

# “WHAT’S IT LIKE TO DIE, GRANDPA?”

[Source: Chapter One of [Hey Grandpa! Volume I](http://www.heygrandpa.com) – [www.heygrandpa.com](http://www.heygrandpa.com)]

**Prologue:** *One of the realities associated with getting older is not that the “lights go out” suddenly, but rather that they start to flicker and dim. In those times of near darkness, one contemplates mortality’s fleeting nature. Recently, it occurred to me that I am closer to my mortal end than to my beginning. In December 2012, during a hospital stay, I sensed that death could be imminent. This was not the first time that I confronted the transition from mortality to another sphere of existence. This is a story (Mary once asked, “Have you written this down?”) of the time I died and was given the choice to return to mortality.*

**A**t the age of eight, I had an experience that taught me where we come from, where are we going, and perhaps even why are we here. It happened the day after Thanksgiving 1961.

My mother, grandmother, grandfather, and I lived at 730 Marion Street in the Capital Hill section of Denver. The house, built in 1912, was three storey’s high; I lived on the second floor with my mother. In 1963, I moved to the third floor, where I could look westward at the Rocky Mountains framed by the high branches of the elm trees that lined the street. That is a story for another day.



730 Marion Street, Denver, Colorado

As a boy, I had the privilege and pleasure of owning a dapple-grey Irish Connemara pony (at 14.2 hands, really a small horse) named Leprechaun. During the summers, we boarded ‘Lep’ at the Walter Paepke farm in Aspen. Almost every summer day, I rode Lep on the mountain trails surrounding Aspen. Our rides generally ranged through the high alpine foothills that separated Maroon Creek from Castle Creek; some parts of this land later became the Aspen Highlands ski area.

During the school year, Lep was moved to Denver, where we boarded her at the Flying J Stables (9300 East Iliff, if you know the area) on what was then the plains east of Denver. I rode almost every day after school. Obviously, I led a good and probably even a pampered life. At the time, I suppose I took it all for granted. It was, truth told, what I knew. Thanks to my three parents!

On Thanksgiving Day in 1961 (I was eight), my friend Vicky Emery called. Vicky, who lived two streets over and one street down on Humboldt Street, and I both went to Graland Country Day School.

She was in fourth grade and I in third; we both kept our horses at the Flying J and rode together all the time. Our parents took turns shuttling us from school to the stables and back home. My grandmother always had a book or her journal, and was content to wait in her yellow 1955 Chrysler New Yorker Deluxe. I digress. On this particular day, Vicki had called to ask if I wanted to go riding on what would ultimately become known to U.S. retailers as “Black Friday;” it was the day after Thanksgiving.

Vicky explained that family friends were visiting from out-of-town, and wanted to go horseback riding. I had had a cold, had not ridden for a couple of weeks, felt better, and was excited to go. I asked permission from Mom or Gram (can’t remember which), received it, and accepted the invitation. Vicki explained that she and “Dr. Kwan” would pick me up about 7:30 the next morning.

I donned my best for the occasion -- canary yellow riding breeches, leather riding boots, and so on. I was dressed early, and sat anxiously watching out the front bay window in the dining room. As soon as I saw the station wagon approach, I dashed out the front door, jumped down the steps two at a time, and hopped into the back seat. We chatted as we made the thirty minute drive to the stables.



**Riding Leprechaun at a horse show in Woody Creek, Colorado, Summer 1961 – just months before accident**

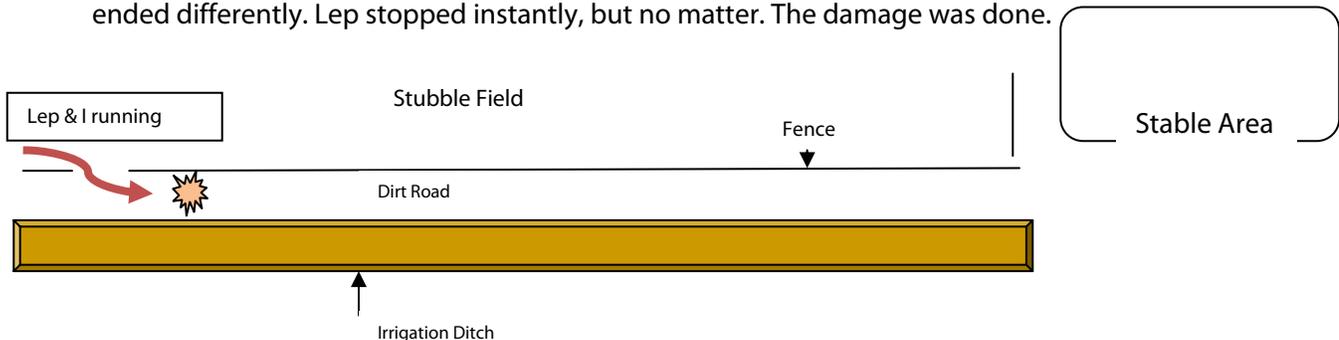
Upon our arrival, we were greeted by Mr. Norgren, a kind and gentle LDS (it was many years before I knew anything about or joined the LDS Church) rancher who owned Flying J. He was expecting us, and had a horse ready for Dr. Kwan. Vicki and I got about saddling up our mounts. When Mr. Norgren noticed that I did not have my helmet with me (I left through the front door of our house, and my helmet was next to the back door), he took out a

pair of bolt-cutters, cut the padlock off someone else’s tack box, and gave me what is called a ‘dress’ riding helmet. It belonged to girl whose name I do not recall. What I do remember was that the helmet was covered in black velvet, and seemed a little big. Mr. Norgren told me, firmly, to “Wear it anyway.” At the time, it seemed unusual. As it turned out, Mr. Norgren’s decisive act probably saved my life.

Although it was a cold, overcast November day, we had a good ride. Having not been ridden for a couple of weeks, Lep was frisky and spirited -- anxious to get out, kick up her heels, get some

exercise, and with good horse logic, to return to the stable. As is the case with most horses, she well knew the way home, back to her stall filled with clean straw and warm oats to eat. The journey back to the stable was eventful, actually life-changing.

I have prepared a diagram to give you an idea of what happened. The red line shows where Lep and I were running for home. I was in the lead, ahead of Vicky and Dr. Kwan. We were running through a stubble field, and had to go through an open gate in a fence that separated the field from a one lane hard-packed dirt road that the ranch and farm equipment and machinery used. The road was next to a deep (12' or so) irrigation ditch. Naturally, at that time of year, the irrigation ditch was dry. It was a nice place to ride -- the bottom was sandy, and the horses liked to walk in it. Just as I went through the fence, a girl named Nancy Lamb rode up through a narrow gap in the ditch bank. Leprechaun shied, and I was thrown, whip-like because my left foot caught in the stirrup, flat on my back onto the frozen ground. In a split second, my liver shattered, a vessel to my heart disconnected on impact and I stopped breathing. It is likely that, had not Mr. Norgren had the foresight to see to it that I was wearing a helmet, my skull would also have been shattered and this story would have ended differently. Lep stopped instantly, but no matter. The damage was done.



After the fall, the next thing I heard was Vicky's voice calling, "Jamey, get up, get up." I tried to stand, and crumpled to the ground ... faintly the words "not like that" passed through my mind. The next thing I knew, I was rising above my body, looking down on my crumpled form with the horses and people (Nancy, Vicky and Dr. Kwan) standing around me. You may very well ask, "What is it like to die?" The best way I can explain it is like this ... think of a hand in a glove. Then think of the experience of gently grasping the ends of the glove fingers, and pulling the glove off your hand. The glove is your body, and the hand is your spirit. The separation was, at least for me, totally painless. One moment I was in my body trying the stand, the next I was moving above and away from my body, looking down for a moment, and then travelling (light-speed like) to a different realm. Light-speed may not be exactly accurate, because it implies travelling a great distance. I don't know how far away the 'other realm' is -- not very far, I think.

So ... I was ascending above my body, looking down and then, "pop", I was surrounded by people in spirit form. While they were familiar to me, their names did not then (nor have now) come to mind. I was in no way scared, intimidated, or uncomfortable. A question was put to me, by a female spirit (yes, gender is eternal and authority is not limited to males): "Do you want to stay here, or do you want to go back?"

I asked, "Where are my mother and my grandmother and grandfather?"

The response: "They are there, and you are here."

I knew precisely what 'here' meant. I explained that I wanted to return. We passed a few more moments together (I asked a question, and received no answer, just a knowing glance), and then I was returned to my mortal frame. I regained consciousness in a pre-op room in Colorado General Hospital.

In the interim between my departure from my body and my return, mortal life proceeded with a sense of urgency. While Nancy Lamb was racing to find Mr. Norgren, Dr. Kwan, a recent Red Cross life saving class graduate (popular classes in the late 50's and early 60's), provided me with mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. Mr. Norgren raced from the stable to where I lay in a station wagon; I was loaded in the back and transported to Colorado General Hospital. Speed limits were ignored (natch).

Fortunately, surgical teams of several varieties were ready to receive accidents incident to the holidays. My operation took eight hours plus, and humpty-dumpty like, they put me back together. I spent two weeks in the hospital, and came home.

## CONCLUSION

I KNOW, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that:

- We are eternal beings engaged in a brief, mortal experience.
- You will live again. The transition from this life to the next is smooth, and there is nothing to be afraid of.
- We are probably going to account for how we conducted ourselves in mortality – when we are asked questions, we will be in a 'no excuses zone.'



December 11, 1961 -- I had come home from the hospital three days earlier. My 'accident' occurred two weeks before.

*"Hey Grandpa, What's it like to die?" is a sample chapter from Hey Grandpa! Volume I. For more information or to download the book in either Kindle or iBook form, visit [www.heygrandpa.com](http://www.heygrandpa.com)*