

Epic Storytelling

Editor's Note: "You must meet Jennifer Morgan," Mary Coelho told me at the annual meeting of the American Teilhard Association in New York City. Jennifer was there, and we found time to talk just long enough to agree to exchange tapes of our storytelling ventures. A few weeks later a tape arrived, and I was enchanted. I listened again and again. I was in awe.

Jennifer has taken on the whole Universe Story, the entire epic, and she has the narrative memorized. "I usually practice for the geese down at Carnegie Lake," she told me. "I tell the geese the story over and over. It makes me feel so free and self-expressive during a performance. And I've found it very helpful for revising my work: the geese are quick to point out the weak spots."

The scope of Jennifer's story is beyond my ken. And the images are stunning. Could I have thought of a juxtaposition as fanciful in the Universe's dreams as "tulips with toes"? Not a chance.

Nonetheless, I could speak for Honey Locust, and so I shared with Jennifer an early draft of a story still in process—a story the mammoths on this continent would tell, were there still mammoths to do the telling. I feel it is my job to tell the story for them: could this be my Great Work?

Perhaps you too will be inspired by Jennifer's storytelling. There is magic especially in the spoken word, so do read this story aloud—or read it to a friend. Maybe acquire Jennifer's tape and learn the nuances of her intent. Perhaps you too will not only want to share this story (my copy of her tape is now on loan to a neighbor) but will be moved to create a version of the epic yourself—or a vignette of the epic, as I am doing. And then let us delight in hearing one another's stories. Epic stories are indeed for "kids of all ages," as Jennifer writes—including this 48-year-old editor.

BY JENNIFER MORGAN

Once you were a tiny speck buried deep in the dark inside your mother. But you couldn't stay small.



My Dazzling Dream of You and Me

A Realistic Fairy Tale Told by the Universe

You grew and grew until your mother's belly couldn't stretch any more. On a very special day, your birthday, you were born into the light.

I too had a special day, when I was born into the light. I am the universe. I will tell you my story, which is your story too. Although you were recently born in your human form, you have been part of me, part of the universe, from the very beginning, about fifteen billion years ago.

Like you, I was once a tiny speck, smaller than a piece of dust under your bed. But I couldn't stay small. I was bursting with a wild and dazzling dream. Oh, how my unruly imagination spun out pictures of galaxies wheeling through space. And stars and planets in radiant colors—bright yellow, molten red, piercing blue.

I longed for creatures of every kind. Fish cruising deep blue seas. Insects alighting on flowers, reptiles basking on hot rocks in the sun, birds swooping down on their prey, and humans flying space ships. I longed for you too.

In my dream, I wondered, would I

become worms with wings, or foxes with fins, or tulips with toes, or daisies with hearts, or boulders with brains? Or, would I turn myself into you?

In my dream, I saw in a flash that I could transform myself into the most amazing things. Was it possible? Could I explode in a giant star? Or grow green in a thin blade of grass? Could I roar as a lion, or purr as a kitten? Could I become sadness, anger, or deep wonder through creatures of infinite variety, including you?

Was I mad to dream such a dream, when I was only a tiny speck?

Or, could my dream come true?

I burst into a radiant fireball. Ripping myself out of the well of mystery, I exploded into being. You were inside me, swirling in a sea of energy that was so brilliant it would have blinded you if you had eyes back then. But of course you didn't.

I was so dense, I would have crushed your hard bones, if you had bones back then. I was so sizzling hot, I would have vaporized your muscles, if you had muscles back then. But of course you didn't.

It would take me a long, long time just to come up with the idea of eyes, bones, and muscles. And then I would have to make a few billion mistakes before I could come up with eyes, bones, and muscles that actually worked.

In the first second after my birth, I could have died so easily if everything had not been just right.

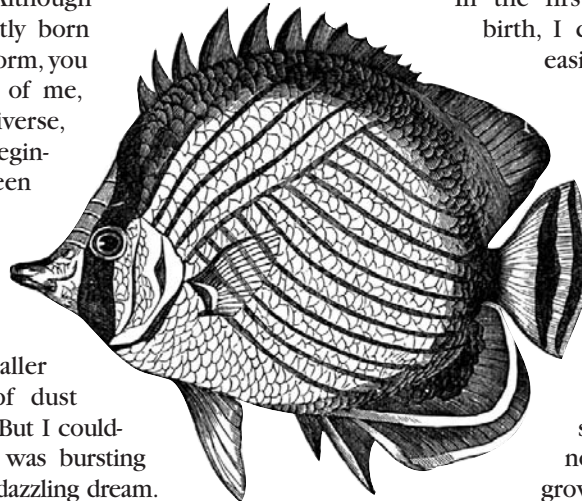
I grew and grew at just the right speed. Not too fast and not too slow.

If I had grown the slightest bit more slowly, my own gravity would have overpowered me and squashed me into nothingness. If I had grown just a bit faster, I

would have blown apart and disappeared into nothingness. No galaxies, no turtles, and no fireflies ever could have formed.

But everything *was* just right.

Now that's not to say that things were peaceful. I was hardly a tidy young universe. If I had a human mother, I'm sure she would have scolded me for all the clutter and confusion in my early life. And we're not just talking about dirty socks on the cosmic floor. It was utter bedlam! When I was less than one



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second old, I was already total turmoil.

Inside the turmoil, I burst forth into the very first physical things: tiny vibrating particles and anti-particles. Particles and anti-particles are the exact opposite of each other, and when they meet they destroy each other. I was in great struggle.

But I wanted so much to transform myself into the physical world. I kept on trying. Over and over, a billion times a billion times, I rose up out of the void in the form of armies of particles that were met on that early cosmic battlefield by myself in the form of opposing armies of anti-particles.

At first, the armies were equally matched. But my anti-particles died a little more quickly, leaving a few surviving particles. My surviving particles, like precious seeds, contained within their tiny bodies the future possibility of galaxies and grasshoppers.

As a young universe, I was a cosmic oven—with temperatures soaring higher than one trillion degrees. Inside the scorching heat I transformed myself into particles with weird names, like protons and electrons. I raced round and round in the form of teams of protons and electrons, crashing into one another, like miniature bumper cars.

And then suddenly (it might have been accidental, I'm not sure), as protons and electrons I joined together. Something amazing had happened; I had turned myself into the very first element: hydrogen. I had created my own basic building block—kind of like a Lego piece—that I might use later for creating other elements such as helium, carbon, oxygen, and so many more.

Did you know that every atom of hydrogen dancing in the water that slides down your throat was created by me when I was only three minutes old? Later, I would cool down, and no more hydrogen could be fused together at the lower temperature.

Was I proud of creating hydrogen? You bet I was!

My adventure in becoming physical took on new and fantastic dimensions. I began to shape myself into a trillion galaxies, spinning and sparkling like jewels in the black night.

In one small region of myself, I was forming into your galaxy. I was warm gas clouds careening into one another, then melding and flaring into stars. Deep in my galactic

center was a black hole that sucked colossal stars into its gaping dark jaws and crunched them to bits. I was a superhot hungry teenager, as a young galaxy.

Eventually, the black hole ate up all the nearby stars and starved. The other stars stayed safely out of reach. That's when the black hole settled down and became quiet. I had grown up and was now more than 100 billion stars strong, as your Milky Way Galaxy.

I was all of the stars moving majestically across the Milky Way. One of them was your Mother Star. I'm not talking about your Sun. As your Mother Star, I transformed myself into your Sun. But before I could become your Sun, I had to create new elements deep inside my fiery belly as your Mother Star.

I melded hydrogen into helium, and helium into carbon. I fused oxygen and knitted calcium. Little did I know how useful carbon might be one day for looping together into the first bubbles of life in the sea.

Or that oxygen could be for creatures to breathe. And calcium, well, if I ever got around to morphing into creatures who needed bones, calcium would certainly come in handy.

You know, of course, that after a long, long time, I did become creatures with bones.

You can look back and know that every single atom of calcium in your hard protective skull and long thigh bones was knitted inside of me when I was your Mother Star.

For the next generation of stars to be born, including your Sun, I had to die as your Mother Star. I exploded in a massive supernova, hurling my precious newly formed elements into space. You were there in the remnants of my body, my stardust, that would one day come together to form your human body.

With the force of gravity, I pressed myself into a whole new generation of stars, even more complex and more dazzling than any stars before them: slumbering red stars, blue supergiant stars, brown dwarf stars, and long-burning yellow stars. These were the children of the Mother Star. In them, I carried forward my mysterious story.

Five billion years ago, I flared into life as your Sun—a long-burning yellow star, father to a new solar family with nine young planets in tow. You were there with me, inside

my solar furnace, burning with love and passion for my planets.

Do you remember?

Are you surprised when I say that as your Sun I loved my planets? Do you think that only human beings can love one another? Do you think that human beings invented love?

Sometimes, human beings don't even notice the infinite varieties of love that surround them. What is love, but the sending of energy to another that the other might live and flourish, just as the Sun does for its planets?

Oh, how I delighted as my planets aged and blossomed. Is that when I discovered what love was? Or had it been there all along, pulsing inside my energy field and visibly unfolding in my physical world?

Was love in protons and electrons fusing themselves into hydrogen? Was it in hydrogen atoms contracting into clouds and bursting into gleaming galaxies? And the Mother Star sacrificing herself for the next generation of stars? Wasn't love pervading every corner of me and propelling my adventure forward?

By now you know: I was not only the Sun. I was also the pack of nine planetary pups, spinning and circling and tagging along after the Sun. Tucked inside the pack, I emerged as the young Earth.

A hot molten planet at first, I cooled down and formed a firm crusty surface. Erupting volcanoes spewed steam and gases to form vast oceans and a protective blanket of air. A hungry young planetary pup I was, I drank light and warmth from my golden Sun—my source of life in the midst of cold, dark space. The Sun, the Moon, and I began our slow sacred dances of light and dark: day and night; spring, summer, fall, and winter.

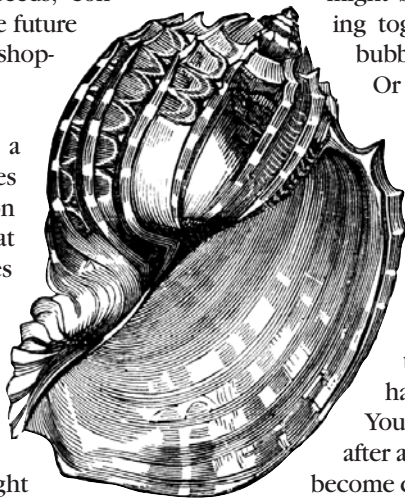
I began to wonder: In what new forms would I rise out of the attraction between Sun and Earth? I bubbled with potential near hot rocks oozing up through rips in the ocean floor. Could this be the place where life would begin to twitch and multiply?

I was coming closer to turning myself into creature form. But how would I emerge as the first creature?

I did not know.

I did know that I had already transformed myself into all the necessary ingredients for life. And every single ingredient had been blended together inside my primordial soup and inside the burning furnaces of my stars.

You, and all my creatures, would be descended from stars. And through stars you would be descended from the one tiny speck in the beginning that could not stay



small: the tiny speck that was me. ©

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Part II Telling Universe Stories for Kids of All Ages

BY JENNIFER MORGAN

"I like the way the universe has ideas about what it's going to do when it has the power to do it," said six-year-old Christine, her eyes shining with excitement through long shaggy bangs. "I like the way the story talks about protons and electrons—about how particles became matter and tiny bits of matter are our ancestors," said Ian, an eight-year-old boy. "Yeah, I like the way the universe experiences itself first hand," chimed in another boy, age eleven.

I had just told these children a universe story with the intention of awakening a sense of wonder in them. Certainly that was happening. But I also was filled with wonder at the depth of understanding evoked in these children through the telling of a half-hour story based on the new cosmology, as articulated by Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme.

For the past three years I've been telling universe stories for children and adults in schools, libraries, and for environmental organizations. What began as an assignment when I was a student in the Earth Literacy Program at Genesis Farm (Blairstown, New Jersey) has turned into my passion—that is, making the new cosmology accessible to all through storytelling.

I am deeply moved every time, sensing with my listeners the miracle of our universe.

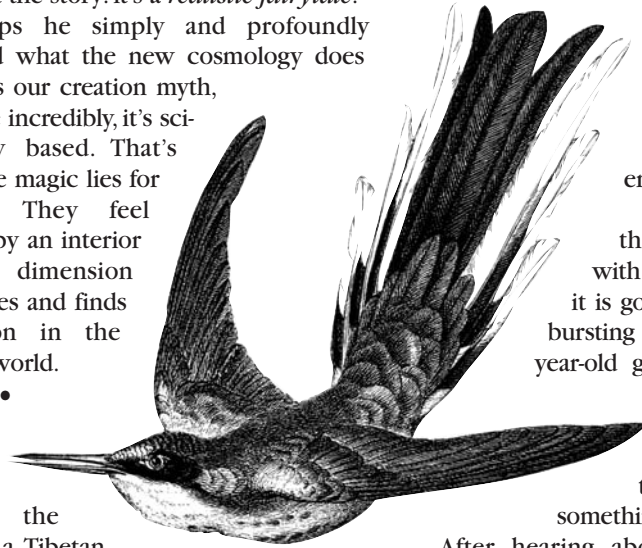
I have found that adults are equally captivated by stories based on the new cosmology. One man responded, "The story shows that all things are resting on a huge pyramid of support, and all things are supporting each other." And a psychotherapist said, "I cannot say it strongly enough that this story is a powerful statement potentially making a huge difference in peoples' lives. It offers a sense of connection to the universe as a whole."

The story is being prepared for publication as a trilogy. Book One—the portion printed here—covers the Big Bang through formation of Earth. Book Two tells the story of the living Earth, and Book Three places human beings within the story of the universe. Thomas Berry, in an introduction to the trilogy, wrote "Your telling the story of the emergent universe makes me think how different life might have been if I had been so fortunate as to learn this story in earlier times. That the

universe is now able to tell its own story through your voice is the culmination of these past centuries of scientific inquiry."

What is it about this new cosmology story that captivates us so? My nine-year-old son may have been getting at something when he said, quite suddenly over dinner, his head cocked to one side, "You know what I like about the story: it's a *realistic fairytale*."

Perhaps he simply and profoundly expressed what the new cosmology does for us. It's our creation myth, and, quite incredibly, it's scientifically based. That's where the magic lies for listeners. They feel touched by an interior spiritual dimension that shapes and finds expression in the physical world.



With the strike of a Tibetan prayer bowl, I ask listeners to imagine I am transforming into the universe. Then, in the voice of the universe, I tell my story of being born and growing up.

I chose a first-person approach so listeners could shift perspective and enter the interiority, or consciousness, of the universe. I wanted to offer an alternative to the traditional objective scientific approach. About that objective approach, a ten-year-old girl remarked, "sometimes I don't like science because you don't get that the universe is alive, but it is."

Children really respond to a first-person account that expresses emotion. An eleven-year-old boy said he liked the way "the story mixed science with feelings." One girl made the connection that emotions, like matter, were part of the universe from the beginning. She said, "If love was going to come into existence, it must have come into existence in the beginning. I know people didn't invent love. It's not something that people could invent."

This notion that the physical and emotional aspects of humanity were born at the beginning, and developed over billions of years, challenges and thrills my listeners. One eleven-year-old girl reflected, "This story shows that we humans were part of the universe long before we could process that thought." An eight-year-old boy said, "I found out that we are part of the universe. In the beginning we were a different property of matter."

Children easily understand that the universe was very different and very small in the

beginning—smaller than "a piece of dust under your bed." And they are quick to make the connection to themselves: that even though they're small, they are also very important. They also relate to the excitement, chaos, and chance in the story. An eight-year-old boy said, "I liked hearing about particles and how they destroyed each other."

Yet out of chaos and chance, the universe unfolds with seemingly deliberate direction. In my story, listeners hear the universe bursting with dreams about where it is going. Children are also bursting with dreams. A nine-year-old girl commented, "The story shows that if you think before you make something, you can make something really good."

After hearing about such comments from children, a number of adults have asked me in disbelief, "Where did you find such remarkable children who made these comments?" I have found that after hearing these stories, children quite naturally open up and express profound wisdom.

Perhaps one of the great works for adults is to tell children stories about the universe, then create a space for them to share. Surely the universe is speaking through them. ©

Jennifer Morgan tells universe stories for adults and children in schools, libraries, conferences, and other venues. She is an adjunct staff member of the Genesis Farm Learning Center in Blairstown, New Jersey. For seven years Jennifer has served as director of the New Jersey chapter of the Northeast Organic Farming Association, initiating educational marketing programs for farmers and consumers. She has also served on the board of the national Organic Trade Association. You can contact Jennifer Morgan at 609-430-1424 or JMMorgan@bellatlantic.net. 43B Linden Lane, Princeton, NJ 08540. Tapes will be available soon. To get your name on a list to receive information about availability, email or send Jennifer a postcard. ©