



CHAPTER FOUR

The Other Side

Shortly after Brandon's obituary was published I made a habit of reviewing the online guest book on a daily basis, looking for new entries from friends and family. This "e-book" was furnished by the newspaper and linked to Brandon's online obituary. Still in great pain, I found a measure of comfort in reading what others had to say about Brandon. Little did I know at the time that this cyber-venue would soon yield an important connection. About two weeks after the online service began I noticed entries from two new people, James Linton and Eadie Ostlund.

James' entry said, "We were hiking behind your son and his group of friends on the day of the tragedy. One of them flagged us down for help but it was too late – we are so sorry. If you want to talk with us, we will share all the details of what happened that day."

In reading their responses, I soon realized that James and Eadie intended to make contact but were unable to locate us. Not knowing our last name, the couple eventually pieced things together after finding the online obituary and linked guest book. Now my mind was really racing. What, I wondered, would they have to say about their experiences that fateful day? Their entries provided lightly veiled references to something mysterious and otherworldly. Who were these people and what was their story? Painful or not, I needed to know.

Since the online book furnished addresses for all entries, I was able to send an e-mail response to both James and Eadie. In my initial notes, I provided background information on our family and Brandon in particular. Just a day or two later, I received a response from both of them. James, a musician, indicated that he was about to release a new CD, which would include a song written in our son's memory titled "Mountain of Sorrow." Given Brandon's love for the bass guitar and general affection for music, I knew that a song would be the perfect way to honor him. Through her e-mail, I learned that Eadie was James' agent and fiancée.

My wife Susie and I met James and Eadie for the first time in March of 2004. We came to see one of James' live musical performances, held at a large bookstore to promote his new CD. After this meeting we began to see the couple frequently. They were both warm and caring people, and I could immediately tell there was something unique about James, an inner spark or intuitive sense. Reflecting on the past, he shared a story that seemed to reinforce my perception about him.

James explained that, as a young man, he had attended a church where it was common for parishioners to join hands after the service and share their "inspirations" with one another. On a particular Sunday, James intuited that a young lady was pregnant and naively shared his foresight with the group. The girl immediately denied this possibility, leading James to apologize under duress. A few months later it came out that the girl was indeed pregnant, and it was also revealed that the father

was a youth pastor. I came to appreciate this aspect of James' personality – he was always very direct and honest and held nothing back.

James and Eadie later spoke with us about Brandon, sharing their specific recollections of what took place on January 10, 2004. The couple noted that they'd been hiking in the McDowell Mountains that day with friends and followed Brandon's group for about three hours.

Eadie was strangely drawn to Brandon and his friends and felt the need to stay near the boys. Eadie recalled experiencing mixed emotions, ranging from delight upon seeing the teenagers laughing and joking, to an inexplicable sense of anxiety. She did not understand these feelings, yet they persisted all day. What was it, I wondered, that drew Eadie to Brandon's group? Was she an unwitting aide in a cosmic process, beyond her immediate surface awareness?

As Eadie shared, "I'd heard about a mountain lion attack that occurred in California just one week earlier, so I packed a knife, cell phone, water, and protein bars. I was also thinking about bringing ACE bandages, but Jim said I was going overboard. About an hour into the hike, we noticed Brandon's group – they were laughing and running most of the time, just about what you'd expect of teenagers having fun."

Brandon and his friends moved at a fast clip, creating separation from James and Eadie's group. As Eadie noted, "We saw the boys throughout the day, on a pace that was typically about twenty to thirty minutes ahead of us. I continued to keep an eye out for them and remembered that one boy's red shirt was particularly easy to spot. [Stuart Garney was wearing the red shirt.] Mike, one of the men in our group, wanted to venture around the back of the mountain through a wash, but I was reluctant because I wanted to stay close to the boys. I just kept thinking about the possibility of an emergency. I worried about someone falling, hitting their head, breaking an ankle, or encountering an animal. I just felt that we would be safer in a big group, rather than in two separate groups.

My worry became a bit of a joke amongst the adults as Mike said, 'Yeah, let's take the back route up the wash and beat them to the summit, so we can scare the piss out of them. We'll show those kids who gets there first!' At that point we all started laughing and took Mike's suggested route. The whole time, though, I just wanted to reach the top as quickly as possible.

"For about an hour, I had this anxious feeling and wanted to get to the top in order to see the other group again. We had to make numerous stops because Mike's girlfriend, Laurie, was suffering from asthma or shortness of breath. At one point they almost decided to turn back but opted to continue hiking, albeit at a slower pace. We would likely have met the boys as they reached the summit if we had been able to maintain our original pace."

As James and Eadie reached the summit, they saw one of the boys waving for help in the distance. As Eadie shared, "When we made it to the top I saw a boy waving his arms, jumping up and down. [This proved to be Stuart.] At first I thought he was saying 'hello' but soon realized that he was calling for help. At this point I knew something was seriously wrong and immediately called 911. Mike ran ahead to meet the boys, while I stayed put in an effort to retain my cell phone signal. Despite these efforts, my call dropped about halfway through the conversation and I was forced to call back two more times. The person I spoke to failed to grasp the extreme urgency of the situation, as I had to repeatedly stress our need for immediate help. Jim, Laurie, and I started moving toward the boys, following Mike's path. Mike arrived at the spot where Stu and Brandon were located about ten to fifteen minutes after leaving our group. Upon his arrival, Mike yelled back, 'He's not breathing – call 911 again to send a chopper!' At this point I knew that someone in their group had died."

When Jim, Eadie, and Laurie approached the group of boys, they saw Brandon lying on his back, pale white. It was obvious to the adults that he had already passed away, but they didn't know how to share this with the boys, who seemed to be in a state of confusion and perhaps denial.

Stuart Garney, Brandon's best friend, and another friend, Chris, had been working vigilantly, performing CPR for over thirty minutes in an effort to resuscitate him. Eadie encouraged the boys to head back down the mountain and most of them did, but Stuart refused to leave Brandon's side. The EMTs arrived soon thereafter and also tried to revive Brandon, but it was too late. Hearing this account brought back all the pain once again.

Eadie continued, noting, "I remembered feeling bad for the family, knowing that the parents would soon hear from the authorities about their son. I also remember feeling terrible for those young men and what they had to go through that day, losing their friend and not being able to save him. I had this feeling of guilt inside for not paying attention to my sense of anxiety and worry. What if we had arrived sooner? What if we had stayed closer to the other group? Could we have intervened and helped prevent this or at least provided CPR sooner? I found it ironic that Brandon had asthma, since it was our concern over Laurie's shortness of breath that kept us from meeting up with Brandon's group sooner."

James said that the area where they found Brandon's body seemed hallowed, and that he sensed his spirit "hovering above." I then shared my uncle's earlier affirmation, where he noted that my father had met Brandon upon his passing.

In response James said, "Not only was your father there with Brandon, but a host of angels as well."

Continuing, James noted, "As I stepped away from Brandon and allowed the EMTs to work on him, I first sensed him hovering. I didn't see a person in the flesh *per se* but had a vision in my mind's eye, where the sky opened up and a host of angels was there to welcome him."

James and Eadie sensed a positive spiritual energy all around them. James shared, "To me, the feeling was almost like being on camera; you know that a lot of people are watching but you can't see them. I knew something tragic was happening, yet I felt as if there was an invisible arm around each of us, letting us know 'It's going to be alright.' In fact,

I was drawn to a boy [Stuart] whom I hugged. I then remember saying, 'It's going to be alright, it's going to be alright' even though I knew he [Brandon] was gone. I felt calm and comfort in the midst of chaos.

"As an aside, I was very angry on my way over to meet the boys because the 911 operator didn't seem to understand that something serious was happening. When my friend Mike told me that Brandon wasn't breathing, I actually remember yelling to Eadie, 'Tell them to send a damned chopper now!' When I arrived where Brandon was lying, however, I felt a strange sense of calm. As the EMTs arrived and I stepped away, the feelings increased."

Hearing James' account made me frustrated for a moment as I wondered once again, "What if the chopper had come sooner?" My snap emotional response was short-lived, and I immediately shot back to the truth: What had taken place was part of the universal plan and there was no alternative. The sense of calm and peace in the midst of such turmoil that James described seemed the ultimate confirmation.

Stu had noted seeing multiple points of strange lights in front of him as he hiked back down the mountain. When I asked him to describe these lights, he said that they were like "auras" or "small colorful orbs." Other friends at the base of the mountain, including Stephen Varns, also noted seeing some "strange twinkling lights" in the area where Brandon died. Maybe something important, maybe not.

One day after the hike, Stuart Garney shared an interesting observation. He felt that it was very strange for the boys to have seen another group in this particular area. Evidently, the boys hiked in that area many times before but had never seen a soul. Also, since they were hiking on unmarked trails, the odds of running into anyone were very slim.

I believe that Brandon had fulfilled his purpose in this life and it was time for him to "go home." I also believe that James, Eadie, and their friends were intended to be there. Their presence brought order to an extreme scene, which helped the boys tremendously. I shudder to think of the additional peril that Stu and the other boys would have faced if

not for these caring adults. Stu was now like my son, and I felt concern for the anguish he had experienced and hoped he'd be alright. I was glad that James was there to give him a hug.

From this point in time forward, we became good friends with James and Eadie and began to see them regularly. James is a gifted, spiritual individual who is always up for a chat about deep topics, like quantum physics or the order of the universe. Eadie is a warm, grounded woman with a practical nature.

Six months after Brandon's passing, my wife and I took a vacation cruise with our son Steven and the boys' friend Stuart Garney. The cruise originated in Galveston, Texas, with stops in Key West, Grand Cayman, and Cozumel. Our hope was for a restful escape that would provide therapy to all after a tumultuous six months.

During days on the ship I typically sat poolside, read books, and found time to meditate. I also spent time reviewing some of my father's writings, seeking to apply some of his meditation suggestions.

I recall sitting alone on one of the last days of the cruise, in the ship library, feeling particularly *connected*. Strangely enough, in a single moment of contemplation, I had an intense feeling that a man would fall overboard. Sitting there quietly, I received a mental image of a person falling by the portal. I recognized that this had not yet happened but felt that it would.

As it turns out, nobody fell from our ship. Just a few days later, however, I was amazed to find a news story about a man who had fallen from another cruise ship. As I continued to read the article, I became even more intrigued by two specific aspects of the story, which seemed particularly coincidental.

First, I immediately recognized the name of the ship, *Carnival Fascination*, since it had been docked next to our vessel in Galveston. Additionally, I remembered that the *Fascination* left port at roughly the same time as our ship. The article also indicated that the man fell overboard at approximately the same time as my meditation hit.

On the evening we returned home my wife, while sitting at the foot of our bed, felt Brandon's presence and then saw him to the right as a "shadowy figure," discernible through her peripheral vision. It was so powerful and seemed so real, but like all visitors from the other side, real and imagined, it was an apparition – tantalizing, unhuggable, strangely confirming, yet lacking the tangibility of flesh and blood. Nonetheless, Susie felt a sense of warmth and comfort that one may not have expected from such an encounter.

On the following morning, we received a call from our new musician friend James Linton, who had been alone all week while Eadie visited relatives in Michigan. During this period, James spent most of his time composing and recording music, and strongly sensed the presence or energy of another. He felt pushed to modify a particular song, which would later become "The Other Side." As James sat down he saw a "shadowy figure" out of his peripheral vision in much the same manner as Susie had, and also (later in his songwriting session) flashes of white light – in fact, multiple points of rapidly moving light that produced something akin to "a vapor trail."

James had experienced accurate precognitive dreams before, but nothing like this. Wondering if he was losing his mind, he kept trying to regroup and snap out of this mental state, but there was no escaping this odd sensation. After accepting the apparent reality of what was taking place, he finally gave in. At this point, James found himself asking the following question out loud: "Okay, Brandon, what do you want me to do?" After this bold affirmation, everything started to flow.

James was guided to modify two main parts of the song, the bass line and lyrics. James' initial bass track was basic by design so as to feature the guitar. Additionally, he did not own a bass guitar so I had loaned him Brandon's instrument, which presented another complication. Since James is left-handed and Brandon was right-handed, James had to play the bass upside down. Initially, this seemed to be a limiting factor. As he began to revise the bass track, however, something very unusual took

place. James started playing an entirely new and more complex line and said, “It felt as if someone else took over while I was playing.” The new track resembled Brandon’s style of playing.

After finishing the bass track James felt *instructed* to “listen to the music without the words.” His original lyrics and music were now completely different – this was entirely new material. The new lyrics, which came to James rapidly, were captured and recorded almost immediately. After finishing the project James told us that “The Other Side” was the best song he’d ever written, but that he didn’t write it. James explained that the song was a gift from Brandon to us, his family.

The Other Side

Hear me—

This isn’t gonna be easy

This isn’t gonna be a cake walk

We’ve got to be prepared to make the sacrifice

Feel me—

You’d better get yourself together

There’s gonna be some stormy weather

We’ve got a date with fate on the other side

On the other side we will shine

The sorrow and the tears left behind

If only I could hold you one more time

Then I would never leave the other side

Touch me—

No debate, you have to trust me

Just realize that it was worth it

You’ll never have to wonder why again

On the other side we will shine

The sorrow and the tears left behind

If only I could hold you one more time

Then I would never leave the other side

You don’t have to wish upon a star

You already know deep within your heart

*Hold onto the truth
And I'll be waiting here for you
On the other side
See me—
Vision is clear now you believe me
You never doubted for a moment
But you were always here on the other side
On the other side we will shine
The sorrow and the tears left behind
If only I could hold you one more time
Then I would never leave the other side
Forevermore by your side*

I found the following verse particularly remarkable: “See me – vision is clear now you believe me.” At the time this song was composed, we had not spoken to James for two weeks and he had no knowledge of Susie’s vision. I also felt compelled to ask James about the meaning behind another verse, “But you were always here on the other side,” which I found somewhat puzzling.

James responded, “As for the verse you don’t understand, I also initially thought it seemed out of place. However, upon further reflection and gut feeling, I think it has a very deep meaning. The preceding line is, ‘You never doubted for a moment.’ This line is almost a precognitive kind of thing. Most of the lyrics seem to address your family and Brandon’s friends in a present tense. It’s like he is trying to let you know he is okay, giving you all advice on how to cope with what’s left of your physical life. Then he comes in with the line, ‘But you were always here on the other side.’ He is speaking from a dimension without the same properties of time that we are in. To us it seems that we are over here and he is over there, when in reality we are all ‘over there.’ This physical existence is just a big illusion. The line is being spoken as if it is in your future and he is saying it as he greets you on the other side. It’s like this is what he says as he sees you, when you cross over – that’s the best way I can describe it.”

James' response reminded me of the puzzling aspect within Steven's astral dream, where Brandon asked him, "Why don't you come visit me more often?" This seemed odd since so little time had passed since his death, at least from our perceptual vantage point. It also implied that Brandon was referring to communication across time, to the future, not just between what we might view as "the living" and "the dead." Lastly, this reminded me of my father's assertion that time and space are essentially human constructs, definitional tools, seemingly applicable to this physical realm but not "true" or "real" in a broader sense. Speaking to one of the initial realizations that will ostensibly become clear to us upon death and transition, my father noted, "The concepts of time and space are quickly broken." Not only was he saying that limiting concepts tied to "existence" in this three-dimensional realm would be cast aside, he was also implying that "life is not life and death is not death."

Continuing, James said, "Keep in mind this song is not meant just for last month or next year or even the next year. The lyrics in this song will continue to hold relevance and the meaning will deepen over time. Many of the lyrics have a prophetic nature about them. The thing I have wondered about a lot is whether or not Brandon's friends have taken the warnings in the song seriously. It seems he was very adamant about the difficulty they will face. I feel this was primarily directed toward his friends, while the comforting words seem to me to be directed more toward you, Susie, and Steve. I may be wrong but that's what I feel."

In fact, in the four years since James perceived this "warning" as directed to Brandon's friends, some of the boys did face severe trials and tribulations, including a second tragic and accidental death in the group (Brandon's being the first).

James cried throughout the process and for several hours afterward. At the time, he didn't know if he was feeling Brandon's pain or ours. James suspected that these sensations might even be tied to our grief or possibly Brandon's inability to ease our pain. James told me that this process let him sense every emotion tied to Brandon.

James explained this process as follows: “While I was writing – in particular, listening to the music without the words – I felt a huge presence and uncontrollable grief. I just could not stop sobbing; I felt heavy, sort of burdened. I also became frustrated because I reached a point where I felt that the song was finished, but I would then be ‘prodded’ by Brandon to continue. It was as if he were saying, ‘That’s not quite it yet!’ When I finally completed the song I felt a huge release, followed by the full realization of what had just happened. This caused me to break down crying again. It was difficult for me to absorb the reality that a spirit had guided the process.

“I also felt a great sense of accomplishment and was overwhelmed knowing that I’d somehow been touched by God. I’d written music my entire life, but this was the first time I absolutely *knew* that the song was something very special. Coincidentally, I also felt a huge kick in the seat of my ego because I didn’t create this song myself.

“When I play ‘The Other Side’ in public, people always react very positively. I recently played at a club when one of the waiters came up to me and said, ‘That’s the best song you’ve played all night!’ I also recall another evening when a fellow artist, Chad Hecklers, told me the exact same thing: ‘That’s the best song yet.’ I took this as high praise, as I’d just finished playing Led Zeppelin’s ‘Going to California.’ Whenever I play this song I know that I’m sending out a very positive energy. I feel honored to know that I’ve been given an opportunity to heal other human beings, even though they may not know me or understand the song’s meaning. People just seem to sense it when they hear it.”

Eadie confirmed seeing the same phenomena whenever James plays the song: “People become very quiet and seem to listen intently to the lyrics, even if they know nothing about the story. When you bring friends who knew Brandon they often become ‘teary-eyed’ while listening to the song, yet they show a sense of hope. They will typically smile back at Jim or me and then back at you two as if to say, ‘It’s okay – he’s still with you in spirit and you will reunite again fully on the other side, one day.’”