

Vision

Temple

The Vitem Rald

by
Leland
Lehrman

Theater

World



“I am working on a vision for my people.” – Crazy Horse

VITALY F. THORINGEN

OR, THE VITEMERALD

Of VISION, TEMPLE, FAMILY, THEATER & WORLD

The Stages of World Creation

BOOK I

by R. Leland Lehrman



What happens to a dream deferred?
Does it dry up
Like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore –
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over–
Like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags
Like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

– Langston Hughes



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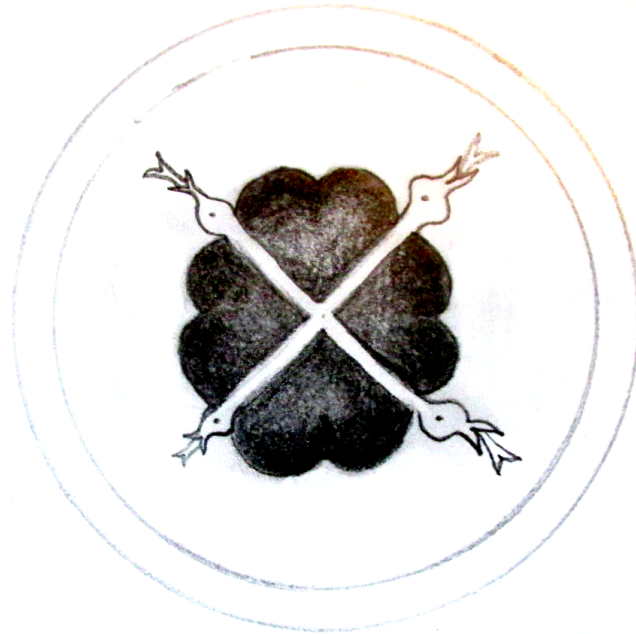
Dedication

For Vera and the Goddess

For my Family whom I love.

For Mimi and Ivan, Rick, and Ted.

And for Lame Deer and Black Elk.



Hearken fair Reader

To a Time out of time

I will you to love

In song and in rhyme.

Now you will hear

Of a day soon to come,

When we find our right places

Under the Sun.

The Vine of Visions



1. Off Balance and Falling
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21. Vera



The Vision

“Without vision, the people perish.” - Proverbs



Today – in much of the world – freedom is accepted as both birthright and natural law. Yet people still have trouble expressing the fullness of their freedom. Why is this?

To answer that question, we might also ask “What do we want to do with our freedom? What *is* our vision? What is our *desire* for the future?” and “How do we bring it into the world?”

The personal nature of vision illuminates the problem of freedom. To be free, we must know who we are. We must know *who is it* that wants to be free. Just because we are *told* we are free does not mean we know how, or feel able to actually live our vision. Those who tell us we are free are not always interested in the full reality of freedom. Human aspirations with political importance, like liberty, equality and fraternity, can be cruelly manipulated towards altogether different ends.

This book is the result of an intense struggle. Life is not supposed to be a struggle, yet no other path was any easier, more direct, or more authentic for me. My path took me down two different roads to the same goal. On the one, I worked to know myself to be myself. On the other, I accepted myself in order to know myself.

I can recommend this general approach heartily to everyone. I cannot recommend all the tools I employed. I hope the way I separate wheat from chaff in this book is helpful.

What follows are the abiding visions of my life. In sharing them with you, I also hope to kindle yours. This is not to suggest that yours will be like mine. Rather I hope my effort supports *you*, as you bring your own vision to the light of day, and to the company of the people.

As I wrote this book I was challenged by voices within and without. These voices asked me what was so special about me or my experiences. Why would the world be interested in what I had to say?

But I did not write the book because I have done something special.

That is not the point.

The point is that vision deserves to be shared. It must be shared, for the health of us all.

Without vision, we perish. Why is this so? Because **vision** speaks the nourishing language of living light. **Vision** heals and inspires the feelings. **Vision** animates the body, and empowers the blessed life.

The instructions for sharing vision were given to us by the indigenous medicine man Black Elk. In his book [Black Elk Speaks](#), this world famous spiritual teacher shared a story from his

childhood. As a young boy he had a powerful vision. For a time he did not know what to do with it, so he kept it to himself. Keeping it inside, he grew weak, and fell ill. His parents, desperate, called the medicine man to their tipi. Taking a long look at the boy, the man asked, "Have you had a vision?" The boy warmed to the elder's interest, and unraveled his tale. After listening, the medicine man threw aside the flap of the tipi, and stalked back to the council fire. There he set about gathering the tribe. Painting themselves and their ponies in purple and white, young and old rode in a figure eight dance pattern. Dramatically enacting Black Elk's vision, they made his dream come true. In so doing, the whole tribe came alive by the sacred artistry and healing power in the visions of its youth.

Black Elk's story clearly articulates why sharing vision is necessary for the health of both individual and society. How can we ignore him?

So now you see. There is no special reason why my particular visions deserve to be shared. When you read them you may enjoy the story, learn something useful or feel as if meeting an old friend. But I do not share these visions because they are special. Sharing vision is as necessary to life as sharing warmth, light, and conversation; air, food, and water; family, friendship and culture.

As you read, you may hear me asking you, "and what is *your* vision?"

It's true. I am.

What are the guiding stars in your life? Have they gathered dust or dimmed? Would they appreciate a friend to hear them out, to see them come to life?

It would be my pleasure to learn of your vision.

The longing in the soul to share vision is the same as the one to share in another's. Let us give each other the freedom to share and live our visions. Let us wake up to the stars in our hearts. Let them shine, warm, and touch the world with light. Feeling together, we can face the great challenge of healing the future.

I have to say the greater gift is given by you, dear reader. Your eye upon this page turns these lifeless marks to magic.

Yet I am happy.

I have done my part.

Now I share my vision, with you.

Leland Lehrman
July 25, 2017
Harlemville, NY

Chapter 1: Off Balance and Falling



I was the kind of boy who lived in the clouds. My mother often said so. “Foggy,” she would call me. “Cloudy...” she would sing, trying gently to get my attention.

I loved my home in the clouds. All was light and airy in the spacious blue sky. I felt peaceful. I didn’t know of any other way to be, and I wasn’t looking for one.

I was alone in the clouds, but felt no loneliness. I liked to walk along a high white wall that stretched out to the horizon and down out of sight, as far as the eye could see. There was a wall like that around the old manor house in Long Island, just down the road from where my grandmother lived. It was down by the crossroads to the little boat launch, on the bay. We would climb up it and walk – balancing on that wall – looking for bunny rabbits in the evenings after dinner. We’d screw up our faces and laugh, at the strange sculptures sitting pretentiously on the grass.

Smiling and daydreaming I kept my balance. Walking on and on, I played. On and on, it seemed.

Forever is so fun.

Then, out of nowhere, what was this? A feeling of “something else” took hold of me. I wobbled, waving my arms, as fear leaped into my heart unwanted. I struggled to recover, but it was too little, too late. I could not break my fall and tumbled out of control down the left side of the wall.

Down, down, down. The fear turned to terror as my speed increased. Thrashing, I struggled, against the feelings, against the falling, against this fate so unbearable, so inconceivable. Terrible visions confronted my mind’s eye, of hard landings, pain, and death. I fought the inevitable, all the way down.

Tumult filled my soul to bursting. In an agony of half-conscious terror and budding fury, the moment of truth arrived. I stiffened in one last hopeless gesture of prayer and pain avoidance, expecting to thud and shatter into the next order of horror...

But surprise! What is this soft pillowy landing? Am I really bouncing back up unhurt? I rejoice in my good fortune, nagged by lack of understanding. “What is the meaning of all this?” It gnaws at me just a little, as I emerge from the vision into my bed.

Now I am awake. The dream it slowly fades. It leaves me happy, but mystified. I swing my legs to sit on the bed, musing, in the room at the top of the third floor stairs.



Chapter 2: The Shadow on the Grass

“So far away...in another land...” - Van Morrison



Unaware of the standing stones nearby, among the parks and green landscapes of cultivated nobility, he felt safe in a lovely old house. He played happily in its gardens. Along with his parents, brothers and nurse, he had the trees, sky, animals and rain for friends. At times he would find himself alone with a white-suited elderly German woman, his constant companion. She spoke differently from his parents, and he enjoyed the secret language he learned from her.

Peering out gently from behind gold-rimmed glasses, this curly white-haired lady stood watch over the boy like an angel.

One day in late spring, the breeze blew an easy warmth over the gardens. The boy’s heart soared, lifting his feet off the flagstone paths and onto the trim soft lawn beneath the regal crown of a giant leafy tree.

Barreling along, certain of some happy destiny, the boy halted suddenly in mid-step. Some grave magic brought his gaze and heart to Earth. There, at his feet, was a songbird – happily and intact – but lying motionless on the ground.

The sight of a bird which did not fly at his approach took the curious lad aback. The pigeons in the park always flew. This happy singer’s motionless form, stiller than sleep, caused him fearful concern. As he recoiled from the swelling wave of painful understanding sweeping over him, Mimi the golden-white angel swooped in from behind, sensing his alarm, rushing to reassure. I pointed at the bird in the grass with a gesture of alarm, fearful urgency, and sad questioning. What might I have said?

“What’s this?” perhaps, in some original blend of German and English babytalk, a chubby finger extended from an outstretched hand. I looked over my shoulder at the approaching oracle.

And Mimi, what would she have said? All I can remember is the soothing poetic sound of the sturdy German language, wrapped around a heart of gold. I can remember her softness as she introduced me to Death. She did not hide me from its gravity, but nor did she pretend it was only tragic. She introduced it to me as a part of the world, but warned me to watch out for it in the same moment. We stayed there a while together, looking at the dead bird.

The sun still shone, the warm breeze still lifted the air.

Clouds rolled by, though time stood still.

I looked down at the fallen hero, then back over my shoulder at the lady in white. The silent urgent questions poured out of my eyes. Softly but firmly Mimi affirmed that all was still well, despite the presence of this painful mystery, lying at our feet. Mimi's blessing upon it, I wandered on, but now dazed and stunned. Back to the flagstones, I shuffled preoccupied. Listlessly I played with my cargo tricycle. The triumphant perfection of the Sun and Spring Breeze had disappeared. In their place, a shadowy question would haunt me ever after.



Plagued by the same question, it is twenty years later. Wreathed in aromatic pipe smoke, a **man** with white curls pores over the words of a green book. Golden hearts and a star shine on its cover. The man's eyes rest thankfully upon the words. He has marked up and underlined them throughout.

The boy has not yet arrived.



Chapter 3: The Mossy Rock



If you look out towards the woods, down over the hill, maybe you can see him, sitting there on a mossy rock, musing. The trickling sounds of the brook, the glinting sun on the water, and the cool shadows of the wood's edge embrace him. You can join him, he will welcome you, though few people come here. There at the bottom of the grassy sledding hill, below the swimming pool and the house, he and Memory are at work full of feeling. They begin with peaceful solitude, the kind surrounded by nature.

Memory rises up like an angel, shining in every direction. Holding time and space in her heart she announces “there **are** places and ways to belong.”

But then the Muse's opponent, Schedule swoops down...darkening the sun. The boy startles uneasily, the skunk cabbage reeks ominously, and he stumbles out of the woods only half willing. At the top of the hill, by the pool and pachysandra, he climbs a huge maple sprouting up mightily out of the lush cropped grass. Step after step he ascends the rungs nailed into the furrowed brown bark. He stops at the top, in the crotch of the tree's lowest limbs, and looks for the brown braided rope. The joy of flight and fun appears before him beckoning, he reaches for it, for the rope...but misses, and falls again. Dissociating from his body, he lands on his head among the roots of the green crowned maple. Darkness and pain banish Memory for years. What remains of him fusses and fights over his fate.

I woke up later in my parent's bed. It was a pleasant surprise to be there in the sacred place to which I was rarely allowed anymore. I barely noticed my sorrow about this lost paradise as the throbbing pain of a concussion demanded my attention. I was furious, angry at everything and anything that dared disturb my triumphant dream of the perfect life. How quickly did I forget the mossy rock, the trickling stream and the warm embrace of the sunlit woods.

Time passed, my head healed somewhat, and I grew comfortable in the room with my brother, John. Out in the wide, distant world of adults, a decision was made, a busting ensued, and the white-haired woman who had been my constant companion in life came to see me one last time. I was musing in bed when she arrived with a chocolate chip cookie. I should have known this was a bad sign. Startled by this barely conceivable event. I was in bed, teeth brushed already and holding a legitimate chocolate chip cookie in my hand? What could this mean? I shared the cookie with the corner of the embroidered pillowcase. The white-haired lady had made it for me. On its soft white face, a boy with a hat on was holding several ballons. My name was stitched on one. What I mean is that I chewed the remains of the cookie into the corner of the pillowcase. This practice had begun with my Windels, the name the white-haired lady had given to cloth diapers. At some point before I could remember, I had begun chewing on the corners of these Windels. The scent of a chewed cotton Windel is exquisite, a kind of floral vanilla with a

bit of wafting holy aura. Add in chocolate chip cookie remains, and well, it's an essence of childhood Heaven.

I stared from under the covers at the wall and the castle windows. If I looked at the wall in a certain way, the world would start to spin. Then, I looked at the rows of marks going up and down the wallpaper. If I looked at them one way, they formed the ropes and planks of a bridge leaning left. If I looked at them another way, the bridge leaned to the right. Hmmm, what perspective shall I take now?

I never saw the white-haired lady again. My father would tell me about her progress in Germany sometimes. He knew of our love. One day he told me they had quarreled over me. As I recall, he said he wanted me to grow up a bit faster than she did.



Chapter 4: The “I” Opens



It didn't last long. Like a bird that swoops, settles and then is gone, did my “I” appear. I didn't know its name, but boy was I happy we met. It was on the fifth floor of the school, housed in a later twentieth century New York City brown brick apartment building. There were eight floors of classrooms, a gym, library and such, and a playground and art space on the roof. I was standing alone in the hall, why I can't remember. It was there by the elevators, and I was just sort of feeling dreamy as my gaze rested on the wall and the heavy swinging doors to the stairwell.

That wall was the scene of great distress for me right around then. I think it was in first grade, but it might have been second. Miss Keithlein and Miss Bell, and their colleagues from the early grades had imagined up a large map of the world on that wall. It was cut from construction paper, and took up an impressively wide section, of the white cinder block wall, in the hall where I was now standing.

Some mysterious process was unfolding at the edges of my awareness. First one classmate and then another would disappear briefly with a kind of unknown assistant teacher. With no introduction, all of a sudden I found myself with this woman I vaguely recognized but did not know. She led me alone into the hall opposite those same elevators, and out of nowhere hit me with the question.

In *that* tone of voice, and with the attitude peculiar to childhood teachers, this towering, semi-recognizable form asked me what was for her, I'm sure, a most innocent question:

“So now *Leland*, where did *you* go on your vacation?”

Quickly trying to understand, I looked for a moment at the map on the wall and saw the names of my classmates, the locations of their vacation listed, and a piece of colored string or yarn connecting that location with New York. I gave myself one more moment to review the locations and distance from New York of my classmates. Seeing long pieces of string and exotic Southern, Island, and Transatlantic locations, I startled with fear.

The oldest of four at that time, our family had stayed close to home for the winter holidays. Eliza was just one or two, and even my mother, a born traveler, daughter of a travel agent, had decided to take it easy that year. What journeys she would take us on later! But at the time, one glance at that fateful wall told me I was a homebody, that I was nothing special by comparison with my tanned classmates, who had returned to school with strange names like Sanibel and St. Croix on their tongues. One of my classmates, Eliot, was particularly dear to me. To be humbled so low beside his inevitably long string, which reached gracefully down towards the beautiful and holy Caribbean. It was just too much to bear.

The beautiful feeling of that Christmas now floats before my mind's eye. Greenwich in winter is lovely, the evergreens under the first dust of snow. There were Mom and Dad, brothers and baby sister, with relatives arriving, Grandma with her flaming plum pudding.

But how could that be translated into a string of impressive length on this cinder block wall?

The wall and I stood there lonely and glum, even for all the effort of the young teachers, with their construction paper map and pushpins, visions of geography going down easy dancing in their heads.

There was no way.

And so I resolved all this in the space of seconds. I drew swiftly on knowledge gained from earnest questioning of adults regarding serious matters of global importance. I remembered that if you dig a hole from New York City straight through the center of the Earth you come out in China. Knowing that whatever is on the other side of the planet is definitively as far as one can go, the public nature of this very personal geography lesson taking on such a competitive color, I spoke clearly but in the anxious tones of the fibber. "China," I said, with gumption.

I can only wonder at the expression on the face of that earnest, fresh young lady as she watched my busy face in those four, maybe ten seconds of decision.

If she believed me I don't know. Certainly I would have been able to give no answer should she have inquired further as to which city or what I did there. But I didn't need any of that. I just needed a testament to my prowess.

Whatever she may have thought, she took me at my word. Letting me return to class she proceeded to string my name out to China in public. I promptly forgot the whole uncomfortable matter, and rejoined the safety of class, routine, and home.

Sometime later, my parents disappeared one night who knows where. The next day at breakfast or so, they came back down out of the night asking, "But Leland, why did you say you went to China on vacation?"

Yup.

They were perfectly sweet about it, if a little disappointed in me. It happens to me sometimes with my kids. I start out wondering what I did to make them feel the need to be dishonest – for about one second until I remember the last time I lost my temper. Of course I could articulate no answer. I muddled through an attempt to telepathically transmit what of this story I could admit to them, and stood there in a pool of abashed clumsiness.

It happened just a little later, this visit with the "I." I can't remember if the map was still there. Some echo of that conflicted "China" moment entwines the two events. The same exact

location, and both events, appear together before my inner eye plainer than yesterday. I stood there gazing at the hall, the wall, the carpet, none of it and all of it; and then all of a sudden, in a quiet pause of the day, inconspicuously, I heard myself thinking:

“I can see!”

And if you can’t quite hear the surprised and happy tones of those words as they rang like a bell in the tower of my spirit, let me translate.

“Wow! There is an ‘I’ inside me that can see!”

This discovery of what now seemed so obvious, and of what had been with me all along, was profoundly rewarding. As I stood there in the glow of warm awareness, some kind of strength to carry on, even to sally forth flowed into me.

I went back to that spot for our 30th reunion. The school is now planning to leave that building forever. I stood in that hall again, and sat back down in my chair in the first grade classroom. As I looked around at the small high windows and the plastic teaching toys, I could not believe I had made it through all those cinder block days. That one moment, and the understanding that then dawned on me, carried my consciousness right to the edge of manhood.



Chapter 5: Missiles into Music, Thoughts, and Things



The boys of school sat assembled in dress code as the serious young scholar stepped to the podium. In winter-weight tweed jacket and turtleneck, he placed a speech on the lectern and held forth. Fumbling an attempt at impassioned righteous rage, the young politico grasped at fact and intellect before retreating finally into official military policy. Beneath wavy brown curls, the rapidly morphing face urgently explained the pressing need for more nuclear weapons than the enemy. He included troop, tank and missile numbers on either side of “The Wall” then closed to the minimum of desultory formal applause. He shuffled offstage uncomfortable and bewildered.

After school, Rick sat with him on the piano bench. Despite the fabulous tone of the lovely upright Steinway, the aspiring musician and composer felt bereft of talent and uninspired. His playing was lifeless and he kept making the same mistakes. When a lesson dragged, Rick often drew the restless brooder into general conversation as a way of easing the tension and lifting the spirit. Immediately the boy would brighten. Relaxing into intellectual conversation he would find himself more comfortable than in the struggle with the feelings of clumsiness in the deep waters where music abides. Somehow he got to telling Rick about his speech at school that day, about the missile gap and the importance of American military superiority. In the comfort of Rick’s calm assurance, our impassioned young page waxed eloquent and certain about the importance of military superiority and the dangers of the missile “gap.” As he spoke, a strange feeling came over the room almost unnoticed. The young orator looked hopefully to Rick for the expected approval and respect, stopping his monologue for a moment. There was a brief, but eternal pregnant pause. The piano teacher was looking at the boy with a mixture of gentle curiosity and a disguised alarm which didn’t register at the time. And when he spoke, from his lips there flowed only a gentle question, posed as kindly as a grandmother might.

“Leland,” he asked quite sincerely, “Do you really think nuclear weapons are a good thing?” I stared, and then looked away. Rick’s head was cocked to one side, that half-smile I knew so well floating gently below the ocean of concern behind his eyes.

A crack in the Universe appeared. There was a blinding flash of inner light. I suddenly found myself awake in a new world. The meaning of everything was different, but somehow strangely familiar. I felt a nameless and eternal confusion about the difference between the words of Jesus Christ and a seemingly status quo Christianity that glorified violence and created rationales for the weapons of mass destruction I had been promoting. I felt a seemingly unresolvable distance from the moral, religious and political guidance all around me and the consequent attitudes and actions of political leaders in whom even my most beloved and respected elders placed their faith.

I knew Rick's question was rhetorical. My words stumbled about confused and disconnected from me. I was dazed and blinded by the light. Hopelessly I tried briefly to reconcile the two incompatible perspectives, as I tried to answer Rick's question. But I now could feel the true answer of my heart, and I would never again fully deny it. "No," it was, though I never quite said it. Rick didn't pressure me at all. I surrendered then to a secret joy that flooded me. I swam to a new shore and stood dripping wet, alone and disoriented, but happy and at peace.

Rick could sense I was on high seas, and promised to bring me a book for navigation. The following week, he brought a slim paperback with a kind of oriental flower arrangement on the front cover. Handing it to me without fanfare after the lesson, Rick's enthusiasm for it was clear but not oppressive. I felt included in a community of wisdom-seekers and was grateful. I wandered dreamily from the piano room and up the stairs to my room leafing through and musing upon this very different sort of a book.

I was thankful to Rick. The book felt peaceful and comforting in my hands. I assure you I tried in earnest to read Think on These Things in my usual, thorough way. That I could not may well have been for the best. At the time I could only gather one memorable image from it. I still find it lovable and it endears the author to me. In that book of spiritual conversation, Jiddu Krishnamurti speaks at one point of an experience he had of kinship with all life. He describes this experience as a kind of awakened feeling, not just an idea, and not at all a dream. He spoke eloquently but clearly of the facts of this inner experience in a way which is easily reimagined.

There was a way, the author said, to sit in kinship with all life, to feel present with and within every being you can perceive. Inwardly and outwardly, one can spread one's awareness into all to which we are connected. He spoke of relationships with people as if there were an inner string connecting our whole beings; he spoke of animals and supposedly inanimate things in the same way.

This I could relate to. It felt akin to my favorite author Madeleine L'Engle's telepathically "kything" characters, and to the magic connectedness between the brother and sister from Alexander Key's Witch Mountain books.

Spreading this awareness like mist over his street, Jiddu described a feeling of being present with and within the construction worker, his machine – a yellow bulldozer or bucket loader is still vivid in my mind – and the every sound of nature and society. I had a sense of that. Fond childhood memories of watching builders and feeling myself at one with them are not so far away.

Standing on the radiator – if I could not sleep – I would look out the window and count bright yellow taxis, as they glided silently below me, down Manhattan's Fifth Avenue, next to Central Park.

Chapter 6: The Elven Diamond



Perhaps eleven or twelve, a lanky youth with a shock of brown curls emerges triumphant from the piano room. In his hands he holds a dot matrix printout from an Apple II computer. Below the ceiling on the stairs to his upper room he dawdles reading his work, accomplishment mixing with dissatisfaction. Page after page of fantasy beginnings leave him struggling to imagine an ending, or even the next adventure.

The book is called The Elven Diamond. He had articulated the primary quest, but was at a loss how to take the next step. The initial encounter with the trolls was just so predictable, almost plagiarism. Helplessly he watched his creative happiness vanish in the harsh winds of self-criticism. He resigned himself, unconscious and strangely angry, to the recognition that he would need to give up this book idea. He could tell he was not yet ready to move forward. No joy was left in the prospect, keen though he had started. It had been so easy, those first ten pages. Why was it so difficult to continue? He looked down at the words and let himself wonder one last time...



Freidenker is my name. It means free thinker. I didn't know that then. I called myself Frinker at the time. It was as close as I could get to knowing my real name. I wasn't happy with Frinker then and I still don't like it. I guess that's how it feels to only sort of know who you are. Just awful, really.

But that was long ago.

I was pretty close after all, even that far back. Over time I got comfortable with my name, once I knew what it meant.

It's a clumsy name, which makes sense if you know me. Then again, who hasn't stumbled when trying something new. Every God I've ever heard about makes some kind of mistake along the line somewhere.

Some people don't want to admit that and just define God as "that which does not make mistakes," which basically rules everything out. And what kind of people are they? You've probably met them. They're inevitably the most inflexible and difficult people in the world. And look at the world. If there is any connection between the world and God - and what kind of God has no connection to the world - then, well, you know what I mean? "As below, so above" is the necessary consequence of the well known and widely respected, "As above, so below." If there's

a problem with the world, then the God and Goddess have a problem. There's no way around it.

So listen. We live in a forest village along the banks of the Ode River. It's nice here. Come and visit. I'd like to talk with you a bit about the Gods and their problems. Let me tell you more so you can make up your mind.

You probably won't believe me. But we are an immortal race, cousins to your own. Or we were until fairly recently. When the elders first started aging we panicked. We don't make the excuses you do when confronted with impending Death. Life is more precious to us. When it starts to slip from our hands, we know there's something wrong with our understanding of life, not just with our body.

Humanity, on the other hand, is strange to us. You seem to keep doing what you're doing...right into the grave! Everything dies you say, or, worse, there are some things more important than life. As far as we can make out, you still practice human sacrifice, you just don't call it that. You even encourage it in under certain banners, like war, economic growth, and some of your concepts of justice, work and lifestyle. Suicide is a more accurate term for the cause of a large proportion of your dead.

Then you have these elaborate, often unexamined platitudes about how death is part of life. Science, Religion, all of your cultural institutions appear to be employed in this most important work of convincing everyone that Death is inevitable. Who could even imagine it was possible for the body to live forever after listening to you day in day out from birth? By the time you're through with each other, most people are convinced they don't even want to live forever, and rationalize every dead end they take.

I know there's life after death, and a spirit world. But that doesn't make this one any less divine. *Here* is where the challenge is, to put what we learn in the spirit world into practice. I know death has been around for so long it appears to be the way things are. But so have many other tragic aspects of life, like war, poverty, pollution and so on. And everyone is eagerly pursuing solutions to these problems, even though they've been around almost as long as death.

Our people can't and won't admit that the death of the body is inevitable, we can't pretend to be okay with that. If we were to die, we would be working the whole time to figure out what we did wrong. We would want to learn from it so that it wouldn't be necessary in the future. We would want everyone in our community to get some benefit from the lesson.

As I was saying – we were an immortal race until just recently, when some our elders started noticing signs of aging. It used to be our elders were only distinguished by their ways and wisdom. We only know what the signs of aging look like because we've been watching you. Here's the part you're going to have a hard time believing. Long ago we branched off from those who accepted the idea that death was a condition of living. In that time, we built a temple in the Spiwilheabod mountains to keep our story safe. This is the story about how it's possible for even

the body to live forever.

Picture this: At the center of the temple, where the solstice light shines down from the sun above, we put the stones. The Diamond we set in the portal of the ceiling. The Amethyst floats above the altar at the top, the Emerald floats below it in the middle. At bottom, resting upon the Golden Altar, is the Ruby.

Our children believe that these stones are the source of our immortality. That was how I was, and what I was writing about before I knew my name. During the time before we can understand these matters, we imagine that the rays of light from the stones on the mountain keep us immortal.

That was long ago. Things are different now. Human beings taken the myth of Death to the extreme. Now even some of you are seeing the danger in believing that all things must die. In a culture for whom Death is inevitable, even the Death of a planet can be justified as natural.

Things were bad enough when a team of your technologists, bankers and secret agencies broke into the temple in an attempt to steal the stones. They're still trying to figure out how to get at them. But we're not really worried about the stones. They're the story, not the source. What we are concerned about is this: we've discovered that it was our silence that is killing us.

We don't have any choice but to speak now, especially since your New World Order technocrats keep trying to convince you all to sell your body and mind to their wireless crystal prison machine. "The Singularity," is their name for it, and they call it immortality. We won't be fighting about this. Our voices will only be heard in the wilderness, and in the safety of the company of those who understand. But they will be raised, and we will dance. Through our voices, and our dances, a new magic will arrive. We will survive, and thrive.

The Earth herself wants this, and She wants Her people to help Her.

Wouldn't you?



Chapter 7: Daemion

"All I really wanted was to try and live the life that was spontaneously welling up within me. Why was that so very difficult?" - Hermann Hesse



Pushed out of the nest, encouraged to fly on to great achievement, he left home sadly, bewildered but hopeful. He liked music and had a religious feeling for life and scholarship. Still, the gangly boarding student resisted the priests his father sent to welcome the birth of his spirit. He listened to these priests from behind the bitter bars of braces, and felt their words binding and metallic upon his heart and soul. They felt pushy and doctrinaire, even the young ones. He had few words for these men, sympathizing with them too much to even try to put his discomfort and critique of their ways into words. Although his careful study of the Church in history gave him enough to be cautious, it was the unwillingness of these priests to embrace the full responsibility of life and the inner, awakened spirituality that left him cold and distant. It was the darkness just before the dawn.

Joy was rising on his horizon, bright and golden, streaked with passionate colors, singing to the waves of music, all around him, inside and out. What did the priests know of this? Chains they offered him while he tested his wings, amazed and frightened at the depth of the great abyss between him and the fullness of world understanding. The wild call of Dionysus and his ladies gripped his timid soul. He resisted at first, but finally he leaped, and flew, falling to the ground over and over again, caught in between attraction and terrified revulsion. In the brief moments of contemplation he allowed himself, afraid they would bind him back up again, he stood transfixed before the unknown, fear and longing breaking alternately on the stormy shoreline of his heart.

He found himself in an unknown and unknowing state foreign to his previous experience of easy facility in school and at home. His abstract and legally structured beliefs were unfit for passion's purpose. Forces flowing beneath his skin swirled into his heart and breathed life into a poetic soul and adventurous spirit he hardly recognized. He was worried and hesitant, but also tired and disenchanted with the viselike grip he held on his life. Chafing and resentful like a too long tethered young stallion, he deplored and bemoaned the fear he felt in the presence of the emotional, the sensual, and most of all the young women. Introduced to the beautiful Dorritt, daughter of his father's friend, he found himself torn inwardly in every opposite direction, a ball of feeling absolutely unmanageable in its mixture of attraction, fear, devotion, and a furious but futile attempt at control. A nine year career at an all boy's school, the oldest of four brothers and a younger sister, as good as these experiences were, they couldn't help him now with an innate shyness approaching awestruck intimidation in the presence of feminine beauty.

But he was comfortable in music, a friend of the popular radio, savior of his down days. He was a devotee of the stereo system and record player. Cautiously he leaned towards the

boarding school youth culture, and the classic rock anthems sacred to hippies. These songs were still popular in the seventies when they had first burst out of the small radios he tuned experimentally, often alone, in his parent's house. Then, like a twig floating out from an eddy, he was swept up willingly in the great river of youth. Listening quietly at first, then singing and finally dancing, he joined eagerly the parading crowd of Dionysian revelers. From house to schoolroom we went, then on to hall and stadium, finally making our way to the open fields.

What was it that drew his opening eye to the psychology course on the list? The young seeker for knowledge and practical social capacity listed towards it as to a quiet whisper. His housemaster, Mr. Vorkink, was the teacher of the course and was accustomed to fighting to control him in house and at evening check-in. But for a few weeks the eager student was so enthralled and studious that even Mr. Vorkink grew tame and sociable within the boy's eager searching gaze. Freud he tolerated, intrigued by stories of successful treatment when all else had failed. Then, he was still threatened and repulsed by Freud's courageous if incomplete understanding of the role played in human and cosmic well-being by pleasure, romance, and sexuality. He could recognize the problem of unfulfilled longings, but disliked Freud's obsessively materialistic and unfeeling approach.

Jung he drank in deeply, opening to his mysterious Red Book of invented symbol and language with joy, wonder, and gratitude that magic yet lived! He sat down with this book and found the mossy green rock still wet and sparkling with life. And then, from out of the mysterious Black Forest of Bavaria came Hermann Hesse, and the creek flowed at his feet again, the sun on the moss shining that brilliant green gold.

I was wide awake now, following earnestly in Hermann's footsteps. I sat near devotedly as he blended literature with psychology. When I read his archetypal novel of spiritual emergence, *Demian*, I could not believe what clarity he gave to my own struggle, and how exactly his story mirrored my own life, right down to the influence of a great friend, the torment of passionate love interests, and the dangerous melancholy that stalked fleeting moments of ecstatic awareness.

One day as I wandered in this tender state – disguised by laconic indifference, alone but not entirely melancholy – a feeling of being noticed swept over me by tiny degrees. A tall, tan, dark-haired mystery from the other side of campus - a friend of friends – was looking at me just so. Wakefulness emanated from him, and sprouted in the two of us alchemically. He addressed me simply from a place of awareness and recognition. And soon Ted and I were inseparable. The profound togetherness I found in Ted called all Heaven and Earth to our company. We moved together over the Earth in time, in tune, reverently observing social, natural and spiritual dimensions. We were immersed in the depths of love, every sensation of soul observed and compassionately handled or celebrated. We celebrated with music, which filled the sky above us and awoke the deepest feelings within. The living connections between people and poetry, music, all the world; everything shone clear as day.

Sometimes Ted would tire of me; my thirst for conscious companionship was unquenchable. I could think of nothing else but him. I yearned for him as for a lover, though I felt no sexual attraction. There were lovely and worthy young ladies with whom I had relationships. Some helped me valiantly and devotedly with my shyness, and I bloomed into a romantic. But for the most part, my social system revolved around a Sun named Ted.

Once we were interested in the same woman. Then was the pain acute. All the dangerous passions so long chained in the basement rattled about like Jacob Marley on Christmas Eve. Too often we took dangerous chemical shortcuts to the land of immanence and permission. Near tragedy alone would finally resolve that.

Still, I had remembered the mossy rock, had been reborn to its reality, and I committed my young adult life to its revelation and devotion. Never again would I forget Her, the secret Mother of all Awareness. But carrying her torch now, I felt condemned as a witch, living on the edge of the forest, foraging for crumbs of understanding, love, and true friendship.

For all I had learned and done, for every struggle and wound I had borne, there was still no end in sight, and no turning back. Now there was no home to which I could return. It was Marie Plume who wrote down the Kierkegaard quote for me, about the moment you realize home is no longer behind you.

From under the tree of this tender, but poisoned, fruit of knowledge, I emerged cringing at every now visible omen and auspice. I could see and feel the invisible forces, but had no idea how to interpret or navigate them. I had barely the slightest notion of destiny, only hope for what it might feel like. I graduated from the Academy with high honors, but felt cast out of all community, drifting on high seas.



Chapter 8: Purple Avalon Lover

“If I ventured in the slipstream...” - Van Morrison



Ever reaching for the sky, our young mystic and his father journeyed to Great Britain. Fond memories of childhood days there together blended with romantic dreams of nobility and greatness. While previously he had lived near the sacred standing stones of Kent, now he returned to them with purpose, disappointed by their fenced loneliness and modernized isolation.

He drew near the artists, poets and musicians of Eton, much enjoying a refreshingly cultured literature class and studying poets like Gerard Manley Hopkins. Paul, a friend from the class invited him up to London one day. Paul had a knowing way about him, and told me he wanted to introduce me to some friends of his. He disclosed to me in a most respectable manner that they were young ladies. I went along in a kind of social butterfly's dream. There are no girls at Eton, and I had had enough of that already.

Annabel was fair and dark-haired, the very picture of magic, and the mystery of love swept over us from the moment I sat down at the table on the Kensington High Road. There she was with her good friend Kate, Paul and I on one side, the two of them across from us, and a mirror on the wall reflecting the whole scene into a heightened awareness.

More than psychology, more even than Ted, Annabel and Love awoke me to the depth and breadth of perception and life.

Waiting for the days I could visit her again, I would walk back and forth over the bridge on the Thames, the border between Eton and Windsor. I would listen to music or watch the skies and people. One day I met him, in a blue raincoat I would see again later. He looked surprised and curious when we met, and asked me simply in bhakti English, “Do you know where is the third eye?” Of course, I did, I thought, and said so, pointing to the spot in the middle of the forehead where Indian women sometimes paint a dot. But no, he said, and he was very clear I was wrong. “It is actually at the end of your nose.” He smiled. There must be some mistake, I thought. I thought he meant the tip of the nose, the promontory farthest away from the face. In my defensive confusion, the encounter slipped away. The yogi and I were both uncomfortable, but he stuck with me in spirit. Then he faded away into the future, in his indigo blue rainjacket, on the Windsor side of the bridge. It was nearly thirty years before I realized he meant the end of the nose where it meets between the eyes, there where the life energy pools.

That bridge over the Thames was a gateway to the spirit world. The bridge and the pub called the Donkey House will remain forever in my heart with the fantastic shapes and colors of the clouds and trees after the magical English spring rains.



Kneeling by the reflecting pool, just inside the walls of the Abbey, he washes his hands in the Spirit before going to meet Her. All the animals watch, discussing the matter with friends and familiars. When the feeling between the lovers is good, all nature rejoices. When the trials come, with it the tragic wind, and the rain.

They hold on as fate tries to break them apart, and plan their escape. All his housemates help him fly, riding his bags down the High Street as he runs to the taxi stand by the castle. They take the train from Slough to Newhaven, and then onto the boat to Dieppes, in France. The owner of the Donkey House had given him the address of a restaurant in southern France where he could work and play guitar. He had let go of his possessions and school work other than the art. His best friends are all artists, they put the passion missing in modern life into their paintbrush. He had painted a picture of Her sitting in a meadow from behind. She had streaked pink and white hair, and was naked in a field of wild weather. The painting shocked and amazed everyone but the teacher. "Mix your paint before you apply it," he admonished. I ignored him and watched amazed as the painting carried the wild spirit of love into the whole school.

One night, while practically living in the studio, I journeyed from the courtyard by the arts building to a London Underground station. As I was preparing to descend to the tracks, a sudden wave of fear swept through the air, and a commotion of frenzied passengers began to run and scream up the steps towards me.

Then I heard it. A wild grunting roar as from a beast tore through the fleeing crowd as they ran past me. I looked down the stairwell for the source of this dreadful noise. Seeing nothing but daring to go no further, I curiously decided to place myself just outside the station entrance, my back up against the cut stone wall, and wait. There were a few more roars, getting louder as the last of the people fled past my hiding spot, and I guess I expected the "thing" to run madly past me in pursuit of the fleeing crowd so I could get a good look at it without it noticing me. That was not to be.

I realized too late, as the slowing footsteps set off my alarm, that this was no mindless disinterested beast. And then, quick as lightning, he leaped around the corner, to stand directly in front me glaring wildly into my eyes in a white hot fury about I knew not what.

"I knew I would find you here," he roared, referring to my hiding spot yes, but more so to my cowering emotional state which evidently displeased him. I stood there transfixed, taking him in. That was when I noticed that his dark brown hair was streaked with red-purple, in the same way my love's hair was streaked pink-white in my painting. He moved closer towards me threatening, demanding, waiting for me to say or do something, to justify myself, to... I didn't quite know what. I had to say something, so I opened my mouth and this was what came out:

“I am not going to hate you.”

For the briefest moment his face contorted in a disbelieving contortion of compressed incredulity, relief and exasperation. Then, we touched, and he exploded, like liquid glass into a thousand fragments and I realized the face was my own.



Chapter 9: Ivan and The Books

“Son, whatever you do, be a seeker” - Steve Earle



Broken apart by error and circumstance, blown upon binding winds of mysterious, inescapable origin, the union finally dies. The lovers separate into two people again. He returns to Turtle Island and hitchhikes to Mardi Gras in New Orleans. She rejoins her class at the Abbey, and other courtiers.

He hitchhikes from the banks of the Mississippi, west into the desert, studying under the prophets of road, street and byway. Music carries his wounded heart along, protecting him, bringing him back to life, connecting him with his soul family from town to town. He looks for other visions in their eyes, visions that could heal the gaping wounds of mechanistic militarism, commercial pollution, and mindless convenience. He meets great spirits, studies indigenous traditions and hunts for the ancient mysteries. Chants from the East and West sing to him and through him rising up out of the Good Red Road. But he rebels at all signs of evangelism, Eastern or Western. He fears he will lose his soul, his individuality, his own path in the ashrams and at the gatherings. Caught between escapism and doctrine, he despairs of all but one thing, the search. Without thinking, he trusts a kind of magnet in the core of his awareness, the kind the birds and whales use while navigating the Earth. Destination: Aspen, Colorado.

Aspen in Spring is magic. There are days when the sun melts everything so fast you can smell Winter and Spring at the same time. The first scent of the Colorado aspens fills the air when the cold smell of snow still lingers. Watery ice trickles through the shade of evergreens on the mountainside.

I had always loved Tatiana and her mother Marina. They have that dark Romanov hair and shining blue eyes, and best of all an artistic disposition nestled in the kind of noble soul that could survive the tragic events of 1917 intact. I had arrived hitchhiking a few days earlier and was happy to join my somewhat alarmed family for Spring Vacation. It was the first time I had ever grown out my hair and beard all the way. My mother patiently brushed out the knots with a concern I wrongly felt was misplaced...preoccupied as I was with the first kaleidoscopic glimpses of a freedom I had never before imagined nor experienced.

What remarkable good fortune it was, then, that the lovely Marina, her oldest daughter Tatiana and family should also be in Aspen that spring. I wondered how this would go now; they had only known quite another boy, the son of family friends.

It was awkward at first, but Marina was so kind, showing me her painting studio and the healthy painting materials she was happily working with. Unjudged, I warmed to the scene.

Obliquely and shyly, I tried again to get to know Tatiana. I had always shyly loved her. But she was out of reach, just as it had always appeared to me. She lived in another universe, with boyfriends in high places, soon to descend. She was friendly though, and we talked. I was in no mood anyway, to pursue attachments I had not the courage nor the understanding to cultivate. Such was the result of my failure with Annabel. My experience with women had been of rejection, confused incapacity on my part, or problematic passion and hopeless heartbreak.

But Tatiana's distance was not impassable. Marina's grace and hospitality shone down upon us all in the ferment of a lively social evening which at times managed to happily surprise me as it veered into meaningful conversation. Seeking, hopefully, any word or gesture that spoke of art, philosophy or spirit, I found myself among others in the presence of an interesting young gentleman who appeared to be awake. He was about my age, nineteen or so, and had the cultivated bearing and clean cut which I had begun to associate with the bored and boring upper classes. But he was different, and he listened to me hold forth for a minute or two, as I spoke passionately of some sacred understanding or rough-hewn point of artistic philosophy. And then all of a sudden, his eyes grew excited and he broke into spirited conversation with me alone. I listened rapt.

“**You** should really go to this bookstore I visited today. The owner there is really... amazing.”

I was all ears. Sensing my interest, the enthusiastic messenger stood with wings on ankles.

“Yeah. He told me I was a ‘Will Angel.’ Apparently he does some type of readings for people.” My eyebrows were now at full height. I had not heard this language before, but the attraction to it was visceral if ritually skeptical. Hermes continued:

“He has these books there which he talks about a lot. You should really go.”

Thankfully and in earnest I asked the name and location of this bookstore.

A day or two later I had narrowed Aspen down until I found Quadrant Books around the corner from the ski shop, across the street from a little park. My pace slowed down and my antennae went up as I walked down the garden path to the entrance. I climbed to the porch of a lovely red house nestled in what was then a residential district of Aspen. There were highly awake cats and dogs on the porch, looking at me like familiar totems. And then, I opened the door.

The atmosphere inside was thick with presence. As I moved slowly and carefully through the door into the warmth of a pot-bellied stove, I vaguely felt a strange shifting about in the magnetic poles of my Universe as Destiny went quantum. It was as if each word I said or step I took could change not only my own fate but the Balance of the World.

Through a fragrant wreath of smoke, a man on an ancient wooden rocking chair peered up at me with interest from beneath a shock of short white curls, wearing spectacles and a leathery tan. Spread comfortably around the fire, he and his familiars – a wolfhound, a husky and a Siamese cat – awoke to my presence intently, as I to theirs. Questions started sparking in my head like lightning bolts in search of land.

“Hello.” He croaked pleasantly, as I crept cautiously around the beautiful interior, books, paintings, objets d’esprit and furniture arranged in the sure steadiness of a comfortable soul. I wanted to feel at home here, but I could tell it would take time. On a table by the door were four stacks of mysterious colorful books. They have a shining golden imprint of the six-pointed star with a heart facing up and a heart facing down embracing it. Slowly, it was dawning on me that these books were the source of a lovely magical feeling that kept pressing upon my inner being.

I responded with some pleasant but cautious greeting. My immune system was responding with concern to what it had come to regard as the danger of proselytizing. I found a recessed corner of the store and selected a book on some profound subject, presenting it to the puffing aroma and the eyes within it, asking his thoughts.

Taking his pipe out of his mouth with a flourish, “Not for you,” he croaked again in a kind of delighted amusement filled with authority that surprised me. His voice pitch rose high towards a laugh. “The only book in this store that is *for you* is on the table by the door. Start with the blue one. I can’t recommend *anything else* for you.”

I stood stock still as I felt through the tone and implications of the man’s statement. He just sat there grinning, and puffing peacefully. The authority in his voice was definitely an inner one. I could tell that his recommendation was earnest and insightful, even authoritative. But I still wasn’t sure it was sane, for him to be as he was, or for me to be considering his recommendation on his terms, which I didn’t really understand. I knew proselytizing well from priests, baptists, taxi and truck drivers, Christian Brothers, Hare Krishnas and other types of missionaries, but this was completely different.

I put the book I had pulled out back, and wandered towards the front of the store with a mixture of fear and reverence. I looked out the windows, considering escape, then picked up a title on Spiritual Science by Rudolf Steiner. It seemed well-informed and well-intentioned, a bridge between the great achievements of science and religion. But it seemed dry and intellectual. I showed it to my host.

“Nope,” he smiled, the word kind of popping out of his mouth, as he smiled wildly and gestured at the table again. Slowly, noncommittal I moved over to the giant stacks of colored books on the table by the front door. Blue, violet, magenta and green were the covers, each with its own stack ten or twenty books high. I had no idea what I was looking at.

They were completely different from any book I had ever seen before. They had neither

ISBN number, nor UPC code, and no Library of Congress classification. They must have been secretly printed, I thought. I had a sense they were controversial, that the author was being cautious.

I opened the first one under a watchful, rocking eye: Right Use of Will was the title, received by Ceanne de Rohan. I began to read the introduction. I felt doubtful and shocked by the suggestion, immediately revealed on the first page, that this was a divinely inspired text. Even more shocking was the immediate discussion of the equal divinity of desire and vision, emotion with spirit, Feminine with Masculine. I read further, stopping on one sentence to rest: “The Will of God is not in opposition to the will of the individual.” Here was something new. I could feel it. Here I felt an acknowledgment of what I had begun to sense, that inner awareness and desire were the authentic, even divine keys to living. This inner quality surpassed in sensitivity and discernment even the greatest rational systems of belief and authority, whether scientific, intellectual or religious. Here also was an embrace of the divinity of passion, something my experience of love, music, dance, and poetry had revealed as ultimately undeniable truths.

I was thrilled, but still skeptical, and broke. We talked about money some as I wondered aloud with him regarding the price of the book and my modest circumstances as a traveling musician. It wasn't long before I walked out of Quadrant Books with the blue title, reading it as I walked down the street to my parents' car, parked beneath the tall conifers on the street corner by a small park.

I returned again and again to the bookstore over the next days, months and years. Sometimes we would talk for hours, Ivan Abrams and I. Our conversation flowed back and forth from the philosophical to the practical, winding around or weaving in the stream of interesting friends and curious customers. Sometimes Ivan would consult his beads, using them as a pendulum for divination. He spoke to the beads by name, calling them “Crazy,” and laughing often. I wondered about him sometimes, but soon realized his behavior was an act that quickly dismissed the insincere. Soon I learned the full name of his oracle, “Crazy Horse,” and that it was the spirit of the great Lakota Chief Ivan he invoked. When Ivan croaked Crazy's name, swinging the beads wildly in front of his wide bespectacled eyes, I felt as if anything was possible, and that was the mood I most desired: infinite possibility, true freedom, inner guidance.

Ivan often consulted Crazy on my behalf, reading again and again that I did in fact have delightful options in the future that my station in life and existing beliefs seemed to deny me. One day, I came into the bookstore and found a book called ET 101, describing itself as a handbook for people who felt an affinity with extra-terrestrial life. It humorously and sympathetically engaged the reader on a number of subjects relevant to the problems of Earth's culture today, in particular Western Civilization and its brainchild “globalization.” Ivan had this book on the table with the colorful ones, so I knew it was significant to him. It is a short book, and I read it quickly, enthusiastic about the prospect of collaboration with any people who might have some power to help me personally on my quest for understanding, and to help Earth with Her struggle with war,

environmental destruction, cultural degradation, and generalized suffering.

Beginning very early, in grade school, the question of UFOs and ETs had been the subject of much speculation among my friends, especially after the release of the films *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and *ET*. At that point, I began a careful investigation that lasted years. Even though Crazy and Ivan both claimed I would be staying in Aspen – and I was tempted – the gravity of another unfinished destiny eventually swept me back east and to University.



The harsh reality of modern life swept back over the young scholar like a wave of nightmares. He found some solace in the forest and among independent-minded off-campus colleagues. Studying the great naturalists like Thoreau, Leopold, Muir and Rachel Carson, his still childlike and innocent soul screamed with fury and indignation at the history of industrial poison and its institutionalization by industries such as agriculture and medicine.

He begins to learn of corruption in high places. His heart and soul are torn with disbelieving rage and heartbreak. Another war breaks out under the guidance of the same forces to which he had dedicated his passionate speech in favor of increased nuclear and conventional weapons deployment.

But this time, he holds a candle at the downtown vigil, and his photograph at the evening protest appears on the front page of the local newspaper.

Final exams bring waves of questions; purpose, meaning, direction, all is confusion. Why is he studying this material? What can be done about these cultural and environmental tragedies? The mechanical attitudes of the other students, their robotic speech and hurried competitiveness strains his heart to breaking. On the eve of the final exam for Environmental Science and Policy 101, he is lying up in his loft uneasy. He falls asleep suspended between the Earth and the Stars, and reaches out...



Chapter 10: The Ambassador and the Ancient Ones



That night, the Ambassador came for me. He was dressed in full blue regalia, sky blue cloak and pointed wizard's hat. From my room on Old Campus, just across from the New Haven Green, we rose upon a beam of light into a spaceship perched high above Earth.

The ship was large. We docked and then proceeded down a long windowed corridor. Outside, the peaceful, pleasant and happy spirits of Space sweetly twinkled. I was delighted to be with the Ambassador, though we never spoke a word. I was as comfortable with him as a child with a dear grandfather. We spoke inwardly; I my heart leaping, my eyes beseeching. As he walked, looking forward, he would bestow upon me a glance from time to time, with a reassuring quiet smile tempering his own joy and camaraderie.

At the end of the corridor we reached the deck and control room. Floor to ceiling windows ringed a roughly circular multilayered bridge deck. It was apparently completely unoccupied, and still. There was a round dark table in a lower alcove off to the side to which the Ambassador now ushered me. As we walked through the bridge room and down the steps to the alcove, my heart soared with jubilation and anticipation of what I didn't know. Reaching the table, the Ambassador bid me take a seat, any seat, and then retired to one side, standing, hands at his side. I looked to him for guidance, "What am I supposed to do here?" like when you look at your Mom or Dad in the doctor's office. But a secret smile and a barely perceptible gesture just pointed me back to the table, a happy and mischievous twinkle in his eye.

So I looked back at the round black table like a child seated at a birthday party in an amusement park, and then slowly, slowly, I began to perceive them.

None of the other chairs at the table was actually empty, or had they just arrived?

In the space above each chair there was now a visible and palpable presence; a cloudy, ghostlike ancient awareness that was relating to me. My excitement grew as I felt the warm soul and light spirit of these spirits around the table with me. I looked again at the Ambassador, wondering what was going to happen next, what was I doing here, what was expected of me? But again, he motioned my attention to the circle, and I turned back to the ancient ones.

We sat there together for a moment more in happy silence, and then in response to my silent questions, an Idea finally formed in my mind.

All at once, I knew what we were there for, and what we were going to do.

Together we began pronouncing the syllable of an ancient rhythmic laugh. On the one word, "Ha," we let our voices dance, deep, but joyous, precise but musical, and continuous. Then the vision of the ship receded, melting into space, as if we were all falling through its windows.

We were still together, but soon only the laughter and their presence remained as we flew through the Cosmos. When the light of the stars joined in our song, I finally understood.

The stars are also the laughter
The laughter is the stars.
Swirling and blending with each other,
Brightly streaking, down through space and time,

We soar – as rays of light.

Pulsating,
Constantly dancing,
We are aware of each other.

We are within each other.

Falling, flying, I came back to Earth.

On waking I was jubilant and restored. I walked with purpose to the final exam in Environmental Science and Policy. I answered the straightforward questions readily, but the last essay question was philosophical and got me thinking. Soon I wanted only to write down the dream. So I did.

For the final paper in the same class, I submitted a taped series of poetic observations set to music regarding why environmental problems could not be solved through science or legislation. At root the issues are spiritual and concern the essence of the relationship between Humanity, the Divine and the Earth. I called for a spiritual reawakening to animate science, law and policy. I was grateful to my teacher, who did not punish me for refusing to write a standard paper. In fact she pleaded with me to work within the University system and by extension the international consensus worldview. But my soul cried out for freedom, and there was no solution to the problems to be found at this so-called University. Shortly thereafter I left, never to return.



Chapter 11: Intending to Fly



It was in Australia, I think, around the time my brother John and I were learning to skydive, that the vision of flying by intention came to me. It was brief and modest, appearing simply and just never leaving. This intentionality becomes very important when it has to do with healing. For without cultivated intention, some healing is just not possible.

It had a way about it, this vision, as if it was in conversational response to our flight training. I lay comfortably in a sort of rustic but pleasant basement room. A wordless voice came to me and began to help me adjust my body awareness, through suggestion, in an increasingly meditative but active way.¹ As my intentional awareness increased throughout my body, it slowly began to lift me off the ground, until although I was still “lying” on my back, I was actually lying on nothing, in midair. At this point, a brief confusion set in as I contemplated how to move without any connection to the ground on which to pivot. Then the wordless voice reappeared, instructing me to use the same force of intention to move my body in space that I had been using to move awareness into my body. I tried out the idea, and to my delight found that I was able to intentionally roll over and begin to move forward and backward in the room, still hovering. I was fully flying in the manner of superman. You can imagine my happiness.



Today is the day we fly, alone. John went up first. He did well, making it back to the runway fine, gliding down fast and tumbling, but with no issues. He was jubilant. I was scared out of my mind as I followed the instructors into the tiny airplane and up to ten thousand feet. I remember going up, the sky, the plane, the noise of the engine, but it was mostly drowned out by my feelings which were screaming at me that I was crazy. I had to admit they were right, but I had always wanted to fly, and well, here I had my chance.

I remember when my trainer opened the door on the plane. Of course, I'd never been in a plane with an open door before. I had childhood memories of adults talking about how bad it would be if a door opened on an airplane. Right while I'm trying to deal with those memories, the instructor is vigorously encouraging me to step out onto the strut of the airplane. Now that is completely insane. I'm feeling a bit sluggish for some reason. Somehow, I manage to instruct my body to get out of my seat, through the door into the wind, and out onto the wing support with the instructor and cameraman. I am using all my concentration to focus on the procedure confirming that I was OK and ready to jump. My instructors are watching me intently for danger signs. I manage to run through the sign language, with the air, the noise, the speed, the goggles, and the feelings. Then there's some kind of a sign, and that's it, you're ready to jump, and immediately

stretch yourself out into a huge arch, arms and legs extended in a spread eagle.

I jumped.

As I fell away from the airplane, I held onto my spread eagle with every ounce of consciousness that I had. But as my speed increased downwards, and the fact that I was free-falling through the air spread throughout my awareness, I'm afraid for at least a second or so, the world went a little dark. There was just too much physical sensation to be aware of anything else.

Knowing the urgency, I recovered full consciousness as quickly as I could, and managed to stabilize the spread eagle properly. I enthusiastically met the wildly smiling eyes of both the cameraman and the instructor who were falling with me in a triangular formation. Giving them the special kind of thumbs up that doesn't flip you over and send you flying off into space, I was able to check my altimeter properly just as I'd been trained. Down, down, down we went. I began to get comfortable and started looking at the Earth coming up from below, trying to get a handle on the impressions, trying to see the beauty, to find something memorable. It was beautiful, wild and free and all of that, but I had a funny feeling there was, well, nothing to grab on to. That all changed at 4,000 feet when I said goodbye to the instructors – who fall farther before pulling – and grabbed the parachute handle to deploy.

Everything worked just fine. And then, there I was, dangling safely in the sky over the river and the Australian bush. I settled comfortable and smiling into my harness. I took in the fine view for a moment, and then tried to see where the instructors were. Their parachutes were quite a distance below me, and heading towards the runway where we were supposed to land. I pulled the handle of the steerable parachute, turning to follow the instructors and relaxed, looking around a bit more.

But all of a sudden, I felt like there was something wrong.

The wind was blowing me the other way. I kept pointing myself towards the runway, but falling straight down. I wasn't making any over land progress at all. Below me there was a river...and power lines. It didn't take long to make up my mind. I needed to point my parachute towards something else. After holding course towards the runway for as long as wisely advisable, I finally pulled the handles on the chute and veered off to the right, towards a meadow beside the river. This course seemed favorable. I soon felt I would find a safe place to land. I didn't worry for a minute that the instructors were going to wonder what the hell I was doing. I figured they would do what I was doing the minute they saw themselves hanging from a powerline over a river.

Childhood sailing experience was helpful in understanding the wind. I had veered off it to get to the meadow, then rounded and steered back upwind as the ground approached, moving rather more quickly than I expected. As I held the chute into the breeze, I pulled both straps to brake in time with the wind, like a bird adjusting its wings before landing. Beneath the slight

upward lift of the braking parachute and the kitelike effect of heading it into the wind, I touched down, bending my knees slightly, without a single step in any direction.

I never felt more accomplished in my life. Falling had always been such a terror for me. But on that day, I landed perfectly, like a bird who did it every day.²



Chapter 12: Jumping off Quetzalcoatl Bridge



There once was a sea of glory. Fantastic joy, misery and desperation.

I traveled extensively, living alone with my blanket, backpack and guitar. Love and music were my only offering. Answerless questions, triumphant spiritual awareness, and devastating inner conflict raged against a world apparently at war with the essential, ennobling aspects of God, Nature and Humanity.

My vision then was marked by a straightforward feeling of empowered freedom. Although it emerged from tortured struggle, it moved to optimistic transformation so quickly as to leave my youthful angst incredulous that I could be restored to psychological health and spiritually renewed by so brief an encounter.

My family's yearly movements wove a domestic web over the Northeastern United States. Strands of that web stretch out over the migratory reaches of my parents and theirs, bringing us regularly in transit over that magnificent estuary just to the northeast of Manhattan Island. The corner of Long Island Sound, called Throgs Neck, unites Earth with Sea and Sky, Humanity with Nature, and the four main boroughs of New York City.

If you cross by car into Long Island, on either the Whitestone or the Throgs Neck bridge, that majestic sight reveals itself as you span the Sound. Such a panoramic encounter between civilization and the natural world moves even this skeptic of the modern to exclaim: "Look, a civilization lives here!" The noise and the stress, the coldness and the cruelty, all are muted for a moment.

In their majesty and artistry,
Their strength and ingenuity,
Humanity's creations
Vie for God's attention...

With the sailing and the sensual,
The sun on rippling water,

Curving shorelines call like seagulls to the soul.

I remember no surprise at finding myself on this bridge, intending to jump, ready to die, at least to the past, to that unbearable weight of despair. The hopelessness of infinite, incomprehensible and inescapable self-hatred *I* could not acknowledge, so I could not name it, so I could not feel it, and so I could not be healed.

I blame no one but myself for my condition. I did not hate myself so much as my inability to resolve the conflict that kept raging between my response to the world and the world's response to me. I simply could not reconcile the feelings I had in response to modern life and its expectations. I wanted the world to change, and it wanted to change me. We fought like buck caribou in Alaska, whose horns lock accidentally and cannot be unlocked, killing both parties slowly. Their skulls remain locked on the tundra for biologists to find; their film reels spooling out visions in the darkness of a child's classroom.

I had never really noticed the majesty of this place before, nor experienced it as the crossroads of Heaven and Earth, Humanity and Nature that it has become.

As I walked onto the bridge, I was filled with youthful nonchalance and a kind of steely resolve to express myself through daring. Holden Caulfield³, Harold, and Maude⁴ were my soul's companions. I felt the weight of despair and the fury of misunderstanding like a kind of distant battle from which I had retired some time since. I was not resolved to die, but to challenge myself and the world. I was resolved to survive the normally fatal, to experience the miraculous within the tragic. I would prove courageously spiritual despite a world of hopeless surrender to secular and mechanical power conventions, despite a world of ugliness and hatefully enforced limits to love and freedom.

As I stepped to the edge of the bridge, I paid little mind to the passing cars, who were equally uninterested in me as I approached the precipice. Before me, I began to see the beauty of sea and sky emerge from the remains of my nightmare.

Without fear or fanfare I jumped forward into a dive. Accelerating towards the water my only thought was a wordless question: "Now what?" It was with complete lack of eventual foreknowledge, total ignorance, and only a blind if hopeful curiosity that I hit the water at great speed. So imagine my surprise and delight when instead of crumpling into deformed death and an agony of nothingness, I found myself elegantly penetrating the surface, arms extended above my head, splashing gently into the blue-green watery depths full of life. I was joyfully and happily swimming with accomplishment.

I soon noticed that my speed underwater remained very fast even after the momentum of the dive had dissipated. Wondering about this, as I undulated quickly, turning blue gray, I found that I had become... a dolphin.

At this point I began to relax into the experience. I had found that the mystery – what I did not know would happen – was turning out better than I could possibly have expected. I turned my nose up towards the surface. I was planning a delightful breach and to soar through the air before diving back in. From below, I could see the sunlit, mottled surface of the water, coming nearer and nearer as my tail beat furiously towards a good thirty miles and hour. Breaching, water flying into the sunlight, dazzled and soaring, water streaming from my sides, I looked at the trees and shoreline of the estuary below me. The Bridge stood quietly above me under the Sun.⁵

And what is this now? Yet another surprise filled me with wonder, as instead of falling back into the water, I continued upwards towards the Sun. The sprays of water falling from my sides turned to feathers, and slowly I recognized with astonishment that I had become Quetzalcoatl, the Rainbow Bird God of the Aztec jungle.

Slowly it dawned upon me. I had been granted a wish.

I reached for understanding now to allow my dreams and desires to feel the support of this mysterious vision. My awareness lived in two places at once. From inside the bird I was feeling the silver and golden, sunlit drops of water falling from my rainbow feathers. At my side, in midair, a human being flew alongside me, looking at the Quetzal he had become. As I looked at myself, embodying all that I had dreamed of experiencing – grace in water, glory in flying color – I felt happy and thankful, reassured and nourished. Flying this way towards the sun, I awoke restored again by vision, and have lived on its blessing all these years.

But on waking I felt as if the journey under my reappearing burdens had barely begun. Inwardly I still wondered, could the more difficult wishes still be fulfilled? After all, at that time I could barely even feel the vague outlines of *The Great Wish* in my depths, the fulfillment of which will bring unchallengeable, eternal joy, evolving powerfully but gently into a bright loving future for all that will last forever.

An ardent bird watcher since the age of twelve, I had made a study of the birds of the world. I had settled on the Quetzal of the Central American rainforest as the Holy Grail of birds. Dr. Schoelling, my seventh grade biology teacher, had inducted a few of his enthusiastic students into the cathedral of birdwatching among the great trees of Central Park. Especially early on chilly fall mornings we took binoculars along the paths, learning of behavior and migration, but experiencing mostly the delight of wild flight and freedom among nature's sun worshipping giants. Bouncing cheerfully along the ground, singing for love and joy, nibbling at this and that, dreaming of the nests of spring, what could be better?



Chapter 13: At Home Among the Stars

No longer able to screen out the catastrophic images of war and environmental destruction appearing all around me, it was increasingly obvious that I was ill equipped to respond to them successfully. Although I yearned to learn the solution to the problem, my soul also began to wonder if Earth was really my home. I began to imagine there was some other place from which I had come, where things were better, and to which I might someday return. The world of fantasy in which I had lived as a child included this theme. Reading the literature on the subject, it became clear that the relationship between human beings and people from other star systems or dimensions is a rich if controversial topic. Troubled in particular by the question of spiritual responsibility for the fate of Earth, but feeling powerless and alienated here, my deep feelings appealed wordlessly to the dream oracle. I just really wanted to go see them and feel them for myself.

Sometime during those long dark days, the Ambassador returned for me. He welcomed me aboard warmly and without fanfare. He was still dressed all in blue, and conducted me to the bridge with its massive windows onto space. This ship was smaller, with no wings. There was just one large central bridge designed in a kind of circular geometric pattern with some angles. We stood silently and straight, staring out into the depths. This time, we were alone. Again we never spoke, exchanging only empathetic gestures and glances. From the first, I knew we were going home, as I imagined it, but I wouldn't let myself really believe it. I wanted there to be at least some surprise to accompany my jubilation. I watched with a strange mixture of mirth and nostalgic sadness, as space and stars moved past the great transparent windows.

And then, we were there, the various stars of that constellation bright before me in three dimensions. From the Earth, they all appear to be in the same location, at the same depth. But as we arrived there, some of the stars were closer, some further away, some slightly above, some slightly below. They are known here as the Pleiades, and in some part of myself, I suspect they may have once been my home. There were no planets there to land on, no civilizations perfected and beautiful. It was the quality and character of the light in that region that made me feel so happy there.

The Ambassador and I stood in silent awe on the deck. We stared long and loving at those great shining orbs, friendliness and humor their essence. And then I was good. Reassured, but ready for my still only half-understood destiny on Earth, I let the Ambassador know I was ready to return. With a strange mixture of new courage and loneliness I returned to Earth, seeking anew among the dying embers of old paradigms for that elusive capacity to heal even Earth, the most embattled because most prized Queen of Creation.

Chapter 14: Molten Lizard



Long ago, I lived on an island in the Western Oceans in the way the Polynesians of today used to live. We built stone temples similar to those of our neighbors in Southeast Asia which were not so different from those of Mesoamerica and the Ancient Mediterranean. This island culture was broadly dispersed over a vast area. We were comfortable in our relations with the world and with each other. A mood of festive peace hung over our island among many. Long warm days brought families and culture-seekers to the temple spa complex where I lived.

The volcanic mountain peaks in the distance were verdant and green but for the jagged black lava at the summit. On a long flat plain facing those peaks, the pools of the spa – blue and tiled with mosaics – were laid out over some three hundred yards from the steps of the temple to the edge of the forest. Picture this. You are standing on the portico of the temple, walking down the stairs. You see before you a kind of broad, tree-lined boulevard with rectangular pools cut into the tiles heading out towards the jungle and distant mountains.

It was a familiar place for me. Like any public pool in summer, it was usually teeming with life and children. Elders visited and lunched in the park-like surroundings, coming and going from the temple and nearby market.

The day had begun this way, clear and sunny. The sky had that perfect balmy temperature as usual. But there was a barely perceptible ominous feeling in the air. As the day went on, the pools and boulevard emptied with no explanation.

I was a pool attendant, attached to the temple, and it was normal for me to be working there alone. I was still a boy, but on the cusp of manhood. No family did I rejoin, for with their blessing, I had dedicated my life to the temple. As the clouds gathered and the people hurried off home, it was I who was called to stand guard. Standing on the boulevard, looking towards the jungle, my alertness turned to alarm as great crashing sounds splintered the air from within the jungle.

Watching as the sounds came closer, I caught glimpses of its scaly head through the trees, as it made its approach to the far end of the plaza boulevard. All I could think of was the legends. So they were right all along, I mused. A single, giant, toothy lizard, looking more like Tyrannosaurus Rex than a dragon, emerged at full height over the pools, swinging its head this way and that as if looking for something.

There was no one there but me. I could not take my eyes off the beast. I was earnestly seeking to permanently dispel the annoying doubt that growing up in our culture had implanted. So there is such a thing as a dragon, I marveled, and I was looking right at one.

This dragon did not seem to have very good eyesight. It never seemed to notice me standing there. Instead, it acted somehow aggravated by the oblivious carefree attitude of the now long gone pool-goers. It roared and snapped at their ghosts as it stomped ponderously in that uniquely reptilian stutter step towards the temple. Along the way it made sure to roar fire a couple of times, but there was nothing on that stone plaza to burn. I never did see its wings.

I was curiously unafraid, but foolish I was not. Well before I expected its beady bad eyes to catch sight of me, I had swiftly retreated to the temple, where the other denizens had gathered.

At this point we all felt somewhat secure in the inner sanctum of that great stone fortress. But what had started out as brave curiosity now turned to real concern as the hot blasts from the dragon began to sear through the temple pillars. Why it was so angry, I did not know, but this was clearly an all-out attack. With the rest of the temple dwellers, I made my way down to the ninth basement where under ordinary circumstances we would have felt safe. But something was terribly wrong with our assumptions. As I stood there looking at the walls of our ninth basement shelter, I began to feel the beginnings of real fear. The walls were beginning to shudder with the blasts...and they were getting warm.

Although I had a good familiarity with our culture, I also had some type of individual relationship with the events. While the miserable temple folk cowered behind me, I stood in front before the wall facing the dragon's blasts. I watched that wall intently, as if it were going to reveal secrets the consequences of which had no power over me. As I watched in fascination mixed with horror, I began to see what was happening. The volcano of the island had become as one with the dragon. Together they were showing us their power, roaring fire from both their mouths. What I had done wrong to be there I did not know. I was mostly deaf to what was going on behind me. I was focused on that wall, the meaning of the forces involved, and the extent to which the dragon and the volcano were really willing and able to destroy our huddled humanity, there in the depths of that stone supposed shelter.

The distant roaring of the dinosaur dragon merged with a kind of ubiquitous, quaking Earth motion. At last the stones of the ninth basement began to glow orange, and melt. I realized She had the power and intent to kill us all by fire, and woke up to escape the inevitable. I was then, and still am confirmed to Her cause. Whatever we were and are still doing to the Earth, we can be sure She has the power to destroy us. It's not hard to see why She would want to either is it? If you let yourself feel things from Her point of view.

Maybe if we do just that with good will, we will learn what it takes to avoid such a fate this time.



Chapter 15: The New Pillar



At the back of the apartment, down the corridor past the kitchen, there is a small blue room set for dinner. The table and chairs are white, and a deep blue couch is set against the far wall. The children of the family and their governess are taking Sunday supper there before school starts again. It is winter. The peppery pea soup with chopped hot dogs makes them comfortable. Outdoors, the dark side of the apartment building forest looms. Through the window see the bleak walls.

A television shines forth a gentle rhythm of Walt Disney and Wild Kingdom. Jacques Cousteau and his colleagues swim underwater. There is an occasional seasonal special. Charlie Brown, Kris Kringle.

Today, the pictures floating from the screen show scenes from a history special. Ancient temples and blue-ringed islands parade past to an enchanting narration. Suddenly, disaster. The entire island sinks beneath the waves. The sounds of crying and screaming, doomed women and children hit the boy's soul with awakening force. The narrator intones the tragic tale of a place called Atlantis. Sunk beneath the waves, she left behind a vast mythological legacy that drives professional scientist and laypeople alike to Herculean labors in search of her true nature.

The boy is only six or so, but he has long since stopped eating. One might imagine him holding his spoon frozen in midair. The sights and sounds of the television trail off. An involuntary barrier in his mind breaks down. He experiences an insistent but unbelievable memory. It was as if he were learning of his own ancestry for the first time...as if the ghost of a family member had come revealing his true birthright. This ghost spoke only in the language of the soul. Translated she might have said something like this:

“My dear child, I am sorry to grieve you with these memories. I can see how terrible you still feel about it. I know how you wish ardently to prevent the catastrophe that killed your loved ones and scattered your people over the Earth. But don't worry too much. In time you will understand...” With his spoon still in the air, the memory of this story emblazoned its seal effortlessly upon the vaulted ceiling of his mind.

As if in shock, the boy returned to his cold pea soup. A million moments slid by unnoticed as he pondered what he had seen. In his heart he longed to change the ending. He wished to make amends for whatever it had been. He wished to rescue his sisters and brothers, friends and family. More than anything he desired to heal whatever rift there was between Humanity and the Gods that alone could account for such a disaster. Like Rip van Winkle his memory slept.



He awoke alone inside the Great Temple.

A dark blue light enveloped him as he emerged from the glowing time tunnel and walked out onto the portico. He looked up at a row of massive stone pillars. Like giants they walked in a line out of sight. Night had fallen upon the Island Mountain.

Stars there may have been – in the distance out over the ocean – but those he could not see. Tonight he was preoccupied by the misty soundless voice of the great temple and her pillars. Standing there he listened to the silent stones. They told a moody tale. There were bygone years of glory followed by failed attempts to reach the ears of God. There were stiff commandments and violent sacrifice. The weathered stones also spoke of loneliness and longing. They spoke of a hard darkness in the hearts of the priests and the people. They finished their tale with the story of the exhausting and futile effort of generations to establish a sense of perfect permanence in geometric step, column, wall, vault and roof.

As the young man listened – his mouth slightly open – the temple began to speak of a new way forward. New hope had come with a youth whose criticism of the old did not fail to provide an offering. It was this new offering that the temple proudly displayed to the lone figure. My tunic was lit up by the glow from the column nearest at hand. For there, at the top of the steps to my right, stood the new central column of the portico facing sea and sky. The voice of the temple began to sing slowly. Grandfather and Grandmother took turns singing to their new grandchild. Turning their attention to me, standing in joyful awe at the sight of this shining pillar, they asked me what I thought of their new grandchild.

I didn't speak, but rested my eyes joyfully on the cylinder of light before me. From portico to roof, this *new* column was completely translucent and shone with an inner light. Inside it swam every color of fish imaginable, alone and in small schools, amongst innumerable corals and seaweeds. Colorful jellyfish hung and undulated amongst the golden tones within this column of turquoise water. I might have gazed at that vision forever.

Off the coast of Ecuador, a young boy snorkels with his mother in a protected lagoon. Mask and fins on, he dives again and again among the iridescent fish through the wavy underwater light. Onboard the old ferry boat used by the expedition to the Galapagos, marine biologist Jack Grove took a liking to the shy but enthusiastic boy. A beam of friendship began to connect the two. Jack tried to hold the boy's future open. The sensitivity increase of the friendship frightened the youth. He retreated back into his shell and to a path of power that dominated his young mind. But he buried the new key in the treasure chest of his memory, there in the sands of the Galapagos Islands.

Chapter 16: The Golden Words



It was a moment of my life when I was most in need of guidance.

Upon my arrival, some of the affected citizens escorted me to the scene of the disaster. It was bewildering and dramatic, if not exactly surprising. As we came down to the young shoreline, in what is now Arizona or New Mexico, we could see the mountains receding into the Ocean, no sandy beach yet at all. But the really curious affair was the sight of what was once a suburban development. At various depths underwater, its inhabitants were milling about trying to find a new normal. Close to shore, some houses were mostly visible, farther out you could see only the second floor. Finally, there was just the barely visible rooftops, and then the vastness of the Ocean horizon.

The waves onshore were placid, as if the winds had not yet accustomed themselves to forming high breakers there yet. The sunken mountain range created a kind of breakwater and bay. My guides took me onboard a small motorboat from which we viewed the underwater houses up close. I was fascinated by that these people were still living there at all, moving from second floor window to boat with an effort at normalcy. They were speaking into their cellphones and trying to get back to business as usual. I had an uneasy feeling they were not getting the message, and then I had had enough. I asked my guides to take me back to shore, and got out onto the dusty pebbled beach still wondering what was really going on.

From the beach, I set off exploring inland. By and by, I came to a lovely old village with cobblestone type houses nestled along a dirt main street in a sparsely wooded valley. I wandered along the strangely empty main street towards the end. After the last house, the road turned into a track that petered out into a mixed hardwood forest of siberian elm and aspen trees that climbed up the rolling side of a rounded foothill.

There, where the sidewalk ended, a track wound through the detritus that accumulates at the edges of human settlement, and made its way through patchy trees. At the foot of the hill, the trees closed in around the path, some of them evergreen, and the coolness of the north slope greeted me.

Coming down that hill to meet the wanderer in those parts you will find a dry stream bed that rounds stones and exposes the roots of nearby trees until it meanders off along the base of the hill. There, at the crossroads between hill and town, this dry stream bed beckons to those who have made it all the way to the outskirts. Step from the footpath out of town onto the gravelly stream bed at this point. Here the paths of people and nature are one.

I ambled upwards, peaceful and curious, over small rock and root formations. Dusty brown and grey tree trunks were my constant companions as we left the shady green foot of the

north slope.

“Where does this path lead?” I wondered unconcerned.

As the trees began to thin, I could see the ridgeline coming closer.

Cresting the top, the pleasant view of an alpine meadow opened before me, the valley in the distance. My eye was immediately drawn down and to my right towards an old stone construction of human hands.

The path leading towards it along the ridge was well-traveled. It led through bright tall grass and wildflowers until I noticed, almost hidden in the meadow, beneath a thick layer of shore to shore algae, a pond. It was a small reservoir cased in the lovely dark stone masonry that had first caught my eye.

Stopping there in my tracks, I stared at the fluffy green carpet of algae on the pool’s surface, wondering at its amazing aliveness. Mixed feelings of dread and disgust, delight and wonder flowed through me as I pondered the mystery of this lonely place which somehow felt so inhabited and aware. Eerie it was. I felt a thrill of mystery and adventure.

Slowly I continued down the shoulder of the mountain. The path followed the edge of the reservoir. As it sloped downwards, the height of the stone embankment rose such that the pool could be supported on the edge of the mountain. It extended out over the slope this way, a kind of castle of water perched on a hillside. Beginning humbly, the rock wall of the reservoir slowly climbed one foot, then two, four, six. Then it was well above my head, the now moist footpath still descending alongside it. Down down, down, went the path, up, up, up sprang the wall, until finally at the far tall end of the reservoir’s foundation, the wall containing the algae-filled pool was twenty or thirty feet high, large stones finely fit together.

The view out towards the young ocean from here would have been lovely, I’m sure, but I had eyes only for the door in the wall. At the deep end of the reservoir, I was jolted alert by the presence, of a large arched doorway leading to the foundation of the pool’s structure. A deep but inviting blackness, swirled in that doorway, beckoning me onwards to adventure and knowledge. Of what, I had to know.

Stepping cautiously over the threshold, I entered the moist chamber. Stone-only construction reigned. The pressure of tons of dark water squeezed seeps into the cracks. Drips faintly plopped. Even in the dim light I could see glistening wet walls.

Uncertain but curious, I stood below the great pool of living green water. I let my eyes adjust to the evening ambience in the chamber. There were a few other rooms connected to each other by arched doorways, but only one thing for me now. There, at the back of the vault, in a small room separated from the entrance hall by an arched doorway was a glowing arcadian screen in an altar of unknown type.

I stepped forward to the console, but no video game was this. There, on the screen, a shifting panorama of stars and space swirled before my eyes. Where the joystick and buttons might be, there were instead two glowing panels. Biometric palm readers. The type used by the military to secure nuclear missile launch codes to the person of the President of the United States. I grabbed a key from my treasure chest. The Dead Zone. Psychic averts nuclear war through magical intervention in the future. I stepped to the altar, and placed my hands eagerly upon them, wondering, hopeful, intent.

On the screen – the scry – the stars danced in their places. A thread of light shot forward from my beneath hands in search of an answer. My signal, that thread of light shooting upwards to the heights of the Universe, sought the abode of the Great Spirit. Smoke climbs to the clouds from the peace pipe.

I stood there, waiting a moment. The ribbon of pulsating light had disappeared into the beyond. A breath, four heartbeats or so, and back down again. The ribbon dropped like a bright waterfall or a bowling ball, returning home from the end of the lane.

Twinkling it returned, brightening the stars in its path, and then it flowed into shapely golden letters hovering in space on the screen. Ten gifts it gave me, words I wish I could remember. Of only one can I be sure. At the top of the list was the guidance I had sought. Filled with love and understanding, the words: “Do Art Slowly,” glowed bold and brightly as if smiling.



Chapter 17: Gestapo Escape



Way at the end of the Orange Street neighborhood, just before you get to the massive cliffs of East Rock, there is a small house that looks like a tiny chapel. Across the street from the old factory, now nicely remodeled, it sits in a pleasant row of well-kept houses and yards. The Mill River flows behind it, along the base of the Rock and into the Sound. Inside, a young man stares out the window of the downstairs music studio. Recording equipment, instruments and computers hum and glow, his headphones lie slack around his neck.

His eyes are far away. He puts the headphones on and listens to the new mix. The music carries him away. Out of nowhere, he finds himself singing of the dream.



During that atrocious period of war and insanity known as World War II – a solid proof of God’s imperfection if only one in a long line – there was a boy who lived in a part of Europe controlled by the Nazis. His town brooded under occupation. It shifted uneasily along the sloping shin of a lovely foothill which bent down to dip its toe in a large body of water. And its tormented spirit sought anxiously to console her families, whose desperation was endlessly distressing.

The boy was yet young. He knew little of battle or politics. But he gathered much from the hushed atmosphere and the uniforms, the curfew hours and the long silences around the dinner table. His soul revolted quietly, and he yearned to break the spell.

Down in the street, a valley of sad but lovely townhouses, we see him motivated by an authentic courage untainted by inordinate self-consciousness. At its root there is a desire to restore a brightness to his friends’ faces that he still fondly remembers. Lost in thought, he glides home from school, slowed to a turtle’s pace.



“What can I do?” The quiet fury brings tears to my eyes. I shove clenched fists deeper into my pockets. “I want us to be free. We must break this spell!”

I have no words for the despair that plagues my thoughts and feelings. I speak to no one

in particular. But somehow my prayer wafts upwards over the grey cobblestone streets to the ears of God. As my prayer arrives in Heaven, an orange light begins to glow at the end of a tunnel between myself and Paradise. I startle, looking at the tunnel. Through this tunnel flow visions of a happily bustling village, Nature in bloom, with friendship by her side among the citizens. As this bridge between the worlds docks in my heart, I look up to find that the sun has come out, bright and orange in the southwestern sky. A mood of happy expectancy floods the town, parting the haze of war, settling into the soul of the place. With amazement and joy, I realize that a magical transformation of the world is happening through the prayer. I had never been sure it was really possible. The vital forces of happy change stream into the very stones of the buildings. An almost audible tone of music plays. Redemption, deliverance, joy, they infuse the air like scented mist, as if the Cosmos were tuning her orchestra.

Dashed to pieces! The rising tide of transformation turns on a dime before the ghoulish wail of a military siren. I startle from my prayer and stand stock still in terror. Something about the sound of the siren pierces me. A pack of fiendish hounds run by wraiths were seeking the breach between the worlds, the source of the forbidden light.

A lump like a rock travels the length of my spine as it dawns on me for whom the sirens wail. I move my feet forward finally, unglued and striding. Pace after pace lengthens until I am in a dead run for home through the backest of back alleyways. The wind whips by, my backpack is light as a feather, but there are blocks to go, and the sirens keep getting louder.



The SS and Gestapo were among the first military orders to practice advanced psychological and occult warfare techniques. This is all well known now. Then, it was pure terror. As a young boy schooled in the basic separation of spirit and matter prevailing in the Europe of the time, the contemplation of a force capable of identifying the geographic location of an emergent emotional force for good was pure black magic. This was pure evil, too powerful to imagine, much less oppose.

How could they sense it? How could they know where I was? Why did I have this dreadful feeling of being hunted by a demon that knew my location by some kind of psycho-magnetic radar?

Around a table in the town's occupied central government building, black uniformed officers with eagle eyes scanned maps of the town for the source of the revolutionary feeling. The senior officer was close cropped. Focused rage lased from thin wire spectacles as he felt his gaze drawn to a location on the map. Barking orders to his driver, he swept his black trenchcoat from its hook and piled into a black military jeep. The growling mechanical beast set off in pursuit of the young boy, whose magnetically charged features had etched their terrified lines into the inner eye of the officer.



Breathing, running, breathing, running, I burst through the door of our three-story townhouse, high on the hill on the outer edge of town. I shout out a warning to my family who stare confused and frightened after me as I vault the steps towards my third floor sanctuary. I cast a backwards glance down the stairs and notice that my mother is home alone today. I throw my backpack down and bounce anxiously around the room, wondering desperately what to do.

The sound of military cars with sirens wailing tells me the time has come for action. I run back downstairs to the top of the second floor landing as car doors slam shut. Boots clatter in step on the cobblestones. I try to warn my mother again, but no words come. A silent request, I appeal to her with my eyes: “Don’t let them in, please don’t let them in!” But she is already at the door, peering through the side windows, wringing her hands, wide-eyed with fright and anger.

The knock on the door comes, loud and terrifying. I give all my attention to my mother, trying to support her will to keep the door closed with my intention. After but a short pause for thought, she opens it, apparently hoping that normal faith and reason will win the day. It usually does for her.

But there *he* stands, dismissing faith and reason with a glance. His flowing black cape folds over a starched and belted black tunic. The red and white armband with insignia are in their usual location.

His gold-rimmed spectacles glint in the red glow of evening. My mother brings hand to mouth in terror at the sight of him. In my mind I hear her scolding me, “Ay, my dear son, what in God’s name have you brought to my door?!”

She cannot hear my answer because the man has begun to announce his business. His words strike like lightning:

“Madam, your son is wanted for questioning in connection with certain *resistance activities*.” My mother protests that I have no such affiliations, that I am just a boy, but the officer insists upon entering and asks her where I am. Mom tries to refuse him, but he grinds her down with a malignant stare that promises trouble, and sweeps past her helpless form.

As her shoulders fall, and she steps aside to let the officer and his lieutenants in, I feel a flash of uncontrollable fury at her willingness to give me away. Turning and leaping to my feet at the top of landing, I race up the second flight of stairs. I act on impulses which knew no solution, but move solely from an inner compass. I was determined above all to thwart the black uniformed officer, with his beaked cap and eyes that wrung innocent hearts like an assassin at the throat. Unthinkingly furious with my mother, my family, my community for allowing this evil in our midst, I pounded the stairs with flying hooves, unconcerned I had given away my presence to

the officer below.

Looking up at the sound, then back at my mother, he asks her where I am in that icy tone that pretends to rationality. With a mixture of sadness, impotence and anger at me for putting her in so difficult a situation – hoping that it will all be all right in the end – my mother motions up the stairs in defeat. The men in black swoop up the stairs in pursuit.

At this point, my emotions are bubbling up in me with wordless power I have no way to understand. I choose the bathroom at the top of the stairs as the most protected place I know, close and lock the door. I can hear the boots of the officers on the stairs as they climb towards me. I turn frantically around and around the small, white, delicate space in search of the strength and hope I need.

What could have brought me here, why had I been so certain of this location? Would my instincts fail me now? Was this the end? Such thoughts and desperation flood me as I look around the bathroom for escape. I catch sight of the window, and look out at the sleepy, sorrowing townhouses stepping down towards the water.

My village, my home, my people, what can I do?

Fury mounts as I hear the impatient knock on the door. In the clipped and harsh German of the militant North, the officer demands entry. I speak not a word, inwardly in full rebellion, and continue to gaze out the window at my beloved town. The shapes of the houses and trees, the contours of the architecture, these are my friends. Resolve, resolve, I urge myself on.

From an old place and deep – it appeared to come out of nowhere – I get the idea to walk to the window, and open it.

The enraged officer beats upon the door with loud raps, demanding and threatening. A lightning strike is building in response to his thwarted purpose.

Staring out the open window, I move into another mood. Peace begins to flow into my soul. I gaze out over the living landscape, no window to dim the sight. Fully exposed I breathe in the air. Constant banging on the door, thuds and orders barked to aides rain mercilessly upon my unhearing ears. I move as if floating upon a cloud. As the noise reaches a feverish pitch at the door, I step out the window and onto the ledge. An ancient smile steals over my lips. My heart is light and gay. As the door crashes open behind me, I jump and fly away, leaping from the ledge into the clear evening air.

Behind me, the officer storms into the empty bathroom, a bewildered look followed by infuriated defeat crosses his eyes. My mother follows closely behind, standing at the window aghast. Amazed and grieving, she watches as I soar over the rooftops towards the water. Triumphant, I fly into the evening.



I'm not going back, I smile to myself.
I will find the right way to resist.

I will learn the secrets of changing the world.
I will find the way to win peace.

I want to live a good life.
To live it without opposition.

And to share it...
With all the world.

So I still will.

Chapter 17: Spoken Bloom



“And she shows you where to look
among the garbage and the flowers...”

- Leonard Cohen

It was a wretched time. I wandered dejected through the streets: renting, evicted, homeless. There was no particular rhythm, but there was a kind of periperal wondering, “Why is the world this way?” and “What the hell should I do about it?” My own fate and that of the Abused of the Earth were converging fast. As I walked the streets late at night, subconscious thoughts spilled boldly into the shadows of Whalley Avenue.

Of friends I had few, but some were good. One would take me in sometimes. He had a lovely second floor apartment near the Church on quiet, tree-lined Lynwood Street. The successful and the Yale set lived there in picturesque townhouses. We would sit in his tastefully decorated living room, mostly comfortable; sometimes in silent contemplation. He had studied the Vedas, among other things, as had I. Our gazes sometimes locked in deep and revealing self-examination, as we worked to iron out our flaws.

He tried to help me, John Cavaliere did. He sought to find words of guidance born of compassion. He tried to encourage me to aspire again – to work towards something – to do anything at all other than accept this unending fall, like a cannonball crashing through deck after deck, floor after floor, beams and spars splintering and dangerous, nothing but dead weight inside.

“Teflon Lee,” he called me once, with a kind of leering smile that was actually a flat-handed rebuke. No remark no matter how critical could shame me. Nothing could arrest my descent. Nothing could wake me up from my nightmare. I didn’t think he understood, or wouldn’t accept from me, that the reason his critique – and that of others including my family – didn’t stick was that none of their arguments had truly direct relevance. Their implied offering of a better life as an upstanding member of society demanded from me a vision of surrender to an infernal modern way of life that was far more terrifying than the hapless questing I asserted as my preferred path. For all the truth in their critiques, there was garbage among their flowers, and as far as I was concerned there were flowers in my garbage, too.

I held my tongue.

John was Italian, and he knew that I knew that “Teflon John” was the nickname given by the mafia to John Gotti, one of those underworld figures who manage to live a life of crime untouched by the law until they go too far and get nabbed, join the government, or die. He wasn’t

really trying to paint me a criminal. His occasionally harsh attitude – tempered by hope and a real sense of friendship to be sure – was intended to warn me that he thought I was crossing some line somewhere. And he was right.

One night, even though it was Spring, there was a wet and gloomy feeling in the air. I wandered sadly away from John's house, caught up in the conflict over my soul. I was thinking about my life and what to do – when I heard a kind of voice speaking from somewhere over my shoulder.

I turned towards the voice, and wandered curiously through a passageway between the townhouses I did not remember. To my surprise, I found a garden and an orchard that I had never seen before.

Then I noticed the source of the mysterious voice, for he was standing among peach trees dressed in simple but colorful clothing. He was speaking, reciting, praying, something of that sort, and I stood there spellbound. I noticed with concern how like myself he looked. His long brown curls fell over a bearded face flushed with color under a pale Celtic skin.

But I was repulsed by the sorrow in his eyes, vacuous sockets seemingly unable to acknowledge the world's love. He seemed to be bawling out his syllables in a kind of monstrous gloom that felt out of place in such a beautiful garden orchard, and in such a beautiful person as he. As I was pondering what could be done for the pathetic fellow, I was startled by a phenomenon unique in my experience. I noticed that as he was speaking, the trees of the orchard were echoing my sentiments. They were blooming with such speed and love for the man that I could not deny the impression of my heart that they were actually blooming in response to him, and with active love for him. His words, the sound of his voice, and his presence were miraculously speeding up the flowering of the very trees! Like pink fingers, the blooms flowed towards the young man like wavy beams of light, dancing to his voice, bathing in his essence.

I observed with mouth ajar, unable to move or to intervene. I was like a time traveler in a future where the people could not even perceive me. I wanted to cry out, "You should be happy! Even the flowers of the trees are in love with you! Look at them dancing to your song!" But the words would not form in my mouth. I could not reach him. I watched suspended in the moment, my mouth opened to speak. My protest silently aimed at him, there in the orchard, but the arrow clung by its notch to the bowstring...

Until I woke up, and it dawned on me, slowly...from pink to orange to morning, that I was he. I did not embrace the vision then. I did not really understand it. Unconsciously I had resolved not to be a poet, preacher or writer. Certain I thought was suffering in those callings, especially given *my* subjects of interest. I would not suffer intentionally. If I could not avoid it, I would suffer, but not as one of *them*. That was too dependably tragic. So I sought a more indefinite calling, as if banishing the Poets and the Prophets could protect me from their warnings.

Chapter 18: My Woman Awakes



Down by the waterfront, on a lawn belonging in name only to a concrete office building, there sleeps a young man. A few trees dot the corporate boulevard that winds in front of I-95 along the edge of New Haven harbor. Gulls swoop and cry in the grey sky, but their mournful hymn to nature is lost in the roar of highway traffic.

Still the young man sleeps on, in his noisy chrysalis by the water. Along the lovely shoreline of the u-shaped harbor, trees and houses compliment the lovely bay for her protective genius and happy shelter. Far out on the point, the great lighthouse shines, towering up out of a sand rich with shells and the gifts of the sea.

Separated from this natural scene by the interstate highway, the young man twitches in a brooding dream, as flashing lights blink warnings to aircraft from the top of the United Illuminating smokestack and the General Dynamics submarine dock.

The waves wobble glistening in the grey afternoon sky, as a vehicle glides along the corporate drive. It slows down to observe the prone figure in the grass. A look of concern crosses the driver's face, and he dials a number into his phone.



When I woke up, everything was different. Really different. I had become a woman. I looked at my troubled relationship with Elizabeth afresh. The hard feelings, disagreements and estrangement had driven me out of the house and down here to the grass between sea and sky. In my inner ear, I heard a voice ask me sweetly and gently, “Well, what would **you** do if you were a **woman**?”

Answering that question had suddenly become easy, because I was a woman. I let the question land on the wet clay of my newborn feminine identity and smiled with relief as clarity finally came to my situation.

I could just let it all go. It was OK. The drugs, the illness, the body and the mind, the ties that bind. I could let it all go, because my woman said so. **She** could feel the rightness of it, and **she** released me from my guilt, the sense of failure, the obligations of partnership. The woman in me did not feel respected in that relationship. Nor were the important things in life, so she told me. I could let go of Elizabeth, she declared, because the principles by which I was staying with her: compassion, commitment, generosity of spirit, concern for her situation, respect for her talent and experience, even the real love, all these were trumped by the greatest inner authority of

all: a woman's feelings, which were now my own.

I felt an inner rejoicing laugh, and smiled at the ambulance driver who was now slowly pulling up to check on me.

"We heard someone was lying hurt on the grass over here," he said with professional concern.

"Sorry to trouble you," I spoke breezily but with respect, smiling in that feeling of joyful freedom. "I was just resting."

"You're sure you're OK then?"

"Yeah, really good actually." I smiled again.

The EMT paused a moment, looked away, and then back to me gently "You should probably pick a different place to rest next time, no?"

"Yeah, I know, sorry about that." I wish I could have thought of something better to say.

We stood there together for just a moment, the gulls wheeling, the highway roaring, the office building brooding sullenly behind me on the lawn. Then he cracked a smile at me, the kind that comes from underneath the uniform. "Take care now," he said as he left, sporting a knowing smile and a jaunty gait.

His partner was looking at us through the ambulance window with a bewildered expression. He turned to question his partner as my friend got in the other side and drove off.

I looked at the sky, eyes wet with real joy, and the lightest heart I had had for a long time.

When the call came from Vera, I was ready.



Chapter 19: An Oath to Life

On my twenty-ninth birthday I died, joining the many artistic and adventurous personalities who check out around that time.

It was not my conscious commitment to life that was in question, but rather the subterranean grumblings of my soul, the foot-dragging on the important issues of health and healing. There was a kind of overwhelming fear of failure to live well that was not getting the attention from me that it needed, and so it became my fate.

When Dan Riley appeared in my back door that day, I felt the darkness rise. About his countenance I saw a kind of witch doctor's shadow. I had quit smoking for two weeks at the time. No big deal. I regularly went months at a time to convince myself I wasn't addicted. But this time had been different. The last time I'd smoked, I had nearly lost consciousness. I had so feared for my life that I had screamed aloud in terror, begging for my health and life from a God I knew had some say in life's affairs, but whose presence I regrettably acknowledged only in desperation.

I remember that day well because it was my Dad's birthday. I was on my way to an Apple Computer conference called MacWorld. It was August 15th, 1999. At the time, Apple was reemerging from a downward spiral my father and all the investment professionals had deemed terminal. But the second coming of Steve Jobs changed all that. It was a time of triumph and hope for those of us intimately linked to the Think Different identity of the Apple Computer of the time. The iconic Jobs was a champion of creativity and the importance of originality in business as well as in life. For those reasons, I was at that time a fan. Later, something happened to him. He refused to allow programs that measure the harmful wireless radiation emanating from iPhones to be sold and installed. I worry that his mercurial nature had gotten the better of him, and often wonder if his premature death from cancer was connected to the radiation he was unwilling to acknowledge.

There was a woman named Alyssa in New Haven who was also a passionate Apple Computer fan. She was a unique sort of witchy intellectual whom I respected for her genius and knowledge. I'm afraid I've not seen her again since that day though because from the moment the smoke of the joint she offered me hit my lungs, I felt as though cursed. Perhaps she just didn't know tainted dope from clean, and she seemed to experience no ill effect herself as we headed out of New Haven towards Boston. But I remember feeling caught unaware by a black magic that had seemed to come through her, in the same way it haunted Dan Riley in my back door. She never gave any sign of malice towards me, but a poisonous crushing burning bad taste in my mouth and lungs spread rapidly throughout my body until I had to pull the rented car over to the side of the highway, struggling to retain consciousness, and panicking.

My father's twin brother has a son named Louie. Cousin Louie came to see me early on, warning me kindly of the dangers of prolonged marijuana usage. One of his lungs had to be removed after it collapsed after years of abuse. And so I was terrified and furious with myself. I had gone and done it, even after the warnings. I wandered into the small trees a hundred feet from the highway or so. It's a wonder the police didn't pull up. What a sight they would have seen. In my long hair and beard, I was literally screaming at the top of my lungs, begging God for mercy, my consciousness, my life. Alyssa never got out of the car. I wonder if she could hear me above the noise of the highway.

Between the emotional release of the screaming and the fresh air, I managed to stabilize enough to get back in the car and drive the rest of the way to Macworld.

Disheartened and chastened, I was nevertheless still enthusiastic enough at the conference. A reporter from Wired Magazine showed interest in my remarks on the return of Steve Jobs and the survival of Apple Computer in the face of the PC juggernaut. I was just standing there earnestly awaiting Steve's appearance or something when the reporter stepped up to me, as someone apparently serious about the event, and started asking questions. I was later shocked and pleased to see my remarks had been published. What I said amounted to a ringing endorsement of the Think Different design campaign waged with Orwellian fervor by Jobs and Apple against the homogeneous corporate mindset of the PC world. The cost/benefit analysis of technology is complex. The benefits of Apple, the internet and technology in general have lost their rosy complexion for me. I see the costs to humanity, society and the Earth rising. These issues are not just incidental. The sedentary lifestyle of the technology consumer is in many ways as unhealthy for the heart and body as substance abuse.

Returning home despondent, I promised myself that I would quit smoking for a long time. I was holding on too loosely to this commitment when I saw Dan Riley in the back door two weeks later, that voodoo aura wrapped around him like I was at the Crossroads with the Devil. And I was.

I remember cringing at the sight of him, then sitting on the stairs, looking frantically around the living room for a way to escape. Elizabeth was at work on some painting or mixed media masterpiece. She really is a great artist. But I should have just left the house. I remember planning my escape. At that time I was still trying to hold on to my relationship with her.

Elizabeth had asthma, but she never appreciated my attempts to get her to quit smoking pot. She argued that it was helpful for asthma. I knew better, having plenty of experience of the heavy feeling it leaves in the lungs. When she would end up in the hospital for days on end, I knew she was just fooling herself. But sometimes I would smoke with her anyway. I had a thousand different excuses.

When she invited Dan in, I couldn't seem to get away. I carefully checked out Dan's herb to make sure it wasn't poisoned. He described it as the best Hawaii had to offer, and it smelled

okay.

I remembered that my birthday was the next day. So I imagined that in view of the joy of an early start to the celebrations, I could forego my commitment to abstinence for the time being. When the first few puffs didn't kill me, and the familiar illusions of freedom, immanence and happiness filled what was left of my mind, I decided that everything was going to be okay.

And it might have been, except I didn't stop there. Sometimes I'd rather not tell you all the gory details. The shame and disgust still abide. But here the useful truth resides.

By the morning of the next day – my birthday – I realized I was in trouble. What had happened by the side of the road on the way to Boston was but the harbinger of this, the main event.

I went down hard.

I had been up all night, and was hoping to sleep. But I was now in an exhausted, terrified panic that I might actually die...and for good reason. The mixture of marijuana, mushrooms, tobacco, coffee, wine and beer is certainly toxic enough to kill, especially after thirteen years of it. But it may have been the chocolate cake that did the most damage. E. coli, salmonella, I'm pretty sure that something had grown up in that dark mass as it sat there under the counter for who knows how long.

As with Dan and Alyssa, I noticed a strange dark presence around the man's eyes. Matt I believe was his name. He was a basically friendly barista with whom I had a pleasant enough relationship. I can't remember if I told him it was my birthday or not, but when he gave me the cake for me free, I felt blessed. That year there was no one in my life to celebrate with. I ate my cake alone in the dark back room of the Daily Cafe.

Perhaps the idea that food poisoning was involved is a ruse to deflect responsibility from the issue of substance abuse. My father certainly felt that way when I finally told him of my condition. And yet I cannot be sure. There is a kind of relationship between food poisoning and substance abuse. Both occur to the unsuspecting, who usually should have known better.

For a moment, let's just breathe together, you and I.

It's hard to proceed here. The weight as I write is still heavy. Initiations of various traditions dramatically reenact death and rebirth as a way to cultivate new capabilities. I now understand that all too well. If I had been confident that there was a way for me to awaken to a new future, to change my destiny through ritually enacting death rather than actually dying, perhaps I would have done it. I say that now, because Death is no joke.

Uninspiring initiates of ritual death and resurrection abound. Still there must be a better way.

The vision of Death is a profound one. It quickly reminds us of those values of life which are overlooked in the pursuit of human objectives. Death has been necessary in order to help us understand what Life is and is not, how to live, to stay alive and enjoy being alive. Eventually, if we learn its lesson, it is longer necessary. But first...

I can scarcely bring myself to tell you, dear reader, of the rest of those events which still haunt my mind. Ultimately I do so for many reasons, but surely the greatest one of them is to preserve for you the realism necessary to be fully significant, clear and instructive. Having in large part abandoned the received wisdom of family, society and faith for a mixture of better and worse reasons, I had invoked experience as my teacher. Unconsciously I had summoned Death.

I can't remember everything in order here. At the end of the night, I was definitely with Gary. There wan't anything dark or scary about him. Or maybe I just couldn't see clearly anymore. I don't hold anything against Alyssa, Dan, Matt, or Gary. And especially not Elizabeth whose many good qualities and teaching I still live. It was to *me* that the darkness spoke, it was *my* shadow stalking me.

Gary and I worked for Wally Weisser selling flowers at streetcorners and on holidays. Like me, he was an aspiring musician with some talent and challenges. We got along well, had a few laughs on the job, but never hung out. I ran into him around town, and ended up at his apartment. I've never seen him since either. It was just the two of us. I remember feeling really pathetic. I was smoking pot even after it had ceased to have any effect. We were playing bad music and listening to worse. I don't remember it very well. But I do remember thinking to myself something like, "Man, I'm smokin' a stupid amount tonight and it isn't even *doing* anything. I feel kind of sick and heavy. I think I better get out of here."

But it was too late.

As I rode home on my bike that night the heaviness turned to fear. The pre-dawn hours were as dark as they will ever be, riding down Canner Street towards the abandoned factory at the end. On the corner stands #1 Canner. That cute little house still looks like a tiny church. High in the front face of the white-painted wall, there is an arched stained-glass window looking south towards the center of town.

It was the dawn of my twenty-ninth birthday, August 29th, 1999, and the lowest I ever got. I guess I wanted to know where the bottom really was. I had lost faith in every one's directions to the top. I had to feel the bottom for myself. The phenomenon is well known.

I couldn't trust anyone or anything else. I sometimes understand myself in light of the lack of a real, trustable relationship between individual and society in modern life. I don't know if anything else would have worked for me, but I can't recommend it either. Which puts me in a bind. For what am I to recommend to you?

Here you go:

Share your vision, and seek those who will support it. Live it every day. I know it's easier said than done. But nothing else is easier, or better. Perhaps if someone had done this for me, had asked me what was my vision, and had really helped to support it, I would not have had to learn all this the hard way. But in the end, it was I who didn't have enough faith in my vision to seek its support, and to live it fully. That's all changing now.

As I said, Death has, in some key respects, taught Life how to live. It's true. And yet, that does not make it desirable. Death is like a teacher who you never want to see again, and never wants to see you again, but whose teaching has nevertheless been true, good and useful. Curiously, Death's teaching is not good of itself, in other words, there is no value to the incorporation of its own principles into life, rather the contrary. It's value lies in the firmness with which it educates the living regarding what is *not* conducive to life. It throws us back on ourselves saying:

“Further than this there is nothing for the living. Study what it was that brought you to me such that we *never have to meet again.*”

Which brings me back to the question. What can I recommend to you?

Although I cannot recommend the path of danger, in any of its forms, approved or illicit, substance or activity, it is also foolish to aspire to an idealistic path that will not allow itself to be tested by experience. In addition, many of the so-called wise paths – those whose contours stray from the abyss consciously – these paths tend to hide so much from experience that they cannot understand what is happening when the Goddess Fate rounds on them saying:

“You have neglected to test your ideals upon your heart and soul. Your wisdom hides from the truth of your heart's desire and so is no wisdom at all. By your secretive and careful path you have judged those who engaged the difficult path of experience contemptible. When will you see that all paths have their reckoning? No life of sacrifice unto Death is ultimately superior to any another. Only the life which leads only to life can pass by me alive with *my* full blessing.”

A careful examination of the archetypal paths through life and their relative merits would suggest that it is possible now – given that Death has been with us for so long, and given us so many tragic examples to study – that it is possible to take heed of the signs and warnings of Fate in a more respectful way. Even as she points at the path to your death – like the Ghost of Christmas Future in that blessed tale by Charles Dickens, the Goddess Fate is not unmerciful. She gives tireless warnings with increasing intensity in proportion to the proximity of danger. She acts not unlike children in a charade game, indicating through increasing amounts of noise and movement when a player is getting closer to winning. Only with Fate, it is reversed. Her frantic sounds and movements increase towards disaster. To the diligent and devoted study of these warnings, I recommend your attention. In particular, pay attention to the lessons they contain regarding how to live in *such that the path one takes away from the abyss is not just a*

temporary detour which merely lands you back at a more socially acceptable abyss. Fate's features change to Health and Beauty when her lessons are learned and understood.

How can one learn the language and meaning of Fate? Here is what I have come to:

Enlighten your shadow with sensitivity and understanding. What does this mean? It means to bring your awareness consciously into the dark corners of your life and experience where it is most needed. Like a mother to its crying baby, come quickly to hold and comfort your shadows, and they will soon be comfortable, smiling up again at you with love.

Treat your every experience, large and small, especially the difficult ones that involve the shadow, as the direct, immanent message and revelation of the divine.

Your feelings are the Goddess and your awareness is the God. Bring them together in sacred marriage. This sacred marriage gives birth to Heart, the loving, evolving Balance that is the promise of the future.

Denial or violation of your feelings or awareness, separately or as one, is deadly.

Therefore, *never sacrifice yourself*, in particular your feelings and visions, to anything or anybody.

Life is the goal, therefore sacrifice is not good.

God does not demand or revere sacrifice.

Never allow the supposed inevitability of death to excuse you from doing the right thing, by which I mean what You really want to do.

“The Will of God is not in opposition to the Will of the Individual.”

Rather the Will of the Individual is a *seed* of the Will of God.

This seed grows naturally without the need for restriction or interference of any kind.

Cultivation is helpful, naturally, even necessary, but it must be a loving and sensitive cultivation *with the utmost care and even deference to the divine presence within original untampered impulse.* ⁶

I will also cite this proverb:

“Intelligence is learning from your mistakes, wisdom is learning from those of others.”

There is however a caveat here. Both intelligence and wisdom are more than the aphorism would suggest. Wisdom in particular is not available solely from observation. Although it is certainly wise to learn from the mistakes of others, there is another requirement. We must learn the *right* lesson from others' mistakes. How do we avoid the hasty, generalized judgments that have imprisoned us for so long? How do we sift to fine substance the lesson of experience? For that one needs to have enough of one's own experience – and enough respect for one's own intuition – to understand the lesson *as it is applicable to the specific situation*. This is why the cultivation and refinement of sensitive discernment is the true path to life and healthy knowledge. Only *such* sensitivity can be right for *any* individual. Rational systems, beliefs, laws and customs – no matter how well-intentioned or eternal the claim made for them – cannot be *divinely* appropriate for the individual *now* given their uniformity and static nature. Our own ability to

feel what is right is the ultimate, *divinely given* tool for decision-making. It evolves with the Universe at the speed of life, while even the best tablets and codes harden and gather dust.

I am walking you to death's door. Naturally I wish to protect you from prejudice and assumption. Too often tragic tales fall prey to narrow interpretations born of trivial or agenda-driven moralizing. I would avoid this fate, and that you will as well. Hence this extended preparation for my last words.



Between the bike ride home and the moment I began throwing up my whole life I remember little other than terror and sadness. I remember that morning as sunny, but I couldn't feel it. In the bathroom I threw up everything I had ingested the day before, food and drink. Then in panic, I went outside for air, heaving and retching. At first nothing more came, but then, standing there on the sidewalk, the bile started to flow like a river. Clear to yellow, and then mixed with a black substance, whatever it was, it appeared to be destroying not just my digestive system but my heart as well. Perhaps the black substance was the black bile spoken of by the ancient Greeks in their description of the temperaments of human beings. Black bile is associated with the melancholy type, which would certainly fit me at the time. It came up after perhaps twenty heaves, and I remember hoping it was the poison in the chocolate cake, and that once it was out, I would feel better. But I was in another universe of danger. The bile turned to fire in my mouth, burning my lips, and my organs kept slowing towards general shutdown.

In abject terror and the most profound regret I began to walk around the block. It was all I could think of to keep my heart beating and from going unconscious. That first day, I stayed alive by walking and drinking water, water, and more water. My friend Matt Osborne stopped by, wisely appraised my situation from what appeared to be his own experience, and advised me gently but authoritatively to increase still further my water intake. His advice and concerned presence helped, and I remember him there with thanks. Elizabeth was not much help. Her own life was already a nearly perpetual crisis. She could barely manage sympathy, but I don't have much in the way of hard feelings, it was hard for all of us in those days.

Tony Turrell, who lived with us from time to time, managed to get hit and nearly killed by a car while riding his bike. He promptly took up residence in our loft to heal his badly damaged knee. And then Harriet, our saintly, smiling dog, who just came to us out of the blue one day, got paralyzed by a hit and run driver at night. Elizabeth found her unable to move in our neighbor's garden. He told us he'd heard her barking and howling all night. All this happened the same week. There we were, the picture of disaster. I could barely allow myself to register the totality of it. The apparent astrological aspect of the events might have given me some comfort if I could have understood. But I was too busy fighting for my life.

I didn't sleep at all that night either. Around and around the block I went, throwing up burning bile, drinking water, showering. Dawn broke and I was closer to death than ever. I began to remember with a mixture of hope and dismay that I might need to give expression to my terror in order to release it and find healing.⁷ Hope because I had found in the past that expression of difficult emotions really could be healing. Dismay because I had no idea how to begin expressing such terrifying feelings as tumbling out of control towards unconsciousness and death. I could see that the effort to avoid these feelings was part of what was causing my body's condition to worsen. So I headed off across the road behind our block, towards the high school track at the base of East Rock park, just before you get to the Mill River.

It was very early. No one was out. It was barely light when I got to the red quarter-mile track with the white guide lines. I started walking around it. Easing in slowly, as I got to the point farthest away from the school and the houses, I began to choke out some desperate sounds which led to shouts and finally to screams. I had learned the therapeutic value and necessity of expressing emotion through sound and movement⁸ some ten years earlier. But it was this crisis that became the unintentional test of that knowledge. As dawn turned to morning, I had managed to learn to scream in terror pretty well. Much to my regret, although it released some of the critical pressure on my life, it did not restore stability the way it had on the side of the highway two weeks previously. I was not too disappointed though; the expression process was giving me the beginnings of a framework for hopeful action.

I wanted to keep moving the feelings, but felt obliged to avoid the attention of the growing morning. I headed towards the woods on the other side of the Mill River, through the parklands of East Rock which I knew well and loved. Between the river and the cliffs there is a little known trail. You have to really want to be in the woods to be there. You won't find it just passing through the park. I crept into the furthest reaches of the forest and sat with my back to the cliffs. Dense foliage and slender tree trunks rose in front of me.

Here I felt safe enough again to begin the emotional expression anew. I hoped that increased or prolonged effort would lead further away from the abyss. As I screamed again from the center of my experience, terror, rage and grief alternated in a kind of kaleidoscope of the hardest feelings I had. At one point mortified into silence by the crazy sounds coming out of me, I noticed that the trees appeared undisturbed. They seemed even thankful for my effort, approving, protective. As I was contemplating this inner experience of connection with the trees, I heard what sounded like a deer crashing through the underbrush, coming closer and closer. Still in a kind of trance with the trees, I stared peacefully at the forest ranger as he leaped into view and stopped abruptly at the sight of me.

Out of breath, he panted confused, "Someone said there was some type of crime happening up here. Someone was screaming or something. Is everything OK?"

Wow, I feel unusually calm, even pleasant, I thought. Difficult encounters with uniformed officials which I will not here describe had led me to fear their inability to relate well to human

crisis. With a strange mixture of thankfulness and peace I assured the ranger that everything was okay and that I was in a therapeutic expression process. I did not use those words. I don't remember which ones I chose, or how I got myself across to him. It was probably the look in my eye. I tossed my head and generally gestured in a street dialect. That and my real appreciation for his concern, my respect for his job performance, I think that's what put him at ease. Anyway, he left the way he had come. It hadn't always gone that well. I squatted there alone again beneath the quiet trees.

I didn't see how I could start the screaming again though, so I wandered out of the woods forlorn and still in great danger, if not quite as panicked as before.

On my way home I took the path towards Cold Spring past the river bend where the water lillies grow. I came to the place where I liked to swim in summer. It was a fateful place. Not long before I had tried to get Elizabeth to come swimming there with me. She had a severe asthma attack the inner experience of which had divided us deeply. She had perceived that I was not there for her as she fought for breath. There was some truth to that, because I was angry, feeling that she would rather kill herself with drugs than swim to life with me. Memories such as these stalked me as I walked along, when there on the dirt path, shining in the boldest of sun, strutted the doves.

In an instant, I was back at the Creek House in Pennsylvania, lowering a rifle from my shoulder for the last time ever. I had just made a shot I didn't think was possible standing up. At over a hundred yards the dove had exploded off the wire, and with it, my peace of mind. It wasn't until it fell that I began to think about what I had done. Oh God, why is it always thus? Walking over to the spot to confirm that in fact she was dead, I was overcome with remorse and resolve. I had killed the bird of peace! I knew right then that I would put away guns forever, and hoped that would be enough.

As I watched the doves milling about in the sun by the river, the horror of what I had done years earlier crashed back down upon me with karmic clarity. I fell to my knees in sorrow and repentance, begging the doves and God for forgiveness. I remember the way they strutted around in my gaze being somewhere between superconsciously compassionate and sunnily oblivious. In time, I felt forgiveness in their peaceful presence, and released myself to the next step of healing.

The experience was exhausting. I trudged dazed and still nearly dead out of the park. But my heart was just a bit lighter, encouraged at least by the way in which Fate and I were meeting so clearly in the world. I didn't mind that our meetings were calls to account. I could tell that the process was authentically alive, and I knew that I owed it to myself, and all I had done wrong to see it through. I remained resolved to live. Skeptical that I would survive a visit to the hospital – where I anticipated being forcibly restrained – I headed home hoping to rest.

But the panic leaped at me immediately as resting slowed my metabolism. My heart was shutting down again. I dragged myself back into the street.

There was no rest that day either. As night fell I was still close to the precipice, going on thirty-six hours or so with no sleep. I was still throwing up bile at regular intervals, drinking water like a fish. I was walking, and walking, and more and more, I was praying.

I was just about screamed out. It appeared to be helpful but no magic cure-all. There was something yet to learn if I wanted to live, and I dreaded my ignorance and deteriorating condition as night came on. I struggled mightily through that night, again and still again walking around now one, now two blocks. I learned every feature of that neighborhood as I never had before. I followed a route that went through a small side street cul-de-sac and then back to the street I lived on, Canner. Perhaps it got its name from the idle factory at the end of it. If it had once been a cannery, I never found out.

Finally, my legs began to give out. In general I walked often. All over town, and to the train station two miles away. But this was different. I had probably done close to twenty miles. Walking was giving me life, and in fear I contemplated having to stop. What would I do then to keep my feelings moving? How would I survive stopping? My heart slowed to a crawl every time I tried to rest. But it was no use. One of my legs was hurting terribly in the calf and I was completely exhausted. I finally just gave up and prayed that rest would actually do me good. Stumbling in through the back door in the morning I lay down on the mattress in the living room. Still frightened to rest and uncomfortable in the extreme, I was nevertheless tired enough to soon fall asleep, or so I thought.

Because it all started so normally. The nodding off finally into who knows what characterizes my ordinary perception of the onset of sleep. I vaguely remember feeling released from the struggle my body was experiencing, but it was no big thing...

I am enthusiastic again. Childlike. I am an adventurous spirit, eager to learn the truth. I want to be good and to do good. I walk along a soft and bright cloudy path. I arrive from I don't remember where with increasingly clear awareness at a low wall. There the path leads onwards between the stone cloud pillars of The Gate. I knew it was The Gate because of the presence of several women in a special type of funny clothing I sort of recognized.

There was a feeling of mission and collective understanding between them. They stood there calmly awaiting my arrival. I had no conscious knowledge of where I was, what was happening, or going to happen. I delight in the adventure. I am curious about what lies beyond the gate. Words are unnecessary. When I reached the gate and the women, I simply stood there beaming cheerfully.

But they knew full well what I was saying. I will translate from the unspoken: "Hi. Well, as you can see I'm here. Wow, this feels like quite a special place. I'm really happy to be here and you women seem important and kind. You also seem to recognize me, which feels like a good sign. Well?" Pause. "I'm ready to go see what's beyond that gate so let's go! And, hey, what is it that we're doing here anyway?"

The women's outfits were like something from the Sound of Music. They reminded me of the nurses and nannies in the park when I was a child, who sit there peacefully talking amongst each other watching over the children as they play. Their dresses weren't fully a nun's habit. They were more ethereal and wing-like, and they floated about their countenances as if borne up by gentle breezes.

Smiling ever so sweetly, they enfolded me gently in their words.

But they were very clear, and firm.

"No, no, no, my lovely boy," they sang, "although we love you very much and are **very** happy to see you, today is not the right time for you to come with us beyond the gate."

Pregnant pause. They give me a moment to absorb their words. I blink but keep smiling, a little uncertain. I didn't really know where I was, or where I was proposing to go. It wasn't even all that big a deal. The other side of the gate just looked like the right place for me to be going, and I just wanted to check it out anyway, seeing as I was here and all.

I just stood there. Maybe I looked like I was wondering what I was supposed to do. That would have been a pretty good guess, anyway. So they told me. And I was all ears.

In the most encouraging tones and words, spoken as for a child who just wants to do the right thing, they leaned close to me and confided: "Now as for you, **you** must return to where you came from. For you must edit the works of a young Italian boy."

Full stop. They look at me for my reaction. At first I have none. I look up at them without expression, vaguely smiling. Then I beam and startle at the same time, beaming because I had a clear, exciting mission, startled because I had no idea what they were talking about. My confusion must have been apparent because the next thing the women did was to help me see a picture of this young Italian boy, leaning over his work in a studio crowded with artistic tools and renaissance type objects. The picture I got of him was not entirely clear. The boy was at some distance. He appears to me now to be wearing black and white checked trousers, and a kind of billowy tunic in natural cotton or linen. The room was wooden, the time period somewhat remote, Medieval or Renaissance, but not too well-defined. At the time, child that I was, I took the picture for granted. I considered it proof positive of the women's authority and good will, and agreed happily to give their advice a chance. I would have done so even without the picture. I didn't really feel like I had a choice, but nor did I feel like I needed one.

There was definitely something special in their tone and request, although I didn't understand what I was being asked to do. I trusted the women because I could feel the love and thoughtfulness they put into their recommendations for me. Remembering it now, I am struck by how important it is to be loving and thoughtful when we offer guidance to fellow travelers in life. If we can come closer to those women's example, we might find a better response from our communities and the world.

The love and thoughtfulness of their suggestion was so total that it was able to overcome any objection I might have had then or now. And I still have none. The fact that I did not and still do not know exactly what or who they were really talking about, yet am still able to enthusiastically embrace it as an inspired mission, is a mystery that has borne fruit in my life of varying quality. A word of caution: the quality of this fruit has varied with the purposes I associated with it.

The first, penultimate benefit of the mission was that it convinced me of the value of returning to my body, which was now quite dead on the floor. Life being a purpose unto itself, the value of its maintenance needs no explanation and no higher mission exists. However, another benefit of the sisters' guidance was the slow but steady development of two important powers.

The one is in fact editing, in its inner aspect as the ability to understand existing knowledge and belief, and to update it intelligibly and relevantly with the latest understandings as the consciousness of God evolves. The second was a growing interest in all things Italian, and especially the artistic, literary and philosophical legacy of that nation. Although there was nothing specific in the sister's words regarding who or when or what exactly I was to edit, the mission has therefore felt sufficiently broad to allow for the idea that any and all of the great Italian cultural figures may be the goal of my quest. If at this point you object, I will respond that the mission keeps me in touch with the possible. And I can give you a good reason for the necessity of editing the works of the great Italian masters, even though I am just now acquiring familiarity with them.

Here it is:

The human family remains in large part tied to a vision of life and love codified by the literary, scientific, theological and artistic traditions of Italy. From Rome to the Renaissance, Dante to DaVinci, Aristotle to Aquinas⁹, the image and inner landscape of humanity is still largely defined by the work of Southern European Mediterranean culture.

There is a reason why the angels gave me the concept of *editing* the works of young Italians as opposed to copying or replacing them. The enormous value of the arts and sciences of the region is a powerful tool, but is not inherently moral. Unfortunately, much of the progress made from Rome forward has been in the use of art and science to increase the violent domination of humanity over Earth and Mind. Much of the value of these qualitative and quantitative arts is lost when it is not made current, and revised in light of the evolution of the consciousness of God and the Goddess. This may appear self-evident, and it is, but to me at the time I received the task, this was all completely mysterious, and as far from my day to day thoughts as can be.

The real point is that the knowledge of the source of this mission has kept me constantly vigilant regarding the Italian contribution to humanity, and to the meaningful effort to revise the

view of Life, Art and God given to the world from Italy.

In our multicultural world, this may seem overblown, so let me be more specific. The Italian concept of God and life vacillates between the poles of intellectual or religious sterility and artistic tragedy. The effort to achieve the fairy tale happy ending in the unification of romance and philosophy has still eluded the inner and outer worlds. This is because the central concept of sacrifice, and the subjugation of the emotional aspect of life, remains the dominant characteristic of our civilization. Even those who react against these ancient imprints cannot find healthy balance within because the vast majority of modern society still teaches that psychological health can only be maintained by controlling instinctive impulses, and by sacrificing the emotional to the rational. A critical edition of the art and philosophy of Italy has the opportunity to heal and free *all* the feelings. It can reconcile the supposedly opposing tendencies of reason and passion in a total acceptance of all experience that provides a safe place for apparent incompatibilities to be understood and worked through. Bringing peace between reason and passion – also known as ending the war of the sexes – results in a true inner/outer harmony, the mother of blessed happiness. To the extent I can be helpful in this regard, I enjoy my mission thoroughly, and remain open to its evolution. “Who is the young Italian boy really?” you may still ask. As with many important questions, it has been **the search** for the answer to the riddle of the angel’s instructions that has defined the value of my encounter at the threshold. Temporary hypothetical final answers have always let humanity down. Now that evolution is understood as a natural, cosmic, and divine, principle we can finally accept its place in *every* sphere of life.

What was left of my body? I returned to it willingly enough, but I can now see the mysterious power of the sisters’ instructions. In their encouraging nature, they helped me to prepare for what was to come.



Slowly I came to. The the first thing I noticed was the light of day as it filled the little house and splashed in a friendly way on the floor. I lay on my back having rolled off the futon. Lying there, the second thing I noticed was that the left side of my body could not move.

With that, the peace of the dream left me, rushing away like a lifeboat disappearing from view in a storm, its hull above the waves as I sank.

“Why is my body paralyzed?” I thought. There followed instantly a wry response from my heart. It had stopped beating completely. For how long I knew not, nor had time to consider. **Nothing** can quite compare to the feeling of knowing you are on the edge of death. In the powerful panic that overtook me, I managed to leap to my feet. To an observer that would have looked more like hauling myself off the floor with a combination of nervous frenzy fighting off paralysis. Out the door and back on the move I dragged myself by command. My heart weighed

on me like a rock inside a bucket. I took to my route around the block with survival my only goal. My legs were rested, but my heart just would not beat.

That was of course, regrettable, but in its reluctance to beat I had the obvious answer to my question about the paralysis on the left side of my body. And so I began to look with my inner eye into my body for answers to my health crisis. Though the answers were all bad, the act of looking into my body – following my body’s awareness towards the problem with intent to heal – became the beginnings of a new understanding of healing. I had seen glimmers of this type of healing before, especially when I had had Lyme disease. Now it became a way of life, it was the only way to survive.

My ability to feel my heart deadened as I reached a kind of black hole of lost feeling. There was a kind of miserable numbness that started somewhere near where the vagus nerve moves through the solar plexus. In addition, there was no response from parts of my lungs and digestive system. That was what I could tell on my own. The vagus nerve, which works with the heart in pulsation as well as in feeling, is the largest nerve in the body. When its function is impaired, *you know it*. I have experienced traumatic brain injury and other painful wounds. But I have never experienced anything like the terror of a dying heart.

There it sat like a stone. I was carrying it around inside a body that appeared to be surviving on water and adrenaline. Numbness, blackness, hardness. Occasional shooting, terrifying pains shocked me, like a comet streaking through a night sky. This was how my heart felt and looked to me that day, in those long moments after my return from that peaceful cloudy gate.

Deeper and deeper I sank into despair, grief and fear. This time it appeared I might not be able to revive myself at all. I was still screamed out. But there was one more thing to try. The direct appeal to God.

Although this had appeared to help two weeks earlier on the side of the highway, I felt ashamed that I had paid so little attention to that lesson then. How could I show up before God so soon again on the same account? I knew there was no chance for a quick recovery, but on that late summer day, I brought my troubled and nearly dead heart to God for help. There was a little lane around the corner, that connects two side streets. The image of those houses, the trees and the street are now forever fixed in my memory,

At first I felt ridiculous. Two ways ridiculous. On the one hand, for all I hoped and believed and thought I knew of God and the Goddess, I was still not always able to believe that a divine being could actually intercede directly in life, or death in this case. The religious upbringing of my family included a warm and serious observance of religion. But the place of the Divine in the personal, daily affairs of humanity was not much considered or relied upon. The importance of individual effort – which may then be blessed – was emphasized. There was little regard for the ever-present immanence¹⁰ of divinity.

The existential philosophies included in my education were confused and contradictory. One class would lean towards scientific materialism. Fantastic Judeo-Christianity would dominate another. The upper grades and beyond were dominated by a morass of agnosticism, scientism, and secular humanism that now looks like a kind of clever smokescreen for outright atheism. None of it – not the ecological, animistic pantheism I encountered at University, nor the indigenous and Rainbow road wisdom I often relied on – had prepared me particularly well for the moment I was in now. I stood alone at the edge of Death, with recourse only to the Divine.

But I wasn't really sure God exists.

The second way in which I felt ridiculous was with respect to the religious feelings that were washing over me unbidden. As it became more and more clear that I would need some type of miraculous intervention to survive, I found myself feeling like the prodigal son. I also began to have strange feelings that seemed like memories. I began to see myself as if in a former life. I felt a kinship with someone who had been wayward, in and out of the Church and the life of faith, finally renouncing self-destruction and coming to God for mercy.

You can bet I felt ridiculous.

On the one hand I wanted nothing to do with the Church. It was a soul-destroying, passion-killing racket by my reckoning, though I was open to the original Essene¹¹ traditions. The other part of me was just plain terrified about the way I had lived my life. I felt afraid of judgment, damned by my own hand. I had no hiding place for my mistakes. There was no one to blame and nowhere to run. As I presented myself to the sight of God, I felt sinful without reference to the Church or any doctrine. What I had done to myself was the very *definition* of sin. I had violated the principles of life even in the face of countless warnings from Fate and Family.

The remorse I felt in that moment was purely between my soul and God. The various judgments and laws, aphorisms and sermons on these subjects were as if nonexistent. All that was left was the feeling of the sorrowing penitent. I did not come to God for mercy because of any transgression the priests had codified but because I could **feel** the now **undeniable** evidence that I had transgressed the laws of life. This I knew to be wrong. I could acknowledge self-destruction as sin without suspecting the secretive controlling mischief of the priests. For my actions I would make no excuse. Understand and forgive yes. But not so as to continue as before. For this sin, for nearly throwing away the blessing of life despite warnings small and large, I stood in the road alone, and with the last of my hope and strength I begged God for forgiveness.

Time stood still a moment or two.

Again I felt as if caught in a memory. Images of myself in habit or frock flooded me, unwanted. I began to feel another soul quality. It was one I thought I'd left behind, but which now, in the intensity of crisis, returned as if in answer to my need. I was not sure I could trust this old way of being and acting. It felt inappropriate to what I'd learned of the fullness of life. As it

filtered into me I felt foolish and ridiculous. How could going backwards really move me forward? The self-denial I had lived by in my association with monastic and priestly ideals was as much the cause of my problems as its cure. Of this I was still certain. Old habits had been replaced with even worse ones, that was true. Yet I had no illusions that returning to the old ways was an alternative. So I cringed as an ancient proposal was put to me from some primal part of my crisis response psyche.

“Take a vow,” said the voice. I was frightened. I was frightened of the formality of the voice, and of the feeling that accompanied it. I did not feel threatened, more scared of being unable to fulfill the vow. My heart grew heavier. “Take the vow,” spoke the voice in firm but free tones. I began to consider the option held out to me. I did so in a whirlwind of forlorn desperation, shameful humiliation, and doubt. Then, as now, I did not really believe it was necessary from God’s point of view that I create any sort of permanent contract on my behavior. I know that God is better than that. The vow I took then, and keep modified today, I took for myself. I needed to take it as a way of justifying myself to myself; not because God required it but because without making it, *I* could not feel worthy enough to ask for life and love from anyone.

None of that seemed to matter much then. I didn’t have the time or the inclination to think too much. My life was slipping away and I felt like a general effort was all I could muster. I threw the life vest in the general direction of the drowning man. I began hurling vows upon myself, calling them down from the clouds, by which effort I also hoped to call God’s presence to me. I still doubted that was possible, or in any event, available to me. I made vow after vow to abstain from all the foods and substances that had been involved in my catastrophe. All of them. The more I included, the safer I felt. And then I stood waiting to see if my effort was relevant. Was I in time? Was I even in the ballpark?

The day was warm but I could barely tell. There seemed to me to be no change in my condition. The rock formerly known as my heart was still and dark as night. I heard no voice, saw no vision.

I turned for home.

The hazy gray summer sky blended with the grays of the houses and street. Even the leaves on the trees are grey in my memory. And then I asked. I can’t remember how. Out loud maybe. Perhaps a mutter or a whisper, or in the silence of my soul. But I really asked, with all that was left of my life and faith, even through the doubts that God even exists. I asked humbly, with recognition of my fault. I took my full share of the blame. I would have understood if I had been found too far gone. Only now does it strike me as foolish that I should ever have doubted. Just moments before I had been sent back from the gates. Angels don’t just send you back to Earth only to have you die a few hours later. But I just couldn’t count on anything anymore, not even a sendoff with a mission from Heaven. I needed to make some progress towards something other than this panic-fueled half-alive state.

In that condition, making sense and thinking straight are not possible in the normal way. The clarity of mind I did have was focused only on the horrifying proximity of death and its avoidance. Minute by minute, hour by hour I stared into the abyss, then away. I struggled on and on to stay awake, to keep the still clear images of life on Earth from blurring into a murky sea of unconsciousness and darkness. As I walked ever so slowly home, down that little side street hoping and praying, I finally tried something new.

With an effort born of the deepest, most desperate fighting struggle, I tried to bridge the distance between my solitary, separate existence and the Spirit World. I went beyond the intellectual appreciation for Divinity and **took an action** born in recognition of the possible **factual** existence of the Divine **in the world**, and in my own sorry life. It might have looked like a kind of barely perceptible dance move. Drawing my arms backwards a little bit, I raised and opened my chest. If you had been there you might have seen nothing noticeable, but with that move I opened myself to receive God into my dying heart. Yup. That's what I did. And I don't mean this in the way the proselytizers do when they warn of damnation if you don't receive Jesus as your personal savior and all. I just asked God to please come into my dying body, and not only with words. I put forth my chest from within, intentionally inviting, and made room for Him to enter.

And He did.

There's just no other way to say it.

Previously leaden as a stone, in that moment I felt the Spirit enter my chest. My heart took Him in, and beat.

I wasn't sure it would happen until the moment it did. I wasn't really sure God existed until that moment:

1. in relationship with me
2. in the physical world.

I had faith, but not *this* level of experience. I wish I had not needed it, but then, even God had to learn Life by facing Death. That much seems obvious now.

Just once did I feel it, after that my heart seemed to go back to sleep. But I knew from that moment on I would survive, and that it was a sunny day.

I walked back to the house and sat on the grey-brown curb with my feet in the black asphalt road. I stared at the grey stones embedded in the cement and marvelled at the glory of physical life; that I was going to be able to keep living it! It is hard to articulate the feeling of joy and gratitude that overcame me. I was overjoyed at the opportunity to just still be here. Just to be able to sit there by the side of the road and stare at the asphalt, the dry leaves, the pebbles, the glass. All that I had despised about the world: the cruelty and unfairness, the ugliness, and the

hardness, the dirtiness and unnaturalness, and the unconsciousness that seemed to rob life of its beautiful promise. All that I looked right in the face. At the gum-spattered asphalt and the stony sidewalk. I loved it all, gloried in it; just to be able to be here with everyone and everything, little strips of green grass and wildflowers bursting through here and there.

The sycamore trees on that corner still stand there, by the lovely house on Canner Street.

I rose that day out of the ashes. The vows I took I have not broken in nearly twenty years. The vows that could be modified without substantial issue, such as coffee, chocolate cake and the very occasional toast to family or friendship have returned to my very careful discretion. I have no interest in any of the other substances, so antithetical to health and life do they now clearly appear to me. I gave up coffee on health grounds with no effort.¹² Chocolate cake, maybe a couple times a year, usually with children, and remembered thanks.

The overall, and underlying, purpose of the vows was to devote myself to the cultivation of life in the real sense. Never again would I idealize its lofty aspects only, or seek to transcendently avoid its difficult aspects. To this vow one can remain true with ease. Because this vow is natural. It is akin to the effort every cell, plant, animal and angel make every day, just to live, and yes, to live to the utmost.



Like a newborn baby, I was nearly without capacity for months. Desperate and dangerous moments still came often. Depression and self-recrimination hounded me in my bed on the floor. With all the newfound faith I had been given, I joined my awareness to my heart. I worked to push that boulder in my chest uphill and into health and strength. I had moments of revelation, when I could see and feel that this biofeedback vision I had discovered through the application of intentional awareness to the body had literal, physical, healing power. But the wound was greater still.

In crisis, I returned to my parents' house briefly. They tried to help, giving me some money and time to visit holistic health professionals. On their recommendation, I even went to see our neighbor the doctor. We used to skate on his pond in winter. I wasn't expecting much. The doctor examined me briefly, then recommended Prozac saying nothing was wrong. Modern medicine has limitations. I was reminded of the neurologist in Denver. I went to see him when I had Lyme. After looking at the MRI he had taken of my brain, he handed me pain pills about the size of my thumb. He hadn't found anything he said. Lyme wasn't well known out west at the time. I stood there in shock, looking from him to the pills in my hand. He confided that these were pills he prescribed himself. I never touched them, of course.

I even went to the hospital Emergency Room. But they too said everything was just fine. I was relieved in a way, but also amazed they couldn't find anything wrong. I knew that a more careful examination would reveal serious issues, but was in no mood to take it any farther with

medicine as usual. It was enough to know that I was apparently not in critical condition. I kept going with the spiritual biofeedback.

I still had trouble sleeping, and nearly went unconscious again after taking just a tiny amount of Valerian root to try and get some rest. Panic-stricken again and often, I must have been quite a sight for my folks. I had confessed the full nature of my health crisis to my father on the phone before returning home. He had little patience, promising to bury me with full honors if necessary. I had been thirteen long years of trouble. After a couple weeks at home, he decided that the only way for me to recover was to go to work mornings at 7. I'm sure he believed it was what I needed. But I couldn't have done it if I wanted to, which I did. I didn't protest. I just got on the train back to New Haven.

I returned to the little house on Canner and tried to move forward with my music and technology careers. I finished up a CD and got some web work here and there. My heart was still so dead. I despaired of life again. I was committed to live, but for what more I did not know. One night, my heart was particularly bad. I worried I wouldn't be able to make it. Gray feelings were leaden upon me. I went to bed hoping to sleep.

And dreamed of Vera.



Chapter 20: Vera

“The Lord God works in mysterious ways.” - Anon



When I left my body that night, I was not so afraid for it.

I had just as little idea where I was going as before, but the destination turned out to be very different. I moved rapidly over the surface of the Earth. Land and sea moved by swiftly. I flew just above the surface.¹³

Onward, onward, over green hills and countryside, I arrived in another land on the outskirts of an ancient city I had never seen before. At the end of the line, I boarded what appeared to be a small orange traincar, and rode it into the heart of the city. I sat there a moment enjoying the novelty of the experience, and the poetic view of the artistic European park-city. Then, somehow, I found my way into Vera's arms. The journey from the tram to her heart is magically evanescent. Pictures of her location and dwellings had filtered through to me from mutual friends, phone calls and letters. But it happened in a flash. What lasted, as if forever, was the embrace. It was an embrace of the heart. Love flowed through her arms, and filled me with a healing feeling.

The embrace became a journey over land. We traveled together over old and wild paths, then up and over stony ground. We passed through craggy foothills and down through narrow rocky passageways. At bottom, we found an amphitheater in a meadow. Trees dotted the landscape, the grass was lush but not overgrown. Parklike, it nevertheless had a feeling of the unknown about it: another...place, unfamiliar, definitely Earth. We came down the well-loved footpath, and found our way to our seats. A sizable and eager audience was already waiting. A bright red wavy velvet curtain concealed the stage.

And then, the drumming started. African, you could tell right away. It grew in intensity and the show began. In the audience, I leaned forward into the music, but the curtain remained closed. Louder and louder the music grew, and with them parading into my heart, the happy excited feelings. I felt the urge to move and dance, but still the curtain remained closed.

There are many things for which I am grateful to my long journey through the wild abyss, but foremost among them is the courage to dance. Before the quest, I did not have it. Nor did I have the feeling that from the moment you begin to dance, no other truth or fate exists outside the one you will give yourself. It is of course the same in any moment, but dancing makes it all so very clear. I stood up from my seat, standing alone among the audience, and silently beckoned Vera to join me. And together we stepped through the central fold in the curtain.

On the other side of the curtain, the stage turned to dirt. We found ourselves in the middle of a traditional African dance. And what a dance it was!

The speed, originality, strength and inspired emotion of African dance is unparalleled in my experience. And yet nothing is more welcoming, nothing more wholesome. It took me a second to realize what had happened. We had changed from audience into dancer. And we danced there, in the dirt, barefoot, amid the welcoming dark angels in their colored wings and feather crowns. There was a profound lack of comparative judgment, the kind that too often accompanies dance. All that was left was the music, the drums, the dance, the dirt, and the feeling of exploring the best of what it means to be alive.

Fading out slowly, the dancers disappeared from my room. Awake in astonishment, I felt a warm glow in my heart. The feeling of Vera's embrace still lived there! And it lingered long after even the impressions of the dance had completely washed away. There was no doubt. Vera's embrace had impressed itself upon my waking heart in a physical, palpable way.

The connection between vision and reality was forever proven for me that day.

Gathering every image and feeling from the dream into memory, I faced the day more hopeful than at any time since the overdose. Assessing later the extent of the dream healing, I could tell there was still a long way to go. But a bright future seemed possible again, and I steered a course towards it, pushing into the welcoming darkness with my light.

At this point, let me be clear. I had *no idea* what the future might bring. Life was my only goal, and I held on to it with everything I had.

Back and forth to the health food store I walked across town. Fresh Haitian mangoes, amazake, rice with burdock root, dandelion greens and oats. Lots of water. Trips to the spring in the park, all this I did with few other thoughts but survival and repentance through healthy living.

As I walked back and forth to Cold Spring, for water, and along the Mill River where I had met the doves, I often passed by the swingset in the park, there at the end of Orange Street.

I had met Vera selling flowers, a decent and social living that got me out from behind my computer screen and sorrows. Before Vera had finally returned home to the Czech Republic, I had visited her once at her apartment near that park. That spring, all the men who sold flowers for Wally fell in love with her.

She was happy enough at the time with the bold artist Peter Bill. He had gone to Prague just after the fall of communism to share in its cultural renaissance. But she was kind to all of us, receiving my own note of poetic appreciation with a kind of warm and graceful confusion which left the door open. And I walked through it one day, meeting her down on Orange Street at Cafe Bravo, where the broccoli rabe panini is a revelation.

We went back to her basement apartment for a few minutes, but it was awkward. So we

wandered slowly towards the park, past a grassy bank of dandelions, and across the street.

There n the park at the end of Orange Street, she walked through the trees and took her place on a swing. I stumbled in clumsy conversation, feelings swirling through me that I knew were not quite welcome. But ever since the collapse of my first real affair, my idea of love had changed. I had decided that it was permissible to express love for any and all whose beauty or kindness inspired me. I doubted the virtue of this approach, and even more so its attractiveness, but I was caught between love for all and fear of loss of the one, which I had already experienced. At that moment, words failed me completely. So after a few long uncomfortable silences, I picked up a big stick and drew a heart in the dirt at Vera's feet.

Twisting playfully in her swing, Vera looked at me like I was the silly boy at the playground, which of course I was. But that was all I could do at the time, that clumsy effort to love through the chains. Salty tears nicked the cold iron with creeping red rust.

She went home to Prague shortly thereafter.

I followed her life through Wally, our boss at the flower shop. He had fallen in love with her as well, in a big way, and pursued her all the way to Prague. I learned of her social circles from him. I even got on the phone with the two of them sometimes, when Wally would ask me to help him give voice to his feelings.

There is of course a vast artistic circle in Prague. Several of them are American: Lee the drummer and Lucien the poet, as well as Duro the Tai Chi teacher, formerly one of the founders of Mother Earth News.

As time turned love's kaleidoscope, I learned from Wally that Vera had become involved with Duro, and one Tomas Slansky, a successful German doctor and notable bohemian singer-songwriter. These events were tragic for Wally. I gave him solace on numerous occasions. After selling flowers for him, we would talk endlessly over falafel at Mamoun's, the late night Syrian spot that was our home after hours.

One day, a letter came from Vera with poems in English. They were lovely mysterious poems that challenged my emotional comprehension and my artistic feeling. I wrote back. I called from a payphone in the Yale science lecture hall. A few years previously, I'd heard lectures there about the lifeless and nearly unintelligible astronomy now taught in Universities. We spoke of nothing and everything again. I had come to know of her garden cottage. I imagined it next to a river in ancient idyllic landscape, moody with magic, apple trees and animals.

In Moravia it was, an almost unimaginable corner of Middle Earth. The romantic mist obscured this refuge for love. I wanted to go, but said nothing.

I couldn't always make out exactly what was going on from Wally's tearful Prague bulletins, but I kept track as best I could. Somehow one day, another woman from the circle

arrived to sell flowers for the summer season. It was Lenka, girlfriend of Lee, the drummer.

Wally promptly fell in love with her. I was drawn, willingly, into the drama again, this time as more than a mostly casual observer and friend.

I had followed Vera's relationships with Duro and Tomas. They seemed deep and real so I had left her alone and comforted Wally the best I could. Now Lenka, a tall and bright blond nineteen year old was in New Haven on the ground. Wally was aggressively pursuing her. She couldn't return his feelings. What was I to do?



The events of the next months and days remains the most mysterious episode in my entire life. I have often thought of quantum physics¹⁴ in light of the apt phrase at the beginning of this chapter. Picture life as a kind of kaleidoscopic game of noncompetitive musical chairs. In each moment we perceive the world as it settles into a new configuration. We then either accept or reject that configuration with evolving responsiveness. Our responses then set the parameters for the next turn of the kaleidoscope, and turn it will.

Flowers wasn't my main business. In response to financial failure as a musician, I had taken up an old skill with computers and turned it into a decent living at the dawn of the internet age. At the time I did not fully foresee the disastrous consequences of the internet: the subjugation of humanity to its mechanical ways, invasive espionage and commerce, increasingly harmful electropollution and energy usage. For me, along with the business it provided, it was a way to learn about those things not taught in school. And those things abounded on the net.

Dragging myself slowly from death's door, I developed clients in New Haven, New York and Connecticut. Walter Borden – my friend and partner since high school – financed some independent efforts to unite science and art with the internet. Eventually, we entered the early stages of a capital raise. Another old passion of mine - venture capital - was aroused. As my health slowly improved, I began to see the glimmerings of possible success.

Although Elizabeth tried to hold onto me as I healed, she held still closer to her substances of choice: marijuana, inhalers and prednisone, a steroid used by asthmatics. These substances got in the way of both our spiritual and physical relationship such that I could no longer overcome my dismay with loving compassion. I began to give myself inner freedom of relationship, while still paying the bills and supporting her.

To be sure, I felt bad. But I felt as though Elizabeth was sacrificing herself, me and our relationship to the drugs. I was first of all, hurt, then sad, then finally furious.

And Lenka was definitely a damsel in distress. She didn't speak English as well as Vera,

but she let me know the trouble she was having with Wally. Soon thereafter, by the fountain at Yale's Sterling Library, we got together.

I was even happy sometimes that summer. I wrote a song celebrating the return of love to my life. I wrote words for that song, but carefully dedicated it to the Goddess. I didn't feel confident about myself, or any of the women in my life. So though I was certainly smitten with Lenka at the time, I wanted the song to be for the Divine Feminine. It consists of just one sentence:

"You are so beautiful to me."

I was afraid to be specific. I could not trust love because I did not know myself. Because I did not know myself, I could not know the meaning or right place of the people in my life. That said, I wanted to trust the healthy, happy feelings of that spring and early summer. Finally, I scooped up Lenka off the streets where she had landed on the run from Wally. I took her to the park in Greenwich where I had lived as a child. We slept there that night in the grass. When I awoke she had drawn a stunningly beautiful portrait of me in pencil. The next day I put her on the train for the airport, promising to visit her as soon as I could.

Returning to New Haven, I quietly bought a plane ticket to Prague for a month, the maximum length of time on a tourist visa. I would fly out around my birthday. It was my thirtieth birthday present to myself. I hoped it would turn out better than my twenty-ninth. I visited with my parents who blessed my journey and my birthday. They had been hoping I would leave Elizabeth and our psychoactive romance for many years. My father sensed, but spoke little, of the import of my trip. In his sober but kind way he let me know he felt respect for my choice and hopeful for its outcome. I went back to work with Walter, preparing our new startup, an artistic web development shop.

Just a couple weeks before the trip, the phone rings. I step into the sunny window alcove that looks out at the green back garden. I pick up the handset on the phone/fax machine I keep there. Imagine my surprise when a beautiful halting voice emerges from the grey handset:

"Hello, is Wally there? This is Vera."

Stunned moment of silence.

"No, this is Leland." Love rushes into the gaps in the conversation. I'm bewildered, excited, ashamed, confused.

"But I'll give you Wally's number." I have it memorized and give it to her. Amazingly, thankfully, she stays on the phone, speaking warmly "I'm thinking of coming back to America. Do you think Wally would let me work again?" Oh my God. What can this be?

"I'm sure he would," I smile, but worry just a little.

“Hey, guess what,” I continue, “I’m coming to Prague.”

It took my whole life, everything I knew about the loving nature of authenticity to say those words. Elizabeth was in the next room, totally unaware of my plans. Lenka was waiting for me in Prague and here I was talking to Vera. Conventional morality might have prevented me from saying anything, but my heart knew better. I trusted my heart, and let it speak. I felt exalted like a worm. But for the vision of her I had had, I would have felt like a fool. She picked me up off the ground where I squirmed. I was overjoyed, but not completely surprised by her next words:

“Oh really? I might have a place for you to stay when you come.”

The Goddess is Great.

She never asked why I was coming or anything else. I wasn’t even sure I was going. The tickets were an option, but I had changed my mind about leaving Elizabeth many times before. Forgiveness and love had seemed to be the right choice at the time.

Vera mentioned she was going to the Rainbow Gathering in Hungary, but would be back shortly after the beginning of September. With a secret, blooming joy I proposed to call her when she returned. I made sure I had all her numbers: at Duro’s, at her parent’s apartment, and at her Grandmother’s house near the garden cottage. I put the phone down – my heart wild. A thought jumped unbidden into my mind like an angel. “You’re actually going to see Vera. Remember the vision...” Dumbstruck, I stood there, in the hall.

As the effect of the phone call wore off, I put the whole thing out of my mind so as not to torment myself. For all I knew Vera was still happy with Duro or Tomas. And I was going to see Lenka. I went back to my healing and to work, not knowing what to think or do. I would leave the future to the mysterious kaleidoscope.



The day of my flight arrived.

I was in New York City meeting with Walter and our new venture partner Alex Kemp, a brilliant artist and bon vivant. He and Walter had commissioned a professional artistic photo shoot. They wanted me to scan and upload it to the web. They presented me with a large manila envelope of prints and proofs, and proceeded to describe the effect they wanted it to have online.

I could barely hear them. Flight time was approaching. I confessed.

“Guys, I might be going to Prague today.”

Brief pause. They were basically nonplussed. I was known for spontaneity.

“Well, if you’re going, just leave the photos with us,” said Walter, practical, accepting, kind as ever. I felt bad, and doubted my resolve. I was still weak and sickly, not entirely sure if I could survive the flight. I needed the work for both money and purpose, so I held on tightly to the envelope. It had become a lifeline.

I assured them I would get it done or send it back to them if I couldn’t. I bid my partners goodbye, took the envelope and headed for the airport bus out of Grand Central Station.

Scared and unsure, I spoke quietly to myself: “Just go out to the airport, you can decide any time whether or not you want to fly.” Coaxing, reassuring, holding my own hand in this way every step, I felt astonished to find myself on time for the bus. There was no traffic on the way to the airport. Joy, amazement, the Universe is with me! Fear, disappointment, if there could just be some traffic on this road, I could miss my flight and forget this insanity. My heart climbed higher and higher into my throat, challenging my brain for control.

I got off the bus and checked in, amazed I hadn’t forgotten my ticket or something. Passport, check. Nothing would go wrong. No one blinked an eye at me, smooth as glass was the sailing. Hours early I took my seat in the Czech Airways boarding lounge. It had been years since I’d flown anywhere.

I sat there uncomfortably at the far end of a long wing of gates. I could have looked out the great plate glass windows at the runway and planes, but for the sea of pictures flooding me from within. Great oceans of feeling washed and waved up around me. I can only imagine what I must have looked like to the other passengers. I sat there blind to the world, staring at the guilt of leaving Elizabeth, our animals, and her health issues. This was a no-turning back moment and I knew it. I knew that I had to follow my own vision, and yet I also knew there would be trials associated with so doing. I would not take them lightly anymore. I was paralyzed by fear, and sat rooted to the spot, as the various rows of passengers were called to their seats.

Then, my row number was called. I could not move. I dared not move. I just couldn’t decide what to do with my mind. Justifications for my actions either way seemed irrelevant. What mattered was that deeper knowing which I had come to doubt could help me. My still fledgling faith in the sacred basis of my own will had been shaken by my near-death experience. It had never been strong anyway. I tried to make a conscious decision, like the one I’d made when taking the vows. But it was no use. I sat, unmoving, until I was the last...the only person at the gate.

I prepared for the inevitable, whatever that would be...trying to stay authentic...

And then it happened.

A pleasant voice came over the airport intercom: “Would Leland Lehrman please come to

the gate for boarding. Leland Lehrman, please come to the gate for boarding.”

That’s all, it was just a friendly professional page. She pronounced my name perfectly, which is rare, but she was probably Czech, and they know how to pronounce the German. I wonder if the woman whose voice called my name that day has any idea the power it had in my life.¹⁵ I rose to her call, cast under a spell, released from another. “This is like sleepwalking,” I thought giddily, as I watched my body and the rest of me walk up the ramp onto the plane.

In my seat I felt exuberant and youthful. I was grateful and no longer guilty. I no longer felt that oppressive load. Adventure, romance, freedom, peace, all beckoned to me with open arms. The future was fun and free again. I settled into my chair and smiled inwardly at myself and life. I could tell by the way I felt that I had done the right thing, but no more than that could I foresee.

At such moments, the body and feelings become the best decision-making tool we have. Indeed, this is always the case, but we deny their role in our lives to the point where we are led astray. Then, when, we blame our body and feelings for bad outcomes, we forget or don’t recognize the distorting and deforming influence our doubts and denials had on the natural beauty, perceptiveness and divinity of our sensitive self, the body and feelings. Let me clarify.

The body and feelings together form the very essence of the sacred discernment process in the human being. They alone are able to sense adequately on behalf of life, between visions and ideas that are good for us – for life – and those that are bad. When we deny them this sacred role in our life, we are then easily led astray by abstractions masquerading as morals, and judgments posing as understanding. When we deny our body and feelings, and then blame them for bad outcomes, we distort and deform them. Then we claim we do not recognize the effect this maltreatment had on the natural divinity of the sensitive self. We judge it evil for becoming deformed and distorted, though it was by our own actions we cursed it. But the Goddess, who lives in us as our feelings, is merciful. She is still willing to help us along, if we don’t fight with her unceasingly. We can give her room to act, in our feet, heart, and head. Although this is an order of decision-making with which some may be unfamiliar, with time it can become natural again.

Let your *feet* do the walking.¹⁶

Happily bouncing between this exuberant state and peaceful sleep, I crossed the ocean in bliss. I woke to the exquisite pleasure of absorbing the European countryside. Even at that height, the arrangement of field and village presents itself as the signature of a culture with natural ideas and a robust pattern language for human settlement. The fairy tale aspect of the European rural landscape – with its beautifully cultured architecture – has been almost entirely lost in the cheap ruggedness of contemporary rural America. I mourn its passing, and call for its revival.



The dream started falling apart almost immediately upon landing.

Lenka met me at the airport with sweetness tinged by a distance I could not place. Her English seemed to have disappeared now she was back home. My attempts to communicate the extent of my crisis at the airport failed. It was not that she didn't understand that bothered me. It was that she didn't seem to want to. All that was haunting me – the difficult decision to leave Elizabeth, the continuing ordeal of healing – none of this could find an audience with her. She was apparently content to think of me as her romantic American visitor. My personal issues did not fit the story, nor require her attention.

She saw something special and beautiful in me, that is undeniable. She had drawn the most beautiful portrait of me I have ever seen. But here on her own soil something of the every day had crept into her feelings. Loneliness swept over me, as if the special thankfulness and enthusiasm she had shown for our relationship was no longer.

We took the bus into Prague from the airport and made our way to some lovely tea room beneath the castle. During the bus ride I tried to speak to her of the difficulty I had leaving Elizabeth. She could not, or would not relate. What was I thinking? I was ten years older than she. How could I expect her to understand at only nineteen? And yet I needed someone who could, or at least wanted to know about my inner life, and not just in its romantic aspect. I started to feel afraid. What had I done?

We made our way by light rail to the rings of communist-era apartment blocks on the outskirts of Prague. The air became oppressive. I fell in behind her, walking as if a child following its mother. Now I understood. She was going home, and had arranged for me to stay at a guest house close to where she lived with her parents. She did not even invite me to her house, but left me alone at the guest house with a promise to return the next day to take me to the second hand store for clothes.

Although I had arrived with just the shirt on my back, I felt so much more complete than Lenka. I did not need the second hand store. I needed her to want to be available for me. I wanted her to listen and talk to me out of love, interest and concern. I stood there lonely and speechless, watching her blond hair and tall form recede into the distance towards her apartment. And I began to feel as if I had made a horrible mistake.

I couldn't shake it. Feelings and pictures flowed through me that I didn't want but couldn't deny. Here I'd left a long-standing relationship with a mature woman, who, for all her faults was at least able to understand my feelings and was willing to listen maturely and with understanding, when she wanted to. I'd left her for a barely full-grown child who was parking me close by for her amusement as she wound her solemn way through a kind of dreary communist young adulthood of art and second hand dreams. This characterization is horribly unfair, but I

could not avoid it because the truth – that for all her beauty and kindness, Lenka could not help me and could not really relate to me – was close enough to my fearful fantasies to require consideration. Maybe I should have been more understanding, or at least more patient with her. But *I* couldn't take care of *her* right then, especially not here in the Czech Republic. *I* needed help.

I panicked and made a violent emotional three sixty.

This had all been a mistake. No problem.

I'd seen the payphone on the way to the guesthouse. I'd go and call Elizabeth, apologize tearfully, beg her again to give up smoking and catch the next flight home.

I rested in the guesthouse until evening came, then made my way to the payphone in the darkening twilight.

The first part of the plan worked okay, although Elizabeth was not amused. She couldn't really appreciate how my health crisis had catalyzed the meltdown of the bonds between us. As I saw it, my choice was either to live, or to die with Elizabeth. And I didn't ever consider *that* a choice, committed as I was to life. But as night fell in Prague, I was prepared to forgive and forget. She didn't discourage me from returning. We had a plan.

We were on the phone until late in the night, and in darkness I returned to the guest house. I reached for the outside door and...

Locked. I reached for the key in my pocket. No key. I was locked out in the Prague projects at night.

There followed perhaps the most terrifying night of my life since the overdose. Although I never feared for my life as I had those nights in New Haven, I got a powerful glimpse into the dark heart of communism.

In my state – and with no Czech to speak of – I feared trying to wake the landlord would get me arrested, or at least a scolding I was in no mood to endure. It was too cold to just walk around all night. That's what I usually did when I was on the run from life. But there was an early autumn chill in the air.

I looked around and started weighing my options, when a brightly lit bus zoomed into view. I hopped on with barely a moment's hesitation. This is it, crazy laughter, I'll ride the bus til dawn. And I did.

It was warm and the driver didn't mind if I snoozed in the back.

The bus I chose ran a circle from one project to another. It wound its way among tall, white, and ghostly monstrosities, ominous gulags raised in homage to the death of Art and Soul,

God and Goddess. Dreary, dumpy, tortured grocery stores went by one after another. Wide and lonely, white and weedy, the concrete walkways of this urban moonscape testified to lives of silent suffering and social alienation. That night I confirmed for myself the familiar critique of Communism. The dystopian future Orwell had depicted in 1984, Eugene Zamiatin in We, was right before my sleepy eyes.

I was long past faith in Western Capitalism, but *this* was no alternative.

Is there a happy middle somewhere? I could have spent some time considering what that was. But I didn't.

I was just gettin' the hell out of Dodge. I would think later.

I was amazingly ready to go back to America and wrestle with my sorry life. So what if I had been forgotten along with the rest of culture in the digital apocalypse. Millenium-crazed America Inc. was hurtling towards a conveniently permanent "War on Terror." But at least I would have my little white house on the corner, solidarity with a few friends and artists, our animals and flowers for company. The dream of a new life and love had time-warped horribly into a soulless communist nightmare.

Even the forlorn prospect of Elizabeth's America was better than taking on this terrifying edifice to nothingness, this now obvious source of Lenka's curious incapacity for pathos. I counted myself blessed by revelation. Now I understood the fullness of my mistake. How could I have known in advance, before seeing it with my own eyes, about this wasteland of soul death I must escape at all costs? I felt like a defector.

Finally, it was morning. The bus came round again to the stop by the guest house. I hopped off with purpose and almost confidently rang the bell to get in. The lady was nice enough, as she let me into my room, but I hardly remember her. I was focused on survival and escape. Exhausted, I lay down and slept a while.

At the agreed time, Lenka rang the doorbell. It was time for our outing to the second hand store.

I did not answer it. I could not answer it. I just did not know what to do or say.

I feel bad about it to this day. But I could not answer the door except by not answering. My words could not hope to be as full an explanation of my decision as my absence. I could not bear to see her confused reaction. I fear hurting people and have no excuses good enough to justify my actions, especially when I do not feel like there will be understanding for my side of the story. I always seem to have feelings no one else can relate to, parents, friends...girlfriends. And right then, I did not have the ability to help Lenka with her emotional development. Mine was messed up enough as it was, and I had made my decision. Nothing she could have said would have changed my mind. Of that I was sure.

There must be a better way, but then I did not know what it was. Looking back on it now, I feel like a worm, again. And yet, today, I am no longer half-dead. Then, I was still on the edge, wounded and on the run from the war between the sexes and the war of morals and lifestyle.

Today I can imagine speaking with her kindly, and taking the time to try and help her understand. Only now have I come to the point where I can declare myself truthfully and compassionately, maintaining respect for others, with kindness towards all.

Then, I just huddled under the blanket on the bed...and waited for Lenka to go away.

If I could have spoken, I might have said something like this, because this is what I was feeling, unfair as it may have been.

“Yesterday, when I tried to communicate the soul crisis I was in you dismissed it, and went home to your parents. You left me alone on the first night of our visit, walking off prim and proper without a kiss or even a real hug. You left me there, in sight of demons of all shapes and sizes: buildings, ideologies, telephone booths. As far as I’m concerned, you either don’t care or don’t really know how to care about how I feel. And I am not about to go through the motions of an immature relationship, even with one so lovely, talented and upright as you. I need depth, healing...*authentic* physicality. I wish you well, but I have to go.”

One day perhaps I will get to say what I wished I knew how to say then; something satisfying for her, and liberating for both of us.

When I was sure she was gone, I gathered my few belongings and left quietly. I felt ashamed and cowardly.

But how could I survive a superficial relationship in a post-apocalyptic soul hell?

I made a beeline for the airport.

Back at the Czech Air ticket window I asked for the next flight out of there. The woman at the counter was kind, looking at her computer for a few seconds, then back to me with a minimum of accent:

“There’s a flight back to New York today, can I book you on it?”

“Yes, please, I’d like to change the departure date on this ticket.” I pushed my ticket across the counter feeling excellent and underway.

She typed a few characters and then looked mildly over at me saying, “That will be one hundred and twenty five dollars for the date change.”

“Sure, no problem.” I hadn’t changed much money into crowns yet. Digging around in my pockets I managed to produce something like \$112 and put it on the counter, still looking for spare change. Finally, I gave up and looked hopefully back and forth from the lady to the pile of

cash. We both stood there a minute awkwardly. I was probably hoping she would just forget about the \$13 and call it close enough. But she did not, and looked bemusedly at me with mild impatience.

“Uh...I guess I’ll have to come back,” I managed to sputter.

I’m sure she agreed pleasantly, with the minimum of accent, and just a hint of the cocked eyebrows that betray the “what the hell are you doing?” face, one of the more common responses to my occasional improvisations. I glumly gathered my money and travel documents from the counter, and wandered off into the small, but nice airport lobby.

I guess I’ll have to call Dad.

Both my parents had supported this trip on principle. They were sure Elizabeth was wrong for me and could sense that sobriety and rebirth were behind the trip Prague. The fact that I was going to propose returning could be a problem though. Perhaps I would just articulate my nightmare bus ride through the ninth hell of Communism by way of explanation. Dad’s hard core anti-communist, he’ll understand. I wasn’t really thinking. I was back in the clouds, floating along in a “So what *is* my destiny?” daze from one incomprehensible situation to the next.

Before I even got halfway across the terminal; like lightning an angel appeared as a voice that appeared as if from everywhere.

“Now you can call Vera.” Trumpets sounded.

A stunned slow smile spread slowly over my face. But I didn’t miss a beat.

I walked to the bank of pay phones and dialed one number after the next. I left a message at one, spoke to her mother at the next, her grandmother at another. Something like that. They didn’t speak much English, but more than I did Czech. I left word for Vera everywhere, under my name, and thought I sensed helpfulness in the responses. Ragged and dashed, I still had my kindness. Somehow my words translated for Vera’s kin.

I started to feel hopeful that I would be able to see her, although I knew she might still be at the Rainbow Gathering in Hungary. I think someone agreed to let Vera know I was trying to reach her. I left the airport and headed back to Prague to get in touch with my parents.

I had decided on email. I could maybe write down what I had no idea how to say on the phone.

I took the bus to the heart of the city,
To the bridge on the Vltava.
A cafe looks over the water,
Bridge and palace, dreamy and pretty.

Above the bridge, there is a low dam.
Water whitens as it rushes like fools.
Boats float by in the dark pools.
I watched with the swans as they swam.

The river flowed silent that way,
Past the ancient stones.
Gold statues, saints and kings
Pose in dignity, on the throne

Of the people who live there today,
Some singing.

I have no idea what I said to my parents. I was scared to communicate with them in this humiliating and heartbroken condition. I just needed thirteen bucks to get home.

It was minimalist, I'm sure; something telegraphic like:

“Please send twenty bucks Western Union STOP Need to change date on return flight
STOP Don't worry I'm OK STOP Love Leland END”

I sent the message and then sat there thinking, “Now what.” I could only watch the river for so long.

I stood up and wandered down to the bridge, then up and over it slowly, towards the castle. I was in an uncertain state again, but getting used to it. In such a state, possibility expands. Our heart's desire can be considered, and granted. The future is open. The Goddess does not feel rejected. She can be our friend, once again. In this way Life can become good.

It had been several hours since the phone calls at the airport. So I decided to try Vera again. At the other end of the bridge, a gothic tower of dark stone guards the river. It stands there protectively, looking out over the parks and fine houses on the banks. Turning right down the street from the tower, I found a few restaurants with outdoor patios. Next to one of them, there was a cozy phone booth that looked inviting.

I summoned my courage and dialed the number. She picked up right away.

I stumbled over the line. My dull wits and faint heart struggled for words. I have no idea what I said, but I'm sure it wasn't anything special. Vera didn't seem to mind, “Where are you?” she asked kindly, ignoring my clumsiness. I brightened, and began to speak normally. I described my location. “No problem,” she smiled through the phone, and said the words I remember so clearly.

“Just take the number 18 tram to Kralovsky Letohradek.”

I laughed out loud as a language barrier jumped up between us.

“What? OK...How do you spell that?”

I got out my pen and listened as she described how much farther I had to go: towards the castle, away from the bridge, to the tram stop on the curving square.

Amused as I was by my clumsy response to the richly consonantal Czech language, Vera then spelled out the name of the tram stop and encouraged me not to worry.

It was all just as she said.

The orange tram met me, with a ring of its bell, soon after I arrived at the stop. We clanged our way through streets and tunnels, stopping just once near the river. Then we turned and zigzagged up the steep back side of the castle hill. It was just two stops. I had been so close to her all along.

That old feeling – Fear and Future – swept over me as we pulled into Kralovsky Letohradek. Those words mean The King’s Summer Garden. Finally, I was here.

I saw her then as I stepped down from the tram. The smile on her face said it all. She wore an orange dress with a wilderness of dreadlocks flowing out behind her.

That smile wrapped us in a time blanket. The past disappeared politely. The future would be happy to wait, of course. And the eternal present stopped for just a moment, watching happily, like a child wondering at the world.

I knew right then.

As we wandered down the cobblestone streets,
Our souls entwined like grapes around a peach tree.

Now I understand the orange tram I rode.

Dreams come true this way.

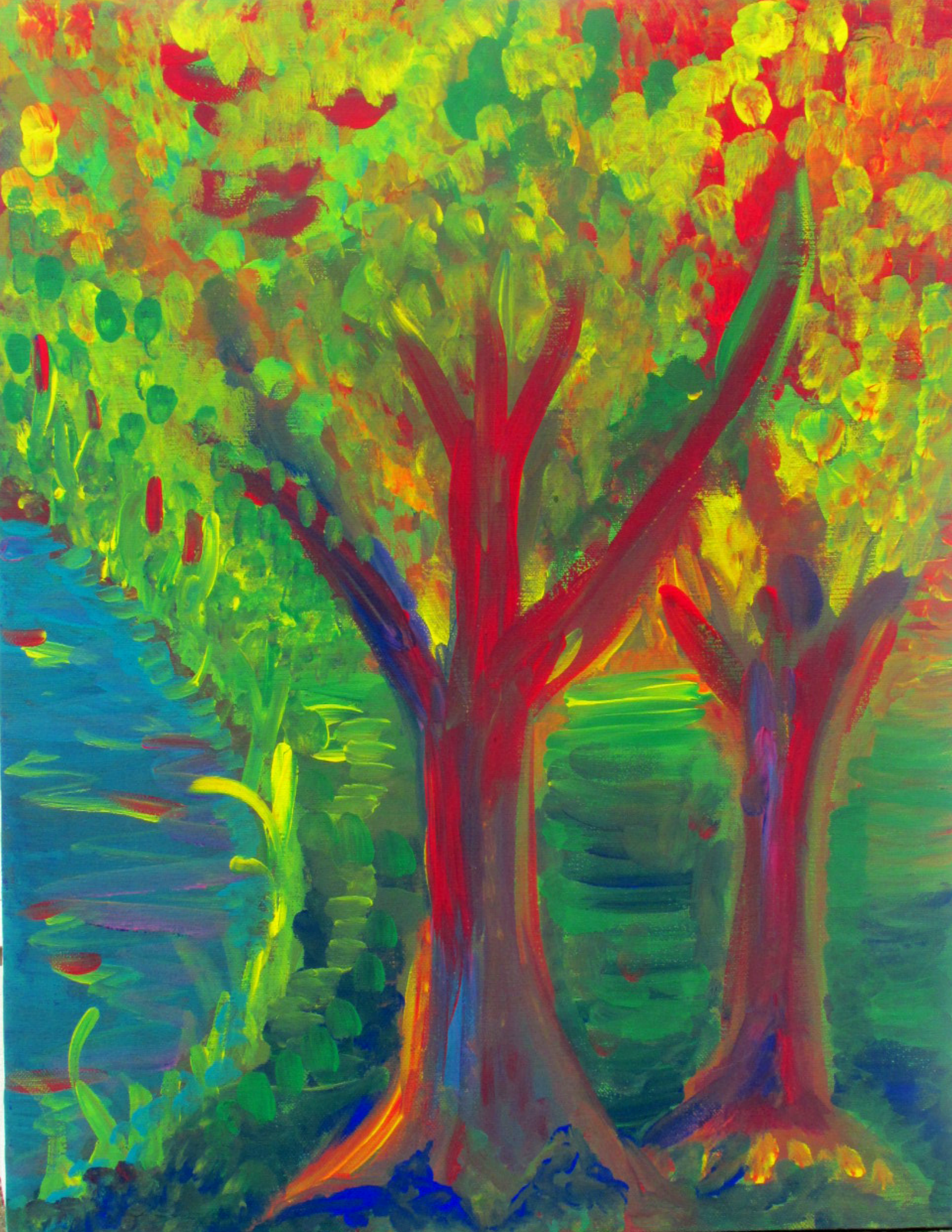




To learn more about me or to share your vision – which of course I encourage – feel free to stop by, call or write:

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Endnotes

- 1 It was an early experience of intentional present awareness in the body, a phenomenon known in the healing uses of biofeedback, yoga (prana/akasha) and the etheric forces (anthroposophy).
- 2 When my instructor picked me up at the site where I landed, he told me that the wind decreases closer to Earth, and that I would have been able to make it to the runway if I had just held course.
- 3 The main character of the Catcher in the Rye, by J.D. Salinger
- 4 Harold and Maude are the main characters in a movie of that title, featuring music by Cat Stevens.
- 5 Those interested in dream imagery might note the significance of the bridge and sun here.
- 6 Readers interested in further clarity on these points might consult the Right Use of Will series, Ceanne de Rohan, Four Winds Publishing, Santa Fe, New Mexico. <http://rightuseofwill.com>
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 I am aware that Aristotle was Greek, hence the reference to Southern European Culture in the sentence. For more information on the relationship between Aristotle and Aquinas, please see Rudolf Steiner's Core Mission, by Thomas Meyer, published by Steiner Books.
- 10 For those not familiar with this crucial word from the Hebrew, *immanence* derives from the Hebrew, Immanuel, or God with us: Im, with, Anu, us, El, God. I use it to invoke the absolutely critical understanding that the Divine is actually alive and present in the World – and within our entire humanity; body, mind and soul – at all times. Without this understanding, Life can appear cut off from God. With it, All is Possible.
- 11 At the time I had the beginnings of an understanding of the difference between popular Christianity and the original version as practiced by the Essenes and the Apostles. I had read the gospels on my own, and could see for myself the difference between the words of Jesus and the practices of the Church and so-called Christians. I had also read The Magus of Strovolos by Spyros Sathi and so was aware of the traditions of the esoteric Christians. But doubts ran deep, and die hard. In the face of death, the limitations of one's faith and knowledge become painfully apparent.
- 12 My wife and I ran a teahouse in Santa Fe many years later. During that time we studied and experienced the problems of caffeine. After a particularly bad bout of flu associated with too many cappuccinos, it was time to give it up forever. I learned that caffeine and nicotine were both natural insecticides created by plants to deter their predators. That may be sufficient intellectual justification for abstinence. I didn't need the justification anyway. My body was giving me the heads up. I don't ignore that anymore.
- 13 Some years earlier I had read Black Elk Speaks about the great Lakota Medicine Man's life and vision. In the book, Black Elk recalled his trip to Europe with Buffalo Bill's rodeo. Lonely and homesick one night, he had traveled home in his vision to visit his mother. This journey had the same quality about it, especially the feeling of flying over land and water.
- 14 The essential basics of quantum physics are that one cannot know both the position and the momentum of subatomic particles at the same time, because to measure them is to affect them. In other words, not only is beauty in the eye of the beholder, but all of Creation, in particular its essential qualities. In addition, quantum physics demonstrates that at very small scales, "reality" is a series of optional states of matter/energy. Things and events can turn out one way or another in ways that are mysteriously hard to predict or understand without recourse to statistics or philosophy. There are many works on the relationship between physics and philosophy. The Dancing Wu Li Masters, by Gary Zukav may be of interest.
- 15 Let's remember that when we speak to others.
- 16 Right Use of Will