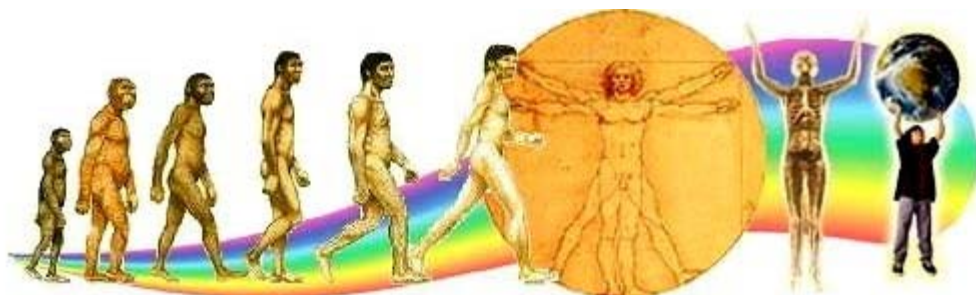


**“I DON’T WANT TO BE YOUR GURU,  
BUT I HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY.”**

**(A CONVERSATION WITH OLD BILL)**

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Personal development is the conscious evolution of human nature, and yet throughout history it has been sorely lacking! Although it is in our nature to learn and grow, we are held back by our culture, which is predominantly focused on survival needs, each of us in competition with others, and our spiritual inner nature is repressed. The animal rules. We make no room for unconditional love.

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**“I DON’T WANT TO BE YOUR GURU,  
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(A CONVERSATION WITH OLD BILL)

JOYCE L. SHAFER

“I Don’t Want to be Your Guru, but I Have Something to Say.”  
(A Conversation with Old Bill)

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

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To Robert –  
Who inspires and supports my path to live on purpose.

To my Mother –  
Who ignited my life-long passion for books.

To my Father –  
Who supported this passion by making quality books and  
periodicals a staple in our home.



## CHAPTER 1

It wasn't there. The old filling station and house were, but B's was gone. Maybe he was still alive.

I pulled into the filling station. The ping-ping of the old-fashioned hose stretched across the ground, used to alert attendants they had a customer, was something most modern service stations had abandoned long ago. It seemed unnecessary in this isolated location. The dust cloud from a car on the road would be enough warning. I got out of my old VW and stretched. It was noon. The August desert air was hot and dry.

The screen door opened on the small unpainted wood-frame house to the left of the station. A man waved and said, "Be right with ya." A napkin was hanging from the top of his stained overalls. I'd interrupted his lunch. I started to tell him I'd wait, but he'd already gone back inside.

The toe of my boot nudged at a pebble. I kicked at the pebble and it dinged off one of the gas pumps. Looking over at the house, I saw the door open. The man walked across the porch, down the three steps, and started in my direction.

He looked to be in his sixties, face tanned and wrinkled from time in the sun. As he got closer, he smiled. His eyes crinkled. Just like the old man's. But unlike the old man's emerald green eyes, his were deep brown.

"What can I do fer ya? Need a fill up? There ain't another station fer a piece, you know."

"I'm sorry I interrupted your lunch. I'm not in a hurry. I can wait if you'd like to finish."

"Don't worry none about that. All's that's left to eat is dessert. Now, what can I do fer ya?"

I knew my car was in good working order and that my half-full tank would make it to the next town. But I wanted to ask

him about the café and the old man. “Fill it up, please. And it’s probably a good idea to check the fluids and tire pressure.”

He nodded, walked to the back of the car, and popped the hood latch. “Only have Premium,” he said when he straightened up.

“That’s fine. It’s only half a tank.” I looked around at the view as he set the gas to pump and began to check the belts and whatnots of my engine.

“You’ve kept this little beauty up just fine,” he said.

“Thanks. It means a lot to me. How long have you been out here?”

“Five years. Before, I used to drive here every day to work the station. But me and the wife decided it would be easier to just live next door.”

“I passed this way ten years ago and stopped in at B’s Café. I couldn’t help but notice nothing is there anymore. In fact, it doesn’t even look as though anything ever was.” I heard him slide the dip stick out to check the oil. “I was hoping to see an old man I met there. His name was Bill—Old Bill was what he said people called him. Do you know if he’s still around?”

He stuffed the oily rag into a back pocket, then slid the dip stick back in slowly, closed the hood and stood still for a moment.

“Did you know him?” I repeated.

“Yup.”

“Do you know where I can find him? I’d really like to see him again.”

He stood looking at me. I held his gaze and resisted shuffling my feet.

Finally, he said, “I’ll take you to see him.”

I felt the tension in my shoulders release. Old Bill had changed my life ten years ago and I had a gift for him. “That’s great. Very nice of you. This is really important to me.”

“Follow me,” he said, and he started off around the other side of the station.

We walked about twenty yards behind the station, then veered more towards the back of the house. On the ground was a plaque made from the same wood as the house, but not as weathered. I realized it was a headstone. It’s inscription read



*"I Don't Want to be Your Guru, but I Have Something to Say."*

Here rests Old Bill.  
Those who knew him  
learned a lot.  
Those who didn't,  
missed out.

I was forced to shift from excitement to deep sadness in just a matter of seconds. But it was the date he died that made my breath stop. I turned to my companion and said, "I don't understand. There has to be a mistake."

"What mistake would that be?" he asked as he narrowed his eyes.

No way to avoid sounding like a fool, but I had to get the facts straight. "Ten years ago, I stopped at B's Café. I spent all day talking with a man who called himself Old Bill. But...this marker says he died fifteen years ago. Maybe this is another Old Bill. I mean, it's impossible..." I didn't finish my sentence.

He nodded. "Best you come back with me to the house. The missus makes a potent cup of coffee and a humdinger of an apple pie."

"I don't understand..."

"Come on. You'll feel better with some strong coffee in ya."

I followed him, turning once to glance back at the grave marker. My mind felt like it was swirling in a marsh fog. Neither of us said a word. When he opened the screen door, he said, "Esther, fire up a strong pot a coffee. We got us another one."

## CHAPTER 2

Esther was as tanned as her husband, but her face, surprisingly, had few lines. The front room was small, but cozy, with two cushioned chairs, a love seat, and a rocking chair. I didn't see a television set, just a radio that looked old enough to need to warm up before it played. The room opened to the right, directly into the kitchen which was painted a cheerful yellow. The kitchen windows were covered with lace curtains waiting for a breeze to bring them to life.

She put her hand out, "Hi, I'm Esther." I shook her hand. It was warm and smooth.

"People call me A.J." I turned to her husband and held out my hand.

He shook it and said simply, "Bud."

Esther seemed to sense my discomfort, if not my confusion, and said as she walked back to the kitchen, "Come on and sit, A.J. I saw Bud walk you to the back and figured he'd bring you in for coffee and pie. Coffee's ready. Just take a second to pour. My apple pie is still warm. Just took it from the oven when you drove up. You want yours plain, with cheese, or with ice cream?"

"Um, plain is fine. Thank you." I took a seat at the table. It was made from the same wood as the house, only this wood had been sanded and oiled over the years. It was simple in design, and I felt almost soothed as I rested my forearms on it.

"This table is really quite nice," I said, "Simple, but really nice."

Bud leaned back in his chair. "Old Bill made it. Just like he built this house. Used the same wood."

"I noticed," I said as I ran my hand on its surface. "What did you mean when you said, 'We've got another one?'"

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Esther came to the table with an old aluminum drip coffee pot in hand and started to pour. "Have a couple of sips of coffee first, A.J. Sugar and cream are on the table."

She finished pouring the coffee, put the pot back on the stove, and cut the pie. She served my slice, then returned with a slice for herself with a dollop of vanilla ice cream, and Bud's with a slice of cheese—and ice cream—just the way Old Bill had eaten his that day ten years ago. Except, according to his grave marker, that afternoon had never happened.

I took a sip of coffee. It was definitely strong. I reached for the cream and saw Esther smile at me.

"Now," she said, "I'm going to tell you what you look a little scared to say yourself. Ten years ago, you stopped at B's Café as you were passin through. You met a man named Old Bill who was a fascinatin character. You found yourself spending all day with him, listenin to him talk, answerin your questions. Am I right?"

I nodded, but kept quiet.

"What Bud meant about 'another one' was that you're not the first. You see every so often, someone shows up lookin for Old Bill."

"The first one," Bud said as he leaned forward, "Really threw us for a loop. We thought the poor fella was a loon. But he knew too much about Old Bill and the café. We listened to his whole story, which was a good un. After about the third one came by, me and Esther here just pretty much expect company from time to time. Usually show up about noon, just like you did." Esther nodded in agreement.

I took another sip of coffee. My hands were shaking and I spilled. Esther got up and grabbed a sponge and the coffee pot. She wiped up my spill with one hand and refilled my cup with the other. "Sorry, Esther. So what happened to Old Bill and what does all of this mean?" I asked.

"We'll see if we can help you figure it out," Esther said. "You haven't tasted your pie, A.J. Give it a taste."

I did. "It's been years since I've tasted a pie like this." Ten years, actually. She smiled.

Bud took a bite of his pie, followed by a sip of coffee. Fork in hand, he started. "At just about noon, fifteen years ago, Old

Bill died when B's Café exploded. Something with the gas leakin and cookin oil, they said. Anyway, Old Bill and his long-time friend Annie (he and Esther exchanged a look I didn't understand) went so fast, they never knew what happened. The nearest firehouse, back then, was thirty miles away. By the time they got here, it was no use. The café and everythin in it burnt to the ground. Once everythin cooled down, the firehouse had someone dump and spread sand across the whole area."

"And you two knew Old Bill?" I asked as I looked over at Esther, "Bud said you've been living here about five years."

Esther looked at Bud. His eyes grew sad and he said, "Old Bill was my daddy."

That explained the familiar crinkling around the eyes. "I'm sorry." I said quietly. "He was a good man."

"Good enough to come back for a while to help folks what needed it," he said as though it were a matter of fact.

"I don't understand this," I said, "This just doesn't happen. I mean, I've heard of people saying they either saw a loved one or heard them speak when they weren't actually there, only to learn these things happened around the time their loved one died. But to create an entire structure and talk all day—and eat and drink..."

"I know," said Bud, "But everyone's story has been the same, except for the meat and potatoes of it."

"He means," interrupted Esther, "What the individual conversations were, A.J., dear. The situations are similar, just the stories are different. Each person's conversation with Old Bill seemed to be about somethin particular to them. Some need they had. I tell you, we can't wait to hear 'em. And that includes yours. I'll put up some more coffee. In a little while, I'll start a pot roast. You'll stay in the guest room tonight. We keep it ready. So you just take a deep breath and start."

### CHAPTER 3

“I’m not sure how to start,” I said.  
“Start when you decided to go to the café,” said Esther.

The windows were rolled down in my VW. Driving sixty miles-per-hour didn’t cool anything off. The wind was hot. The desert was hot. It was August desert heat. But the colors along both sides of the two-lane highway tended to pull my attention away from the temperature.

Dark storm clouds covered the sky to the right like heavy canvas, making the sky a roiling deep pewter blue. The mesas were bathed in shades of navy and cobalt, with the exception of one lone patch the color of a Cabernet wine. The flats seemed to have been splashed with burnt siennas, ochres, and deep lavenders. One sliver of sunlight had pierced its way through the cloud cover, creating a single vivid splash of yellow on the ground below, like a beacon.

I slowed and watched as the yellow sliver diminished and disappeared. Up ahead and off the road to the right about a quarter of a mile down, were three lone buildings. I could see a gas station, a small house, and another building with a sign out front that I couldn’t read from the highway. A narrow dirt road connected the two points. I downshifted and turned onto the road. Dust blew up in small spirals behind the VW.

As I neared the cluster of buildings, I saw the gas station and small house were across from the other building that was wood-framed and set on piers like the house. There was a porch running the full length of the front, with two wooden steps at the

center. The sign, painted white with deep turquoise letters, read B's Café.

I stopped my car and looked across at the gas station. No one seemed to be there. No one came out of the house. Everything was quiet. Still. Unmoving, like the mesas.

It was noon and I was hungry. I walked onto the porch, turned and breathed in the colors once more before heading into the café. It was surprisingly comfortable inside, as though the heat of the day was not welcomed inside. I stood for a moment as my eyes adjusted to the shadows. Opposite the door I'd entered, was a counter made of polished wood, and seemed about fifteen feet wide. Behind the counter was an old-fashioned soda fountain. The round stools in front of the counter were covered in turquoise vinyl. A mirror on the wall reflected some of the sunlight, but the only lights on were two gas lanterns mounted on either side of the mirror. I wondered if the stools swivelled. They did.

I sat on my stool, gently swiveling back and forth for just a few moments. One of the two swinging doors to the right of the counter pushed open and a woman who looked to be in her late fifties stepped out.

"What can I get ya?" she asked, and pointed to a blackboard behind her. A small menu was neatly written in chalk on its smooth surface.

"Cheeseburger, fries and a large cola—lots of ice, please."

"You want everything on your burger?"

"Yes, ma'am. Everything but catsup."

"Be just a few," she said. She pushed on one of the swinging doors, but turned to me and said, "Annie. My name's Annie." Then she disappeared through the door.

About two minutes later, Annie returned. She opened a wooden cabinet door and took out a heavy glass mug. It frosted as soon as it hit the air. She filled it half-way with ice, then added the frothy brown cola from a dispenser. "Cherry in your cola?" she asked reaching for a jar.

"Not cherry. A lemon wedge if you have one."

She shrugged, reached down, and came up with a lemon she cut into wedges which she placed on a saucer in front of me. I squeezed a wedge over my glass, dropped the wedge into the

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glass, and gulped down the whole thing. The ice rattled in my glass when I put it on the counter.

One of her eyebrows raised, then she smiled slightly. "More?"

"Yes, please."

She didn't refill my glass. She got another glass from the little freezer and fixed me a fresh one. "I'll check on your food," and she disappeared behind the doors again.

I heard a soft chuckle behind me. I turned, but saw no one. Then a movement. In the shadows in the far corner near the front, someone leaned forward slightly. I couldn't make out any features.

"You seem mighty thirsty," a gravelly male voice said from the shadows.

"Yes. It's a hot one today. I had a thermos of water in my car, but drank the last of it about an hour ago. I should fill it up before I go."

"That's easy enough. You travelin, or are you on a journey?" he asked.

Odd question, I thought. "Actually..." but before I could say more, he asked me to join him.

"We only get the few visitors this time of year," he said, "Most people prefer to travel through here in the cooler months."

I wasn't really in the mood for conversation. Just food, water, and fuel. But I picked up my glass and the saucer of lemons and sat across from him. I was in front of a window and, therefore, in the light. He was still in the shadows because of the angle of the light filtering through—which wasn't much due to the storm clouds that hung overhead.

"Folks call me Old Bill," he said.

"I'm A.J."

He chuckled. "A.J. Probably stands for somethin. But if you wanted people to know what, you'd tell 'em. Right?" He chuckled again. What the heck, I'd eat my burger then clear out.

"I'd like to fill up my car before I leave, but I don't see anyone at the station."

"Gas all you need?" he asked.

"Yes. Maybe clean my windshield."

“Small car like that don’t drink much. You’ll have time before your food’s ready. Go on over and fill it up. There’s stuff to clean your windshield. You can settle up for the gas when you pay for your meal.”

“That’s a good idea. I’ll be right back.”

Even though it was cloudy, when I walked out from the shadows of the café, I had to cover my eyes until they adjusted to the light. I drove the VW across to one of the two pumps—Regular. While the gas tank gulped fuel through the nozzle, I cleaned all the glass on my car. It seemed silly to drive it back and forth across the road, but I did. I parked it back in the original spot and wished for just a bit of shade. I left the windows open about two inches so it wouldn’t be quite as stifling inside the car when I was ready to leave.

Inside, my food and a fresh cola waited for me across from Old Bill. In front of him, he had a sizable slice of apple pie topped with cheese and vanilla ice cream.

As I took my seat, he said, “Didn’t want you to eat alone, A.J. Doesn’t seem polite.”

Annie appeared with a cup of coffee which she placed in front of him. “Any opportunity Old Bill can get to eat my pie, he takes,” she said when she put the cup down.

“Well, you know what they say,” his eyes crinkled, “An apple a day....I figure the way Annie here makes her pie, I’ve got at least two of ’em on my plate. That’s why I’m still around. Annie is the pie queen.”

“Old fool,” she said as she started to walk away, but not before I saw a smile light up her expression.

“Well, dig in, A.J.”

I did. We ate in silence for a couple of minutes. I realized I was wolfing my food while Old Bill savored every bit of his concoction. I slowed down. “Bill, you asked me if I was just traveling or if I was on a journey.” I waited, but he didn’t interrupt. “Aren’t they the same thing?”

“Not at all, A. J. Not at all.”

“And the difference would be...?”

“When people are just travelin, they start out with the notion they’re gonna end up someplace by a certain time. They get together what they think they’ll need and head out. They stop for



fuel if they're drivin. Maybe they stop for food or maybe they pack their own so's to limit the stops. If a detour comes up on the highway or there's a traffic jam, they get upset. They don't like anythin to slow 'em up. They're on a schedule.

"A person on a journey prepares the basics as well, but doesn't have a schedule—not as such. That person is willin, if not enthusiastic, about enjoyin every second. Might create detours just to see what's there. Maybe pulls over to watch a sunrise or sunset. Might get out in a rain shower to feel the cool drops on their skin—taste the rain. That kind of person will stop along the way just to talk to people, have a new experience. You can tell a lot about how a person moves through life by how they travel." He took a bite of pie.

"I don't know, Bill. Perhaps I'm doing a little of both. It depends on if I have to be somewhere by a certain time or if it's just my time to spend as I choose."

"I see your point. But what if even when you're on a schedule, you make it part of the journey?"

"You're talking about attitude."

He smiled. "A lot of folks are born, go to school, go to work, have a family, retire, then die—always followin a straight line from birth to death. Some of them do this 'cause they never take the time to think of their lives as bein any other way...not to say there's anythin wrong with that kind of life. But some folks are just plain scared of detours. They're afraid of the unknown. Poor devils. They live in an illusion. Every moment is an unknown. The only thing you can ever know is yourself. And that's plenty right there. Sad to say, though, a lot of folks don't ever try to know themselves either."

I looked out through the window and watched as another sliver of sunlight broke through the clouds. The air felt charged, electric, under the impending storm.

"Yup," he said, "Lotta folks think they're plugged in. But you know what they are, A.J.?"

I shook my head No.

"They're two-prong plugs in a three-prong universe. And they can't figure out why life is just not offerin more to 'em."

I sputtered on my sip of cola. "I've never heard that one before. It's funny, as well."

“Glad you see the humor in it ‘cause I’ll let you in on a little secret, A.J. When you can eventually see the humor in a situation, you’re saved.”

“Why’s that?”

“Takin everythin in life so serious is the same thing as takin a trip with a schedule instead of takin a journey. You miss more than you ever get.”

“Were you always on the journey, Bill?”

“Heck, no. Ever hear that sayin, ‘serious as a heart attack?’”

“Yes. Never liked it.”

“Well, that was me. I was known for bein downright dour. Always so careful in life so’s I wouldn’t make a mistake, though I still made plenty. I was harsh on myself and on everyone around me. Wanted everythin perfect instead of good enough. Not a lot of joy in a life like that.”

I picked up fried potato wedge. “What happened—to change you, I mean. You don’t seem like you could’ve ever been different from how you are now.”

“Had a heart attack.” He saw more humor in this than I did. It was two minutes before he stopped belly-laughing. “Lighten up, A.J.”

“Well, yeah—but a heart attack. You’re saying it was like a wake-up call for you?”

“Shoulda been. But you see, I was so set and stubborn, it wasn’t ‘till after the third one that I finally got it.”

“You had three? Jeez, Bill. It’s amazing you’re still alive.” I didn’t think my statement was at all funny, but it had him laughing again.

I heard the swinging doors open. Annie came to the table with the pot of coffee and refilled Bill’s cup. She looked at him, shook her head and said as she walked away, “No fool like an old fool.”

“Annie,” Bill called after her, “You ever look up the Fool in the Tarot cards?” He winked at me.

“Finish your pie, old man. I got my own stuff. A.J., you need more cola?”

“No, ma’am...I mean, Annie. I’m still good here.” I watched her walk back through the swinging doors. When they stopped moving, I turned my attention back to Bill.

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"I'll tell you, A.J., those heart attacks were a gift for sure. You think my survivin them was amazin, but there's a whole lot more amazin things I can tell you about."

"And I want to hear them, but first I have to find..."

Bill saw me looking around and started laughing again. "I wondered when you'd ask. Bet you put more liquid in you than in your little car there. It's at the station, round back. Door's unlocked. Want Annie to bring you anythin while you're gone?"

"Yes, actually. A piece of that apple pie, plain—and a cup of coffee, just cream."

"They'll both be here when you get back." He leaned all the way back into the shadows and almost seemed to disappear.

## CHAPTER 4

Outside, the clouds had blackened, emitting deep rumbles like growls. I crossed the road and walked to the back of the station. The station was clean and tidy. I hoped that was a good sign for the condition of the restroom.

The restroom was immaculate. The floor was terra cotta tiles. The walls were painted peach from the ceiling half-way down. The bottom half was tiled in alternate shades of white and turquoise. A glass window near the ceiling let in enough daylight, so I didn't bother with the light switch. The fixtures were white porcelain and almost pristine despite their obvious age. A mirror was fixed to the wall with smaller white, turquoise, and navy tiles framing it. I was careful not to mess anything up.

I made my way back to the café, this time stopping to roll up my car windows. The apple pie and coffee were set at my place across from Old Bill.

"Bill, that bathroom—I mean, I didn't expect it to be so pleasant. Even the station is neat and tidy." He smiled and looked out the window, his gaze fixed on the station. "I haven't seen anyone there. Who runs it?"

"I do. I own and run the café and the station. Glad they suit you."

I picked up my fork and cut into the pie. "You really never see service stations, much less their restrooms, look like that."

"Every place we have, every place we go, should be treated with respect. It's not as complicated as some folks make it, it's a way to make the journey a better one."

"I never thought about it like that." He shrugged and took a sip of coffee. I scooped a piece of pie into my mouth. "Oh, boy, this is heavenly." Bill's smile seemed a bit distant, as though he

had a private joke. I gave him a second in case he wanted to share it. He didn't. "You were going to tell me about amazing things."

"Right. Where to start? Now, A.J., I don't want to be your guru, but I have something to say. Maybe the beginnin's as good a place as any to start. Let me give you Old Bill's take on things. No one actually knows what was going on before everythin got started."

"You mean life on Earth?"

"Nope. Every thing. They got some good folks guessin at it, but they don't know fer sure either. Now some of the old books say that, 'First there was the word.' Now, the word Word was translated from Logos—a sound. Now stay with me here, it's just my theory, but I figure my theory is probably worth as much as most. If first there was a sound—well, what's a sound?"

I shrugged.

"It's the result of a vibration. You with me?"

"Yes. Vibration. That makes sense."

"Now, it's said that every thing in existence is energy. And it's all vibratin—different speeds and such—but vibratin. The human body is supposed to be vibratin at about one billion times a second."

"I never heard that before."

"Doesn't sell to the general public like a candy bar."

"Uh, true. Sorry. Go on, please."

"When a violin is played, the player isn't hittin a note. The placement of the finger on the string and how the bow is drawn across the strings creates a vibration in the materials makin up the violin. That vibration creates the note. The note isn't there."

"The note isn't there," I repeated.

"And, yet, it is. Same for every thing you think of as real. The old Greeks created the word Atom for what they thought was the smallest particle there was," he chuckled, "Wouldn't they just be surprised?"

"Why surprised?"

"Because now we know that when we get all the way to the bottom of the barrel, so-to-speak, *nothing* is there."

"Nothing is there." I sounded like a parrot.

“Nothin but energy, that is. Matter is comprised of energy, A.J., and matter returns to energy. Gives new meanin to ‘What’s the matter?’ ‘Nothin’.” He was really pleased with his pun, so I smiled. “Gotta learn to lighten up, A.J. *Nothin* is serious.”

Again, he started laughing and I found myself wondering if he was a lunatic or a genius.

“What this makes me wonder,” he said as he speared a piece of pie, “Is if maybe every thing is sound-like lots and lots of musical notes in a universal symphony.”

“I like that image, Bill. But then why do we see the universe as real and solid, if what you say is true?”

“Electrical signals in our brain register things as real—real tastes, textures, sounds. Like if all of humanity uses the same radio while they’re alive.”

“Ah.” I didn’t actually understand what he was driving at.

“You look at that window glass there.” I did. “Now you’d say it’s solid. You can rap your knuckles on it, and it separates you from the outside. You know what glass is, A.J.?”

“Well, it’s sand and...”

“It’s a slow movin liquid.”

“I didn’t realize that.”

“Nope. You and a lot of folks who are passin through life, never gave it a thought.”

My expression must have reflected my thoughts.

“Don’t get your knickers in a knot, A.J. Not bein aware of things ain’t necessarily fatal. It’s like a virus. It runs it’s course, and you do get better eventually. And like a virus, you recover quicker if you don’t feed it. I’m tryin to tell you you can turn your travelin into a journey anytime you decide to.”

“I guess my ego got in the way.” I began to dig into the apple pie in earnest, then I paused. “Bill, where did the first vibration come from?”

“Good question. We don’t know. We can make some good guesses; but truth is, we don’t know.”

“I guess that’s where faith comes in.”

“Hmm...now, my take on it is that faith is a tool, or maybe better, a vehicle like your car there, that gets people from point A to point B.”

“I don’t follow.”

"Back to our idea about travelin versus journeyin. Some folks plod along in their religions and their lives, rather than takin a journey through it. They never really open up to what it means to them. They never question whether it brings them inner peace or serenity or genuine guidance in their lives."

"Some religions," I said, sipping my coffee which had gone cold, "Tell followers not to question the teachings, that without the special training their priests or ministers or whatever get, there's no way they can understand the true meaning of the texts."

"Personally, I got a problem with that." He paused to sip his coffee. "Why have a mind and a conscience if we're not supposed to use 'em? It's like science."

"Science?"

"If we decided long ago to have one book of science based on what we saw, and if we threatened people who tried to question it..."

"Like the early astronomers Galileo and Bruno..."

"Yup. We keep learnin more and more about ourselves and where we are in the big picture. Picture where folks could be spiritually if instead of just listenin to what's read and told to 'em about their faith, they were encouraged to talk about it, think about it, figure out how it all fits into their lives—and their hearts."

"Like science," I said, "The 'facts' would possibly expand into something even greater than we imagined."

"Yup. Want Annie to get you some hot coffee?"

"No, thank you. I'm good for the moment. Keep going."

"Like faith and science, we have a problem with truth as well. Sure, there's an overall truth to things; but just like faith, most truths are subjective—which means they're actually beliefs. Beliefs change, truths never do. Remember I said I thought folks could share the world as real because it was like they all used the same radio?" I nodded. "Well, they all use the same radio, but listen to different stations."

"Good parallel."

"Hmph...the problems start when we get into judgin what others listen to. We'd be a lot better off if we just asked others what is it about a particular station that interests them."

“Seems we could learn a lot about each other and ourselves if we did it that way. I mean, I know people who listen to only one kind of station their whole lives. I guess—or hope—they’re happy with that. That wouldn’t suit me at all. I like to change around, depending on my mood. And, there are some stations that hold no interest for me at all.”

“You like bein able to choose for yourself, dependin on what matches your mood, or your need.”

“Absolutely. I’d be unhappy, angry even, if someone dictated what I could listen to.”

“Why?”

“Because I can decide for myself what I need or want. I guess that sounds childish—that ‘Let me, I can do it’ thing kids do.”

“It’s not childish; it’s child-like—and there’s quite a difference. It’s like a butterfly breakin out of its cocoon, A.J. If you watch it, it looks like quite a struggle. But what that effort on the butterfly’s part does is build its wing strength so it can fly. If you help that butterfly out of the cocoon before its time, it’ll die—because it can’t fly. And it’ll never do what it came here to do.”

“As I think about it, I see the parallel—how it applies to humans in all aspects of their lives.”

“The reason children want to do things themselves is because that’s human nature, not a lack of maturity. Children like to figure out as much as they can on their own. They want to know someone’s nearby if they need help, but they’d rather folks wait until they’re asked before they help. I heard something once, A.J., that I really liked: Sometimes the questions matter more to us than the answers.”

“Why is that?” I asked, leaning forward.

“You tell me.”

“Well...because questions allow us to use our minds—to strengthen our minds and ourselves like the butterfly strengthens its wings—by working it out for ourselves.”

“Yup. The more people think for themselves, ask questions and seek answers, the stronger they get. And like the butterfly, they add a useful function and a kind of beauty to the world as a result. You ever heard that sayin, ‘As above, so below?’”

“Yes.”



"You understand it?"

"I think it means that the smaller levels and the larger levels operate on the same principles."

He smiled, then continued. "If we like to question and explore meanin and possibilities in our lives, seek out the greater truths, so-to-speak, then maybe what's larger than us is the same way."

"What are you saying, exactly?"

"There's two words I like a lot: macrocosm—larger, and microcosm—smaller. That's the As Above and So Below. The universe is expandin. It's already bigger than we can imagine. There are levels and levels—like universes within universes. For all we know, maybe our universe is an atom of something else. If we are self-learnin and can increase our useful function and beauty..."

"Then, the macrocosm—the universe?—is self-learning and seeks the same thing. Is that what you're saying?" I asked.

"I am proposin it as a possibility," he said as he scooped his last bite of pie, "But there's a really good question I want to ask you. Where does the consciousness come from?"

"That is a question."

"Annie," he yelled out, "How 'bout some fresh coffee *if* you have the time?"

Annie's head poked out from between the swinging doors and she gave him a look I didn't understand. "Comin right up. Need anythin else?"

Bill looked over at me. I shook my head. "That'll do us," he answered. Annie disappeared back into the kitchen.

"Those clouds been hangin around like an old hound dog," he said, "I like clouds. I like clear weather. Heck, I like it all."

"Um, Bill, about the question of consciousness..."

"Take a breather, A.J. After Annie brings the coffee. Everythin in its time."

## CHAPTER 5

Annie brought a thermos of coffee instead of just pouring more into our cups. She put down a small bowl of ice with a small pitcher of cream at its center, as well.

“Thanks, Annie,” I offered, intrigued that she prepared enough coffee for us to be there awhile. She left without a word, exiting back between the swinging doors.

Bill poured coffee into my cup, leaving room for cream. He poured his own, then sat back. “That question is one that can’t be answered. Just like what was goin on before the universe started. But I was hopin you’d offer up a thought or two. You look disappointed, A.J.”

“Well, a little, I suppose. I thought you’d have a theory about it, at least.”

“Nope, just wonder—and awe. I think about it from time to time, but it’s a question without an answer at this point. But it doesn’t stop me from bein amazed that consciousness is in every thing.”

“Everything? What about a rock? A rock can’t have consciousness.”

He leaned forward, picked up his cup and took a sip, then said, “Typical.”

“What does that mean?”

“Typical human arrogance. Now, I’m not callin you arrogant, A.J. It’s just that folks tend to think that if they’re not aware of somethin, it probably doesn’t exist. Kind of like sayin if your radio is tuned to a particular station, no other stations exist.”

“I think I see what you’re saying. It’s like a dog whistle. The human ear can’t hear it, but every dog that isn’t deaf can.”

"Yup. My theory about the vibrations in energy is that somethin—a consciousness—either generates it or, at least, sustains it."

"And you're saying it's self-learning and adjusting," I added.

"A.J., did you ever think about how a tiny acorn can fall to the ground and become an oak tree? When you look at an acorn, you don't see an oak tree, you see a vehicle that carries the patterns—or blueprints—of an oak tree inside. No human has to tell it what to do, it already knows. And to really play with this, if you think all the way back to the first seed, where'd it come from and how did it figure out what it needed to do?"

"Some people would say God created it – like in Genesis."

"You religious, A.J.?"

"Not religious. But I do believe something exists. I just don't agree that it's a guy with a beard sitting on a throne deciding who wins the game this weekend."

Bill nodded his head slowly. "For a while, let's keep with that. I think *God* is a word that helps folks label or name something so they can grasp some understandin of it, and have a common term when they talk about it with others."

"Yeah, but I've noticed that no one is in agreement about who or what God is or what principles are to be followed. And, a lot of people who say they believe certain principles, don't follow them anyway. Seems hypocritical in a way."

"I don't think their intent is to be hypocritical, A.J. I think it's a matter of a butterfly not having its chance. You see, a lot of religions are set up, like we talked about earlier, to discourage folks from thinkin about what it all means to them as individuals. A group consciousness, so-to-speak is encouraged instead. Think about the word *discourage*. Dis-courage. You can see it means asking someone not to have the courage to do something. When you think about it, it's dis-empowering."

"The butterfly."

"Yup. I think a lot of folks involved in religion have their hearts in the right place. But we can't blame the leaders entirely when folks give up thinkin for themselves so readily. They need to remember to just say Know. That's k-n-o-w, A.J."

"Clever."

“I like it. Now, back to my point. I don’t care what religion a person chooses or if he chooses none. Every path is just a path. My hope is that every person, more often than not, connects with the bigger picture. To remember that we’re all part of somethin so incredible, somethin that can make an oak tree from an acorn, or a universe from whatever the first *seed* was, can be mighty helpful when our focus gets locked into place on the details of our lives.”

“You’re saying when we get caught up in bills and relationships and problems, we need to stop and remember we’re more.”

“Every person is an acorn with the potential to be an oak tree. Lots of folks don’t know that. Seems to me if they did, they’d feel a bit better about themselves. And it would be nice if they realized it’s the same for everyone.”

“I always thought of myself as someone who believed that all men are created equal; but thinking of it like this gives me a whole different feeling. Several feelings, actually.”

“Such as...”

“Every person is like me, born with a potential that may or may not be realized in a lifetime. That makes me feel hopeful and saddened at the same time. Hopeful, because I can almost feel the possibilities in a world where everyone aims for, attains, and then shares what they can be. And saddened, because not only are there people who don’t see themselves this way, but there are those who tell others the opposite is true. That has a feeling of hopelessness in it.”

“Just like the acorn, A.J. The acorn has the patterns inside for what it can become, but unless it gets the water, soil, and sun it needs, it stays an acorn.”

“It, like people, thrives if the environment nurtures and supports it,” I added.

“But there’s one big difference between an acorn and a person. They express consciousness differently. A person can decide he’s not gettin what he needs and move. An acorn grows or withers where it falls. We possess a level of free will the acorn doesn’t.”

“You’re saying that ultimately, we are responsible for whether or not we reach our potential—which I know. But what about

people who are in really distressed areas or circumstances and never get an education or even enough food? Their struggle is to live another day. How can they afford the luxury of wondering about their potential?"

He smiled at me. "Another good question. Life is about perception, A.J. To believe that every acorn is here to become a tree ignores other aspects of nature. If every acorn became a tree, we'd lose a certain balance in nature—certain nutrients for the ground, food for animals..."

"But..."

"To think otherwise, judges *what* the purpose of every thing or everyone is supposed to be—according to *our* perception. Every thing in existence, A.J.—at least in my take on things—is a part of the larger consciousness. Every thing expresses that consciousness in its own way."

"Bill, are you saying not everyone is supposed to reach their full potential or that some people are born to suffer?"

"Nope. I'm sayin that we have to be careful not to judge that they do or don't. It's like this, some acorns are needed to grow into trees, some need to go back to the soil, some need to feed the animals. It's their contribution to the bigger picture—and no one has a right to judge that contribution. We just don't have enough information to do that. Don't get me wrong. I'm not sayin people in real need shouldn't be helped. Help them. And, teach them how to sustain themselves."

"Well, what about, say, drug addicts or criminals?"

"Those folks abandon their possibilities, A.J. See, some folks come into their lives to do little things in a big way. Others do big things in a little way. A person might open a business or run a company that provides certain needs for the community and gives others a way to earn money so they can have a home, maybe support a family. Some may work in the home and dedicate themselves to being a good parent so they can raise children who become quality adults. Neither may ever get their names in the paper, but their contributions are important."

"Now someone who abandons their possibilities is—well, like energy in reverse. But it's still energy. Seems to me, the universe never wastes. It sort of recycles in a way. There are drug addicts who hit bottom and make a choice. They heal themselves, then

set out to help others. Although there's a lot of negativity involved with say, an addict or a criminal, the other side of that is that some folks—on both sides of the situation—are moved into compassion and forgiveness. What is negative and restrictive also has a potential for expansiveness.”

“I don't know, Bill. I think a few victims or their families would argue with you on this one,” I said.

“I'm sure they would. And I don't think they'd be ready for me to say to them what I'm gonna say to you.”

“Which is?”

“Once somethin happens, you gotta deal with it as it is.”

“What does that mean?”

“Somethin happens. Naturally, whether we see it as a positive or a negative has a lot to do with what kind of emotions we have about it.”

“Right.”

“Perfect word for this, A.J.”

“What is?”

“Right. You see, if something happens to us that we see as negative, we start dealin with a lot of whatever emotion seems appropriate to us. But what gets us stuck is that we want everyone to know *we* were in the right.”

“But if we are, I don't see the problem.”

“We get so stuck on bein in the right, we settle into bein the victim rather than sayin, “Fact is, maybe I gotta heal physically or emotionally. Fact is, I gotta realize this may change my life. But, I gotta deal with it and go on.”

“That seems pretty cold, Bill.”

“Only because we're so used to hangin on to bein right or bein the victim. Now, I'm not talking about right after somethin happens. That's a time when you gotta deal with takin care of whatever has to be done includin realizin your emotions about it. But at some point, it's a better path to walk if we stop askin Why? and instead ask, Where do I go from here? If you feel like somethin took your options from you, create your own—but make sure they're productive options. No need to add negative to negative.”

“Let me see if I understand what you're saying. You're saying that when bad things happen, or things we perceive as negative,

the first thing we should do is deal with the immediate issue...whatever that may need. And, we have to recognize and deal with our emotions about it. But at some point, we need to stop saying, Why me? or Why this? and ask, Where do I go from here?"

"That is what I'm sayin."

"Still seems a bit cold to me, Bill."

"If you nailed one of your shoes to the floor, put your foot in it and turned in circles, you could tell people you were movin all the time. But you'd be goin nowhere, right?"

"Yes, but what does that have to do with..."

He held up his hand to silence me. "Never confuse activity with productivity, A.J. I'm not sayin that someone who's had something negative happen doesn't deserve compassion and whatever help can be given. What I'm sayin is some folks get stuck. They've got a lot of activity goin on like maybe talkin about it to everyone, or doin things they shouldn't be doin. But if at some point they don't choose to face that what happened, happened—and it's over, past tense, that particular event, that is—and make productive choices about their life—they're makin the same choice, on an energy level, as a drug addict or a criminal. They're goin in the reverse of energy—or just circlin around and around, never goin forward."

"At first we may need help from others; but eventually, we have to help ourselves."

"Right," he said sitting back. "Pour me some more coffee, will ya? You're givin me a workout. But I'm havin a grand time." His eyes crinkled from the broad smile on his face.

## CHAPTER 6

I poured coffee for both of us, took a sip and leaned back. “Bill, you talked about perception of positive and negative. Aren’t events or people simply either one or the other?”

“That’s always a tricky one for folks. Have you, or someone you know, ever done something that started out a positive—that was the intention—then it ended up a negative or the other way around?”

“More than likely.” I thought about it. “Well, yes. I think I have an example. A college friend of mine lost both parents in a car crash. That was definitely negative. But they left him, an only child, everything, which turned out to be substantial. He could have never worked a day in his life as long as he managed his new wealth properly. But, he finished his degree, took some of what he inherited, and went to the poorest county in his state. He opened a training center to teach people who live there, skills they can use to get jobs and continues to turn what used to be a pretty much hopeless situation for these people into a community that thrives.”

“Yes, A.J. Look at the negatives and the positives. Your friend lost his parents—a negative. He inherits everything and chooses to do something useful with it—a positive. He coulda just taken a ride through life without ever contributin to it. He coulda become an alcoholic or drug addict because of the pain he felt. Everyone of us faces things every day—not always so serious; but every day, every event gives us that same opportunity to choose to turn a negative to a positive.

“You could even say the situation for those folks your friend helps was a negative. But it created an opportunity for your friend...”



I interrupted, leaning forward. "In other words, Bill, if I'm getting this right, everything can be both negative *and* positive. It seems that what you're saying is that they exist together. I have an image in my mind of a liquid-filled tube, moving like a see-saw, with the liquid moving back and forth between negative and positive."

"Yup. Think of a coin. It has two sides, but it's one coin. Every thing, event, and person is like that coin. Folks don't like to claim that they have a negative side. And some folks want things in life to be either right or wrong. But, A.J., this universe is not an either-or universe. It's a both-and one."

"Keep going, Bill. Both-and..."

"Something can be both positive and negative, dependin on perception. Every thing is both solid and not solid. Light is..."

"Both particle and wave," I finished for him. He smiled.

"Exactly, A.J."

"Why isn't that easier for us to see?"

"Conditionin, mostly." He took a sip of coffee. I waited. "Now," he continued, "I liked your image of the tube with liquid movin back and forth; but I want to take your image a little further. Every time somethin is created—a thought, a word, an action—that creation creates somethin else. Let's call it a conflict or change—not meanin it's negative, just a shift or a vibration that wasn't there before. A ripple in the pond, so-to-speak. Once the conflict or change exists, the nature of energy is to find a resolution. You with me so far?"

"I think so. Creation stirs up a Conflict that seeks a Resolution."

"Yup. Now explain to me what you get out of that."

"I need to ask a question first—for clarification."

"Go ahead."

"You said a thought can start that process. I can see how a word or action could, but a thought?"

"I like that you listen, A.J. Some folks mighta missed that. Goin back to what we said earlier about every thing in existence bein vibration of energy means that every thing—including folks—exist in an energy field. The *same* energy field. That means that every thing and everyone is connected—like a lot of cables hooked up to the same battery. Now, I told you my theory that the

energy exists and is sustained by what I perceive to be a consciousness. We're a part of that consciousness. Fortunately for us, it's not designed so that every time we have a thought, it happens. But, our thoughts are real things. And if we give 'em enough juice—energy, that is—they can become real. Let me explain.

“You can have a thought about someone; and at some level—because we're all ultimately connected—they'll feel it. And you might find they behave towards you in accord with what you feel about them. Sometimes you're walkin along and you see someone else walkin along and you feel like you need to avoid them. You probably are perceivin somethin in their energy field—since we share the same larger energy field. Or someone around you may be in a bad mood and you start to feel negative. Now, you can choose not to play along. You might even be able to make 'em smile, dependin on if they're open to shiftin their thoughts.

“Also, the way this field works is you may've at one time or another thought that you needed somethin and it showed up. Or you wanted to talk with someone and either they called you or you met on the street. These things happen because we share the larger energy field. If you have a thought and someone picks up on it—and *agrees* with it—that increases the chances of it happenin.” He leaned back.

“That means, if I understand you right, that positive or negative thoughts influence what goes on in our reality.”

“That about sums it up.”

“That means responsibility for what happens is in our hands.”

“Not all of it, A.J., but quite a lot. It's important to remember that we're players in a larger game. But it's also important to remember when the game throws us a curve, then *we* become responsible for what we do from there. Now, unless you need more clarification, answer my original question.”

“Okay. I'm going to go with an image again. I imagine a moment where there's stillness, or at least, little movement. Something charges up the stillness—a thought maybe—with energy. That creates a change in the stillness that we'll call conflict—like a bow being pulled across a violin's strings—opposing motion, so-

to-speak. If the bow hits the strings in a certain way, a beautiful note or chord can be played. Stroked another way, it could be a sour note or an inharmonic chord. The violinist can make an adjustment, find a resolution, and it shifts to a pleasing note or chord."

"That's a good example. Now, since you like to picture things in your mind, what shape or motion does the creation-conflict-resolution process look like to you?"

I thought about it. I even used my finger like a pencil on the tabletop. Bill watched me patiently. When I made a particular motion with my hand, I heard him chuckle.

"Very good, A.J. What do you call that?"

"A spiral."

"Why do you think it's a spiral? Why not a circle?"

I sat back in my chair and looked out of the window while I thought about my answer. "Because, as you said earlier, if all we do is turn in circles, we go nowhere."

"Yup. Now just think about the spiral," he said as he leaned forward, "Our decisions—our resolutions—can move us either forward or backward on the spiral."

"You mean progression or regression?"

"That's what I mean. If we're a small segment on that spiral, then what we do, even if only in a small way, affects the whole spiral. Kind of like your pinky finger. You don't usually focus your attention on it; but if it gets injured, you notice it. And if it gets infected and that infection gets bad enough, it can affect your whole body. If the infection kills you, your death affects people you know dependin on what your relationship is with 'em."

"The ripple in the pond from one tiny pebble," I added quietly.

"Just remember, any good thing you do has the same affect."

"So every person—past, present and future—influences, to some degree, the forward or backward motion of the spiral."

"Kind of amazin, I think."

"Yeah."

"But you gotta also realize, A.J., that every resolution creates another change."

“Which means, if I understand what you’re getting at, Bill, is that the activity along the spiral—the momentum of events—is ongoing, always in motion.”

“Yup. Whatever we’re thinkin, sayin, or doin is always contributin to every thing that’s goin on both near us and what seems far away from us.”

“And, most of us have no idea we have that kind of influence in the greater scheme of things.”

“Nope. Sadly, lotsa folks pretty much sleepwalk through life. If they were taught this or recognized it on their own, they wouldn’t feel so powerless about their lives. Instead, they’d feel the power that’s in ’em and, hopefully, make better choices.”

## CHAPTER 7

“Now,” Bill said with what I took to be a sly expression, “I want us to take imagination even further. You up for it?”

“Sure. I should be taking notes or recording this conversation.”

“Don’t worry. It’ll stick with ya. We’ve talked about how every thing is both solid and not solid at the same time.” He paused. I nodded. “And, A.J., you knew that light is both a particle and a wave. Do you know when it’s a particle? When it’s a wave?”

“No, actually.”

“Light is a wave until it’s observed. Then it becomes a particle.”

“Wait a minute! You’re saying that light goes along as a wave—um, a wave frequency—until an observer focuses attention on it. Then it appears as something visible?”

“Yup. But not just light. That’s the way it is with all molecules of energy. What does it mean when more than one person focuses their attention on somethin and then observes it?”

“I’m not sure what you’re getting at.”

“They make an agreement.”

I frowned.

“On some level, A.J., or in some way, they agreed to focus their attention and see light particles or somethin as solid. Keep in mind that consciousness is connected. The agreement is like tunin two or more radios to the same station.”

“I think you’re saying that even if they don’t specifically say that’s what they’re going to do, at some inner level, they communicated.”

“That’s what I’m sayin. But we also have to consider conditionin.”

“Conditioning?”

“When we start to learn to speak, people tell us what the agreed-upon names are for things. We call an apple an apple, not a fish, because that’s the agreement. The older we get, the more we’re told. Funny thing is, we’re bein told what somethin is by somebody else all the time. But all of those somebodys are usually just repeatin what someone else told them. What I want you to think about is that based on what we know about atoms and light and observers with focused attention, every thing, includin us, is basically a hologram we all agreed to experience.”

“A hologram?! You’re telling me that everything we think of as real is vibrating energy that takes form as a hologram?!”

“Yup. You could say if it’s a vibration, it’s an illusion. A hologram we believe to be real.”

“But why does it feel so real? I mean, if I hit my head, it hurts. Isn’t that real?”

“We believe it to be so, so it is. You see, A.J., we’ve all agreed that three-dimensional reality—the hologram—is real. You don’t see with your eyes, you know.”

“What do you mean?”

“Your eyes are like eyeglasses for the body. Your brain does the seein. It perceives vibrational frequencies—ones we’ve agreed to call solid. The eye picks up the signal as two-dimensional, in an upside-down version. The brain takes the signals that pass through the eyes and turns them right-side up and converts the images to three-dimensional ones, so-to-speak. But—and this is important, A.J.—only about fifty-percent of the vibrations out there makes it through, and that information is filtered through the conditionin of our minds. We never see the totality of what’s really there, nor do we all see it the same way, because of our conditioned perceptions.”

“Bill, I need to reflect here for a moment.”

“Take your time.”

I got up and walked to the front door and looked out. I wanted to think about what he was saying, piece everything together in my mind, if I could. The old school question came to me—if a tree falls and there's no one there to hear it, does it make a sound? I recalled two sides of that puzzler. One side said if no one was there—no observer—no sound occurred. The other side said the friction caused by the tree falling definitely created a sound. Bill's theories were causing me to consider reality as something completely different than I ever believed it to be. The thoughts in my mind were spinning. I looked in Bill's direction. He had leaned back into the shadows, but I could feel him watching me. I walked back and sat down.

"Bill, I want to try to summarize what you've said so far. Create a fluid image in my mind, if I can."

"Take your time."

"As I understand it from what you've said, we don't exactly know how the universe got started. It may have been nothingness, which I admit, I'm challenged when I try to picture that. Now, if what was there was just a wave frequency—whoa, Bill, I just had a image..."

"Let me hear it."

"If what was there originally was, say, in the form of a wave frequency—and if as scientists say—the big bang, or whatever form the activator took, started it up—and if we consider that light is a wave until it's observed, then becomes a particle—then maybe the consciousness was just a wave until—I feel like I'm babbling here."

"Go on, A.J. It's a good thread, and it'll straighten out."

"Whatever that consciousness was—is—may have become aware of itself and wanted to see itself. For it to see itself, maybe it had to become sustained vibration—a particle—or maybe, maybe something outside of it excited its vibrational frequency. If that consciousness wanted to see itself, it had to not just be, it had to become an observer as well. Like an infant is initially focused on itself until it reaches a point where its awareness expands." I paused.

"Don't stop, A.J. Keep the thought goin'."

"This consciousness isn't limited by space or time the way we think of it. Like ants or microbes may live a lifetime, but one

very different from a human's. So the observer, which is still the consciousness, becomes simultaneously the wave *and* the particle. But because matter is actually energy that's observed in a certain way, it's really a huge hologram—just as a reflection in a mirror is not the actual person, but reflects everything the person does and looks like.”

“Let me interrupt for just one question. What's the difference between glass and a mirror?”

“A mirror has a reflective substance on one side.”

“What does the substance do, other than reflect? Think a second before you answer.”

I did. “It blocks, or locks, the observer's observation. Depending on lighting, you can look through glass and have a ghost-like image of yourself reflected; but with enough light, you just see through the glass to what's on the other side. I know you want me to get something out of that, but my mind's racing. Can you just tell me?”

“I'll tell you this much, then I want you to pick your thread up where you left off. That reflective paint is like the agreement people share when they tune in to the same station.”

“I think I get it. The reflective surface is like a filter. When you tune into one station or signal, you filter out the other signals so you focus only on one. So maybe the grand observer agreed to filter—or set up filters—in order for it to focus on aspects of itself while still observing the entirety. Like if I put twenty televisions on in the same room. Or like when I'm doing several things at once—only on a much larger scale.

“Bill, if there's one grand observer, well, the image I have in my mind is sort of kaleidoscopic. Like a multi-faceted mirror that lets you see all the sides of yourself. Maybe the filters were set up so the aspects would focus on their experience, giving a greater chance for a greater number of experiences. But, Bill, why would the grand observer create some of its reflections as evil?”

“Maybe the grand observer, to use your words, doesn't judge. Maybe it allows its multitude of holographic—let's call 'em atoms—to experience their own observations and reflections, as you described them. It doesn't need to judge anything it sees as good or evil because it knows it's not real. Besides, it knows all the



atoms are its own. The real clincher is we're the ones who decide what's good and what isn't."

"So we experience pain or joy, or good or evil, because we believe our holograms are real. But if they're not..."

"Just think a little bigger, A.J. Remember that I just said that *we* are aspects of the consciousness. The *self-learnin* consciousness."

"It not only desires to see itself," I added, "But to experience itself, as well. It's just that it's still a little difficult to get around the idea that the consciousness and I are not ultimately separate."

"It's a filter, A.J. Nothin wrong with that unless it holds you back. I tend to think of it as our agreement with ourselves and each other—as reflections of this consciousness—so we *could* focus, *could* self-learn."

"I see what you're saying. But I really need to live with it awhile before I can feel it as my reality."

"Nothin wrong with that. Long as you're thinkin about it, that's what matters."

"So, everything we do is an experiment of sorts. If the grand observer allows us to do pretty much what we want because it doesn't judge...I don't know, Bill..."

"Think of it like this, A.J. It's like electricity. Ever hear of a light switch that refused to turn the light on because of whose hand was on it?"

"No. Of course not."

"Same thing. The grand consciousness doesn't need to directly interfere. It gives us what we need and leaves decisions about our choices up to us."

"That's kind of scary. Like letting a four-year old try to live like an adult."

"I see why you feel that way. But let me remind you that we're not four-year olds. It goes back to what we said earlier—about folks thinkin for themselves. Some of what we learn about proper behavior is a bit messed up; but there are enough kernels of truth around for us to figure things out if we just take a moment to think before we act."

"But sometimes we have to act fast. There's no time to think."

Bill chuckled. “That’s true enough. But folks sure do like to jump to extremes of thought about new ideas—as though no point of balance happens between the extremes.”

“I don’t follow.”

“Well, what we’re talkin about right now is thinkin about takin action in an extreme situation—as though all situations are extreme. Folks hear new ideas like these, and immediately—just as you did when you asked about the consciousness allowin evil to exist—go to the worst possible case to try to prove the concept is wrong. I’m not sayin that’s what you were doin. But think about how often that is the first response. It’s like this, there will be times when somethin happens and you do nothin, which is still an action. Other times, you’ll feel you have to act right then and think about it later. My point is, whether you’re dealin with the extremes or with the middle ground, your choices, even when they’re automatic, will be better ones if you build a sturdy foundation under them. That foundation doesn’t just happen. Life gives us plenty of opportunities to assess what we do and determine if we can do better. That’s why guilt can be good.”

“Guilt good? I can’t see that. It feels terrible.”

“Guilt, like anger, is there to draw our attention to the fact that somethin in our lives is outta balance, outta harmony with who we are at our core. Neither guilt nor anger will keep you alive. They could, in certain circumstances, save you in a particular moment. But if you hang onto them, feed them, they end up eatin *you*.”

“So how do you deal with them—use them the right way?”

“Guilt let’s you know there’s a better way to handle somethin. If you can fix it, fix it. If you can’t, think about what the better way woulda been. Sure enough, you’re likely to get your chance to test it out. Remember, we’re self-learnin. Part of us wants to know how we’re doin and that we’re capable—like the child who wants to do things himself.

“Life gives us those opportunities. None of us stands up and walks when we’re babies. There’s a process to it. And, first steps are wobbly. We fall, scrape somethin or bump our heads; but we don’t let that stop us. And like a good parent, the grand consciousness doesn’t say to us when we wobble and fall, ‘You’re

not good at this. Might as well forget about doin it.' We're the ones who tell ourselves that."

"We are our own worst enemies, as the saying goes."

"Yup. No one can tell you what you can or can't do. Not really, if you think about it. We have to *agree* to their control of us. There are people everywhere who live with limitations most of us never have to think about, yet they don't let it stop them from livin full lives."

"That's certainly true. Okay, what about anger?"

"Anger gets our attention on the fact that somethin goin on is not appropriate for us. It let's us know that somethin needs to be changed or shifted. Sometimes what needs to change is our attitude. When we get angry, that's our opportunity to take a moment to think about what triggered it and what we can do to shift it into a positive."

"But we do sometimes have to handle something right at the moment it happens."

"But, again, how you handle it is based on the foundation you create about what you believe about yourself and life. Only on occasion will a person need to act right away. Most of the time, we could actually say, 'I need to take a little time to think about this because I want a productive resolution,' or somethin like that. Most folks are conditioned to think they have to know what to do right then, all the time. They spew out one-liners or zingers that puts the other person in a place he thinks they belong in. Sometimes that's appropriate; but most times, I think, could benefit from a little thought—or askin the right questions."

"Makes me think of fast foods."

"Come again?"

"Sometimes you need to eat in a hurry. Your body needs something, but you don't have a lot of time. It takes care of the immediate need, but you wouldn't want to do it every meal. That type of food doesn't sustain a good balance in the body's chemistry. The best meals take time. Some planning, some preparation; and they can be quite nice when you share them with people."

"That's good, A.J. Part of the problem is that folks feel rushed in life. They *agree* to run through their days and moments at warp speed. They don't think about ever sayin 'Whoa?'"

*Joyce L. Shafer*

“I know people who seem to be addicted to the adrenaline rush of always being in the On position.”

“Bulbs left on always burn out faster. Crops need the energy of the sun to grow, but they also need the night to rest. Even the soil needs to rest to be good for the next crop. Folks would be wise to remember that.”

## CHAPTER 8

The kitchen door swung open and Annie came out with a tray. She put it down on the next table. Between us, she placed a plate of fresh fruit and vegetables, beautifully cut and arranged. Then she put a pitcher of iced water and two glasses down. She cleared the other dishes from the table, winked at me, picked up her tray, and went back into the kitchen.

“Does she have radar, or is she psychic or something?” I asked Bill, “We were just talking about eating healthy and there she was.”

Bill laughed. “Yup, that Annie’s a special one, alright.” We were both quiet for a moment as we nibbled on items from the platter.

“Bill, I’m intrigued by the idea that everything, including us, is holographic. If that’s so,” I said as I picked up a carrot stick, “Then pretty much everything we believe about reality is sustained based on what we create in our smaller holograms *and* the larger one.”

“Yup. I find it pretty amazin when I think about it. There are folks willin to die or hurt or kill others just to keep alive what’s basically a self-perpetuated theory of either a few or a culture. Now, let’s look at cultures for a moment. We touched on this a little bit earlier. We know that some folks involved in organized religions will shut themselves off from others. Their rules, what they eat—lots of things—keep them separate from everyone else. Then, there are folks who treat their cultures same as religions. They eat certain foods, hardly ever tryin somethin new, and follow traditions—even if the traditions or foods have a negative impact on their lives—and like some of the religious folk,

act like separatists. Anyone not of their culture is less in their eyes.”

“Bill, why do you think they choose that path? Or, maybe I should say *we*, since I think most of us practice that to some extent.”

“Lots of reasons. One reason is—like other situations in life—if they spend their lives reinforcing the traditions and behaviors on themselves and their families, to break from that would be like saying maybe their ways weren’t necessarily right ones. They don’t understand they can celebrate their culture or religion *and* choose not to be restricted or separated from others by it. After all, cultures are based on geography, nothing else. It’s not genetic, but they act like it is. Not that that should matter either. Another reason is fear. The effects of tribal mentality. If they do anything different from the tribe, who do they belong to? They don’t understand they belong to themselves and the bigger picture.”

“That belief is so limiting, yet I think most of us do it from time-to-time.”

“Yup. Most especially limiting is that some folks never learn to deal with or accept the rest of the folks.”

“Seems a shame to share a planet and a kinship with others who live here and never, or rarely, extend ourselves to each other.”

“That’s what feeds wars, A.J. You know, we think we are the children of the universe. But what if we are actually the parents?”

“That’s a good twist. Lots of New Age books refer to us as children of the universe. There’s a whole range of books and counselors that deal with the inner child. You know, Bill, we’ve been talking about holograms and consciousness. Some people would assume that we are products of the consciousness. But maybe you’re right. Maybe we are the consciousness. If we co-create or play, at least, some role in creating and sustaining the myriad of holograms...that puts a whole new spin on things. It demands a revised perspective.”

“Go on,” he said, smiling.

“Perhaps the world is the way it is, precisely because we behave like children—like brats or bullies, even. If we view ourselves as parents with certain responsibilities, then we have to

*“I Don’t Want to be Your Guru, but I Have Something to Say.”*

alter our behaviors. We have to act like adults, always be conscious that we teach by example.”

Bill’s smile broadened, then faded. “Can you imagine a responsible, caring parent or adult not feedin a neighbor’s hungry child? Or rather than guide a child towards self-reliance, lead it into dependence? The list of examples, sad to say, goes on.”

“And as we said earlier, what supports any system or individual is a strong foundation based on integrity—of ourselves, and toward others.”

“Simple, A.J., but not always easy. Though in my mind, I feel it should be easier,” he said as he gazed out the window.

## CHAPTER 9

“Bill, this is all very nice—intellectual and all—but how would it be incorporated into the everyday life of the man on the street?”

“Well, first, A.J., let’s change the word *incorporate* to *integrate*. This goes back to our discussion about religion. People claim to be members of certain “isms”—Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Protestant—what have you. They may know all the laws or rules or commandments; but very often, they end up practicing the letter of the law rather than the spirit of the law. Kinda like ideals. Ideals should guide your life, not rule ’em. Someone might be really good at bein whatever their “ism” is—let’s use Christian for example—but they don’t go the distance.”

“What distance?”

“They don’t aim to be Christ-like. It’s easy to quote chapter and verse, but how deeply is it understood? Is it integrated into the life?”

“I know what integrated means, but please explain what you mean so I know we’re talking about the same thing.”

“You ever been to a class or somethin, or read a book—somethin that gave you suggestions about makin life easier or better?”

“Yes.”

“You probably felt all charged up—energized—ready to put your new insights to work. You probably walked around feelin really upbeat, big smile on your face like you had the keys to the kingdom in your pocket. You maybe even started to tell folks about it—like you’d become the expert of somethin. Any of this familiar?”

“Oh, yeah,” I said, shaking my head.



"What happened?"

"Several things. Instead of actually bringing the 'light of reality' to others as I thought I would, I just irritated them. And as soon as the opportunities to test my new insights arrived, I wasn't as successful as I thought I'd be."

"Do you understand what happened?"

"Not exactly."

"No integration. See, when we get an insight, it shifts our energy up a bit. We like the feelin. We want to share it so others can feel as good—and as less fearful—as we do at that moment. When higher energy bumps into lower energy, there's resistance in both directions. The lower resists goin higher, the higher resists goin lower. Instant conflict.

"Also, when we get a new way to do somethin and that first opportunity comes to try it out, old behaviors pop up as well. Integration comes after a time, A.J. It's like tryin to put new furniture into a room before the old furniture is moved out. Everythin is in there, but it's too crowded to move around in or work the way it should."

"I see what you mean. Every old way—or most old ways—of dealing with situations in life need to be removed first so that the insights work."

"And you pretty much have to move one old item out at a time. When most or all of the old bits are gone, you can find the right place for the new ones. Once your room is in order and you've moved around in it for a while, you've integrated."

"And the part about irritating others?"

"We'll use the same example. You have your old and new items in one room. You invite several people over to see you new bits and bobs. But it's chaotic in there. What they see is old and new competing for space."

"In other words, people can still see evidence of old behavior patterns."

"See or feel, as it may be. It's important to work this energy quietly, A.J. But especially while you're integratin it. You want to clean out the old, one piece at a time, then carefully position each new piece before you invite people into that space."

"You're saying keep it to yourself until you have it down, then tell people about it."

“Almost. You see, when you’re dealin with your inner energy, it’s best to wait for someone to ask you why things are goin so well or why you seem more in balance than you used to. See, you want to be more like a sage than a salesman with this information. Like in nature. You never hear of a tomato plant goin door-to-door askin folks if they need or want tomatoes. Nope. That tomato plant does what it does quietly and waits for people hungry for tomatoes to come to it. Once you integrate a new energy and way of dealin with things, you begin to be an example. Folks just sort of show up and start askin questions.

“Somethin else that’s important, A.J., is not to get into judgin yourself durin this time—or anytime, actually. It’s okay to re-assess yourself, but judgin creates all kinds of harsh energy. You see, the integration time is an opportunity for you to observe yourself, your beliefs, and your conditionin as much as a time to test out the new insights.”

“How’s that?”

“You get to consciously realize how negative or unproductive some of those old behaviors are, and decide not to repeat them in the future. It’s like learnin to walk.”

“The most important thing is to get up if you fall down.”

“Yup. But before that even, as we talked about earlier, is not to judge yourself for fallin down. That’s one of the reasons for keepin it to yourself. There are folks who will feel compelled to comment about how you’re doin, how your new insights ain’t workin for you. Or worse, maybe they tell you there’s somethin wrong with you. Best to avoid that energy if possible.

“But probably the most important reason to keep it quiet is so you don’t diffuse the energy. This applies to any goal that’s still a seed. Say, you get an idea to change or create somethin. If you keep it to yourself until the right time, you build the energy around it. If you’re talkin about it to everyone, that’s where your energy is goin—into talkin, not doin. Also, when you really get into usin the energy consciously, you want to not let your ego get into thinkin you’re special because of what happens in your life or what you know. When you’re really flowin, life can seem magical. The ego will want to take credit. Feel above others. That can really gum up the works. Just remember that every other person has the ability to have the same conscious awareness. They just

haven't opened up to it yet. You're not better because you did. Probably the best way to feel about it is grateful—grateful you expanded your awareness, grateful others can tap into it anytime they're ready. And, you have to let go of judgin when they should be ready."

"But if someone asks me why things are working for me, shouldn't I share that?"

"Yup. But find a way to do it without ego. As I just said, tap into your feelin of gratitude, feel humble and in awe of how it works. Then tell them the answer to their question. Let them know this is available to everyone, not just some. I do want to make one other point about the ego. Don't go thinkin it's somethin negative. It's what keeps us alive and goin, but it's not always the wisest advisor. Recognize when it's a good thing and when it's not."

Bill leaned back and paused. I waited. "Another thing, A.J., folks tend to resist change—even if it's's productive. Some resist it more than others. And some folks really react when an individual they're close to changes. They feel if you change, they may have to. Folks get used to their behaviors. They're familiar, like old friends who really aren't good for you, but you resist lettin 'em go for somethin or someone better for you."

"It's like that popular definition of insanity," I interrupted, "Repeating the same actions over and over, expecting different results. I supposed we all do that from time to time."

"That's why life can feel so crazy at times. But if folks understand that even a slight shift of how they look at somethin can shift what they are lookin at..."

"That's actually a powerful—or, rather—empowering concept, Bill. That goes back to how we started this conversation: Do I view my life as a series of trips from one point to the next or do I view it as a journey?"

"Yup. If you view your life as a journey, you'll pay attention to the connection between all the points—even how the link between point B to point C affects or influences what happens when you move from point N to point O. You'll see it as a whole path."

"All of the moments in our life are connected."

“They are, indeed. All it takes to see that is a willingness to consider every moment, every event in your life, as a piece of the bigger picture.”

“Like threads of a tapestry.”

“I like that image, A.J. Threads of different color and size interwoven to create a complete picture of a life.”

“Thanks.”

“A.J., know what the biggest influence in your life is?”

“Um...”

“We’re back to attitude. See, folks think if they get enough insights—let’s call ’em tools—or just the right tools—whatever that means to *them*—stuff won’t happen to *them*. But life happens. Most of the stuff that happens is a direct result of how a person thinks—what he or she focuses on most of the time. Shift the focus enough, and you shift the events of your life to a certain degree. But some things that happen are a result of life. That’s just the way it is. Folks could help themselves if they just remembered it’s not always about how they solve a situation. Sometimes they won’t be able to solve somethin, it’ll just resolve itself. Nope, the really important thing is how a person handles himself—whether he reacts or responds to what happens.”

I leaned forward. “Bill, I had a thought about shifting focus. When someone has something they perceive as negative happen, a great deal of thought or focus is placed on it—in some cases, for the rest of the person’s life. Someone we think of as negative, focuses only on the things they perceive as ‘wrong’ in their life. Very little focus or attention, or playback time, goes toward the good things.”

“Yup. With all that focus on the negative, they wonder why most of their life is the same—and why they’re not happy.”

“If all of us understood that what we focus on not only keeps us in that spot or that energy field, but also pulls more of the same to us...Bill, if we really understood that, I wonder what we would choose?”

“If folks realized, as you said earlier, that the field is a mirror—that if you say you lack anything, it doesn’t argue with you, it helps you perpetuate your belief that you lack—well, perhaps they’d shift their thinkin a bit. But it’s not only about what folks choose, A.J., it’s also about the *why*.”

The *why*?"

"You can make better choices, but what's underneath the choice? If your consciousness understands how the energy works, that's far better than just doin what's 'right.' I've seen folks get stuck in that place. They do somethin they think is right—maybe they consider it the 'Christian' thing to do. But underneath the action, they're angry or bitter about doin it—maybe even judge those they're doin it for. It's much better if what you choose to do is somethin you find your mind, heart, and spirit are all together on. Doin somethin you resent isn't productive long-term. Either shift your attitude about doin it—find some benefit to you for doin it—or don't do it simply because it isn't appropriate for you. Maybe doin it's gonna fragment some part of you, so-to-speak. So many folks are doin things because they don't want to be a 'bad' person and say no, even if no's what they really feel. Just remember, A.J., you can put a pig in a tuxedo and bring it to a party; but underneath the fancy duds, it's still a pig. Eventually, do-gooders—folks who do stuff in order to be thought well of rather than because it's what they really want to do—either explode on the inside with health problems or finally blow up in a fit of temper. They think they're angry with the others who they think are doin it to 'em, but they're really angry with themselves for allowin it and not stoppin it at the beginnin. They're angry with themselves for not feelin they have a right to do what's more appropriate for them in certain situations. They think folks will call them selfish if they take care of their needs. An empty well gives no water, A.J."

"I understand what you're saying. No matter what you believe about the surface you show others, it's what's going on at the deeper, inner levels that ultimately matters."

"Yup. How 'bout I ask Annie for some lemonade? She makes the best."

He called out Annie's name and his request. I was waiting for her to poke her head out from the kitchen, but she didn't. Bill was quiet, so I followed his lead. We both look at the sunbeams breaking through the clouds, creating a dazzling prism of colors on the desert canvas.

## CHAPTER 10

Annie carried in a tray with a pitcher of lemonade with lemon circles floating on top, two glasses filled with ice, two spoons, and a bowl of sugar. Again, she cleared the other dishes, winked at me, then left us. Old Bill poured the liquid into our glasses.

“There’s another thing to be aware of,” he said as he handed me a glass, “When we start workin on ourselves, it’s real easy to start seein what we think is wrong with other folks. We can get mighty critical. Know why that is, A.J.?”

“Because we think we know something they don’t?”

“That’s part of it. Think mirrors.”

“Mirrors. Okay.” I paused while he poured lemonade into our glasses. “If the universe reflects our beliefs back to us...and if the universe is looking at itself through mirror-images...ah, people reflect something, on some level, that exists in us.”

“Go on.”

“If I see something in someone else, it’s because it’s within me as well. And if I don’t like what I see and I criticize them, in reality, I’m criticizing myself. I’m resisting my own mirror.”

“Yup. First I want to say somethin about resistance, then I’ll continue this thought. Sufferin is caused when we resist somethin. We don’t have to like things that happen in life that we feel are negative; but when we resist them, we cause our own sufferin. You follow that?”

“Yes...I never thought of it like that. When something happens I don’t like, I try to fight it. But shouldn’t we fight sometimes?”

“Well, let’s say that some things are worth puttin forth extra effort to make ’em right; but if it takes a fight—forcin something

or someone to do what *we* feel is best—maybe we need to re-evaluate the situation. When things are workin' right, there's no need to use force. It just flows. Some folks will choose to fight a battle for decades because it's more important to them to win than to live peacefully and productively. That's an ego trip, for sure. If folks know who they are, then what others think of them doesn't control them. But, back to what we were sayin' about bein' critical. I learned that when I've worked through the kinks in somethin' inside of me and I see that same thing in another, I feel compassion for them—compassion based on a bit of understandin' what maybe motivates their behavior and what they may have to go through to overcome it."

"And if their behavior upsets you," I interjected, "It's because it's still an issue you haven't resolved."

"Yup," he smiled, "We only criticize when we feel restricted in some way. If you look around, you realize how many people feel restricted in their lives about somethin'. This goes back to resistance. We may want to be better, but we resist doin' what it takes. Sometimes, 'cause we just don't want what we say we want enough to do somethin' about it. Or maybe we'll have to do somethin' that goes against the way it's always been done in our family or community." Bill picked up his glass of lemonade and nodded for me to do the same. "Cheers," he said as he clinked my glass with his.

It was sour. All lemon, no sugar. As my face puckered in surprise, he laughed.

"Okay, Bill, what's the lemonade thing about?"

"Life *is* like lemonade, A.J. It has water, which is somethin' we need. It has lemons, which though they're sour—or bitter—like some things in life, there's still something in a lemon that is good for us. But *we* have to add the sugar to make lemonade—and life—palatable. Too much sugar isn't good either. And, it's a matter of individual taste. The bitter and the sweet make up our lives, but it's up to us to get the mixture right."

We both spooned sugar into our glasses and stirred.

"You know, Bill, as I think about what we just said about people feeling restricted, it begins to pull some things we've talked about together."

"I'm listenin'."

“We are born into this world. From the first moment, we’re influenced by the beliefs of everyone around us about everything. When we reach what we might call an age of reasoning ability, if we haven’t had much practice in thinking for ourselves—you know, evaluating or assessing what we believe rather than just accepting the beliefs of others, beyond what’s accepted as normal...”

“Just want to interrupt for a moment, A.J., and repeat somethin I heard once: ‘That which is usual is often called normal.’”

“Another one I’ve never heard before, and one I need to remember. So, even if people are not practiced at this kind of thinking, the individual desire to be who they are—to be true to themselves—seethes under the surface. Without proper guidance of how to break out of this...this...”

“Prison without bars.”

“Yes! The frustration level just keeps going up. Depending on what kind of foundation is within them, that frustration could manifest anywhere from never living more than a banal existence to becoming a criminal. If people were aware of even half of what you’ve told me today—well, I like to imagine the world might be a different sort of place. One where there were not only fewer conflicts and imbalances, but also one where conflicts had more productive resolutions.”

“Some might call you an idealist, A.J., but what you’ve just described is based on what reality really is—and could be. Easy, but not necessarily simple—because of perceptions and conditionin. It does go back to folks thinkin for themselves—as long as their thinkin is not supported by the beliefs that cause the conflicts. And if folks realized that a lot of their experiences are a direct result of their thoughts—what they focus on...”

“It would be a new concept for most, Bill. It’s not the way most of the world works. Even with my being open to it, I’m still going to have to think about what it means in my day-to-day reality.”

“Long as you give it some thought, A.J. Just remember: Cinch by the inch, hard by the yard. It’s not important to always take leaps, A.J. Every small step counts.”



## CHAPTER 11

“A word I’d like you consider, A.J., is Mindfulness. You asked how folks can apply what we’re talkin about here in their everyday lives. Well, that’s the word I offer as a tool to help them do that. When we talk about folks thinkin for themselves, we need to include Mindfulness in that process. Mindfulness means that in every moment, we do our best to assess the bigger picture. Too often, it’s just easier to react rather than respond. Do you understand the difference between a reaction and a response?”

“A reaction is something we do immediately. A response requires a bit of thought. It might be a thought that happens quickly or one we mull over.”

“Yup. One of the biggest problems I see in life—and I used to live my life this way—is to react rather than respond in nearly every situation. And the ugliest face of that is in group mentality—mob mentality, if you will. You get a group of people together who don’t have Mindfulness, you tell ’em what to think or how they need to behave, and you can generate somethin that demonstrates the darker side of mankind.”

“We see it every day, don’t we?”

“Unfortunately. But we’re not victims, A.J. Remember that. Even if we up our awareness a small bit, we influence the movement on the spiral. The world is not evil or out of balance. It, like folks, reflects back to us our thoughts, words, and actions. Goin back to your earlier question about the consciousness creatin evil—it doesn’t, we do. If we want to change things, we have to start right where we live—inside ourselves.”

I nodded in agreement, then looked out the window. “Weather’s cleared. There’s not a cloud left in the sky,” I said as I glanced out the window.

“Does that out here. Looks like the sky’s gonna open up, then it moves on.”

“Much as I’d like to stay, Bill, I guess that’s what I should do as well. I did promise to be somewhere by a certain time, though I think I’ll see it more as a journey the rest of the way instead of just traveling. I can’t honestly say I agree with everything you’ve said. But I am going to think about all of it. See if I can make sense of it. I don’t know how to thank you for what’s been one of the most challenging and intriguing conversations of my life.”

“My hope, A.J., is that every moment, from this time on, feels just as important to you. No moment ever needs to be wasted.”

I extended my hand to him. Our eyes locked. He didn’t move. Then slowly, he extended his hand to shake mine. A sensation I still can’t explain surged through me. The closest thing to describe it is—well, it was like pure, unconditional love.

Annie came out of the kitchen. I stood up and faced her. “Annie, thanks for everything you did today. I don’t think I’ll ever taste an apple pie as good as yours—ever.” Annie beamed a smile at me. “Now, I need to settle my tab.”

“No tab, A.J.,” Bill said quietly.

“But...”

“My treat.” He held up a hand to stop my protest. “Believe me, I’m one of the wealthiest folks in the universe.”

I sat back in my chair. Esther and Bud were quiet, but her eyes had tears in them. It wasn’t that the silence was uncomfortable, but I felt inclined to say something. “Esther, I thought I’d never taste an apple pie as good as Annie’s again. I’m pleased to say, yours is just as good.”

It was like a bolt from the blue when Esther beamed the same smile I’d seen on Annie that day. I didn’t get a chance to say it. She did.

“Yes, A.J., Annie was my mother. This is her pie recipe, since she’s the one who taught me.”

“Well, that explains it. You know, I wanted to send letters to them, but I’d failed to get the address before I left. For all the

*“I Don’t Want to be Your Guru, but I Have Something to Say.”*

importance of that day to me, I didn’t even know the exact location of where they were. They changed my life, and I never had the chance to tell them.”

“What *did* you do, A.J.?” asked Bud.

“I thought a lot, wrote a lot. I knew I had to do something productive with all Bill told me that day. Eventually, I created a workshop. It was successful—still is. In my spare time, I wrote a book.” I paused to reach into my bag, pulled out a copy, and placed it on the table. “It’s been successful as well. I wanted each of them to have a copy. So, I came back here to give it to them, taking the chance that I’d find them.”

Bud picked up the book. On the cover was a pencil sketch I’d had an artist friend do based on my memory of Old Bill. The title was “I Don’t Want to be Your Guru, but I Have Something to Say (A Conversation with Old Bill).” He opened the cover, then began to read aloud what I’d written:

*To Old Bill—*

*You gave me a unique vision of the Universe, helped me to  
awaken my life’s purpose,  
and taught me the art of lemonade in life. I never take a step  
without you by my side.  
Eternally grateful, A.J.*

“Bud, I’d be honored if you’d accept Bill’s copy. And Esther,” I pulled another copy from the bag and handed it to her, “This was for your mother.”

She took the book, handling it as though it were fragile. She opened the cover and read aloud, as well:

*To Annie—An amazing woman with a profound sense of  
timing and the best apple pie in the universe.  
Deepest affection, A.J.*

“Thanks, A.J.”

I sat quietly as they thumbed through the pages of the book. Bud stopped on one of the pages and began to read it to us.

*Imagine with me, if you will...*

*Imagine if we felt free enough to allow ourselves to choose in every moment how to move forward on our evolutionary paths, free from judging our stumbles, but pleased that we get up and continue each time.*

*Imagine if we felt free enough to allow others to make their choices without the need to judge them—free to wish others well and move on in peace if the choices they make are not in vibrational harmony with our own current frequency.*

*Imagine if we understood that every thought, word and action we project out, not only is a reflection of what is within, but returns to us as our reality.*

*What would we choose...in every moment?*

“This is fine, A.J.” offered Bud after several moments. I know my daddy would be pleased and proud.”

“He’s been my compass all these years,” I said. “I just wish I could have told him all the good that has come about since that day. How enriched my life is because of him.”

“He knows, A.J. He knows.” Bud’s eyes crinkled as he smiled.

Esther put both hands flat on the table top and stood up, “Who wants pie?” she asked.

I smiled, “Count me in. And Esther, make mine with the works, if you please.”

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Joyce Shafer has an eclectic background which includes office manager, artist, writer, numerologist, and various other titles. Published works include topics such as numerology, numerical patterns in the universe, and metascience in the real world. She has presented workshops, done radio programs, and has been a guest speaker at various events around the U.S., including the International Forum for New Science. She created, published, and edited Network Quarterly which featured articles, interviews and reviews of authors both renowned and little known. Shafer resides in the New York City area and can be reached at [jls1422@yahoo.com](mailto:jls1422@yahoo.com).





