

What lies beyond the veil of innocence at death?

Beyond The Veil of Innocence

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Beyond the Veil of Innocence

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1. My World

In the summer of 1964 I lived in Hereford, Texas with my mother, father, three brothers, and three sisters. Three were older than me and three were younger. I was twelve that summer, just between 6th and 7th grades. Hereford is a small rural community up on the Great American High Plains in the Texas Panhandle. And although it was a small town we had everything we needed there. There was a Piggly Wiggly supermarket downtown on Main Street. Right next to it was the post office: around the corner was a doctor's office. There were two convenience stores, a bowling alley, a radio station, the courthouse, and a lumber yard. The radio station carried talk shows about farm and ranch products all day. For music we listened to stations from Amarillo. Huge grain elevators rose majestically up from the hard pan of the plains floor all along the railroad on the south side of town. The schools were in town. I went to Northwest Elementary the year before: I was to attend Stanton Junior High in the fall. My older sisters and brother went to Hereford High. We lived on Avenue B in a stucco house.

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With three bedrooms, it was the largest house we had ever lived in. When we were moving into it I had thought the boys could actually have their own bedroom, the girls could have one, and Mom and Dad would have the third. Mary, my oldest sister was 16, Mom and dad said she should have her own bedroom. Johnny Ray (my older brother) and I ended sharing bunk beds in the hall. That left Janie, Charlie, Kathy, and Jeffery in the last bedroom. Charlie, Kathy, and Jeffery were babies and Janie was a year older than me. It was not really Janie's room. It was more like her nursery.

Dad was a yardman for a lot of people around town. This year he had picked up some additional work at a local cemetery as the caretaker. Dad said since he had a couple of big strong boys to help, Johnny Ray and me, he could handle the extra work. I worked after school, Saturdays, and Sundays after church (if we needed to) helping Dad care for his customers' lawns. In the summer of '64 Johnny Ray and I mostly helped Dad at the cemetery. I say mostly because there were some customers who wanted either Johnny Ray or me to take care of their yards and gardens. The idea was that the

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more that Johnny Ray and I could do around the cemetery was less that Dad had to do there. That would free him up for his lawn care business. We dug all the graves by hand, mowed, edged, trimmed, and watered the grounds. Oh, I forgot, we cleaned, and cleaned, and cleaned, etc, etc. All of the grounds, the exterior, and the interior of the shop and pump house had to be neat and clean at all times. Dad said that it didn't do anything for the dead, but it showed respect for their loved ones that came to visit.

The cemetery lawn care was done in ten sections. Our goal was to mow and trim five sections a day, once a week. In theory, with two good work days, we could mow and trim the whole place. My Dad was always joking, "We have to mow the whole place in two days because people are just dying to get in. HA! HA! Of course, when someone died, digging the graves always took precedence over everything else. The watering schedule was different. We tried to water two sections a day for five days, so every week the whole cemetery was watered.

Two major things happened that summer. The first was when Johnny Ray pulled the mower back over his foot while he was mowing around a headstone. It was a

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big commercial mower, so when the blade hit, it sliced right through his shoe and cut all five toes. Split them in two all the way up into his foot, crushing bones all the way. Needless to say he was out for the summer. Dad and I started working from dawn to dusk seven days a week just to take care of his customers' yards and keep the cemetery in good shape.

The second thing that happened that summer happened on a Saturday morning in August while I was setting irrigation pipes at the cemetery. Dad had dropped me off at the cemetery at dawn that morning to set up the sprinkler system while he was mowing lawns: then he would pick me up in a few hours so I could mow a couple of lawns. This would give me plenty of time to set up the irrigation system and turn on the well. Then he would drop me at the next customer's house. I would have enough time to do all the work there before he picked me up. In between peoples' lawn work he would drop me back at the cemetery where I would turn off the well, disassemble that section of irrigation pipe, move it to the next section, reassemble it, and turn the well back on. We followed this schedule all day Saturday and Sunday (after church).

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On this particular Saturday, just before dawn, Dad dropped me off at the cemetery to set up the irrigation system, which consisted of a bunch of 20 foot sections of aluminum pipe. The main feeder pipes were four-inches and the smaller pipes which started at the center of the cemetery and ran to the outer edges were two-inch pipe with a riser and impact sprinkler head on it about twenty feet apart. The well could supply two of the two-inch lateral pipe sprinkler lines. We set up two lateral lines, ran it for about two hours, disassembled it, moved it to the next section, and started over again. The initial setup took a lot longer because all the pipe sections had to be loaded onto the trailer, and the trailer hooked onto the tractor. The pipe sections were then dropped off where you wanted to assemble the system.

Setting up the irrigation system was real awkward and slow to do by myself. Because I had to stop the tractor, jump off, pull off a couple of sections of pipe off the trailer, place them about where they needed to go, get back on the tractor, pull up forty feet, stop the tractor, jump off, and drop off a couple more sections until all the pipe was roughly in place. Next, I had to start assembling

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pipe from the main line connection to the edges of the cemetery. Normally, with two people setting the pipe sections up, one of us would drive the tractor slowly to where the system was to be set, and the other would pull off the sections and lay (throw) them about where they needed to be connected. Then we would start assembling the pipe, starting at the main riser connection Johnny Ray would assemble one lateral line of pipe and I would assemble the other. With two people the system could be set up and assembled very quickly. Johnny Ray and I could do the initial set up and have the sprinklers going in an hour and a half. We guessed it would take me four. Dad dropped me off at 6AM and would pick me up by 10.

This particular morning I had dropped all the pipe sections roughly in place and then parked the tractor and trailer on the west side of the barn in the driveway. Then I walked back to where I was setting up the irrigation system. I was assembling the sprinkler sections when I saw a squirrel run into the next piece of pipe I needed to hook up. I told the squirrel to get out of the pipe. I hollered at the squirrel. I yelled at the squirrel and I shook the pipe. All I managed to do was scare that squirrel silly and make

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it hang on tighter. I carried the pipe down to the shop, thinking if I pushed something up through the pipe the squirrel would run out the other end. I could find nothing that was long enough to make the squirrel move. The tractor and trailer was parked just outside the shop on the south side of the cemetery under the high line wire.

I put the pipe across the side rails of the trailer and looked into it. I could not see any daylight so the squirrel was still in there and hanging on. Hoping I could shake the rascal loose I held the pipe straight up and started banging it against the trailer and then I shook it hard. Nothing happened so I did it again. The pipe started vibrating. I was thinking it was vibrating an awful long time so I clutched it tighter thinking I could stop the vibration. The pipe kept vibrating. I knew then it was not vibrating from banging it on the trailer. The only other thing I could think of was it was touching the electric high line wire that I was standing under. The instant I realized what was causing the vibration I tried, using all my strength, to let go of the pipe and get away from it as soon as possible. At that moment my world faded to black, really quickly.

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One time, a couple of years earlier, I had fainted from shock. It was on a Sunday afternoon. Johnnie Ray, his best friend, and I were out, trying to collect enough Coke bottles to return for the deposit so we'd have enough money to buy a candy bar and a coke each. I had a finger in each bottle and some others clutched between in my arms. When we finally had enough Coke bottles we were headed downtown to the Piggly Wiggly to get our reward. That's when I tripped over a curb. I fell forward onto the sidewalk and must have hit my head. I remember falling forward and thinking of all those glass coke bottles in my hands. My last thought was "Oh no, this is going to cut all my fingers off!" and then there was just a passive sinking feeling: sounds and sensations just faded away into nothing.

Johnny Ray and his friend carried me into a doctor's office, which was on the same block as the one where I fell. The doctor cleaned me up and stitched my fingers and hands, and then bandaged them up. Because I had hit my head on the sidewalk, I was out and couldn't remember any of that. Sometime later everything slowly faded back in, just like life had a rheostat and you could

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turn up, or turn down life's intensity. The point is that there was no sensation or memory, between fading out and fading back in. I remembered falling forward and then waking up in the doctor's office with my hands all stitched up and bandaged. Johnny Ray had run all the way home to tell Mom what had happened. Mom made him bring our old Radio Flier wagon back with him so he could pull me home in it. That was neat because that was the only time Johnny Ray ever pulled me in the wagon.

This time was different for two reasons. The first was that one moment I was standing in the driveway holding a pipe straight up in the air, and deciding to let go. Life's intensity was all the way up, and then there was nothing, just black and quiet. It was like an instant transition with no fading in or out. The second difference was, **I was still thinking!** When I had fainted everything faded out, and then faded back in. I was not aware of anything in between. My brother and his friend carried me into that doctor's office that we were in front of. The doctor stitched up all the cuts on my hands and bandaged them. I did not remember that! This time everything faded out, but **I was still thinking!**

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Sights, sound, feeling, smell all sensations were gone. Gone also were the things I never noticed before but did now because they were not there, heartbeat, eye blink, and breathing. We are so used to the rhythms of our bodies that we forget they are even there. There was not even the sense of weight on my body. The only thing left to me was an aware mind. As soon as I noticed that, I realized that I no longer had a sense of even having a body. I was aware, I could think, but that was it. Without sensation of any kind, or any control over anything physical, the best description I can use to explain what it was like is floating bodiless in an utterly black void with no sense of time. I would guess we get our basic sense of time from the physical rhythmic aspects of our bodies, like eye blink, heartbeat, and breathing. All this should have been scary, but I was in awe or shock. It just had happened too fast. Where was I? What was I? Was I dead? It was really strange because I felt natural, or as I should be. By saying I feel natural I mean I felt normal. Not normal as I was a moment ago, but normal more like being natural, as if I had been this way before, sometime. This has to sound strange for me to say. Here I was in a

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black void with no sight, sound, or touch, and no physical body, but then, I felt normal. I did though: I felt more natural, or as I should be, than I did walking down the street.

An explanation is necessary at this point, because it gets very hard to explain things in the story using the words I know. There are no words I ever knew that can describe this experience.

First statement:” Every language is the product of the experiences and knowledge of the people in a certain environment.”

Second statement:” Every language known is the product of the experiences and knowledge of the people who developed that language in a closed environment contained somewhere on Earth.” In other words, every language known is limited in its development by the experiences and knowledge gained only on the Earth.

The very beginnings of any language are the rudimentary efforts to describe people’s wants, needs, dangers, or things they experience. A basic need would be “eat,” and that could lead to “good to eat little ground animal.” Body language could fill in the missing words.

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The point is that people create words to describe things they experience, need, or want. There could be a race of people living in a remote mountain valley that has no word for murder. They never created words for things they have never experienced. The more the environment is changed, the more the language will change. Think, for a moment, of the words that might be needed by a group of nomadic people living on a desert plain, or the Arctic tundra.

Imagine what the language would be like if a race of intelligent sea dwellers were to develop. The method of communication may not be spoken words; spoken words carry well in air, but maybe not in water. It would have to be some sound that carries well in a water environment. The words created would, for the most part, be totally different because they are developed, and experienced, in a different environment. Even a small difference in environment might cause the thinking processes or the *need / want*_mental structure to be substantially different. Examples of environments that might cause different words to be created could be a desert, a tropical rain

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forest, an isolated valley in a high mountain range, or the Great American High Plains.

We assume, from our experiences, that any life that exists anywhere in the universe will be similar to life that we have encountered up to now. The criteria for intelligent life to develop anywhere is remarkably similar to some of the intelligent life here on Earth. What seems to be needed are: opposable thumbs, carbon-based, the same temperature ranges as on Earth, the same amount and strength of sunlight, gravity, and an oxygen-nitrogen atmosphere.

Imagine what a race would be like, if, instead of carbon-based they were energy-based: instead of manipulating tools with opposable thumbs, their tools were manipulated through energy directed from their mind: where air, light, and gravity made no difference. What would their language be like if communications was mind to mind: instead the process of *thought to words from mouth to ear and then words translated back into thoughts*? Simply put, "I have no words to accurately describe what happened to me beyond this point."

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I have given a lot of thought of how to approach telling my story from this point on. I prefer to tell it as simply as possible, without any religious context at all. Some words or phrases will be used that have religious meaning; these will be used only to emphasize a point, or a thought.

Keep in mind that if you could bring a person from the eighteenth century to experience life as we live today, every aspect would seem as a miracle to them. They could even believe all of us to be gods with miraculous powers and knowledge. Without knowledge there can be no understanding: without understanding there can be no true knowledge. All we can do at some point is ask a question and hope it is a good question. A good question may result in a good answer and a good answer may give us a little knowledge, possible a little understanding. Growing a little at a time it is possible, in time, to accept an apparent miracle, or godlike powers, as more mundane and normal. To do this we will have to turn the way we think inside out. Think of it as a challenge or an exercise. For now, just try to look from a different angle or level, and then use this aspect to compare to your old

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view. Hopefully, the beginning of a good question might be there.

At times when experiencing an extraordinary circumstance you may not be able to react. Sometimes there is no time to react at other times you just freeze up until it's over and you have time to think. Shock is a good word, better yet, stupid shock. Yes, I was in stupid shock as soon as my world went blank. Oh, not at first I thought I had passed out until I realized I was thinking. I could not be unconscious if I was thinking.

The next shock started when I heard. "*HEY! YOU'RE BACK ALREADY?*" Heard is really the wrong word because it was in my head like I could feel the voice. It was a friend's voice. Another difference to this voice, other than feeling, or hearing the voice inside me there was a lot of support information along with the voice-thought. It was like a really broadband communication. The main subject was, "Hey! You're back already?" but the support information included: 1. who we are, our true nature and our natural form. 2. What we do and how we do it. 3. Where I have been and what I have been doing. It was really like communicating a complete thought all at

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once which would leave no room for a miscommunication or a misunderstanding of what was said.

A complete thought communicated all at once: that is the beginning of the shock. As a twelve-year-old boy growing up in a small rural community in the Texas Panhandle, my father had a third-grade education, my mother sixth grade, and communication was not what we were best at. It could even be argued that all preteens and teenagers have communication problems regardless of the level of their education or their parents. This *whole thought communication* really shocked me. If that wasn't enough, I could see "HEY! YOU'RE BACK ALREADY?" Oh, not with my eyes: it couldn't be that simple. I could see them as if they were right in front of me. I could see a group of seven *spheres of light* moving, swiftly, against a star field. There was nothing to gain a perspective of size from, nothing at all to compare these spheres to. From my perspective they seemed in another area of the universe, far, far away, but really it seemed that distance, and time for that matter, was irrelevant. I could hear their thoughts and see them in my mind just as if I was standing next to them. I knew, it just felt right, that my friend that had

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called me was the light sphere second from the right and that we were fast, longtime, friends. I just could not quite remember who he was. It was like my consciousness was expanding. When this kind of thing happens, well, to be very blunt when you die, as you die, you come alive. As you come alive, you will see a tunnel. It seems to be a tunnel with a light at its end. At least that is what it looks like, and it seems so, until you realize what it actually is. The tunnel with the light at the end of it is actually only your natural vision and senses expanding as the veil of innocence is lifted. As you come alive in your natural form your senses open up, and at first it seems that you are looking down a tunnel with a light its end. As my senses opened up, the first thing I could see was “Hey! You’re back already?” Then I could see many, many other spheres of light in the same area of space. They were in groups of two to eight, and most of these individuals, friends, were greeting me. They were all going in different directions as if on errands. I felt like **this is me, the real me!** My life living as a young boy in Texas seemed less real than I felt at this point. I was just an awakening consciousness floating in space. I felt so free, so

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liberated. I never realized how much having a body limited me until now.

2. “The Presence”

My world went blank again, or it would be more accurate say there was no sensory input. I was still thinking but there was nothing else. It was like someone, or thing, capped or muffled my senses to the point I felt I was in the black void again. There was a difference this time because although I could not see, smell, hear, or feel anything, I sensed, or I could feel a presence. It was kind of like when you know someone is looking at you, or looking and thinking about you. If you turned around quickly enough you know there will be someone, there, watching you. There was something here with me: someone. There was someone here with me. Someone was here with me: I could feel the power. It was very powerful, but warm and considerate, and loving. Yes, that was it. Someone who felt immensely powerful, undeniably kind, extremely wise was in this void with me. And it felt like that someone loved and cared for me, much like a mother and a father cared for and loved their newborn child. I felt as innocent, as helpless, and as trusting as a newborn child looking up into its mother's face for the first

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time. I knew this presence would not, nor could not, ever see me come to harm. Something stirred in me. I knew this “Presence” also; I knew I felt the same toward the “Presence.” Words are a complete failure now. I could never describe the intensity nor the quality of feeling that was between the “Presence and me. If I had the words, they would not convey to anyone the warmth of the feelings of the bond between “The Presence” and me. I would share it if I possibly could but I just have no way to tell you. The only way you could ever know what it felt like would be to actually be with “The Presence.” I sincerely hope you can do that, one day. That it may mean you are dying is of no concern. Life or death really makes no difference with this feeling. It is kind of like when you were very young, you were lost and scared. When your mother found you and held you so tight you felt safe, warm, and loved, and you knew everything would be all right. That is close to the feeling: not near, but close. This was very eerie. It was like standing in a very dark room, so dark you can’t see, hear, or feel anything at all and you know there is someone in the room with you. Not like it was scary or spooky at all: I just knew someone was there.

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I would like to say a little more about languages. All the languages used by all the peoples of the earth use were developed word by word. They were conceived and developed by us. If we needed a word to name a person, place, thing, action, or feeling we invented one. There are practical vocabularies; there are technical vocabularies. But generation after generation we teach these languages to our children. Each generation has to learn these words and add a few more when there is a need to.

At this point, I have to ask. "Is there a natural language?" Somewhere deep within us is there a natural form of communication that is universal and efficient? What I am trying to say is that our present form of communication is clumsy, ineffective, inefficient, and error prone. Have you ever had a thought or a conception of a thought and tried to communicate that thought to another person? You can explain over and over, and still not make yourself completely clear. There will always be misconceptions. Even if you manage to get all the words right, an inflection may be wrong, or the tone may be misconstrued. Other things that may interfere with efficient communication may be the mood of the person you are

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trying to explain the thought to, his or her attitude, or culture, or their personal upbringing. I will try to explain what happened to me using only the words I know. This, I know, will be very difficult. How difficult? Think of a dog trying to explain to another dog how television works.

There will be a few points in the story that will touch on a more religious aspect. I wanted to keep all religious contexts out of the story; however, I find that I can't completely. One way I think of what was happening to me would be a deep religious happening. Think about it: I have been electrocuted; I have died or am somewhere between life and beyond. I am in contact with a very powerful presence. My life is about to be viewed, or reviewed, to determine if I am ready to pass on to a life beyond this one, or if there is some need or reason to go back and finish this one. I will be judged (the ultimate JUDGED!). Is this not a religious moment? I need, and want the answer to be "NO." To tell the story, I feel I must treat this as something that happened to a twelve-year old boy one Saturday morning, or least tell it that way. All the avenues of reasoning, and what few conclusions I have come to, I must explain as simply and straightforward as I

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can, because I am simple and straightforward, and I must be true to myself. One reason this cannot be told from a religious aspect is because I am nothing: I know nothing. When I think of all the people that who dedicate, and have dedicated their lives to religious study now, and in the past, I know I am not worthy, so I will just tell my little story. I will have to use a few phrases that I think of as religious, and I apologize for those now. The first phrase is, *"You are born_unto innocence"*. Just for the sake of this story. I have to make sure everyone will use the same understanding, or definition of this phrase as it is meant in the story. Anything not related to this story, feel free to interpret the phrase any way you want. Innocence and innocent, in this story, means the lack of knowledge. When the phrase *"born unto innocence"* comes up, just think of a newborn babe.

The first voice-thought from "The PRESENCE" was, ***"You are born unto innocence. We are here to determine if now is the time for you to pass on to life, or is there reason for you to remain in this life."*** This voice-thought did not have any of the support information around it. This was more like voice talk, like we do, but

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still it just appeared in my mind. I had the feeling, at the time, that I was to be kept innocent of the true nature of things, and that was the reason for muffling my senses. Either that or “The Presence” wanted to hold my attention to the matter at hand, although I really felt it was important for me to remain as innocent as possible until it was determined if I had to go back into my life again. Like learning some forbidden knowledge that would make it impossible to return to my life. That is, until after the determination was made about me: where I would go, and what I would do. This voice-thought had color, and feeling. HEY! Your back already?’s voice-thought feeling was that we were great friends. There was love, caring, surprise, happiness at seeing me again, and it was open. Open as in a lot of information came through. This voice-thought was very powerful, with immense love, kindness, consideration, I felt completely subservient as soon as I felt this voice-thought. Anything this “Presence” determined, I would do or go anywhere for any length of time for this presence. The feeling of love, caring, and consideration was so great from this “Presence” that I felt in total awe. There is an old saying, “you get what you

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give,” or “you must give love before you can receive love.” I felt and still feel I would do anything this presence demanded of me. I can’t overemphasize the feelings that came with this voice-thought; if a rain drop could be like an ocean, a comparison could be like being frozen solid , and then be allowed to bask in the sun on a tropical beach. Even that is not a good comparison because there is no comparison that would do justice to the feeling of love and caring in that voice-thought.

There were “**Others**” present. There were a number of “others.” Present may be the wrong word. I could hear their communications, or, a few parts of their comments. I felt there was a lot more going on than I was allowed to witness. I would have thought they were there, except for the brief example I had with the spheres of light before my senses were clamped down. Honestly, they could have been anywhere in the universe and communicate as if they were standing next to me. I had the feeling I could hear only the thoughts I was allowed to hear. Each of “The Others” communicated with me like it was a courtesy to me, or as a courtesy to help guide me through this, or as a courtesy to let me know what they

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were going to do before they did it. Why they did it and what was important about what they discovered. Before one of "The Others" would replay an aspect or a part of my life they would let me know. When they found something important they, they also would let me know. "The Others" never even gave a hint as to why a certain aspect was important. It was just as if they examined the detail and reported what was important to "The Presence" That is not exactly right because when something important came each of "The Others" would let me see the importance of the experience, but not what it meant to the whole, or even what the whole was. Anyway, "The Others" each dug into the detail (taking me along) and, with no sense of judgment whatsoever reported the important experiences to "The Presence.". They addressed "The Presence," but I could hear/understand only some of what they were communicating. They had much less authority in their presence; I could not feel them as much. It could be that was the profile presented I could sense as much as was pertinent to this situation and no more.

Bit by bit my life was viewed. I was a boy who always lived in rural areas, small towns at best. I did not

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have extensive experience with people, relationships, and life experiences. I was allowed access to all they viewed. Every now and then, one of the others would comment to “The Presence” about a certain experience viewed.

Did you ever wonder what we will be judged on? I had always assumed it had something to do with good or bad deeds. I thought it could be that how we lived our lives determined where we went next. Some believe that we came into existence when we are conceived and we are gone when we die, and that is all there is. As I said before, I am not qualified to even think this stuff, then or now. I was just a twelve-year-old kid, a country kid at that. I believe, now, that in our natural form we live immensely long lives: only when we are shrouded in flesh are our fleshly lives brief.

We are here to experience and to learn from those experiences. Our purpose in this life is to learn through experiences. What I was judged on has to do with what I learned in my life and who I had become. I could dictate every second of every review, every act: it could be interesting. I think it would be very boring to review the full life of a twelve-year-old boy living in the rural areas of

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Arkansas, Missouri, and Texas, so I will just hit the high spots on some things I experienced and learned in my life. These are just the things about which comment from “The Others” was made to “The Presence.”

I was born in Fayetteville, Arkansas. We lived up in the hills west of Winslow, which is about 35 miles south of Fayetteville. In the early 1950’s, our part of Arkansas was mostly deserted. There was not much money in Arkansas; it was a really hard place to make a living. My Dad worked for an attorney who lived in Hereford. The attorney led an investment group that bought land for a dollar an acre. They had my Dad scrape the trees off the land with this huge bulldozer, and then they would sell the land for a dollar-fifty and acre. My Mom, Dad, and four of us kids lived in a two-room shack way back up in the hills. There was no water, electricity, or gas in the house. There was a creek about a quarter of a mile away. Over many years the creek had hollowed bowls out in the rocks as it ran down the mountain. We used these to bathe in. When I was about five years old, a couple that knew my parents brought by some squash: it was the white scalloped squash. My Mom let me hold one of the squash while she

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talked to the couple. I was really impressed by the people, the squash, and their kind act of giving them to us. Dad barely made enough to feed us. The shack was on some of the land the attorney owned, so he let us live in it. These people drove up the mountain to give us food. I just kept looking at the couple and then down at the squash in my hands.

This was the first act of kindness and consideration from a casual acquaintance I had ever witnessed. This was also the first milestone in my life's review.

The second was when I was five years old. We briefly lived in Missouri. The closest town was Popular Bluff. Closest town is a very poor description. We lived so far from town I had no idea how far it was or in which direction, and I have never been there. There weren't many people in the Ozark Mountains of Arkansas in the early '50s, but it was a metropolitan area compared to this part of Missouri. Our closest neighbor was about eight miles of dirt road away. My older sister, Mary, had met the girl who lived there in school. One Saturday morning Mary talked me into walking to the neighbor's house to visit her new friend because Mom said she could not go alone.

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Now, no child would even think about walking sixteen miles on a Saturday just to have a brief visit with a girl they go to school with, but you have to remember this was rural Missouri in the mid-' 50s. Arkansas like Missouri had no utilities in the rural areas. That means no electricity (no television and radio), no phones, and no water unless you pull it out of the ground with a bucket on a rope. Our house in Missouri was like the one we lived in back in Arkansas it was a two-room shack. Mom and Dad slept in the bedroom and all the children slept in the common room/kitchen room. There was no bathroom: there was no running water. The privy was out back. So it seemed natural that when Mary asked me to walk with her to her new friend's house, I said "sure." It was something to do.

This part of Missouri was gently rolling hills, with a lot of the valley land in pasture and in farming. When we were walking up to Mary's friend's house I could see a white picket fence around the house. On a long fence corner post there was a big beautiful brass bell with a pull rope. We introduced ourselves to the lady who answered the door. Mary went off with her friend and I asked the lady "Can I ring the bell?" The lady explained that the bell

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was their emergency bell. She said, "In case of a fire or another emergency, we ring the bell and all the neighbors that could hear the bell would come as fast as they could to help." She said, "The bell must never be rung except in an emergency. "Yes Ma'am" I said. The lady brought me some cookies and a glass of water. While Mary visited with her friend I walked around the house looking out into the fields and the hills. I could see no sign of anyone. I imagined people all through the valley and all over the hills going about their normal lives doing the wash, plowing and tending the fields, herding the cattle, mending the fences, whatever they did throughout the day. At the sound of a bell they would stop, drop whatever they were doing and run toward the sound of the bell, just to help a neighbor.

For three hours, I watched the hills and valleys around the house thinking about how wonderful, how caring, how concerned, how willing to help another person in trouble, people can be. To think they would be willing to drop whatever they happened to be doing, that was their lives, and come to help. Just like that, they'd put a neighbor in trouble as more important than their own

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interest and run to help. Then I realized that I was ashamed of myself because I wanted to ring that big beautiful bell for fun. The trust, the love, the caring concern all these neighbors had for each other was overwhelming. To think if I had rung that bell I would have violated all of these people's trust. I wanted to ring that big beautiful bell, but if I had, I would have endangered the lady and her family because if the bell were rung by some kid for fun, the next time the bell was rung the people might not come. I was ashamed that I could have violated that trust on a whim or an impulse to have fun.

The second milestone in learning was that you may hurt, injure, or endanger others by acting on impulse and not thinking of the consequences of your actions. Those are the dangers of thinking and acting in only your own self-interest.

The third came a few months later. School had started and we had moved back to the shack outside of Winslow. I was in the first grade, in the same school as my sisters and brother. The school was a country school outside of Winslow. We rode the bus to and from school. Our bus driver looked like a true mountain man, big and

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burly, with long wild hair all over his head and face. I don't know how any of the other kids knew which bus to ride in to get back home. I always looked for the mountain man driver. One day in December, after school, the bus I needed to ride on was not there. I walked up and down the line of buses, looking in each one for my mountain man driver or anything else familiar. No brother, no sisters, and no mountain man driver. I kept looking until, one by one, the buses were all gone and I was alone in the school yard. The sun was going down: I felt alone and abandoned. I walked the few miles into Winslow. There I took the dirt road west up into the mountains. The road was a series of switchbacks as the mountain got too steep for cars to be able to get up. It was there in the switchbacks where I met my Mom coming down the mountain in our old Ford wagon to look for me. It seems my mountain had cleaned up. He had his hair cut, shaved off his beard, and even bought some new clothes. My sisters and brother were too busy to notice that I was not on the bus.

This moment was a milestone in the review. The third thing I learned is the terrible feeling of abandonment

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and being alone. I learned this and I will not willingly inflict it on others.

The fourth was the next spring. Dad had finished clearing the land; he then worked in a local saw mill. When the saw mill caught up with milling the timber Dad had cleared from the land, Dad was laid off. Dad went to his brother's house in Lubbock, Texas. When he left our little house in Arkansas, he was walking, but he hoped to find a ride along the way. The old Ford station wagon stayed with us in Arkansas. As soon as Dad found a job, he would send for us, or come for us.

Two weeks, four weeks, six weeks, eight came and went with no word. We were out of money and the limited line of credit at the general store in Winslow was used up. Mom sold everything she could to people she knew. She raised enough money to pay the bill at the general store and enough for gas for the drive to Lubbock, Texas. School was not yet over: it was late April. But if we were to go at all, it had to be now. I am not sure there was any value in that stuff Mom sold to those people: I thought maybe they just wanted to help. Early the next morning with the car loaded during the night we were ready to go.

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That was when I saw my blanket lying in the yard. I jumped out of the car and ran across the yard. When I reached down and snatched up my blanket there was the biggest spider I had ever seen underneath it. The thing was easily as big as my head. I dropped the blanket, jumped back, and ran for the car.

The moment I was startled by the spider was the milestone. I learned there are surprises in life and it's how well you cope with those surprises and learn from the surprises that show what kind of person you are. You can't give up on the things that matter in life just because something scared you.

The fifth came the following fall. Dad had not been able to find steady work in Lubbock. Dad's sister lived in Hereford, and she helped him get a job at the cotton gin there, or actually it was west of Hereford, closer to Summerfield. Summerfield was a two house town a few miles southwest of Hereford. Although I had not quite finished the school year the previous year, the school in Hereford agreed to let me go on to the second grade. In school we would sit in a reading circle. One day we were reading a new book, which was a little more difficult than

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the others before. Our teacher was having trouble finding anyone who could read the story. When one student faltered in the reading she would say “next”. And when the next one faltered she would say, “next, next, NEXT, NEXT!” When she got around to me she stood up, pointed to me, and said “YOU, STAND UP, COME WITH ME, NOW!” She grabbed my shoulder and led me across the hall to a first grade class. She opened the door, pushed me in and said “YOU WILL STAY HERE!” Then she turned and left me standing there just inside the door facing the whole class and the teacher. All of us were speechless for a few moments. Then the teacher asked me to have a seat at the back of the room.

That moment was a milestone. I learned that patience is needed in trying times. That rash action in times of stress can hurt others, and you can never take those actions back. Most everything you do does affect others.

The next subject:

The next two were not moments of insight, but more of development in my life. These were just normal

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parts of growing up. They were, however, some of the most important parts, love, family, companionship, and friends. My first love was Cordella; we were in the third grade. Cordella had blue eyes and long curly blond hair, but she was so much more than that. Cordella was the best thing about third grade, and about the only thing I can remember about it. I always looked forward to seeing Cordella in the mornings. I loved it when she read aloud in class. I don't think I ever spoke to her or about her to anyone. She was my first love.

In the sixth grade there was Julie. Julie was a slim, dark-haired girl with a narrow face. I loved talking to Julie: she was easy to know. What first attracted me to Julie was her laugh. When she laughed it made me feel good. Julie lived across town. I don't know how many times I walked all the way across town just to walk down her street. If she was playing outside I would stop and talk to her. I would tell her I was just walking down the street and saw her, so I just stopped to say hi. I would say just about anything to hear her laugh.

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I am not sure what I learned. I think I only cracked the door on love, devotion and companionship from one person to another, children, and nurturing your family.

The next subjects:

This is wants, yearnings, needs, dreams, and pride.

This was a current events subject. Everything in the past has led up to this. There are seven children in my family. I had three sisters, three brothers, three older, and three younger. We lived in the largest house now that we had ever lived in. It was a three-bedroom home that was about 1200 square feet. Mom and Dad had a bedroom, Mary had a bedroom, Janie and Kathy had a bedroom, Johnny Ray and I shared a bunk bed in the hallway. We, now, lived in Hereford Texas and it was easily the largest town we had ever lived in. Well, OK, so it has been the only town I had ever lived in.

A Yearning

I had always lived in very isolated areas, with very few people. I had always wanted to see a big city, and the biggest city nearby was Amarillo. Amarillo is about 50

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miles northeast of Hereford. I could pick up Amarillo radio stations in Hereford. My favorite was KIXZ, which was a pop station. Johnny Ray's favorite was a country music station. I thought country music was whiney, sad, and depressing. I would listen to KIXZ as much as I could. They would say things like "Stop by the station and pick your free tickets to the movies." I thought it would be wonderful to be able to stop by the station and meet those guys that I had listened to on the radio. It was a big thing to me; I could hardly even imagine what it would be like to visit a big city like Amarillo. I suppose that radio station symbolized a different way of life to me than anything I had ever known.

Pride

My pride was examined. I did not have a lot to be proud of. I was happy with my family and my life. There was one point though. My Dad was proud that he was strong, and he worked hard. As part of our yard work business we dug ditches for pipes, sprinkler systems, and house foundations. One year someone had bought a mechanical ditch digger, it was claimed to be faster than

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digging a ditch by hand. Dad challenged that claim. Although I was the younger son, Dad and I worked well together. One day the challenge was set up. In a new housing addition, there needed to be two foundations dug side by side. It was Dad and me against the machine, and it started at sunup. We beat the machine that day. Everyone congratulated Dad. They shook his hand, and clapped him on the back. I didn't say anything because, although we had beat the machine, I knew, we had really lost. We would not be digging very many foundations for long after that day.

My wants, needs, yearnings, dreams, and pride: this subject could be very complicated for some. I guess I was just a simple boy. I wanted to have an active life, to be involved with people and their lives. I wanted to hear happy people laugh, and see them smile. I love happy people and I want to be near them. I wanted to be part of their lives. I needed to make a difference to others. Maybe I would have pride, someday, if I accomplished my dreams, satisfied my wants, and needs, and chased my yearnings.

The last subject;

This one is difficult for me. I failed this one, I guess. One of "The Others" stated the subject: 'Who will miss him, whom will he miss, and how much?' I am the middle child of seven, with three younger, three older, three sisters, and three brothers. Everyone would miss and grieve the loss of their child if they lost one. It is against nature not to. The truth is that my parents would miss me the most, but with six other children, they would not miss me much and not for long. Of all the people I had known, my parents would miss me the most. I hadn't thought about it much, but "The Others" made it seem to be a very important aspect of our lives. How we affect others in our lives, and how deeply we will be missed when we are gone. The second part of this aspect is: who will I miss and how much? I could not lie. I had no control of this process. What I would miss the most was the radio station in Amarillo KIXZ, and what it represented to me. It is very important in this life how we interrelate with others. I think of the phrase "No man is an island." To hold ourselves separate from others is wrong to the point it is regarded as a sin, a capital sin. It is a failure of our purpose in life. It

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is not only interrelating with others: it counts as to how we relate to others. This is a difficult point to say. Maybe you could think of this as creating good *Karma, or grace*.

Every time you do something for someone else you are graced in return. When you put someone else's best interest above your own your grace is increased. Even, or especially, if the person you are acting for is not aware of your action, and the benefit to them, then the grace you build is multiplied many times. In other words the more you do for others are weighed against the immediate credit you receive and what is left is the grace you earn. The selfless act for another with no recognition is the greatest act of grace. I can make excuses about coming up lacking in this aspect, but the fact remains I did not do well on this.

The "Presence" asked for the conclusions of the "others" for the decision if I was to pass on from this life, or was there need to stay. I heard only one of the "Others". This one said, "He is not yet ready." The "Presence" said to me ***"You are not yet ready to pass on. There are three reasons you are not yet ready. They are; 1. You have not experienced enough. 2. You***

are meant to accomplish something that you have not yet accomplished, and 3. You are meant to influence someone you have not yet influenced.” ” *The Presence*” continued: ***“It would be very wrong for you to tell what you have learned here today, it is not yet time.”*** The feeling that came with the last statement left no doubt: it would be wrong for me to tell any part of what I had just experienced.

The light came back on and I was in my body. My hands were about an inch from the pipe, and moving apart fast. I overbalanced to the right and fell on my elbow. I jerked my elbow back hard enough into the asphalt to come right back up to my feet. Then the pipe hit the ground, fell over, and that pesky squirrel ran out of the other end and into the cemetery. My elbow was neither skinned nor was it sore where I had jerked back and hit the asphalt hard enough to put me back on my feet. I was wearing an old pair of sneakers, blue jeans, and a T-shirt. My elbow should have been skinned and sore: as a matter of fact, I felt really good. I felt really great: confused, but really great.

What lies beyond the veil of innocence at death?

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