
Prologue: The Power of Youthful Minds

Like many of you, I often dreamt of flying when I was a young child. Some experts believe these kinds of dreams are caused by emerging sexual urges (Freud, 1910), but that is a dubious contention considering the experiences began when I was only four or five years old. Given their widely shared, cross-cultural, and prototypical nature, Jung postulated that flying dreams are reflective of an inherent need to be free from control or restrictions (Jung, 1948). Others have opined that flying dreams can be related to stress (Soffer-Dudek & Shaha, 2010) or body position (Cheyne et al., 1999). However, early flying dreams might be a reflection of what our youthful imaginations and thoughts are capable of doing. Indeed, ample research indicates that our brain is organized during youth much differently from its subsequent adult configuration. Children have a superabundance of neurons and synaptic connections, but these are slowly winnowed and reordered into function-specific modules as we mature—a process called *cortical parcellation* (de Haan & Johnson, 2003; Cloutman & Lambon Ralph, 2012).

This early abundance of synaptic connections might allow our young minds to process information in more multi-sensory and synesthetic fashions than is possible after we mature. Synesthesia is a condition or faculty wherein the stimulation of one sensory or cognitive area influences the activation of another, as when people perceive certain letters or numbers as having particular colors or specific sounds as producing distinct visual effects (Spector & Maurer, 2009; Ward, 2012). For instance, during our youth, we might remember a car ride in vivid detail. As the recollection unfolds, the early wealth of cortical connections could allow the sensation of seeing objects fly by to become enmeshed with the simultaneous feeling of movement we experienced, and all the more so during dream states. In fact, our youthful minds might experience and recall event sensations in fashions that far exceed what we can manage in adulthood. It could be easily argued that children possess a potent window of imaginal opportunity that few can touch when they are mature, albeit that children have expressive limitations in the information they can relate concerning their dreams (Szajnberg, 2010; Bouldin, 2006; Burnham & Conte, 2010). With adulthood, our minds grow more compartmentalized and efficient, but I suspect that some of us lose much during the transition.

Due to their vivid and exhilarating nature, I retain distinct memories of the flying dreams, some of which were recorded during my youth.

Wow, I'm soaring high above our house, but where should I go? What about crossing the Connecticut River and flying above the forests and fields of Vermont? Hmmm, Nana lives out there. Yeah, I'll go that way! All the roofs and streets can be seen from up here. That's Main Street, and I think that road leads to the river. But I'm too high, so it's best to go down a little. Oh, there's the steel trestle bridge between West Lebanon, New Hampshire, and White River Junction, Vermont. The bridge's flaking green paint and rivets are coming into view while I descend. There must be a gazillion rivets on the bridge! And look at the swirling eddies and whirlpools in the river. Don't want to get stuck in them! No way. There are also trees up ahead, so I better go higher! Wow, that was close! I barely got high enough to get over those trees. The treetops, the roofs, the roads below—everything is so clear. I can even see boulders, road lines, and chimneys on the roofs. The wind blows on my face and I can feel the motion when I turn or change height. This is neat!

I was excited about where the enthralling adventures would lead and looked forward to these flying dreams. I am sure many of you have had similar experiences, and some might even recall details of their journeys. Regrettably, fear became a problem in my case—a carry-over from the turmoil of my home life. I kept trying to fly higher, faster, and farther when the flying dreams occurred, and there came a time wherein I became hopelessly lost within frightening nocturnal surroundings. The event was as traumatic as any in the corporeal realm, and the memories remain.

What am I going to do? The moon is out, but it's too dark up here to see! Gosh, why did I have to go so far and so high? And which way leads back home? I could crash into a plane or something. Look, there's a clearing over there, just below the slope of that big hill! Yeah! Let's land there and figure out how to get home. Be careful! Slow down more and go around those bushes! There! I can feel the ground.

Hmmm, it's kind of cold here, and I bet some big animals are in those woods. And don't go near that dirty water! This place must be on the far side of White River Junction, just beyond the Veteran's Hospital. Well, maybe that's where I am. But it's dark, and I'm too tired to fly anymore. How am I going to get home? I'm going to have to walk, but which way is best? And what if a bear or wild dog gets me? It's best to hide in that thicket over there and wait until dawn. Then, I can find some help.

Yuck! This place is all muddy, with reeds and cattails that are taller than I am. I could get caught in quicksand or drowned. I want to wake up! I want to...No! Don't cry! Something might hear! Shhh, just stay still.

Gee, I'm thinking about things while in a dream. But is this a dream? Maybe I'm really here, lost in this dirty place! Yeah, this might be real. There are stars twinkling up above. I feel the night's chill and hear crickets chirping. And those are peepers in the water—lots and lots of them. The long grass and bushes feel prickly, and my feet are getting wet. But I want to wake up. This is scary!

I can still recall the dream as an actual event, even more than fifty-five years later. During this stage of development, I began to blur the distinctions between reality and thought, and the experience was powerful enough to become enmeshed in memory's net. The processes that cause emotional events to be so vividly memorized are now well understood (Pelletier & Paré, 2004; Abe, 2001; Hass & Canli, 2008). When we experience strong emotions, our

bodies release stress hormones that can aid long-term memory formation. Excessive amounts of these hormones will impair memory, which is probably an inherent defense response. Indeed, the complete recall of an extremely traumatic memory can have very negative consequences, but at the time I had no such insights. As the dreams proliferated, I also began experiencing many instances of *déjà vu* (Wild, 2005; Brown, 2003; Sno et al., 1992). It is hard to say whether my dreams or daily experiences caused these *déjà vu* effects, but other odd perceptual occurrences soon became manifest during consciousness.