

Chapter 1: The Skotos Project

Jack O'Donnell had spent the last 30 of 61 years living for God. He felt like he could live another 50, his health was good and his mind was sharp. But there in the doctor's exam room wearing one of those little white gowns without anything on underneath, pacing and holding onto the back to keep from flashing, he felt vulnerable. The doctor had just finished examining him for his yearly physical and he was waiting on him to come back in and give him his report. He expected a clean bill of health like he had gotten every year, yet right now he was perplexed as to why he was left waiting. As soon as he was done here at the doctors he would head over to his daughter's house to pick up his grandson Sam for their annual week long camping trip. Sam was really getting big, a strapping 12 year old with lots of energy. It did seem a little strange, usually the doctor would have told him to get dressed and come to his office. However, during the exam the doctor muttered to himself and then called the nurse in to draw some more blood. He told Jack to wait in the exam room while they "ran a few tests." This made him nervous.

"Jack, you are 61 years old, it's probably just routine. Why are you getting yourself worked up over nothing?" He chided himself. Looking at his watch he saw it was almost one o'clock. He was supposed to be at his daughter's house by three to pick up Sam and he still needed to stop by the grocery store and pick up a few things. The plan was to stay at his house that night and then head out for their favorite camping spot early the next morning. His mind drifted to that spot where he found 'Krazo' 30 years earlier.

‘Krazo’ that’s what he called the small white stone he carried in his pocket. It had only been two years since he lost his wife of 35 years to cancer. Oh how he missed her, sometimes the loneliness was unbearable. He missed the funny little pet names she would call him and the way she always knew when something was bothering him. It hadn’t always been that way, well not exactly. There was a time not long after they had married when he went through a really tough time, and she just didn’t understand. It almost cost him his marriage and his sanity, but God intervened. He started on a journey that has lasted for 30 years and he has never looked back. It’s how this journey got started that makes it unique. He had decided this year during their camping trip he would share his story with Sam. “It is time”, he thought. Sam was getting older and more mature and his interest in science would certainly be enhanced by what he had to tell him.

“False alarm Jack!” the doctor spoke as he stepped into the room.

“Whew, you had me worried for a minute, what was the problem?”

“When I did your EKG I noticed some unusual blips and I wanted to be sure you hadn’t had a heart attack recently. It must have been artifact because the blood work showed that your ticker is in good shape. You might want to cut down on the French fries though; your cholesterol is up from your last visit. Are you still runnin?”

“Yes, I usually get twenty miles a week in, not bad for a 61 year old huh?”

“Not bad? That’s doggone good you old fart! Are we going golfing this weekend?”

“No I’m taking my grandson on our yearly pilgrimage to South Fork for a little fishing, hiking and stories around the... hold on John, whaddiya mean by ‘artifact’?” Jack suddenly remembered what the doctor had said about his EKG.

“Oh, I’m sorry Jack. Sometimes we get so used to saying certain things—you know medical jargon that we forget not everyone knows what it means. Artifact is like saying interference. Sometimes it’s caused by movement, but other times from some unknown electrical interference. It could be as benign as touching something metal and causing a little static electricity. Basically it’s nothing to worry about, Ok?”

“Ok, thank you.” Jack said, satisfied with the answer.

“Now if you want I can schedule you for a full cardiac workup to include a stress-test. I don’t think it is called for in your case though.”

“No, that’s ok John, if you say I’m ok, then I believe it!”

John Stalwart had been his doctor and friend since their days working together on the Skotos Project in New Mexico. John was on Jack’s team as the Medical expert and also provided medical care to the whole team. John was a good doctor clinically, probably one of the best. However he was the kind to give medical advice to his patients but not necessarily adhere to it himself. He was a little overweight and the only exercise he got was walking from his car to the office. He had spent many years working with scientists and then a number of years in academia before setting up his own practice here in Durango.

“So Jack, are you gonna tell Sam about Skotos?”

“Yeah, I think it’s time, he’s getting older and I’m certainly not gettin any younger!”

“Are you tellin him everything, Jack?”

Many years before Jack had disappeared while hiking in the mountains near Durango and it was in these same mountains that Jack was taking Sam for their annual trip. John still had trouble with the crazy story Jack told everyone at Skotos after he returned. One thing he couldn’t deny was the fact that Jack had changed. Something happened while he was “out there,” as everyone else put it. Jack just called it “The Journey.” And what a journey it was. To most who knew Jack O’Donnell in 1974, a renowned Theoretical Physicist working on a secret government project known as “Skotos”, he was a man with his feet planted squarely on the ground. He didn’t go for strange unexplainable things, as a matter of fact he believed if something happened there would always be an explanation, perhaps not a simple one, but an explanation nonetheless. So how could this man, a scientist and atheist come back from a solitary camping trip with such a fabulous tale of traveling to other planets and meeting up with the devil, demons, angels, the Spirit of God and even God Himself? This was what John found so difficult. Oh, he liked Jack and would always be his friend, but he had tried for the last 30 years to understand this fantastical story that Jack told.

“Well I can say this for ya Jack ol’ buddy, you sure are consistent.” As he said this he shook Jack’s hand vigorously and said, “You two have fun and try not to catch too many fish, save some for the rest of us!”

“I’m still praying for you John, I know you think I’m crazy, but one day you just might be surprised by a visitor like I was; you never know!” Jack said as he started for the door.

“Ok Jack you know I don’t go in for all that religious stuff, I’m going to keep my feet on the ground. All of this talk of God and hocus pocus of spirits and demons are just too much for me!” John called out to his parting friend.

Jack just shook his head as he headed out the door. He couldn’t understand how someone couldn’t believe. But then he remembered how he used to listen to Ron tell about God and Jesus thinking all the while that it was a bunch of nonsense just like John. Ron Johnson was the Astronomer on his team at Skotos. He had witnessed to Jack on many occasions. Ron also was someone who continually warned the director of the Skotos project that they were working on things that put them in danger. He felt like they were trying to play God and this worried him.

“When I look up into the heavens and see the stars and planets I can’t help but see a master designer—God.” He had told Jack. Jack would just listen and then tell him that he thought he was crazy.

“There’s an explanation for everything we see Ron, eventually I’ll show how it all came about and you’ll see how silly you’ve been.” Jack said in retort to Ron’s reasoning.

Of course that was before the journey, before that night sitting by the river when everything changed. Jack left the doctor’s office and went to the grocery store and picked up the items they would need for their trip to South Fork. Then he drove out to his daughter’s house to pick up Samuel. When he arrived Sam ran out to meet him.

“Hey Gramps, I thought you would never get here! What took you so long?” Sam asked.

“Sorry Sam, I had a doctor’s appointment and it took a little longer than I thought it would.” Jack said as he rubbed Sam’s head.

“Now you start loading your stuff in the truck while I talk to your mama a minute, Ok.” Jack continued.

“Ok, Gramps. Do you want me to get her for you?” Sam asked.

“No, that’s alright Sam, I will just go inside.”

Jack walked into the kitchen. Susan was sitting at the table reading a book, she looked up and smiled. She looked so much like her mother it was always a little tough on Jack, even though it had been two years since she had passed away the pain was always right there at the surface.

“Hi Daddy.” She said in her bubbly way as she rose to hug him.

“Sit down honey, I want to talk to you a minute.” Jack said trying not to sound too serious.

Jack began telling her about his doctor’s visit and the slight scare he had while there.

“Daddy, are you sure you want to go on this trip?” Susan asked trying to mask the concern in her voice.

“Baby, my health is good; I’m going to be just fine. I just wanted you to know, that’s all.” Jack said in his no nonsense way, then he got up and they both headed outside. Jack helped Sam finish loading the truck.

“Bye mama.” Sam called out as he carried the last of his stuff to the truck.

“Come here and give me a kiss young man!” Susan called after him.

“Awe Mom, I’m too big for that!” He complained, but then quickly headed over to her.

“Have fun Sammy, you better listen to your gramps or you’ll be in big trouble.” She said as she kissed him on his cheek.

“I will mama.”

“Don’tcha worry about him Baby, you know your daddy can take care of things if I have to.” Jack spoke to Susan with a smile and winked at Sam.

“Daddy, can I talk to you a sec?” Susan asked as Sam got seated in the truck.

“Sure, what’s up?” Jack said, moving away from the truck to where she was standing by the house.

“Daddy I know you are going to tell Sam about Skotos and everything that happened back then. You probably already had it in your mind to do it even before your scare at the doctor’s office, but I’m sure that’s made you want to do it even more. I just want to ask you to do one thing for me.” Susan said.

“What’s that honey?” Jack asked.

“Try not to fill his head with too many crazy ideas, Ok?” Susan gave him a look of skepticism and her tone was patronizing. It wasn’t that she didn’t believe her father; it was only that she figured he must have had a dream caused by all the pressure he was under from the Skotos Project.

“It must have been hard on him.” She thought as she saw the look on his face. “Daddy, you know I believe you. You’re a fine man and I know that God showed you a lot of things back then...it’s just...” She stopped, unsure if she should proceed.

“Susan,” She knew he was serious when he called her by her name. “God did something extraordinary in my life back then. I intend to share it with my grandson and to pass on to him a part of my life. Whether I went somewhere physically or not, God took me to places that are almost unimaginable and unexplainable.” His tone softened and he added “Baby, don’t worry, this is serious, I have done a lot of praying about this, Ok?”

“Ok daddy. I’m sorry, it’s just Mama...” She started to tear up.

“Hey baby, don’t do that. I miss her too.” He hugged her and then patted her on the head and mussed her hair like he used to do when she was little. This brought so much comfort to her she couldn’t even begin to understand it or explain it to anyone. She knew her Daddy delighted in her and that made everything Ok somehow. She smiled as he walked toward the truck.

“You two men have fun!” She called out after him as he headed for the truck, wiping the tears from her eyes. Sam just waved sitting up tall with a big grin on his face from being called a man.

“Ok young man, we are off!” Jack said as he put the truck in gear and they made a loud grinding sound.

“This old truck is gettin wore out.” Jack said. “But I can’t bring myself to get rid of it.” He laughed a happy laugh. It felt good to be in the old truck heading out onto the highway and an adventure with his grandson next to him. They went back to Jack’s house and spent the night. Jack got up early the next morning and finished loading the groceries and fishing supplies he had picked up the day before and then woke Sam up.

“Hey boy, it’s time to get up.” Jack said as he shook Sam awake.

“Umph!” Was the only response he got from him. So he started tickling him by poking him in his ribs and that finally got him moving.

“Get up boy; we need to get on the road!” He said as he left the room. Sam got into the truck and curled up in the seat and fell back asleep for a couple more hours. It wasn’t until Jack stopped for gas and breakfast that he finally got up.

“Where are we?” He asked as he stretched and yawned real big.

“Were in Hermosa it’s the last stop before we get to our campsite. Were going to get gas and then eat some breakfast.”

They ate a hearty breakfast of sausage, eggs, hash browns and biscuits at the little mountain diner and then drove up the road to the gas station to fill up.

“Gramps, what’s that?”

Sam was looking at the small white stone Jack pulled from his pocket while he looked for change to pay for his gas.

“That’s a friend of mine.” He answered.

“Gramps, that’s a rock!” Sam protested.

His twelve year old mind was able to make friends out of many things, a pet, a toy soldier or characters in a video game, but a rock? He understood you just can’t have a rock for a friend.

“Sam, this week while we’re camping I’m gonna tell you a story about this rock.” Jack told him.

Sam got all excited, “Gramps, will you start telling me now? I love stories!”

“No Sam, I want to wait until we get to South Fork, it won’t be long now. After we get camp set up I’ll start telling you all about it, deal?” Jack knew it would be better to wait until they were down by the river where he found the rock and also in a place where he could feel more relaxed than standing at the counter of a convenience store. “Deal, Gramps!” At this point the two shook hands and headed out to the truck.

It had only been a few years since everything Jack went through as a young physicist in the early 1970’s had been declassified. He had only told a few people the whole story since then. He had told his daughter, son-in-law and his wife Mary and that was on her death bed. Mary suffered the most during that time and He felt he owed it to her to finally tell her everything. Sure he shared his testimony about how Christ had delivered him and made him a new creation, but since there were so many unexplained things that happened to him and how they may have been connected to the Skotos project he was constrained from telling the whole story. Now years later it was like a burden sitting on his old chest and the story burned within him. To tell his grandson, to pass on to him a legacy of how God had worked in his life would be a crowning achievement for him. He knew one day he would die and wanted someone to have the small stone that he cherished as a stone of remembrance of the working of a holy God in his life.

“Who better to pass it to than the next generation?” He had said to himself when he decided he would tell Sam the whole story. They arrived at the campground before noon and got everything set up and then ate some lunch. Sam

was a typical twelve year old boy who doesn't forget much and loves a good story. As soon as lunch was done he was ready to hear the story and said, "Gramps are ya ready?"

"Ready for what?" Jack asked, joking with him.

"You know! The storyeee."

"Sam this will be a very long story and I'm hot, whadaya say we go for a swim first, and then I'll start telling it right after dinner?" Jack said smiling.

"Ok, that sounds good to me, I'm hot too." Sam pulled off his shirt and grabbed his towel out of his pack.

Later in front of a roaring fire Jack leaned back against a log and began.

"A long time ago, I was having difficulties in my life that I didn't understand. This rock played a central role in it all."

He pulled the small stone from his pocket and showed it to Sam again. "As you know I was a Theoretical Physicist and I was working on a secret government project called Skotos. Our team studied the stars and how they sometimes explode. Do you know what it is called when a star explodes?"

"Yes Sir, it's a Supernova, and it can create a black hole, which is like a giant vacuum in space that sucks in everything around it!" He answered.

"Yes, that's right, Sam!" Jack said as he high five'd him Sam beamed with pride for having the right answer.

"My job was to study images from powerful telescopes; these pictures were taken by the Astronomer on our team, Ron Wilson. Ron was a Christian and everyone, including me thought he was crazy because of his beliefs. The Skotos Project was operating under the assumption that time travel using the power of the black hole may be possible. It was

theorized that we could use a powerful contained explosion and create a black hole here on earth and use it to travel through time. It was a foolish notion, but we had sent vehicles in space and had harnessed the atom; I think we thought we could do anything. Man has been fascinated with time travel for centuries and the idea that it might be possible simply had us all ecstatic. We really didn't think about consequences, except for Ron. Ron believed that God would not be pleased with us tinkering with such things. He would even talk about the story in the bible when the people all got together and started to build a tower up to heaven.

"I know that story; it was called the tower of Babel, God mixed up their language and they left it unfinished and were scattered all over the earth." Sam said.

"That's right Sam." Jack said. "You see Babel means confusion and in the same way Skotos means 'darkness' and that is exactly what happened to my life while I worked on this project."

"Gramps, is the Skotos Project still going on?"

"Heavens no son, if it were I suppose I wouldn't be able to talk about it. At the time we couldn't talk to anyone about the project. Your grandmother thought I was doing something wrong, because suddenly I quit talking to her about my work and became very agitated and irritable all the time. Frankly I was afraid, there were strange things happening and I had no one I could talk to about it."

"Why?" Sam asked.

"You see it was exciting when we first started. It seemed like we would be able to travel in time and fix things that

had gone wrong in the world, and who wouldn't want to do that? But then the disappearances started.”

“People actually disappeared?” Sam's face went ashen at the thought.

“That's right, first it was someone in the Nuclear Department; but since he was far removed from my office I didn't think much of it. Then Günter, another Theoretical Physicist from the one of the other team disappeared. That's when I started to worry. When I came home your grandmother would ask me about it but I couldn't tell her that people were disappearing. However, things like this were hard to hide in our small community of scientists, engineers and their families. The authorities told everyone that they had been transferred, then their families were quickly relocated and no one ever saw them again. Of course I knew different and acted very angry and frustrated. Now mind you at this time I was an atheist, I had no need of God, nor did I even think about him. However, Ron was a Christian and a critic of the project. I remember one of our conversations to this day.

‘Jack I became a believer from looking at the stars. There is just too much of a design for all this to be an accident.’

Ron had said this to me with a determined look in his eye.” Jack told Sam.

“So I asked him, ‘why wouldn't God, want us to fix everything if we have the opportunity?’ I went on to protest that God doesn't seem that concerned with it. His answer to that was to say, ‘Jack we can't play God and mess with things that are beyond us.’ So everyday he marched into the project director's office and told him if we

kept this up we were going to get ourselves into some kind of trouble.”

“But Gramps why didn’t he just leave the project if he thought it was wrong?”

“Good question Sam, I asked him that also. I said to him, ‘Ron, why do you stick around and contribute to this project if you feel so strong against it?’ He said to me, ‘Well Jack I feel that someone has to stay here and be a conscience to those who are running this project. I guess you could say I’m a crusader of sorts.’ He had said this with a smile. Anyway, I would listen to him talk about God all the time, I thought it was entertaining. He told me all about Jesus and salvation, but I would just laugh at him and tell him that was all silly nonsense for weak people.”

Jack stopped talking and sat there staring off into space for several minutes just thinking. He was remembering Ron and the way he used to tell him about God and how important it was to read the bible and talk to Him. Samuel sat there patiently just staring at him with anticipation. Jack could see the wheels turning in Sam’s mind; he wanted to know about Skotos. Jack knew he would tell him, but he wanted to make sure he heard the most important thing, the real story; the story of how Jack had descended into darkness and how God rescued him by some very unusual circumstances.

After several seconds Sam finally broke the silence and said, “Tell me more Gramps!”

“I want to know all about this time travel stuff! Did you ever travel through time? This is all so neat!”

“Samuel, in a way, I have traveled through time, but it was not through the Skotos Project. I will tell you all about it,

but first let me lay the ground work to help you understand how I went through hell to get to where I am today. You see the Skotos Project was not going well, and all the engineers and scientist were trying to figure out what happened to the people who disappeared. I was on a team with two Engineers, an Astronomer, a Physiologist – My friend Dr. Stalwart and me. I was the Physicist. Individually we worked on our piece of the puzzle and then twice a week we'd meet to put our findings together, after our second meeting we would write a report from the findings. A representative from the group would meet with the Project Manager and his team which they called 'The Project Committee' to present our findings. We never knew about the other teams and their findings, nor did we see the final outcomes or how everything fit together. My job was to take the information the Astronomer collected from studying space photographs of Supernova's. Those that had created black holes were of most interest. We had at our disposal powerful telescopes that could look into deep space. We had theories about what was really going on out there, so I would look at the photos and conduct what Einstein called 'thought experiments'. Once I worked out my formulas I would pass the data on to the Engineering team and they would conduct experiments of their own to see if what I came up with was physically possible to build with our technology. If they had anything they thought might work, then they sent their report on to the physiologist who would check it with the 'human factor' because ultimately it didn't matter whether we could build it or not. The real question was can the human body handle what we were going to put it through? We did this over

and over again; most of the times I would have nothing to contribute because my 'thought experiments' would fail. It took months and months of research for us to come up with just one possible solution to the problem. Though we knew they were building something, we had no idea that they were close to completing anything until people started disappearing. Then just two days after the third disappearance someone put a folder on my desk that had 'TOP SECRET' written in bold red letters, under that it said 'Project Skotos, April 7, 1974'. It wasn't the normal way I received information to work on, but I thought it was more data from the Astronomer for me to review; until I opened it!" Jack paused.

Even though it had been over 30 years it was still hard for him to talk about it.

"What did it say Gramps?" He was excited; he wanted to know what was written in that folder.

"There it was every detail of my last contribution to the project. It was my idea, my thought experiment! They had used our teams input to build the machine that was sucking people into God only knows where. Do you know what that does to you when you realize you could be responsible for the deaths of three people? Of course you don't; let me tell you it will throw you into a tailspin son, that's what it did to me!"

"Wow, that's scary Gramps; I didn't know you went through all that!"

"It's been a long time ago son, I'm alright now. I know you want to know all about the Skotos Project and what happened, but I want you to know where it all lead me and how God got a hold of me through everything I went

through. That is when the unbelievable stuff really began...”