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Death in Switzerland An account of some strange experiences in 2017

This is an account of my major experiences in 2017 connected with the peculiar novel that I wrote in 2011. Not all my experiences in that year are covered and it is difficult to write about any in isolation as everything connected with the novel is tightly interrelated and describing any inevitably leads to others. However, these particular experiences are so significant that they can convey a good sense of the whole even in isolation.

At the end of 2016 I was contemplating writing a book about my experiences over the past five years since writing the science fiction novel *Never Upon A Time*. This story was about a team of office workers operating a time capsule, actually a four storey building, which could move outside of time and temporarily abduct “visitors” from the future so that they could provide fragments of information from their own times. However, I decided against writing the new book at that time even though I had amassed a significant amount of notes from which to work on this website. Had I written the book then then I could have expected sceptical readers to observe that I’d done so because my experiences to date had been favourable to my opinions and I wouldn’t have written the book had they not, a common explanation of how bias creates false impressions. Instead I decided to postpone writing the book until the end of 2017 because the novel had as a key motif a persistent link between the minds of two people six years apart in time. Taking this to apply literally to myself, as many other aspects of the novel apparently had, I concluded that I should have significant experiences during 2017 six years after writing the novel while according to conventional statistical models my experiences ought to be no more significant than any other person’s if the sceptics were right. Of course the sceptics could use the same argument if the novel proved right a year later and I did write the second book as a consequence, but I actually had no interest in publishing anything at all, even the original novel, and only wanted to satisfy my own curiosity.

At the beginning of 2017 I enrolled for a study day at the local education centre on the subject of “Breaking the Rules of Writing”, something that I enjoyed doing as I had never expected my work to be published. Suggested reading prior to the day was *The No Rules Handbook for Writers* by Lisa Goldman, so I bought a copy, the only book on writing that I had ever actually bought. It amused me that the very first conventional rule that she tackled was “Write what you know,” suggesting as an alternative to “Write to discover what you don’t know yet.” Lisa hadn’t meant this quite as literally as I had apparently taken it when I started to write my prescient novel six years earlier (to within a couple of weeks maybe) but I frequently take statements literally, often to the annoyance of others including my long-suffering wife. There were other things in the book which suggested that it had been an influence in my experiences, so I checked its year of publication and wasn’t surprised to see that it was 2012, so Lisa had quite likely been working on it when I was working on my novel. This fitted the pattern of a synchronicity accompanying a souvenir from the future that I had observed in other incidents, so I felt that 2017 had started well.

In her book Lisa mentioned the fact that fiction writers sometimes see parallels between their stories and later events in their own lives, much as I have, but she explained this away conventionally, referring to the incredible pattern matching capabilities of the brain creating false impressions. I had examined my own experiences more carefully though and excluded such simple explanations as a sole cause, but I did consider the idea of “automatic writing” that she mentioned as a fiction writing technique. It had already become clear to me that “free writing”, as it is also called, is the least constrained by considerations such as existing plot lines when a writer makes up names for his characters, so these would be ideal places to find souvenirs from the future. I had had such success with my own characters’ names already, but I went further, looking back to the original short story that I had written in 2009 that provided the central idea of the time capsule in my novel.

I had quickly written that short story as a letter to a firm of solicitors called Bishop & Smedley and while I had a good idea how the name Bishop had arisen the only thought that I could associate with the name Smedley was of tinned peas and I couldn't relate that to my story at all. However, a little research revealed that in December 2010, not long before I first felt the urge to write my novel, a man named Peter had controversially been filmed by the BBC dying by his own choice at Dignitas in Switzerland. Only months later in 2011 was it revealed that he had been Peter Smedley, a member of the canned foods family, so my association with tinned peas had evidently been correct. In 2010 I had provisionally booked a holiday in June 2011 at a hotel in Austria and intended to arrange to travel there by train through the scenic Arlberg Pass from Switzerland when the train timetables were published in the spring of 2011, but when it came to the time I had trouble making the various bookings, so cancelled the holiday and instead booked a luxury river cruise on the Danube. This booking was made in April 2011 while I was busy writing my novel and turned out to be a key decision that would eventually affect events in 2017.

In March 2017, almost six years later, I was having premonitions about Smedley and death in Switzerland, forebodings even, as I was about to pay the balance on our third river cruise with the same company, one on the Rhine that we had booked back in the middle of 2016, starting in Amsterdam near the end of June 2017 and ending in Basel. I had already experienced connections between my novel and Amsterdam and finally we would be visiting that city in person, but the idea of the cruise ending in Basel in Switzerland bothered me. At the end of my novel the main character had died, so if I was expecting any corresponding spectacular experience in my own life during 2017 this seemed to be a bad omen. Nevertheless in a bout of pragmatic *amor fati* I paid for the holiday on the basis that we would be able to enjoy the majority of it because it only *ended* in Switzerland. Anyway, while I was willing to accept that something significant in relation to my novel might occur at some time during 2017 even I couldn't believe that it would specifically happen during the few hours in the whole of that year that we would be in Switzerland. Another fact was that my souvenirs from the future had never precisely predicted any event, only linked to them once they had occurred in a postdictive manner, so I saw no reason for this apparent prediction to be literally true.

On Monday the 12th June 2017 I received an emailed newsletter from The Literary Consultancy in London which mentioned that their much loved founding director had died in April following a short illness. This sad event had seriously disrupted their activities in the meantime. I was on their mailing list because I had sent an extract from my novel to them for assessment exactly six years earlier. Sceptics are critical of people who use words like "exactly" when they are actually applying suitably wide margins to make their case, so I will explain my use of the word here in detail. According to my records I wrote the covering letter and cheque to TLC on Saturday the 11th June 2011 but probably not in time to catch the midday post, so most likely posted the extract on Sunday the 12th to be collected in the first collection on Monday morning. My computer contains a copy of the extract which is dated the 13th June, but I probably created this after posting the printed copy. Whether one counts whole years to the same day of the month or week this period is undeniably exactly six years to within the accuracy of our postal system. There was a further fact that confirmed in my mind that this was the death that had figured in my premonition in March. On checking I discovered that the programme showing Smedley's death had been broadcast by the BBC on the evening of Monday 13th June 2011, the day that the postman had collected my letter.

Although I had never been directly involved in any way with the lady who died I was taken aback by this revelation. In 2011 the professional reader at TLC who read my extract had suggested that I abandon the main plot of my novel and instead write more about what was actually a minor character who appeared in the first chapter, which was itself directly based on my original short story, but I told him that I had to write the story that I had chosen, although in truth I didn't know why at that time. To avoid anyone else being misled by that first chapter I replaced it with a preview of a later chapter where the main character, Graham the engineer aboard the time capsule, met a girl from six years in the future and instantly fell in love with her. This placed the motif about two minds connected across six years clearly in the foreground, almost as though I were trying to make a point about what would happen six years later in reality. In 2017 I was concerned that somewhere at the back of my unconscious mind in 2011 I had known about the future death that would so affect TLC but had been unable to bring it to the surface in any perceptible form. As I have already mentioned though, my souvenirs from the future have never directly predicted anything.

As the Peter Smedley connection had apparently been correct I wondered whether there had been any synchronicity involved with it that had caused me to write my entirely spontaneous short story specifically in March 2009. Tracing such synchronicity when it involves people with whom one isn't connected is difficult, but I did notice one possible explanation. In February 2009 the well-known writer Terry Pratchett had released through the BBC a film about him having Alzheimer's and he had also allegedly been closely involved with and present at the death of Peter Smedley. Possibly then there had been some event around the time of my writing my short story that had precipitated the production of the BBC programme eventually broadcast in June 2011, but I cannot know for sure of course.

Regarding my premonition in 2017, this had evidently been an example of separate souvenirs from the future incorrectly reassembled by my mind into a single thought that reflected the coincidental broadcast of that programme about Smedley in 2011, not that I had watched it or most likely even consciously been aware of it being scheduled at the time. The omen had apparently not been about death *in* Switzerland at all but probably death *and* Switzerland as distinct events, which made me feel much easier about our imminent cruise. However, I did wonder just what the lady who died had been going through while I was tackling that omen in my mind in March only weeks before her death, but again that would be something that I would never know. To my knowledge that was the fifth death that had seemed to figure in my experiences over the recent years and I was tiring of the game that my mind was apparently playing with me.

Fully involved in our preparations for the cruise and then the cruise itself, I didn't give my novel another thought although there were odd reminders about it on occasions, but their significance didn't fully occur to me until later. When I first saw the lounge on our ship I noticed that the dance floor was smaller than I'd expected because they'd made some changes to the layout compared to the previous two ships that we'd been on. The bar now extended further into the room leaving less space for the dance floor, a key feature for us as on each cruise we had been the first couple to dance on the otherwise empty floor in the evening and our dancing had invariably been a talking point, maybe for all the wrong reasons but I've never really been sure about that. In the novel when Graham had first taken Lucine, the girl from six years in the future, into the main office of the future time capsule he had remarked that it was smaller than he'd expected, comparing it to the earlier version that he was used to, and said that they'd evidently made some changes in the future. It was a small detail but many of the souvenirs from the future that I encountered did seem like that when taken individually. For example, Graham and Lucine had quite evidently fallen in love at first sight and our Rhine cruise ship was named AmaPrima, which with my inadequate grasp of Latin grammar seems to approximate to "Love First" or something very similar. Again that is a small thing in itself but just part of a much larger pattern.

During a visit to Strasbourg on the cruise I photographed an ornate children's carousel in the square. It was typical of ones seen in town squares on mainland Europe and a similar carousel had been central to the second chapter of my novel. Turning away from the carousel I also photographed an adjacent statue. It was a monument to Johannes Gutenberg and he was holding out his first edition of the Bible printed with settable type, his key invention that would make book printing so much easier, as though taunting me for not making any effort to get my novel published.

One day our Catalan cruise manager was walking round chatting to guests and approached us. He said that I was obviously a gentleman and that he enjoyed English poetry, especially that of William Blake. To his delight I recited a short poem that I had myself written and he went away no doubt feeling assured that the typical English gentleman writes and recites poetry, which in my case was far from the regular truth. In fact writing poetry is in my experience an ideal opportunity for souvenirs from the future to manifest themselves as it is often truly free writing without the contextual constraints encountered by writers of fictional stories. Oddly I had rewritten the first encounter between Graham and Lucine as seen from his point of view in my novel to show his inner conflicts and during this rewrite I had extensively quoted from the works of William Blake, the only poet specifically named in the novel if one regards William Shakespeare as predominantly a playwright that is. In fact Graham found himself in an inner dialogue with his own intellect during which it said to him about his lack of conviction, "Then why have you stacked up all these memories of William Blake, and why am I searching through them?" It was almost as though in my own mind I had also been struggling with the inexplicable insistence to be heeded that some of my souvenirs seemed to exhibit, my own intellect apparently knowing more than I did.

The one thing that I didn't understand at first was why I had left this rewrite until late in 2013, but then I noticed the potential synchronicity. Not only was 2013 the first year that the AmaPrima was in service but also we went on our second cruise with the company on another ship on the Rhône in the middle of that year, so during the latter part of it no doubt the possibility of subsequent cruises was prominent in my mind. These things are just circumstantial of course but ultimately all of life is nothing but that.

One evening just before the entertainment started we were told that there would be a short delay while the ship was transferred from its own generators to an onshore power supply. No doubt this had happened on occasions during our previous cruises at inconspicuous times but on this occasion it was very evident. In the novel Graham had the regular task of switching the time capsule between external and internal services as it moved in and out of normal time. Again it was a small and hardly unexpected similarity but the fact that it had been highlighted during this particular cruise was notable.

Despite the smaller dance floor once again our dancing became a talking point, this time as a result of our making full use of the music from an ABBA tribute group when nobody else seemed inclined to. We were apparently successfully re-enacting our first cruise taken six years earlier in 2011 and any omens about Switzerland were entirely forgotten. Now being regarded as loyal customers we found ourselves invited to sit at the captain's table on the gala dinner evening. This just happened to fall on the 4th of July but I noticed that despite there being a large proportion of Americans amongst the guests they were outnumbered at the captain's table. A motif in my novel was that Americans were marginalised whenever possible, the story being very British in nature. The couple sitting next to me actually were Americans but they had been on five cruises with the company, the first having been their honeymoon, so their loyalty was undeniable. On reflection this event was reminiscent of a scene in my novel where the present day team of office workers in the time capsule led by their director sat facing its visiting future crew of naval personnel led by their captain, except that here the roles were reversed. Our cruise manager, the effective leader of the visiting guests, sat opposite the ship's captain across the width of the table while at the ends were respectively British and American guests. In my novel the captain had been American while the director opposite him had been British. The numbers of people seated at the tables was about the same as well, a dozen.

At dinner our German captain mentioned that he would be leaving the ship at the end of the cruise as he had finished his two week tour of duty and would be able to ride his Harley-Davidson home to enjoy barbecues there again. His down to earth remarks contrasted pleasingly with his smart dress uniform. In the novel the two versions of the time capsule from different times had collided beyond time and partially fused together at the molecular level, their molecular structures being to a large extent the same ones, and therefore neither could return to its own time until the bond was broken. In an attempt to break the bond by creating a temporal paradox the visitors had started to talk about their own experiences, providing the resident team with the knowledge to change their future and destroy the event altogether, but as a result the visitors simply vanished, much as our real captain would once his tour of duty was over. Again these are small details in themselves but that is no doubt how a fiction writer creates original stories, by using many fragmented ideas from his real experiences.

The day after the gala dinner was our last day of cruising and we arrived in Basel. During the cruise a strike of cabin crews at British Airways had started but they had assured passengers that they would keep all the flights operating and that afternoon I contacted their website to check in online for our flight home the next day. For some technical reason I was informed that we would have to check in at the airport the following morning but I wasn't concerned as such things sometimes happen when a flight has been booked by an agency. However, after dinner I received an email from BA informing me that our midday flight home had been cancelled and offering an alternative ten hours later the following evening. Unfortunately I couldn't confirm our acceptance of the replacement flight as our agency in England evidently had to do it, so I emailed their office hoping that they would find the message as soon as it reopened the next morning. Fortunately the ship would remain moored in Basel until the next evening to board the guests for the next cruise, so we were assured that we could remain there as guests until it was time to go to the airport to catch our later flight. We would have to vacate our state room in the morning though. Apparently just like the people in my novel we would be marooned in time but only for just under ten hours rather than just under a thousand hours as the clock in their time capsule had threatened and even then only because it couldn't display any more than 999 hours, their plight being potentially endless. With our doubts about the handling of the strike by BA our own plight also felt potentially endless.

Although I was too busy making revised travel arrangements at the time to realise it the highly unlikely situation relating to my novel had started exactly where and when I had anticipated in Switzerland. What I hadn't anticipated was that, much like the people marooned in the time capsule, the time available for our experiences to occur had uncontrollably expanded beyond our expectations.

The next morning most of the other guests and even our cruise manager left the ship. He was conducting a party of guests on an overland extension to the holiday in Switzerland so had to leave, but he was concerned to be leaving us there as he was still technically responsible for us while we were on the ship. The ship's hotel manager was very reassuring that his staff would continue to look after us during our enforced stay though. Some other guests did stay on until lunchtime, maybe because they were waiting to move into hotel rooms that they had booked in Basel in the afternoon, and we were given a snack lunch to keep us fed. There was never a shortage of free food and drink on board, even between cruises apparently. That had also been a characteristic of my novel, that people seemed to indulge in eating and talking about cakes far too often for a science fiction story. During our cruise the Canadian guests had celebrated the 150th anniversary of the foundation of their country and the chefs had made a cake in their national colours for the occasion, which was more than I recollect happening for the Americans on their Independence Day. On reflection the staff in my time capsule did behave very much like guests on a cruise ship, something that hadn't occurred to me before because when I wrote the story we had never yet been on one.

We tried going for a walk to explore some of Basel but it was an oppressively hot day and my wife wasn't feeling well, so we soon returned to the ship. As we walked to the gangway I saw a man in a shirt and jeans carrying a large rucksack on his back walk up it. He was challenged by the officers on watch there who demanded to see his passport but then everyone burst out laughing. Apparently he was the replacement captain arriving to take over the ship from our captain. In my novel when the future crew had materialised on board the time capsule their captain had told the present team operating it that he was the captain but they naturally didn't know him. The fact that I had witnessed something similar in reality was uncanny and not something that I could possibly have imagined happening. I had no idea whether the performance had been spontaneous or a regular ritual joke, but it was something that, had we left at the right time, I wouldn't have witnessed at all. Up until our captain had mentioned the fact at dinner I hadn't even known that these ships each had two captains working in rotation as only one of them was ever mentioned on the company website.

We tried lying on loungers on the ship's sundeck but even doing that it was too hot to be comfortable, so we retired reluctantly to the lounge with its powerful air conditioning. In the novel someone had asked why the sealed time capsule wouldn't heat up as an apparently endless supply of power was consumed within it over a period of weeks and it was explained that the temporal field surrounding it acted much like a cave, absorbing the heat to maintain an even temperature. Fortunately the air conditioning in that lounge had much the same effect.

As we sat in the lounge a man came and introduced himself to us as David, our cruise manager, but I told him that he wasn't ours because we weren't guests on his forthcoming cruise, so he went on his way. In the novel Graham was originally recruited to work in the time capsule by a man named David who then disappeared from the story, much as this new cruise manager disappeared from ours having failed to recruit us to his entourage. David is a common enough name though.

I saw the two captains standing by the bar talking although it was too early in the day for them to be drinking. In the novel the present director of the time capsule had offered the future captain of it a single malt whisky in his private office. As the new guests were due to start arriving we moved into a small seated area adjoining the main lounge to keep out of their way. It was called the library although it only had a couple of dozen books there on a shelf above an electronic simulation of an open fire. In the novel the director's office had a more advanced version of this simulation in a mock fireplace and he and the captain had sat by it discussing their situation. On our previous two cruise ships the area where we were sitting had been fitted out as a shop, not a seating area with a fireplace, so this was the first time that I'd seen one on board a ship. During their fictional discussion by the fire the captain in the novel implied that he knew something specific about the director's future but couldn't say what in case it caused a temporal discrepancy, much as knowing more specific details about my own future back in 2011 would have.

My wife found having to wait around for so long feeling ill a nuisance and kept vocally counting down the number of hours left before we could leave. In the novel the capsule's clock should also have been counting down the hours before it returned home, but it was stuck at 999 hours and showed no sign of changing.

We played cards to fill the time and I lost every game. Maybe it was simply that my mind was on ensuring that everything went smoothly to prevent my wife feeling unnecessarily stressed. I had been in contact with our taxi service in England to arrange for them to meet our new flight and our travel agency had confirmed the flight for us and even sent our boarding passes directly to the ship's reception so that they could print them out for us, so hopefully it would. In the novel under similar circumstances Graham had also played cards with his colleagues and lost every game.

From where we were sitting we could see the new guests arriving in reception and being taken to their state rooms. The fact that we no longer had one made me feel excluded from something that I couldn't be a part of. In the novel Graham's feelings reflected my own. While playing cards he saw the deputy director enter the bedroom of the girl with whom he had been having a relationship and stay there for some time. He had never been sure that she had seen theirs as a serious relationship and this appeared to confirm his doubts. A souvenir from the future can be a very specific feeling just as much as an item of information apparently.

Although snacks and ordinary drinks were freely available we couldn't buy drinks from the bar because our account there had been closed when we vacated our room, but the hotel manager came and told us that he would personally pay for any that we wanted, not that we did. This good Samaritan was, almost unsurprisingly, named Cristian. In the novel I had made reference to the dilemma having a religious aspect, but I'm not convinced that this observation was inspired by his offer in particular.

The guests on our cruise were from substantially English speaking nations and reasonably subdued in their behaviour, very much the type of clients that the company aimed at, but the new arrivals were different, noisier, multilingual and with more children. One of the staff told us that there were several large extended families in the party, which probably explained their excited interaction. In the novel the staff in the time capsule had been typically English and one effect of this had been that only English speaking people were abducted from the future by the capsule's incomprehensible mechanism because logically no information could be conveyed if there was a language barrier. However, in contrast in a chapter of a partially written sequel novel I had described another version of the time capsule where a different strategy was employed, there being a cosmopolitan mixture of staff knowing many languages so that a wider selection of visitors from the future could be handled. Strangely the two communities of cruise guests that we had seen mirrored these two versions of my fictional travellers. Eventually when all the new guests had assembled David started the standard introductions to the ship and its various staff just as had happened at the beginning of our cruise, but he was nothing like our cruise manager and more like a boisterous TV game show host, which actually probably suited his entourage. It wouldn't have suited us though and we were glad that we'd chosen the right week to take our cruise.

Just as in the novel we were now part of an overlap between two worlds, that of the past cruise and the future one both within the same physical structure and we were just as eager to break away from it as my novel's fictional inmates were. The time came for us to catch the taxi to the airport, but that strange thought of overlapping realities would stay with us for a little longer yet. I had read about Basel airport, formally known as EuroAirport Basel Mulhouse Freiburg because it serves Switzerland, France and Germany simultaneously. It was built by the Swiss on French territory near to the German border and the road from Basel to it through France is deemed to be Swiss territory, as are the car parks at the end of it, while separate roads and car parks are used by travellers from France. The terminal building is split into matching Swiss and French halves with notional customs checkpoints between them, so it is analogous to the two versions of the time capsule in the novel by effectively being two buildings in logically different domains bonded together into a single physical structure. The coincidence of this being the airport from which we were to fly was itself remarkable.

The baggage check-in area was very empty when we arrived at that time in the evening. There was no sign of check-in staff at the British Airways desks and the few waiting passengers milled around hoping that they would materialise, which eventually did happen. In the novel financial cut-backs had resulted in a minimal number of staff manning the time capsule building designed for many more and this scene at the airport seemed to mirror that situation. In fact the two staff who handled our check-in also turned up at the departure gate to man that during boarding, so the staffing really was economical but adequate.

As is commonplace the flight had many different identities assigned by different airlines, continuing the sense of overlapping realities. Our original booking had included a reserved choice of seats, but we had lost that benefit and just had to take the seats we were assigned, but we received a refund for that inconvenience. We were in a bank of three seats, the one by the window being occupied by a sleepy girl while I took the one by the aisle. As a result of the strike by some regular cabin crews BA had brought in office staff to carry out their duties and this was so on our flight. That was a coincidence that could hardly have been predicted, that just like the novel's time capsule the plane was currently crewed by office staff who would be replaced by more formally trained regular personnel in the future. It was obvious that our stewards were inexperienced as some passengers nearby, who evidently knew the younger one personally, laughed at him and called him by name when he faltered over one of the standard announcements.

During the flight one of the stewards handed out landing cards for those who needed them. Our sleepy companion by the window made a vague effort to attract his attention but he didn't notice her, so when he returned I asked for a card to give to her when she next woke up as she had already fallen asleep again. In fact she apparently spent most of the flight asleep. In the novel Graham's erstwhile girlfriend had fallen into a coma as a consequence of an encounter with the time capsule's mind-probing supercomputer. The staff had by then regained control of the capsule after separating it from its partner and he was about to return it to reality and home, just as our plane had left the dual world of Basel airport and was doing. He considered making these regular transitions to be a boring task, so each time would imagine that he was controlling some more interesting form of transportation instead. On this occasion he chose to imagine that he was landing an airliner with a comatose passenger in desperate need of help on board. In our reality the young lady in the window seat appeared to be in no danger, but the inspiration was definitely there to fuel my own imagination. In the novel as the time capsule returned to reality the director thought with relief about returning home after their enforced absence beyond time. They hadn't been confined on board for 999 hours as the clock had threatened but only about two weeks, the same length of time as the captain of our cruise ship was on board it as he had mentioned to us at dinner while relating how pleased he was to be going home, just like my fictional director.

The number of similarities between our experiences and the contents of the novel hadn't just been significant but ludicrous. Were it not for that very clearly implied six year anachronism nobody could doubt that our cruise had directly inspired that part of the story in the novel. Later our travel agency told us that the cancellation of our flight had not been caused by the strike but something else unforeseeable. That explained why we had received such short notice of it. I checked the flight records for that week and indeed the only time that that particular flight had been cancelled had been on that one day, so we had just been unlucky, unless one believes in fate of course.

Once we had settled back into our normal home life I wondered about the remainder of the novel if the inspiration for it was truly going to end during 2017. Graham had died at the end of it after all, but nothing much was happening in our normally quiet lives to inspire anything more apparently. Six years back in 2011 I was equally having trouble finishing the novel as my previously demanding muse seemed to have abandoned me to a spate of writer's block. I wanted to get the work done because there still seemed to be in my mind some inexplicable deadline that I had to meet. I couldn't know then that a year later towards the end of 2012 the real events that the novel mirrored would start to happen and I had to have a complete draft written and given to someone to read before then for any claims that I might make in the future about it to be plausible.

Ahead in 2017 I noticed an item in the news on TV about a man who had been in a persistent vegetative state (PVS) for fifteen years and had medically shown internal signs of consciousness as a consequence of stimuli applied to his brain stem. The event was hailed as a significant step forward in the understanding of PVS and consciousness. It wasn't something that I could count as being among my own personal experiences though, a constraint that I tried to apply to my evaluation of them alongside the novel, and it would doubtlessly be open to sceptical remarks if I treated it as in any way significant, so it seemed worth little to me and certainly not up to my usual standard.

Back in 2011 my story was still in the doldrums. The time capsule had inexplicably stopped working and Graham could no longer use it to meet up with Lucine from six years in the future, so in desperation he tried to do so using just the power of his own mind, which he thought might just work. Such a thing simply wasn't achievable though (in retrospect an ironic view considering what it seems was covertly happening within my own mind!) and all that happened was that he fell into a coma for fifteen years, which was certainly one way to travel into the future mentally but not his intended one. Being equally desperate I accepted this unsatisfactory literary device to get the story back on schedule even though it was hardly up to my normal standard. I had only been writing the latter part of the novel as a rough draft to get an idea of its total length anyway, but I disliked the idea of needing to make a major plot change later, so it would no doubt stay in permanently.

In 2017 all I had left to consider was Graham's death, but this had been no simple event in the novel. Although he had evidently physically died, in his mind he had found a way to travel back through his experiences almost to the point where the story had started and in a very strange final chapter he had materialised back within his younger body alongside another version of his own personality. The two had evidently had slightly different past experiences but they had quickly reconciled their differences and began to think of themselves as just one indivisible personality. I realised that this was very much what had happened to me at the beginning of 2011 when I had experienced the brainstorm, several indeed, of dissociated thoughts that had caused me to start writing the novel. I had remarked at the time that it was like some errant muse invading my mind and had actually delegated the writing task to a conceptual fictional writer within my mind for whom I would simply be the scribe, as though I had two personalities within me. This is actually not that unusual for me as I have great faith in my unconscious mind and don't hesitate to give it quite intellectual tasks to perform for me behind the scenes. In fact I designed a lot of computer systems that way during my working life and it was only when I thought consciously about the details in them that I realised just how complex that task had been. My novel writing had therefore been a standard way of working for me, free writing taken to its unconscious limits with apparently remarkable results. In a sense the character Graham, literally the "grey home", seemed to have been a construct within my brain, physically the grey home of my mind, that had somehow spanned time in both the real and fictional worlds. My wife had criticised me for choosing such a mundane name for the central character in my story but it had seemed totally appropriate from the very beginning in 2011 and by 2017 I was convinced of this.

I thought that with the predicted six years having ended my strange experiences relating to the novel were over, but there was still a loose end remaining that continued to trouble me, the real identity of Yvonne.