

The Involuntary Hitchhiker

My grandmother lived about four miles from the little church my parents usually attended. I was to go to the service there on Easter Day. Afterwards, I decided to walk the four miles back rather than wait forty minutes for the bus, because I was wanting to test out my solution to a familiar school mathematics question. I had worked out exactly how fast I would have to walk so the bus wouldn't catch me up. If my calculations were wrong, I would admit defeat by taking the bus for the rest of the journey. I was absolutely determined to walk those four miles at just the right pace, to prove that I'd worked it all out correctly.

However, after about twenty minutes, I was shocked to find that—in what I can only call a reflex action, as though my right arm had suddenly taken on a life of its own—I put out my right hand to thumb down one particular car. I was utterly astonished to watch myself defeating my own purpose. To my relief, the car drove past—my race against the bus was, I thought, not to be spoilt. But a moment later the car suddenly stopped. Since, regrettably, I had thumbed it down, I felt I had to accept the offered lift.

I got into the front beside the chauffeur. I imagined he had first driven by and chosen to ignore me, but had then been told to stop by the lady in back. So I turned to her, and simply said, "Thank you."

She immediately asked, "Were you at Winchester?" I had no idea what had prompted the question but I replied that, in fact, I was currently at that school.

She replied, "If you are there now, you won't know the person I am thinking of. He was called Roddie Casement and he went to Winchester, but that must have been a long time ago now." When I told her that she was actually speaking of *my father*, the lady was delighted, and immediately asked, "Is his mother still alive?" I informed her that she was, and that we would soon be driving past her door, two miles down the road we were on. The lady then told me a story almost exactly parallel to the one I had been hearing from my grandmother all week. This lady had been trying to trace her very close friend—my grandmother—ever since they had lost touch

during the war. She was, in fact, the friend my grandmother had been seeking for ten years. They spent that day together—probably their last chance, as my grandmother died soon thereafter.

Account by Patrick Casement in Mayer (2007) *Extraordinary Knowing: Science, Skepticism, and the Inexplicable Powers of the Human Mind*. Bantam Books. pp. 21-22