

Infinite Time

Growing up, I wasn't a popular kid. My social skills were poor and I cried easily. As my mom used to say, I was "too sensitive." So I was the target of much teasing. Perhaps most damaging of all, I stank at sports and I didn't even find them all that interesting. I preferred TV, or books once I learned to read.

I grew up on a little one-block suburban street in Livingston, New Jersey: Balmoral Drive. Growing up at the same time as me on that block were a bunch of other boys, all pretty good at sports, and most of them physically tougher than me, though thank God I had some rudimentary fighting skills or I'd have gotten beat up a lot more. (As it was, I got beat up plenty. I was the guy that the other boys liked to "gang up on" now and again. Fucking brutes.)

I don't remember exactly how I met Mark G. He didn't go to the same elementary school I did – he went to the local Catholic school instead – but he lived a couple of blocks away from me on Falcon Road, and he was my age (whereas, strangely, most of the other boys on Balmoral Drive were exactly a year ahead of me at school). Mark was a gentle soul and – best of all – not obsessed with sports like every other friggin' male kid in my universe. So we easily became friends. We hung out at his house and played board games and stuff. He was a nice kid.

I guess I must have been six or seven years old – old enough to read the TV show listings in *Cue* magazine, which came to my house regularly, but not old enough to read the letter from Mark's parents that arrived in our mailbox. My mother read it out loud to me. It said, essentially, that their whole family liked me very much, that they were glad I was Mark's friend, and I was invited to visit again the following Saturday morning. It was a lovely little letter!

I think, by then, I'd only known Mark a few months at most, and had only visited him at his house once or twice. I felt pleased about receiving the letter and, actually, I think it arrived on a Friday! The prospect of going over to Mark's house the next morning was fun!

But then, I'd also recently seen a very special listing in *Cue* magazine. Mighty Mouse was going to be on at 10:30 Saturday morning. This too was exciting.

So Saturday morning held a great deal of promise. When I went to bed that night, I had a sense that the following morning was going to be rich and special, though I could not imagine exactly how it would unfold. Really, I was quite thrilled. It was all so magical. The invitation, AND Mighty Mouse!

It wasn't until I woke up in the actual reality of Saturday morning that I realized there was a little problem. If I went to Mark's house, I would miss Mighty Mouse. And I guess, honestly, being a totally TV-addicted kid – TV was smack in the center of my world at the time – I was more attracted to the idea of watching Mighty Mouse.

So I dawdled. I procrastinated. I didn't get dressed. I think the letter had specified that they wanted me to go over there at 9 or 9:30 a.m. but I remained in my pajamas and kind of wandered around the house

aimlessly, ashamed to admit to my mom, and perhaps even to myself, that I really wanted to watch Mighty Mouse.

My mother was perplexed. Here I had a friend – a real friend, a nice boy – and I was acting like I didn't care. Mark's parents called to find out if I was coming. I heard my mom say something to the effect that she didn't know what was wrong with me, why I hadn't left the house yet. Slowly, the reality seeped into my consciousness that I was behaving in a disrespectful way to Mark and his family, that there was some annoyance and resentment forming like a cloud with me at the center of it, like a foul mist engulfing me in my sweaty pajamas.

In the end, I did not make it to Mark's house – nor did I watch Mighty Mouse, because by 10:30 I just felt too ashamed. My mother was very disappointed in me for not making an effort to go see a friend that was waiting to play with me. She deemed me lazy; she could see no other explanation or excuse for my puzzling behavior. Didn't I ever want to keep a friend?

And in fact, Mark and his family never forgave me. Our nascent friendship faded quickly after that episode. I felt very ashamed about it. I had secretly put Mighty Mouse ahead of Mark! For over 50 years, I never told anyone about this.

Reflecting on it now, I think that perhaps, being so young, I may have been possessed by some vague wispy memories of how time works on the astral plane, the pre-birth/post-death realm, where in an analogous situation it might have been possible for me to do both things – watch Mighty Mouse and go see Mark. That is, a realm where time conflicts didn't and indeed couldn't exist; a realm where it's possible to do and have everything at once. Maybe that's why I felt so thrilled about what Saturday morning held when I went to bed on Friday night.

Like I say, my sports abilities and social skills may have been under par, but I wasn't stupid. I was good at math, and I knew how to apply logic. But I wasn't moved to think logically in that situation.

So that was one of my first-ever (if not THE first ever, for me) earthly life lessons about making choices, and how one choice always precludes another, and every time I walk a particular road, I forgo the opportunity to take a different road.

This has been a very tough lesson for me to really get, and at age 64, I'm not even sure it's entirely sunk in yet. I still often get paralyzed when I'm faced with a multiplicity of appealing (or at least reasonable) choices, afraid of missing out on the ones I don't choose. But then, of course, not choosing also becomes a choice, albeit usually the most self-defeating one, because then time runs out (another lesson of earthly life!) and the better choices are gone.

I think, by the time I die, I'm really going to understand, way down in my bones, these truths about time and choices and limitations. But then I'll be in the astral realm again where it's all much different, and my companion souls will look at me and say, "Hey, take it easy, what's your hurry? Why so intense? Don't you realize you have infinite time?"