

Futures

Mementos from my lives (un)lived

Anything is possible. By D. Thomas Minton



ILLUSTRATION BY JACEY

“What about this one?” my granddaughter Sky asks, pointing her tiny hand at a length of rubbery hose coiled neatly on the shelf. Her wide eyes hang like twin moons in the night.

“That’s the leash from the surfboard I rode to the big wave world championship,” I say. “I was 57.”

“That must have been a long time ago,” she says with the innocence only a six-year-old can bring to such a statement. “Was it scary?”

“I suppose so.” In this universe, I’ve never surfed a wave, but Sky has already moved on to the next item on my shelf of mementos, a petite, ceramic spoon nestled atop a velvet pillow. “That’s from when I served as the royal ice-cream taster for King Olaf of Norway.” The spoon, crafted to fit the curves of my hand, is keenly balanced and insulated so the handle never gets cold, even if left submerged in a

double scoop of chocolate decadence.

My daughter Dakota, Sky’s mother, looks up from her crossword puzzle. “Dad ...” She sits down the hall, in the wingback chair near the fireplace in the cabin’s ‘great’ room.

“It’s true,” I insist. “The multiverse makes it so.”

Dakota rolls her eyes. “You’re filling her head with fantasies.”

“Since when are fantasies a bad thing, right Sky?”

The little girl squeals, jumping up and down. “Fantasies are awesome!”

“And this”, I say, picking up a small silver bell, “was from my time serving as the Bell Summoner in the court of our Tardak overlords.”

Sky’s lips roll into an ‘oh’ shape.

I show her the bottom of the bell. “Notice it’s stuffed with cotton. If I were to ring it, the Tardak would appear from a transdimensional rift and enslave our planet.”

“Did you hear that, Mommy? They come on

a transdimensional raft if papa rings the bell.”

Dakota shakes her head and turns her attention back to her crossword with an exasperated, “Daaaaaad.”

“How did you do all these things?” Sky asks, waving her hands at the dozens of mementos we have yet to explore.

I have spent years collecting the items. I palmed the queen of diamonds from a casino in Monte Carlo while I was swindling the house as a card shark. The ostrich feather had been plucked from a large fan in the middle of my head-turning dance as a female impersonator in a vaudevillian revival. And the spiked collar? I removed it from the neck of a convicted man brought to justice when I served as an Enforcer of the Seventh Seal of the Proterean Assembly. Every memento came from a life I lived, even if it wasn’t *my* life.

Sky stares up at me, still awaiting my answer.

“The universe is limitless,” I say, tussling her hair. “We all have the potential within us to be

Futures

anything and everything.”

“Even me?”

“Especially you.”

“I want to be a unicorn brusher.”

“A unicorn brusher? Now, *that* is a very important job.” I retrieve a small purple brush with a sparkly handle from the top shelf. “I used this on fairy horses when I worked as a groom for the Lady of the Mushroom Circle, but I don’t see why it wouldn’t work on unicorns.”

Sky looks at her mom in the adjacent room.

Dakota sighs and nods, knowing that she’ll be taking home another cheap, plastic toy. But what Dakota doesn’t realize, is that the brush is not a cheap, plastic toy, but a memento that her daughter will now cherish.

Sky takes the brush and dashes away to try it out on one of her stuffed animals.

Dakota joins me at the cabinet in the hallway. “Where did you *really* get all this stuff, Dad?” She picks up a sleek, metal spyglass and holds

it up to her eye. The brass cylinder is engraved with unintelligible runes. “You never had these things when I was little.”

“Where do you think I went when I was attending those conferences.” I tap finger quotes around the word ‘conferences’. Motioning to the spyglass in her hand, I say, “That’s from my time as navigator aboard Slick Silver’s sky corsair.”

Dakota returns the spyglass to its spot on the shelf. “You know unicorns don’t exist, right, Dad?”

“I believe they exist somewhere, and in that universe, they’ll have unicorn groomers.”

“Your multiverse and wave whatchamacallit stuff.”

“Wave functions and probability densities,” I say with a nod. “In an infinite multiverse, anything is possible; some outcomes are just more probable than others. In truth, dear daughter, all possibilities will exist because —”

With a shake of her head, Dakota finishes what I was going to say — because in an infinite multiverse, every event with a non-zero probability is a certainty.”

“Truly, you are my daughter,” I say with touch of pride.

Dakota smirks. “In *this* universe, yes.”

One of my mementos catches her eye, and she picks up a pair of small, leather shoes, only slightly scuffed. Her left eyebrow arches in my direction.

My throat tightens. Frowning, I say, “Life is precious and to be cherished because a long life is not necessarily our most probable outcome.”

D. Thomas Minton is a marine biologist and SF writer who lives in the mountains of British Columbia. He assumes this is not the most probable combination of events.

THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY

D. Thomas Minton reveals the inspiration behind *Mementos from my lives (un)lived*

Sitting around one day during the COVID lockdown, I decided to build a random prompt generator. I use writing prompts on occasion to force myself to think outside of my usual creative box. I spent about an hour compiling more than a thousand prompts from dozens of Internet sites and feeding them into a simple randomizer built in Excel that would output a new prompt every day. On the second day using this prompt generator, I drew: “You get to go to any museum in the world. Which one do you choose?”

Inspired, I immediately began brainstorming the most unusual types of museum I could imagine, and quickly hit upon a museum of artefacts from different dimensions, all of which would tell the potential life story of a single person. From there, it was a short jump to the personal story of a grandfather (who very much reminds me of my father-in-law, a theoretical physicist) and his granddaughter Sky, all tied together by one of my favourite sayings about probability: given enough time, the improbable is certain to happen.

