

Turtles and Their Possible Significance to Indian Lake

By Lana

[Author's note: I wrote this email to Jennifer to share my own experiences with some of the issues with which she struggles around her feelings that J.Q. was present at Indian Lake after he died. As someone who also identifies herself as agnostic, I too have struggled with similar issues after the death of a loved one. Here, I share my own experiences with the appearance of turtles after my former partner's son was killed in an auto accident, and how one such recent occurrence appeared to relate to J.Q. and his beloved family. While my mind tells me that there is a high probability of coincidence, my heart also tells me otherwise. I've also recently researched the symbolism associated with turtles in various cultures, and was interested to learn that they represent many things, including immortality. What follows is a shortened version of my story, and the message that I sent to Jennifer on July 29th, 2012.]

Dear Jennifer,

I want to share a story with you that holds much significance to me. I think that I might have told you in the past about the significance that turtles hold for me and how they relate to Andrew [my former partner's son] and some of the unusual occurrences that I experienced following his death.

Andrew loved all living creatures and would become annoyed if anyone in his family as much as squashed a bug in the house, instead preferring that it be captured and taken outside. He especially loved turtles, and I can recall many, many times when I would drive him to a school or another event and he would make me stop my car because he had spotted a turtle in the road and wanted to assist in its arrival to its destination without harm. We also quite often took walks in the woods behind our house to a swampy area that led to a small creek, and had many turtles, large and small, living in relative comfort.

Andrew would sometimes wade into the mucky waters just to pick up a large turtle to show it to me, and then place it back in the water so it could be on its way to wherever it was heading.

I acquired Andrew's love of turtles, and soon began my own mission to assist them in crossing roads, and I otherwise appreciated their existence.

When Andrew was killed, his recently purchased small truck hit a bridge abutment and flipped over the side of the road and down into the embankment of a relatively large stream. During the process of arranging for his memorial service, I asked his mother if I could speak at his service about his love of animals, and specifically about the turtle encounters on what were often very busy roads. She agreed.

When I first went to the scene of the accident, before his memorial, I stood on the bridge and looked down to the cracked, but intact windshield of his vehicle

that still lay just a few feet from the water. I saw the round and shattered section where his head hit the glass, ultimately causing his death. I was distraught, crying and feeling the despair that comes with losing someone I loved so deeply. But within seconds, I noticed a quick movement in the water near that windshield, and a large turtle shot out of the water and sat near it -- turning its head and looking right at me.

Because of the significance that turtles held in our relationship, and because I had just discussed speaking about Andrew's love of them at his service, I became so startled that I almost ran from the scene in complete disbelief of what I had just witnessed. I looked away, thinking that I must have been imagining the presence of that turtle. But after a brief moment, I was overcome by a great sense of peace and comfort, and of Andrew's presence, and I decided to look back down at the creek bank, only to find that the turtle was still there - still looking right at me - sitting next to the windshield that had not been collected by the towing company when they had removed his truck from the accident scene. I stood there for many minutes, pondering the significance of what I was witnessing, and the turtle stayed there the entire time. I came away from that experience believing that it was probably a coincidence because, after all, I was at a body of water and turtles live in and around water.

After that experience, the memorial service was held and I talked about his love for turtles, not mentioning the turtle sighting at the accident scene, but sharing that incident privately with Andrew's mother and the three other kids. We all found it interesting, but agreed that it was most likely coincidence. However within that same week, I went to the cemetery (where Andrew's ashes had been interred) for the first time since we buried them on a hillside. I needed time to be alone and sit under the beautiful and grand maple tree that shaded his gravesite in the hot afternoon sun. I spent some time there, literally laying next to his grave and weeping into the grass. Too upset to drive, I waited for my emotions to level out before getting into my car to head back home before sunset. About a few miles from the cemetery, as I was driving a long and winding country road back home, I spotted something ahead. It was a large turtle, about the size of the one that was at the accident scene just days before, sitting in the center of the road. I stopped my vehicle, got out, picked the turtle up and carried it to the other side of the road. I felt at peace. I felt a strong sense of Andrew's presence.

I told Andrew's mother about that turtle sighting and the following day she bought me a necklace with a small turtle pendant that I wore each and every day as I grieved his death. But on August 6th, the year anniversary of Andrew's death, I was standing on the fishing pier in Ocean City, MD, looking down to the sea and hoping that a turtle would appear. None did, and instead of seeing a turtle, the pendant on my necklace became caught in the chain-link fence without my knowing. I was crying - desperately wanting to see a turtle for

comfort, but when I pulled my head back from the edge of the pier, the pendant was pulled off from the necklace and dropped into the ocean below.

At first I was more upset - having lost a precious token of love, and a precious reminder of Andrew and his presence in my life. But then I felt him, and I felt as though he was telling me that it was time to let go. I also thought that perhaps because I could not see any turtles in the water, that he decided to put one there for me. After all, it was near dusk and turtles would have been difficult to spot in the rough surf below.

Years would pass since that time and I would rarely ever see turtles. I now live in an area where there are abundant road signs notifying drivers of sea turtle crossings, yet until recently, I had only seen one turtle since I moved to the eastern shore 3 years ago. That turtle appeared when I was driving back from the Cape Henlopen State Park in Lewes, DE, with our former housemate who had wanted my company as he surfed. We stopped, moved the turtle to safety, and got back into my vehicle. That incident prompted me to tell him about Andrew and turtles. As he listened, and I drove, about 2 miles further on the road that leads back to Rte 1, we encountered an SUV in a deep ditch with water in it -- it was a nurse who had just ended her shift and had suffered a seizure -- and lost control of the vehicle. As my friend and housemate called for help, I busted her backseat window with a rock to gain access to the inside of her locked vehicle so I could provide aid to her until the rescue squad arrived. Coincidence?

The next turtle sighting was July 7, 2012, at approximately 1:30 pm EST. My partner Linda, me, and a friend who was visiting for the weekend, decided to head down the coast to Bethany Beach for an air-conditioned ocean-front table at a favorite restaurant for some appetizers and cold beverages in what could only be described as sweltering, oppressive heat. Though for some odd reason, I ended up in downtown Rehoboth Beach instead of staying on Route 1 south. Habit. I am very accustomed to driving visitors to downtown Rehoboth Beach - my vehicle knows the way all by its self. Compensating for the error, I drove over to the [Silver Lake](#) area via some side streets to catch a road that leads south back to Rte 1 in Dewey Beach. However, as we were nearing a stop sign next to the lake, all of the sudden my partner Linda yells from the back seat "TURTLES!!!". Of course, I immediately stopped the car, backed up and pulled off the road.

Here is a picture of what we saw: Six turtles, two large ones and 4 smaller ones, sitting on an immersed log in Silver Lake near the lakeshore. I have never seen 6 turtles at one time except when I was with Andrew in the woods behind our home (at the swamp). As I pulled my camera with my long lens out of the backseat of my car and photographed them from a distance, not wanting to disturb them as they basked in the sun, I wondered what significance they might hold, if any.

The images sat on my memory card until I dumped them onto my computer desktop a few days later. I quickly forgot about them until yesterday, when I saw the file folder and immediately thought of you and J.Q. and of your sense that you can feel his presence at Indian Lake. It occurred to me that perhaps Andrew was up to his old tricks and that he wanted me to see these turtles so I could reassure you about J.Q.'s presence at the lake. It was a "Duh" moment. Six turtles, two large and four small. Six turtles that appear to be like a family in a lake near the ocean. So I took one of those images -- the very first one that I shot, and cleaned it up since the water was green from an algae bloom and had tree debris floating at the surface, and I turned it into a photo that represents more of the beauty that I imagined when I first saw it. It also reminded me of an old photo, and the old photos that are in the house at Indian Lake that you've described in your blog posts.

I know what the photograph of the turtles means to me -- that J.Q. was indeed at the lake with you and your family as you gained a new son. I think that perhaps my Andrew is looking out for you because he knows that you are very important to me He was a brilliant young man who graduated Valedictorian and was going into computer science -- and had a heart full of compassion. [He also self-identified as agnostic.]

I will leave it to you to decide what this photo means to you, if anything.

I like to work in black and white, and I like toned images with a shallow depth-of-field, so this is what I came up with:

