



PARANORMAL

MY LIFE IN PURSUIT OF THE AFTERLIFE

BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *LIFE AFTER LIFE*

RAYMOND MOODY, M.D.

AND PAUL PERRY

PARANORMAL



My Life in Pursuit of the Afterlife

RAYMOND MOODY, MD

with Paul Perry



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Dedication

*With love to my family
—Raymond Moody*

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Introduction

I have stumbled onto many things in my life, and through this brief loss of stride I have found the world that I live in. It was through a student in my philosophy class who began to question me deeply about his own experience of almost dying that I studied and named the phenomenon known as the near-death experience. Had I not allowed the student to dominate my time with his story, I might have never examined near-death experiences, a path of discovery that led me to write *Life After Life* and led to my lifelong exploration of matters related to the afterlife.

Had I not, literally, stumbled into a bookshelf and been hit on the head by an old book of research by Northcote Thomas, I would not have begun researching the fascinating world of facilitated visions. It is through this line of research that I have been able to re-create many aspects of the near-death experience in patients without them having to almost die. Better yet, I have been able to ease the grief of losing a loved one by helping people to see and otherwise interact with their dead relatives.

And then there are past-life regressions. I tripped into that field of endeavor after listening to a patient who'd gone back in time while engaging in an ordinary session of hypnotherapy.

These are all fields of endeavor that I have gratefully stumbled into. And yes, I believe Mark Twain when he said, "Accident is the name of the greatest of all inventors."

Sometimes, though, I have just stumbled. And the worst of these stumbles have been the result of a disease that clouded everything for me, from my physical senses to my sense of humor to my sense of the world around me. From my late twenties until now, I have lived with a disease called myxedema. This is a difficult affliction to diagnose. Simply stated, with this disease the thyroid gland does not produce enough thyroxine, a hormone that acts in our body something like the volume dial on a radio. The result of this disease is a variety of peculiar symptoms that can lead to myxedema madness, which the afflicted person gradually loses his mind.

Although myxedema seems as though it should be an easy disease to diagnose, it isn't. Residual thyroid in the bloodstream can trick test instruments into "false positive" readings, which makes thyroid levels seem normal when they are not. As a result, my thyroid levels have been erratic over the years, and at times nonexistent. These have been the times when I stumbled the most. At times when my thyroid levels have been low, I have made major mistakes in judgment: given control of my financial life to people I shouldn't have; found myself in mental hospitals; worn thick woolen coats in the middle of a Georgia summer because I was terribly cold; locked myself in my house and refused to come out because I thought the world was against me. I could go on and on.

Over the years I have kept this condition quiet—or as quiet as I possibly could—thinking that it might affect the perception of me or my work. But now I have become wiser about my illness and its effects on my persona. Instead of working against me, it has made me more empathic and a better understanding of those who are faced with end-of-life issues. It has also made me look at illness as an altered state that changes our perceptions of ourselves and the world around us as much as, say, a near-out-of-body experience or even a near-death experience. Like those and other altered states, illness can make us feel both weak and powerful at the same time, depending upon our level of acceptance

the way things are and our ability to dig deep and find new sources of strength. When one man said me—as others have said—that his near-death experience drained him of strength yet filled him with hope, I understood completely how that could take place. I also understand that to accept such contradiction, one often has to experience an altered state as powerful as illness.

That's why I feel it's important to begin this book by recounting the battle of my own life. Without such a near-fatal illness, I wouldn't have the empathy for others necessary to continue my research in the field of the afterlife. And without it, I wouldn't have had my own near-death experience, an event that taught me more in a few minutes than years of research and lecturing.

So what I am trying to say, dear reader, is that if the presentation of my attempted suicide makes you doubt my work or the value of its lessons, you should stop reading now. Let me just say that I think this experience has made me more honest about myself and my work; without it, I would lack that dimension that is not present in many doctors, the one that goes beyond knowledge and into the realm of actually being a patient. To paraphrase William Osler, the father of modern surgery, *a man who has been a patient becomes a much better physician.*

That has certainly been the case with me.

My switch from physician to patient came in January 1991. This was before my myxedema had been properly diagnosed. My thyroid level had dipped off the charts, although I didn't know it. I just knew that I had not felt well for months, but somehow I had convinced myself that it was world events combined with the impact of those events on my personal situation that was making me ill.

This was the year that Iraqi ruler Saddam Hussein decided to attack Kuwait for stealing his country's oil. It was also the time when a new book of mine was being published. *Coming Back* was a study of past-life regressions that I had worked on for years. I had made some astounding discoveries in this work. I had found ways in which modern medicine could use these hypnotic transitions into the past to help patients overcome long-standing psychiatric problems. I had also discovered that a large number of patients seemed truly to go back in time to past lives. Not only did they say they had, but many of them provided proof through their hypnotic regressions that they had indeed lived in an earlier era. I had collected this proof from the patients during my sessions with them. I had established to my satisfaction that if they hadn't actually lived in the past, they had somehow been channeled very vivid information linking them with the past.

I was very excited about this book. Not only could it change the lives of many patients with long-standing psychiatric problems, but it would open another door into my continuing study of life after death.

But as the summer progressed, it became more and more obvious that the publication of my book and world events were about to collide. Saddam Hussein was preparing his attack on Kuwait, and our president was lining up international support for an attack on Saddam. These events couldn't have converged at a worse time for me. My marriage had fallen apart, I had been defrauded out of a fortune and had little money left, and I was exhausted from an imbalance of thyroid in my system, a condition that wasn't diagnosed yet. I begged my publisher to delay the book tour until the coming "mother of all battles" (as Saddam called it) was over. "If I go out on tour now, I'll be canceled in every state," I told the publisher. "I don't think people want to hear about my work when a war is starting."

Surprisingly, no one at the publishing house seemed to understand what I was talking about. Instead they launched the press tour two days before Saddam's troops rolled into Kuwait.

My first stop was New York City. I was ill by the time I reached the Big Apple from Georgia, but still ready to tell the world about the findings in my new book. But there was no need to be ready. All of my media appearances were canceled as Iraqi tanks rolled into Kuwait. "Of course," I said as a T

producer told me she didn't have an extra reporter to do an interview with me. "Why would you? For once, present life is more exciting than past lives."

I visited each of several media outlets on my schedule and got the same comment from each of them: Operation Desert Storm was the biggest thing going. They couldn't waste a minute on any other coverage. "We're hardly covering the Yankees," said one distressed producer.

I left New York the next day for Boston, where no one would interview me either. "Go home," said a blunt-spoken producer. "Saddam's getting everything we've got." After a day in old Beantown I was interviewed by exactly no one. I was zero for eight: no press interviews and eight studio visits.

I pressed on. By the time I left Canada I was zero for twelve. Well, sort of. One Canadian station found a few minutes to interview me and said they would run the interview at a later date. I don't know if the interview ever ran. I didn't care. I was getting sicker.

By the time I reached Denver I knew I should see a doctor about my rapidly declining thyroid levels. There I could get a blood test and be prescribed an appropriate amount of thyroid medication to get my blood level back where it should have been. But I didn't see a doctor. The lack of thyroid had clouded my cognition so much that I thought the haze I was living in was due to severe depression. I felt from being on the road and pushing a dead book, one that had been killed by world events.

And so I pressed on, one for eighteen by the time I left Denver.

California was next. By the time I landed in Los Angeles I was seeing the world in black and white, a danger sign for me of very severe thyroid deficiency. I was accustomed to the routine by now. A public relations person would pick me up at the airport and then tell me how many of the planned interviews for that day had been canceled. Then we would drive to the ones that hadn't been canceled, only to find that they had been too busy the past week to remember to cancel by phone. A couple of the stations did hurried interviews out of courtesy, and by the end of the day I was on another airplane headed for San Diego.

It was in San Diego that the idea to kill myself took hold. I sat in my hotel room, looking down at the street below, and considered prying the window open and taking a final leap. Every day it was a feeling as though tomorrow would be the day everything came apart. Being a psychiatrist, I knew that *presque vu* was the name for that feeling. It means a constant state of frustration. Now, alone in the San Diego hotel room at the end of a failed press tour, I was ready to end the despair once and for all.

I called Paul Perry, my co-author, in Arizona. We had been talking daily as my tour progressed across the country, and he knew how down and depressed I had become. But the conversation we had from San Diego alarmed him. I shared with him my latest plan. I was going to figure out a way to pry open the window—hotel windows rarely open all the way just for this reason—and throw myself in the alley below.

Paul had a different plan. "We can always do another press tour," he said.

It was worse than that, I said. I had been watching my life unravel for some time, and now it was finally happening. I could see it coming apart right before me, like springs and screws coming out of the back of a wristwatch. That was it. My life was broken. I wanted out.

I spoke to Paul for more than an hour and then, exhausted, fell asleep. In the morning I left for Atlanta.

I hoped things might improve when I returned to the comfort of home, but they didn't. I could hear the tension in my own voice as I explained to my friends what a failure the lengthy press tour had been. I am exhausted, I said to my friends, who looked genuinely concerned. I made an appointment to see my doctor on Monday, but by Sunday I was completely over the edge, deep in the grip of myxedema madness. With a large bottle of the painkiller Darvon in my possession, I got in my car and drove

my office at the university. There, I reasoned, I would lock the door and take an overdose of painkillers sufficient to kill me.

In my office I opened the bottle of Darvon and poured them out onto my desk. Then I began to take them several at a time with gulps from a can of Coca-Cola. I took about two dozen of the pills and then sat down at the desk. For some reason I called my co-author Paul.

“I’ve done it,” I said with a note of finality.

“Done what?” he asked.

“I’ve taken pills and I’m dying,” I said.

I could hear the controlled panic in Paul’s voice as he started to ask a series of questions: “What do you take? How many did you take? Where are you?”

I became somewhat angry at the line of questioning. I could tell that he wanted to get enough information to somehow intervene from Arizona. But I didn’t want an intervention. What I wanted was good conversation in the final moments of my life.

“Look, Paul, I have researched death and I know it’s nothing to be afraid of. I will be better off dead.”

And that was genuinely how I felt. Myxedema madness had put me in the throes of a paranoia and despair so great that I felt everyone would be better off if I was no longer around. No amount of talk could convince me otherwise. Paul suggested a number of possible solutions to my problems including an agent and CPA to straighten out my money problems and a new press tour to arouse interest in the book. I would hear none of it. I was ready to die.

“You know, Paul, being alive holds more fear for me than being dead. I have talked to hundreds of people who have crossed into death, and they all tell me that it’s great over there,” I said. “Every day I wake up afraid of the day. I don’t want that anymore.”

“What about your children?” Paul asked.

“They’ll all understand,” I said resolutely. “They know I’m not happy here. They’ll be sad, but they’ll understand. It’s time for me to leave.”

I could hear someone jiggling the office door knob as we spoke. Then there was a pounding on the heavy wooden door, a couple of raps at first and then a persistent drumbeat. Then a loud voice: “Campus police, open the door.”

I ignored the demand and kept talking to Paul, taking a few more pills as we spoke. Within seconds a key was slipped into the door lock and the door sprang open. Policemen rushed in, and before I could say much of anything they had put my hands behind me and sat me on the floor.

One of the policemen picked up the phone and began talking to Paul. Apparently Paul asked about the presence of pills, because the policeman began to count the pills on the desk. When he was done he dropped the phone on the desk and from his police radio dialed 911.

An overdose of Darvon has little effect on a person until it reaches a certain blood level. Then the painkiller overwhelms the heart’s beating mechanism and quickly stops it cold. A dentist friend who had seen someone overdose on Darvon said it was like falling off a table. The person was going along fine until they just dropped. I knew that the same thing would happen to me shortly. All I had to do was wait. I sat patiently on the floor as emergency medical technicians charged up the stairs with the gurney and equipment.

“Are you okay?” asked one of the EMTs.

“Sure,” I said, and I was. Never better, actually. I was not afraid of death, but I had obviously become very afraid of life.

Things began to happen very fast after that. My chest felt very heavy, and I had the feeling of

slipping into a dark blue place. They hoisted me onto the gurney and strapped me in and rolled me quickly down the passageway to the waiting ambulance.

As they loaded me into the ambulance the world around me began to fade. The concerned EMT was in my face, trying to keep me awake. Another EMT was drawing something into a very large syringe, probably adrenaline, to inject into my heart. "Better get going," shouted one of the policemen as he slammed the rear doors. I could feel the ambulance accelerate, hitting speed bumps hard as we headed for the hospital. An elephant was sitting on my chest. My eyes were closed, or at least I think they were. Either way, I could see nothing.

After decades of studying the process of death, I knew what was most likely coming next. I would have the feeling of moving rapidly through a tunnel; maybe I would see my grandmothers and grandfathers. Certainly I would have a life review before it was all over. I hoped that would happen. As far as I was concerned, my best years were behind me. If anything excited me it was the past.

Now I could relive it again....

Chapter One

I was born on June 30, 1944, the very day my father shipped out for World War II. I don't know what my mother thought as she labored to give birth to me that summer day. Given the way her life had gone up to that point, she probably thought that her husband would be killed in the war and would never see his newborn son. Already in her young life, eight of her fifteen brothers and sisters had died in childhood, and one more would be lost in the war. Death had been a constant companion for Mom and it would be safe to say that she didn't expect a better future.

I know mine was a difficult birth. Mom was young, I was large, and negative thoughts about Raymond Sr.'s likelihood of returning from war were on her mind as she struggled with my childbirth.

Childbirth, dark memories, and fear of the future all added up to a tremendous case of depression that my young mother would only talk about with her parents. In those days people didn't talk freely about their emotions, as they do now. Americans were almost devoutly stoic, expected to show endurance in the face of adversity rather than let anyone know how they truly felt. The result for my mother was a worsening case of depression, which she had to hold inside rather than express.

I think the town of Porterdale, Georgia, was filled with women coping with the same level of depression as my mother. World War II had emptied the town of all its young men, and the women of Porterdale lived with a daily uncertainty about whether their sons, husbands, and lovers would come home alive.

The war also left them childless. Few children had been born since the war started in 1941. And now, with my birth in 1944, an event of some importance had occurred in the town of Porterdale. The town had a baby.

That was good for my mother. When she needed a rest or just some time alone to deal with her depression, Grandmother and Grandfather Waddleton would take over the role of parenting. They doted over me like I was the only child they had ever seen, passing me constantly from one to the other in an effort to give my mother breathing space. It was through them that I was "shared out" to the rest of the community, an arrangement that gave me a large and caring family.

All of the women in the neighborhood who were about the age of my grandmother unofficially adopted me as a grandchild of their own. Two doors down was Mrs. Crowell. She became one of the most important figures in my life. I remember her as being a sweet but very strong woman, the kind who would eventually be the most happy with in marriage. I would go to see her all the time—as an infant and later as a preteen. She allowed me to come in without even knocking, which I did frequently. Once inside, I would curl up on her sofa and dream. She was among the most encouraging people in my life. Her son told me at her funeral years later that she would hold me on her lap and repeat over and over to me, "Raymond, you are going to be a very special person someday."

Next to us was the home of Mrs. Day, who baked and cooked all the time and let me sample with impunity anything that came out of the oven. Best of all were her chocolate chip cookies, followed by puffy home-baked white bread.

Then there was Grandmother Moody, my father's mother. She lived about a mile away. I spent many

hours there, smothered with kisses and given great praise for looking just like my father, who was that time struggling with the daily dangers of combat in the Pacific Theater. I don't think she expected to see him alive again, and sometimes she hugged me just a little too hard.

Mrs. Gileaf, Mrs. Martin, Mrs. Ally—to all of these women I was a novelty because I was a baby. I remember well being held, rolled around in a stroller, or rocked by each of these beautiful people. They were the ones who made my childhood such a big and bright place in my mind.

Porterdale was on the wide and fast-flowing Yellow River, which powered a sawmill. The streets were tree-lined, the sidewalks were clean and new, and the atmosphere was bucolic. Porterdale was the perfect little town. The most memorable place of all, though, was the front porch. Believe me, in Porterdale in the forties there was nothing to do but sit on the porch and talk. That is what people did. Town folks would stroll the streets at night, going from one porch to the next, trading stories of the war or local news.

It was on the porch one night that I was first introduced to the concept of the return from death. I was in a story that my uncle Fairley told about his dog Friskie. One day, as the story went, little Friskie got hit and killed by a passing truck. Uncle Fairley was heartbroken as he loaded Friskie into his truck and took the poor little dog to the dump. (Sorry, readers, but that is what we did with dead dogs in Porterdale.) Several days later, an unnerving thing happened: Friskie trotted up the street and showed up on the porch, his tail wagging and his face a vision of happiness. Everyone was moved deeply by the return of Friskie, as was I. Friskie was my protector, and to have him back was a great delight.

I was very young when this event happened, but members of my family spoke about it constantly over the years, especially my aunt May, who found in it powerful religious overtones and alluded to Friskie and the resurrection of Christ all in the same breath. It was this memory of Friskie's return from the dead—implanted by my own family's lore—that led me to be fascinated by near-death experiences later in my life.

If I was the town's baby, I was also the apple of my Grandfather Waddleton's eye. Frankly, no one expected my father to return from fighting the Japanese in the Pacific. Everyone had seen the newsreel footage at the Porterdale Cinema and been shocked at the savagery and brutality happening on islands they had never heard of. Because as far as anyone knew I might already be fatherless, Grandfather Waddleton insisted that I call him "Daddy." That is what my mother told me. She said that it would keep me from feeling fatherless in case my real father didn't return. I knew no difference. I didn't really understand the concept of fatherhood at that point, and Grandfather Waddleton would certainly have been my choice of a father if I'd had such a choice.

I can still see his deep blue eyes and bright smile as he held me close and read to me. Sometimes he would drive me around town in his Model T car, the wind blowing through my wispy hair. I can remember the feeling of the wind and know from photos that I was squinting from the glare of the sun. It feels good to look at those photos now, which is why I think I was feeling good at the time, riding in a jet-black Model T with the man I thought was my father.

Years later my real father told the story of being on a remote island air base in the Pacific when all the men were told to come to the flight line. They stood there until a silver B-24 touched down with a squeal and revved its way to the hangar where they all waited.

The name of the plane was *Enola Gay*, and the pilot, a small slim man with a puzzled look, had the name tag "Tibbetts" sewn to his flight-suit pocket. A number of civilians and high-level military

officers were standing by, and when Tibbetts approached them, a brief speech was made and he was immediately awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross.

My real father's vocabulary expanded that day. He heard the words "atomic bomb" and went away wondering just what such a device was and why the military was making such a big deal out of dropping only one.

Back home, the people of Porterdale were also figuring out what an atomic bomb was. Pictures in the paper showed a mushroom cloud and cities fried right off the map by this new invention. Whatever the atomic bomb was, they welcomed it because it brought the end to a brutal war.

I am told that there was jubilation in the streets and tears of joy. Everyone had expected that an end to the war would come only after a costly invasion of Japan. By some estimates, 500,000 American lives would have been lost in such an invasion, along with the deaths of millions of Japanese, truly the mother of all battles. But this atomic bomb had stopped the war in its tracks. The people of Porterdale were elated.

My mother started reading the newspaper avidly now. Soldiers didn't know when they were coming home, but they did know the number of the ship they would be on. My father sent that number in a letter to my mother, and now she would scan columns of type looking for the ship that would carry my father to California, where he would be transferred to a train to Georgia.

I remember vividly the day we went to Atlanta to pick up my father. We all piled into Grandfather Waddleton's Model T and drove the sixty miles to the train station. The place was chaotic, with families milling around nervously waiting for the trains to arrive. Finally a long troop train pulled into the station, and the crowd pressed in, nearly spilling over the platform.

My mother searched frantically for her husband, and when she saw him she pushed her way through the crowd and flung herself on his chest. I was right behind her, held in the arms of my grandfather. I remember to this day a panicked feeling as my grandfather handed me off to my rightful dad. He pressed me into my father's scratchy woolen coat, and my dad held me tight and close until I began to cry and push away. Dad held me tighter, and as he did the woolen coat felt even rougher on my infant skin. I squirmed and cried, and as I pushed away harder my father held me tighter until I could barely catch my breath.

With my free arm, I reached to my grandfather, and when he didn't reach back I twisted around and held my arms out to my mother, who snatched me away from this intimate stranger.

"It's going to take him a while to get used to you," she said to her husband. "He doesn't quite know what's going on yet."

And she was right. Even at such a truly tender age, I knew a lot was going to change.

Looking back, I can visualize this entire scene from my father's perspective. As a medic in the Army, he had seen some of the most god-awful injuries that modern warfare could dish up. All the while, in what little spare time he had, Dad was dreaming of a homecoming in which he would be reunited with a loving family in Georgia and be able to get on with his life.

And what was the first thing to greet him? A child who was spoiled by the entire town and didn't want to be hugged by a father he had never seen.

Now I can look back and cringe at my behavior. At the time, though, I felt very displaced. I had been the center of my family's universe. Now I was being supplanted by a man I was supposed to call "Dad."

Frankly I had difficulty with this new dad. The man I had been raised to call Daddy, my Grandfather Waddleton, was a smiling and kindhearted gentleman who paid careful attention to me. My new dad proved to be very difficult. He had been a military officer and as a result had developed a sort of creased cut military bearing that would become his trademark for his entire life. Plus, he would eventually

become a surgeon, a personality type that is usually rigid, uptight, and wanting to be in charge almost every situation. I frequently heard stories in my teenage years about my father yelling in the operating room at nurses or other support staff. I wasn't embarrassed when I heard nurses swear about my father. Rather, I could sympathize with them because I too was frequently on the receiving end of such anger.

One example that sticks in my mind came only months after my father had returned from the war. He was outside my grandparents' house planting some peach trees when I ran into one of the tiny trees with a tricycle and snapped the trunk. It was an accident, and no big deal since there were plenty more saplings where that one came from. Still, my father flew into a rage, yelling at me with such vehemence that I began to cry at the anger that boiled over. And then the yelling continued, until my grandmother came outside and rescued me from the unwarranted tirade.

These angry outbursts took place frequently and were disturbing for everyone who witnessed them. My mother tried to dismiss them by laughing them off, but nobody found them forgivable. I remember after one of his outbursts, my Grandfather Waddleton became very pensive. After a consultation with my grandmother, he went outside and with great animation began to talk to my father. I couldn't see my grandfather's face because his back was to me, but I could see my father's and knew he was hearing something that he didn't like. His jaw was clenching and his face was turning red as his eyes narrowed their gaze on my grandfather.

I couldn't hear what the two men were saying, and it probably would have meant little to me if I had. For me the tone of their voices told the tale of dueling styles, a sharp battle between a gentle man supporting his grandson and a gruff, newly returned veteran who would never admit he knew little about dealing with children.

When the two men stopped talking, with no clear agreement, my grandfather turned and walked back toward the porch. That was when I could see how much the conversation about "tough" versus "love" had taken out of my grandfather. He looked withered as he crossed the lawn, and when he reached the porch he scooped me up and took me inside, his arms trembling as he set me down in the living room and then fell onto the sofa. Grandmother brought him a drink of water, and we sat in silence for a long time.

That was the first of many confrontations between my father and grandfather, and the fact that we all lived together in one house didn't make things easier. My father's years of military training prevented him from backing down. His way of getting what he wanted was yelling and intimidation—attributes that might have worked well in combat but weren't very effective with a two-year-old child. And Grandfather Waddleton wouldn't back down either. He had always been a gentle man, and he wouldn't allow quick anger or gruffness to become the new environment in his home. Since we lived with my grandparents until my father could get into medical school, we all had to live by their rules. But the standoff between my father and grandfather created a lot of unhealthy tension in the family.

I remember once when my father was studying in the living room and I was playing with some toy soldiers not far away. I was standing them up in a line and knocking them over one by one with my index finger. Suddenly, with no warning, my father began to swear loudly. I thought he had slammed his finger in a book, but when I looked at him I could see that the swearing was directed at me.

"Can someone get this kid out of here!" he barked. "I don't need the noise. I'm trying to study!"

He slammed his book down on the wooden floor and stood up. Without saying a word, my grandmother swept through the room, picked me up, and took me outside to be with my grandfather.

I am sure my father and grandfather had words about the incident later, because I saw them talking in the kitchen and could tell that both of them were uncomfortable with the conversation. Still, it was

a conversation between them that was repeated many times before I was four years old. And it was the type of conversation that wore heavily on my grandfather, who never anticipated that the return of my father from the war would bring such tension and anger into his household.

Gradually, my grandparents began to shield me from my father, acting as a protective wall from his anger. They were sympathetic in knowing that he had been changed by the horrible traumas of the war. But they were also afraid that he would traumatize me. Because of that, they made a conscious decision to become the buffer between the two of us.

This buffer wasn't a bad thing, at least not in the beginning. I heard and saw a lot that I wouldn't have experienced had they not taken such a great interest in me. Even though I was so young, they truly fueled the fires of thought for me.

One day, for example, an elderly man died across the street from my aunt's house. Rather than conceal death from me (as so many people do with children), my grandmother walked me down the street and into the house, where she paid her respects to the man's wife. As she did so, I wandered into the family room and discovered the deceased man laid out on a couch.

The sallow look of his skin and the angle of repose of his head showed me the distinct difference between the appearance of death and the appearance of sleep. Even at the age of four, I could tell that this man was dead, although I touched his cold chest with my hands just to make certain.

"Dead people look different, don't they," said my grandmother, coming up behind me. "It's like something has left them and gone somewhere else. Must be the soul."

This may have been the first time I ever heard the word "soul," and it was certainly the first time I thought of anything "leaving the body" upon death. I didn't think of the concept of "soul survival" until I was being religious in nature, since we never went to church anyway. But I do remember that the idea conflicted with what I assumed happened at death—a complete wipeout of consciousness.

Chapter Two

I know it sounds ridiculous to think that a four-year-old might have a philosophy about death, but I did. It was a philosophy that was originally formed by all the talk of death that revolved around World War II. Most of the soldiers who died in that horrible war didn't come home. They were either buried in foreign graveyards or totally decimated. The ones who did come home were sealed in a box and were never seen again.

The notion that something might survive bodily death was not something I even thought about. The dead were simply gone.

This was not such a pleasant thought to me as a child, because I always felt that I was going to die. That belief was also a holdover from World War II, where a sense of doom pervaded each and every day. It seemed as though death was always around the corner, and I would stumble into his hooded presence at any time.

On one devilishly cold night I did get a glimpse of death. I was sitting on the floor by the fireplace in my grandparents' home, intently reading a comic book while trying to stay warm. Next to me in chairs sat my mother and grandmother, chatting away about my father, who had just been accepted into medical school in Augusta. It was an exciting time for all of us because it meant that my father would begin that long journey through medical education that would lead to him becoming a doctor.

The two women were so deeply engaged in conversation that they hardly noticed my grandfather. He opened the front door and shivered his way to a spot close to the fireplace. He was wearing his turtle green wool coat and a cap, but it didn't seem to be doing the job of keeping him warm. He just stood there and shivered, standing as close to the fire as he could.

"What's wrong, hon?" asked my grandmother.

"I don't know," said my grandfather. "I've never felt colder in my life than tonight."

The two women continued to talk, and my grandfather continued to shiver. Finally, at my grandmother's suggestion, he went to bed, where he could bury himself beneath piles of blankets.

When I awoke the next day I could hear my mother and grandmother talking very loud downstairs and crying. I peeked out of my room and could see both of them going in and out of my grandparents' room. Shortly thereafter, the front door opened, and my father came in, leading two ambulance attendants with a stretcher.

My father embraced my mother for comfort and looked at me as I started to come out of my room.

"Stay there a minute, Raymond," he said to me. I stayed at the top of the stairs until my grandfather was wheeled out of the house, and then I ran down.

"I think your grandfather has had a stroke," said my grandmother.

Stroke. The word meant nothing to me, but I began to cry. Soon we were all weeping and holding one another. Then my father said that he and Grandmother would follow the ambulance to the hospital and Mother and I should stay home.

Stroke, I repeated to myself. *Stroke.* I had no idea what it was, but I was certain that I was never going to see my grandfather again. I went into a kind of shock that erased my memory of the next few

days. Even now I can't remember if I went to the hospital to see him; nor can I remember the day I returned from the hospital. Strangely enough, I do remember reliving my short life with the man who was most important to me.

For instance, I remember looking at a blue marble on my bedroom dresser and being able to recall the day my grandfather gave it to me. I had been with my aunt May, who picked us up every Saturday in a cab and took me downtown to buy me a toy. On this particular day we got out of the cab right next to a pipe that was standing up about two inches from the edge of the sidewalk. While my aunt paid the cab, I looked down into the pipe and saw a blue cat's-eye marble sitting at the bottom. I tried and tried to get that marble, but my short fingers couldn't quite reach it.

When my aunt took my hand and walked me into the toy store, I thought I would never see the marble again. But when we came out of the store, there was my grandfather with the marble in his hand and a smile on his face. Now with him in the hospital with a stroke, all I could think of was his face beaming down at me as he held the marble that was as bright and friendly as his jovial blue eyes and wonderful smile.

Stroke. Was my grandfather being punished for having me call him Daddy when my father was away at war? Was he being punished for being so totally devoted to me? At times I wondered if the stroke was my fault for thinking of my grandfather as my dad.

Stroke. Or maybe it was my father's fault? Maybe the way my father treated me—a great source of distress for my grandfather—had caused the stroke. Did their bad relationship somehow cause the calamity? I know it made me feel confused, guilty, and sick to my stomach. Was a stroke the same kind of sickness? I was totally confused.

My grandfather's stroke was so distressing to me that I can't remember how long it was before I returned. Thinking back, I do remember coming down the stairs one morning and having my grandmother take my hand and lead me into their bedroom. There, propped up with pillows, was Granddad. He couldn't speak, although he tried, and when he smiled only half of his mouth curled up, the other half remained immobile. His left hand didn't work, and neither did his left leg. Rather, those two limbs just lay there like they were dead.

When I realized that half of my grandfather didn't work, I began to fidget nervously and cry. It was horrifying to see the man I thought so highly of in such a condition. A dozen questions popped into my mind. Was my grandfather still in there, just trapped inside a nonfunctioning body? Was this just temporary? Would he ever be okay again? And what is a stroke anyway?

As these questions ran through my mind I began to cry very hard. Then I noticed that my grandfather's working eye was becoming damp with tears that ran down his cheek. I wanted to touch him, but I was afraid that I might hurt him. Mercifully, my grandmother intervened.

"Come on, Raymond," she said, putting her arm around me and walking me out of the room. "Grandpa needs a lot of rest."

The experience of seeing my grandfather was so traumatizing that I remember very little of my grandfather after the stroke. Most of the time he stayed in bed, looking at the ceiling, at the wall, or out the window, depending upon which way he was turned in bed. Sometimes Uncle Fairley would come over, and he and my grandmother would lift Grandfather into an old-fashioned wheelchair and take him out to the porch, where he sat slumped and silent. It seemed as though those were the only places I saw my grandfather for the next eight years. And since he was paralyzed, my interactions with him were very limited.

My grief is apparent to me now, looking back. I had lost my best friend, a man who had insulated me from what was bad about the world and introduced me to what was good. Now that he was

essentially gone, there was little for me to do. My father spent all of his time studying for his medical school tests, my mother focused her attentions on his needs, Grandmother was taking care of Grandfather, and no one talked about how they felt about the loss of the family patriarch.

Nowadays the phrase “family dysfunction” would come up in discussing this situation, but in 1944 the concept was not yet defined and the phrase was not yet in the medical lexicon. In retrospect, I see that our family was truly dysfunctional, but oddly normal for the times.

With the loss of my grandfather, my curiosity veered in other directions. I spent a lot of time with the few other children in town my age, but soon became bored with children’s games. I was more curious than these other children and had little interest in activities that didn’t have creative elements to them.

I remember standing at the mouth of the caves on the outskirts of Porterdale and having an uncanny feeling, like I was about to step into the mouth of the world. Even at such an early age, I felt that the earth openings provided access to something deep inside of us. When I expressed this feeling to the other children, they gave me a blank look, clearly not understanding what I was talking about.

My playmates complained to their parents that I was boring, and to them I definitely was. But as our neighbor Mrs. Crowell said to her son Billy, “Raymond Jr. is going to be somebody very special. He’s the smart kid, and maybe you should learn from him.”

With my mind in creative turmoil, I began to turn inward. I saw words as the key to the intellectual world and began to work on my reading ability. At breakfast I would look at the backs of cereal boxes and ask whoever was at the table with me how to pronounce words and what they meant. Before long I was reading cereal boxes with little effort and decided to advance to more difficult reading material, namely, comic books. I had looked at Donald Duck comics in the past, but now I was making an effort to actually read them. And I did. Before the end of my fourth birthday I was reading several Donald Duck comics per week, fully engrossed in the genius of the creator, Carl Barks.

In many ways, Barks replaced my grandfather. I can honestly say that he became one of the biggest figures in my life. I knew the exact day each month when the next Donald Duck comic would come out. To this day I can remember the excitement of buying them and the fresh smell of the ink as I opened them and began to read the stories.

I know it seems odd to hear an adult admit that comic book figures helped shape his life. But in recent years I have read that both Steven Spielberg and George Lucas, two of my generation’s greatest film directors, had their sense of adventure shaped by the works of Carl Barks. I am sure they can point to specific comic books that were seminal in their lives. I know I certainly can.

It was to Carl Barks and my father that I owe my eventual career path. I was reading a comic book in the same room where my father sat reading his anatomy book. Suddenly I came across the word “philosopher.” I believe Donald was pretending to be a philosopher, and for the life of me I didn’t know what that word meant. I am sure I mutilated the word the first time I said it, but I looked up at my dad and asked, “What is a philosopher?”

My dad didn’t look up from his book, but his answer was clear and to the point.

“Philosophers are very wise men who talk about very big and important questions,” he said.

“Then that’s what I want to be,” I said. At the age of four, I knew clearly that I wanted to answer the world’s big questions, no matter what those questions might be. I wanted to become a philosopher.

Having begun this chapter with my grandfather’s stroke, I will end it with his death. Although he didn’t die for another eight years, he was essentially gone from my life after that stroke. He couldn’t

chase me in the yard anymore or take long walks with me and talk about the people he knew or the places he had been. And although he tried to read to me a few times, he gave up on that too, since he couldn't form the words that he was looking at on the pages of books that I turned for him.

Grandmother, trying to make the best of the situation, would say that he was only half-broken, since the stroke had affected half of his body. But even at the age of four I could see that Grandpa was less than half there. The change in him was so fast and so definite that I often likened it to turning off a light switch. Turn it on and the room goes bright, turn it off and the room is dark. His light had been turned off and nothing—not Grandma, not modern medicine, not prayer, and not my dad—could turn it on again. My grandfather had become a dark room.

For the next eight years, my grandmother was totally devoted to her husband. She bathed him, helped him with the bedpan, turned him over frequently to prevent bed sores, and sat with him on the porch. When Fairley or my father helped her get him seated in the antique wheelchair, she would wheel him through the house, out the front door, and down the street for a “roll.”

Conversation after the stroke became one-sided between them. Grandmother would read him newspapers or magazines or talk about events in Porterdale, and he would sit silent and listen. Sometimes he would just fall asleep and she would keep talking as though he were as attentive as ever. When he smiled, half of his face worked. When he tried to speak, half of his tongue worked, as did—seemed—half of his mental functions. It was the ultimate horror for all of us.

When Grandfather died in 1956, my grandmother seemed to expect it. She called the Porterdale Funeral Home and the owner, Mr. Davis, drove the home's vehicle over himself, loaded my grandfather's body on a stretcher, and returned to the home to prepare the body for burial.

We returned for the funeral from Macon, where we were living. When we went to the funeral home, Mr. Davis took my mother's arm in his and with tears in his eyes told her that her father had no bed sores on his body—“not one”—until the day he died.

“We were astounded,” he said, looking deeply into my mother's eyes. “Can you imagine? He couldn't turn over or take care of himself in any way for eight years, and still he had no bed sores. Your mother's a saint.”

Chapter Three

I wouldn't say that I focused excessively on death as a child, but when the subject came up I could rarely keep my questions to myself. For example, there was the first time I truly pondered the notion that death may be survivable.

It was the summer of 1956 in Macon, Georgia, and I was twelve years old. I was standing at the corner of our house by the garage waiting for my father to come home. It wasn't unusual for him to be late. He was a surgeon, and even at my young age I knew that there was no nine-to-five in the profession. Nevertheless, I was waiting anxiously by the garage for him because we were planning a weekend in the woods at a cabin my mother had rented.

Finally I could see his big Oldsmobile come around the corner and lumber down the street. He pulled the car onto the carport and steered the front end within a foot or so of my legs. It always made me nervous when he did this, but I didn't move, even though getting tapped by the massive car bumper would be painful. I held my ground.

Dad got out of the car and took a deep breath, like it was the first he'd had all day. Then he smiled, which made me think he was feeling guilty for being late, and shut his car door. I noticed that he was wearing no tie or jacket, and his longish crew cut looked slightly mussed, as though he had been running his hands through it.

"Sorry I'm late," he said. "But right before I was about to leave a patient's heart stopped and I had to start it again."

My father was a natural surgeon who loved what he did and talked about it at every opportunity. Typical dinner conversations included how to stop a spurting aneurysm or the many different and fascinating ways to set a badly broken leg. That evening, he began to explain the process of restarting a heart, which was vastly different in those days before chest compression became the norm or the defibrillator was invented.

"By the time I got to the man he was dead," said my father, who described the next step of cutting open the man's chest by drawing his finger across the chest of an imaginary patient in front of him. He cut open his chest just below his breastbone and was able to get my hand in there and squeeze his heart until it started beating again."

The discussion of such an act could easily have been traumatizing to a twelve-year-old, but I was used to hearing the physical details of medical emergencies. That day, however, my father's words hit me in a slightly different way. My mind stuck on one thing my father said: "The man was dead."

At that age, the idea of an afterlife would not have occurred to me. I had made up my mind even earlier in my life that when you die your body goes to nothing and your consciousness simply vanishes.

But now, as Dad told me about reviving this man's heart that had stopped beating, I remembered saying, "Do you mean that he was dead?"

My father seemed taken aback by the way I had formulated the situation. I seriously doubt that he had considered what it was like for the patient, who had been resurrected from certain death by me.

father's deft handiwork. I could see my father thinking for a moment about my question, and then I shook it off. "Yeah, the man was dead, but I brought him back to life."

I didn't hear any more of what my father said. All I could think about was what this experience must have been like for the patient. I remember thinking that this man must have been in the darkest, deepest, most unfathomable and utter blackness—and then he had come back from that. Did he know he was dead when he was dead? Would he be able to tell us what that other place was like? Or was there another place at all? This man had been in a place of total obliteration, yet he returned. *Was there anything we could learn from that?*

"Dad, did you talk to the patient when he came back?" I asked. "Where did he go when he died?"

"Well, I did talk to him," my father said, somewhat defensively. "But not about that. I asked him if he knew his name and if he could count the number of fingers I was holding up. That seemed more important at the time."

I was only twelve years old at the time, so I was puzzled as to why my questions about the look and location of the afterlife disturbed my father so much. It didn't become clear until much later, when I was a student in one of Professor Marshall's philosophy classes at the University of Virginia, just exactly why my father didn't consider the discussion of the afterlife to be a "live option." William James, the nineteenth-century psychologist and philosopher who coined this phrase in *Varieties of Religious Experience*, his great book on the origin and purpose of religion from the psychological point of view, defined a live option as religious belief that we can relate to, usually because it has been with us from childhood. So, for example, Hinduism was not a live option for James because it was not a part of his childhood experience and he had no familiarity with it. Christianity, on the other hand, was a live option for James because he had been exposed to Christian ideas as a young person.

My father had been raised an atheist and was dubious about religion, to say the least. The notion of an afterlife was not a live option for him. In fact, he would become agitated at the mere discussion of religion, calling it institutionalized superstition, or worse. Just mentioning something like the afterlife to him, if he was in the wrong mood, could dampen the discussion with a truckload of invective. So concerned was I about his ridicule that it took me years to realize that notions of the afterlife can exist independent of religion. In fact, I can now say with assurance that "religion" and "afterlife" are two entirely different concepts linked together only by religious dogma.

To be fair to my father, survival of bodily death didn't seem like a live option to me at the time either. It never entered my mind that this man who died had stepped into some kind of an afterlife dimension. What I was fascinated by was that he had been in a state of total obliteration and then come back. The idea that something had been going on while he was dead, that perhaps he was out of his body watching my father perform this desperate procedure to save his life, did not cross my mind. Now I realize that he may have been having the peak experience of his lifetime. He may even have confided later to his wife that he left the room via a tunnel of light and met dead relatives who convinced him that a spiritual life awaited his passage from the physical realm.

Years later, when I began to hear about near-death experiences for the first time, I thought of the man my father had saved by plunging his experienced hands into his patient's chest. I remember thinking, *Would my father have heard a story like this if he had thought to ask the patient whose heart he had revived?*

About this time my parents enrolled me in Stratford Academy, a private school started for gifted children. The school was in an antebellum mansion overlooking Macon from the top of a hill. The facility was beautiful, with a Victorian house as the main building and a large brick carriage house that held classrooms and a library.

The headmaster was Joe Hill, who became one of the most influential people in my life. He was a historian who demanded much from his students. On the first day of school he came to class with a stack of thirteen books and assigned one to each of us in the class. I was lucky enough to be assigned Thucydides' work on the Peloponnesian War. I was in the eleventh grade.

Mrs. Hill was just as amazing as her husband. We studied literature under her, and every week the thirteen members of the class had to write a lengthy paper about what they had read. With the close personal attention we received from the Hills and other staff members at Stratford Academy, none of this work was difficult, even though we were so young.

All of a sudden I was getting straight As on my report card. I was no longer derogatorily labeled "the smart kid," as I had been by the other students at the public high school. Now, at Stratford, I was among the smart kids in an environment that truly respected intellect. I had finally found the place where I belonged, and I was thriving. My depression left me, and my parents noted that I rarely retreated to the basement for long periods of time anymore, something I had done frequently when I was in public school.

My parents made a lot of my "return to normal," and I can now understand why. After all, how many sixteen-year-olds are interested in constant, self-guided study? Not many. Was it abnormal? Perhaps so to an outside observer, but from my point of view I was not abnormal. I liked to learn the way most boys like to play baseball.

There was something going on that was definitely abnormal, however, and that was my body temperature. Despite the heat of the Georgia summers and the hot furnaces and thick coats of the winters, I always felt constantly and memorably chilled to the bone and had a "funny feeling" in my throat, a tingling that was difficult to describe. I also had other feelings that are easier to sum up. I felt as though everything around me was a dream, and that I was watching someone else's reality. It was like there was glass between me and the rest of the world and a feeling of de-realization. This was an annoying feeling, one that I always knew was wrong but that I could not shake.

I think these feelings were the first signs of the thyroid deficiency—myxedema—that plagues me this day. Most people have never heard of this disease. Myxedema is caused by an underactive thyroid gland, one that does not produce enough thyroxine. This hormone controls much of a person's metabolism. If one has too much thyroxine—hyperthyroidism—then the body's metabolism burns at a high rate. People with hyperthyroidism have unpleasant symptoms such as weight loss, fast heart rate, increased bowel movements, heat intolerance, and insomnia.

On the other end of the spectrum, people with too little thyroxine—hypothyroidism, which is what I have—are plagued by low metabolism, cold intolerance, fatigue, hair loss, depression, and irritability. If hypothyroidism continues, then myxedema madness can occur, a condition that leads progressively to dementia and delirium and eventually to hallucinations or psychosis.

At this point in my young life, I was far from suffering myxedema madness, but I was certainly in the beginning stages of hypothyroidism. The problem was that nobody knew it. To most people I just came across as an aloof and physically heavy young man who was mainly concerned with books and much less concerned with the world around him. In reality, though, I was a person with a developing thyroid problem that left me with little physical energy and a diminished ability to push back against the world.

Oddly enough, my thyroid problem may have been diagnosed at this time by my uncle Carter. I remember the moment well. My father and I were with Carter, standing outside a Walgreen drugstore in downtown Macon, when Carter put his hand on my arm and then put the back of his hand against my face. A frown came over his face as he tapped my father on the arm.

“I think Ray has thyroid problems,” he said. “He should be sweating like the rest of us, but he’s as cool as a cucumber.”

My dad reached over and put his hand on my face. I noticed that he was perspiring just as heavily as one would expect on a hot and humid summer afternoon in the Deep South. Uncle Carter was pouring sweat too, his shirt soaked like he had walked past a sprinkler.

As my father’s hand touched my face, the front door of the Walgreen’s drugstore opened and the cool air from the air-conditioned store blew out the door and across my dry and cold body.

“I think it’s just the air conditioning from the store,” he said.

The two doctors engaged in a brief conversation about my case. My uncle asked me if I ever had a “funny feeling” in my throat. When I said yes, he started feeling my throat and asked if I had gained weight or ever felt cold when I thought I should be hot.

As I started answering his questions he became more interested. Then the Walgreen’s door swung open and out came my mother and aunt.

“Come on, let’s go,” said my aunt. “It’s hot out here.”

Now, when I think of the attitude I adopted in those days toward knowledge, I think of the philosopher Kant, who said, “There are always two things that fill me with wonder—the starry heavens above me and the conscious self within me.” That is how it was for me as I found myself engrossed in the worlds of astronomy and human psychology.

My interest in the starry heavens came one day in 1952 when I was perusing the racks at a newsstand in a downtown hotel. I frequently became lost in the world of magazine covers and current news, but on this day a headline on the cover of *Collier’s* magazine caught my eye: “Man Will Fly to Space Soon.” That article, which would change my life, was written by a man with the unpronounceable name of Werner von Braun. Working for Hitler during World War II, he had developed the V-2 rocket, which at the time was an advanced weapon that was launched from sites in Europe at his great nemesis, Great Britain. These deadly winged “buzz bombs,” as the British called them, would fall from the sky with their explosive payload. They killed very few people, but their presence was unnerving to the British, who hated not only the bombs but the men like von Braun who had created them.

When the war ended, the United States scooped von Braun and other scientists out of Germany and brought them here to start our own rocket program. Von Braun was our greatest scientific catch from the war. A genius and a natural leader, von Braun was in charge of the American rocket program that eventually put a man on the moon and sent spacecrafts far beyond it. One NASA source called von Braun, “without a doubt, the greatest rocket scientist in history.”

The article I found at the newsstand that day presented a brief history of rockets. Over the next several issues the magazine covered such enticing subjects as the satellites that had already been launched, the creation of three-stage rockets that would blast men into outer space, the creation of giant space stations, flights to the moon, and the eventual creation of winged airplanes that would fly into outer space.

I was already hooked on astronomy at this time. But this series of magazine articles made me realize that we were close to being able to leave the earth and study firsthand many of the things we had only seen with telescopes or speculated about. As I read these articles I was in complete ecstasy.

After the second part of this space travel series came out, I showed my father what I was reading. I remember the event very well, because it was the beginning of another rift between us. He was sitting

in his easy chair, reading the newspapers, when I proudly opened the magazines and showed him the articles. I expected to have a conversation with him about the eventual exploration of outer space, so I was surprised to hear him chuckle as he scanned the magazine pages.

“This is completely ridiculous,” he said, tossing the magazines at my feet. “Man will never go to the moon!”

For the next fifteen years my father tormented me with his belief that man would never go to the moon. He made fun of my belief until the day Neil Armstrong took his first step on the moon, and then he never mentioned it again.

Looking back, I think that my father either thought I was mentally ill to believe “such nonsense” or perhaps believed that I would waste my life studying the heavens when there was so much here on earth that deserved our focus. Beyond making it clear that he was completely against any interest I had in space travel, he never really told me what his issue was with it.

Afraid that my father would throw out the magazines, I kept them hidden under my mattress, like many boys who hide *Playboy*. Late at night I would bring them out and read them by flashlight, using them to prime myself for dreams of weightlessness or a deep space view of our own world.

I kept the magazines for years. Finally they deteriorated so much from constant reading that I had to tape their covers to keep them together. I eventually lost them when I went to college.

I couldn't get enough of astronomy. The vastness of space and the fact that there might be other worlds out there, the pictures of Mars with the lacework of canals covering its red surface, the pictures of Saturn and the notion that in my lifetime we could fly to these distant planets—all of these things became my primary source of daydreams. I would sit at my desk during school and imagine flying through space. By the end of the day my notebook would be filled with different designs for spacecraft. I would imagine sitting in the pilot's seat, feeling the g-forces as the rocket blasted off. Then I would be weightless as the spacecraft shot across the universe. Sometimes I would take a short trip to the moon. But if time allowed, I would imagine going all the way to Mars, where a soft landing would allow me to see up close the canals that I had only seen in photographs. Sometimes, in my mind, living beings would come out of those canals to greet me and I would be treated to a visit with people from another planet.

When this outer space obsession began, I was afraid that the teacher might call on me and I would be brought back into the gravity of the classroom. After a while, though, I didn't care if the teacher called on me, no matter how embarrassed I might be not to know what she had been talking about. I was an astronaut—an astronaut of inner space at this point, but an explorer nonetheless.

Other thoughts came to my mind too. I realized that we were one of perhaps thousands or tens of thousands of planets. Thinking about the vastness of space expanded my consciousness. It became obvious to me that among these uncountable galaxies, we could not be the only living beings. Somewhere out in space, there were more of us. I began to draw the types of people we might encounter on other planets. The ones on larger planets might have a squat appearance from the increased pull of gravity, while those on smaller planets would be spindly and tall because they would not need very much muscle. These basic illustrations were of great interest to my teachers, who always paused to look as they walked past my desk.

I was also drawn to science fiction movies, all of which had aliens who disembarked from spaceships and either wreaked havoc on earth or came in peace.

For some reason, my father would become very upset when I chose to go to a science fiction film. When I asked him for my allowance to go to a movie, I could see his face start to flush red and his teeth clench.

“You're wasting your money on that garbage,” he said. “There's more to do here that you should

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