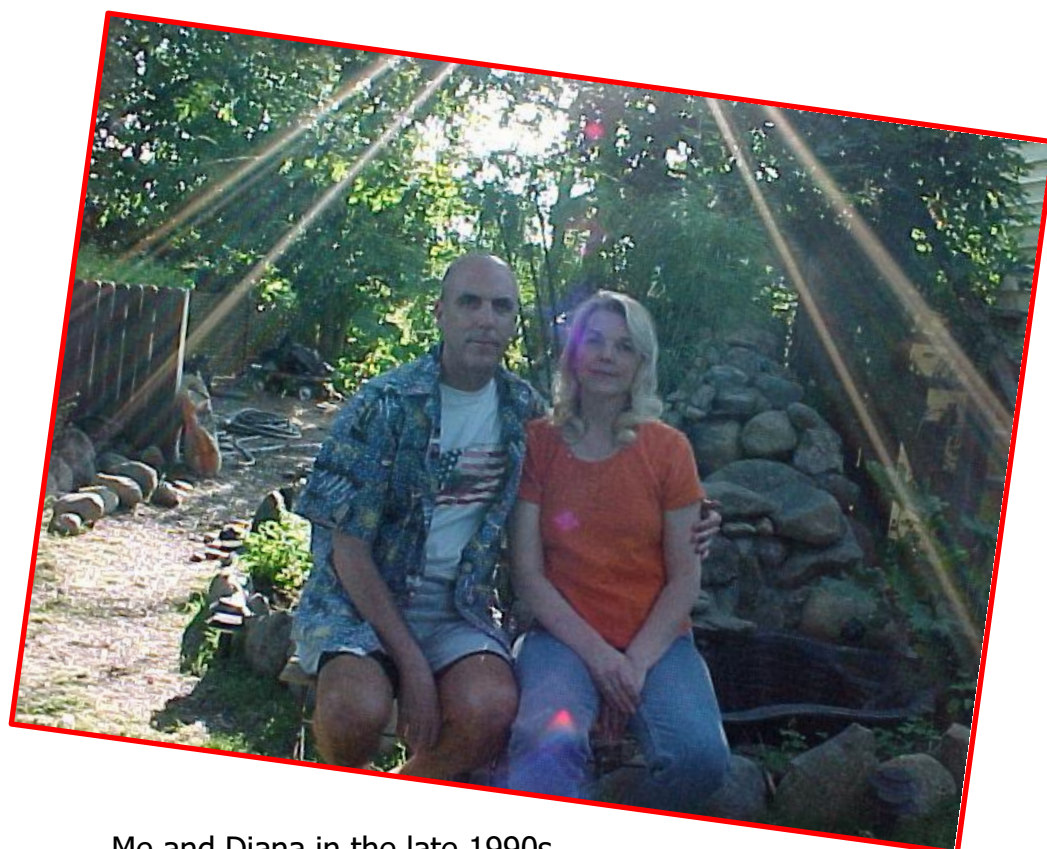




From left to right above, Ian and I at the Santa Barbara Board of REALTORS annual dinner in December of 1982. The center photo above is Ian and Diana standing next to one of the 3D puzzles Diana I had just finished ... this being in the early 1990s. The final shot on the right is Ian and Diana in our garden on the three acres of the property that was originally my grandfather's 40 acre farm. We always had big gardens and one of our most popular items (that I still miss to this day) was the sweet corn we grew.

Me at PITD!





Me and Diana in the late 1990s,
not long before we moved to Austin, Texas.



Conspectus ... Blue Book (OPTIONAL, but, go ahead, give it a go)



So what have we learned here?

I've "told the story" of me. Yet my one-man, three-act play, "[Light at the Keyboard](#)," wraps things up at the end ... and that is that in terms of who I really am.

Now, if you want, it's your turn (well, it has been at any point, really). If you so choose, you may wish to consider and, perhaps, respond to, the following subsequent, non-sequenced Interrogatory. To put it all into perspective, a "bonus disquisition" can be found in my [play](#), which is a bonus appendage at the very end of this PhD Life Thesis. Have a look/see and then see what you think.

- What is life all about?
- What do you believe you believe?
- What do you really want in life?
- And, really, who are you?
- Why do you do so many things you don't like to do ... and yet not do so many things you would like to do?
- Are you doing what you want to do or what you think others want you to do ... or, is it all just to impress people? You know, seeking attention ...
- What will (or should) you be doing in five years? In ten years?
- What are you most proud of doing in your life?
- What have you accomplished that amazed you?
- What haven't you accomplished what you are absolutely sure you can do?
- Why do you worry so much?
- How much do you "plan things out" to make things happen?
- What makes you happy?
- What are you most thankful for?
- Did you make a difference today?



I'm Feelin' Good ...

Okay, so I've "had my say" here in and amongst all of the "***play of words***" ... as I have done my entire life.

That said ... **the best is yet to come** (for YOU and me).

For everything there is a beginning, middle, and ending ... the ending, of course, which leads to new doors opening (if you just know where and how to look).

Each day for me is a new beginning to yet again **make a difference** ... in my life long quest to be the writer I have always been, as well as a "Renaissance Man" (of which I am constantly striving to "work on that").

I want to leave you with one thought, so if nothing else "sticks" from this PhD Life Thesis effort ... I hope these words from the lyrics of a song will leave an imprint firmly embedded upon your intellect for the start of each new day ...

Birds flyin' high, you know how I feel.

Sun in the sky, you know how I feel.

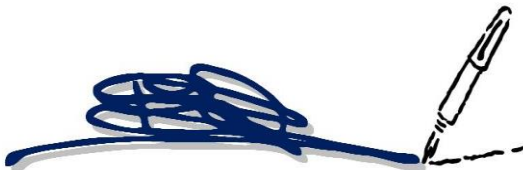
Breeze driftin' on by, you know how I feel.

It's a new dawn, it's a new day, it's a new life for me.

Yeah, it's a new dawn, it's a new day, it's a new life for me,

*And, **I'm feelin' good!***

Stick with that outlook and you just can't go wrong!



Who started out as and will forever more be known as
America's Premier "Unknown" Writer!



Title/Copyright Page

Penning My Life!

My PhD Life Thesis ... and Lifetime Achievement Award!!

Bil. Alvernaz

(Mastering the Universe with certainty, though tiptoeing
at seemingly perilous points of anomalous purviews.)

DIGITAL BIL. PUBLISHING COMPANY

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Bil.'s other ebooks for the Kindle:

[Light at the Keyboard – a Three Act Play](#)

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[Life 101: The Art of Life](#) - Primer on life.

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Questions/Comments: bil@alvernaz.com

Please drop by <http://alvernaz.com> anytime.

Virtually imprinted on Planet 'Ert (and in your mind)

First Edition on YOUR Consciousness



It's what's in here

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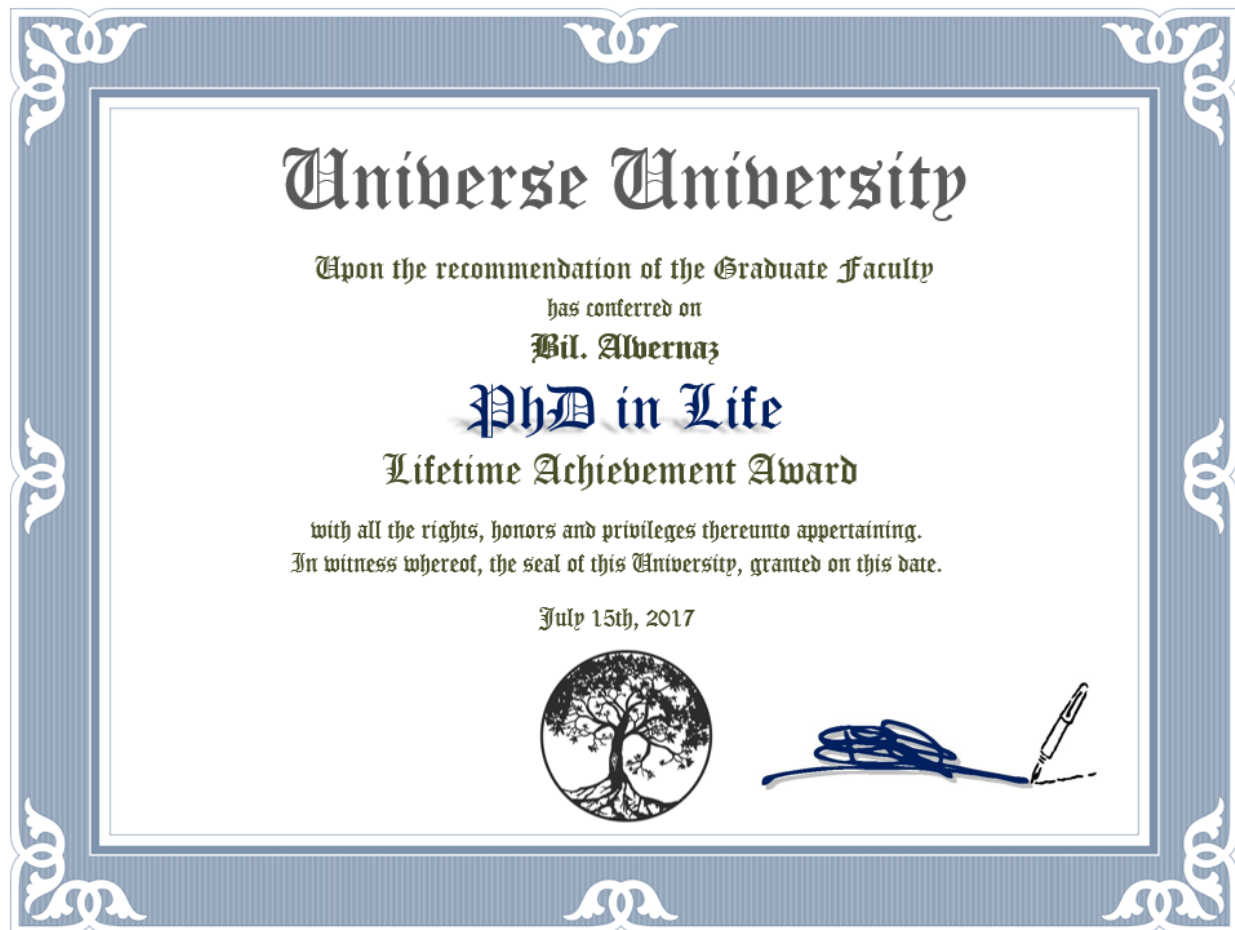


Lifetime Achievement Award

And, so, septuagenarianly speaking, I now pronounce myself to be awarded a Lifetime Achievement Award, boldly self-awarded (but, in my mind, deservedly so), combined with my PhD in Life.

Hey, anyone who wants to be upset, can be, but I warrant this award!

For all the stuff that "just needed to be done" (without anyone asking), for all of the accomplishments others took credit for, for being the person who has made a positive difference in so many people's lives, and for always, always, always making a difference (even if I say so myself) ...



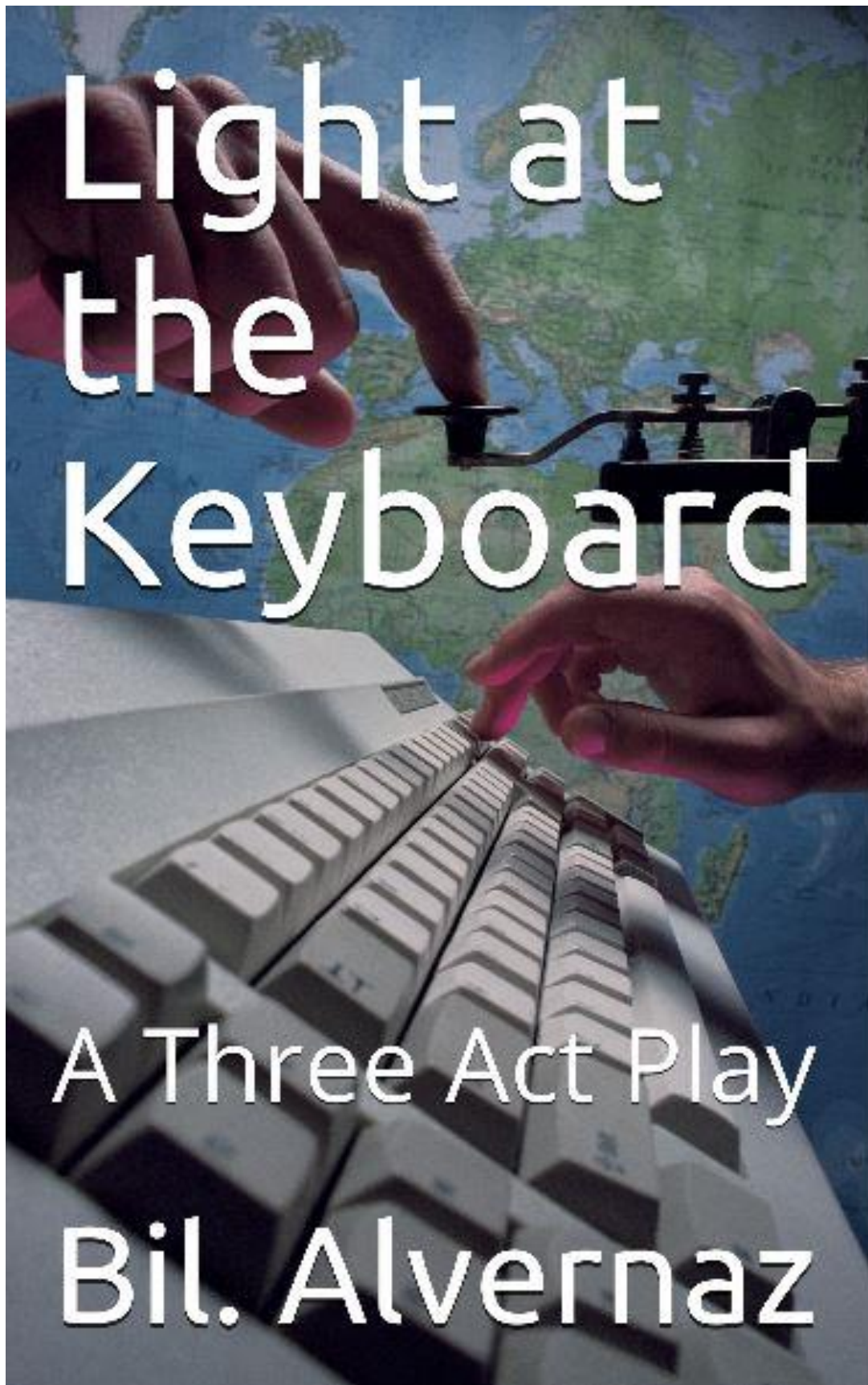
BONUS - THE PLAY - Light at the Keyboard

This is my three act play. You may a) read it; and/or 2) consider the true meaning and intent ... and, perhaps, even write out (in your head, digitally, or on paper) what you think it all means ... about life, about your hopes and dreams, about the Universe ... about whatever it is that you think it is (or isn't). There are no wrong answers.

Also, educational institutions, from High Schools to Colleges and Universities may freely perform this play with no need for royalties or any other payments and/or fees. But, hey, Broadway, if you want this play, you're going to have to pay for it! For, it is, after all, just like everything else herein, COPYRIGHTED material as in:

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Light at the Keyboard

A disquisition on the vacuum of "being lost" and
tangled in technology, trying to finding our way ...

A play by: Bil. Alvernaz

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PLAY PLOT LINE

A man sitting at a sophisticated computer work area, with several computers and monitors, talks throughout the play to the audience about his quest and the "process" (or lack thereof) of finding just the right job. This man tells his story by talking to the audience about a play he is writing about a man who is writing a play who is also talking to the audience he sees as a reflection in a computer monitor (which is really the stage itself that he imagines as a two-way portal for him to look through to see the audience and for the audience to look back at him). This tilting twist on perspective engages the audience right from the start, pulling them into a unique and inventive interactive experience.

"Telling the story" by engaging the audience adds fun to an encounter where the audience must figure out, as the play unfolds, how (and when) they need to participate at certain points throughout the play, especially at the conclusion of the play. That fun and inimitable oddness results in this play "not being the same old story."

The audience, as part of this interactive experience, helps carry the plot line right to the unexpected, but oh, so realistic and ironic ending that you'll never see coming. This three-act play is intermixed with humor and caustic wit, while the audience is kept "on their toes" to figure out what they need to do at different points, all while gaining insight and perspective about the realities and exasperation of finding a job ... and insights into people, as well as trying to communicate! The main character isn't just telling his story. This is everyone's story, in one way or another, about what really matters most in life.



CHARACTERS

Bil. Alvernaz – a computerist, writer, and philosopher who, while he is out of work as a casualty of a workforce reduction program, has figured out much about life and what really matters, as well as what should and shouldn't matter. And, he is writing a play about a man writing a play, which he keeps referencing for the audience.

Diana Alvernaz – Bil.'s wife. And, while her part is "small" in the play, it provides significant impact on telling the story. It is especially important that she doesn't see or acknowledge the audience "out there" that Bil. sees and is talking to.

Bradley Andrews – this person, nicknamed "Skeeter" shows up in the form of IM (instant messaging) interaction with the main character. You never really see him (or know that he even exists). Though very brief, this character makes the point that everything Bil. is doing to find a job helps many others find jobs ... all while Bil. just can't find a job.

Gabriella Sawyer – this is the "voice on the phone" part in the play, as she is the headhunter Bil. talks with on the phone about the ultimate job that he just might get.



ACT I – IT’S GOING TO BE OKAY!

BIL. AT HIS COMPUTER

The stage is dark as the curtain opens. After a moment a single light from overhead shines down on Bil.’s computer keyboard, providing subdued lighting just enough to provide a glow surrounding Bil. and the keyboard. The audience sees Bil. Alvernaz from his right side as he sits, lost in a monosyllabic trance, in front of what he calls “Computer Central.” He looks back and forth between six large computer monitors. Two worktables in an “L” pattern form his work area that also includes a printer amidst piles of papers, including random stacks with carefully folded newspapers on the floor.

Webster’s massive Unabridged Third New International Dictionary sits open on the floor, along with three different thesauruses, map-size paper with cryptic drawings on it that is half-unrolled is mixed in with everything else on the floor that requires careful course-plotting to enter or leave the room without stepping on or tripping over anything. Bil. is wearing a Microsoft t-shirt and faded blue shorts. He is barefooted, resting both forearms on a futuristic looking chair that he just loves to swivel and twirl in.

It is obvious this is the cozy lair of a computerist who just happens to be somewhat of an esoteric, human-computer interactive, techno geek, writer, philosopher who often finds himself trapped somewhere between flashes of brilliance and fits of stupidity. You can tell he is obviously a baseball fan because of the Chicago Cubs 2016 World Series Champions baseball cap on his head. There are many other types of caps piled on the table behind him. And, there is a large wall clock hanging upside down behind Bil.



As the light shining down on the keyboard brightens the rest of the stage lights up. Bil. looks into his monitor, then out to the audience. He has a very puzzled look and is scratching his head.

He looks into the monitor again, then takes a good long look out at the audience, then back to his computer screen, and then again out to the audience again.

BIL.

Well, that's just weird. I'm looking in my computer monitor here and I see the reflection of an audience looking directly at me, just like YOU are doing right now. Then I look out there, where you are, and I see the exact same thing, an audience looking back at me looking back at them like what I see reflected on my computer monitor. I tell ya, it's very strange.

He scratches his head and kind of looks off into the distance for a moment.

BIL.

But, here's the thing and it's really strange. Well, maybe odd. Or, exactly the way it's supposed to be. You see, I'm writing a play about a guy who is writing a play who sees an audience reflected in his computer monitor looking back at him, just like what is happening here ... now. And, this guy I'm writing a play about who is writing a play just like this talks to his audience as he is writing the play, like I'm doing right now. And, gosh, how is it that that can be happening? Or, is it



really happening?

He looks back at his computer monitor and then at the audience again. He does a double take, looking at the monitor, then the audience, then the monitor.

BIL.

Wait. What? Okay, so you're really there, right? I can see you and, obviously, you can see me, Right? So, if you really are there right now and I'm not imagining this, then please say, "Yes, we're here!"

He gets the audience to do what he asks by responding to him.

BIL.

So this is really happening. Okay. Cool.

He pauses and thinks a bit.

BIL.

But what if I'm imagining that it is happening. Or, maybe YOU are imagining all of this is happening, despite knowing you have a ticket to prove you are actually here. Being a writer, I have a creative imagination, of course.

He stands.

BIL.

So, let's do this. Just to be sure. I'm going to face away from you and when I do I want you to say, "You're not imagining this!"

He turns away from the audience. They either respond or he coaxes them to respond. Then he turns around to face the audience and he sits back down.



BIL.

Alrighty then. This IS happening, just like in the play I'm writing. I've never had this happen like this with anything I've ever written before. But, hey, now YOU can help me work my way through the rest of this play; or, help me help the guy who is writing the play, as well as you helping the audience who is in his play. They seem to be doing the same thing we are doing. Or, is it that you're doing the same thing they are doing? I think I'm getting confused. Oh, well. So let's get on with this. I want to try one more thing ...

He quickly turns to his computer and starts typing furiously on the keyboard. Then he turns to the audience.

BIL.

Okay, so, in this play I'm writing I just typed in that the audience raised their right arm to prove to the guy that they were really there.

He waits for the audience to raise their hands or coaxes them to do so. Not all of them have to do it and he even comments about it.

BIL.

So, okay, some of you raised your hands and some didn't. That's exactly what happened in the play I'm writing! So this is all real, though somewhat unreal. Awesome! Now we're getting somewhere. So here's what I'm thinking now ...

Suddenly, there is the sound of crickets chirping



rather loudly. After a slight pause, Bil. blinks several times, shakes his head, and spins his chair away from the audience to face his cluster of monitors. Then as he turns back to face the audience, he holds up his right index finger towards them slightly wagging it left and right, and starts speaking to them.

BIL.

Just give me a second. Those cricket sounds mean I have new email. So I need to see what it is.

Bil. leans closer to one monitor, chin on his palm, and then shakes his head in frustration, deleting the emails, as he turns to directly face the audience again. Leaning back in his chair, legs stretched out.

BIL.

Geeze. That was more spam "work from home" emails. I've been getting a lot of those since I lost my job and am now "in the hunt" for another job. Once you start signing up at web sites to find jobs, you start getting those emails, because those web sites sell all of the information you provide. Nice, huh? Those spam "find a job" emails lead to NOTHING! Other than them wanting to squeeze money out of you several which ways, if you're stupid enough to "buy into it all." I don't. I just hit the job web sites. I just want to find a job, like many other hundreds of thousands of people!"

He looks out over the audience as if studying them, back to his computer monitors, then back out to the audience and pauses slightly before continuing.



BIL.

Yea, I'm looking for a job, just like so many others. Well, I'm NOT just looking for a job. I already have something lined up, but I'm not crazy about it. Still, it's a regular job, something to make money, and it starts in six weeks. In the meantime, I'm seeing what else is out there that I might really like. At first I took it personal when the company I worked for "axed me" with a workforce reduction program. That's the way they worded it. Not having a job makes you feel lost at first, especially when you were doing a great job, but they had to make cutbacks because of how stupid they ran the company ... and also because the executives needed bigger bonuses. Sons a bitches! And, hey, my last name starts with "A" so I was at the top of the list when it came to getting rid of people. It didn't take long, though, to accept shit happens. There isn't much you can do when someone walks up to your desk with that "you don't work here anymore" look on their face. However, after I left the joint, they found out just how much I did that they thought somehow automatically happened. And, they had the nerve to call me, after they axed me, to ask me about this and that. Yea, right, like I'm going to help them after they unceremoniously canned



me!

The crickets sound again, as he holds up his wagging right index finger again, turns to read his computer monitor, saying.

BIL.

Just give me a second. Damn!
More junk mail! Don't those
people ever give it a rest?
Sheesh!

He holds up his right index finger again, looks at it, looks out to the audience, and then moving his pointed index finger left and right says ...

BIL.

This is kind of like a
universal gesture, don't you
think? An index finger
pointing upward, wagging.
Among other finger codes and
hand gestures we all know too
well, of course. But, I mean,
when someone holds up their
index finger like this,
wagging it, you just know
they're going to say
something like "Just give me
a second!" "Hold on." Or,
some similar nonsensical
phrase. Even though it is
rude and they're going to
make you just wait while they
do whatever self-important
thing it is they're going to
do, well, like I've been
doing. But, hey, this is my
show, right? When you see an
index finger pointing upward,
you know what's coming!

He holds both arms outward, moving his hands up and down, putting his index finger up in the air, wagging it, until the audience figures out they need to say "Just give me a second." If they don't catch on, he helps them figure it out ... like saying, "You can do this ... say it with me ... "Just give me a second." He lowers his index



finger and then continues.

BIL.

There. I knew you could do it! So, when you see my index finger like this, you know what to say. Let's try it one more time. I'll put up my index finger, and you say it!

He holds up his index finger, wagging it. The audience responds (or he "gently nudges" them until they say, "Just give me a second.")

BIL.

What? You didn't just think you get to sit there during all of whatever it is that's going on here and just be entertained while I do everything else, did you? This is supposed to be a fun AND interactive experience. As the Beatles said, "'ving been some days in preparation, a splendid time is guaranteed for all." Anyone know what song that is?

He engages the audience until someone shouts out the name of the song (or he needs to reveal the answer) "Being for the Benefit of Mr. Kite."

He pauses ever so slightly, eyebrows raised ...

BIL.

Alright! Hmmm. I won't even ask what album that is from. Anyone? Anyone? Buehler? No, wait. That's a whole other movie!

Finally, either he says Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band or gets someone in the audience to say it.

He turns back to the computer monitor and then swivels back to face the audience, leaning out towards them.



BIL.

Okay, so what's really interesting here is that I now know for sure the play I'm writing, well, it appears we're all actually in this play right now. So YOU are a very real part of it.

He makes a gesture of quote marks with his two index and middle fingers, then looks up to the top of the stage, following the top of the stage back and forth and then down each side. As he does this, he uses his index fingers to draw an imaginary box in front of him, in proportion to the stage. And, then looking just a tiny bit sideways at the audience, he says, moving his arms outward ...

BIL.

I might be off base here or totally nuts, definitely more like nuts I suppose, but, then who isn't. I digress. So, if you look ... at the outline or outer edge of this stage ... and then you look at a computer monitor ...

He looks to his computer monitors and then up and around to the edges of the stage again ... then back again to the computer monitors ... and then again out to the audience. He points with his fingers outlining the top, sides, and bottom of the stage.

BIL.

Wow, this stage could just be a gigantic computer monitor, or a symbolic representation of one, where I'm looking into it, just like the guy in the play I'm writing about, while the audience, just like you are doing right this minute, is looking back at him or me, the guy writing the play. Hmmm. Kinda makes you think, doesn't it?



He stands, then slowly looks around the audience, pausing to stare at specific individuals. He plops back down in his chair, legs outstretched, then continues ...

BIL.

And, you know what the biggest thing missing is when you're out of work? It becomes self-imposed exile because you just don't feel like talking to anyone. You know the first thing they're always going to ask if you have found a job yet. Anyone have any idea what the biggest thing missing is when you're looking for a job? Besides having a job, that is. It is something very simple that needs to be said for a whole lot of reasons! Anyone have any idea what it is? Come on, just shout out some phrases. Humor me!

He engages the audience here, getting them to shout out what they think he wants to hear. Then holds his hands up, palms facing outward, to stop the audience input.

BIL.

Well, those are all quite good guesses, but NOT close to the correct answer I wanted which is even in your program as the title of this first act. And, hey, because I'm the one writing this play here as we go, so to speak, and I need to hear it right this very minute. (Dramatic pause) What I need to hear and I'm sure all of you have needed to hear it, too, more than once and for many reasons ... we just need someone to sincerely utter



the words, with emphasis,
specificity, and with the
most heartfelt meaning, like
they really believe it, and
that simply is **"It's going to
be okay."** So let me hear you
say it!

He stares at the audience, and works with them
until he coaxes them enough to get them to say,
"It's going to be okay." He makes them say it a
couple of times, louder and louder. Then he holds
a thumbs up sign.

BIL.

Ah! Thank you. I needed that.
So I guess you've figured out
by now that, just like in the
play I'm writing, YOU, the
audience, on the imaginary
other side of the monitor I'm
staring into, while you are
looking right back at me ...
YOU need to interact with me.
Otherwise people might think
I'm nuts ... or you are ...
or maybe both! Or, maybe,
just maybe, we're just
imagining each other to be
there/here ... or, perhaps
this isn't even happening,
even though we know/think it
is. Right? What's really
going on is we're all sorta,
kinda, maybe participating in
a new kind of play,
production, communal event,
or whatever this is or might
be or could be or should be
or probably was or maybe
isn't really happening. I'll
give you a second to
contemplate that while I see
what this email is.

He pauses yet again, holding up his index finger,
to respond to the chirping crickets, biting his
lower lip and looking upward before he continues,



letting out yet another long sigh.

BIL.

More of nothingness, of course. A complete waste of time. But I need to hear comforting words again, and since you already figured out and know what to say when I wag my index finger, let's do this for when I need to hear you say "It's going to be okay."

He holds up his thumb, while coaxing the audience to say, "It's going to be okay."

BIL.

There. See. Now we're working together. You're making me feel better, too, and you're actually participating smartly in what we're doing here, except for the ones who refuse to utter but a sound. And, that's okay, too, I guess. But, let's try it again, LOUDER.

He holds up both thumbs. The audience responds with "It's going to be okay." Then he holds up both thumbs and waits for an even louder response.

BIL.

Ah, that's so sa-weeeeeet! Thank you. And, just let me say to all of you, "It's going to be okay!" And, those of you who needed me to say that know exactly what I'm talking about!

He stands up and takes a bow. Then sits back down, grabbing hold of the arm rests on the chair.

BIL.

So, let's review here. (He holds up his wagging index



finger) This means? (Audience responds with "Give me a second!") (He then holds up his thumb up and the audience responds with "It's going to be okay!") Alrighty, then. Now we're getting somewhere.

Eyes darting back and forth, he finally pauses, putting his palm outward towards the audience and says,

BIL.

Okay, now here is an easy one.

He engages the audience until he gets them to say "Stop!" or "Wait!" or "Halt!" ... any of which will work.

BIL.

I knew you'd get that one fast, because we all do that, too, right? With one hand or two. It's kinda rude, but, well, effective. And, it always works!

Then he puts his thumb down.

BIL.

You know this one, too, right?

He engages the audience until they say "No!" or "Thumbs down!" or "No way!" or "I don't like it!"

BIL.

You see, we communicate a lot with gestures or codes to talk and many times it is because we make these signals, that's what they are, behind people's backs so you can get your point across without saying anything so the person you are behind has no clue what you're doing, but the person or people facing you do know. They get



the signal. It's kind of like
rolling your eyes when you
don't agree with someone or
you're skeptical

He holds up two fingers in a V shape.

BIL.

Victory, right?

He interacts with the audience for their
agreement. He holds up a fist, shaking it.

BIL.

If you shake it at someone,
it isn't a good sign. It's
like "I'm going to get you."
Or, "Why, I ought to ..."
Actually, it isn't a good
sign no matter what. But, how
about this?

He aligns his thumb with all four fingers, palm
down, and then moves it back and forth in front
of his neck.

BIL.

We all know that's a
universal symbol for off with
your head or shut up or stop
what you're doing or I'll cut
your throat. Or, something on
that order, right?

BIL.

And, there is one more finger
code, we all know. You put
your index finger to your
pursed lips without saying
anything, implying
"Shhhhhhhhh." As in be quiet.
So let's review what we've
learned here.

He holds up a wagging index finger. Audiences
gets it or he helps them say, "Just give me a
second."

He holds a thumbs up. Audiences gets it or he
helps them say, "It's going to be okay."



He holds both palms out towards the audience until they say "Stop!" or "Wait!"

He holds thumbs down until they say "No!" or "No way!"

He rolls his eyes until he gets them to say disbelief or skepticism.

He holds up his middle finger and then says, "Never mind!" We know that one!

He shakes his fist and works with the audience to get them to say "I'm going to get you!"

He holds his thumb lined with four fingers, moving them back and forth in front of his neck. Audiences gets it or he helps them say, "Off with your head." Or "Cool it" or "Shut up."

He holds his finger up to his pursed lips. Audiences gets it or he helps them say, "Shhhhhhhhhhhhh!"

BIL.

Now remember those, because I'm sure you're going to be using them either in real life or perhaps at various points up ahead in whatever it is we're doing here! So pay attention ... you know, just like you should be doing in life as much as possible.

He holds all four fingers together, while moving his fingers up and down, in sync with his thumb.

BIL.

We all know this means "Yack! Yack! Yack! Someone is going on and on about something, right?"

After audience understands/agrees, he pauses. Then he holds index and middle fingers of each hand together, doing the quotations gesture.

BIL.

Oh, and, actually, there is yet another finger code, too.



You hold up your index finger and middle finger on each hand, when you want to make quotation marks to emphasize something you are saying, usually, it's a sarcastic implication to mock someone. Come on. Show me you can do it!

He gets audience to do the quotation marks gesture. Then he puts his index finger and starts drawing circles around his ear.

BIL.

No, wait, we all know and do this one. You take your index finger, making circles around one of your ears to imply someone is crazy. Again, you are probably doing this behind someone's back so they can't see what you are "saying" in finger code to others who can see you.

He pauses, scratching his head. Then says,

BIL.

You know, there is yet one more quite famous finger code "movement" and it is probably the most famous one. You see it in courtroom dramas where the person is on the witness stand and uses an index finger to point to "who done it." Like this. (he points to a person in the front row, saying) ... that person there, he/she is the most charming person in this room. Now you try it. Point out who you think is the most charming person in this room! And, yes, if you must, you may point at me as you say it!



He waits as people are pointing around at each other (if they aren't, he encourages them). The says,

BIL.

Ah, I see some of you pointed to yourselves! Interesting ... and, probably true! Oh, and you know what? Me being a writer and communicator, words are my main tools. But, all of us use finger codes and gestures, even body movements, all the time to communicate. How 'bout this one?

He shrugs his shoulders, really emphasizing the movement. Then says,

BIL.

Kids, especially teenagers, have this one down, don't they? You ask them something they don't want to admit or confess to, or they just don't want to be bothered (usually during gaming of fooling around with their phone or laptop). Or, when someone wants to play dumb or not answer the question or even try to imply something by not saying anything, they just do this (he shrugs his shoulders again). We do that kind of stuff all the time, don't we? The worst body language message is the complete absence of a person, especially when you have called upon them or asked them to help you or do something with you. Them not "being there" speaks volumes in terms of them helping you or being a friend. But enough about all of that. Let's get



back to ...

He pauses yet again to respond to the chirping crickets, biting his lower lip, wagging his index finger, and looking upward before he continues, letting out yet another long sigh. He looks at the computer and then looks away quickly towards the audience.

BIL.

After you lose your job people no longer want to know how you're doing. They just focus on or obsess about what's going on with the job search; or to be more specific, what ISN'T going on with your job search. What really gets to you at those points is a) the way you feel like you've done something wrong; and 2) <emphasize NOT point "b"> the looks on other people's faces and their body language that all seem to scream out, "Why can't you find a job?" When, really, all you need is just some encouragement with someone saying ...

He holds up his thumb, engaging the audience to get them to say, "It's going to be okay."

BIL.

Exactly. Don't forget that. And, thank you. I needed that AGAIN and, well, I just wanted to be sure you've really figured out your vital interactive responsibility in terms of what you're doing here which is exactly what the audience is doing in the play I'm writing. Only they don't seem to be as smart as you guys! And, there will be more that YOU have to do in a little bit, and especially at



the end of this play, so PAY ATTENTION! You know, just like you're supposed to be doing in real life. Besides, getting you involved throughout the process here will keep you from falling asleep or obsessing over your cell phone as I have seen some of you have been doing! At least put your cell phone on vibrate!

He lets out a long sigh.

BIL.

I'm going to let you in on a little secret about the best way to not answer any questions if you don't want to. I do this when people ask me about my job search or with sales people when they ambush me in stores or anywhere else. And, well, it is helpfully frustrating (to the other person) in really a lot of other situations when it isn't anyone's business that they need to know something about me that I don't want to talk about.

He lets out another sigh.

BIL.

At those points, I just say, "I really couldn't say." That's it. You just keep repeating that, no matter what they say or ask. Finally, it wears them down and they either go away, leave you alone, or change the subject. Remember that. "I really couldn't say." It just might come in handy for YOU at some point.



Bil. puts his right hand to his mouth, letting out an excessive amount of air through his nose, as he rolls his eyes, looking around contemplating what he will say next. He then reaches over to one of the piles of paper and grabs a photo.

BIL.

But, my two dogs. This is them here. Lucky and Max. Australian Shepherds. Smart dogs! They are brothers. They are the happy ones, because as the days have gone by, I found I was taking more and more breaks, going outside playing with them and taking them for long walks. So they think this whole me being home all day is just terrific! After all, with dogs it is ALL about the dog, as dog owners know. Cats. Forget about it. They have that whole Egyptian arrogance thing going on. But, dogs don't care if you're working or not. In fact, they love me being home! Oh, and dogs understand hand movements for commands, too. That's very cool!

He sets the photo down and looks around at the audience yet again.

BIL.

And, you know, well, there are some aspects to this not working thing that are kinda nice. Sleeping in. Not having a fixed schedule. What isn't nice and what I really hate is that there is always this nagging feeling that I should be doing more. That I'm not doing enough or that I'm missing something that I



should be doing that will
make a difference somehow.

He pauses again and lets out a long sigh.

BIL.

That with all of these
computers and technology,
along with all of my skills
and know-how, all that I have
done, and my reasonable level
of intelligence, I should
have been able to just pick
right up where I left off,
and find a new job ... an
even better job!

He pauses again, as if out of breath.

BIL.

Oh, and don't get me started
on "networking" ... you know,
the "bug the crap" out of
people you know for contacts
that will somehow magically
help you find a job. That is
all such bullshit and it just
alienates people, too. Even
though the job search
specialists harp on and on
about networking being the
best way to find a job ...
all while never really
telling you how to actually
network! Or, just what it is.

He turns to his work area, then moves his left
arm as if to point things out as he continues. He
smiles, puts his head down for a moment, then
looking out at the audience says,

BIL.

So here we are connected on
all of these intersecting
grids, hundreds and thousands
of grids crisscrossing each
other on the inter-web,
Internet, or whatever the
hell it is "out there" that



connects us all ... that we
don't even have a clue how it
actually works.

He walks over to his computers, points to his
monitors, while looking over his work area. Then
he sits down again and looks out to the audience.

BIL.

Social media. Texting. Gaming
... I'll never understand the
addictive and infective
attraction of all of it,
especially gaming, other than
the dopamine rush - which is
similar to the rush of
heroin, cocaine, and other
drugs! Then there is
streaming movies and TV shows
and, of course, porn which
generates the largest amount
of traffic on the web, not to
mention all of the money
major banks are making from
all of those porn related
credit card charges.

He puts his hands up in the air, pausing for a
moment.

BIL.

No one really ever talks
about any of those negative
effects, though. We just want
it all, don't we? But give me
Amazon.com and online
shopping any day. Hey, that's
the world we live in.
Everything is interconnected,
fully "wired," and tied
together with a new kind of
string, like so many soup
cans that we grip tight on as
we all "dangle along" for the
ride. It's the evolution and
extension of our
consciousness as it relates
to how we, all of us, are now
subjects and serfs in the



Kingdom of the Internet.
That's how we think. How we
communicate. And, all tied to
squeezing more and more money
out of us.

He pauses again, looking around the audience.

BIL.

It's all how we get and share
information, along with LOTS
of mis-information, too. If
it's on the Internet, it has
to be true, right! And,
hundreds of times a day we
just have to "check things,"
like I'm even doing right
now!

Phone rings. Bil. puts up his wagging index
finger and takes the call.

BIL.

Yes, no, yes, no, no, and no
thank you.

He tosses his cell phone back on the desk.

That was a temp agency trying
to get me to get involved
with their full proof
programs ... that's full
spelled F, O, O, L, because
they just want to string you
along in the hopes that you
might get a job through them
so they can then "earn money"
while you do all the work! So
anyway, as I was saying,
we've jumped into bed with
this Mistress of Technology.
Like an octopus she has
wrapped all of her tentacles
tighter and tighter in a
suffocating way around our
intellect! And, if you think
you're not addicted to it
all, how do you feel when the
electricity goes out or a
glitch mucks something up,



or, God forbid, you might be
separated from your phone or
tablet, and you're suddenly
"disconnected" from it all?
In an instant, all of your
magical electronical toys can
easily just quit working!
Then what? Besides panic!
And, you in the quietness
with eyes wide open,
muttering, "WTF?"

He picks up a cell phone from his work area and
holds it up for the audience to see.

BIL.

We all pretty much have at
least one of these. Right?
But, do I really need it? Do
you? Really? And, don't we
look like aliens with
Bluetooth earpieces attached
while we seem to be muttering
to ourselves as we aimlessly
wander around seemingly
talking to imaginary people?

He tosses the smart phone over his shoulder on to
the desk, motioning with both hands in dismissal
(acknowledging yet one more hand "code" for
making a point), and smiles. He leans forward to
the audience, putting his hands on his knees,
elbows sticking outward, as he puts his head down
and lets out a long sigh. He finally looks back
out at the audience.

BIL.

You do know we do all of this
to ourselves. We complicate
life more than it needs to
be. I mean life is very
simple. Each day is a new
beginning. The sun rises. We
"make our way" through the
day, foraging and finding our
way. The sun sets. We seek
shelter as darkness falls,
shrouding & clouding
everything. Then the sun



risers again and each of us starts all over for yet another day, etching out an existence on the fragile slate of life. That's it. Those are the fundamental basics of our lives, upon which we pile and complicate everything else ... most of which we have been induced, seduced, duped, tricked, and/or bullied into believing we absolutely "have to have it!" That is until the newness wears off and it all becomes yet another burden to maintain or just shove in a drawer somewhere, a closet, a box of stuff, in the garage, or one of those self-storage places ... or maybe even dumped on, ah, I mean given to someone else. Or, the ultimate fate of so many things we just had to have; we throw it away! How much money and time do we waste in this existence of ours where we obsessively collect so many different things that are initially "most beneficial" to fulfilling our "look at me" wishes and needs for attention and, of course, being cool? That is, until the next "greatest thing" comes along or the next version of your beloved cell phone (I'm talking mostly to you Apple people out there)! And, hey, I'm just as guilty here as you are. I mean, do I really need six computers? But, you are supposed to be impressed, right? Maybe this is all just part of the play I'm writing and I'm just



imaging all of you on my
computer screen. Or, maybe it
is ME who you see reflected
back at you on your monitor
and you're still at home
sitting in front of your
computer in your bunny
slippers!

He lets out a long sigh as he looks out into the
audience at specific audience members, pointing
to them.

BIL.

Ah, I can see it in your
faces. I see I'm not the only
one here who ends up with a
bunch of stuff I really never
needed and no longer care
about, even though I spent a
lot of money on all of it ...
most of which, it all becomes
nothing more than a burden!
And, isn't that really the
heart of the matter with time
and money? We don't have a
lot of either and we waste a
lot of both of them!

Strange techno sounds emanate from the computer
system. Bil. turns from the audience to his
keyboard, the one directly under the light
shining down from above, and he holds up his
wagging index finger quickly, and then
frantically starts typing on the keyboard. As he
continues to type, he looks to the audience and
says,

BIL.

This is Skeeter. He is
messaging me. Actually, his
name is Bradley Andrews. I
call him "Skeeter." He calls
me Mr. Bil. for IM - instant
messaging.

Bil. types, laughing a bit, while periodically
looking out to the audience. Then, as he holds up
his wagging index finger yet again, he says,



BIL.

Just give me a second. Let me finish typing this and I'll fill you in on what's going on.

Bil. types more now, even faster. Then he stops and turns to the audience.

BIL.

Okay, so first off, I told Skeeter that "It's going to be okay." We start most conversations with that, online and in person. And, then he proceeded to tell me that he just landed the exact job he wanted. And, he did it by doing exactly what I told him to do. Actually, I've helped a whole bunch of other people land great jobs, too. My finding-a-job system really seems to work well for everyone else, EXCEPT ME!

The computer makes more techno sounds. Bil. looks to the computer monitor and then out to the audience. Holds up his wagging index finger yet again, raising his eyebrows.

BIL.:

It's Skeeter again. He is getting impatient. Let me get rid of him and then I'll finish what I was saying. (Bil. says each word as he types it) Glad, you, landed, the, job, Skeeter. Gotta, go, some, imaginary, people, are, here. I. can't. keep. 'em. waiting. Happy face!

Bil. then uses his index finger he had held up to the audience to distinctly press on the ENTER key and then leans closer to the monitor to read something. Then he looks out to the audience without removing his hands away from the keyboard, letting out another sigh.



BIL.

Ya know, the keyboard is like playing a piano, don't you think? Actually, I really think the keyboard is an extension of my mind through my fingertips! Anyway. Skeeter says to say "hello" to my imaginary friends, by the way. So, well, "HELLO from Skeeter!" Oh, and just as he signed off, he said, "It's going to be okay." Strange. This is exactly what is happening in the play I'm writing. Hmmm.

He reaches to the far corner of his worktable and grabs a stack of letters, holding them out for the audience to see.

BIL.

Maybe you really aren't here or YOU are imagining me imagining you imagining me! Think about for a moment. So here are just some of the many "kiss off" or rejection letters I get, day after day, week after week. Mostly, though, it is emails I get with the same message, politely saying we don't want to talk to you so go crawl under a rock and die. Basically, "Drop dead!" That's what they are really saying. But, for the most part, once you send something "out there" in terms of finding a job, you just don't ever hear anything back! It's an assembly line out there in a void somewhere with emails swallowed up into a gigantic black hole. The good news is that with the Internet there are lots of jobs posted "out



there." The bad news is there are hundreds and thousands of other people applying for the same jobs! So what does that all mean? Never mind. It's a rhetorical question. Or, is it?

He raises his eyebrows and tosses the rejection letters behind him up in the air! Then he continues as the letters all flutter down around him.

BIL.

Well, that felt good! What I really think is going on is that I'm viewed as a threat to the people I would be working for, that I would probably go after their jobs, make them look bad, or maybe they think it would cost too much to hire me. Maybe I'm too old and thus they think I would try to run the joint or just be a pain in their ass. When all I really want to do is write. Communications, internal and external. Content management on the web. That's what I like best and what I'm good at. There is no way to tell what's really going on though! It's exasperating because you rarely ever talk to human beings!

He stands up to continue. And, taps each finger with his other index finger as he emphasizes four points.

BIL.

Here's what I do know. When you apply for a job, you need four things. (he holds up four fingers to tap as he makes each point) You need a one-page cover letter. (taps



one finger) And, that needs to be so good, they want to "turn the page" to look at your resume. That's number 2. (taps a second finger) In addition to your resume, you should provide contact information for references. (taps another finger) That's number 3. Make it easy for HR or the hiring manager to check out just who you are. And, the most important thing to have is an online profile or portfolio. (taps the fourth/little finger) That's number 4. I call mine a Dossier. That way EVERYTHING is right there in a "point & click" format, making it effortless for anyone to check out who you are as well as find out what you can do; and even look over your writing or work samples. Oh, and you want a QR Code on EVERYTHING. I guess that's five things. Anything you give to anyone, should have your QR Code on it. That way, you pull people right in, because with their smart phones they can "snap" the QR code and go right to your online profile. Everyone knows what QR codes are? You've all seen those square box hieroglyphics on everything. So make one for yourself, once you get your online profile all set up. The QR code also subliminally "makes a statement" about you being techno-savvy.

He walks over to the work desk and picks up a single sheet of paper. He holds it up to the audience as he then plops back down in his swivel



chair.

BIL.

This is it. One page. That's all you need to convince 'em you're the one they want to talk to. You either sell 'em with that single page or your stuff AND YOU goes in a rejection pile. Oh, and, you definitely should get a copy of the book "What Color is Your Parachute?" Even if you're not looking for a job, you need to work your way through that book to be sure you know who you really are and what your mission in life is - i.e., what you really want out of life. That will make sense once you read the book. Oh, and one other thing you need to do to find a job is have a killer Infographic like this <he holds it up>. It's one page, graphics and text, that "tells the story" about who you are, what you can do, and why you are the exact right person for the job! It's telling your story with minimal text and insightful graphics! All connected. Impactful and attention grabbing.

He flips the paper over to his work area and it flutters its way onto what he calls his organized chaos! He looks and points to the upside down clock on the wall before he continues. Then he points to it.

BIL.

You might be wondering what's with the upside down clock. Even if you aren't wondering or didn't even notice it because, as usual, you



weren't paying attention.
I'll tell you about upside
down time anyway. It's
important. Well, at least
it's important to me because
it helps me look at time
differently. After all, we
really can't keep track of
time, whatever time is
anyway. You'd be surprised to
see just how much your
perspective improves when you
look at time upside down!
And, speaking of time, I
think it's just about time
for my wife, Diana, to enter
stage right (your right). We
know other so well that we
can pretty much finish each
other's sentences. And, we
also know when the other one
is going to do something.
Like right now. Diana hasn't
popped her head in here for a
bit, so I'd be willing to bet
any second now, three, two,
one ...

Bil. points towards the audience's right. The
door, stage right, opens as Diana pops her head
in just enough to speak to Bil.

DIANA

You doing okay?

Bil. looks first at the audience, raises his
eyebrows, then back to Diana, and then puts up
his hands and says ...

BIL.

Yea, I'm doing good. Great,
actually. Just talking to
those people out there.

Diana walks into the room and again takes a long
look out to where the audience supposedly is
(where Bil. was looking).

While doing that, Bil. uses his index finger to



make circles around his ear for the audience to see. Then he quickly stops before Diana looks back to him. Diana pauses, looks back to where the audience is, then back at Bil. (Audience most likely chuckles.) Diana looks back to the audience again and then back to Bil.

DIANA

What did you just do? Did you do something?

Bil. shrugs his shoulders, but says nothing.

DIANA

You did something. I know you did. Admit it.

Bil. looks at the audience again and shrugs his shoulders.

BIL.

You didn't see them, that audience sitting right out there?

Bil. points to the audience. Diana looks to the audience again. While she is looking, Bil. does the Four fingers together, while moving his fingers up and down, in sync with his thumb, implying "Yack! Yack! Yack!" and, with perfect timing stops before Diana turns back to him to see it. Then Diana takes a long look at Bil, hands on her hips, shaking her head back and forth.

DIANA

No! I don't see anything. And, I know you did something both times while I wasn't looking. You see something there?

Diana points again to the audience as Bil. slowly nods his head up and down.

DIANA

How nice for you ... and them. (she takes a quick look back to the audience, then faces Bil.). Look, I've



packed all of your stuff.

Bil. winces, then looks out at the audience. Puts his head down and shakes it slowly left to right, back and forth, letting out a long sigh.

BIL.

Awe, man!

Diana moves to then stand between Bil. and his computer (to be sure she has his attention). Then Diana looks back out at the audience. She frowns because she supposedly sees nothing that Bil. sees.

DIANA

You've known for weeks we're going on this trip. I'm just trying to help.

Bil. nods his head up and down in agreement. Looks out at the audience and then back to Diana.

BIL.

Yea, I know. I was going to pack in just a little bit.

Diana raises her eyebrows.

DIANA

Well, we're running out of time. We're leaving soon. This is a good thing. You know that and you need a long overdue break.

Bil. continues nodding his head up and down. Then looks at Diana.

BIL.

I know. I know. You're right. You're right. I should have packed last night when you were packing. Thanks for doing it.

Bil. then looks out at the audience and talks to them.

BIL.

She is hardly ever wrong so



there is no point in arguing.
She stands between me and the
computer so she has my full
attention. (he holds up his
thumb to get the audience to
say "It's going to be okay!")

Diana looks out to the audience, puzzled, and
then keeps staring at Bil. as Bil. smiles at the
audience, saying to them:

BIL.

Thanks. I needed that.

Diana looks at Bil. and out to where his
supposedly imaginary audience is and then back to
Bil.

DIANA

What was that all about?

Bil. smiles at the audience, turns to Diana and
shrugs his shoulders.

BIL.

I really couldn't say.

Diana folds her arms and speaks in a harsh tone.

DIANA

Don't try that "I really
couldn't say" stuff on me!
What's going on here?

Bil. slumps down in his chair, looks out to the
audience and then to Diana.

BIL.

You really don't see them out
there?

Diana shakes her head NO.

DIANA

There is nothing there but a
wall. The same wall that has
always been there.

Bil. sits up straighter.

BIL.

It's kind of hard to explain,



but it has to do with the
play I'm working on that YOU
and I just happen to be in.
So the audience, in my play
and also the one out there,
they are just letting me know
it's going to be okay.

Diana frowns, looks out at the audience, then
back to Bil. She starts out toward the door, then
stops as she looks first out at the audience and
then to Bil.

DIANA

This trip will give you time
to decompress. They have wifi
there, so you'll still be
connected with them <she
looks out at the audience>
and/or anyone else you care
to imagine or write about.

They both look out at the audience and then back
at each other as Bil. says one last thing to
Diana.

BIL.

Oh, they're not going to be
there. At least I don't think
they are. They're just here
as I write and talk my way
through this play. I'm doing
it together with them; and,
YOU, of course! I really
think they are somehow "tied"
(he uses quote marks) to when
the computer is on and I'm
writing.

Diana smiles and walks out the door, leaving it
cracked open. As she walks out the door, she
says,

DIANA

Oh, you never know. Your play
might be so good, your
imaginary friends "out there"
just might tag along with
you!



Bil. looks at the door and then to the audience.

BIL.

She leaves that door slightly open as a reminder and hint that I soon have to exit stage right to leave with her for the trip.

He motions out to the audience.

BIL.

Hey, what writer doesn't interact with the characters she or he is writing about and working with? By the way, this is exactly what is going on in this play I'm writing. I don't know if it is what you are doing that affects what I'm writing in the play or that the audience in the play is affecting what you are doing.

Bil. thinks for a moment. Then continues.

I do hate to leave my lair here, this sanctuary where no matter how bad everything else gets "out there," I still have this place to hide out. This is the place I do my best thinking ... and imagining. And, writing. Diana is right. I know this trip will be good. And, to be honest, I don't think I'm going to touch the Internet while I'm gone. Diana is going for training and I'm just going to decompress, knowing that when we get back in six weeks I already have my "fallback position" job lined up. It is a typical marketing weasel kind of job putting together collateral material for this "ginormous" industrial manufacturing



company or complex or
whatever, so it will bring in
money. But, what I really,
really wonder about a lot
lately is what do I really
want to do next after I have
already done most of
everything in life that I set
out to do and then some?

The phone rings. Bil. looks at caller ID on his
cell phone and purses his lips. He holds up his
wagging right index finger to engage the audience
again to say, "Just give me a second!"

LIGHTS FADE OUT, STAGE
GOES DARK:



ACT II – FINDING YOUR WAY

Stage is dark. Sound clip repeatedly plays of Homer Simpson saying "Press any key to continue. Where's the Any key?

Light comes on over the keyboard, providing a glow to Bil.'s work area. Bil. is asleep, bent over, head resting on his crossed arms on his desktop. He finally wakes up and then clicks a key on the keyboard in an accentuated manner with his index finger which kills the Homer Simpson sound. He is wearing a 1920s style "Peaky Blinders" cap sideways.

Bil. yawns, stretches his arms upward and then looks towards the audience.

BIL.

Oh, so, don't you think life,
all of this we're doing, even
right here, right now, is
like one big play, starring
each of us, of course? I
mean, the drama, humor,
heartache, people being pains
in the ass. Well, I should
stop right there, because
we're all in THIS play right
now, right? And, I, we need
to get back to business, so I
don't want to go off a side
tangent. There's too many
other things we still need to
talk over if I'm, along with
YOU, ever going to finish
this play. Right? I mean,
right? Right!

He keeps nodding his head until he gets the audience to agree by nodding their heads or saying something in agreement.



BIL.

There. I knew you could do it. It's the 'ole "nod your head up and down" to signify yes or agreement. So how 'bout we start with you first telling me what I need to hear?

If he needs to, he gives a "thumbs up" hand code to get them to say "It's going to be okay."

BIL.

Ah. Okay. You're all still with me and paying attention. That's good. So where was I before I took a short rest? Or, otherwise, was purposely, momentarily absent to get us here to the second act of this play? Oh, yea. That phone call, before everything went dark, which was either me actually falling asleep or the dramatic and theatrical way to get from Act I to Act II, which this is - Act II. Anyway, that call I got was from Gabriella, the head hunter I'm working with."

More cricket sounds as Bil. wags his index finger at the audience.

BIL.

Just give me a second. I know you know that. More emails, of course. So I need to see if there is anything worthwhile.

Bil. leans closer to one monitor, chin on his palm, and then shakes his head in frustration as he turns to directly face the audience, leaning back in his chair, legs stretched out.

BIL.

More worthless emails, all of which I just delete. Job



recruiters. Head hunters. Temp agency reps. They're all the same. They don't really give a crap about you, unless you magically turn into dollar signs ... meaning, they land you a gig of some sort. The recruiters and head hunters get hefty bonuses and referral fees if you land a job. The temp agencies get a substantial "piece of the pie," (Bil. uses his fingers to make quote marks) but really, they're just getting part of what you are making and, really, you should be getting that extra money if you want to get right down to it. They do nothing while you do all the work and they still get paid every week because of the work you are doing. So you work, they do absolutely nothing and just keep getting dollars so long as you keep working. You also have to sign these supposedly "air tight" agreements, which really mean nothing, because if you lose your job, they don't really care. They just move on to the next person to "run through the mill." It's pretty much like herding cattle! Only no branding. Not that I know of anyway.

He checks his arms for brands, then says

BIL.

Nope. No brands that I can find. Of course, I don't even have any tattoos, but we won't get into whatever the deal is with tattoos and piercings. That will be for another act in some other



time and play. But, really,
how much do you think it
helps to have tattoos or
piercings when you go to
interview for a job? I'm just
saying ...

Bil. shrugs his shoulders, then says,

BIL.

I choose to work with a head
hunter, mainly because it
doesn't cost me anything
because the company pays them
a one-time fee if you get the
job. With my reputation,
skills, and know-how, I'm
more of a commodity, or so it
would seem. Anyway, that's
what Gabriella thinks so
that's all that matters. She
lines up the interviews and
then I do "dog & pony shows"
otherwise known as
Interviews. Most start with
phone interviews and then, if
you "impress their asses
off," you get an in person
interview. But, that doesn't
really mean anything, because
they are interviewing many
others ... it's just like an
assembly line.

Bil. shrugs his shoulders again, shakes he head
from left to right a few times, then continues.

BIL.

It's all just a big, stupid
game. I don't really have
much faith in Gabriella, but
I like her the most out of
all of those deceiver types I
have worked with. All, while
I'm checking Indeed.com and
other sources on my own. I
also have a LinkedIn.com
account. Everyone pretty much
has to because you don't



really exist unless people can find you on LinkedIn.com, but that's a joke, too. It all takes a lot of time, but time is all I have. And, really when you come right down to it, so often it isn't the best person that gets the job either. It's all a crap shoot where, if you're lucky everything clicks and you get hired, but there are people who do great in interviews but can't come close to doing the job. Which brings me to one of my most important points I want to share with you. And, that is STUPID PEOPLE!

Bil. looks down, lets out a big sigh, then continues.

BIL.

You all know what I'm talking about, too. Stupid people. They are everywhere. They are in management. Lots of them there, actually. It doesn't take long to spot or see that someone is stupid either. They should have a Nobel Prize for Stupidity, because there are so many of them breathing the air that we could otherwise be putting to good use. A dead giveaway for spotting a stupid person is the dumb questions they ask. And, they ask the questions usually so they don't have to think or, well, there is no other way to put this. They're just plain stupid. Anyway, my point here for mentioning this is that there are many stupid people inhabiting the ranks of



hiring managers. And, you'll find the stupidest of all people, to the point of being anal in HR departments. That said, something I really need to talk about I finding a job is, well, let me think of a polite way to say this.

He stands, turns around, looks himself over for a moment.

BIL.

There's no other way to put this than to be blunt. It isn't really just about how much you know, who you know, or your experience, or even your skills when you're looking for a job. NEVER ever NEVER trust what anyone says when it comes to finding a job either. The point I'm getting to here is that we need to talk about something that most people don't want to talk about, not even your closest friends. They're certainly not going to ever even mention it to you. But this really, really, REALLY matters, not just for finding a job, but living your life. So while I'm not going to preach here ... Well, okay, maybe a little. But, I just want to enlighten you a bit about something about YOU, each of you, that is vital and critical in all aspects of your life. If nothing else I say in what we are doing here "sticks in your head," I hope it will be what I'm about to tell you.

He pauses for a moment, looks over his body again, puts his arms out and stretches, then



continues.

BIL.

This is probably the single most important thing about finding a job and even finding your way in life, or, well, just being more happy with yourself and who you are. It isn't just the words that come out of your mouth during the interviews that matter. Nor, how much you know. Not even all of your sterling references either. All of that stuff is very important to showing the hiring manager or selection committee why you are the person for the job. BUT!

He holds up his index finger, pauses, stands, walks back and forth a bit, then uses his index finger to point to his stomach. Then sits down again.

BIL.

What I'm getting to here is that it isn't just what comes out of your mouth that matters. That's only part of it. What really matters most, though no one will actually admit to this or even speak of it, is what goes into your mouth leading up to the interview.

He stands, puts his hands on his hips, turns around and touches his flat stomach.

BIL.

I'm not talking about words going backwards into your mouth, of course. I'm talking about all of that FOOD and all of those empty calories and other crap you shove down your gullet! You need to be



presentable and, well, dare I say it, NOT FAT or sloppy looking.

He pauses yet again, looking around the audience.

BIL.

Let me put it this way, **"STOP EATING LIKE A PIG!"**

He pauses again, slowly, carefully looking over the audience, making eye contact with lots of people.

BIL.

Okay. Maybe I'm not supposed to use the "F" word here, but FAT or overweight people have less of a chance of getting the job. No one, especially people in HR, will ever admit that is true. But, I know that to be true for a fact because I've hired a lot of people, worked with a lot of hiring managers and many HR departments. No one will admit it, but weight is, well, a weighty matter when it comes to getting a job.

He taps on his stomach.

BIL.

That's why I've always been fitness oriented. Let me ask you this. Who is in control? You are the food? Do you eat something, anything - donuts, snacks, whatever - just because it is there? Diana and I have done a lot over the years to help people lose weight and keep it off. We have a very simple formula - eat less, MUCH less, exercise more, MUCH more.

He pauses, then points to his mouth, circling it with his index finger, as he continues.



BIL.

It is this tiny piece of real estate on the front of your face where all the damage is done – both words going out and food going in. YOU have complete control over what goes in there, even if you don't think you do. Or, if you never even considered it. It isn't rocket science to do something about your bulging ASSets. It's very simple, really. 3,500 calories equals one pound of fat. If you consume 3,500 extra calories, more than your body burns off,, which is your metabolic rate combined with physical activity (or lack thereof), you'll gain a pound. If you exercise and burn off 3,500 calories, you'll lose a pound. Simple? Right?

He holds out his arms to emphasize his point.

BIL.

NO! It is definitely NOT that simple. Here's the catch. One hour of aerobic exercise, that means SWEATING, only burns off, on average, 600 calories. That means you need to do at least one hour a day for six days to burn off a pound, all while not consuming excess calories that will be "added on" to what you already have.

He pauses again.

BIL.

It sounds so simple, but, hey, you have to say NO to you, whenever you get those cravings and urges and compulsive impulses. And, we



all have cravings. But, food is NOT your friend. If you eat it, you wear it! Look at it this way, food is fuel!

He motions with his hands around his waist, rear end, and twirls around, as if modeling.

BIL.

No one is going to stop you from cramming things into your mouth but you. And, you need to know about BMI, body mass index, and how well your metabolic rate is working. Those are factors "at play" in all of this. But, here is the simplest, most effective way to lose three to five pounds in less than a month by only doing one simple thing. Something most of you will never be able to do, because we are all a) creatures of habit; and 2) compulsive eaters. Really, we, me, YOU, we all are! And, there is plenty of stuff to be eaten, right? It's always all right there all around us!

He puts his hands up in the air, then into his pockets.

BIL.

And, we all have plenty of money in our pockets to buy whatever we want to eat whenever we want to. And, THAT is the problem. But, even though you won't be able to do it, I'll tell you anyway how to magically lose at least three to five pounds in less than a month. Just eliminate eating between meals, maybe more, and maybe even sooner, depending on if



you exercise or not. Each snack, those chips, a candy bar, cookies, whatever it is, all average 200 to 300 calories EACH. And, when you figure people snack or graze all day long, that means several hundred, then thousands, of empty calories are snaking their way down your throat and, with gravity, ending up smack dab (Bil pats his butt) on your ass that will do nothing but expand outward, along with your belly and waist. Your clothes aren't shrinking, you are increasing in size - to the tune of 5 to 9 pounds per year. Do the math on that for the next ten years! The more empty calories you "swallow," the more those assets increase in size - you all know that! And, yes, you should exercise, but just work on eliminating the between meal snacks first. Just see if you can do it! And, just start walking more. That can easily lead to you actually exercising!

He takes a long breath, holding up his right index finger to engage the audience to say, "Just give me a second." He looks around the audience yet again, until they say it.

BIL.

Okay! I just wanted to be sure you're still with me here and "playing along" in this play I'm writing, that YOU already know you are a part of. I can go on and on about that calorie stuff. That's even one of my books I wrote for the Amazon Kindle



reader. I wrote the book so you can get all of the information for free. Why? Just click on the book cover at the Amazon site and you can read the first five percent of my book for free. I wrote the book so you could get everything you need to know in that first five percent. Really! Anyway, judging by the size of this audience ... and I'm not talking about the total number of people in attendance either, MANY of you need to do something related to consuming less calories and exercising more! But enough about that. So here is really what IT is all about ...

He stands up, exaggerates his stomach sticking out. Then says.

BIL.

Carrying one of these (points to his protruding stomach) into an interview "ain't purdy" and it will KILL any chances you have of getting a job

Bil. puts his hands on his head, leans back and yawns while stretching. He stands up and then motions for the audience to stand up.

BIL.

Come on. Stand up. Shrug your shoulders a bit. Nod politely to the person next you. Now you can sit down so we can continue here!

He sits back down.

BIL.

So, like I was saying,



Gabriella, my very own head hunter (I hate that term) is all I got. Kind of like a crap shoot, hoping for the best.

He pauses, noticeably listening.

BIL.

Well, it's about time for Diana to come back in again.

Diana rushes back in, immediately placing herself between Bil. and his computer. She is a bit out of breath.

DIANA

Are things just about wrapped up in here?

Bil. looks at the audience with a questionable look, then to Diana.

BIL.

Uh. Um. Well. Yea, kinda.

Diana lets out a sigh and she leans on Bil.'s desk.

DIANA

You haven't done anything since I was in here, have you?

Bil. sheepishly shrugs his shoulders, then moves his head back and forth, finally looking out at the audience and then back to Diana.

DIANA

You know we're going to do this and you know you have to get your laptop ready to go. And, don't forget to forward the phone calls, too, because that stupid answering machine might erase an important message.

Bil. looks at the audience as he starts to talk and then to Diana.



BIL.

(talking to the audience) Our stupid answering machine erases messages once it gets full. I've read the manual and, first off, it is poorly written, but it doesn't tell you how to clear/erase messages. So when it gets full, it just erases all the messages. We've never been able to figure it out.
(looking to Diana) I just wanted to be sure they understood what's going on here.

DIANA

Why do you keep looking over there? Oh, right. The audience in your play.

Bil. looks first to the audience and then to Diana.

BIL.

Yea, the audience? My play? They're all part of this. YOU are, too.

Diana looks out at the audience, then to Bil.

DIANA

Oh, yea, right. Whatever.
(she turns to the audience and says) You know he has to go, too, right?

Bil. holds up his thumb and encourages the audience to respond with "It's going to be okay?" until they finally do. Diana frowns, looks towards the audience, acts as if she heard something.

DIANA

Did I just hear something or are you playing mind games with me?

She pauses, puts her hands on her hips, looks out



again at the audience and then to Bil.

DIANA

Okay, great. So they're happy. You're happy. I'm happy. I just want to be sure you're ready to go pretty darned soon and that you don't forget to forward our phone calls. Okay?

Bil. nods yes.

BIL.

I'll take care of it. I promise. I just don't want to forward calls yet, because Gabbie might be calling me back, or someone else might call. Don't worry. I'll forward the calls to my cell phone. And, yes, I am about ready to go, but I need a little more time to work on some stuff that I can't just leave up in the air, especially with all of them right out there waiting to see what happens next (he motions to the audience).

Diana lets out a sigh.

DIANA

Okay. I'll be back in a little bit. But, hurry up, will ya?

Diana leaves. Bil. goes through a few things on his desk and grabs his laptop, putting it near his computer.

BIL.

With my laptop right here, I won't forget to transfer the files I need as well as forward the phone calls to my cell phone. I need to copy files over to my laptop, including all of what we have



been doing here. That way I can continue working on this play. (pause) And, the things all of you will be doing in the play, of course, while we're gone. And, Diana is right. I need to forward the phone calls to my cell phone or the messages will just go to our stupid answering machine that has a mind of its own. I've never quite figured out how it works and you really can't read the directions which are in five languages. Worst of all, when the machine gets full, it automatically deletes all of the messages. I haven't figured out how to turn off that feature. So that's why we forward our phone calls when we're gone.

Bil. puts his hands on his head, leans back and stretches.

BIL.

So, here is where you will become an even more important part in this play. I don't want to forget to forward my phone calls, so just in case I do forget, because I know Diana is only coming back one more time and she is going to be rushing me. So YOU GUYS, you need to help me to not forget to forward our phone calls. Okay?

He holds his arms out until he gets the audience to agree by saying, "Okay." Or "Sure."

BIL.

So here is all you will have to do if you see that I have forgotten to forward calls.



He holds his thumb out and his little finger out, with the rest of his fingers curled. And, puts his hand next to his ear.

BIL

You've all seen or done this to simulate talking on the phone, right?

He waits for the audience to agree.

BIL.

So, before I walk out that door with Diana. We have a ways to go yet before we get to that. But! If I haven't set our phone to forward calls, you need to give me that hand signal or code. So I don't forget. Okay?

Audience agrees.

BIL.

So, okay. Show me the signal for if I forget to forward phone calls.

He waits to see the audience respond. Then smiles.

BIL.

Ah, you are such a good group. The audience in the play I'm writing had a harder time with that one than you did. (he laughs).

Bil. pauses again, collecting his thoughts.

BIL.

Okay, so just before the lights went out, you know, between acts here, as the phone rang, I was about to tell you something. And, that was that not just about finding a job, but everything in life is about "finding your way." And, that means



knowing who you are and who
you want to be. The Universe
tries to help you, but we all
seem to get in our own way
when we try to force things
to happen. Don't you think?

Phone rings. Bil. holds up his wagging index
finger, motioning for the audience to say, "Just
give me a second." Bil. picks up the "land line"
and answers the phone. As he talks into the
phone, he makes a "hand talking" to imply the
person on the phone is yacking/gabbing.

BIL.

Hi, Gabbie. Oh, yea. Really?
Or, is this just more smoke
you're blowing up my ass? Oh,
so this is the real deal?
They liked my infographic,
Yea, And my online profile,
eh? Cool! Thanks. I'll let
you know what happens as soon
as I hear from them. That is
if they really get back to
me.

He listens for a moment, while Gabriella finishes
the call. Bil. nods his head up and down like he
is agreeing with Gabriella about something. Bil.
hangs up the phone. Then talks to the audience.

BIL.

Gabbie, Gabriella, says she
has the perfect job lined up
for me and that it pretty
much looks like a slam dunk.
I have the job, so says she.
I passed their online
personality profile, 700+
question test and I did
perfect on the in person
interviews giving them lots
of great ideas - ideas I know
I can deliver on. That was
two weeks ago, so they must
have been interviewing other
people. Gabbie also said they
are checking references and



doing a background check.
Having had a Secret, Top
Secret clearance before, I
know I won't have any issues
with the background check.
And, references, well those
are all great. But, maybe,
just maybe, and I'll believe
it when I see it ... I will
get this job. Oh, and that
hand movement. We already
talked about that as the code
for "Yack, yack, yack."
Right?

Bil. raises his index and middle finger in the V
code.

BIL.

You remember this one, right.

He waits for the audience to say victory or helps
them figure it out. Bil. holds a thumbs up code
until the audiences says, "It's going to be
okay." Then, nodding his head up and down in
satisfaction, says ...

BIL.

Now you've really got it.
Thank you! And, I sincerely
appreciate you're paying
attention. I couldn't do this
alone, ya know. Just like the
guy in the play I'm writing
about the guy writing a play,
talking to the audience as we
go along our merry way here
or there or wherever ...
maybe both places or
alternate dimensions. Hmmm

He stands up to take a bow.

BIL.

This whole thing we're doing
here isn't over yet, though.
So don't think I'm cutting
things short on you. You'll
get more than your money's



worth with plenty to think
about afterwards. That's
besides all the hand signals
you now know - or know
better, those will come in
handy in many ways. You just
wait and see.

Now he holds up four fingers and his thumb, all
sticking out.

BIL.

This one is for WTF. You can
even shake your head when you
do it. Even use both hands at
the same time, doing it.
Everyone knows what WTF
means, right? Well, you can
either say, "WTF?" or "What
the ...". We all know what the
last word is.

So, let's try it. He holds up his open hand,
shaking his head a bit until the audience says
it. Then he holds up his index finger until they
say "Just give me a second." He holds up his
Index Finger and Middle finger until they say,
"Victory." He holds up his middle finger and
says,

BIL.

Oh, never mind about that
one, even though you all
definitely know what that
means. And, I'm sure many of
you are "well versed" at
using it. (he gives a big
"HA!")

He looks at the answering machine again.

BIL.

Ah, technology. We've come
this far and still there are
those points where you can't
control the simplest of
things like getting a
frickin' answering machine to
stop deleting messages when



it gets full.

He holds his arms outward, stretching.

BIL.

Okay, now for something
really, really, REALLY
important, that YOU - all of
you - need to do for me. It's
much more important than the
finger codes or even
shrugging.

He looks around, throughout the audience,
carefully studying them.

BIL.

I hope you're ready for this
and that you can handle it.
Okay. In a minute I want
everyone to close their eyes.
NOT YET! NOT YET! Those of
you have already closed your
eyes, open them. Now pay
attention.

He paces the stage.

BIL.

This isn't going to be that
hard, especially if you know
how to count to five. Can
everyone count to five.

He waits for them to nod or acknowledge they can
do that.

BIL.

Alrighty then. DO NOT close
your eyes yet. Listen to my
instructions first. Here is
what you are going to do.
After you close your eyes. DO
NOT CLOSE YOUR EYES YET. But,
when I tell you to close your
eyes and you all do that -
NOT YET - then, after you
close your eyes, I want you
to count to five - one, two,
three, four, five. Like that.



Then open your eyes again.
Okay? Can you do that for me
... especially after all we
have been through so far.

He looks around to see if everyone agrees to do
so.

BIL.

Boy, this is tougher than
teaching my Australian
Shepherds a trick. And, I'm
fresh out of dog treats so
you're going to have to
figure this out on your own.

He holds his arms stretched outward, wiggling his
fingers.

BIL.

Okay. Ready? On the count of
three. That means when I get
to three, you'll close your
eyes and then count to five,
at which point you'll open
your eyes again.

He still searches over the audience for a moment.

BIL.

Okay. One. One and a half.
One and three quarters. DO
NOT close your eyes yet. And,
hey, I'm not hypnotizing you
either. Okay? Two. Two and a
half. Okay, three. Close your
eyes, count, and then you can
open your eyes again.

Bil. works with the audience, counting with them
to five. Then as they open their eyes. The stage
is dark and they can hear Bil. say ...

LIGHTS FADE OUT, STAGE
GOES DARK:

BIL. (LOUDLY, JUST HIS VOICE)

"What the ..."



ACT III – FATE. CHANCE, LADY LUCK – IT'S THE UNIVERSE

Stage is dark.

ANNOUNCER VOICE

BEFORE WE CONTINUE, WE HAVE
AN IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT ...
This is a warning for your
own regard and protection.
Because of the interactive
nature of this play and YOU,
as the audience, being a
certain "piece in the puzzle"
of this play, it must be
stressed that each of you
cannot leave your seat during
what happens next. And, that
simply means, no matter what,
you cannot and must not
"break the barrier" or cross
over between where you are
and what is happening on
stage.

Bil. speaks next in the darkness to the audience.

BIL.

Well, that sounded kind of
ominous, didn't it? But,
don't worry, it's all just
part of this play I'm
writing; and it is exactly
what is happening at this
same moment in time in the
play I'm writing.

Bil. clears his throat.

BIL.

Well, that announcement was a
little bit different of a way
to open this next act, but it
is something that needed to



be announced. Okay, so let's get on with what we're doing here. The best part in all of this is yet to come so hold on to your socks because I might just "knock 'em off" with pure brilliance! But, I digress. Since you did so well "closing things down" in the last Act, we're going to do some counting, in the opposite direction, so to speak, to get things started for this next Act. But, first you need to pretend you can see me holding up my thumb. Don't say anything yet. So what I need you to do is count down from five to one. NOT YET. Then when I do tell you to start the count down, when you reach one, you need to say what the thumbs up code means. That's the only way the lights will come back on so we can continue whatever it is that we are doing here. As the saying goes, "The show must go on." BUT! It's up to all of you to get things going here. So. Counting down from five to one, and then saying what the thumbs up code means, let's do it. GO!

He waits for the audience to count down and then says "Everything is going to be okay." (He helps them if they need it.)

Lights finally come up, starting with the single light over the keyboard, gradually intensifying until the entire stage is lit. Bil. is wearing yet a different baseball hat from his pile of caps. There is a suitcase next to Bil.'s desk the audience can plainly see. Eventually Bil. points to the suitcase as he speaks.



BIL.

Well, thank you very too much
for helping get things
started here so we can start
up and wrap up, so to speak.
Just like what is happening
in the play I'm writing.
Notice my suitcase is ready
to go. Once I copy things
over to my laptop, all of
that stuff (and maybe even
YOU) will be ready to go off
with Diana and me!
Unfortunately, I just don't
think I'm mentally ready to
exit stage right as they say
in this world of whatever
plays themselves are (or
aren't)!

Bil. puts the hand code for talking on the phone
next to his ear.

BIL.

Now, I want you to remember
this, you've got an
important, non-paid part
(which means you won't get
any royalties or other
payments), in this final act
here. And, that is to make
sure I don't forget to
forward my phone calls from
my stupid answering machine.
That's why I'm doing this.
(Holding his hand to his ear
in the phone code). So you've
got me covered, right?
Because if I forget to
forward the calls, I'll need
you to remind me about it by
doing this. (Still holding
the hand code next to his
ear). So come on. Show me you
can do it! You can do it with
either your left or right
hand, but not with one of
your feet! Okay?



He waits for the audience to respond ... even if he has to coax them to put their hands next to their ears the same way.

BIL.

I don't want to set things up just yet for the forwarding of calls, though, because I know I'm going to get another call or two. (next slyly saying) You know, because I'm the one writing this play, of course, so that's how I know I'll get a couple more calls. But that doesn't take away any of the importance of your role here. You could even look at it as a responsibility on your part to be sure I don't forget to forward phone calls.

Just as Bil. concludes his statement, the phone rings.

BIL.

Ah, it's Gabbie. I love caller ID.

Bil. picks up the phone.

BIL.

Oh, hey, Gabbie. What's going on?

Bil. nods his head up and down as he listens. He looks at the audience, shrugging his shoulders and raising his eyebrows.

BIL.

Uh, huh. Yea. Right. I know. Oh, really? That sounds great. Yea, I'll keep you in the loop. But, as I always say, "I'll believe it when I see it actually happen ... that is, that I get a job offer, which means YOU get paid! I will. I will. I promise I'll forward my phone



calls, because my answering machine is so stupid! So, don't worry.

Bil. hangs up the phone. Sits there for a moment, looking up, then lets out a long sigh. Then looks out to the audience.

BIL.

Okay, so things are looking GREAT about this perfect job that I want. Gabbie says I have it. They're going to call at any point. She knows I'm leaving, but I assured her I will forward the phone calls. And, she doesn't even know that I have "extra insurance" and a failsafe "mechanism" in YOU guys! So I know I won't forget to forward the calls.

Bil. pauses again as he thinks with his head cocked sideways.

BIL.

You know, when it comes right down to it, and I'm sure you've already heard this a million times ... when all is said and done, you have to believe in yourself. That's how I've been able to accomplish all of what I've done, including this play that I'm right now in the process of wrapping up ... which is just as important as getting that perfect job I hope I get that Gabbie says I absolutely, positively will get.

He pauses again, scratching his head looking upward. Then he looks right out at many different people in the audience.



BIL.

I always say I won't believe it until it happens because there are too many "moving parts" in any given situation to make assumptions that you just plan on like they are going to happen. Yes, you have to be ready for what happens, but you also need to have a Plan B and a Plan C, and even a Plan D. Great expectations lead to incredibly great disappointments ... whomsoever it was who said that was exactly right! It's all about the dynamics of any given situation and how they play out, while you dance among, as well as jump "to and fro" from spinning cog to spinning cog.

He stands, looking out at the audience and then points to different people, one by one.

BIL.

I know so much of what I've said and will say, you've already heard. But the most important thing of all is believing in yourself, while still being a realist. Okay, so wait. I gotta set the answering machine to forward calls. See there. I didn't forget, but you had my back anyway, right?

He stares out at the audience for a moment. The phone rings BEFORE he sets up forwarding calls. Bil. looks at the audience as he talks.

BIL.

I can see by the caller ID in is my cable company. Sons a bitches. We all know what this call will be about,



don't we? They want more business. And, hey, it has been years since I had cable. I just have high-speed Internet service. I mean with NetFlix, YouTube, and everything else on the Internet as well as most TV shows available to watch on the web, why do you need cable TV? Certainly not for the news, which isn't really news. It's manufactured entertainment.

He picks up the phone.

BIL.

Hello.

Covering the mouthpiece on the phone and he talks to the audience.

BIL.

You're going to love this! And, pay attention because it's a good lesson how to "turn the tables" on sales people. This is going to be fun.

He takes his hand from over the mouthpiece of the phone.

BIL.

Can you just cut to the sales pitch, that being the reason you're calling because I only have high-speed Internet service.

He covers the mouthpiece of the phone again and talks to the audience.

BIL.

They hate this, but they don't quite realize yet that I'm the one in charge here.

He takes his hand away from the mouthpiece and



continues talking with the cable company person.

BIL.

Oh. Really? Gosh. What a deal. NO THANKS! Nope. Not interested in that either. Or, that. Why? Well, let me ask you this. Why do you want me to have it if I say I don't need it? Oh, is that so.

He covers the mouthpiece again and talks to the audience.

BIL.

So it turns out I'm "missing out on so much." The implication is I'm too stupid to decide what I want to watch so I need all of these extra channels that no one else watches, right?

He uncovers the phone and continues talking to the cable person.

BIL.

So, here's the deal. I don't get it. I don't want it. I've not had it for several years. I only pay \$49.95 a month and I'm very happy with your service.

He covers the mouthpiece and talks to the audience.

BIL.

Okay, here is where I out-snooker this person. Pay close attention because it works for any sales person or even those nosey relatives you don't want to talk to.

He uncovers the phone and continues talking to the cable person.



BIL.

I really couldn't say. About what? I really couldn't say. What am I saying? I really couldn't say. Do I want this deal? I really couldn't say. What do I really want? I really, really, REALLY couldn't say. So what now? Well, I guess I do know what I can say. GOODBYE!

He slams down the phone with great emphasis. He stands up to take a bow to encourage applause, saying,

BIL.

That, my friends, is how to say nothing by saying something nonsensical. It works every time, and is especially wonderful for those nosey relatives and even friends, too. But for sales people, it is the best. I wouldn't even have taken the call, but I just wanted to show you how to confound people when you don't want to talk to them! And, that is that! Really! Because the best way to put a stop to being annoyed by people is just to, well, say something that is really nothing they can "latch on to" for more and more questions.

Bil. looks around again at audience like he has done so many times. Then he speaks.

BIL.

Back to believing in yourself. Screw what anyone thinks or says. It's important to believe in yourself and all that you want to do. Period! Oh, by the way, I'm still copying



files over to my laptop right now. Next I'll forward the calls.

He looks up and lets out a long sigh.

BIL.

I can't tell you how many times I could easily have given up, mostly because no one was backing me or believing in me. But, you know what? I did what I knew I needed to do and succeeded BIG TIME. All while people were betting against me. Some friends, huh? But, then it all comes back to believing in yourself.

Bil. looks at his computer and then at his laptop.

BIL.

Yep, things are zipping along. In no time, I'll be all set with all of the files (including YOU GUYS in this play) will be copied over.

He folds his arms in satisfaction and then lets out a big sigh.

BIL.

But, you know what? Life is really about two things. Liking yourself enough to believe in what you know is right and then somehow, some way finding your way. Oh, and, helping others find their way, too. The most important thing in all of it is making a difference. I ask myself that question every day. Did I make a difference?

He pauses, looking sideways, deep in thought. Then continues ...



BIL.

You do know the Universe has brought us all to this "point in time" for a very exact specific reason, right? For me and for YOU.

Bil. holds up his hands as he remembers something he wanted to say, all while the copying of files continues.

BIL.

Oh, and let's not forget about time and money. Both of which there is never enough of, though, still, no matter how hard each of us tries, we waste a good deal of both. But then that leads us straight to talking about regrets, of which I have NONE. There's no point in beating yourself up when things don't work out. Do the best you can at the time you are doing something, based on the information at hand and then move on from there. If something doesn't work out, okay. Then that just means you need to focus on something else or an "optional route." If you can't go over the bridge, go under it!

Diana enters in a hurry, no knocking. She just bursts into the room.

BIL.

Geeze, Louise! What's going on?

Diana puts her hands on her hips.

DIANA

We only have about five minutes until the Super Shuttle gets here and you



don't even look like you're
ready!

Bil. points to the suitcase, saying ...

BIL.

I'm packed as evidenced by
the suitcase and as soon as I
finish copying these files
over, I'll be ready to zip on
outta here, man.

Diana moves closer to Bil., taking a quick glance
out at the audience, even though she can't see
them.

BIL.

So you do see them out there,
right?

Diana shakes her head back and forth as in "NO!"

DIANA

No, I don't see anything out
there. Did you forward calls
from the answering machine?

Bil. slinks down in his chair, like a child
getting scolded.

BIL.

Not yet, but I'm going to.
Don't worry.

Diana looks again at the suitcase and nods her
head. Diana turns to the audience, who she still
doesn't believe is actually there, saying,

DIANA

If you really, truly are out
there, you need to encourage
him to forward the phone
calls. Oh, look at me,
talking to a wall. You're
making me nuts!

Bil. looks at the audience, smiles, and says ...

BIL.

Oh, don't worry, Diana. I've
got things covered and so do



they. (he points to the audience as he puts the hand phone code to his ear.

Diana scowls.

DIANA

What's with your hand to your ear?

Bil. takes his hand down.

BIL.

Nothing. Never mind. But, I've got this covered!

Diana looks again to the audience and then to Bil.

DIANA

Well, I don't care whatever whatever. Just forward the calls now.

Bil. sits up straighter.

BIL.

Don't worry. I've got it covered. I'm still doing things, but I'll get the calls forwarded. Just as soon as I'm done copying files. Okay?

Diana stomps her foot. Then responds in a firm, loud voice.

DIANA

OKAY! I'll be right back and you better be ready to go!

Bil. nods his head up and down I agreement. He starts to forward the phone calls, but his computer sounds off with a message from Skeeter.

BIL.

Damn! It's Skeeter. I gotta respond to this.

Bil. leans back in his chair. Then talks to the audience.



BIL.

Skeeter needs some of my infographics that I just created. Thankfully, my files are done copying, so I'll get these files off to Skeeter. Then, we're outta here. I can hear Diana coming. Man, I'm cutting things close.

If the audience starts to react about forwarding calls, Bil. shakes his hand at them and tells them not to worry. Bil. unhooks his USB cable to his laptop and puts his laptop, cables, mouse, and keyboard in his laptop carry bag, placing it down by the suitcase, just as Diana comes back in the room. He is just shutting off his computer.

DIANA

You're ready, right?

Bil. stands, looks at Diana, his suitcase and laptop bag, saying ...

BIL.

Yeppers. Got everything done.
Just turned off my computer.
I'm ready, baby! YOU ready?
(he laughs)

At this point, the audience is beginning to make the hand code for phone calls so Bil. will forward calls.

Bil. stands and moves towards Diana, handing her the laptop bag as he picks up the suitcase.

BIL.

I told you I would be ready,
didn't I.

Diana looks at Bil.

DIANA

I know I'm forgetting
something, but I think I got
everything. You?

Bil. puts the suitcase down and hugs Diana.



BIL.

I told you I would have it
all covered. We're all set.
Let's go!

By now, the audience is probably shouting as well
as making hand codes for forwarding the phone
calls. But, because Bil. has turned off his
computer, the audience is no longer "there" for
Bil. to see. As Bil. and Diana start to leave,
Bil. stops.

BIL.

Hmmmm.

Diana moves closer to him

DIANA

What is it?

Bil. frowns.

BIL.

Nothing. Nothing. I thought
... no, never mind. I thought
there was something else.
Let's get going. I hear the
Supper Shuttle.

Diana stops Bil. as she looks out at the
audience.

DIANA

Ask them. They're supposed to
be helping you, right?

Bil. frowns as he looks out to the audience. And,
no matter what they are doing, he acts as if he
can't see or hear them.

BIL.

They? Them? They're gone.
Once I shut off the computer,
I couldn't see them any
longer. Maybe they'll show up
as a reflection once I turn
on my laptop when we get to
where we're going.

Bil., with the suitcase, and Diana, with the
laptop bag, leave stage right. There is a short



pause, then Bil. comes rushing back into the room.

BIL.

I knew I forgot something!

He rummages around on his desk. Then he finds he baseball cap!

BIL.

Can't leave without this.
Man, I would have been pissed
if I'd forgotten this.

He pauses, looking around his desk area. Whatever the audience is doing, he can't hear or see anything.

BIL.

I think that's everything.
(he pauses again) Yea, that's
it.

Bil. walks out

You can hear footsteps as Bil. and Diana are talking as they leave the house. The front door closes and you can hear the sound of the Supper Shuttle leaving.

The phone rings and the answering machine takes the call. The audience can hear the message.

ANSWERING MACHINE

Hello, this is Santana
Fulton, from Future Solutions
Corporation. I'm following up
from my conversation with
Gabriella Sawyer about your
Communications Vice President
position. We are ready to
move forward with this, so
please call me so we can set
up a time for you to come to
finalize everything. You
know, sign papers and all of
that. We're looking forward
to having you as part of our
team. We need to act on this
within the next 48 hours so



please get back to me as soon
as you can. Ms. Sawyer says
you have my number, so I look
forward to hearing from you
as well as working with you.
Thank you.

Call ends. Answering machine's robotic voice
states the date and time of day. After a short
pause, the answering machine says,

ANSWERING MACHINE

Messages have exceeded the
allotted storage amount and
will now be deleted."

You hear the squiggling sounds of messages being
deleted.

Lights slowly dim to darkness - play is over.

F
A
D
E
O
U
T
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The End

