

A Bump on the Head

by
Robert Rietschel, October 3, 2023

As far as head injuries go, it seemed minor. He was cleaning the gutters of his house and the ladder seemed secure. That is, until the roadrunner darted through the yard, and his German shepherd took off after it knocking the ladder loose from its mooring. Down he went and hit his head on one of the flagstones that made a trail from his back door to his gate. He didn't lose consciousness, or at least he didn't think so. There was no bleeding. He didn't even have a headache. Sure, if he touched the area, it was sore, but that was to be expected. He didn't seek any care for this insignificant event. He righted the ladder and completed his yard work.

When something fundamental changes, we usually mark the occasion. But when the change is something so radically different from the norm, we might not even connect the dots and realize that cause and effect are in play. So, our hero, John Veritas, didn't remember which day he hit his head. He figured out in retrospect that the blow must be the reason his perception of the world around him changed. His senses were sharper. He had an awareness that was hard to put into words. His knowledge wasn't greater, but he seemed to know so much more about his immediate environment. He didn't get that same enhanced feeling when watching TV, but if he visited a place he'd seen on TV, he understood. If you asked him what he understood, he'd tell you that he "got it". John couldn't tell you what it was. At least, not at first. In time he realized that his senses were so heightened that he could tell what a person was thinking. He couldn't read their minds, but he could read their looks, their body language, their subtleties that others didn't pick up on. It was almost as though he could see into their souls. He could anticipate what they would say or do next.

Was John ever wrong about his new clear vision? That's what he decided to call it. If John told you something was about to happen and then it did, you might ask him how he knew. He would tell you that he just has very clear vision and could see what was coming. John wondered why others didn't see it too. He might say something like, "Didn't you notice what he was doing with his left index finger? And his right hand was on his back pocket. He was thinking of paying with something in his wallet when he changed his mind and just signed for the check with his left hand. Didn't you notice that?" Well, no, John, none of us noticed that. We were distracted by the waiter's impatience with who was going to pay the tab. For John, no twitch went unnoticed, and no facial feature, no matter how slight, went unrecognized. John could tell when anyone was lying. John could choose to act on his enhanced information or ignore it. He wasn't a slave to his new gift, but he also was unsure how to exploit it.

The advent of DNA testing revealed the parentage of those tested and the results weren't always what the family story had portrayed. John's parents had always told a story of his birth happening in a taxi on the way to Mount Sinai Hospital in New York. They had given him a birth certificate which indicated he was received in the Mt. Sinai emergency room after birth in a taxi and it listed John's parents as the family he grew up with. But John lost that birth certificate and requested a new one from the city. The document he received indicated different parentage and delivery in a Queens hospital. John had been adopted. He didn't confront his parents with this new knowledge, rather he chose to test his enhanced senses. He simply asked his parents to tell him once again about his birth. Of course, they repeated the cover story they had concocted. John watched and had no trouble telling when the falsehoods started. He said nothing to indicate he knew the reality of his birth. He simply confirmed his ability to read the room. For him that wasn't an expression, it was just a fact of life.

John wondered if he could monetize this talent. So, he went to Vegas and entered a poker tournament. The pros know that having the best cards isn't how the game is played. It's being able to bluff your way to victory with a hand that should be a loser. And no tells. No little habits or ticks that give away the fact that you are bluffing. But then they had never encountered anyone with the senses that John had. John called all the bluffs correctly. He

won almost every hand as he could read the table and know who was bluffing and he knew what cards he had. Could he beat what the other player had showing? If he didn't think he could, he'd fold, but if he thought his two queens could beat any possible combination that a player whom he knew was bluffing must have, he pressed the bet. If you know someone is bluffing, you know their hold cards aren't what you would fear, but likely something useless. And John always knew who was bluffing.

The casinos take a dim view of someone who wins consistently. They must be counting cards or have some scheme that accounts for consistency at the tables. After John won three major poker tournaments, he was a marked man. He was banned from every casino on the strip. John wasn't a professional gambler and didn't know that casinos could do that. Well, no matter. He'd confirmed that his skill was real. And he owed it all to an anonymous roadrunner and his German shepherd. Or more correctly, to the bump on his head that they caused.

John had close to \$2 million in winnings, so money was no longer a problem. He wondered how he might use his skill for some higher purpose. John needed a place to think, so he went to the bar at Caesar's and ordered a martini. He figured he would bounce ideas off the bartender and the guy tending bar had been at Caesar's for over 26 years and had heard it all. Or so he thought. John suggested that he could tell when someone was lying, and the bartender decided to challenge John to a little game of Liar's Dice. It was no contest. John could always tell when the bartender was bluffing. Another patron was sitting two barstools away and had been taking in all of this. Judge Amos Alonzo. The Judge started up a conversation with John as the bartender was putting the Liar's Dice away. The Judge had become somewhat cynical over the years. If you asked him, he would tell you that everyone in his court was lying. But Judge Amos wanted to be fair. He wished for the wisdom of Solomon but would settle for far less. Here was the answer to the Judge's prayers. Amos put a proposition to John. Come and work for me. Sit in my courtroom and just watch and listen. When I call a recess, you and I will convene in my chambers, and you can tell me who's telling the truth. The idea caught John at that moment when he was trying to figure out how to use his gift for some higher purpose and he readily agreed.

A couple of years went by, and the legal community developed a new respect for Judge Amos Alonzo. He was seen as unusually wise. You couldn't fool this guy. Somehow, he could see through bogus arguments, he could tell when someone was trying to pull a fast one. Nothing slipped by the Judge. No one recognized the vital role that John played in this. The attorneys who thought they could outwit Amos found themselves exposed as frauds. Several were brought before the State Bar for disciplinary action.

When a person garners respect within the legal profession, a run for public office becomes a viable option. A number of prominent citizens wanted a man of Judge Amos' reputation to run for the vacant Senate seat. It isn't often that someone starts their political career at the U.S. Senate, but the Judge had been in the Las Vegas papers as often as the Clark County Sheriff. Only he was held in higher esteem. Judge Amos had name recognition and cruised to victory. If you can carry Clark County, you can carry Nevada. He was seldom seen in public without his personal aid, John Veritas. John's official title was media consultant. No one bothered to check John's credentials as John kept a low profile. If anyone had, they would have discovered a man who won a lot of poker games and little else.

Senator Alonzo was given a position on the Judiciary Committee. It was a natural fit. In normal times the work of the committee goes unnoticed. But not when a Supreme Court nominee is up for review. How many times had pundits and the public alike wondered just where the nominee stood on critical legal matters? The art of dodging loaded questions was part of the preparation of all candidates for a Supreme Court appointment. These were polished professionals who knew how to parse a phrase and how to evade, evade, evade. John Veritas sat in on the proceedings and he was seated where Senator Alonzo could easily see him. A nod or a shake of the head would let the Senator know when the witness was less than forthcoming. The questioning by most Senators didn't reveal anything as the witness deflected questions with ease. Not so when it came to Alonzo. The cameras captured the beads of sweat as the Senator refused to accept certain answers as truthful. The witness could only wonder, "How

did he know?" When the witness claimed he didn't know a certain call girl named Tammy Wonderful, but there had been rumors about the witness being a frequent companion of Miss Wonderful, the Senator was able to keep chipping away at the denials. The Senator had been able to find Miss Wonderful and she would be called as a witness herself. She had been living very comfortably in the Bahamas where she was supposed to have gone undetected and unable to testify. The FBI had tracked her down. They wouldn't normally have been so keen to do so were it not for the media attention Senator Alanzo's questioning had garnered on the nightly news.

No one was surprised when the Supreme Court nominee withdrew from consideration. There were other skeletons that Senator Alanzo wanted to explore, but the nominee had seen enough. There was no evading that could get passed the wily old judge turned Senator. Talk turned to the future of Senator Alanzo. It's said that every Senator looks in the mirror and sees a future President. The power brokers knew a winner when they saw one. Senator Alanzo was now a household name. He was seen as a rare breath of fresh air. A man that could cut through the smoke screen and get to the bottom of things. The kind of man that should be in charge. The Senator never explained why he chose a roadrunner as a symbol of his candidacy for President. Speculation was that it was a symbol taken from his Nevada roots. Some of us know the rest of the story.

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