

# **The Bridge Across Forever: A Lovestory Study Guide**

**The Bridge Across Forever: A Lovestory by Richard  
Bach**

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# Plot Summary

"The Bridge Across Forever: a Lovestory" by Richard Bach is a work of non-fiction. The story begins with Richard Bach waiting for an unnamed female. The author is sitting in the cockpit of his biplane in a rented field in Russell, Iowa. It is autumn. There are nearly 60 cars surrounding the hayfield and Bach hopes that the woman will be in the crowd. The crowd is there to see a show and Bach takes his plane through a series of maneuvers designed to wow the crowd.

Bach fights to keep from being distracted while he scans the crowd for the woman—the perfect woman—destined to be his soulmate.

Bach refers to his relationship with fellow pilot Donald Shimoda, who turns out to be the Bach's spiritual Messiah. Shimoda has since died but still keeps in contact with Bach who often needs spiritual guidance.

Bach decides that it is time to move on and sells his beloved biplane before heading to Florida. Once in Florida, Bach contacts his agent, Eleanor, and discovers that his latest book is on the best seller list of Publisher's Weekly and The New York Times, both very prestigious positions. Bach learns that he is a millionaire and is completely baffled by the amount of money and what to do with it. Bach buys a new plane and makes arrangements to hire a financial manager, tax attorney, and business manager, all of which turn out to be poor and life changing choices.

Bach's relationship with Leslie Parrish is described in detail. Bach also speaks of other women with whom he has casual relationships. Leslie is different in that she is Bach's closest friend and business partner. The two eventually fall in love, which is completely against Bach's nature.

Bach describes in detail his spiritual quest, much of which mirrors Leslie's experiences. There is reference to autohypnosis, astral projection, reincarnation, self programmed dreaming, soulmates, the true absence of time, and much, much more.

Although the book is mainly chronological, it skims over some things and tends to go off on tangents.

This is Bach's first truly autobiographical work which can be attributed, at least in part, to Leslie and the need to write about her and their relationship.

Bach's financial trouble with the IRS is an integral part in the book. As a result of Bach's incompetent and apathetic managers, the author loses about \$800,000 of his newfound wealth. Moreover, none of the managers seems the least bit sorry and are certainly not going to be held responsible for the losses. Even though the losses are so large that Bach will not have any tax liability, the managers do not inform the IRS of this fact and Bach ends up owing \$1 million. After 4 years, a large amount of trouble and grief, Bach claims bankruptcy. John Marquart, Bach's tax attorney hired by Leslie, tries his best to

sort out and settle the matter. During this time, Marquart relays how the IRS works and details many of the agency's absurd policies and desire to avoid blame at any cost.

Bach believes that every event in one's life is self-imposed to further one on a spiritual level. As Bach explores this belief, he and Leslie rebuild what was lost and focus on building a new life together.



# Chapters 1-9

## Chapters 1-9 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 1: the story begins with Richard Bach waiting for an unnamed female. The author is sitting in the cockpit of his biplane in a rented field in Russell, Iowa. It is autumn. There are nearly 60 cars surrounding the hayfield and Bach hopes that the woman will be in the crowd. The crowd is there to see a show and Bach takes his plane through a series of maneuvers designed to wow the crowd.

The author describes his maneuvers, designed to look like he is in a tailspin.

The crowd is offered an opportunity to go up into the biplane with Bach. While Bach talks to a woman eager to fly with him he is secretly disappointed that he does not see his soulmate.

Bach recalls meeting Donald Shimoda, the retired Messiah, two years before, after both had landed in the alfalfa Hayfield. The story of that night is rather comical, because it was dark and Bach became frightened when he heard a noise automatically assuming that it was a timber wolf. It was a raccoon.

Bach thinks about what Donald Shimoda would tell him about the fact that he has not yet found his soulmate. Bach's previous books deal with the search for enlightenment and direction from the Messiah, a spiritual guru named Donald Shimoda. Through Shimoda, Bach learns how to listen to himself and be open to all the possibilities of the universe.

Bach focuses on being alone and why he has not found his soulmate, the one woman in the world that is perfect for him and him alone. Shimoda has told Bach that the woman is out there. Each person already knows everyone else on the planet, instinctively and intuitively, even if those two people have never met.

Bach gives up many things in order to find his soulmate. It becomes a single minded obsession. Bach even gives up barnstorming in his beloved biplane because he is no longer convinced that "she" will never show up at a hayfield in Russell, Iowa. The decision to stop flying is a shock to Shimoda, who is dead but is still in Bach's mind as a wise spiritual guide.

Bach also has an imaginary conversation with Shimoda in which Bach tells Shimoda that he is given up barnstorming. Shimoda tells Bach to think it through before making a possibly rash decision. The next day, Bach sells the airplane for \$11,000 after landing at the Kankakee Airport in Illinois. Bach says goodbye to the plane and goes on his way.

The author recalls that he had kept a journal of that season and eventually turned it into a best selling book titled "Jonathan Livingston Seagull."



Chapter 2: The story reverts to a time when Bach is with his potential soulmate. The author is writing a letter to himself about things that would have been useful to know 20 years ago. Bach asks the woman to name one thing that she had loved passionately.

The author recounts a trip to Florida during which he met a woman on a bus. While riding on the bus Bach talks to himself about being alone and the reasons for it.

Bach thinks about the "Messiah's Handbook" and wonders what happened to it. On the day Shimoda dies to Bach throws the handbook into the field and imagines that it has probably been plowed under by now. Bach ruminates on the last installment to him by Shimoda. One of the lessons learned by Bach is that he already knows his soulmate and now he just needs to find her.

Chapter 3: Bach arrives in Florida at 8:40 AM and immediately looks for a café. The owner of the café looks at Bach strangely as he notices the author's bedroll and torn denim jacket. While enjoying a piece of hot lemon pie Bach thinks about contacting the women he already knows to find out if one of them is his soulmate. The first person Bach calls is married and the conversation is short.

Richard calls Eleanor, his agent. Eleanor is shocked that Richard does not know that his book is on the best-seller list of Publisher's Weekly and the New York Times. Eleanor asks if Richard will be available for TV appearances and the other duties involved with being a best-selling author. Bach is non-committal. On a whim Bach calls his New York bank and asks for the balance. He is expecting a balance of \$20,000 or maybe \$50,000 and is shocked to find out that the balance is \$1,397,353.68.

Chapter 4: Eventually Bach recovers from shock, hangs up the phone, and walks out into the sunshine. Bach thinks about the film tied to the book and hopes that the directors have done it justice. Bach also hopes that the ones responsible for the potential work of art earn \$1 million.

Chapter 5: Bach walks into a drugstore and gets directions to the nearest library. Once Bach is in the library he asks the librarian how to find a copy of "So You've Got a Million Dollars!" The librarian has never heard of the book and suggests others that are not related. Bach says he is going to go to a table and to sit to think about alternative books. The librarian asks him to put his bedroll, which she mistakes for laundry, on the floor because the furniture has new upholstery.

Bach believes that somewhere in the library must be a book advising him what to do next. Bach leaves the library empty-handed.

Bach thinks about fame and wonders what it would be like to be recognized wherever he goes. Then Bach realizes that while movie stars and actors have that kind of recognition writers do not. Bach wonders how becoming slightly famous could alter the search for his love.

Bach finds a nearby airport and asks to see the Aeronaca Champ, which he refers to as "the best biplane in the world." Bach goes out into the hangar and speaks to the



mechanic. Bach is taken with a Tiger Moth and asks if it is for sale. Bach realizes that the thought of never flying again is frightening and that he must have the Moth. Bach calls Eleanor to agree to the television appearances.

Chapter 6: Bach talks about serenity and following one's heart. Bach never doubts the existence of the soulmate and believes he has seen women who are "almost her" everywhere he goes.

Bach reviews some of the women that have been close to being his soulmate and details the reasons that each was not. A woman named Katherine comes closest and almost blows the whole deal when she lights a cigarette. Bach tries to refrain from discounting her and appreciates everything she is from her intelligence to humor. Bach goes home with Katherine.

Chapter 7: Kathy and Bach stay together for a while and enjoy each other's company. Finally Bach realizes that he cannot allow the relationship to get in the way of finding his soulmate.

Each of the women formerly involved in a relationship with Bach are detailed, from their good qualities to the final reason Bach devises to move on to find his real soulmate. None of the descriptions are hostile or insulting, simply matter of fact. Bach has learned how to read into life's situations and tries to deal with them according to his own path.

Chapter 8: Bach thinks about flying and how it remains fun until one begins to focus too much on the future. As Bach lies on the kitchen table he thinks about the specificities of being in the plane and of skydiving. The author also recalls several incidents during one of his flights.

Chapter 9: Bach is still completely baffled about what to do with the money. Stan, a friend and editor turned investment counselor, offers advice and Bach wants to hire him as a full-time financial manager since he is relatively clueless about money and what to do with it. Stan agrees to the position and begins to outline possibilities for the money—all of which are Greek to Bach.

After spending years focusing on the spiritual side of life in which Bach seeks his destiny, the reality of the book and money is a shock and reversion into day to day reality. The entire concept is foreign, confusing and frightening to the author that has stormed the best seller lists. The choice of Stan as a financial manager may well be foreshadowing of events to come, not all of them positive.



# Chapters 10-17

## Chapters 10-17 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 10: This chapter deals with Bach's relationship to Donna, a divorcée, who has similar desires and dislike of forced commitment and restraint. Both believe that one should be with someone because of want and desire, not because of bondage.

Bach's relationship with Donna helps him to see that perhaps there is no one perfect mate. Although the author desires the concept of the perfect mate, he also wants to be free and not be required to be with another person out of obligation instead of love. Donna understands this and both are strongly adverse to any type of commitment. When one gets tired of the relationship, it is time to move on. Each expects the other to be offended by the concept and are pleasantly surprised, even thrilled, that this seems to be the ideal situation. Bach wishes that he and Donna were not so perfectly matched.

Bach begins to lose motivation to search for his perfect mate and convinces himself that a perfect mate does not exist and instead can be found, in part, in many people.

Chapter 11: Bach begins by stating, "There are no mistakes. The events we bring upon ourselves, no matter how unpleasant, are necessary in order to learn what we need to learn; whatever steps we take, they're necessary to reach the places we've chosen to go."

Even though the author has convinced himself that the perfect woman does not exist, the concept and myth of her haunts him. Bach listens to an airplane taking off while thinking about how he should fly more. Bach also thinks about the things he is meant to learn by his current situation. Although the author has been worried about publicity it seems to faze him little. There is much speculation from the public about Bach's personality and activities, many of which are incorrect.

The author writes about the details required in preparing a plane for takeoff.

Chapter 12: Bach plays chess with Leslie Parrish in a room that is perfectly silent. The author recounts their meeting years ago. Leslie is an actress who also serves as a mediator when Bach sues the director of a film for making changes without the author's approval. Eventually Bach and Leslie form a partnership. During a game of chess Bach is suddenly aware that Leslie is a beautiful woman. The thought embarrasses him, because it took so long to notice. Bach decides that he must maintain the current relationship with Leslie.

Chapter 13: Stan informs Bach that he has lost some money in the collapse of the West Coast Commodity Exchange. The author has also been taken for \$50,000 by a so-called friend. Stan seems to take all of this in stride, and does not seem terribly upset when he tells Bach that to date the author has lost \$800,000.





Stan makes a comment about corruption: "One more thing I've been meaning to tell you. It's not easy. You know that saying: 'Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely?' Well, it does. I think that might be true for me too."

Bach is not quite sure what Stan means by this and the pair agrees that the only thing that matters is how things go from that point forward.

The incident with Stan is troublesome. It seems that Stan takes the huge losses as a typical thing in the finance world. Bach blames himself for trusting Tamara with \$50,000. Stan basically admits that he has been corrupted and one must wonder if the amount lost on the stock market is accurate or if Stan has seen fit to take a portion of it for himself. Bach's lack of scrutiny is worrisome. Even with the admission and lackadaisical attitude of Stan, Bach does not question his financial manager and lets everything rest in Stan's hands. One must wonder if Bach's on again off again search for his soulmate and spiritual advancement has clouded his judgment or has redirected his focus away from the money and his future. Bach takes Stan at his word and agrees that there is always more money coming in. It is clear that the situation will only get worse.

Chapter 14: The chapter begins with Bach, preparing for takeoff. Bach goes to visit Leslie in LA. Leslie has given him a bowl and spoon with a hog painted on it. Together the two indulge in ice cream, something that Leslie often refuses because it is so fattening. From this point on, Leslie often refers to Bach as "Hoggie."

Bach begins to take notice of Leslie in a new way. There is no romantic attraction yet the two seem to be inseparable, perhaps because it is easy to be together. The author and Leslie have a great deal in common. Bach uses foreshadowing to indicate that there may be something much more with Leslie. At first, Leslie seems resistant to spending the day with Richard after their all night chat fest. Bach realizes that he could not see himself landing because he was not meant to land in Florida, or anywhere else, that day.

The conversations between Bach and Leslie are comical. They are the conversations of good friends that can jump from topic to topic and speak about anything. Leslie seems open to Bach's unusual theories and notions.

Another present Leslie gives to Bach, despite Bach's vehement dislike of presents, is a wookie mask, which she forces him to wear while they go to the movies. From this point of, Bach often refers to Leslie as "wookiee."

The nicknames adopted by the pair also show a high level of intimacy and outsiders could easily mistake them for a couple. Even the phone call from Kathy shows that no one else in their lives thinks that they are anything more than friends.

Leslie asks Bach if he has ever experienced some of the things written about in the book, such as walking on water. The pair also discusses out of body experiences and the lives of models and actresses.



Later Bach discovers that Leslie has an uncanny memory for numbers and can recite every number Bach asks for.

Chapter 15: Leslie tells Bach that Kathy called from Florida, wanting to know if Richard's frequent trips to Los Angeles meant that he was involved with someone. Leslie assures Kathy that Richard sees no one and spends almost all of his time with her. Bach and Leslie play chess and discuss various techniques.

Bach reads some of his notes to Leslie, which includes some unique concepts such as buying whales and giving them citizenship so that no one would kill them. Bach also discusses living as if extremely intelligent and spiritually advanced.

There is a lengthy discussion about the notes and Bach's high school English teacher. The teacher, John Gartner, is credited with teaching Bach how to become a writer despite the student's proclamation that grammar is boring. Through Leslie the author realizes how much the teacher meant to him and allows himself to grieve. Bach also recalls the last time he cried, which was the day his mother died. It is shortly before Bach becomes an aviation cadet in the Air Force.

There is also an anecdote of the time Richard teaches Leslie how to speak Horse-Latin.

Leslie also discusses her childhood and how she went from foster home to foster home after her parents divorced and her mother became ill. Leslie also discusses her love of the piano and a new fascination with classical music. Leslie says that she needs to study the classical composers. Bach offers to teach her how to regress into former lifetimes.

Chapter 16: Leslie and Bach talk until 4 AM. Bach thinks that he could have stayed up all night talking to no one else but Leslie.

Chapter 17: Bach calls Leslie in the morning and wants to spend the day with her or at least part of the day. Leslie tells Richard that she assumed he would be headed back to Florida so she had made other plans for the day. Richard decides to fly home. The thought of flying back to Florida is distasteful, and Bach thinks about flying somewhere else but cannot see himself landing the plane. Just as Bach is ready to embark Leslie calls and says that she has canceled her plans for the day and will pick him up at the airport.

While the author waits for Leslie to park the car, he slips into autohypnosis and comes to the realization that love is all that matters. The revelation is joyful and he is anxious to share it with Leslie.



# Chapters 18-26

## Chapters 18-26 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 18: Bach comments to Leslie that their relationship is one of inaction. Leslie thinks that he is joking but soon finds he is not. Bach explains that while many friends go skiing or dancing or some other energetic activity, they prefer to see a movie, talk, and play chess.

Leslie and Bach have a conversation about money. Bach is at a loss how to handle having so much money. Leslie tells him that money does strange things to people. This could be why Bach's search for a soulmate has been tainted. Women may see him for what he has, not what he is.

As Bach is getting ready to leave, he and Leslie share an intimate moment and for the first time, they kiss. As this is happening, Bach is taken with Leslie, yet at the same time, wonders if he is ruining the best relationship he has ever had; helping to create a situation that might cause him to lose the only sister he has ever had.

Chapter 19: Leslie and Bach wake up together. Bach expects that any minute something will happen to burst the bubble of his dream-like state. It is shocking to Bach that he never realized how terrific and beautiful Leslie is on a romantic level. Leslie does not seem surprised.

The pair share want ads in which they discuss the ultimate desires and/or requirements for a soulmate. Bach still struggles with his recent revelation that there is no such thing as a soulmate. One cannot help but wonder if the thought is real to Bach or if it is a defense mechanism to ease the situation of not being able to find the perfect woman, which he now believes to be Leslie.

Bach asks Leslie why she is not involved with any of the Hollywood crowd, those who are rich, famous, and beautiful. When Leslie refers to herself as an actress, it is in the third person, "Mary Moviestar." Leslie says that all of those people tend to look at the surface only and assume that she would only be interested in "Harry Handsome." Bach is sad thinking that people only consider the surface when it is not who we are.

Leslie also shares the belief that once you know a person, you change the way you perceive that person, for better or worse. A beautiful person with a rotten personality is no longer attractive while an average or even unattractive person can become beautiful if in possession of a good soul or personality.

Bach agrees and thinks: "Because we believe the surface, we forget that surfaces aren't who we are. When we find an angel dazzling of mind, her face grows lovelier still."



Chapter 20: Leslie plays the stereo at full blast, the loud music assaulting Bach's ears. The piece is by Bartok and Bach cannot understand what Leslie hears when she listens to the music, as it seems discordant and almost offensive to Bach's ears.

Bach begs Leslie to turn the volume down and expresses his disbelief that she could like something so awful. Leslie is shocked and tries to explain the finer points of the piece, how it builds and the purpose behind the technique. Leslie tells Bach that some day he will appreciate Bartok, which Bach finds hard to believe. Leslie asks Bach how he feels about Johan Sebastian Bach's music. Bach confesses that after a while, he becomes bored.

Leslie sits down at the piano and begins to demonstrate what she means by the building of a song and the purpose of it. Leslie admits that her first love is the piano and that she had hoped to become a professional pianist. Bach notes that this is the first time she has played for him and it is because she had not practiced and felt rusty.

Leslie is shocked that Bach could become bored of one of his own ancestors, one she often refers to as "Granddaddy." Leslie swears that she will teach Bach how to appreciate classical music and begins to put him through "musical kindergarten." At the end of the chapter, Leslie tells Bach that he is far too much like Granddaddy to be bored with his music.

Chapter 21: Bach describes Leslie's office. It is organized in a way he could never be.

The musical education continues with quizzes on composers. Bach likes the quizzes and education and looks forward to learning more. Leslie also states that music is a forever thing.

While in line to see a movie, a fan approaches Leslie and asks for an autograph. Leslie is flattered and has a pleasant exchange with the woman. Leslie and Bach discuss being recognized and how one deals with it. Leslie says that most of the people are nice while others are insensitive. Nothing can be done about insensitive people. Bach says that only 1% of his interaction with people is negative and even then it is not face to face. The rest of it is just fun.

While driving home, Leslie curses at another driver. Bach is shocked, never having heard Leslie swear. Bach practices cursing and Leslie laughs.

Chapter 22: Bach returns to Florida after spending 7 weeks in LA with Leslie. Bach's spiritual guide greets him and chastises him for being so late. Bach apologizes and explains. The spiritual guide tries to remind Bach about commitment and how it does not work. The guide also says that while Leslie may be the perfect woman, Bach is allowing himself to abandon much of what he believes in order to be with her.

Bach talks about flying and how nothing else makes him feel so free. For Bach, flying is a spiritual thing, a metaphor for his metaphysical journey.



Bach wonders how miraculous it would be to meet his future self to see what he could learn.

Chapter 23: Bach slips into autohypnosis/dream state during which he meets his future self. The future self takes him up in a small jet and they talk while flying. The future Richard tells the present Richard that in order to find what he wants and needs, there will have to be great changes. Richard should marry Leslie. At this, the present day Bach is stunned, as he does not believe in commitment and bondage. The future Richard offers the advice and tells the present day Richard that he is only one of the possibilities of the future and that the choices are in present day Richard's hands.

After the plane lands present day Richard meets future Leslie and realizes how perfect she really is.

Chapter 24: Bach goes to Madrid to appear in television interviews. Bach feels brave and chooses to forgo a translator and tackle conversations in Spanish.

Bach receives a call from Leslie and learns that the IRS has issued an ultimatum regarding taxes. Bach has only two days to pay \$1 million or face seizure. Bach is stunned and asks Leslie what to do. Bach takes it in stride as he does with everything and is surprised that Leslie is taking it all so seriously.

Chapter 25: Back in LA, Bach spots a folder on Leslie's desk which he mistakes for something he is meant to read. It is a poem, written the day Bach had gone to Spain. There is another written later. Bach realizes that Leslie is a poet. Leslie is horrified to find that Bach would violate her privacy. Bach thinks that Leslie is overreacting and finally realizes that he has crossed a line in many more ways than she.

Chapter 26: Bach is faced with mounds of paperwork that he has no idea how to tackle. Leslie is stunned that Bach's records are such a mess and utterly incredulous when Bach admits that he has no idea how much money he has. The entire concept of paperwork and accounting is baffling and abhorrent to Bach. Leslie attempts to explain. Bach says that he hired people to do these things for him but obviously, they failed.

Chapter 26: Leslie has an appointment in San Diego and Bach says she should have an airplane. The thought is scary for Leslie. Bach flies Leslie to San Diego in the plane he used to fly from Florida. En route, Bach learns that Leslie is afraid to fly. Leslie apprehensively takes the controls and flies the plane.



# Chapters 27-35

## Chapters 27-35 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 27: While sailing off the coast of Florida, Bach speaks of the stars and constellations learned when he was ten and how he considers them to be constant companions. The author also wonders if there are sharks in the water and what it would be like to drown. Regarding near death experiences, Bach says, "A lot of people have been near-dead and revived. Dying's the most beautiful moment in living, they tell us, and their fear of death is gone."

There is an argument between Leslie and Bach regarding distance. Leslie claims that Bach always distances himself from her. Bach says he distances himself from everyone, not just her. Leslie recalls Bach saying that if he ever had to be with a woman for more than three days, he would go mad, but they had been together for months and cried when they had to part. What changed?

Bach thinks about the boy who questioned the barnstormer that landed in a hayfield. The boy wanted to play "what if?" in regards to landing a plane during a catastrophe. Bach refers to kids as "a bunch of vultures."

The author begins to wonder if maybe he has always been wrong about love.

If things had changed with Leslie, was it because her wants and needs had changed and the agreement between them was no longer valid in her eyes?

The author also questions why no one has been able to develop a sailboat that can fly.

Chapter 28: The tax fiasco is explained in brief. Stan had lost nearly all of Bach's money and offered only a simple apology as if it did not really matter. Bach's tax lawyer had missed the IRS deadline and any hope of avoiding payment of \$1 million. Bach's business manager said that the tax issue was "a shame" and that he tried to keep the information from Bach as long as possible. In other words, everyone's reaction was sort of an "oh well." Then Harry the business manager had the audacity to ask for a month's severance pay.

Bach and Leslie meet with the attorney Leslie has hired while Bach is in Spain. John Marquart, the tax attorney, speaks mainly with Leslie while Bach is simply a bystander. The entire tax issue is foreign to Bach while Leslie seems to understand it all. Once again, Leslie's intelligence and business acumen serve Bach well.

In a nutshell, the IRS does not care about Bach's devastating ordeal. It does not matter who was in charge. The only thing that matters is that Bach pays the \$1 million, even if it is clear that he does not owe anything.



Bach tells Leslie that maybe it happened that way because the money was making him miserable. Leslie disagrees.

In lieu of the business manager, tax attorney and financial adviser, Bach hands over his wrecked empire to Leslie and Marquart. One must wonder if this is a wise choice. While Leslie is more invested in solving the problem that Bach, it is irresponsible for Bach to go on being uninvolved in his own affairs.

Chapter 29: Leslie calls Bach and asks him to come over. Leslie is sick and needs to be pampered. Bach says that he cannot, that he has a date. Leslie is upset and pressures Bach. Bach will not budge, determined to uphold their agreement of non-exclusivity and possession.

Chapter 30: Bach receives a long letter from Leslie in which she expresses gratitude for their relationship and everything she has learned. Leslie also says that she can no longer be involved with Bach.

Bach reads the letter and thinks that Leslie does not understand him. Bach throws the letter away.

Chapter 31: Bach realizes that Leslie is right and does not want to admit it. Bach has a conversation with a new self, whom he refers to as "the newcomer." The newcomer argues against all of Bach's reasoning when it comes to Leslie. The newcomer says that Leslie will eventually get over him. Bach will get over Leslie, too—in about a minute and a half. Bach will do what he always does—slam down the steel doors and shut himself away. Bach thinks about changing his name, much like Winnie the Pooh who lives under the name "Sanders."

The two selves continue to argue. Bach tries to blame Leslie while the newcomer calls the author on his own actions.

At last, Bach realizes that he is at a point where he has a big choice to make. Which will he choose—Leslie or the elusive Perfect Woman who most likely does not exist?

Chapter 32: Bach calls Leslie and they have a long talk about their relationship, desires, needs, and why their arrangement could no longer work. Leslie is determined not to give in and change any more than she already has. Leslie is content to have a friendship only. Bach is still determined to hold on to his principle of commitment. When Bach asks if they could resume their relationship the way it was, Leslie refuses. Bach is torn between his own stubborn ideals and wanting to be with Leslie.

Chapter 33: Despite Leslie's fear, she flies for the first time with little to no help from Richard. The author describes the process and how it is explained to Leslie. The day Leslie solos, she realizes how invigorating it can be and even begins to speak pilot. After the flight, Leslie suffers from heat stroke and goes inside the trailer to lie down. Richard does not notice she is gone because he is talking to other pilots. Bach is forced to put the plane away, a difficult task when done alone. Bach is angry with Leslie and thinks she is faking. There is a huge argument once again. Leslie feels abandoned and



Richard feels trapped. Bach is trying so hard to hold onto the ideals that clearly are not working any more. Leslie tries to point this out which angers Bach. Bach tries to explain and in the end shocks Leslie by saying that he loves her.

Chapter 34: Bach claims that he and Leslie cannot be soulmates because they argue. Leslie says that there must be bad times in order to learn the lessons one needs to learn. Bach continues to be gently argumentative even though he knows Leslie is right.

Chapter 35: There is a mid-air collision. Bach has never seen one before. Suddenly he realizes that if he and Leslie had not talked things through, it would have been him in the collision, distracted and tired. Bach realizes that for some reason he is being protected. By choosing Leslie, has Bach chosen life or death?





# Chapters 36-49

## Chapters 36-49 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 36: Bach is in the Mojave Desert in a Jeep when a snake blocks the road. Bach radios Leslie to look in the snake books to see what kind of snake it is. Against Bach's advice, Leslie steps out of the trailer and meets Bach as he reverses the Jeep to pick her up. The pair analyzes the snake and it is determined that it is a Mojave Rattlesnake, a highly venomous snake; its venom has no antidote. Each promises to stay in the Jeep. Leslie turns on some classical music, its volume loud as snakes cannot hear well, if at all. The couple also talks to the snake and watch as the snake mellows and goes on its way.

Both Bach and Leslie wonder if what they heard from the snake was real. Could it be a passing spirit? What was the point of the meeting? Bach decides that just in case the snake decides to return, they will make a lot of noise each time they exit the trailer.

Chapter 37: Bach receives a letter from John Marquart regarding the IRS debacle. Marquart informs Bach that the IRS has refused to accept his offer and demands the full payment of the \$1 million immediately.

Bach and Leslie fly to LA to meet with Marquart. The information received from the IRS is absolutely ludicrous. The IRS refuses to accept payments from Bach because he is famous. There is an actual law stating that famous people cannot pay on time. Leslie is furious; Bach incredulous. The only two options are to pay the money, which Bach does not have, or wait for three years, file bankruptcy, and owe nothing. None of it makes sense. Marquart has tried everything he knows to resolve the situation, including calling a regional director who is a professional colleague. Leslie refuses to accept the decision.

Marquart explains that the people working for the IRS are not terribly intelligent and are highly fearful of making a mistake. So they make no decisions at all.

After the meeting, Leslie asks Bach if he remembers the snake in the desert. Then she comments that dealing with a straightforward snake is better than dealing with the IRS.

Chapter 38: Bach and Leslie return to the trailer in Arizona to discover that it has been robbed. The thieves took even the most insignificant things like wooden spoons, plates, and a ball of string. Leslie is furious and for the first time wants to learn how to shoot. After cleaning up the trailer, a dust devil swoops through the desert and hits the trailer. Both decide that they are not meant to live in the trailer and need a house. Leslie is shocked at Bach's agreement to get a house and to commit. She is fearful that Bach will change his mind.

Chapter 39: Bach and Leslie fly around the western part of the country looking for a house. They eventually find a small one in Oregon and move in. The plan is to wait until



the IRS has settled its case and then build a larger house next to the small one, keeping it as a guest house.

Bach buys a computer, an Apple, and takes it home to surprise Leslie. At first, Leslie is baffled by the purchase. Bach tries to explain how much she will love it. Leslie spends the next several days learning about the system. Instead of interrupting so that he might have a chance to explore, Bach simply buys another. Within days, the two are fluent in computer speak.

Not long after, a woman approaches the house and is yelled at by Bach who demands privacy. The woman turns out to be on a mission regarding a statement from the Bureau of Land Management.

Chapter 40: The Bureau of Land Management decides that it is going to cut down the trees in the local area, clearly going against its own laws. It is explained that the BLM is prone to cutting down and selling trees instead of saving them.

Bach and Leslie put up an intense fight trying to save the trees while they are met with strong opposition. It becomes a legal and moral quest. In the end, the group against the deforestation wins.

Chapter 41: After four long years, the debacle with the IRS is settled, as is the issue with the Bureau of Land Management. During that time, neither Bach nor Leslie have worked. After the IRS issue was settled, Bach and Leslie are free to marry, which they do.

The ideal of marriage has changed for Bach and he discovers that instead of being cold and distant; their relationship becomes warmer and more loving. Bach and Leslie visit his parents and suddenly, Bach realizes that he always knew—the child in him knew—that his soulmate would someday walk through that front gate.

Chapter 42: Bach and Leslie go to a hotel where they discuss intimacy and defenses. Bach shares the story about the gate. Leslie wants to know why Bach held off so long on finding her if he had known all along. What was Bach so afraid of? Why now? There had to be something about his defenses that were so strong and what had happened to those defenses. Bach explains that it is his nature to hold everyone at arms length. Leslie agrees that she does the same thing. Leslie also claims that despite Bach's behavior, it was obvious to her that he was "not that cold thing" and that underneath she knew him. It is discussed how sex is not good without some level of intimacy.

Bach comments that he has always been afraid of endings and wants to know if their marriage is an end to something or the beginning to something else. Leslie says that she believes it is the beginning and quotes a passage from Jonathan Livingston Seagull: "Now you're ready to fly up and begin to know the meaning of kindness and love."

Chapter 43: The bankruptcy court requires that Bach and Leslie leave their little house in Little Applegate Valley. The couple will be permitted to stay on as caretakers until they



can find a place to rent. Leslie sobs over the loss of all they have built together while Bach says that they can start over.

One of the hardest things for Bach is losing the rights to his books. Leslie promises that they will buy them back as soon as they can.

Chapter 44: Bach is notified that the copyrights to his books will be up for auction. Leslie says that they should offer every penny they have for the seven books. Bach disagrees, saying that they will have no money to live on and besides, three of the books are out of print. Who will pay for those? Leslie disagrees, saying that her parents will lend them money to live and it is too important to be frugal.

Bach and Leslie win the bid. No one else makes an offer. Leslie worries that the money spent is too extravagant but Bach disagrees.

Chapter 45: Bach writes an article that pays enough to buy food and a small ultralight airplane. The plane spawns new dreams and thoughts, which Bach describes at length. Bach also asks Leslie how it would be possible to miss something one never had. Leslie claims that when one is sad for no obvious reason, it is because of missing those things.

Chapter 46: Bach and Leslie each retire with their own books. The author comments that their reading choices reflect their personalities.

Bach returns to practicing self-induced dreams where once again he meets with the future Richard. This time, Leslie is with him. They are sharing the same dream. Bach awakes first and makes notes. When Leslie awakes, they discuss the dream. Leslie says that she saw his new book on the shelf. She struggles to remember the name and it slips away, save for "something about forever."

Chapter 47: Bach shares with Leslie a new revelation about choosing when to die rather than being pushed toward it. The couple also continue to practice astral projection and joint dreaming.

Leslie begins to consider returning to her lecture series even though speaking out against the Vietnam War is terrifying to her. Bach reminds Leslie that the war is over and she can speak of love. Leslie says that was what she was talking about all along.

Chapter 48: Bach and Leslie sit on a stage in front of a large crowd, talking about their experiences. There are questions and answers, ranging from the impetus of Bach's "crazy ideas" to everything under the sun, most of it spiritual.

Chapter 49: Bach is in the last stages of finishing the new book while Leslie plays with the earthmover outside, preparing for the new house. The story ends with Bach revisiting his first meeting with Leslie although the circumstances have changed. Leslie is delighted that they have chosen to try life together and wishes them love.



# Characters

## Richard Bach

Richard Bach (1936-) is an American author, pilot and philosopher. Bach is best known for his body of work, including "Jonathan Livingston Seagull," "One," "Illusions: The Adventures Of A Reluctant Messiah," and "The Bridge Across Forever: a Lovestory."

All of Bach's works are in the non-fiction genre and revolve around his spiritual quests plus his lifelong devotion to flying. It is often said that flying is a metaphor for Bach's spiritual quest. The airplanes often tie in to where the author is at any given time. The more elaborate the plane, the more progress Bach is making in his journey. Smaller, more basic planes mean that Bach is starting from the beginning to reinterpret old ideals or start on a new path.

Bach is married for many years and has six children with his first wife, whom he divorces after developing an ideal that marriage is bondage. Eventually, Bach falls in love with actress, model and pianist Leslie Parrish. Bach and Parrish seem to be made for one another, laid back and non-committal, until the relationship becomes more serious. Bach decides that he cannot live without Leslie and they marry in 1977.

It is Leslie that helps Bach to become more involved in his own affairs although, as his business partner, she does the work.

The couple finally divorces, amicably.

Bach lives in the Northwest with his third wife and continues to share his philosophies with his readers.

## Leslie Parrish

Leslie Parrish (1935-) is an American model, actress and pianist. Born Marjorie Helen, Parrish changed her name in the 1950s, part way through her career. Parrish has a successful career and has appeared in more than 100 TV shows including "Star Trek" and "Logan's Run" and major motion pictures including "The Manchurian Candidate" and "Sex and the Single Girl."

Parrish attends the Philadelphia Conservatory of Music as a promising pianist. Although Parrish will always continue her love of the piano and classical music, she chooses to pursue an acting career instead as it will pay more than life as a musician. Parrish models in New York before becoming an actress and moving to LA.

Parrish meets Bach on the movie set for Jonathan Livingston Seagull. Parrish and Bach become business partners and friends before developing an intimate relationship which culminates in marriage in 1977. The couple divorce over 20 years later.



Leslie and Bach also share a love of chess.

## **Mary Moviestar**

Mary Moviestar is the name Leslie uses to describe her Hollywood self.

## **Katherine**

Katherine is one of the women that could have been Bach's soulmate.

## **Donald Shimoda**

Donald Shimoda—a barnstormer and friend of Bach who is commonly referred to as the retired Messiah, "Ex-Saviour-of-the-World."

## **Eleanor**

Eleanor is Bach's agent, one who tries to convince him to focus on his career and the fact that his book is on the best-seller list.

## **Jonathan Livingston Seagull**

Jonathan Livingston Seagull—the name of the book that becomes Bach's first major success.

## **Stan**

Stan—Bach's friend and financial manager, responsible for losing the majority of Bach's money.

## **John Gartner**

John Gartner is Bach's high school English teacher at Woodrow Wilson High School in California. Bach credits Gartner with teaching him how to be a writer.

## **John Marquart**

John Marquart is the tax attorney in LA that helps Leslie sort out the IRS disaster.



# Objects/Places

## Airplanes

### Biplane

Being a pilot is one of Bach's obsessions. Bach becomes interested in flying at age 17 and devotes a large part of his life to it.

A biplane is most commonly identified as the plane flown by the Wright Brothers in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina. There are two sets of wings, one set below the cockpit and the other above. The plane tends to have more drag than more modern planes but is preferred by pilots like Bach who have the desire to have a certain amount of control over the plane. Even compared to larger more advanced planes, Bach prefers his biplanes as it takes more skill in flying and gives him a stronger sense of control.

Bach often comments that flying is such a large part of his life that he cannot conceive being with a woman that does not fly. Leslie Parrish does not fly until Bach teaches her, helping her to get over the fear.

Bach often uses the plane as a metaphor for flight into the spiritual realm.

The first plane mentioned in the book is a small biplane used for barnstorming and performing entertaining maneuvers for the crowd. Bach sells plane and after he makes a significant amount of money, owns 9 planes. Bach eventually upgrades and follows his heart's desire when it comes to purchasing new aircraft, including biplanes, of which there are many styles.

## Spiritual Realm

The Spiritual Realm is the topic of all of Bach's books, beginning with Jonathan Livingston Seagull. Bach often uses the act of flight as a metaphor for spiritual progression.

Bach is clear about his beliefs and quest for spiritual advancement. Along the way, Bach encounters spirit guides, himself in past, present and future, and has conversations with his own inner guide.

There are many revelations in the book referring to spiritual matters. One of Bach's most rigid beliefs is that there must be one perfect woman, one soulmate for him. This subject takes up a great deal of the book and can be seen as the main theme. When Bach becomes involved with Leslie, he struggles with this belief until he finally gives himself permission to try to love and commit to her fully. Stepping forth into marriage is also a sign of positive spiritual growth.



Another of Bach's strong beliefs is that there is no such thing as linear time. Time is a man-made concept that is imposed on people for various reasons. This theory allows Bach to visit with himself, and Leslie, in various stages of life during which he is taught lessons by his future self.

## **Hayfield**

The author rents an alfalfa hayfield in Russell Iowa, near other farms that harvest soybeans and corn

## **Gladys Hutchinson Memorial Library**

The first library Bach visits to find a book on how to deal with wealth

## **Russell, Iowa**

Russell, Iowa is the beginning location in the story. Bach lives in Russell, and also houses his plane in a hayfield there.

## **Travel Air biplane**

The biplane operated by Donald Shimoda

## **Florida**

The place Bach chooses to go after selling the biplane

## **Tin Witch**

Another name for a biplane.

## **Long Beach, California**

Long Beach, California is where Richard Bach grew up.

## **Los Angeles**

Home to Leslie Parrish



# Themes

## Spirituality

Spirituality is the main theme in the book, as it is with all of Bach's works.

Bach is clear about his beliefs and quest for spiritual advancement. Along the way, Bach encounters spirit guides, himself in past, present and future, and has conversations with his own inner guide.

There are many revelations in the book referring to spiritual matters. One of Bach's most rigid beliefs is that there must be one perfect woman, one soulmate for him. This subject takes up a great deal of the book and can be seen as the main theme. When Bach becomes involved with Leslie, he struggles with this belief until he finally gives permission to try to love and commit to her fully. Stepping forth into marriage is also a sign of positive spiritual growth.

Leslie shares almost all of Bach's beliefs and together they explore new ideas and practices that lend the couple the ability to live as they would choose, in harmony and love.

Another of Bach's strong beliefs is that there is no such thing as linear time. Time is a man-made concept that is imposed on people for various reasons. This theory allows Bach to visit with himself, and Leslie, in various stages of life during which he is taught lessons by his future self.

Bach's quest for the next level of spirituality never ends, giving the reader constant insight.

## Soulmates

One of Bach's most rigid beliefs is that there must be one perfect woman, one soulmate for him. This subject takes up a great deal of the book and can be seen as a main theme.

Bach focuses on being alone and why he has not found his soulmate, the one woman in the world that is perfect for him and him alone. Shimoda has told Bach that the woman is out there. Each person already knows everyone else on the planet, instinctively and intuitively, even if those two people have never met.

Bach gives up many things in order to find his soulmate. It becomes a single minded obsession. Bach even gives up barnstorming in his beloved biplane because he is no longer convinced that "she" will never show up at a hayfield in Russell, Iowa.





When Bach becomes involved with Leslie, he struggles with this belief until he finally gives himself permission to try to love and commit to her fully. Stepping forth into marriage is also a sign of positive spiritual growth.

Despite Bach's commitment to Leslie, he has not completely given up on the idea of soulmates. Most of the time, Bach considers Leslie to be his soulmate while other insights still nag him that perhaps many people must converge in order to make up the perfect woman.

## Legal Trouble

Throughout much of the book, Bach focuses on legal trouble with the IRS. While part of this issue can certainly be blamed on others, Bach must also take responsibility for allowing others to take over his financial world. Bach claims that the advisers are necessary as he has no idea how to handle finances. At times, Bach wishes that he had never become wealthy. Eventually, Leslie enters the picture and straightens things out as best she can.

Stan, Bach's financial manager, is a poor choice. Although he is a former colleague and friend, Stan's financial prowess is sorely lacking. When Stan informs Bach that he has lost \$800,000, Stan seems only slightly concerned and not at all remorseful.

Harry the business manager is also a hindrance when he keeps the information about the IRS from Bach so as not to upset him. Finally, the tax attorney puts the nail in the coffin when he does not file with the IRS until two weeks past the deadline, locking Bach into owing \$1 million although financial losses could easily prove that he owed nothing.

John Marquart is the best help throughout the 4 years of hassle and angst. After going through 12 agents, none of whom want to make any kind of decision regarding Bach, Bach claims bankruptcy and starts all over again.

# Style

## Perspective

Richard Bach is an American author, pilot and philosopher. Bach is best known for his body of work, including "Jonathan Livingston Seagull," "One," "Illusions: The Adventures Of A Reluctant Messiah," and "Bridge Across Forever: a Lovestory."

Bach takes a lifetime of spiritual work and molds it into his eighth book, the one that details in depth his search for a soulmate. The author gives insight into the process of coming to terms with one's needs and desires.

All of Bach's works are in the non-fiction genre and revolve around his spiritual quests plus his lifelong devotion to flying. It is often said that flying is a metaphor for Bach's spiritual quest. The airplanes often tie in to where the author is at any given time. The more elaborate the plane, the more progress Bach is making in his journey. Smaller, more basic planes mean that Bach is starting from the beginning to reinterpret old ideals or start on a new path.

Eventually, Bach falls in love with actress, model and pianist Leslie Parrish. Bach and Parrish seem to be made for one another, laid back and non-committal, until the relationship becomes more serious. Bach decides that he cannot live without Leslie and they marry in 1977.

There are several references to Bach's other books, particularly his most famous, Jonathan Livingston Seagull. The history behind Bach's works gives the reader a bigger sense of Bach's experience and perspective.

## Tone

The tone used in "The Bridge Across Forever: a Lovestory" is partisan as it is a non-fiction work written about Richard Bach's various spiritual quests.

Bach is deeply introspective throughout the work and is often at war with himself over his own ideals and how they often conflict with the ideals and advice from others, including the reluctant Messiah, Donald Shimoda, as well as his future self and opinions of Leslie Parrish.

Bach's desire for freedom and the ability to follow his own path, alone, makes the author appear completely self-absorbed. The desire to remain free from commitment and bondage leaves many people behind when Bach decides that it is time to move on. As much as Bach believes that this way of life is beneficial and what he needs, it often proves to be detrimental to him and those around him.

The tone changes throughout the book as Bach begins to realize the importance of Leslie Parrish and how the woman who has been his business partner and friend is turning into the woman who will become his wife.

At the end of the book, the tone returns to being peaceful and joyful regarding the path Bach has chosen.

## Structure

"The Bridge Across Forever: a Lovestory" by Richard Bach is a work of non-fiction. The book is comprised of 316 pages, broken down into 49 chapters. The shortest chapter is 1 page in length; the longest chapter is 18 pages in length; the average length of the chapters is 6 pages.

The book's overall structure is a bit random. The main thread is chronological with forays into past, present and future events that are related to the story but not directly relevant to the text. The rehashing of certain topics makes the book somewhat repetitive.

"The Bridge Across Forever: a Lovestory" is different from Bach's other books in that the text is much more personal in a factual sense. Bach's other books are all autobiographical in nature and also personal but the events are told through the use of metaphors and elusive tales instead of relating directly to the author's life.

The result of Bach's insights allows the reader to gain information, knowledge, and perhaps spiritual growth. Bach also shows the reader that one already knows the answers to all questions and that the events in one's life are not happenstance.

The book ends with Bach starting over after a 4 year battle with the IRS. Bach and Leslie are preparing to build their house and choose to wait until it is finished before venturing forth to change the world.



## Quotes

"Whatever enchants, also guides and protects."  
Page 23

"According to the wisest souls, we know everyone everywhere without having met in person—not much comfort when you're trying to narrow your search."  
Page 30

"When it comes to slipping a Fleet biplane down to land in a little bit of hayfield, I was second to few; but at that moment in the Gladys Hutchinson Library I thought that when it comes to herding a fortune, I might be second to none at all, I might be an unmatched disaster."  
Page 39

"Airplanes, I can handle, I thought, but money makes me nervous. Can money crash?"  
Page 62

"There are no mistakes. The events we bring upon ourselves, no matter how unpleasant, are necessary in order to learn what we need to learn; whatever steps we take, they're necessary to reach the places we've chosen to go."  
Page 68

"Because we believe the surface, we forget that surfaces aren't who we are. When we find an angel dazzling of mind, her face grows lovelier still."  
Page 128

"What was Simple Addition to her was Advanced Calculus to me; by closing my eyes and squashing my forehead together with my hands I could nearly understand."  
Page 131

"Here is a woman unequaled in my history, I thought, looking at her in the dark. I cannot imagine what it would take to shatter, to threaten the warmth of being close to her."  
Page 139

"To overcome such a fear of flying would require a trust and affection as strong as love itself, and love is a passport to disaster."  
Page 172

"Next to 'God,' 'love' is the word most mangled in every language."  
Page 172

"A lot of people have been near-dead and revived. Dying's the most beautiful moment in living, they tell us, and their fear of death is gone."  
Page 173



"Do you think they'd mind, all those hundred of other uses everywhere at once beyond time and space? Considering what we've been through." She said, "do you think they'd mind if we built our house first, and then changed the world?"

Page 314



## Topics for Discussion

How did Bach's casual attitude help him in his personal advancement? Did it hinder him in any way—personally or professionally?

Do you think Bach can learn to appreciate music, even the music that seems to be nothing but "noise?"

How might Leslie and Bach's relationship have changed if Bach became involved with another woman after they had been intimate?

How do you view Bach's relationships with Shimoda and his spiritual guide? Do you believe that they exist or are figments of Bach's imagination?

Why is Leslie so shocked at Bach's lack of knowledge regarding his finances? How might Richard have prevented the fiasco given his casual attitude?

Discuss Bach's concept of soulmates. Do you believe that soulmates exist? How can one find a soulmate? Is there only one soulmate for each person? Does everyone have one?

Why is present day Bach so surprised at future Bach's advice? What could possibly change present day Bach's mind to follow the path outlined by future Bach?

What are your beliefs compared to Bach's regarding the true absence of time and space?