TIME CAPSULE

It was the centennial year of the small town of Robbinsville in Knox County, Indiana -- population 4086.

A modest time capsule had been laid inside a cornerstone on the southwestern side of St. Augustine's Church -- which, like the town, had been founded in 1928. Now, as a historic part of its 2028 Memorial Day celebration, the town council and mayor had gathered their curious constituents together for a speech and the grand revelation of the capsule's aged contents. There was drama for the old and mystery for the young as ancient mortar was carefully chipped away from between several surrounding bricks. The weathered bronze plaque declaring the time capsule's dates and intention was then removed off the center of the cornerstone, as the eager crowd applauded.

Inside the 18"x 18"x 12" cavity rested a faded copper metal box, coated with dust and laced with long-abandoned spider webs . The box was about an inch shorter on each of its sides than the cavity's dimensions.

Mayor Julius Hardy supervised a workman who gently peeled away with mallet and chisel the solder which sealed the edges of the time capsule box. The mayor then triumphantly held up each item for the crowd to see as he removed them from the one-hundred-year-old container.

First to come out were five yellowed folded newspapers from 1927. There headlines proclaimed: Lindbergh bravely crossing the Atlantic alone in his Spirit of St. Louis airplane; the beginning of the carving of Mount Rushmore in South Dakota; Henry Ford retiring his Model T automobile , to be replaced with the new and improved Model A; Al Jolson speaking and singing in the first 'talking' movie, "The Jazz Singer;" and the Great Mississippi Flood, which affected 700,000 people in Arkansas and nine other states. People clicked photos using their cell phone cameras as each item was held aloft. Meanwhile, the small town's sole newspaper reporter -- Denton "Dent" Williker, who worked for the four-page weekly, The Hoosier Beacon -- took detailed notes on a spiral steno pad.

Next came a stack of photographs tied with a purple ribbon, which had been donated by some of the local families of the day. That was followed by: a small American flag; a woman's soft beige 'flapper' hat; a man's straw boater; an empty Coca-Cola bottle; a Bible; a crucifix & rosary; a Calvin Coolidge for President campaign pin; assorted medals and ribbons from various men's fraternal organizations; several coins and a dollar bill from 1927; a small, shiny brass key; a silver pocket watch with chain (which amazingly still worked after it was wound up again); a blue & yellow polka-dot bow tie; a map of Indiana; a woman's cameo brooch and charm bracelet; and a McGuffey's Reader.

The final items hoisted aloft by Mayor Hardy were a tied bundle of letters, presumably written by the 1928 compilers of the time capsule. He assumed his task was done now, and announced (mopping his brow with his white pocket handkerchief) ,"Whew..It's getting hot, and I know everyone is probably hungry too. I think we are all finished." But at the very bottom of the copper box, Julius noticed out of the corner of his eye an odd brown envelope addressed "To the People of the Future" in flourishing cursive script. Because of his just made pronouncement, however, the mayor didn't bother to hold it up, nor was there any time left to open it at that point. So he deftly ended the assembly by proclaiming that all of the items would be put on display for a year in a special glass case in the lobby at City Hall, after which they would be archived for preservation at the Robbinsville Library. The townspeople cheered and then dispersed to enjoy their picnic baskets and barbeques and watermelons at Founder's Park, and, afterwards, an afternoon softball game -- having earlier paid their due respects to the silent fallen soldiers and thus mark Memorial Day at the local cemetery.

Two days later, the town reporter showed up at City Hall to view the time capsule items which were now resting in their bright new display case. Dent Williker noticed, however, that the envelope marked "To the People of the Future," while attractively displayed among the other objects, had yet to be opened. He popped his head into Mayor Hardy's office and suggested they do so together now if the mayor had a minute. Julius confessed that he had forgotten all about the envelope and gladly agreed. They borrowed a letter opener from Margie Welles, the City Hall's main desk secretary. The men also got the display case key which she kept in her desk drawer. They unlocked the case and then carefully slit open the cryptic old brown envelope. The Mayor's phone suddenly rang down the hall, so he left Denton alone with the letter while he stepped back into his office take the call. Williker unfolded the letter and began reading.

Here is what it said:

"December 31, 1927

My Dear Friends,

My name is Evan Temple. I requested the letter you are now reading to be included in this, the Robbinsville Centennial Time Capsule Project. I must proclaim with all seriousness that I am a true clairvoyant. I studied under the famed psychic Edgar Cayce for eight months in 1925 in Virginia Beach, Virginia. With his encouragement, I realized that I have been given a mysterious gift by Our Creator. I have hence written down seven predictions about the future, each of which will occur within the next one-hundred years. Your eyes will be the first to have read this letter since I write these words down. I believe my sealed contribution was accepted by the Time Capsule Committee at the last moment as somewhat of a lark on their part, but I assure you that this is a legitimate and important matter. The proof that man can actually see into the future will be proven at this time, should my predictions have come true. What follows are the seven visions I have seen:

#1 -- A second World War will be started by Germany near the end of the 1930s. Again, they will be defeated.

#2 -- A terrible weapon of unimaginable destruction will be dropped on a country in Asia in the mid-1940s, killing untold amounts of people and shocking the world.

#3 -- The Soviet Union will successfully launch a man into space and return him alive to Earth in the late 1950s.

#4 -- A popular American President will be assassinated in the early 1960s, plunging the nation into mourning and despair. Other terrible assassinations will likewise strike the country later in that same decade, leading to great social unrest.

#5 -- The United States will land men on the moon by the late 1960s, leading the way to further peaceful scientific explorations of space.

#6 -- The Soviet Union and its Communist system will collapse, beginning in the late 1980s. But the world will be gripped by a new danger of continual terrorism from religious fundamentalist fanatics.

#7 -- A global pandemic will occur around 2020, with an unknown deadly virus sweeping the world, killing millions of people before a vaccine is made available.

I have a final piece of information to share: I have discovered that the normal human life span as designed by Our Creator is close to 150 years, rather than the average 57 years you have been lead to believe. But I must detail the reasons for that startling find and reveal it to the world at another time, when I am free to do so.

I bid you farewell for now...May 2028 be good to you.

Sincerely,

(Signed) Evan Temple"

Denton Williker finished reading, just as Mayor Hardy reappeared after taking his phone call.

"Well, what did you find out?" Julius asked. "Anything interesting?"

"Here, you better read it for yourself," the reporter replied. "It's simply incredible." He handed the letter over to the mayor.

After Hardy was done, he exhaled a low whistle. "You've got to write this up in the Hoosier Beacon, Dent! This is amazing stuff. People are going to go wild! This is the biggest story since the Copley/Learner murder-suicide back in '23. Do you realize that his Temple guy nailed seven out of seven? He's like a modern Nostradamus or something! Maybe we should have Bob Hawke and his news crew come up from Vincennes and cover this. Get our town some nice publicity on the TV. Unless this is some kind of a hoax or slick prank. What do you think?"

"Look, Julius. I don't think this is a fake. That time capsule was undisturbed in the church cornerstone for a hundred years. We both witnessed it get removed and opened. There was no prior tampering as far as I can tell. Sure, I'll write up the full story and have a special edition of the HB printed. We'll put the original letter back in the locked display case. People will want to see it for themselves after they find out. But before we do, I want to make a photocopy of Temple's letter for myself. I have some important research to do. So hold off on contacting Channel 4 in Vincennes, O.K.?" The mayor agreed, and Williker went off with his copy back to the office of the Hoosier Beacon, which was just down the street next to the newly modernized Robbinsville firehouse.

Dent fired up his desktop computer once he sat down in his cluttered work cubicle, and finished the half-eaten maple donut he had begun earlier in the day, while waiting for the machine to boot. The only other employee of the small newspaper -- editor and owner Brian Yost -- was out, so the office was quiet. Williker needed to find out what the internet had on a certain Mr. Evan Temple. Exactly who was this guy? A genius? A crackpot? A charlatan? Or someone truly gifted and remarkable? Could Temple really have been a genuine seer? Indeed, was their obscure little town now in possession of seemingly tangible proof of a modern-day Nostradamus?

An internet search of everyone with the name "Evan Temple," who was found in Indiana prior to 1928, yielded just one entry. He had been born in 1900 in the tiny hamlet of Patoka in Gibson County. He was adopted from the orphanage there by Ezra and Gladys Temple, a local farm couple. Evan attended Patoka School, then apprenticed as an electrician, which later became his trade when he moved to Evansville -- on the Ohio River, the largest city in Vanderburgh County -- in 1921. He married Alma O'Neill in 1923, and they had an only daughter the following year, Evangeline, whom they nicknamed 'Eva.' She, in turn, married a machinist, Horace Butler, in 1940, and they likewise had an only daughter whom they named Caroline. That was all that Denton Williker had to go on. No photos, other than of the old Patoka orphanage and school buildings, both since demolished.

The reporter decided to see if Caroline Butler was still alive, so he called the Vital Statistics clerks in both Knox and Vanderburgh Counties to see if there were any records. He naturally assumed that Evan, Alma, Eva, and Horace were all dead by now. But nothing turned up on any Caroline Butler.

HB owner Brian Yost cheerily showed up at the newspaper office after lunch. He had been busy selling ads for the paper in the surrounding communities. Denton explained what had happened that morning at City Hall, then showed his editor a photocopy of the letter containing the amazing predictions of Evan Temple.

"Jesus H. Christ!" Yost exclaimed. "Write this up right now, Dent, and we'll set it in type and run a special edition of the HB tomorrow. Got a photo of this Temple guy?" Williker shook his head no. "No matter...We'll just include a front page photo of the letter. I'll notify the printers in Vincennes to get ready for a double copy run. 2000 instead of the usual 1000. That's enough for everybody in town to see and share. This will be a historic keepsake edition for sure!" Dent then explained that Mayor Hardy wanted to wait a while before contacting Bob Hawke at Channel 4 Action News. "If word leaks out around Vincennes after we publish our story in the Beacon tomorrow, so be it. But I need to gather more specific information before any TV crews show up," Denton insisted.

Robbinsville went wild the next day once the big news about the 'mysterious oracle' was known. Locals flooded City Hall to view the original letter in the glass display case of the time capsule artifacts. That was when Denton got a surprise call later at his newspaper desk from Eunice Ludlow, a well-known, diminutive, but spritely widow in her mid-90s who still lived independently in a tiny frame house on Sycamore Avenue with her cat, Mittens.

"Believe it or not, Mr. Williker, Eva Temple is still alive, the last I heard. She's 104 years old or thereabouts, and lives in a nursing home in Boonville in Warrick County. You see, us old folks have nothing to do every day but check the various obituary columns, to see who's recently given up the ghost and who's still rattling around. That's how I know. You should track her down, Mr. Williker. Probably has some interesting tales to tell about her suddenly famous father," the widow offered. "All of us old-timers have stories that would curl your toes, you know...but nobody ever bothers to ask us!" Eunice added, smiling and softly chuckling.

Enlisting the help of his wife, Tricia, the following morning after breakfast, Denton discovered that there were three nursing homes in Boonville. He asked her to call each facility and inquire whether they had a resident named Evangeline Temple. Sure enough, Tricia found out that Eva was currently residing at Bakers Rest Haven on Rockport Road. So Eunice was right! Dent would remember to buy her a pouch of cat treats for Mittens and a box of Russell Stover chocolates for herself as a big thank-you.

Kissing Tricia and their two young children --Peter ('Petey') and Geena -- good-bye, Williker headed out in his blue pickup truck for the ninety-minute drive to Boonville.

Eva Butler greeted the reporter cordially in her private room at Bakers Rest Haven. The air-conditioning was turned up high, and she had a knitted pink wool shawl draped around her shoulders. Eva had what was left of her white hair pulled back in a bun. Her pale flesh was like translucent onion skin, revealing various blue veins and knobby bone joints. She put on her thick-lensed eyeglasses, which accentuated her clear hazel eyes, and then turned up both of her hearing aids. Her voice was raspy but definitive. Denton introduced himself, then told her the whole story thus far.

"Oh my...so all that happened recently? I hadn't heard. They finally opened it up, you say? It seems I dimly remember them setting the time capsule in that church cornerstone in 1928. I was only four years old, mind you. My father and mother were both there too. It was a windy day with dark clouds -- now THAT fact I vividly recall. Pa told me when I was older that folks were afraid a tornado warning might be called, so they sort of hurried through the ceremony so people could rush home and take shelter if a bad twister hit."

Williker next asked about her husband, Horace and their daughter, Caroline.

"Well, my Horace died in 2003, about twenty-five years ago. We were married for almost sixty-three years. I was only sixteen when we got hitched...can you believe it? It's true. But it was a good match. He was exempt from serving in Army uniform during the war because of his vital machine skills which were needed in the munitions factories here in Indiana." Eva paused to show Denton a photograph of the happy couple, which was prominent in a fancy frame on her nightstand. "As for Caroline, she never married, so obviously we never had any grandchildren. She passed away from a stroke in her sleep when she was seventy-eight, about a dozen years ago. She lived in Owensboro in Kentucky, right across the Ohio River. Caroline worked as a sales clerk in Strober's Department Store. When I got word she had passed, I had her brought home, so she's buried next to my Horace right here in Boonville. There's a spot for me alongside them too, once the Good Lord calls me home." Eva Butler likewise paused and shared with Dent a photo of her daughter. Plain-looking, but with a friendly smile.

"Tell me about your father now, Eva. When did you first know about his ability to see into the future?" Williker wanted to know. "Was he really a true psychic?"

"Well, Pa told me that he had a kind of vision when he was a boy. A spiritual being of some sort appeared by his bed one night. It was a tall man with blond hair and blue eyes, dressed in glowing white robes. Pa didn't think he was Jesus, but the strange being was kindly and not at all scary. He gently touched Pa's forehead, eyes, ears, and lips, and said just one word: OPEN. Then he vanished. After that experience, my father was able to see into the future. First, it was simple things like predicting when the telephone would ring moments before it did. Later, he could predict the main newspaper headline the day before it was printed. Finally, he was able to advise friends and neighbors when to see the doctor, explaining their hidden maladies before they had any tell-tale symptoms." Eva paused to take a sip of water out of a plastic cup on her nightstand, then continued.

"Things really took off, however, when he left Ma and me to study under Edgar Cayce in Virginia Beach in 1925. He was a new man after those eight months, according to my mother. Although Pa kept working as an electrician in Evansville, he also diagnosed illnesses 'remotely' in his spare time, as Cayce had taught him. Like Cayce, Pa would enter into what he called a 'sleeping trance' while lying down in one of our darkened bedrooms, and he would then be able to 'see' diseases in the bodies of patients that Cayce had referred. Ma and I had strict instructions never to interrupt him when he was in such a state. He would wake after a time and then take notes, writing later to the same people he had diagnosed with their medical details and possible treatments. Pa also began to see many unrelated future events during his trances. He kept a written journal of all of them. Lastly, he told Ma and me to keep his 'gift' a secret from all others outside of our family."

"What happened to your mother, Eva?" Denton asked. "She must have been a remarkable woman, too, in her own right."

"Sadly, Ma was hit by an automobile while crossing the street in downtown Evansville," Eva explained. "The police ruled that the driver was totally at fault. She died instantly and painlessly, the ambulance men said. I was thirty-two years old. That was in 1956. June 16th...an awful, shocking day. Pa took her death especially hard, and he was always baffled why he couldn't have predicted her death so as to have her avoid going downtown that fateful day. She's buried in Evansville. Here's a picture of Ma and Pa together on a holiday to Mammoth Cave in 1951." Williker was handed a black & white photograph by Eva, and the reporter saw -- for the first time -- the face of Evan Temple. Tall. Thick hair swept back. Confident gaze. Distinguished bearing. Impressive. And Alma looked content too, proudly clutching her husband's arm.

"You must miss them both," Denton offered, politely handing the photo back.

"Sure, I miss my mother," 104-year-old Evangeline Butler admitted. Back in the day when I could get around better, I'd go and visit her grave every year on her birthday."

But Denton Williker was staggered by the bombshell revelation in Eva's next sentence.

"But Pa is still alive. He sends me a letter every month, telling me he is O.K. and asking about how I'm doing. I respond through a caretaker here at Bakers who types up my replies on the office computer, prints them out, and mails them back," Eva calmly announced. "I can't do it myself anymore because of my arthritis." She held her gnarled hands aloft, in helpless affirmation.

Flabbergasted, Dent countered, "But that means your father is 128 years old! That simply can't be possible!"

"Oh but it is, Mr.Williker...look...here are some of his letters," she replied, opening her nightstand drawer and offering a neat stack. "Check the dates. Read them for yourself, if you like. He still has a good cursive script."

"Thank you, but that won't be necessary, Eva. I trust you and you are most kind. Now, do you think it would be somehow possible for me to ever meet your father? Where exactly is he living now?" the reporter inquired.

"Well, Pa is rather a recluse, you might say. Doesn't take to strangers poking around his privacy. But if you promise to keep his whereabouts a secret, and write nothing up in your newspaper about seeing him, and swear to that effect on the Holy Bible, I'll tell you where you can find him," Eva announced. She opened another nearby drawer and produced a well-worn copy of the Good Book. "Now swear!" she demanded, holding the volume up to her guest with unsteady fingers. So Denton Williker, without hesitation, placed his right hand on its dark leather cover, and solemnly did as she asked...

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Evan Temple lived alone in a rustic log cabin three miles from the town of Roark, deep in the remote woods of the Daniel Boone National Forest in southeastern Kentucky. He had a horse for making brief weekly trips into town for supplies he could not grow or make himself. The cabin had no electricity, telephone, or running water, but there was a good creek nearby. Winter heating and all of Evan's cooking was done with firewood. When Dent was invited inside, he noticed hundreds of books neatly resting in several homemade wooden bookshelves. Williker showed Temple the white rabbit's foot charm that Eva had lent him by way of certified proof of the reporter being a rare, approved visitor. Evan found that quite touching. "I gave that to Eva for good luck when she turned ten," he admitted. "And she still kept it safe after all these years. What a sweetheart! And she is doing well, you say?"

Williker noticed that Evan Temple appeared to be a fit and still agile man about age seventy, six feet tall, about 175 pounds, with thick gray hair swept back, clear eyes, tanned skin lightly wrinkled, and a full set of nice teeth. His smile was sincere, and his handshake was warm and firm. His mind was likewise soon to be proven lively and alert.

"Yes, it's true Mr. Williker. Or may I call you Dent? I did indeed turn 128 years old in March. So far, I am the only known person who beat Jeanne Calment's documented longevity record of 122 years and 164 days in France. You perhaps remember reading about her seeing Vincent Van Gogh when she was a girl, and about her watching the Eiffel Tower being built? I would have liked to have talked with her for an afternoon or two. We could have exchanged notes, so to speak, on the joys and sorrows of growing very, very old."

Dent obviously wanted to know everything that Evan Temple could tell, so the reporter sat back and got comfortable and listened. It was perplexing to be unable to take any written notes -- for this, the biggest scoop of his journalistic career -- but he had duly given his solemn oath to Eva Butler to refrain from that urge.

"I moved here in 2000, shortly after my one-hundredth birthday," Temple began. "I sold my house in Evansville, and that money, along with my life savings earned as an electrician and invested, pays the bills for both Eva and me. I bought this particular cabin for a song. It was built by a grizzled old moonshiner back in the 1920s, so I was told. Some folks back in these hills and hollers still make their own hooch to this day, the area being so remote. I rarely see anyone else unless I'm hunting deer. I have a garden that grows corn, tomatoes, carrots, and beans. I have four laying hens and two milk goats. I ride my horse, Mariah, the three miles into Roark once a week to collect my mail at the post office and buy things like fresh citrus fruits, salt, flour, yeast, coffee, and canned goods of items I can't grow or make myself. Once a year, a County van picks me up in Roark on my birthday and takes me forty-minutes away to Manchester to see my doctor for an annual check-up and to the dentist to get my teeth cleaned. I lied about my true age -- explaining that I lost all of my legal documentations -- to discourage both the curious and the snooping press, so both professional men simply assume I'm the 72-year-old I claim to be. Folks this far out in the country seldom dig any further into matters like that, so its accepted as natural fact. I've never had a credit card or a bank account, because they require a social security card for opening either. I stopped using the internet and computers in 2000, having completed my research which I'll detail to you in a minute. I've not watched television or seen a movie since that year either. I am still in contact through the mail, however, with several notable scientists from around the world, so my work continues and is known and shared with a select few -- all being my age."

"Your letter in the time capsule concluded with your rather startling declaration that human beings are biologically designed to live a life span of 150 years, but that something was interfering with that timeframe. Can you explain exactly what you mean, Evan?" Denton asked next.

"Certainly. The average life span in the United States today is, what, about eighty years for men and eighty-three for women? That's similar to other wealthy nations with good nutrition and the latest medical knowledge and advanced technologies. Obviously, the average life spans go down from there when we consider the poorer so-called Third World nations. Poverty, malnutrition, unchecked diseases, unclean water -- all will shorten your life. But what would happen if every person on the planet was able to live to be 150 years old, as God intended? Well, the entire Earth would be plunged into an accelerated spiral of resource depletion, and this, in turn, would lead to an environmental catastrophe such as the world has never known -- all because of how our current global economic systems sustain themselves. Thus -- beginning around 1900 -- statistical modeling and future population projections were run in secret by alarmed world political, scientific, and medical leaders. Their conclusion: it would be impossible to allow human beings to live that long. The social order would ultimately collapse, and civilization would quickly fall into barbarism and chaos. So their solution was to introduce 'life-shortening measures,' the aim being to have the greatest security and stability for the greatest number of their citizens, and with each generation pre-arranged to have a manageable but nominal life-span."

"How exactly was this monumental task of modifying the human life span tackled?" Williker -- now completely fascinated -- wanted to know.

"By introducing substances and habits that first appeared safe into the populations," Evan explained. "Then, when the damage was done, people were informed that those same substances were in fact 'discovered' to be deadly. They were then banned and eliminated, but soon new substances were introduced by world governments to help 'curb' the natural human life span. My exhaustive research -- and my psychic abilities projecting into certain secret inner policy circles -- has traced and verified several of these substances: the use of tobacco, DDT pesticide use on food crops, leaded gasoline in cars and trucks, the addition of fluoride to municipal water supplies, artificial sweeteners flavoring soft drinks and other products -- and even more examples you might not be aware of. The leaders of the world knew these were dangerous and harmful to human health, Dent, but they deliberately allowed their production and usage -- even officially promoting them! All these efforts were designed to keep the human life span of their citizenry within certain manageable perimeters. And, you should know, the latest introduction of this 'life span scam' is the use of common sunscreen, and the introduction of 7g cell phone signals. Both will be 'found' harmful and then banned in a few years. Yet something equally as dangerous will be introduced while these are being phased out. I won't tell you what it is, but I have seen it already in one of my sleeping trances." Temple stopped here for a moment to let the full weight of his incredible disclosures sink into Williker's mind.

"Now, Dent, did you happen to notice a brass key among the contents of the time capsule when it was opened? I slipped that key in, unseen by others, before the capsule was sealed on the last day of 1927 and then mortared up in that church cornerstone. It is a key to a safety deposit box, which I paid for in advance up to the year 2050. After I die, I want you to go to the Guaranty Bank and Trust in Lexington, Kentucky. Inside that box are every one of my other predictions about the future of the world, written by me in a notebook. You have my personal permission to reveal them to the world media as you see fit. I'm also entrusting you with my research papers and my global scientific contact information compiled here in this cabin, detailing all of the proof of what I have just shared with you today. Well? Do we have a deal?"

The overwhelmed newspaper reporter for the Hoosier Beacon agreed. The men formally shook hands on it.

"Remember, Dent, you can never come here again, or write up anything that we have discussed. This was our first hello and our last good-bye, my friend. And remember to stop using sunscreen, and only use a land-line telephone from now on...no more 7g cell phone calls, O.K.?"

"But can't you give me just one more prediction, Evan? You know...to definitively prove to me one last time that everything you have told me is the truth?" Denton weakly pleaded. "This was the most amazing afternoon of my life!"

"Oh, you mean you'd like to know the exact date of your own death, or when World War Three with China will begin, or when we will finally make proven contact with beings from another planet? No, Dent. I'm sorry...but no," Evan Temple said with crushing, utter finality. "Live your life with your family and be happy. It's better if you don't worry about what will come. Let the future unfold as it always has."

Williker looked crestfallen, but understood.

Before Evan Temple closed his cabin door, however, the 128-year-old seer gestured heavenward with his right arm, and pointed with his index finger, and whispered cryptically, "Just look to the skies, Dent. Look to the skies..."

THE END

by Jack Karolewski

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