



EVERYTHING THAT WAS BEAUTIFUL BECAME UGLY

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For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.

Matthew 12:34

27

THE BEGINNING IS THE END

I HAVE a confession to make. I've *always* wanted to be interviewed by Patricia Steere. Ever since coming over to the flat earth community in its toddler months, I've often fancied the inevitable invite that would never come. For the record, there is a high probability that somebody out there, notably a card-carrying member of the flat

earth community, has only *just now* spit out their coffee and is pausing, without having yet read this far, to wipe off their screen with a napkin. I mean, generation of vaginas will go dry for penning this *very* article. That is what I was told by one such self-identifying flat earthist after announcing my intention to write it. *Oh*, haven't you heard the news? It's all over YouTube.

Patricia Steere has a penis.

Just *now* there is some other sad sap out in there in the world that, having haphazardly stumbled upon this article

through a careless phrasing in the search engine, has choked on an overly priced blueberry scone. Be careful out there. But back to my public confession—I've often imagined the microphone which I might prop myself up behind as Patricia's latest conversation piece on her YouTube series, *Flat Earth and Other Hot Potatoes*, interviewed purely on the basis that I was a contributing *anything* for the Movement.

Hemingway once described the process of writing as *sitting down at a typewriter to bleed*. I've always maintained that writing is more akin to walking out on stage, stripping down to one's undergarments, and then standing there quite alone, sweating under the blinding bulb of the spotlight while my anonymous audience, hidden in the blanketed darkness, sits there to take account of my intricacies—the added padding of flesh caked onto each thigh or the uneven distribution of hair streaming from my lower neck to my chest. It is strange indeed then that I so regularly labor over a seemingly endless gauntlet of potential mockery while simultaneously doggy paddling with a leg cramp through floodwaters of timidity, lacking enough self-confidence to pick up the phone and introduce myself to a former DJ.

Steere, I often thought, would never have me on.

And then one day I was sitting under the shade of a tree somewhere alongside the Dordogne River in France, welcoming the sweltering heat of summer in, when news had reached my social media feed that Patricia Steere had terminated her YouTube account. Hundreds of *Flat Earth and Other Hot Potatoes* episodes were simultaneously eliminated with it. Just like that—*gone*. The woman who'd once given a voice to so many flat earth researchers was lending her microphone no more. To be

more precise, Steere had pulled the plug on everything.

Patricia, it seemed, had left flat earth for good.

I was preparing to cook my family dinner, trying to make sense of another long-winded recipe in French, when a message lit up my screen. Rick Hummer, the gentleman who performed the Chicago experiment with Rob Skiba, had said Patricia Steere was *willing to talk*. More specifically, she wanted to talk *with me*.

But I didn't have her number, I said.

She told me to give it to you.

Wait. Hold on. Patricia Steere mentioned *me*, specifically?

CALL HER NOW, BRO.

Dinner was critically panned by a family of food critiques, who had made a point of highlighting my French to English measurement *miscalculations*. How could this go any worse? So, I positioned myself comfortably behind my computer screen, soon as unhappy faces had finished scouring their dinner plates, and set up the microphone, just as I'd so often practiced in my own imagination. And then, with a heavy *sigh*, I told myself, "It's now or never, *bro*."

ACTUALLY, the woman who answered hadn't a clue as to *who* I was, despite the fact that she'd agreed to be interviewed regarding the circumstances leading up to her departure. And to make matters even more awkward, I'd interrupted her during

a shower. Our conversation came solely based on Hummer's recommendation, and in fact I thought she may have been disappointed to hear that I'd actually gone through with it. We hung up so that she could better prepare herself, but when she answered again half an hour later, and perhaps it's simply my own insecurities talking, I still think she was hoping for *somebody* else. My second introduction was sloppier than the first. The woman on the other end of the phone was *deeply* hurt, and I fumbled around a bit, not at all as I'd practiced, while Patricia likely decided if she wanted to hang up.

I finally managed to course correct my terribly awkward introduction, though dinner was not salvageable, and said, "You probably don't remember who I am, but we actually met once, almost two years ago."

"Remind me again," she said.

Our initial introduction would happen *explicitly*, and might I add, quite *appropriately*, considering the subject matter at hand, through an online picture—one which I sloppily captured on my cell phone. The image will testify to the fact that the photographer was sitting in the second row of the first annual Flat Earth Conference in Raleigh, North Carolina, directly behind Patricia Steere and Mark Sargent while Jeran Campanella stood onstage speaking. A story which it simply cannot vouch for is the electricity of excitement filling the room. I wanted to capture *that moment* any way I could. And so, I snapped a photo of the back of Mark Sargent and Patricia's Steere's head, and then immediately uploaded it onto Facebook.

Patricia Steere just so happened to be scrolling through her Facebook news feed, by which she and I were quote-unquote friends. Apparently, another Facebook

friend, if any of us can ever really call each other that, had rudely suggested that I reach forward and pull her wig. It would take Patricia to let me in on it.

Patricia laughed with delight over the phone as I described our first encounter, perhaps as a sort of remedy to the pain she was currently attempting to heal from.

"I *remember* that." She smiled.

She even recalled precisely what she *said*, a quip which can best be described as a simultaneous and trademark blend of funny and scathing, the very moment she turned around, quite abruptly, and I sunk into my chair.

"Go ahead and pull it. It's all natural."

Though it is true that I had Patricia laughing now, her fullest confidences in *how* I might take her own confessions and spin them on paper had certainly not yet been earned. The woman on the other end of the phone was *deeply* hurt; there was no question in my mind about that—and over the next two, nearly three hours, I was about to learn why.

"I told myself I wouldn't do this," Patricia seemed to bemoan our conversation with a sigh.

And then she began to tell me about it.

PATRICIA LYNNE STEERE

THE WINNER of the space race would reach the moon first, but its outcome was still undetermined when Patricia Lynne Steere was born on earth. The date was February 5, 1963—the place, Spokane Washington. She was the last of the baby boomers. By