

CONNECTIONS

Justin revealed his gifts in early childhood. He learned to talk and draw at almost the same time as his sister who was more than a year older. His parents often spoke of his precociousness and how he seemed so intuitive. His stepbrother, six years his senior, was convinced that his scribbled drawings depicted a past life, but his parents dismissed such foolishness. "But he knows so many more things than I do. And I think he sometimes controls me." To them Justin was just special, in a good way. He repeatedly drew pictures of a stick figure family with just two girls. One with red hair, fair skin and glowing green eyes. He only spoke her name, calling her Emmy. Everyone in his family had dark complexions and very dark hair. He explored his skills by quietly willing his parents and siblings to do as he wished. At first, it was his little, secret game. Sometimes it worked, sometimes it didn't. It typically worked better if he wanted them to do something. It didn't work as well if he wanted them to stop what they were doing. It sometimes scared him, as it did the first time he invoked the power, it sometimes delighted him. But the scares grew more intense as he grew more aware of the world around him.

Even by age five, he knew to be afraid to tell anyone. So he told the only person he could ever fully trust, because she, too, knew things that others only imagined. One afternoon he sat next to her on the back porch. They both watched a yellow swallowtail butterfly fluttering past. The cloudless sky was a brilliant blue, the grass shined a verdant green. After looking around to make sure no one could overhear him, he confided in his grandmother. All the while that he spoke she caressed his scalp. He felt safe, he felt understood. He spoke to his shoes until he looked into her eyes and confessed his fears. His fears of being different, of his unusual abilities, of being made fun of, of being misjudged. Most of all he feared reliving what had become of him in his past life, when he was Emmy. He knew she didn't survive her teenage years, that she suffered a lot before dying. He didn't want to know more. He drew happy pictures of Emmy and her family. It didn't help. He tried to appear cheerful.

He hated the doctor that his mother took him to see for his seizures and all of the questions they asked him. He hated evading. At night he forced himself to awaken, to flee the nightmares, to spare himself the horror of Emmy's death. His grandmother listened intently and assured him that he would learn to harness his strengths and vanquish his fears. He believed her. Then he sobbed with his head in her lap until he could cry no more. These were their private secrets until many years later, after she had passed, when he finally confided in another woman. Until then, he practiced his skills mostly in silence.

His grandmother both nurtured and protected him. She knew that, like herself, he could neither deny nor escape his powers. She never had a guide who would instruct her in the ways of healing. She would not allow Justin to be similarly deprived. They lived four hours apart by car. But on special holidays, vacations and summer visits she would take advantage of their treasured time together to school him in the practices that would someday cause him his greatest grief and elation, at the same time. She began, during summer vacation when he just turned eight, by introducing him to a path to enter the alpha brain wave state, where he could relax and exercise his creativity.

During this exercise, one event forever altered the course of his life. As his grandmother began his training, she had him lie on his stomach on the floor with a pillow under his head. In a soft, soothing voice she helped him to completely relax by first relaxing

his toes so that he couldn't feel them. She led him to relax his feet, ankles, calves and the rest of his legs as she moved up his body. In the same manner, she led him to sequentially lose feeling in his fingers, hands and up his arms. Last, she led him to relax his head, torso and abdomen. Now that he had lost all feeling of his body and was not distracted by any external sensations, she instructed him to inhale slowly and deeply through his nose and exhale through his mouth, continuing to do so until it became a natural and effortless rhythm.

She next had him imagine a perfect spot in nature, one where he would feel protected and wish to return to for years to come. She advised him against choosing a real location. They can suffer fires, flooding or other disasters that interfere or thwart the ability to achieve tranquility. Justin considered a desert island and a mountain lake before deciding on a rocky seacoast where he could hear the crashing of the waves, feel the earth trembling beneath his feet and taste the spray gusting from the ocean. He had never visited such a spot, he had only seen photographs, but the scene felt very familiar. He sat on a ledge overlooking the boulders hundreds of feet below and counted the number of waves between the largest ones, seeking to find a pattern to the rhythm, a truth hidden in the ferocity of nature.

He invited the only dog he ever knew to join him. Shelby, a collie mix, had developed hip dysplasia when Justin was just five years old. By the time she passed, she had become his closest confidant and preferred pillow. He clipped a lock of her fur before his father took her to the vet for the final time. But in this perfect spot she was as healthy, exuberant and loving as ever. She jumped all over Justin and licked his face and arms when she arrived. He was so overwhelmed and joyous that he unintentionally invited Emmy, too. She looked to be a teenager. Though he didn't remember it, this was once her favorite spot.

His grandmother recognized Justin's alarm. She had never envisioned such an encounter; she had no experience with anyone summoning a departed human, much less one's own soul. She had sternly warned him against inviting anyone; it was to be his private sanctuary. By the time she realized the source of his panic it was too late. Justin and Emmy had met and he was experiencing her dying emotions. He writhed and convulsed, just as she had. His grandmother shook him and even slapped him, but his thrashing continued. He called out Emmy's name. At the sound of that his grandmother, having been told of the connection by Justin, tried another tack. "Justin, Emmy is here to assist you. Don't fight her. Focus on listening to her. Don't be afraid." She stroked his scalp as she always had. His convulsions diminished. "It's like listening to yourself," she continued. He settled down, his breathing slowed. "You can return now," she added. But he ignored her and chose to remain with Emmy, to hear more of their life, to feel more what they had learned. She told him more than he could understand, but not so much that he wouldn't always remember her words. After Justin finally decided to return, he asked a question, the answer of which changed his destiny.

"Grandma, how could I be talking to myself like that? I can't be two people at once, both Emmy and me, can I?"

His grandmother took her time to answer. "What you experienced was two bodies of you. Two different lifetimes. Two different incarnations. But you've always been a single soul. That's the way it works."

"How do you know these things, Grandma?"

"We all know them, hon. We just sometimes forget. What did you learn from this experience, Justin?"

"I learned a lot. Seeing yourself from a past life is really scary. And after you get over that you can ask questions to yourself." He looked his grandmother in the eyes and added, "And I should listen to my grandma better."

"What did you ask yourself in there?"

"I asked, 'Who am I?'"

"What did Emmy say?"

"Whoever I decided to be. That didn't help much."

"Or, maybe it did."

"I want to learn more about my soul. I should have asked her about that."

"What *did* she tell you?"

"That I am blessed."

Justin returned to this spot a few more times over the next week. Each time he invited Emmy to join him. "Grandma, it's safe. I know it is." Each time Emmy taught him more about his soul. "You must use this knowledge to help others, like I wanted to do." Each time he left craving even more understanding. "Why me?" Each time she promised to reveal more during his next visit and to keep him safe. As the return visits became more calming, Justin investigated his powers in that setting. He first set out to fly, to soar over the ocean, to join the sea birds as they scanned and skimmed the waters below. He next sought to silently communicate with the creatures he had welcomed to his newly found lair. He kept his grandmother abreast of these adventures. Once she was assured that he was comfortable in this new environment, she introduced him to another, one that would serve him for the rest of his life, where his abilities would come to join with those of others.

Justin's grandmother, Clara, rarely used, much less revealed, her talents. When she was young she had let her guard down. She was seen relieving the breathing of her best friend during an asthma attack by laying her hands above her chest. Her friend's mother misread the gesture and forbade them from ever playing together again. Clara retreated into solitude. She well understood the risks she was taking with Justin. Her concern for his well-being both now and in the future outweighed the risk of discovery. When his brother asked why he so often was lying on his stomach, awake, with his eyes closed, he responded as Clara had suggested. "It's relaxing, you ought to try it."

His talents had frightened Justin when he first became aware of them. He feared that he would be punished, or worse, sent off somewhere. He, of course, had no idea that he was uniquely blessed. He once was playing with his sister in the backyard. They frequently argued over who got to play with a certain toy. Amanda, being older and stronger, always got her way. She decided she wanted to take the toy tractor that Justin was using to build a path for his plastic workmen. He knew she didn't want to play with it, she only wanted to annoy him. A tug of war ensued and Justin lost. Instead of crying he became furious. He wished her to fall down as she ran away. She immediately tripped and her head landed on the corner of the sandbox. She screamed and stood up holding her forehead. Blood gushed through her fingers. At the sight of the blood she shrieked so loud that their mother came running. Justin was horrified by his actions and sat quietly in the back seat of the car as their mother drove to the hospital. Amanda received seven stitches. When asked how it happened, Justin remained silent and Amanda said she tripped while running. Neither mentioned the tractor and Justin didn't confess his role. He hoped that his mother wouldn't notice his shudders. He later asked his brother if he could will things to happen. "No silly, nobody can." Like any extraordinary strength, he came to both fear and appreciate his unique abilities. They did, however, rob him of many of the mindless joys of early childhood. He, instead of playing children's games, would often test and nurture his gifts. As they improved, so did his mistakes. Fear diminished his pleasure, but it paled against the draw of curiosity. Consequently, Justin was relieved and thrilled when his grandmother offered to lead him in his journey. He had a direction, one that followed a safe path.

Once Justin could easily access and enjoy his perfect spot in nature, Clara taught him to create a subterranean passageway to what would become his healing room. She informed him that in this room he could channel his abilities to accomplish the greatest good for him

and for others. He would be able to diagnose and treat ailments, learn about himself and his abilities, and fully summon peace and grace into his life. The entrance to the stairway was hidden in his perfect spot. The stairway consisted of twelve steps. As he deliberately descended each step, he willed himself to slip deeper into a meditative state. He had never tried anything like that before, but it felt natural to progressively release all of his thoughts and clear his mind. When he reached the bottom he constructed a doorway, as directed, with a protective curtain that denied access to all but him.

His grandmother warned him of dangerous and malevolent entities that might attempt to invade his very special and potentially vulnerable asylum. He was to be very careful about who he allowed to enter. The curtain also provided a cleansing function, to ensure that Justin would not contaminate or otherwise compromise the healing room. He simply had to will the curtain to serve these functions and it was so. And so it was with all of the constructions, supplies, equipment and furniture associated with his healing room.

In his next session, Justin began preparing his healing room. He really didn't know what to include. After instructing him to descend the stairs, his grandmother suggested that he begin by creating the room itself. Did he want it simple or fancy? Square or round? She reassured him that he could modify it any time he liked. He could even add rooms. He decided on a sparse, conventional layout, with white walls. He next prepared a healing table with sheets and a pillow. And two chairs. He figured he could add fancy machines of his own creation later, if needed. His grandmother hadn't suggested that, but it sounded fun. All of this was fun. The room was very real to him. Neither contrived, nor imaginary. He had finally found a venue where he felt to belong. It was his own playground, made for him and by him. He was excited to begin exploring. His grandmother admonished him to be patient. He had more work to do. He needed to create an entrance for visitors with another protective curtain to thwart uninvited guests. And he had one last, special preparation to attend to, one that caused him great consternation.

"You'll need to create helpers to assist you in your duties."

"Duties?" he silently asked. "What duties?"

Anticipating his questions, his grandmother added, "Your abilities come with responsibilities, Justin. You knew that didn't you?"

"Not exactly," he thought.

"You need to add a male and a female helper to your room. They can be anybody you want, just not real people. Any age. Any nationality. They'll perform any services you ask of them even if you don't know how to perform them yourself." She gave Justin time to digest all of this then continued, "You don't need to do this now... It's a good time to return. Why don't you climb the twelve steps and slowly return to the awareness you had in your nature spot. Then, whenever you're ready, you can return home."

Justin ran to find his grandmother immediately upon his return. He was still bouncing up and down when he found her in the backyard garden sniffing roses.

"Grandma! This is so fun. I'm making my own healing room! When can I go back? I want to finish."

"You need to slow down, Justin. This isn't a playhouse. It's a serious..."

"I know that, Grandma. It's just that I can be me there. Like never before."

"There are important considerations."

"Like what?"

"Like how are you going to be sure that you don't hurt anybody?"

"I won't."

"But how can you be sure?"

Justin stopped to think. "I'll ask their permission before I do anything?"

"That's an excellent start. Yes. What else?"

"I don't know what else."

Clara took his hand in hers. "Do you remember the Golden Rule?"

"I won't do anything that I wouldn't want someone to do to me."

"Exactly. You must ask people to join you in your room and let them know your intentions. What do you think will happen if you betray their trust in you?"

"I don't know. What?"

"You need to answer that for yourself. Or maybe your helpers can help you."

The next day, Clara guided Justin to create his helpers and presented him with his first healing challenge. After lunch, Clara found Justin alone and approached him. "Well, are you ready to learn how to heal?"

"I've been ready all day."

"I know. I saw that look in your eye. But I wanted you to think about it and anticipate it. Have you decided the type of helpers you want?"

"I think so."

"Then let's go to your bedroom. You can lie on your bed."

As they walked to Justin's room, Clara thought back to the time she created her own healing room. She was much older than Justin was now; she was in her early 20s. She already knew everything and was happy to let everyone know it... that is, until she allowed herself the self-awareness and growth engendered in her room. She was a quick study, well read, a true student of her many varied experiences. She did not conform to the conventional roles afforded to women. She was impetuous and uninhibited. It took a strong man, later to become her husband, to match her wit and strength. It took a loving man, later to become her husband, to embrace her idiosyncrasies and mood swings. But most of all, it took a man equal to her in curiosity and drive, later to become her husband.

They shared decades together before he succumbed to kidney failure. Near the end they once again vacationed in Rome, capping off their enduring romance. He passed just a few weeks after they returned home. Three years had passed and Clara had still lost her way, wandered alone and failed to find solace. When she noticed Justin's abilities she dedicated herself to his well-being. She turned to her healing room to protect and nurture him.

In doing so, she nurtured herself, as well. She found a new calling, a new purpose. She volunteered at a local elementary school, setting up a library, encouraging children to read and nurturing them should they request it. Assisting Justin in creating a healing room was a natural project for her, a way to ensure that her purpose would be fulfilled.

Clara waited for Justin to enter his perfect spot, followed by descending the steps to his healing room. Once there, he alerted Clara and they began the process of creating his helpers. He focused on Clara's every word. "Justin, all you need to do is imagine what they look like and the type of people they are. They will follow your instructions and answer all of your questions." Justin wondered how they could do that, but didn't exit his meditative state to ask; it could wait. He invited a man in his 20s to join him. The man and a female helper, about the same age, instantly appeared. To Justin, they were both old. Clara next had him stock the room with generic salves, lotions, tinctures, pills and powders that could treat any number of maladies in any manner that Justin desired.

Clara next taught him how to diagnose illnesses and fractures. She started with the skin and skeletal system. She followed that with the muscular system. She generally described the vascular system to him then had him choose an imaginary man and start in the heart and visualize traveling through the blood vessels. She guided him through all of the organs, into the capillaries, up to the lungs and back to the heart. Next, she introduced him to the respiratory system. She finished with having him examine the nervous, digestive and urinary systems. The session ended with Justin, with the encouragement of his helpers,

easing into a state of detached awareness. Clara watched over him as he grew increasingly distant, familiarizing himself with his deeper nature. After a half hour she brought him back to his healing room and led him up the stairs to his perfect spot in nature.

The following day, Clara supervised Justin's first healing session. He attended to an elderly friend of hers who was suffering from excruciating leg pain. All Justin knew was her name and age. She accepted Justin's invitation to join him in his healing room. He followed the diagnostic steps that Clara had taught him. During his exploration he identified calcific buildup in her coronary arteries, but not so severe to significantly compromise blood flow. He also identified a long-healed fractured rib and even an absent appendix, two findings that Clara had to later confirm with her friend. With the latter diagnosis he didn't even know what an appendix was, he only knew that something wasn't where it should be. Clara had to identify the condition. As he continued, he felt Clara's friend's pain in his own leg. He eventually identified the source to be compressed vertebrae. Clara then suggested that he hold his hands over her friend's back and visualize healing her. He requested that his helpers join him in the treatment. When he sensed that their work had succeeded, he stood back, taking in all that had happened. In those few minutes he lost his innocence and won his self-confidence. He had become a healer. He told Clara that her friend should stop hunching over as she walked and while sitting. And she should see a doctor because he knew back injuries were serious. When Clara later asked him what he thought of the experience he simply hugged her as tightly as he could and wiped away tears of self-fulfillment.

Justin distinguished himself that day. He knew then that he would thereafter dedicate his life to serving others in ways most thought impossible, in ways that astonished him. In ways that increasingly overwhelmed him as he grew older. In ways that earned him a following from the many who accepted his assistance. As he treated his friends and family, his reputation had grown. He never refused anyone treatment. He also relied on the room and his helpers to relieve his own pain, sadness, insomnia and other conditions. He learned that his greatest successes occurred when his treatment was accompanied with conventional treatments and procedures.

By the time he entered college he had amassed a rather large number of devotees whose ailments ranged from sprained ankles to heart disease. He provided relief to all he treated. Starting with a fellow dorm mate, he developed a new clientele in his college town. It began as a tongue-in-cheek suggestion from one of his clients, but he began to keep regular office hours in his dorm room, and later in his apartment. He refused to accept payment; his ability to help others was gift enough. As the number of clients grew out of control he began teaching others the healing room techniques.

His early college years were marked by self-discovery and a dramatic enhancement of his skills. The most prominent event occurred when he visited Clara's house for the last time to attend her funeral. It was a classic old two-story house, painted white, large front porch with chairs and a hanging swing. Many nights he and Clara swung together pointing out fireflies and bats. A massive butcher's block sat in the middle of the kitchen. He used to sit on it and discuss his day's adventures as Clara prepared dinner. She loved the company of her grandchildren.

He knew this would be his last visit. After surveying the house, once the refuge of his childhood, Justin went upstairs to wash up in the guest bathroom that he had always used. Until then, the return to Clara's home was more of a clinical examination and mental filing of last looks. But when he looked into the mirror, he failed to fool his most severe critic, himself. A stream of tears and choking sobs washed away his air of aloofness. As he composed himself he heard a familiar voice... Clara's. She informed Justin that she would intrude this one last time. Thereafter, he would have to summon her. She had one final

lesson to share. He stood staring at his face as she whispered to him that coincidences are illusionary, that they conceal their true nature to spare us the overwhelming confusion that would accompany learning the depth of the connectedness in our experiences. For most people, that realization would paralyze their dreams, holding them hostage to a misplaced concession to predestination, rendering them hapless victims to an unfounded denial of free will.

As odd as all of this sounded, Justin understood Clara's message. Through oneness and interconnectedness he understood that grace would blossom in his life and could in everyone's life. He also understood that Clara had nourished it sufficiently to last his lifetime.

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Clara had armed Justin with the confidence and awareness he needed to pursue his calling. His mission was not simply to heal. His was to reveal to others, through the comfort of reassurance and innocence of purpose, the healing power of recognizing and nurturing connections. He mentally slapped himself on the side of his head for never recognizing this on his own. He had not the words, nor the syntax, to explain his altered mission to others. No matter, he would never wish to do so. There was no need to do so.

To better fathom this new awakening, Justin looked back at all of the most obvious connections he mistook for coincidences. Examined in this light, the numbers and convoluted associations astounded him. Justin knew he needed to transform his healing room to better identify connections. But how?

He returned to his healing room where he desired guidance from his helpers. They, too, were at a loss as to how to proceed. He decided to try to create an adjacent room, a connections room, where he could construct a map of people's "coincidences" that pinpointed events in time. He did not constrain the mapping by requiring that time only progressed forward. Consequently, the maps became ethereal representations of life's paths, the twists and turns. He first sought to test this approach with his own experiences, creating his own map.

As he was about to begin, he was interrupted by his female helper who addressed him for the first time without being asked. Neither she nor the male helper had ever before initiated a conversation. They had been restricted to only responding to Justin's requests. She asked Justin why he thought he had recently written the short story he titled, *The Choice*. "What did you learn from your soul?" she asked. He thought about how he had ended the story with the protagonist choosing to return to earth for another incarnation instead of continuing onward. "Why do you think you're on your present course?" she continued.

"I have unfinished business."

"What kind of business? What business had you already started?"

"I don't really know exactly." He thought for a moment, then it came to him. "I need to remember more about Emmy."

With that epiphany, he felt to be engulfed in an otherworldly whirlwind of sorts. He felt to be swirling counterclockwise, faster and faster, traveling backwards in time. It wasn't a twirling sensation, rather like he was inside a twister a great deal larger than he. No vertigo, no nausea. Rather, a new mode of transport, without translation, without a view beyond. He paused upon reaching the third grade when he was separated from his classmates during recess for speech pathology training. It wasn't traumatic, but it felt alienating. He willed himself further back in time, resuming the swirling, pausing for a moment when he pleaded with his parents not to incarcerate him in a crib far too small for

him to sleep comfortably. Further back, he had vivid memories of Emmy and other sensations that his parents dissuaded him from pursuing. He eventually returned to a time before his birth. He surveyed his appearance and saw that he had assumed the form of a teenage Emmy. In a moment of impulse he returned to his healing room as Emmy. Justin was standing where he was just before the swirling began. Upon finding themselves in each other's presence, Emmy and Justin gasped with recognition and embraced. Justin introduced her to his extensive, contorted map. They studied it together in awe. They didn't speak, they knew. They knew that they had somehow completed one of life's loops. For the first time, they both felt complete. In that instant, Justin had glimpsed the unfinished business that lay before him.

He invited Emmy to stay in his healing room as long as she wished, even becoming a helper if that interested her. Emmy stood speechless until finally saying, "But I died, didn't I? I know I did. I remember dying."

"I also remember you dying. Your body died, but not our soul. My grandmother told me this. She knew these things."

"Who is she? Am I related to her?"

Justin paused. "She recently passed. I don't know if you're related. Maybe. I suppose you could be."

"Why am I here?" Emmy asked.

"You've always been here."

"No. I was somewhere else. Before you were even born. Are you behind all this? You are, aren't you?"

"It's not me, it's us. And maybe we've always been here. It could have been you who set this up long ago, you know. I wanted to learn about my, our, unfinished business and somehow I found you."

"Wait... where have we maybe always been?"

"Wherever we've been together," Justin replied.

"And where do you mean by 'here'?"

"Emmy, you understand this more than I do. Why are you asking *me*?"

His question stumped Emmy for a moment. "I wasn't prepared for this. I've been someplace among friends and family for a long time. And then you came in and swept me away."

"You visited me in my personal spot in nature, remember?"

"Of course, I do. I had no idea why I was there, either."

Emmy had Justin describe his healing room and connections room and how he healed people. After providing the details he added, "Like you, I had no idea what I was doing in the connections room. I didn't even know I could do any of this. But I do believe this... our soul is on some sort of mission. And I think it has to do with connectedness. We're both young, but our soul feels to have been on this journey for quite a while. We need to listen. *I* need to listen. I need to learn from you."

"What can I teach you? I died young, you can see that."

"But you're old, we're both old. You need to try to remember things you knew that other kids didn't know. I'm sure you had special gifts, just like I do."

"You're alive? Now? You are alive, aren't you?"

"I am."

"Why are you doing this to me? Just leave me in peace."

"Emmy, stop for a minute. Trust me."

"Why didn't you just call for me, ask my permission, like you do everyone else?"

"That's what I thought I was doing. I had no idea that I'd be traveling to find you and bring you here. How could I have known?" He concluded by saying, "We're in this together."

“No we aren’t! You’re alive. You can ditch me any time you want.”

“I’m not holding you here. You came because you wanted to. I never forced you. Besides, you’re not actually here. Just like the people I heal aren’t exactly here. Just their souls or their essences are.”

“So it’s like we’re talking to ourselves?”

“Exactly. At least that’s how I look at it. Everyone comes on their own volition. And they can leave at any time. I don’t completely understand it, but I do know that it works.” He paused, then changed the topic. “So let’s explore the connections if you are interested.”

“What questions did you have for me?”

“Do you have any ideas on how I, we, can help people see their connections with others and their experiences?”

“I’m not sure you need my help. Look at what you’ve created on your own.”

“But that’s my point. It wasn’t on my own. Everything I’ve learned went into this, including what I learned as Emmy. Let me ask you this, how do we know so many things that defy explanation? I know I have special, unexplainable abilities. I believe we all do, it’s just that most people don’t know they have them. We are taught to unlearn many lessons when we’re young. Or we simply forget them. I’m sure you have them.”

“Had them,” she corrected.

“Once people exercise them they can perform what seem like miracles. Others could greatly benefit from our guidance. From our soul’s guidance. Those who possess these skills don’t often teach others. But we could. We can. I think that’s our unfinished business. To pass it on. To heal not just bodies. I’ve been involved in that for years. But to heal souls.”

Emmy nodded agreement. “To bring souls together...”

“Yes.”

“... by teaching interconnectedness.”

Justin smiled. “Yes, I think, I feel, that is our mission.”

Justin’s studies suffered as he spent an inordinate amount of time adjusting his connections room to serve his needs to help others. He researched what others had said about connections. He contemplated what Edgar Mitchell, the sixth man to walk on the moon, wrote in his autobiography: “What I experienced during that three-day trip home was nothing short of an overwhelming sense of universal connectedness. It occurred to me that the molecules of my body and the molecules of the spacecraft itself were manufactured long ago in the furnace of one of the ancient stars that burned in the heavens about me.” But Justin failed to find any guidance or even precedence for the room he sought to create. He feared the consequences that his clients might suffer (and their possible rebuke) should he expose them to the path he took to examine his past, the path that ultimately led him to finding and then becoming Emmy. He needed a simpler tool or process, something easier to fathom and to accept without anxiety, fright or risk.

He wished he could turn to Clara for advice. She would know how to resolve his dilemma. So he turned to the next best alternative. He invited her to his healing room. He thought of her often, but had never before considered this option despite missing her so profoundly. She accepted the invitation and they elatedly reunited. After being prompted by Justin, Clara tried to describe her new experiences. “I’m still joyous. I’m gone from life as you know it, but not entirely so. It’s like my life was a footprint. It’s always been there and continues to be, it’s just that it fades away after a while... like so many other things do.”

Footprints. Justin’s memory raced to the time his father described visiting Delfshaven, a borough of Rotterdam in the Netherlands. He happened upon the church where his Mayflower relatives had worshipped after they fled England and before they had sailed back to England and ultimately to America. He found the church by chance, as he put

it. (This characterization later amused Justin.) The original stonework was still intact at the sole entrance to the building. Justin's father stomped his feet on every stone, ensuring that he had stepped in the 300-year-old footprints of his ancestors.

As Justin completed that thought, his eyes widened, along with his smile. "That's it! That's the map element I was searching for. Thank you so much, Grandma!" He hugged Clara so hard it surprised her. That's what I needed to add to my connections room, to the maps... footprints. With them, we can see where we have been intersects with where we are." He thought for an instant. "And even where we're going!" Clara was happy with Justin's exuberance, but his explanation made no sense to her. "I've been constructing a new room, Grandma. A connections room. But I wasn't sure how to make it work. This is the missing piece. It's like a keystone." Clara still didn't understand. "I'll invite you back to see the room when it's all done."

He spent many days designing his room. He wasn't satisfied with just a functional room. It needed to be inviting, to convey a special ambience. His healing room felt rather sterile, almost to the point of feeling chilly. The new room would not mimic the healing room in any way. He performed most of his work when he'd first awaken or as he drifted off to sleep. His creativity soared during the times he spent in a hypnagogic state. Emmy often dropped by to examine his progress and to offer suggestions. Justin would invite her to the healing room, then escort her through the private and disguised passageway to the connections room.

He experimented with many furniture arrangements and types of maps. He devised unconventional furniture to suit both his needs and those of his clients. After much iteration, he settled on gyroscopically stabilized, transparent hemispheres. The cushions were optically clear and unusually comfortable. He didn't need to concern himself with inventing the new material, he could simply imagine it and it was so. A person could sit in any position and would immediately become securely surrounded by the cushion material. Movement was controlled by the will of the occupant. He or she was afforded perfect views of their maps and Justin had a perfect view of them as they traveled in search of footprints.

The maps presented far greater challenges. They had to be both simple and complex. The clients would provide Justin information to initiate each map, but after a while it was up to them to develop them to the point of forging innumerable connections within time and place and with others. Speaking to Emmy, he likened the task to utilizing the entirety of the sun's rays without becoming blinded by the light. The enormity stymied his advance. She took his hand and said, "Come with me." She instantly transported him to a ranch where she once rode horses. She led him into a stall and pointed at an old wooden door. "There," she said, "there is your solution." Bright sunlight shined through the slight gaps where the slats were once tightly joined together. Slivers of sunlight that almost, but not quite, blinded him.

Justin hugged Emmy. "You're absolutely right. Light always finds its way through the gaps, but it can be modulated by slits." He stared at the door as his mind raced. "I can devise special glasses that filter the immense information rendering it manageable and focusing it. Yes! Sort of like the slotted goggles that the Inuit wear. The same idea." He hugged Emmy again. "We sure are something, aren't we?"

Just as quickly as they left, they arrived back in the connections room. He had previously fashioned the room into a maze of timelines, pseudo maps and strings extending from surface to surface, intertwining as well as bunched together like tangled yarn. The timelines were but dates suspended in air, mostly in chronological order. The maps were more like place markers, akin to pushpins used with real maps. The strings, Justin's proudest invention, were diaphanous tiny strands that could be effortlessly prepositioned, deleted, or separated into many new strands. In some ways they were like the route indicators found in map apps in which the origin or destination is readily changed by

dragging the end point. The strands could be readily reassigned to form any connection.

They contained the footprints. Connections occurred where two or more footprints past or present or even future had overlapped. Each of the overlapping footprints was typically, but not necessarily, created from different strings. All overlaps indicated connections. Clients could sit comfortably in a chair and identify the connections, as if checking their ancestry. They could explore the details of each connection to understand how and why it occurred. They could follow the newly created common string. Even more remarkably, the client could generate new connections by overlapping his or her own footprints with those of others. All that was required was the permission of those with whom the connections were to be made.

Justin set about to construct the glasses and work on the lighting. He added a special feature to his original glasses design consideration. The slit width could be simply adjusted in response to clients squinting or widening their eyes, thereby affording them immediate control of their field of focus. He also imagined that the glasses would not touch their faces and so not create any discomfort. He deemed it important that the clients not be distracted in any way from the mission of seeking and growing their connections. He also felt it important to bathe them in cool and soothing light, light with no obvious source. He created a bluish glow throughout the room, bright enough to read, but not so bright as to divert attention from the work at hand. The hue would redden as connections arose and epiphanies flourished.

These projects consumed all of his energy and creativity. Though he had no concept of where his ideas originated, he delighted in showing absolute disregard for the laws of physics. In this world no such laws were ever written. His meticulous attention to detail exhausted him. He became absent minded. He grew so obsessed that even his frequent reconfigurations of timelines and maps and strings became a compulsive exercise that would awaken him in the middle of the night. Such awakenings were associated with new rounds of creative eruptions that exacerbated his travails. He felt to be spinning downwards, not unlike the swirling that led him to Emmy in his past life. Only in this case he did not venture through time, rather he remained fixed where he was, further depleting his energy while his imagination expanded in response to what felt to be an outward, a centrifugal, force.

Eventually, while enjoying a back massage from his female helper in his healing room, she casually intervened. "It's time that I reveal myself to you," she said.

"You don't have to," he replied. "I know who you are. I created you."

"Yes, I know you believe that. But do you remember how we first met?"

"I do..." He thought for a moment. "Wait! That's right, I didn't imagine you, did I? I didn't specifically create you like I did my male helper. You just appeared with him." He rolled over to look at her.

"That's right."

"But you're exactly who I wanted in a helper."

"I know. That's why I appeared to you this way. You accepted me immediately."

"You tricked me?"

"No, Justin, nobody tricked you. I am you. I am a spiritual force beyond your comprehension. I'm your spiritual guide."

"This is crazy!" Justin exclaimed. He sat up and stopped to think. "Are you saying that you're my guardian angel?"

"Yes, if you wish to see me that way."

"Why haven't you told me this before?"

"You never asked and I never saw the need."

"And now you do?"

She didn't answer, allowing Justin time to draw the obvious conclusion. He sat on the massage table, awestruck. His thoughts first ran to how clueless he was to have missed recognizing who she was. He dismissed those self-doubts by deciding that there was no way he could have known. Next, he surveyed their past interactions to assure himself that he never said or did anything inappropriate around her. He hadn't. Lastly, his mind felt to shatter contemplating all of the new connection possibilities across space, time and various realms. When he reached that point his guardian angel interceded again. "You need to slow down and focus, Justin. You have much to learn and plenty of time."

"But I want to know it all."

"Don't you recall what happened to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden?"

"Of course I do."

"Do you remember the tree?"

"Yes."

"And the tree's full name was what?"

"The tree of knowledge," he said.

"Close. It was the tree of knowledge of good and evil."

Justin got the point. After all, he thought, who doesn't listen to one's guardian angel? He spent a few days interpreting her advice. He didn't want to seek her counsel again until he felt he fully understood her messages. He asked Emmy what she thought. She advised him to err on the conservative side, that he could cause irreversible damage to himself and others if he moved too quickly. "What could go wrong?" he asked.

"You know that some people aren't ready to learn about their connections. It can be scary." Emmy stared at him. "Even we were apprehensive at first."

"I wasn't *that* apprehensive... Okay, then how about just you and me trying out the connections room?"

"I think it would be better if just you tried it out. You can create connections involving me if you want."

"I'll do that."

"And, Justin, you know what else?"

"What?"

"You should really make some friends. You're too wrapped up in all of this."

"I *do* have friends."

"I mean friends who don't rely on you for your abilities."

"They don't."

"I'll be more direct. A girlfriend. A girl that you have a normal relationship with."

"Really, Emmy? Really? Maybe you can tell me what normal is. To me, forging connections is normal, very normal."

"That's true. If you don't use your powers to manipulate people."

"I'd never do that. Not now anyway. Only when I was a kid."

"Oh. Just exactly how did I end up here?"

"Fine. I'd never intentionally do it. Is that better?"

Emmy laughed. "You're good. You're very good. But we both know intention has nothing to do with it. Call it subliminal or whatever you want. All acts are intentional and you know it."

"How old are you again?"

She shook her head in exasperation. "It depends on when you begin and stop measuring time."

"Yeah, you're good, too."

"You still should find a girlfriend." Justin rolled his eyes. "Hey! Stop that. You learned that from me."

“Stay if you want,” he said, “but, I’m going to test out the connections room.” With that pronouncement, Emmy disappeared in a flash.

Justin fitted himself into one of his inventive chairs, wiggling into position until he could no longer feel any pressure anywhere on his body. He felt to be floating. He next reached out and grabbed a string, it at once became his own string, his current life’s string. He grabbed another string at random and laid it on the beginning of his string. He had merged the first footprints. He looked into the footprint, saw his young mother and smiled, both at seeing her and seeing that the connections room was working. In his enthusiasm, he grabbed a few more strands and placed them randomly on his own, some crossing his strand, others terminating on his. The result startled him. It was as if he had unleashed a multi-headed hydra. All of the strands began writhing, seemingly uncontrollably. He quickly disconnected them and methodically reconnected one at a time. He initiated an investigation to confirm the validity of his concepts and suspicions. Ones that dead ended on his strand should indicate lasting relationships, whereas those with a shared crossover point but continued past his string should indicate important, albeit it one-time, connections. He laid one strand directly on top of his own and, sure enough, when he viewed the trail of footprints, the other strand represented Emmy.

He chose to perform one last test before retiring for the night. He knew he had to pace himself. His guardian angel was very clear about that. He would be satisfied with his creation should this experiment succeed. He placed the end of one strand on his own, tugged it from its anchor on the wall and placed that end further along his own. He expected the result to be identifying someone of immense importance to him, a long relationship that had ended. Indeed, he saw Clara in the footprints.

He returned to his connections room for a short while every day for the next few weeks. He practiced connecting and learning from connections until he was comfortable enough to invite Emmy back to give it a try. He made sure that it was safe, installing many ways for a client to immediately exit the room should the client become fearful or uncomfortable. Safety mattered most to him. He also wanted to make sure that anyone could easily figure out how to recognize and examine connections. He practiced healing himself, mostly of conditions like insomnia and the occasional headache. As he became more accomplished, the more he needed to wear his special glasses, for the connections propagated at an alarming rate, as he had hoped.

Ridding himself of headaches was relatively easy once he got the hang of it. He had to create a medicine cabinet. Just an empty cabinet. It didn’t require stocking. He would separate a new strand from his own primary strand, will his chair to the location of the cabinet and attach the strand to it. Whatever medicine or treatment he required would automatically be transported to his primary strand. Regardless of the malady, the treatment was always benign, so much so that he frequently woke up hours later, finding himself back on his apartment bed, where his journey usually began. He knew he would have to learn how to negotiate far more complex connections in order to treat serious conditions and illnesses.

His self-confidence grew with each passing day. He never expected to invent anything so marvelous. Previously, he was more than content feeling so blessed with all of his other talents. With these new abilities, his desire to share his learnings and successes with someone, especially a girl, grew exponentially. He rationalized that it was all Emmy’s fault. He replayed her advice over and over in his head. He considered using the connections room to join footsteps with a girl of his choosing, but dismissed it as unethical and disreputable. He had learned and adopted the precept, first, do no harm. Instead, he was on the lookout for a new friend.

His preoccupation with room construction had previously blinded him from noticing anyone in any of his classes. With its completion his vision was restored and her name was Connie. She had sat two seats away from him all of that Spring semester in their religious studies class. Or, at least he assumed that she had. Not only had he not seen her, he was rarely in attendance even for the opportunity to see her. She wore no rings on her left hand. That was a good sign, as was the fact that she smiled at him when she caught him staring at her. Justin was never one to approach a girl. He had the remainder of the class period to wrestle with choosing his next move. He finally concluded that it was then or never. He reasoned that if he passed on approaching her, she'd just think he was some weird guy who stared at girls. If he went up to her after class, he reasoned, the worst that could happen is that she'd think he was some weird guy who stared at girls. After the lecture he made his way through clumps of a few dawdling students and caught up with her. "Excuse me, but I'd like to introduce myself. I'm Justin."

She furrowed her brow and smiled. "Hi, Justin. I'm Connie."

"Can I walk with you a bit?"

"Sure, I'm just heading back to my apartment to study for an exam tomorrow. I don't remember you from class. Where have you been?"

He didn't expect such a hard question so early in their conversation. "I'm, umm, involved in construction." He realized he had just opened the door for her to ask even more difficult questions.

"What kind of construction?"

Justin was a lousy liar, but after years of concealing his abilities, he had become an excellent evader. "Just a pet project. But it's finished now. You'll be seeing me more often in class."

That ploy failed him. She picked up on his uneasiness. There was more to learn. "What kind of project?"

He liked her perceptiveness and curiosity even more than the discomfort it caused him. What's to lose, he thought. He would reveal his passions soon enough, anyway. "Well, you know how our professor has addressed how different cultures embrace spirituality and inexplicable powers in different ways?"

"Yes."

"I've been fooling with that. Sort of as an extracurricular project."

"Okay. But what does that have to do with building construction?"

"Nothing much at all, actually." He sighed. "I hope you're ready for this. I haven't been building a real building. I've been working on a virtual room. One that is in my imagination."

Connie stopped walking and turned to him. "You mean like an imaginary room?"

"Not exactly."

"Like science fiction?"

"No. I imagined it... but it's real. Oh man, I really didn't want to get into this right now."

She remained undeterred. "Is it related to a class assignment?"

"Not that either."

"Come up to my place. I'll make us some lunch and you can tell me all about it."

"Really? This isn't too weird for you?"

"No. Not yet, anyway. You're not a stalker or serial killer are you? I hate knives."

Justin thoroughly described his rooms as Connie prepared grilled cheese sandwiches. He failed to mention Clara's and Emmy's roles. Connie held her questions until the end. "Why are you telling me all this. Do you tell all the girls this stuff?"

"I've never told anyone before."

"No one?"

He once again relied on his skills of evasion. "Not a single living person."

"So, why me?" He ignored her question. Having finished his meal he stood up and asked if it was okay to look around. "Are you sizing me up, big boy?"

He laughed without turning to her. "No, I'm just calibrating you."

"Calibrating? That's a funny way to put it. It's so geeky."

"That wouldn't surprise you if you knew my other major was architectural engineering."

"Religious studies *and* engineering? And you skip classes left and right?"

"I never said I was getting good grades."

"Go ahead and snoop. There isn't much to see."

Justin headed to her bookshelf. Lots of books on religion and spirituality. One in particular caught his eye. "What's this one, *Man's Search for Meaning*?"

"The author, Viktor Frankl, was a concentration camp survivor. It's about how he and others survived. He was a psychiatrist and developed a new form of psychotherapy based on those experiences. It's an amazing book, actually."

Justin opened the book. "You highlight books?!?"

"What of it?"

"It's so, so irreverent."

"And so practical."

Justin read aloud, "Those who have a 'why' to live, can bear with almost any 'how.'" He flipped a few pages and added, "When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves." He took time to process them. "You know..."

"Yes, I know. You never answered me."

"What?"

"You know very well what. So, why me?"

Justin kept staring at the bookshelf. "You sure ask a lot of questions," he responded.

"I have my own ways of, what do you call it, calibrating. Last time. Why me?"

"To tell the truth, I really wanted to share what I've been doing. Like I said, I've treated lots of people in my healing room. But this connections room is totally new. I created it and I wanted to tell someone."

Connie smiled and nodded. "That's nice, but you still haven't answered my question."

"You sure are persistent."

"But not so much as you are evasive."

"Okay. All right." Justin sat back down at the table and looked her in the eyes. "It was the way I saw you as you looked at me in class. I know things about people. I'm somewhat intuitive you might say." He looked down at his fidgeting fingers. "I saw a very nice and understanding person."

Connie reached out and touched his hand. "That's what I saw when you were staring at me."

"You saw that?"

"How could I not?"

"And you didn't think I was weird?"

"I would have had you not talked to me."

He laughed. "That's what I figured."

"I figured."

"I also gave you bonus points for being enrolled in that class."

"Oh did you now? What else?"

Justin thought to himself, wow, this is fun. “Well, I also noticed you had no rings on your left hand.”

“You just happened to notice, eh?” She reached down under the front of her blouse and pulled out her necklace with a ring at the end. “Did you happen to notice this?”

“Oh nno,” he stammered. “You do have a boyfriend. I’m so, sooo sorry.” He started to stand up. “I never would have...”

“Justin, stop! Look at it. It’s an old ring my grandmother gave me. And I don’t have a boyfriend. I broke up with him weeks ago.”

He sat back down and looked at Connie sheepishly. “It’s just that I’d never want to...”

“I know. You’re sweet. Let’s leave it at that.” Connie asked a lot more questions about his skills and rooms, ending with, “When can I visit your connections room?” His eyes widened and jaw dropped. “Well, that’s what you wanted me to say, isn’t it?” she asked.

“Well, yes. But I expected it to come up some time later.”

“Justin, here’s the deal. Why do you think you’re in my dining room? It’s because I liked what I saw *and* you were spontaneous. You got what you wanted. Right?” He nodded. “That’s the way I am, too. So, when?”

“Can we get to know each other a little more first, please? I need to make sure the room is safe and that you’d be safe in it. Okay?”

“It’s a deal. Let’s shake on it.” They shook hands and nodded agreement. She delighted in his modest discomfort. He needed to know someone like her she figured. “I have one more question about your connections room.”

“Alright.”

“I get the strings, the strands, part. But why the maps and timelines?”

“They help you to return to any previous space/time location so you can pick up where you left off.”

“Wait. I have one more question.”

“Okay.”

“I don’t ask too many questions do I?”

“Are you suggesting that you could ask more?” With that she stood up, leaned in front of him, wrapped her arms around him and gave him a quick kiss on the lips. “Now shoo. I’ve got to study.” They made a date to meet the next evening just to hang out together.

Justin was thoroughly flummoxed by the day’s events. He couldn’t study. He was too distracted to return to the connections room. His anxiety interfered with his ability to fall asleep that night. Eventually, after an hour of rustling around in his bed, he sought the assistance of his healing room helpers in order to finally get some rest. Connie, on the other hand, slept soundly in the belief that she had finally found somebody truly special, someone she could relate to, someone she could maybe trust with her soul. A comforting satisfaction soothed her into slumber.

In the morning, when he first awoke, Justin headed to his connections room. He resisted the temptation to seek out Connie there to enhance their connection. Nevertheless, she appeared as a new footprint on his string. He consulted the map and timeline. As he expected, the meeting in the classroom was confirmed. He also refrained from trying to follow her actions along her string. He had never attempted that technique and wasn’t even certain if it was possible. Or what the consequences might be. But he definitely didn’t want to experiment with Connie as the subject. Content that the connection with her was confirmed, he readied himself for class, but his thoughts remained on Connie and what he imagined and hoped to be their imminent dalliance. It troubled him that he wasn’t sure how to plan hanging out together. He allayed his concerns by reasoning that she would know how. Meanwhile, Connie was recording their first encounter in her journal. “Yesterday, I

finally met a guy who possesses similar abilities as mine. Plus, he seems to be very nice and smart. What a pleasant surprise! I'll learn more about him tonight."

Connie answered on the first ring when Justin called. She suggested that they meet at a quiet coffee shop next to campus. She arrived armed with many more questions. He had already been there for about 15 minutes, ensuring that they would have a table, he explained. Connie looked around the room, Justin's eyes followed hers. The place was almost empty. "It looks like we just managed to beat the rush," she said.

"I guess the word didn't get out that we'd be meeting here," he replied.

After exchanging a few pleasantries, Connie began inundating him with her questions. All the while she stared into his eyes, searching for more information than his answers would reveal. He found that unnerving at first. No one had ever before listened to him so intently. But after a while he met her stares head on and answered with even greater self-assurance. He patiently waited his turn to interrogate her, for she revealed glimpses of many answers within her questions. And he wanted to learn more.

She inquired about where he first learned of his healing rooms, what his grandmother was like, what kind of child he was, how many people he had healed, why he built the connections room, who he confided in, why he has no friends, why he studied architectural engineering, why he didn't add certain accouterments to his rooms, why strings and not spider web-like connections, why did he really approach her, and much more. She had a gentle, inquisitive manner, one that enabled him to answer fully, with candor and comfort. After a while he wondered how she knew to ask some of the questions she did.

His questions were more pointed and fewer in number. "Connie, tell me, you asked a lot about my rooms. Why I chose to construct them as I did. That all made sense. But you also asked about alternatives that I didn't choose."

She had been resting her chin in the palms of her hands. She leaned forward and slightly smiled, suggesting that she knew where this was heading. "Yes."

"So, what haven't you told me about yourself that I should know?"

"You don't dance around, do you?"

"I never learned to dance," he said.

"We'll teach you."

"Who's the 'we'?"

"The girl you haven't mentioned to me."

"There is no girl."

"Oh really?"

"Really. Not like you mean."

"And just how *do* I mean, Justin?"

"I'm sure you know what you mean."

"I sure do. Now I'm asking you, 'Who is she?'"

Justin looked at his watch. "Oh, I'm sorry. Your time for asking questions has expired. It happens to be my turn."

"Are you kidding me?!? There are no rules. We are talking like humans are wont to do. As opposed to engineers."

He had to laugh at that remark. "Fine. Then let me ask this, 'What haven't you told me about yourself that I should know?'"

She nodded her head. "Okay, I'll answer that question, then you'll have to answer mine."

"Not fair, but I'll go with it." They shook hands again. Not so much business-like as it was congenial; not brusque, but rather intimate. Connie went on to explain how she suffered from bouts of extreme empathy as a child. She broke into tears every time she

heard someone cry or saw someone or something suffer. Before she learned to temper her comments, her unbridled telepathic skills led to many embarrassing situations. "Apparently," she said, "few people appreciate having their intimate thoughts broadcasted to strangers in a crowded room." Déjà vu experiences were also common occurrences for her. "By the time I got to high school I was able to lead people in what they were going to say."

"I'm sure those skills made you *very* popular."

"Oh, everybody knew me alright. I couldn't wait to dissolve into the college crowd."

"And then what?"

"Well, two years ago I met this guy. He was so different from me, so different from anybody I had ever met. None of my friends liked him. That should have been my clue."

"Why not?"

"Where to start? He even hated puppies."

"Puppies? He actually hated puppies"

"Yeah, I thought he was kidding until I saw one try to climb his leg. He probably would have kicked it if he was alone."

"Wait!"

"Yeah, I know. How did I not see that? Easy. I never really looked. I told you I wanted to disappear into the crowd. I retired my skills. He was exciting, very much so... for a while. Charming in a dark sorta way. Then he started trying to control me. I went along at first, but he kept amping it up. When I finally said enough he began unleashing his anger."

"How long ago was that?"

"It started close to a year ago. I didn't know what to do. Who to even talk to. I was so afraid he'd turn violent."

"He's the one you broke up with weeks ago?"

Connie closed her eyes and whispered, "Yes."

Justin placed his hand on hers. "You don't have to say more."

"Yes. Yes, I do. I haven't shared this with anyone before."

"Did you use your powers to extricate yourself?"

"I did. But he figured out what I was doing. That's what infuriated him the most. He said I was fucking with him."

"How did you end it?"

"I had no clue at all. So I started thinking about other bad situations and how to resolve them. You kill cancer with poison. I wasn't going to do that. You inoculate against viruses. I couldn't figure a way to inoculate myself. Then I thought of him as fire, a fire raging out of control. And then it hit me. I'd take away his fuel. I threatened to turn him in to the cops for drugs if he didn't leave me alone."

"How did he react?"

"He punched me. Once. And then he got real familiar with the flat side of a frying pan. I moved out that night..." She bit her lower lip, searched Justin's eyes and said, "And here I am."

"Wow. Wow," was all Justin could say. He reached over to hug her. They shed tears together.

"Well, there you have it. The short, mostly sweet life of Connie Stower. Are you scared yet?"

"I'm not sure if I want to turn my back on you in the kitchen, if that's what you're asking." He was relieved that she laughed.

"Okay. Your turn."

"What was the question again?"

"Who is she?"

"Her name is Emmy. I've known her all my life actually.

"All of your life, eh?"

"Yep."

"And yet she's not a girl like I mean a girl. Is she a rabbit? No, wait, they don't live that long. She's a parrot isn't she? An African Grey?"

"Are you ready for this? You won't think I'm weird will you?"

"We've already been through that. Just tell me."

Justin revealed with as much clarity and completeness as Connie had. When he finished by sharing how Emmy had helped with his connections room all Connie could say was, "Now I understand our attraction."

"How do you mean?" he asked.

"We're looping together, aren't we? Just like you described it with Emmy. Now, I *really* need to visit your connections room."

"Hold on a minute, Connie. How did you make that leap?"

"It wasn't a leap at all. It's just that we're connecting on another plane or something. Beyond the here and now. You *do* sense it, too, don't you?"

She had thrown him a hard curveball. "I feel connected in almost too many ways at once," he answered.

Connie licked her lips and grabbed his thigh. "Yeah, I bet you are. Feel like learning to dance, do you?" She silenced him with embarrassment.

All he could muster to say was, "Can I get you another honey and chamomile tea?"

Justin woke up anxious in the middle of the night. Per Emmy's advice, he had been throttling back his compulsion to visit and improve the connections room. He didn't visit *every* time he thought to do so. He hadn't this night after meeting up with Connie. But he awoke from a disturbing dream of some sort. For over an hour he tried to return to sleep. Insomnia was becoming a favorite excuse to dabble some more. He had waited long enough, the connections room didn't have to be perfect, just yet anyway. He entered through his healing room and settled into one of his fancy chairs. He reached out to select a string that became his own. He was unsure of what to do next so he opted to check out the healing aspects of the room.

He moved to the medicine cabinet and tugged on a group of strings connected to it, then connected its end to the side of his string. Suddenly, hundreds of familiar faces appeared, people who had helped him heal in various ways over the years. He had to use his special glasses to avoid becoming overwhelmed. But even they didn't help much. He felt a huge rush through his body. It felt to be healing him as it radiated outward. Freaked out and not knowing what to do next, he urgently summoned his guardian angel. She arrived immediately and instructed him to relax, then led him to his healing room where he decompressed on the table. "The room really works!" he exclaimed. "I knew it would but it's still surprising, if you know what I mean." He was silent for a while. "I didn't expect to see all those people, not at once. I hadn't invited them. Just now I realized that they really weren't there, just their strings, their connections with me were there." The helpers stood by and smiled. "What do you guys think? Say something."

His guardian angel spoke for both of them. "You've created something entirely new to us, too. But it's not all that surprising. We all have our own way of coming to the realization that we're all connected. Yours is just a little more shall I say complex or convoluted than others."

His male helper chimed in, "I'd say a lot more."

"Do others seek to heal people in this way?" Justin asked.

"Some do," she replied.

Justin remembered no more when he awakened in the morning, late for an engineering class. He didn't care. He still had plenty of time to make it to his religious studies class with Connie.

When they talked after class, she asked again when she could visit his rooms. "You must learn patience," he said with a smile. When she glared at him he described his experiences from the night before. "I still need to test everything out before risking inviting anyone else. I think it's important to not abuse my skills. That would ruin everything. Besides, I need to be sure that you aren't some evil-doing vixen."

Connie dropped her head to look up to him and slowly licked her lips. "You'd like that, wouldn't you?" She took his hand. "Come with me."

"You don't waste any time, do you?" he asked.

"Time is all we really have, right?"

"Well..."

"Just agree with me, okay? And trust me."

"Where are you taking me?"

"I know some special places, too, you know." When they arrived at the campus clock tower she added, "And I know some special people, too." When she approached the security guard, they both embraced. After a brief conversation, he made sure that the coast was clear and unlocked the door to the tower. "We won't be long," she told him.

"Take your time," he responded. "Just don't touch anything, okay?"

"Okay." Justin's jaw dropped as they climbed the stairs and the four clock faces and immense gears and mechanisms came into view. The sounds of the ratcheting of time left him speechless. "How's this for a nice blend of architectural engineering and religious studies?" she asked.

Justin looked at her and shook his head in disbelief. "You astound me."

"Good, that's my intent." She walked toward him until their lips met. She pulled her head slightly back to say, "This is how you stop time."

They hung out together for the rest of the day. Later in the evening, while Connie was studying in her living room, Justin relaxed on her couch and returned to his connections room to resume exploring. He took a seat and grabbed his strand at its end then followed it along its length. It worked as he had intended. The end started with his birth. As he progressed along its length, he stopped to examine random events. Some he recalled, like falling down the stairs when he was very young and playing ball with Shelby. Some events he had forgotten. Each relived memory further confirmed the achievement of his creation. He proceeded slowly and deliberately as he approached the present. He saw Connie in class, then himself in his connections room, following his string. He stopped at the threshold of seeing his future. He didn't proceed further. He was never one to sneak early peeks at his Christmas presents, why would he change that now? He preferred surprises. Maybe some other time he'd take a look. He also checked to confirm that he was unable to follow anyone else's strand, he could only study crossover points, footprints.

After exiting the connections room, he returned to his healing room where he considered the dilemma of examining his future. He wasn't certain that it was even possible. And if it were possible, what, if any, time-space continuum conflicts might arise. He concluded that there was no need to risk untoward consequences. He added the safeguard that all strands would terminate at the present point in time in order to be certain that no accidents could occur.

Between attending class and attending to his interest in Connie, mostly the latter, Justin devoted little time to thinking about his connections room over the next few days. When he did return, his guardian angel called out to him as he entered the portal. "Don't forget to use your new flashlight."

“What new flashlight?” he wondered. After he got comfortably seated, he surveyed his strand. He could not discern the faint footprints for the much brighter prints that indicated far more frequent connections. He remembered his guardian angel’s comment and fashioned somewhat of a reverse flashlight that extended just beyond the tip of his index finger. It illuminated the faint prints and dimmed the bright ones. Without giving it any thought, he stopped to examine his strand at the spot where the time marker indicated he was ten years old. What he saw next startled him. It was a paw print, a dog’s paw print.

In the once-faint print he saw a dog, one that had frightened him for a very long time. It wasn’t entirely recognizable at first because of his effective sublimation of the incident. It was a boxer, it lived next door, it ran out and attacked him when he rode his bike down the street in front of its house. He relived it all over while searching the paw print for its meaning. In time it reminded him how it was to bury bad memories. What troubled him most was that he, or anybody, could unintentionally happen upon and re-experience past traumas without warning. Justin returned to his healing room to consider how to address this concern. After considering a range of options that even included closing down the room, he concluded that the best solution was to color code footprints, using the Roy G. Biv mnemonic. For good measure, he added the requirement that a visitor had to reach down and actually touch the red and orange prints to be able to examine them. Despite these protections, the experience continued to unnerve Justin. His healing room had never suffered untoward circumstances. He fretted that his solutions would not prevent further such occurrences. This situation changed everything.

The next day, Connie again pestered him to show her the connections room. “What’s the hold up, Justin?”

“I’m still tweaking it. I found something yesterday that has me concerned. And cautious.”

“Not termites, I hope. They destroyed my grandparents’ house.”

“No, not termites.

“Then what?”

“It’s a safety issue. I can’t let anybody in until I’m certain that it’s 100% safe.”

“Nothing’s 100% safe, Justin. Even doing nothing isn’t 100% safe. How about if I just take a peek?”

“Peek, huh? I hadn’t thought of that. That’s another alternative. A good one. Like levels of access. I can work with that. How obvious!” With that, Justin hugged Connie and kissed her. His mind was already racing. Only those with red or orange access could access those colors of footprints. He could match chair color with the access level so there’d be no confusion. And those who wanted that access would be screened by having them fill out a special questionnaire. His racing mind bogged down at that point. Who could create such a questionnaire and who would score it?

Connie tapped him on the shoulder. “Earth to Justin. What are you thinking?” When he explained the quandary, Connie offered a simple solution. “Let the clients do that. They’re in the best position to judge themselves.”

“But how would I know if they’re being open and truthful with themselves?”

“No problem. How about inventing some sort of machine to judge it. I don’t know. Maybe? You’re that smart, aren’t you?” She paused and smiled at him. “And you can try it out on me.” Justin was a step ahead. He had already decided to try it out with Emmy.

The next couple of weeks were packed with classes, studying and Connie. These endeavors had become his new routine. And it didn’t include visiting or designing the connections room. Besides, he rationalized, he needed a break to allow all of the concerns and potential solutions to settle in. Connie and he shared their most treasured thoughts and

secrets. They found themselves in one another. They reveled in becoming one in every manner they could imagine.

When Justin did return to contemplating his next modification to the room he found himself longing to experience the joy associated with constructing items without any physical or financial impediments. Instead, he now was designing for safety and had to accept certain constraints. He liked Connie's invention idea. But he doubted that any machine or test could discern the facts when querying someone should that person be a victim who had completely sublimated the event. And he was powerless to vanquish that doubt he harbored. He spent hours pondering the solution. He sought the advice of his guardian angel. He summoned Emmy and then Clara to the connections room to get their opinions. Clara was overwhelmed by his creation. All either could offer were warnings to be careful, he was venturing into unfamiliar territory. He questioned Connie. Also to no avail. He eventually dismissed the idea of color coding and relying on some sort of client assessment. The best suggestion came to him after he mindlessly watched the morning news.

"Connie, I hate the news. It's always bad and tragic and gruesome. I refuse to believe that people like it."

"I think people just get hooked on it somehow, babe. Turn it off if it bothers you so much. I just watch it to see the meteorologists mess up. Don't they even look outside their windows? And since when did they start wearing tight and short dresses, anyway? Like that enhances their credibility? What happened to all the old geeky guys? They seemed to even like the unpredictability of the weather."

Justin turned off the television. "Connie, do you think it's possible to limit people to only seeing positive connections?"

"Maybe. But what would be the point of your room then? It'd be a lie. Even a good lie is a bad lie."

"You're right. That would defeat the purpose of the room. Everyone has to be able to examine all of their past and present experiences." He paused and sighed, "I've reached a dead end."

"No, it's actually more like a do not enter."

"Or, no trespassing. Which always seems to me to be an invitation to a place where there's no other people."

"Then there you have it."

"What do I have?"

"Think about a contrary, an intruding, type of solution."

And so he did. He devised a plan in which the connections, the footprints, would start off evoking a very low intensity memory. The intensity could only be increased in small increments. A person would have to expend a lot of concentration and invest a lot of patience to become fully involved with the person or event that formed the connection. He or she would be warned of impending bad experiences. And have plenty of time to avoid them. It preserved the intent of the room. It wasn't foolproof, but it did allay almost all of his concerns. Those that weren't dispelled posed a manageable risk. After all, he reasoned, nothing is 100% perfect, not even perfection.

With that modification, his connections room was complete.

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The end of Spring semester was just a few weeks away. Term paper due dates and finals were approaching. Justin and Connie had decisions to make. Both had planned to spend this last summer before senior year at home with their families. Their parents lived

eight hours apart by car. Justin intended to apply to a graduate program in architectural engineering. Connie had planned to travel in Asia after graduation with her childhood friend, Lacey. Neither had envisioned a relationship that might alter their plans.

Connie was the first to broach the topic one night as they lay under the covers, in each other's arms. "What are we going to do this summer?"

"I was thinking we could maybe stay here and take classes or find some job."

"All of the jobs are crap in this town."

"School isn't an option for you?" he asked.

"It could be. Maybe. But graduating early doesn't help my situation at all." He searched her eyes for understanding. "I mean, that's not a very strategic decision for me." He furrowed his brow. "Okay," she continued, "what I'm saying is that the decision should be based on us, how we feel about each other, if we want more from each other, not on geography or convenience or some other arbitrary criteria."

Justin kissed her. "Here's what I think. It's not so much what we decide, but rather where our decision comes from. If it originates in our hearts, it can't be wrong. What does your heart tell you?"

She rolled over on top of him. "That eight hours is way too far away from each other. What does yours say? But before you answer, let me tell you this. You're a lousy excuse for an engineer. What engineer ever talks like that?"

Justin ignored her last comments. "My heart tells me to listen to you. Because it's never heard or felt such exhilaration before. It likes the exhilaration. It likes you."

In the morning, they intended to discuss their future together at their favorite café, "*Bean There, Done That*." They disregarded its lame name. It's where they first met for coffee. As a way to ease into their impending decision, Connie asked what Justin was currently thinking about doing with his connections room. "I must admit that the project has sort of exploded in my mind. Should I invite people in and set it up so they can heal themselves and find their own connections? We already know the problems with that. Should I just teach others how to create their own? But that could cause them to get into trouble. It could be dangerous. It's a very powerful tool."

"I know it is."

"I could just keep it to myself. That's the safest thing to do."

"Hey, what about me?"

"What do you think I should do?"

"Why did you build it in the first place?"

"There you are again, answering a question with a question."

"I'm so sorry, but I happen to think that Socrates had a good thing going. Why did you build it?"

"To better heal people, their bodies and spirits. Through the many connections we forge as we go through life."

"Okay, let's go with that. You call it a tool."

"Yes."

"And you just referred to our secular experience as 'going through life.'"

He half-heartedly nodded affirmatively. "I did."

"Why not use your room as a tool to enhance lives? It's remarkable what you've done. We're not all in a place where we need to be healed, but we are all in a place where we can benefit from finding and living love... to bathe in the goodness all around us, in us and through us. Why not give that a try?"

Justin erupted by shaking his hands in front of his face, gesturing the magnitude of her insight. "Geeze, Connie, how do you come up with those ideas? They're perfect!"

She smiled demurely. "Ummm, didn't your room basically bring us together?"

"So, what are we going to do about that?" he asked.

"Do about what?"

"Staying together."

"I vote that we do."

"Me too. But how? Here?"

"That's okay by me," she said as she extended her hand to shake his. "It's settled then. But I do have one qualifier..."

"Yes, Connie, I will invite you to the connections room. When the time is right."

"Before the semester ends."

"Before the semester ends."

"Then you better get on with it, big boy."

For the next few days, when his mind wandered, especially as he was falling asleep or just awakening, Justin thought about finding goodness, wondering what a loving space would look like. He considered different ideas about how to modify the connections room to create a loving space, but the room was already too cluttered and unmanageable. He could make it larger, but any modification would add unacceptable complexity.

Connie kept pestering him to invite her. She distracted him one evening when they were in his apartment, as he was deep in thought. "I need more time, honey. This isn't easy for me," he muttered.

"I don't want to burst your bubble, babe, but finals begin in less than two weeks."

"Say that again?"

"Finals begin..."

"Not that. You mentioned something about bubbles..."

"I said I don't want to burst your bubble."

He jumped up and rushed to his bookshelf. He pulled out an old slim paperback entitled, *Soap Bubbles*. He quickly paged through it. "That's it! You did it again! Bubbles! Why didn't I think of that?"

"That's what? You sorta did think of whatever it is that you're thinking."

"Soap bubbles are like almost perfect geometric shapes. They encapsulate a volume with the smallest possible surface area."

"Okay. So what? What's that have to do with anything?"

Justin finally lightened up. "Actually nothing." He laughed. "But the concept of bubbles has everything to do with the new room that I'm going to construct."

"Another room? Now you're building a mansion?"

"Connie, remember, this is all your fault. You brought up goodness and love. I'm simply at your mercy."

"I like the mercy part, not so much the fault part."

Justin stayed awake well into the night trying to imagine a bubble room. The scope of creating an entire room exceeded his creativity. So, he turned his attention, instead, to individual bubbles. He reflected about how bubbles form and grow until they burst. Two adjacent ones can exist side by side or merge to become larger than either. He visualized making huge bubbles. And myriads of tiny ones.

Connie woke up and sensed he was awake. She tightened her arm around his chest. "Come to sleep, bubble boy."

"Soon," he said and resumed thinking about how several of them can interconnect to create foam, forming a complex and convoluted network. These considerations inspired him to return to attempting to construct a new room. He fell asleep without having created even a rudimentary blueprint.

He resumed his efforts in the morning right after Connie slipped out of bed. This time he turned to his healing room to his helper, the spiritual guide, for assistance. She was standing at the entrance when he arrived. "How can I help?" she asked.

"I'm wanting to construct another room. One devoted to love and goodness. But I don't know what to do."

"I like your bubbles concept."

"Don't you like my connections room? You never offered to help with that."

"That room was for you, not for others. You needed to experience it to arrive where you are now. You made some very important decisions."

"How should I design the bubble room?"

"Perhaps a bubble room is excessive."

That was all the incentive he needed. It could be just like a pool inside his healing room. Recently, his guardian angel had surprised him by preparing an earthen floor in the healing room with the shape of his silhouette dug out. It looked a bit like a gingerbread man mold. She instructed him to lie down in it on his back and to relax. All but his face was submerged in warm water. She swirled the water around him, not unlike a gentle whirlpool bath. He later awoke in his apartment calmly invigorated. At the time, he had no idea why she made it. He surmised it was just another vehicle of hers to soothe or treat him. As it did.

After the latest interaction, he nodded his head in understanding. She had prepared the earthen depression for what was to become his bubble treatment. She knew his path far better than he. "What should I do now?" he asked her. She once again had him lie down in the earthen mold of his body. This time she added a warm bubbly liquid and swirled the names of the recipients of his prayers in the liquid around him, faster and faster, as fast as he could add names. He ultimately included every person on the planet in his prayers, something entirely new for him. He further surprised himself when he, without forethought, for the first time prayed for God. As he transmitted the many prayers he felt shivers pulse through his body. He thanked his angel and she and the liquid disappeared.

He refilled the depression with a bubbly liquid of his own design. His solution comprised bubbles associated with those who had contributed to his life, persons kind and cruel, alive and dead, known and unknown. As the liquid swirled around him, the associations surged through him. He felt to understand himself, his origins, his purpose. He felt loved and loving, at ease and whole. He next imagined himself to become one of the bubbles. He recognized and felt others. They merged once again, as they always had and always will. They burst and became fresh ones, merging with more and more other bubbles. New bubbles formed continuously. Eventually, the motion calmed and foam formed, formed from all of the people who had helped him become Justin. The foam remained stable until he exited his room and returned to his other life.

Justin described what he called the bubble tub to Connie as they both licked yoghurt from their spoons at the kitchen table. "I'm glad you like the bubbles idea," she said. "And that it works. So when do I get to play?"

"Very soon, Connie, very soon." Justin figured that he'd invite Emmy that afternoon and get her thoughts. He was more comfortable having her be the first one other than himself to test out the cavity. It wouldn't be the same as with Connie, but it would still help to ease his minimal qualms. The bubble tub felt much safer and far less unpredictable than the connections room.

After class, Justin rushed to his apartment to summon Emmy. He barely paid attention in class. His focus was directed to this more critical test. He was clueless as to how she would react. Or what might transpire. After settling into his healing room, Justin summoned Emmy and asked if she'd like to join him. She entered through the visitor's

entrance and immediately remarked about the new addition. "What do you think?" he asked.

"What is it?"

"You really don't know?"

"How could I know?"

"I dunno. I was just checking." Justin described it just as he had to Connie. "Do you want to try it?"

"What happened to your connections room?"

"It's still there. I prefer this for a number of reasons."

"I think it would be better for you to use this bubble tub under my supervision."

"Emmy, I don't need supervision."

"Maybe that was the wrong word. How about under my direction, my guidance? Better?"

"Better."

"Better yet, let's rely on our guardian angel, too." That was the first time that Emmy ever acknowledged that they had the same angel. It made immediate sense to Justin. After all, they were of the same soul.

"Why do we need her?" he asked.

Emmy smiled and shook her head ever so slightly. "Why do we ever need her?"

"Good point, Emmy."

Their guardian angel appeared as Justin lowered himself into the bubble-filled cavity. He, again, felt the many connections. He felt his greater strength, he felt the universal oneness. He lost his identity and found his intent.

The angel quietly asked him questions as he felt the bliss of awakening. "Justin, what is your purpose? Why did you return?"

Her questions reminded him of his answers, ones he knew as a child and had long ago forgot to remember. He had tried to remember, but the bustle and confusion of his present had erased his past. Long dormant connections, bubbles, found their way to rub up against him, to nudge him, to remind him of his soul. At first, Emmy felt to engulf him, enshroud him, guide him. He allowed himself to continue on this path, immersed in the bubbles of connected understanding.

His angel next asked, "Who do you assist?" He felt to grow in ability, yet shrink in size. He felt to possess and exude ever-powerful energy. He felt a driving need to reciprocate these wonderful feelings, to impart this sense of wonder and wholeness in all who had connected with him. And those he had yet to encounter.

"Where is your love?" was his angel's last question. At first, he didn't understand her question. He felt it inside himself, but much more than that. He realized that he had released it and shared it. Shared it with all of the connections, the bubbles, in the cavity. In that instant he felt what he knew everyone seeks to feel. He knew the true answer to all of the questions. He remembered his purpose, his reason for returning, who he wanted to assist, and where his love resided. They all had the same answer. To bathe and be bathed in love.

Later that night, Justin shared with Connie that he had fully tested the bubble tub and it was ready for her to give it a try. He explained no more, wishing for her to experience it without expectations. "Connie, let's take you to the bubble tub instead of the connections room. It has all of the most important features."

"But not the timeline strands."

"True."

"I want to explore my past in your connections room, Justin. You promised."

"I'm very sorry, but I won't. It's not right."

"Why won't you? What do you mean it's not right?"

"It's inherently dangerous. I can't in good conscience invite you inside. However, if you want, I can teach you how to build your own." Justin mentioned his guardian angel's admonition about the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

"Why did you build it, then?" she asked.

"It was a necessary step. I had to go there to be here. Have you heard of Ockham's razor?"

"No, but I bet you're going to tell me."

"It's a very old philosophical principle. I'd summarize it as the simpler solution is usually the better solution. The bubble tub is a far simpler solution. I want to heal. The strands aren't needed for that. They could make people worse off."

She was still a bit unsure of Justin and his abilities. He, more so than any other person she had ever met, was inscrutable, impervious to her telepathic skills. She needed more evidence to justify her trust. Too many stumbles and poor decisions jaded her past, eroding her confidence when it came to men. In the connections room she could explore what brought them together. "I still want to try it, Justin. You promised."

"Please just try the cavity. It has changed me already. What can be the problem with just trying it?" He paused, held Connie's hand, pierced her heart with his gaze, then said, "Trust me. I love you." She looked him in the eye and smiled, a smile of loving concession. She nodded acknowledgement that he knew how to win her.

"Okay. But I still want to visit the connections room."

"I know."

"So, let's do it."

"Now?" he asked.

"Now."

Justin descended into his healing room. Once there, he contacted Connie. Once she gave her permission, he summoned her to enter through the visitor's entrance. He knew the events to unfold would forever define their relationship. He felt the presence of her doubt and the residual distrust. This was not to be a routine treatment. Nothing of the sort. When she arrived he gave her freedom to explore, unlike he had ever done with any previous visitor. He turned his back as if to be preparing something at one of the counters. Connie walked up to the healing table and placed her palm on it to check it for any remnants of healing energy. She had expected to see more equipment and tools. His helpers were not to be seen. She instinctively approached the wall that concealed the entrance to the connections room. Justin watched her in his peripheral vision.

She located the door and looked to see if Justin was watching. He didn't appear to be. She cracked the door and peered inside the room. Justin had described it well. She recognized all of the elements. What she hadn't anticipated was its power of temptation. It felt to be daring her, enticing her to enter. She checked to see that Justin was still busy fooling with something across the room. She opened the door further. This was her chance to answer all of her questions. Justin had promised her access, after all. The strands appeared to transform into the shape of limbs of an inviting tree, a forbidden tree. The time markers became its leaves, the footprints its distinctive bark, alluring lights its fruit. She slammed the door shut. Justin turned to see if she had entered. "I couldn't, Justin." Connie began to sob. "I couldn't betray you. I couldn't betray us." He approached her and held her in his arms. "Was this some sort of test?" she asked.

He pulled back to look into her eyes. "No, Connie, it was only an opportunity. A choice." He held her close again. "I'm very glad you chose as you did. Now let's prepare you for the bubble treatment."

She closed her eyes and imagined scores of connections as he covered all but her face with the bubbly froth. She recognized the many influences and events in her life. They

weren't daunting or intimidating, not even the unpleasant ones. She wasn't reliving the past, she only recognized it, much as one would watch a historical documentary. She experienced an unsettling vulnerability and realized that she was faced with another choice. She opted to embrace it, rather than flee from it. The more vulnerable she felt, the stronger she became. She welcomed the unorthodox healing of her damaged soul. The goodness and love of those surrounding her felt to enter her pores. She came to understand the connections, to understand herself. She wasn't alone, she wasn't superior, nor was she inferior. She wasn't even an individual. She was one with the love that now permeated her being. It soothed her and much more. Forgiveness was bound with the love. So, too, was joy.

She felt the presence of Justin and bathed in all that he had given her. The doubts had trickled down her emotional drain. Only the warm comfort of him remained. She learned that the best, strongest, most healing love is plural. And that their meeting was no coincidence, nor were all of the other lessons she had learned. She had earned her abilities and had unconsciously fed the connections she had made with acceptance.

When Justin and Connie finally returned from his healing room they sat up and stared at each other. They knew that their paths had inextricably merged. They had just experienced an intimacy that defied explanation, one that defined their futures.

Justin spoke first. "It's not so much a small world as it is a connected world and a connected world is a healing world and a healing world is a world filled with gratitude and love. I feel all of that with you, Connie." He whispered, "Thank you."

"It's not connections," Connie told him, "it's just love."

"That, too," he agreed.

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#### Postscript

The origins of this story date back to an extended conversation I had with my guardian angel/helper in my own healing room. I had been blessed with extraordinary help from a large number of people for quite a long period of time. I had been wondering how to best repay this phenomenal kindness by helping others. My angel pointed out that everyone has psychic skills, they just don't know how to access them. Like having memories, but being unable to reach them. She suggested that I teach others how to create a healing room, in the same way that I had learned. But to whom, I asked. To those who have inquired, she responded. I've always shared how I learned, but have rarely followed-up. As I considered that, she added that I maybe should write a story in which the protagonist describes his skills and how he acquired them. He then seeks to broadly share his learnings. My angel recommended this course because in this way I could listen to myself and tap into what I already knew.

*Connections* mostly wrote itself. I rarely knew where it was headed. Even the ending came as a surprise.

Jim Lewis  
March 2016

## Addendum How to Create a Healing Room

### **What is a healing room?**

A healing room is a retreat, a place to be alone, by yourself, or alone with others. You can heal yourself or others. Or just relax and fall asleep. You can receive a nice massage from your helpers. Or you can tap into your creative wellspring. You can remember, you can ignore. You can teach, you can learn.

What you or anyone else can't do is to be mean or uninspired or anything negative.

It's a refuge for goodness and love. And you create a male and female helper to assist you as you wish.

### **Is it real?**

It's imaginary and it's real. You create a room in your mind.

### **Is it like meditation?**

It's sort of like meditation lite. It's not nearly as intensive, nor is it nearly as challenging to master. In the healing room, you ignore thought. It allows you to perform certain functions.

I do not know how to meditate. But, it's my understanding that with meditation you learn not only to ignore thought, but then to stop thought and eventually, reach a state without thought. Enlightenment is an, if not the, ultimate goal.

### **How did I learn about healing rooms?**

I worked with an accomplished biologist, Lillian, at the Chicago VA Medical Center in my early twenties. Her interests extended far beyond conventional medicine. She created a curriculum addressing alternative approaches and invited a few of us from the hospital to become her first students. Among many other topics, she taught us about the creation and uses of workshops, or what I call healing rooms. I learned that I was quite adept at diagnosing the ailments and conditions of people I had never met, with only knowledge of their first names, gender and age. I suspected my abilities were a consequence of telepathic communication between Lillian and me until I was able to identify old injuries that Lillian had to later confirm with the client.

I used my room sparingly over the years, mostly for myself to calm me down, vanquish headaches, solve a problem and to help me to fall asleep. I've had other such skills that I've not practiced much, either. When I was diagnosed with lung cancer 5 years ago I immediately relied heavily on my healing room to assist in my treatment and to help others. About a year later my female helper addressed me for the first time. Prior to that I had always initiated the conversations. She asked me if I wished to feel all of the many prayers that I had received. When I responded yes, instantly, an enormous wall of white light and white noise (so loud that I felt it) engulfed me. A little over two years later she revealed herself to be my spiritual force, my guardian angel. Unlike my male helper, I hadn't created her as I had assumed.

### **Is it easy to construct?**

It's about as easy to construct as it is to fall asleep. Sure, there are guidelines and suggestions. But no hard and fast rules. The strongest suggestions are for your own safety.

**Is it dangerous?**

Certainly not at all if your room is constructed properly. The realm of the healing room is beyond our normal senses. When I was introduced to healing rooms, I was warned to take measures to avoid evil forces and intruders. I cannot confirm their existence, but I see no reason to take any chances.

**What increased powers can I expect to develop?**

At the very least you'll be able to lessen your pain, fall asleep, eliminate your headaches. You may be able to treat your more significant issues. You should be able to diagnose and treat the conditions of others. Helping others in this way is not all that different than prayer.

**How long does it take to construct one?**

3-4 sessions of about a half hour or so each, with practice between the sessions.

**Is it easy to use?**

It's a breeze.

**How do I get started?**

You first learn how to create and relax in a perfect spot in nature. You return there until you're comfortable.

**What's next?**

You next begin constructing your room. You start with creating an entrance and security system. Next you design the room and stock it. Finally, you invite two helpers to assist you.

**Why can't I construct it all at once?**

It's like learning to ride a bike. You practice a bit, make sure of your balance. You don't take on the Alps as soon as you have learned how not to fall. Patience.

You *can* try to do it all at once, but I offer no guarantees.

**How should I begin?**

I suggest that you ask someone guide you by speaking the following instructions. Alternatively, you can proceed alone.

**Steps that I was taught to create my healing room:**

Session 1 -

- The first step involves learning to dissociate yourself from all distractions. Find a quiet place and lie comfortably on your back or stomach. Use a pillow if that feels better. Start by taking slow, deep breaths - inhale through your nose, exhale through your mouth. Continue doing so until you develop a relaxing rhythm. Focus your thoughts on your breathing.
- Next, learn to lose your sense of all feeling in your body. Ensure that your arms and legs aren't crossed or pressed against anything. Make sure you're still comfortable and breathing in the same manner. Start by relaxing your toes on both feet to the point that you don't feel them. Then move up both feet, ankles and legs, very slowly, doing the same to no longer feel them. Repeat these steps for your fingers, hands, wrists and arms. Next, relax your head, then neck, then torso. At this point your body should feel no external sensations.

- Practice this exercise for a few days until it comes naturally to you. Once it's natural you're ready for the next step.

#### Session 2 –

- In this next session you will free your mind by imagining a journey to your perfect spot in nature. Imagine such a perfect, idyllic, passive location. You'll return to this spot every time on your way to your healing room, so make it special. (You can, of course, change it any time in the future.) It's best to create a fictional one. Real scenes can be destroyed, overrun, burned down, flooded, etc. Lillian initially had an actual lakeside spot that began to feel suffocating to her. She went to visit it and found that it had become submerged.
- Consider more than one before selecting. Design it to awaken all of your senses. Songbirds, crashing waves, brilliant flowers, towering rock formations, sea breezes... anything goes.
- Once you've decided on one, count up from 1 to 3, then jump to your scene from nature. Look and walk around it. Tweak it if you choose. Add a creek, a pond, a cave, whatever. You can even invite pets that have passed, just don't invite people.
- To return to consciousness, count down, in your head, from 7 to 1. With each count, visualize a successive color of the spectrum, beginning with red [remember the mnemonic Roy G. Biv – red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet].
- Practice returning to this spot until you're thoroughly comfortable while you're there as well as while you are journeying back and forth. Then, you'll be ready for the next step.

#### Session 3 –

- From your perfect spot, search for a secluded area where you can create an entrance to your underground healing room/workshop. Build a simple entrance, just a hinged door that is flush with the earth or something like that. You don't want it to be obvious.
- Next, you'll create 12 steps leading down to the entrance to your room. Count down as you descend each step, taking a deep breath with each one. When you reach the bottom, construct an entrance to the main room. It is *extremely* important that you design (imagine) the door to have a curtain that allows access only to you. Furthermore, design this curtain to defend against anything harmful from entering your room. It performs vital safety and security functions. (When I say the word design, all I mean is for you to consider that feature when you are mentally constructing something.) Once you step inside your room you can begin designing it to fit your tastes and needs.
- Lillian suggested that we consider a number of items to include. We imagined them and, poof, they appeared. We all needed a treatment table for our clients. We also needed to create a visitor entrance accessible only to those that we specifically invited. It, too, had the special safety/security curtain. Medicine and tools were highly recommended. We could add a host of other items: a bed, a clock, a time piece that could be set ahead or back, a phone, a closed-circuit TV, files, books, buttons to do special functions. You don't need to fully stock yours the outset. As with everything else, it can be altered immediately, at any time and in any way you wish.

#### Session 4 –

- In this last session you will create two helpers and learn how to heal others. The helpers, a male and a female, also are imagined. They are not real people. They can be any age, background, ideology, possess any skills, anything you wish. They will

serve you and assist you in any way you deem desirable. They are experienced in many ways and can answer most of the questions that you pose to them. Their purpose is to serve you.

- The final lesson is associated with learning how to heal people. From inside your room, you first invite your client into your room for the purpose of treatment. If he or she grants you permission, you have them enter through the visitor's entrance where they will be screened for security and safety as they pass through the curtain. The curtain will block their entry should they pose any threat whatsoever.
- Once inside your room, instruct the client to lie down on your treatment table. You first examine the skin for any anomalies. Regardless of what you find, do not cease your examination. Examine the client completely before finalizing your diagnosis. Next, imagine yourself to be small enough to travel through every system in the body. Imagine yourself small enough to enter the client's body to examine the skeletal system. Keep a lookout for any fractures, growths or anything unusual. Sensing inconsistencies is just as effective as seeing them. Then, examine the muscular system and the cardiovascular system after that. For the latter, begin by starting in the heart and visualize traveling through the blood vessels. Proceed through all of the organs, into the capillaries, up to the lungs and back to the heart. Finish by checking out the respiratory, nervous, digestive, circulatory and urinary systems.
- Once the exam is over, it's time to start the healing process. For injuries or disease areas close to the skin, place your hands over the regions needing treatment and imagine restoring them back to normal. Continue to do it as long as you feel is necessary. For deeper injuries and maladies, again become small enough to travel to the site to accomplish the healing. Concentrate on healing.
- The room can serve other purposes, too, specifically for treating yourself. Use your helpers, as appropriate. Or just heal yourself of things ranging from headaches to insomnia, from pain to major disease. You can solve emotional and logic problems there, too. Your helpers can also provide advice upon request.

Once you become thoroughly familiar with these steps, you can first relax then go straight down the stairway to your room. With even more practice, you don't need to go to the room to perform whatever work you set out to accomplish. The room becomes part of your life, how you live.