

CHAPTER IV - TIME TO FLY

OUT OF THE NEST

As I said previously, a lot is being said today about the Law of Attraction and the feelings and visualization processes that are necessary to manifest what you want in life. I didn't have any knowledge of any of that, but, somehow, the law worked its magic on me.

Now that I look back and analyze all the events that shaped my life, three vital elements emerge:

- vision of what you want
- faith in the plan of creation
- and...action

I didn't know how it would all come out; I didn't have any say in that but the Universe worked it out. But what I knew was that I had an unshakeable belief it would all come to pass. I believed it before I had a chance to see it! As Dr. Joe Vitale says: *"Catch the mood of the wish fulfilled and drench yourself in that feeling."*

I don't know who said this, but I have heard it many times: *"When your intentions are clear the method to achieve them will appear."*

I would unconsciously put this law to the test many times in my life and, truthfully, I must say it has never failed me. Only when I vacillated and fell in the grip of fear did my life sustain its heaviest blows.

So it was that, while studying at Turin's Culinary Arts School, the way to act on the plan came to me via the school. I began working the summers in Switzerland, and progressed through the various credits by working week-ends at a downtown upscale hotel.

Working in Switzerland – as an Italian – in those days, was akin to being a third class citizen. You were almost treated like a slave by many operators; not all, mind you. I found some who were decent but, overall, Swiss people harbored a lot of resentment toward foreign laborers, but their hospitality industry couldn't operate without them, so they had to have them. Italians, Spaniards and Portuguese made up most of the work force running Switzerland's hospitality industry at that time.

My first summer job through the school was at a hotel in St. Moritz. You can imagine the excitement of this 16 year old going abroad on his own for the first time; and to St. Moritz, no less; one of the most celebrated skiing resorts in the world.

The trip from Turin took most of the day. I arrived there around 4:30 in the afternoon. The 7 hour journey – with change of trains - had been absolutely spectacular; the Alps breathtaking. I can still see myself on the cog train, climbing the mountains and looking out to this new country.

To me it was as if I were climbing my way to heaven. The day couldn't have been more beautiful. I really felt very fortunate and grateful. I was living my dream!

I arrive at the hotel and present my papers to the concierge who promptly and rudely tells me to go downstairs to my room (with six bunks and a washing basin), leave my suitcase and come up.

I didn't like being addressed in that manner. Many boys had felt the scars of my fists over the years and my blood was boiling on my way down to the basement's room. When I saw it and smelled it, my heart sank. How could this be happening? Wasn't the school aware of these conditions? After all they had chosen the hotel. My mind was in turmoil.

I go back up and the guy tells me to start washing the floor in the foyer and gives me an apron, a pail and a mop. Now, I had been sent there to work in the restaurant as a busboy. Washing the floors in the hotel's foyer would be something for a student going through reception training. I let the concierge know.

Although the language of the region was and still is German, we were conversing in Italian, one of the three languages spoken in Switzerland.

"If you don't like it you can pick up your suitcase and leave." – He tells me in no uncertain terms.

He should have never said that to me. I can almost see myself now as a young Robert De Niro, looking around the room: "You talkin' to me? You talkin' to me?"

I dropped the bucket and mop, took off the apron, walked downstairs, picked up my suitcase and, without uttering a word, out the door I went! I was afraid it would end in a fist-fight. I'd better be careful.

It was around 5:30-6:00 PM. I still remember the look of amazement on his face as I walked past him on my way out. He didn't say a word. I had called his bluff. He'd have to pay his own price with management and my school who had sent me there.

"You, bastard" - I mumbled to myself between my teeth as I walked out the door.

Bastard, of course, was a word that was very prominent in my vocabulary in those days, having been called that gazillion times by society.

So, now, here I was in a strange country, not knowing German. It's 6:30PM and I am homeless!! (I've always been ahead of the times!)

"Well, great Gino. You, stupid idiot. What are you going to do now?"

I had a long conversation with myself. I walked away from the hotel so the concierge could not find me and then I sat on my suitcase and pondered the events that had put me there. (The Law of Cause and Effect – I would come to learn later on).

Here I was again facing a do or die situation. Calling home was out of the question and so was calling the school. Besides, I would not be able to reach the school till Monday and it was Saturday evening.

Calling home would have put my parents in such a tizzy that I really didn't see myself giving them all that aggravation.

There were only two ways out. One: going to the police and being repatriated; two: finding another job. After all, I had a work permit.

The latter had more advantages. I started going from hotel to hotel. I don't know how many I called on, but I must have looked pathetic. By 8:30PM somebody had pity on this sixteen year old lugging a suitcase or admired my guts, I don't know which - maybe they thought looking for a job with a suitcase at sunset was an original new way to get in the door - but I had found a job as a night watchman for the whole summer.

Then I wrote my parents, explained the situation and told them I was all right. They would have to explain that to the school.

The summer in St. Moritz was very pleasant and I shared a small room with another boy. I was feeling the thrill of being able to fly on my own. I was out of the nest and the first flight - although I had experienced a stall - didn't end up with a crash landing. I was pretty proud of myself.

THE BIG BREAK

Because of my experience at the reception desk in St. Moritz - as a night watchman I had to learn how to operate the switchboard - upon my return to Turin the school placed me at the reception desk of a downtown hotel to finish my credits.

I began meeting people and artists of all nationalities - the hotel was half a block from one of Turin's greatest theatres. It was there that I came to meet Walter Chiari, the famous actor who had a passionate interlude with Ava Gardner - while she was thinking of leaving Sinatra.

Anyway, 1956 was a "very good year." I was the one who used to connect the international calls. No, I won't tell you the juicy tid-bits, but I listened in. With my basic knowledge of English at that time, I could just about understand "I love you" - and there were many - and I knew those three words were magical.

But honestly, I didn't know what to do for a career. Singing had been almost beaten out of my brain, except as a form of hobby - my father had bought me a guitar and I was slowly learning how to play it. I'd always wanted to play piano or the trumpet so it wasn't till my father "reasoned" with me that I would have better chances with girls with a guitar rather than a trumpet, and lugging a piano around was quite a challenge! Of course, my mother going out of her mind at the idea of having a trumpet in the house didn't have any bearing in it!

I didn't particularly like the Hotel and Culinary industry, but it gave me a way to implement my plan: pursuing the knowledge I needed to do something better, which was to become fluent in at least three languages; Italian, English and French. At the time I even entertained the thought of possibly becoming an interpreter at the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland. That was my vision, so-to-speak.

Then the big break came out of the blue in early June of 1958, just before graduation. The school principal asked me if I would be interested in joining six other students going to England for the summer. The Douglas Hotel in The Isle of Man was looking for a full restaurant crew.

Have you ever seen a man float up to the moon?

The big day finally arrived. I will never forget it. My Mom and Dad waving good bye as the train left the station for what was to become a three and a half year journey before I would return to Turin, for just 12 hours... but I'm getting ahead of myself.

Did the plan work? Did the Universe deliver? Was I ready to recognize the opportunity of a lifetime and get my wings? I was eighteen and a half and the world was in my hands! That night, we would all be in Paris – the city of lights - for the very first time; the following night in London. It took us three days to get to Liverpool and then cross over to the island. What a trip!

This was the stuff people could only dream about and I was living it! We were all in awe.

That summer I saved all my money. Through a friend of the family who lived in London I found out about a school for foreigners and the cost for a year's tuition and board. I was focused. First language: English. No better place to learn it than in London.

I called my dad at the end of the summer and told him I had already enrolled at the Davies's School for the whole year and had my student permit. Could he support the cost of my board?

What do you think he said? I was two steps ahead of him.

Lessons learned: many.
Score: Dad three, son four.

I was beginning to feel great and he and Mom - I would learn later on – very proud. The family's naysayers were slowly running out of air.

Once again, knowing what I wanted and believing that somehow I would achieve it were to deliver me my wish. The Universe created the perfect opportunity for me. It had been creating it since the age of fifteen. The only request was for me to have unshakeable faith that the seed would bloom, and patience. The former I believed; the latter I didn't think about. I just did what I had to do: study and graduate hoping the school would find me another job elsewhere.

The Law of Attraction, Cause and Effect and the Law of Gestation were doing their job. There were no unconscious counter intentions on my part. None. And that is a big part of the art of manifestation: having no counter intentions.

LONDON – SHAKESPEARE and SHOW BUSINESS

The first opportunities to start singing in public opened up while I was studying in London, then they blossomed in Paris and mushroomed into a passion in Rome during the two years I had returned to Italy. Rome was getting me hooked on my real aptitudes and I was beginning to look at being a singer as a possible career. I was 24.

London had been quite an experience. Two years of study in complete immersion in the language –away from Italian friends – had paid off handsomely. I was fluent in the language, both written and spoken and had even studied Shakespeare!

For fun I had found a Greek coffee shop in Soho where the guitarist would let me play and sing during his breaks. Of course, singing Elvis' songs had brought me a girlfriend, with whom I would share some great adventures and tribulations in Paris later on. She had even bought me a Höfner electric/acoustic guitar! Wow! Having a girlfriend was cool! Now that I had my own guitar I had even found a week-end job in a high-end Italian restaurant in Chelsea, strolling around the several rooms dressed in a toga and laurel on my head. Can you see the picture? My first paying job and the tips were great. I couldn't believe it!

Never once did I think that singing would come to be a blessing and a curse, all wrapped up in one. And not only in London, mind you. But there is a price for every conquest. Obviously, whether I liked it or not, life would make me pay it every time.

Every year I would have to go to the Immigration Office to renew my student visa; consequently, in September of 1960, I paid my yearly visit to Her Majesty the Queen's immigration officer.

After reviewing my file and listening to my request for another year's extension she politely refused it. At my shock and ensuing inquiry about the reason of her denial, she replied:

"We found out that you are not a student anymore but, rather, spend many nights singing. You have two weeks to leave the country! "

LONG SILENCE HERE

"But...but..." – I mumbled

"Two weeks, Sir. We know where you live." – She emphasized, while leaving the room.

Leave the country? I couldn't believe it. Where would I go? And in two weeks??

I knew I was eighteen and an adult, but this was way too much stress to impose on an eighteen year old. These people were insensitive. I was beginning to wish I had gone into military service.

Now I was in deep doo-doo. This was worse than St. Moritz. Could it be that I had to go through that experience to find the courage and the wits to get out of this one?

My girlfriend was in shock! Her parents relieved.

That week I left my guitar with my girlfriend, packed a trunk with my precious china tea set I had bought at Harrods and other bric-a-brac and shipped it all to Turin. Thank God I didn't have any furniture or a car to deal with.

The Universe was pushing me to the limits. It was creating absolute chaos. It was forcing me to grow, absolutely oblivious to all my screaming and kicking!

Where in the world would I go? Sweden, Denmark, Portugal, Spain, Germany, Greece? My head was about ready to explode!

But wasn't my early intention to get out of Italy to go and learn at least two other languages? English was in the bag. Why wait around? The moment I realized that it was as if the storm had all of a sudden subsided.

Yes. I was growing up and there were no apprehensions about where to go next. The choice was logical: France. I had to learn French. Besides, by the time I took stock of my finances, there was only that much rail that my few pounds could buy me. I could only get as far as France. The Universe had orchestrated a perfect scenario; down to the last shilling!

Two weeks later I would arrive in Paris intent on learning French as quickly as possible.

TO BE CONTINUED