RAMBLINGS MAGAZINE

COMMENTS ABOUT ANYTHING

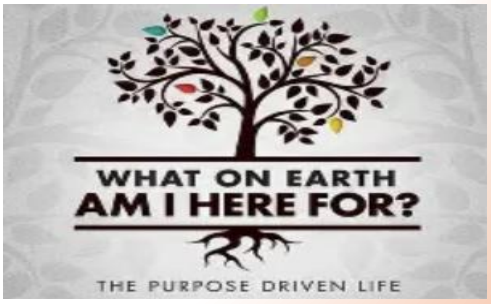














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The twenty-first issue of *Ramblings Magazine* drifts in like a leaf caught in a lazy autumn breeze—unhurried, a little scuffed around the edges, and carrying the faint scent of stories that haven't quite decided what they want to be yet. That's the charm of rambling, after all. Some days it's a tale from long ago that taps you on the shoulder; other days it's a passing opinion that insists on being written down before it evaporates. Lately, even the smallest things seem to have something to say: the neighbor's dog who refuses to bark at anything important, the grocery clerk who looks like he's been awake since 1978, the way a memory can ambush you in the produce aisle without warning. Life keeps tossing out these odd little moments, and we keep gathering them up, turning them over, wondering what they mean—or whether they need to mean anything at all. Issue 21 is simply another stretch of the road, another chance to wander through thoughts, tales, and the occasional half-baked theory about why people do what they do. Settle in. The path ahead may not be straight, but it's always interesting.



Portraits Come to Life

In the attic of a crumbling New Jersey house, Zach the painter worked by flickering light, creating portraits that glowed with uncanny realism. His subjects—nobles, merchants, and waifs—stared from their canvases with eyes that seemed to follow you, their expressions filled with stories untold. By day, they were silent, frozen in oil and pigment, mere reflections of a time long past. But at midnight, when the town clock tolled, the attic became a cacophony of complaints, their whispers weaving together like a haunting melody, echoing through the dusty eaves. Each brushstroke Zach applied appeared to bring their personalities to life, and it was as if the very walls of the attic held their breath in anticipation, yearning for the secrets and sorrows of these long-forgotten souls to be set free. The atmosphere thickened with an electric charge, urging him to listen closely, and awaken their hidden tales.

Zach discovered this one moonless night when he crept upstairs to retrieve a forgotten brush, one that had remained tucked away in the dusty corner of his art studio for far too long. As the clock struck twelve, the air shimmered as if charged with a mysterious energy, and the portraits stirred to life with an eerie grace. Lady Beatrice, adorned in her opulent gown complete with a powdered wig and pursed lips that held secrets of the past, was the first to speak. “My nose is entirely too sharp!” she snapped, glaring at her canvas neighbor, a ruddy-cheeked merchant named Cornelius who had long been the subject of her disdain. “And you, sir, your doublet is garish! Zach has no taste,” she continued, her voice dripping with aristocratic indignation, while a murmur of agreement rippled through the other portraits, each one keen to join in on the fantastical debate that had unexpectedly unfolded in the stillness of the night. Cornelius adjusted his collar defiantly, preparing to deliver a retort, but the room was abuzz with anticipation, ready to witness the clash of artistic tempers beneath the pale moonlight that dared not shine.

Cornelius bristled, his painted mustache twitching in indignation as he glared at the critic. “Garish? At least I don’t look like I’ve sucked a lemon! My complexion is vibrant and alive, unlike that washed-out version of yourself! And my hands—look at these sausage fingers! They’re proof of my hard work and passion for life’s culinary delights! He’s made me a caricature, a mere shadow of the flamboyant personality I embody! How dare he reduce my vibrant spirit to a cheap joke! There’s more to me than this absurd representation; I am a tapestry of experiences and flair waiting to be unveiled.”

From a corner canvas, a waif named Lila, with tangled hair and wide eyes that sparkled with a mix of hope and despair, piped up. “You’re both lucky! He painted me in rags, with dirt smudged on my face, a stark contrast to the delicate dreams I hold inside.” Her voice cracked, brimming with emotion as she folded her painted arms tightly across her chest. “I wanted to be a princess, adorned in flowing gowns that shimmer in the light, with a crown of glistening jewels resting upon my head. To dance in grand ballrooms and be the envy of all, not trapped in this frame, where all anyone sees is a beggar!”

The arguing grew louder, each portrait vying to list their flaws, as if attempting to outdo one another in this absurd contest of self-deprecation. A knight grumbled about his dented armor, claiming it made him look cowardly, and lamented how the battle he fought was not just against foes but against the relentless judgment of others. A duchess wailed that her emerald necklace was “dull as river mud,” asserting that no light could ever capture its once-vibrant gleam, and she declared that without it, her elegance was utterly lost. Even a stern magistrate, usually stoic and composed, muttered about his receding hairline being exaggerated, insisting that it made him look older than his years, a victim of time’s unkind grip. The attic vibrated with their bickering, a chorus of vanity and discontent, as dust motes danced in the air, bearing witness to an age-old struggle where pride and insecurity collided in this peculiar gallery of whispers.

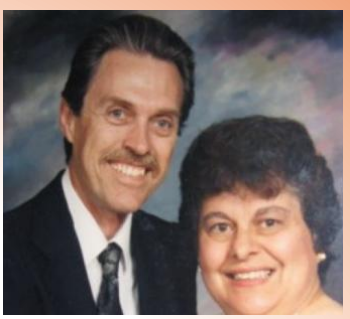
Zach, hidden behind a precarious stack of canvases, listened in horror as their sharp words sliced through the air like a knife. He’d poured his soul into each meticulous stroke, believing that his work truly captured their essence—their joys, sorrows, and intricacies, all woven into the fabric of each portrait. Yet here they were, tearing it apart piece by piece, ridiculing the very creations he had invested his heart and spirit into. As he observed their disdainful gestures, a wave of desperation washed over him. He stepped forward, his heart pounding in his chest like a war drum, refusing to let them dismiss his passion any longer. “Enough!” he shouted, his voice echoing in the room, creating a tense silence. The portraits, suspended in their own world, seemed to freeze, their painted eyes wide with shock and disbelief. “I painted you as I saw you—flaws and all. That’s what makes you real!” he continued, his voice now steadied by the heat of conviction. “True beauty lies in authenticity, and it’s time you see that.”

Lady Beatrice scoffed. “Real? You’ve made us laughingstocks!”
“No,” Zach said, voice steady. “Your sharp nose shows your wit, Beatrice. Cornelius, your hands tell of hard-earned wealth. Lila, your rags hold your resilience. I painted your stories, not perfection.”

The portraits fell silent, their expressions softening as if draw to the depths of Lila's heart, where emotions roiled beneath the surface. Lila’s eyes glistened with unshed tears, reflecting not just sadness but a fierce determination and vulnerability. “My resilience?” she whispered, her voice barely audible, yet heavy with meaning. Cornelius nodded slowly, the corners of his mouth hinting at a rare smile. “Perhaps the hands aren’t so bad, after all,” he mused, contemplating the weight of their shared struggles. Even Beatrice sniffed, adjusting her wig with a thoughtful frown. “Well, I suppose wit is something,” she finally conceded, her gaze shifting back to Lila, as if recognizing that laughter amidst adversity was indeed a gift worth treasuring.

As the clock chimed one, the portraits stilled, their arguments fading into the night like echoes dissipating in the cool air. Zach smiled, picking up his brush with a sense of purpose and anticipation. He’d paint them again tomorrow, flaws and all, knowing they’d bicker again at midnight, just as they always did, animatedly debating the very essence of art and identity. But maybe, just maybe, during those late-night discussions, they’d start to see themselves as he did—beautifully, gloriously imperfect—flawed yet vibrant reflections of humanity, filled with stories and experiences that shaped their essence. Each stroke of his brush, he hoped, would slowly unveil their hidden beauty, urging them to understand that imperfections were not mere faults but rather the unique traits that made them truly remarkable.

A Bond Built Over 40 Years



The love of my life is the person I spend most of my time with, sharing moments that weave the fabric of our story together. We met over forty years ago and immediately realized there was an attraction that could not be restrained, a magnetic pull that drew us closer despite the world around us. Through countless adventures, laughter, and even the challenges that life threw our way, our bond has only grown stronger. Every shared glance and gentle touch tells a story of resilience and deep connection, and I cherish each day that we spend together, grateful for the enduring love that has transformed our lives into a beautiful journey.

Married in 1995, we share an inseparable bond that has only grown stronger over the years. We sleep together, eat together, and go to church together, nurturing our spiritual connection and values. Attending meetings together helps us support each other professionally and personally, while our frequent visits to restaurants allow us to explore new cuisines and make delightful memories. We watch movies together, immersing ourselves in various genres that reflect our tastes and spark our discussions. Engaging in countless other activities, we often find ourselves enjoying the simplest pleasures of life, like taking long walks. It truly feels like we are connected at the hip, understanding each other's thoughts and emotions without needing words. Our deep companionship suggests that we will probably experience the full journey of life together, cherishing each moment until the end.

AVOIDING FINANCIAL PITFALLS IN RETIREMENT

Retirement is an important time in life. After many years of work, the goal is to enjoy your later years in comfort. It's part of the American dream, achievable with careful planning and saving. A bit of luck is also needed for everything to align for a successful retirement. Since I retired nineteen years ago, I will share how I managed my finances for a comfortable retirement. First, I paid off all my credit cards, ensuring I only had monthly expenses that were paid off completely. I checked my social security benefits and the small pension we would receive. I assessed the condition of our vehicles to determine when they would need replacing. Then, I created a budget to see if our retirement income could cover our monthly expenses, with entertainment costs coming from our savings. We decided to retire, hoping our finances would last as long as we did.

Everything was going well until the financial crash of 2008, which caused our portfolio to show losses over half its value. We had to decide whether to sell the stocks and realize those losses. Since I didn't need the money, I chose to keep the stocks until they returned to their purchase price before selling. We didn't earn any money, but we also didn't lose anything. It took about seven years to recover our original investments. These were challenging times, and I decided to withdraw from the stock market entirely and invest only in secure options because I was too old to handle the stress. Since then, we have been financially stable.

As we age, health problems can affect our retirement plans, often putting vacations and trips on hold. We have enjoyed over nineteen years of a comfortable retirement and feel lucky to have had this time. We hope for many more years ahead.

Am I starting to show my age?

Recently I went to Home Depot to buy a replacement connector for a hose, a task that seemed straightforward enough. I find what I need, a sturdy little connector that would serve its purpose well, and head to the self-checkout with a sense of accomplishment. I scan the item and get ready to pay, feeling rather pleased with my efficient shopping. However, as I reach into my front pocket for the money, I receive the shock of my life. My billfold and money are not there! **PANIC!** Where are they? My heart races as I search my other pockets, but there's nothing. No wallet, no cash, nothing to complete my purchase. I feel a wave of embarrassment wash over me as I finally have to summon the clerk, my cheeks burning with the realization that I've forgotten my money. I inform her, awkwardly, that I can't pay for the five-dollar purchase because of my carefree negligence. She kindly voids out the purchase, a small relief amid my distress, and I rush to my car, my mind racing with thoughts of where I might have lost my wallet, as I hurry home, vowing to be more careful in the future.

The trip is about ten minutes to home, but it feels like an eternity as I replay the events in my mind. All the time I am thinking about what could have happened to my billfold and cash, the weight of worry growing heavier with each passing moment. Did it fall out of my pocket during my hurried walk? Impossible! I can't bear the thought of having lost such an important item. I start trying to retrace my tracks, mentally revisiting the last place I remember having it—each location sparks a flicker of hope but also despair. Maybe someone took it at breakfast yesterday, though I truly don't believe that, as this is precisely why I carry my billfold in the front pocket to thwart pickpockets. I had different pants on yesterday, a pair with more pockets but perhaps a looser fit. Maybe I left it in yesterday's pants, tucked away in a pocket I didn't think to check. That is possible, isn't it? The thought gives me a glimmer of optimism, as I urge myself to maintain hope while counting down the blocks until I reach home.

As I drive home, I can't shake off the feeling of dread as I imagine the worst-case scenarios—what if it is gone for good, lost among the countless other items in my car, or worse, stolen by someone who has no regard for the inconvenience they cause? My mind races through the exhausting process I will undoubtedly have to face, reporting my credit cards to prevent any unauthorized charges, replacing my driver's license along with my health insurance card, which is a nuisance I could do without. This situation brings back vivid memories of a particularly distressing day when my wife's purse was lifted off her shopping cart during our grocery run, a simple act that spiraled into a massive headache as we navigated the chaos of getting everything replaced. The discomfort and frustration we endured were overwhelming, turning a mundane shopping trip into a stressful ordeal that seemed to take forever to resolve. I can't help but wish we had taken extra precautions then, as this experience serves as a painful reminder of the vulnerability, we all face in our daily lives.

I finally get home and rush in the house, hurrying toward the closet where I had left yesterday's pants, my heart racing with anxiety and anticipation. **RELIEF!** It is there, waiting for me like a long-lost friend. Apparently, in my flustered morning rush, I took out all the other items from the pocket and meticulously placed them in the replacement pocket, but inadvertently put the billfold back in yesterday's pants, thinking I had checked everything thoroughly. As I hold the familiar fabric in my hands, a wave of embarrassment washes over me, reminding me of how forgetful I can be these days. It seems like little mishaps like this are becoming a routine, making me acutely aware of how I'm growing older, and I can't help but chuckle at my own forgetfulness, wishing I could easily dismiss these moments as mere quirks rather than signs of aging.

A Journey to Oshkosh



This is how it started.

My wife, Dee and I were over at Jeff my son's house for a delightful Christmas time meal, where the warm atmosphere and festive decorations sparked a nostalgic thought within me. "Maybe my Jeff would be willing to take us to Oshkosh, Wisconsin, so we could visit my brother Jack, who I haven't seen for over twenty years," I pondered, feeling a wave of emotion. It's been far too long since I shared precious moments with my sibling. At over eighty years old, and with my brother Jack being five years my senior, I often reflect on the fleeting nature of time and the importance of family connections. Unfortunately, due to my declining health and mobility, I felt apprehensive about embarking on such a trip alone. So, gathering my courage, I approached my son with my request. I asked him if he and his wife Jennifer would consider taking the journey with us. Jeff paused for a moment, contemplating the idea before he responded, saying that he would think about it and let me know, leaving me filled with hope and anticipation for the possibility of reconnecting with my brother after all those years apart.

Two weeks later, Jeff calls with excitement in his voice, saying he would be willing to assist us in this venture to Oshkosh, which filled me with joy and anticipation. I was elated at the thought of reuniting with my brother, cherishing the precious moments together before time on this earth is over for me or Jack. The connection we share is something I hold dear, and I imagined all the stories and memories we could create. After serious consideration, Dee informs me that due to her ongoing medical conditions and the age factor, she feels that she shouldn't make the trip for her own well-being. I understood her concerns, as her health must come first. Therefore, I call Jeff and informed him to just make plans for me, him, and Jennifer, hoping that this adventure would strengthen our bonds even further while honoring Dee's decision.

The following evening, Jeff calls me with an intriguing suggestion that Jennifer had proposed. Instead of her attending the trip, she thought it would be a great idea to invite Adam, who happens to be Jeff's brother, to join us instead. I found this suggestion quite interesting, as Adam, Jeff, and I have not spent some quality time together for many years. So, I decided to call Adam directly to discuss the idea, He responded enthusiastically, saying he would first talk to his wife to see if he could get off work for that weekend, which made me hopeful for a positive outcome. A few days later, I received a call from Adam, excitedly informing me that he had indeed managed to secure the time off, making it possible for him to join us. This development was fantastic news! With this confirmation, Jeff immediately set to work planning the details of our trip, Final arrangements were made for us to leave the evening of Thursday, May 15th, filled with anticipation for the adventure ahead, and return on Sunday morning, May 18th, looking forward to creating some unforgettable memories together. Ensuring our reunion would be one for the books.

On May 15th, Jeff worked in the morning and then picked me up at noon since I live conveniently between where he worked and his home. We decided to have a bite to eat at his home. Then, Mina, took us to the light rail station for the trip to DIA airport. I had never experienced this mode of transportation to DIA before, but Jeff had done this many times and seemed quite knowledgeable about the whole process. I am not a big fan of light rail

since the stations are always in a remote area that feels disconnected from the bustling city life, and I don't feel very comfortable waiting there. Additionally, there is that small number of people you encounter who make you uneasy with their actions or just their general demeanor. Despite my apprehensions, we arrived at DIA without any problem, and as we stepped off the train, I felt a wave of relief wash over me, grateful for the smooth trip and Jeff's company.

Jeff commented that the security wait during this time of day should be short. Wrong! It took about 40 minutes to get through security, which felt like an eternity with our bags weighing us down. The hustle and bustle of the airport only added to the stress of the afternoon. Finally, we met Adam at the gate to board the plane, relief washing over us as we spotted him in the crowd. The plane to Appleton was a small plane with just 3 seats across, and it was not very comfortable; each bump in the air seemed magnified in such a tiny cabin. Leaving Denver around 5:30 pm, we sat quietly as the sun dipped below the horizon, arriving at Appleton sometime after 10, accompanied by a growing sense of fatigue. After disembarking, we quickly made our way to the rental car, eager to leave the airport behind, and we drove to Oshkosh, arriving about 30 minutes later. As we pulled in, Jack met us, greeted us warmly, showed us to our rooms, and then promptly crashed, utterly exhausted. It has been a long, stressful day, filled with the anticipation of reunion and the weariness of travel.

On Friday we met Jack at 8 am, and his welcoming demeanor immediately put us at ease. Jack is some authority at The Jesuit Retreat House in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, a serene place known for its tranquil environment, where individuals come to seek peace and reflection. That is where we are staying for the weekend, surrounded by the picturesque landscapes that make this retreat house so special. Ironically, this weekend there is not a retreat going on, allowing us to enjoy the facilities more freely without the usual schedule of structured activities. it worked out well that the trip was planned without knowing there would be no retreat this weekend, as it provided us with a unique opportunity to explore the grounds and engage in meaningful conversations with Jack.

We then went to Oshkosh for breakfast, which is about 5 miles away from our place. Jeff, who is an early riser, decided to exercise at a fitness site in Oshkosh. He stumbled upon this charming little restaurant named Good Yolk that caught his attention. Intrigued by its inviting atmosphere, we collectively decided to give it a try, eager to see what breakfast delights awaited us. Jack, always the pragmatist, warned us that in this area, the food portions are normally large, a fact that often accompanies hearty breakfast cultures. He was indeed correct; our plates were overflowing with delicious options. Despite the overwhelming size of the meals, it was all exceptionally good, filled with flavors that made it a memorable experience we were glad to share together.

After breakfast, we drove back to the retreat house, a charming haven nestled in a picturesque setting, where Jack eagerly provided a grand tour of the facilities. It is truly a stunning place, characterized by its serene location on the shimmering shore of Lake Winnebago, surrounded by lush, meticulously maintained grounds that enhance its natural beauty. As we strolled through the property, I was captivated by the breathtaking views. From a cozy lounge area, you have a panoramic view of the lake, where the water sparkles under the sunshine like a blanket of diamonds. They had binoculars available, allowing us to observe the delightful birds flitting about as well as the various activities taking place on the

water, such as boats and fishing, adding to the lively atmosphere of this idyllic retreat.

Then after lunch, Jack wanted to take us to Waupaca, Wisconsin, which is an hour away from Oshkosh. They have a facility there where priests go during the summer for resting and relaxing, providing a serene escape from their daily responsibilities. It is only utilized during the warmer months, transforming into a tranquil haven away from the busyness of the outside world, a place where peace reigns, and nature's beauty captivates hearts. Jack really likes the area and apparently goes there every summer, always returning refreshed and rejuvenated after his visits, sharing stories of his experiences that resonate with a deep sense of connection to this idyllic setting. The drive to the facility is quite scenic; it is isolated, where you navigate down a narrow gravel road for maybe half a mile to reach your destination, surrounded by towering trees that seem to stand as guardians of this retreat. As you drive through this heavily wooded area, the anticipation builds, and you arrive at a location nestled near a beautiful lake, where the calm waters reflect the surrounding nature and cradle the silence that fills the air. Unfortunately, that day, the weather was not our friend, as the wind was blowing hard, rustling the leaves ominously and casting an eerie atmosphere that made our hearts race. On the way back, while navigating down the narrow gravel road, we discovered that a tree had blown over and blocked our path, an unexpected challenge that increased the tension among us. Fortunately, the main trunk did not fall across the road, creating an obstacle we couldn't ignore. Or we would have been stranded there, with no way to return to civilization. We quickly assessed the situation and were able to move the smaller branches, while Jeff skillfully maneuvered the car around the larger tree trunk, showcasing his adept driving skills. Adam and I worked together to hold back the branches that we couldn't break away from the trunk, each crack of the branches above adding to the tension, instilling a growing concern that another tree might take a tumble while we were precariously navigating this situation. It was a moment filled with both anxiety and exhilaration, the adrenaline coursing through us as we worked together to overcome this obstacle, but ultimately, we got out unscathed. Yes, that is indeed an ideal place to get away and disconnect from the chaos of everyday life, where one can truly immerse themselves in nature's embrace, allowing the soothing sounds of the lake and the forest to wash over the soul. We then got a bite to eat. We returned to the retreat house to spend an evening of talking and sharing events in our lives, where laughter echoed against the walls, and the warmth of friendship enveloped us like a comforting blanket.

Saturday, we met at the same time and went for breakfast in Oshkosh at The Mineshaft. This is primarily an evening restaurant, known for its vibrant nightlife and bustling atmosphere after dark. However, to our pleasant surprise, we discovered that they have a very reasonable breakfast menu priced at only seven bucks, which is quite a steal for the quality offered. The menu features a variety of delicious options, from fluffy pancakes to hearty omelets, catering to all breakfast lovers. You can tell that most of their profits are generated from drinks at night and the young crowd that flocks there for the lively energy and socializing. Despite its evening focus, the breakfast experience was enjoyable and filled with the friendly chatter of early risers, making our visit a delightful start to the weekend.

Driving by, we stumbled upon an intriguing establishment, the Military Veterans Museum, which piqued our curiosity, prompting us to make an impromptu visit. The museum showcased a comprehensive display of military conflicts throughout history, featuring an

impressive array of vehicles and equipment that have played pivotal roles in combat. Adam and I, being veterans ourselves, felt a deep connection to many of the items and stories on display, as they echoed our own experiences and sacrifices. Jack and Jeff, were equally captivated by the exhibits, sharing their insights and memories as we walked through the museum. After thoroughly exploring, we heard about the EAA Museum of Flight, which was highly recommended by several locals, and decided it warranted a visit. To our amazement, we quickly discovered that EAA was far larger than we had anticipated; it was a treasure trove of aviation history where one could easily spend an entire day taking in the detailed exhibits and aircraft on display. After 2 or 3 hours of exploration, however, the older members of the group were feeling fatigued and agreed it was time to call it a day. Before heading back to the retreat house, we made a stop at a charming Japanese restaurant that Jack had enthusiastically recommended. The food was delicious, providing a delightful culinary experience that was perfect after a day of adventure. Since it was late afternoon, we decided to return to the retreat house to unwind and spend another evening reconnecting with each other. We shared countless tales and stories, reminiscing about the last twenty years we had spent apart. Each narrative was filled with laughter and nostalgia, creating a warm atmosphere that allowed us to strengthen our bonds. This experience was not just enjoyable; it was a memory that we would all cherish forever.

Sunday, we met at 5:45 am to have a small bite to eat, eager to fuel ourselves for the day ahead. After indulging in two days of large, hearty meals, a modest breakfast felt both satisfying and refreshing, a welcome change that allowed us to ease our way into the morning. At 6:30, with a mix of nostalgia and anticipation, we said our goodbyes to Jack, who had been an incredible host throughout our stay. We then drove to Appleton, where the excitement grew as we approached the airport. We managed to get on the plane somewhere around 8:30, and as we took off, I looked out the window at the ever-changing scenery below. The flight was smooth, and I was filled with thoughts of the past few days until we landed at DIA around 10:30. Stepping into the terminal, I was just astonished by the sheer number of travelers bustling around the airport, a vibrant mix of voices and energy. I also couldn’t help but notice that there were very few older travelers in sight; most were young, hurried individuals, all with destinations calling. After navigating through the crowd, Tara, Adam's wife, picked us up with a warm smile. She took me home first, engaging in light conversation about our trip, followed by a detour to drop off Jeff, wrapping up what had been a memorable journey.

In conclusion, this has been a very memorable experience for me, one that I will cherish forever. I am incredibly glad that it all worked out well for everyone involved, as these moments are truly precious. I feel fortunate to have had the opportunity to visit Jack before our time is up on this earth. These visits remind us of the importance of connection and the bonds we share with our loved ones. Additionally, the time spent with my two sons was absolutely priceless; it filled my heart with joy and gratitude. It has been many years since we made the effort to reaffirm the love and the unbreakable bond a father and his sons share, a connection that will never fade away. Those moments together, filled with laughter and storytelling, not only reignited our familial ties but also allowed us to appreciate the present and the memories we create together.

Meeting in Dreams



Every night, Bernadette and George met in a dreamworld where gravity bent, colors bled into impossible hues, and buildings pulsed like living things, resonating with a heartbeat that felt both foreign and familiar. They were strangers in waking life, unaware of each other's existence, yet in this surreal realm, they were constant companions, bound by threads of fate that transcended the ordinary. As they explored the ever-shifting landscapes, laughter and whispered secrets filled the air like a melody, intertwining their souls in a dance of dreams. The first time they locked eyes, standing on a glass bridge over a sea of stars that shimmered with the essence of forgotten dreams, they both felt it—a jolt of recognition, though they'd never met, as if the universe had conspired to weave their destinies together in this ethereal space where the laws of reality faded into the backdrop of their shared imagination.

Bernadette, a quiet barista in Seattle, had dreamed of this enchanted place since childhood, her imagination ignited by tales of magic and wonder. George, a seasoned carpenter in Dublin, had been wandering its shifting landscapes for years, seeking solace and inspiration in a world that seemed to echo his innermost thoughts. The dreamworld was vast and mesmerizing, with forests of liquid light that shimmered like jewels and rivers that whispered secrets of forgotten lore. They'd find each other instinctively, drawn like magnets across the ethereal expanse. At first, they explored in silence, marveling at floating islands suspended in mid-air, or the playful dance of shadows that brought life to the otherwise still surroundings. Then, as curiosity overcame their initial shyness, they began to share their thoughts—discussing the dreamworld's whimsical rules, its breathtaking beauty, and their own lives that felt burdensome in the waking world. In that surreal haven, the barriers of reality faded away, and neither questioned why they shared this extraordinary space; it felt not just coincidental but profoundly inevitable, as if the universe had conspired to unite their souls in this sanctuary of dreams.

One night, under a sky of spiraling fractals, Bernadette asked, "Why us? What's connecting us?" George, carving intricate patterns into a glowing tree, paused and looked up, pondering her question with a faraway gaze. "Maybe we're two halves of something," he said, his voice barely above a whisper but carrying the weight of their entwined fates. They pieced together clues, reflecting on their journeys: both had lost someone—a parent for Bernadette, a brother for George—and both carried a peculiar loneliness, a profound sense of being unmoored in a world that seemed to move on without them. In the silence that followed, they shared unspoken fears and dreams, realizing that their paths had diverged only to converge in this ethereal space. The dreamworld, they theorized, was not merely a random occurrence but a bridge between their minds, forged by shared grief and collective healing, a

frequency only they could tune into, where the memories of their loved ones lingered like echoes, guiding them through their solitude.

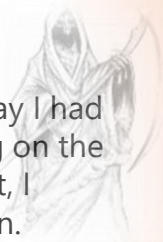
They grew close, sharing stories on dream lit cliffs that seemed to stretch endlessly beneath the vast, starry sky. Bernadette described Seattle's rain, how it fell gently like whispered secrets upon her skin, while George mimicked Dublin's pub songs, his voice echoing the lively spirit of the city. They laughed, their joy ringing through the air, argued about whimsical topics, and even danced once on a field of mirrored grass that glimmered under the moonlight. The dreamworld felt more real than their waking lives, each moment vibrant and full of emotion, as if they could touch the very fabric of their dreams. But neither could find the other outside the dream—no names to call out in the waking world, no addresses to search for, just fragments of a bond that lingered like the sweet, haunting melodies of the songs they shared. Their connection, though ephemeral, shone brightly within their hearts, leaving an imprint that would always tie them to those fleeting moments of pure magic.

Then George stopped appearing. The first night, Bernadette wandered alone, calling his name as the dreamworld dimmed, its colors muted, as if the very essence of her dreams had faded with him. Days turned into weeks, blending together in a hazy confusion, leaving her feeling isolated and lost. The once vibrant landscapes she would traverse grew brittle, crumbling under the weight of his absence, the trees sagging as if mourning the loss of their companion. Without George's presence, the joyful laughter they shared echoed in her mind like distant memories, leaving an ache in her heart. Bernadette's dreams became erratic and disjointed, sometimes filled with strange images that made no sense, while other times they formed empty voids that swallowed her whole. In waking life, her desperation deepened as she scoured the internet, spending countless hours posting vague descriptions of him on forums, hoping against hope that someone, somewhere might have seen him or could offer a clue. Yet, despite her efforts and the plethora of messages she sent into the digital abyss, she found nothing but silence, each reply further fueling her despair.

Unknown to her, George lay in a Dublin hospital, in a coma after a catastrophic work accident that had left everyone in shock. His mind, once a beacon in their shared dreamworld, was silent and unreachable, shrouded in darkness. Without his consciousness to anchor it, the dreamworld, once vibrant and full of life, began to crumble under the weight of uncertainty. Bernadette felt it fading around her, like a cherished memory slipping away from the grasp of her mind. Desperate to maintain a connection to him, she clung to sleep each night, where she sketched the dreamworld's landscapes with all the vivid details she could muster, drawing rivers that sparkled under imaginary moons and forests that whispered secrets. Each stroke of her imagination was a lifeline to the beauty they had created together a world teeming with colors and emotions that felt almost tangible. But with each passing night, as George remained adrift in his silent slumber, less and less of that precious world remained, transforming into shadows of what once was, leaving Bernadette increasingly anxious and lonely.

One night, the dreamworld vanished entirely, slipping through her fingers like sand. Bernadette woke sobbing, feeling as if a piece of her soul had been ripped away, the loss as sharp as losing a home where she had built countless memories. In Dublin, miles away yet connected by invisible threads, George's monitors flatlined, their steady beep replaced by an ominous silence. Their connection, born of shared sorrow and a strange cosmic alignment, dissolved with his final breath, leaving an emptiness that echoed through both their lives. Bernadette never learned his name, yet she carried the dreamworld's echoes within her, painting its impossible colors on the canvas of her heart, searching for him in every stranger's face she passed in the bustling streets, wondering if the universe would ever align their paths again in a way that could rekindle the bond they had unknowingly forged in the dreamscape. The world outside seemed less vibrant, a mere shadow of the brilliance they had shared in those fleeting moments, and she longed for a sign, a whisper from the cosmos that he might still be out there, dreaming alongside her in some parallel realm, waiting for the moment when their destinies could intertwine once more.

FROM DEATH'S DOOR TO NEW BEGINNINGS



My favorite moment in my life happened February 7, 2023. This is the day I had a near-death experience that profoundly changed my perspective on life. I was laying on the operating table, feeling a wave of panic as I couldn't inhale or exhale. In that moment, I surely thought that my time was over and that I would never see my loved ones again. Suddenly, I passed out and went somewhere beyond the bounds of my earthly existence. With a massive blood clot between my lungs. The doctors said they had better results if the patient stayed awake, so I went with that option. About 30 minutes after the start, I was really feeling horrible. I was having trouble getting a breath, at this time, I experienced **PEACE, TOTAL PEACE** like I had never known before. It enveloped me, washing away all fears and worries, transcending the chaos of my thoughts. It was an overwhelming sense of serenity that I will never forget, a stark contrast to the medical environment I had just left behind. I find myself reflecting on this experience frequently, and I look forward to experiencing this **PEACE, TOTAL PEACE** after my time on this earth is over, knowing now that there is a beauty in the unknown that goes beyond life itself.

This is the day I dodged death. I was standing in front of death's door, and Doctor Death was holding the door open for me to enter, beckoning me with a chilling smile. **Surprise**! **I survived!** The moments that followed were surreal, almost dreamlike, as I wrestled with the reality of my existence. I found out later that the survival rate of that type of clot is only 3 to 5 percent, making my escape feel like a miracle. I beat the odds and emerged from that harrowing experience with a newfound appreciation for life. Now, I have experienced over 2 1/2 years of bonus years on this earth, filled with laughter, adventure, and moments I never thought I'd take for granted again. Waking up each day has transformed into one of my favorite moments, a celebration of existence where every sunrise is a reminder of my strength and resilience. Each breath I take is infused with gratitude, pushing me to make the most of this unexpected lease on life.

POCKET CALCULATORS



When pocket calculators rose to prominence in the early 1970s, they encountered significant skepticism and opposition, particularly from educators and traditionalists. A range of negative criticisms and excuses emerged during this period, grounded in the historical context of the time.

Many educators argued calculators would make students lazy, reducing their ability to perform mental arithmetic or master basic math concepts, which are crucial skills for everyday life. Teachers feared students would rely too heavily on machines instead of learning multiplication tables or long division, leading to a generation that struggles with fundamental mathematics. This reliance could hinder their problem-solving abilities and critical thinking, skills that are not only essential in academics but also in real-world scenarios where quick calculations may be necessary. Furthermore, the concern extended beyond just academic performance; it encompassed a broader issue regarding the potential erosion of cultural literacy in mathematics, as students might miss out on the satisfaction and confidence that come from mastering these essential skills through practice and understanding. As a result, many educators advocated for a balanced approach, incorporating calculators in a manner that would enhance learning rather than undermine it.

Schools worried that calculators would allow students to bypass learning fundamental mathematical concepts by quickly computing answers during tests, thereby undermining the educational process and making it hard to assess true understanding. These concerns highlighted a deeper issue: the fear that reliance on technology could lead students to become overly dependent on devices for simple calculations, stunting their ability to think critically and solve problems independently. Educators emphasized the importance of grasping the underlying principles of mathematics, suggesting that without a solid foundation, students might struggle in higher-level courses. Moreover, there was a growing debate about how to effectively integrate technology into the curriculum without diminishing the value of traditional learning methods. As a result, schools began re-evaluating their policies on calculator use, seeking a balance that would encourage both technological advancement and comprehensive learning.

Critics pointed out that early calculators were prone to errors, had limited functions, and relied on batteries that could fail, making them less dependable than manual methods or mechanical adding machines. These devices often produced incorrect calculations due to their rudimentary technology, which did not account for more complex computations. Furthermore, the reliance on batteries posed a significant drawback; users frequently found themselves without a functioning calculator when power ran low, particularly in critical situations where reliable calculations were essential. The maintenance costs and the need for constant battery replacement added to the overall inconvenience, leading many to prefer the tried-and-true methods of manual calculation or the reliability of mechanical systems. This skepticism about early calculators also reflected a broader hesitation within the industry to fully embrace electronic devices, as users questioned their long-term viability and accuracy in comparison to traditional techniques.

Slide rule users and accountants argued that calculators would render established tools obsolete, threatening the skills of professionals who relied on manual computation methods. They believed the introduction of these electronic devices would not only diminish the use of traditional tools like slide rules and adding machines but also risk a significant loss of practical skills among workers in the field. Many professionals felt that their expertise, honed through years of training and practice, could become undervalued in a world increasingly dependent on automated solutions. This shift challenged the established norms of education and practice, prompting a debate about the importance of foundational skills in an ever-evolving technological landscape. Furthermore, there was a concern that an over-reliance on calculators might lead to a generation of professionals who could struggle with basic numerical reasoning and problem-solving, thus impacting the overall integrity and accuracy in fields where precision is paramount.

Some saw calculators as a gimmick, claiming they didn't teach problem-solving or critical thinking, just button-pushing, which was viewed as less intellectually rigorous. These critics argued that relying on technology for basic computations could lead to a decline in essential mathematical skills. They believed that the traditional methods of learning, which emphasized manual calculations and deep understanding of mathematical concepts, were being undermined by the convenience of calculators. Furthermore, they expressed concerns that students might become overly dependent on such devices, potentially stunting their ability to approach more complex problems with creativity and confidence. In the long run, they feared that this reliance could result in a generation of learners who lacked the foundational skills necessary for advanced studies or real-world applications.

Do these criticisms sound similar to the ones you hear about artificial intelligence (AI)? It sure does to me. Many people express concerns about the rapid advancement of technology and its implications for society, often raising questions about ethical considerations, job displacement, and the potential for bias in AI systems. Just as the advent of the internet sparked debates about privacy and information overload, the rise of AI brings forth similar discussions about its role in our daily lives and the long-term effects it may have on humanity. These parallels highlight a recurring theme in our relationship with technology: the need for careful scrutiny and responsible development to ensure that progress benefits everyone.

The car I bought when discharged out of the army. 1966 Dodge Charger



THE WHISPERING INK

Bill Graves was used to writing in silence, his words shaping worlds for others while his name remained absent from their covers. He was a ghostwriter—a specter in the literary shadows, crafting narratives that thrived in the minds of readers, yet remained anonymous to the public eye. His latest project was different, however, stirring something within him that had long been dormant. The request had come in a faded envelope, scrawled with a single name: Barry Carrol. Unlike the countless other clients whose stories he had brought to life, Carrol's reputation resonated like a haunting echo from the past, invoking curiosity and a sense of urgency. As Bill held the envelope, he felt an unusual thrill; the chance to reveal the truth behind Barry Carrol 's enigmatic persona filled him with excitement. The shadows felt a bit brighter, and the silence around him buzzed with potential as he prepared to delve into a world that promised both challenge and discovery.

Barry Carrol had been a celebrated novelist, known for his haunting prose that lingered in the minds of readers long after the last page was turned. His works, filled with deep emotion and intricate storytelling, captivated literary critics and audiences alike, earning him numerous accolades and a loyal following. Then, years ago, he vanished without a trace. There were no more books, no more interviews, just distant whispers of him retreating into solitude, lost in a world of his own making. Friends and colleagues speculated about his disappearance, while fans mourned the abrupt end to a brilliant career. Now, in an unexpected turn of fate, Bill had been hired to complete Carrols's unfinished manuscript, a daunting task that came with immense pressure and a profound sense of responsibility, as he aimed to honor the late author's voice while infusing the narrative with his inspiration.
The pages arrived in bundles, sent by an unnamed editor, each package wrapped tightly as if to contain the energy within. Bill expected fragments of ideas, skeletal outlines that would require his creative touch to flesh out. But what he received was unsettling, almost haunting. The words were alive, pulsating with a rhythm that seemed to seep into his very being. Characters spoke in voices that echoed in his mind, their emotions so vivid that he could almost feel their breaths against his skin. As he delved deeper into their stories, he found himself ensnared in their struggles and triumphs, each turn of phrase igniting a spark of inspiration within him yet also leaving him with an unsettling sense of responsibility for their fates.

As he wrote, something strange happened. He would wake in the night, startled by the sound of scribbling, only to find new passages written in his own hand. Words he hadn't drafted appeared on the pages, eerie and unmistakably Carrol's style, flowing like a river that had burst its banks. Each time he turned the pages, he felt a shiver run down his spine, not from fear but from an inexplicable thrill of realization—the book was writing itself, crafting a narrative that seemed to transcend his own consciousness. It was as if the voice of an unseen muse had taken hold of him, channeling ideas and scenarios that felt both foreign and deeply personal. As he read the newly inscribed lines, he wrestled with the notion that perhaps he was not just an author but a vessel for something more profound, a connection to an otherworldly source of creativity that was beyond his understanding.

One evening, unable to shake his unease, Bill scoured old news archives with a sense of mounting dread. He found an article detailing Carrol's mysterious disappearance, claiming he'd died in solitude, shrouded in an unsettling silence that made the hairs on the back of his neck stand up. The official story was vague, leaving many questions unanswered, but there was something chilling about the timeline that seemed to dance in the shadows of his mind, suggesting deeper secrets lingering just out of reach. As he delved deeper into the sparse details, a sense of foreboding washed over him, igniting a flicker of curiosity mixed with dread about the truth behind Carrol's last moments.

His trembling fingers turned to the final pages of the manuscript, each delicate turn amplifying the mix of anxiety and anticipation gnawing at his insides. It was nearly done—yet he hadn't consciously written the ending, leaving a void that felt as vast as the empty pages themselves. He scanned the paragraphs, heart pounding like a drumbeat in the stillness of the room, each word echoing with uncertainty and hope. His mind raced with the possibilities of what could unfold; the characters he had nurtured, their struggles laid bare, seemed to gaze back at him, pleading for closure. The last line struck him like a jolt of lightning: "*Some stories never truly end. They only wait for a new hand to tell them.*" In that fleeting moment, he realized that perhaps his journey as a storyteller was just beginning, and the ink of his pen was merely a bridge to the countless tales yet to be woven.

Bill dropped the pages in frustration, letting them scatter across the floor as he reached for his phone, intending to call the editor for guidance on the pressing issue at hand. However, just as he was about to press the call button, his screen flickered dramatically, momentarily illuminating the dim room in an eerie glow. In that brief instant, the reflection that appeared wasn't his own, but rather a shadowy visage that sent a chill down his spine, making him question whether he was truly alone in the room or being watched from an unseen presence lurking in the darkness.

Barry Carrol's thin, knowing smile stared back at him, a subtle hint of mystery dancing at the corners of his lips, as if he held secrets that only he understood; the kind of smile that suggested he had seen things others could only imagine, experiences etched into his features like a map of a complex journey, inviting curiosity yet holding back the truths he might reveal. Each curve and line of his face seemed to tell a story, layered with depth and intrigue, leaving the observer not only captivated but also yearning to unveil the enigma that surrounded him. His eyes sparkled with a glimmer of mischief, possibly hinting at laughter shared in quiet moments or whispers of adventures taken under the moonlight, which made the beholder wonder about the paths Barry had walked and the memories that lingered, enticing them to delve deeper into the psyche of the man behind that enigmatic expression, to unravel the tapestry of experiences that shaped him into the person he was today.



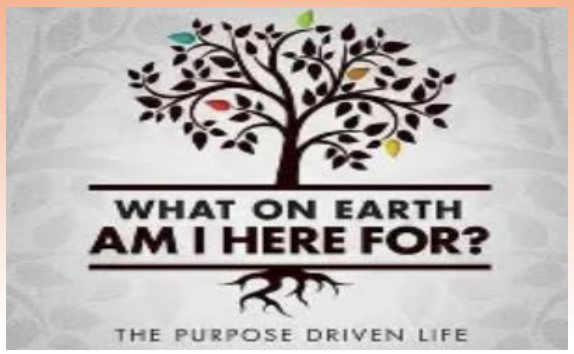
CELEBRATE NATIONAL SPLURGE TODAY

National Splurge Day, celebrated annually on June 18th, encourages people to set aside their usual frugality and indulge in a little luxury, whether it's a lavish meal, a spa day, or a significant shopping spree. Founded in 1994 by Adrienne Sioux Koopersmith, dubbed "America's Premier Eventologist," this holiday was created to offer a much-needed break from constant budgeting and to boost the economy through strategic spending that can stimulate local businesses. Koopersmith chose late June, post-tax season, when individuals might have extra cash on hand to treat themselves or their loved ones, creating an opportunity for joyful spending and the enjoyment of life's pleasures. The day serves as a reminder of the importance of self-care and indulgence, inviting people to reflect on what they truly desire and encouraging a balance between saving and enjoying the fruits of one's labor.

Splurging doesn't mean reckless spending; it's about enjoying something special without breaking the bank. For some, it might involve treating themselves to a fancy dinner at a celebrated restaurant, indulging in a luxurious spa day complete with massages and relaxation, or investing in a stylish pair of new shoes that complements their wardrobe. On the other hand, for others, it could simply be a small treat like adding whipped cream to a latte or purchasing a decadent dessert to savor. The day promotes mindful indulgence, encouraging experiences that create lasting memories, such as attending a lively concert, going on a weekend getaway with friends, or even participating in a fun workshop that sparks creativity. Koopersmith later shifted the holiday's focus in 2017, urging people to splurge on helping refugees or shelter animals, reflecting a more altruistic approach that not only enhances one's own well-being but also supports those in need, fostering a sense of community and compassion in the process. Ultimately, splurging can be a multifaceted experience that balances personal enjoyment with the joy of giving back.

Whether it's buying a luxury item, enjoying a decadent meal, or donating to a cause, National Splurge Day is about balance—celebrating life's pleasures while staying financially responsible. It's a day to break away from the mundane routines and immerse yourself in experiences that bring joy and fulfillment. Share your splurge on social media with #NationalSplurgeDay to inspire others, showcasing both the small delights and the grand gestures that make life richer. So, on June 18th, take a moment to treat yourself or someone else to something special, whether it's a lavish spa day, an exquisite piece of art, or simply a thoughtful gift. Celebrate the joy of indulgence done right, and remember that it's the little things that can make a big impact in our lives and the lives of those around us. Embrace this day as an opportunity to reconnect with what truly matters to you, creating lasting memories that elevate your spirit and enhance your well-being.





EXPLORING OUR PURPOSE

Have you ever thought about why you are spending time on this earth?
The world is not a friendly place. There is bad weather, disease, and pain, all of which contribute to a pervasive sense of distress. It seems that there is constant war somewhere on the earth, threatening lives and displacing countless individuals from their homes. In some parts of the world, starvation is a serious problem, with entire communities struggling to find enough food to survive each day. The anguish of those suffering from hunger is compounded by a lack of access to medical care and basic sanitation, leading to a cycle of despair and hopelessness. I could go on and on about how this earth is not a friendly place for millions who have spent time on this planet, enduring hardships that often seem insurmountable, leaving them to wonder if there is any reprieve in sight.

How many faiths and religions have been or are currently attempting to explain the profound question of your presence on this earth? Each belief system, whether ancient or modern, carries unique stories and teachings that reflect humanity's quest for understanding its place in the universe. From the monotheistic teachings of major world religions to the polytheistic perspectives found in various traditions, countless voices have sought to articulate the meaning of life and existence. Through rituals, sacred texts, and communal practices, these faiths aim to provide answers to our deepest yearnings and questions about purpose, identity, and the ultimate nature of reality.

The earth is just a small speck in this gigantic universe, a tiny oasis amidst the vastness of space that stretches infinitely in all directions. I do not know how many planets have been discovered that may be suitable for forms of life to survive, but scientists tirelessly search for those celestial bodies that might harbor the conditions necessary for life, such as the right temperature, atmosphere, and presence of water. Each new discovery ignites the imagination, prompting wild speculations about the myriad possibilities for life beyond our own world, raising questions about our place in the cosmos and whether we are truly alone in this grand expanse.

What if your time is a form of penance or punishment from another civilization located in the gigantic universe, a celestial courtroom beyond our comprehension? Are we paying for something that we did in another planet, shackled by the weight of our past mistakes, and time on earth was the sentence imposed upon us? Perhaps the very fabric of our existence is governed by unseen forces, orchestrating our lives in a manner we cannot fully understand. I often find myself pondering these perplexing ideas, questioning whether the mundane trials we endure are mere trivialities or echoes of a cosmic judgment. I don't know where these crazy thoughts come from, but they linger like shadows in my mind, provoking a sense of wonder and questions about the true nature of our reality and our place within this vast, enigmatic universe.

Is this just me, or do you ever wonder about your purpose and time on this earth? It seems that, at various points in our lives, we find ourselves pondering the deeper meanings of our existence, searching for answers to questions that often feel too complex to grasp.

We reflect on the choices we've made, the experiences we've had, and the dreams we once chased, all while considering how they shape our identity and future. In a world that is constantly changing, it's natural to seek clarity about our roles and the impact we leave behind, as we navigate the delicate balance between fulfilling personal aspirations and contributing to the greater good.

This question will remain unanswered until after our time on earth; it lingers like a whisper in the wind, provoking thought and curiosity in those who consider its meaning. As we navigate life's complexities and mysteries, we often struggle with the uncertainties that shape our human experience. Whether through philosophy, spirituality, or science, the answers we seek may be out of reach, prompting us to reflect on our beliefs and values as we move through life. Ultimately, we may only discover the truths that have been hidden from us once we rise beyond our earthly limits.

In my younger years I dressed up for Halloween!











My First Crush



The night of April 11th, 2010, I had a strange dream. This involved a girl, (woman) I have not thought about for 68 years. This was Sandra. I went to grade, junior, and high school with her. In grade school Sandra and I were very close. The first time we met we were attracted to each other. That was over sixty years ago, and I can't say that I can remember that much about that time. We did make it a point to be next to each other and would look for each other when there was a gathering. I do remember one event that still is important to me. During that time there were tables the size where two individuals sat at the table. We always made it a point to sit at the same table if we were able to. Anyway, the teacher was rambling on, and I was on the left Sandra was on the right. Our arms were resting on the table, and they were barely touching each other. I was starting to get this tingling feeling from my elbow down to my wrist where our arms were interacting. This felt great! I can still feel the tingling going up and down my arm. Sandra was having the same response. She looks at me and smiles. I will never forget this moment. This was before sex ever became involved or thought about. One could say she was my first girlfriend, maybe even my soul mate and didn't realize it.

We went on to high school and began to drift apart. My teenage years were very hard for me. I was angry and mad. I didn't like myself. I didn't like the feelings and thoughts I was having. Those apparent hormones were doing a number on me. I had a loving family, All the things a teenager could expect. Driving at sixteen, a part time job and money in my pocket. Looking back at those times, I would say I was a jerk. Because of this I killed the relationship between me and Sandra. We went our separate ways, and I didn't think of her until April 11, 2010.

In this dream Sandra came to me and said, "*Tom, I was meant (created) for you. However, you rejected me. Our lives would have been totally different if you would not have rejected me*." This dream was a visual and moving dream. This bothered me because I wondered why I dreamt of Sandra after not seeing or hearing about her for over fifty years or more. Finally, on April 18th I thought I would search for some information about Sandra.

Going to my yearbook newsletters I found out she was married to Ed. I did a Google search and came up with an obituary stating that Sandra passed away April 8, 2010. **That was only three days before I had my strange dream**. This really shocked me and leaves me with more questions than answers. Was this a visit from someone who recently died. Would my life have been different? Would it have been better or worse? I will never know. I have had a good life, and I feel I have made more good decisions instead of bad decisions. Did this change my outlook? Yes, it did. I have never been a strong religious person even though I was born and raised a Catholic. They teach that there is life after death. But I always had in the back of my mind, that may be wrong. However, after this dream I am convinced that yes, there is something after death. This dream occurred in 2010, and the dream relieved me of that thought ever since. death is not final. You can come to your own conclusion. Life is one large teaching experience. From birth until death, you are learning.

LESSONS FROM PRESIDENT LINCOLN

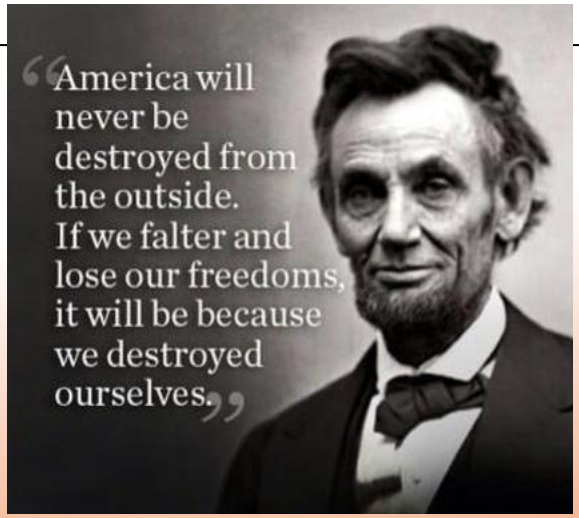
Lincoln led the United States during the Civil War (1861–1865), a time that challenged the nation's core values and survival. His determination to keep the Union intact while handling numerous political and military obstacles demonstrated strong leadership. Throughout the war, Lincoln encountered significant opposition from both his party and outside forces, but he stayed committed to equality and democracy. He recognized that the conflict was about more than just winning battles; it was also about ending slavery and healing the nation. Through impactful speeches, key decisions, and adapting his strategies, Lincoln inspired hope and ensured that the principles of liberty and justice would survive beyond the war's turmoil.

Born into poverty in a small log cabin, Lincoln was determined to educate himself. He read many books and discussed ideas, eventually becoming a respected lawyer. His journey from such humble beginnings to political power shows resilience and grit. He faced personal struggles and led a divided nation with compassion and integrity. His story of perseverance can inspire anyone who values determination, proving that hard work can help overcome significant challenges to achieve success.

His speeches, like the Gettysburg Address, clearly expressed powerful ideas about democracy and equality, leaving a lasting impact on history and society. He conveyed a message that touched people's hearts and minds, encouraging them to think about their values and responsibilities, while fostering hope for a future where everyone is treated with dignity and respect. During times of conflict, his words acted as a guiding light, promoting unity and justice, and inspiring generations to support the principles of freedom and human rights for all.

Lincoln wasn't flawless. He wrestled with his own views on race, faced criticism for suspending habeas corpus, and made tough calls that weren't universally popular. His ability to grow, listen, and adapt while staying true to core principles makes him relatable and human.

That is why I immediately thought of Abraham Lincoln, a leader renowned for his wisdom and unwavering commitment to unity during one of the most tumultuous times in American history. His ability to navigate through conflicts and bring people together, despite their differing views, serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of empathetic leadership in today's world.





The Emotional Role of Dreams

In many parts of my life, I had terrific dreams that painted the night with vivid colors and extraordinary stories, making it feel like I was living two lives simultaneously. The dreams were colorful and vibrant, filled with an array of subjects that ranged from whimsical adventures in fantastical realms to profound encounters that shifted my perspective on reality. The nice part was I could remember the dreams when waking up, and each recollection felt like a precious gift, allowing me to hold onto those enchanting moments from my subconscious. Unfortunately, everything changed when I had a kidney stone when I was seventy-five and was put under anesthesia to remove the stone. Since that time, I do not remember my dreams at all; they seem to slip away into oblivion as I awaken, leaving behind only an elusive echo of their existence. I experience them when asleep, but now when I wake up, they are gone, like whispers lost in the wind. I miss my dreams dearly, as they were a source of inspiration and joy. I really enjoy recalling my dreams in my conscious time, as they opened up new avenues of creativity and allowed me to explore parts of my mind that felt unexplored. Now, I long for the return of those magical nights where my imagination could run wild and the boundaries of reality seemed to fade away. I do not believe that ability will ever return.

The purpose of dreams isn't fully understood, but research suggests they serve multiple functions. Neurologically, dreams may help process emotions, consolidate memories, and integrate new information, with the brain's amygdala and hippocampus playing key roles during REM sleep. Studies, like those from the University of California (2019), indicate dreaming aids in emotional regulation, reducing stress by reprocessing challenging experiences. Cognitively, dreams might enhance problem-solving and creativity by allowing the brain to form novel connections—evidenced by historical anecdotes like Kekulé's benzene ring dream. Some evolutionary theories propose dreams simulate threats, preparing us for real-world challenges, though this is debated.

Psychologically, dreams could reflect subconscious thoughts, as Freud suggested, or serve as a "virtual reality" for testing scenarios, per Antti Revonsuo's threat simulation theory. However, the random activation synthesis model (Hobson & McCarley, 1977) argues dreams are the brain's attempt to make sense of random neural firing, not always purposeful. Cultural and personal beliefs also shape dream interpretation, but no single purpose is universally agreed upon. Ongoing research continues to explore these angles.

I have always wondered if not going under anesthesia would allow me to keep my dreams, those fleeting images and feelings that often fade upon waking. It intrigues me how dreams can be vivid and meaningful yet easily forgotten. What in the anesthesia removed my ability to remember my dreams? I will never know.

THE CHAOS AND BEAUTY OF RAINSTORMS TALES

The sky had been a deep, foreboding grey all morning, with clouds that seemed to swirl and twist in every direction, creating a dramatic tapestry that hinted at the chaos to come. The air was heavy with anticipation, electric with the promise of something big, as if the very atmosphere was charged with a sense of impending change. People moved about their day, casting glances upward, sensing the shift in the wind and the tension building around them. And then, just as suddenly as a switch had been flipped, the heavens opened up, unleashing a torrential downpour that transformed the landscape, painting the world in shades of silver as water cascaded from the sky, offering both relief and a touch of chaos to the day.

Rain came pouring down, drumming against the pavement, rattling the leaves of the trees, and flooding the streets. It was a deluge, a torrent, a spring rainstorm for the ages, transforming the world into a shimmering tableau of water and light. The droplets were big and fat, falling with a force that made them bounce and splash on impact, creating tiny, glittering puddles that began to merge into one another. They pounded against the windows, threatening to break through, and drummed a relentless beat on the roofs of cars, filling the air with a rhythm that seemed to echo the pulse of nature itself. The scent of wet earth and fresh rain wafted through the air, invigorating and soothing, as the skies darkened and lightning flickered against the horizon. People hurried for cover, their faces turned upwards, momentarily entranced by the sheer spectacle of nature's fury, while the streets transformed into rivers, carrying away everything in their path.

As the storm intensified, the world outside became a blur, transforming into a chaotic tapestry of swirling shades of gray. Visibility was reduced to mere feet, leaving pedestrians to navigate by instinct, while even the brightest colors were muted by the veil of relentless rain. People scurried for cover, their laughter and shouts mingling with the sound of raindrops hammering against the pavement as they desperately tried to stay dry. Some brave souls, undeterred by the weather, attempted to dance in the downpour, twirling and spinning in the puddles that quickly formed, their joyous movements creating a stark contrast to the dreary scene. The air was filled with a sense of exhilaration, as droplets cascaded from leaves overhead, adding to the symphony of nature's fury and the collective spirit of those embracing the storm.

The smell of wet earth and ozone filled the air, a primal scent that spoke of renewal and rebirth. It was as if the storm was washing away the remnants of winter, cleansing the world of its chill and darkness. The rain seeped into the parched soil, quenching the thirst of roots and seeds that had lain dormant for months, awakening them from their deep slumber. As each droplet fell, it created a symphony of sound against the leaves and pavement, harmonizing with the distant rumble of thunder that echoed through the skies. The once-silent world began to stir; birds emerged, darting through the droplets, while insects buzzed joyously, celebrating the much-needed reprieve from the harshness of the cold season. A vibrant tapestry of green started to emerge from the ground, as grass blades stretched toward the heavens, soaking in the nourishment from above, and tiny buds unfurled, eager to embrace the warmth of the sun that would soon follow.



As the storm raged on, the sounds of the city changed dramatically, creating an eerie ambiance that felt both surreal and captivating. Car horns honked, but they were muffled and distant, as if the storm wrapped the vehicles in a thick blanket of water. The once vibrant chatter of pedestrians, filled with laughter and conversation, was replaced by the relentless patter of raindrops hitting various surfaces, creating a rhythmic symphony that drowned out the usual bustle. Even the birds, which typically filled the air with their cheerful songs, seemed to take shelter, their melodies silenced by the cacophony of the storm that roared overhead. Streets, usually alive with movement, now appeared desolate, the only movement coming from the wind that swept through the deserted avenues, carrying with it the scent of damp earth and the promise of renewal once the tempest had passed.

But amidst the chaos, there was beauty that caught the eye and touched the soul. The rain brought out the vibrant greens of the trees, transforming the landscape into a shimmering oasis, while the flowers that had begun to bloom seemed to unfurl their petals in joy, their colors bursting forth like a painter's palette. The world was fresh and new, washed clean by the storm's fury, as if nature itself had been given a rejuvenating bath that restored its brilliance. In the stillness that followed, when the rain finally began to let up, a breathtaking rainbow stretched across the sky, its colors bold and bright, arching gracefully as if reminding everyone of the hope and promise that follows even the most tumultuous downpours. The air was filled with the sweet scent of wet earth, and everywhere around, life seemed to awaken, vibrant and full of possibility.

As the sun broke through the clouds, casting a warm golden hue across the landscape, the city began to stir with a newfound energy. People emerged from their shelters, blinking in the bright light as they shielded their eyes with their hands, trying to adjust to the vibrant day that had dawned. Laughter echoed down the streets as friends and families reunited, their smiles wide and genuine, relieved that the storm had finally passed. The air was crisp and fragrant, filled with the scent of wet earth and blossoming flowers, a true testament to nature's power. Children dashed through puddles, their giggles mingling with the sounds of birds returning to their perches, singing sweet melodies. The world was renewed, refreshed, and rejuvenated, as if it had taken a deep breath after a long, restless night. The spring rainstorm had breathed life into the city, washing away the remnants of winter, and it would take weeks for the delightful effects of this transformation to wear off, as the vibrant colors of spring unfolded in every corner, and the community thrived anew. In the puddles that remained, the sky was reflected, a perfect mirror image, showcasing hues of blue and gray that danced together like an artist's palette. And in the hearts of those who had weathered the storm, there was a profound sense of wonder, a deep appreciation for the power of nature's forces, a reminder of how small we truly are in the grand tapestry of existence. The air, fresh and invigorating, carried with it the delicate scent of earth and rain-soaked flowers. The spring rainstorm had been an eye-opening reminder that even in the midst of chaos, where thunder roars and lightning strikes, there is beauty to be found, hidden in the droplets that cascade from leaves and the vibrant colors that burst forth as life awakens once more.

THE EMOTIONAL IMPACT OF COLD WEATHER

Cold weather is tougher to deal with as I age. My body is more sensitive to the chill, as blood vessels constrict more with age, reducing warmth, which makes me feel the cold more intensely than I used to. My joints can ache in the cold, and arthritis flares are common, per studies, making even simple movements feel like a daunting task. This increased discomfort is compounded by the hassle of icy sidewalks, which not only present a risk of slipping and falling but can also lead to serious injuries that could be life-threatening, especially in older adults. Additionally, the psychological toll of winter can further exacerbate feelings of isolation and discomfort, making the desire for warmth and safety all the more pressing.

When I was young, we used to spend hours in the newly falling snow, marveling at the pristine white landscape that transformed our neighborhood into a winter wonderland. We excitedly made snowmen of all shapes and sizes, dressing them with colorful scarves and hats that added a touch of personality to our frosty creations. In our ambitious quest, we attempted to build an igloo, huddled together as we packed the snow tightly, forming the walls of our icy fort. Unfortunately, we never had much success because of the ceiling or roof, which always seemed to elude our grasp, leaving our structure incomplete. Despite the chill in the air, we would stay outside for hours, our feet growing numb but our spirits high, as we laughed and played. By the time we finally trudged back into the warm house, our feet were a few degrees above freezing and our eyes felt like they were on fire from the glaring sunlight bouncing off the snow, rendering us snow blind. No wonder I had a cataract when I was fifty; those winter days filled with joy and adventure were etched into my memory, along with the price of such carefree revelry.

Then growing up came into play, and with it, the realities of adult life began to unfold. Driving to work on treacherous ice and thick, heavy snow became a struggle, transforming many mornings into an anxious chore filled with uncertainty. Shoveling thousands of sidewalks over the next 40 or 50 years felt like an endless battle against the elements, a chore that wore on my spirit as the years passed. Cold weather, once a source of excitement and joy in my youth, became a bitter reminder of the burdens I now bore, diminishing the thrill of snowy winters and turning them into a relentless cycle of labor and discomfort.

When I retired, we thought of moving to Phoenix like our neighbor did, lured by the promise of sunny skies and warm temperatures year-round. However, family ultimately won out, as the ties to our loved ones were too strong to break. This reminds me of one holiday when I casually mentioned to my stepdaughter the possibility of relocating to Phoenix, expecting her to be enthusiastic about the idea. The expression on her face was unforgettable; her wide eyes and dropped jaw conveyed a mix of disbelief and disappointment. I could see that the thought of leaving her behind would have crushed her spirit. I don't think she would have ever forgiven me if we moved away, uprooting our lives and leaving memories behind. Therefore, after deep discussions and a lot of heart, the decision was made to stay in our home, surrounded by familiar faces, sharing laughter and warmth, even if it meant enduring the biting cold of winter and just moaning and complaining about the chilly weather during those long months.

Random photos

Where I worked before retiring. Industrial lasers where substrate boards were cut out of ceramic for micro electronic circuits. Very precise close tolerance procedure.









My wife was a cake decorator and had her own shop. Many fond memories delivering And setting up these wedding cakes.





RAMBLINGS MAGAZINE

COMMENTS ABOUT ANYTHING

I'll bring this installment to a close, but the journey is far from over. Each issue has its own rhythm, its own little spark, and sharing that with you makes the whole process feel alive. Your presence gives these pages a kind of continuity, a thread that carries forward even when the story shifts or the tone deepens. So take a breath, settle in, and know that the next chapter is already gathering itself in the wings. I'll see you in the next issue — number 22— where the world opens a little wider, the stakes rise just enough to keep things interesting, and a few well-placed surprises wait to greet you.





