

One (Third One)

That which was expected to happen did happen; I leapt again to 2005. Darling Lulu was doing her best to help me get off over the phone, but I could not get it up, which may have been bad in itself, yet not so bad in my situation. Hawaii was back in my life as well, but I did not see myself hanging loose. Douglas Adams and Ken Grimwood had hypothesized that to exit this loop and live my life beyond April 14, 2007, I would need to replay one of my leaps without changing anything about the world as I had known it during my original life, the shortest leap, this one, being obviously the easiest one to keep kosher. Yet upon reflecting about it of late, I reasoned that I did not repeat parts of my life for my sake, but for the sake of others. In my relentless reruns, I needed to help others stay alive in order to help myself find meaning to it all. All places, including Hawaii and Tahiti, were afflicted, since they all existed in the same afflicted world. You will grant me, however, that some places are more afflicted than others.

What was I going to do? Live forward, if everything holds true, for the rest of my life, or keep repeating most of it at the tempo of 2, 4, 8, 16, and 32 years? I had lived a total of 168 years: the initial 44, the ensuing 62, and the latter 62; these additional 124 years minus any aging beyond 44. Forty-four forever! My mind was surely tired, my resolve certainly tried, my patience nearly spent, yet I could sense something singular stirring quite unexpectedly in the core of my being. A bewildering thought wavered in my mind. How can I help those who cannot be helped?

Who cannot be helped by me: the knower of things to come, the 2^N -years-back leaper where N lies loyally between 1 and 5; the savior of Ken Grimwood and Douglas Adams and Charlie Chaplin and Philip K. Dick and John Lennon and Joe Dassin and Yitzhak Rabin and Anwar Sadat and Tupac Shakur and Elvis Presley and Aaliyah and Steve Irwin; the defender of Moses Sasportas; the lifesaver of the Indian Ocean Tsunami and Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Iniki and Kobe Earthquake and San Francisco Earthquake and Polytechnique Massacre; and the preventer of 9-11? I cannot save the terminally ill, the reason why I did not try to save Carl Sagan, Mordecai Richler, Herbert Pagani, Jacques Brel, Israel Kamakawiwo'ole, Freddie Mercury, and Andy Kaufman. I cannot save those whom I cannot face for one ambiguous reason or another, like Jean Améry, Primo Levi, and Pierre Elliott Trudeau. I cannot save those who do not come to mind, but there are other leapers who may think of them. I cannot save the dead, that is, the already dead when I am alive.

How can I help those who cannot be helped? Food for thought during the two years that span this shortest of leaps, the leap that enabled and enables me to memorize everything about the previous 30 years. The better I know about the events that took place between 1975 and 2005, the better my chances of controlling my lives and saving others.

I was happy to land in Honolulu and see my beloved Lulu upon my return to Hawaii. She had seen the original me a few days ago, before my short business trip to one of those afflicted places, but I had not seen her, my spouse, in 48 years: the last 16- and 32-year leaps. We had been together though for a grand total of 80 years.

She welcomed my consuming embrace, but was troubled by my tears.

“You couldn’t have missed me this much after just a few days apart. Is something wrong, Louis?”

“I’m just happy to be home.”

“You’ve been away and back before without the tears.”

“I don’t know, Lulu. I’m just happy to see you. I missed you more this time than any other time before.”

“I missed you too.”

I chose to spare her the long and winding story of my lives given her absence from the last two leaps and the reasons that had led to it. I espoused the Louis that she loved and I remembered from long ago: the loving Louis, the loyal Louis, the reliable Louis, the usual Louis.

To avoid the possible exit from my rejuvenating loop in case Douglas and Ken were right, I decided to make one change during this Benjamin of leaps. I wrote to the proper papers and the National Hurricane Center before the end of July. “My computations, as mysterious as they and I may be, predict a deadly hurricane on August 29. You have to warn the *good* people of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama, that levees will break against this storm. You will be blamed for over 3,000 deaths if you do not prevent this tempest from owning the day.” Over 2,600 people were saved that day.

I loved Lulu, prized Honolulu, studied my 30-year period, and considered my idea about helping those who cannot be helped, in that order.

New Louis: How do you help those who cannot be helped?

Old Louis: I’m not sure that I understand what you mean.

New Louis: How do you help those who are already dead?

Old Louis: There is not much to be done if they died from natural or accidental causes, except for helping their families cope with their loss.

New Louis: Is there something that can be done for those who have been murdered one way or another?

Old Louis: The murderers can be apprehended and put on trial.

New Louis: What if they cannot be captured?

Old Louis: What do you mean?

New Louis: What if enough time had passed and they are dead?

Old Louis: There is not much that can be done, except for helping their families cope with their loss.

New Louis: You surely mean the victims’ families.

Old Louis: Surely.

New Louis: What if there are no surviving families to console? What if the crime is so heinous that coping is just insufficient for some families?

Old Louis: Are you talking about revenge?

New Louis: Yes.

Old Louis: Whom against if the murderers are dead?

New Louis: Their families.

Old Louis: Their families?

New Louis: Yes.

Old Louis: Why their families?

New Louis: What if they murdered entire families? The punishment should fit the crime.

Old Louis: You don't believe that.

New Louis: Not under standard circumstances.

Old Louis: Go on!

New Louis: There is an exception to every rule.

Old Louis: What is the exception here?

New Louis: Relentless persecution, planned annihilation, executed extermination.

Old Louis: Are you talking about the Holocaust?

New Louis: No. It was not a sacrifice. I am talking about the Shoah, the destruction of the Jewish people.

Old Louis: Luckily they are still with us.

New Louis: Luck has nothing to do with it. Six million Jews and their potential progeny are not with us. They have been wiped out from the face of the Earth.

Old Louis: What are you proposing to do?

New Louis: Expunge six million Huns and their progeny.

Old Louis: Huns?

New Louis: Fritzes, Jerries, Krauts, Germans!

Old Louis: Are you insane?

New Louis: Surely.

Old Louis: Go on!

New Louis: I cannot go on, yet.

I loved Lulu, prized Honolulu, studied my 30-year period, and considered my idea about helping those who cannot be helped, not in that order.

New Louis: It has been estimated more than once that had those six million Jews not been reduced to nothingness, their number would have doubled half a century later.

Old Louis: What are you saying?

New Louis: I want to ruin 12 million Germans in 1995.

Old Louis: You are insane.

New Louis: Any year after that would mean that more German heads would have to roll.

Old Louis: You are insane.

New Louis: I hope that half of these 12 million Germans would be decimated on the same day. The other half should have slow agonizing deaths.

Old Louis: How do you propose to accomplish this sheer madness?

New Louis: It is a work in progress.

Old Louis: We are insane.

New Louis: The time to get even has been long coming like a freight train filled with frightened, famished, fatigued Fritzes.

Old Louis: You mean Jews.

New Louis: Do I?

Old Louis: I guess not.

New Louis: How am I going to rid my world of 12 million Fritzes?

Echad, shtayim, shalosh (one, two, three), *ani tsarich libiyot chofshi* (I must be free), I chanted in my heart while my head intoned a different tune at the idea of the genocide of 12 million Germans; free of the weight of 12 million Jews who vanished within a few seconds, a few minutes, a few hours, a few days, a few weeks, a few months, a few years, a Primo Levi, or were never born, or could never be conceived.

And thus dieth Abendroth and Anselm and Barbie and Bartul and Baum and Becker and Blauvelt and Charles and Claget and Clauberg and Cuyler and Dannecker and Diefendorf and Eberly and Emma and Fake and Ferdinand and Fleischer and Gallup and Genzken and Germain and Getman and Godfrey and Haff and Hartjenstein and Heidegger and Ingram and Jost and Kaltenbrunner and Lorenz and Maynard and Mann and Marmaduke and Nagel and Ostheim and Putzkammer and Querfurth and Reiter and Schenck and Segur and Talheimer and Ulm and Volk and Wagner and Werden and Wiesliceny and Wolff and Xylander and Yelin and Zweiacker!

I was jumping the gun; I tend to do so under singular circumstances. The year of the *Katastrophe*, as the Germans could call 1995, was many years away. The fourth leap to 1991 would only provide me with four years in which to plan the *Katastrophe*, let alone the second and third leaps, which would offer none. It would then need to go off in the fifth leap, which would supply me with 20 years in which to score.

I kept considering my idea about helping those who cannot be helped, studying my 30-year period, loving Lulu, and prizing Honolulu, until my birthday in 2007.

Two (Third Two)

It was April 14, 2003. I had leapt four years. For the fourth time in my long life, Lulu and I were preparing for our move to Hawaii. I did not tell her anything about my leaps, but again put forward our stop at the more afflicted place called Los Angeles, so I could visit Ken Grimwood who was gravely ill before he died.

“Who’s Ken Grimwood?”

“One of my favorite writers.”

“Do you know him?”

“Yes, I mean no. I never forgot his novel, *Replay*, which I kept since reading it in 1986.”

“I haven’t read it.”

“Not yet.”

“How are you going to contact him?”

“I read somewhere that he lives in Santa Barbara.”

“It’s going to change our plans with the move and all.”

“It will.”

“What are you going to say to him?”

“Something unusual relating somewhat to his novel.”

“What?”

“You’ll find out when we see him.”

We arrived to afflicted Los Angeles on May 23 as we had done on our previous trip many of my lives ago. Having read the book, Lulu wanted to help me find his number, but having it imprinted in my mind for so many years, I told her that I had found it on the Web. I called him the following day to set up a meeting, so we could discuss his novel, *Replay*, this time introducing myself as Jeff Ripley, a freelance reporter for the *New York Times*.

“What else is there to discuss about *Replay*?”

“The possibilities are endless.”

“They are,” he chuckled.

We were greeted again by his large smile, and invited to sit on the large, comfortable, beige, leather sofa in his sunny office between the two towering plants, which gave us a foretaste of Hawaii.

“The fortuitous fortunate numbers 5, 21, 23, 27, and 38, will be the California Super Lotto Plus winners on May 31’s ten-million-dollar jackpot, while the fortuitous fortunate mega number will be 24. I bought two tickets and one is for you. No one else

will win it. That's all I wanted to replay today. I'll call you back after they prove to be fortunate."

"I had a dream," I told contemplative Lulu after we had left Grimwood somewhat intrigued. I had taken the easy way out in both cases.

"What are you talking about?"

"I saw myself buying two lottery tickets with the same numbers, giving him one, and celebrating our win in Hawaii."

"It's only a dream."

"Dreams do come true. Aren't we moving to Hawaii?"

"You're right," she said smiling.

I took her to Paradise Café where Douglas Adams and I had dined on three of my leaps. Looking forward to seeing him again on the next one, I could not stop myself from ordering my usual fare in his company: sautéed mushrooms, an oak-grilled fresh salmon fillet, and a green salad. Lulu ordered grilled artichokes, oak-grilled fresh Idaho rainbow trout, and a green salad. There were already quite a few things to celebrate, so I ordered the best champagne.

"We haven't won yet."

"But we will, my dear, we will!"

"If you say so."

"And champagne can only help."

"Especially if we don't win."

"Doubt is better than greed."

"I love you."

"I love you more."

"If you say so."

"But I do, my dear, I do."

"You seem at home here. Have you eaten here before?"

"Not really."

"What do you mean?"

"I dreamt that I did."

"Since when have you been having these dreams?"

"I don't know."

"What do you mean?"

"I don't remember most of my dreams, but when I do, whatever I dream about just

happens.”

“Come on, Louis.”

“I saw you in my dreams before we met.”

“That’s sweet. You’re serious?”

“Yes.”

“I saw us living in Hawaii.”

“And you saw us winning the lottery.”

“Yes.”

“Cheers!” she said raising her glass.

“Le’chaim!”

“Fortunate they were, your numbers. Are you sure you want me to have five million dollars?” Ken asked when I called him back.

“Yes. Think of it as residual royalties for Replay.”

“Why would you pay royalties for my novel?”

“It’s a rather long story better told in person. Can we meet again?”

“Yes. Will my house do?”

“Yes. I’ve met you there more than once.”

“I can’t wait to hear your story.”

“I can’t wait to tell it.”

Overjoyed by our richer means, Lulu agreed to let me see him alone while she shopped unafflicted for everything available under the sun.

“Replaying is happening to me, but in reverse. I wanted to see you initially, many years ago, to intimate this reality. Having discovered, however, that you had died on June 6, 2003, I had to try and save you, which I was able to do many times now. Please, take it easy and have your heart checked!”

“My goodness.”

“Your goodness, indeed.”

“So a simple checkup saves my life?”

“Plus a longish stay at the hospital a couple of weeks past June 6.”

“My goodness.”

“Indeed.”

“Are you the only one replaying?”

“No. It seems there is one for every 50 million people.”

“My goodness.”

“Yes.”

“Did you meet any of the others?”

“I did in earlier leaps, but since we didn’t see eye to eye in regards to the meaning of our predicament, our contact was always short-lived. It seems that I was the only one who saw it as a pickle with all the bumps. Lately, however, I seem to see it their way.”

“What changed your mind?”

“While I still think that leaping, replaying as you called it, is arbitrary, what can be done with it is not. I’ve done many things to better my life and the lives of others, but got tired of having to redo it repeatedly, when upon leaping I found all my actions undone. There are, however, actions that can be done specifically because the following leap renders them undone.”

“I’m not sure that I understand the latter.”

“Retribution with no undying consequences.”

“I see.”

Honolulu looked welcoming upon our arrival on June 2. Lulu looked luminous. I called Ken the following day to wish him well and remind him to insist on being hospitalized and thoroughly checked in that order. He had laughed again upon realizing that Jeff Ripley was an assumed name, recognizing the wordplay.

“Thanks for everything, Louis. I hope we can meet again after I’m discharged.”

“You’ll have to visit me in Hawaii, since I’m not leaving it until the next leap takes me away from it. You’ll love it here. You did before.”

“I’ll take your word for it.”

“You can’t go wrong.”

I happily resettled in Hawaii. Lulu was happy to do it for the first time. Ken came to see us in July, having spoken to Lulu a few times after leaving the hospital in late June. He beat death again. I would have him again as a friend until my birthday in 2007.

My fellow leapers, Philip and his crew of multicultural 32- and 64-year leapers who call themselves the repeaters, or any of the 2- to 16-year nitwits whom I call the stupors, and the repeaters call the unenlightened, averted the heavy losses of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and most of the needless victims of 2005’s Hurricane Katrina.

Near the end of August 2006, I called Steve Irwin, the Crocodile Hunter, one of my toughest tasks, pledging a million dollars to his Australia Zoo if he postpones the filming of his documentary at the Great Barrier Reef. The chances of the same stingray killing him any day after September 4 seemed remote, but I warned him nonetheless to be watchful. He lived to hold many a crock.

April 14, 2007 was rapidly approaching like a runaway train. Lulu was her lovely

self, and Ken was forever quizzical. It was too early, or too late, to tell him—if I ever do—about my idea of helping those who cannot be helped. My aim would perhaps be better served if I only shared it with you. Time will tell.