

Chapter Two

I was born in Los Angeles in 1945, on the day before the official end of World War II, so I qualify as a war baby by the barest of margins. I am the only child of a couple of very talented and successful classical musicians. They met as teenagers at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. Mom was born in 1914, and Dad in 1916. Mom in particular was an internationally known violinist. Dad was an excellent cellist, though throughout my childhood I saw him as content to simply enjoy his proficiency at his instrument and to support Mom in her career.

Both of my parents became mainstays of the movie-soundtrack industry, and they wound up playing on hundreds of those soundtracks in the 1940s and 1950s. Dad passed on in the early sixties, and Mom went on to become a distinguished professor of violin at USC, teaching and performing there for 50 years.

As a small child I understood, without ever being told, that my parents' role was to give the gift of music to innumerable audiences and colleagues, and my role was to be presentable, well-behaved, and quiet, and in this manner make my parents proud. And in the process, I would earn their love and attention. I expended untold quantities of energy trying to please them and at the same time trying, mostly unsuccessfully, to retain some sense of personal power over my own life.

As of this writing I don't remember much in the way of specific instances of being complimented for this behavior. But I am aware of how much effort it took to put aside a young boy's energetic impulses and "perform" for them in that way. In a later chapter I will relate an incident some 60 years later in which all that suppressed energy came flooding out and essentially ended my relationship with my mother, at least in this present lifetime.

I was brought home from the hospital to a little apartment on Franklin Avenue in Hollywood. Soon my parents moved us to the San Fernando Valley, known simply as the Valley. I remember orange groves everywhere, and the sweet smell of orange blossoms still takes me back to memories of that time and place. I remember a drive out to the Valley's center to buy fresh-picked corn. The air was always clean and clear, and I don't remember any of the extreme weather events that seem to dominate local newscasts these days. I do have one 8mm movie of me as a four-year-old venturing outside after the one and only snowstorm of my childhood. I look bewildered, and on my hands are a pair of oven mitts; I guess I didn't own a pair of gloves yet.

I attended Carpenter Avenue Elementary School in Studio City. Of the friends I had there, I am in contact with only one, and he is as dear a friend as one could have. Pete Luboff is the son of the late Norman Luboff, the founder and conductor of the Norman Luboff Choir, a leading choral group from the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. Norman wrote musical scores for many television programs as well as recording more than seventy-five albums. Pete and his wife, Pat,

are gifted songwriters living in Nashville; they also coach songwriters and teach the art of crafting a great song.

At Carpenter Avenue I was close friends with Joey Funicello, whose sister Annette was just beginning her career with the Mickey Mouse Club. We lost contact after school. Many of my friends have nurtured friendships that began early in life, and their address books are filled with names from the past; that's not the case with me. The friendships I have mentioned are for me early examples of divergent paths. One can add layers of meaning to "lost" friends, such as "it's a shame you haven't kept in touch," but seen from another perspective, people do pass in and out of our lives; some reappear after many years, some don't. At some point I got to wondering why that is, and later I will consider an explanation for this phenomenon that doesn't have those layers of meaning.

Like most of us, it was during my years in elementary school that a significant part of my personality appeared and evolved. I am not a tall person, and I remember how the teachers frequently lined us up on the playground in descending order of height. I was almost always at the end of the line, and I'm sure that part of the manner in which I have interacted with other people throughout my life was shaped as a compensation mechanism for the feeling of inferiority I had looking up at all my classmates.

Later on, I became aware of very subtle distinctions that were made among schoolmates between Jewish and Gentile kids. We of the former variety always ate lunch on picnic tables set up on the blacktop, while the latter folks sat on the grass under the trees. One day I gathered my courage and ventured to join them on the lawn, trying to appear as natural as I could. I remember feeling as if there were a force field I had to press through to do so. Those considerations were of course entirely self-generated, though I didn't know that then.

A very close friend in junior high and high school was Fred Kuttner. Fred and I shared a passion for learning, and both of us would go on to major in physics. In fact, we would both go off to MIT after high school, though I didn't see much of him once we got there. Fred went on to earn a doctorate in physics, and he spent most of his career as a physics lecturer at the University of California, Santa Cruz. The book he co-wrote with Bruce Rosenblum, *Quantum Enigma*, is as succinct an explanation of quantum physics as I've seen, and I will quote from it later. In the summer of 1957, Mom was invited to participate in the Aspen Music Festival in Colorado. Dad drove us there, stayed a few days, and then returned to Los Angeles and to his work in the movie studios. While Mom taught violin and prepared for the numerous concerts in which she performed, I got to know the mountains, lakes, and streams of that wonderful valley on the western slope of the Rocky Mountains. I spent twelve summers in Aspen, and with the friends I made there, almost exclusively children of other classical musicians, I had an almost idyllic childhood.

AN INTRODUCTION TO PHYSICS

In high school I discovered that I was "turned on" by physics. In those classes, taught by a man named Mr. Corben whose enthusiasm sparked my interest, I first felt the beginnings of an intellectual passion. The topics were basic, mostly classical mechanics and electromagnetism,

and the lab equipment was rudimentary by today's standards, but it did spark my interest. I recall feeling excitement when I grasped some concept he was explaining.

Later, at MIT, I specifically remember writing a paper in which I expressed the idea, which was clear to me then, that we can never know what something is, but only what it does, or how it behaves. For example, we say that some object reflects light in a certain way, light that then enters our eyes and creates electrical signals that travel to our brains and create the experience of visible objects. As another example, the electrons in the object's atoms interact with those in our skin to provide, through the physics of electrostatics, the experience of touch, and so on. Those verbs "reflects" and "interact" indicate that the object in question acts a certain way when we encounter it. But of the more essential nature of these objects—what they "really" are—so I wrote, we are doomed to be ignorant. It seemed to me even then that we cannot know the essence, the actual nature of anything we observe as long as we are observing with the five senses with which we're all so familiar. This idea became central to my current thesis, as we shall see.

A FIRST LOOK AT PHILOSOPHY

Along my academic way I also studied traditional philosophy and its practitioners' attempts to explain what human beings can know, an inquiry that philosophers call epistemology. Many of us can remember the names—Aristotle, Kant, and many others. I remember bits of many of those college classes. I studied David Hume, who argued that "humans have knowledge only of things they directly experience." I remember reading Bishop George Berkeley, who denied "the existence of material substance and instead contended that familiar objects...are only ideas in the minds of perceivers." Some also considered his arguments to be "a precursor to the views of Mach and Einstein," in that he questioned Sir Isaac Newton's pronouncement of the existence of absolute space, time, and motion (more about that later). At the time I found their ideas to be interesting and baffling, almost in equal measure.

I studied physics throughout my undergraduate years and about a year and a half of graduate school. In my memory, the material was presented largely in its rigorous mathematical formulation, with only occasional conversations about the underlying abstractions and the underlying meaning, what is "actually" going on. Occasionally, I saw the math as elegant, and for a while I found that elegance appealing. I considered a career in physics, and I thought it would most likely be as an academic, but the elegance of the math wasn't enough to ignite real lasting passion in me. Apparently, there was enough "juice" there to hold my interest for the duration, but after that stint in grad school (enough for a master's degree), it had run its course.

A FIRST LOOK AT POLITICS

In 1969 my interest in physics waned in the context of what I found to be a much more stimulating intellectual environment: the Vietnam War and the intense opposition to it among my fellow students. My search for understanding became redirected for a time to the political and economic factors that—as I saw it then—caused the human suffering of which I was certainly keenly aware, though it must be said, without my ever really experiencing much of that suffering personally. As opposition to the war and to the "power structure" that appeared to support it

increased, so did the pushback on the part of those who were committed to the status quo and who perhaps felt threatened by our activities. As I will describe more fully a bit later, things got dramatic and a bit violent, and I fled to the next chapter in my life, what might be called music in the mountains and, occasionally, beyond.

FINDING A HOME IN COLORADO

I moved full-time to Aspen, Colorado, in the winter of 1969–1970, and I discovered there a community in which I felt at home in a way I never had before. The way I felt then was summarized for me a few years later, when John Denver wrote the lyric, “He was born in the summer of his twenty-seventh year, coming home to a place he’d never been before.” I had been in a rock ‘n roll band in college, hardly following in my parents’ footsteps, but thoroughly enjoying it nonetheless. In Aspen, I discovered a rich music scene, through which many famous and/or talented musicians passed at one time or another. Playing music with other musicians and friends has produced some of the most magical and enjoyable moments of my life. For a number of years, it was a nearly effortless existence—joining with many other musicians in a wide variety of combinations, learning to collaborate and to perform in front of audiences large and small, and eventually in front of television cameras.

I was aware, at least to some degree, of how many other people would have liked to be doing what I was doing. Believing as I did in the cultural assumptions with which I grew up, I often wondered why I was so fortunate as to be able to make a modest living doing what I loved, especially without any of the formal training my parents staunchly believed was essential to considering oneself a professional. I believed in the scarcity of viable spots in the music business, and so having one seemed a very fortunate situation, to say the least. I was also aware that holding a master’s degree in physics from a highly respected institution and playing music in bars did occasionally arouse the ire and frustration of my mother, who tried mightily throughout our time in the world together to understand just what I was up to.

With my nights occupied by the music business, my days were free for my intellectual curiosities to surface. One day I came upon a book about, of all people, Harry Houdini. In reading about his amazing escapes, I found myself wondering if he was simply a talented, even inspired, gymnast, or whether there was some kind of magic involved. Somehow, the idea that magic might be involved didn’t strike this scientifically trained mind as outrageous. Looking back, I believe I was hearing “whisperings,” or feeling a pull, from a deeper source.

BECOMING A SEEKER

In 1973 I came upon an introduction to Eastern mysticism, in the form of a young boy from India named Prem Pal Singh Rawat, who was known to his followers as Guru Maharaj Ji. I felt in his presence the possibility that there might well be forces at work in my life that went far beyond anything I could then explain. Much like the Beatles on their journeys with Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, but without the fame and the cameras, I travelled to several places in the United States, as well as one trip abroad, to see and be with him, even if just for a moment. In his presence I felt a peace and joyfulness that I had never before experienced. Maharaj Ji said that those feelings were always within, and that with the practice of the meditation he taught I could feel them

whenever I wanted. I have experienced that peace and joy in meditation in increasing levels of proficiency ever since. But as usual I also wanted to understand. I couldn't yet find a way to integrate his teachings with what I already believed I knew, and so I felt I needed to keep searching.

For decades my favorite source of images and inspiration has been Carlos Castaneda and his books about the Yaqui Indian man of knowledge, don Juan Matus. I came to accept that don Juan actually acted and spoke as Castaneda reports he did; it's also possible, I suppose, that Castaneda made the whole thing up, as various debunkers have claimed. It really doesn't matter to me, because what I feel when I open myself to his accounts of the "sorcerers' explanation"—for why and how things are the way they are—inspires me and continues to draw me forward. Castaneda's accounts of his experiences while in don Juan's presence are largely centered around his fears and his physical and emotional turmoil as he struggled to comprehend that sorcerers' explanation through his encounters with "allies", with the outlandish sensory distortions to which he was subjected, and with all the other aspects of don Juan's teachings. To my knowledge he rarely spoke of the awe and excitement with which I read of his experiences with don Juan in what he called that "marvelous desert". I continue to read his books over and over, because I continue to feel the "whispering" when I do so.

In 1976 I was introduced by my dear friend, and gifted singer/songwriter and guitarist, Bobby Mason to the est Training, a four-day course originated by Werner Erhard in 1971. That course was designed to allow people to experience, in one culminating moment, the distinction between the mind and the self, and to make available the possibilities inherent in making that distinction. I experienced that moment as a profound transformation that will stay with me forever.

In Erhard's words (to the best of my recollection), the mind is "a linear array of multi-sensory records of successive moments of now." In my words, the human mind is a nearly endless, hyperlinked spinner of explanatory stories, decisions, and strategies about how to cope with the inevitable struggles of childhood. I use the word "hyperlinked" to reflect the mind's tendency to be reminded of topics that are similar to the one being thought about, resulting in the so-called train of thought.

It appears that functionally the mind's job is to make records of everything that happens to us, to record the circumstances surrounding events that have significant positive and negative connotations, to make decisions about what circumstances to seek and to avoid, and to do all this to ensure our well-being.

By way of example, I can now say that based on some long-forgotten events, it appears that one far-reaching decision I made way back when was, "If I can get people to feel sorry for me, and if I can please them with my behavior, they'll watch out for me and take care of me." I don't remember the act of making that decision, but I see it show up constantly in my behavior, and specifically in the stories I tell about why something should or shouldn't have happened to me, stories that are commonly thought of as whining or complaining. That forgotten decision is metaphorically like a fossil record. Finding the fossil prompts a conclusion that the life form that became fossilized existed at one time, even though no one has ever seen such a life form.

According to the material presented in Erhard's work, we map these stories and decisions from childhood onto the struggles of adulthood without, in most cases, ever considering whether they are valid in the context of our adult experience, or indeed whether they were ever valid. When I whine and complain nowadays, I hear the echo of my early-childhood decision. I can see right away that my complaints are actually a technique for obtaining the sympathy of other people. If my experience can be generalized, those strategies may not be particularly effective for us as adults, and they certainly can't make us happy.

Anyway, somewhere along the way these survival strategies seem to become strategies for the survival of the mind itself. In the guise of a personality, with which we were arguably not born, we adults act in the world without ever considering that our personalities were to a large degree developed for the purpose of coping with feelings of powerlessness. Powerlessness, after all, is the inevitable feeling of an infant who cannot take care of himself and relies on bigger people for his every need. The upshot of this process is that the awareness of the being one really is gets lost quite early in childhood. According to Erhard, by the age of seven, "it's all over." He went on to say that a human being will sacrifice anything, including happiness, love, health, and self-expression, to obey the dictates of these strategies, and to steadfastly consider them to be the right strategies. As don Juan put it, "the guardian turns into a guard."

I spent years participating in Erhard's work, in seminars in a classroom environment as well as in field classes that included a ropes course and other intensely physical exercises. These exercises were designed to allow one to examine certain elements of one's personality and to discover for oneself that as coping strategies they are unnecessary and so can be discarded. On the ropes course, for example, one can examine fear and discover that, in the absence of lions and tigers in our daily experience, fear is actually one of those coping strategies that the mind has adapted for its own survival. That course led me to wonder if perhaps fear is only of the unknown, and once the situation is known, the fear eases and finally disappears. In my first and only experience of the (initially dreaded) zip-line, that was indeed the case. Standing on the edge of the precipice, my mind screamed, "No way!" My body tensed, but my trust in the people managing the course was such that I stepped off the edge, and my fear was immediately replaced by joy. That moment of transformation will also stay with me forever.

More recent in my experience is a woman named Esther Hicks. In seminars she conducts, she enters a unique kind of lucid meditative trance and speaks in a deeper, clearer, and more authoritative voice than that of her more "normal" persona. She calls this voice "Abraham." In that voice, she speaks about how we humans are not simply these flesh-and-blood bodies—with the supposed "miracle" of consciousness—but rather physical extensions of the energy that creates worlds.

In terms of her explanation, only a portion of who we really are comes forth into this time-space reality. We do this with great purpose and with full trust in our ability to sample life, to make distinctions between what we like and what we don't like, and to trust that the totality of who we are will create from those preferences possibilities for us that didn't exist before. Our real, total selves then call to us on a new, "higher" vibratory frequency, inviting us to experience these new possibilities as manifestations in our physical world.

In this section I have briefly described my understanding of the ideas and methods employed by some of the teachers whom I have encountered in my search for understanding. I think one of the challenges of being a seeker of deeper understanding is that spiritual teachers often use terminology that doesn't map clearly onto the vocabulary used by scientists. Or by regular folks, for that matter. I have sometimes found that this leads to confusion and incomplete understanding. In addition, I have found that no single teacher has left me with what I consider to be the completely satisfying explanation I have always hoped to find. However, I have somehow synthesized all these ideas with some of my own and come to a framework that seems to hold up pretty well.

In the next chapter, I will return to my earlier statement that, when relying on information accessible to our five senses, we can never know about the essence of something we observe but only about how it behaves when we interact with it. That will lead to a discussion of the basics of first-semester high school physics, the understanding of the physical world that stood at the end of the nineteenth century. This basic level of physics matches up quite well with our shared, common-sense understanding of the world around us. I think this discussion will prove useful in grasping why twentieth century physics represents such a radical transformation in our understanding of the world we think we live in, and why we might want to acquire an understanding of who we really are in the light of this new understanding.