

**A Work of Heart –
Eagles, Deserts, Monkees and Canyons**

*The story of an extraordinary friendship that
transcended space, time and physical death.*

Jay Atkinson

Local Legend Publishing UK

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To my beautiful Sandy – Take it Easy 'til we meet again...

“We first met Jay when I was appearing in *Hairspray* in London’s West End. She sent a letter to the theater that caught my eye. I showed it to my wife, Donna, who promptly got in touch. The bubbly Jay came to the show with her lovely daughter, Anna, and we were able to hang out a little while afterwards. Our meeting that day seemed even more serendipitous when I learned her story. She and her cousin, Sandy, had been lifelong Monkees fans! Jay’s writing is inspired...We feel she will soon move beyond her small town in Wales to a more global platform. She is truly a gifted communicator!” **Micky and Donna Dolenz** – The Monkees

“Sensitive and beautifully written, Jay absorbs you into her world and shares love, laughter and tears. You will find a new friend here.” **India Redman** – Artist & Writer, Cloudhorse Design, NM, USA

“This is such a poignant story from which a flame of love burns eternal.” **Jackie Weaver** – Author of *Changing Lives*

“This book brings back so many happy memories for me...of my home town and my youth, but mainly of my friendship with one of life’s special people, Sandy. She had a beauty that many people could never see, or didn’t take the time to discover, and she will always be in my heart.” **Michael Dore** – Singer: www.michaeldore.com

“Reading Jay’s book very much took me back to my days as a child and her style of writing was reminiscent of that of Enid Blyton. Her way of writing brought back the child in me. Yet interwoven within her simple way of relating her story was the more innate and profound message about that of a deep friendship, a love woven between two women not just on the physical plane, but one which carried on into the non-physical plane, a spiritual plane of foreverness. Jay’s honest and sincere portrayal of her feelings of loss and love is a great reminder of what should be important in our lives. This book added dimensions to my understanding of love and encapsulated extremely well the reality of unconditional love and how this influences and affects our lives and who we are and the extraordinary bond between two people that can last for a lifetime.” **Esther Austin** – Radio Presenter, Author, Spiritual Healer

“A beautiful and heartfelt story that lovingly reminds us that there really is no death; that we are eternal and that aspects of the non-

physical are always communicating with us. Jay's experiences, which she so authentically shares with us, will put a smile on your face as it did mine." **Sierra Goodman** – Radio Presenter, Photographer and President of Vida Marina Dolphin Conservation, Costa Rica: www.vidamarina.org

"There are millions of children around the world suffering with unrepaired clefts - Smile Train is delighted that through the publication of this book many more will receive the free surgery they so desperately need, giving them a new smile and a second chance at life." **Meg Flanagan** – Smile Train: www.smiletrain.org

"This is a very moving story that enthralls but evokes deep fears, prejudices and issues all humans feel difficult to deal with but the enduring message is that true love overcomes everything life can throw at us." **Stephanie Booth** – Businesswoman, Star of BBC's *Hotel Stephanie* and Author of *A Girl in a Million*

"A Work of Heart is an amazing story of recognizing and engaging with love through all time and space. Jay has taken us on her story of remembering the infinite connection we have with others, no matter where they are. As one reads this amazing story, one remembers at a very deep level our ability to stay connected, whether someone is still with us here in physical or have moved on to non-physical time-space. Love is truly timeless and transcendent of all time and space. Jay's connection with Sandra and their amazing stories warm the heart and help connect each of us to those we love." **Shelle Pourmanafzadehardabili** – Corporate Director of Marketing, Rock Resorts and Vail Resorts Hospitality

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Paul M – you know who you are! For being there to catch the angel who had lost her wings, my eternal appreciation. Without your validation, this book would never have been given the breath of life.

Anna, Jamie and Kate. No words can express how much I love these three wonderful people. My kids...

Beth – Publisher of this work of heart. Beautiful Beth, without whom none of this would have been possible. Thank you from Sandy and me for giving unconditional love and life to our dream.

The late, great John Denver – another magical instrument through which Sandy Miracles manifested over time. When his beautiful song, *Sunshine on my Shoulder* manifested itself one day in a 1970's film of the same name, it broke my heart. The film is about the death of a young woman who leaves behind a baby son and his father and is beautiful and sad and happy at the same time. A few weeks later this lovely song burst into life again on my radio, accompanied a rainbow in the sky and a butterfly on my shoulder on a 'missing Sandy' day, my heart filled with sunshine and my soul soared, as it does with all of his music. Thank you JD – I now know you are Everywhere...

My lovely friends and family without whom this life experience would be hollow and meaningless. Each and every one of you is

precious to me. Whether or not you are still in my life, I appreciate your contribution to it. I love you.

Solomon – the beautiful 12ft owl who showed up at the foot of my bed to give wings to my process. Your wisdom is eternal, as is your presence.

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Foreword

This book has been written with all of my heart and soul. It is intended that my experience be shared with as many people as possible, because as the old saying goes, 'Two things are certain in this world: death and taxes!' At some stage in everyone's life, they will encounter death. Everyone has a different experience and there is no time limit on grieving. I don't need to write *War and Peace* all over again to give you the picture. So this is not a lengthy tome. But I do hope that it will bring upliftment to your heart, in the knowledge that you cannot die for the life of you and we do go on, albeit in the energetic sense, not the physical. If this book serves only to provide a bridge across forever, my experience will have been validated for me and for Sandy.

Sandy was my cousin and my friend but more importantly she was a part of me. When she died in 1997 aged 41, I wanted to die with her. My grief blinded me to all goodness, until I realised that Sandy was still around. Evidence of her showed up all around me in ways I found at first difficult to comprehend, but as time progressed, I realised she hadn't really gone anywhere. Her physicality had ceased to be, but the true inner being of my beloved friend and life companion had remained. In fact, not only had her energy self remained but her personality was expanding beyond where she had evolved whilst in the physical. The accounts I share with you here are the facts as they happened to me. I know Sandy is still here and every day more evidence appears that our work together continues.

I have learned through speaking to other people, that it is generally uncommon to have a friendship that lasts a lifetime, let alone one that survives the death experience! Most people have friends and many have long-term friendships, but the ones that weather all storms from beginning to end are rarer. Friendships are very transient, especially in our day and age where people up sticks and travel around the globe. In the 1950's it was perhaps a less itinerant population due to lack of funds and lack of transport! I feel it important to let my readers know some of the background to my amazing relationship with Sandy and so it is written in distinct parts. The first part is the 'getting to know you' part; this covers childhood

into adulthood and conveys some of the experiences we shared that made our friendship solid and unique. The second part is about Sandy's untimely death and my subsequent withdrawal from the world at large. I found the grief unbearable at times and just wanted to be with her, wherever she was. The third part is still a work in progress... she showed me, quite simply, that you can't die for the life of you! After her transition, which I prefer to call it nowadays, Sandy very quickly became my 'guide', unseen companion and mentor, through dreams and other miracle happenings. We have continued growing together – she from the other world and me from down here on Earth. She can still make me lose control of my bladder with laughter!

You may be wondering about the title of the book and how it came to be. The original write up of what has evolved into the current version, was truly a Work of Heart, and that is what I was going to call it. However, some years down the line and with new perspectives, I decided to re-write what had mainly been my catharsis, my healing, into a joyful story. Writing, it turned out, was the only way I could get through the pain and it somehow made Sandy more valid. When someone you love dies, a light goes out in your life. Your soul can feel as if it has had a part of it torn away and lost. If the loved one has been cremated and the ashes spirited away by one of the family, as happened in my case, there will be no physical or geographical place you can take your grief. It begins to feel as if they never existed or that you must be going mad. I desperately needed to feel that Sandy's life had not been in vain. Nor mine come to that.

I know that someday Sandy and I will join hands again and give our way through the heavens, wearing only our angel wings and a smile.

Until that day, I have to be content with her unseen presence. She is the 'absent friend' I toast every morning and evening and Christmas and birthday. Her presence is my gift.

She was and continues to be the *Wind beneath my Wings...*

Part 1



In the Beginning

My first encounter with a funny little kid they called my cousin, was in my granny's back yard. It was a hot summer day in July 1959; the kind of day that made you wish you had a swimming pool. Three friends were playing contentedly on the picnic rug (an old flannelette sheet that my granny had grown weary of patching up) on the six square feet of grass that granny called her garden, and were happily doling out watery tea and crab paste sandwiches from the dinky china tea set that I'd been given for my birthday in April.

Debra and Penelope (Debbie and Penny) lived next door and the wall between the two pre-war terraced houses had been demolished due to age and disrepair, and for a time, our worlds merged and we could move freely between the two houses. No barriers. Kid's paradise. Debbie was a year younger than me, and her sister, Penny, was a couple of years older. Debbie was my best friend and we shared everything. We would have been about three years old and Penny would have been five or six.

This lovely buzzy-bee, lazy day was soon to be shattered by the arrival of 'Our Sandra'. She was my Aunty Joyce's younger daughter and, until that day, I had been unaware of her presence. Aunty Joyce was my mum's maternal cousin and she and Uncle Ted lived a few streets away in Wellington Street, Grimsby. They had two daughters, Sandra and Janis. Janis was the older sister and very pretty.

Every Friday in Grimsby was 'Market Day' and after a frenzied shop for the weekly groceries in the cobbled, covered market in Freeman Street – main shopping area for the locals of the town – all the ladies would congregate for a welcome cup of tea and a gossip, usually at my granny's house. The children, naturally, were dispatched outside to play.

Sandra appeared from nowhere and stood defiantly at the edge of the circle of friends. She wanted to muscle in on our game and we were having none of it. In any case, there were no sandwiches left and the 'tea' in the pot had been drained. I told this strange little child to go away, and she did, only to return two minutes later with a packet of Daz from her mother's shopping bag,

which she had somehow managed to prise open in order to dump it all over my head!

There was a lot of caterwauling and dramatics on my behalf, being a theatrical and highly vocal drama queen, and as I struggled for breath trying to avoid choking on the soapy dusty stuff, Sandra was hauled inside for a telling off and a good smack. Justice had been done and as granny cleaned me up, I was pacified with a bag of dolly mixtures, which always worked with me.

It was only later that I realised Sandra didn't look the same as us. She was a funny looking little kid, and I thought she looked a bit like my teddy bear. This was on account of her having been born with a cleft palate, a hare lip and a 'wry neck' – which basically meant that her head was sitting squarely on her shoulders without the benefit of a neck. She looked as if she had been fashioned out of plasticine and had somehow melted. This is not meant to be an unkind description of my lovely girl, but as children, we view things a little differently from adults and also we are not judgemental; more observational and honest about our observations.

I later learned from my mum that as I had been born in April of 1956, Auntie Joyce gave birth to her little bundle six weeks later at the end of May. Sandra Coulbeck stormed into the world with impact. It was recalled by my mother, some years later, that Auntie Joyce's screams could be heard streets away, when her bundle of joy was born with a huge hole in her face and two large balls of flesh stuck to the side of her head that should have been a nose and mouth.

One can only imagine the distress of a mother who had already given birth to a perfect and very pretty girl child, and who found herself in a minority. In those days, things weren't as accepted as maybe they are now and medical help was very rudimentary, especially when it came to reconstructive or plastic surgery. Auntie Joyce and Uncle Ted took it in turns, around the clock, to feed the tiny and helpless infant with a dropper. She had no means of sucking a bottle teat, and so the only way to get milk into her was to painstakingly drip it into the opening on her face, drop by drop. The years that followed were a round of over 15 different operations to make Sandra appear 'normal'. Uncle Ted adored his little girl and love and attention were heaped upon her, sadly to the detriment of

his other lovely girl. He wanted to protect his child, understandably, from the harsh and cruel realities of life.

As life unfolded, Sandra and I learned more about one another and as we were family, we were thrown together quite a lot, through family 'hatches, matches and dispatches', as my granny called them, and soon realised we shared a great deal in common. Her mother would often hand me down her clothes because Sandra was bigger than me. I was a very small child for my age and Sandra grew rapidly as her mum shovelled good home cooking down her neck in order to 'build her up'. I think, looking back, Auntie Joyce was subconsciously trying to shield her little girl from the life she knew lay before her. I was particularly fond of Sandra's swanky red anorak. They were the fashion item to be seen with when I was five years old, and my mum couldn't afford one, so when Sandra outgrew hers and it was passed to me, I was delighted.

Children can be unbearably cruel and it was not long before it was time to go to school and face some of those harsh realities we were thus far protected from. Sandra and I attended the same school for a while, as it was in close proximity to both our homes. That is where our friendship was cemented and later we went to Brownies and Girl Guides together and formed an alliance that was to last a lifetime... and beyond. I was even given Sandra's cast off Girl Guide uniform when we went to our first Guide Camp aged 11. That was a hoot. The Cherry Garth Girl Guide and Boy Scout camp was in Humberston. Humberston was the posh part of Cleethorpes, where the affluent businessmen and retired skippers lived in palatial dream houses, with sweeping driveways. The country lanes were lined with mature and beautiful trees. Cherry Garth was a huge field somewhere in the midst of all this splendour and was surrounded by woodland. It was given over to the Scouts and Guides as a jamboree venue.

We were away from home for a week and, after two days, most of the girls had cried themselves to sleep at least once, with homesickness. Good grief... home was only about two miles away, but you would have thought we were in the outback. Sandra and I relished the Sunday visit from the relatives and were delighted when our grannies turned up in the back of Uncle Ted's Ford Anglia with bags full of goodies and lemonade. My mum and dad didn't come.

They were too busy nursing their hangovers to have the energy to come and see their child!

During the week, it rained incessantly and everything we owned got soaked. The tent leaked and our sleeping bags were soggy, but we were determined to stick it out. The one day we got sunshine, we were off into the woods to find green sticks to whittle, so that we could make doughy balls of fire-bread to toast over the campfire. My stick was so green it still had leaves on it, but they made the dough-balls taste better. That night, Sandra was sick, which set up a chain reaction of heaving in the next tent. It was chaos, but good old Brown Owl and Akela dealt with the fallout admirably. We did learn, however, to wash our clothes and peg them out on the guy ropes. Sandra and I shared a tent with Janis and her friend, Polly, so they at least took care of us, soothing us with tales from the crypt and scaring us sleepless every night. Was I ever glad to go home to a hot bath and a palatable meal!

There were many occasions when some of the children who didn't know Sandra first saw her, would either run away crying, or shout and call her names. It is remarkable how, when we are frightened of something or don't understand it, we react with fear and in defence.

Every time something bad happened to Sandra, I seemed to be in close proximity, and like a Tasmanian devil, I would launch a physical and verbal attack upon anyone who upset her. All I could see and hear were their words and actions that hurt her feelings badly and rather than defend herself, she would take herself off into a little corner and try to be invisible. For someone I knew as having a personality larger than life and who had the most wonderful sense of humour, it was hard for me to take and I wasn't going to see my cousin and friend battered like that.

And so, enter stage right, Sandra Coulbeck after which my life would never be the same. I am happy that she was in my life for a brief period and I know that when I return to the Source she will be the first to greet me. Can't wait!

Beauty is only skin deep... Ugly runs all the way through!

The following anecdotes serve to give but a glimpse of the funny, sad, wonderful rollercoaster ride that formed our friendship. I can feel everything happening over again as I write and am so grateful for the experience of life that we shared.

An event springs to mind of one summer evening in August when Sandy and I had a night out planned. She and I loved dressing up and going dancing and we didn't do it often, but this night was special, as it was a Motown tribute band called The Rumble Band. They had been playing in and around the town for many years and were very good, and as Sandy and I loved Motown music, I bought two tickets as a surprise belated birthday gift to her. We headed into Cleethorpes, which as a seaside resort had, at the time, seen better days but which was in the middle of being re-marketed and 'tarted up' (an Aunt Joyce-ism). The concert began at 8pm at the Winter Gardens. Every seaside resort has to have a Winter Gardens, doesn't it? I hear it is no longer there, due to lack of financial support and the need to redevelop the land into boxes called property. Anyway, prior to going to the Winter Gardens, we decided to visit one of the bars on the seafront for a couple of glasses of wine to get the good vibrations flowing! Standing at the bar were four very drunken males, who were leering at anything in a skirt, nay, with two legs. Sandy waited politely (she was always getting told off by me for being too polite at times) for the barman to take our order and I went to find us a seat.

As she walked towards me with the glasses of wine, I could see that she was shaking and she looked pale and upset. "Are you okay, sweets?" I asked her. She didn't like to make a fuss and so she tried to cover up her emotions but I persisted. My Tasmanian devil radar was off the scale and I just knew it had something to do with the jobs at the bar. After some prompting, she told me that one of them had turned to her and asked, "Don't I recognise you from somewhere?"

To which she had replied, politely, “I don’t think so, I might have remembered.” This was her naïve attempt at batting back what she thought could be a compliment.

“Oh, I think I do,” he continued, “at the zoo... in the Monkey House. That’s what you f***ing look like, love.” He then laughed in her face and watched her embarrassment, as she turned away, mortified and humiliated.

On hearing this, my blood boiled and I was not about to let this lout spoil her evening or mine. I calmly walked to the bar and ordered the biggest glass of red wine they had and took it back to the table. “What’s that for?” asked Sandy.

“You’ll see,” said I.

We chatted a little more until it was time to leave for the concert and I pushed her in front of me toward the door. As I passed the moron who had offended my girl, I calmly tipped the full glass of red wine over his head, and down his new, white and expensive shirt. His mates all gasped, and backed away, as their friend spluttered and coughed and looked bewildered.

“Oy! You! Beauty is only skin deep, but remember - ugly runs ALL the way through, buster. And you have ugly stamped all the way through you like the letters in a stick of Cleethorpes Rock,” I hissed into his stupid face. Then, to Sandy, “Quick, run like the bloody clappers,” which we did. We laughed so much that we tripped up on the Winter Gardens’ steps and made a rather undignified entrance, but we didn’t give two hoots. We danced like we hadn’t danced in years and the evening ended in triumph! Revenge is a dish best served cold? Nah! Revenge, on this occasion, was a dish best served in a wine glass!

Telepathy or Coincidence?

Sandy and I attended Holme Hill Junior School together. She lived across the road from the school and I lived a short walk away. Our class teacher was a very ancient spinster named Miss Schofield, who had huge bosoms that were tightly bound in a Victorian contraption that was obviously very uncomfortable for her. Unfortunately for her, she also wore a very ill-fitting wig. The class found it hilarious to

watch this wayward hairpiece, nicknamed ‘Wiggy’, moving around, as if it had a life of its own. I’m sure we were collectively willing it to fall off. Wicked children! She had a foul temper when crossed and it was all we could do sometimes not to call out, “Keep yer wig on Miss.” This would have been all the encouragement she needed to come and haul you up onto your desk and give your ankles a good slapping. Nowadays, we could have sued her for damages!

One day, Miss Schofield set us a task to write a story. She chalked up six subject choices upon the blackboard and each of us were to pick a title and write a story about it. A few days after we’d completed this task and handed in our papers, Miss Schofield called Sandra and me out to the front of the class. Although my mother would have bet her five-inch Italian stiletto heeled shoes to the contrary, I was extremely shy, especially under scrutiny, and so was Sandra. We stood at the front of the class together, shuffling our feet, painfully conscious of being centre stage. Miss Schofield asked if we were aware that we had chosen the same title for our stories. We shook our heads, murmuring, “No, Miss Schofield,” anxious to be out of the limelight, but our teacher eyed us suspiciously and asked more questions. It appeared that not only had we chosen the same story title, we had virtually written the same story! The poor old dear adjusted her bosoms and it was obvious that she was trying to buy herself some time. She simply didn’t believe that we had not collaborated in some way, and remained in a state of awe for the rest of the lesson. I think we had unnerved her because she kept readjusting ‘Wiggy’ and each time she did, the errant hairpiece looked more ruffled. For the remaining period of time that we were her pupils, she viewed us as strange and I suspect she was rather glad when we moved onward and upward!

This was one example of how close Sandra and I were. Over time, we realised we had a telepathic empathy with one another. Many times we would say the same thing at the same time, or have the same idea and always she could reduce me to tears of laughter with one look that spoke a thousand words – words that only she and I knew the meaning of. It really felt as if we were one body, mind and spirit at times and it was spooky.