

My Famous Brain by Diane Wald

Chapter 2: I'm No Angel

When I realized I had died (it happened in January, 1974), I expected to be privy to a great deal of knowledge, expected to have the mysteries of the universe open up to me like water lilies in the sunlight, but, alas, that isn't what happened at all. Probably we give much too much attention to our physical bodies. I was alive, and then I was dead. I was the guru of nothing but my own life. That's saying a lot, though, really, as it included remembering everywhere I'd ever been, everything I'd ever experienced, everyone I'd ever known. Remembering everything feels like this: imagine a photograph of about fifty beautiful sky-blue rowboats floating on a sunny day in a pretty harbor. That's from one angle. From another angle, you can see the warships floating right next door. Everything depends on where you focus.

I couldn't feel my body anymore. It was just gone. No heaviness, no pain, no hunger or thirst or heat or cold. I was no longer lonely (that may be what is meant by "heaven"). And my entire, absolutely entire, life as John Tilford MacLeod unfolded before me, from the moment of my birth. I've tried to remember life before birth in my mother's womb, but there's simply nothing there—I suppose one mustn't be greedy. I found it was as easy to call up a day from my life as a one-year-old as it was to recall Eliza's face in Thompson Park when we fed the swans, or Don Rath's funny little laughing cough, or the doctors in St. Sebastian's as they stood chatting around my father's death bed, unaware that their words were being recorded on some celestial tape loop for future reference by the deceased son of the nearly deceased. Once in a while I catch sight of my sons, and they seem to be in their thirties. But I could be wrong; my perceptions have altered radically, and, as I've told you, I still haven't learned to understand them too well in terms of earthly time.

I now remember things I didn't even know had happened to me, and I've been re-viewing (as I call it) all of it ever since I died. I don't actually know how long ago I did lose my life, since I can no longer follow the events of living humans with any chronological accuracy, but I suspect it was about fifteen years ago. Incidentally, I don't think I really "lost" my life; I just experienced a radical shift of some kind. I also suspect that those theories about the flow of time being an illusion, with the past, present, and future existing simultaneously, are probably true. I'd always loved what Lewis Carroll's Queen said in *Through the Looking Glass*: "It's a poor sort of memory that only works backwards."

By the way, I'm no angel. I never was, of course, but I'm certainly not one now. No wings, no halo, no access to Jimmy Stewart. I don't know what I am. A soul, I suppose. How I can communicate with you this way is not something I understand. All I know is, it's not a hoax. I know what true means. I'm not going to disguise anybody or make things up. It's hard enough just to recount everything without doing anything like that. I'll probably skip around a bit though, since time is such a mystery to me now. I find the big picture more interesting than the details. Bear with me.