

The Invention of the Big Bang

A Novel

Preview Edition

About the Author

Fred Schäfer grew up in Germany. He writes fiction and non-fiction books in English and German. Today he lives with his family in Western Australia.

Author's Comments

The central character of this story is Ludwig. Without him I could not have written this book. However, the three women protagonists are the characters I fell in love with. They are the true heroes.

I must ask people who are familiar with Acapulco, the New York Stock Exchange and other locations mentioned in this novel to forgive me for the liberties I took with these places and their neighbourhoods. I have no idea if there were disused mine shafts where I decided that I needed them. Whether it was actually possible over half a century ago to hire a booth and a telephone for half a day at a well known address in New York, I can't guarantee. I made it a reality because it suited the story. It was at this place then and it is at this place now where fortunes are made and lost. I needed such a location and my protagonist needed a desk and a phone at that location and so I gave him what he needed.

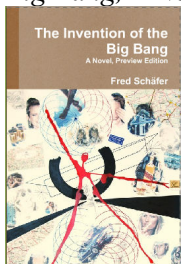
Henry Miller and Big Sur I think I described fairly accurately. The additional characters that I incorporated into the Big Sur community of the late 1940s, I am confident Henry would have loved to meet.

Should I meet Henry one day in another world I am sure we will have a good laugh about it all.

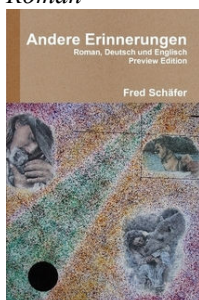
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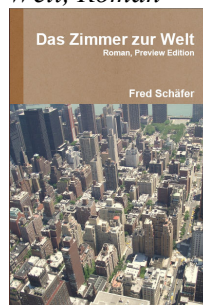
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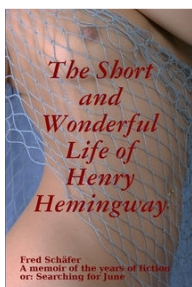
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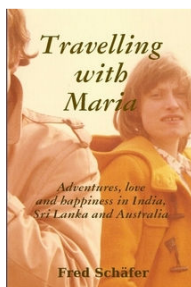
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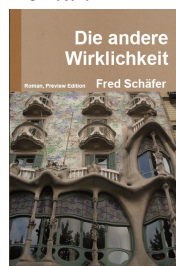
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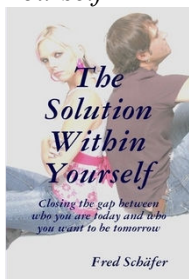
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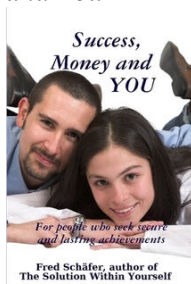
Die andere Wirklichkeit, Roman



The Solution Within Yourself



Success, Money and You



Die Beeinflussung des jungen Jakob Berg durch Henry Miller



Fred Schäfer

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A Novel

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Front cover: *Undecided*, Transfer Drawing, P. F. Schäfer

ONE: The Banker 9

TWO: The Bohemians 125

THREE: The Banker's Wife 167

FOUR: Desideria 191

EPILOGUE: Roberto 241

Acknowledgements

I am a fortunate writer. I have family members and friends who are happy to read my manuscripts with a red pen in the hand. In the case of this book, my thanks go to my son Volker, his wife Claire, my daughter Linda and especially to Maria, my wife and my best friend. Also many thanks to a good friend, Hans Hoette. Thank you for finding my mistakes and for challenging me.

ONE: The Banker

1

Ludwig was sixty five and I twenty seven when he commenced telling me his story. “When referring to people and events,” he said, “am I talking about countless entities or one big blob of consciousness?” He emphasized the last part of the sentence: ...*or one big blob of consciousness?*

I did not reply and he resumed: “From now on I will live a normal life.”

This was in Australia in 1973.

“What life have you been living so far?” I asked.

“I’ve always tried to be someone whom I wasn’t.”

It did not occur to me until many years later that there might have been something unusual about these sentences: From now on I will live a normal life. I’ve always tried to be someone whom I wasn’t.

“You have lived an extraordinary life,” I said. “You are an example, a man of integrity.” I meant what I said. “You are happily married. You have good relationships with your son and daughter. You have travelled the world and financially you have been amazingly successful.”

“On the surface,” he agreed, “yes, you are right; on the surface my life looks pretty good.”

“On the surface?” I knew him well and yet had no idea what he was on about.

He told me his story. He talked of adventures, success, love, art, philosophy and of his wife; how she was convinced that death would be her only solution. He finished his story four months later.

I came to his place or he came to mine; frequently we had dinner; sometimes our wives did the cooking and we joined them, sometimes we did the cooking and they joined us. After dinner Ludwig and I went to his study or another quiet place, opened a bottle of wine or placed a bottle of Zwetschgenwasser on the table. One bottle of the Schnaps lasted for several evenings. We enjoyed the wine with Swiss cheese; with the Zwetschgenwasser we ate little pork sausages. We kept them hot in water just below the boiling point with the assistance of a candle underneath the pot. He talked and I listened. Sometimes I asked a question; not often. He was good at telling his story and didn't need prompting.

2

Today, nearly four decades later, I am in my sixties. Ludwig is still alive and enjoys a normal life. At the end of our first conversation, all those years ago, I remember this well, I asked him:

“What, in a practical sense, will be different from now on? What’s going to be the difference between your past life and your future life? Your normal life?”

“Nothing and everything,” he replied. “Living a normal life, I suspect, must start in my head, in my attitude towards people, events and things, in my attitude towards myself. How this is going to express itself in a practical sense, I don’t know.” He thought about his words for a moment before he continued with a smile that seemed a tinge sad. He said: “I also have to forgive myself.”

I looked at him questioningly, but instead of elaborating he remarked: “I suggest you keep a good eye on me and you may find out.”

Which I did.

Later the same evening, shortly before I left, he said: “Don’t write about this. I know you like writing about stuff. My son once said to me if somebody tells you the time you grab a pen and write it down.” This time his face displayed a genuine smile: the happy beam of a friend who enjoyed his little joke.

“It’s not that bad,” I protested.

“It’s just,” he continued more seriously, “this is not yet for other people. Not yet.”

We shook hands and met again a week later.

A few months ago we celebrated another one of his birthdays. Halfway through the evening he said: "If you want you can write about me now. Just don't let them know how old I am."

"Heck, why not?" I asked. "There is nothing wrong with being one hundred and two."

"Okay. Never mind my age. But don't use my real name and true nationality."

"What name and nationality would you prefer?"

"You decide."

I thought about it and said: "Your name shall be Eduardo and you are from Spain."

"Am I a bullfighter?"

"Do you want to be a bullfighter?"

"No. Not bad, but think of something more appropriate."

"More appropriate?"

"Yes, you know..."

"Do you want to be a Russian, a Swede or be from Switzerland?" I asked.

"Not bad, but no. What else can you offer?"

"How about Germany? I think you would make a good German. They are a bit like you."

"How am I?"

"Stubborn, indestructible, helpful and difficult." I wasn't serious; I just said words which for some unexplained reason appeared in my head.

“You only say that because you grew up in Germany and you are stubborn, helpful, difficult and probably would like to be indestructible.”

He wasn't serious either, but there was some truth in what he said.

“Okay,” he continued, “make me a German and give me a good German name.”

“You are Ludwig Berg and you grew up in a village near Munich. Couldn't be more German, what do you think?”

He was amused. When he replied, “I shall do my best to get used to it and do it justice,” you could have thought he was an Englishman.

3

Ludwig ran away from home at the age of fifteen. His mum and dad found a note on the kitchen table. “Dear mum, dear dad, I hate school. The teachers are idiots. The other kids are boring. There must be more to life. I have to find out. Don't worry about me. I will write. Love Ludwig.”

Since I've made him a German he probably didn't finished his letter with “Love Ludwig”. He would have finished it with “Herzliche Grüße, Euer Ludwig”. It means more or less the same, except that the Germans of his generation and even more so of his parents' generation didn't use the word *love* as freely as it is used

these days. That someone loves you, an old German woman once said to me, is something you just know. There is no need to say it. I guess, Ludwig and his parents (if they had been real Germans) would have looked at it the same way.

For the next four years he wrote on average two letters a year to his parents. He was reported as missing to the police, but it is doubtful that the police made an effort to find him. There were no suspicious circumstances. Just a boy who had run away, who was even polite enough to let his parents know that there was no need to worry about him. Besides, he was a tall, strong kid who looked like eighteen and probably was regarded as being quite capable of taking care of himself. Ludwig was a good-looking and handsome boy and would remain good-looking and handsome all his life.

I asked him: “Did you really run away because you hated school and thought the teachers were idiots and your school mates boring?”

“This was my excuse, even towards myself,” he replied, “but decades later I had doubts about it and discussed it with a psychologist.”

“What did he think?”

“He was a she and after several hours she concluded that I ran away because I was afraid.”

“Afraid of what?”

“She thought I was afraid of the known.”

“I have heard that people are afraid of the unknown,” I replied, “but I have never heard that one can also be afraid of the known,

except of course when you find yourself in a dangerous situation. You weren't in danger, were you?"

"No, not at all. I was well protected."

"So, why did she think you were afraid of the known?"

Ludwig thought about my question for quite a while, before he answered: "She said that I was a rebel who was not interested in what could reasonably be expected. In the village where I had spent my first fifteen years it seemed obvious what the rest of my life would look like. In other words: what I could expect. I just had to look around. My life would be just like everybody else's lives. I think that was what she referred to as the known and what she thought I was afraid of."

"Do you think she was right?"

"Perhaps, although I never fully understood the logic of it. Maybe she just told me what her intuition told her."

"Which would be a bit unusual for a psychologist, even speculative. Aren't they meant to guide people towards arriving at their own conclusions?"

"She was unusual in many ways."

I said nothing. I had the feeling there was more to come. For several minutes we were silent, just sitting there, sipping at our drinks, before he added the missing piece: "She was also my lover. I guess she was entitled to express her opinion a bit more freely than what she might have done otherwise in her professional life."