

## Chapter Two

# All That Jazz

*It's the group sound that's important, even when you're playing a solo. You not only have to know your own instrument, you must know the others and how to back them up at all times. That's jazz.*<sup>1</sup>

– Oscar Peterson

It's one of the great mysteries of our age: why do people continue to go see M. Night Shyamalan films?

In *Unbreakable*, Shyamalan took what I thought would be an interesting premise – an everyman discovers that he has superhuman abilities and becomes a reluctant superhero – and turned it into two hours of overwrought drudgery, made even worse by a final scene that was as hackneyed as it was predictable. In *Signs*, he used an alien invasion as a heavy-handed metaphor for our own times with a singular lack of panache or imagination. *The Village* was undone by glacial pacing and a completely preposterous resolution, with a “twist” ending that you could see coming from a mile away, like an 18-wheeler crawling towards you on Interstate 15 outside Barstow, California. *Lady in the Water* wasted the considerable talents of actor Paul Giamatti, which is akin to burning hundred dollar bills just because you can afford to do so. In *The Happening*, nothing actually happened, largely because Shyamalan “cast” *the wind* as the villain. And *The Last Airbender* was the worse big-budget film made in 2010, a cinematic abomination that actually had me looking back at the *Star Wars* prequels, and the character of Jar-Jar Binks, with a measure of fondness that I would never have thought possible.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Oscar Peterson, quoted at *Music With Ease*. <http://goo.gl/6t2Ec>.

<sup>2</sup> The movie review site *Rotten Tomatoes* had *The Last Airbender* rated at 6%, which places it among the worst movies ever reviewed. “The Last Airbender,”

Shyamalan has been given hundreds of millions of dollars to make these movies, none of which will ever be confused with *Citizen Kane*. Nevertheless, people continue to watch them, and the films make a profit as a result. Even *The Last Airbender* made \$319 million dollars at the worldwide box office (on a budget of \$150 million dollars, although this doesn't include the advertising and marketing costs).<sup>3</sup>

All of which brings me back to my original question: why do people continue to watch these dreadful films?

The answer, it seems clear to me, is that most people continue to pay the price of admission to a Shyamalan film because they hold out hope that he'll replicate the magic of his one true success, *The Sixth Sense*. In that film, Bruce Willis starred as Malcolm Crowe, a child psychologist whose wife was murdered by one of Crowe's patients. A year later, Crowe encounters Cole, a troubled nine year-old boy (played to perfection by Haley Joel Osmett) who claims to see dead people. At first Crowe thinks Cole is delusional, but eventually he comes to believe that the boy can indeed interact with people who have died in order to help them complete unfinished business. At the end of the film, however, it's revealed that it was Crowe, and not his wife, who was murdered, and that the unfinished business was his failure to help the former patient who committed the crime. By helping Cole, Crowe is released from his own existential prison.

The film plays as a puzzle, and when the "twist" at the end was revealed it made sense to the audience even as it surprised them. A few audience members may have figured it out before the final "reveal" (although nowhere near as many as subsequently claimed to have seen it coming), but most became so immersed in the film that they didn't see the signs the filmmaker had planted along the way to indicate that there was more happening than was readily apparent. It was a masterful concoction by Shyamalan, a sleight of hand which he has never come close to duplicating, despite what one can presume have been his best efforts. All these years later we continue to go to his films, hoping in vain that he'll find a way to thrill and surprise us

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*Rotten Tomatoes*. <http://goo.gl/kMSNV>.

<sup>3</sup> "The Last Airbender," *Box Office Mojo*. <http://goo.gl/eoZs8>.

once again.

*The Sixth Sense* is one of the more notable and successful examples of this type of storytelling in film history, but it's far from the only one. Indeed, other films of a similar type have gone even further than Shyamalan did in that they specifically refuse to provide a definitive resolution. Christopher Nolan's *Inception*, one of my favorite films of the past few years, managed to be that rare cinematic blockbuster which remained ambiguous even at its conclusion. I still debate with friends whether or not the main character Cobb made it home in the end, or whether he is still trapped in his own dream.<sup>4</sup>

This type of storytelling, regardless of the medium, is all about providing the audience with a mystery and seeing if they can spot the clues and figure out the pattern before the answer is revealed. In stories like *Inception* it's left up to the audience to determine their own ending, and ultimately their own meaning.

This fascination with mysteries, clues, and puzzles is deeply rooted in the human psyche. Every year, for example, someone in my family gets my mother a Sudoku book for Christmas because she enjoys them. She almost always gets a picture puzzle as well. Weeks later I'll pop by for a visit (and to scrounge for some homemade cookies) and discover the pieces of the puzzle spread over the dining room table. In college I played the video game Tetris so often that after I was done I would close my eyes and still see the colored pieces dropping into place.

And then, of course, there is the Rubik's cube, the most popular puzzle of them all. Introduced worldwide in 1980, it became a cultural phenomenon. In the three decades since over 350 million cubes have been sold.<sup>5</sup>

Puzzles are perhaps the ultimate form of co-creative art, and that seems to me to be the reason why we're so fascinated by them. They involve us in the most direct way possible. Someone else may design

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<sup>4</sup> *Inception*, directed by Christopher Nolan (Burbank, CA: Legendary Pictures, 2010). Feature Film.

<sup>5</sup> Alastair Jamieson, "Rubik's Cube inventor is back with Rubik's 360," *Daily Telegraph*, 31 January 2009. <http://goo.gl/2RwPu>.

the puzzle and plant the clues, but we're the ones who must discover the pattern. In a 2009 interview with *Time Magazine*, Erno Rubik explained why his creation was so popular: "People like its beauty, simplicity and form. It's really not a puzzle or a toy. It's a piece of art."<sup>6</sup>

These puzzles serve as a metaphor for our own lives because most of us wonder whether there is a "pattern" to our existence. We look for clues that might provide an answer, or at least a hint. More than a few people think that at least some of those clues might be buried in our dreams, or revealed by events such as déjà vu or a series of strange coincidences.

Human history is replete with individuals who have been regarded as eccentric. One of them was an Austrian biologist, Paul Kammerer, a sort of mad genius who committed suicide at the age of 46 in 1926. Kammerer's passion (many would say "obsession") was documenting coincidences. He saw a pattern to them, and perhaps even a purpose or meaning, where others saw only random events.<sup>7</sup> This was a concept later expanded upon by Carl Jung, who referred to it as "synchronicity" – the notion that people see meaningful connections between the subjective and objective world.<sup>8</sup>

The idea that there might be a pattern to be found in at least some coincidences certainly has its critics. In 1958, for example, German psychologist Klaus Conrad coined the term "apophenia" to describe what he called the "unmotivated seeing of connections" accompanied

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<sup>6</sup> William Lee Adams, "The Rubik's Cube: A Puzzling Success," *Time Magazine*, 28 January 2009. <http://goo.gl/kSY5C>.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Kammerer, *Das Gesetz der Serie* (Berlin: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1919). The book has never been translated from German into English. The German original can be found at: [www.archive.org/details/DasGesetzDerSerie](http://www.archive.org/details/DasGesetzDerSerie).

<sup>8</sup> See: C. G. Jung, *Jung on Synchronicity and the Paranormal*, ed. Roderick Main (London: Routledge, 1997), and *Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., trans. R. F. C. Hull (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981). See also Robert H. Hopke, *There Are No Accidents: Synchronicity and the Stories of Our Lives* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1997).

by a "specific experience of an abnormal meaningfulness."<sup>9</sup> Where Jung saw the potential for meaning, Conrad saw psychosis.

But what if they were both right? In some people, it may indeed be a sign of mental illness, particularly if they fixate on coincidences to the point of obsession. But what about the average person who only notices coincidences when they seem to stand out more than the simple random events of our day to day lives? Are they psychotics, or are they perhaps, for whatever reason, getting a glimpse of those patterns Kammerer believed exist.

Even more intriguing is the possibility that these patterns, if they exist, may represent a form of contact with an advanced non-human intelligence. Christopher Nolan gave us *Inception* and let us figure out the ending. Erno Rubik gave us his cube and 350 million people moved the colored squares around, searching for the solution. Perhaps an advanced non-human intelligence has given us coincidences, as a sort of puzzle for us to solve, or a message to be deciphered?

A series of unusual events I experienced on a trip to Los Angeles in May and June of 2011 definitely made me think twice about the question of random coincidence versus meaningful synchronicity. I was house-sitting for a couple of weeks while Greg Bishop and his wife Sigrid were honeymooning in Europe, and at different times while they were away my brother Jim and my friend Christina Cuffari joined me. I wrote about my experiences as they happened.

Here are the highlights, in "diary" form.

### 18 May 2011

Several years ago I was flying through O'Hare airport in Chicago on my way to Cedar Rapids, Iowa, to interview Kevin Randle for my

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<sup>9</sup> Peter Brugger, "From Haunted Brain to Haunted Science: A Cognitive Neuroscience View of Paranormal and Pseudoscientific Thought," in *Hauntings and Poltergeists: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, edited by J. Houran and R. Lange (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc. Publishers, 2001), 195 – 213. Brugger is a Swiss neuroscientist who posited that above average levels of dopamine increase the likelihood that a person will find meaning and patterns where there are none, and that this propensity is linked to belief in the paranormal.

documentary *Fields of Fear*.<sup>10</sup> Due to weather our flight was delayed for 9 hours. Anyone who has ever been to O'Hare knows that it's a huge airport, with multiple terminals, and within each terminal there are multiple concourses. The place is a bit like a giant rabbit warren, with all sorts of nooks and crannies, and it's an easy place to get lost. As I was walking through the airport who should I see but Will Fraser, the former host of my television series *The Classical Now*, and one of my closest friends. Will was on his way home to England for a visit from Mississippi, where he was studying for a graduate degree in English at the time. He was sitting in a coffee shop reading a newspaper when I noticed him out of the corner of my eye. If I hadn't been held over I would have missed him.

All of which is to say that I have a history of coincidences at O'Hare... which brings me to yesterday.

My flight to Los Angeles was through O'Hare, with a four hour stopover. Four hours is a lot of time to kill, and I didn't have any idea which gate my flight to LA would be departing from because it hadn't been posted yet, so I wandered around through several different concourses. After about half an hour of walking I grabbed a hamburger from McDonald's and found a seat at gate B6, totally at random. I ate my burger, listened to my MP3 player for half of the new *Mumford & Sons* album, watched a bit of news on CNN, and then walked over to the departures board to see if my flight had been assigned a gate yet.

Indeed, it had – Gate B6. I stared at the departures board and pondered the odds of me sitting down at random in such a large airport by the exact gate to which my flight would later be assigned. I then went back over to the seating area at B6, reclaimed my seat, listened to some more music, and watched some more CNN.

Another hour went by and I still had an hour and a half still to kill, so I decided to stretch my legs again and get a copy of the *New York Times* to help me pass the rest of the time. I walked down to the Hudson News outlet by gate B16, bought the paper, and then moseyed out into the hall at the exact instant when an announcement came over

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<sup>10</sup> *Fields of Fear*, directed by Paul Kimball (Halifax: Redstar Films, 2006). Television. <http://goo.gl/SAHo3>.

the public address system to inform passengers that my flight had been relocated to a new gate – B16! As I looked over at the B16 stall next to me the information was posted on the board above the desk by the boarding ramp.

There was only one thing I could do when faced with this second coincidence. I sat down, cued up Golden Earring on my MP3 player, hit play for "The Twilight Zone," and settled in to wait for my flight.

22 May 2011

Continuing the run of coincidences on my current trip to Los Angeles, I had set up a meeting this evening at 7 pm with my friend Walter Bosley, a filmmaker, author and paranormal researcher. We were going to get together at the sprawling Farmer's Market here in Hollywood, but he was coming into town in the afternoon and asked if we could meet earlier to accommodate his schedule. I was fine with that, but my friend Christina Cuffari had already arranged to meet someone in Culver City at 11 am. She said she could get back to Hollywood and meet up with Walter and I between 2:30 and 3:00 pm at the Market, so I wanted to make sure that I was there no later than 2:45 pm, as she doesn't really know the area and I didn't want to leave her hanging there. I sent Walter an e-mail to let him know about this wrinkle, and I asked him to meet me at Greg's house at 2:00 pm, after which we could walk down to the Market and meet up with Christina.

2:00 pm came and went with no sign of Walter. I didn't have his cell phone number, and at 2:15 pm I decided that I had to head off to the Market to meet Christina. I sent Walter a Facebook message telling him what was up and letting him know that we would wait for him at the Market until at least 3:30 pm. I then hustled over to the Market (a 15 minute walk), and settled in to wait for either Walter or Christina.

After about ten minutes Christina showed up, and we each grabbed a coffee and sat down. Another twenty minutes or so passed and I was getting hungry, so I popped over to the Market Grill, one of the small eateries in the sprawling food court. I ordered a hamburger and fries, which the clerk told me would take about five minutes to get ready. I looked around and didn't see Walter, so I went back to our table and

asked Christina if I could borrow her I-phone. I wanted to quickly check Facebook and see if Walter had responded to my earlier message.

I have never carried a cell phone of any sort, and I'm in no hurry to start. As I wrote on my profile at an on-line dating site once: "I don't own a cell phone (and probably never will), and I don't text or IM. While I'm very tech literate, to paraphrase Obi-wan Kenobi's views vis-a-vis lightsabers vs. blasters, I prefer a more civilized form of communication than 'how r u.' I also cherish the freedom to be out of touch with the world and far from the madding crowd whilst enjoying a vanilla milkshake, watching a film, walking around the Commons, having lunch... or just about anything else that's best done uninterrupted." In short, not being constantly "wired in" is my modern version of Thoreau's Walden Pond.

As a result, anytime that I use an I-phone and try to type on the "keyboards / pads" that they have I tend to muck it up, often more than once. In this instance, whilst trying to enter my Facebook user name and password, I made mistakes twice in a row. The third time was the charm, but the service on the phone was really slow so I told Christina that I was going to pop over to the Market Grill to grab my food, which I figured was ready. Just as I stood up and looked in the direction of the eatery who should walk into the very busy courtyard from the entrance besides the Market Grill but Walter.

After I introduced Walter to Christina and picked up my dinner, we all sat down and had a chat about the sequence of events that had to have happened for Walter to be entering the courtyard just as I stood up. For example, if I wasn't such a purposeful luddite I wouldn't have had the delay on the I-phone as I was trying to "connect" with Walter, and the timing would have been off.

Oddly enough, this wasn't the first coincidence on the trip that involved a restaurant. A couple of days earlier Christina and I toured Hollywood Boulevard with Greg Bishop. We walked all the way up and down the Walk of Fame and then visited Graumann's Chinese Theatre and the Kodak Center. After all of that it was time for lunch. We debated several choices, including the famous Pig & Whistle, but decided to maximize our time and just grab something relatively



quick at one of the many spots in the Kodak Center itself.

We eventually settled on a Johnny Rockets, a chain diner, despite the fact that Christina is a vegetarian and Johnny Rockets is better known for burgers and fries than salads. Still, she was a good sport, particularly because she knows I love vanilla milkshakes, and they make a pretty good one at Johnny Rockets. But it certainly wouldn't have been her first choice, nor Greg's. Indeed, it obviously wouldn't have been mine either because despite myriad previous trips to the Kodak Center I had never once set foot in the Johnny Rockets there. But that day I did, with Christina and Greg in tow.

As we were leaving after lunch we stopped at the counter to pay, and noticed that there was a sign hanging on the wall behind the cash register. It read: "Christina Eats Here."

To paraphrase Humphrey Bogart's character from *Casablanca*: "Of all the restaurants in all the buildings on Hollywood Boulevard..."

27 May 2011

The run of coincidental weirdness continues on my West coast trip with what was the strangest experience yet.

Christina has returned to Canada, Greg and Sigrid are still in Europe, and my brother isn't here yet, so I'm footloose and fancy free. I got up this morning and decided that I would catch the bus and head out past Westwood to visit the Getty Center, which is perhaps my favorite place in Los Angeles. I spent the afternoon wandering through a wonderful series of art exhibits and sitting in the beautiful grounds listening to Vivaldi on my MP3 player. It's about as close as you can get to a Walden moment in Los Angeles.

After several hours I caught the bus and headed back to Hollywood. By the time I got back to Greg's house it was 6:00 pm and I was really hungry, having eaten only a package of M & M's up until that point.

I figured that my best option was to head over to the Farmer's Market to grab dinner and catch some Thursday night jazz. I decided to take a book from Greg's well-stocked collection to help me pass the time before the live music started.

At first I picked a compilation of John Shirley short stories, but at

the last second I switched my choice and took another book which I had been meaning to read for quite a while.

More on that in a moment.

The Market was jumping when I got there and the tables in the area around the stage in the West Patio were packed. I wandered off to another section, where my favorite deli is located, and ordered a cheeseburger.

Now usually I just get it plain – burger and cheddar cheese and nothing else – but this time, because there were other options for the cheese, and because I was getting a bit bored with the "same old, same old," I decided to switch it up. I went with Swiss cheese, something I had never done before.

That's important.

The burger was going to take a couple of minutes to cook so I grabbed a beer from a nearby bar and took a stroll through some of the vendors' kiosks. After buying a couple of postcards for my niece and nephews I wandered back to the deli, picked up my meal, and headed back to the area of the Market where the jazz group was playing to see if I could find a seat there.

It was still packed but I spied a table at the back near an entrance that wasn't taken, so I moved as quickly as I could through the crowd to get it before anyone else noticed it was available. I sat down, reached into my knapsack and pulled out the book I had brought with me from Greg's apartment, placed it on the table, and began to eat my dinner.

The jazz was good, the food was better, and the beer was the best part of all after a long day of walkabouts and bus rides.

After a few minutes an elderly couple approached my table. There were three unused seats, and over the music the woman motioned to them as if to ask whether they were taken or not.

I smiled, nodded, and said, "They're all yours." She returned the smile, sat down with her husband, and listened to the jazz for a bit as I finished up my food. As the band came to the end of their set, the man stood up and headed off to get some food.

I'm a friendly sort, and I always like talking to people (it comes in handy in my line of work), so I looked over at the woman and asked

whether she was from Los Angeles. As soon as she spoke, I knew that she was from further away than I was – her accent was definitely European, although I couldn't quite place it. Turns out she and her husband were from Switzerland.

I chuckled to myself – these random people who had sat down next to me were from Switzerland, and for the first time in my life I had ordered a hamburger with Swiss cheese on it instead of cheddar.

I asked her what they were doing in the United States, and she told me that they come here every second year to visit their daughter and then take a vacation.

"Oh," I said, "that's nice. Where does your daughter live?"

"Dallas," she replied.

I immediately looked at the book on the table in front of me, the one that I had grabbed at the very last minute instead of the collection of John Shirley short stories that I had first picked up. It was *Final Events* by my good friend Nick Redfern, who lives in Dallas!<sup>11</sup>

As I pecked away at my remaining French fries and listened to the jazz begin again, I was reminded of a quote by one of my favorite jazz musicians and composers. "Making the simple complicated," said the great Chales Mingus, "is commonplace; making the complicated simple, awesomely simple, *that's* creativity."<sup>12</sup>

I began to wonder if I had drifted into some sort of an alternate reality where "someone" was being very creative with me.

28 May 2011

Tonight, foot loose and fancy free in Hollywood, I wandered over to the Farmer's Market for dinner, after which I was planning on going to see *Thor* at The Grove theatres. Hardly living "la vida loca," I know, but my reputation as a "bad boy" is a bit overstated.

After I finished dinner I walked up to the theatre, took a look at the massive crowds inside, particularly the very long ticket lines, and

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<sup>11</sup> Nick Redfern, *Final Events and the Secret Government Group on Demonic UFOs and the Afterlife* (New York: Anomalist Books, 2010).

<sup>12</sup> Charles Mingus, "Creativity," *Mainliner Magazine*, July 1977, 25.

decided to give it a pass. A Hollywood epic about the Norse god of thunder just wasn't worth spending two hours cooped up with the madding crowd. I wandered into the Barnes & Noble next door to read a few graphic novels and browse a few other sections of interest.

I spent about twenty minutes engrossed in *Superman: New Krypton, Vol. 3*, and then walked down a couple of aisles to the New Age section where I leafed through a few books, including Nick Redfern's new tome *The Real Men in Black*, and Mark Pilkington's *Mirage Men*, because I wanted to have another look at the section he wrote about my friend Walter Bosley, which Walter had informed me was inaccurate to the point of being libelous.

After about another twenty minutes I decided to head back to Greg's to catch the end of the Dodgers game on television. As I made my way to the escalator to the main floor I noticed the Philosophy section and walked over to see if they had Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations*. I lost my old copy whilst traveling about a year ago, and I've been meaning to pick up a new one ever since.

I found the book, flipped through it for a minute or two, and decided to buy it the next time I was in the store. As I was about to place it back on the shelf a scream from the adjoining aisle startled me. I looked around the corner of the shelves and saw three young teens in the Manga section laughing and carrying on quite loudly as they browsed some vampire books. I gave them a bit of a stern look, which did absolutely no good, and then I shrugged and turned back to the Philosophy shelves. Due to the distraction, however, my gaze focused not on the shelf where I found had *Meditations*, but the one above it, where a particular book immediately caught my attention: *The Duck That Won The Lottery*, by British philosopher Julian Baggini.<sup>13</sup>

As my friends are aware, for years I have traveled with a stuffed duck I named Zorgrot, who is sort of my film production company's unofficial mascot.<sup>14</sup> This trip to Los Angeles is no different.

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<sup>13</sup> Julian Baggini, *The Duck That Won the Lottery, and 99 Other Bad Arguments* (London: Granta Books, 2008).

<sup>14</sup> He's also supposedly an alien explorer from another planet, but that's an entirely different story for another day... or my therapist.

Unfortunately, I've been so busy since I got here last week that I had forgotten to take Zorgy out of my knapsack until this afternoon. Just before I left for the Farmer's Market, I had taken a few photos of Zorgrot and "Kitty," the cleverly named cat owned by Greg and Sigrid that I'm looking after while they're in Europe.

I thought it was a cute little coincidence that I had finally pulled Zorgy out earlier in the evening and now my attention had been drawn to a book with "duck" in the title, so I placed *Meditations* back on the shelf and picked up *The Duck That Won The Lottery*. I opened it at random to the first page of chapter 55, which is titled: "Chance wouldn't be a fine thing: The no coincidence presumption."

"Okay," I thought to myself, "what are the odds?"

Given the series of coincidences that I've experienced on this trip I decided to try a little experiment. I closed the book and put it back on the shelf. I wanted to see if this copy was somehow predisposed to open at the beginning of chapter 55. I picked it up and opened it at random a dozen times, and not once did it come close to the beginning of chapter 55. The three kids had distracted me just long enough so that I would notice *The Duck That Won The Lottery*, which I opened at random to the chapter on coincidences just that one time.

I put the book back on the shelf, and walked out of the store.

"Well, that was weird," I muttered under my breath.

On the way home I decided to pop into Canter's Deli on Fairfax Avenue to pick up some cookies for a snack later in the evening. I ordered six chocolate chip cookies and four little squares of some sort (they're tasty, but I'm not quite sure what they're called).

At Canter's the cookies aren't priced individually, but by weight, so the clerk weighed them and then rang them in. He turned to me and said, "That'll be three fifty five, sir."

Weird had just gotten weirder!

The antics of *three* kids had led me to notice a book with "duck" in the cover, which I then opened to *chapter 55*, about *coincidences*.

Then \$3.55 for cookies, based on weight.

If the clerk had picked a couple of different cookies for me, the price would have been different.

It had to be *those* cookies.

3 kids? Chapter 55, about coincidences? \$3.55?

I feel like I'm in the middle of a jam session with an unseen jazz trio, and I'm picking out the notes, but I can't quite figure where they're going with the melody – and as the famous Duke Ellington song observed, “It don't mean a thing, if it ain't got that swing.”<sup>15</sup>

I'm a former rhythm guitarist, and I've always been about the swing, so I'll keep at it and see if I can discover whether or not there's a meaning to this particular gig.

6 June 2011

Last night I joined my friends Walter Bosley and Greg Bishop, who has just returned from his European honeymoon, for an episode of Greg's independent radio show, *Radio Misterioso*, which we recorded live at the Kill Radio studio on Vermont Avenue in Los Angeles. About forty-five minutes in Walter and I brought up the run of coincidences that have been happening since I left for Los Angeles in late May, and I related the most recent one, which occurred while my brother Jim was in town a few days ago.<sup>16</sup>

One of the things that Jim wanted to do while here was take a drive up the Pacific Coast to Malibu and the beaches. I readily agreed, because I love that area. I came up with a little itinerary that included a stop at the Swingers restaurant in Santa Monica for lunch because it's one of the best spots I know of to get a vanilla milkshake in Los Angeles. I figured that from there we would drive up the Pacific Coast Highway, stop at Zuma Beach, and then head to Point Mugu where we could turn around and come back to the city via Interstate 5.

Seemingly apropos of nothing, I had gone on the Internet earlier that morning to check my Facebook page and my e-mail. After I was done I made my way to Wikipedia, which is a fun place to browse at random when one has some free time because it can lead one on

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<sup>15</sup> Irving Mills and Duke Ellington, “It Don't Mean a Thing (If It Ain't Got That Swing),” Perf. The Duke Ellington Orchestra (Brunswick Records, 1932).

<sup>16</sup> Greg Bishop, “Synchronicity and Creativity,” *Radio Misterioso*, 5 June 2011. <http://goo.gl/hTqMo>.

interesting little “six degrees of separation” tangents of discovery. I once started with King Zog of Albania and wound up at Lauren Bacall! Last night I had watched a program on the History Channel that referenced the American Civil War, and as that was relatively fresh in my mind I decided to start with that terrible conflict and see where I wound up.

As I started scrolling through the main entry on the Civil War I ran across the name of one of my favorite Presidents – Millard Fillmore. When people ask me why he’s one of my favorite Presidents, I just smile and repeat his name: Millard Fillmore. How can you not like a guy with a name like that? It’s the kind of name that a character in the old Looney Tunes cartoons would have had. As a result, I clicked on the link to Fillmore, read the page, and then followed some links from there to other material about him. By the time I was done I had spent an hour reading about this odd duck of a President, whose most memorable accomplishment was landing on almost every list ever made by historians of the worst Presidents.<sup>17</sup>

Jim and I set off on our day trip up to Malibu shortly thereafter. Like the Cylons of the re-imagined *Battlestar Galactica* television series, I had a plan, which we followed more or less to the proverbial “T” until we were getting ready to leave Zuma Beach and head up to Point Mugu. At this point I decided to ditch the plan and freelance, something I’m notorious for amongst my friends.

I pulled a map out of the glove compartment, took a quick look, and decided that it would be fun to take highway 126, which runs from the Pacific Coast Highway to Highway 101 through a valley with lots of orange groves. I had originally thought of going up on another route that circled through Ojai back to Interstate 5, which is a really pretty drive, but the reason that the 126 caught my eye was because I had

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<sup>17</sup> Some trivia about Fillmore: He was the last member of the Whig Party to be elected President, he later joined the xenophobic No-Nothing movement, losing the 1856 Presidential election as their standard-bearer, he opposed Lincoln during the Civil War, and in a nice bit of synchronicity that I didn’t realize at the time but which fits perfectly as I look back on that trip to Los Angeles a year later, Fillmore was President in 1850 when California became a state. See Benson Lee Grayson, *The Unknown President: The Administration of Millard Fillmore* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1981).

never taken it before, and it went through a particular small town – Fillmore, California.

A small coincidence at best, but one that I couldn't pass up given the run of synchronicities I've been on. And then, almost as soon as we got on the 126, we saw a sign for the first exit as you drive north, which led directly to – Kimball Road!

As I related this anecdote on the radio show Walter slowly leaned back in his chair, listened with great concentration, waited for several moments afterwards as Greg and I bantered back and forth, and then pushed himself forward again and spoke slowly and purposefully into his microphone.

"I'll throw something else at you," he said, with a pause afterwards for effect. "You were on Highway 126. When you add up the digits in the highway number it comes to nine, and nine is a very esoteric number with special properties that no other number has."<sup>18</sup>

Greg chimed in with a comment about Whitley Strieber and his use of the number nine, and then Walter added that it was obviously a special number where baseball was concerned, and that baseball is a mystical game, a sentiment with which I have always agreed, although up until that point only in the figurative sense of the word "mystical."

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<sup>18</sup> When you look into the history of the number nine in religion, philosophy, and mythology, you find that it has occupied a special place in many different cultures. For example, as the highest single-digit number, it symbolizes completeness in the Bahá'í Faith. The number 9 is also revered in Hinduism, where it is considered a complete, perfected and divine number because it represents the end of a cycle in the decimal system, which originated from the Indian subcontinent as early as 3000 BC. The first nine days of the Hebrew month of Av are collectively known as "The Nine Days" (*Tisha HaYamim*), and are a period of semi-mourning leading up to Tisha B'Av, the ninth day of Av on which both Temples in Jerusalem were destroyed. Nine was a significant number in Norse mythology as well: the all-father Odin hung himself on an ash tree for nine days to learn the runes. In the Christian angelic hierarchy, there are 9 choirs of angels, and there are nine levels of hell. Finally, Ramadan, the month of fasting and prayer, is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, and in Islamic belief God has 99 names. See Annemarie Schimmel, *The Mystery of Numbers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 164-179; also "Mystic Attributes of the Number Nine," *New York Times*, 7 September 1895.



“Now, this is freaky,” I interrupted. “As you said that, I was just about to tell a baseball story from the game last night.”

Both Greg and I are die-hard baseball fans, and whenever I’m in town during baseball season we try to catch some games, whether with the Major League teams in town or at the many minor league teams scattered around southern California. This trip had been no different.

“As you know,” I continued, looking directly at Walter, “we went to see the Rancho Cucamonga Quakes last night, and we called you from the highway on our way out there to see if you wanted to join us, because you live in San Bernadino, which isn’t far away.”

“Yeah, but I couldn’t make it,” Walter replied.

“Right,” I said. “But guess what? One of the relief pitchers used in the game was named Josh Walter. Not *Walters*, which would be a far more common surname, but *Walter*.”

Greg and Walter then proceeded to have a discussion about coincidences versus synchronicity and whether there might be any meaning to it while I checked on my camera to see if there was any relationship to the number nine and the pitcher, Josh Walter. His uniform number was 38, which didn’t fit, but then as I scrolled through the photos I had taken at the game I saw one of the scoreboard when he came in to pitch. It displayed his Earned Run Average, perhaps the most important statistic for a pitcher.

Josh Walter’s was 4.05.

Add it up, and you had the number nine.<sup>19</sup>

Walter almost hopped out of his seat. “There’s your nine,” he exclaimed with a big smile on his face.

We continued on for a while with a friendly discussion about what Walter calls the “axis of circumstance, and the vector of desire,” and how it happens at certain times in your life. Greg responded that the consciousness of the person experiencing a synchronistic event is just as important as the event itself, and that the events are always there but we usually don’t notice them. Walter thought about that for a moment, and they came to an agreement of sorts in terms of their

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<sup>19</sup> Walter’s birth-date as listed on his Major League Baseball player page is 04/05/1985. “Josh Walter.” *Inland Empire 66ers*. <http://goo.gl/KjQZI>.

points of view.

“You start seeing the fabric of reality, and how you fit in,” said Walter at one point.

As Greg replied with an anecdote about how William Burroughs used to send writing students out to try and become more aware of their surroundings, I picked up a copy of John Fante’s novel, *Ask the Dusk*. I had never heard of Fante before this trip to Los Angeles, but when Greg told me that Fante was one of his favorite writers, and a major influence on Charles Bukowski, who is one of *my* favorite writers, I decided to take a look. I immediately liked what I saw and so I brought Greg’s copy of the novel to the studio with the idea that I would read from it on the show. I randomly opened it up as Greg was talking, and looked down at the page I had hit upon.

“Hold on!” I said as I broke in on Greg’s train of thought. “I want you, Walter, to read the page number.”

I handed Walter the book, he took a look, and then breathed an audible sigh.

“Ninety-nine.”

We all paused for a brief moment, and then Walter said, “Welcome to my world.”

“Somewhere in your subconscious,” responded Greg, playing the Devil’s advocate, “you can figure out where ninety-nine is, and then opened it up.”

“I don’t believe that,” I shot back.

“I do,” said Greg, “but I don’t believe that it’s meaningless. People will deal with concepts and include them in the creative process, and maybe they’re not even aware of it. The concepts and the synchronicities are finding them.”

I could see where he was coming from, and when he put it like that it made sense to me, particularly as I’m working on a screenplay that deals with the prospect of life after death, and free will versus pre-destination. And maybe that’s what these past couple of weeks have all been about – opening my mind even further to the true nature of the world around us and the creative possibilities of existence.

Shortly after this exchange we started talking about politics and religion, a conversation which went on for about half an hour. One

final coincidence (or synchronicity) was still waiting for us, however. Greg left to use the washroom, and I hijacked the show by playing *There is a Light Which Never Goes Out*, my favorite song by The Smiths.

When Greg returned, we all had a good laugh because Greg isn't a fan of their music. As he stopped the song from playing further, I once again picked up *Ask the Dusk* and opened it to a random page as I was paying attention to Walter, who was pontificating about something. When he finished his stream-of-consciousness soliloquy I looked down at the page and then shook my head in disbelief.

"Now remember," I said, "I had the whole '355' thing with the book at Barnes & Noble and then Canter's, and tonight it's been the number nine, so Walter, I want you to look at the book."

I held the book out to him so he could see the pages I had opened it up to, but didn't give it to him because he had the microphone in his nearest hand. "What pages did I open it up to? Fifty-four, which added together is nine, and fifty-five."

Walter nodded his head and smiled, because he had noticed something that I hadn't picked up on with regards to how I was holding the book open.

"You've got three fingers visible to me; therefore the three, five, five."

As I checked my hand and confirmed what he had said, Walter asked me to have a look at the pages and see if there was anything within them that might tie in with everything we had been discussing.

"The key is what's on the page," he said.

As I read the final paragraph on page fifty-five, which was the end of that particular chapter, we noticed a couple of things. The first was the fact that it talked about a mystery, which was exactly what we had been discussing all night. Then Walter chimed in.

"Okay, the first synchronicity is connected to me," he said, ignoring the 'mystery' angle that I had hit upon. "In that paragraph, there is something mentioned three times. I am a fan of Cary Grant, and in that paragraph Fante used the name Judy three times. 'Judy, Judy, Judy' – one of the lines Grant was best known for."

As Walter noted, it was another three to go with the fifty-five. Of

course, Grant never actually said “Judy, Judy, Judy” in any of his films, but to me this perfectly illustrated the key point that it can be a fine line between perception and reality.<sup>20</sup>

Indeed, perhaps there isn't any line there at all.

As I walked out of the studio with Greg and Walter on our way to the House of Pies, a nearby diner where we always go after a show when I'm in town, I thought back to that first coincidence, or synchronicity, at gate B16 at O'Hare airport in Chicago.

If you assign a numerical value of '2' to the letter 'B' based on its position as the second letter in the alphabet, and then add it to 1 and 6, you get the number 9.

Now we're really swingin'!

7 June 2011

This is the last day of my three week long trip to Los Angeles, which has seen a weird run of coincidences. So it's only fitting that today saw the final truly weird coincidence, which was the most personal one of them all.

There has been a group of filmmakers from Halifax here in Los Angeles at a conference over the past couple of days (I'm not involved in the conference), one of whom is my friend Ben Stevens, the older brother of my *Ghost Cases* co-host Holly. I haven't seen Ben since the fall of 2010 when he left town for a gig in northern Alberta, so we decided to meet up at the Los Angeles Farmer's Market this afternoon (or as I have come to jokingly call it, the “Nexus of Synchronicity”).

We met at noon along with Greg, who had worked with Ben in 2008 on my feature film *Eternal Kiss*. After coffee we made our way to The Grove because I wanted to get a picture of Lynda Carter, who was being interviewed for a TV show just outside the Barnes & Noble (I remember her well as Wonder Woman, as does almost every man who grew up in the late 1970s). She showed up just after 2 pm, I snapped a few photos, and then we wandered off. Greg went back to his house to do some work, and I decided to walk up Fairfax for a couple of blocks to show Ben one of my regular hang-outs, Canter's

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<sup>20</sup> Nancy Nelson, “Judy Judy Judy,” *CaryGrant.net*. <http://goo.gl/NI3Tv>.

Deli.

Ben had mentioned earlier that he would like to see the Walk of Fame on Hollywood Boulevard if I was game. It's quite a lengthy walk from the Farmer's Market, so he offered to pay for a cab. I had already been to the Walk of Fame on this trip with both Christina and Jim, so I was non-committal – one can get too much of a good thing. I also had some work of my own to do back at Greg's house, so I wasn't sure that it was the best use of my time.

As we walked up Fairfax, however, Ben and I were having such a nice chat that we just kept going. We hung a right onto Melrose, and headed towards central Hollywood. After about ten or fifteen minutes I realized that we were halfway to Hollywood Boulevard, so I decided to go all the way. It was very much a spur of the moment, last second call, in the same way my decision had been to travel on highway 126.

As we continued down Melrose, chatting away as friends do, I stopped paying attention to where we were until I looked up and saw that we were at La Brea, which is a cross street that leads up to Hollywood Boulevard (about ten blocks away). As I had never walked up La Brea before, but knew it intersected with Hollywood Boulevard at the beginning of the Walk of Fame, I figured it was the perfect way to get to our destination.

After a few blocks, I noticed a large statue of Kermit the Frog on the top of a building on the opposite side of the street, which I then recognized as Jim Henson Studios. I had driven past it before but didn't recall that it was on La Brea.

As anyone who knows me is aware, I'm a big Kermit the Frog fan, to the point where I've become well known back home for my impression of the legendary Muppet. For example, while on the set of *Eternal Kiss* Ben and I were filmed by another crew member one day goofing around during a break in production. At the end of the short clip I did my impression of Kermit at the request of the crew member shooting the footage.<sup>21</sup>

Naturally, I had to get a picture of Kermit, something I had never done before in all my trips to Los Angeles. I stopped, turned, and took

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<sup>21</sup> Paul Kimball, "Paul Kimball and Benjamin Stevens on the set of *Eternal Kiss*," *Redstar Films YouTube Channel*, 24 February 2009. <http://goo.gl/O27Nc>.

the shot.

This was all a bit weird given the video of Ben and I from 2008, and that it was Ben and I who randomly made our way to La Brea today. But then things got much stranger when I glanced down at the sidewalk, something that I had absolutely no reason to do – indeed, something that I almost never do.

Of all the people who have seen me do my Kermit impression, *none* has enjoyed it more than my good friend Veronica Reynolds. She has asked me to do it so many times over the years, both for her and for others, that I've lost count. I recall one time where I was in a bar with several of Veronica's friends and she went out of her way to tell them that I did a great Kermit impression. I wound up "introducing" all of them the way Kermit introduced his guests on *The Muppet Show*.

So imagine my surprise as I stood on the sidewalk on La Brea, looked down, and saw a name carved into the cement exactly where I had stopped to take the Kermit photo. There was no plan to be there with Ben at *that* place, at *that* moment, taking a picture of Kermit while walking to Hollywood Boulevard from the Farmer's Market, something I had never done before.

The name?

Veronica.

By the way, referring back to that video of Ben and I goofing around on set on *Eternal Kiss* (which is the only video ever recorded of me doing my Kermit impression), there's one more factor, which is the question of how Veronica and I first met. It was years ago when she auditioned for and was cast in the original version of *Eternal Kiss*, which I had written in 2001 but didn't get around to filming until years later.<sup>22</sup>

The name of the character for whom she had been cast all those years ago was Elisabeth Langstrom.

In each of the two names for that character, there are exactly *nine*

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<sup>22</sup> Her role was re-cast, against my wishes and at the direction of the distributor, when I eventually got the opportunity to make the film. She was crushed when she I gave her the news, and she wouldn't speak to me for over a year, which I completely understood.

letters.

31 October 2011

Is an advanced non-human intelligence attempting to communicate with us through things like synchronicities? Could they be trying to inspire us to think in new and different ways about something bigger than ourselves? Perhaps they're providing us with clues about the true nature of existence, and our place in it.

Regardless of the nature of the experience, or how we choose to interpret what happens, it seems to be something that we all have in common. I doubt that there is anyone in this world who can honestly say they have never experienced a coincidence, or *déjà vu*, and that commonality may be the real point of the exercise. After all, the Rubik's Cube has 43,252,003,274,489,856,000 possible combinations on its six faces, but it has only *one* solution where everything fits together. Everyone who solves it will have found a different path to the same place.<sup>23</sup>

Who are we, and how do we all fit together? That's the question we need to ask, and the puzzle we spend our entire lives trying to solve. As Alice said in Lewis Carroll's classic novel *Alice in Wonderland*: "Dear, dear! How queer everything is to-day! And yesterday things went on just as usual. *Was* I the same when I got up this morning? But if I'm not the same, the next question is, 'Who in the world am I?' Ah, *that's* the great puzzle!"<sup>24</sup>

Robert H. Hopke, in *There Are No Accidents: Synchronicity and the Stories of Our Lives*, sees the artistic elements of synchronicity within a literary context. "The most essential and distinctive aspect of synchronicity is the experience of meaning upon which the coincidences are based," he wrote. "Through our ability to uncover and live out the individual meaning of what befalls us, we receive in a synchronistic event a reminder of an important truth: that our lives are

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<sup>23</sup> Jamieson, "Rubik's Cube inventor is back with Rubik's 360."

<sup>24</sup> Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland* (New York: Sam'l Gabriel Sons & Company, 1916), 10. <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/19033/19033-h/19033-h.htm>.

organized, consciously and unconsciously, the way a story is, that our lives have a coherence, a direction, a reason for being, and a beauty as well. Synchronicity reminds us how much a work of art the stories of our lives can be.”<sup>25</sup>

But how does this all integrate into *my* story?

Well, the last few years haven’t been easy for me on either a personal or a professional level. Production on *Eternal Kiss* was a disaster that I was lucky to get through without going both bankrupt and mad. Some of it was out of my control, such as the financial crash of 2008 hitting just as we started filming, which wiped out our private American investment, or the craziness and corruption I wound up having to deal with in Shelburne, Nova Scotia, where we shot the film. But I made lots of mistakes on my own, the result of a combination of hubris and a desire to push my career forward at any cost, even when it came to relationships with friends.<sup>26</sup>

On a personal level, my long-term relationship of twenty years ended in 2007, although we remain best friends. My mother underwent life-threatening open heart surgery in 2008 (in the midst of me shooting *Eternal Kiss*, which provided another distraction). She survived, but it reminded me of the fragile nature of our lives. And then in October, 2009, Mac Tonnies passed away suddenly at the age

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<sup>25</sup> Hopke, *There Are No Accidents: Synchronicity and the Stories of Our Lives*, 47.

<sup>26</sup> While I have trouble separating the film itself from the soul-draining experience of making it, others have been more positive. Long-time Halifax film critic and Atlantic Film Festival senior programmer Ron Foley MacDonald, for example, gave it the following review: “*Eternal Kiss* resembles Ingmar Bergman’s mid-60s work, such as *Persona* and *Hour Of the Wolf* when that Northern European master mixed terse issues of identity with strong undertones of horror... Kimball’s film emphasizes feelings of dislocation and looming desire. *Eternal Kiss* is an intense and personal trip into the Vampire world; it is as unsettling as it is engrossing.” Ron Foley MacDonald, “Eternal Kiss: World Premiere,” *InfoMonkey*, 4 April 2010, accessed 14 September 2012. <http://goo.gl/m9Hqx>. On the craziness and corruption I had to deal with, see Office of the Ombudsman, “Final Report: South West Shore Development Authority,” Government of Nova Scotia, February 2010. <http://gov.ns.ca/ombu/publications/2010-ombu-report.pdf>. See as well Brian Medel, “Seacoast Assets on Block Today,” *The Chronicle Herald*, 23 November 2011. <http://goo.gl/fxifQ>.



of 34. He was one of my three or four best friends and a collaborator on various projects. His death threw me for a loop on a number of levels from which I still haven't quite recovered.

Maybe, just maybe, the run of synchronicities in May and June 2011 was there to remind me that we're all linked together, that I wasn't alone, and that my story, despite some rough chapters, is still being written. Maybe it was a reminder of the synchronicity of the people I love, which Hopke believes "lies not just in the amazing circumstances that make up our love stories but in the inner meaning we see and live in these stories of our lives."<sup>27</sup>

All of which brings me back to music.

I think our lives are a lot like jazz, the musical form that floats most often on a cloud of improvisation. Living is like that, too – it should be based on feeling, and on finding a groove, but most of all it should be based on enjoying the moment. As any good musician will tell you, however, no matter how brilliant a soloist might be as they improvise an inspired riff, the whole thing can be undone if they lose sync with the rhythm section around them. The greatest solo, the greatest moment of improvisation, is still always part of something bigger. In the end, maybe the purpose behind the puzzle of synchronicity is to act as a reminder of this common journey that links us together. As individuals, we're the notes – but all together, *we're the melody*.

As I write this section, it's now the 31<sup>st</sup> of October, 2011. I was working away at this book when my roommate, Linda, who was under the weather, asked me to run out and get her some groceries. I drove down to one of the local supermarkets and pulled into the first open parking space I saw in what was a very crowded parking lot. As I turned the engine off I noticed that the car parked in front of me had a vanity rear license plate.

It read "*Ghosts*".

I paused for a moment and thought to myself, "Hey, that's weird." There are a couple of hundred thousand cars licensed in Nova Scotia, and only one of them has a license plate that reads "Ghosts," so the odds of running into that car in that place at that time are pretty long,

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<sup>27</sup> Hopke, 93.

to say the least.

I went into the store and did my shopping, came back out to the parking lot, stowed the groceries in the trunk, got in the car, and turned the key in the ignition. The radio, which I had left on earlier, was silent for just a split second... and then Ray Parker's "Ghostbusters" started to play. What made this really interesting to me is the part of the book I was working on when Linda asked me to get groceries. It was chapter three, about my ghost investigating experiences.

One more thing. It was Linda to whom I was engaged to be married from 1998 until 2007. Linda Wood.

Nine letters. Nine years.

I'm not quite sure what to make of it all. Like Cobb in *Inception*, however, I can't help but wonder if my top is still spinning. Or, in the words of Count Basie, "I'm saying to be continued, until we meet again. Meanwhile, keep on listening and tapping your feet."<sup>28</sup>

Is there meaning in all of this? None that I could demonstrate in a court of law, or to a panel of scientists – certainly nothing that I could replicate on demand. But there's meaning to me, and in the end, as with all great art, isn't that what that really matters?

Ultimately I think an advanced non-human intelligence would agree with Charlie Parker, who said, "Music is your own experience, your own thoughts, your own wisdom. If you don't live it, it won't come out of your horn. They teach you there's a boundary line to music. But, man, there's no boundary line to art."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Count Basie and Albert Murray, *Good Morning Blues: The Autobiography of Count Basie* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 1985), 385.

<sup>29</sup> Charlie Parker, "Charlie Yardbird Parker - Quotes," *Estate of Charlie Parker*. <http://goo.gl/awuuv>.



Christina Cuffari at the Johnny Rockets in the Kodak Center, May 2011. Note the sign.



The receipt from Canter's Deli, May 2011.



The exit to Kimball Road off Highway 126, June 2011.



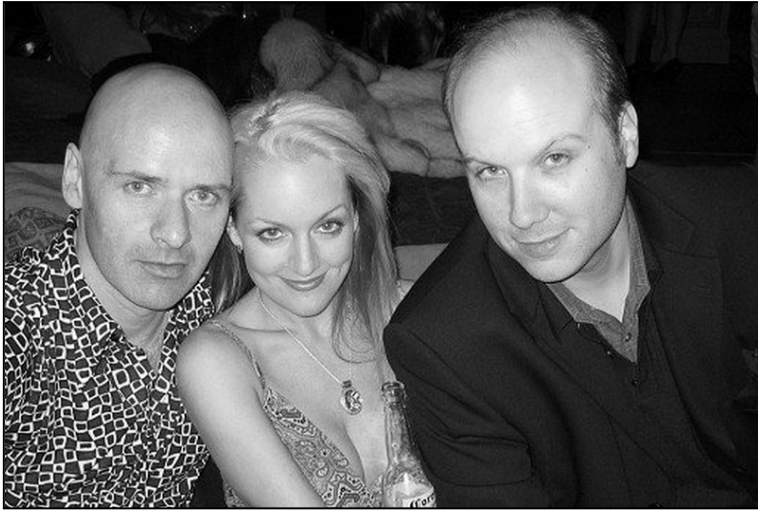
Josh Walter on the scoreboard at Rancho Cucamonga, June 2011. He was born on 04/05/85, and had an ERA of 4.05 entering the game that night.



My good friends Walter Bosley and Greg Bishop in the studio as we were on air on Greg's show Radio Misterioso. The synchronicities came fast and furious!



The name "Veronica" carved into the sidewalk on La Brea in Los Angeles, across from Jim Henson studios, June 2011.



Nick Redfern, Veronica Reynolds and I in Las Vegas in 2004 at a UFO conference.



Linda Wood in 2012. We remain best friends. Nine years. Nine letters. Maybe our relationship has nine lives, or nine different levels? Or maybe all of this was just a reminder of the people who matter to me. (Photo courtesy of Linda Wood)