

The Rich Spirit of Humanity

By Jonas Cain

Every time you meet someone, a part of that person becomes a part of who you are.

Perhaps through an expanded vocabulary, incorporating something from their mannerisms, or by gaining new knowledge, skills, or resources. Maybe it's by emulating part of their character (or a desire to avoid a part of their character), or the creation of new dreams, visions, or goals. At the very least, encountering another person creates a bookmark in our memory of the specific time and space when two worlds collide. As Carl Jung reminds us, *"The meeting of two personalities is like the contact of two chemical substances: if there is any reaction, both are transformed."*

This was certainly the case when I met Stephanie.

She was 16, wore a black dress with a white floral design, and was playing the drums (even though she was a singer and very much not a drummer).

I was 15, had just finished playing saxophone in the high school winter concert, and walked into the band room to put my instrument away—and there she was banging away on the drums.

I didn't know it at the time, but that moment began a transformation.

The Acrobatic Knot

Seven years later I met Daryl, *The Magician's Magician*. He was lecturing at the 2006 SAMCON in Peabody, MA and afterwards, instead of buying what I thought I wanted, I asked him what he thought I should learn—what he considered to be his best material. After asking a few questions to understand my style, Daryl suggested the Acrobatic Knot.

You know the trick. It's the one where a knot tied on a white rope magically jumps onto a red rope—and when the knot is untied, it is revealed that the white threads have become permanently woven into the fabric of red rope, leaving it completely transformed.

Today, if presented with the hypothetical question, *"If you could only perform one piece of magic for the rest of your life, at the exclusion of all others, what would you perform?"* my answer would be the Acrobatic Knot.

At first sight, this might appear to be an odd choice.

A rope trick? A trick that doesn't reset instantly? It may be good for the stage, but how suitable is it *really* for strolling situations? Sure, the ropes don't take up too much pocket space—but how natural does this really look? Who carries rope anyway?

Despite these objections, I propose this piece points to a magic beyond magic—a moment of *metamagic* that can remind us of the magic in our everyday lives.

The Acrobatic Heart

In 2006, if presented with a similar hypothetical question, *“If you could choose to spend the rest of your life with only one person, at the exclusion of all others, who would you choose to be with?”* my answer would have been Stephanie.

For as long as I had known her, Stephanie had the ability to make those around her feel truly seen, heard, and valued. She made time for others. When others spoke, she really listened. And when she looked at you, she looked you in the eyes (with her deep brown eyes), resulting in a sincere heart-to-heart connection. She was always ready with a smile, a bit of laughter, and a shared moment of joy.

By that time, we had become close friends with mutual respect and admiration for each other (and today, all these years later, she continues to inspire me to want to be a better person). And I like to believe the same has been true for Stephanie. After all, “if there is any reaction, both are transformed.”

Our relationship had become like Daryl’s Acrobatic Knot, with our proverbial knots jumping from heart to heart, resulting in a joy beyond words and without measure—which is why it was such a shock the following year when Stephanie suddenly and unexpectedly died in her sleep.

The knot transformed from one of joy to one of grief, as if my heart valves were being choked by it, becoming numb to the experience of joy.

But I still had a job to do. I was still a magician, after all, with a full calendar of gigs. After taking a few days off for the funeral, I was back at it, performing magic at restaurants, house parties, and company banquets—doing my best to channel the wonder, laughter, and delight that Stephanie had shared with me while she was here, even though I could no longer feel it.

Woven into the Fabric

It’s been said that time can heal wounds, which may very well be true—but it can also leave scars, reminding us of who we were, where we’ve been, and all that we’ve gone through to get to where we are today.

Over the years, I came to discover that every time I showed up to share wonder, laughter, and joy with others, a little bit of the knot in my heart would loosen. At first, I didn’t want to let go of that knot, because holding onto it was like holding onto Stephanie’s memory—but with time, I came to understand that untying the knot didn’t mean I was letting her memory go. Rather, it was a discovery that the love we shared

had become permanently woven into the fabric of our lives, leaving us both completely transformed.

These days, when I perform the Acrobatic Knot, I don't mention Stephanie. Instead, I play it for wonder, laughter, and delight. But I do hold her in my heart when I tie the knot and watch in wonder as it jumps to the other rope—and I like to think that the audience can feel its deeper meaning, even if it's something quite apart from the direct visible truth. Sure, it may be “just a trick,” but if magic can be used as an art, then Pablo Picasso's words can point to an acrobatic knot's deeper meaning: “*Art is a lie that makes us realize truth.*”

The Magic Mirror

In *An Essay on Magic*, Robert Neale suggests that magic can serve as a mirror that reveals the magic in our everyday lives. “*When this happens, magic performance deepens and broadens into a stage on which the rich spirit of humanity is enjoyed.*”

I witnessed this *rich spirit of humanity* a number of years ago while performing strolling magic at a restaurant. After providing some brief moments of wonder, laughter, and delight for a small group at the bar, I was about to stroll along when they stopped me before I left to thank me—not just for that moment but for a moment we shared together years earlier at that same restaurant.

“*We had just come from a funeral and stopped in for dinner on our way home,*” she said, “*While we were waiting, you shared your magic with us. We hadn't laughed in days and no one felt like there was anything to smile about. You gave us a gift. You reminded us that there is still joy to be found in life.*”

Every time you meet someone, a part of that person becomes woven into the fabric of who you are—because when two worlds collide, both are transformed.

Reflection

How has the influence of others become woven into the fabric of your Being?

¹ Jung, C. (1933). *Modern man in search of a soul*. Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co, London.

² An allusion to a quote from Albert Einstein, from a 1901 letter to the mathematician Marcel Grossmann: “*It is a magnificent feeling to recognize the unity of complex phenomena which appear to be things quite apart from the direct visible truth.*” Stachel, J., et al. (1987). *Collected paper of Albert Einstein*. Princeton University Press. (Document 100).

³Picasso, P. (1923). “Picaso speaks: A statement by the artist.” *The Arts: An Illustrated Monthly Magazine Covering All Phases of Ancient and Modern Art*, 3(5). pp. 315-329.
<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015020076041&seq=339>

⁴Neale, R. (2015). *An essay on magic*. Theory and Art of Magic Press. pp. 92-94.

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