

Jason Anthony and the Magic Spinner



By: D. Edward Bungert

It was almost Jason Anthony's tenth birthday and boy was he excited. He was going to get to spend the evening at his grandparents' house. And that meant a surprise gift. Grandpa Ed always gave him a gift, even when his actual birthday was days away.

"Hurry up, Jason," shouted his mom from the kitchen. "We are leaving in five minutes. Don't forget to pack your pajamas!"

"OK, mom," he said. "I'll be right down."

A few minutes later they were in the car and on their way.

Grandpa Ed and Grandma Linda lived just a few miles from their house in Lextown. Jason's mom, Lori, was a school teacher who taught American History at the high school and also taught adult classes two nights a week at the local college. Since she had to teach late tonight, Jason Anthony got to eat dinner with his grandparents.

Grandma Linda was waiting at the door when they arrived. "How is the birthday boy?" Grandma Linda asked as she smothered him with affection. Mom said goodbye and after the usual offer of apple juice and a cookie, Grandpa Ed came up the stairs to say hi. Jason figured he was tinkering around in the garage. He did a lot of that since retiring from the power company last year.

Grandpa Ed's greeting was different than grandma's. A pat on the head or a high five would do. Today it was the high five. "What's up, JA?"

Jason Anthony said hi but was distracted by what Grandpa held in his right hand. It was bright green, almost glowing. It had three sections and each has a little red wheel inside. The center had what looked like a flat button, the same bright green color.

“Here you go, birthday boy,” said Grandpa as he handed the object to his grandson.

“What is it?”

“It’s a fidget spinner. It will help you concentrate,” his Grandpa explained. “Hold the center with your middle finger and thumb and spin it with the finger of your other hand.”

Jason Anthony complied and was immediately transfixed by the spinning wonder. He felt a funny tingle at the back of his neck. The sensation moved up toward the top of his head where it seemed to settle right in the middle. It felt itchy so he scratched at it vigorously. When the spinner stopped, so did the itch.

“Thanks, Grandpa.” Jason Anthony placed it in his pocket, wary about spinning it again.

“No, no,” Grandpa Ed protested. “Let’s test it.”

Reluctantly, Jason Anthony pulled out the spinner. Before he could spin it again, his grandfather gently placed a hand over it. “Wait. First, let’s try a question without the spin. Who was the fifth President of the United States?”

Jason laughed and shrugged his shoulders. “I don’t know! Who knows that?”

“Now try again,” Grandpa Ed instructed. “Spin.”

He spun it and Grandpa Ed asked the question again. The feeling once again raced up the back of his head and almost without a thought his mouth formed the words and he blurted, “James Monroe!”

Grandpa patted him on the head. “Good job, JA. Let’s try one more.”

They tried a second question. Then a third and a fourth. After about a dozen more answers Jason Anthony’s head started to hurt. “Let’s take a break and watch a little TV. Grandma’s almost done with dinner.”

It was about nine thirty when Jason Anthony’s Mom came to pick him up. He felt groggy when Grandma Linda gently shook him awake but quickly recovered when cool night air filled his nostrils as they walked toward the car.

“So how was your evening with Grandma and Grandpa?” Jason Anthony could see his mother’s eyes in the rear view mirror as she glanced at him.

“It was fun. Grandpa gave me a magic spinner.”

“A what?”

Jason Anthony explained all about the spinner and how he could answer any question with it. When his mom stopped for a red light she turned to look at him and smiled. "I'm glad you had fun. "

"Do you want to try, mom? Ask me something."

Turning her eyes back on the road she asked, "What year was the war of 1812?" They both chuckled and Jason Anthony pressed for a real question. "Ask a hard one, mom."

"Ok," his mom, Lori, agreed. "Get ready." Jason Anthony flicked the spinner into motion. "How many miles from the Earth to the Moon?"

"Two hundred thirty eight thousand, nine hundred miles."

He could see his mother's eyes again in the rear view mirror. She looked surprised. "Very good. I had no idea you knew that. "

"It's the spinner, mom. I get all the questions right."

They arrived at the house just as his dad returned from work. "That's very nice, dear. You can show your father what Grandpa gave you, then off to bed."

* * *

"What?" Lori asked her husband as he emerged from the staircase, looking a little unsteady on his feet.

"I don't think I can get my mind around what just happened."

The concerned mom sprang from the couch. "Is he okay? What happened?"

"He's fine. He's fine. Let's sit down for a second. I don't think *I'm* fine."

They sat on the living room couch and Jason Anthony Sr. held his wife's hand as he described to her what had just happened in their son's room.

"At first I played along with his little joke, asking him easy questions like how much is ten times ten, what's the capital of New York and the like. So then I thought I'd have a little fun with him and ask him an electrical question." JA Sr. took a deep breath and shook his head as if was not believing what he was about to say.

"What did you ask him?"

"At first, something simple. Like on a first year quiz. I asked him, 'what is the most frequently used wire size for interior wiring?'"

"And?"

“And he spun that thingie and answered without hesitation. Twelve AWG. I never told him about wire gauge. But then I thought, maybe one of his friends? A teacher? So I asked another, ‘What law would you use to determine the voltage of a power supply?’ He spun and answered, ‘Ohm’s law.’ Then again and again. I must have asked him thirty questions and he got them all right.”

“There has to be some explanation,” Lori said. “Tomorrow I’ll take him to The University and we’ll speak with Dr. Highview.”

Jason Anthony was very excited the next morning when his mom and dad told him he would not have to go to school. Instead they drove him to Diamond River College where they met with a professor of psychology named Alyson Highview. Dr. Highview was friendly and offered him a juice box, grape-flavored, as the family sat at a conference table in her office.

The professor wrote something on a note pad with yellow pages then smiled at Jason.

“How are you this morning, Jason?” Dr. Highview had a friendly smile and immediately put Jason Anthony at ease. She removed her glasses and placed them on the table.

“I’m good,” Jason answered.

“Your mother called me this morning and told me about a nice trick you do with your toy. May I see it?”

Jason Anthony handed her the spinner.

“I want to ask you a couple of questions. Is that alright?”

“Sure. Can I have my spinner? I answer better when I can spin it.”

Dr. Highview placed the spinner on the table, just out of Jason Anthony’s reach. “Let’s try first without the spinner, ok?” She wrote on her pad again, then asked, “Who was the first person to break the sound barrier?”

Jason Anthony’s mom placed her hand on his shoulder. “Go ahead, dear. Answer the professor.”

“What’s the sound barrier?”

Dr. Highview again wrote on her pad then handed him the spinner. “Let’s try it again. Who was the first person to the break the sound barrier?”

“Chuck Yeager.”

“When?”

“October 14, 1947?”

“What is the speed of sound?”

“758 miles per hour.”

Dr. Highview looked at Lori. "Did you teach him this? Could he have learned it at school? On the Internet?"

"It's the spinner," said Jason Anthony. "The answers just come to me."

"Let's try something different," said Dr. Highview. "I've written about similar phenomena before. People, even some very young, often store incredible amounts of information in their subconscious until something, perhaps a stimulus like this spinner, triggers the recall." Dr. Highview tapped her fingers on the table and looked intently at Jason Anthony. "Jason, in what town and state was I born?"

"Wesley, Maine."

"What was my father's first name?" Her voice sounded a little uneven, as if she was getting upset.

"Ethan."

Dr. Highview stood up. "What was my grandma Emily's special name for me?"

"Bunny."

The professor collapsed back into her chair, shaking her head. "This cannot be possible. There is no way he could have known that information. We might be witnessing a supernatural event."

* * *

The next few weeks were a blur of activity. After the head of scientific research, along with a team of experts, quizzed Jason Anthony, it did not take long, despite a news blackout by the college, before reporters and television cameras showed up at the school and at their home asking questions.

They had to move into their Aunt Christine's house to get away from the harassment but the reporters eventually tracked them down there as well. Jason Anthony had not been to school in three weeks and his parents took turns missing work so one of them would be with him at all times.

It was late in the evening, about 10 PM, when Jason Anthony peeked through the curtain in his Aunt's living room and got a bad feeling in his gut.

"Mom? Take a look outside?"

"What do you see?" she asked.

"Nothing. All the reporters are gone. Their trucks and cameras all gone."

Lori opened the curtain a little wider to confirm what her son had just described. They were gone. The street was empty.

“Everyone get upstairs,” she ordered. “Until we can figure this out.”

A dark SUV pulled in front of the house. Two men in suits emerged from the front seat; one opened the back door to let the passenger out. A woman, with light-colored hair pulled back tightly, wearing a skirt and blazer, stepped out of the vehicle and walked toward the house, the two men in tow.

Lori opened the door.

The woman immediately reached inside her jacket and produced an ID and a badge.

“Danielle Edwards. Homeland Security! May we please come in?”

“This isn’t my home, I..”

“...we know, ma’am. It’s your brother and sister-in-law’s home. May we come in?”

Reluctantly, she allowed the government agents to enter the house. The children remained upstairs while Lori and her sister-in-law sat down at the dining room table with Agent Edwards. The two other agents remained standing, one by the front door, one just off the entrance to the kitchen. Jason Anthony’s dad arrived a few minutes later, passed a quick interrogation by the agent at the front door, then joined them.

“What the heck is going on here?” he demanded.

Lori waved him over and brought him up to speed about the government agents’ visit.

“Mr. and Mrs. Pastore. I’ve been sent here under direct orders of The President of the United States,” said agent Edwards. “News of Jason Anthony’s ability is being discussed at the highest level of government. Frankly, most people think this is some kind of hoax. Hence the reason for my visit.

I understand if someone else uses the spinner or Jason uses a different one that he is unable to answer the questions.”

“How did you know that?” asked Lori.

“We’re the government, Mrs. Pastore. We know things.”

Agent Edwards removed a small plastic card from her pocket.

“This is called ‘the biscuit.’ Every day The President gets a new one. It contains the authorization code to launch a retaliatory nuclear attack on a foreign enemy. These codes are generated daily by the NSA and contain mostly random numbers and letters. Only a few people can recognize the sequence that identifies the President’s or Vice President’s authority. Could you please call your son down so I may ask him a question?”

A moment later Jason Anthony sat at the table. Both his cousins remained upstairs, peeking around from the second floor landing.

“Jason, my name is Danielle. I understand you have a very special ability.”

Jason Anthony shrugged. “I guess so. If I spin this.” He held up the spinner.

“May I hold it?” Agent Edwards asked. Jason Anthony pushed it across the table. The agent picked it up and spun it. “Is this how you do it?” Jason nodded yes. “I have a question to ask. Do you see this card? Can you tell me what the Gold Code is?”

Jason Anthony held out his hand and Agent Edwards returned his spinner. She repeated, “What is the Gold Code on this card?”

“12EEE45GO40X11.”

Without saying a word, Agent Edwards stood up, took out her phone and walked out of the dining room, making some sort of hand gesture to one of the agents. He walked into the dining room and stood next to Jason Anthony. A few seconds later she returned.

“Mr. and Mrs. Pastore. I know this is difficult for you to hear but I have just been ordered to take your son into protective custody so we can access the risk to national security.”

Jason’s dad stood up. “Over my dead body you’re taking my son.”

The other agents stood a little straighter as if ready to take action. Agent Edwards raised her hand and the other agents relaxed.

“Mr. Pastore, we want you and your wife to come with us. “

“Where?”

“The Central Intelligence building in New York City. This story is spreading like wildfire across the globe and we need to get him someplace safe until we can figure out if he is in any danger.”

The family left with the agents and climbed into the large, black SUV. In less than an hour they arrived at 60 Christopher Street where they drove straight into an underground parking lot. The Pastores were then escorted into an elevator and up a few floors where they entered a small reception area outside of a meeting room with glass walls. Jason was taken into the meeting room alone with Agent Edwards while his parents were ordered to wait outside. Edwards waved her hand across a small metal panel and the walls of glass instantly became cloudy.

“Don’t worry, Jason. Your parents are right outside. I am about to ask you some questions and only I can hear and record the answers.”

Jason Anthony choked back tears, scared that he was separated from his mom and dad. He could hear the muffled sounds of his father speaking on the other side of the glass. Jason looked around the room. Besides the meeting table and about twelve chairs, there was no other furniture. On the far end was another door with a large doorknob and five numbered buttons.

“Are you ready, Jason?”

Jason shook his head. “I want my mom and dad,” he said, tears now running down his cheeks.

“You have nothing to be afraid of,” Agent Edwards assured. She opened a folder that had been sitting on the table. “Have you ever heard of a country called Iran?”

Jason shook his head.

“Try answering the question now, using your spinner.”

The agent sat between him and the entrance door so trying to run out that way was not going to work.

Jason Anthony spun the spinner. Only he didn’t repeat the question she asked him. Instead he asked one of his own. *What is the combination to that door lock?*

He jumped up from his seat and darted toward the rear exit.

“Jason, wait!” Edwards yelled.

He entered 4 4 2 8 and the lock clicked open. He ran through and found himself in a short, brightly lit hallway. He spun again. *Which way should I run?* He ran through a staircase door at the end of the hall and spun again. Running down two flights he entered another floor, this one darker except for a dim light near the baseboard. He kept spinning and asking which way to go so he would not be caught. Directions just popped into his head. Directions like when to wait in a hallway and for exactly how many seconds before continuing his descent. He kept spinning and answers kept coming until he found himself on the street. *Which way now?* He ran two blocks and made a left, sprinting just a half block more before he stopped in front of a church building.

He ran up the steps and pushed through the large wooden doors. Once inside he was immediately greeted by a kindly looking priest dressed in black pants and a black short-sleeved shirt with a white collar. His gray hair, beard and large belly reminded Jason Anthony of Santa Claus.

“Why if it isn’t Jason Antony Pastore,” he said.

“How do you know my name?”

The kindly priest placed a hand on top of Jason Anthony’s head. “You’re famous, son. The whole world is talking about you and your spinning device. I’m Father Joseph. How did you find your way in God’s house tonight?” He looked around. “Where are your parents?”

Jason Anthony described the night’s events, then asked, “Can you take me home?”

Father Joseph reached into his pocket and pulled out his cell phone. “Based on what you told me I don’t think that’s a good idea. What’s your mother’s cell phone number?”

“I don’t know,” Jason Anthony answered. Father Joseph gave him a puzzled look.

“Really, son?”

“Whoops.” Jason gave his spinner a spin.

* * *

After calling Jason Anthony’s mom and letting them both speak for a few moments, Father Joseph made another call. “Your parents will be here in about 20 minutes.”

“Then I can go home?”

“I’m suggesting a little detour first. You’re safe. Nobody is going to bother you.”

They talked for a little while and Jason Anthony started to feel better and much less scared. He jumped up and ran toward them when his mom and dad burst into the church. After a long group hug, Lori turned and kissed Father Joseph on the cheek.

“How did you manage this? Thank you.”

“We also know people in high places, Mrs. Pastore. But we don’t have much time. I’ll walk you outside.”

Father Joseph wished them well and the limousine that brought his mom and dad to the church now whisked them all to JFK Airport. They boarded a private jet and took off for Rome. Once airborne, a man in a dark suit emerged from the cockpit and greeted them.

“Please try to relax,” he said. “My name is Cosimo Capatezzi. I’m Vatican City’s ambassador to the United States. Unofficially, of course. His Holiness called your President directly and assured him your son would be safe under the protection of The Vatican. The Holy Father believes this phenomenon with Jason Anthony deserves to be investigated as a possible miracle. If you agree, he, along with a select group of cardinals, would like to meet with you tomorrow afternoon.”

Lori looked over at her husband, who nodded his approval. They were in agreement. They would meet with The Pope tomorrow.

* * *

The family slept through the rest of the flight and, once they arrived in Vatican City, were provided with accommodations, a meal and fresh clothing. It was about five minutes to two in the afternoon when Cosimo Captatezzi knocked on their door.

“It’s time.”

They were escorted down a long hallway that had religious statues and paintings lining the walls on each side. Two Swiss Guards were on duty in front of a set of ornate doors which were opened by a third guard from inside to allow them entrance.

The room was large, about the size of a basketball court. Its colorful tiled floor was so shiny, Jason Anthony could see his reflection. The room's walls were decorated just like the outer hallway, only this room also had paintings on the ceiling. At the far end of the room there was an empty chair of carved wood with gold leaf paint and purple fabric. Six cardinals stood on each side, all dressed in black robes and red hats. The twelve men turned toward a rear door as the Holy Father entered. He wore white and gold vestments and a tall, white peaked cap with a large cross in its center.

He greeted everyone with a wave of his hand and the cardinals sat. Three chairs were brought in and placed in front of the Pope and his twelve cardinals. Jason Anthony and his parents were invited to sit.

"Thank you for being here today." The kindly man looked directly at Jason Anthony. Any nervous or scared feelings quickly subsided. "You have been quite the topic of conversation around here, young man. From what I hear, you have the ability to answer any question, no matter how complex, when you use your spin device."

"Yes, sir," said Jason Anthony.

"Come. Bring it here and show me."

Jason Anthony looked at his mom who whispered, "It's fine. Go."

The twelve cardinals looked on eagerly as the boy approached The Bishop of Rome. Jason Anthony held out his spinner. "Would you like to hold it?"

"Yes, thank you. Is this how you do it?"

A few of the cardinals chuckled as the Pontiff handed the spinner back to Jason Anthony. The boy returned to his seat and the cardinal to the Pope's right stood and addressed the Pestore family. The man had dark brown skin and spoke with a British accent.

"Needless to say, this phenomenon has captured the attention of The Vatican. The Holy Father has assembled this committee of cardinals to determine if this is a true miracle from God. We've studied the media accounts and also the transcripts from the university. All the questions asked were about things known in the world. All facts that could be verified. Do you mind if we ask something of a more philosophical nature?"

Jason Anthony readied himself, his finger on the tip of his device.

The cardinal looked over at The Pontiff who singled his approval with a slight nod of his head. The cardinal then took a deep breath and asked Jason Anthony the question.

"Is Heaven real?"

The sound of the main doors closing shut caused everyone on the panel to look up. The Pastore family looked back over their shoulders to also take a look. Jason Anthony felt uneasy when he saw Agent Danielle Edwards standing next to Cosimo Capatezzi, the Vatican representative they had met on the plane.

The cardinal asked the question again.

“Is Heaven real?”

Jason Anthony gripped his fidget spinner and spun the device into motion. He felt that now all-too-familiar tingle on the back of his neck as he waited for the answer to enter his mind.

The spinner wobbled, then shook vigorously. Its three outer wheels popped out and fell to the floor, each one rolling away. The middle section also dislodged, the ball bearings jumping out in all directions. The tingling feeling in Jason Anthony’s head subsided.

The Pope stood up and everyone in the room did the same. He smiled at Jason Anthony then turned and walked out the way he had entered. The cardinals followed.

The government agent had also left. Only the Pastore family and Cosimo Capatezzi remained.

“That’s it?” Lori asked Capatezzi.

Jason Anthony, still holding the empty frame of the spinner, looked up at the priest. “So this wasn’t a miracle?”

Capatezzi placed his hand on young boy’s shoulder.

“Perhaps it was. Or at least what happened today might have been. “ The priest walked over and opened the door.

“Are you ready to go home?”