

The Wonder of it All!
The Depth of Our Belonging to an Evolving World

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**From an Old Story toward a New:
An Evolution in 23 Scenes and 6 Chapters
(To Be Told in 7 Minutes)**

Chapter 1. *Roots of an old story*

Age 7. Hot Springs, Arkansas. I'm with my parents in my grandmother's living room. She announces they are divorcing. My sister and I are to go to Texas with my mother, to live with my other grandmother. I run to my father, crying out "I want to stay with Daddy!" He says he can't take care of me.

Age 12. My mother has remarried and we've moved to Canada. After two years we move back to Texas. My step-father decides there is no room for my most precious possessions, my books. He forces me to burn them. I stand by the trash barrel, sobbing, putting my books in the flames one by one, hating my stepfather, feelings powerless. Where was my mother?

At age 16 being a model student loses its allure. I'm drawn to the rebels in my junior high school. One night I come home drunk, turn up the radio loud in my bedroom. My step-father storms in to turn it off. We scuffle. My sister and mother scream for us to stop as we slug one another. I win. My step-father retreats to his bedroom and doesn't emerge for three days. I'm proud but somehow ashamed.

Celebrating my new power, I stop going to the Methodist church, where I have found the sermons hollow, the hymns overly earnest, and the adults hypocritical underneath their pious postures.

As a freshman at the University of Texas two years later, I debate beliefs with a friend from a non-religious family who has embraced Christianity. I decide I am at least an agnostic, probably an atheist.

Chapter 2. *Sources of healing*

At age 29, plagued by depression, I join a therapy group. I discover the pain that I've deeply buried. As I grow with the support of the group I learn that there are consultants who lead the equivalent of therapy groups for organizations. I resolve to go to graduate school and become one.

At age 44, I become a father. I'm initially disappointed that the baby is a girl. I wanted to do for a boy what my father had not done for me. My disappointment soon dissolves as my daughter

teaches me how to love. Providing her with a nurturing environment becomes my primary purpose in life.

Chapter 3. Emergence of an activist stance

At the age 23, confronted with the prospect of being drafted to a war that I consider unjust, I become a rebel with a cause. After soul-searching about whether I can say—in conscience—that my views are grounded in religious training and belief, I declare myself a Conscientious Objector. Astonishingly, my Texas draft board approves.

At 45 I read of the demise of the Texas Horned Toad, a beloved playmate from my youth in Austin. It leaves me sobbing. I vow to fight to preserve the environment for all species and begin seeking opportunities to do so.

2011-12. I volunteer to coach a senior member of the Obama Campaign Team, and take personal pride in Obama's victory. In Washington, D.C. for the inauguration, I am deeply inspired by the commitment of the volunteers I meet. I ask myself, why is not all my work this meaningful?

Feb. 2013. I board a bus to Washington, D.C., to attend a rally at the Washington Monument and march to the White House, protesting the Keystone XL Pipeline. I realize I've become a Conscientious Objector to Climate Change.

A year later, I decide to let my 30-year practice of leadership consulting/coaching wind down so that I can address climate change full time. I feel I've reconnected with my activism in the sixties.

One year later, last year, I get arrested protesting the West Roxbury pipeline extension. I also decide to play a national and local leadership role in a new organization, Elders Climate action. I feel that my behavior and my values are getting close to full alignment.

Chapter 4. Emergence of a spiritual stance

In 1969 I learn Transcendental Meditation at the encouragement of a Persian girlfriend. 15 years later I'm introduced to Buddhist meditation at the Cambridge Insight Meditation Center. I become committed to a daily practice, while ignoring the dogma. Years later I find that I'm sometimes able to enter a deeply absorbed state, in which the boundary between my awareness and the object of my awareness dissolves.

I go on a vision quest in the mountains of Montana and lose myself in the bark of a tree. I take the name "deep heart," in recognition of my growth edge.

Practicing the tool of Focusing, I experience a felt sense in my upper chest that evokes the visual image of a satellite dish that is sending and receiving information with a friendly cosmos.

The image morphs into that of a masted sailing ship. It floats through space as I stand on the bow, a radiant figurehead dispensing blossoms of love.

Cultivating moss in my garden, something deep within me connects with something beyond me and outside of time.

I discover readings that are compatible with my non-theism, yet embrace spirituality. Stuart Kaufman, Chet Raymo, Nancy Ellen Abrams and others open a path connecting religion with what has naturally evolved, holding out the possibility of reconciling faith and skepticism.

Chapter 5. *Persisting dilemmas*

In my 44th year as a meditator, I notice with dismay the persisting gap between my occasional moments of deep connection/surrender and my more typical everyday consciousness and behavior, driven by a small self on automatic pilot. I wonder, how can I bring a sense of wonder and connection with something larger than myself more fully and consistently into my everyday life, including into my work on climate change?

I also note two patterns relevant to my search for support for ongoing growth:

- One is a tendency to go my own way, staying on the periphery of communities. I'm reluctant to fully join. My default mode is separation, which I choose without consciously choosing.
- A related pattern is being skeptical to the point of being hypercritical of any claims of "belief" ("insisting on mistrust" as a friend put it). I instinctively distance myself from belief systems.

I wonder, how much of these patterns is the result of defenses I developed to shield myself from experiencing the pain of abandonment by my original father and to enable me to resist the authority of a step-father I didn't respect? How do I distinguish between strategies for coping with trauma on the one hand and efforts to preserve my autonomy and intellectual integrity on the other?

Chapter 6, the last chapter. *Seeds of a new story*

At age 70, although still a non-theist, I decide that I have irrepressible religious leanings. I seek connection with a community that blends spiritual inquiry with political commitment. I begin attending meetings of the Cambridge Friends, drawn by Quaker spiritual activism and by the absence of both a preacher and hymns. I realize with sadness that—after decades of solitary meditation—the Sunday services don't feel like a good fit. But I'm drawn to the New Story discussion group.

Age 71. The present moment. I find myself resisting the supernatural elements of the New Story belief system as understood by this group, e.g., that evolution is purposeful. For me, nature is enough. I'm content with mystery about origins and destinations. But there's something alluring about allowing myself to imagine that the universe is a friendly place. I explore acting as if that were true. I volunteer to join the group preparing the third workshop in the series "The Wonder of It All." As I participate, I wonder what it would mean to be a person of "faith" who is a member of a community of faith.