

Golden Vortex

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Chapter One:

A VORTEX IN OREGON

We know practically nothing about anything

–Charles Kettering–

There are localities on this planet where reality contrives a subtle shift from that which is considered normal, and it apparently does so simply because human beings are present. A natural condition exists one moment that should be the same in the next moment, except the memory of the two moments do not match.

These anomalous sites on the landscape are not scarce, for they exist in an encompassing global network of intertwining lines that lace through each other like a spider's web forming focal nexus points. Here, the mind interprets the products of the eyes as contradictory, and tends to ignore the experiences. Human reason carefully guards its hard-won description of reality, and since everything is formed from the same unsubstantial stuff, these creases, or lines through the body of the continuum can be easily disregarded. The discovery of these places, therefore, is rare.

For lack of a better descriptive term, these distortions on the face of reality are called vortices, or as I prefer vortexes. A better term would be vortex *field*. When I ran across my first vortex field, it had to be shown to me. I doubt I would have recognized it on my own.

It was 1970, and I was holding down the passenger seat in a friend's car as we headed for home from Reno, Nevada. Forty-five minutes earlier we'd left California, and topped Siskiyou pass on Interstate 5. We were about ten minutes north of the city of Medford, Oregon, when, a half-mile or so from the exit to the town of Gold Hill, my friend pointed out a billboard in a pasture alongside the freeway.

VISIT THE HOUSE OF MYSTERY, the sign beckoned, AT THE OREGON VORTEX.

"I think I've heard of this thing," my driver said. "Wonder what it's like?"

"It's a roadside rip-off, John," I answered without enthusiasm. I'd not visited this place, but was certain I'd been to one just like it.

"Could be," he said, steering his '68 Mustang toward the highway exit.

John had never been to Reno, and he had talked me into going on this trip so I could show him around. I didn't care about seeing a tourist trap called the House of Mystery, but I decided I could use the break. We'd been on the

road almost five hours, and there was another nine hours of pavement until we reached home in the northwest corner of Washington State. An hour or so on my feet, and away from the torture of a Ford bucket seat looked pretty good.

We crossed the Rogue River into Gold Hill, a small town the bypassing freeway on the other side of the river had made even smaller. Two miles on the other side of town, we turned up a country lane called Sardine Creek Road. A sign informed that the "mystery" house waited four and a half miles ahead.

"It's a fake," I said.

"Could be," was John's laconic answer.

I settled back, thinking of a weekend over ten years in the past. It was 1959, and I was with a different companion in a replica Wild West saloon at Knott's Berry Farm. We were having a sarsaparilla, and taking part in a market survey of a new snack sensation called Frito's Corn Chips. We were on the second day of our first liberty from Camp Pendleton in Southern California. Life wasn't too bad. After all, we'd survived Marine Corps Boot Camp.

I was 18, and exploring my young life which had developed a strange glitch. I was right in the middle of learning that things are not always what they seem, and certainly not what I thought they should be.

We told some people with clipboards that the Frito's were good, but the sarsaparilla could easily have been replaced with a Pepsi. Outside, a fake cowboy gunfight was happening on the street of the fake Old West town.

The morning before, a Los Angeles MTA bus had dropped me near Hollywood and Vine. I suppose a neophyte like me expected the place to be teeming with movie stars. At any rate, a simple urban street corner wasn't on my list of things to be found there. What a gyp!

That same evening, while attending a promotional dance inside Disneyland, I stood in a long line of other Marines and Sailors, waiting for a thirty-second dance with Annette Funicello. At last! A real movie star.

When my turn came, Annette, the obvious better dancer, pushed me around to the slow music. She asked my name, and I told her. Without much interest, I thought, she asked where home was, and I told her. How was the weather there, she wanted to know?

I said that home was about a thousand miles away, and that I hadn't been there in four months. How would I know what the weather was like? She shrugged and looked blankly over my shoulder. I realized that she not only didn't care about the weather in Washington, she wasn't terribly interested in me.

Her limp hand was slick with sweat, probably from all those other guys ahead of me, and there was something hard and flat at her waist. A girdle? She was a pretty girl, and no doubt I would have stood in line to dance with her no matter who she was, but I was wishing I'd left her up on the silver screen running around the beach with Frankie Avalon.

Just prior to ordering the bad soft drink in the fake saloon at Knott's Berry Farm, I ran across something that had ruined another memory.

In the early fifties, I used to tune in a weekly country music radio show that was broadcast from a place called The Chuck Wagon Circle. My radio

imagination had conjured up a picture of a group of covered wagons and cowboys on the lone prairie. The wagons were circled around a roaring campfire, a la Roy Rogers, and on the fire were a kettle of beans, a blackened coffee pot, and a spitted rack of ribs. My mind's eye even put in a moon-silhouetted coyote howling in concert with the fiddles and guitars. All this, of course, came from the legendary, Knott's Berry Farm.

I had just found the Chuck Wagon Circle. It was a big cement hole in the ground with spectator's seats forming the sides. Ringed around the top edge of this small amphitheater were little, fake chuck wagons looking down on the stage at the bottom of the hole. Just beyond this affront to a cherished memory was a line of planted trees along a sidewalk, then a parking lot full of automobiles. There were no horses stirring restlessly away from the light of the fire. I was not appreciating the lessons Southern California was serving up.

It was with some trepidation that I left the saloon to further explore this concrete and asphalt "farm".

The next thing that caught our attention was a poster at the ticket booth of what looked to be an interesting concession. For fifty cents, the sign promised to amaze and mystify with a trip through the MINER'S HAUNTED SHACK. It was billed as a place where gravity was upside down, and the laws of nature were bent.

We paid the fare, waited for a tour group of ten or fifteen people to form, then followed a young male guide through a man-made tunnel of plaster and river rock. The first thing I noticed was that the tunnel entrance was smaller than the exit, which tended to throw off perspective. Part way through the thirty-foot tunnel, our guide warned us to beware of the "strange force" trying to hold us back.

I turned to my companion, and said, with what must have been a sneer, "Feels like the same strange force that holds us back on those hills we run up and down in Pendleton." I was a newly born skeptic, turning fast into a cynic.

Beyond the tunnel, we encountered a horribly twisted, longish building made from old, grayed boards. The "Haunted Shack". It was lying at about a 15-degree angle from plumb, and the concrete landscape looked like what it was; contrived. Inside the shack, water seemed to flow uphill, and we were allowed to roll a ball down a ramp only to have it roll back up toward us. I was impressed with the optical illusions, but in no way thought the ball and water were actually defying gravity.

I sat in a chair that was propped against a wall, and then true to the guide's assertion that I would not be able to stand, I was unable to do so. This presented no problem to my newly awakened scientific mind. The chair and the wall were leaning so far back that I was nearly lying on my back.

I was a little bothered by the guide's next trick, though. He stood a straw broom up on its sweeping end, and made it balance by itself on that steeply slanting floor.

When the guide turned to lead his flock out the door, I held back pretending to tie a shoelace. I snatched the broom and sneaked a peek at its

bottom. The straw was neatly shaved flat and slanted to match the angle of the floor.

Outside the shack, we took seats on benches that were fronted by a ten or twelve-foot long platform. Volunteers faced one another from either end of this small stage, and then changed places, apparently also changing height. I believe I laughed out loud. The background behind the demonstrators was so outlandishly slanted that I was forever cured of belief in magic.

So, eleven years later, when John pulled to a stop under the hand-carved wooden sign that announced our arrival at the HOUSE OF MYSTERY, I was certain we were about to be treated to another very bad magic show.

The price of admission was more than fifty cents, but the scenery at the Oregon Vortex was far better than at Knott's Berry Farm. A rustic footbridge crossed the four-foot-wide Sardine Creek to the ticket window. The green Oregon flora featured red-barked Pacific Madrone, or Madrona trees, standing with Maple, Oak, and the occasional tall Douglas Fir, and Incense Cedar. Part way up a path from a flat yard, though, was what I expected to find. Obscured by a gray, barn-board fence on the side hill, was a slanted, and badly twisted old shack. The "House of Mystery", no doubt.

I hadn't forgotten the contrived cover story at The Miner's Haunted Shack. A miner, frustrated by lack of gold, was hanging around, even though dead, still hunting the elusive yellow metal, and messing up reality while he was at it.

The tale of the House of Mystery was less colorful, but at least more realistic.

The history of the slanted shack was told to us by our guide, an older man by the name of Ernie. This longish, obviously old, and very crooked building was once an assay shack, supposedly built around the turn of the century by a gold mining company. Sometime later, in a rainstorm, the shack slid downhill getting into its present sorry condition naturally.

I listened politely, but paid little attention when Ernie had the small crowd make an estimate about how much higher the north end of the structure was than the south end. It looked a lot less than the number of feet most thought it was, but I knew all about perspective and screwy angles. Inside, there was no water flowing uphill, but there was a ramp outside the upper window on which a golf ball, when rolled down, briefly stopped, and then came back up.

Not only had I seen that before, but the old board which made the ramp looked so much like the one at the Haunted Shack, it could have been stolen from there. It was the exact same dumb trick.

Then Ernie threw me a curve. Not only did he admit that the golf ball demonstration was a fake, but he insisted we understand that it was no more than an optical illusion. He said the trick was only included in the tour to point out the kind of things done to unwitting tourists at many different imitations of the Oregon Vortex. Places like...Knott's Berry Farm!

While I was digesting this candor, Ernie balanced a straw broom on the slanted floor on its sweeping end. He did it quickly, and I must have blinked

when the broom looked as if it had pulled itself from his hand and stood on its own. When I asked to examine the broom, he thrust it at me, and then stood by silent as I examined the straw bottom. It wasn't shaved flat, and appeared to be rounded and worn down by what were probably years of sweeping.

Something began gnawing at my smug certainty, and it may have been the same thing that caused me to be a little unsteady inside the crooked old shack. It felt as if the floor was moving, but looking around confirmed that terra firma was still firm. It wasn't the air, there was no wind, and even if there had been a breeze, it wouldn't have accounted for the feeling that something seemed to be churning through me rather than around me.

When we all moved outside into the fenced backyard, the feeling abated, so I blamed it on the the old building. If the eyes feed unfamiliar signals to the brain, like crooked walls, the equilibrium is bound to get a little messed up. Still, I had been in the slanted environment of The Miner's Haunted Shack without queasiness. I was only a little worried, though. Given time, I was sure I'd figure out how Ernie was fooling us.

In the backyard, parallel to the rear of the building, was a wooden platform about ten feet long. Ernie put one person on each end of the platform, then had them change places. The effect was startling. It appeared as though the two demonstrators changed heights in relation to one another by as much as eight or ten inches.

Our guide placed a four-foot carpenter's level on the platform to prove it was even with the world. He didn't need to use the level. If the platform was so far out of plumb to cause the effect I had witnessed, I would have also easily seen its tilt. Also, the demonstrators would have surely felt themselves walking up and downhill as they went from one end to the other.

There were only two explanations: One, that the background provided by the slanting face of the shack caused a dramatic optical illusion, or two, that those people actually shrank and grew as they walked by one another on the level wooden planks.

As I was desperately rooting for number one, Ernie asked for a couple more volunteers. John grabbed my arm and dragged me toward the platform.

Standing on the east end of the platform, looking across at John, I realized that something else was not right. I knew that I was at least three inches taller than my friend, yet my eye level was squarely on the bridge of his nose. John claimed to be looking above my hairline. When we changed places, I got that funny feeling in my gut again. My line of sight had moved to a couple of inches above the top of his head.

Next, Ernie unhooked a huge brass plumb bob from the side of the old board fence. It hung from a tree limb high above the yard on a long chain. He pulled it back, then just let it swing east and west. For a few swings, all seemed normal, then the plumb bob began swinging off center until, in about a minute, it circled around and swung steadfastly north and south.

"The plumb bob will refuse to swing east and west," Ernie told us, driving a nail into the coffin of my skepticism.

I knew enough physics to realize that a swinging weight acts like a pendulum. Once the weight is set in motion, it must go in the direction of that motion until it stops. Even if Ernie had applied a covert twist to one side or the other of the plumb bob, causing it to circle, it would not have assumed a new back-and-forth motion. It would have continued to circle.

I had shed the inhibiting garb of skeptic, and came to a conclusion that should have been apparent long before tangling with Gold Hill's little vortex:

Just because a thing can be duplicated by slight-of-hand doesn't mean that everything is done by slight-of-hand.

The problem was, I wanted to learn what caused the things I had witnessed. I was instantly addicted, and without knowing it, I took on a quest that continues stronger than ever thirty years later.

During the seventies, I returned many times to the vortex. With different friends at different times, we spent at least twice a year wearing ruts into the pavement of I-5 on our way to Nevada. We would leave Washington, from up near the British Columbia border, drive in one 850-mile shot to Reno, and burn out the town in three days. On the more leisurely trips home, especially if someone was along who had never seen the vortex, I would stop in to pick Ernie Cooper's brain at the House of Mystery. He and I never became close friends, but did manage to get in a few hours of combined conversation over more than ten years of being acquainted.

I told him once that the Gold Hill Vortex was closely connected to the Bermuda Triangle anomaly. Ernie listened to my theory, and then said I should write it up. With that prodding, I put together a short book in 1980. Ernie sold a bunch of those booklets in the House of Mystery's gift shop, and he even posted excerpts from it on the information board in the yard.

While this was going on, an era was closing. The traveling cadre was breaking up, mostly because of marriage, mine included, but also because Reno was slowly becoming Las Vegas of the North. The old clubs were either being taken over, or simply remodeling into glitz. The old mechanical slot machines were giving way to electronic monstrosities where all one did by pulling the handle was trip a switch. When a perfectly good product is "new and improved" it generally loses me as a customer. We lost interest in Reno, and I spent a lot of time not traveling through Southern Oregon.

I did continue chasing and researching the kind of ideas that regular scientists normally disdain. My library of odd books grew, and my experimentation notebooks fattened up. I was no longer a fanatic wild-eyed skeptic, but a more careful plodder who looked at everything with an open mind. I was also learning to have fun with the strange knowledge I was acquiring.

Most of my time, though, was spent in the mundane tasks of making a living, so all that fun came in fits and spurts with long droughts in between. It seems I spent a lot of time in those mundane tasks, and along about 1993, I managed to lose my mind. At least I consider buying an apple farm in north central Washington, or anywhere else, an insane act.

For about three years I fooled myself into believing that next year I would actually make money growing apples. Then, after I retrieved my mind, I spent another two years sitting behind a for-sale sign hoping someone who really enjoyed growing apples to give away would come along and buy my really swell farm.

Then it finally happened; a farmer, who couldn't stand to be without hundreds of trees to prune, showed up with a bank in tow that didn't know any better. Through this small window of opportunity one more totally unexpected thing flew in. I got a phone call from out of my past.

It was from a television producer who was researching a segment for a Learning Channel program called STRANGE SCIENCE, WIERD PLACES. She had been told that I might know something useful about a place called The House of Mystery.

I knew a few things, and filled her in. How much they used of my vast knowledge, I don't know, but with my upcoming freedom from apple bondage, the call triggered a primal urge to revisit the good old Gold Hill Gravity Vortex.

The call came in the spring of 1998, and by September, I and my trusty '75 Datsun 280-Z were on the road to Southern Oregon.

It was a beautiful fall day when I parked my copper-colored steed beneath the old familiar hand-carved sign along Sardine Creek Road. The log house souvenir shop still spanned the slow-moving creek, and all around the trees were just beginning to change color. As I approached on the steps down from the road level, the admission window slid open.

Two women peered out at me. After a pause, one of them said, matter of factly, "You're the guy who wrote the book." I was home.

I was loaded with new facts and research to pass on to my old acquaintance. I asked for Ernie, but the answer I received exposed a trail of leaves behind me. These were not leaves from Autumn Maples, but were calendar droppings. I was made to deal with what I knew; that it had been sixteen years since I had last been there. What I did not know, was that it had been ten years since Ernie had passed away.

The middle-aged lady who recognized me, I had met a long time ago. She was Ernie's daughter, Maria, who I quickly learned, was now managing the business. She invited me in to the gift shop where we proceeded to catch up on a large time gap. It was Maria, I learned, who I could blame for sending the TV producer after me. I was shocked to see that the excerpt pages of that old, long out of print booklet still graced the bulletin board in the yard outside. In some ways, the place hadn't changed a bit.

I hung around most of the day, and in between tours, Maria allowed me to wander the property to do experiments. When I wasn't engaged in arcane activities, like dangling magnets from a string, she told me about the day when the television people came to shoot the segment.

She talked about a man named Salvatore Trento who had come with the crew. He was a writer and expert in alleged strange places, but not a newcomer to the Cooper's Oregon Vortex. He'd been there a few years earlier, but in a book written right after that visit, he hadn't exactly given the place a five-star

recommendation. The feeling is that, during this time, he had just come from one of the cheap copies that have been built as tourist traps, and perhaps had his view of such things influenced negatively. I knew a little something about that sort of thing.

On his latest trip, though, Mr. Trento was evidently more impressed. He prowled the area with a sensitive magnetometer, looking for funny goings-on, and reportedly, found a few. Almost four months after the film crew departed, Maria showed me the general place, just outside the souvenir shop, where Mr. Trento complained of not being able to calibrate his machine back to a zero setting. Evidently, such a thing needs to be done after each result in order to take a new reading. This sort of glitch with an otherwise healthy machine was not supposed to occur, and it bothered him greatly.

After hearing this, I charged out the door to investigate. It took about ten minutes of dangling my magnet to discover that the demarcation line marking the boundary of the vortex suddenly came to an impossible end. It is supposed to be a circle. If this spot on the ground had confused Trento, it was doubly confusing to me. I knew the circle could not just stop, so I kept looking. It took another ten minutes to find where the line picked up and kept going about 18 inches on a direct line toward the center of the vortex. This, however, left a gap I couldn't explain.

I marked the end and beginning of the line in the dirt with my boot toe, then stood back to think. I wondered if anything would happen if I bridged this gap with my body? When I stepped on the ends of each line simultaneously, some sort of subtle, but never-the-less rude force shoved me backwards. I tried this maneuver several times while my head played with a wild "what if". What if this gentle, but steady push were magnified a few thousand times?

Stargate?

From up the hill a tour group was heading toward me, so I backed off to let them pass into the gift shop. A man in full stride placed one foot squarely between my marks, lurched awkwardly sideways, but continued on without giving any sign that he had noticed.

Maria approached and inquired of my intense interest in the dirt. I explained the marks, and asked her to step on them. She did, and by action and voice confirmed that there seemed to be an active anomaly of some sort at work.

The man who had stumbled came back out into yard with his wife, and they got involved in the discussion about my discovery. The woman seemed more interested than the man, so I asked if she would step on the marks.

She stepped right up. "Oh..." she said, wavering backward, "there does seem to be something happening."

The husband's face held the look of a confirmed skeptic, but with prodding from his spouse, he took a position on the marks. The three of us watched his fists clench, his arms and shoulders stiffen, and his body incline from the knees about five degrees.

He turned his head, looked at us with an absolutely blank expression, and said calmly, "I don't feel anything."

With the sigh of someone who has been there before, his wife answered, "Honey, that thing you can't feel is about to knock you over."

Maria tolerated me for an entire day while I roamed around loose, retracing old steps, and learning new ropes. When she shut the gate, and chased me out, I took her business card and promised to stay in touch.

As my vintage sport car and I pointed our noses north to visit friends and relatives in Washington, I had plenty to think about. For five hundred miles of mostly driving through the night, I pondered exciting new ideas. Then, three days later, when I reached home, I began placing those ideas into a fantastic context. If I was right, the iceberg below water was about to be exposed.

Two months later, after I could no longer question the unconventional drift of my own work, I made a decision to change the direction of my family. I placed a call to Maria.

"When you open in March," I asked, "will you need help?"

She wanted to know if I was serious. I assured her I was.

"March first," she said. "If you can't make it, let me know."

It was the easiest job interview I ever had. On March first 1999, I reported for work as a fledgling tour guide at the Oregon Vortex, also known as the House of Mystery. It turned out to be the best job I ever had. Don't tell Maria.

Being in the vortex eight hours a day, five days a week, has allowed me many things, not the least of which has been the privilege to meet more incredibly interesting people in one short season than in the last forty years.

On the first day our only customer was a man dressed in buckskins, wanting to know if he could come in and play his Didgeridoo, a hollow, crooked stick carved and painted for him by an Australian Aborigine chieftain. He wanted to see if it sounded different inside the vortex. Maria, myself, and my trainee partner, an intense, somewhat unfocused, but very intelligent young woman named Bryton, showed him around. He aimed and tooted his stick at almost everything. We didn't learn if the instrument was affected by the vortex field, but for nearly an hour it sounded like a sick elephant was loose in the woods.

The first thing that Bryton and I had to learn was how to tell customers concisely what a vortex is.

In a strict classical sense, a vortex is any thing that whirls around. A tornado, hurricane or even a spiral galaxy is a form of vortex. The simplest example is water going down a bathtub drain. This explanation doesn't describe the precise nature of the whirlpool of force existing around the old assay shack, but it is a good analogy bridge allowing a language leap from the third dimension to the fourth. The Oregon Vortex is not exactly like a tornado with a top and a bottom, because, it must be seen as spherical; an infinite energy sphere, with its genesis in the Quantum where three dimensions are not enough dimensions.

The vortex might also be considered an entity, because it has measurable boundaries. Its main boundary is delineated on the ground with a short line of bricks showing the beginning of a curve that goes on to make a circle. This

circle constitutes a knife-edge mark, called the line of demarcation, and it was originally measured at 165 feet, four and half inches across its diameter. Another important feature is the corona, another circular line that surrounds the vortex like a thin donut. This line is 27 feet, six and five eights inches wide. The corona's width is precisely one-sixth of the vortex's diameter, a mathematical necessity that will be showing up frequently the deeper into the book we get.

(Ill. # 1)

The vortex is only about three-quarters of an acre in area, but it stays in one place, and has done so for as long as its existence has been known. Its geographic position is rigidly stable, though from day to day, or even from hour to hour, its effects do change in intensity. These effects on the senses are what many consider disquieting, sometimes sobering, or even just uproariously funny.

Next, Maria stresses to her guides, the need to relate the true history of the area. She is aware of all those Miner's Haunted Shacks out there, and wants to make sure the staff doesn't pass out the same kind of silly stories as they do. The Oregon Vortex is the original vortex field to be open to the public, and she proudly points out that the many imitators, even if they sit on natural vortexes, copied the House of Mystery, not the other way around.

The first human contact with the vortex is uncertain, however, the Native Americans in the area must have known about it, if for no other reason than the animals they hunted were aware of it. Warm blooded, wild animals have an innate distrust of the field, evidently sensing something alien. The Indians might also have noticed that game trails went out of their way to go around this small area.

The most reliable story about the local Indians acknowledging the anomaly comes from the time when they got horses. If horses can be said to hate, then horses hate the vortex. Those who have risked their lives to ride or lead a horse beyond the line of demarcation can, at the very least, attest to an intense equine fear.

Birds will fly in, or fly through, but will rarely stop to visit. Birds don't perch in the vortex, and none have ever been seen to nest. I was startled one day to see a Robin land in the yard. I watched for about two minutes while it stood still, then it walked, almost staggered around in a tight circle, not even attempting to cock its head to check for worms. Finally it discovered it had wings, and escaped.

Humans and dogs get along with the area, but sometimes even that observation has to be revised. I've watched people try to pack a pet cat across the demarcation line, and it's not a pretty sight. Cats and horses have an equal dislike.

Cold-blooded animals like snakes, lizards, and frogs don't seem to have any problem with the area. Unfortunately, insects such as hornets and mosquitoes are also quite at home in the vortex.

After the 1849 gold rush in California, prospectors began breaking rocks all along the Cascade, and Sierra Nevada mountain chains. With few towns in those days, cartographers relied heavily on the placement of mountains, rivers, and creeks as reference points for maps, so an early first survey was conducted along Sardine Creek in 1858. It's not known if the surveyors noticed anything odd in the neighborhood of the vortex.

By the turn of the Twentieth Century, Southern Oregon was bustling with two main industries, sawmills, and gold mining. In 1904 an outfit called The Old Gray Eagle Mining Company, established a large hard rock mine just up the hill from the vortex's position along the creek. A number ten stamp mill was built on the property, which was used to crush the gold ore into powder. Several other buildings were erected, including the assay shack that later came to be known as the House of Mystery. Everyone assumes the shack was originally constructed plumb, but since it was erected almost dead center in the vortex, and since all measurements in the vortex are suspect, no one can be certain.

This was a large mining operation, and it ran full-bore for the next seven years, employing many men. Certainly, some of the miners must have noticed that reality in their work area was a little out of whack. One of the things I point out to visitors is that the hill where the last demonstration takes place appears very steep when looking down, yet at the bottom, the incline looks like a gentle upward slope. The miners must have wondered how half a hill vanished when compared from one end to the other. A large bunkhouse was part of the complex, and still exists sixty or seventy feet from the line of demarcation. Working and living at the site had to have generated some interesting letters to the folks back home. Unfortunately, the stories from this era are mostly word of mouth, and anecdotal.

One of those anecdotal stories relates that just before the mine closed in 1911, a rain storm loosened the side hill dirt, causing the assay shack to fall off its foundation and slide a short distance, where its progress was stopped by a small Maple tree; now a large Maple tree. The Company, knowing the gold was running out, didn't bother to straighten up the building, and for the short time remaining, moved the assay operation to a tool shed lower down the hill. Not being aware of the special nature of the area, they didn't know that this building was not in the vortex. Immediately, the story continues, it was noticed that the refined gold being assayed weighed a tiny bit more at the new location. The Company supposedly learned, to its horror, that it had been cheating itself, over nearly seven years, by a factor of about two percent.

This is a fun story, but perhaps, one with a grain of truth backing it up. Experimentation has shown that under certain conditions, gold is the only substance that will weight differently on either side of the demarcation line. Everything else, people or lead, always weighs the same inside and outside the vortex. This is a consequence of relativity, which points out that a measuring device will necessarily change to the same degree as the object being measured.

I had long been aware of the aberration concerning of the weight of gold, which caused me to harbor a pet theory; underground, I thought, at the center

of the energy sphere, was a huge gold nugget weighing several tons. This glob of gold, I reasoned, caused the abnormal effects in the area. After my 1998 trip, I disposed of this idea in favor of a more likely cause, which I will deal with in a later chapter.

After the Old Gray Eagle Mining Company ceased to exist, the property lay unused, though there may have been a little high grading going on. Old tailing piles, the leftover garbage rock of a mining operation, still contains extractable gold, and a few independent miners might have helped themselves to some of this booty. Even if this activity, with or without permission of the mineral rights owners, was going on, the history of the place has a gap until sometime in the late twenties, when a mining engineer by the name of John Litster came on the scene.

Litster grew up in South Africa as the son of a diplomat in the English Foreign Service. The Litster family moved around a bit, but later, John took his higher education in Scotland, and considered himself a Scotsman. By all accounts, he possessed a huge intellect, spoke nine languages fluently, and held at least one university degree, and that in Geology. He was a highly regarded geologist and mining engineer, and known to be something of a scientist by many people in the Southern Oregon area. Then he got himself all tangled up in the vortex.

Here I have to make guesses. Perhaps Litster heard miners tell campfire ghost stories about a world that just wasn't quite right, or he may have been asked by the owners to investigate the odd things going on up there in the woods. Maybe he just stumbled into the vortex, but I suspect he had heard about, or had visited another such area, and already had an interest in the phenomenon. He was in his forties, a man of the World, and he may have thought he'd be able to walk into whatever was going on along Sardine Creek, quickly figure it out, and then publish a blockbuster scientific paper. Instead, he got hooked. The place will do that to people. Ask me.

We know for sure that Litster bought the twenty acres on which the vortex sits. We know that after doing experiments, in 1930, he opened the vortex up to the public as an oddity roadside attraction. We know he lived on the property while showing it to tourists, and doing research. Folklore has it that over the thirty or more years he owned the place, he conducted some 14,000 experiments on the way to trying to explain the mystery.

Folklore generally isn't too concerned with facts, and rarely bothers to run the numbers. If he really did 14,000 experiments, that would be about one and a third experiments per day, every day for the rest of his life.

There is little doubt that he did many, many experiments, but there is also little doubt that those experiments did not produce a satisfactory public explanation of what makes a vortex tick. Litster died in 1959, and by dying, he made himself a part of a greater mystery.

For a long time after his death, folklore spread another story. He went out in the yard behind the gift shop, lit a bonfire, and then fed the flames all his notes detailing those 14,000 experiments. The reason for this action was supposed to have come from his widow. She was believed to have said that he

burned the research notes because he didn't think the world was ready for what he had found.

It has taken nearly thirty years to dig up the facts behind this myth, and oddly, there was a lot of truth buried. Evidently Litster's last will and testament directed his wife to destroy his notes and data. There was no bonfire out in the backyard. His widow, though, was in bad health, so she gave the records to her son to dispose of. The son, instead of burning the papers, stored them in his attic. A bad leak developed in the roof, soaked the documents for several days, and ruined them beyond recovery. Litster got his last wish, and the world is safe from his discoveries.

I think that's just great. Really. Now, I get to drive the world crazy. I'm on to old John Litster. Even without his notes, he left a great many clues that a person who tends to ask off-the-wall questions can decipher.

By 1944, Litster was thought to have actually solved the mystery. Around that time, or a little after, he published a 30-page booklet, titled, *Notes and Data*, in which he described the vortex in rather arcane Nineteenth Century scientific jargon. The booklet was mostly diagrams of what he called *Terra lines*, and a lot of photographs of the crooked building and short and tall people. Whether Litster meant to leave clues in this book, I don't know, but when matched with the placement of his demonstration platforms that are still used to bend customers' minds, the book begins to make sense.

Notes and Data is still sold by the hundreds of copies a year out of the gift shop. People are hungry for any kind of explanation to help them understand what they have just experienced. It seems to me, though, that almost no one understands the book. I've had a copy hanging around since 1970, but didn't have a workable idea what it said until the last couple of years.

One of the first things Maria showed me after I came to work was a small sign left by Litster out in the yard. It's a piece of metal about six by eight inches, painted white, then hand-lettered in black. It was old, but easily legible and hanging on rusty wires from the roofline of a small canopy covering the first demonstration platforms. Situated between two other, larger information signs, it rather cryptically read:

The black line on which you are asked to stand is at an angle of 23 degrees, 27 minutes, 8 seconds (plus) from true north. (This is the equivalent to the Obliquity of the Ecliptic.) The magnetic declination at this point is approximately 20 degrees East.

Maria didn't have a clue. She wanted to know if perhaps she should take it down, because no one else probably had a clue either. This sign generated a lot of unanswerable questions, and patron's questions deserved answers.

I wondered how many times I had seen and read this sign since I first began showing up? Obviously, I'd never studied it, and at first glance, there didn't seem to be much point in trying to study it. For instance, there was no black line on which to stand. If there ever had been such a line, time and weather had long since erased it.

Magnetic declination, I understood. A compass on the Earth only points to Magnetic North, not to the axis of the planet, which is True North. The magnetic pole is north of Hudson's Bay, around Baffin Island, and compasses point toward this spot. If a compass isn't positioned directly in line with both the axis and the magnetic pole, the difference in degrees of arc is referred to as declination. The needle declines, or deviates, from the polar axis toward the magnetic source.

Even as I explained this part of the sign to Maria, I was puzzling over the rest of it. What in the world was the tongue twister, *Obliquity of the Ecliptic*? Then it hit me. 23 degrees, 27 minutes, and 8 seconds of arc had to be referring to the tilt of the Earth on its axis relative to the plane of its orbit around the Sun. Obliquity of the Ecliptic, I told her, was just a perplexing way to describe summer and winter.

The Boss' reaction to this was a kind of pensive, so-what shrug. So what does this have to do with anything? I could tell from this reaction that the more she knew, the more she didn't know, and I didn't blame her. She asked me to take the sign down.

At the time, it seemed like a good idea, but that little sign has since provided a huge insight. Its message dovetails neatly into my other research, and verifies to me that Litster knew what he was doing. I now know, as well, where the missing black line should be. Maybe we should get some new wire and rehang the sign?

As the Spring progressed, both Bryton and I became more at ease dealing with the number of people, which came in larger groups the closer we got to the Summer season. I had come to the vortex for a variety of selfish reasons. I needed something to keep me busy, but beyond that I wanted to get experience in public speaking. Later, I hoped to get on a seminar circuit talking about the related subject of magnetic fields for health purposes. The biggest reason, though, was for the constant accessibility to one of the more interesting places on the planet, and how that aided my greater research.

With each bunch of people I showed around, I learned something about groups as single entities. I began to understand what entertainers mean when they refer to audiences as having personalities. What I wasn't prepared for was to be having so much fun, while at the same time being able to explore such a wondrous, open-ended universe.

I also wasn't prepared to have my tour groups inadvertently help me with the more critical research. One day, while standing in the front yard of the assay shack filling some folks in about the history of the building, I noticed a woman whispering in the ear of a friend. They were both looking at me and giggling.

I asked politely what they found so amusing?

"I'm sorry," the first lady said, "but you...well, you're crooked. And you just look funny."

A couple of others agreed, saying that they also noticed that I was standing leaning backward. Finally the whole crowd of 12 or 15 people pointed out that they too noticed that I was in a rather peculiar, and what looked to be

awkward, stance. There was mutual agreement on the question of whether I was doing this on purpose?

I assured them I wasn't, and said I felt perfectly normal. Then, the lady who had started the whole thing asked if I would trade places with her?

After switching positions, I saw what everyone else saw. She was standing near the front of the building, and leaning opposite the direction of the shack's slant. It looked like she should fall over backwards. Someone asked her how she felt. Her response was that she felt just fine, and couldn't possibly be leaning. This turned out to be a slow tour. Almost everyone had to try standing in front of the shack, and many had their picture taken in that spot.

After that, I began using other groups to test a theory. Finally, one day when I was sure of my findings, I asked Maria, "Did you know you have more than one vortex here?"

She had no idea what I was asking. The standard, every day, one hundred and sixty-five foot, four and a half inch vortex was plenty. What did I mean, "...more than one vortex...?"

I took her up in the front yard and showed her the leaning act, then explained that this result was possible because there is another line of demarcation encircling the old house. This primary vortex, as I call it, is exactly one-third the diameter of the larger vortex, a little more than fifty-five feet across, and the assay shack barely fits inside it.

(Ill. # 2-A)

I dragged my foot through the dirt to show her where the line was, then showed her something that I'd been trying on tour groups for more than a week.

"Watch me very closely," I told her. "I'm going to back up slowly toward the house. Keep your eyes on my body as I go back."

As I stepped backward over the line in the dirt, I saw two things happen at once. First, she quite suddenly seemed to get just a little farther away, and second, her eyes widened every so slightly in surprise. She was an old vortex hand, tough to surprise, so I knew she had never seen this before.

The effect is reciprocal. When, to me, she appeared to get smaller, or lose distance in a way that normal perspective could not account for, I knew that she saw the same thing happen to me from her perspective.

"When the world's view of us changes," I told her, "our view of the world changes."

I then led her through the house toward the backyard. "The reason some people feel a little queasy in here," I said, as we moved along, "is that inside this primary vortex the continuum is more dense, and reality is spinning faster. That line of demarcation outside is why some feel dizzy even before getting inside."

About four feet outside the building, and running parallel with the face of the structure is that 30-inch, by ten-foot wooden platform that yields those amazing results I first saw in 1970. Early, in all the tours, we point out that the demonstrations work only because the platforms are running along Litster's

north/south Terra lines, then when we get to the backyard of the house, someone invariably notices that this platform runs east and west. During our early education, Maria told Bryton and me that these East-West height changes were possible because of being so close to the center of the vortex. For some time this had been an incomplete explanation, and now the student told the teacher that she was wrong.

"We're not really all that close to the center," I pointed out. "The true center of our sphere of energy, since we're uphill, is about forty-five or fifty feet straight down. What we're close to is the axis. But that isn't even what causes the effect here. What causes the effect is that new line of demarcation I showed you in the front yard. It completely circles the house, and is now running at about sixty degrees across the west end of this platform".

I punctuated my words by slowly and deliberately stepping across that invisible line while looking her in the eye. I could, by the raised eyebrows, tell that she saw me instantly pop up about two inches. I knew that it looked as if I had suddenly stepped on a two-by-four.

"This east/west platform works because of this line of demarcation." I pointed down to my foot. "It has nothing directly to do with the close proximity to the axis."

Maria had grown up a vortex brat, and had seen a lot, but all this one was new. "Do you suppose Litster knew about this?" she asked, her tone flat and matter-of-fact.

"He spent thirty years working in here," I answered, "How could he not know?"

She nodded thoughtfully. "He was no dummy, that's for sure. So why didn't he point this out?"

In 1960, Maria's parents bought the place from Litster's widow. Maria was getting up in her late teens when Litster died the year before. She had known the man when he was alive. I, in 1959, was busy being underwhelmed by The Miner's Haunted Shack, and had never met him. I treated her question as rhetorical.

"Maybe this is one of those things he didn't think the world was ready for?"

I wondered if this might be one of those more-truth-than-poetry statements? If Litster really was, "no dummy," why did he hide this aspect of the vortex? I could feel things coming together. I had knowledge that Litster, because of the time in which he lived, probably didn't have. I felt that the coming together of these two sets of knowledge would unlock whatever it was that he thought might so damage the poor unwary, and unsteady population of the world.

(Ill. 2-B)

For one thing, I suspected that an aspect of the vortex that Litster might have worried about, and maybe even pried open, was a temporal overlap.

Perfunctory time studies have been done in the vortex with varying results. Maria and I, for instance, spent the entire summer running a simple

time test. This involved synchronizing four identical quartz watches, then placing three of them at different positions inside the vortex, while the fourth was kept outside.

After several months, we compared the second hands. If the fruit of this endeavor means anything, then time seems to run about a quarter of a second per day slower in the vortex than outside. Should I decide to accept this unscientific result, then my 1999 is about ten seconds shorter than everybody else's' 1999. I am the first, though, to discount this rather clumsy experiment. Like us, without the use of million-dollar atomic clocks, others haven't fared much better.

In 1996, another researcher wandered into the vortex with the desire to see if time was affected by the field. He brought with him a resonating quartz crystal device of his own invention, put it out in the yard, and ran a cable up to the parking lot to power his "clock" with a car battery. For an hour or two his oscilloscope registered a lot of disappointing normal ups and downs, but, as any experimenter knows, results quite often don't follow the rules of expectation.

He was about to give up the vigil when a large family showed up at the ticket window. Among this group were two or three boisterous and undisciplined children. They ran, whooping and hollering, into the yard and across the line of demarcation, and even though these kids were nowhere near the experimenter's device, the scope went nuts. Electronic spikes nearly jumped off the screen.

The researcher didn't reach a conclusion about the movement of time, but he did document that the vortex does not like loud and unruly children.

The Oregon Vortex reacts to people, just as people react to it, and that brings about an interesting paradox. Even though the vortex's existence is dependent on a magnetic field, the magnet of the Planet Earth, it is not a magnetic field. A compass, for instance, functions just fine almost anywhere inside the area. If the vortex was itself a big magnetic field, a compass would not relate to the Earth, which it does. The vortex obstructs those magnetic Terra lines that Lister discovered, bending them as they pass through the energy sphere, which in turn, many think, causes the warped optical effects seen on the north/south demonstration platforms.

The vortex is made of something we can't yet hang our hats on, and I don't think this something is a tangible substance. I simply refer to this something as a "line". When *lines* cross and interact with each other in an electromagnetic field, perceived reality occurs. Like the tree that falls in the forest without being heard, reality means nothing if no one is there to witness it.

The vortex is an entity that is the product of an electromagnetic field, and it is surrounded by a corona that is not electric. A living being is an electromagnetic entity that produces a surrounding field that is not quite electric. Human beings, horses, and loud unruly children act as obstructions in the electron flow of reality. Just as a rock in a streambed causes an eddy to form in the moving water, we make waves in the electron flow. If the vortex is

anything, it is a very simple, though elegantly intricate, electron flow, and nature may contain only one basic vortex form.

One of the things we do at the House of Mystery is let ordinary folks find out for themselves that dowsing rods really work. The scientific name for water witching, or dowsing, is radiesthesia, but no matter what it's called it is a way to interact with those *lines* of mine. A lot of *lines* cut through the vortex. Most people who take a pair of L-shaped copper rods in hand, and walk around the yard, will find them seemingly moving on their own. Outside the area they might not function for the same people.

To set up the demonstration, I point out that copper rods are used because they are non-magnetic, which allows us to avoid the charge of having buried electromagnets in the ground. The rods are about 18 inches long, with a ninety-degree bend that forms a six-inch handle to hold in the fist. They are then held firmly, parallel with one another and out from the body. When they turn in the hands, they may go either clockwise or counterclockwise. Direction does not matter, only movement.

One day I was showing a group how the rods would react over the bricks marking the line of demarcation. Instead of doing what they had always done for me, which was cross one another, they forcefully twisted around and instantly stopped, pointing in unison to my right. I was more than surprised, I was dumbfounded. Frankly, I half believed that the rods' movement was the result of an unconscious tilt of the hands. This particular movement was overtly dramatic. The metal wires felt as if they had been grabbed and yanked. Showing up for work in this place means that the unexpected should always be expected.

I turned my head and looked where the rods were pointing. Some of the things Litster left were three small, round cement platforms where he said north/south Terra lines crossed east/west lines. On these spots, inside the vortex, these lines oscillate causing some people to sway, or circle with the movement. I was looking toward my favorite concrete circle where, if my trick back was acting up, I could stand and get some relief.

On my favorite circle a young girl of 14 or 15 was standing, swaying gently, her eyes closed, and smiling. When I aimed my body away from her position, the rods moved, staying locked on her as if physically connected. I was about eight feet from where she was, and as I began walking around, the rods followed her, not losing adherence to that position until I was at least 12 feet away. I again moved in the direction of the platform, but an angle, and the rods leaped back toward her. I turned my back on her, and those fool rods whipped around and pointed right at me. Right *through* me?

I was oblivious to the tour group that had just formed. They must have thought I'd lost my mind.

After that, I always had someone stand on the circle while I dowsed him or her. I found other strong reactions, out to four or five feet, but never anything like that first time. The usual distance from which I can "find" a person, is about a foot, but sometimes I need to get within a couple of inches. I

think the vortex is showing the sensitivity of people. I believe that in one respect, I'm measuring auras.

In the early summer, I was leading twelve people around, and it wasn't too long after starting that I realized I had a hardcore skeptic on board. I don't mind skeptics, even the hardcore variety, because they usually come out the other side cured. This one, however, was a determined skeptic, the kind that doesn't utter a word, just camps in the back of the crowd and nods knowingly. Skeptics come in all ages and sexes. Kids around twelve or thirteen are the worst. When backed into a corner, kids usually fight. It's either fight or listen. Most skeptics are men, but this one was a woman. She was in her mid-thirties, tall, so she stuck right up there in the back row. It's amazing how people can get in your face from as far away as possible.

We had gotten through the house and were just about to leave the back yard, and my skeptic was as determined as ever. She was into the arms-crossed stance, and every once in a while her head and eyes would roll skyward. I could almost hear the inner voice, saying "Oh boy, what a crock."

I was about to classify her as a debunker. Debunkers are those who walk in knowing everything, and walk out the same way. I used to talk to debunkers, but stopped when I realized they were void of realistic arguments. Happily, there aren't many of them.

At the top of the hill where the last platform is, I was harboring fading hope. Why these people fascinate me, I don't know. Maybe it's the challenge. The last demonstration is usually the kicker. I get them there, or never, and it was beginning to look like never.

I had gone through all the demonstrations accompanied by the usual gasps from the crowd, and her arms were still crossed. This sale was not going to get closed.

It was a slow morning. I looked down the hill, and noticed no other group was waiting in the yard, we had lots of time; so I let everyone who wanted to walk the platform do so. Many times a person walking this short four-foot piece of cement will feel themselves grow and shrink. It's also possible for the spectators to see the instant a person makes a change, and I was hoping my skeptic would see it and catch on.

So it was that I was looking right at her when she became an ex-skeptic. Her arms flew apart, her eyes snapped wide open, and her jaw dropped. She stood shaking, and pointing with a near spastic arm and forefinger toward the platform. I noticed, also that she could talk; yell, actually.

"That guy...that guy...that guy!"

It was such a startling sight, that I didn't look where she was pointing. Some one else had to ask her, "what guy? What about him?"

"He...he's...vibrating!" she screamed.

I looked. A middle-aged man was on the platform staring bemusedly back at her. I think *my* jaw must have dropped. About a foot out, and all around his body, he was outlined by what appeared to be wavering heat lines such as are seen above pavement on a hot day. The background behind these lines was

obscured by a faint whiteness that wrapped his entire body. He appeared slightly out of focus, and looked to be vibrating.

This was a starkly real sight, and one that everyone on the tour saw. I know, because after he stepped off the platform, and became normal, quieting the excitement, I asked everyone what he or she witnessed.

Later, in conversation with the man, I learned he made his living giving psychic readings. He was interested that everyone saw his aura, but didn't think it was all that big of a deal. After all, it was something he saw any time he wanted, and what he saw was always in living color. The peons were still using their black and white sets.

Auras are something I've had some minor experience with, but I'd always chalked it up to a visual trick. If one looks just to the side of a person who is in front of the right background, usually green or blue with the light behind them, the difficult task of focusing on nothing will reveal these wavering lines, or some other faint outline. I liken this to peering at those computer-generated pictures of dots and nonsense swirls that was a brief fad a while back. Focus behind the picture, and a three-D image pops out. Cross the eyes, focus in front of the picture, and the same image emerges, but smaller and in reverse relief.

I had performed this very trick on the young girl who had made my dowsing rods take on a life of their own, and was rewarded with a fairly good "black and white" image of those familiar wavy lines. It was nothing in relation to the psychic on the platform, though. That was so apparent and real, that it is difficult, in retrospect to accept the product of my own eyes.

Human reason will work hard to forget something that has forced itself into Reason's construct of reality. Reason jealously guards its view of life, and is always just a glitch away from having its absolute interpretation vanish back into the quantum soup. Reason needs to run the show, and if actors appear that don't belong, it turns into a quaking bundle of fear. Witness the nearly complete unreasonable outlook of debunkers. I have seen stark fear in the eyes of those 12 and 13-year-old kids who fight so hard to retain the solidity of a world that a recent revelation told them was solid. First Santa Clause, and now this?

Psychics have told me that the vortex has an aura not unlike those of cats, dogs, and human beings. On a near-freezing morning in October, I unwittingly tested that assertion. I was sweeping up in the assay shack, while mulling over deep thoughts. In this small trance, my gaze was out the glassless window, and down toward the horizontal logs that make up the gift shop building. Slowly, I realized that the gift shop seemed to be wavering. By holding my focus on this effect, the whole landscape, as outlined by the window, took on a grayish tint that was decidedly shimmering.

When I came down off the hill, I asked Bryton to go up, look out the window and stare at the gift shop. We had been together long enough to know that if one asked the other to do something odd, that the question, why, would not yield an answer. We didn't want to color the results of an experiment by an expectation.

Five minutes later, she was back, slowly shaking her head. "It's like looking through a rainy mist," she said. Case closed.

Subsequently, we learned that cold air allows this sight to solidify. After the day warms up, the effect disappears. On another cold morning, we stood side by side in the assay shack's back yard at a position that had our noses practically touching the edge of the primary vortex. Together, we blew warm breath steam toward the windows of the old house, projecting a small, momentary cloud against the blackened interior. After several puffs, I took out a notebook, and wrote two words.

"See any thing?" I asked Bryton.

"Well," she hesitated, and exhaled some more breath. "It does look like some square shadowy stuff." She huffed more warm air. "You'll think I'm nuts, but...it looks like a big gear. You know...just a shadow, but gear teeth."

"No, not nuts," I said, and held up my notebook. In big block letters, I'd written: GEAR TEETH.

What did we see, not necessarily *in* the house, but probably projected *on* that shimmering curtain of the vortex's edge? The past? The future? Somebody else's universe? We don't know, but we both saw the same thing.

It's almost as if the vortex goes out of its way to pull in and reveal the extremes of human sensitivity. It outlines some, like the psychic on the hill, and it shuts down in the presence of those it seems not to like. Those in the middle can only stand around in awe, or simply try to have a good time. Psychics and shamans are the most obvious entities the vortex points out, and because they tend to be the most serious, they tend to not be as sporting as some others.

I was beginning a tour, one busy Saturday afternoon, when I looked up toward the parking lot. A big van was dispensing a mob of people. Ten men, all middle-aged, swarmed the yard as I was relating the history of the House of Mystery to about 15 others who had gotten there ahead of them. For the next two hours, these guys took over the joint, and I felt like I'd stepped into a Marx Brothers' movie.

They called themselves a discussion group, and they brought along an array of tools, like levels, tape measures, and really big laser pointers. They were underfoot, almost literally, jumping right into demonstrations to measure people, and asking questions that would stump most fourth-year physics students. I swear, one of these men looked exactly like Albert Einstein, with his wild, graying hair, round, red nose, and bulging eyes. While I was trying to show something to the regular folks, he got right up on the platform with me, and with a four-foot level, began to measure the angle of a demonstrator's arms,

"Al," I pleaded to him, "I thought you died in 1955?"

I was beginning to sound like Don Rickles.

It turned out the discussion group began their discussion of the Oregon Vortex that morning, 450 miles to the north on Vashon Island in Puget Sound. One of them evidently asked the others how they could discuss something none of them knew anything about? Good question, and at that point, normal people

would have changed the subject. These guys chartered a plane, and rented a big van.

The group contained one or two research scientists from the University of Washington, a few Boeing engineers, some lawyers, doctors, writers, and an artist. After the dust settled, I had to admit that it had been great fun.

Even Maria, who would rather have things orderly, had a good time. Never the less, she still wouldn't let them fire a rifle through the place so they could check the bullet's trajectory. Its been done, she told them. Nothing happens to the bullet's path, but you have to use incredible Kentucky windage, because you can't hit what you aim directly at.

The vortex seemed to like this bunch, and really showed its stuff, but one day it came upon someone that was too much for it.

A normal tour starts with a quick history in the yard near the canopy where the sign used to hang, then I set up the first demonstration by picking someone shorter than me, usually a woman. Since this is the first demonstration, I want it to work, and this arrangement shows off a height difference to the best effect. As usual, on this day, the lady victim was placed on the small platform outside the demarcation line, and I was on mine inside the line.

"As we change places," I told the newly assembled gathering, "watch closely and see if something peculiar happens."

The lady and I passed on the line of demarcation, mounted the opposite platforms, and turned to face one another. I looked at her, and my worst fear materialized!

The short person is supposed to get even shorter, and the tall person taller. The group gasps, snorts, and otherwise expresses wonder. That's not what happened. I saw a lady who was the same size as when she started, and heard a deafeningly silent crowd.

"I walk out the door everyday, asking myself, 'is this the day it all goes away?'" I told them with a gulp. "Well...what do you say we try this again?"

We traded places again, then again, and once more. My audience seemed a bit restive.

Luckily, I had a few months experience, and one similar occurrence to draw from. I remembered three couples on a tour months before. The vortex that day was absolutely rejoicing. The top platform in particular was yielding monstrous height changes. One by one, each of the six people walked the platform and felt themselves growing and shrinking. The rest of us watching could see them almost literally bounce and drop.

It was marvelous, until the sixth person, a man, strolled along the concrete slab. He walked, stopped, looked over at us and said, "I didn't feel anything."

It was no wonder he didn't feel anything, the rest of us didn't see anything. There are some people the vortex just won't accommodate.

For some reason, I don't know why, I didn't think my problem was the young lady's fault. I scanned the crowd, and my eyes settled on a tall man in a straw hat. He had the look of a troublemaker skeptic, and he was straddling

the line of demarcation. Whenever I've put one leg on either side of the line while trying to talk, my words and mouth don't seem to fit. The best way, it seems, to get on the wrong side of the vortex is to get on both sides of the vortex.

"Ah, sir," I asked a bit tentatively, "I'd like to try something. I wonder if I could have you step a foot or so to one side or the other?"

He shrugged, then raised one foot to move. I turned my head to the woman just in time to see her flicker. Like an image on a TV during a power surge, the entire scene flickered! Then, instantly, she lost three or four inches.

A voice came from the audience. "Oh, now I see it."

The lady across from me owned eyes as big as full moons.

After the tour, she sought me out, and asked, "Did you see what I saw back there?"

I asked her what it was she saw.

"It was so weird. I mean, there you were, then all of a sudden it was like, well a movie film skipped a frame. There was a jerk of some kind. In...in reality? Does that sound funny? Then, well, you shot up like a rocket. This isn't special effects, is it? I mean, darn it, this is broad daylight. How'd you do that?"

I commiserated with her, related the story of the three couples, and pointed out that I was just as puzzled as she.

Reality blinked. I think the vortex sort of pushed its own reset button to regain its balance. The tall fellow in the straw hat evidently acted like a battleship in a magnetic field. Some lines of force were sucked into the "battleship", while the rest of them flowed around.

If I hadn't come so close to losing my wits, I might have thought to ask him to stay for a while so I could have tried some experiments that seem obvious now. Would the hill seem taller at one end than the other if he was straddling the line of demarcation? Did the whole place shut down?

On rare occasions at this position another anomaly occurs that defies explanation. One day Bryton rushed into the gift shop abandoning her just-formed tour group. She was waving her arms and shouting.

"Get outside, quick! You gotta see this!"

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"That thing!" she yelled. "You know, that roof over the platforms. It's shaking!"

By the time I got outside the old canopy she was referring to was perfectly still, but Bryton made her group attest to me that it indeed had been shaking.

A month or so later, I was just beginning a tour while standing beneath the canopy, when a lady interrupted me.

"Pardon me," she said, "but could you tell me why that building is moving?"

I looked up to see the edge of the roofline gently swaying back and forth. The canopy was obviously one of Litster's installations, and is little more than a roof built on four two-inch steel pipes. Two of the pipe legs are inside the line of demarcation, and the other two are outside the line of bricks marking the edge

of the Vortex. As I looked, the canopy picked up speed and began a violent shaking. For perhaps 30 seconds, it rattled the signs and the demonstration level hanging from it, then it quieted, and stopped.

There was no earthquake. No other building shook, and no one felt the ground move. The next time I saw Bryton, I told her I now believed her.

Maria knows this sort of thing happens, but her interest is more on the business side, and her instincts in this regard are very good. I'm the goofy, pretend scientist. One of her better instincts involves picking candidates for temporary summer help. She goes to the speech teacher at the local high school and asks for the cream of the crop.

One her champion picks was Claire, a young woman of sixteen, going on thirty-five, who, since this was her second season, had seniority over both Bryton and me. I listened in once when someone asked Claire where the center of the vortex was, and what went on there.

"Well," she began studiously, "the center is actually underground. We can't get to it, but the axis is just on the backside of the house, and it's a dead zone of sorts. It's like the eye of a hurricane, calm, and nothing happens there."

Like the eye of a hurricane! Why didn't I think of that? I went up to her and asked if I could use the metaphor. My faith in America's youth soared. If I can last 19 years longer, I might vote, Claire for President.

Of all the fascinating people the vortex has lured in, the most amazing encounter I had was the least dramatic, and was provided by Claire. On a very busy day, she came toward me in the gift shop after one of her tours. A smallish senior citizen male tagged along behind her.

She introduced her charge as Harold, and said that Harold had some questions that maybe only I could answer. I took Harold's limb, and tentative hand, asked what I might do, then waved to Claire as she moved off to sell someone a candy bar.

Harold was in his early 70's, short, with wavy graying hair, and he seemed nervous and jumpy. He stood there, licking his lips obviously not knowing how to start.

"If your problem is weird," I said as an icebreaker, "you've come to the right place."

"Well, yes," he stammered. "Something the young lady said made me think of asking. Anyway, it was during the war." He stopped and looked around furtively.

"The Second World War?"

"Well, yes. No. Actually it was a little after. The War was over by then." More silence, as he looked at the door, I thought, longingly.

I waited, then asked, "What happened?"

He jumped. "Oh, yes. Certainly. I'm sorry. It's just that it's been so long ago. Yes, ok. I was a radar operator. A trainee, actually." He stopped. I wasn't surprised. It had been a big speech.

"Where were you stationed?" I prompted.

"Florida," he said so low I nearly missed it. "It was a B-seventeen." More silence.

I looked at my watch. It was just about time to take a new group on tour. I was about to excuse myself when the dam exploded.

"I was training as radar operator on this B-seventeen. The regular guy got sick that morning. Look, I was only eighteen. I didn't know what I was looking at. For a while, there were these planes out there in formation, and some really strange radio traffic. I mean these guys said they were lost, but it was a one-sided conversation. It sounded like they were talking to someone, but nobody answered. It was nuts. They weren't any more than five miles away. If I'd looked out the window, maybe I could have even seen them. How could they be lost?"

This time I was glad he fell silent. It gave me time to stop hyperventilating. I took a couple of breaths, then asked, "Where were you, exactly?"

"About, I don't know, about one, maybe two-hundred miles east of Boca Raton. The crazy thing is, I was looking at the scope. The sweep goes around, lights up the planes. They fade, like normal, right? The sweep comes back around...they ain't there." He paused to look me over. My mouth must have been open wide enough to fly that B-17 right into.

"I mean, listen, if those guys had fallen out of the sky, I coulda followed them all the way down to the sea. They just weren't there, and the radio traffic stops right in the middle of this guy saying he's takin' over the squadron. Right in the middle of a word...bloop, he's gone."

I realized I was holding my breath, and I let it out in a whoosh. "Were there five planes?" I asked.

"Yeah..."

"Were they Grumman Avenger Torpedo Bombers?"

"Say, do you know something about this?"

"Was this December the fifth, nineteen-forty-five?"

"How do you know these things?"

"Was the original flight leader, the first guy on the radio...was his name Charles Taylor?"

Now, Harold was really nervous, and it was a contest to see which of us had the larger eyes. I found it impossible that a find like this could just come out of a nice sunny day and land in my lap like a great big lottery prize. I wondered how he could be honestly ignorant of any public knowledge about the incident he was describing.

"Are you aware, Harold, that you could not only be the only surviving witness to the disappearance of Flight 19, you could be *the only witness that ever existed?*"

Poor Harold was like a cat on a frying pan. I took his arm to keep him from fleeing. Maria called to me to say I had a tour waiting. I managed a pleading look at Claire across the room, and asked if she could go out and stall them for me. Please.

Claire nodded knowingly, and headed for the door. No problem. I promise, in the 2020 Presidential Election she's going to get at least one vote.