

DIRT - AN AUDIO DRAMA
Chapter 1 Transcript

****Warning****

This is a complete written transcript of the entire Chapter 1 audio file and is full of spoilers from start to finish. To avoid ruining surprises, read along as you listen—but don't read ahead!

Link to audio files: <https://www.dirtaudiodrama.com/#listen>

NARRATOR:

DIRT - An Audio Drama, is a production of STUDIO5705. Chapter 1.

NARRATOR (JOSEPH ELO):

Sometime around the year two thousand ten, a man in his eighties named Forrest Fenn hid a chest full of treasure somewhere in America's Rocky Mountain range. And lots of people went looking for it, all over the west.

It's not hard to understand why. The contents of the chest were reported to be worth between one and five million dollars. And according to Fenn, an antiques collector and art dealer who was based in Santa Fe, New Mexico, the person who eventually found the chest, 10 years later, got to keep it—along with everything inside of it—*all* for themselves.

There's a good chance you already know about Fenn's treasure, considering it's been covered by National Public Radio, Reader's Digest, Newsweek, Forbes, People magazine, and local newspapers and TV stations around the world. But in case you don't know, here's a little more background.

Published images of the chest show that it was a bronze, 10-by-10-inch box decorated with Romanesque figures and carvings. Inside were things like gold nuggets from Alaska, rare coins, and gemstones. When fully filled, it weighed close to 40 pounds. Sturdy enough to withstand the passing of time in harsh elements, yet light enough for an octogenarian to have carried it from his car to its mysterious hiding place.

Fenn, who died in 2020 mere months after the treasure was found, said he did it all to inspire people to reconnect with the natural world. To go on an adventure and rediscover something lost. *And*, he insisted, no one besides him knew the exact location of the chest. Not his wife, nor his closest relatives. So, if he did it all in secrecy, how did it become such a sensation?

The answers lie in Fenn's self-published autobiography, *The Thrill of the Chase*. In it, among the recounted many tales from his adventurous life, including flying more than 300 missions in

Vietnam and successfully battling cancer in the 1980s, there contains a map and clues about where the chest was hidden. The clues were written by Fenn as a 24-line poem, in a style of prose that sounds straight out of Narnia or Middle Earth, with phrases like, “Begin it where warm waters halt,” and “Put in below the home of Brown.”

Among the estimated hundreds of thousands of searchers, many documented their efforts online. And as you might expect, Reddit went nuts over the whole thing.

And yet, with Fenn remaining coy about the exact location of the chest right up until his death, dedicated searchers are left to wonder if they were ever close to finding it, or if finding gold was really ever the goal at all.

(Sounds of door opening and closing, and walking outside to mailbox)

So...why do I bring all this up? My story isn't about Forrest Fenn. But it does remind me of what's happening in my own life. A treasure hunt of sorts, with mysterious origins. And for reasons that I'll soon explain...

(Sounds of opening mailbox and opening letter)

JOSEPH:
(Whispering) What?

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):
...I think my deceased grandfather is trying to communicate with me.

(Sounds of hurriedly walking back into house)

From STUDIO5705, this is DIRT.

* *

(Sounds of being in a room)

(Sound of 8mm movie projector being turned)

JOSEPH:
(Laughs) Wow, it's still works. I can't believe it.

KIM:
(Laughing) I know. I think mom and dad got it in '75? I've used it a few times here and there. Mostly back when I thought about converting all this to digital. Still hoping to one of these days.

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

When I say my deceased grandfather is trying to communicate with me, I don't mean I'm literally getting transmissions from beyond the grave—at least, I don't *think* that's what's happening. I'm not one to believe in that kind of stuff. What I mean is that several strange things have happened lately that I can't really explain. Things that all tie back to him.

And what makes it weirder is that these things are coming out of nowhere. My grandfather died 30 years ago. Yet either by coincidence or by design, it seems that he, or somebody connected to him, wants me to find something. But what that something is, and why me, and why now...I have no idea.

KIM:

Okay, there they are. I think this is in Portland...

Looks like...McKenna Park?

Yeah. Yeah, it is. I can tell from the playground. They used to have to drag me off of that spinning roundabout thing, I loved it so much. Pretty sure I barfed once afterward in the car.

JOSEPH:

Oof. Not on me, I hope.

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

I flew from my home in Seattle to Santa Monica to visit my sister Kim over the weekend and find out if these old movies were still...watchable. Film can decay over time, but if this first one was any indication, they were holding up pretty well.

Our grandfather was 77 when he died, in 1990. I was seven. I really only remember him as a vague presence in my life. I wasn't old enough to form any real memories of our interactions. Just...images and feelings. Like when he and my grandmother visited our house one time.

(Begin background music)

It was always a big deal when they arrived. They lived in Portland and we lived in Seattle, and they usually stayed over for a few days at a time.

(Sounds of children playing in yard and car driving up)

I have a picture in my mind of being out in the front yard with my sister and my brother when they pulled up to the curb in their silver Volkswagen, with their luggage tied down tightly on top. They were on their way home from a long drive to Alaska and back, which, if you can believe it, they did a total of six times over the years. I remember their windshield and front grill absolutely pasted with bugs.

My grandmother told me years later that she always felt like her body bounced for days on end long after they'd get back from the Alaska Highway, due to all the potholes and rough sections they had to endure during their weeks of driving.

(Sounds of seagulls and waves)

I can also remember moments from my grandfather's memorial. Again, just flashes of images. It was on the banks of Columbia River, at Maryhill State Park. It was windy and hot, and the river, just beyond the edge of the grass, looked more like a giant lake.

I remember there being lots of people sitting in lawn chairs under big, shady trees. A strange combination of sadness and laughter. My grandparents both came from large, extended families and had lots of friends that they'd met and become close to, from all over. I think my grandmother was the real secret to that. She could make friends with anyone in about five seconds.

There are other things, too, like having to play piano for my grandfather, and eating ketchup sandwiches with him. But most of what I know about my grandparents comes from home movies like these.

No matter where they went or what they did, they always had a camera—filming everything from big moments like graduations and new cars to the small details of everyday life. My sister, whom I deferentially call the extended family archivist, is in possession of most of the original slides and film reels.

KIM:

Oh look! He's getting it out of the trunk!

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

The other major source of knowledge about my grandparents' lives is the collection of short stories that my grandfather wrote in his later years. It's called *A Hitchhiker's Guide to Grays Harbor*, by Aimo Elo, and it sits on my bookshelf at home next to my other favorite story collection, *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*. Grays Harbor refers to Grays Harbor in Washington state, the wide estuary on the coast where my grandfather grew up. The Hitchhiking part... Well, you'll hear about that later.

We're watching footage of Aimo doing something that became one of his favorite hobbies later in life: metal detecting. But first, you may be wondering what kind of name Aimo is. It's spelled A-I-M-O, and in Finnish it means something like "fair-sized" or "generous amount." At least that's what Google tells me. It kind of feels like the wrong name for him though. He was pretty thin for most of his life, and not tall. About five foot nine.

(Begin background music)

In this reel, dated 1966, he's in his mid-fifties, and already starting to look aged in his dark brown slacks and short-sleeve buttoned-up shirt.

(Sounds of person opening and closing trunk of an old car, walking across the street, then sounds of being in a city park)

We watch as the camera follows him, in the jittery way that Super 8 footage does, as he walks across a small street to the edge of the park. The footage then jumps abruptly to him standing thirty or so feet *in* the park, on the grassy lawn, slowly moving the long, downward arm of the metal detector to and fro. He looks up and smiles quickly at the camera, as if asked to do so. Then he goes right back to work, taking a few short steps before hovering the disc over a new spot.

We don't get to see him kneel down or dig in the ground, as the footage abruptly cuts once more and we see him facing the camera up close now, flashing a satisfied smile. The camera then pans down to his cupped right hand, which is holding what looks like a coin. Then we're back to seeing his face again, and he's saying something to the camera and smiles once more, but there's no audio attached to these reels, so we're left trying to read lips.

A few seconds later, the footage shows Aimo holding a different coin in a slightly different part of the park.

JOSEPH:

I wonder how many of those he found over the years?

KIM:

I think...a lot. Coins, rings, and other stuff. I have an earring he gave me. I had it appraised years ago, but it was just costume jewelry. Looks pretty real though.

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

Each of the reels we watched had a segment of Aimo using his metal detector in different locations: parks, beaches, campsites, wide open fields, even one time in a neighbor's yard with the neighbor's beagle going crazy running in circles and finally helping Aimo dig a small hole in the ground.

JOSEPH:

Oh. And there she is.

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

Now Aimo must be filming because we're seeing Vivian, our grandmother, sitting on a wooden bench gazing across the park at the houses and tall trees on the far side. Her hair is loosely curled, and her legs are crossed. She looks serene and elegant in a white ruffled blouse. The

camera is angled perfectly to place her in a long shot and you can feel the stylish mood they were going for. Then she bursts out laughing, unable to hold the moment.

(Sound of tail end of film reel spinning on projector, projector being turned off)

KIM:

Well, there's the first one. That was about...three minutes. Should we do another?

JOSEPH:

Yeah. Yeah, this is great.

(Sounds of commotion entering room)

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

Suddenly, two judo students burst in to the room, with loud shrieks and sharp arm and leg movements, followed by Kim's husband, Kenji, who announces he's taking the kids to practice.

KENJI:

Alright kids, say goodbye to uncle Joseph.

YOUNG BOY AND GIRL TOGETHER:

Goodbye uncle Joseph!

JOSEPH:

Okay guys, have fun at practice. Hey, break a few wood blocks for me, will ya?

KIM:

That's...more karate, not judo.

JOSEPH:

Right. I'll try to remember that.

* *

(Sound of car passing by outside and restaurant door opening, then being inside restaurant with background music)

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

After about a half dozen more movie reels, Kim and I rent electric scooters and head over to one of her favorite restaurants in Venice for lunch, a stylish Korean BBQ joint with dance music. Once we're seated, it doesn't take her long to get personal.

(Sounds of plates being set on table, grill lighting, people talking, restaurant noises)

KIM:

So, you and Julie...what's going on there?

JOSEPH:

Ugh, it's complicated.

KIM:

So...you're not together then...

JOSEPH:

(Laughter) I didn't say that. We still see each other sometimes.

KIM:

It's okay, it's okay. You don't have to soften the blow for me. I didn't like her much anyway.

JOSEPH:

(Laughter) Hey!

KIM:

It's true! Or maybe it was just her giant St. Bernard. *You know* I love dogs. But holy shit, Joseph, that dog needed some serious boundaries.

JOSEPH:

What, you don't like having a 200-pound slobbering fluffball climb on your lap all day? C'mon, what's wrong with you?

(Sound of Joseph taking drink of beverage)

Actually, that dog slept with us every night. Or I should say, slept on *me* every night. I couldn't even see or touch Julie on the other side.

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

My love life is pretty fair game I guess, considering that a) it's been in the news, and b) I've introduced three different girlfriends to my family in the last year and a half alone. Each one, of course, was supposed to be the one. That's what most everyone around me is gunning for—for me to find someone nice to settle down with. Kim has, and she seems pretty happy with Kenji and the kids and her life down here. But she's four years ahead of me. Our little brother, Eric...he's been engaged for five years, and they're getting married in August.

For now, I've been advised to keep this part of my life very private. Spare everyone around me, as well as nosy reporters and photographers, the roller coaster ride of my unsuccessful dating

life. When something real happens for me, if it happens...well, then we'll see about introductions.

(Sound of food cooking on grill)

KIM:

And work? How is the life of the celebrity CEO these days?

JOSEPH:

Mmm. I get written up in a bunch of magazines and you guys think I'm Mark Zuckerberg. It's not like that.

KIM:

Oh, you're on TV too. I've seen it.

JOSEPH:

Yeah, that was just a PR tour. You know we were just named a top 10 agency.

KIM:

The ticker under your name read, "Joseph Elo: Wolf of *LOL* Street." *And* they showed photos of you in your private jet...

JOSEPH:

Woah, okay, you know I don't have a private jet, and that was just a weekend getaway to blow off some steam.

KIM:

To Bali?

JOSEPH:

It was a *long* weekend. And a few people got carried away on Instagram.

KIM:

And what about the hotel room in Tokyo last year?

JOSEPH:

(Laughs) During Algorithm & Ad Words Week. Like I said on camera, I made sure the band got home after they played for us.

KIM:

Okay. They also mentioned—

JOSEPH:

Okay! *Point taken*. I gotta admit, I do miss the days of flying under the radar. It was a lot easier when no one knew about us. I didn't have to be so careful about every little thing I did. Now that we're a 40-million-dollar company with a potential buyer, it seems everybody is watching.

So please, by the way, don't do anything embarrassing right now, in case we're being photographed?

KIM:

Ha ha. Who's the buyer?

JOSEPH:

Oh. These short ribs are amazing. Mmm.

It's a group in Berlin called Molecular. They own five other agencies about our size in the states, plus ten others in Europe and Asia. It's a great move for us, it's basically what we've been working toward. (Laughter) That said, Molecular is *very* by the book. They don't make much room for fun. In fact, I've *personally* been put on notice about maintaining a "positive public persona," whatever that means, until the purchase goes through. None of that's been announced yet by the way, so *shush*.

KIM:

(Chewing) My lips are sealed. Right after this next bite.

JOSEPH:

(Laughs) Hey I'm speaking at a few conferences coming up, two this month alone. In fact, one of them is down here. And then there's our own agency conference—

KIM:

Convergence? I mean Confluence? No, wait, I've got it. Fusion? (Laughs)

JOSEPH:

Ummm, Conjoin?

KIM:

Conjooooiiin. Right. I knew it was one of those "together" words. You know, that's actually hard to say, "Conjoin." Is it "CONjoin" or "ConJOIN"? You couldn't just go with Convergence?

JOSEPH:

Yeah, Convergence is taken. But...Conjoin! It's a little bit of a play on words, using "con" for conference, like Comic-Con?

Okay, I'm not in love with it either. But when you put on a big show like this, it has to have an equally big name that sounds substantial and generic at the same time.

KIM:

Right. Mission accomplished. Where are you putting it on this year?

JOSEPH:

Minneapolis. I'll be giving the keynote for that one, too. You should attend. Hey, *you* could give a talk!

KIM:

(Laughing) A talk? A talk about what? Are your attendees dying to know about the inner workings of the hypothalamuses of *sus scrofa domesticus*?

JOSEPH:

(Laughs) Maybe.

KIM:

You know pigs are actually quite sweet? Lots of personality. You wouldn't know unless you spend every day with them.

JOSEPH:

Yeah, I hear pigs and I go straight to bacon. But seriously though, anything having to do with the brain, or the decision-making mechanics, of any species... I think people would sign up to hear about that. Or *maybe* they'd just sign up since you're related to me.

KIM:

(Laughs) Well, I'll think about it. But what I *really* want to know right now is why you came all the way down here to watch reels of grandpa digging up pennies in the dirt. I mean, I know we're all a bit sentimental about those days. But...there must be more to it than that—

JOSEPH:

Hey, it's great spending time with you and Kenji and the kids. That's not something we do enough of.

KIM:

Right. You're right about that. But come on little brother, I can tell something's up. There are dozens of film reels in that storage box. *You* wanted to see movies of grandpa using his beeper.

JOSEPH:

Yeah.

KIM:

So?

JOSEPH:

Well...it's just...

Okay, brace yourself. Are you bracing yourself?

KIM:
Yeah...

JOSEPH:
I have a hunch about something.

KIM:
Woah. Woah! From Mr. Evidence-Based Research? Did you say, *hunch*?

JOSEPH:
Did you see the way grandpa looks up at the camera when he finds something? Did you notice how he *talks* to the camera? Close-up? Just for a few seconds. It happens almost every time.

KIM:
You know, it's too bad those reels don't have sound. I would love to hear their voices again. Although I guess that's what I've always liked about old movies. I mean, without sound it really feels like something from another era.

JOSEPH:
Yeah. Same here.

But...in those moments when he addresses the camera... I mean, maybe he's just talking to grandma or whoever was filming, about whatever he found...or about the weather...or just making nervous talk because he was on camera. Could just be conversational stuff I suppose.

But what if it wasn't? What if, instead, he was saying something *specific* in those moments? Like something very...*intentional*.

KIM:
What do you mean?

JOSEPH:
Okay, stay with me here. What if he was delivering some kind of message? Something that I— or we—are supposed to understand years later?

I know. I *know*. But I have my reasons for thinking that.

KIM:
You have your reasons...

JOSEPH:

Yeah.

KIM:

I don't know, Joseph. Leaving messages on home movies for future you to decipher? That seems strange. I mean, we were just kids when he died. We barely knew him. How...how could he know you'd pick up on something like that all these years later?

JOSEPH:

It's not just the Super 8 reels. It's other stuff too. Stuff you could say...I've recently become...tuned in to.

KIM:

Okay. I like the conspiracy angle you're going for here; it sounds like about five of the podcasts I've been listening to. But if you're asking me—and I don't think you did, but *hi!* favorite sister here—it just...it just doesn't seem like him to have a hidden motive or be cryptic or anything. It doesn't fit the profile, you know? Not of him, or really anyone in the family. There's no dirt on anyone.

Except maybe uncle Lyle... But that's more just his own stuff that he's working out.

JOSEPH:

Why does it have to be dirt? Couldn't it be something else? I mean, sure, it could be dirt. But maybe Aimo had something different in mind. Something that's...I don't know, more of a game? Some kind of puzzle to solve? You know how he was.

KIM:

(Nervous laughter) Okay. Well, this lunch has taken a weird turn.

JOSEPH:

I know.

KIM:

So what has you thinking this way? You must have some kind of evidence to support your theory.

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

Kim is totally right. I don't live on hunches. And the same can be said of her. I think maybe it started years ago when our parents died. I think we stopped being dreamers when that happened. But also, we're both scientists. And because of that, I feel foolish suggesting there might be some kind of unexplainable connection between our past, and what I'm experiencing in the present. But I'm hoping she can help me make sense of it.

JOSEPH:

So...evidence. Well, this is where it gets really interesting.

For one, I've been having dreams. Dreams where—it's like I'm a character inside of Aimo's stories. I'm talking really, really vivid dreams. Almost like visions.

Hey, I know dreams are just reflections of our subconscious. But also, it's the timing of the dreams. I've been having them almost every night for the last two weeks now. Before that, nothing.

KIM:

Okay. Why do you point that out? What's significant about the timing?

JOSEPH:

Because I started having them around the time I received *this*.

(Sound of envelope being handled)

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

I grab an envelope from my jacket pocket and hand it to Kim. Her face becomes serious, like I'm delivering a warrant or an eviction notice. I give her a moment to look at it, and then she opens it. She pulls out a piece of paper that I know she'll recognize. She looks up at me and then back down at the paper. Her eyes scan its contents. She looks back up, and then she reads it again.

KIM:

What is this?

JOSEPH:

I suppose it's what it looks like.

KIM:

It's...it's his handwriting and everything. And it's...

(Sound of paper shuffling)

You just got this.

JOSEPH:

Yup.

KIM:

Joseph?!?

NARRATOR (JOSEPH):

In her hands is a letter I'd received in the mail. An *impossible* letter. A letter that arrived only ten days ago.

A letter from *Aimo*.

Our dead grandfather.

END CREDITS:

Dirt - An Audio Drama is presented by STUDIO5705 and is written, produced, and composed by me, Kris Kaiyala. This chapter features the voice talents of Genie Leslie as Kim, Sho Ito as Kenji, and Price and Parker Brooking as Kim and Kenji's kids. I play the part of Joseph.

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For more information about Dirt - An Audio Drama, as well as media or sponsorship inquiries, please visit [dirtaudiodrama.com](https://www.dirtaudiodrama.com). That's dirtaudiodrama.com. If you like what you hear, please rate and review us on your favorite podcast app or platform. And please, spread the word. Thank you very much for listening.

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