

Business May Be Your Life – But – Life Is *Your* Business

Part IV: Listen to the Omens – A Letter to Julia^{A,B,C}



James A. Cusumano, PhD

“Will you still need me, will you still feed me, when I’m sixty four?”
John Lennon/Paul McCartney

KEY CONCEPTS:

- Everyone experiences several critical “forks” on the road of their life’s journey.
- The results of choosing one or the other paths are profoundly different.
- Deep within, our personal essence knows which path to take.
- To bring your essence to the surface, pay attention to the “omens.”

Dearest Julia:

Although you’re just several months from struggling out of your comfortable cocoon in Mom’s belly, into this exciting and challenging world, I have a few thoughts I am eager to share with you. I guess the miracle of your coming into our life has fanned the flames of excitement within me. I honestly feel like a kid again.

I hope that someday if you read this letter, you’re patient with my pontification, as I express some of my experiences, views, and hopefully leave you with at least a spark of wisdom. Perhaps there is something here that will be helpful to you as you prepare for your life’s journey.

I would guess, Julia that most of my friends would say I have led an eclectic – some might say “hectic,” life. But I can honestly say that I deeply value the experiences that have crossed my path over the years, and trust that I have learned from them, and hopefully left a few good marks along the way.

As a young boy, growing up during the 1950s on the streets of Elizabeth, New Jersey, I wore the typical teenage uniform of the day – Levis, strapped with a black, big-buckled, chrome-studded belt, a white tee shirt, motorcycle boots, a black leather jacket, and dark, aviator sunglasses carefully perched on my nose

at just the right angle. My hair was Brylcreemed® back with a small spit-curl gracing the top of my forehead, a la “Bill Haley & The Comets” of “Rock Around The Clock” fame. That was *the* style of the 1950s “in-crowd.”

My friends and I did lots of normal guy things. We played stickball and curb-ball in the street and football, basketball and baseball at an empty lot near your great-grandmother’s two-family home. It was there I was born and lived for the first 15 years of my life. My friends and I went on “safaris,” hunting snakes and rats with homemade bamboo spears and slingshots in the dense North Elizabeth meadowlands, an area that one day would give way to the runways for Newark International Airport. And on occasion, I confess, we resorted to daring, dangerous pastimes, like jumping from one tenement roof to the next, hopping slow-moving freight trains at the nearby Pennsylvania Railroad yard, or walking narrow wooden planks, loosely strung between the windows of abandoned buildings. By some miracle of destiny, I somehow survived those times.

If I had been shown even a glimpse of my future, I would never have believed it. I hadn’t the faintest idea – that is, consciously – that I would eventually become a recording artist; a physical chemist; a research executive for the world’s largest oil company; founder and chairman of a billion-dollar, high-tech, public company; founder and CEO of a feature film production company; and more recently with Mom, owner of Chateau Mcely, an award-winning castle retreat in the Czech Republic providing a holistic experience of body, mind, and spirit to people from all over the world. Five forks in the road, five lives – who would have guessed? But, as I will share with you, deep down and early on, I had a sense for each of these destinations.

Julia, please don’t think that your dad is a mental giant. I’m not. Nor, do I want you to think that this was all luck. It wasn’t. Yes, I worked passionately, diligently and tenaciously all of my life. But, my life unfolded this way because it was my “calling.” Fortunately, by listening, I heard the invitation. Equally important, I recognized a few key opportunities at critical crossroads in my life – some would call them “omens.” But in all honesty, at those junctures, as Sir Isaac Newton was fond of saying, “I stood on the shoulders of giants,” – a few incredibly talented people. They were people who really made *the* difference in my life – men and women, more intelligent, more experienced and certainly more evolved than I. They were there when I needed them, and they wholeheartedly embraced me and my ideas. A few special friends made a world of difference for me, and people like this will be there

for you too. I am sure of it. But you must listen carefully to recognize these few people and the omens at the crossroads in your life, and to sense what they portend for your future.

Now, I’m not suggesting that you follow in my footsteps, or that you even entertain such a diverse multiplicity of roles in your life. I don’t think that approach is necessarily the best for a successful and fulfilling life’s journey. If it comes your way, fine. If not, that’s fine, too. I have seen in the lives of others that a single focus can be equally fascinating and rewarding, perhaps even more so. But I strongly suggest that you listen for the omens and follow your heart, your passion and your purpose tenaciously, whether your dream is to be a scientist, a banker, a doctor or a carpenter. And Julia, the key words here are **passion, purpose and tenacity**. In my opinion, they are **always** the driving force behind any real success in this world. And always treasure the freedom you have in making your choices in life, and of course take personal responsibility for your decisions.

Figure 1: Julia – Age 3½ – Her First “Work of Art!” – No Room For Another Picasso! Sometime in the next few years, an “omen” to her destined future will likely appear.



^{A)} I wrote this letter on December 31, 2005, six months before my daughter, Julia was born. I hope that she will read it at some point in her life when she begins to wonder, “What should I do with my life?” Maybe it will provide her with a spark of wisdom and some level of comfort.

^{B)} **EDITOR’S NOTE** – This is Part IV in a series of articles based on the author’s experience as an entrepreneur, having founded several successful businesses, including Catalytica Pharmaceuticals, Inc., a billion-dollar public company. His experience base spans “5 lives” – A multimillion record sales recording artist; R&D Director for Exxon; CEO & founder of 2 public companies; CEO, founder and Executive Producer for Chateau Wally films; Chairman & Owner of Chateau Mcely, an international award-winning luxury hotel & SPA. This article is extracted from his latest book, currently in preparation and entitled, “My Little Book of Business – Tales of Passion, Life & Enterprise.”

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I am not saying that success will come your way without a dedicated, diligent and focused effort. You must work hard to get “there,” and “there” will always move further into the future, as you set new goals and objectives to replace the ones you achieve. As far as I’m concerned, that is the best definition of success – **achieving those goals in life that you continually set for yourself.** And if the engine for your journey is fuelled by your **passion, purpose, and tenacity,** you will not only get “there,” but you will enjoy the ride. So yes, you must be a doer and work hard for your success. But that still leaves open the pertinent and provocative question, **“What do I do?”** Here, I offer you a way to think about this. It’s simple to state, but so challenging to do.

You see, at the conscious level, we really have no idea what the universe has in store for us. For many people this can be frightening, and yet for some of us, it’s exhilarating. I suggest that you let your life unfold according to the possibilities that are already written on the pages of your destiny, and are well known within your subconscious. Don’t be afraid. As you listen inside to your true self to uncover and set your purpose and goals, and then proceed to achieve them, let your intuition lead the way. It is your personal compass and it’s connected to the soul of the universe.

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“There is no real distinction between your consciousness and somebody else’s consciousness. And this is not mumbo jumbo philosophy; it emerges from our understanding of basic neuroscience.” – V.S. Ramachandran, Neurologist, University of California, Science News, January 30, 2010, p. 4.

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What I’m saying, Julia is **always** following your inner voice – your deepest intuition. In moments of quiet contemplation, some might call it “meditation,” it is your intuition that enhances and strengthens the bond between your spirit and that of the universe. This is why all things are connected. For I can assure you, they are. Don’t let anyone convince you otherwise. This connectivity has been espoused for thousands of years in Eastern thought, and based on findings of modern quantum physics, increasingly more scientists are coming to the same conclusion. But that’s another long and complex story. I think until the majority of us come to grips with the fundamental truth of connectivity among all things – tangible and intangible – there can be no everlasting peace on this planet.

Figure 2: Julia Studying Beetles Under Her Dad’s Microscope – A Future Entomologist or Biologist? She says she wants to be a bug and animal doctor! Only she really knows.



For me the first critical “omen” in my life appeared when I was 9 years of age. It was a Christmas gift of a chemistry set from your grandparents that ignited my passion for science, technology and the world of opportunities they could address. Unbeknownst to me at the time, this set me on a life journey and “love affair” with the interface of technology, business and the pressing needs of society. Likewise, it was my childhood passion for rock ‘n roll music that guided me to an entrée in the entertainment world, and the subsequent professional success that followed.¹

So Julia, as you travel your own personal path, you may experience many different “lives” just as I have. Each may well be distinct from the other, initiated at a fork in the road, a consequence of your choice at those junctures, yet all of them will be embraced in some way by your deep personal essence. It’s like parallel universes; there are different outcomes depending on the one you choose. Or, you may be destined to live but one or two “lives,” with equally intense passion, satisfaction and success, and as I have said, that can be just as incredibly rewarding as any “many-lives” experience.

My advice to you is don’t let anyone – me, your mother, your friends, your teachers, the government – anyone – tell you what you **must be or must do.** Yes, you should listen carefully to understand various points of view, but in a moment of your own truth, only you can know which path to take. I suggest that you be as still as you can and listen to the omens. Please pay no attention to that beguiling voice inside of you that will often prod your psyche with, **“I really should do this, or I should be that.”** It will grab the seat of your soul with a strangulating grip, and never let go. That mischievous captivating voice is some-how imprinted in all of us through subtle injections of a subconscious potion of “advice and wisdom.” It’s concocted and brewed early on by the often well-intentioned counsel of parents, teachers, and friends – and of course, that monster we call the “media.” If you should listen to that echo, the end product is almost never a happy and fulfilled you. Don’t try living someone else’s life; it can’t be done!

As written so insightfully within the pages of Paulo Coelho’s *The Alchemist*, **“Listen to the omens of the Universe.”** She is a wise and fair maiden. She knows what all of us should do in the big picture to

Figure 3: Julia Loves Ballet – A Future Ballerina? – Probably not, but who knows? She does.



continue the evolution of universal consciousness, that amorphous positive energy that somehow permeates all things, everywhere. In my view, it’s the primary reason we are here. And *only* the universe knows what should be your destiny to optimize your contribution to creation. But *She* is not pushy, and *She* will accept your choices, for free will is truly alive and well. As I say Julia, the outcomes will be quite different for each of the choices at those junctures in your life. **So, be wise – be present – be patient, and listen carefully – stay hungry – and work very, very hard.** All of the omens are there. They are waiting for you to recognize and embrace them, each already written on the pages of your destiny.

I love you!
Dad

James A. Cusumano, PhD ■

¹ See Part III of this series for more details.

About the Author: James A. Cusumano is Chairman and owner of Chateau Mcely (www.ChateauMcely.Com), chosen in 2007 by the European Union as the only “Green” 5-star luxury hotel in Central and Eastern Europe and in 2008 by the World Travel Awards as the Leading Green Hotel in the World. He is a former Research Director for Exxon, and subsequently founded two public companies in Silicon Valley, one in clean power generation, the other in pharmaceuticals manufacture via environmentally-benign, low-cost, catalytic technologies. While he was Chairman and CEO, the latter – Catalytica Pharmaceuticals, Inc. – grew in less than 5 years, to a \$1 billion enterprise with 2,000 employees. He is co-author of “Freedom from Mid-East Oil,” recently released by World Business Academy Press (www.WorldBusiness.Org) and can be reached at Jim@ChateauMcely.Com.