

# *On Life and Meaning*

MARK PERES

## **Episode 5 – Bruce Fritch – Getting to Insight**

### *Cards and Letters Before the Age of the Internet*

And now a personal word,

When I hear Bruce talk about his reflections, I'm reminded of my own love for the artifacts of memory. Here is an edited version of something I once wrote called 'Cards and Letters':

In my garage are bins filled with evidence of a life so far: files from college, yearbooks, photographs, film negatives, artwork, sketches, mementos. They are stacked against the wall, with tool-sets and garage gear on top of them. I know the bins are there, filled with traces of my life as a younger man. Rarely do I look at any of it, but when I do, there is one bin in particular which draws my attention: cards and letters from before the age of the Internet.

The bin, one of those clear plastic ones with a white lid that you find at Target, is packed with rubber band-bound correspondence from my dad and mom, from sisters and my brother, from friends and lovers. The envelopes are rectangular and boxy, standard-size and small, domestic and air-mail. Postcards are interspersed throughout. All the envelopes are hand addressed to places I once lived, right down to zip codes I've long forgotten, in Tallahassee, Orlando, Miami and Washington DC. Stamps in the upper-right-hand corner are half the price they are now, all post-marked the day they were sorted and delivered on trains, planes and automobiles.

Inside the envelopes are Hallmark and Shoebox cards, and paper folded neatly and in odd shapes, lined and unlined, white and yellow and pink, from writing pads of all sort, with the most personal of handwriting. It's the handwriting that moves me. So alive. So individual. Each slant and curve a unique expression, the ink capturing an un-replicable life essence.

All the cards and letters I have are magic. Like the silvery recollections that Albus Dumbledore draws from his mind and siphons into his Pensieve, allowing him and others to witness what once was, each card and letter is a memory portal. They transport me to a different time. I am younger, my hair is dark, I hear voices, scenes are played.

Sometime in the mid-1990's, the cards and letters stopped. The World Wide Web ushered in a new age: Electronic. Inkless. Paperless. We could type Arial or New Times Roman and send messages at the touch of a button. We would hear the chime that 'you've got mail.' Today there are smartphones and social media, and the yearning, dreams and desperations of romance are reduced to instant messaging, texting and tweets.

I get the power of the digital world. I understand what it can do and I'm invested in using it to change society for the better – but there is something to be said for bent corners, tear stains and hints of perfume.

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