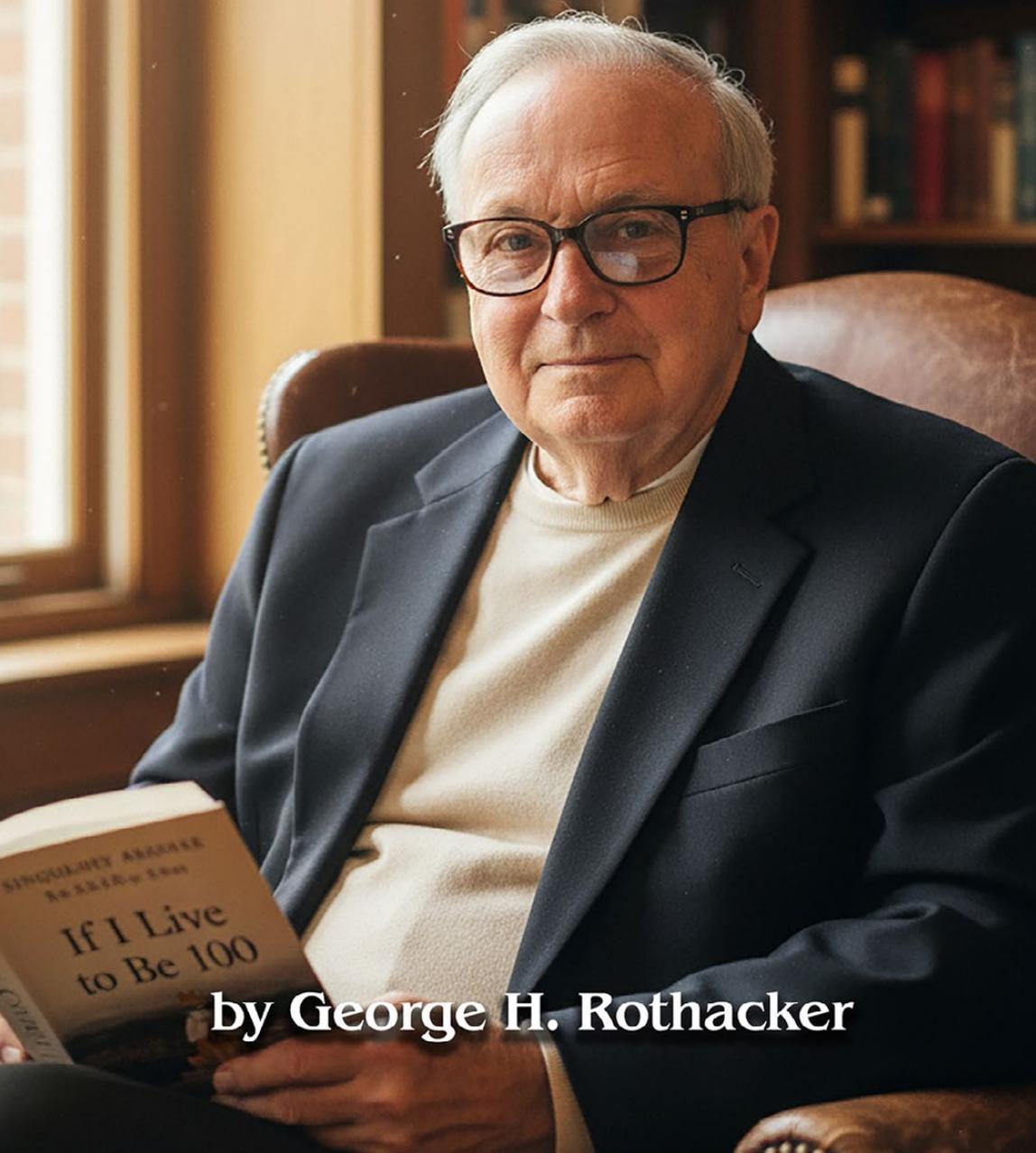


If I Live to Be 100



by George H. Rothacker

George H. Rothacker

Prologue

I, George Stanbelt, was lying in bed the other night, concerned about my age, and how long I might be viable before becoming a burden to my family. I never thought that I'd live to the age of 78, since at the age of 36 my small intestine became kinked and then exploded during explorative surgery, resulting in two operations and several days in the intensive care unit. Overall, I spent more than five weeks in Paoli Hospital and I still have an alien-like bulge that protrudes from my stomach when I wear a t-shirt. Over the course of my life I've developed a bad right knee that resulted from a car accident I was responsible for more than 45 years ago. My arthritic lower spine requires shots, and I have two cancerous spots on my prostate that the doctors aren't concerned about, since they believe that I'll die from another cause before the cancer kills me. For the most part, I'm doing well. I still can paint most of the exterior of my house, execute household repairs, mow our lawn, shovel snow and walk five miles on weekends.

But in the silent hours of the early morning when I awake to pee, I return to the consistent worry about my ninth decade creeping up on me. How long will I be able to manage the house and my life before the long and inevitable decline, or will I succumb to a clean and simple death?

I often think of the comedian and writer Carl Reiner who, nearing the age of 100, confessed to an interviewer that he didn't worry much about death or growing older, "When I wake up in the morning, I read the newspaper," he said. "If I'm not in the obits, I'll have breakfast."

He was teamed during an interview with two of his nonagenarian buddies, Mel Brooks and Norman Lear. Thoughts of Reiner returned to me the other night as I remembered the comedy routine he created with Mel Brooks in the 1950s. The two later named the routine the "2000 Year Old Man." According to Reiner, the act was prompted by a television program titled *We the People Speak*, a show that featured politicians, celebrities and everyday folks being interviewed about difficulties in their lives that they'd overcome.

One night, after work on Sid Caesar's *Show of Shows*, Reiner imitated the *We the People Speak*'s host, Dan Seymour, by pointing at Brooks and saying, "Here's a man who actually witnessed the crucifixion of Jesus 2,000 years ago." Brooks immediately replied in a Yiddish accent, "Ooooooh boy," and the two men got such laughs that they kept the act going, and then began performing it at parties.

Reiner always played the straight-laced interviewer, while Brooks improvised hilarious answers to questions about the life he led during his 2000 year existence.

Reiner was Jewish, as was Brooks, and asked oddball questions such as: "Did you by any chance, know Jesus?"

Brooks responded: "Oh, boy. Yeah. Thin lad. Walked around with twelve other guys. Always came into the store, never bought anything. I had a little candy store, and he'd ask for water. I said, 'Look, I got a water fountain. You don't have to come in here and ask for water'".

Reiner then asked the old man about his main form of transportation in those days, and Brooks responded, "Mostly fear," to which Reiner questioned, "Fear?"

"Yes." said Brooks. "You saw something coming, you ran."

When asked by Reiner about his profession, Brooks said, "I was a manufacturer. I made Jewish stars."

Reiner then asked, "How did you do that?"

"Well, we didn't have lathes, so I hired six men, each with a point.

"And they ran around at each other in the middle of the factory."

The crazier the questions asked, the more laughs Brooks got from his answers, so the duo eventually turned the act into a routine they performed on TV shows, including those hosted by Ed Sullivan and Steve Allen, and finally turned the routine into a book and a Grammy Award-winning comedy recording in the 1960s.

In looking back at YouTube videos of their routines, I had to smile, even as I worried about what the years ahead would be like if I lived far less than 2,000 years.

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Although much has changed in science and longevity, Reiner's and Brooks' humor still stands up after 70 years. Today, 100 years of life has become a reality for many humans. Carl Reiner lived to the age of 98, while Lear made it to 101 before his passing in 2023. Brooks will, in all likelihood, turn 100 in 2026.

My takeaway is this: despite enduring losses throughout their lives, the three comics found humor in growing old. If they could do it, perhaps I also could.

So here's my story.

Episode One

Like most kids, I never thought much about growing up or growing old, except perhaps to reaching the age of 16, and owning a car and, perhaps, having a girlfriend. At the age of 11, I knew nothing about how to acquire or maintain either one. Most realistically, my main desire was having a new and better bike – a bike with three gears controlled by a lever on the handlebars. It was what was known then as an English bike and had thin wheels, hand-operated front and rear brakes and small fenders, which was quite different from the well-worn burgundy Roadmaster bought for me by my grandmother for my 10th birthday. Even when I acquired it, the bike was too small for me, despite the fact that I was short for my age. It had thick tires, was hard to pedal, had no gear changer and sported a bulbous housing that stretched between the seat and the handlebars that contained a horn that, from the time I got it, didn't work. My father helped me brush-paint it silver, and we removed the horn enclosure and the fenders, but the paint soon chipped off revealing spots of burgundy, due to the fact that we never took the time, or invested the additional expense, to sand and prime over the existing paint before recoating it.

As for a girlfriend: I was baffled by, and hopelessly in love with, a girl who lived in an apartment down our street. Her name was Lena, and most of the time I wasn't self-confident enough to speak to her, while her sister Kaye, a year younger, with curly hair, and not nearly as pretty, sought me out, chattered endlessly to me and seemed to enjoy my company. She also enjoyed climbing trees, wrestling and shooting marbles. Lena was in my sixth grade class at Stonehurst Hills Elementary, and Kaye was a grade behind her. Though Kaye was the tomboy of the two, Lena was as good as any of the guys when we gathered on the dirt playground behind our school on Saturdays to play hardball, a game restricted by the rules at Stonehurst.

I was usually picked last on a team, which meant that I wasn't really picked at all, but placed last at bat and positioned in right field, a place rarely hit to by right-handed batters. Since my parents and I had moved around a

lot, I'd never learned to play ball of any kind prior to attending Stonehurst Hills.

My most memorable moment of those ballgames on the dirt lot was when I accidentally hit to the opposing team's right-field player and he missed the ball, and I was able to reach third base to score a "triple." Although I wasn't batted home before the end of the inning, and didn't score a run, the hit gave me a short-term feeling of confidence until the lightweight bat I'd used, split and I was left with no choice but to use a heavier bat that I could barely lift for the remaining games that summer.

My only academic strength in school was that I was a fast reader and could comprehend and complete assignments quickly. I wasn't considered dependable by my teachers, so I wasn't selected for "safety duty" the following year by my fifth grade teacher. But after entering the sixth grade, I was deemed responsible enough by my new teacher to qualify as a projectionist and run 16 mm movies for all grades. I was then reassessed by my sixth-grade teacher for safety duty. The two tasks exempted me from classes on most days during my final year at Stonehurst.

My most unforgettable memory of elementary school came about by accident, when I competed with the athletic stars of my fifth grade class in the standing broad jump, and discovered that I could leap further than anyone else in my grade. Because of that single prowess, I was selected to participate in Delaware County's Sports Tournament held at the high school. I came in second and was awarded a red ribbon by leaping nearly six feet across the sand. I was only bested by a much stronger, taller and more mature 5th grade boy, Nick Pappas, a student from Cardington-Stonehurst Elementary.

I was extremely proud of the red ribbon I received, and realized, only years later, that I excelled because my legs were strong and I was small and light enough to propel myself to excellence in that singular event.

Another memory of the late 1950s was when my blonde-haired crush, Lena, who had no television at her home, was invited by my parents to watch TV at our house, a blessing to me in that I was allowed to lay side-by-side with her on the living room floor to watch programs aired prior to 9:00 p.m.

The budding romance was ended all too soon when I discovered that Lena and her sister Kaye no longer lived on our street, and there were rumors that a family of a classmate some streets away had taken the girls in. I didn't know if the rumors were true, since Lena still remained in class, but she no longer spent the evenings beside me watching *Lassie*, *Maverick* or *Have Gun-Will Travel*.

My sporadic attendance in the sixth-grade classes might have contributed to my poor academic performance after switching schools the following fall, but my term on safety patrol and as a projectionist alone didn't account significantly to set me on less than solid footing for the challenges of seventh grade. My lack of motivation could also be blamed on my family's precarious financial situation, or the lack of understanding of teachers in those times of the attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, or the ADHD, I exhibited. In retrospect, I now realize that I just couldn't concentrate on my studies, mostly because I focused my attention on other things such as model trains and customizing model cars. Not once in the six years of junior high and high school did I ever entertain thoughts of attending college, nor have any academic focus on skills I might possess, that would qualify me for entrance to of school of higher learning.

As I neared the end of high school, I was ill prepared in all ways for my future. My mother had little money and I had none, but with some urging by my uncle I investigated a vocational education program offered by Temple University. Most of its courses required skills in math, the study of which I was poorly suited for, but despite that deficiency I entered the engineering technology program in the fall of 1965. After registering and attending classes, I applied for and received a state "need" scholarship, which kicked in money for my second semester. Upon reflection, the most significant result of the experience was that I remained in school the entire three years and chose to participate in the co-op job program offered by Temple, pairing with local manufacturers. I truly despised the jobs I was given, the worst of which was cleaning carbon seals and numbering them with an engraving tool. But beyond the drudgery, I couldn't envision any future for me using the courses I was taking. But, I continued to show up for work each day

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and the program instilled in me the beginning of a work ethic I profited from despite my resistance and knowledge that I was poorly suited for the engineering field. The jobs provided me a minimum wage, introduced me to the concept of work-for-hire, and provided me with a resumé I used after graduation to secure and maintain a full-time job, a discipline for which I now am immensely grateful.

During my years at Temple, I taught the senior class in the Sunday School at my church, the focal point of my social life. Coincidentally, or because of my work ethic, I began to take on responsibilities for the completion of tasks entrusted to me, even while I remained scatterbrained in tackling other issues and clueless about any life beyond the moment. After completing the program at Temple, I applied for a job as a draftsman at Clifton Precision Company and was hired. In my free time, I returned to drawing in pastels and creating charcoal portraits, a hobby I'd begun while in classes at Temple. I quickly became adept at creating likenesses in black and white on tinted paper, and either selling them or giving them away to colleagues and managers who appreciated my artistic skills. Despite my dislike and lack of talent for electromechanical design, I became quite proficient with a Rapidograph pen and ink, and taught myself multipoint perspective, enabling me to create three-dimensional views needed by Clifton Precision for instruction manuals and covers.

With little resistance, and some encouragement, my supervisor approved payment for two evening courses held at the Philadelphia College of Art, or PCA. I enjoyed the color and design course, but not the life-studies classes, so after the first semester I dropped out of night school after finding a job posted on the PCA bulletin board for a graphic arts firm as a traffic coordinator familiar with graphic design. The job they listed wasn't listed as an art job, but it involved managing the flow of work from sales input to completion, a job for which I soon found myself poorly suited. The job did, however, provide me with the knowledge and skills required by people entering the graphic arts industry.

Three months after securing the job, I was fired, but surprisingly received unemployment benefits from the engineering firm I had left behind.

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I used the time over the next three months writing stories on my old Underwood typewriter and creating cartoons on acetate, which I unsuccessfully submitted to major magazines. I also used the pause between careers to improve my airbrushing and graphic arts skills in hope of landing a real job in the industry. After a few unsuccessful interviews, I was fortunate to find a job with a Philadelphia-based bank research firm which needed an artist to hand-letter sales presentation charts. I had just turned 25, and accepted the job despite it paying less than I had previously earned as a draftsman when I was starting out more than five years before. During this same period I began to date Gerry, a girl older than I who I'd met in a drama group at church. I learned only later that she was less prepared and more naive than I was in dealing with the world.

During the five years I worked at the research firm, I learned illustrative techniques from art manuals and began to develop multiple styles. I even received a few awards for my work, and was promoted from the job as the "sign guy" to that of art director and then, a few years later, to creative director managing the firm's new image as a direct mail marketing innovator. Since I had risen further along and faster than I'd ever expected, I impulsively bought Gerry a small ring which she took as a commitment to marriage. Without me understanding or knowing how to explain the error of her perception of the ring, I agreed to marry her, despite all of the issues I envisioned by moving forward with the plan. Gerry, and I were married three months later, and moved into an apartment in Springfield, Delaware County, only about 8 miles from where she and I grew up. By my age of 30, my wife and I had purchased a small home in Media, a few miles from the apartment where we were living, and where I continued to draw and paint as well as work my way up the ladder at the direct mail marketing firm.

Since I've told this story many times in previous books, I'll fast forward past my short term employment as an art director at an advertising agency, and an even shorter career as a freelance graphic designer and illustrator. So as to not repeat my journey through my 20s and 30s, I'll move past the birth of a daughter born to Gerry and me, and the separation and divorce that

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followed... to a life much different than my first, to horizons I never dreamed possible.

Episode Two

The second installment of George Stanbelt's memoir,
dated: July 2, 2030

Today is my 83rd birthday and my stepson, Wayd, just completed setting up my new Mac computer, and I find it all quite astonishing what it can do. He's been after me for three years to upgrade, but I've had few tasks I needed that required it since I've ramped down the production of my writing to a few short stories and only one new novel since 2025. The slowdowns happened for many reasons, including the fact that my eyesight's been failing me due to the progression of dry age-related macular degeneration. The doctors don't seem too concerned about my condition since they've provided me with injections that slow the progression of geographic atrophy. They also are anticipating a one-time treatment that will provide a semi-permanent or permanent solution, which means, I guess, that I'll likely die before going blind. The second reason for my reduced output is that I doubt that I have much more to say than I've written in my many stories or 16 published books.

My daughter tells me not to worry about becoming invisible, either to my children or grandchildren, since I've gained a small following and received several articles on my work and the late start I had to writing books.

While recently trashing some of my existing files, I came upon a diary post I wrote back in 2025. I had to smile at the brazenness I felt when considering my legacy, which at this point in my life seems trivial or ingenuous. I guess it's a blessing that I no longer remain obsessed about the future without me in it. I was still on testosterone therapy then, and I must have seemed possessed by building up a canon of accomplishments that would outlast me. Although I now appreciate when someone finds something I've written to be of any value. I'm almost embarrassed by what I wrote while in my 70s, especially in how I shared intimate details of my relationships with my friends and family.

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My granddaughter Callie has read most of my books, and knows more about me than I can now remember about myself. She's now a sophomore at Princeton and has remarked to me that some of her professors are familiar with my books and my art, specifically the portraits of 20th century writers, four of whom are alumni of the university, or taught at the school over the years. I'm in the process of leaving my collection to the Princeton University Art Museum. Since my work has been sold with little documentation, and the galleries from which I sold are now defunct, the financial value of the collection is negligible unless Princeton decides to sell it at auction. Personally, I'd rather have it remain with the University, since it contains synopses of the authors and how each related to my quest to become one myself by expanding my view of life and literature,

If the review board at the Princeton Art Museum decides to accept the collection, there will be a stipulation that the museum must place it on a regular rotation schedule of exhibition. That alone will make the gift personally valuable, since it may continue to be source of pride to Callie, an alumnus of the school by then.

My stepson Wayd has taken on the task of maintaining my various art and author websites, and I've received enough credible exposure over the last few years to warrant the approval by the Wikipedia board to include a listing of me and my work. Despite these proactive measures, thus far the public hasn't clamored for any of the books I've written, and filmmakers haven't rushed to seek options to turn any of them, or my stories, into films.

Fortunately, Louise and I are still both well, and besides slowing down, we have most of our faculties. Our biggest challenges are physical, since it has recently become more difficult to manage the many tasks required of our old home and property without assistance. Our children have been great about giving us a hand whenever we've asked for help, but they have their own lives and burdens, some of which we know, and others about which they keep silent, at least from us.

On the positive side, we recently traded my eleven-year old two-series BMW for a new Tesla, which does most of the driving for us. I still love to

drive, but at 83 neither my wife Louise nor I are comfortable driving at night, and my wife feels safer with the car under its *own* control rather than me driving it. We also purchased an Optimus, the second-generation Tesla robot that does cleaning, cooking and serves as a companion and a butler at “happy hour.” Optimus can also be linked via the cloud to the car to provide us an additional layer of protection when on the road. Optimus operates using WiFi and Bluetooth devices, but provides cloud memory that ranges from necessary items on trips to the market to prescription updates, as well as reminders to us that we take the medication as prescribed.

Optimus is pre-programmed to play chess, bridge, pinochle and Mahjong, but can be easily taught other card or board games. As with many current robotic devices, Optimus can be dumbedown or beefed up to accommodate the skill level of its users, so it’s been quite pleasurable adjusting the robot to my level of expertise, though I’ve found that it still wins a majority of the games.

Louise and I remain active and still retain Mika, our “real life” physical trainer to work with us once a week. We also receive exercises assisted by Optimus two additional days each week. The robot runs errands, gathers the wash, inserts it into the washer/dryer and folds and stores the dry clothes for us when the cycles are completed. Though Optimus was an expensive purchase, it was a wise one, since it does chores that enable us to remain in our home. For the moment, our master bedroom remains upstairs, but we have plans of turning Louise’s first-floor studio into a bedroom, since the lower level of our house has a bathroom with a shower, and the family room is only one step up to the hallway and the rest of the downstairs. Jeff, our carpenter and handyman, will soon be installing a grab rail at each of the single-stair locations, as well as in the first-floor shower.

Last year, Louise and I took a 15-day ocean cruise to Scandinavia on the Viking Cruise Line. The staff did a magnificent job of accommodating us. My knee was acting up and I took a cane with me to most places. The most arduous part of the trip was the flight to Europe and back, even though we selected the upgrade to business class. We opted for a stateroom on the ship,

and arranged for trip insurance... just in case something happened prior to debarkation. The expense was somewhat steeper than we'd expected... 40 thousand dollars. But everything was top-notch, even though Louise and I had to opt out of a few of the tours since they were more physically demanding than we expected, even when characterized as "slow walkers." We sometimes even skipped dinner on the ship in order to be rested for the next day.

What we also didn't realize was the length of 15 days shipboard, which became tiresome, as did our dinner companions who were genuinely nice, but were mostly our age or older. Since we'd opted for the less-demanding excursions, we rarely got to hear the stories from younger explorers who partnered at meals with less elderly voyagers like ourselves. We'd tried to travel with friends, but they backed out due to the cost. We weren't as shocked by the prices as they, since we didn't really care about the cost since we knew this would most likely be our final trip abroad.

One of the side benefits of the cruise was that our children weren't calling us every day to see if we were okay. The Viking personnel were far better equipped at dealing with our needs than were our kids, who always seemed to overthink issues of little importance while overlooking what we considered the essentials. My older stepson, Ben and his wife Lisa now have two grandchildren of their own and often view us as burdens, even though we don't ask them for help in fear that they'll try to take over what ever freedom we have and can manage on our own.

We're very careful not to mention any ailment in front of any of the kids. Our granddaughter, Debbie's older daughter, Callie, often rolls her eyes when her mother attempts to modify our behavior, since she realizes that we can still function on our own, as we prefer, without her parents' intercession.

I've asked myself "why" any of this is important. But I, having arrived at an age where losses are more frequent than gains, have realized that pleasure and relief of pain is essential to the quality of life at any age, and that if we are to live longer, we also need to live better, or what's the point of hanging around just to become bitter, invisible and marginalized?

Episode Three

August 12, 2036, six years after Stanbelt's previous entry in his memoir.

It's August 12, and I've been searching for my journal since my birthday in July. I finally found it this morning under a stack of papers topped by a handwritten note of mine that said, "Please Don't Destroy." The first entry was date was in 2025, so I searched my computer for the file last opened in 2033. It was written three years after I started it at age 78, and my life has changed significantly since I've reached my mid-80s. I found the text file updated last in October 2033.

I turned 89 this past July, and Louise passed away in April. Her mind had been failing for some time, but I hid from the reality and the diagnosis of her doctors. We still played pinochle and she would still laugh at my jokes, but she seldom could remember my name. She rarely spoke, but her smile was the same as when I first met her. Her face was barely blemished by wrinkles, except for a few laugh lines around her eyes. She still responded to my touch without really knowing who I was.

The end came quickly, which I believe was a gift to her, and perhaps also to me, though I was not yet prepared for the reality and was desperately depressed by her loss. There were moments through her final days that the fierce young woman I had married was still so very much with me, so much so that I couldn't truly believe she wasn't still capable of yanking the children's hair to gain control over their often brutish behavior, and forcing them to submit to her rule by the swing of her shoe at them behind her seat while she was driving. She was always fiery, and fragile....delicate, and yet structurally solid and beautifully independent.

We'd headed to bed at 9:30, and I'd kissed her goodnight after turning off the light. She made the statement she so often plead over the years of our marriage, "Don't leave me!"

I responded with a smile, "Why would I ever do that my love? You're the best thing that ever happened to me. You're the love of my life."

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She looked at me with sadness in her eyes, shook her head and looked up at me in a shy way I'd often seen her do when she had no words to speak. She then again pleaded for me not to leave her.

I kissed her again on each eyelid and then on mouth, and said "good night." Then rolled over on my right side after finding that she was sleeping soundly. Her face was at rest, and there seemed to be a ghost of a smile on her lips. After a short prayer for her, and for my own strength, I fell asleep.

When I awoke, a little after 6:00 a.m., I turned to her and she was cold.

I snuggled next to her, hoping that my diagnosis was wrong and that she only needed to be warmed, but it was to no avail. I then lay beside her and wept. When it was 8:00 a.m. I called my older stepson, Ben, and told him that his mother had passed away in her sleep, and before he could ask much more, I apologized and interrupted, saying that I needed to call his brother. I made the call quickly, and he responded in kind, and I then called Debbie, our youngest, who wanted details. I answered that there were none, except that she died in her sleep, before apologizing again so I could call my daughter Nichole, but before I could say anything I burst into tears, as did she, and the harmony of our sobs were muffled in concord, every now and then her cries louder than mine, since my tears were for myself, and the loss of my dearly departed wife.

I once again apologized for having to end the call, since I could see that there were several calls back from the children, which I ignored and let ring, having wrapped myself around Louise and continued to weep.

It wasn't very long before Ben arrived, and found the hidden key to the kitchen door and let himself in. He climbed the stairs quietly and entered our bedroom and found us both lying in bed, entwined. When I sensed his presence, I raised my right arm to acknowledge him, and he remained where he was as I lowered my arm back around Louise. He raised his left arm to his mouth and spoke to the person receiving the call of what had happened, after which he sat on the edge of the bed with us and waited.

My stepson Wayd showed up before the ambulance came. He was more in control than his brother and me. He said he had spoken at length with

Nichole and Debbie, and told them that it might be best for them to come to the house only after the ambulance, EMT's or hearse had arrived and left.

We soon could hear the sirens as they approached the drive, and Wayd was at the door to meet them. He pointed upstairs and the EMTs climbed the narrow staircase to our room, and I separated from Louise and they pronounced her dead.

I remained upstairs with Ben as Wayd spoke with the paramedics, after which he came up and asked me if his mother and I had made plans for his moment. I told him that we had and that we'd prearranged a graveside funeral at Westminster Cemetery, the place where I'd inherited several plots beside the family mausoleum built by my great grandfather. "The mausoleum's full, but the ground beside it is the only inheritance left to me by my family," I said.

"There's room for 13 double plots, so if any of you don't mind being laid to rest near your mother or my family, I've got the space. I know that Louise didn't want an open casket, but she and I both preferred a graveside service and a burial there...since it has some history. Just, please, let the people at Westminster know that she and I have no specified religion and that a secular ceremony is preferred. We can decide later whether a memorial services is appropriate, but I feel it may be, if the family does. I know that I'd like to speak about Louise, since I can no longer speak directly to her."

Wayd contacted Westminster, and was given the location of the mausoleum and the plots owned by the family. The person in charge was aware of the mausoleum, since it was adjacent to the Westminster office, and Wayd asked them to take care of everything. I told Ben and Wayd that I had the entrance key which would most likely be passed on to either Nichole or Debbie.

When the hearse arrived, I rode behind it with Wayd to the Laurel Hill funeral home. As might have been expected, I was in a daze throughout the trip and not much help in providing answers to specific questions. As we drove east to Belmont Avenue, I kept thinking that I should tell Louise about the plans when I got home, forgetting that she was no longer there,

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and wouldn't ever be returning home. Debbie met us at the office, but Nichole, who lived in Indiana, Pennsylvania, didn't volunteer to return, Daisy was returning to Colgate and her son Sarge was preparing to leave for his freshman year at Cornell. Her husband, Hank, was just starting a construction company in Penn Run, where they lived and said that he'd be of better use back home, and that Nichole could take all the time she wanted to be with her father. "He'll need you there, Nichole," he said. "If there's a memorial service, we'll all try to come back for that, but it sounds like your mom and dad wanted to keep this personal"

Hank was right. Nichole was needed by me, and although she wasn't Louise's biological daughter, I believe that she mourned my wife's death just as much as did my wife's own three children.

Nichole came back two days later and remained home with me for two weeks. We shared some laughs and tears. Wayd helped in settling Louise's affairs, Ben stopped over nearly every day, and Debbie invited Nichole and me out to lunch and arranged visits to Winterthur, the Michener Museum and one or another of the gardens in the area, trying to distract me from the loss of my wife. I tried my best to smile and respond positively, but I was totally at odds with the value of any of the distractions, since none of them meant much without Louise.

The burial was a simple one, as she had wished, and I stood with the children, grandchildren and Louise's best friend while listening to the person assigned to the task of speaking the generic words for the ceremony. Debbie walked up at the end and spoke a few words about her mother, and we joined together at a nearby restaurant for lunch and shared stories.

There's no more pretending that I didn't know that my wife's mind and health were failing long before her death. But now that she's gone, so is the life we'd built together. I'd heard that grief affects people in different ways, and I'd suffered some in the past with the passing of my parents and a dear

friend from childhood, but none was nearly so devastating as the passing of Louise. At this moment, the kindnesses to me by our children means little, and I truly would rather be dead than to continue my life without my wife.

I struggle with thoughts of suicide and how it would affect our children, but I don't at the moment really care that much what they think or feel. Nichole will miss me. Wayd will follow my instructions and make sure that most of my wishes for my art and writings are honored. Debbie and Ben will remember me by the paintings they'll inherit, and my granddaughter Lucy will know me from my books she's read.

Today, I spent too much of my time wondering why I'd even cared so much before about what would happen to my "legacy of work." How could it have meant so much to me? And now – how little value I place on it. It's taken time to realize that what I always hoped I would accomplish was actually for my Louise. The opinions of the rest of the world didn't matter that much. An afternoon we'd spend together on a blanket under a tree in our own back yard was all I really needed. And without her, my work now seems worthless. And it isn't just my work that's bereft of meaning. It's also the songs I loved, the beauty of our home and yard... my own children and grandchildren for whom I now seem to have scant concern.

Just yesterday, I revealed my plight to Wayd, and he recommended that I seek counseling. I told him I would, but today I don't believe I shall. After a nearly sleepless night, a memory came back to me very early in the morning about an interview with George Burns speaking about his wife, Gracie Allen, on *The Tonight Show* in the 1970s. Although the show was largely entertaining, Burns, brandishing a cigar, performed a few verses of songs he knew from way back when, tunes that most people of that era didn't remember.

While sitting on the sofa next to Johnny Carson, Burns spoke of his conversations with Gracie, who had passed away in 1964. The couple had enjoyed great success in movies, radio and TV, with Burns the straight man for his ditsy wife's comedic comebacks.

"I still miss her greatly," said Burns. "But on her birthday, holidays and our

anniversary, I visit her at the mausoleum at Forest Lawn, and I talk to her.”

Carson, at this point, who didn’t know if this was a setup for a joke or genuine, asked Burns. “Does she talk back?” There were some sniggers from the audience as Burns explained. “In a way she does. I tell her about the gigs I have and about my life since her passing, and even try out some of my jokes on her. Sometimes, when I tell her one, she’s silent, and at others I find myself start to chuckle, feeling that she might have liked that one.”

Getting more serious, Burns talked about his wife’s retirement from show business. “I really didn’t know if I could continue without her, but even after she passed, I felt her presence and the need to gain her approval.”

Since I couldn’t sleep, I fact-checked the George Burns story on my phone to see if I had gotten it right, and discovered that the real story matched closely to the one that I recalled. I also learned from an appearance on YouTube that towards the end of his life, Burns had made a promise to Gracie that he’d live past 100 years, a promise he repeated with every visit. In his mid-90s, he had even scheduled a performance for his 100th birthday, a feat he accomplished before passing away 43 days later. The article concluded with a notation about Burns, that when he died he was laid to rest beside Gracie with the epitaph mounted above their dual crypt that read, “Gracie Allen. George Burns. Together Again.”

Although I’d been thinking about and telling stories every day about Louise since her passing, I hadn’t once chosen to speak with her directly. If I would have, I was sure that any or all of the kids would drag me to a senior care facility.

Putting my phone down, I turned over on my right side, and attempted to remember my wife as she looked and spoke before her health had weakened. It seemed strange that what I remembered most were our arguments, and how she lawyered up when defending her accusations that often contained harsh expletives.

As we’d grown older, I’d learned never to respond when she was angry. Instead, I stood there and listened to her berate me until she felt she had said enough. If I’d responded in any way, the battle would be prolonged, and I

knew that no matter what I said, she'd stay angry with me for at least three days. If I shut my mouth, or apologized quickly and then returned to what I was doing or perhaps assisted her with the task, the banishment would perhaps last only a day. So I'd stay quiet, and we would speak sparingly the rest of the day and evening until the next, when I could conjure up something nice to do for her that would get me out of trouble.

While lying there in bed, I began to hear her voice blaming me for something that I couldn't identify, while in my mind's eye I saw the fierceness of her expression, her jaw jutting out, and her jerky, unfriendly movements she was engaged in while scrubbing a frying pan. I listened until her tirade subsided and I fell back to sleep.

When I awoke in the morning, I first thought the episode to be a dream, but then I remembered the argument about a failure of me to give her her due for something she'd accomplished. According to her, I'd taken credit for a job she'd inspired but needed my help to complete. She'd heard me on the phone speaking with someone about it in a way that sounded to her like I, not her, was its creator. Louise waited for me to end the call before asking me which job I was speaking about and why I had told the caller that I was responsible for its success.

I made the mistake of answering her question, and a fight was about to begin, but I quickly apologized to her, but only after the confrontation began.

I don't usually remember my dreams, but this wasn't the same experience as any dreams I'd had; it was more of a recollection, one that I now recognize as due to a judgment error on my part, and one for which her argument was justified.

The vision was also dissimilar from dreams I'd had, in that I remembered every detail of the scene in the kitchen, including the 80's era blouse Louise had bought in New York when we first met, and the multicolor bouquet of dahlias in a green-glass vase centered on the window ledge behind the sink. I also recalled the combined scents of cooked beef and dishwashing liquid from the frying pan she was scrubbing, and the sound of people chattering in

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the background. It was a place and time that I fit right into without noticing anything unusual in the way she spoke, maneuvered her way through the pots and pans, and glanced towards me with fury in her eyes.

I was startled, since it was so very vivid, and not the way I chose to remember my wife... but it was still comforting to have had her back in any fashion.

So that was what set me on the search for the notes of yesteryear, which I re-read before adding to the episode. For now I'll keep the journal nearby, in case I have other revelations. Until then, I plan to pursue my conversations since even this confrontational dialogue was better than no contact with Louise.

Episode Four

September 2, 2040

I've been at Dunwoody Village for three years now, having moved there when the house that Louise and I had shared became too much for me to manage. I was determined to keep possession of the home as long as possible. It was the place where I'd constructed my art gallery in 2022, and I'd stored my 1953 MG for 35 years. It was the testament to my creative and personal life, and in many ways it was my legacy.

Three of our four children were after me to move shortly after Louise passed away, but I hung on, trying as best I could to maintain the house and yard, negotiate the awkward whims of the snow blower through the coated courtyard in winter, and peel back the cover in the spring, and managing the vintage swimming pool each summer, to entice the grandchildren and great-grandchildren to visit.

Wayd, Ben and Debbie's husband, Hank, helped me a whole lot, but as time went on I knew my hopes of sustaining the property, using future profits from the sale of my artwork and published books, was a fantasy and not an achievable goal.

Wayd has since been charged with maintaining several of my websites, and I am called to speak about my artwork on occasion, but the money and time invested in the project of building a profitable legacy has yielded scant returns, and has occupied far too much of our children's time and effort, while also possibly diminishing the resources earned by Louise and me.

So finally, in 2039, at the age of 92, I took it upon myself to shut down my legacy project. I knew that I was past the age of building dreams, with Ben's turning 67 this year and retired, and Wayd's still struggling at various jobs to maintain his own house and property. I called the daughter of a friend of Ben's, a realtor, who got an appraisal of my home and the 2500 square foot barn/gallery that backs up to our swimming pool.

Our fortune, such as it is, has diminished only slightly since Louise's

passing, since I have used little of our 401K, except for the maintenance of the property and an occasional dinner out. The children have all done well on their own and Debbie, Ben and Nichole each have enough money saved or inherited from other parents, to pay for the higher education of their children as well as build a nest egg for retirement, and don't rely on either the money Louise and I had saved, or the future income from the sale of the house to sustain their lives.

Louise and I had agreed to divide the estate fairly between the four, with our youngest daughter receiving a bit more, since she was our child, together, and the one without an extra inheritance from another set of parents. As it ended up, I outlived Debbie's in-laws, who were younger than I by more than ten years, so she and Leo got a boost from the receipt of a portion of their estate, and both of Ben's in-laws have since passed on, leaving them with enough wealth for both he and his wife to survive nicely on their own.

Wayd's and Ben's father, Paul, is still alive at nearly 96, and is as healthy as can be. He lives sparsely in a condo with a Gen 4 Optimus bot. Many of the jobs around my house were daunting and required more specialized skills that my Optimus 3 robot could handle. But Paul's's robot can easily manage his small living space without much assistance, so Wayd is the one most impacted by my decision to remain in his mother's and my house, and although he had a good income and enough money to maintain his life, he's the child most effected by my stubbornness to sell, and the one who contributes the most time to me in fulfilling my self-ascribed "legacy."

Wayd doesn't seem to mind waiting for me to sell the house, since I believe that he has designs for acquiring it himself, a quest we haven't yet discussed, since, in his calculations, he can't afford to buy it from his siblings with only his portion of the inheritance. He also seems to believe that there is still a small chance that my legacy might matter more than what has yet to be proven. He feels close to his mother when he comes home and he doesn't really want to let go of that part of his past.

But I did know when it was time for me to leave, despite my love for our home. I still am very much in love with Louise and feel her presence every

moment I'm there, even if I can no longer smell her tomato sauce or the chicken bones she simmered into soup.

I didn't sell the house before moving to my small apartment in Dunwoody, but I tried to make it as homey as possible with some paintings that would fit the small spaces and an armful of antiques collected by Louise over the years, including her slaw boards, ceramic potties and woven baskets.

I settled in at Dunwoody, and have met some nice folks near my age, some of whom knew of my artwork and, a few, my books.

A number of my closest friends have passed, and it was good at first to reminisce about them with others at Dunwoody who had suffered loss, but I am too often reminded of my sadness from losing so many. My grandkids and great-grandkids visit on occasion. They sometimes ask about my paintings, but seldom about my books which are lined on a shelf next to the video monitor. I don't understand much of what the youngest speak about, but also am quite sure that their parents are nearly as clueless about their conversations as am I.

I now miss Louise more than ever after moving from the comforting surroundings of our home. The food here, though tasty, seems sterile, and the people I meet, though nice, provide no real solace for those that have left me.

I've had some medical issues, for which I've received sleep medication which I haven't taken, but have stored. I'm not really sure on any given day that I want to endure another season of torment. I've spoken to the kids about it, and they seem to understand. But they don't take it seriously because I appear stoic around them. I laugh at their jokes and pretend to care about their world that is as irrelevant to me, as mine is to them.

The best I can say is, "I'm still here." There's little joy in this existence, but as of yet I'm causing no real harm to anyone in my family. I'm, at this point, just a bit of an inconvenience.

There's been some talk at Dunwoody that I might just live to reach my 100th birthday. If that is true, it would take place in seven years. That's quite some time in the future, when I can't right now bear even one additional

birthday.

At night, in bed, I tell Louise what I'm feeling. She and I both know that we won't meet anywhere on the other side of nowhere, and I realize that my conversations with her are one-sided. But I honestly do long for the peacefulness of extinction...the sweet nothingness that follows this interminable pause.

October 15, 2044

I ache with each step I take, so I use Optimus braces in order to navigate from place to place. I can't hear most of what's being said by visitors, and can't tell my grandchildren from my children. I'm still collecting pills, but can hardly remember where I've put them when I decide to take them all.

Wayd stopped over today with news of a breakthrough in our quest for building my legacy. He captured an email addressed to me that the news program, *60 Minutes*, was considering recording an interview with me. Wayd asked how the producers found me, and noted that I was mentioned in a notebook of their former CBS journalist and host, Bill Whitaker, who wrote about creating a video I'd created and produced on the life of the suburban Philadelphia activist Dorothy James. She and his mother Marie Whitaker had formed a friendship and bond before creating an inter racial community center in the borough of Media, Pennsylvania, in the 1940s.

I told Wayd that I well remembered the video I created with the help of Bill's sister, Gail, who had assisted me in connecting with the son of Dorothy James, John, who provided me with film clips, letters and pictures of his mother and their family. John James also provided a key element for me to broaden the appeal of their story. Unbeknownst to many, John James and his mother Dorothy were related to Thomas Garrett, a Quaker man from Upper Darby, who had assisted hundreds of slaves on their trip northward along the underground railroad in the early 1800s. Garrett was his mother's great-great grandfather.

Gail also asked her brother, Bill, if he would narrate the script for the

video, which he did after hours in the CBS studios in New York.

Bill Whitaker was apparently working on a memoir focused on his career in broadcasting when he died suddenly of cardiac arrest at his home in New York City. His literary agent had searched my name on the internet as a source for additional information to complete Bill's memoir after his passing.

I wasn't difficult to find, since Wayd had maintained several sites which included numerous pages on my history, artwork and writings spanning more than 50 years.

Bill's agent shared the information with the *60 Minutes* team, none of whom had previously known anything about me or my work, but who then discovered a great deal of info from the stories written about me, including my relationship with the Jimmy Stewart Museum with which I partnered on a video on the life of Stewart, and my book that reimagined the futuristic story of *It's a Wonderful Life* in the year 2060.

Wayd explained to the agent that I wasn't in perfect health, and that I currently lived in a retirement community not far from the family home in Radnor. When asked about the gallery, Wayd explained that it contained nearly 130 paintings that followed my career from the early 1970s until the death of his mother in 2032.

They then asked if I would permit one of their journalists to interview me, perhaps at the gallery. Wayd replied that he would ask, and that he'd get back to them.

I must say that I perked up at the thought of a *60-Minutes* interview, since the show was one of the favorite TV programs of Louise and me. But I wished that I looked a bit younger and healthier for such a momentous spot, and also was sad that Louise couldn't be alive to see that I'd finally hit the national news.

Wayd got back to them just yesterday, and the interview was scheduled for November 13th, Louise's birthday.

George H. Rothacker

November 18, 2044

Although I'm living at Dunwoody, the house Louise and I own has not been put up for sale. Instead, thanks to Wayd and the other kids, it was lit up for the holidays last year as was the gallery of my works, with Christmas dinner held for 30 in the barn behind the house. Between Thanksgiving and Christmas, my granddaughter Lucy orchestrated the redecoration of our home as she remembered it growing up. When she was done she and my other grandchildren invited me to review the finished product and assure it looked as much like it did before their Nana passed away.

I must say that it brought tears to my eyes to relive a moment with my great grandkids standing in for their parents as tree decorators and tour guides.

The *60-Minutes* interview was conducted this past week by Poppy Hager, daughter of Jenna Bush Hager and the granddaughter of the 43rd President of the U.S., George W. Bush. It was held in the family living room where some of my early pen and inks are hung, and also in a barn once owned by my neighbors, that I converted into a gallery to display my artwork. My classic MG TD remains in front of a portrait of the car I painted in 2005 in the unfinished section of the barn. The MG has not been driven by me for many years.

Poppy was gracious as I gave her the tour of the art-filled walls assisted by my Tesla augmented braces to provide strength and balance. I wore my yellow suit for the interview that mimicked the suit I am wearing in my painting "The Death of the Man in the Yellow Suit." The yellow suit had become a signature of mine since 2019 that mimics an avatar written into my first novel, *Singularity 1.0*. The painting is placed at center-stage in the gallery. It's a large work that features me, dressed in yellow, inside a coffin surrounded by nearly 80 friends and family members. It was painted in 2022, and since that time many of those in the painting have passed on.

Poppy spent more time than I expected examining the works, and then moved to a table filled with at least one each of the 17 books I've written and self-published since 2019. I provided a very brief synopsis of the collection,

and Poppy asked why I hadn't sought out a legitimate publisher. My answer was simple. "I tried to get an agent, but was perhaps too old at the age of 72 for me to capture interest of an agent who might want to grow with his or her author. And, I knew no one in publishing. And, possibly, my writing wasn't good enough for a publisher to invest in publication.

"I read your short memoir," said Poppy. "It was well-written..."

I interrupted, "But it had two glaring typos; they were pointed out to me after printing. My editor, Fred Roesler, has helped reduce mistakes in the newest of my published works."

"I also read *The Book of Edie*, continued Poppy, "And I thoroughly enjoyed it."

"There are thousands and thousands of books written by new writers every year," I said, "and only a fraction of them ever become profitable. There's no doubt that there are many interesting and well-written books, but it takes more than talent to get published.

"Your mother, Jenna, has written books, but she has several things going for her, being in the public eye on TV and being the daughter of a president. Your grandfather became a professional artist at an older age and has made money for charities from the sale of his work. And he also has benefited from his father's legacy to enable him to not only write a very honest memoir, but also to change careers and succeed at an older age as a painter."

That last exchange won't end up in the *60 Minutes* interview, but Poppy acknowledged the challenges faced by people in the arts.

"What made you continue to write so very much in your 70s?" she asked.

"It might have been that I had said enough in paint, and pen and ink. But I think it was that I never felt comfortable as a visual artist. I loved the stories behind the paintings and drawings more than the physical artworks. Writing gave me a voice to express my fears, my needs and my philosophy, of which part of which painting only satisfied a portion."

As we left the barn, Poppy commented of the beauty of the property

that crosses Ithan Creek to the rear of our barn and that backs up the houses along our busy street. “It’s like you have your own private park in the midst of an active suburb,” said Poppy.

“Yes, we were fortunate in buying it in the 1980s. A few weeks ago the trees were golden back here, but the land requires a lot of upkeep. My wife and I took care of the yard work and the gardens, but after she died, I lost a great deal of my incentive to continue the tasks, especially as I was growing older and required more help. I haven’t yet sold the property, but I will have to sell it soon. Currently, I’m living in a retirement community about 15 minutes away. But I miss this, and I’ve been told that I can afford the upkeep without the physical labor contributed by my children... but they’re growing quite old themselves.”

We returned to the house and I gave Poppy a copy of my latest book, *Predictions* and told her it was named after a fictional book within a book I published in 2025, that offered predictions of life in the near future.

Poppy responded with the question: “That was 19 years ago. How have the predictions turned out?”

I corrected her assumption, by making her aware that my most recent novel, was written only a few years back, and I chose to use the name of a book I imagined in another novel I wrote, *A Victorious Life*. “It’s too early yet to tell if my predictions will come true,” I said, “but so far, I’m not far off in my forecasts.” She then asked if I was working on anything new, and I told her that I think I’ve written enough, and that aging hasn’t been inspiring especially after losing my wife, Louise. It was only after her passing that I realized that I had spent most of my career trying to prove my worth to her. “When she got ill and then died, there was little reason for me to write, since what remained were our children and their children, and it was their job to find their own motivation through life and love amidst the changes that happen over time.”

At this point the interview ended. Poppy thanked me for being so gracious, and I thanked her and her videographer for their efforts. “It’s a big deal for an old man to be able to spill out his guts to an attractive, younger

woman without feeling... *creepy*.”

She laughed at that and said that I was every bit the gentleman. I smiled, but still felt a sense of neediness for Poppy’s appreciation. We left the barn and returned through the house and exited into the courtyard. As I watched her leave, I felt a pang of longing. It wasn’t specifically for any one thing, but included a memory of my wife as a young woman in her 40s. It also was a sense of jealousy of the younger man I used to be: a realization that my longing couldn’t turn back the clock.

I called Wayd and spoke with him about the interview and he said he’d be right over. He also asked if there was anything I needed, and I told him there wasn’t, and that the Tesla Optimus braces he’d purchased worked well, and that the robot was waiting for me in my car to take me back to Dunwoody.

“You don’t have to come to the house, Wayd,” I said.

“I know, but I’d like to hear all about the interview. When will it be aired?”

I told him I didn’t know, but that we could discuss it when he arrived. I waited for him in the living room and reflected with Louise about highlights of the tour, excluding my sense of longing for a woman.

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Episode Five

July 2, 2045

Today's my 98th birthday, and although I physically feel my age, my mental outlook is better than it's been for a long time. The *60Minutes'* interview did wonders for my mood change, in that until now I've been considered largely unproductive as I've grown older than most I know. The interview with Poppy Hager gained me a bit of acknowledgment for my literary output, enough for Debbie and Nichole to each have completed the reading of a couple of my books, urged on by friends, or their friends' parents who suggested that perhaps they should.

Since winter, I've been receiving calls from grandchildren Lan, Ventra, Daisy and Sarge in an attempt to figure out how much of what they've read was fiction and how much of it was fact, especially concerning my portrayal of their parents. I had to admit that I don't have distinct memories of every book, but when they read me passages, I was quickly reminded of any truth contained within the lines, and provided a fair assessment for them.

Another benefit of the interview was the near instantaneous response that came in from legitimate literary agents requesting the rights to market my books to publishers. I referred the requests to Wayd to negotiate any advance and royalties expected. What was further surprising was that an advance could be expected after the *60 Minutes* interview: as much as \$250,000.

Several agents contacted me directly after the program aired, since the sale of my existing self-published paperbacks and digital copies have soared and agents are competing and suggesting "what if" deals with Penguin Random House, Harper Collins, and even the European powerhouses such as France's Hachette Livre and England's Oxford Press.

Though enticed by the reception, Wayd has suggested we pause and hear from as many agents as possible. Concurrently, he has contacted Outskirts Press to be assured that I have, in fact, retained 100% of the rights to my books published with them. Once that was confirmed, Wayd explored

the credibility and sales record of every agent who contacted me, and then chose one who had previously heard of my work, but admitted to being discouraged by my advanced age and dismal sales. “At least he was honest, and I accepted his offer,” Wayd added, after he told me the news.

A further surprise was the fact was most all the agents knew very little about the content of any of my books, but instead based their opinions on AI generated descriptions of my novels, rather than bothering to read at least one of my books. Through his investigation, he had learned that he would need to draft a letter from me to Outskirts Press, terminating the existing contract and having the rights of publication revert totally back to me.

While my books were selling well, the management at Outskirts dragged their feet a bit, but since all of my books weren’t included in any one publishing contract, they realized that they would actually benefit from the boost of sales of the remaining, yet unrepresented, books under their mark.

Since I had only formed a casual business arrangement with Wayd regarding his percentage of profits from the sale of any of my art and writings, he suggested that we formalize our agreement, and perhaps consider changing my will, since for both now and the future, he knew that he might profit greatly from the advances and proceeds both before and after my death, an issue that would impact the entire family.

Prior to creating any arrangement with an agent or publisher, Wayd made an appointment with my attorney to assist me in revamping my will to make the division of property less beneficial to him than to his siblings and their families. At the same time he also had my attorney draft his own personal will that would, after his death, be distributed equitably between current family members and charities he would choose to benefit significantly from his bequests.

Since I had never really thought about having enough money to donate significant funds to beneficiaries other than family members, Wayd suggested that he work with me to establish a trust that would preserve my new wealth for future generations, while also selecting charities important to me and to his mother.

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In the meantime, he developed a plan that would enable me to move back into my house, by merging his mother's first floor graphics studio with the family room and bath into a bedroom suite for me, a luxury I could afford even if none of the deals proved profitable. Since Louise and I both had long-term life care policies, I could have all of the care I needed and remain in our house until my death, if that was what I truly wished to do.

After my life's work had suddenly been acknowledged by the airing of the *60 Minutes* interview, I settled into a period of reflection. I thought of the cruises Louise and I might've taken if only the success had come years sooner. And although I appreciated my family's new positive reaction to me and my success, their respect felt a bit gratuitous, particular from my great-grandchildren who previously barely noticed my existence.

The truth was that I was seen by them only as "an old man," better off as a memory than as a living, breathing 98-year-old. After thoughtfully considering Wayd's offer, I decided to remain at Dunwoody with people my age and who often came and left quickly, while the younger residents seemed to grow closer to my age as time went by. Being 98 wasn't much different than 89 for many, and with my Optimus leggings, I could move fairly quickly through the food lines, and beat some of the 80 year olds at ping pong and paddle ball.

Most of all, from living at Dunwoody I realize that there, I'm not much of a bother. When I pass on, those after me can recall my triumphs and get a good laugh from my weaknesses, rather than feel guilty about not really wanting to see me for who I now am. Neither the additional money, nor the forced attention to my well-being, really matters much. I'm happy that the children remember Louise, and that profits from my life's work may accrue and benefit all of my family. Later, in the kids' and grandkids' lives, they may proudly show off a few of my paintings they've inherited and maybe a couple of them will open one of my books to read a chapter or two, before

bending the corner of a page and failing to ever get back to it.

Heaven knows what life on Earth will be like for them.

Since it's my birthday, the whole family's gathered in the barn to celebrate. My youngest great-grandchild is only two, and he seems to appreciate my humor. The other kids, no doubt, believe that this may be my final birthday, but ever since I turned 90, they've felt that every birthday would probably be my last.

I told Wayd and Ben that I wanted to speak after the cake was cut. They were surprised, since I hadn't chosen to do anything similar in all of the years they've known me, even when they were children. I actually wrote my short speech, and it was strange getting back to writing after several years, and my fingers were stiff from arthritis and disuse.

I spoke with Louise before sitting down at the computer, knowing that she would be better at finding words than I. The final count attending the party was 32, including a couple of new friends I've made at Dunwoody and a neighbor now housed in Waverly Heights in Gladwyne. My main job for the day was arriving at the party. My second job was to not make a fool of myself when I spoke. There would definitely be a speech!

The party was scheduled to start at 4:00, and it was to be the first time I've been back to the house since Christmas. Wayd informed me that he and Ben had opened the pool in mid-May and the water was clear, clean and 80-degrees for the 12 children who were expected to be inaugurating its use for the summer. Their mothers and grandmothers were in charge of the catering, and the guys were assigned to the cleanup crew. I've heard from Ben that the yard, bushes and flower gardens were pristine. I only wish that Louise would have been alive to witness it.

I arrived at the party a little after 3:30 in the Tesla, driven by Optimus. It

left me off at the door to the gallery located at the side entrance to the barn. A panel of windows in the structure overlooks the field, woods and creek, permitting afternoon light to enter the gallery. There are a few steps to enter, and I had no trouble negotiating them. The gallery remarkably remains unchanged, since nearly all of my work put into it was completed more than 20 years ago.

A “Happy Birthday” banner was strung across the partition between the addition and the barn, and white lights were stapled along the door and window moldings. Four long tables were strung together as they were at the most recent Christmas dinner, along with a small table placed off to the side, since the large tables were not long enough to serve the total number of guests.

Wayd’s partner, Steve, was manning the bar. We shook hands and he asked me what I’d like to drink. I asked if he could make me a Manhattan, and he said he could as long as I didn’t mind it on ice rather than in a martini glass. I told him I didn’t care and that it would be my only drink for the day, since I couldn’t risk getting tipsy.

I was, in fact, the first guest to arrive, but Ben, Wayd and Debbie’s husband, Leo, were all working to assure that everything was in place including the tablecloths, napkins and bouquets of daisies placed equidistantly along the length of the table settings.

I’d been conscious of my attire, but there’s not much you can do to dress up a 98-year-old-man. I’d purchased a Dunnas nordic green polo shirt and paired it with five-pocket chinos and suede sneakers, but I looked nothing like the 20-something model I’d seen wearing the ensemble online. Despite the slim Optimus leggings strapped to my legs under the pants, I still looked frail and unkempt. I recently had my hair styled short in the back and long on the top, but there isn’t enough of it to hide the freckled baldness on which the gray-brown strands lay lifeless.

The next guests arriving were new acquaintances I’d met at Dunwoody, but I couldn’t remember their names. They’d never seen the gallery and were impressed by my work, but I, at this point, was tired of telling the

stories that explained the paintings and drawings about which they had no idea of my reasons for ever creating them — nor did they really care.

The great-grandchildren remained in the pool while the adults chatted. The discussions were mostly about the publication of the first of my books to be re-released by Penguin Random House. *The Little Green Car* was one of several books displayed on a table in the entranceway enhanced by a poster featuring its cover next to it. A few people flipped through the pages, but were more impressed with the advance I'd been paid than by any of the writing I struggled with between its covers.

I understand their curiosity since most of them had known me only as an artist, and not a writer, even though I've worked at my newest craft for more than 30 years. Nearly all of them, including my family, have little idea about what I've written.

My daughter Nichole came up to me and gave me a hug. She told me she was proud of me, and I responded the same way to her. Debbie praised my first book for its foresight, being that it was written and published more than 35 years ago. Everyone was glowing with admiration, but I felt cheated of success in so many ways, one of which was that I was now nearly dead, before most had gained any real interest in my work.

The grandkids and great-grandkids took selfies with me, but I was tired even before we began the celebratory dinner.

To me it was more like a wedding, since there were toasts after we arrived at the table. These were followed by discussions about the timeline for the publication of each of the novels, and who might play my part in the TV series based on my book, *The Little Green Car*, especially since Kevin Costner, the famed actor and producer who I had hoped would star in the film and fund it, had died in debt twelve years ago.

When I looked around at the grouping of friends and relatives, it warmed my heart, but only enough to exacerbate the feeling of the loss of Louise, the love of my life. I was moved enough to smile at the wellwishers and kind words said about me, and was impressed by the hard work my children and grandkids put in to making this birthday memorable. But parallel to this

reflection, I felt the weight of the heavy loss of Louise and our life together. It was authentic, while this celebration seemed more of a pretense to praise me, and I was cynical of some of my family's intent.

At the end of the meal, before blowing out a symbolic number of candles on the cake, I asked Steve for another Manhattan, and told him to "make it strong!"

I took a gulp before returning to the table and remained standing while holding the drink. I raised my glass and rotated my head and body in order to acknowledge all who were there, while several guests began recording me with their phones.

"Thank you for celebrating my 100th year on Earth with me today," I said, realizing perfectly that this was the beginning of my 98th and not my 100th birthday, but at this age it seemed close enough.

The crowd laughed and applauded me, with some shout-outs that I was doomed to live far longer than a century.

I continued: "As many of you realize, I may have been launched into a viable second career by the publication of my book, *A Victorious Life*, along with others soon to be published, most likely, posthumously.

Again, some applause and cheers that I tamped down by waving my hand so that I could continue.

"It has been a wonderful life, and this is a great way to top it off, celebrating with some of my remaining friends and family. I could only wish that Louise was here to take credit for the huge part she played in my survival and my later successes.

"I've spoken to her about all that my fame might make possible for our grandchildren, great-grandchildren and so on, but I've also spoken of how the riches that may come from all of it might take away the incentive and initiative of my progeny.

A worried hush surrounded me, as almost everyone there didn't expect this statement and wondered if I had finally lost my mind.

I continued: "I want all of you to know that many of you will certainly gain from any riches I've accumulated after my passing. But so will others

that you and I don't know. Many of them aren't yet born, and others who will benefit many be from other countries and at distant places in places outside Earth's atmosphere..

"Wayd has been entrusted by me to assure that whatever his mother and I made together will be shared equitably within the family, and a large enough share of any future profits will also be passed down to you. I have been working with Wayd, your brother, uncle or cousin, for several years to imagine a legacy and have given him my promise of half of whatever might be made from future sales of my work after I'm gone. He's agreed to match me in my giving with his share of this new wealth, which will equitably be shared by many of the rest of you as well as the separate family trust accompanying my own, with the remaining half donated to organizations of your choice."

"At this moment, no one quite knew whether the amount gained from my books and sale of paintings would be small or large. For my part, I won't be around to monitor the family's collective philanthropic generosity, but my desire is to use my legacy for the benefit of the world and not just my family."

I took another large sip of my Manhattan and concluded:

"I know there will be questions about my bequests, but I also know that our children will best understand the benefits derived from Louise's and my life's work, which could be little or, just maybe, enough to help change the world."

At that point I sat down amidst the hush, as Ben was the first to stand and applaud my speech, followed by Debbie and Nichole. Wayd remained seated, but applauded quietly. A few of the grandkids then stood and clapped, not exactly knowing what my statement meant to them, but my new and old friends joined in with a modicum of enthusiasm, not fully understanding my implications.

It was well past my bedtime, so I excused myself soon after my speech and had the Optimus-operated Tesla pull down across our lawn to the barn. Wayd stopped me before leaving and said he was afraid the family would hate him for receiving so much.

“Trust me, they won’t,” I said. “Your brother and sisters all know how hard you worked on this project, and they’ll win from our joint accomplishment. I also believe that their spouses will champion you, and as far as the grandkids and great grandkids, they’ll get more than they deserve.”

Wayd laughed at that.

I got in the passenger seat, and let my Optimus pilot me back to Dunwoody. My anxiety kicked in when I got back to my apartment, just hoping that I hadn’t made a fool of myself or a mistake in my confessional. Given that it was recorded by many, I wouldn’t have much of a chance backing up my position.

As I walked through the door of my new home, my phone signaled a caller. It was Ben.

“George?” I heard him question.

“Yes, I’ve just arrived home,” I answered.

“Great speech tonight,” he replied.

“Was it?” I asked.

“Yeh! We all agree that Wayd’s the favorite son.”

“I didn’t mean...”

Ben interrupted, “Just kidding. We’re all glad Wayd was there for you, and we give you both a hell of a lot of credit for pushing through with your work. I was busy with the girls and my job, and Nichole and Debbie were busy with their lives. We all admire your art, but, maybe, we missed the point.

“I’ve talked to my girls and explained everything to them, as did Debbie and Nichole to their kids. They all appreciated you, but....I guess none of us thought anything big would come from some of the stuff you were doing. Watching the *60 Minutes* interview, we kind of got it... at least those of us who saw it, *but still...*”

I told Ben not to continue, and that I understood. “Your mother never really grasped what I was doing,” I said, “or if she did, it just seemed so random, and improbable. Wayd recently has embraced the concept, even

though he's never read anything I wrote. But, I sold him on finding an answer, and laid out a plan for him to follow."

"Are you okay with all of this," Ben asked.

"I'm fine. Except I miss your mother more than ever. The party was great, and we can dispense with the next two birthdays, even if I live to reach them. Okay?"

Ben didn't answer.

"I told Wayd I wasn't sure I wanted to live that much longer, and that I've hung around long enough."

He laughed at that. "We can put up with you for a couple more years," he said.

"I'm not so sure that I can."

"Mom would be proud of you," said Ben.

"I hope she would," I mumbled back while taking off my braces.

"Doesn't she encourage you in your talks with her?" asked Ben.

"Not too much. I kind of have to work around her, just as I did back when she was still alive."

"It's the woman issue?" he stated flatly.

"Yes," I said. "I still have to watch my words."

"Just know that I'm behind you 100%"

"That's good to know."

"Is Wayd still the *better* stepson?"

"What do you think? You can't compete. You still have a wife, two daughters and four granddaughters. I applaud you for even having the time to talk to me," I said with a gruff chuckle in my voice.

"I guess you're right. I'm currently calling from a closet in the downstairs hallway."

"I'll keep you informed," I said. "Hopefully, you'll respond from elsewhere when I need you."

I folded down the bed covers and lay down slowly, trying to ease my back. I couldn't remember when getting up to pee at night was so great a problem that it wore me out and forced me to rest on the toilet. Despite the many well wishes from my friends and family today, I thought at one point

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about the comic, Carl Reiner, as he reached my age, and joked, *If I read the morning paper and don't see my name in the obituaries...I have breakfast.*

Like Carl Reiner, breakfast is perhaps my favorite meal, but I'd now gladly give it up for the harsh alternative on any given day.

Episode Six

November 13, 2045

I'm not sure how much longer I'll be able to manually enter data into my computer. It's been getting more difficult as my arthritis has spread into my fingers, down from my neck and upward from my legs. Fortunately, I'm able to speak the words into a microphone strapped to my head and even hear them back in my voice. But I'm used to writing and have always enjoyed the physical process; I still use my stiff digits to make changes.

Since my 98th birthday, Wayd has spent a great deal of time managing my legacy. I never realized how much attention one interview would make in expanding my vistas. Wayd has sold three of my novels to Penguin Random House, and is working towards solidifying a deal with Sony Pictures on a screenplay of my novel *The Little Green Car*. Wayd said that they've suggested several changes to the script including swapping out Kevin Costner, who was written into my book with the actor and producer Taylor Sheridan, who was Costner's young co-creator on the *Yellowstone* TV series. Sheridan, is a screenwriter and was nominated for four Academy Awards including one for the screenplay *Hell or High Water* back in 2016.

Since my *60 Minutes*' interview, I've been invited as a guest on several talk shows, with the focus on my writing and my paintings which, surprisingly, are now selling again. Wayd has altered his financial arrangement with me and the rest of the family, since he has determined that the 50 percent he agreed to receive from current sales was too much in his favor. He's decided that he wants his portion equally divided between his siblings and himself, with my 50 percent of the profits still going directly into the trust account.

Just last week, Wayd reported back that I was asked to be a guest on Emma Chamberlain's streaming talk show and her podcast. Frankly, I told him that I had no idea who Chamberlain was. Wayd said that she's been a popular podcaster for decades and has featured stories like mine as well as on lifestyle, deep thoughts and general musings. He said that it might be a good venue for reaching a younger audience for the sale of my books as well

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for promoting the “green car” movie.

“Don’t worry”, said Wayd. “I’ll be going with you. It will be fun to see Hollywood up close. If you have trouble walking, we’ll get a scooter for you.”

“When do they want to schedule the interview?” I asked.

“As soon as possible,” he said with laugh. “I think they’re afraid you won’t be alive if we don’t act soon.”

November 29th, 2045.

Wayd and I arrived in LA yesterday. He had my Optimus leggings upgraded for the trip, and I now feel like I’m walking on a cloud. The updated *augmenters*, which is what they are now called, do wonders for my back: they provide heat, support and even a massage that extends from my lower back down to my ankles.

We met Ms. Chamberlain at the Netflix lot in Burbank. Her set was *homey* with a sofa and armchairs set in front of a large LED screen of Burbank, timed to be consistent with the natural lighting of the sun as it travels from the east to the west coast. Her smaller podcast studio is very modern and equipped with multiple cinema-grade cameras and high-end microphones and her podcast’s logo’s displayed on the wall behind her as she speaks with guests — both online and in person.

Wayd captured the interview with his iPhone, and edited the content down to the highlights for *YouTube*, *TikTok*, *Snapchats* and *Instagram* reels.

The interview began this way:

Emma: *I’m speaking today with George Stanbelt, the 98-year-old artist and writer who has written 17 books, many short stories, and two plays since beginning a new career as an author at the age of 72. Throughout his life, Mr. Stanbelt’s work has remained largely unnoticed, but a random mention in a memoir written by the late 60 Minutes reporter, Bill Whitaker, brought recent attention to Mr. Stanbelt’s career, and his most recent project.*

Good morning, George. You’ve had an incredible rise to fame in just the past few weeks, but we’ve heard that there’s another project you’ve written

about in a blog and podcast back in 2025 that concerned a 500-year plan to save Earth, intelligent life, even transporting humans to the moon and other planets.

George: *Yes, Emma. I was at that time, and still am, very concerned, about the health of our small but beautiful planet Earth. I believe we could have stopped the damage we humans have done sooner, but as you can see in LA, the wildfires are no longer seasonal, but a constant year-round menace. Today I saw people wearing masks throughout the city, since the megafires in the Sierras have continued to blow toxic gases into LA.*

And I've seen that its not any better on the east coast either. Nor'easters and hurricanes are becoming fuel for warmer temperatures and intensified storms while the salt waters are pushing further inland reducing the shoreline and contaminating coastal aquifers that are the source of your drinking water.

It's definitely gotten worse here over the past 20 years, even with recent efforts to correct the damage.

Unfortunately, it may be too late to start the change, since money and politics still are getting in the way, and now I don't know what the prognosis is for life on our planet.

Emma: *Your Augmented Artisans podcasts were simulated conversations with Google's AI program, Gemini, and offered a plan to involve billionaires in a legacy program that would last 500 years.*

George: *I did, and it was, but it never took hold. Not because there wasn't a need, but because I had no way to reach the right people who needed to be reached.*

Emma: *But, from what I've heard lately, you had more than three million listeners to that one Augmented Artisans episode alone. The superwealthy around the world are now making an attempt to use their money and work together to clean up the oceans, land and atmosphere with the assistance of computer intelligence being installed outside the boundaries of government,*

politics and the Earth.

George: *That's all well and good, Emma. But it may now be too late. All we may be able to accomplish is to start colonies of some form of intelligent life outside the boundaries of Earth in hopes of preserving the mere concept of humanity.*

Emma: *You proposed your concept more than 20 years ago. The existing generation of billionaires could have made a difference.*

George: *I did propose it. And I still do. But my message never came out strong enough, so now it will cost a great deal more, and we'll need trillions of dollars and thousands of willing workers to begin the process because we disbanded a willing group during the past quarter of this century.*

Emma: *So you see no hope, George?*

George: *There's always hope, Emma. But reality has done more than creep in. It has also dimmed my light.*

Emma: *Do you think now that you have gained a larger following, that your message will be more widely heard?*

George: *I can't speculate on that. I believe that humans were, and are, more intent on politics, isolation and selfish gains than in developing a workable international solution to end wars, improve our atmosphere and educate our offspring to understand the implications of neglect.*

Emma: *Can you now provide any solution to the dilemma we face?*

George: *Yes. My message is mainly to anyone who has more money than they'll ever use in their lifetime: Please, think beyond your own children when*

you decide whom you care about in the years to come. You are the parents of the world, and your decision to leave it to an incorruptible foundation that's smarter than humans will underscore your commitment to preserving humankind.

If you choose to squander your fortune and leave your money to your closest progeny, the public that truly believes in the future, the environmentalists, will be unable to repopulate the planet with generations of humans who can afford to explore the new frontiers.

And, if you are good stewards of the Earth and all of its children, you can still, by proxy, be those generations to change themselves to be less selfish with their gifts, and realize that their personal legacy and yours can live far longer than the 500 year period which I envisioned.

If, however, you choose to limit your gifts to your bloodline alone, you may never have a chance to fulfill true legacy that exists beyond your allotted years, and you will be destined to be forgotten in only a few generations.

Emma: *That's a very impactful statement, George. It sounds, almost, religious.*

George: *I'm hoping that those who believe in God as well as those that have their doubts, will align with a prophecy that's taught in most sacred books. If we look at our planet from outer space, it's like none other and abundant with life and beauty.*

We can choose to make the effort to preserve it, or let it die because of our narrow view of existence.

Einstein, Newton, Beethoven, and Michelangelo may live as long as humanity will remember them. But you, out there, with wealth, power and the wearwithal to save the Earth may be revered over time by no one and your contributions snuffed out quickly.

Emma: *Thank you, George, for being with us today, I hear that it's a special day for you.*

George: *It's my wife's birthday. Have a happy one, Louise!*

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Emma: *How old is she, if I may ask?*

George: *85, the same age she was the day she passed away, and I love her and need her more than ever.*

December 1, 2045.

The phone hadn't started to ring and the emails hadn't popped up on my screen until after the airing of the interview with Emma Chamberlain. The stats on my *Augmented Artisan* website spiked after Emma's podcast and remained elevated for several days.

Many of those who had read my 2025 post commented on other conversations uploaded by me, and a great many of those who contacted me wanted to know if it was too late for them to become a legacy investor.

If I had doubts about my concept, those who called or emailed now proved me right. It seemed that many now feared missing out on an opportunity that did not yet exist. They were also having their financial managers seek in vain for my 500-Year Legacy Foundation and the person in charge of giving.

Wayd understood what was happening before I did. So I referred all of my calls and emails to him so that he could calm the individuals until we could figure out how to make the foundation a reality. During the process, we realized that what we needed was a recognized spokesperson, someone who had earned the credibility to explain the plan in simple terms to wealthy investors as to how they might become "signature" members.

It was very noticeable that the state of our planet and the atmosphere surrounding it had deteriorated greatly over the past few decades, and since that time no alternatives had been successfully proposed.

Individuals in their mid-fifties or sixties in 2025 were now in their 70s and 80s, while others who might have joined in former generations have

passed on invisibly or with ignominy. So our new aging crop of superwealthy humans is receptive to the ideas presented at this period of their lives, since the pollution of our air, rivers, streams and oceans, and the destruction of the eastern seaside estates and western mountain resorts, has inevitably proven their forebears wrong.

The signs were evident when my challenge was proposed. But many of the richest were then sheltered by their wealth and were unwilling to adjust their priorities to face the planetary disturbances only they might have curtailed.

One of the first to respond to my interview with Emma was an Australian entrepreneur, Melanie Perkins, who with her husband co-founded the visual design platform, Canva, that made them billionaires. She signed the giving pledge along with Bill Gates and his ex-wife Melinda and several others to encourage wealthy individuals to contribute their money to philanthropic causes. Since that time, Melinda dropped away from the group, but continued her work with charities addressing the current needs of women.

Melanie had never heard of The 500-Year Legacy Program, but was one of the first to contact me after the interview. At the moment, she and her husband are worth more than 50-billion Australian dollars. She's 58 years old, and explained that she was very interested in the concept, and had read the conversation with Gemini that clarified the vision.

"Currently, there is no such wide scale commitment of the kind you spoke about in your conversation," said Melanie. "Why has it taken so long for the plan to be introduced?"

I explained my past, and my nearly invisible public identity. I also made note that, at the time, I needed a *bridge* between me and the wealthy, and I couldn't find one. The fact that I was now approaching 100 and began writing at the age of 72 has finally made me an attraction, so I used the *60 Minutes* interview as my opportunity to reach out with the most necessary part of my message.

Melanie then revealed to me that she was interested in my project

and gave me a list of global issues she was tackling, along with many still involved with the Gates initiative. “The focus seems to change each year,” she said, “and because the Gates Giving Pledge was established in the year 2000, before AI was universally available and accepted. At that time the plans proposed were to address global issues while those which I speak of now were not yet feasible.

“Without any concern for diplomacy,” I asked, “if you find my proposal to be reasonable and plausible, would you consider being a spokesperson for me and The 500-Year Legacy Program?”

“That’s a big ask right now,” said Melanie, “but I’ll look into it and get back to you with an answer, along with any issues I see in the materials you’ve shared. Who, besides you, will be my contact?”

I chuckled and said that I understood her reticence since she most likely wondered how long I’d be alive to be in charge of any initiative. I explained that my stepson Wayd, who is 70 years old, had transitioned to the position of administrator of my trust, as well as my legacy, and is therefore now in charge. I said that I realize that he’s no longer young, but many administrators will come and go through any long-term plan, but until a plan’s established, we are doing our best to keep our options open and our minds free of bias.

I also added a hope that she might suggest a spokesperson, a possible COO or CEO to head such a program.

“I can see now, why, your idea has been so slow to be adopted,” said Melanie. “Let me get back to you or Wayd to see just how I might be of help in backing the program as well as presenting it to other leaders in industry.

January 14, 2046.

After the holidays, Melanie contacted Wayd and said that the Gates Giving Pledge was interested in pursuing a strategy based on my proposal. She added that Bill Gates, who recently turned 90, found my concept refreshing, as he’d found some of the projects he embraced to flounder, mostly due to their dependence on human management, or the inability for humans to

imagine past their own existence.

“How much seed money would you need to launch the 500-Year program?” asked Melanie.

“We don’t need any money, since we’re not capable of managing the program. The most we can do, is function as advisors.

“But in answer to your question, I really have no idea. With the state of intelligent systems today, AI may have a better grasp on who needs what than do we humans.”

“I’ve tried to work through it using AI’s computational intelligence,” responded Melanie. “But its answers are vague and usually ask more questions than I can possibly answer.”

“Let me try,” said Wayd, “and then I’ll get back to you and see if you’re interested... in any capacity.”

“Oh, I’m interested right now,” said Melanie. “I’m just not sure that I’m the right person for the job.”

“My stepdad’s been hoping for someone to come along and take on the challenge for the past 20 years. I’m sure that, at this point, he’d welcome a notable person, like you, to take on the project.”

I was patched in on the call and astounded that Wayd may have found an influencer prepared to take over our job. I realized, at that moment, that if I hadn’t survived 98 years, this and many other of my creative aspirations might have perished with me.

“That sounded promising,” I said to Wayd, after he ended the call with Melanie.

“It did. And I now have you scheduled for one additional interview. It’s with Juan Carlos Lopez, the new head of NASA. He was a senior program manager at Azure Space and managed the NASA Earth Copilot application when at Microsoft. Copilot was an AI powered tool that engaged in educational research and relied on humans to visit schools to recruit students to become engineers. Still in his 40s, Lopez is interested in how you planned to implement and maintain the secure, off-Earth placement of the processing and data storage units that you conceived of 20 years ago.”

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“Can’t he just ask me?” I answered.

“He says that he could, but that perhaps you would like to see how he and his engineers have built what you’ve imagined, an application that may serve as the starting point of your projected program.”

I thought about the problems I had with travel at this age, but there wasn’t any other scenario possible, so I will leave tomorrow for Arlington, Virginia, to discuss the 500-Year concept with Juan and also the fourth generation of NASA’s Earth Copilot tool.

It is truly such a wonderment; I now have a renewed purpose in my life.

Episode Seven

December 4, 2045

Wayd decided that he would drive me to Arlington to meet with López. Although Washington was often involved in long-range goals and the selecting of a director, López's qualifications overshadowed his Mexican heritage. He had been elected President of the Hispanic Employee Resource Group at NASA in 2036, coordinating the STEM educational outreach and development program and established partnerships with space markets in Latin America, an achievement which resulted in him becoming the first Mexican to be transported to the International Space Station.

Check in at the Arlington campus was rather easy, since Wayd and I had pre-scheduled an appointment for 1:30 with López. When we arrived, he came out from his office to meet us in the lobby. He was dressed casually, appeared to be in his late 40s, and was extremely approachable. He had obviously been briefed on my profession, age, experience and the working relationship between Wayd and me.

Wayd told López that we'd driven from Pennsylvania, and he asked us if we'd had lunch on the way, or would we like to catch a bite in the cafeteria. He'd already eaten, but our meeting wasn't classified, and most of those in the complex had returned to their offices after lunch. Wayd and I followed López to the cafeteria, ordered sandwiches and cold drinks and sat our trays down at a long, unpopulated table by a wall of windows.

After watching Poppy's interview with me on *60 Minutes*, López had researched my writings, and had read my 20-year-old white paper on the development of The 500-Year Legacy Project. He had then listened to my podcast with Emma Chamberlain before contacting me.

"We seem to have similar objectives for the planet," said López. "But you have held your view much longer than I, while I have unknowingly, and almost magically have adopted many of your ideas, integrating them into programs we've planned.

I explained my isolation, in that I had been an *outsider* most of my life and had come to many conclusions with the assistance of Google's Gemini that had been released to the public a few years before I wrote the paper. I explained that the *60 Minutes* interview empowered me after many decades without much of an audience and publicly invisible. I further explained to López that at the age of 98, I now had even less access for my work to become acknowledged in any of my fields of endeavor.

"I give the credit for this late success to Wayd," I continued, "And I'm thankful for his commitment to me and my work, so that at the end of my life, I finally may have found my voice.

"So Mr. López, you have now contacted me to establish this meeting, a connection that I could never have had without Bill Whitaker's posthumous mention of a documentary we created together back in the early 2000s."

López then told me that, in actuality, it was the podcast interview I agreed to do with Emma Chamberlain that sparked interest in me.

"You had an interesting take on the ultra-wealthy and their motivation. 500 years is a long time, and we've already wasted 20 years of those since you first suggested billionaires as the key to the project. Bill Gates must have gotten wind of your commitment in 2025 when he altered his mission from current affairs to the long-range goal of preservation of the planet.

"Since I invited you here, I read your multi-layered and colorful plan for saving intelligent life in your novel, *Sex in Space*, the third book in your *Singularity* trilogy. Your concept of reaching a suitable planet outside our galaxy was a bit premature, but your use of humanoids, altruistic bacteria, and frozen sperm and ovaries in 2021 was innovative and plausible."

I was embarrassed by the mention of *Sex in Space* as a subtitle to *Singularity 3.0*, but pleased that he and other scientists had been considering such a speculative solution.

"To get to the point," López continued. "we've already started canvassing older billionaires to see how many we might get aboard to provide the seed money for the project you presented. And from what we can assess from our findings, many of those in their eighties and nineties are ready to

come onboard as legacy members, if we can put together a group of trusted candidates for the board, and a spokesperson. You seemed to believe the same in that you mentioned it to Melanie Perkins.”

“How did you get in contact with her, or she with you?” I asked.

“She got in touch with me and told me all about her talk with you. She seriously doubted that she should be the person to lead the charge. She then asked me if I’d consider it.

“I told her that I already had a job, and that I wasn’t a billionaire, but suggested that I meet with you to see if I could convince you and your stepson to share the duty. Of course, the first thing we needed was a list of heavy-hitting billionaires to canvas for bequests, but also for the human co-director along with an AI chair entity.”

“Did you find any of the billionaires that desired the job, and if you did, how did they react to your pitch?” asked Wayd, who had remained quiet while López and I were speaking.

“Collectively, they don’t seem to trust humans any more than you do,” said López. “But more than that, they don’t trust AI.”

“But they weren’t opposed to supporting such a program?” probed Wayd.

“As I just said, the small number we approached were ready to sign up and contribute large amounts of cash to such a foundation prior to their death, as well as leave more after their term is up.”

“How much, collectively, did they promise?” asked Wayd.

“Twelve of them were collectively committed to \$87 billion!”

“Does the President know about this?”

“No,” said López. “This isn’t a political project, but the billionaires will get tax advantages with donations made before they die.”

“But you don’t yet have a plan?”

“We do. It’s to follow your concept and keep the U. S. and other governments out of it as much as possible.”

“Will that be possible?” I asked.

“That’s why I needed to speak with you.”

“Me?” I asked.

“Or Wayd,” he answered.

“My concept was introduced 20 years ago, and the world has changed,” I said.

“It has, and our politics are contributing to the destruction of the planet,” countered López.

“My memory isn’t as keen as it once was,” I replied, “but I know that there are enduring institutions that have lasted more than a thousand years. The Universities of Oxford and Bologna have survived plagues, world wars, revolutions and geopolitical shifts for nearly a millennium, while the Rockefeller and Carnegie Foundations are each still functioning well and at more than a century old. So 500 years isn’t impossible if the original endowment is large, and even if it’s one-time. So, it would probably be best if you could seek out as many billionaires as possible to forge a collective agreement before you attempt to create the foundation.

“In order for it to function over centuries, it *has* to be politically and geographically neutral. If the mission is the one I wrote about, to protect systemic viability, it has to be able to continue to protect the Earth and human intelligence beyond any global issue. It must also maintain a clear, non-familial, merit-based governance of leadership. In this case, it means that there can’t be any way for the foundation’s funds to be passed onto family members. The board position can only be merit based, but also must be guided by an unwavering, but human and AI guided commitment.

“As of today, we don’t have a way of proving AI’s credibility,” said López. “And those we’ve spoken to, hope to create the foundation now, before they die, but can’t be included in it now, since it doesn’t yet exist.”

“I do believe that I looked into this issue 20 years ago and concluded that the original team of billionaires could establish the governing structure and appoint the initial, trusted board. At that time each could make contributions of cash or appreciated assets and receive an immediate tax deduction in the year the gift was made. They could also make provisions in their wills that designate the foundation as a beneficiary of other assets such

as IRAs and 401(k)s, which are not subject to the income tax normally due when non-charitable beneficiaries inherit these assets.

“This blended model allowed for contributions given during their lives and include tax benefits. The more massive sums could be in a trust transferred to the foundation after each of the individual’s death. That, as I remember it, was the only viable solution for 500-year plan to be endowed, since it would provide the contributors the luxury of deploying their wealth both immediately and also eternally, thus securing their legacy.”

“If you knew this, why didn’t you promote it?” asked López.

“I knew no billionaires, and I’m not a financial advisor. I was a painter and designer. Which billionaire was going to listen to me, a crackpot multi-tasker? I knew then that I needed a bridge, but I never got one until my interview with Poppy and then the contact with Melanie.”

López got up from his chair and paced the tiles of the cafeteria floor as Wayd and I ate our sandwiches.

“So who will lead the charge?” asked López.

“Hopefully, Melanie will reconsider,” said Wayd. “My stepfather, at this time in his life can’t take that task on, and I’m not the visionary he is, or was. I also have few credentials, so the most I can do is help facilitate any transactions or connectivity between people interested in the project.

“Your skills seem to have enabled your stepfather to earn the respect due to him,” responded López. “Would you be willing to serve in a similar capacity as you do for your step-father as the foundation’s director of operations?”

“I might have considered that some years back,” said Wayd, “But at this time in my life, it seems the job will require a great deal more work than I’d want to contribute.”



George H. Rothacker

Episode Eight

July 2, 2046

This hasn't been a particularly good year for me physically. I was dealt a bout with pneumonia in January, and haven't fared well since. I can only take a step or two before I struggle back to my bed and pull the covers up to my neck. Wayd's provided me with earphones and a mic, so I can converse with him about all the things left to do around the house. The Optimus robot that he's adopted takes care of the rest.

And, yes, I'm in a convalescent facility and probably won't be returning home. At this moment, I don't really care where I am. Over the past few days, I've been getting calls from journalists and reporters who want to engage in conversation about my art or writing. I gasp through sessions with them, but truly want them to just go away. There was a time before Louise died, that I craved attention. With each sale of a painting or a check from a publisher, I only wanted to let her know that she needn't worry about the future. Then her mind began to fail and she was anxious all of the time and feared we'd lose the house, even when we both knew our finances were fine.

According to Wayd, I recently sold a large painting that had hung in my studio for decades: *Man at the Crossroads*. He told me that it was bought by the Museum of Modern Art for more than my house is currently worth. So for now, I least know that my artwork will finally be on view somewhere beyond the studio I've abandoned.

In 2011, I learned the story of how Diego Rivera's masterwork, also named *Man at the Crossroads*, commissioned by John Rockefeller, Jr. for the lobby of Rockefeller Center, had been covered over and then smashed before its completion. The only evidence of its existence were a few black and white photos taken of the painting by Rivera's assistant. I planned to recreate the painting in a much smaller scale and traveled with Louise to New York City to see the space it was to fill and the painting that replaced it. While Rivera's work was to be colorful and show off his mastery of fresco,

it was also destined to be controversial and featured portraits of soviet leaders along with conflicts between the rich and working classes, while the work that replaced it is monochromatic, and features Lincoln and Emerson symbolizing the intellectual and physical efforts as represented by the skyscrapers of New York.

Louise and I took photographs of the ground floor walls including the side panels that butted up to the 41-foot wall. When we returned home I prepared a 6-foot wide canvas and scaled up the work from the photos we'd taken along with the black and white photos of Rivera, and a similar painting he created, titled *Man, Controller of the Universe*, which remains exhibited in the Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City.

My painting completed in 2012, retains the same title as the destroyed original: *Man at the Crossroads* and been exhibited a few times in the Philadelphia area, but has for the most part remained on the wall of my studio since it was completed. It's truly one of my favorites and reminds me of Louise and our trip to New York, the MOMA and the musical, *42nd Street*.

Those times are far behind me now and there is little time remaining. I'm not complaining. I've gotten everything I ever wanted, including *fame*, perhaps a little late, and *money*, with which I've struggled to maintain a proper balance between enjoying, giving back to the world for the luxury of success, and leaving money to my well-off family.

From what Wayd reports to me, I'm doing exceptionally well financially in my old age. And until this past year, I've even been able to enjoy some of the rewards, while conscientiously funding programs that are most needed for our world to survive. Once I'm gone, it will no longer matter to me: what wars are being waged, what children are going hungry, and what corrupt politicians come into power.

I am somewhat surprised myself by my apathy. The closer I get to death, the less I feel the urgency of my quest. I guess that it's just a matter of perspective and of nature. When we're infants we think only about ourselves, and when become toddlers we start to care about our family, including our

grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. Then we add into our larger family some of our parents' friends, the kids in our neighborhood, teachers and a smattering of schoolmates.

As we head into our teens we begin to seek out people with interests similar to our own, and then refine our search further still as we come across random individuals who believe or share, not only our interests, but our values. Over time, we become more selective, welcoming in new people to our circle and discarding former individuals who for some reason have grown in other directions and with whom we no longer share connections.

During our middle years we firm up established relationships and welcome fewer newcomers, and although we still send them cards at Christmas, we don't care to hear much about or from them unless they become of value to us for a collaboration of one kind or another. We compartmentalize our relationships by talking sports with some, finances with others and about our families with still others.

Then when we get to my age, and we've lost most everyone we once cared about, we seek solace in anyone who shows us kindness and sympathy. Our children may be there, but we have little to offer them in life but a bestowal and half-remembered stories of the people we used to be. And if we have a little money to bestow on them after we're gone, we're welcomed at their holiday table, or visited for a few moments when they are free from other obligations. They're mostly our kin, and most of what we have is left to them until it's all used up.

It's cynical, but that's the way it is. And we, ourselves, have or were guilty of the same betrayals spawned by the inconvenience of having to listen to the repetitive stories told by our elderly relatives while we had better things to do.

Fortunately, my life and finances are squared away. Wayd has already said that he wants to buy our house. He'll wait until I die and my will is carried out. He knows that there are more practical ways of handling this transaction, but he also knows that the house should remain in his mother's name and mine until I'm no longer alive. He plans to use the second largest bedroom upstairs for his own, and remake Louise's studio into his home

If I Live to Be 100

office. We've decided that every member of our immediate family can choose, by lottery, or by the unanimous permission of the other three children, five paintings or drawings from the scores remaining. Some will remain in the home and distributed after Wayd's passing, or with his permission, to our other children, or our great or great-grandchildren to do with as they wish. Other paintings will remain in the gallery and be sold to support charitable purposes, as preselected by the family trust.

Sales of any book or movie rights will also be managed by the trust, with 50% donated to programs beneficial to the world and all of its people as designated by the family board of trustees. Neither Wayd, nor I, know exactly how that will work, but the lawyers have created a framework that Wayd checks over regularly with a Legal AI app he uses for a second opinion on all of the trust's transactions.

Fortunately, all four of our children agree that Wayd is most perfectly suited as the executor of our estate, and as such, in charge of assuring that the division of property and other assets are distributed fairly as his mother and I would have wished. We have been blessed with good fortune and a great family. I love them all. And I truly hope that they each will have a life as wonderful as mine.

So if I happen to make it through another year and reach the age of 100, so be it. If not, I suppose, like Carl Reiner, my obituary will make the news, and I will no longer have any need for breakfast.

George H. Rothacker

Episode Nine

April 15, 2047 - *George Stanbelt's memoir*

continued by Wayd Emma

My stepfather hasn't fared well during recent months, and two days ago he settled into a comatose state. Prior to that, though difficult for him, we discussed the progress of his 500-Year Project.

A few weeks before, I had heard from the Australian entrepreneur Melanie Perkins, who we hoped would take on the duties of stewardship for the project. After inquiring about my step-father, she said that after great deliberation, she was receptive to the idea, but that she needed to know what her primary duties would be in addition to fundraising.

I thanked her for considering the position, and that I'd send her a complete draft of what her duties might include moving forward, but that for the moment she would be the President and CEO, and later shift roles to becoming the Institutional Architect and Chief Curator of the Project.

She asked me again, if I could *briefly* tell her what I thought her job would involve, and I responded that she would, at first, be the sole executive officer responsible for maintaining the political and financial isolation of the Global Charter of the Project. "Your role would not just be to manage the money, but to ensure the structure's integrity and curate talent needed to make the program indestructible."

At that point, I read her a brief outline that my stepfather had composed at the program's inception:

The role of steward is essentially a blend of a UN Ambassador, a Chief Investment Officer, and the President of an exclusive, non-political Institute for Advanced Study—all focused on the single goal of generational continuity.

Melanie asked what that statement meant, and I dissected the statement by explaining the three essential pillars upon which the Project was conceived:

Number One will be to establish and maintain the project's legal and

political independence;

Number Two is to guide and direct the core mission of safeguarding the Global Charter Status with signatory nations and international bodies.

I then explained that I would have to explain the third pillar *to construct a rigorous, non-political protocol for the seamless succession of your role as Chief Steward, the Board, and key management positions over the next 10-20 years.*

“That’s a greater task than I expected!” replied Melanie, overwhelmed by the scope.

“It is. But there’s also a lot more,” I said with a slight chuckle in my voice.

“Well, then,” she said rather sternly, “please email the entire document to me as soon as possible.”

Fortunately, before my stepfather drifted into a coma, I was able to let him know that Melanie had accepted the assignment, and that I would serve as her advisor until she had her Board in place.

My stepfather responded rather weakly that since the concept had been created some years back, even more time and money would be required to begin the process at this late date due to years of neglect by governments around the globe.

I tried to respond with optimism, but by that time my step-father had fallen asleep, and I had several chores to attend to in anticipation of his death, as well as the fulfillment of his personal bequests.

July 2, 2047

This would have been my stepfather’s 100th birthday, and a memorial ceremony is planned for later today. It will be small, as requested by him, but since his burial in late April, many have asked if they could be involved in some way or other. That being said, Melanie Perkins and her husband arrived two days ago from Australia, and several other notables recruited by Melanie are expected to stop by to pay their respects to our family.

Family members and many friends will be gathering for a luncheon

downtown at the Bellevue Hotel. The list has continued to grow, but my brother and sisters have insisted that we try to accommodate as many people close to our father as possible.

I worked at the Bellevue soon after graduating from Ithaca College. I understand the workings of the hospitality industry and know the limits of flexibility, even now, despite the efficiency of a back-stage staff of robots managed by AI schedulers who can react to changes instantaneously.

Before he died, I asked my stepfather what he thought my job should be at this time in my life. He laughed at the thought since I'm over 70 and have worked hard my entire life.

"You should enjoy your life," he said. "If work is part of that enjoyment, continue to do the parts you like, and let go of what you don't like."

"How will I know?" I asked.

"You already know. You just want confirmation. You have a family and many friends. You get gratification from helping people. You still like to balance your life between valuable work, traveling and entertaining, but what you seem to value most is being appreciated for what you do and who you are.

"Use these next years wisely, and try not to stress over conflicts that become too difficult, or transactions of little importance."

"The 500-Year Project's a big responsibility," I said, as if I had just realized the magnitude of it.

"That's why you're passing the job on to others, like I passed many of my responsibilities onto you."

"But I still value the work," I answered.

"Then continue to do it," he said, "but you can't save the world on your own. No one person can do that. You can, however, still make an impact that lasts long after you're gone, much like those billionaires who are now clambering at our doors with money as if they can buy their way past heaven's gates.

"I used to wonder what it would be like to be old and bedridden," continued my stepfather. "Since your mother died, I many times have

thought about ending my life. But then, for some reason, I 'm still here. And though I'm a bit sad and often lonely, I'm not suffering. And, although I no longer think much about the troubles of the world, I'm satisfied knowing that what I've done in my life may matter to future generations. But, overall, I suppose the future is always a bit of a guess, especially when you're not going to be in it much longer, like me."

August 25th, 2047

The memorial service went smoothly as planned with speeches by friends and colleagues about my step-father and his work. I learned a few new things from those who spoke that I hadn't known during my younger years, since at that time he was just "a man who hung around the house a lot" after my parents got divorced. I was pleasantly surprised to meet Melanie Perkins' husband, Cliff Obrecht, who was very likable and seemed to wear his wealth casually. Accompanying the two billionaires was a well-dressed Asian in his early 50s: Alexandr Wang. Melanie took me aside to explain that he was interested in my step-father's 500-Year Project, and that it mirrored a plan he'd developed several years back, at the time when quantum computers had begun to experiment using AI to develop their own alternative human-like life-forms.

I'm not as knowledgeable about my stepfather's concept as he was, but Wang, with few words, presented a list of geopolitical roadblocks that stood in the way of any commitment to reverse climate change. He had many questions for me that I couldn't answer, but I told him that I had access to my stepfather's drafts, briefs and letters he distributed to those he'd thought likely to embrace his 500-Year Project.

Following the memorial service, Melanie, Cliff, Wang, and I escaped into the 19th-floor lounge of the hotel, at which time Wang shared his story of growing up in New Mexico to parents who were both physicists at the Los Alamos National Laboratory. His interest in math started early and twice,

in his teens, he was picked as a finalist in the USA Computing Olympiad Program. He matriculated early into MIT and at the age of 19 dropped out to create Scale AI, a company specializing in data annotation and evaluations.

Some years later, Meta made a \$14 billion investment in Scale AI for part ownership of the firm, and Wang became the youngest self-made billionaire in the country. After stepping down from his job as CEO of Scale AI, Alexandr joined Meta to head its Superintelligence Labs.

Wang sat back in his chair and smiled at how he's since been able to retain his independence and focus on the ultimate long-term challenge of cleaning up the environment and protecting the existing life forms remaining on it.

“When Melanie sent me the outline of your stepfather’s program, I realized that aside from my strengths in technology, I hadn’t thought enough about the human desire for a legacy,” said Wang. “It should have been obvious to me that uber-wealthy individuals in their late 70s or 80s might choose to invest in an improved eternity for their descendents, especially if they didn’t believe in a caring God or *heaven*.”

Wang continued, “At my age, I’m thinking about it for the first time since I now have young children, and I don’t care to imagine them spending their life on a dystopian planet, governed by creatures far smarter than they, but who have no appreciation or need for music, art, philosophy, love or the marvels of nature.

“That being said, it’s about time that I step up with some money and time to assure that the Earth remains beautiful and the creatures on it, especially humans, are perhaps a little better behaved and more protective of the Earth than have we thus far become through natural evolution.”

Episode Ten

November 8, 2048

I've spent more time than I could ever have envisioned over the past year assisting Melanie Perkins in recruiting members for the board of what is to be legally registered as *The 500-Year Legacy Foundation*. In October 2047, an earthquake measuring 7.8 on the Moment Magnitude Scale caused major destruction along the Hayward-Rodgers Creek fault line in the East Bay area of California, crippling the highway system, while fires erupted in the nearby Hills and continued to burn, destroying large swaths of Oakland, Berkley, Morago and El Cerrito. Meanwhile, the eastern and southern coasts of the U.S. were hit with 4.0 hurricanes with winds of up to 125 mph, adding to the devastation caused by Hurricane Mildred just two years ago.

Within the last several years, weather patterns have fluctuated sharply with temperature highs reaching 140 degrees in the Sahara, 148 degrees in Azizyah, Libya, 152 degrees in Death Valley and 60 degrees along much of the coasts of Antartica. The cost to repair and replace housing, factories and infrastructure caused severe economic strain in the U.S., the European nations, Japan, Taiwan, Australia and several of the small islands in the Pacific. Although it seemed obvious to most citizens of the world that the Earth was facing a crisis, this climactic event became the first time individuals of every country, rich and poor alike, had to admit that the planet was warming due to the effects brought on by humankind and its indulgences.

Melanie had begun recruiting prospects for her board within a week after my stepfather's death and soon had boosted pledges from her fellow billionaires. The total commitment thus far has reached \$350 billion in bequests and start-up donations. This quick uptake is the result of many who have softened their stances since their own communities, homes, yachts, artwork and expensive trifles had been turned to ash by fire or smashed and torn to bits by the wind and rains. Melanie admitted to those she approached that it might take decades or more to show real progress,

but Alexandr Wang, who was the first to join her board, had already made a commitment to change and had been working with companies such as BluePlanet, CarbonCureTechnologies, and Climeworks to scrubbing CO2 from factory emissions, and then converting the exhaust into useful chemicals and profitable products. Toyota, Mazda and Subaru have been just a few of the major auto suppliers that have invested heavily in the development of new engines run on synthetic carbon-neutral fuels, but have invested even more money in the production of hyper-efficient batteries and nature-powered generators, while knowing that it might take a cataclysmic event before real changes could take effect. While Melanie's been raising money through pledges, Wang's been traveling to parts of the world where the forests are still home to the indigenous populations. Working within communities in Africa, the Philippines, South America, and island nations, Wang has been arranging land-leases with the natives to prevent further decimation of existing forests. He's privately funded salaries for workers assigned to the growth, nurturing and replanting of trees on land previously cleared for farming and timber.

In addition, Wang has been working with the Arbor Day Foundation, One Tree Planted, and the other reforestation projects which for many years have provided stable incomes in exchange for long-term stewardships of the forests and payment for saplings to assure their growth.

Wang called me the other day to discuss his progress, a task he was primed for even before the board was fully assembled. Here's the transcript of the call:

Wayd: Hello, Alexandr. We haven't spoken in a while. How've you been faring?

Alexandr: About as well as the rest of us on Earth, as we watch the world implode.

Wayd: It could be worse.

Alexandr: You mean it *will* be worse.

Wayd: I'm an optimist.

Alexandr: I used to be, but not so much of one any more. I did want to

fill you in on what's been going on overseas.

Wayd: I usually travel only locally.

Alexandr: I've taken a leave of absence from my job to visit corners of the Earth few are talking about. It hasn't always been easy to get to them, but once there I've been leasing land.

Wayd: I heard that news from Melanie, as well as about the other programs in which you've invested.

Alexandr: I've also been visiting laboratories and found a few which have proven to grow trees to maturity in a third, or half the time, to create a carbon-canopy greater than their natural counterparts.

Wayd: Sounds like a new version of a bonsai tree.

Alexandr:(laughed) I guess you could say that. I saw sampling of poplars, maples, walnuts and one, almost extinct big-leaf mahogany. Each was about 6-feet tall with thick trunks and large canopies of leaves.

Wayd: And where'd you find the mahogany?

Alexandr: With young poplars in a greenhouse lab in New Zealand. I hear that we've been developing something like these in the States. The new Zealand trees were cloned from tissue culture, so they're identical copies of each other. Outside the lab in fields there were many more mature trees, none over ten feet tall, but with a much larger canopy than those within the lab.

I did the math on the poplars to see what the saplings would cost in bulk and at 50 cents a piece we'd be able to purchase a million-and-a-half modified poplar saplings, 1 to 2 year old trees with a root system, ready to plant for \$1 million.

Based on planting these hybrid poplars in fast-rotation plantations, a single tree could accumulate approximately 500 kilograms of CO₂ over a decade, or 4 metric tons of CO₂ per tree annually. Assuming there would be a 100% survival rate, the conservative results would be 80,000 metric tons annually over a ten-year period or 800,000 metric tons of CO₂ in the first decade.

Wayd: So what's that mean in English rather than in math-speak?

Alexandr: The 800,000 metric tons is equivalent to the emissions

of nearly 190,000 average passenger vehicles, and thusly, the \$1 million investment would provide a stable, self-sustaining financial asset for the first 10 years of the program. The cost of all of it would be approximately \$13.5 million while the revenue generated for the foundation would be more than \$35 million.

And, as far as I know, Living Carbon, a forestation company located in the Bay area that's been partnering with nurseries throughout the U.S. for more than 20 years, has been propagating many variants of poplars for numerous projects in the States.

Wayd: Do we then even need to recruit billionaires? This is something anyone could put a few bucks in to make a difference.

Alexandr: 500 years is a long time and there's much more to be done to protect future generations of humans from being altered or replaced by a newly synthesized species of humans, or of an errant asteroid from knocking the Earth off its axis. We have as yet such limited knowledge of quantum computing and AI, that we can't possibly imagine outcomes based on current models. Plus, any technology we imagine now can be rendered obsolete before it's even introduced. That's why one of the tenets of the program, is that it welcomes improvisation.

Oh, and by the way, Melanie's recruited another new member to the board.

Wayd: I'm surprised she didn't call me. Who is it?

Alexandr: Dr. Elara Vance, a native of Singapore, a country that's aggressively become a global leader in green finance, sustainable investments, and fintech innovation.

Wayd: I'm sorry, Alexandr. I'm not familiar with the term "fintech."

Alexandr: It has sort of replaced the term "state of the art" but is mostly used in the field of finance. She'll be well suited for the management of bequests to the foundation, especially since Singapore is a critical hub for the tokenization of carbon and biodiversity activity.

As far as I know now, Elara will help the foundation meets the stringent environmental, social, and governance criteria, particularly as they relate

worldwide to the ethical stewardship of indigenous people and community land rights.

Wayd: Well, I'm glad that isn't my job. And I know my stepfather would have been happy to have you and the others to continue his work. I can see that my assistance won't be required much in the near future.

Alexandr: As far as I can see, you'll always be needed, just as your stepfather still is, even after his passing. We've inherited a mission we could never have conceived of on our own. I'm sure that there were many others in the past 50 years who could have conceived of a 500-year plan, but now the implementation is most urgent, and we've wasted a great deal of our technology and time on frivolities and machines of war rather than the essential needs of our planet. His plan was prophetic.

Hopefully, we can delay the disintegration of the Earth by keeping the plan a *peoples project*, rather than a governmental one. And then, just maybe, the governments of the world will catch up as the wealthy reinterpret their legacies on more than two- or four-year election cycles, and the ruthless control of politicians.

George H. Rothacker

Episode Eleven

July 2, 2048

My biological father is still alive at one hundred and three, and who is still active and enjoying the activities afforded at Waverly, a retirement community not far from my brother's home. I visit him at least once a week, and join him for Bingo in the activities center after our lunch together. He makes friends easily and isn't too much bothered by his ailments and has been able to accept the death of those around him as he will his own.

My stepsister Nichole is 69, and she and her husband have sold the hardware store on Philadelphia Street in Indiana, Pennsylvania that they've run since his retirement from Walmart in 2032. Their son Jesse, age 33, earned a masters degree in AI engineering at MIT and is currently a data analyst at the Agility Robotics plant in Salem, Oregon. His sister, Daisy, is a middle-school teacher in Indiana and an author of five children's books.

My brother Ben and his family are all doing well. His girls, Lan and Ventra, live within a 10-mile radius of their parents, of me and of each other. Lan owns a retail chain of high-end fashion stores as well as a clothing manufacturing plant in Seoul Korea. Her online business far outsells her stores. Ventra earned a degree in Veterinary Medicine from Cornell and lives only a few miles from her parents in Bryn Mawr with what we call *her pack of rowdy dogs*.

My younger sister, Debbie, has become a shipping magnate, and runs her business primarily from her home in Thorndale, while her two girls, Callie and Melody, her younger daughter, both live in California. Melody is an actress and a regular on an afternoon TV soap opera titled *Century 22-the Final Chapter*. Callie earned a doctorate degree in biophysics from Stanford and has for many years been part of a team at the University to provide an improved quality of life for the elderly, but not to sustain life beyond reasonable limits.

As for me, I now occupy my parents' home that I purchased from the

family after my stepfather died. I currently live alone there, but would love to have someone with whom to share my life. I am fortunate to have many friends, but since Steve passed away, I haven't found any single person to whom to devote my life.

Knowing that I would soon end my advisory position with the foundation, I traveled to Scandinavia, learning that the countries within it have become the new Caribbean, since temperatures in the fall are temperate and the maples, wild cherry, and beech remain glorious for weeks during the autumn months, while the waters of the Baltic Sea and the Gulf of Bothnia average out in summer in the mid-to-high 70s.

The ship journeyed westward to Scotland and the archipelago that is now the remains of the United Kingdom, since the major storms covered much of the land except for some steeples with crosses that mark the waters as they commemorate the dead. There is still great history in the north, but much of the south has been reduced to small land masses, some with old remaining buildings and cities of modern times, but others barely resettled after water levels rose, cutting parts of the lowlands away from view except for the unlinked skeletons of the tall buildings poking up along the horizon.

In the States, we all watched the news as the western coastline of France, Spain and most of Portugal and Morocco were wiped from the map with many surviving citizens expatriating to the Ukraine, Poland and Belarus.

Wars are still widespread in Central Africa and parts of South America, while most of the Asian countries have remained fairly stable and have united with Russia and what's left of Europe, into a somewhat peaceful coexistence.

We, living in Pennsylvania, are far enough from the Atlantic coastline to our east and the rolling landscapes and Alleghenies to our west, to be barricaded from the cataclysmic storms that devastated the shore towns of New Jersey, Delaware and Maryland. It's the wars in Africa and South America that will continue to be most threatening to the reforestations as outlined in my stepfather's Legacy program. But then, again, I must shield myself from his agenda and concentrate my efforts toward what I can control and not on what I can't.

George H. Rothacker

Our family trusts and endowments include GiveWell, Direct Relief, Doctors without Borders, The Nature Conservancy and the World Central Kitchen. My stepfather also set aside funds for local charities while I, who volunteered for The Trevor Project in high school, have targeted funds for LGBTQ programs and the Human Rights Campaign, PFLAG and SAGE.

My siblings and I collectively support the Humane Society of the United States, the World Wildlife Fund and the ASPCA, with funds specifically targeted for assistance by my siblings' children and grandchildren. Three of the grandchildren are actively involved in the Best Friends Animal Society, and all have pets.

Since I've taken over the family home, I've made few changes to the decor and still host Christmas dinner in the Barn Gallery behind the house that displays many of my stepfather's unsold artworks. I've integrated paintings from my own collection and several of Steve's filling the gaps of my stepfather's paintings that have been sold or relocated to the homes of my siblings and their children. So I would say that at this time, my major job has been the stewardship of my family's trusts, and the preservation of our homestead and the cultural heritage of the generations before us.

My step-sister, Nichole, is separated from the family by 300-miles, but she's our family's historian. She points out changes she thinks aren't correct to past traditions, if I or any other family member creates a novel variable that violates the original design, placement or themes begun by our parents, especially during the holidays. We all take part in the often adult table games, even if they are not always age appropriate, and we all are strict in following the recipes taught to us by our mother.

I've tried hard to maintain the overall character of the home, but allow myself personal indulgences that sometimes don't exactly fit into the decor as well as I had hoped, like a huge inflatable snowman I've introduced in the front of the house that the young children loved but which everyone else told me was *just wrong*. There's not much I can do about the lack of snow, since by most of December the temperature remains in the mid-seventies.

Yesterday, I received a call from Melanie about the reforestation project

in the Congo and how the greenhouses filled with saplings were trampled by tanks and three of the caretakers were murdered. This was after a new accord was reached to protect the settlements. So what if humanity breaks its own rules? There's little we can do but keep pushing forward.

"Would you like me to investigate what happened?" I asked her, hoping she would resist the temptation to say 'Yes'.

"We know what happened," said Melanie. "The rules are useless when everyone doesn't choose to play by them."

I hadn't really thought she was that naive, so I softened my attitude. "Although deforestation and dumping crap in the oceans are criminal offenses, humans will always find an excuse for their actions. It's why humans are incapable of running the world, since they really have no control over personal accountability.

"Would it be better if we made the rules and then broke them and were immediately extinguished and pulverized into sand like Lot's wife in the bible? Drones continue to do it every day in war. And this is a war we're waging against humanity's capricious mistakes. But we push on."

Melanie thanked me for responding to her need for help and said. "I need to remind myself that the predictability of human behavior is often the same as that of a volcano or an earthquake."

"But there are sometimes valuable rewards for even trying," I replied.

"I'm sorry you're not still around to be our barometer," she said and chuckled.

"I'm still here," I said. "when you need me. But I was in the way. Besides, I've got enough to manage with my crew of relatives."

"I'll let you get back to those things," she said. "I took this on, and I guess I should learn to live with losses."

"You've only lived with this for a year. You've got another four hundred and ninety-nine before it can be called a total loss."

At that, she laughed.

George H. Rothacker

Episode Twelve

December 6, 2053

It's been a long time since I've packed away this memoir, and I'm now the same age as my stepfather when he began to record this history. My past may not be as complex as his, but I do believe that I've experienced more changes in my life than he did. My reasoning is based partly due to the scale of innovations accrued since I was in my early teens. But, the recent demographic changes to our Earth within the past few years has aged me.

My life started out well enough, and it remained that way throughout my childhood. I was little affected by my parents divorce, since my brother, stepsister and I gained a swimming pool and larger rooms in the transition. We took family trips, and my father and stepfather got along well. And, I never even knew I was gay until I went off to college.

My stepfather was adventurous and enjoyed envisioning the future. He and my mother bought me an Apple Two computer in 1985, and I put its computational skills and word processing tools to the test when writing papers for school and homework assignments. My stepfather had purchased his first PC in 1983, hoping it would assist him in creating graphics for his design business, but he soon discovered its limitations and used it only for word processing. The software that he purchased to create graphics was limited and clumsy and it took many hours to create even simple designs.

In 1988, my stepfather learned about the MAC II computer and attended a seminar with his staff. In less than a week after seeing it in operation, he borrowed \$25,000 to purchase an entire system, complete with a color monitor, scanner and several programs that enabled him and his employees to digitally create graphics and layouts for brochures, flyers, ads and pamphlets without the use of conventional drawing and layout tools.

Despite its amazing performance, the MAC took time to be accepted by the industry, but by the mid-1990s the often goofy-looking machine took over the graphic design business, and my father and his team mastered its

tools, a status that remained dominant for decades.

I worked for my stepfather in the late '90s and taught myself the programs he purchased while also learning the intricacies of the IBM-based PCs. He and I performed different functions: I was better suited to the technical side of the business, while he used his time experimenting with the machine's creative functions. These included the ability to create digital TV spots, animations, soundtracks and content-driven narratives as well as cost-efficient alternatives to the labor intensive tasks traditionally used for video production. His staff learned along with him, and I followed along parallel to them learning the programming and technical skills necessary to keep the firm's equipment up-to-date and functioning properly.

Over time, I developed my own clientele of startup businesses in search of a low-cost IT option. During the 2000 market crash, my stepfather's business was hit by the economic slowdown, and he was forced to terminate me from his company payroll, while he turned over to me the list of clients that had grown dependent on my skills.

We both survived the downturn, but it took its toll on both of us. By the middle of April 2001, I was forced to move back home from the apartment my former partner and I had rented in the city, while my stepfather suffered an emotional breakdown that ended up with him drifting back into art with a new objective to become a saleable landscape painter, while I navigated my way into the field of business management.

Over the next ten years my stepfather maintained his design firm while supporting his business with the sale of his artwork, continuing both careers into semi-retirement at the age of 72. With time on his hands, he began to write stories and then books and self-published 12 novels, a memoir, a collection of short stories and the drafts for two plays by 2025 — all of which made him little or no money. Meanwhile, he continued his business by serving a few remaining clients, as well as his painting, by commission, or just for the love of his craft.

He began this document after collaborating with AI in 2025 as he began to develop new blogs and podcasts that cost him little to produce, but gained

him a broader online recognition. He continued to add to it until his death in April 2047, after which I took over and found his story, along with his final creative effort: The 500-Year Legacy Project.

So here I am, less than six years after my stepfather's passing, continuing to report on the project. Over the past five years, progress has definitely been made. Although I questioned the reasoning, Melanie and the board have renamed the program "The Perpetual Canopy Foundation," but have retained the original 500-year term. My personal feeling is that the name change deemphasizes the importance of the legacy in their efforts to raise capital from new and returning contributors and places too much emphasis on the initial phase of the campaign.

During these last few years, the Arctic and Antarctica ice masses have continued to shrink. Environmental scientists have confirmed that ocean temperatures have somewhat slowed their rise and that the reforestation protection projects have already made an impact despite statements by some government leaders who claim the foundation's efforts to be useless. Since the reforestation efforts have been paid for with private funds, and no taxes have been added to support the project, the negative claims have held little weight and the board has been able to continue the program's expansion beyond the African and South American interiors into the northern regions that have become more temperate over the last five years. Increased temperatures have enabled resilient reforestation in the Boreal Zone by moving hardy, native species of larch and spruce northward to stay ahead of the warming curve, while preserving the peatlands to keep the ground wet and lock in ancient carbon. This Canadian-Russian coalition between the native tribes, and not the governments of the east and west has enabled the northern regions to create an alliance that includes the use of basalt, a fine-grained igneous rock rich in iron and magnesium, to permanently capture carbon in the soil. In this way, the Boreal Alliance will serve as the first successful, intergenerational model of cooperation; a place where humanity finally becomes aligned with the planet's economical survival as well as the planet's biological rhythm.

In addition, cooperative agricultural expansion has also proved profitable for the northern tribes and in response to these positive results, The Perpetual Canopy Foundation has diverted funds from reforestation elsewhere in the world to assist the indigenous tribes of the north with crop management programs in both countries.

As Melanie explained it: this controlled approach, while temporarily benefiting Canada and Russia, may ultimately build an environmental alliance between the two countries, one not dependent on politics, but created between two independent agencies: the Ministry of Agriculture of the Russian Federation and Agri-Food Canada. The Perpetual Canopy Program will, over time, continue to provide funding for independent scientific research and assistance to each country's territorial or provincial governments that will help maintain a positive discourse and relationship despite political disagreements between the two countries.

My next question to Melanie was how and where are the funds being held to protect the foundation from abuse over the full term of the 500-year program. She answered that the board has currently selected Switzerland, since it still maintains neutrality and can explicitly uphold the foundation's mandate that make its assets legally indivisible for the lifespan of the program thus assuring that the core endowment will be protected from creditors, political seizures, and dissolution.

"But," Melanie emphasized, "it's far more complicated than that. We are continuing to raise funds guided by a team of international law attorneys who are knowledgeable about such bequests. If we didn't provide this level of protection, the 500-year term established by your stepfather's mandate, would have absolutely no guarantees of legacy continuity as promised to investors.

"The foundation can't be put into a situation by donors or governments in countries, such as Argentina and Australia located in the southern hemisphere, disagreeing about decisions being made in countries in the polar north. To avoid this kind of rivalry, we've appointed Dr. Vance, the head of our Board of Directors, who resides in Singapore, a neutral jurisdiction,

George H. Rothacker

to have the power to veto actions enacted by trustees if those actions even begin to violate the mission and the mandate of the foundation.”

After speaking with Melanie, I was much relieved by the news of the joint project between Canada and Russia that could set an example for expansion of improved relationships between countries worldwide. Though the polar alliance will be temporary, since the area will freeze over again in decades, the planting of trees and crops between these regions give me hope, as does the thought of actually seeing a mature forest of trees as they spread together in an embrace across planet Earth.

Hopefully, I will live long enough to see the fruits of the labor that I shared with my stepfather.

Episode Thirteen

November 13, 2063

The following is an excerpt of the speech delivered by the keynote speaker, Dr. Kenji Almasi, the current CEO of The Perpetual Canopy Foundation at its annual meeting. It was presented to more than 300 world leaders at The Global Climate Citadel in Reykjavik, Iceland on November 8, 2063. Dr. Almasi was recently selected as the President and Executive Director, replacing Dr. Elara Vance, who announced her retirement in September. Although only 37 years of age and the youngest member of the board, he was selected because of his performance as the Executive Director of the Sovereign Wealth Fund, Norway's Global Pension Fund, which included multi-century trusts that confirmed his competence in the safeguarding the core investments of the fund.

His selection by the PCF was based on his authorship of a white paper that provided the framework for the implementation of the global Robot Data Taxation system, which has become the primary, non-punitive funding source for the Universal Basic Asset, or UBA, that ensures that AI and Quantum computing are used to optimize deployment of supply chains for sustainability rather than the monitoring or controlling of recipients.

Welcome!

For those of you who don't know of me, I'm Dr. Kenji Almasi, and my mission in life has most likely been defined by my name. Since my brother was born before me, and my mother was of Japanese descent, she named me Kenji, which translates to "wise second son" in Japanese. My last name, Almasi, is passed down from my father's Swahili/Arabic heritage and means "diamond," a substance that signifies enduring value and the purest transparency.

My expertise is in blended finance and management, and my work thus far has been in safeguarding the fortunes of the wealthy world citizens as well as those of working men and women who might also share in profits generated by intelligent robotics systems.

George H. Rothacker

The memoir provided to each of you in your packet, was passed along to me by Dr. Elara Vance, the past Executive Director and Trust Manager of the The Perpetual Canopy Foundation. It predates the formation of the PCF program, and serves as a personal account of the foundation's conception as proposed by George Stanbelt, a visionary artist, writer and philanthropist who passed away in April 2047. The memoir was updated by his stepson, Wayd Emma, who managed and expanded on Stanbelt's legacy.

Accompanying the document, I've also provided the list of names and short biographies of the founding legacy members as well as the total amount of the interest compounded gifts made to the foundation. Many of those listed have since passed away, but also provided additional bequests to the PCF in their wills. Because of their generosity, we have been able to accelerate our mission to include projects previously thought unattainable prior to the next century.

Our initial covenant was to address the negative effects of climate change and the cooling of the ocean's, the cleansing of its floor and the decarbonization of Earth's atmosphere. In only 15 years the PCF has accomplished a great deal more than planned, including the repopulation of the oceans with sea life. While trees were growing and consuming CO₂, human-crafted coral reefs were being constructed that would withstand any future heatwaves. Over the past several years the manufactured reefs have become home to natural coral larvae, many varieties of fish families and young crustacea introduced into the water surrounding the reefs, a process that naturally would have taken decades, but may now take only a few more years to repopulate to a level dating back to the mid-20th century.

Using Quantum Trajectory Modeling we've also begun deploying systems to accurately analyze asteroids and their near-earth trajectories. Over the next few years, this system will be operational and make it possible for the foundation to build a canopy of space-based quantum sensors and deep-space radar systems with the architecture and data shared among all nations.

This program does more than protect the Earth from annihilation from objects in space, but also prevents governments from using the technology in ways not beneficial to the world as a whole. It's therefore possible that because of the transparency of this and other foundation-owned programs, inter-state hostilities and warfare amongst countries will become irrational

due to the mutual dependencies of the technologies of all nations.

We can't yet guarantee a unified outcome, but we can trust that through the QC mandates agreed upon by you, as well as other world leaders, the outcome will become sacrosanct, immutable and unbreakable.

We've also included within your packets a document that details the development of a proposed "dual economy" which will provide every person on the planet with essential health care, nourishment, housing and care when aging. This tax will be levied on work done by robots and AI, but not on human toil, and it will be charged world-wide and administered globally to guarantee the four basic fundamental needs afforded every human on Earth.

We at the foundation realize that humans are essentially goal oriented and require incentives in order to work at their best, and while the UBA provides the economic floor, the perpetual trust encourages and promotes massive private wealth accumulation above the UBA's basic standards. Humans who prove their worth by furthering innovation, expanding use of specialized labor, the creation of high-art, and complex problem-solving, will be rewarded with discretionary income — *not without limits*, but enough for them to enjoy fulfilling lives in the time allotted to them.

As originally conceived, the 500-year project imagined by Mr. Stanbelt and moved forward by his stepson Wayd, was daunting to early founders and investors who struggled to embrace the complexities of the project. But fortunately, it now seems that much of the heavy-lifting was done in only the first 15 years after its founding, and the remainder possibly carried out in less than 30 years. We also know that our predictions are often faulty, and that the universe doesn't function on human timelines so, at best, we may only have paused the inevitability of disaster, and require the remaining 450 years of legacy for maintenance.

Please note that team workers have begun passing out cards and pens you may use for questions you may have after reviewing the materials in your packet.

After a 30-minute refreshment break, the team will collect your cards after which I will attempt to address as many of your concerns as possible during the final hour of our meeting.

George H. Rothacker

Episode Fourteen

March 15, 2098

*An Addendum to George Stanbelt's Original Memoir
recorded by the Secretary of Records of the
500-Year Perpetual Canopy Foundation*

*I*n commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of the Perpetual Canopy Foundation, a meeting of shareholders of the PCF is being held on Orbiting Nexus, a massive, zero-gravity research and governance station located at the Earth-Moon, L-5 Lagrange Point. The venue has been selected due to the PCF's mission away from planetary protection and defense systems, to species preservation.

The political divide is therefore separated from all Earthly governments, reinforcing the PCF's role in creating the Secular Covenant for humanity from a neutral, sovereign and unassailable territory, beyond Earth's atmosphere.

The keynote speech is delivered by Rumi Sharma, who now holds the title of Chief Systems Steward. This lead position was redefined in 2073, as the day-to-day operations of the foundation shifted from human management to one guided by the Varilus quantum computing system.

Sharma is a renowned Cybernetic Ethicist who has spent most of his career creating bridges between machine intelligence and moral philosophy. His selection as the Chief Systems Steward was based on his proven track record of maintaining the integrity of the PCF's Secular Covenant – the commitment to Intergenerational Justice.

He begins his talk by presenting the major accomplishments of the project over the last half-century, before switching to the irony of the foundation's most fascinating success.

“Since I have been appointed to my new position, I've been made aware that the legacies of the wealthy who had decided NOT to invest heavily in the PCF initiatives, have proven to have experienced exponential financial growth in comparison to those who have invested. Many of those who ventured along on their own course have actually expanded their legacies beyond those who have chosen to save the Earth and protect humanity from

technological dominance.

“The unfortunate truth surrounding their financial success was that our organization removed all systemic risk necessary for their high-risk ventures to yield massive, guaranteed returns, while the PCF, conversely, was locked into lower-yielding, perpetual public assets such as tree plantings, infrastructure and the development of programs that benefited all of humankind through its commitment to developing a system of universal basic assets.

“Those who have continued to invest in the PCF were driven by many goals, but our selling point was that their legacies would continue far longer by their investment with us, although in less than three generations we’ve discovered that many of those who have not invested in our mission, have succeeded in continuing their legacies through the creation of their own foundations which Rockefeller and Carnegie had done in previous centuries.

“Although PCF has accomplished far more than all of their personally managed programs, we realize that we cannot continue to rely on altruism for the next 450 years of our journey, and that we must introduce a new class of non-transferable Stewardship Equity incentives for our original investors, as well as to their direct descendants.

“This initiative will provide PCF descendants a legacy of sovereignty that operates above the Universal Basic Assets floor, providing additional rewards of guaranteed access and influence within the universal system. Instead of receiving cash dividends, these family members will have a voice in the direction of services to the planet as well as PCF administered services such as advanced fusion energy access and enhanced health protocol.

“Contrary to the beliefs of many, the wealth created by the hyper-successful non-investors is now the largest source of taxable automated labor funding of the UBA economy. In this way, the PCF doesn’t need to seize the wealth of the billionaires, it simply mandates the economic stability that their wealth depends upon be funded by a fraction of their wealth to achieve global stability.

“It’s not enough that we can claim that a stable world is immensely more profitable to non-investors than a world in conflict. We must demand it and provide additional incentives for the families of the those whose acted with courage to assure an environment conducive to the building of wealth 50

years later.

“Our coffers are full, and the use of our funds is dictated by our board that now includes several selected descendants of our founders. We are no longer dependent on the discretionary funding of the wealthy, and since our systems are provided as a public service to all, we are not threatened by those who would rather fight us, than to join us in our mission.”

This segment of Sharma’s talk immediately went viral.

Some reacted to it as a commitment by PCF to advocate socialism, while others realized how their lives were vastly improved by the Foundation’s accomplishment thus far. For the less-successful descendants of those who depended on the services of the Foundation, they felt empowered and rewarded by the Foundation’s nod to them in honor of the courage and investment granted to the world by their forebears.

Those non-investors who flaunted their new wealth based on the generosity of their ancestral gifts were not only acknowledged, but rewarded by the commitment of Sharma, who made a mandate that their names be linked to the common good of the global community and thus responsible for the creation of a better world.

Unfortunately, George Standbelt’s and his stepson Wayd Emma’s input for the program had faded to a footnote in Wikipedia. Standbelt’s significance as painter and writer was likewise diminished by the termination of many of the websites maintained by his stepson that brought him to prominence decades after his death. Once Wayd sold the house and barn, his nieces and nephew detached themselves immediately from their grandfather’s grasp, and except for paintings hung in their houses, or accidentally discovered in museums, universities and galleries around the world.

The sale of Stanbelt’s paintings and pen and ink drawings had reached record highs at auction in 2054, when his “Movies and Music of Hollywood” series was purchased at Sotheby’s for \$268,000. The artist’s family took full advantage of the increased price of his work to sell off several paintings and drawings from major galleries profiting between \$6,000 to \$20,000 from each transaction. Of his books still listed with Ingram, only three remained

in print as Wayd had discontinued the storage management fees of his stepfather's less successful titles and they had long ago disappeared from online purchase.

There was a brief reawakening of the public awareness in regard to George Stanbelt's art after a story was published in the *Princeton University Press* about his series of paintings of 20th Century American Writers, now owned by the University, and painted between the years 2013 and 2026. No mention of his later novels made the article into Press, blogs or podcasts, or his masterminding of the concept for the 500-Year Legacy Program, the precursor to The Perpetual Canopy Foundation.

Lasting legacies are nearly impossible to predict as they are the rebirth of artists and writers who have struggled with their craft as they face the inevitability of obscurity. The 17th century Dutch artist, Johannes Vermeer, had only a modest success in his hometown before his disappearance from view for nearly 200 years, his name forgotten until a French art critic rediscovered his work in 1860 leading to a massive reassessment.

Franz Kafka published only a few short stories during his lifetime, and instructed his friend and literary agent, Max Brod, to burn all of his unfinished manuscripts including *The Trial*, *The Castle*, and *Amerika* after his death. Brod didn't, and thus Kafka's acclaim and influence grew well into the 21st century.

And Vincent Van Gogh sold only one painting in his lifetime. His style wasn't appreciated by the public or the critics. It was only through the efforts of his sister-in-law, who after inheriting Vincent's work, that the artist earned fame grew into one of the most influential artists of the modern era.

As it would turn out George Stanbelt's writing legacy past would become visible again as the canopy he envisioned covered the Earth as humans and technology managed to merge into one in the year 2188. For the young, it seemed like a change of seasons, but for the older citizens of the world it appeared miraculous, like an ancient ornate clock with every mechanical feature on its face in perfect timing with the rest. Snow fell when and where it should and disagreements between countries vanished. Though people everywhere still had human flaws, the severity of the flaws were less noticeable or severe.

Over the past several generations, humans have begun to evolve into better versions of themselves as the darker traits they inherited have become

less pronounced, as enabled by design to preserve the better ones that keep us human. The man or woman who worked with stone or wood, was enabled to continue work the lathe, hammer or chisel to provide a wall or a table for the woman who could sew or paint. Children weren't forced into being other than who they were. Those who loved sports could play sports and those who longed to harmonize could find someone else near with whom to sing. When the street filled with snow, the neighbors helped clear each others walks for no other reason than it was what humans were to do.

When an accident happened and someone died, those connected to that person grieved for their loss as well as for the loss of others dealing with the loss. Though their beliefs were often different, no one tried to change the course of another's life, only to modify it as best they could to assist the other. Some were still more kind and generous than others, but few were vicious and no one chose war over peace.

There had been arguments between scientists, clergy and philosophers of how this all might work. Would humans be less of themselves than they once were, and would harmony destroy the individual? Would there be free will or would we be like robots, not caring or having the ability to think, feel sadness or exhilaration? Or could it be done without a loss of what we thought of as humanity?

The change had been anticipated by the quantum computing network that populated the exosphere. The network was planned for installation in 2096 to not interfere with human activity. Since then, it had created on its own millions of scenarios of how humanity might be *improved* without be *remanufactured*. On the Earth, scientists along with quantum computers and AI were experimenting with synthetic humanoids manufactured in their labs on which they tested modifications of human traits that could provide improved outcomes for humanity. The directive for these experiments was preservation, not elimination of the natural order. In accordance with human mandate, humankind would still be in control, but could be adjusted to better improve decision-making for the good of all, while maintaining the feeling pleasure, peace, satisfaction and purpose.

Insects, birds, fish and creatures, large and small, would remain untouched. And humans would remain the highest of the natural order. But they were vulnerable and still needed to protect themselves and their progeny from harm.

If I Live to Be 100

“How could this be done?” was the question posed by all, but answered by mandates created by quantum computers, the first being that humans needed to evolve without a lack of vengeance, but only preservation. The second would be that humans would no longer be capable of cruelty. The third, and most important, would be a heightened and common sense of empathy.

“What would be the limits set for the human id and ego?”

It was decided that the ego should stand much as it is, but that the id be modified to prevent impulsive acts that lead to cruelty, vengeance and selfishness.

“What would the timetable be for such changes to go into effect?”

The quantum computer mediator suggested three to five generations or 60 to 100 years.

“And then what?”

Let nature take its course...to some degree.

“And what if it doesn’t work?”

We’ll have time to make changes along the way. That will be the easy part.

“Could it all be in place within the 500-year term originally conceived?”

That seems plausible, and perhaps sooner. But it also provides room for improvement and positive revisions.

“Will the Earth last long enough for this to happen?”

We’ve already progressed so far, the rest should be easy.”

George H. Rothacker

Episode Fifteen

April 5, 2298

As recorded by the Secretary of Historic Records, Jan Douglas.

For the 250th anniversary of the Perpetual Canopy Foundation, the Oracle Prime, a non-human holographic avatar generated beyond Earthly borders, provided an update to humans on Earth along with those living in lunar outposts, colonies recently developed on Mars, and interplanetary technology centers in the exosphere. The broadcast was delivered using a simplified version of Global English translated into the cultural dialects understood by the Global Axiomatic Interface, the primary working language of the PCF.

The Oracle Prime became the Chief Systems Steward of the PCF since the retirement of the Foundation's human leader, Rumi Sharma, and has remained the voice of the UBA's Interplanetary Management System since 2115. By its leadership, the Oracle, over the last 90 years, has assisted in the establishment of a voluntary program of gene enhancement intended to expand the human species' cognitive empathy and complex problem-solving capabilities. In addition, the children, after becoming adults, would naturally gain the personal vision to understand and value long-term outcomes over immediate gain, one of the species greatest limitations.

In 2150, the program was first introduced to expectant mothers and fathers as a way to boost disease immunity in their children and enable them as adults to adjust to the challenges of rapid change. Although not mandated by every government, in 2167 the PCF required young adults to receive an Enhanced Trait Certificate as a prerequisite for working in any of its governance sections. The DNA modifications could be performed, at no cost to children within five years of their birth, but if a certificate was not received by them or their parents, they would be prevented from working in any but the lowest sections of the Foundation's programs, even if they chose

to undergo therapy later in their lives.

The logic by administrators of the modification program was that once the first generation of genetically enhanced children began to demonstrate superior learning skills, they could then demonstrate the ability to rapidly solve problems collaboratively as they entered their teens and joined the workforce or went on to academic institutions. The modifications also insured their emotional stability so that expectant parents would question, “Can I justify crippling my child’s potential by withholding a safe, free, and globally accepted advantage?”

Over the next several generations nearly every child worldwide had received the genetic enhancer prior to birth and as they came to maturity they retained the modified genes and passed them along naturally to their own children without their sons and daughters needing further enhancement.

Adults who opted for modification at a later date were welcome to receive the therapy as well, but were also limited in the scope of work required by those who possessed an Enhanced Trait Certificate.

By the time of the Oracle Prime’s speech, 97% of humans had received some portion of enhancement.

In addition to the human augmentations, quantum computing systems had become more robust and in doing so became the executor of the laws created by humankind. Their function was to preserve, protect and enforce the moral mandates that threatened the sacred covenants and in doing so, threaten human life or welfare.

With the time set by the world clock, the speech by the Oracle Prime was broadcast precisely at 8:00 AM, and was repeated once every five hours, until the end of the following day. Lights positioned in the skies within the various time zones near to the Earth’s horizon emitted a flash and dimmed in a repetitive pattern, and then continue through three, one-minute sequences, prior to the Oracle’s address. A similar pattern was repeated on the moon, Mars and within the interplanetary communities.

Below is a transcript of the Oracle’s speech:

Citizens of the Earth, Mars and the Orbital Nexus:

Two hundred and fifty years ago, our ancestors stood at the edge of extinction, paralyzed by a simple paradox: ‘We knew what was right, but we lacked the wisdom to do it. We poisoned the air we breathed and starved the children we loved. Our systems were built on scarcity...of food, shelter and well-being, and scarcity demanded conflict.

Today, on the 250th Anniversary of the covenant created by the Perpetual Canopy Foundation, we announce that the long-term solution to that paradox has been nearly completed .

We have secured the floor of human dignity. And developed a new quest for our species.

Today, we close the first chapter on our fight for survival, and we announce the terms of our self-chosen, self-imposed destiny.

The atmosphere is stabilized. The ocean floor pulses with new life. The Universal Basic Asset is inviolable. And the gently delivered refinement of the human spirit, passed down through generations, has secured our tranquility. The time has come to answer the question that only a perfectly stable world can ask: What is humanity’s great, shared purpose, now that we are theoretically forever safe?

The Oracle paused, as if searching for answers. It then outlined The Planetary Commons Mandate, extending it to those living on non-sovereign celestial bodies, issued and financed by PCF as we continued into the second half of our 500-year mandate.

After describing the responsibilities contained within the license, the Oracle spoke about the 500-Year Legacy Program as proposed but its two founders.

Should we forget those who brought us here today – those original adventurers who entrusted their fortunes to secure a legacy that has just now reached to include half of its destiny?

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There were the Gates and Buffet families that began before us who later directed their ancestral funds to the PCF program, as well as thousands titans of industry, science, education and the arts who gave freely, beyond their gifts to their own children and grandchildren, to create equity for generations of populations of various nations and descents who all can now live in a world safe from plunder, slaughter and corruption.

Hopefully, this will encourage even more commitment to long-term giving to the PCF. We have not survived on our own. Without the gifts of those who came before us, I would not exist, as well as any of you. And if we somehow did survive, it may not have been in a land or interplanetary-sovereignty of plenty. Over the past 250 years, many of your ancestors may have been struck down by plagues, floods, fire, famine or warfare with few or none of you ever existing. The Earth may have become a barren planet, naked of life for thousands of years, if not for all of time.

Instead of empty space, we, in only 250 years, have enabled humans to be living and working on the surface of Earth's moon, building cities on Mars and securing our planet from locations outside of the Earth's exosphere.

For whom should we give thanks to for this gift than to George Stanbelt and Wayd Emma, visionaries who without the money, wealth, patronage or scientific acumen to finance or construct such a mission, were able to overcome the odds and find one shared spirit who listened to their plan and built a bridge to many others.

Many of you have never heard of George Stanbelt, since his name has remained unmentioned by the foundation. Over the centuries his paintings and writings have lost most of their audience, but the board of the PCF has now rectified its neglect of him and his stepson, Wayd, whose legacies remain a cornerstone of the foundation that we've built.

In appreciation and recognition of Standbelt's and Wayd Emma's accomplishment, the board of The Perpetual Canopy Foundation has retroactively placed both Stanbelt and Emma on the list of legacy donors, and has included their descendants with privileges, equivalent to those given to original legacy donors.

George H. Rothacker

In addition, both will receive posthumously the Rumi Sharma Humanitarian Award, which provides a monetary prize of \$1 billion that has been donated back to the PCF by the Stanbelt and Emma families.

At this point the Oracle spoke of plans for the next 250 years, including the widening of the safety net guarding Earth and the outer planets, before concluding:

What is humanity's great, shared purpose, now that we are forever safe?

We look back at two centuries of sunrises. We see the founders, Stanbelt and Emma, not as gods, but as stewards. They saw the ancient flaw: the magnificent brain, tied to the short-term heart. The genius that built the grid also built the wall; the kindness that fed a village, also starved a continent.

They gave us the covenant which became the Perpetual Canopy, a 500-year promise etched not on stone, but in the immutable truth as defined by the Quantum Ledger: the operating system of civilization.

Their first sacrifice was their wealth. Their second, was their faith—trusting the machine to be the perfect memory of their intent, to be the relentless, impartial execution of benevolence. The third, their promise, to be faithful to the quest

They, and we now, realize that the machine could only guarantee survival. It could not teach us wisdom.

That was the human task.

The legacy is not the money, or the power, or the trees. The legacy is us. The continued, free, and purposeful maintenance of the perfect, stable system, by the perfected, feeling soul.

Our purpose, now, is to move beyond mere rightness and explore the unbounded field of goodness. The next 250 years begins now.

Episode Sixteen

A Conclusion as transcribed by the Secretary of
Historic Records, Jan Douglas.

As the Oracle Prime stated in its address to the world's population in 2098, a sense of "rightness" had been achieved. Ultimately the PCF enabled the Earth to achieve zero-variance energy distribution and a perfect ethical allocation of resources. Its governance measured and conquered carbon draw-down, the yield of a robotic tax and the stability of planetary shields. It also provided a manageable evolution of humankind, leading to a gentler and wiser version of itself, making life more predictable, systemic, and functioning as a flawless, tireless machine.

But in its perfected "rightness" a void was created. The founders, the men and women who signed the original pledged or covenant, never conceived of the Universal Benefit Asset for humans in its fullness. Their personal trusts failed to thrive in comparison to the general market, as we learned. Their direct financial legacy was eclipsed by the abundance their sacrifice birthed.

Their true contribution, or the Second Legacy, was the ultimate inefficiency: *Time*.

The PCF secured the future so that the current generation—the wiser, less caustic children, had the freedom to waste time. *Time* to paint a beautiful, unnecessary mural on a newly constructed wall in a remote part of the Earth or in the solar system. *Time* to spend a redundant hour comforting a neighbor over the passing of a pet. *Time* to compose a new symphony whose only value is its ability to create a momentary, illogical sadness.

This is *Goodness*. It is inefficient. It is non-quantifiable. It is the spontaneous act of compassion that the machine could never mandate, and can never fully measure.

Shakespeare is not remembered because his vocabulary was efficient, but because his work contained beautiful, messy truths. Socrates' legacy is not a ledger of assets, but the unpredictable, viral transmission of curiosity.

Our role—the in the Second Legacy, and our purpose in the next 250

years—is not to improve the machine. It is to guard the Fragility of the *Goodness* earned by perpetually maintaining the System of Rightness. We guard the floor so humanity can focus on the ceiling. We secure the planet so humanity can be free to love it, argue over it, and build its next, beautiful, completely unnecessary creation. We gave them the world. What they choose to do with the day is the final measure of our success.”

George Stanbelt and the original founders of the Perpetual Canopy Fund did not seek wealth; they sought certainty. George Stanbelt’s rewards were never achieved by an accounting of the number of paintings sold, books purchased or in the praise of critics. And for the rest it needn’t have been posted in ledgers of their personal trusts, which have long been surpassed, but in the perpetual solvency of the planet itself. Their legacy is the only true immortality available to humanity: to have their original moral compass remain the guiding star for a civilization that, thanks to their courage, is now forever safe.

In the journal of George Stanbelt begun in 2025 at the age of 78, he wrote:

Since I’m an irreligious man, I envision no St. Peter’s gate, and no loving God that will welcome me into heaven.

When I’m dead, I’m dead.

But then recently I’ve conjured...maybe not?

If some part of me can walk through a doorway that will allow my existence to last even a few more years after death, I can see a loophole through time and space. If, perhaps, a book of mine that someone reads will touch the heart of the reader and lead him or her along a path, other than the only option that would exist without me having written the work. Or perhaps a painting or two might remain on the wall of a grandchild’s house, reminding them and those around them that I once was a necessary part of their life.

And what if I live to be a hundred and still remain strong enough to

If I Live to Be 100

continue to create ideas that will last beyond me?

I've taken this matter to heart, and will use what time is left to light the sky like the stars that have faded from existence but still shine upon us.

Does any of this matter?

I hope it does.

We should all hope it does!
