

Chapter Thirty-five

AGING

IN THE TIMESTREAM

There is no time, only this luminescent present, the timeless moment in which everything in the universe spins and whirls simultaneously.

LU



O **Birthday Boy**

We finished our performance in Frankfort, Germany, loaded our guitars, amps, and vibes into a truck, then hopped into a waiting car. Barry Shulze, whom we called "Bear" because of his size — at least 6'5", 260 pounds — did the driving for us. We wheeled out of the auditorium's underground parking lot, into Frankfort's neon-nighttime city streets.

"Hey, Bear, there's a liquor store. Stop." I walked in, bought a bottle of Cutty Sark Scotch, returned to the car, hunkered down in the back seat behind Bear, and

proceeded to sip what I regarded as my final series of drinks. Figured I'd be dead by midnight.

Clear skies, a full moon. The German Autobahn stretched before us like a silver ribbon. Barry said the drive north to Hamburg wouldn't take long. We should arrive by 2 a.m. Tim and David slept. I couldn't.

It was October 8, 1968, the last hour of the last day of my 29th year. Since childhood, I had been convinced that I would die before age 30. That meant I would be dying tonight, which meant I would probably die in a car wreck, because that's where we were: on the road. I didn't like the prospect of violent death, but what the hell, violent or otherwise, it didn't matter. Death was death. No big deal.

I hugged the bottle close, its lip nudging my own, my knees pressed into the back of Barry's seat. All I had to do was raise one knee slightly, and the Scotch trickled into my mouth, onto my tongue, down my throat. Sweet comfort, blessed warmth, God-sent relief.

The moon cast a silvery glow over the harvested fields, autumn trees, darkened farm houses. I sipped and waited for annihilation, carefully watching each car wheeling towards us. Perhaps it would be a drunk driver, asleep, careening into our lane head-on. Maybe somebody's blown tire. Maybe a self-destructive lunatic intentionally lurching into us.

"Hey, Bear, what time is it?"

"Five minutes to midnight."

It would happen within the next five minutes. Jesus.

I took a hearty gulp, enjoying the way the Scotch washed down my throat like fiery ribbons. I stared at the moon, loved its soft glow. Wished I was home. Said goodbye to my woman, Jennifer, and her son Michael.

"What time, Bear?"

"Uhh, two minutes to twelve. Go to sleep."

"Be careful."

"Huh?"

"Any cars coming?"

"Go to sleep."

I rode in silence, clutching the bottle, waiting for disaster. Maybe it wouldn't be another car. Maybe we'd have a blowout, spin off the road into a tree or a concrete wall.

Death, death, death.

"I'll die before I'm 30," I had told Jennifer three years before.

She laughed. "You're still a kid. You're not even a man until you're thirty."

"Yeah, well, I can't help that. Guys like me die young."

She laughed again. "You'll outlive us all."

"Hey, Bear, what time is it?"

"I just told you — whatsa matter with you?"

"Midnight?"

"One minute after."

"Really?"

"Go to sleep."

Thirty years old and not dead. My God.

I smiled, breathed a sigh of relief — and then felt shocked. Time suddenly stretched before me, endless — and meaningless. I had not anticipated life beyond thirty. Now the potential for a new and possibly lengthy lifetime stared me in the face. I had no plans, no future and no perspective. What was I going to do with the rest of my life?

Scary. In fact, this thought was far more frightening than the prospect of death.
What was I going to do with the rest of my life?

Adrenalin shot through my system. I didn't know who I was, what the point of my life was, what I might do with whatever time I had left. A few moments ago, my existence had narrowed down to minutes. Now it spread itself infinitely before me like the mirror surface of an empty ocean.

"Happy birthday, asshole," I muttered to myself.

"What?" Bear said.

I took a massive drink and passed out.

AP

Peaches and Pits

At my age, the secret of eternal youth seems to be a combination of creativity and arrested development.

One morning ten years ago, I woke up and realized that today's world is being run by people I went to high school with. The whole show out there is high school, and always has been! — class officers, cheerleaders, bullies, jocks, nerds, lone wolves, idiots, geniuses. High school! In that same flash, I realized that I was absolutely right *then*, and I'm right *now*. I have *always* been right — about nearly everything — and today I see it more clearly than ever. My only regret is that I wasted so much time doubting myself and trying to verify my insights.

But things are a little different now. I realize I am simply no longer *young* enough to know everything. In fact, the more I know, the less I know, and today I'm as ignorant as Socrates, who at age 70 insisted he knew nothing at all. Since I no longer know everything, I keep learning and questioning, which keeps enthusiasm alive.

I remember, too, that I am still in the flower of middle-age, which is everything between twenty and ninety-five (more or less!), so that helps. Nothing is complicated anymore. I have my CDs and books. I will die. Then somebody else will have my CDs and books.

Obviously, we have no choice about birth or a natural death, so why not enjoy the interim? I know, ol' Al Einstein once said, "There are only two things that are infinite: the universe, and human stupidity. And I am not so sure about the universe." Thank God I've managed to live long enough so I can now be amused by human folly, instead of shell-shocked. I say that with a degree of wry cynicism.

This whole trip just keeps on keepin' on, so why can't I? Growing up is too difficult. Peter Pan simply skipped from childhood to childhood. What the hell, there are worse role models, aren't there?

Of course, Peter never lost his hair or his chompers, and he never made love to a sixty-five-year-old woman. But then again, he didn't have wigs, false teeth or Viagra either. It's all a trade-off.

On the whole, I think life is better because of technology, not worse. And as Alice Walker said, life is certainly better than death, if only because it is less boring and has fresh peaches in it.

Hey, I'll go for the peaches. I don't mind the pits, either. They keep me awake and alert — and I can use all the help I can get.

To heck with Peter Pan. He was merely monological. I yam what I yam, and I like it. Glad to be here.

SW Two Adulthoods: Before and After 50: “The Age of Mastery”

Your husband J's restlessness as he approaches 49, which of course leads directly to 50, is understandable. The phrase “mid-life crisis” springs immediately to mind. And that's exactly what it is — a crisis in midlife, the facing of the fact that one's youth, with its vitality, hope for the future, and the seemingly endless span of time that lies ahead, is fading quickly. Since youth is all one knows at this point, the terror of losing it and its sense of potential can shake one's perspective. My god, nearly 50. Over the hill. Energy, beauty, unlimited possibilities — out the window. Yikes! Desperation can set in. Women go through it too, of course, usually at a

younger age, like 40, but that sense of youth-loss is very much the same in women and men alike.

Interestingly enough, for whatever it might be worth to your husband, I faced many of the same fears, but discovered, much to my surprise, that life got *better* after 50, not worse. The time between 50 and, say, 75, becomes a Second Adulthood, which in a dozen different ways is more thrilling and interesting.

In my first adulthood, I was in a turmoil of confusion — about the roles I had been taught to fulfill; about my continually shifting sense of identity; about women, work, purpose, success, failure, creativity, money and meaning.

After 50, in my second adulthood, huge clouds of confusion evaporated. I no longer felt bound by the various roles I had known as student, apprentice, spouse, musician, writer. Even as confusion sorted itself out, so a new light of clarity began to emerge. I felt infinitely less confusion, infinitely more awareness. I had the benefit of a new maturity, with a new and more grounded perspective on life.

As I stopped clinging to the roles, values, and particular needs of youth, so I emerged into a new sense that all of the youthful striving, struggling, questioning, and hard work was not an end in itself. It was a preparation for these newly emergent years. I now had experience. I still had energy. I had knowledge. I had clarity — all of which I lacked in earlier years. I had entered what writer Gail Sheeny called “The Age of Mastery.”

Well, hello!

Yes, I had become more intensely aware of mortality. But that sense of mortality became a kind of gift. It awakened me to a new sense of depth, meaning, and purpose. It intensified the value and beauty of daily activity. The search for meaning increased not only the depth of soul I felt, but the spiritual imperative to see clearly, to understand more truly, to stretch beyond myself and my exclusively personal

preoccupations, and to enter into a new psycho-spiritual zone based on clarity, insight, compassion and sharing with others, perhaps especially with those coming of age just behind me. Nature, music, sex, relationships, activities — *everything* became more intense, precious, and wondrous.

In short, these years between 50 and the present have not seen the disintegration I so dreaded. Yes, I am physically a bit weaker, but as I exercise I retain vitality and mental acuity. I've lost some hair, yes, but to my delight, mature women and men just don't care. They understand that youthful bodies and middle-age bodies are different, and that's okay. It's what's inside that counts. The clarity and wisdom I was just talking about is far more important. As time shifts, so bodies shift — but so do values and understanding. Insight is matched by new energies, new meaning, new interests, and brand new forms of creativity in daily life.

The only suffering at this stage is the suffering we bring upon ourselves by clinging to the images we held of ourselves in youth, and rejecting the new portals of possibility that open to us from 50 on. Every age — childhood, youth, middle-age, old age — has its particular problems, even as it has its particular beauty and particular joys. But first *we must drop the old self-definitions and embrace the new-self perspectives that reveal themselves to us*. I did that, and have felt absolutely wonderful ever since.

AP Choices, Values, the Good Life

On this side of the Sierras, all is going well. Sonia listens to music for long stretches, reads books for long stretches, exercises at a gym three times a week, cooks great dinners. I play piano, write, read, listen to music, continually exploring without/within. Have been modestly delving into astrophysics, cosmology and

paleontology for a while, in addition to my usual diet of psychology, philosophy, responsible mysticism and poetry.

Just today we brought in a new load of firewood, which is heaped in the driveway. Over the next few days, I will place individual logs into four well-ordered stacks (that way I can make the stacks high, without their falling down — which one did a couple of years ago, boo-hoo). Fun work, at least to me. Empirical, simple, direct, good for exercise, and I get to be outside in cold air, doing something concrete and tangible. Our dog Buddy, and Leela, one of our cats, hang out with me. It's infinitely easier grappling with wood rather than with abstract thoughts, searching for terms, trying to articulate inner realms in words/sentences/paragraphs, blah-blah-blah. How much better to say, "This log goes here; that one goes there—Ha!"

And then Sonia and Buddy and I take a walk by the stream.

All of this is made possible, I suppose because we more or less keep material needs within grasp. If I needed more complexity and busy-ness in my life, or bigger and better material objects to fill an inner emptiness, well, I wouldn't have time to read people like Ken Wilber. No big deal. Choices, values.

For Sonia, turning 71

Shine in Light

February 2006

You are entering one of the most beautiful psychological and spiritual zones that exists for any human being. If you allow it, and become hyper-aware, each moment of your daily life becomes infinitely precious.

The bird on the wing against the backdrop of blue sky shines like a flashing star. Leaves on trees become greener and brighter. The love you feel for those close to you becomes heightened to the point of simultaneous tears and laughter. Your

sensitivity will intensify a thousandfold. Food will taste better. Smells of every sort will become precious. Even as anxiety ripples through your mind, so your heart will become incandescent with love. Soon you will transcend anxiety and rise above fear and sail beyond. You are already at one with existence, and now you come to know that fact, not as a thought, but as a living, exultant reality.

Each moment pierces time's veil. You realize you stand at the center of timeless eternity where there is no then-now-tomorrow. There is no time, but only this luminescent present, the timeless moment in which everything in the universe spins and whirls simultaneously. You rise to new heights of awareness: how magnificent it is to be alive, to be conscious, to feel feelings, touch a loved one, breathe air. You will attune yourself with the miraculous and exquisitely beautiful realities in everything you see and hear. Each moment becomes more precious, more luminescent.

Cherish this time, for your life will be lived at the peak of mental and emotional intensity. It is a time in which these moments are occasions for celebration, a crescendo of passion, not loud or vulgar or trite, but radiant with the love that wells up from within your deepest soul.

Shine in light, beautiful one. Shine in light.