

Eddie, The Early Years

Chapter Four The Return Trip

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With Summer break nearing its end, Eddie contemplates making one more trip through the portal sometime before school starts. The first trip was purely an accident. The next trip, however, will be purposeful. After all, Eddie has the gold, so he might as well see if he can sell it for a profit. The second trip, if it is even possible, would be more of an adventure rather than a surprise.

Hoping to get some answers, Eddie decides to take the drawing of the portal, with the distances and angles, to a high school honor student, Ralph, who lives down the street. Barely knowing Ralph at all, Eddie is hopeful that a future fellow high school student can help him understand the diagram. Ralph's father is an accountant, and has always stressed the value of education. Eddie is hopeful that Ralph, who will be a senior this year, could shed some light on his drawing.

Eddie walks to Ralph's house, since it is not far. When he arrives, he knocks on the door. Ralph's mother answers the door, prompting Eddie to ask, "is Ralph here?" "Whom may I say is calling?" Ralph's mother responds in perfect English. "Eddie, from down the street," he replies. She tells Eddie, "I shall retrieve him for you," speaking to the visitor as if she were born on a different planet.

Ralph comes to the door, and invites Eddie in. The two, who have met once or twice before, reintroduce themselves. After they talk for a moment, Eddie tells Ralph that he has a geometry problem that he is trying to understand. Eddie asks Ralph, "can you take a look at this and see what you think?" "Sure, let me see it," responds Ralph. The honor student takes a look at Eddie's drawing, and asks Eddie, "where did you get this?" Eddie responds, "I drew it myself." Ralph sternly tells Eddie, "the only thing this will get you is an F in geometry class." Eddie, who is dumbfounded, responds, "what do you mean?" Ralph explains to Eddie,

“this is an equilateral triangle. The inside angles must be 60 degrees. You have them labeled as 52 degrees.” With firmness, Ralph adds, “this is not even possible.” Reassuring Ralph of the accuracy of the diagram, Eddie replies, “but, I measured it myself.” In a curt tone, Ralph tells Eddie, “maybe you should just stick to cutting lawns. The way you have this drawn is not even possible. You obviously made a mistake.” Eddie, figuring he is not going to get any help from Ralph, thanks him for taking a look at it, and heads home.

Eddie’s first academic experience with a high school student was not at all a good one. The encounter with Ralph was all Eddie needed to motivate himself to go home, get his bicycle, and ride to the portal right away instead of in a few days. On his way home, Eddie is hoping that everyone in high school is not like Ralph. Ralph cut into Eddie like a shark at feeding time. In a purely academic way, Ralph beat Eddie to a bloody pulp. Eddie, however, is somewhat used to people pointing out his academic deficiencies, so he just moves on.

Getting on his bicycle, Eddie checks that everything he needs is in his tool bag. He has the gold, the drawing of the portal, his tools, two spare tubes, and is ready to go. On his bicycle, he sprints down the road, and heads toward the portal. Moving rather quickly, Eddie seems to have a little excess adrenaline after his encounter with Ralph. Eddie passes Angelo’s Service Station and Mark’s house, and arrives at the path next to the parkway in record time. As Eddie approaches the portal, he slows down. Getting off of his bicycle, Eddie confidently walks toward the portal.

Eddie briskly walks into the midst of the three boulders with his bicycle. As the mechanic instructed him, Eddie raises his right arm into the air and says, “August 1980.” The sound coming from the parkway, as it did before, changes. This time, however, the weather is much better than the last trip. Eddie walks over to the path, and rides back in the direction from which he came. Passing Mark’s house again, he takes a good look and notices Mark’s house does not look too much different from before. As Eddie rides farther down the road, Angelo’s Service Station slowly comes into view. Eddie looks up, and the sign in front of the service station has Angelo’s name on it.

Somewhat apprehensive, Eddie peers into the service station from across the street. The station appears to be deserted, with just a few cars parked off to the side. From a distance, Eddie sees someone inside. He carefully rides toward the station, which has all three bay doors open. As Eddie gets closer, he sees the mechanic inside, pressure washing the floor. Getting off of his bicycle, Eddie walks into the service area. The mechanic waves, which is quite a relief to Eddie.

Yelling out over the sound of the pressure washer, the mechanic asks Eddie, “do you have any gold?” This question gave Eddie even more confidence, but confidence in what is the question. Eddie replies, “I sure do.” The mechanic walks over to the pressure washer, which is on the side of the building, and turns it off.

Eddie asks, “is Angelo here?” The mechanic replies, “no. Angelo just moved back to Greece. I just bought the station from him a few weeks ago.” Stating the obvious, the mechanic tells Eddie, “I’m cleaning the station up a bit. This place was a big mess, but it’s getting there. I’ll reopen the station in a few days.” Looking around, Eddie remembers how organized the station appeared the last time he saw the mechanic.

The mechanic tells Eddie to bring his bicycle inside, and closes the garage doors to the shop area. They both go into the office and talk for a while. The mechanic explains to Eddie that the shop has been closed for three weeks in order to clean it up. The mechanic proudly tells Eddie that he ordered a new sign that reads *Eddie’s Service Station*, which will be installed next week. Pressure washing the station, both inside and out, is the last thing on the list to be completed. After the pressure washing is completed, the station will be ready to reopen. The mechanic asks Eddie, “well, are you ready to go to the coin store?” “Sure,” replies Eddie. After locking up the station, the mechanic and Eddie leave, and walk over to the mechanic’s car.

The mechanic’s car, a British Racing Green 1969 MGB, with factory wire wheels, looks immaculate. “Nice set of wheels,” Eddie compliments the mechanic. Giving Eddie a hint of his future, the mechanic replies, “the next time you drive by Angelo’s, the MGB is going to be sitting over there in the corner, next to the fence.” The mechanic tells Eddie the story behind the car, explaining, “when I was in high school, taking auto shop, Angelo told me I could have the MGB. He said a customer had it towed in, and never wanted it back after hearing what it would cost to repair. After Angelo told him how much it would cost to fix, he sold it to Angelo for next to nothing. The customer was so frustrated with the car. He just wanted to get rid of it.”

Eddie, curious for knowledge, asks, “what was wrong with it?” Going into detail, the mechanic replies, “the overdrive box needed to be rebuilt. It needed a valve job, and a few other minor things. But, I wanted to do things right. The engine block was bored out. I put in oversized pistons, oversized stainless steel valves, a balanced crankshaft and a balanced camshaft. Then, I added a stainless steel exhaust. The suspension was totally reworked, and an anti-sway bar was added. It runs really good now. Actually, it runs and performs far better than when it left the factory. And, the really good part is the body was in perfect condition.”

Eddie and the mechanic get into the car, which fittingly has the top down on such a beautiful day. The car starts flawlessly, and the engine sounds better than the day it left the factory. They head down the road toward the coin shop, which is in the same direction as the parkway. Driving under the bridge to the parkway, the echo of the engine off the wall sounds like a well-tuned racing machine.

Pulling into the parking lot of a small shopping center near the mall, the mechanic finds a parking place far from the storefront. The mechanic explains to Eddie, "you'll have to wait here." Eddie responds in disappointment, asking, "why?" The mechanic explains, "you bought the coins last week. You've seen Jimmy once before but, by August 1980, he will have seen you many times. He might recognize you and me together and, since I am you, that might cause a problem." Eddie, gaining a little wisdom, sees the mechanic's point, and responds, "oooooh, I get it." The mechanic tells Eddie, "I'll be back in a sec." Giving Eddie something to do while he is away, the mechanic tells him, "pop the hood and take a look underneath."

While the mechanic is selling the gold in the coin store, Eddie looks over the MGB. Inside, the car is in showroom condition. Eddie gets out of the car and reenters on the driver's side. He opens the hood, and gets out to take a look. The engine compartment is clearly not the original factory design. Looking around, it appears that the Lucas electrical system has been extensively re-engineered to something that will not catch on fire. The rubber gas lines going to the twin SU carburetors have been replaced with higher quality braided metal lines. And the puny little stock fuel filter mounted in the engine compartment has been replaced with two larger filters, one for each carburetor. All of the nuts, bolts, and fasteners have been upgraded to stainless steel. Eddie, needless to say, is impressed by the work.

The mechanic returns with \$3,150.00 in cash. Eddie closes the hood, and they both get into the car. Handing the cash to Eddie, the mechanic tells him, "go ahead and put it in the glove box." The mechanic explains to Eddie, "when we get back to the shop, we'll have to separate out the bills that are later than the date you came here from. The older ones you can take back with you, but the newer ones you obviously can't. But, I have some older bills at the shop in the safe that we can swap for the newer ones."

When Eddie and the mechanic get back to the shop, they go into the office to sort the money. Quite different from the way the service station looked three weeks ago when Angelo owned the station, the newly renovated office is immaculate. The mechanic goes back to the safe and gets some older bills. Hidden in a private restroom, the safe is concealed behind a wall that raises up into the ceiling on a track. Vertical molding

attached only to the adjacent walls hide any hint that the wall may be movable. No one would ever suspect that a safe is hidden behind the wall. The mechanic and Eddie swap the newer bills for some older ones. Eddie now has \$3,150.00 in old bills, mostly hundreds and fifties. Eddie thinks to himself that amount represents a quick profit of \$2,850.00.

After sorting the money, Eddie asks the mechanic, "can I show you something?" The mechanic replies, "sure. What do you have?" Going into the shop to get the drawing he made of the portal, Eddie brings it back to the office. Laying the drawing on the desk, Eddie tells the mechanic, "here's the drawing I made." Eddie explains, "I showed it to Ralph, this honor student guy down the street, and he told me it's not possible."

Looking at the drawing, the mechanic explains the portal to Eddie, "ten feet, three-and-one-half inches is 3.14 meters. That number, 3.14, is pi. You'll learn about it in tenth grade in geometry class. The angles should be 60 degrees, but they are about 52 degrees, which you did, by the way, measure correctly. That is why it's a portal. It doesn't follow the rules of the universe." The mechanic adds, "the angle of the hydrogen atoms in a water molecule is 104.5 degrees. The 52-degree angle that you measured is about half that angle. That's all I've been able to figure out." The mechanic humbly admits, "beyond that, I really don't know. Maybe you'll run across someone who can figure it out." Eddie, who was somewhat confused earlier, now has a better understanding about something that makes no sense at all.

Changing the subject, the mechanic tells Eddie, "next time, bring the gold forward to September 2011. The price will be somewhere around \$1,750.00 per ounce." "Wow," exclaims Eddie. The mechanic informs Eddie, "if you think \$1,750.00 per ounce is high, wait until the 2020s. The price will be even higher than that. But, it's a really weird society during that decade. You have to be careful of what you say and how you dress, or you might offend someone." Eddie asks, "really? Are you serious?" The mechanic replies, "trust me. 2020 is only the beginning."

Eddie asks the mechanic, "how much should I bring with me?" The mechanic replies, "as much as you want." The mechanic suggests to Eddie, "buy the gold in small amounts, not all at once. Get some from the shop down on Sunrise Highway too. And, there's a few other coin shops in the area. You'll find them." After all, a fourteen-year-old buying thousands of dollars of gold might attract the wrong kind of attention.

Before Eddie leaves, the mechanic gives Eddie some wisdom regarding money. The mechanic tells Eddie, "money is just a way to buy your way into an unobtainable destination even faster." The mechanic, explaining himself, continues, "with the money, all of this can be built, but it means nothing if you aren't happy. When you get back, focus on school and

sports. Fun in school, competition in sports, enjoyment from working on cars, that's the kind of stuff that really matters." The mechanic says to Eddie, "oh, and one last thing. Ralph will someday be your accountant, but keep that a secret." To that, Eddie could only reply, "seriously?" The mechanic replies, "yeah. But, I won't spoil it for you how that happens." How that will unfold will be a future mystery.

Eddie packs the tool bag with the cash, as the mechanic reminds him, "September 2011." As they say goodbye, Eddie repeats to the mechanic, "September 2011. Got it." So that he does not forget, Eddie writes the date on his drawing of the portal. Eddie then gets on his bicycle and rides toward the portal.

On the way back to the portal, he notices Mark's parents getting out of their car. Eddie says to himself, "good. Mark's parents still live here. At least something make sense." Mark's parents do, however, look a little older. Seeing Mark's parents leaves Eddie to wonder where Mark is at this place in time. Eddie decides that will be a question to investigate during another trip. Arriving back at the portal, Eddie walks in among the three boulders, and is immediately transported back to his time with \$3,150.00 in his tool bag.

For the remainder of the Summer, Eddie continues to cut lawns, clean pools, and go on a few rides. During each ride, he stops by the coin store and picks up a little gold, which Jimmy is very glad to sell to him. He also frequents the coin store on Sunrise Highway, which is a considerable distance away. Taking the mechanic's advice, Eddie does not want to buy too much gold at once and bring the wrong kind of attention to himself. Eddie decided he would accumulate gold, which is in the \$65.00 per ounce range, until the money ran out. He would then go back to the portal, and redeem it at a date in the future.