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# A Day in the Life

## Or, What a Long, Strange Trip It's Been

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As a professional astrologer, I am asked from time to time to speak to various organizations in public, usually astrological or spiritual groups. In my presentations, I tend to use my own life as an illustration, since mine is the only life I know intimately and can reference with any semblance of depth and accuracy. While I may speak of my occasional triumphs, I'm much more likely to relate any of various misadventures, disasters, or tragedies (of which there have been many) that have occurred over my half century of living in this body. As I finish my anecdote, almost without exception someone in the audience will then raise a hand and ask, "But you're an astrologer; didn't you see that coming in your chart?"

The question itself is innocent enough, but it carries a subtle Pandora's Box of implied judgments, the most central and obvious of which is, "Couldn't you have avoided what happened?" As a way of addressing that difficult question, let me relate an extraordinary incident that occurred in my life more than a decade ago.

Monday, October 19th, 1992, was the final day of a brief autumn vacation to see friends and drive south through the fall colors. Anticipating the ten-hour drive

home from Missouri to Minnesota, I whipped out my computer-generated personal transit guide and noticed that Mercury would square my natal Pluto at precisely 9:29 p.m. that evening. This gave me a certain pause, especially since Mercury and Pluto are angular and squared in my natal chart. Added to that was the one-year conjunction of transiting Pluto over my natal Mercury and MC, both at 21° Scorpio, with the third and final pass exact that very week. The shorter cycle might well act as a trigger to provoke the longer transit, which could in turn activate the natal square's implications. Having grappled with a severe speech impediment in the first half of my life, and then later, after I could talk, having seen the impact of more than 10,000 sessions with clients, I knew that the natal Mercury-Pluto square carried significant whomp in my life.

I'd been well aware all through 1992 of the ongoing "psychic surgery" (*Pluto*) affecting my mentality (*Mercury*). Many issues involving my career (*MC*), and more to the point, many changes in thought, perceptions, and strategies around my niche in the world (*Mercury conjunct MC*) had been cooking. That was an obvious psychological dynamic. Now, however, the symbols took a different slant in my mind — less psychological and more physical. I was about to embark on a 600-mile drive on what was arguably the most powerful single Mercury-Pluto day of my whole life. *Uff da!*

I considered that waiting another day to return home might be a wise choice. But I needed to get back because I had sessions scheduled. Should a one-day transit, however potent it might be, cause me to go to the considerable trouble of changing my plans?

The raw symbolism was a bit daunting: movement, especially vehicular motion (*Mercury*) had a high-energy connection (*square and conjunction*) to the possibility of explosion or eruption from sources beyond my conscious control (*Pluto*). I could easily imagine quite a few unpleasant scenarios that might take shape around this symbolism. The most obvious potential was trouble due to a lapse in my attention — running off the highway after falling asleep at the wheel or, God forbid, being in a wreck with another vehicle that I might not even see. Even if I were totally attentive and blameless, however, I could still envision a flat tire at high speed, perhaps. With my natal Mercury ruling the 5th and 8th Houses, should I worry that the conscious and intentional risk (*5th*) of driving on a day where I knew the factors to be provocative might result in my death (*8th*)? And given the 10th House emphasis of both transits, confrontation with authority was another consideration. I might be flagged by a hidden state trooper using radar and ticketed for speeding. I could even imagine giving the officer some lip in a moment of compulsive frustration and spending the night in jail. *Yikes!* My mind conjured up a thousand distasteful ends.

Generally, I am not the kind of astrologer who won't make a move without consulting an ephemeris, nor am I imprinted on the traditional astrological morality of "good" versus "bad" days for a certain activity. While I have known astrologers who were walking doomsayers concerning Moon phases, eclipses, and Mars or Saturn transits, I have always felt those rigidly judgmental approaches to be tiresome at best and paranoid at worst.

Attempts at astrological control of circumstances can backfire all too easily. Because astrology is a system of symbols, the combination of those symbols produces near-infinite possibilities as we move from the abstract into the literal. The problem here is simple: Where can we go to hide from our own charts? If we

conclude that a particular time is ripe for accident, on the basis, say, of transiting Mars opposite natal Neptune, should we stay locked in our houses to avoid possible danger? We might still slip in the bathtub and break our necks.

Astrological charts give no advice about what we should or should not do, how we should or should not be. Charts are silent about such strategies. That overlay comes from *us*, from all-too-human rather than cosmic sources. Through their linkage of symbols, charts express simply what *IS* in the resonance of a certain time/space matrix. They do not advise, they do not encourage, they do not shame — they reveal only what *IS* in the flow of being. Nor does astrology reveal the particular *way* a certain *IS-ness* will manifest into (or out of) our personal realities.

Yes, we can hook up the symbols into technical linkages of transiting and natal planetary meanings, aspect phases, zodiacal sign modifiers, along with occupied and ruled House categories of circumstance. But guessing which of the myriad possibilities might be the one event that will emerge is tantamount to finding the proverbial needle in the haystack. Clients occasionally ask me what a certain aspect or transit means in their charts. My standard first response is to say: "*Well, do you have three or four days to hear all the meanings?*"

Astrological symbols are universal; Aries, Neptune, or a sesquiquadrate each resonate with a certain basic feeling that never changes. Interpretations in astrology, however, are invariably context-sensitive; the manifestations of the symbols are multileveled, changing dramatically from one situation to the next, one time to another, and between different levels of perception or evaluation.

I'm reminded of a story from earlier in my life, way back in the 1970s. An acquaintance of mine had spent years in the formal study of metaphysics, channeling, and the development of "psychic powers." She wholeheartedly embraced many aspects of new age spirituality: chanting, telepathy, pyramids, past-life regression, prosperity imaging, etc. Home again after a long cross-country drive, she related with some gusto to me how tiring it had been for her to telepathically "fog the minds" of all the highway police along the way, making her car invisible to them and their radar (or so she claimed), in order that she could drive 85 miles an hour and save time getting back. She seemed quite pleased with herself. I countered that she might have been better off using the wisdom of her spiritual disciplines to foster patience in herself, so that she could happily drive within the speed limit, making it unnecessary to control others, whether telepathically or any other way. She countered that she had "protected all beings in a circle of healing light," or something like that.

Too often, astrologers' attempts to divine the best and worst times to accomplish or avoid a particular experience strike me as similar to my acquaintance's efforts to make herself invisible to traffic cops just so she could exceed the speed limit.

I do not suggest that we blithely ignore our charts. We all make judgments about what to do, when to do it, and how it might best be done. Making such choices is inevitable, natural, and appropriate. And astrology is a brilliant addition to that process. Astrology itself, however, is not the issue in all this. The real issue is the *state of mind of the person using astrology*.

If we believe that astrology can help to foster a deeper understanding of experience, we are correct. Astrology offers a way to unify otherwise separate

levels of our perception into a unified field of awareness. It helps us better appreciate the mystery of life in all its wonder, paradox, and irony.

If, however, we believe that astrology's main application is the protection of our egos, we are not merely incorrect, we are deluded. Our egos want to control everything. They are often defensive, fearful, even hysterical in their resistance to necessary change and growth. When we use astrology to promote an experience for which we are unprepared or insufficiently mature, or to avoid an event our egos regard as unpleasant, we prostitute the system. More to the point, we set ourselves up for serious disillusionment, for life has a way of pulling the rug out from under even the most staunchly resistant human ego.

Like the woman in the famous W.W. Jacobs short story, "*The Monkey's Paw*," who brought her dead son back to life with magic, only to discover that he was living but decomposed, we are unable to control all the factors involved in manifesting what our egos so desperately desire. While we may initially seem to get what we want, the end result is almost always a humiliating pratfall. Our best-laid plans backfire, sometimes comically and other times tragically, but without so much as an apology from life, which goes on without comment in its mysterious way.

Again, I'm not suggesting that we ignore the tools at our disposal. By all means, schedule elective surgeries when the Moon is not full; move more slowly and deliberately in intimacy when transiting Saturn squares Venus; expect delays or misunderstandings when Mercury is retrograde; take time off during Void-of-Course Moons. Certainly be aware when Jupiter conjuncts your Sun of new opportunities for enlarged self-expression. And yes, factor in the significant aspects between your own and another person's chart when considering a business or personal relationship.

On the other hand, if you need emergency surgery and the Moon happens to be full, don't wait — have the surgery. Assuming that love will fail when Saturn transits Venus is a self-fulfilling prophecy. Don't passively waste time when Mercury is retrograde or the Moon is Void — stay awake to what's happening. Remember that Jupiter transits do bring buoyancy, but can just as easily signal excess or arrogance. And for heaven's sake, don't burn up all your intimate energy worrying about whether a beloved's chart is "compatible" with your own.

Finally, don't presume that a certain combination of symbols means what you read in a textbook or hear from some hot shot astrologer at a lecture. Instead, file away the insight as a "possible" meaning, then let your own experience in real life gradually confirm or deny that particular interpretive slant.

In other words, use astrology as fully as you like, but do so in the proper spirit of humility and reverence — to enhance experience by understanding with your *soul* rather than controlling with your *ego*.

My admonitions here may appear on the surface to be moral judgments. Ultimately, however, my advice is not moral at all, but purely pragmatic. In the long run, I'm convinced that we'll get further faster, with more of what we truly want, if we transcend the endless prodding of our childish, petulant egos.

But back to my story: I did choose to make the ten-hour drive home on the day of the Mercury-Pluto transit. In balance, my need to get back outweighed my

concerns about the symbolic pitfalls. In fairness, I did admonish myself to be extra careful while driving. At the time, I felt I had hit the razor's edge between the needs of my soul and the desires of my ego.

Everything went fine at first. Then the rain started. It rained for hours, all through northern Missouri and southern Iowa, then turned to freezing rain in northern Iowa. Night fell and the hard sleet reduced visibility to nearly zero. I thought to myself, "Jeez, not *everybody* on this highway can have a Mercury-Pluto transit!" — my lame version of whistling in the dark. The trip was turning into an ordeal.

About two hours from home the highway construction began — all through northern Iowa and southern Minnesota, I-35 was restricted to a single lane of traffic whizzing through fog and pelting sleet past mile after mile of those damned orange barrels. After eight hours of difficult driving, this was downright nerve-wracking. Between the fog and the sleet, I couldn't see squat. I was tired and my nerves were frayed. My strategy of taking the interstate rather than back roads — so as to be safer, you understand — well, suddenly this looked less like a smart soul move and more like a bonehead ego play. In trying to "negotiate" with the transit (read: *get around it*), I had inadvertently stepped in it.

The Mercury-Pluto transit was rapidly approaching it's 9:29 p.m. partile. The drive had been hellish, but with only 20 miles to go, surely I was home free.

Just south of the Minneapolis suburbs I entered a stretch of highway where the northbound lanes were completely closed. Traffic headed north had to detour onto the southbound lanes, where road crews had lined up temporary, four-foot high concrete dividers for two miles. Now it was single-lane driving against oncoming traffic — still with freezing rain and fog making the darkness nightmarish.

Up ahead about 500 yards, I noticed a strange glow, and then the oncoming traffic just stopped. No more cars zipping past in the lane five feet away. At 300 yards, the glow was revealed to be fire. A *big* fire. At 150 yards, I could see what had happened: A large truck had skidded on the icy surface and lost control, plowing into the temporary dividers, then flipping over as it burst into flames.

Traffic in my lane slowed — 40 miles an hour, 30, then 20. I was barely 100 feet away from the accident. Motorists were pulling off onto the shoulder and milling around the scene, although the flames kept them at bay. At 50 feet away, I saw a figure scramble out from under the wreck. Then, just as my Saab crawled precisely alongside the overturned truck, a car up ahead of me stopped.

There I was, stuck, with nowhere to go. Cars idling on my bumpers both in front and behind. On the shoulder to my right was the parked car of a motorist who had pulled off to help; I couldn't have gotten out of my car on the passenger side even if I'd wanted to. And to the left, barely ten feet away, was the blazing inferno.

Time stood still. Seconds became hours. As I sat in my car, trapped, I felt the heat of the fire through my closed window. Then suddenly, without warning, the gas tank in the burning truck exploded. A huge fireball erupted in my direction, literally rolling over my Saab, enclosing me in a solid wall of flame. Wowiee Zowiee!

But nothing happened. The fireball erupted and vanished in about three seconds. My car did not catch fire. Up ahead, traffic again began to move, and I slowly inched away from the wreck. To say that I was relieved would be profound understatement, since I was scared to death. All told, I had probably been stuck alongside the truck for only about one minute, but it had seemed like forever.

As traffic resumed speed, I glanced at the clock. It was 9:31 *p.m.*, two minutes after the transit's exact partile. All my astrological sophistication was reduced to a simpleton's astonishment: "*Oh man, is this too weird or what???*"

Barely 20 minutes later, I was home, safe at last.

Now, I hesitate to read too much into this experience. Everything that happened could have been mere coincidence rather than "cosmic" synchronicity. But either way, the timing is compelling: Why did I happen to arrive on the scene within seconds after the accident occurred? Why did the traffic stop just as my car was directly alongside the burning truck? And why did the truck's gas tank explode in that single minute? Why did the fireball not ignite my car, nor even leave scorch marks? What would have happened had I stayed in Missouri an extra day?

Since the astrological timing was so precise, should I assume the event to represent a "telegram from the Gods?" If so, then how am I to interpret that message? This was, after all, not my accident, but someone else's. I was merely a bystander in the right place at the wrong time. Should I consider myself warned and give up driving forever? Is this some bizarre foreshadowing? Maybe the whole experience was just a random close call with no meaning at all. Life does not explain itself to mere mortals.

Astrology doesn't reveal ultimate answers. My chart indicated merely that certain symbolic patterns would come together in a particular way, at a precise moment in time. And the experience I had corresponded well to the matrix of symbolic factors. That's all I truly know. Everything beyond that is speculation.

Perhaps the whole experience was a ruse — a red herring — merely a stimulus to motivate me to write this article, which you have now read. That would translate as professional communication (Mercury conjunct MC) to produce provocative impact (*natal and transit squares*) on a collective public (*Pluto in the 7th*).

As always with astrology, multiple possibilities for meaning coexist. Sometimes we get to choose which possibilities become real. Sometimes our plans work out and our hopes are fulfilled. Other times (and perhaps more often than we'd like to think), life vetoes our choices, defies our expectations, overturns our plans, confounds our hopes and dreams, and manifests a very different direction.

Finally, we all just roll with the punches. And some days we roll better than others.

