



Time Traveling

Tolly Burkan

Memories of My Past

TIME TRAVELING

by Tolly Burkan

Preface

These are just random memories of my past that I cannot forget. I had fun writing them down, and I hope you'll have fun reading them.

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Jos

In my youth, I was a professional magician and performed extensively on large ocean liners, such as the SS Michelangelo, the SS Rotterdam and others of their class. Between the ages of 20 and 25, I sailed completely around the world and visited over 50 countries.

In 1968, when I was 20 years old, I was aboard the SS Leonardo da Vinci. We were docked in Curaçao, located in the Dutch Antilles of the Caribbean. When the ship was in port, it was often open to visitors, and a Dutch family from the Netherlands (who was temporarily living in Curaçao) sat at the bar in one of the lounges. I struck-up a conversation with the father, who was aboard with his wife and three children, Jos (short for Joseph) 16, Marion 14, and Paul 12.

When the father learned I was an entertainer on the staff of the ship, he made me an offer. He said that if I gave his family a tour of the ship, he would give me a tour of Curaçao, followed by dinner at his home. Thus began a relationship that has spanned over 50 years. Jos and I met that day in 1968, and since then, our children grew up knowing each other. Now we are grandparents, and the friendship encompasses three generations... four, if Jos's deceased parents are included... plus my deceased parents who hosted Jos and his wife Riet, and then corresponded for years.

My relationship with Jos had an episode that stands out as being so bizarre, I am motivated to write about it.

As I mentioned earlier, Jos's family was only living in Curaçao temporarily. However, they resided there for a number of years, and I visited them often when I was aboard a ship docking in Curaçao. In 1970, Jos moved to the Netherlands to attend the University, and his family followed shortly thereafter.

I was frequently aboard ships going to Europe, and visited Jos both at the University and at his parents' new home. We saw each other, and wrote to each other, until 1973, when we lost touch after I gave up my career as a magician, and moved from New Jersey to California to become a hippie.

In 1981, I was living without electricity in a tipi. However, I had a telephone with a long wire running through the woods to a neighbor's trailer, plus I had a battery-operated answering machine purchased at Radio Shack.

One day in late June, my brother Barry phoned. He told me that a friend of mine in Holland had written me a letter and it was delivered to the last address he had, which was my parents' home in New Jersey. Since we did not keep in touch, Jos had no way of knowing I had moved to California eight years prior. When the letter was returned to him in Holland, he addressed the letter to the "Current Resident," and again mailed it to

my parents' home. My parents sold that home years before, and a family from India was now residing there.

Barry was always attracted to India. He introduced me to Indian culture, literature and spiritual teachings, and was responsible for my own visits to India. Because of this, he became friendly with the people who now lived in my parents' former home. From time-to-time he dropped by for a short visit. One day, in 1981, he stopped to visit and was handed a letter. He was phoning me to read it aloud.

"If you know how to reach Bruce Burkan (my given family name), please give him the enclosed letter."

The envelope had arrived many months before, and when Barry arrived for a short visit with the Indian family, he got the letter meant for me.

It read: "Dear Bruce, I will be visiting California in the United States with my girlfriend Riet this summer. We know you live in New Jersey, but perhaps that is close to California and then we can see you?"

I thanked Barry and put on my "thinking cap." I recalled that when I visited the new home of Jos's parents in Holland, Jos and I took a long walk. When we passed the bakery, Jos casually said, "My uncle owns that bakery." I noticed it was directly across from the train station.

From my tipi, I called "Directory Assistance" in the town where Jos's parents lived. His last name is so common, there were dozens of possibilities. So, I got the number for the train station, and phoned. When the phone was answered, I told the person I was calling from California in the United States and asked if he spoke English. He said "Yes," and I asked if there was still a bakery across from the station. Again he answered "Yes." When I asked if he could look up the phone number, he took a moment and then gave me the number.

I immediately phoned. When I again explained where I was calling from, to my chagrin, the person did not speak English. I started repeating the names Marion, Jos, Paul... over and over again. I figured, if this is the uncle, he'll recognize those names and bear with me. After a small commotion, another person got on the line. This person did not speak English either, so I again started reciting the names. The phone was passed to someone else, who turned out to be the uncle — who, of course, recognized the names; but he did not speak English. After what seemed like an interminable length of time, the collective occupants of the bakery, staff and customers combined, finally were able to give me the phone number of Jos's parents — in English.

After just one ring, Jos's father answered. "Oh Bruce," he exclaimed. "How did you get this number?" I told him the whole long story and he replied that Jos and Riet were already in California, backpacking around the West.

I asked if there was any way to get in touch with them. He then said that Riet's mother was ill and that Riet phoned about once a week to check on her Mom. The next time she phoned, he would make sure she got my number.

I returned from grocery shopping the next day, and there was a message on the phone machine. "Bruce, this is Jos. We are camping at the Samuel P. Taylor State Park and there is no way to contact us, but I will phone again."

That state park was about a four-hour drive from my tipi. I called a friend of mine who worked for the phone company and asked if I could get the number of the pay telephone that was certainly near the park office and rest rooms. It took some time, but I got the number.

My plan was this: I would wait until the park office closed, so the only one hearing the ringing pay phone would be some person en route to the bathroom. I'd let the phone ring and ring, even if it rang for an hour, and as soon as it was answered, I'd say: "Please don't hang up. I have friends from Holland in the campground. Please yell as loud as you can that there is a phone call for the campers from Holland."

When I finally dialed the number, the phone only rang a few times before it was answered. I said, "Please don't hang up. I have friends from Holland in the campground. Please yell as loud as you can that there is a phone call for the campers from Holland."

There was a pause, a long pause, and then the voice on the other end of the phone said, "Bruce, is this you?"

I told Jos that the next day I was leaving for a hippie festival near the Canadian border. It was called The Rainbow Gathering and I offered to fetch him and Riet and take them with me. They were also hippies of a sort, and the next day, after eight years, we had a reunion.

Though I no longer traveled by ship, I did continue to visit Europe by plane when I was teaching firewalking seminars there. My former wife Peggy also taught seminars in Europe, and we became good friends with Jos and Riet. When our daughter Amber was born, she traveled with us. Therefore, when we visited, our kids got to know each other as well. This renewed friendship became even more solid when our children were in their teens and the two families took a large van on a month-long road trip together, going from California to New York.

Today, in 2019, I am 71 years old — and Jos remains my oldest friend. We've been to each other's homes, we've seen our kids grow up, and now we exchange emails and photos of the grandchildren.

The Kindness of Strangers

People do not necessarily wake up in the morning and decide that today they will do at least one kind thing; but sometimes fate gives ordinary people the capacity to be Saints — if only for a day.

I had been an entertainer on ocean liners for almost five years. I had visited many countries and traveled "first class," meeting "movers and shakers" from large global industries and powerful political circles. Many men I met, even owned an island.

There was one particular voyage I had always wanted to take, and that was aboard the SS Rotterdam's World Cruise — a three-month voyage completely around the globe.

I decided to apply for the position of Assistant Cruise Director, knowing that my resume of years at sea would be a valid credential. Plus, as a self-confident 24-year-old, I felt assured that if I could have a face-to-face interview with the person responsible for hiring the staff, my personal charm and charisma would clinch it.

I made an appointment to be interviewed in the city of Rotterdam, in the Netherlands. This was the summer of 1972, and I was applying for the voyage that departed from New York in early January of 1973.

The only people who could afford to sail on these luxurious voyages were celebrities, powerful people, and the super-rich. When I sailed with them, I thought that I fit right in. I had cultivated the manners, the clothes, the polish and experience as a world-traveler, to hold my own in any gathering and in any conversation.

But more-and-more, deep within, I was transforming into a hippie, and was on the threshold of rejecting materialism.

So, in the summer of 1972, I was actually being sort of a hippie, backpacking around Europe, and a few days before my interview in Rotterdam, I purchased the appropriate clothes, since there's never a second chance to make a first impression. I rolled the clothes into a knot inside my backpack, and figured I'd visit a cleaners and have them pressed in the morning before my appointment.

On the designated day, I made some inquiries and was directed to a cleaners. When I got there, the proprietor did not speak English. I tried to tell him that my outfit was polyester, that he just needed to wash it in cold water, and it would dry wrinkle-free.

I went a few doors down, had breakfast, and returned.

When I said "cold" water — it sounded like the Dutch word for "Boiling Hot." So my outfit was a mass of wrinkles. I asked the proprietor if he could press the clothes, but he said he could not.

A Dutch woman, who was overhearing our exchange, came to me and said, "COLD in English is like the word BOILING HOT in Dutch. This is actually a self-serve establishment, and the manager was only trying to be helpful."

I told the woman I had an appointment in Rotterdam, and needed to catch a train. I asked if there was someplace I could get my clothes pressed? By now, I was sweating bullets.

The woman said "no," but she would take me to her house, and she would iron my clothes for me.

This offer stunned me, but I felt desperate, and I accepted her offer while thanking her profusely. We drove about ten minutes and arrived at her home.

When we got inside, she gave me a towel, and told me to take a shower while she ironed. When I emerged from the bathroom wearing a t-shirt, boxers, and over-the-calf stretch socks, the woman was at an ironing board in the kitchen. On the table was my lunch: a sandwich and a cup of coffee. I remember thinking, "She must be an angel."

She told me that she had phoned her husband, and he was coming home from work to drive me to the train. She explained that she could not leave, as she had to wait for the moving van. She was so easy-going, so laid-back, so unstressed, that I — preoccupied with my own drama — was oblivious to the reality of this woman's situation.

At this point, it finally struck me that the house was filled with boxes. The woman told me that they are moving, and that's why most things were packed. She had more to do.

I was deeply touched that on moving day, even with all the tasks she had to complete, this woman (and her husband) were willing to help a total stranger... GRACIOUSLY!

All I could do was to keep repeating, "Thank you. Thank you. Thank you."

In the car, as the husband drove me to the train, again I kept saying, "Thank you. Thank you. Thank you." I remember wondering if I myself could be so selfless?

I later regretted that I did not think to get this couple's name and address; so I couldn't write to them and express my gratitude. I doubt they even remember me, but I will never forget them, and their unexpected and amazing kindness. I got the position of Assistant Cruise Director... and I certainly thought of them often as I sailed around the world on the SS Rotterdam in 1973.

My First Hot Tub

Years ago, I decided to spend a few months in New York City to visit friends and family who I hardly saw since moving to California. It was also an opportunity to spend time with my spiritual teacher Hilda Charlton. I sub-let an apartment on Riverside Drive, in an upscale building on the Upper Westside of Manhattan. This apartment was formerly used to house the building's doorman, but now it was rented to the public. It was the only apartment located in the basement. The rest of the basement had a laundromat, storerooms, supply closets, a furnace room, and not much else.

My bathroom had a very large, tiled, stall-shower. "Hmmmm," I thought. "I can easily turn this into a hot-tub."

I knew that this rental was only temporary, so I set about engineering a wall I could install in the shower, yet it could be easily removed when I left. I wanted to enclose about 100 gallons of water, so I had to anticipate the pressure, and devise an adequate dam. The three existing walls were tile-covered concrete, so there was no doubting their ability to contain the water's pressure. I designed a fourth wall, to create a box.

Over the span of about a week, I shopped for and purchased the tools and materials I would need. My own cleverness at inventing this odd hot-tub, tickled me as I labored over my architectural wonder.

Finally, it was completed. I cleaned the mess I had created during construction, and at about 11 p.m., I dimmed the lights, put on some soft music, lit a few candles, and eased myself into the hot water.

It was Heaven — for about two seconds. Then, a horrific groan resonated through the bathroom, and the dam burst. My first thought was that the elevator was only four feet from the front door of my apartment. The water would surely go under my door and into the hall, and then down the elevator shaft.

I had to prevent that. So I grabbed every towel, and as I thought about using clothing, blankets, my sleeping bag, pillows... and whatever else was needed to stop the water from passing under my door — I was suddenly aware that I was being electrocuted.

The many electrical extension cords I had on the floor going to lamps and appliances, were now about to kill me. Naked, hopping and shrieking, I yanked every cord from the wall. The overhead light enabled me to start piling everything and anything, in front of

my door. In five minutes, there was not a dry article in the apartment. Fortunately, it was so late at night, no one came down the elevator to use the washers and dryers.

I worked like a machine, moving dripping towels, blankets, and clothing into the bathroom — where I wrang out each article as best I could, and as quickly as possible. When I was sure it was safe to open the door and peer into the hall, at about three in the morning, I could see that only a minimal amount of water had hit the elevator.

I gathered my wet clothing, put a wet towel around my waist, and headed for the building's laundry room. Starting with my clothes, I filled every dryer, all the while feeling thankful I didn't blow one of the building's electrical circuits before I had unplugged my power cords.

It took the better part of four days to completely restore everything. No one ever mentioned the incident, and I never told a living soul. I was just so embarrassed by my own stupidity.

Choosing Our Parents

I believe we choose our mother and we choose our father, before we are born. I'm not asking you to agree with me; I'm merely sharing a belief I hold.

When you walk down the street, you see countless people, and unless the person wears a Buddhist robe or the collar of a Catholic Priest, their beliefs will be unknown to you. I believe there are many planes of existence. I believe that before we are born into the Earth plane, we exist somewhere else, vibrating at a different frequency of consciousness. Unless I share my beliefs with you, you could not know what my beliefs are.

I can imagine my daughter Amber on some astral plane, pulling me and her mother Peggy together. Even today, at 71 years of age, I am astonished that Peggy and I ever met.

It happened like this. I had just completed writing my book *DYING TO LIVE*, an autobiographical account of how I came to be the founder of the global firewalking movement. I was passing the rough draft around to my friends, and asking for feedback. One of my friends commented that my description of skydiving reminded her of a woman in her rock-climbing class. She said the woman was rock-climbing to deal with her fear of heights. She also went skydiving for the same reason. In my book, I talk about my fear of heights and dealing with it by skydiving.

So through my friend, this woman received a copy of the rough manuscript. Her name was Peggy.

Peggy read the manuscript, which I wrote longhand by a kerosene lamp while living in a tipi. We agreed to meet so she could give me feedback. Now this is where it gets weird. We both lived in the mountains, in a sparsely populated, even remote, village. I was a rather unique character and knew there weren't many kindred souls like me on the whole planet, let alone in Tuolumne County, high in the Sierra Nevada mountains of California.

Here I was, in the twentieth century (1982), living in a tipi. I had lived in the tipi for over a year, and weathered the worst winter in 100 years. I taught personal growth seminars at a time when that was a most uncommon vocation. Prior to becoming a hippie and moving to California, I was a world-traveler. As a magician, I had performed on many ocean liners, including the majestic SS Michelangelo. I had never known anyone else who sailed across the Atlantic on her. She was the third largest ship in the world at the

time, and then sank in the late 1970s. Another thing that was unique in my life was that I had been to India to live at Sai Baba's ashram. What was the likelihood of meeting someone else in this remote area who had also lived at Sai Baba's?

Well, Peggy had been to India and lived at Sai Baba's ashram. She had sailed the Atlantic on the SS Michelangelo. She also had once lived in a tipi; and, in fact, her son Aaron was born in that tipi. I already knew she had gone skydiving to confront her fear of heights — but what totally blew my mind was that she too was a world traveler and taught personal growth seminars. She was leaving in two weeks to teach a seminar in Sweden.

As we talked, I was simply flabbergasted by all we had in common. Not only was it so unlikely to meet someone else who taught seminars, but our teaching techniques, and the tools we used, were almost identical. How was it possible to meet someone in Tuolumne County who had so much in common with me?

Amber did it.

Calling on God

When I was 26, I was a pedestrian and was hit by a car. I was thrown 25 feet, and discs in my neck were crushed. However, The MRI had not yet been invented, and the micro-surgery necessary to reconstruct my neck was such a high risk, that doctors prescribed morphine instead of performing surgery.

The morphine made it so hard to function, I tried giving it up three times. I finally succeeded, and attempted to live with the pain.

Eventually, the whole left side of my body was paralyzed, including my face. A hospital bed was installed in my home, along with a traction unit. I had to have a live-in attendant to assist me with everything from eating to hygiene.

The pain was so intense, I could not sleep. One night, at about three in the morning, I screamed out loud, "God! Please help me. Why am I having so much pain?"

The answer was loud and clear: "Because this is the only time you turn to me."

It was a profound lesson. Now, I turn to God *every day*... mostly with gratitude.

The MRI was finally invented. I underwent many surgeries over the span of five years so that my neck could be completely reconstructed using parts of my hip and cadaver bones. I am no longer paralyzed, and few can tell that this is not an ordinary neck.

Sick of Getting Sick

Up until I was 39, I caught a cold or flu about six or seven times a year. In my teens and twenties, the frequency seemed much higher; perhaps ten times a year I'd contract some respiratory problem, often having to spend up to a week in bed. The sore throats, fevers, wheezing and congestion were frequently so bad that I can still remember the intense suffering.

In 1987, I had the first of many surgeries on my neck. A friend pointed out to me before the surgery that the last thing I would want was to catch a cold after leaving the hospital. "Can you imagine what it would feel like if you started coughing and sneezing while your neck wasn't yet healed?" he asked. The very thought made me shudder. He suggested that I do all in my power to avoid catching cold during my recovery. His suggestion made a lot of sense and I resolved to do whatever was needed to avoid getting sick.

What I discovered served me well. I remained in robust health during the entire five months that I remained in a cervical brace, and when the brace came off, I thought, "Why not continue like this... who needs a cold or flu, surgery or no surgery?"

Years went by without getting sick, and I thought others might benefit from what I've been doing. Some of my approach is quite conventional, some less than conventional. If you'd like to give it a try, you really have nothing to lose.

The first thing I began doing was taking garlic capsules every day. A few times a week I'd supplement this with some fresh cloves of garlic which I have learned to chew and swallow with water. The taste is not that great, so I swallow as quickly as possible. Along with the garlic I ingest 1,000 mg. of vitamin C each morning. Then I take some Siberian Ginseng. There are many brands on the market and I simply follow the recommended dosage on the label. Finally, I take a high-potency multi-vitamin with minerals. And that's it.

At night, regardless of whether I am at home or at a hotel, I always sleep with the window slightly ajar. It doesn't matter if the weather is frigid or if the outside air is polluted, I ALWAYS sleep with some outside air entering the room.

When at home, I try to have a daily sweat. I use my sauna to accomplish this. When on the road, I seek lodging that has a Jacuzzi or sauna.

Another habit I've developed is that of fasting periodically, perhaps three or four five-to-ten-day fasts in an average year. I am not a vegetarian, and when traveling, I loved to eat junk food. I didn't eat that much red meat, but I must confess that I adored Whoppers and Big Macs. Since I knew that these things were not that healthy, even detrimental, it made sense to occasionally cleanse the accumulation of toxins from my system. I also drank caffeinated and alcoholic beverages, imbibed in sweets and had been known to inhale chocolate bars. To balance this, I also ate a substantial amount of healthful and nutritious foods. But generally speaking, there was enough garbage going into my body that I knew I must do a good cleansing at least three or four times a year.

Does this mean that I never felt like I was coming down with a cold?

Not at all.

Actually, even today, I feel that I get preliminary cold symptoms as often as anyone. However, as soon as I notice them, I instigate a battle plan. And this is where I feel I have radically departed from the path most people take when they "feel a cold coming on."

I have made a conscious decision not to get sick! A conscious decision means that I have done something with my mind that stimulates an electro-chemical change in my brain, which in turn affects the chemistry of my body and immune system. (If you doubt that thoughts alone trigger electro-chemical changes in your body, notice what happens when you entertain a sexual fantasy.) When most people feel the symptoms at the onset of a cold or flu, they usually respond by saying something like, "I'm coming down with a cold." THAT is where the battle is lost. Once they feel the symptom and label the body's condition as "sickness," they are destined to play out the entire drama that the cold entails.

However, as soon as I notice these symptoms, my *immediate* response is: "I must eliminate whatever it is that's attacking me." Furthermore, I am actually *grateful* for the message my body is giving me that it's time to take out the garbage.

Here is my strategy. Right away, I begin fasting. These fasts, to combat illness, are in addition to my routine fasts. When I fast, I give up solid food, alcohol, protein, caffeine, refined sugar and anything that my intuition tells me not to ingest. (I do take psyllium twice a day in water to keep the process of elimination active.) I boil a variety of vegetables in water (especially zucchini, celery and string beans, as they create alkalinity in the body) and drink six to eight quarts of the clear broth each day. I also mix some lemon juice with pure maple syrup and dilute it with filtered water. I drink four to six cups of this healthful lemonade during each day. The lemon juice causes the stomach to become alkaline to balance the acidity of the lemon, and the maple syrup

contains calories so that the fasting doesn't deplete my energy. If the psyllium does not stimulate a substantial amount of cleansing through the colon, I augment this approach with enemas as needed. The idea is to eliminate whatever toxins are being dumped into the colon on a daily basis.

How long do I fast? As long as necessary.

I have followed this approach for days, even weeks (I *once* fasted in this way for five and a half weeks.) Because my body is receiving nourishment from the broth, I never feel exhausted or hungry. Is there a risk of harming myself when I do a long fast? Not really, because before any harm might take place, I would have genuine hunger and would start eating again. As I understand it, once the body is deprived of protein, it begins digesting protein that exists within the body. The toxic and damaged cells are digested first through a process known as *autolysis*. The body literally starts eating itself. Only after it has consumed the protein provided by these toxins does it attempt to feed on healthy cells. At that point, hunger returns.

Another thing I do at the first sign of symptoms is begin taking Echinacea. I also take Alka-Seltzer. Someone once told me that viruses don't do well in an alkaline environment. My response was to attempt to make my system more alkaline. Perhaps the Alka-Seltzer is acting only as a placebo and the true power comes from my belief that it is working. In any event, whatever the power is, Alka-Seltzer is on the front-line of my attack. Despite its pungent taste, I ingest massive amounts of fresh garlic in addition to everything else I've mentioned. Yes, I reek rather badly, but those who know me well have learned to put up with the odor while I fortify my defenses against whatever germ or virus has entered my system. Besides making the respiratory system more immune to bacteria and viruses, garlic taken regularly lowers cholesterol levels in the blood... so I have cultivated a real love for this wonder food.

I've found that it is important to floss my teeth twice daily when I stop eating. This stimulates my gums, since other than chomping on garlic, all chewing ceases. If needed, I also employ expectorants to help me drain my lungs and natural ephedra root to dry my sinuses so that I can go about my daily routine with a minimum of inconvenience during the process of elimination. When I take ephedra root, I always drink much more liquid so that whatever mucus is trying to be discharged through my respiratory system is forced out through my kidneys.

I can't over-stress how important it is to engage this strategy *at the very first signs* of a cold or flu. Each person must be attentive to his or her own body and be sensitive to how your particular system signals you with a warning. Some people first notice a cold virus because they have an itch in their throat, others begin to sneeze, many get nasal

congestion. Learn to be attentive and to recognize when your body is telling you that, if you don't intercede, illness will follow.

When I am absolutely certain that I have eliminated whatever it was that tried to catch me, I break my fast by eating non-fat yogurt mashed together with a fresh, ripe papaya. The yogurt and papaya combine to literally digest each other and this pre-digested food gives nourishment to the body while not over-taxing the digestive system. Gradually, each day, I add wholesome foods in VERY SMALL QUANTITIES, taking about five days to once again resume my typical diet. During this time, if I feel the symptoms of indigestion, I chew some dried papaya or papaya tablets and also drink a little pure lemon juice to help my stomach along until it is back in the routine of manufacturing all the digestive enzymes required to process food normally.

Does all this really work?

It works for me!

Earthquake

I live in a rather safe part of California as far as earthquakes are concerned. I'm three hours east of San Francisco in the Sierra Mountains. However, there are no medical facilities near my home that can support the micro-surgery used to rebuild my neck. Therefore, I've spent time in hospitals close to earthquake faults, and must visit doctors in that seismically active portion of the state.

I had an appointment with a doctor in Oakland, just across the San Francisco / Oakland Bay Bridge. It was October 17, 1989 — the day of game three in The World Series — being played at Candlestick Park in San Francisco. My appointment was on October 18, but I went down the day before and was planning to spend the night at a friend's house.

I was on Highway 880 going north, when suddenly, my car went out of control. I initially thought one of my tires must have blown out. My instinct told me to get off the highway onto the right shoulder of the road. But I wasn't able to steer the car. It flashed through my mind that perhaps more than one tire was blown out. I wondered if a crate of nails had spilled into the road? I hit my emergency flasher button, looked into my rearview mirror to be sure I was not cutting in front of another car, and I pulled my steering-wheel all the way to the right.

I was originally going about 60 miles an hour, but was all this time applying my brakes. The sensation was more like being on a bucking horse than being in a car. When the car came to a stop, I jumped out and looked at my tires. They were all fine. Behind me, was a long line of stopped cars. The drivers were all walking around their cars looking at their tires.

By now, the shaking had stopped. I had no idea what happened. Off in the distance, I saw smoke and saw helicopters. I wondered if the nuclear reactor on the university campus had exploded? It was a small one, used for educating nuclear scientists.

I looked north, and it was a sea of red tail lights. Nothing was moving. It was like a parking lot. Because it was just after five o'clock, I assumed this was typical rush-hour traffic. Or maybe it was worse today because people were trying to get home in time to watch the World Series? Thankfully, there was an exit right at the spot I had stopped, so I left the highway.

I had no idea that 2,500 feet in front of me, the freeway had collapsed and crushed all the cars going north on highway 880. I was only 30 seconds away from being right there. Instantly crushed, 64 people died in just that one overpass.

I arrived at my friend's house at 5:15, and learned there had been an earthquake eleven minutes earlier. In the next instant, someone screamed out an open window: "The Bay Bridge collapsed!"

Me, my friend, and a few others quickly went inside and turned on the television. Because of the World Series, all the TV stations had helicopters in the air at the time of the earthquake. Their cameras zoomed in on the Bay Bridge; and immediately, we all grasped the truth of what had just happened... the enormity of it. A car was dangling from a gap in the bridge. After being riveted to the television for 30 minutes, I wanted to phone my family to let them know I was okay. But the phones were dead. The electricity worked, and also the running water, yet the telephones were out.

I walked a few blocks and found a pay phone. It was dead. This was before the ubiquitous cell phone, so there were lots of pay telephones in Oakland. Some worked and some did not. There were long lines at every working phone. Finally, I was able to call my daughter's mom, my parents, and my brother to assure them I was fine.

On my way back to my friend's house, I thought to buy some food — but the stores were all closed, with their merchandise off the shelves and scattered everywhere.

Back at my friend's house, the television was on, and stayed on, all through the night. Buildings had collapsed, a mall collapsed, homes were destroyed, thousands of people were homeless, and about 200 were dead. There were frequent after-shocks, and none of us slept at all that night. We were glued to the TV screen. By five in the morning, it was clear which roads were open and which roads were closed — so I plotted a route to get myself back to my home in the mountains. My daughter Amber, then four years old, came over and spent the day with me. I'd never before felt so close to her.

Throughout the day, I watched the television and finally realized the extent of the destruction — and that I myself was a mere 2,500 feet from the very worst of it. The greatest loss of life was on the highway in front of me, and it remains the single worst catastrophe to have ever hit Oakland.

I was in a state of shock and could not sleep, despite having been up all night. My neck was pulsating with pain from having been tossed around so severely when the quake first struck. I drove to a market and bought a rotisserie chicken. I thought some food and some alcohol would help me sleep. I downed the entire chicken in a few minutes and then slugged half a bottle of gin, but was still unable to calm down and get some sleep.

For the most part, I just watched TV for updates about the quake. The phones were jammed and only worked sporadically for two days. It was difficult getting calls into or out of California. However, I was able to receive some calls from friends. When I told them where I had been — EXACTLY — at the time the quake struck, they were all amazed. The highway 880 disaster was on everyone's TV screen and on the front page of everyone's newspaper.

During the four days following the 7.1 earthquake, I was in a cloud of disbelief. I was so thankful for the grace that kept me from being just a half-mile further down the road. I was in a spiritual state and communed with God... A LOT! I drew a map of the highway, where I was and where the disaster ahead was, and I pinned it to a wall. I had to constantly look at how close I was to the disastrous collapse of the highway. I was

breathing with gratitude on my lips. I tried to focus on how blessed I was, and how many others were also spared — rather than dwelling on the number of lives lost.

Later, when I spoke with others who were there, the word "surreal" was used over and over. The air itself seemed to buzz with an intangible quality, as if the air were somehow thicker. It was as if the atmosphere was imbued with a perceptible psychic weight. My first awareness of it was as soon as I heard the scream: "The Bay Bridge collapsed!" Even as I knew it was true, I could not accept it. The thought made my mind numb. That numbness, I believe, affected so many people, it caused the perception that the atmosphere had changed.

Ultimately, the Bay Bridge came to symbolize the force of this quake. More than anything else, it was the object most familiar to those of us who live in northern California. It also was the telling reminder of our perishability.

Penny Price

In 1989, I visited a friend who showed me a video on VHS tape. It was called THE GLOBAL BRAIN, by Peter Russell. It was produced before the universality of the Internet, but it predicted the Internet and the World Wide Web. It was so brilliant and filled with such profound insight, I wanted to buy 100 copies to give as gifts. (Now, you can watch it free on YouTube.)

It is so easy to locate everything and anything these days — computers have almost replaced libraries. However, in 1989, I was simply unable to find a source where I could purchase 100 copies of this video. It was produced by Penny Price, of Penny Price Productions. Yet, when I went to the library, I could not find Penny Price. I asked friends, made inquiries from people who were active networkers, but all to no avail.

I spent about a year diligently seeking a way to purchase this video.

By 1990, I had appeared on the front page of the Wall Street Journal, and had been acknowledged as the founder of the global firewalking movement. I had done a live firewalk on the Regis Philbin show, and had also been a guest on the Phil Donahue show. Despite the massive media coverage of my work, and being a public figure, I still had not yet hired a staff to assist me. So when the phone rang, I always answered it myself.

Thus, in mid-1990, when the telephone rang, I answered, "This is Tolly Burkan."

"Hello," came the reply. "My name is Penny Price. I am the producer of the Geraldo Rivera Show and I want to invite you— "

I cut her off. "You mean you aren't calling me because I've spent a year looking for you?"

"What are you talking about?" she inquired. "I was just phoning to invite you onto the show. Why were you looking for me?"

"Did you produce THE GLOBAL BRAIN?"

"Yes, I did."

"I want to buy 100 copies. That's why I was trying to locate you."

Penny laughed and said, "That's easy. I'll have them shipped to you in California. But can you come to New York and teach Geraldo how to walk on fire — on stage, before a live audience in the CBS studio here in Manhattan?"

I said yes. And I did.

Barber Bob

Over the years, I've been involved in many, many diverse enterprises, and have met so many interesting people. Now, in my seventies, I have a wealth of memories. Some that seem ordinary — and some that seem extraordinary. But I have this one memory, simple, but quirky in a "coincidental" way; and here it is.

There was a time in my life when I bought and sold real estate as a hobby. During this phase of my life, I got the idea to build a model home on the state highway, with a large billboard proclaiming: THIS HOME ON YOUR LOT.

The first thing I did after getting the idea, was to contact a company that moved houses from one location to another, putting them onto permanent foundations. I knew my lease on the land would not last forever. I was given all the specifications so the house could be moved in one piece. I was told it could only be moved along the state highway between 4:30 in the morning and 5:30 in the morning — as the highway would have to be closed. I could only move the house a distance of three miles or less. There would have to be a California Highway Patrol car in front and in back of the house.

If the house was to leave the highway and enter secondary roads, a special person must be retained to sit on the roof with a tool that raised the electrical wires high enough for the house to safely pass under.

I spent almost a year locating an appropriate parcel of land with highway frontage, obtaining a lease, then navigating the maze of bureaucratic hurdles, and finally, hiring the necessary contractors. In the summer of 1989, the model home opened with professional landscaping, carpets, furniture, a large billboard and a stadium-sized American flag atop a 40-foot flagpole. It was open to the public nine-to-five, seven days a week.

Moving forward — When the lease expired and it was time to move the house, I was completely prepared. I had, of course, purchased a lot within the three-mile radius specified by the house-mover.

The highway was closed, the California Highway Patrol escorted us with vehicles front and back, and on the roof sat a man with a tool to raise the electric wires crossing the road.

All was proceeding nicely, until we were a block from the lot I had purchased. On either side of the road was a residential mailbox upon a post. We could not fit between them. It was 5:15 in the morning, and I did not feel inclined to ring someone's door bell, waking them from a sound sleep, only to ask permission to temporarily remove their mailbox so this house in front of their front yard could be moved up the street.

I had dealt with huge challenges before this moment, and here I was, at this point in the road, with a tiny obstacle that suddenly seemed huge. So I made a judgment call, and removed one of the posts with its mailbox — the house passed, and within 20 minutes, the mailbox was replaced. Fortunately, I had a 4"X4" length of redwood, and the mailbox was quickly restored, though its original post was round.

Several days later, I was sitting in Barber Bob's barber chair getting my hair cut. Bob was talking to a friend of his waiting a turn. He said, "Frank, it's the darndest thing. My wife came in the house the day before yesterday and said there was something strange about our mailbox, but she couldn't figure out what it was. So I went out, and I looked at the mailbox, and I knew she was right. There was definitely something different about it, but I couldn't figure out what it was either. Isn't that strange?"

I asked him where he lived? When Bob told me, I said, "Isn't it even stranger that the only person who can tell you what happened to your mailbox is sitting in your chair this very minute?"

Survivor

I was on my way to have lunch with my friend Bill, back in the late nineties. Bill was a certified firewalking instructor; a friend of both Peggy and myself. On my way to the restaurant, a radio broadcast announced that CBS was launching a new form of game-show. It was dubbed "reality TV." Two competing teams were to be placed on a remote island, and they would be given challenges. At the end of each episode, someone who did not measure-up, had to leave the island. At the end of the season, only one competitor would remain, and that person would receive a million dollars. The new show was called *Survivor*.

Over lunch, I told Bill about what I had heard on the radio. We agreed it was an intriguing new idea for a "quiz show," and we both said we intended to watch it when it aired. *Survivor*, at the time, was unique. After its first season proved to be a smashing success, "reality shows" started popping up on every network.

Of course, I watched the season's premiere. The show had a real "hook," and it was not possible to watch the first episode without looking forward to the next episode. And so it went. Each show was so novel, it was hard to wait for the following week.

One day, my phone rang. The producer of *Survivor*, Mark Burnett, wanted me to fly to the South Pacific and conduct a firewalk as part of the show. I had already undergone three neck surgeries, and I was not about to put myself through the ordeal of traveling to this remote island. I suggested that Peggy may want to lead the event. But Peggy also declined. She referred the event to our mutual friend Bill — the very same Bill to whom I had enthusiastically described what I had heard on the radio that day I was coming to have lunch with him.

Bill did indeed fly off and do the firewalk for Mark Burnett.

I'm not sure what word to use here: Serendipity? Ironical? Coincidental? Bizarre? Synchronistic?

You decide.

Winning with Love

In the early 90's, I was taught a technique for using slot machines as biofeedback devices. Today's slots are no longer run by levers and springs; rather, they are run by a computer chip. The chip is known as a Random Event Generator (REG). Scientists have demonstrated that an REG is sensitive enough to be influenced by electro-chemical changes in a person's body if they are near enough to the REG.

Logic told me that anger creates a different electro-chemical state than love, laughter and happiness. So I began doing my own experimentation in Las Vegas casinos. I found I could consistently influence the slot machines by simply focusing on opening my heart and generating loving thoughts and feelings.

When I taught seminars on firewalking, the purpose was to show people how to overcome fear and tap into their inner power. Now, I realized I could teach people something even more valuable — how to open their hearts and love — using slot machines as a tool.

At the time, Native American casinos were not as ubiquitous as today, so I had to travel to the two states with legalized gambling (Nevada and New Jersey) to teach my new seminar, which I called : WINNING WITH LOVE.

The results were quite extraordinary. People would attend the seminar, then afterward, on their own time, they would visit casinos and mail me letters that spoke of winning hundreds of thousands of dollars. People frequently sent me photocopies of their checks to prove they had actually won those large amounts. The enthusiasm of people prompted me to add another chapter to my new book *Extreme Spirituality*. The chapter was called: USING SLOT MACHINES AS BIOFEEDBACK DEVICES.

Soon, I was contacted by reporters. A television crew came to one of my seminars and documented that we were, in fact, successful at influencing the slot machines. It was reported on national television that this was not a hoax — I was legitimate. The news anchor delivered the bottom line: "The numbers don't lie." (You can see this online at YouTube.)

The seminar became so popular, I was traveling to New Jersey and Nevada often enough to aggravate a spinal disorder I've lived with for decades. It is the result of being hit by a car while I was walking across a Manhattan street. My neck had to be reconstructed with cadaver bones and part of my hip, but getting around was still difficult for me. Even today, it is a severe handicap.

So I stopped doing the seminar.

When people complained to me, I just said, "If God wants me to do this seminar, then God has to build a casino in my back yard." And with that, I permanently gave up all traveling — for the sake of my body.

However, seven years later, a sprawling, billion-dollar casino / hotel complex was built on the Native American reservation a half-mile from my home. It was state-of-the-art and could easily have been mistaken for Las Vegas! I no longer had an excuse, and I again started doing the seminar... but in my own home. People stayed and ate at the hotel, and drove five minutes getting back and forth between my house and the casino.

I did WINNING WITH LOVE until I retired in 2017. At my final seminar, every single person left with more money than they came with.

Although I no longer teach the seminar, people read my book *Extreme Spirituality*, or they see the video of the seminar on YouTube, and they visit casinos on their own. Then, they write me about their results. This past year, a man from Australia, who had never in his life been to a casino before, read *Extreme Spirituality*. He decided to try the technique after studying the book for several weeks. He made his first visit ever to a casino, and left with half-a-million dollars.

12

Halloween

My daughter's Halloween in 1998 was so spectacular; I am sure it's something we'll both remember for the rest of our lives.

Amber was 13 years old. Her friends' parents and I created a "haunting experience" — not unlike temporary Halloween Haunted Houses constructed by parents across America every October... but ours was soooooooo scary!

There was considerable expense involved in producing this, as you will see. All the parents donated some money so we could rent a large warehouse. We began the construction early Friday morning so the Haunted House would be ready by 7:30 Saturday night.

About 30 parents worked together to construct the "Haunted House." It took several weeks to plan, and over 500 man-hours were expended to construct it. Every detail showed how much we loved our kids and wanted to participate with them in this holiday. This is a long episode, so settle in, and imagine you yourself in this adventure.

The kids were told in advance to wear clothes that they were prepared to totally discard. Each child was blindfolded and was given into the custody of a ghoul. Later, the kids would see these ghouls with their own eyes... each one was dressed in black, with a black hood that shadowed a horrible face with grotesque features resembling some of those associated with Frankenstein, half-decayed mummies and vampires.

It was explained that no matter how scary things seemed, the people were all their parents and that we loved them and would do nothing to hurt them.

I am sure you can imagine how difficult it is to startle, shock or scare today's thirteen and fourteen-year-olds. But more than being meant to scare the children, this Haunted House was meant to symbolize an epic adventure with trials, tribulations, challenges, decisions, obstacles... the lesson being: persevere, at the end of the journey, there will be an ultimate reward

Here we go. Blindfolded, you are led out of doors. There is a slight mist of drizzling rain falling. Blind, you are guided up a flight of stairs, shoes and socks are removed, and you are perched on a platform.

A ghoul says, "If you will trust us, we will give you an experience you will never forget. Are you prepared to trust us?" You answer "yes," and a ghoul says, "Then you must prove it, by simply falling backward and trusting that we will catch you." You fall — into the waiting arms of seven loving parents.

"You are now going on an airplane ride," you're told while being lifted aloft by seven pairs of hands. The ghouls position you with arms and legs outstretched, face down, lifting and swooping in circles and along a pathway so that you become totally

disoriented and have no concept of how high off the ground you actually are at any given moment. You're told you are going higher and higher. When you are completely disoriented and think the ground is many feet below, (although you're only 3 inches from the ground) the parents suddenly let go. The scare is unbelievably short, but the all the kids said this was VERY intense.

Off with the blindfold! The ghouls take you to an outdoor chamber of horrors: machetes, chains, hooks, threatening metal objects than can easily injure and maim. There is a hooded executioner and a very fierce-looking caveman, half naked, ranting out of control and waving a thigh-bone from a cow... very authentic I assure you, not just authentic-looking, but actually GENUINE! The massive bone was still dripping raw tissue and tendons. There is a large steel spike on a platform and the hulky wildman is smashing the bone against the spike and bits of flesh are flying everywhere. Occasionally he grabs a pumpkin from a pile (about the size of a human head) and impales it on the spike.

As you are about to go into sensory overwhelm, a cargo net is dropped on top of you and the ghouls ensnare you in this cage of rope, while your arms dangle free through the net. You are hoisted off the ground and the ghouls take out large shears and begin cutting away your shirtsleeves. The hooded executioner goes to a forge (composed of welding torches) and a red-hot branding iron is shown to be so hot that not only does it shine incandescently in the night, when it is put into a metal pot containing water, the water boils instantly.

Suddenly, on your left, a ghoul starts a chainsaw. He lifts it above his head and comes down with it swiftly, right onto your left arm. It pinches you... you aren't dismembered, but you scream... but not for long. The wildman has grabbed your right arm. The executioner plunges the glowing-hot iron onto your right forearm. Again you scream, as it is so very hot. Fooled you! When you were looking at the chainsaw, the irons were switched. The one that just touched you was painted to look identical to the hot one. However, this one was kept on a block of ice.

The wildman frees you from the entrapment of the cargo net, but you are instantly imprisoned by the arms of many ghouls. They start tossing you about. Are they crazy? They are playing with your body like some kind of rag doll... awfully close to that steel spike. Whoops! You slip from their hands... face down, right onto the spike! Gotchya! While you were distracted, the spikes were switched. This one was only made of aluminum foil!

You laugh. That offends the ghouls. They grab you and announce that you are to be put through a maze. What? You mean it hasn't even started yet!?

You are sent through a door. You are in a large black room with galaxies and mysterious symbols painted around you. The room is also lit by black-light and all the colors are dazzling against the black walls. In the middle of the room is a large podium, upon it is a man dressed all in white. "I am the Infinity Man." Next to him is a panel that obviously controls something electrical. There are lights, buttons and switches. The

Infinity Man leads you to a door. He hands you a flashlight and a gun. "Go in there and pull the trigger. If you want, you can turn on your flashlight."

The room is totally dark. You pull the trigger on the gun. It emits a laser. The room is five-sided. The walls have moved, and now there is no exit! It is made completely of mirrors. It is eight feet high. You turn on the flashlight and it bounces around you amid the laser beams... and there you are with your cosmic face-paint. The beams seem to swirl off into infinity. Suddenly a strobe light comes on. Your eyes cannot adjust. You start to blink and the strobe stops... but at that moment, a mirrored ball starts to spin on the ceiling. The strobe goes on, then off. The lights combine into a glittering fireworks display. A few more minutes of this and you would definitely start to hallucinate.

You then enter a room lit with two small lamps. You are in the presence of the shaman. "I am the shaman, he says. He is wearing a small, primitive cape. He wears antlers, fur and bones dangling from his belt. An assistant shaman is seated next to him and the room is adorned with power objects: animal skulls, rattles, incense, medicine bags and a curious crystal ball that is lit from within and seems to float in a high corner of the room. There is an altar. An area of the floor is covered with a meticulous runway composed of 50 pounds of broken shards of glass. It is a meter wide and a meter-and-a-half long. (This is just one challenge we borrowed from the Martial Arts.)

After being told the "secret," all 17 children walked across the glass unharmed and learned applicable tools for focusing awareness and attaining peak performance in challenging situations.

The shaman gazes into the crystal ball and announces that he has seen your future. "Your future is filled with many more challenges!" It is here that you begin to realize that the Haunted House is meant to be a metaphor for your life's journey. As you pass along the maze, you are told there will be challenges and decisions to make, just as in life. The idea is to take each challenge as it comes, knowing that you have the inner power and resources to master each challenge and complete the journey. And of course, there is also the promise of a reward at the end.

Next, you enter a room that seems to be a tropical, Polynesian paradise. This room is the crown jewel of the Haunted House. More time was spent constructing this room than any other room in the Haunted House. The environment was Disney-like in its detail. Walls could not be seen, because there were so many potted plants and trees. There is a small thatched hut off to one side. Vines with real flowers are creeping over and around an assortment of rocks and logs. There are torches, a campfire, magical little lights behind ferns and huge tropical leaves. Sacred herbs and incense are being burned in a large seashell. There is drumming coming from behind a bush. Also, an old native woman is rattling bones and striking a drum.

The medicine woman is dressed like a tribal native. She also has an assistant. The assistant demonstrates breaking an arrow by putting the metal point into the flesh of her throat and placing the feathered end against an idol... she then pushes forward against the idol. The arrow does not impale her... it snaps under the strength of her determination. (This is an ancient Fijian Rite of Passage.) All but three kids accept the

challenge and break the arrow with their naked throats. The other three choose a strategy to create a win for themselves and break the arrows across their knees. The medicine woman dispenses some more wisdom about taking risks and personal growth. Now, you are told to enter the thatched hut.

You exit into a small room that is decorated in black and purple. There is a single table in the center of the room. On the table is a gift-wrapped box. An unseen voice commands you to open the gift. "It is for you!"

You open the box. It contains a human head on a bloody plate. It is someone you know... one of the parents. Suddenly the head comes to life and two hands from under the table grab your ankles. You scream. That was a shock! A ghoul then grabs you from behind and you are escorted through a door. The door closes behind you and the ghoul has left you alone.

There is an opening at one end of the room. You go to the opening and peer through. There is your friend's mother. She is lying in a coffin. The coffin is propped upright and she is right there five feet in front of you. Suddenly she opens her eyes and looks right at you. She raises her hand and she points at you, beginning to speak. "I have something important to tell you," then she gasps, her hand falls, and before your very eyes she starts to dissolve.

Within three seconds, your friend's mother has dissolved into a skeleton. You are in shock... utter disbelief!

(I'm sorry I can't tell you how this fabulous illusion was accomplished. It is a magician's secret and has been used in professional magic shows for hundreds of years.)

A ghoul again grabs you from behind and says, "Welcome to the maze within the maze."

You are in a cavernous room. There before you stretches literally 250 feet of cardboard labyrinth! Many parents spent many weeks gathering cardboard boxes from large appliance dealers; then making this intricate labyrinth.

Within the pitch-black tunnels of the maze, unbeknownst to you, are moving walls, hundreds of things that go pop, bang and bump in the dark. There are unseen maze creatures that will grab you and secret rooms where costumed phantasms give prizes and treats. You are in this labyrinth for about an hour... groping past your friends in the dark as the labyrinth accumulates more and more children who become entwined in a maze that more than once takes everyone all the way back to the beginning.

At last the exit appears. You survived and now it's party time. You are allowed to wash, change your clothes, and become human again. The party room is filled with wrapped presents, food, sweets and, of course, wonderful decorations.

I'll NEVER forget that Halloween!

The Silver Man

I often enjoy visiting San Francisco, which is only a three-hour drive from my home.

A few years ago, I arranged to meet a friend there. As I was approaching one of the city's many parks, I noticed there was a group of people staring at one particular point. There, upon a large concrete area, was a guy dressed in flowing, silver pants... he wore a silver jacket and silver shoes... his hands were painted silver, as well as his fingernails, his neck, his face, his ears, his ear-canals, and his hair. He was ENTIRELY painted silver. His lips were silver and he wore silver sunglasses. He was sitting on a silver backpack, and there was a silver can unobtrusively placed by one of his feet.

He had assumed a pose, and was sitting absolutely still... just like a statue. People were taking his picture, children were trying to make him move... but he never moved a bit. I watched him for about 10 minutes. He never wavered, he never swayed, absolutely nothing moved! People were putting paper bills into the man's can. He may have made as much as 40 or 50 dollars in the 10 minutes I was watching.

Unlike a beggar asking for spare change, this fellow had created a truly unique form of theater. As one gentleman was placing a dollar in the can, he said, "You put a lot of effort into this, and I appreciate it."

I walked up and put a dollar in the can myself.

About a minute later, a woman appeared from nowhere, she takes the can, pulls all the money out and stuffs it in her pocket, puts the can in a trash barrel, crosses the street, and disappears into the crowd.

The fellow maintained his pose. After about 30 seconds, someone in the group asked if that woman was a part of the act?

Finally, the guy broke his pose.

"No," he said, and he shook his head in disbelief.

At this point, people came forward and started handing the man dollar bills. I also went forward and gave him a dollar.

I noticed that a tourist was taking the silver can out of the trash barrel, stuffing money into it, and was in the process of giving the can back to the silver man.

I went off to meet a friend, but realized that I still had some time to spare. So I went back to the park. The silver man was again posed as a statue. However, there was a policeman there, and the woman who had robbed the guy was in custody.

It seems two men had followed the woman. She went into a store and bought some deodorant. The two men prevented her from leaving the store and telephoned the police. However, after the silver man got his money back, he refused to press charges. The officer checked to see if the woman had any outstanding warrants... and since she did not, he let her go.

A few hours later, my friend and I were walking around the city... I told him the story about the silver man, and we decided to stroll past the park.

The concrete area was now in full sun, so I really didn't expect to see the silver man.

The sun was blazing down on the concrete. However, there, seated upon a backpack... a backpack that was painted gold... was a man in a pose, as still as a statue, but a different man altogether, and this man was gold.

I kid you not!

Amber Turns Fourteen

A few weeks after Amber turned 14, we went to New York and spent ten days in the "Big Apple."

Amber was a very mature, serious and scholarly fourteen-year-old. (Years later, she graduated high school as the class salutatorian — ranking second highest academically — and also received a full-ride scholarship to the University of California.) As a departure from her usually staid lifestyle, she wanted to go clubbing and dance 'til the wee hours of morning. However, in New York, as everywhere else, you must be twenty-one years old to get into these nightclubs.

Amber's mom Peggy had friends in New York who assured us that fourteen-year-old Amber could be made over to look as if she were indeed twenty-one years old.

In 48 hours, Amber had her "make over," and we did indeed go clubbing.

Peggy's friends first brought us for dinner at "Lucky Cheng's" on Friday night.

Here, all the GORGEOUS waitresses that paraded about in scanty states of dress (and undress)... ALL were actually men in drag. So, as you can imagine, Amber was wide-eyed!

On Saturday night, they took us to a nightclub called "Le Bat." The motif was like a castle filled with bats!

Amber looked absolutely stunning. She wore a black cocktail dress, heavy makeup, hair down, platform heels, borrowed jewelry, and a designer purse.

We arrived at the club Le Bat at mid-night by taxi. Amber was stopped at the door and asked to provide proof of age. She showed a borrowed passport and the doorman said, "That isn't your passport. Show me your I.D."

Amber rummaged in her purse and said, "I don't have it with me."

The doorman said, "I can't let you in. It's the law."

Our friend stepped forward and put a hundred dollar bill in the doorman's hand. He opened the door and welcomed us in.

The club had three floors.

The first floor had a live band of ten people... sax, organ, drums, guitars, six vocalists... very loud, very good, very strong. Second floor was a disco. Third floor was a bar.

We headed for the bar to discuss our strategy now that we were inside.

Amber sat at the bar and the bartender asked her what she'd like. Amber looked to me and I ordered two *margaritas*.

When Amber's drink arrived, our friend asked, "Do you like Midori?"

Amber replied with, "What is that?"

Our friend said, "It is a liqueur made from melons."

Without another word, the bartender was summoned and our friend ordered, "Put a shot of Midori in her *margarita*."

As soon as Amber's drink was ready, I said, "Let me taste that," and I drank 75% of her drink. After all, I was not about to let Amber get drunk.

We danced with the live band until the club closed at 4:00 in the morning. We got home at 5 a.m. and went to sleep.

Confucius Said: “Even a monkey can fall from a tree.”

Every year, just before Christmas, my daughter Amber and I fill a grocery cart with food items, and put them in a collection barrel for needy families.

Today was earmarked for that activity, and since Amber's friend Gina was visiting us for the day, it was Amber, Gina, and I who all went shopping. I promised the girls that we would go to an arcade afterward and play air hockey. Then I would drive them to a party where they were to meet their friends at 6:00.

My intention was to model for the girls a bit of Christmas spirit. Once the basket was filled, I suggested to the girls that we hurry along since time was getting short. We got on a line where only one person was ahead of us.

The woman that operated the cash register was in a wonderful mood. She scanned all the items for the person ahead of us, and told the person how much the total came to. The man said, "I don't have the money... though, here she comes."

A woman walked up with an armload of groceries... she put them down and asked to have them added to the total. The checkout woman announced the new total, but apparently neither the man nor the woman in front of me had any money. By now, almost 10 minutes had passed and I was losing my patience. Just then, two men walked up and one of them announced that he had the money.

This man was almost completely blind. He took out a checkbook which was very, very large... perhaps five inches by eleven inches. It took him a full five minutes to fill out the date, the name of the market, and his signature. Finally, he said to the checkout woman, "Would you please fill out the rest of this?"

She was about to fill in the amount, when the man said, "I have some coupons."

Very sweetly, the woman at the register said, "Give them to me now."

The man proceeded to remove from a leather pouch, about 100 coupons.

By now, 20 minutes had gone by and I exploded. I said to the checkout woman in a gruff voice, "I think I'll leave the groceries here, as we have someplace we need to go."

She responded in the sweetest manner, and the sweetest voice, "Please sir, I'll go as fast as I can — and I promise this won't take much longer at all."

Just then I realized that all the people in front of me were mentally challenged. Obviously the checkout woman understood this and was being incredibly patient, even saint-like. Here I was trying to model Christmas spirit for Amber and Gina... and I was getting angry at these

handicapped people, and at this sweet and saintly checkout woman... and ultimately — I was angry with myself for getting angry!

Finally, after 25 minutes, the checkout woman was about to begin scanning our groceries, when the blind man turned and said, "I forgot to write the amount in my check register, how much was it?"

I almost shouted... "A hundred and 12 dollars and 14 cents!!!"

Though I write about, and lecture about, keeping one's heart open, I felt helpless and hopeless. I began feeling depressed, unworthy, and downright slimy.

After spending a full half-hour getting through the checkout, there was no time for air hockey, but I managed to get Amber and Gina to the party at exactly 6:00.

I drove home feeling morose. Since I couldn't rescue myself from this depression, I called Amber's older sister Taya. I asked her for her wisdom... and she delivered it by laughing hysterically as I related the story. By the time I finished telling her how miserable and depressed I was, we were *both* laughing hysterically.

I've read that even monkeys feel embarrassed when they fall from a tree.

The Voicemail

A number of years ago, my daughter Amber went to Africa to do some volunteer work. Because of all the endemic diseases, she had to be inoculated for everything from malaria to yellow fever.

When she came back to California, her friends threw her a "welcome home party." Apparently, the combination of sleep-deprivation, jet-lag, party-punch, and some kind of reaction to a drug she had been inoculated with before flying to Africa, caused her to get dizzy and short of breath. A friend called an ambulance. Another friend called me.

When I go to sleep, I turn the ringer off on my phone. In the morning, after having coffee, I listen to the voicemail that might have come in while I slept. On this particular morning, I started playing my voicemail.

The first voicemail: Tolly! Pick up the phone! Amber was just taken away in an ambulance! Pick up the phone!

The second voicemail: Tolly! Pick up the phone! Amber is going into surgery! Pick up the phone!

The third voicemail: Tolly... Amber's dead.

The fourth voicemail: Papa, this is Amber. I'm not dead. Call me on my cell.

Only a split-second passed before I was phoning my daughter. When she answered, all I could utter was, "What the —"

"Papa, I'll explain," Amber began. "Last night, I was having a really great time with my friends, when I started feeling dizzy. I had been drinking, and apparently, the alcohol reacted with one of the malaria drugs I had been given. I did not know that until I was interviewed by a doctor in the Emergency Room. When the dizziness was followed by difficulty breathing, someone called 9-1-1. So an ambulance came and took me to the E.R. I was lying on a gurney behind a curtain when my friends arrived at the hospital. No sooner than they had gotten there, however, a gurney left the E.R. and was pushed through double-doors. The person on the gurney had long red hair, like mine. So naturally, my friends assumed that was me. They asked an orderly where those double-doors led to? They were told 'the Operating Room.' Later, a gurney was wheeled out from the double-doors, and the body was fully covered by a sheet. My friends thought I died on the operating table."

"How are you?"

"I'm fine Papa. Sorry to give you a scare."

Yosemite Falls

I live a short drive from Yosemite National Park. One day, some friends invited me to join them for a hike to the top of Yosemite Falls. Yosemite Falls is the tallest waterfall in North America. It plunges 2,425 feet... just about a half-mile. The plan was to leave early the following morning, as the hike would take all day.

It was the late 1990s. I was in my fifties and wasn't in the best of shape, and the friends hiking with me were all 20 to 30 years younger than me. My concern was that I'd hold them back, but they assured me that the trail was so steep, even they had to rest every few minutes.

We arrived at the trailhead at nine in the morning. The day was cool and clear, not too warm in the morning, but sure to get warmer after noon. I was in bliss. I live in the mountains because I am so nurtured by the feeling of wilderness. Yosemite is in the county where I live — Tuolumne County. Our county is huge... almost twice the size of Rhode Island. Two thirds of the county is either National Forest or State Forest. The third that is privately owned is mostly undeveloped. There is a lot of wilderness.

It took us about five hours to reach the top, and about two hours coming down. It is a rugged trail, and there weren't many others that we encountered. Half-way to the top, I was regretting that I had joined the hike. To do this hike, I really should have been in better shape, and it was wringing me out. The others were very patient and supportive; so with a little help from my friends, I made it to the top. At that point, to say I was proud of myself would have been an understatement.

At the very top of the falls, there is a railing that you can peer over, and look down at the plunging falls, and see the valley 2,500 feet below.

All the others went to the railing and looked over. When they called for me to join them, I held back. Even though I thought I had dealt with my fear of heights when I went skydiving — three times — once solo, here I was, in my fifties, and still phobic about heights. I couldn't do it. I sat on a rock far back from the edge of the waterfall and watched my friends exclaiming over the awesome energy.

I had hiked to the top of the falls and back, but in the end, instead of feeling proud of myself for accomplishing such a challenging climb, at my age, I was completely ashamed of myself for not being able to look over the railing.

As I relate this to you, you are getting a better sense of who I am. Day after day, I found it more and more unacceptable that I failed to look over the edge of the waterfall. I berated myself. Here I was, teaching classes on overcoming fear, and I could not even employ the skills I was teaching. A week passed and I began realizing that I had no choice but to go back to the top of Yosemite Falls and look over the edge. My self-esteem depended on it. My happiness depended on it.

So, after an interval of 14 days since the first hike, I hiked back to the top of Yosemite Falls — and looked over the railing.

Divine Intervention

Because my fused neck is such a challenge when I leave home for any reason, I've become a very happy homebody. Even the three-hour drive to San Francisco is exhausting. However, in December of 2010, I decided I wanted to purchase some special Christmas gifts for family and friends, and I drove to San Francisco.

On the way home, I was driving my maxi-van in the fast lane of the freeway, going 70 MPH. Behind me, a driver in a large SUV, had an epileptic seizure and put his foot to the floor — hitting me while he was going 95 MPH.

First, my van flipped back to front. Then it rolled 2 1/2 times, over the guard-rail, and came to rest upside down in the fast lane of the oncoming freeway. The van was crushed.

Inside the van, I had been thrown from my seat. Fortunately, the seatbelt failed, for if I was in the driver's seat, I would have been decapitated. The metal roof of the van buckled inward and severed the top of the driver's seat. Lying in this twisted wreckage, I was almost in shock. However, I was astute enough to quickly assess my body, and I determined I wasn't hemorrhaging blood and I did not think I had broken bones.

But there was gasoline and oil pouring into the van and I was afraid it would explode. Because the van was upside down, it took me a moment to figure out where the ignition was so I could turn off the engine. That accomplished, I realized that perhaps the onlookers would assume anyone in this tangle of metal was certainly dead. So I started screaming at the top of my lungs, "Help me! Help! Help! Help!"

Soon, I could hear voices and saw movement outside the van. A man used his tire-iron to pry at one of the van's windows so I could be removed from the wreckage. As several people gently moved me onto the grass median, I was fully conscious and asked them to get my neck brace from the wreckage. I put it on immediately, and was wearing it when the ambulance arrived.

This accident happened in Tracy, California — hours from where I live in Tuolumne County. As fate would have it, Amber's mother Peggy was driving someone to the airport, just happened to be passing, and saw the accident. It didn't occur to her that it was my van, but she wanted to stop and try to assist. The others in her car convinced her that anyone in the van was certainly dead, and there was actually nothing she could do. Besides, there was a plane to catch.

In the ambulance, the paramedics gave me a once-over and ascertained that nothing obvious was broken. I asked them which hospital they were taking me to. When they told me, I took my cell phone from my pocket and called my daughter Amber.

"Honey," I said "I've been in an accident and I don't want to be in a hospital so far from home. I want to be closer to the doctors familiar with my reconstructed neck. Please come to the Emergency Room and take me home."

"I need to figure out what car I can use, as mine is in the shop," said Amber. "I'll call you back."

She then phoned her mother. "My dad was in a car wreck in Tracy — "

"Oh my God," Peggy replied, just then realizing it was me in that crushed van she had just seen. Peggy assumed I must be dead, and she wondered how Amber could have known so quickly. "How did you know?" Peggy asked.

"My dad called me from the ambulance."

At the hospital, the doctor on duty in the E.R. said he had seen the wreck on his way to work, and presumed whoever was in the van was dead. He shook his head in disbelief and actually gave me a hug.

Amber arrived with a rental car while I was being x-rayed, scanned, and evaluated. I had two fractured ribs (no big deal), a compression fracture on a thoracic vertebrae (also no big deal), and I had broken my neck — a hairline break through the fusion — treatment: immobilize my neck. But because I was already wearing my neck brace, there was nothing else to do for my neck.

I said to Amber, "Take me home."

The doctor said, "You can't leave."

I said, "Watch."

Amber drove me to the wrecking yard, as I wanted to salvage the Christmas gifts I had purchased earlier in the day. She took lots of photos of the van.

Today, I have those photos mounted on the wall of my den so I can see them every day. When looking at the pictures, no one can imagine that a person actually lived through the flipping, rolling, and crushing of the mangled van. I look at the pictures daily, and only one thought comes to mind: "Divine Intervention."

Sunrise House

Back in 2005, a house was under construction on Sunrise Way, not far from my own home. Each day I'd take a walk and inspect progress on the construction of that house on Sunrise Way, which I came to simply call the "Sunrise House."

The Sunrise House was remarkable in many ways. Firstly, it was 4,166 square feet — the largest home in the community. My own house was 900 square feet. I've always been drawn to huts, cabins, tipis, and small shelters. Yet the Sunrise House tickled something deep inside me. I imagined that I could teach my seminars in my own home, instead of renting meeting rooms at hotels. But it was just a fleeting fancy.

The contractor was actually building the home for his own family. He had five children; so in addition to bedrooms, there was a game room, a media room, a workshop, and a mammoth gourmet kitchen with three ovens, two sinks, pass-through counters, and lots of custom detailing that only a craftsman can create — especially for his own home.

Every morning, I would stop on my walk, and speak with the builder. Sometimes a few of his children were there, and I really got to know this man and his family. The house was under construction for many months, and I was continually bringing friends and family over to watch its progress. The contractor had designed a magnificent house, and I fell in love with it.

I started thinking that perhaps I should have the builder construct the identical house for me so I could start doing my seminars in my own home. Since traveling was so hard for me, it seemed like a luxury to have a house I never had to leave.

Day after day, as the house neared completion, I continued my daily visits and constantly brought people over to show them the house. Everyone who saw it agreed with me; it was spectacular. The views from the huge windows were breathtaking. The great room had a 20' ceiling.

A few days went by without me visiting the house, as I was doing some sight-seeing with my friends Jos and Riet, who were visiting from Holland. When we were done with our sight-seeing, I brought Jos and Riet to see the house.

However, in those few days, the family had actually moved in, and was living in the new home. I was a bit surprised when I went to open the front door and it was locked. I rang the doorbell and the lady of the house opened it and informed me that they were living in the house now, and I could no longer bring friends over for tours. She saw my

disappointment and said, "Look, the beds are unmade and the house is a mess, but if you come back tomorrow, I'll let you show your friends the house." By now, her husband was coming to the door and he heard me tell his wife, "My friends are leaving to return to Holland tomorrow morning at 4:00 a.m."

Her husband was so proud of this house, and knew how much I appreciated it, he said to his wife, "Why not let them take a quick look through?" She said, "Okay," and in we went.

Four years later the economy crashed and there was no work for a custom builder in my area. The family had to move.

It was 10:30 a.m. and I was on my morning walk that day in 2009. As I passed my "dream house," a Realtor was affixing a FOR SALE sign to the front of the house. By 1:00 that afternoon, I had the house in escrow.

On the day of the closing, I met the builder at the house to go over some small details, and as we finished our meeting, the builder was giving me the keys, and said, "It's almost as if I actually built this house for you." He paused for two seconds, then added, "Well I guess I really did build this house for you," and he handed me the keys. Later, he told me it made him happy to know someone who loved the house as much as he did, would be living in it.

God as Mother

In some traditions, such as Judaism and Christianity, God is always depicted as a man. Yet there are other religions that perceive God as a woman. For most of my life, I never knew that I had a choice: God as Father, or God as Mother.

I never had a good experience with my father, nor my step-father. Therefore, at some point, I decided that I wanted my God to be Mother: Gaia, the Divine Mother, feeding me, nurturing me, connecting me with Infinite Love.

I developed a relationship with my Mother, in the same way Christians develop a relationship with Jesus. I talked to her, asked her for help or strength, I brought her my sorrows, problems, and woes. I began feeling Her as a tangible presence in my life. In 1992, I purchased a gold coin with "Lady Liberty" on one side, and the American Bald Eagle on the reverse. I told myself that this was not Lady Liberty, this was The Divine Mother. I have carried that coin in my pocket ever since, as a reminder that my Mother is always with me.

This might seem superstitious — and, in fact, it is.

But it works for me. When confused or confronted, I put my hand in my pocket and connect with my Mother; in much the same way that Catholics carry an amulet with the Virgin Mary engraved upon it. I ask for strength when I need it, and I feel the strength flow into me as my Mother infuses me with whatever is necessary to help me forward with ease. Just as others say they can feel Jesus helping them, I feel my Mother.

I never feel alone. My Mother is ALWAYS there.

You might want to dismiss this bit of superstition as mere "foolery," but the truth is that I am empowered by this relationship. The only thing that makes something "real" or "unreal," is your own thinking. If you discover any trick you can do with your mind that empowers you and improves your performance in the world, why not employ it? Who cares what others say or think?

If you can change your thinking, and change your life, DO IT!

I am You, You are Me.

Each of us have different life experiences and different memories. Anyone reading this could have written their own collection of anecdotes. I wrote these down simply for the fun of it. They are mere snapshots of my own personal melodrama. Everyone has a melodrama... from birth to death — it is our own personal movie.

I was eating in a restaurant with two friends. The friend on my right was a young guy who invented a computer code, and instantly became a billionaire. The friend on my left was a woman in her sixties who worked all her life for an hourly wage. They could each write a tale relating their melodrama, with its challenges, insights, interpersonal dialogs, spiritual epiphanies and poignant moments — so any reader would be captivated. Rich or poor, you can tell others about what happened in your life; and, most importantly, what you did about it, how it affected you, and how you feel about your past... looking back over time.

In writing down our memories, we gain even more insight into the lessons we've received in this lifetime and the wisdom we've gleaned from the process of living our "karma," our "melodrama." It doesn't matter who you are — you have a story to tell... many stories to tell.

In my life, I've been given significant challenges. But I was also given the inner resources to deal with them. Such is the blessing of "Grace." Whenever I experience Grace, I offer thanks to my Divine Mother.

The other day, I fell and tumbled down a hill. My clothes were torn and I was a bloody mess. Someone else might have thought it was a misfortune. However, I immediately appreciated the Grace — because I could easily have broken my damaged neck, or broken a leg, an arm, or any number of bones. I offered gratitude that all I suffered were lacerations, a black eye, scrapes and bruises. I saw the entire episode as a reminder of how much I am loved by my Mother. I welcome those reminders.

If I were to write every incident that struck me as odd, coincidental, ironic, or uncanny, the book would be a million pages. Therefore, I'm only sharing enough to inspire you to look at your own melodrama to see if there are any episodes that might be fun for you to write down. When you are old, or after you have passed on, your children and grandchildren, or your nieces and nephews, will find your unforgettable moments to be a treasure beyond measure.