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## The Fourth Dimension

*People like us, who believe in physics, know that the distinction between past, present and future is only a stubbornly persistent illusion.*

Albert Einstein

When I attended a nuclear medicine meeting in Neu Ulm, a charmingly old city in Germany with centuries old buildings and streets, I realized that, although I had lived in Germany for two years many years earlier during military service, I had never visited Neu Ulm or Ulm (its even older sister city across the Danube). In fact, I had not been to that particular German state and did not remember hearing of Neu Ulm before the conference except for several articles that had been published in the *Journal* by the nuclear medicine faculty at its university.

Despite my familiarity with other medieval German cities, I continued to be especially fascinated by the charm of the well preserved (or restored) buildings lining the cobblestoned streets, a remnant of a previous era with wood-burning stoves and oil lamps. The cathedral, an engineering marvel, dominated the city's silhouette. It was built many years before modern construction techniques and electricity and certainly before the discovery of radioactivity.

While walking to the convention hall one day, I was struck by the contrast between such a modern event, an international nuclear medicine meeting, in such a premodern setting. In the mysterious meanderings of the mind, the juxtaposition of the old and new, modern science in Alt Deutschland, could evoke thoughts of Albert Einstein. Einstein was born in 19th century Germany and remains, perhaps, the principal icon representing 20th century physics. Einstein, Nobel laureate and discoverer of the photoelectric effect;  $E = mc^2$ , the theory of relativity; and the unified field theory. Aside from intellectual association, I felt his essence must be very near, as if he had been there or actually had lived in Neu Ulm.

Although I knew that Einstein was born in Germany, my only knowledge of his whereabouts in Europe included his job in the Swiss Patent Office as a young man and his position later as a professor of physics in Berlin. Nevertheless, I continued to have the distinct notion that Einstein had walked these same cobblestones and past these buildings. In fact, I was sure of it, although I suppose there would never be any real confirmation that he ever visited a small city like this. No matter, I took comfort in the fantasized association.

I was surprised to learn later in the week that Einstein had, in fact, been born and raised in Neu Ulm. He had gone to school there, no doubt ran errands and probably played children's games on those same cobblestoned streets. I still cannot recall ever having heard or read this piece of biographical information. Perhaps I had and had simply forgotten. Perhaps I had filed it deep in a recess of my mind, a sleeping fact, to be awakened by the special stimulation of that time and place, to be recalled as a seemingly new idea. Or perhaps it was simply a coincidence. How else could it be explained?

Stanley J. Goldsmith, MD

Editor-in-Chief, *The Journal of Nuclear Medicine*  
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