

# Rendezvous with Destiny — A True Story

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As the sun began its descent into the western winter sky, its message illuminated the great outdoors and quickly thawed the frozen crevasses of my sedentary mind. Unlike prior weeks of the worst winter in recent history, this sun beamed into our living room with undeniable force and indefinable beauty, immediately awakening my heart, mind and spirit from a severe case of midwinter doldrums. Not one cloud tarnished the perfection of an enormous, sparkling, ceiling of blue.

“CAVU, ceiling and visibility unlimited!” I shouted to my wife, who was working at her computer in her office on the other side of our house. CAVU is an aviator term that her father, a World War II Navy pilot, used whenever possible. As prisoners of merciless arctic air and dismal cloud cover, it was time for us to go outside and breathe.

Household errands were beyond overdue, but our first destination was a very special place, an obsolete freight railway line nestled in the Connecticut countryside. Covered with a smooth layer of road mix, “The Rail Trail,” a onetime artery of our industrial strength, now serves every size, shape and form of outdoor enthusiast, including lovers, hikers, bicyclists and leashed dogs. A peaceful setting for every season, its quietude is greatly compounded during winter, especially after a fresh snowfall.

Though only a 15-minute drive from home, the rail trail is a faraway place. Regardless of

season or time of day, conversations along the trail tend to turn away from the ordinary dysfunction of human existence. Its magic somehow has the power to transform petty, self-centered interest into more philosophical and spiritual discussions. For long stretches, thoughts and words have been known to stop altogether. The harmonizing silence allows an opportunity to become absorbed into the oneness and wonder of nature.

On such a spectacular afternoon we expected the parking lot to be full and the trail buzzing with its assortment of heavily clothed cross country skiers, nature lovers and lovers in general. To our pleasant surprise, tucked away in a distant corner of the lot were just two cars.

Though it hadn't snowed for a couple of days, the frigid air kept the blanket of white as crisp as the day it had fallen. Other than streaks of dissipating jet trails, the afternoon sky remained crystal clear, CAVU.

About a mile into the trail, tall naked oaks, ashes and maples sleep tight against a background of massive cathedral rock formations towering high above both sides of the carved-out passage. Gently trickling water below ice glazed brooks of near-frozen water accent the entire route. Rock ledges and huge bulging boulders supply excellent hiding places for nature's guardians; tiny, winged elf-like creatures that can only be seen with eyes closed and heard if the stillness is allowed to supersede perception. At one point, lining both sides of the raised rail bed are narrow streams of running water, collected from above.

To align with such a strong sense of nature, my wife and I always enjoy synchronizing our walk with a breathing exercise. Side by side and hand in hand, we inhale for six seconds, in coordination with our steps, and then exhale for six seconds with arms swinging, steps and breath in perfect rhythm with the surrounding pulse of life.

About a quarter of the way into our excursion, a mystical guardian lured my attention

away from the glorious, natural stone cathedrals and directed my eyes towards the ground, slightly to the left of the boot-printed path. Nearly buried beneath the lightly trafficked, fluffy white snow was a small non-organic object. Before reaching down, I somehow knew what I was to find, lost keys.

The idea of losing my own car keys on the trail has always been a dreaded nightmare, so securing them in a zippered or deepest pocket is not unusual for me. This didn't look like the type of key I was accustomed to. It hardly looked like a key at all. After examining it I understood why. It belonged to a Mercedes Benz that had an electronic locking and unlocking device as well as a red panic button.

I showed it to my wife and then shouted, "I found a key!" several times in full volume hoping that just around the bend was the lock that fit. With no luck we continued far beyond the point we would normally turn around. Three bends later and still, no one in sight. Sadly, the sun quickly settled behind a thick band of grey and the once beautiful sky lost its friendly appeal. Though we had come prepared for the cold, our hands, ears, feet and face began to feel the sting of the arctic air.

We had to head back but now what? The idea of a peaceful, rejuvenating walk through the woods was over. Should I try attaching the key to a tree? Should I dangle the key across the trail on a stretched string? That might work as long as they're still on the trail, but where do I find string?

Suppose the key was lost days ago. Should I prop a branch out in the middle of the path? Do I try to spell the words "Mercedes key" with an arrow in my very personal organic yellow scripted font? Should I call the cops to report a lost and found? How about placing an ad in the local newspaper? Maybe I should have just left them in the snow? The peaceful walk along the rail trail had turned out to be much different than I had imagined. There were far too many questions and far too much thinking when all I wanted was a simple, mindless afternoon.

As a kid, I prided myself in recognizing year and make of just about every car on the road. Returning to the lot I tried recalling the brands of the parked cars but couldn't. Had they been older models I would have taken more notice, but these days, all new cars look alike, especially black ones.

Upon reaching our car I scoped the parking area and noticed that two cars were still in place. They were an odd couple. One looked like an older model Ford and the other was, sure enough, a late model Mercedes. I figured the key wouldn't fit but my wife on the other hand was sure it would and worried that I would set off the alarm. At about 10 feet away I pressed the unlock button and presto, lights flashed and no alarm, success!

Suddenly I became responsible for far more than a simple walk on a beautiful afternoon. Covertly probing into someone else's private life was not my specialty. Suppose he or she suddenly showed up with me exploring their personal belongings? It wasn't fun but my intuition felt finding the key was to become the impetus for something bigger.

The shiny black car reeked with status. A perfume-scented, pristine, light beige colored interior told us that a rather classy female owned the car. The idea of looking in a strange woman's glove compartment was creepy, but again, since I picked up the key, it was my karma to finish the job.

Holding my breath, I reached in and pulled out the only item there, a miniature Coach handbag. My heart picked up its pace. This invasion of privacy showed me that I wasn't cut out for detective work or for that matter, thievery. My wife offered to search the bag but again, the karma was mine and besides... I was really curious.

The small bag was stuffed to the brim. Locating her driver's license meant fishing through an assortment of female paraphernalia as well as lots of money, mostly 100-dollar bills. "Yikes!" I shouted to my wife who was standing by. "Florida here we come. Just kidding."

Luckily, I didn't have far to go before locating what I needed to retrieve a phone number. Her license was neatly stuffed inside a small zippered pocket along with a pack of credit cards. Since my wife is the commander of the family cell phone, she called local information for the phone number attached to the address, but I had to do the rest. After 'dialing' the number, she handed me the phone. Five rings later, a message machine with a deep, rich voice answered.

"Hello. Neither my beautiful wife nor myself are available to come to the phone at the present time. Please leave a message at the tone and one of us will be sure to return your call as soon as possible. Thank you very much. Have a lovely day"

"Antonio Banderas?" Not really, but I was impressed by his dignified manner and then did my best to return the same sense of refined sophistication.

"Yes, hello. Please call Robert at 203-268-2682 ASAP. I'm calling about your black Mercedes. You might like to know that I found your key."

Totally ignorant to the workings of a cell phone, I handed it back to my wife to end the call. Just a few moments had passed when the phone rang. "Hello, this is Barbara," answered my wife. It was Antonio.

The voice quizzically replied. "Perhaps I have the wrong number; it seems a gentleman named Robert just left me a message about my car key?"

"Yes, that was my husband, but he used my phone. Here he is."

"Hello."

"Oh yes... I understand you found the key to a black Mercedes."

"Yes, we're standing at the car right now."

“And where, may I ask, did you find it?”

“I found it during our walk on the rail trail.”

“On the rail trail?” He repeated, in disbelief. “Actually, they are not my keys. They belong to my wife but she’s supposed to be at work. I can’t imagine why she’d? ... I don’t know...where did you say you found the key?” he asked again in a more perplexed tone.

I repeated, “...on the rail — trail?”

“Where is the rail trail?”

“In Monroe, by Wolf Park. The key was buried in snow, barely showing. I don’t know how I saw it or how long it’s been there. We were lucky we found it. Or better yet. You’re lucky, I guess. But anyway, we have it. What would you like us to do with it?”

After a few seconds of silence that seemed like minutes, he replied, “OK ... if you will, please place it under the driver’s side floor mat.” It was clear that the gentleman was uncomfortable and confused.

“...aah, but wait” he continued, “let me call my wife to see just where she is and what she thinks. Either she or I will have to call you back. Is that OK?”

“Sure, but please be quick, it’s getting really cold.” The sun had tucked itself away.

We walked back to our car to start our engine and warm ourselves up. Minutes later the phone rang. My wife handed me the phone.

“Hello” I said expecting to speak with the same man.

“Hello,” the voice on the other end said, sounding very nervous. “I own the black Mercedes. I can’t believe I dropped my key. This is not good, my husband is very upset,

but yes, if you would please leave the key under the driver side floor mat I would really appreciate it. Thank you for all of your trouble.”

“No trouble.” I replied, thinking, at least not for me.

Her nervous inflection and choice of words along with her husband’s uneasiness expressed the strong possibility that our intuition was correct. A new story was about to unfold. Though I thought I was doing someone a big favor by finding their lost key, I probably acted as the hand of someone much greater, knowing that there are really no such things as accidents or coincidences.

Perhaps the key wasn’t dropped after all. Perhaps the same mystical guardian that tapped me on the shoulder, telling me to look down, also pulled the key from Simone’s pocket knowing I was soon to follow. Anyway, opening her car door meant opening up a large can of worms.

As we thawed our shivering bodies in our heated car we discussed how the simple act of picking up a lost key might have become the tipping point in a marriage. The entire scenario seemed divinely designed, and I can’t help but think that our role draws some sort of a mystical connection to the others involved.

What began as an innocent “walk in the park,” turned out to be a rendezvous with destiny. Twenty minutes had gone by and the woman still hadn’t returned to her car. While checking my rearview mirror, preparing to leave the parking area, another late model black Mercedes drove in. Alone in the car was a pensive, dark-haired man. We drove away wishing them the best of luck.