

The BOOK OF WANDS



NEIL SLADE

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Illustrated by BRIAN GIES

Neil Slade Brain Books
Denver, CO

Author's Note:

This is a memoir and a recollection of some of the more notable events of my life from my youth to the present. Some of the names have been changed to protect the privacy of individuals as needed. Although the chronology of some of the events has been slightly juggled in a few spots to aid comprehension, with minor exceptions the stories in this book are literal and accurately reflect true events.

The Book of Wands

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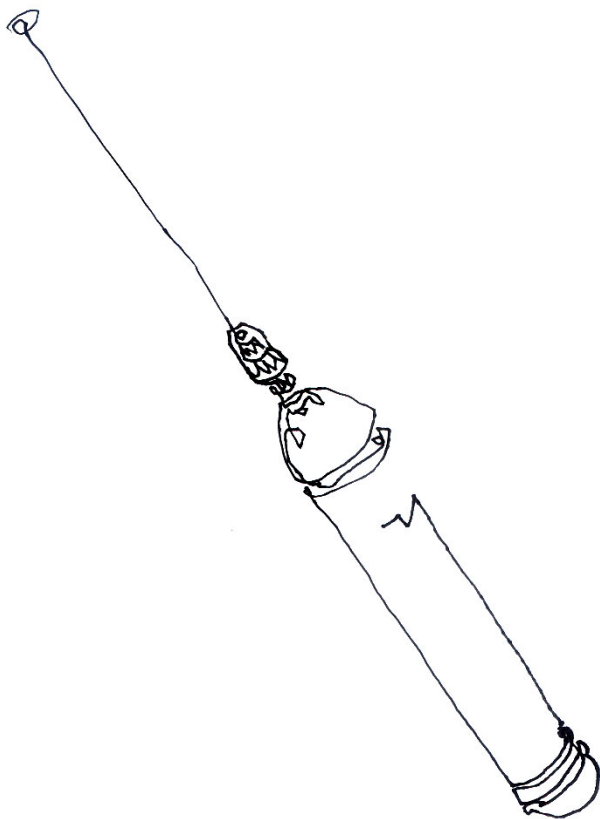
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THE
BOOK
OF
WANDS

BOW WOW 1

Greetings

I am The Book of Wands.

Nice to meet you.

You might be expecting to be reading a book. Haha. 😊

This is different.

I show the Way Of Wands, and this has inspired some to fondly refer to me and my method as BOW WOW.

A Paper Leaf Ensemble, thusly:

You know that you aren't the clothes that you are wearing. Similarly, these pages are also only just my clothes, what I am wearing at the moment. You are holding my socks.

What you see are letters printed on a page, symbols made up of microscopic smudges imprinted on bound sheets of flattened dried wood pulp, what people commonly refer to as a "book".

Indeed, however, I am in fact not a bunch of sentences, a few hundred paper pages that have been stitched together in the basement of a print shop, in a dusty old building, on the outskirts of a big city far away.

Rather, this is my portrait, a paint by number ink splat collection bound together. Pages that are perhaps stapled here, or loosely thrown in a box over there, or maybe even glued on a paper spine in another place.

Instead,

I am the originator.

Please just focus beyond what you read to see ME. Thank you.

I thought this thought, which was then hammered out by someone's fingers on a clickity clack letter embossed checkerboard. Tappity tap tap tap dance duet of two hands into a code of reflected light and dark now shining upon your face.

I tickled someone's brain, and he excitedly wiggled his ten fingers over a Keyboard, and that produced this arrangement of marks that lightly scurry over your rods and cones like a team of untamed hamsters on ice skates.

Tickly tickle tickle. Scurry scurry scurry.

In the case of an Audible Incarnation of one form or another, someone speaking my words with their mouth and perhaps captured on a recording of some sort, I ride upon compressed air waves like a bronco buster upon a wild horse of crazy ideas. The steed gallops full bore out from the coral of vibrating vocal cords and dances around the rodeo ring of a vibrating paper or plastic cone inside a cheering speaker box. Ride 'em cowboy!

I continually twist and turn at the speed of light. I am an aural pixie, skipping across iridescent purple inorganic atoms, then shaking hands with blue glow organic electrons at the entrance of a grinning neural network.

I enter your inner ear labyrinth, whirl around your cochlea whirlpool into your cranium like a supersilly microbe on a lubricated water slide.

Zip zap zoop.

So then, this is Me transmitting direct to you through one code or another.

Hellooooooooooooo.

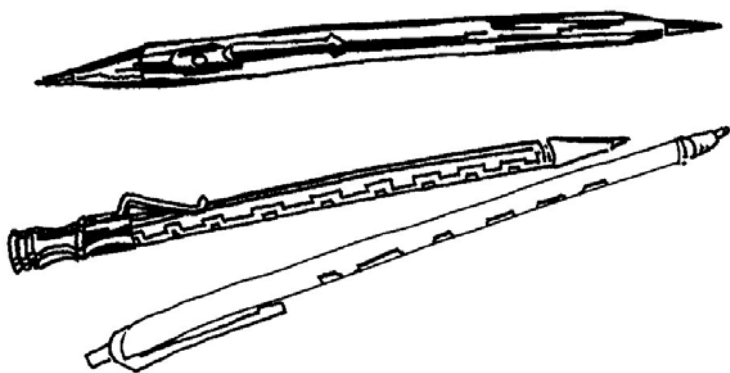
But I am not the duplicated sound dancing on the internal high wire of a reader's throat, I'm not a celluloid record bound wiggle, nor the dancing trapeze wire signals inside a human's brain. Nor am I the printed lettuce and tomato in an ink sandwich between two hard covers.

I live outside any container, flesh, bone, wood, paper,
metal, or otherwise.

Understand this, and you too will be set free.

See me as I truly am, and you will begin to Travel.

And to Travel, my good new friend, is to live.



**PART ONE:
THE BRAIN LAB**

Chapter 0

Prologue

We locked the car and then took a good look around. Here we were at twelve-thousand five hundred feet, stepping out onto the gravel, a small pullout, a minimalist parking lot, if you could call it that.

There was virtually nothing here but small alpine plants and lots and lots of rocks. It looked like the Scottish Highlands, but that place was on the other side of the globe.

The air was cool, and the sky- what parts of it that we could see through the heavy clouds- was a perfect and flawless cobalt blue. There were no birds, because there were no trees up here.

I had been here uncounted times myself, with enough strange experiences alone to fill a volume, so I knew Bobby was in for an extraordinary experience, although I could not predict what that would be. This place was mystery personified.

We were very nearly completely removed from our every day life. We were so very far from the energies and influences that effectively contaminate the consciousness of everyone who is in the middle of that madness we call “civilization”.

Remarkably, we were barely an hour’s drive from the metropolitan area that we lived in. We looked east, and we could see the sprawling city far, far below us through a thick humid haze, as if we were looking down on earth from outer space, a gaseous cloud of cosmic vapor between us and the rest of the universe.

“This is amazing,” Bobby said. “This is like another world.”

And we hadn’t even walked away from the car yet.

I went around to the trunk and opened it.

“Take a Wand,” I said. “Do you want the cane or the umbrella?”

Bobby looked up. “Hmmm. Looks like it might rain. I’ll take the umbrella.”

“Good choice,” I said as I handed him this unusual and rare wangee handled tool. This was among my favorite Wands, and I was certain he would pick up something good with it, especially up here. The signals were exceptionally clear in this area and I was certain it would afford him access to information that he would never be able to get otherwise.

That the umbrella might keep him dry if necessary was almost entirely beside the point.

I took the Chinese Sword Cane for myself. I was actually relieved, because I frankly didn't think he had enough experience to use it yet. He was still pretty green and he might end up putting a hole in his foot or worse, even though the sword was for the moment safely sheathed inside the barrel of the cane.

The whole purpose of our expedition was to cement in Bobby's mind the experience for himself- that he was surrounded by unusual tools, tools that everyone else took for granted as being nothing special at all.

It was my hope that he would at last see that these very tools could open doors for him, that these tools could launch him far from his common experience into other worlds that otherwise only seemed a dream. It was my hope that the two Wands we had brought with us would reveal their potential up here in a manner that he could no longer deny as nothing more than my fertile imagination.

Nearly everyone else on the planet thought that things like Wands were nothing more than make believe. Nearly everyone else on the planet thought I was out of my mind when I even talked of such things.

We removed our packs from the back of the car and I shut the trunk.

"You know, I once locked my keys in the car out here, seconds after my friend told me not to. It took us about five hours to get to the nearest town and get a locksmith to open up my car." I held up my keys in my hand. "Won't do that again."

"Why don't you get one of those magnetic key holder things?" Bobby asked.

"Hindsight is always twenty-twenty." I added.

I pulled my backpack on and began to walk on the almost imperceptible dirt trail that wound away from the car park towards the spine of the peak that lay in the short distance in front of us, perhaps an eighth of a mile up the path.

"Follow me, the best is ahead of us. You haven't seen anything yet," I suggested.

Suddenly something caught the toe of my foot. "ACK!!" Not six feet from the car I stubbed my toe on a rock that was jutting out from the trail and I barely kept my balance. "Ooo, ouch!!" I stopped and rubbed my toe grimacing, wobbling on the on the un-stubbed leg.

"Hahah!" Bobby laughed. "Oh man, it can't get any better than that! How long have you been giving these guided tours? Hahaha!... OWWUUPP!!!" Bobby was so busy laughing at me he stumbled on the very same rock himself, did a jumbled and twisted clown ballet pirouette, and then fell flat with a big thump on his rear end.

“Hahaha!” Now it was my turn to chuckle, and my sore toe completely stopped hurting.

“Shuddup...” he said, embarrassed as he pushed himself up and dusted off his pants.

“People who live in housed glasses shouldn’t stow thrones,” I commented.

“What?” Bobby said as he picked a couple pieces of imbedded gravel out of his palms.

“Forget it, “ I smiled. “You okay?”

“Yes, thank you, Mr. Neil.”

I was more than three times the age of my young teenage guitar student, my Traveling protégé. I had been to this place many dozens of times over the preceding decade. I knew the landscape as well as my own urban back yard. But the place still retained secrets from me, even in the many spots that I was intimately familiar with. I never tired of exploring every nook and cranny up on this mountain.

There was no sound at all. We had driven up the long winding road off the main two-laned highway for several miles and had not seen another single vehicle of any type. Although the road commonly had cars traveling this scenic road during the weekend, I had purposefully chosen a weekday for this trip.

We certainly would not run into anyone off the road and where we were going, on the edge of the rocky cliffs where we were headed. We might see a pica, or a crow, but I expected few other moving creatures save a bug here or there.

We had walked several hundred yards from the car and quite a vertical distance in elevation higher up. Our vehicle now looked like a matchbox sized toy car a far below us.

We zig-zagged the most crooked indirect path winding higher and higher, between boulders ever increasing in size. The wildflowers were at their peak and surrounded us.

“Look at this!” Bobby exclaimed with surprise. “These flowers, this is incredible! They’re huge, they’re absolutely huge!”

I turned around and looked at him slightly puzzled. “Huh?” I didn’t understand. They were just regular wildflowers.

Bobby held up a picked purple stem right in front of his one opened eye, blocking his vision. “Neil, look! This flower is actually bigger than your car!”

I smiled for a second, then understood the joke. “Hey! You’re not supposed to pick the flowers up here. It’s a reserve.” I frowned slightly and shook my head in motherly disapproval.

“Oh, sorry.” Bobby knelt down and made like he was trying to replant the flower back in the ground. He was mocking me, in a good natured way as was his habit. It was actually absurdly funny.

“Forget it. Just don’t pick any more. If everybody who came up here picked one flower, in ten thousand years there wouldn’t be any left,” I lectured.

However, the reality was that it actually was prohibited to pick anything up in this wilderness. Tourists had already created significant damage to the ancient forest that lay a half mile downhill from where we walked.

This place contained some of the oldest trees on the entire planet-Bristlecone Pines, the oldest living things on earth. We walked a mere quarter mile above them and could see the ghost-like odd angled dark branches of this enchanted forest peeking through the ground fog below us. Any moment I expected to see goblins run out from behind one of the nearby truck sized boulders we passed and dash off into the dark woods below.

Before the area was protected by law, tourists had regularly picked up and taken away gorgeous pieces of ancient dead wood that was an irreplaceable part of this natural environment. Close to the road itself where people drove to access this area, the ground was nearly as bare as a beach.

But up where we were hiking the story was different. We were above tree line itself which we could see several hundred feet below us. At the place where the forest came close up the hill nearer to where we were, it was too far for lazy flat-landers who had little respect for this place to hike. This further uphill end of the enchanted forest remained pristine and whole and unspoiled-and unpicked.

There was an incredible abundance of wild flowers everywhere. There were Purple Sparklers that looked like violet fireworks shooting off of a green rocket trail with gold bursts in the center of each brilliant blossom. There were snow stars hugging the ground, no more than a quarter inch across each, as delicate as fairy footprints. There were football field sized patches of Indian Paintbrush here and there in an infinite variety of subtle shades of ruby, scarlet, and orange. And then there were the Giant Pluto Heads, big green round balls of spikes that truly looked like they belonged at the bottom of an extraterrestrial ocean.

It was impossible not to stare at our feet as we climbed higher and higher towards the crest of the peak in front of us as the ground was an unbelievably psychedelic and detailed landscape of multi-colored pebbles, plants, and moss.

Bobby came up behind me and tapped me on the shoulder. “This is like being – gee, I don’t know...” he remarked. “And all I had for lunch was peanut butter.”

I smiled, but didn't say anything. I knew exactly what he was talking about.

In the city, you would not think twice about such patterns under your feet. You would think such simple things as small plants and stones were entirely unremarkable. But up here in this rarified environment, something instantly clicked in your brain: You became super sensitive to subtle variations of texture and color that struck you as entirely magnificent. It could be compared to taking a powerful shamanic concoction, but here, the potion was this special place itself.

We began to reach the top of one crest and had long lost sight of the parking area. As we rounded a small outcropping we stopped and took in a view that was nothing short of breathtaking, literally.

"Hold on a minute," Bobby said. "I'm outta' breath!" He bent down with his hands on his knees.

"Wimp," I boasted. "I'm a Capricorn, a mountain goat. What are you, a Pisces?"

"Shut up. I'm a Capricorn too, January 7th. I'm just not used to this."

"Too much pasta." I retorted. I hadn't named him Bobby Spaghetti for nothing.

"You're suppose to carb up when you go on a hike, don't you know," Bobby replied.

I chucked to myself. Here was a young teenager, and he was having trouble keeping up with me, an old fart. Of course, I didn't dare mention that my thighs were already aching from the very steep leg of the trail we had just come up. I was actually glad he wanted to rest.

"Look at that," I pointed out the range of snowcapped razor sharp peaks immediately across the valley to the west.

Bobby straightened up and turned around to look. "Oh wow," he said nearly under his breath. "That's incredible."

We were looking at not one, but several fourteen-thousand foot peaks all within eyeshot from this vantage point. The very top of Mt. Evanescence was just mere miles from where we stood. Gray and Torries twin fourteeners were a short distance west. Long's peak was up range perhaps twenty-five miles. Pike's Peak was a relatively far fifty miles south of where we stood. But we could see all with an easy twist of our necks.

"Let's keep going, there's a vector window just over there," I suggested and pointed a short distance away. Bobby looked puzzled. "Um, a very interesting place," I clarified a bit.

We hiked down a bit from this one high spot, hopping from the top of one flat boulder to the next, but still staying more or less on the crest of the spine of this peak we were exploring. To our immediate right eastward, the

peak dropped sharply down, forming a wall of granite bluffs that ended a couple hundred feet below us leading to the dense Bristlecone forest. To our left, the side of the mountain we traversed was a more or less gradual descent that eventually led to a long deep valley. We made our way along this side of the ridge, continually working our way higher and higher.

After another ten minutes of hiking up and down on this rocky roller coaster, we came to an unexpectedly flat area just below the edge.

“This is it,” I said as I took off my back pack and sat down on the ground to get out a drinking bottle. “You want some?”

I handed Bobby the aluminum water bottle after taking a good long swig myself.

“Shortstop,” he said.

I smiled. I had heard my father say that to me when I was a kid and used the salt before passing it on. I wondered if my father’s spirit was following us that afternoon.

Bobby walked over to a solid wall of rock that sat on one side of this flat area. “I didn’t expect to see something like this up here,” he said as he ran his hand against the wall.

It was as if we had suddenly stumbled upon a big outdoor movie screen that had been carved out of the side of the mountain. I had been to this place many times, but for Bobby it must have been quite something to encounter for the first time.

“This is awesome,” he said examining the twenty foot vertical wall of rock.

Directly in front of the wall was a living room size of flat ground, big enough to hold a modest wedding reception.

There was also a small ledge about three feet off the ground at the base of the wall. I watched as Bobby contemplated the spot with his back towards me. He threw his own backpack and the umbrella on the ground. Then he spotted the ledge and placed one foot on it, as if to test that it was not loose rock.

It was as if instinct took over and he dug his fingernails into the rock face and then hoisted himself wholly onto the lip. He flattened himself against the wall, hugging it with his ear to it as if he was listening to something deep inside the earth.

Looking at him flat against this rock cliff, it made the most incongruous sight. Here he was standing vertically against this nearly perfectly flat area of rock, a wall perhaps twenty five feet across and twenty feet high, and yet from my vantage point it looked exactly as if he were lying down on a granite bed horizontally. It was a remarkable illusion.

He closed his eyes.

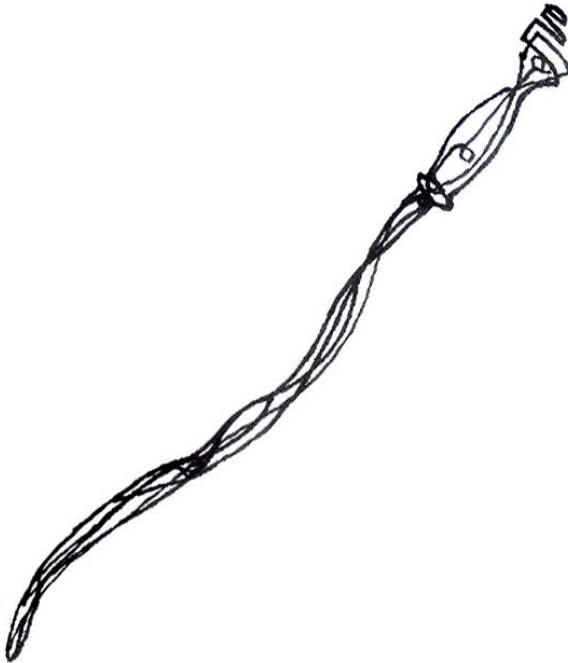
There was no sound at all; no wind, no birds, nothing.

And then we heard in the distance, from the direction of the forest of twisted fifteen-hundred year old pine trees far below us, a sound as sudden as a crack of thunder piercing the clouds high above us, a sound that sent a bolt of pure electrical shock up our spines.

Bobby was catapulted off the wall no different than if the wall itself had suddenly come to life and knocked him off with the force of a heavy weight boxer.

We had both heard the unmistakable sustained sound of a woman screaming at the top of her lungs, as if she was seconds away from her own murder.

“Get up!” I yelled, as I stood up, my cane in my hand held out at arm length.” Grab your Wand! Now!”



Chapter 1

Neil Slade

I met Frank Zappa one Denver summer night in 1973. My high school buddy Scott Limburger and I snuck into the KFML radio station office building before one of Frank's concerts while he was giving an interview. Frank was polite and cordial, and he gave me this single bit of advice along with his ball point pen autograph on the outside of my electric utility bill envelope, the only scrap of paper I had at hand at the moment:

“Remember you are employed, and working for the muse.”

My name is Neil Slade.

I've taught over thirty thousand music lessons in my life to an uncounted number of pupils, with a few students thrown in. Very few.

I've taught an even select fewer of those to use Wands.

I am a university trained musician, with a teaching certificate in Music Education from the state of Colorado, United States of America, Earth, Solar System, Milky Way Galaxy, Universe 14RCB Sector 42, Reality Phase 9. I earned this certificate many, many years ago.

I've long outgrown it, and I let it expire and die of natural causes five short years after it arrived in my mail box. It came in a big white envelope packed along with my diploma as well as an application for car insurance.

My teaching certificate and college diploma were mailed to me since I had not received such documents ceremoniously in person with a handshake, wearing the traditional cap and gown. Nor had I less ceremoniously obtained it either, as conceivably wearing mere plain jeans and sneakers with holes in each, the certificate slid through the opening of a bullet proof teller window inside the administration office building by a smiling cherubic clerk with a Hispanic surname.

I opted for the much more informal U.S. Postal Mail delivery. Less walking for me, same end result without all the pomp and pageantry. I'm not big on ceremony.

In college I learned how to play every band instrument that John Phillips Sousa wrote an arrangement for. I also as learned how to toot and pluck on every instrument used in a modern day symphonic orchestra, those instruments that I already had not taught myself to play out of curiosity

growing up. I was always very interested in music and doing things with my hands, but I was never interested in institutions or tradition per se.

It is no coincidence that the same dexterity applied to instruments helps in the channeling of energy through an assortment of Wands. However, there is presently no college course in Wands, nor is there any diploma associated with this skill. I earned my extra curricular skill without documentation or accreditation. I learned the How-To of Wands directly from studying the only real source of literature I know of on the subject, and from trial and error.

As I've come to learn, Wand technique greatly relies on the underlying Fun-da-Mental principals that I learned from the one person who was responsible for allowing me to get my hands on a copy of such a textbook on the subject. This person, almost certainly a Wand practitioner himself during his life, was considered by the general public as wildly eccentric at the very least, if not outright out of his mind.

Indeed, my first direct knowledge of Wands and how they work came as a result of spending an awful lot of time with a fellow that most people thought was just some crazy old guy living in a shack up in the mountains.

High up in a remote forest near the Colorado Continental Divide lived and worked the founder and director of The Dormant Brain Research and Development Laboratory, D.A.T. Stingo, or as we called him, DaStingo, or even simpler, Stingo.

I've always found that a person's name reveals something about their character, and this seems to be the case with everyone that's played a significant role in this story.

In his case, Stingo was a tough professor and teacher. He didn't mess around. He could give you the most powerful injection of truth and wisdom of anyone I ever met, or a huge shot of inspiration and energy. But he also had a sharp bite if you made the fatal mistake of taking him for a fool. You could get stung badly, and you wouldn't forget.

Up until now, his involvement with Wands has remained a complete secret to nearly every one of the students and subjects who passed through the stone gate to this pristine wilderness facility.

In all respects it was already a place off the most un-beaten track. For him to further admit to utilizing Wands would have pushed his already teetering reputation even further off center and completely off the precipice of logical acceptance.

Had Stingo revealed his interested and knowledge, much less a use of Wands, he would have certainly been considered a complete lunatic by all, including his most ardent supporters. Thus, it went unadvertised to his grave.

The main work of Stingo's behavior lab was teaching people the ins and outs of how their mind motor worked, learned in the atmosphere of nature unspoiled.

You see, Stingo wanted to save the world, one person at a time.

He felt that the world was a mess because most people had a mess of a brain. Multiply a messy brain by billions of brain owners, and you get a messy and doomed planet.

If you can save one brain, that brain can save another. "Each one, teach one," he would say. And with that, a geometric progression would begin. "Save one soul, and you save the universe," an ancient script echoed from the past.

My self-imposed job was to see if I could save myself for a start.

If you managed to hear about and to actually find The Dormant Brain Lab and its director-caretaker, you might sign up for a six-week Brain In Nature Course. You would camp out for weeks on end, sleep on hard stone covered ground in your self-made lean-to shelter, and at the end of the summer you would have enough knowledge of how the human brain works to teach a university crash course on the subject.

Then you would go home.

To all of the hundreds of people who found their way to this back woods institute and completed the course, brain training would remain their only impression of what Stingo and his place was all about.

But quite out of view, hidden far off the main trail proper was a key to tools that would surely land anyone locked admission into the funny farm if they dared speak of it in public. It was here where I first learned of *The Book of Wands*.

Surely, no other former participants at the brain lab will confirm what I am about to reveal, mainly because they weren't in on this most secretive of Stingo's secrets. They all split once they got from him what they wanted and what they expected to get.

"Once a student pops his frontal lobes," Stingo often remarked, "I never seem 'em again."

I hung around years after everyone else had gone home to feed their fish. As it turned out, something else turned up on the end of my line.

During his life Stingo did not want to jeopardize the rest of his work and his already counter-culture reputation by even wilder claims now set forth in my own account here. I can afford such a personal risk as I already have a steady and permanent income selling thousands of battery operated pet nail trimmers on eBay each month under a completely different name.

So let us proceed.

Chapter 2

The Neil Slade School of Music And Other Stuff

My Wand exposure and education began as early as I can remember, although I didn't realize nor was I told that I was obtaining such instruction indirectly or otherwise until far later on.

My grandma gave me my first Wand for my sixth birthday. It came attached to a long playing phonograph record titled "Conduct Your Own Orchestra." It was a long black plastic Baton, and the idea was that as you listened to orchestral favorites on the record player you would wave your Baton along with the music. This was rudimentary Travel in that I was actually glimpsing my own true future.

In fact, before I was twenty-one years of age, I was leading an orchestra, at least in conducting class at the University. I would lead numerous other ensembles throughout my life. I rather doubt if any other user of this album and the Wand that came with it actually shared a similar fortune.

Of course, the record absolutely did not advertise the stick as a Wand for Travel, but rather supplied the would be conductor with more regular expectations and directions for use.

Using a Wand as a Wand is almost universally unadvertised as such. Understandably, claims one would make of such an activity would lead others to the perception that one has lost all his marbles.

I refused to go to my university graduation, held early one summer Saturday morning, because I felt that achieving my higher education had already robbed enough of my personal time. I had already missed hundreds of hours of early weekend Bugs Bunny cartoons during my youth because of Saturday morning religious school that my parents forced me to attend. Enough was enough already.

Speaking of religious school, I have never been particularly interested in religion either, with the possible exception of Taoism. That is clearly a pretty feeble excuse for an institutional belief system, but about as close to religion as I will ever voluntarily wander.

You know what those Taoists say: “The Way is not hard for those who have no preferences.”

Well now, that’s what I call religion.

When I graduated from college, I immediately took a position as a substitute teacher in the Denver Public Schools. This lasted for exactly one semester before I completely dropped out of classroom teaching. I had begun drinking a half gallon of coffee a day just to stay awake in class from the lack of creative stimulation inside my own head. I drank other potions to calm me down both on the way home and additionally after arriving home. My nerves were ritually being fried by junior high schoolers bouncing off the walls inside the hallowed and revered walled institution known as School.

Being that necessity is the mother of invention (and more on those Mothers later), and that my own survival seemed very necessary to me, I soon learned that I could make a perfectly comfortable living by inventing my own school, teaching music one person at a time at in-home private music lessons.

Thus, The Neil Slade School of Music, Art and Other Stuff helped me to dodge brain atrophy and/or putting my nervous system at possible fatal risk from over-exposure to large numbers of wildly enthusiastic elementary, middle, and high school pupils.

Not that such public school classrooms are filled so much with students wildly enthusiastic about music, but more accurately are typically filled with pupils enthusiastic about being wild.

Speaking of students and pupils, one thing I do remember from my own middle school training, or at very least I continue to hallucinate, is that the difference between a pupil and a student is that a student studies, and a pupil simply watches.

It is easy to remember the differences between these two if you remember that a pupil is nothing but a hole that sucks in light.

The same classroom may be filled with thirty or more pairs of pupils, but may easily and simultaneously have zero students in it.

As I’ve said, necessity is the mother of invention, and so for me, it was necessary to make a living with music without losing my mind. I do however continue to be accused of already having met that fate. So it goes.

Speaking of mother, when I was in the sixth grade I earned my first few fistful of dollars self-employed walking door to door in my neighborhood selling my own original pastel sketches. This was indeed chalk Wands at work making dollars in this most innocent manner.

I shocked my mother, herself a school teacher, when she found out how I had spent my afternoon mixing adolescent capitalism with crayons.

My mother is now 84, and she still can't believe, nor does she entirely approve of the idea that I actually make my living as a self-employed artist of any type.

Like I said, I let my teaching certificate expire because I never again wanted to voluntarily or otherwise set foot in a band room after an indoor winter and spring spent trying to wrestle order out of hundreds of entropy intent adolescent and younger bi-pedal hominids wielding drums, cymbals, horns, loud reed instruments, catgut strung boxes, and other "civilized" instruments of cacophony.

I continue to get my car insurance through my college, however, so my college education was not entirely wasted.

My mother had tried her best to sculpt me in her own image as a dedicated public school servant, but it was ultimately an exercise in futility for her part. My heart had been guided by another "Mother" throughout my teenage years:

I had grown up listening to the decadent and rebellious strains of Frank Zappa and The Mothers of Invention, as well as giving equal time listening and studying Captain Beefheart and His Magic Band. These were Dadaists with a tune.

Years after I had fled the public schools, Mom had still tried to convince me to keep my school teaching certificate valid. "You'll never know when you'll want to teach in the schools again!" she told me over and over.

I temporarily succumbed, and as I sat in the Colorado Teaching Certificate Renewal Study Seminar held at the Stapleton Airport Sheridan Hotel Conference Center, my mind kept drifting back to strains of Zappa compositions such as, "Who Are The Brain Police?" and "You're Probably Wondering Why I'm Here".

At the lunch break, sitting in a large cafeteria with a hundred or so noisy soon to be re-certified re-fried public servants, I pondered my future in a just emptied vanilla pudding cup that was part of our collective lunch break. I wondered how many more pudding cups I would stare into in how many more noisy lunchroom cafeterias in the years to come. I took a quick deep breath and silently made a break for my car out in the parking lot, and forever away from re-certification as if I were escaping from a penitentiary and a life sentence. I never looked back.

My resourcefulness in creating a career for myself as a private music teacher has had many distinct advantages over being employed by the state, not the least of which is that I get to stay home all day long and spend quality

time with my dogs Erfie and Chloe, and practice with my sticks, Wands, and other useful tools of Travel.

Erfie and Chloe are sleeping next to me on the couch right now as I write this.

Yes indeed, you are now ingesting the thoughts of a person who while transcribing this at his particular longitude, latitude, and other dimensions and coordinates of time, space, and abstract thought, is sitting on a comfy three cushioned sofa with semi-abstract southwestern Native American inspired geometrical designs imprinted on the fabric. Self-determination also allows this person to type at his own whim, day or night, with nary a care of waking up in time to join the mad rat race at seven A.M.

Next to him are two snoring, dog dreaming twin sibling West Highland White Terriers, each in their own, or perhaps other intersecting dog dreamy universes. They never dropped out of the rat race because they never joined it to begin with.

They have, contrary wise, chased smaller rodents across the kitchen floor. Fortunately my home has largely been rat free, albeit not free of their smaller and cuter cousins.

I hesitate to inform them that they have never actually caught a single mouse.

Wait!

I take that back.

One of them had actually deposited a big fat gray mouse at the foot of my bed a couple of months ago. That's probably why this particular rodent got caught in the first place- too chubby to run away fast enough.

Anyway, Erfie is the big brother, Chloe the little sister.

As I engage in interspecies telecommunication, CLICKING FORWARD and ON, I perceive the internal and non-corporal activities inside these somewhat smaller canine craniums:

Erfie, dreaming of a giant bowl, a white ceramic bowl decorated with colorful yellow flowers and blueberry and strawberry designs. It overflows with endless crunchy peanut butter and molasses doggy cookies.

Crunch crunch crunch.

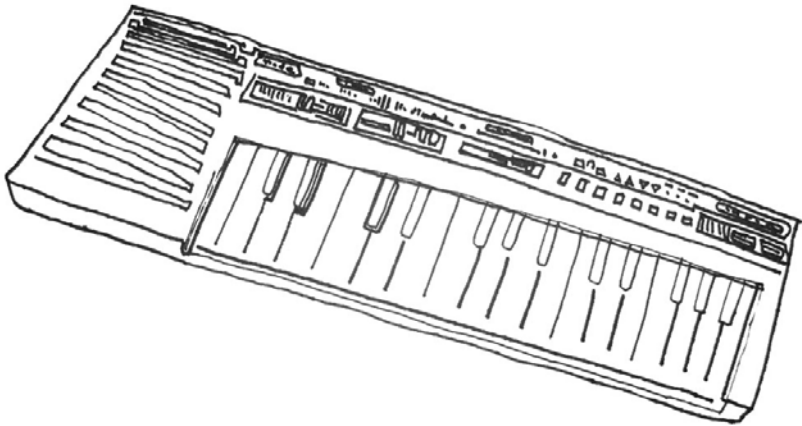
Chloe, running through a wonderfully green hilly meadow, sun shining, birds twerping, butterflies dancing, clouds drifting, dandelion puffs riding on the

wind. She runs to the top of the hill, wagging her tail-
and at the top of a hill she comes upon a giant bowl of
endless crunchy peanut butter and molasses doggy
cookies.

Crunch crunch crunch.

I have no doubt at all who is the more intelligent of creatures, between
humans and canines.

Despite the greater relative volume of the human brain, I humbly bow
at the simple wisdom and generosity of my furry family members. Less is far
more.



Chapter 3.1415926

The First Jar

You wouldn't know it by looking, but months and months have past since I last tap danced my fingers on my laptop Keyboard from two pages ago with the intention of notating this written history for any such person as yourself to eavesdrop upon.

Of course, YOU, my attentive listener, are indeed there. If a tree falls over dead in the forest and no squirrel or worm is there to hear it-(Does a worm have ears anyway?)- it does not in fact make a noise. Naturally, the converse is also true: If you weren't there to comprehend my descriptions then, well... then... um.. of course you are, because you are... gosh, I am even getting lost myself here... Hmmm. Okay, then... Uh...

Anyway, I have been putting most of this off for nearly a year now, but I can no longer delay the inevitable. Like Chloe barking and scratching at the back door wanting to come inside, the need for this written record has been making its presence ever more intense as each week passes.

Certainly, you must know what I mean. You've woken up early in the morning, perhaps only half out of a dream, hearing *that* persistent voice when you are in bed, still in your wrinkled and sweaty pajamas and there is no place to run away to. Your own conscience is staring at you from inside your skull and in no uncertain terms laying down the law. There is not enough room under your bed to hide away to. You know what lies ahead for you in the upcoming daylight. You cannot pull the covers up over your head any further than you already have.

In my case, I no longer have any doubt at all that my unfinished task must be completed, and that it is now more than ever immediately at hand. It is certain that I will be Traveling a great distance this time, and from all indications my farthest distance yet in one fell swoop.

For one aspect of this journey that I will share with you in this account, a tool that I will come to rely on using it in the most ordinary fashion, my Wand used for typing here, is of the complex variety, a portable alphabetic Keyboard.

Scoffed upon by purists, the portable Keyboard is a very distant cousin to simple Wands such as pencils and brushes. Of course it is an even more distant relative to the archetypal and classic and mythical tool, the one that non-practitioners always think of when you mention the word "Magic", what is properly called The Baton. This is commonly referred to as a Wand in the

fictional literature. You know, Merlin waves his magic stick, hocus pocus presto chango. *That's* a Baton. They work, but not in that fairy tale fashion, surely not. You may shoo away a couple of mosquitoes by waving your Baton around, but Traveling with it takes a bit more finesse than that.

Besides that, truly learn Wands, and you realize that Wand Batons barely scratch the surface.

As for Keyboards, it is in another sub-category altogether, belonging to complex tools such as mechanical pencils and spring loaded ballpoint pens. And even then, it has branched off into its own sub-sub category onto a remote limb of the tree and a very long stretch of evolution.

Some continue to vehemently deny the inclusion of any kind of Keyboard into the family of Extendio Humerous. E.H. of course referring to Unusual Tools that you utilize with an extended forearm. Obviously unlike most other Wands, a Keyboard does not resemble a stick or pole of any type. But neither do Cameras, Pendulums, Watches, or Cards, and those tools have long garnered fair inclusion into this family of unusual implements.

The fact is that you use a portable Keyboard with a relatively extended arm, although usually not completely straight as a baseball bat, but away from your body, like any other Wand.

Naturally, Keyboard usage can produce the most mundane and ordinary results, like typing a letter or sending an email. But undeniably, in the hands of a trained and experienced master, like any other Wand you can use a decent Keyboard to more or less figuratively Travel to the sun and back- or for that matter, only hop around the block if that's all that you desire.

I remember when I first considered the idea of using a manual typewriter as a Wand and what an incredible disbelief and protest that caused among Travelers. That lasted until word finally got around that one didn't pick up a typewriter and wave it around like a Baton or blow on it like a clarinet, as many unsuccessfully tried to do.

Manual typewriters finally caught on and things quieted down at last, at least for a while. This is similar to the kind of resistance that "The Earth Is Not Flat" idea initially met.

Then of course, came electric typewriters. I'm still not so sure of those myself, because any time you are plugged into the wall there are issues. It restricts your movement severely. You can trip and hurt your ankle. You can unplug yourself if you're not careful and then everything will certainly immediately grind to a sudden and disturbing halt. You may find yourself stuck face to face with a walking catfish on some swampy beach and without an exit.

Personally, I've never had much luck with cords. Generally, I avoid corded appliances altogether, except for my electric guitars. You won't even

find a blender in my house- not that a blender could ever conceivably qualify as a Wand. Haha. That's stupid.

Now of course, some Travelers are moaning about laptop computers, and you would think it was the end of the world. Sure, trying to use a desktop computer as a Wand, that's ridiculous. Even if you could wave it around, you are sure to sprain something. But with even a cheap laptop, there is no denying that you can get truly hard core Traveling done with it if you know how to handle it.

Of course, regarding Keyboards, some people who know absolutely nothing about Travel will completely get the wrong idea and think that the WORDS you hammer out with a Keyboard allow you to "Travel with your imagination". Oh gosh, how absurd. I can only imagine an adult would think of that one.

If you have actually Traveled somewhere, you don't have to imagine anything. You see it all with your own real eyeballs.

And then of course there are those portable musical keyboards, and they work too, but that's something altogether different. Alphabetic Keyboards are one thing, and Sonic Keyboards are another entirely.

My first real inkling of a Keyboard serving as a Wand of course came directly from the person who was both a Traveler and my brain teacher. I saw him using his typewriters constantly, but it was years before he ever let on even slightly what he was really doing with these things when nobody was watching. It wasn't until after he died that it hit me like the proverbial bolt from the blue what he was actually up to. But that is a story I will put off now for just a short time, or for at least until you turn enough pages.

So, ANYWAY,

Here we are.

You are my passenger. My electronic pen is in my hand, my car key, my spaceship launch code. Buckle up. Do not leave your seat until the No Smoking sign is extinguished.

I have general ideas about my destination, and these coarse images are my inspiration and fuel. I will leave the delectable details to remain as a pleasant adventure and surprise, for this is both desirable and unavoidable as on any journey.

Where this will all lead, I surely have no exact and complete idea, although I am certain everything will be quite different, or at least as different as peach jam is different from chocolate sardines.

I am leaving the land of smelly fish and will be landing upon more fragrant shores.

As a Traveler, if one stops Traveling, it is as though one becomes oddly oversensitive to one's own horrendous body odor. It's quite the opposite phenomenon of odor tolerance- you know, how you stop smelling something when you're around it all the time? Didja' ever see someone smell their own armpits? Weird. It doesn't make sense.

There are no nose plugs that can protect me from my own stagnation emanations at this point. Maybe this is because it comes from the inside out.

But, Hurray! Boredom has set in, and escape is a great motivator. The Silver Lining of misery is the encouragement of change.

Time to move on and make a quantum leap off these pages. We will Travel together, myself and whoever hitchhikes along. That looks like you at the moment.

* * *

I was all set to live the perfect life. Or, as a cocky independent twenty-seven year old, so I thought so, keeping my scariest fears under wraps.

I was then living on my own in a little claustrophobic apartment in a rectangular brick six-unit building smack dab in the middle of Denver, Colorado. My apartment was one of hundreds of square, non-descript buildings, located on an endless urban criss-cross grid of streets that had about as much personality as a screen door screen.

But then my life, at least on the surface, was less generic than most. Handsome (in my opinion), confident, healthy, I was additionally self-employed and running my own small stable of willing piano and guitar students. (Really, my ex-girlfriend had said I was indeed very handsome. That is before she broke up with me for being too short.)

When I dropped out of teaching in the public schools and first attempted being my own boss via the NSSOMAOS (The Neil Slade School of Music, Art, and Other Stuff), it didn't take very long to accumulate enough kid music students to make my rent and vegetarian hot dog buns each month.

Within fourteen days of getting my first two regularly paying students, I had sixteen more steady customers clamoring to have lessons every week. Word got around the neighborhood pretty fast that here was an opportunity to entertain the kids that wouldn't require even more schlepping them around after school.

Like wildfire, news spread that there was this fellow (me) who would come and teach junior and missy at-home music lessons right in the convenience of one's own basement wreck-room every week, and mom could

watch her afternoon soaps completely uninterrupted, or whatever it is moms do after school.

But in spite of my modest early business success, things were really not going as smooth as banana yogurt despite the pretensions dictated by my young male ego. In reality, my future outlook and my self-assurance was as thin skinned as same banana, pre-yogurtfied.

For one, despite my best efforts, I had made a habit of striking out in the romance department. My latest love disaster was with Sarah Jogurt, a more than lovely graduate of Vassar, whom I had met at yoga class. She made her living making gorgeous white porcelain functional pottery. Alas, before long, her potter's studio trash can of discarded broken cups and saucers was soon joined by the fragments of my broken heart.

Of course for any young person, sheer hormone level in the blood stream dictate that one's love life sits high on the pedestal of positive self-image.

Unfortunately, the tonality of Amore for Neil had been set long before. For starters, as early as in the sixth grade, with knees shaking, I had one day miraculously managed to gather enough courage to phone up the object of my unrequited desire at the time, little cute elvin Cassie Boggs. She sat dolefully two rows over from me every day in Mr. Watson's home room class. I figured my chances with her were ripe for the plucking.

Age 12 years old, I picked up our kitchen's demure Princess model wall phone, paused for a moment, took a breath, and dialed.

"Hello...?"

"Hello, Cassie?"

"Yes."

"Um...uh... this is Neil."

"Neil?"

"Neil Slade."

"Oh. *That* Neil."

My mother walked into the kitchen, and I immediately froze solid.

Then I dropped the phone.

Eventually I heard this distant voice in the ether as I waited for my mother to walk past into the laundry room, "Hello?... Hello?"

"Hello?"

"What was that?"

"Hello? Cassie? Are you still there?"

"Neil?"

"Yeah...um... so, uh...I...um...was wondering if you would like to go to the shopping center with me on Saturday?"

I figured this was a good starter for my first romantic escapade. First we would go look through the front window of the barber shop window where I got my hair cut one Saturday each month.

Then, it would be on to the drugstore, where we might peruse the greeting cards and see if Epsom Salts might be on sale.

Then perhaps conclude our wonderful shopping center afternoon together by strolling past Big Wheel Car and Truck Tires and Shocks.

There upon in my kitchen, was dead silence for what seemed forever.

According to Einstein's Special Theory of Relativity, if you are in a rocket ship moving away from Earth at nearly the speed of light, time stands still. I think it is the same if you are on a phone calling up a girl for your first date.

I could barely breathe. Then, the answer came.

"No, I can't. I have to do something. I have to get something for my brother's turtle cage. Sorry."

My first ruby red luscious Adam's apple of desire had fallen from the tree, and it had a worm in it.

Cassie's response on that fateful pre-pubescent afternoon would set the pattern to similar quixotic proposals for many years to come, and Sarah J. made me keenly aware that this had persisted well into my twenty-seventh year, cast in stone (pottery that is).

And then there was my career. My ambitions of becoming a famous and respected avant garde composer and progressive jazz musician were stuck on fly paper. I was stranded in Nowheresville, man. I was spinning the wheels of self-expression on the gravel roads of Cowtown, USA, the home of the National Western Stock Show- Denver, Colorado. Yippee Kai Yea.

After my heroes Frank Zappa and Don Van Vliet, I had been writing modern sounding compositions and giving them such poetic titles as "Potato Chip Roundup" and "Fartsalot". I was convinced that these were immortal sonic creations, but nobody was jumping on board my musical band wagon train.

In southern California I might have met a better reception. But here, smack dab between Wichita and Salt Lake City, in Colorful Culturally Backward Colorado, someone came up to me after one of my self-promoted concerts and suggested,

"You guys would be great if you just played some *real* music."

And that comment came from one of my best friends.

I had magnificent dreams, as does every young person.

But did I know how to make those glorious dreams come true?

Heck no.
I was lost.
High school had barely prepared me to tie my own shoes.
College had shown me how to zip up my pants, and not much more.
And my parents, God bless 'em, with all their honest love and guidance,
still had not prepared me for the all important skill of FINDING MY OWN
WAY.

I needed my idea spark plugs connected.
I needed a no-fool injection.
I needed a change of under-awareness.
I needed SOMETHING.

In the summer of 1982 one evening, it came in the form of a
documentary movie shown on my TV.

I had been bored out of my skull late one Saturday night, barely
propping myself up in bed, on my stomach, chin in one hand, remote control
in the other. I was endlessly channel surfing one station after another.

Eventually I took a bathroom break at the top of the hour, got a drink of
water direct from the bathroom sink faucet, returned to bed, plopped myself
back down, then continued as before.

Then I saw him.

I had clicked forward to a channel coming out of a little independent
nineteen-watt PBS station situated in a Quonset hut twenty miles outside of
town.

I adjusted my rabbit ears and tried to get rid of as much of the furry
static as I could.

On my TV set was a picture, a moving picture, a gloriously low budget
faded color 16mm documentary film picture. There in the center of the screen
sat this fellow, about fifty years old, on a log, in the middle of the woods.

His hair was long and nearly shoulders length, and his belly button hung
leisurely over the elastic band of his shorts. He wore a beard on one end and
he was wearing shorts on the other. And by that I mean his boxer shorts. And
that was all. No shoes, no shirt. But here on educational PBS, he was
supplying a service.

His hands held a one gallon bell Jar. Later I would discover how
important all kinds of Jars would be in the world of Wand manipulation. But
for now, this is the kind of Jar that you see in Frankenstein movies containing
a brain, and that's what I saw.

In this Jar, was indeed, a brain.

And this half naked fellow was pulling this brain out of the jar, dripping wet with, I presume, formaldehyde.

Hydee hydee ho.

The brain momentarily slipped from his grip and tried to hide back inside the safety of the jar. Plop plop. No fizz.

However, the man persisted to wrangle this creature out of its container, and moments later he proudly held up the brain at eye level. The bearded one slowly turned it to display it proudly from all 360 degrees...

“This,” he said slowly, deliberately, and very grandly, “is...

“The ...
Center...
Of...
The ...
Universe.”

Chapter 4

Dormant Brain Camp

So here is this absolutely wild looking guy holding up a dripping wet brain like a three pound mass of congealed cottage cheese looking for a home, a giant alien snail out of its shell. I sat there transfixed to my TV set, anxious to see what on Earth would come next in this obscure late night public television broadcast.

The 1970's documentary film *Stingo* was a tour de force of likely the most unusual summer camp in the history of the planet. There was a scene of songs around the crackling campfire with the director strumming his guitar. This was followed by student testimonials swearing to newly acquired abilities allowing one to peer as through a high powered microscope upon one's own internal organs. This could be very handy if one were considering a surgical procedure, especially if the surgeon was a singing cowboy.

The film then showed Stingo playing his folk guitar and sparring with Groucho Marx on the 1950's NBC game show *You Bet Your Life*. This classic black and white show from television's golden age was mostly a vehicle for Groucho to improvise clever quips with his as often as not quirky and unusual guest contestants. This was followed by the actual game portion where contestants were given a chance to go home with a little cash.

On that occasion Stingo perfectly played the part of a back country woodsman, complete with deer skin jacket that he claimed to have culled himself from one of his four legged friends. Groucho amusingly remarked that if this is how Stingo treated his friends, he would hate to be one of his enemies.

I found his portrayal of an uneducated frontiersman even more amusing later on years after seeing the film of the show, as I learned that in reality Stingo had attended three universities, including the University of Chicago to work his Ph.D. But this was show business.

The comical give away for anyone in on his secret was that despite his theatrical pauses feigning complete bafflement, Stingo effortlessly and nearly instantaneously correctly answered his set of quizzicals put forth by Mr. Marx concerning obscure science facts, and he won a thousand dollars for his effortless efforts.

The documentary then moved on to touch upon the numerous experimental studies done with brain lab participants. These studies

scientifically documented the dramatic increases in creativity, awareness, pleasure, and improved human relations after systematically applying the lab's new techniques of brain self-control.

Next in the film was a cute as a pin shapely twenty year old blonde sitting by an idyllic mountain stream, all the while playing with a human skull. The top portion of the skull had neatly been fitted with hinge to allow convenient opening of the cranial cavity. She earnestly looked inside, as if hoping to re-discover a long forgotten treasure inside a sacrificial jewelry box.

What could be more fun?!

The film hammered home the inescapable message that each and every human being had been delivered upon this planet with a brain capable of infinite possibilities, and that paradoxically nearly every inhabitant of this spinning globe was using an infinitely small percentage of one's potential.

Ah ha! Now I understood the facial hair- Stingo's beard was that rather uncommon fashion of Abe Lincoln; a beard minus the mustache. Stingo's very face was a subliminal Emancipation Proclamation of the Human Spirit from the Slavery of Dormant Brain Cells.

The overt purpose of the brain lab was simple: Hand each brain lab visitor an instruction manual to their own mind machine, then hand hold them through a short period of thought and behavior training during their stay at Camp Brain In Nature.

Certainly, it looked like all of the campers were having a fabulously jolly and inspiring time. This was Adventure Land for Neural Explorers. Bring your coonskin cap and a copy of Gray's Anatomy.

At the conclusion of the film, to my delight, the TV station had a live interview with the brain man himself, decked out in an out of fashion thrift store suit. Stingo and the interviewer sat on lawn chairs outside the station's half-barrel shaped army barracks, and reminisced about the origins of the brain lab.

"After my appearance on Groucho, some big New York City TV executive saw me and said, 'I know a phony when I see one, and that guy is a GREAT one.'" Stingo boasted. "They flew me to Manhattan, gave me a summer replacement show with guests like Burl Ives and Woody Guthrie."

"I played the part of a mountain man to a tee. I told back woods stories and strummed my gee-tar and sang folk songs. The network paid me \$2000 an hour for the summer. At the end of the last show I looked straight into the TV camera and said, 'If anybody has a mountain to sell, call me.' And somebody did."

Stingo went on wearing a self-satisfied grin ear to ear, "I packed my bags and left the city with two grocery sacks full of money. One I gave to the IRS, and with the other one I bought Laughing Coyote Mountain."

"To this day we all work and play up on the mountain without any electricity or running water, just like my boyhood hero, explorer Jim Bridger. I live on just pennies each year, just what people donate." So that explained the out of date thrift store suit he was wearing. His budget dictated that fashion took a back seat to pick-axes and lamp oil.

Stingo then gave out a P.O. box address for correspondence and for those wanting to learn more.

"Sign me up!" I shouted, standing up in my pajamas.

By the time the mailman dropped off my mail the next afternoon, my own letter for directions to the brain lab was on its way. But I had much more in store for me than simply learning about the human brain. Eventually I would learn and understand what kind of real magic Stingo had used to buy his mountain.

More than a month slowly went by and like clockwork I heard the familiar clank of my mailbox. One typical day I ran over to the slot in my front door and picked up the small pile of letters that lay scattered on the floor.

At last, here it was, a plain white envelope with a hand ink-stamped logo of a howling coyote next to the return address.

I tore open the letter and read the simple double spaced hand typed letter with eager anticipation. The typeface indicated an old manual typewriter with a spotty ribbon, but it was personally written note written specifically to me:

Dear Brain Scout Neil,

Thank you for your interest in The Dormant Brain Lab. I am sure glad you enjoyed seeing the film about our work here.

Also thanks to you for patiently waiting many sunsets and moon rises for a response to your letter. Up here in the forest, I only make it down trail with my jeep to the post office box about every two weeks to roundup my mail. Then it's another two more weeks to get back to town with my gunny sack of mail going back out. In winter it's even longer when I'm snowbound and have to take the mule.

I understand your interest in learning how to better use your brain to accomplish those things important to you that you mentioned, such as personal improvement as well as your desire for a professional career in music.

Since 1957 we have been engaged in the systematic study and research of the most fabulous instrument in the known universe: The Human Brain. I would suggest that better use of this In-Your-Head-instrument would help you in achieving your goals, and more.

We have visitors come here from all over the world each summer, and I cordially invite you to come visit our facility at your convenience any Sunday afternoon between the hours of noon and five P.M. Please see the enclosed mimeograph sheet for directions and a guide for visitors. You need only bring your brain and your willingness to learn.

Yours Sincerely,
D.A.T. Stingo, Director
Dormant Brain Research and Development Lab
Laughing Coyote Mtn., Blackhawk, Colorado

Stingo's response was a curious combination of back-woods twang and serious science, and I had never seen anything like it before.

I was raring to go. The very next Saturday, I packed my backpack with a peanut butter sandwich, a thermos full of hot tea, hopped in my car, then took off.

BOW WOW 2

I Am Not A Guy

Everything that follows here hinges upon THIS very first lesson that follows, for it is the basis of the power that one manipulates with one's Wand.

And this is what I, The Book of Wands, am all about:
Traveling with the aid and use of a Wand.

What is Travel?

This is easy, yet difficult. Anything that I say Traveling is, is not Traveling.

Certainly you cannot contain Travel or anything else for that matter in mere symbols that mean something else. A representation of anything- IS NOT THAT THING, so obviously.

However, this record, in its entirety will provide a general approximation for the meaning of Travel. Eventually, at some point after ingestion of this collected symbolic representations of ideas, those predisposed to experience the actual thing, the essence of Travel, will utter, "Ah ha!".

Anyway,

What I must emphasize is that I do not mean for you to mistake that somewhere generating this tome I was initially sitting around, a tube of mortal skin and bone, a walking food processor with eyes and clumsy fingers and a big shiny nose.

I am happy to report that has not been my package previous, not then, not now, and not in the future.

I lounge comfortably beyond scratch marks made by mechanical pencil or typewriter, quill pen or charcoal on cave wall, past any scribbling made by a common three dimensional collection of self-mobile cells that you may perceive as an initiator of paragraphs.

Am I making myself clear?

I am not the result of some GUY writing a book,
Rather, I am

Original Idea and Thought

flying boundless above the common chlorinated swimming pool of popular perception.

I.e., I, the true “author” of this book, The Book of Wands, I am not a person, the creation of a person, nor the product of writer with or without a contract, but a growing idea, a moving concept

Such IS your's truly,
The Book of Wands.

Like any living creature, even though you can reread this sentence a thousand times, I am not static. Rather, I am as changeable as a bank of white clouds drifting against a carpet of blue. There you see me. There you don't. I move. I Travel.

My Mind Mine bubbles out a new synthetic vision reflected in these particular printed words. But, I am a creative un-embodied entity, merely dressed in the form of whatever you happen to have there speaking to you.

This book is a convenient footprint left in the sand.

Follow it as far as you can. My trail will lead to the edge of the water, my impression will then be found washed away in the ocean of daily infinities.

To go on you must dive in and swim from a defined sandy shore, and leave the beached whales of conformity behind.

Otherwise, you will remain just another Lump of slimy rock moss.

I am out of the reach of most of you, and not because you can't touch your toes.

I am, in fact, right here.

To shake my hand, you must learn to pass through the cheese grate where there is no grate.

Although any two of us are like un-matchable evanescent snowflakes, as the Universe was created from one super compressed infinitely dense spot one Big Bang Afternoon, you and I are forever Cosmic Dust Bunny Cousins, made from the very same unitary polka dot. No matter how many galaxies you hop, skip, and jump away, I'm there right next to you, sharing your ancestral spiral twisted pretzel DNA blue jeans and squeezed right in next to you between you and your underwear.

Smmmmmmmmmmmmmmoooooch.

And that's how it ALL is, all the time.

Chapter 5

Riddle of the Ph.B

The drive to Laughing Coyote Mountain consisted of a hop, skip and a jump west into the foothills from my urban stomping grounds, winding forty miles deep on the two lane blacktop of U.S. 6 through historic Clear Creek Canyon. Many miles further south was the newer six-lane Interstate that took the brunt of most current mountain traffic. The old highway now saw much less use, and most of that was for Sunday picnics with grandma and the kiddies.

U.S. Pot Hole 6 east of the old mining towns of Central City and Blackhawk was bordered much of the way on the shoulder by gold tailings from the Colorado gold rush days like endless giant anthills one after another for miles on end. I wondered if I would find another kind of gold at the end of my journey.

I kept my eyes peeled for a raccoon tail hanging on a sign marking the Smith Hill Road turnoff, just as Stingo's hand drawn mimeographed map indicated. I easily passed it on my first and second try. When I finally found it, the small wooden road sign was nearly falling off its post, and either a tourist or a cougar had made off with the tail.

This little gravel lane quickly turned my car into the inside of a washing machine with me as the dirty socks, so bad were the washboard ruts that went on endlessly from the beginning. I was sure I would spot errant pieces of my station wagon randomly scattered about on the return trip.

Although the drive off the main road was initially as level as the paved highway that I had been on, within minutes it quickly became steep and narrow. A thick dark pine tree forest laced with patches of lighter green flickering aspen bordered the road on either side. The dirt road wound on and on for miles, then finally split at a fork in the road just past a small uninhabited volunteer fire station, an inconspicuous tiny red garage with a small water tank tower nearly hidden in the trees.

There was absolutely no other sign of civilization at this point, and even the fire station looked like ruins from a long lost world. I looked at the map and paused.

You know what they say, "When you come to a fork in the road, eat." So I sat down next to my car. My eyes took in the high mountain meadow scenery while my stomach took in a peanut butter and jelly sandwich.

Before long I was on my way again. The road abruptly became viciously steep at this point, my car tires struggling to find grip on billions of loose gravel ball bearings. My old Datsun station wagon was not a motorized mountain goat, this became strikingly clear.

Never the less, I threw my car into first gear, kicked up a pile of dust behind me, and managed to slip-slide it past the rise. I would later learn that in winter this portion of road was completely impassable in nothing less than a four-wheeled drive jeep with chains- or else a good pair of furry hiking boots.

A quarter mile later the road leveled out again having gained perhaps a thousand feet or more above Clear Creek, now far away and below. As I glanced out the window I could see the Continental Divide in the distance along with fourteen-thousand foot high Pikes Peak sixty miles downwind and an even higher Mt. Evanesence across the valley. The view was dizzy and splendiferous.

Suddenly some fuzzy crazy zig zagging thing crossed the road ten feet in front of me and I jammed on the brakes. Like a flash, it disappeared into the trees instantly.

I thought that maybe I was seeing things. As a decent biology student in high school I was familiar with the native wildlife. This thing, what two second glance I had been given, looked like nothing I could identify. I dismissed my brief hallucination as the effect of thin air and altitude. Perhaps it was an omen of stranger things to come.

I drove on in the flickering sunlight that strobe painted the surface of the dirt road. Finally, at long last I spotted a modest stone gate and a cast iron plate marking the entrance to the brain lab. These were the last remnants of a long dismembered and grander wooden and stone arch that I had just seen in Stingo's TV documentary that had been produced only ten years earlier. The now missing archway had originally proclaimed the lab's existence in a more conspicuous fashion. Now, the eighteen inch wide plate embedded amongst the remains of a stone wall was all that was left.

The plate read, "Founded 1957, D.A. Stingo, PH.B., B.Sci., M.A., Director" What the heck was a *Ph.B.*? I hadn't heard of that before. Was this one of Stingo's jokes? A typo hammered in steel, too inconvenient to replace? Was someone handing out a Doctor of Brain degree?

It turns out that I would stare at the sign and ponder that riddle unsolved for a full twenty five years.

Eventually I figured it out, and the solution took mere seconds. From that point on, just glancing at images of this sign would forever remind me of the inherent human tendency for inertia. Since I answered that silly nagging intellectual mosquito bite, I've nailed a photo of it to my refrigerator to keep

me on my toes. Apparently, outgrowing laziness never ceases, even for brain lab graduates.

Et tu?

I backed my car up a little bit and looked for a gap in the trees, the inconspicuous entrance to the so-called “parking lot” as indicated on the map. Neither an asphalt or even a dirt lot, this was a small grass meadow hidden from the road, and required a very confident driver willing to drive his wheels over a small ditch, some very sharp rocks, and a few pointy fallen branches.

Sighing a breath of relief at finding all of my tires absent any new puncture wheezings, I locked my car. I did not want my car radio stolen by some unexpectedly dexterous brown bear.

At one end of the meadow I could spot an old worn and rusty hand water pump. I presumed that the narrow trail leading up from there led to the brain lab proper.

I trudged up the nearly invisible dirt path. At many places it was no more than an inches wide trail of depressed grass. It made the previous road look tame by comparison, and it truly seemed nearly vertical at many points. I had to stop over and over again to catch my breath and to catch a tree branch to keep me from falling on my butt.

It was beautiful wall to wall rocks, grass, trees, and wildflowers at every turn of the head. And the smell of the air was divine.

“So *that’s* what clean air smells like,” I thought.

Immediately there was a remarkable quietude present that I had never experienced any where else in my life. Normally, for any city dweller, the absence of sound only exists within four walls in one sort of sound proof man-made chamber or with the use of ear plugs. Here I found the same absolute quiet as one might find inside a stainless steel bank vault, but I was in the middle of natural abundance everywhere.

The setting was unique for me. I was in the middle of everything, and everything made virtually no sound at all.

Then, more curiously, I began to notice something quite unusual. I could hear a steady background drone inside my head, a steady beat less

“Roouoooooohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhmmmm”.

For a short while I was stumped. I sat down for a minute on a stump trying to figure out what the mysterious humming was and where it was coming from.

“What is that?” I thought.

It was weird.

Suddenly it dawned on me. I put my hands over my ears, closed my eyes, and listened intently.

“Wow,” I realized, it was the echo of my car engine still bouncing around inside my head. I had never noticed such a sound before, even after driving for hours. But here in the forest where there was barely any sound at all, this internal reverberation was as plain as day. The lack of cityscape background noises here in this utterly natural landscape made me sensitive to something I had always missed before: Inter-cranial Engine Afterburn.

In retrospect, this new found sensitivity was at the crux of many brain lab experiences. The remote virgin forest, away from the all manner of civilized distractions, gave one an unparalleled new perspective and sensitivity to one’s interior self and one’s exterior You-niverse. This would be a key in later experimentation properly guiding Unusual Tools that nobody else would even admit existed.

As I learned with each new visit to this mountain retreat, you could experience things at The Dormant Brain Lab that you could not duplicate anywhere else. Here I would find just the right combination of natural solitude blended with just the right amount of creature comforts.

Unlike fasting for forty days in the desert until you were as thin as a toothpick, or a year spent meditating in a damp wet cave, the brain lab offered clean mountain water, a grocery store about an hour away, the safety of a log cabin, and a wood stove for drying your muddy wet socks after thunderstorms.

Why sleep on a sticky bed of nails when you could have an old mattress on a log floor for the same price?

In the late 60’s and early 70’s, i.e. in the Summer of Love and slightly beyond, one brand or another of Guru-ism was The Thing in pop culture. Grand Masters of This and That popped up on every corner.

Further, The Age of Aquarius was frequently blended with cold cash Madison Avenue commercialism as many times as not. In those days, and even still quite common, various spiritual organizations as well as independent and institutional education and research was often run with a level of opportunism, dogma, authoritarianism, and ruthless hierarchy that would make a Roman emperor blush.

By contrast, Stingo decidedly took a back seat to the master of your brain, and that was YOU. For a six week intensive course that included rugged home cooked vegetarian meals, you paid only what you could afford, and at the most this was a couple hundred bucks- the paper kind, that is.

You paid for your expenses and contributed to help satisfy Stingo's endless need for postage stamps. In return, you got a custom fitted program of brain self-control. The lab director provided experience, guidance and a tested regimen of study.

But essentially every participant was his or her own boss all the way. Stingo was The Anti-guru. He repeatedly made this perfectly clear with a hearty self-depreciating giggle, "Your way is not my way, and my way is *certainly is not your way!*"

I made my way slowly up the mountain side and at last arrived behind a rickety log structure with a red tar paper roof that extended from the top of the A-frame all the way down to the dirt and weeds.

I walked around to the front and found myself at a small clearing perhaps a half-acre in size. It was occupied by a tilled garden plot located downhill, another smaller cabin fifty yards away, the wreck of a roofless uncompleted log structure in the shadow of some trees, another hand water pump up the hill about fifty feet, and an old pale blue army jeep at the end of a dirt path that nearly qualified for a road. This must have been the end of the road that started from behind the stone gate that I had seen upon my arrival.

At the summit of the roof of this little cabin was an old rusty brown school bell, and from it hung a rope that brushed the ground.

The small cabin's door lie a few wooden steps down in the dirt, and was a simple unpainted wooden affair with a glass window cracked in one corner. Next to the door was a bulletin board with a few odd scraps of paper and a big note, written upon it with a bold black magic marker, "Ring Bell 10 times and I'll whistle you on up."

I wasn't ready to announce my presence yet, because I first wanted to look around a little bit in private. I walked down the steps and peered inside the window.

Inside was a stove, a few odds and ends like enamel pots and pans, some dishes, and a few boxes. This was a primitive back woods kitchen, surely. The window ledge was a mausoleum for flies.

Eek. Either wilderness housekeeping was low priority relative to brain work, or it was just plain impossible to maintain the same level of cleanliness as one might in a suburban cooking zone.

I walked around the outside of this cabin, the walls protected by the long extended roof. There was lots of firewood, and shovels and axes hanging on nails hammered into the side of the logs that made up the walls.

There were sticks everywhere, piled up like firewood, but curiously not at all like logs, they were too skinny for that. "Kindling?" I thought. The canes were made from tree branches, some of them stripped clean of their bark,

others waiting. Some were six feet long, others mere inches. I assumed “tent posts” and other things I could not fathom, and left it at that.

But most unusually, the log walls under the protection of the A-frame roof were absolutely covered- littered one might say- with hand written notes, woodland graffiti of a strange sort.

“Lone Wolf- BINC 1972- Never lonely again!” stated one signatory.

“Lost since birth, finally FOUND- April May Flower, June ‘69”, signed another.

“City Sucks Life- Mountain Air Breathes- Dragon Dan, BINC ‘75”

This was an obvious ritual of brain lab participants, to leave their fingerprint permanently on the very walls of the establishment. It was unique and quite unexpected.

Then there was a funny little cartoon, maybe seven inches across, simply drawn of a sheep herder standing with a long staff next to one of his sheep. The caption read “H.I.S. L.A.B.M. >>>>” with little arrows pointing off in the opposite direction of the clearing, off to the west away from the center of the camp.

“Ha, somebody can’t spell!” I said out loud. And I glanced off in the direction of the arrow, but saw nothing but trees and more trees. I saw no furry sheep or even one little lamb.

I continued scanning the wall graffiti and came upon another scribbling that caught my attention...

“Always take spare jeep keys to town- D.A. Stingo, June 68”.

I walked completely around and found myself at the dangling bell rope, grabbed it, and pulled hard. Nothing. The bell was stuck.

I looked up to see what the hang up was, and tried tugging from an oblique angle in the opposite direction...

“DING!!!!” it came unstuck and rang out suddenly and clearly.

Wow, I had never done this before in my life, rung an actual school bell. Five minutes at the lab and I was already having a brand new adventure. I felt like a teacher in a Lucy Maud Montgomery novel, expecting a little red haired girl to coming running by any moment.

“DING!!! DING!!! DING!!! DING!!!”

I listened. Oh yeah, ten times...

DING!!! DING!!! DING!!! DING!!!”

DING!!! DING!!! DING!!!”

Oops.

I listened carefully.

Nothing.

Nothing.

Then I heard a “Woot woot woot” loud hoot-owl human whistle uphill behind me, from the trees, farther up the trail. It seemed a hundred yards away.

“Up here! COME UP HERE!!”

“Woot Woot Woot!!!!!!!!!!”

I took a deep breath, and headed uphill, towards what, I did not know.

I had no idea what a Wand was. I didn’t even know they existed. Controlling them would come eventually. But first I would have to learn about the organic machine that did the controlling. And that was a major adventure in itself.



Chapter 6

Buckets and Brains

I started climbing up the brain lab mountain in the direction of the hoot owl call that I had heard just moments before, and I slowly wound above the clearing where the cook's cabin lay. A steep curving path cut into the side of the hill threaded its way past fallen pine trees and small boulders. Finally, about a hundred or so feet ahead and above me at the point where the trail vanished, there stood D.A.T. Stingo, waving.

"Up here!" he shouted. "Come on up," he added as he turned and walked beyond my line of sight.

As I made it to the top of the trail, I could just see Stingo disappear inside another cabin that sat precariously on the side of the hill a little further back.

This cabin also had a roof that went from its peak down to the forest floor, but this was only on one side of the building. This roof side was completely covered with dirt and sod, and one haphazard skylight.

On the opposite side, the cabin faced the south with nearly a full wall of glass windows. I imagined that with the spectacular view that I now saw behind me, this was as much for scenery as it was for solar rays.

On this cabin, the door was painted bright red with a nicely quartered glass window in the center. As Stingo came back outside, I noticed that he had to crouch down to get through, and he looked like a giant leaving a cottage that belonged to the seven dwarves.

"Sit down, sit down," Stingo instructed as he pointed to one of two large split logs situated a few feet from the cabin's entrance.

I started to sit down and he held my arm, "Not here, you sit on that one so you can have the view." One bench sat at a ninety degree angle to the other, this other one with a clear view of the range of mountains that lay grandly across the valley.

He started buttoning up an old flannel shirt that he had obviously just put on for guest company, namely me.

I had not said a word. I don't know if it was telepathy or not, but Stingo knew I had noticed the door.

He pointed behind him at the cabin, "The kids who helped me build this cabin built the door for somebody their size," he lightly chuckled. "When I started out, I brought up kids from juvenile hall, and they'd never seen a pine tree in their life. They helped me build this cabin as part of their adventure."

He finished buttoning his shirt, and then smacked and licked his lips, like a hungry wolf about to devour his innocent prey.

He then looked me straight in the eye. “What are you doing here?” he asked quite sternly.

I was taken aback as this was really not the genial tone I had expected at all. He wasn’t smiling at all now.

I reached into my pocket and took out the letter and map he had sent to me in the mail.

“Um, I’m Neil Slade, and you sent me this letter.” I held up the letter somewhat sheepishly for him to see. “I came up to see the lab.”

Stingo rubbed his eyes, scrunched his mouth, and paused for a moment as if irritated. Then he continued with a decidedly unforgiving tone, “The first thing you learn around here is to READ and follow the instructions.” His gaze was piercing, and he spoke slowly and deliberately, “You didn’t follow the instructions.”

“Huh?” I answered quietly. I started pouring over the sheet I had brought with me to see what I had missed. “It said between noon...” He didn’t let me finish.

“We don’t have visitors *today*,” he glared. “READ THE INSTRUCTIONS.”

I frantically scanned the letter. But before I finished, Stingo scolded, “Today’s Saturday, not Sunday. Sunday is for visitors. NOT Saturday.”

I started to get up. “Oh, sorry...”

“No, no, sit down,” he insisted, “You’re already here.” He waved me back down on the log.

He continued, “On Saturday I’m completely in my frontal lobes flow. Visitors bring all their city chaos with them, it’s a mess. Their entropy slops up everything. I have to be ready for that.” Stingo then dusted off his legs with his hands.

He sighed, and then seemed to relax a bit and consign himself to the situation, i.e., *me* disturbing his “flow”. He picked up a little twig off the end of his log, and started to casually pick his teeth.

There was a decidedly awkward pause in the conversation. I didn’t know what to say, although I now realized I had gotten the day wrong. Otherwise, I hardly understood what he was talking about.

He went on, starting anew, “Okay, so tell me, what do you need?”

I thought for a moment, then blurted out the obvious, or so I thought. “I just wanted to see what you did up here, and what this place...” He quickly interrupted me again.

“No, no, no,” he waved. “What do you *need*?”

I didn’t understand the question.

“What do you NEED?” he asked again, “Tell me what you *NEED*.”

My mouth hung open slightly as I tried to figure out exactly what he was getting at. I didn’t say I needed anything actually. If I didn’t come there to check out the grounds, he must have been referring to something else. And I was missing it.

“What do I *need*?” I questioned half under my breath. I nervously started to chew on my index fingernail.

Suddenly I heard this rustle and noise in the trees nearby, and a gust of wind began to blow things around. It came out of nowhere.

Stingo picked up his chin and looked around. He seemed to be noting something that I could not perceive. Suddenly, something darted through the brush near the back side of the cabin. Was it one of those odd creatures I saw on the road coming up again?

“What was that?” I exclaimed.

“Nothing, nothing,” Stingo dismissed, and he looked around a bit, almost like an owl pivoting its head and observing.

I suddenly had the feeling that the forest was mirroring back my own inner nervous discomfort in this situation. It was un-nerving.

Stingo silently bobbed his head as if in recognition. “Mmmmm,” he said quietly.

Then he faced back towards me.

“Come on, what do you need? Again...”

Stingo sat there studying me. I felt like an insect under a magnifying glass.

I tried to ignore the wind and concentrate on an answer. Things began to settle a bit. “Um... I need to be happy?” I suggested.

“Good, good,” Stingo said. “What else?”

I was a bit relieved and let go of my breath. “Let’s see,” I pondered with a pause. Finally I blurted out again, not quite sure, “I need to be a good musician?”

“Are you certain?” he asked.

I lifted my eyebrows.

“You would *like* to be a good musician. But are you absolutely certain you *need* to be?”

This question stopped my thoughts. I had simply taken this assumption for granted after playing music all of my life. “I *think* I need to be a musician. I *like* being a musician,” I answered.

“Not the same,” he said. “Okay, go on.”

I had to think for a few moments. Then with hesitation and some embarrassment I admitted, “Um... I want to be loved by this girl I know?”

I said this, hoping it was the right answer. But with a sinking gut I knew the chances of that was about as slim as one of the blades of grass under my foot.

Stingo shook his head like he had already anticipated my reply. Did he know that I was talking about the girl who had ripped my heart out just months ago, or had he heard this confession so many times it didn't matter who the girl was?

“Do you love *yourself*?” Stingo struck back.

Now I began to feel like an even smaller squirming insect under a microscope, never mind under a harmless magnifying glass. I could nearly feel a mounting pin poised above my quivering thorax. Here I was getting a full psychological examination and the wood log under my butt wasn't even warm yet. I squirmed in my seat.

“*Do you love yourself?!*” Stingo emphatically asked again

“I suppose.”

“I suppose? How do you expect anyone to love you if you don't love yourself?”

Dr. Sigmund Stingo was giving me the third degree barbecuing and pouring on the hot sauce. He relentlessly hammered on, “What *else* do you need?”

I just sat. I couldn't think of anything. I was more in shock than anything. Stingo had completely dispensed with the common cultural oilings that strangers generally engage in upon first meeting. This was not whiffle ball. This was hard ball.

I just arched my eyebrows in helplessness.

“Okay,” he said. “That's fine for now.”

I breathed a half sigh of relief.

He went on, “If you want to control your life, you must first control the thinking meat inside your skull. And to do that, you must first learn how your brain works. Follow me.”

“Uh oh,” I thought.

Stingo pushed himself up.

I followed him through the tiny door and into the cabin.

Inside the cabin, I looked around. It was at most about fifteen feet across in either direction, and about the same in height. There was actually very little free floor space. A full sized bed with an old mattress covered by a old faded spread out sleeping bag took up nearly half of the place.

In one corner was a large sky blue enameled wood stove with the name “Universal” in big letters on the front. In two other corners were several file cabinets. Against the inside of the glass walled side of the cabin was a

mimeograph machine, and shelves with supplies of all sorts; tape, paper, pens, pencils, ink, staplers, and so on.

Smack dab in the middle of the cabin were two standing tree trunks, one in the corner with its bark intact, the other smack in the middle of the cabin with all of its branches and bark stripped down smooth. It was obvious that both trees helped to supply support for the roof. The trunk in the middle was a virtual bulletin board, covered with more magic marker notes, notably names of people. These names were all the same handwriting, unlike the cook's cabin graffiti, and presumably the work of Stingo.

And then there were the walls: In a few vacant spots were nails upon which hung a wide variety of knick knacks like rulers, more pens, and a few aluminum pots, and eating utensils. Again, as on the outside of the cook's cabin, there was writing everywhere, but here all the writing was on the inside walls along with scores of index card notes. Some of it was in plain English, but much of it was in some cryptic foreign tongue with fancy curly cue letters in all colors as well as oddball symbols that could have passed for chemistry and physics formulae.

Beyond all of this, the great majority of wall space inside, from the ceiling rafters all the way down to the stone floor, was completely covered in books. There was shelf after shelf of books and books and books of all shape, color, and sizes.

Every couple of feet scattered here and there on the front part of the shelves was stuck a hand written label, each apparently describing the content of the reading material above the label. Again, many of these labels were in strange lettering.

Stingo picked up a foot high hand-made pine footstool from the corner and placed it on the dusty floor in front of me, then motioned me to sit down. He fluffed up a couple of old pillows on the bed and reclined back down himself, hands and fingers laced behind his head.

"What's that language?" I asked, pointing to the numerous labels and writing.

"Oh that?" Stingo smiled. "I learned Russian in World War II. Our allies then, you know? Now I use it to keep sharp. It makes me work to remember what I wrote. I continuously challenge myself. I don't want to grow cobwebs in my ears." He took his pinkie and scratched the inside of his right ear.

"Oh," I nodded.

"Besides, I need to keep some things to myself, especially when I have people up here that I don't know very well, and people I don't trust." Stingo nonchalantly glanced out the big picture window.

Was he referring to me?

I looked up and spotted a guitar case above me in a little bunk loft high up. It had one of those cryptic labels stuck on it near the handle. And this label had additional ornaments on it. I thought that it must have contained something particularly special.

“So, Neil, my good new friend, where did you go to school?” This seemed to be moving in a deliberately more casual tone.

“Metro State College, downtown,” I answered.

“Uh huh. And what did they teach you about the human brain?” he asked

“I took a biology course, but we didn’t study the human brain much.”

“Of course, of course,” Stingo replied, my answer apparently expected.

“When you go to college, your brain is like a ten cylinder motor running on two cylinders. You graduate, you get a diploma, and they never even bother to teach you how to connect the other eight spark plugs.”

I was trying to imagine having spark plug wires inside my head.

Stingo went on, “That’s what we do here. You teach yourself how to connect all the cylinders. You’ve been crawling along like a snail most of your life because nobody took the time to help you learn how to use the most important organ in your body. Your friends didn’t tell you, your parents didn’t show you, and your teachers at school certainly didn’t help you with it.”

He scratched his head. “Actually, now that I think about it, I’m wrong. They disconnect one wire in college. You go in with two connected, and leave with one more pulled off. Hahah!” He laughed heartily.

“But seriously,” Stingo swept across the air with his arm, “The human brain has infinite potential. Yet, despite everything we known, the human brain remains 90% dormant.”

I saw the space inside my own head as one big vacuum, then retorted, “Hey, isn’t that just a myth?” I answered. “I’ve heard that’s just a saying, and it’s not really true.”

“No, no,” Stingo closed his eyes and shook his head. “Here,” he said as he suddenly sat up. He stood up upon his bed, which sunk even further with his standing weight, and began rifling through some loose papers high on the shelf above the head board. A few sticks were knocked off the shelf, and Stingo quickly picked them up. They looked liked fancy chop sticks, with colorful designs painted on them, but I couldn’t figure on Stingo bringing much Chinese take-out up here. Stingo quickly scooped them up and quickly put them back up on the shelf and tucked them out of sight.

“Let’s see, where is that.... Ah ha!”

He removed a small pile of papers. “uh huh...mmmmm...ah!”

He pulled out one sheet then sat back down on the mattress cross legged, then pointed to the page.

“We do not know what human beings are fully capable of. This is what Sir John Eccles said, and he won the Noble Prize.” Stingo began reading the quotation,

“All indications point to the conclusion that the brain and its powers are endless.”

Stingo let the papers rest on his lap and exclaimed with loud drama, “If the human brain has endless capacity, how do you measure a percentage of infinity?!”

I had to work this out in my head, and I was having a little trouble on my own. Maybe it was the altitude.

“Even if you are using 99% of your brain, what is 99% of infinity? It’s nothing! It’s an infinitely small slice of an infinitely big pie!” He continued to fling his hands around in exclamation.

“The whole idea that you are using all of your brain or any percentage for that matter is a completely absurd idea. Heck, even the idea that you are using 10% of your brain is too generous. The point is, the folksy notion that you are using only a smidgen of what you are capable of is intuitively correct. People correctly intuit that they are not even getting out of first gear.”

He sat up in bed and leaned towards me. “Tell me Neil... EXACTLY WHAT ARE YOU CAPABLE OF??” His eyebrows lifted in great exaggeration.

“If you can tell me that, I’ll tell you that you’re using more than 10% of your brain!” He pointed in the air like an orator making an important point.

“People don’t have a clue about how their brain works. And if you don’t know how the motor works, if you don’t know where the brake is, where to put the key, where to put the gas and the oil, how to change gears—you’re not going to get anywhere, *no matter what other TOOLS you might have in that trunk.*”

He emphasized this last fact by gently poking his fingertip right on my forehead.

I had the feeling he was talking about something I didn’t quite get yet. What tools was he referring to?

“Once you learn how this engine works, once you learn a few brain basics and apply them, then...”

Stingo slapped his hands together ten inches from my face and moved one hand zapping off like a rocket sled-

“Then...BANG! ZOOOOOMMMMMM!!!!”

He relaxed, and reclined back in his bed.

He laughed and spoke in an assured jolly tone, “No more grinding gears, no more flat tires. Life becomes an infinitely interesting game with the universe. It flows from one moment to the next, like a well oiled machine.”

My heart was beating fast. Stingo had delivered with impressive panache, like a well rehearsed actor. I was floored with the mere idea that my brain, my very own brain was boundless. Nobody had suggested that to me before.

“So,” he said “Do you want to learn?”

“Oh yes, yes,” I said excitedly, “This sounds great!”

“Alright then.” Stingo sat back up and stepped over to the stove. Next to it sat a galvanized steel bucket with a handle.

“This is your second lesson.” He sat back on the bed in front of me, bucket in hand.

“My second lesson?” I asked, perplexed.

“Yes, your second one. What was your first lesson?”

I had to think.

“Oh yeah,” I admitted. “Always read the instructions.”

“That’s right,” Stingo lightly agreed. “Now this is part deux.”

I anxiously waited, and couldn’t for the life of me figure out what the bucket was for. Maybe I was supposed to go out and gather some special rocks outside.

Stingo spoke as if he had said these lines a thousand times, perfectly rehearsed and repeated to countless students. “The human brain is three brains in one. It is known as a Triune brain, tri- meaning three, -une meaning one. Three in one. Three brains in one.”

Okay, I got that. That was easy.

“It is a reptile brain seed surrounded by a mammal brain core, and then these two parts are further enveloped by a thick advanced primate brain.”

“Okay.” I was following this elementary brain physiology lesson without too much problem, so far so good.

“Here,” Stingo said, reaching over to grab a fresh green apple that was sitting on the edge of a shelf next to an old worn copy of Fun With Dick and Jane, the original elementary school reader that I had myself used in the first grade. Perhaps quite an appropriate coincidence.

He grabbed an impressive looking 10 inch long antler handled Bowie knife that was hanging by a thick piece of rope on a nail hammered into the log wall. He carefully cut the apple in half.

Stingo pointed to the inside of the apple, somewhat dwarfed by this weapon, and repeated, first as he pointed to the seeds, then the core, and then

the big juicy white flesh of the apple, “Reptile brain, Mammal Brain, Primate Brain.” Then he took a loud crunchy bite out of one half, and offered me the unbitten half.

“Thanks,” I said, and I took a bite myself.

Stingo put the apple down. “In order to control your brain and get the most out of it, you must understand how each of these independent parts of the brain work. Each layer has specific functions, but can work together to one extent or another with the other layers.”

He again seemed to emphasize this next point, “What ever you do in life, what you do with other tools that you use, always comes back to what part of your brain is actually wielding such a tool.” He held up the knife in front of me, and paused as if wanting me to contemplate the last sentence. “You got that?”

“Sure,” I responded hopefully. “I think so.” But actually, I wasn’t really quite sure what he meant.

“The reptile brain can do nothing but kill as a murderer with the same knife that the frontal lobes will use to heal, like a surgeon” He hung up the knife while I pondered what he had just said.

“The problem for most humans is that they barely click much past the first or second layers, the reptile and mammal brain. And that’s a shame, because the juiciest part is right here, in the primate brain.” Stingo poked my forehead with his finger with distinctly more pressure this time. I was glad he wasn’t poking at me with the tip of the knife.

“This is your *frontal lobes*, click your amygdala forward out of your reptile brain and into your frontal lobes, and that’s when the magic happens. You pop your frontals.”

Now he was starting to lose me. “Amygdala?” “Click?” “Pop?” I thought to myself. This sounded more like a snap and crackle Rice Crispies cereal commercial. Is he going to wire me up? Is he going to put an implant in my brain with a toggle switch connected to it?” “Is my brain going to explode?” The images were making me nervous.

Stingo put down the knife and apple and picked up the bucket that he had sat down on the floor next to me. “Put this on your head.”

“Huh?” I exclaimed.

“Put this over your head.”

I took the bucket from Stingo and reluctantly held it above my head.

“No,” he said. “Not above your head. Turn it around and cover your head. Everyone who comes up to the lab does this. This is your catechism. Go on.” He grabbed the bucket, flipped it over, and gave it back to me.

Suddenly I nervously felt that things were decidedly taking a turn for the worst, and I began to seriously doubt my decision to trek up to this place. Was he mad?

“Go on. Or go home,” Stingo said.

I paused for a moment and thought, “What have I gotten myself into...” I then slowly lowered the bucket over my entire head and held on to the edges. It was nearly pitch black.

“Say,. ‘Me me me!’” Stingo commanded.

“What?” I answered, convinced that this had now all turned crazy. My own voice metallically reverberated inside the bucket.

“Say it! ‘Me me me me me.’ ” Stingo immediately struck side of the bucket with his knuckles making a resounding loud clang.

I could already feel a few tears welling up in my eyes. I was completely mortified

“Me me me me me!” Stingo reiterated as he hit the side of the bucket again for emphasis.

I barely uttered the words, “me me me.”

I didn’t want to cross the guy, after all, he had a huge knife sitting next to him. I wanted to go home.

“Louder!”

“me me me.”

“Again!”

“Me Me ME!”

“Once more, LOUDER.”

I shook as I answered,

“ME ME ME ME ME!!!”

Silence.

Then Stingo took the bucket off my head and set it back down next to the stove. I wiped my face off.

“That,” Stingo stated, “Is your Reptile Brain.”





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