



Very Short Stories

Ventures

Bradley Davidson

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ISBN: 9798499524060

DEDICATION

To all who have lost during the Great Pandemic of
2020.

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CONTENTS

Preface	v
A Hike in the Forest.....	1
No Escape	11
Divine Conics	17
Confusion	21
The Ah Ha Moment.....	27
Yet Another Christmas Story.....	31
An Alternative Truth.....	39
The Wallet.....	45
About the Author	51

Preface

Ventures. Whether it is a hike in the forest, a sail on the ocean or a business effort, ventures are always a risk. To put oneself out there in an effort to scale a mountain, cross a sea or build a business and in the process strive to improve oneself and build something for others is always a personal chance for failure, mediocrity or success. But it is in the doing that one learns and grows. So it is with these pages. This is a venture of words, writing and storytelling. A venture for both you and I.

The venture for me is in the writing and telling of stories which is a challenge in itself. The venture for you is in the picking up of these pages and the reading,

but even more, an attempt on your part to understand, reflect and possibly enter the realm that I have presented. It is a scary proposition at best on both sides as it takes time and effort. The writing is the fun part. The production of a self-published book is another matter. The cover design, font type and size, formatting, and of course the copy editing are all a challenge. I've come to a devastating realization that the cover design might be as important as the writing. It seems few will pick up a monochromatic looking book full of black and white pages. A book is, indeed, often judged by its cover, at least at first. And who wants to stumble across a misspelled word or poorly placed comma, forgotten question mark or a semicolon unwisely used while racing their eyes across a page? It is like hitting a pothole during a bicycle race.

Of course, the venture you take can be just as much hard work and as risky as mine. Time is precious, and how much time you spend on what you read matters. So you are taking a chance, hopefully drawn in by the interesting cover design. Many these days don't like to process a pile of words. "Too Long, Didn't read" is a popular reply to a story or article

forwarded to a friend. So these stories are short. The book is small. The words are sparse. You can read the whole thing while deciding whether you want to read it or not. I have cleared the path and made your way forward easy. But in all ventures, there is still the risk.

As an illustration, Sir Ernest Shackelton ventured out. On several occasions. His third venture, in 1914, was to the Antarctic, during the Age of Antarctic Exploration, where his ship, the *Endeavour* was caught in an ice flow and slowly crushed over a period of months, and where Shackelton lead his crew of 27 via small boat, open-ocean, 346 mile passage to Elephant Island. From there he sailed with 5 companions for help toward South George Whaling station, an additional 720 miles of rough sea voyage. Landing on the opposite shore of South George from the whaling station, he then traveled an additional 32 miles over icy peaks and crevasses in a journey that wasn't known to be ever attempted and was not repeated for several decades. From the whaling station, he immediately sent a boat to pick up crew he left on the opposite side of South George and started arranging rescue of the 22 remaining men on Elephant Island. It took four

attempts to reach Elephant Island, and finally after 4 ½ months, all 22 were picked up.

Some might say such a venture into the frozen, Antarctic seas was foolish and that this one had failed. It certainly did not meet its objective. But it did show leadership abilities of Shackleton and the endurance and fortitude of his crew. That no one died during this ordeal was a feat in itself.

The point here is that ventures are defined by risk. Their outcomes uncertain and possibly unexpected. So, venture out, enjoy the risk and greet the uncertain. You may just find something unexpected.



A Hike in the Forest

Once upon a time there was a father and son who decided one bright Sunday to take a hike in the mountains above San Diego. They drove high into the mountains and deep into the woods on a dirt road and parked amidst the tall pines. They shouldered their packs and set off.

After a while they came upon a young boy.

“Wolf, wolf, wolf.” The boy cried.

“What’s wrong? Where is the wolf? The dad asked.

“I’ve been sitting here yelling wolf for the longest time and nobody comes. They used to come but they

don't come any longer. You are the first people I've seen in days." The boy explained.

"So where is the wolf?" the dad asked seriously.

"Oh," the boy lamented. "There is no wolf. There used to be but he ran off. I just got used to all the people coming, but they come no more."

"Maybe you should find the wolf if he is wandering around here someplace. Find him and tell him to leave this forest." The dad suggested. "Come with us and we can look. Which way did he go?"

"He went that way." The boy said pointing in the direction that led deeper into the forest.

So the father and son continued their hike with the boy tagging along, now all three in search of the wolf. Soon they heard some rustling in the thick forest vegetation, and they thought they had found the beast. But out of the bushes skipped a little girl wearing a riding hood, red, of course.

"Hello little girl." The father said in greeting.

"Well hi!" she replied in surprise at seeing anyone this deep in the forest. "I'm on my way to my grandma's house with this basket of goodies. She lives

alone here in the forest and can't get out much. So, I bring here things."

"Well," the father says. "there is a wolf about. It isn't safe wandering around by yourself. We will walk with you to your grandma's house."

"I skip", says the girl.

"Fine. You skip, we'll walk."

"Can I skip, too, dad?" the son asks evidently taking interest in the little girl in the hood.

Ah, sure, son."

The four set off skipping and walking through the forest in search of a wolf and grandma's house. Soon they come upon a cottage nestled in the pines.

"This isn't grandma's house." The girl says.

"Well, we will stop and ask if they have seen the wolf." The dad says.

They walk to the door, some skipping, and knock, but there is no answer. The door is unlatched, though, and swings open upon the knock, and they peak in.

Helllloooo..." the dad calls out. There is no answer. But they notice on the dining table there are three settings with a bowl of porridge at each. "Well, maybe we can rest here a bit." The dad suggests.

They all pile into the small cottage and sit around the table resting their weary feet.

“This soup is still warm, dad.” The son says. “The folks that live here can’t be too far off. The dad looks around the room at pictures of bears on the wall. “And it’s pretty good soup!” the son exclaims.

“Hey! What are you doing? Put it down. It’s not right eating their food.”

“Try it, dad. It’s the best soup I’ve ever had.”

“The father knowing his son doesn’t even like soup tries some wondering what’s up with this gruel.

“Hey! This is good. A little hot, though.”

“Here, take this bowl. It’s a bit cold for me.” The girl chirps in.

“What about me? Where is my bowl?” the boy who cried wolf asks.

“Go look in the kitchen and see if there is any more.” says the father who forgot his manners with the taste of the exhilarating soup. Soon the troupe of four were sitting about the table gorging themselves on the mystical porridge. After a while, the kids went upstairs to take a nap while the father laid out on the couch.

But no sooner had the father gotten comfortable, the son came down with a panicked look on his face.

“There is someone sleeping in one of the beds, dad,” the son announced.

Soon they were all standing around one of the upstairs beds looking at this figure covered in blankets snoring comfortable. The father grabbed the blankets and gently pulled back the covers to reveal... the wolf!

“Wolf, wolf, wolf.” The boy cried. “I told you there was a wolf.”

But just then they heard noises downstairs and a young voice saying “Hey! Someone ate all my soup!” A deeper voice growled “Yeah, someone has eaten all the soup.”

The four looked at each other in surprise and panic then stumbled down the stairs to explain and warn of the wolf upstairs. There they were met with three bears, a whole family, two parents and kid.

“Who the heck are you guys” the father bear growled baring sharp pointy teeth. “And what are you doing in our house?”

“I can explain.’ The father says. “But first, we just found a wolf sleeping in one of your beds. Maybe we should deal with him first.”

All seven ran up the stairs and gathered around the sleeping wolf. They stared in wonder and fear for a few moments before the father bear spoke.

“Grab his hind legs and you the front legs,” he commanded his family and the strangers barking out orders to each. “I’ll wake up the trouble end here. He slapped the wolf across the snout several times. “Wake up, wake up.” He barked.

The wolf slowly came out of his sound sleep and looking up at the varied faces of those holding him said, “Yo dudes! What’s up? There’s nothing like a good nap.”

“What are you doing in our house?” the father bear blared.

A bit confused, the wolf answered, “What? You all live here? Wow. Is this a commune of some kind? Far out!”

“No, no, no.” the big bear shot back. Why are you sleeping in my son’s bed?”

“Yeah!” cried out the girl with the red hood.
“And what did you do with grandma?”

Everyone paused and turned in silence to the girl.
“What?” they all asked with confused stares.

“My grandma. We all know how this goes. The wolf always does something bad to the defenseless grandma.”

“Whoa, whoa, whoa.” said the wolf. I didn’t do anything to any grandma. And I don’t do bad things. That’s bad karma, man. I just live in the forest, eat the mushrooms, smoke the herbs. I don’t bother anyone. Isn’t that right kid?” He looks at the boy who cries his name a lot.

“Yeah, pretty much. He’s pretty laid back. Never touched me. Always hid when the other people showed up.”

Just then there was a knock on the door. All with their hands full of wolf the father bear yells, “Come in. It’s open. We’re upstairs.”

They could hear slow footsteps walking and ascending the stairs. Soon an old woman stood in the doorway.

“Grandma!” the little girl shouted. “You’re okay!”

“Ah, yeah I am” she says slowly while observing the scene in the room. “And what are you doing with Walter there on the bed?” Hey Walter, you okay?”

“Fine and dandy. These good folks are just giving me some kind of deep tissue massage is all.”

“Mable, what are you doing here?” the mama bear asks.

“Just came over for a cup of sugar. My granddaughter here is a bit late with the goodies so I was going to bake up some cookies myself.”

“So you know this wily wolf?” The father bear asks.

“Walter? Oh yeah. He comes around. Always the perfect gentleman. He does like to dress up in my cloths sometimes, but then we all have our little quirks, right?”

Everyone looks at each other in bewilderment while slowly releasing their holds on the wolf.

“Okay, okay.” Says the father bear. “Let’s all go downstairs and sort this out.”

The nine shuffle downstairs and squeezed around the table. Everyone explains themselves and the father bear lectures the boy’s father on being a good parent

and not condoning breaking, entering and stealing food. The afternoon gets late and a chill descends upon the forest.

Its decided they should all spend the night, so the bears stoke up the fires, the father and son break out what snacks they brought, all break into the girl's goodie basket for grandma and mama bear heats up hot chocolate with marshmallows for all. Then the little bear breaks out his Monopoly game and they all settle into a long competition of buying and selling property while the forest darkens.

“After a bit Walter pipes up. “So, you have any more of that soup?



No Escape

Two friends are sitting on a cliff overlooking the rising Pacific Ocean watching the sun set in a blaze of reds and oranges produced by the increasing smog and smoke from nearby forest fires. Let's see if we can eavesdrop and hear what they are talking about. Shhhhh.

"I'm rich!" the first declares to the other.

"That's nice. I know your story. You started a software company and sold it for billions. So what? What are you going to do with all that money? More of a pain than a pleasure if you ask me." the second responded.

"You are just jealous. We went to college

together, I offered you an in when I started the company but you declined. Bad choice if you ask me.”

“Hey man. I want to save the world through painstaking research to solve the world’s problems like climate change, sea-level rising and poverty, not fritter away my talents at developing some social media software. I’m happy. You?”

“I’m happy. I’m gonna live happily ever after with my billions and just enjoy life. I’m one of the .001 percenters.

“Sounds lonely to me .”

“Can be. Lost a lot of friends along the way. Still got you, though. It’s amazing how many old friends want me to give them money. And how many new friends want the same. Just need to say no.”

“That why you live in a big gated house with a tall wall all around your property?”

“Yeah, just need to keep people away and my stuff safe.”

“Aren’t you worried about the world’s problems? A lot of it will affect you soon enough,”

“What do you mean?” the rich guy asks.

“Climate change for one. It’s real. It’s happening

and already having effects on the world economy. Famine, floods and fires happening all over. People are immigrating. Countries are building walls of all types. What are you going to do when our society devolves into chaos and all the services we are so used to stop? There will be hordes of homeless and hungry people roaming about looting and stealing anything they can get. And there won't be enough police to prevent it."

"I'll hold up in my fortified mansion."

"Forever? Unless you are self-sufficient with a food and water supply, you can't stay there for long. And if you think those hordes are going to be stopped by some tall walls and a gate, think again. Your fortress would soon be overrun."

"Good point. I'll buy an island in the middle of the ocean on some coral atoll and grow my own food and collect my own tropical water. That will keep most of the hordes away, right?"

"And your fortune? You gonna bury that in a big chest like some pirate?"

"Of course not. I've got stocks, bonds and most of it in bit-coins. It's all online and I'll have access

through my satellite network.”

“Wrong. Stocks and bonds will crash with the economies and the internet will go down eventually trapping any sort of crypto currency you might think you have. Cash will be useless as the only thing people will seek is food and shelter.”

“Wow, such an optimist you are. Anything else?”

“Yeah, your coral atoll will soon be inundated as the sea level rises. You’re gonna have to get a bigger island. Taller.”

“Then I’ll buy a volcanic island. Tall enough to withstand any rise in the sea.”

“A volcano? Really? Good luck with that”

“A dormant volcano, of course.”

“Well remember what happened to Robinson Crusoe. Pirates will eventually find you. You will need defenses against invaders of your safe haven. Also, if you are not lonely now, sounds like you will be.”

“Okay, so what do you suggest? What are you going to do?”

“Come work with me and use your fortune to fund some research into how we can make this climate change less damaging to our societies. I’m going to

keep working and if the hordes come, they come. Nobody can stop them by that time. It is now we can do something.”

“But I don’t want to save the world. I really don’t care about the 7 billion people on this planet. I just care about me, ultimately.”

“Well then save yourself by saving the world because you are part of it. It’s all or nothing. The whole ecology of mankind needs to be preserved in order for you to save yourself.”

“Hmmm...” the rich guy muses and he sits quiet and thinks and ponders what he just heard. After a while he speaks.

“Nice sunset, don’t you think?”



Divine Conics

God likes ice cream. Among the religions it is an obvious fact but one often disputed if the subject is ever brought up at all. Most of these organized houses of worship do not support simple pleasures, so the vision of God enjoying a pile of rocky road or chocolate or even vanilla ice cream is not one that appears in the minds of the religious. But in fact, if God created man in his own image, and mankind typically likes ice cream, then the conclusion must be obvious. God enjoys ice cream.

So, during one of those few short days that God was busy conjuring up all of creation, he was enjoying

ice cream in a cone. It wasn't one of those flat-bottomed cones that one can set down without the ice cream falling out of it. No, it was a cone cone with a radius and circumference and height and an apex, a little point where all the line segments from the cone's base intersect. God was busy that day and the heat from the sun and all the stars he mustered up was quickly melting his ice cream, and as he was busy swirling up the universe, his ice cream started to drip down the sides of the cone in lines and curves. God pauses and watched this wonderment which made him think about intersecting this cone with planes in different directions and angles. He envisioned ellipses and parabolas and hyperbolae and thought that was such a great and symmetric idea that he incorporated conics and conic sections into the fabric of the universe.

Of course, like ice cream, mankind knew nothing of this until they discovered, uncovered or simply became aware of it in later times. Then, besides making 54 flavors of ice cream, mankind developed geometry and equations to describe it. And armed with these equations, mankind went on to describe all the

variations and deviations even coming up with a collection called degenerate conics. Some don't consider these degenerate conics to be conics at all, but then mankind likes a debate. The ellipse was defined as well as the parabola and hyperbola. Circles, of course are a special case of the ellipse. Then there is the point or line or pair of intersection lines that make up the degenerate conics. But basically these working minds God created had defined these conic sections as the locus of all points P whose distance to a fixed point F (called the focus) is a constant multiple (called the eccentricity e) of the distance from P to a fixed line L (called the directrix). How all very simple.

God did not incorporate these equations into the DNA of the humans who write them. God figured just coming up with the marvel of conics to begin with was enough for the universe. Let those do what they will with it. But it turns out some enjoy the challenge of mastering these equations while others simply enjoy the graceful curves and intersections which they describe, and consider these shapes to be artful and sometimes erotic. But the mere exercise of learning this geometry with each generation will undoubtedly

eventually knit this knowledge into their DNA just as the knowledge of how to make a bird's nest is in that of a bird.

So, whether one wants to understand the equations of conic sections or use them in an artful masterpiece or merely view them as erotica, it is all in God's image.



Confusion

I think there must be some confusion.

Some people in the majority seemed confused as well as people in the minority. I am also confused. The confusion spreads across this whole spectrum. And it has to do with the reading, comprehension and interpretation of authoritative documents such as the Bible and the United States Constitution. There are many instances of such confusion, but let us visit two which seems to divide us considerably.

First there is the Bible, a document of Christian faith which tells us how to live, what is right and what

is sin. First of all, the original four gospels of New Testament, Mark, Matthew , Luke and John, were written sometime after the life of Christ, some 70 to 100 years after. The Old Testament was written mostly prior to the life of Christ and is considered the Jewish Bible. And various parts of both these Bibles were originally written in Hebrew, Aramaic and Koine Greek. The translated version we have today and which is held up by those of deep Christian faith as the roadmap to righteous living, has been milled, revised and authenticated by a host of translators, interpreters and authenticators. It is a document not written by Christ, but by his disciples, followers and predecessors who have written, translated, interpreted and presented it as the word of Christ. It is this document which is quoted by chapter and verse by devout Christians usually to not so devout followers as the final word on how to live, how to be righteous and how to get into the kingdom of heaven. Even after all that, the resulting text can be interpreted and applied to life situations as the reader sees fit.

This Bible is vast and contains multitudes. To be a good Christian, then, some would say one must

follow all the tenants in the Bible. Yet many who consider themselves devout Christians tend to pick and choose and apply to life situations how they want. Take abortion. The Bible speaks about life within the womb (Jeremiah 1:4-5, Isaiah 49:1b, Luke 1:15). It also speaks about compassion and love of all life (Corinthians 16:14, John 4:8), yet some pick and choose who to give their love and compassion to ignoring the homeless, immigrants, those children of unwanted pregnancies born out of wedlock into hard times who might become homeless or criminals. Who to love? Who to feel compassion for? It's a choice many make without consulting their authoritative, guiding document. Also, you can't eat shellfish or any other seafood that does not have scales and fins (Leviticus 11:9-12).

Moving onto another authoritative document which gets waved around in people's faces with frequency these days, the United States Constitution. The Bill of Rights which was added several years after the U.S. Constitution was ratified, has a very short amendment which allows citizens to have guns. The Second Amendment states: "A well-regulated militia,

being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed.” That’s it. It sounds simple enough but has caused confusion as to what rights this is giving. The U.S. Supreme Court has weighed in over the years trying to clarify what this means as late as 2008. A literalist would contend that private weapons are permissible and needed for the defense and protection of the state. The 2008 Supreme Court decision extends that need to personal self-protection. But what arms are necessary. When the amendment was written, rifles and canons were the firearms of the time. Today we have automatic weapons, grenade launchers and missiles. What is actually needed for the security of the state and self-protection? For a military militia, wouldn’t you need the most modern arms available to be effective in protecting the state? But where is the well-regulated part? Perhaps these weapons need to be secured by the chain of command of the well-regulated militia until needed. But there are no well-regulated militia existing for the protection of the state.

So, you see? There must be some confusion.



The Ah Ha Moment

This pandemic has made me realize we have too many people in the world. I mean, I always knew we did. There has been the low drone of overpopulation warmings my whole life. I remember when the US population reached 200 million and it was a big deal. Well, that was back in 1968 and the US population is now over 328 million. Back in 1968 the world population was 3.5 billion, with a B. Now it is over 7.6 billion. In this age of billion- and trillion-dollar budgets, it is hard to visualize what 7.6 billion things look like. It's hard to visualize what a million things look like. But the pandemic can give one an idea of the enormity of these numbers when

one tries to figure out how to get vaccine into everyone's arms. Just do the math.

In the US alone there are about 255 million people above the age of 18, all of whom need to be vaccinated. The goal is to have all these people vaccinated in 6 months (which is 182.5 days or 4,380 hours or 262,800 minutes). Simple math says we need to give over 970 shots per minute $24/7$. Triple that if we are only going to be working 8-hour days. Then throw in the fact that 2 of the 3 vaccines require two shots, then that's thousands of shots per minute. That's a lot of shots!

It is surprising all the people of the world get fed every day. The fact is, they don't. About 690 million people go to bed hungry every night. Some of that can be attributed to food distribution problems, but most is the fact we don't produce enough food to feed everyone. It is not only food that is in short supply. Shelter, clean water, clothing are all wanting. Simply put, the world and its resources can't sustain all the people that live upon it. And its not projected to get much better. Of course, this overcrowding affects the environment and its rivers and oceans and mountains and jungles pushing out other living things into

corners. And one of the things this overcrowding and reduction of wildlife habitat predicted is the creation of new pathogens which can infect people and create world-wide pandemics. Another thing predicted from all the industry supporting this huge population is climate change. Its all here. It's all happening.

You have heard it all before. That is the drone that carries on in the background. But what to do? What to do? Not your problem, you say? I think it is.

Stop making babies! Well, at least stop making unwanted babies. If you are planning a family, that's great. Plan wisely. Unintended pregnancies worldwide are about 44% of all pregnancies, though, so if you want to do the sex without making the babies, use contraception.

I've always liked the saying "Think globally. Act Locally". And there is nothing more local than the nonexistent interpersonal space between lovers where two skins meet, lips press against lips, tongues intertwine and for a brief (or more) moment, and two become one. Enjoy those moments without adding to the billions already on this planet. Think of the monarch. Save the polar bear. Remember the

whooping crane. Think of the California condor and the hellbender. Remember the sea otter. And for the sake of the horned lizard, slow down. Use contraception.

For more fun facts and information, go to www.endangeredSpeciesCondoms.com



Yet Another Christmas Story

“It’s Christmas Eve, Grandma. It’s Christmas Eve! Aren’t you excited?”, the young girl wailed with glee.

“Oh yes I am.” Grandma said “And I can see you are just so excited you are going to bust a seam”

“I am excited, Grandma. But my clothes are fine, seams and all.”

Grandma’s smile dropped a bit. “It’s just an expression, honey.” She sighed and continued, “I guess from the old days.”

The little girl skipped off into the kitchen to share her excitement with all those preparing the feast for the next day.

Grandma sat by herself in the living room, her face gradually transforming to a blank stare as she thought about Christmases through the years and all the friends and family involved. Most had passed on. There were only her kids and their families left which she was very grateful for, but she missed all the others. There were so many shared memories and the rich history of friendship. She missed talking of the old days with someone that was there. She thought long and hard of the happy past and all the people she had known missing each and every one. "They are all gone." she thought to herself and continued daydreaming soon nodding off into a late afternoon nap.

"Grandma, Grandma", she heard faintly. "Why are you so sad?" Her granddaughter asked.

Oh..., she replied. "I miss my friends. I love you all dearly, but I miss my old friends. They are all gone now. No one is left to share the memories."

"I know, Grandma."

"How do you know? You hardly knew any of my friends, and I bet you don't remember your Grandpa

much at all. How can you understand my longing for my connections to the past?"

"Dunno except to say children can be wise beyond their age, if you only listen." The little girl said slyly. And I am actually here to show you how wrong you are about them being gone. Come with me and I will show you."

"What?" asked Grandma confused. "What do you mean? Go where?"

"Just pretend this is a rendition of a Charles Dicken's story and follow me." She replied with authority. "Come along."

She led Grandma out the front door and they walked through the night until they came to a well-kept house with a man sitting on the front porch.

"Recognize this?" the little girl asked.

"Why yes. This is my house I sold after your Grandpa died." She replied.

"And who is that on the porch?"

"Why, ah..., that's your Grandpa. Mercy me. That's Earl!" she replied as her excitement rose."

"Go talk to him. I'm sure you've got a lot to say."

The old lady shuffled up to the front porch, sat beside her Earl and they started talking like nothing was strange about all the time that separated them. They just picked up the conversation where they left off years ago. After a while Earl went inside and the old lady walked back to the little girl.

“Well, that was delightful.” Grandma said with sincerity. “That Earl. He hasn’t changed a bit, but he had so much to say. So did I! How is that possible? He’s been dead all these years.”

“Has he?” the little girl asked tilting her head ever so slightly. “Come on, let’s go visit your best friend Ethel. She lives just down the street here, right?”

They shuffled down the street until they came to another well maintained house with a large green lawn. Grandma walked up to the door and soon was let in by elderly lady. The night slowly passed and after a while, Grandma returned to the little girl.

“Oh, that Ethel. She’s always got the stories.” Grandma declared. “How can she tell me such fresh, new stories. I’d never heard any of those.”

“Ah,” the little girl replied. “If you listen, you will hear. Now let’s visit some other of your old friends you miss so much. Follow me.”

And the pair shuttled through the night visiting people Grandma went to school with and worked with and just knew through all the years of her life. It was a busy and seemingly long night, but it came to an end, eventually, as they made their way back to the house where they had started.

“Well thank you for a wonderful evening.” Grandma said to the little girl. “I’m just not sure how this is at all possible. All these people have passed on, some long ago, and I’m talking to them with fresh conversations and new stories. I just don’t know what magic you are performing here tonight.”

“It’s not magic, Grandma.” The little girl starts. “It’s real as real can be.”

“I doubt that.” Grandma says. “All these people are dead.”

“Not really. You see, when someone physically dies and you go through all the motions of a funeral and burying them or scattering them about, that’s just a part of it. They are not really dead. They have left

pieces of themselves all over, with everyone they have met or dealt with or people they don't even know but have affected them somehow. They are in the things they have built and made and created. They are instilled throughout the fabric of the world, mainly in the hearts and minds of those who know them. They live on and can't die until the last person that knows them dies or the last person of the person that knows them or so on. So, you see, these friends of yours aren't really dead because they live on in your heart and mind as well as those of others."

"Yeah, yeah, I've heard that before. The memory of them lives on in my mind. But that does very little if I want to visit them like I did tonight." Grandma says. "They were telling me stuff I've never heard before just like they used to. They surprised me with their news and stories. How is that possible?"

"It's possible." Said the little girl. "One just has to listen."

"Well how can I visit? Can I call them on the phone? Can I visit whenever I want? What is this strange place we walk through?"

“So many questions. Could you see them whenever you wanted before? Could you always get them on the phone? Not likely. But they were there when you needed them, right? At least most. They were there when you didn’t expect them, to your dismay sometimes. That’s how people are. They are not there for your bidding.”

Grandma thought about this for a few moments then hesitantly agreed.

“They will be there.” said the little girl. “And they will talk with you and tell you things you don’t know or have forgotten just like they always have, and you can take comfort in it. You just have to listen.”

Grandma turned to asked more question and was surprised to see her guide had vanished.

“Grandma, Grandma. Wake up!” said the little girl excitedly. “We’re going to open some presents!”

Grandma awoke slowly from her nap, cheeks flush, big smile and surprisingly refreshed. She was ready. And she was listening.



An Alternative Truth

The following story has not been translated, edited or changed in any way. It is presented here in its original form. If, after reading the first few lines, you can understand and comprehend any part of the writing, read on. Your humanity may depend on it.

The scientist sat at his computer terminal scrolling through screens and screens of numbers and graphs. He looked content. There was a smile on his face.

“The data look good, Gork.” He said to his colleague. “The numbers are starting to align as we predicted and hoped they would. Things are

changing.”

“Little by little, eh?” Gork responded. “We’ll have to wait a generation or two to make sure, though.”

“We’ve been patient. World-wide pandemics don’t occur often, but when they do, you can bet we are there, either instigating them or taking advantage of them.” Werk continued. “I mean we have shown it takes many generations for the results to prove themselves, then we can carry on, apply another dose, another pandemic. Little by little, like you say. It’s proved itself on other worlds.”

“And this pandemic is like no other. We first create the virus that starts the pandemic affecting millions. Then we use our guys, who have been openly developing the technology for years, to suggest the idea of using mRNA technology to develop a vaccine to fight the virus. It gave us a chance to introduce more genetic changing material into the individuals not infected with the original virus. A sort of double header.”

“Yeah, well we had to wait until they thought they themselves developed the technology to fight a pandemic.” Werk said. “But it was a great opportunity

to infect more with our genes. I mean, remember the Black plague? Most we infected died. Didn't carry on the genes to their progeny. Big mistake."

"Yeah, but we learned." Gork continued. "These creatures are a little delicate when it comes to microbes. So, we developed gentler and kinder infections and vaccines. Got the polio vaccine into kids! We got a whole generation inoculated with our genes, and essentially none died. "

"Yeah, well our little pandemic this time killed a bunch. But that's just natural selection." Werk said "Some gene combinations are just not viable. We are actually weeding out those that are unfit for our genes. Evolution isn't about the individual, you know."

"Darwin's natural selection?" Gork asked slyly. "It was genius introducing that idea into their knowledge base. I grew up with Darwin back home, you know. He was always full of good ideas. He didn't want to come here at first."

"More like God." Werk answered. "These creatures believe in a benevolent being which created them all in his image. We never suggested any such thing. I'm not sure why they think he is benevolent.

Looking at human history, he hasn't been very nice to his creations. But we both know it's been us through the eons of animal evolution on this planet that guided the development of these creatures, little by little, slowly evolving them into us. We are creating them in OUR own image."

"True that." Gork agreed. "And it's been long, hard work. I don't know where they got the idea of 7 days." he joked. "But we slowly introduced the ability to reason and grasp technology. Most can read and understand our cryptic language. And with that, introducing new technologies is easier. And to think they believe they come up with this stuff by themselves is rich. We got the free will part right, but we just have to work at breeding out some instinctive behaviors like greed and irrationality and starting wars and such. Then we can go. This lot will just destroy themselves otherwise."

"It sure helps our directive by working our way into leading research labs around the world." Werk continued. "It will accelerate our work exponentially."

"Yeah, especially like this lab at Big Pharma."



The Wallet

The wallet didn't resemble a wallet at all. It acted as a wallet in purpose, but didn't look like a wallet. It was composed of two worn pieces of leather that may have been part of a wallet in the past. Paper cards and documents and bits of information scribbled on small pieces of paper, folded neatly, and maybe a news clipping or two, faded and worn, and a few black and white photos all were sandwiched between the pieces of leather. This loose compilation was held together with a rubber band, changed frequently and usually double or triple wrapped. It held no money, as wallets typically do. A few bills of various denominations were usually

folded separately and stuffed into pants pockets along with a handful of coins. And as it existed before credit cards were popular, there was no plastic except for maybe a driver's license and a laminated card or document. But however simple it was, my dad's wallet fascinated me as a kid.

To me it held important stuff, adult stuff. Stuff that kids did not need or could not have. There was the driver's license and the union card, various certifications for various achievements that were needed for his job, important notes stashed away and pictures of things taken before my time. My dad would often take this wallet from one of the shirt pockets of his wool Pendleton shirt where it always resided, pull off the rubber band and wrap it around his hand as he opened the archive of his life, rifling through layers of papers and cards with his fingers always finding what he needed quickly. He would pull out a card, flash a photo or unfold a piece of paper, often writing more notes on it with a pen he carried in the same shirt pocket. This was adult stuff. I needed a wallet if I ever wanted to be an adult.

My first wallet was a typical leather

contraption with pockets and a plastic insert of window for cards and a long pocket for cash. It even had a little section to carry a few coins. There were few cards and less cash to begin with. And my wallet was always shoved into my back pocket of my Levi's. Extended storage in that spot fashioned it into a curved leather pancake while chaffing a large faded square in my back pants pocket. However necessary it was to carry what I needed, it lacked the mystery that my dad's worn and weary wallet had. Not knowing exactly what he carried between those worn pieces of leather, I could only imagine it was all the stuff needed to be an adult. I was at a loss. I never felt like I had arrived at adulthood.

That is until my son, when he was about 4 years old, exclaimed he needed a wallet. What do you need a wallet for? I asked him. I need it for my license, he tells me. But you don't have a license, I replied. And he asked, how do you get a license? Well, I set him up with a wallet and a license with his picture and name and my phone number if he should ever get lost. Then I felt too much like an adult.

And my son carried that wallet around,

loosing and finding it over and over. Eventually he said he needed some money to put in his wallet. That, of course, came later. Soon he was carrying a student ID card. When he got older and got a checking account, a debit card was added to his wallet. Then an employment card. His wallet started to fill with his life. He carries his wallet in his front pocket, as is popular, along with his phone in the other front pocket. Both chafe square outlines in his pants.

Yet, for as much as my son is filling his wallet, and for as much stuff I have in my wallet including pictures and cards and licenses and credentials and receipts I even forgot were in my wallet, I am still enamored with the well-worn bits of leather and paper that comprised my dad's wallet. Someday I will have such a wallet. As far as becoming an adult? I'll pass.



About the Author

Bradley Davidson works, plays, sails, meanders the trails of the Zoo, paths of SeaWorld and the corridors of the Aquarium, wanders the National Seashore and beaches, and explores the parks, all in San Diego, California.



Ventures. Whether it is a hike in the forest, a sail on the ocean or a business effort, ventures are always a risk. To put oneself out there in an effort to scale a mountain, cross a sea or build a business and in the process strive to improve oneself and build something for others is always a personal chance for failure, mediocrity or success. But it is in the doing that one learns and grows. So it is with these pages. This is a venture of words, writing and storytelling. A venture for both author and reader.

Bradley Davidson works, plays, sails, meanders the trails of the Zoo, paths of SeaWorld and the corridors of the Aquarium, wanders the National Seashore and beaches, explores the parks, and endures the malls all in San Diego, California.

