

A

Attention

Relax and Pay Attention

Gravity again!

My head followed a smooth arc toward its destined kiss with the highway. Time slowed, a familiar sensation when facing imminent disaster. Words came into my empty mind one at a time:

"I'm either going to live....or....die.

Either way, it's going to be interesting.

So relax and pay attention."

My body, already surrendered in a back dive with hands at my sides, let go of a last bit of tension. My eyes closed as awareness expanded in all directions, an indistinct field with no images, just a quality of softness and safety like falling into a feather bed. If I had believed in angels at the time, I might have seen them.

Relax and pay attention... hey, wait a minute! I was barely launching into adulthood at twenty-two. Non-attachment was a worthy Buddhist philosophy, more appealing than the hard-core materialism of my suburban Midwestern upbringing, but I was looking forward to having a few more adventures in this life. Hopefully stick around long enough to make some sort of a contribution. Things were just getting interesting.

A few weeks earlier I had started the fall quarter at New College in Sarasota, Florida, moved into a house scheduled for demolition on Main Street, furnished it with an old mattress and a four-dollar chair from Goodwill and painted the kitchen bright green. When a friend of a

friend named Phil came by and offered fifty dollars for three days of hauling organic fruits and vegetables around the state, I jumped on the opportunity. In 1976 I could stretch this to cover my groceries for two months, and in addition to a chance to make a few bucks I was eager to see new territory far from the populated tourist centers.

We took off in a battered UPS-style van with the doors wide open to avoid asphyxiation from a carbon monoxide leak. Except for brief spells behind the wheel to give Phil a break, I perched on two orange crates that served as a passenger seat. We headed inland, then down through the Everglades, skirted Miami, and continued south. Arriving at the agricultural breadbasket around Homestead, we stopped at farm after farm, picking mangos off of trees and eating creamy, delicious avocados the size of cantaloupes, too big to ship North for market. We sampled dozens of varieties of honey during an afternoon with a beekeeper. I'd grown up on orange blossom honey, but buckwheat honey had an entirely different flavor and palmetto honey was a revelation.

Near the end of our last night of driving I was riding shotgun on I-75, facing the driver with my eyes glued to a stack of produce boxes that threatened to tip forward onto his head. As we rolled into Tampa, he leaned into the curve on the Hillsborough Avenue ramp and I felt the crates levitate beneath me.

After a moment of weightlessness, I sailed backwards out the door. Streetlights, headlights, taillights turned upside down in an impressionistic blur.

Through the silent center of my mind, word by word passed through calmly and distinctly.

R e l a x
a n d
p a y
a t t e n t i o n

My skull hit the pavement with a loud CRACK but no pain. That came a second later when an orange crate landed on my left hand—I hadn't been paying attention there. When the slow-motion effect ended after a skid, I scrambled out of the road before my consciousness faded into the orange scented mist on the shoulder.

After what seemed like no time at all, I became aware of a small crowd hovering above me.

“The ambulance is on its way!”

“How much does a ride to the hospital cost?” My tone seemed to reassure the bystanders. They started to disperse, or at least fade from my sight.

“Thirty-five, plus one dollar a mile.”

“Do I have to pay if I don’t get in?”

“No, I don’t think so.”

“Good, then tell them I’m okay. I don’t need an ambulance.”

The ambulance took off without me as I started babbling something about Cincinnati, the home of my German immigrant ancestors. When two policemen offered a ride in their squad car, I accepted gratefully. I dove into the back seat apologizing for streaking blood across their upholstery. My long hair and the back of my t-shirt were soaked and dripping, the red blending patriotically into a Spiro Agnew-as-Mickey Mouse design.

At the hospital emergency room, I was admitted and remember opening the doors for other arrivals while waiting to be called in for x-rays. My only other memory is of a nurse peering curiously through a white curtain, and realizing that I had been chanting the 99 names of God in Arabic. *Ya Hayy! Ya Haqq! O Life! O Truth! Allah Hu Akbar! God is great!*

After x-rays came stitches, which I didn’t feel were necessary even though I still have a bumpy scar all these decades later. The nurse assured me that she would shave as little hair as possible, and that it would eventually grow back. I laughed in delight-- how sweet that she was concerned about my appearance when I was astounded to be alive! I giggled through the stitches; the more concern and kindness they showed, the more I overflowed with giddy gratitude.

Since that day, *“Relax and Pay Attention”* has become my mantra for times of literal or metaphorical free fall. I’m pretty consistent with this habit but can’t claim 100%. After a head-on crash the kids told me, “You said the *S-word* and then your head went through the window!” I was given another chance to practice when my car was T-boned by a psychiatrist in a black SUV running a red light. This time I watched the hood of my Ford station wagon crumple toward me while remaining present and relaxed. Since it happened on the lunch break while teaching a

trauma therapy workshop, I had a conveniently fresh incident to use for a class demonstration the next day.

Now here's the toughest challenge: if I can *relax and pay attention* in a crisis, what about in this moment, sipping coffee on a Sunday morning as I edit stories in bed?

The practice continues.

B

Birth

Gabriel

As the weeks of November passed one by one, I lived with a rising terror that I might be pregnant. My period had never been this late before and I'd taken a careless risk. How could I go to college on student loans, pay rent in San Francisco, and provide for a child? Raising the baby with its father was out of the question. Abortion had seemed like a sensible option before actually facing the choice, but now my mind refused go there.

I was laying awake on yet another sleepless night when the name--Gabrielle or Gabriel--came to me. Although I'd never had a connection with family, friends, or even public figure named Gabriel, I decided that this was what I'd call my baby-- while still praying desperately not to have one. Finally, after four days of fasting with only water, I was relieved to get my period and move on with my life. I didn't mention the name--or the pregnancy scare-- to anyone.

Five months later, while visiting a friend in Aspen, I dreamed I was in Navajoland, face to face with the very pregnant wife of the principal I'd worked with at Rough Rock Demonstration School. I gently placed my hands on her belly and gave a blessing to the baby. I awoke with the realization, *"I need to do that."*

In the afternoon I met a man who offered to give me a ride home to San Francisco, but wanted to take a scenic route.

"Have you ever been to Rough Rock, Arizona?"

"Let's go!"

That evening I gave the blessing of the morning's dream, and later I discovered that the father and mother, Mark and Georgia, had been discussing names for their baby when a visitor suggested "Gabriel".

On May 18th, back home in San Francisco, I dreamed that I was in labor surrounded by several women. Holding my belly, I walked out of the room and down the sidewalk of a small, western town. At the corner I squatted down and a baby slid out into my hands from under my long dress, a glowing raspberry color, the most beautiful sight I'd ever beheld.

As I melted into awe and love for this tiny new life, a woman who had followed me spoke gently from behind.

"Remember, there was something you wanted to do."

Oh, yes! I raised the baby up toward where the sun was shining in the mid-afternoon sky and dedicated it to the light. I awakened with a smile.

A thousand miles away, Gabriel was born at 3:00 that day in an Indian Health Service hospital on the reservation.

Mark and Georgia divorced when Gabe was six, and his sister Jessica was four. Mark and I ended up in a marriage that lasted for thirty years. Many stories later, Gabriel is now serving the Light as a minister and the father of our grandchildren.

C

Creation

Caesars 3-Step

Summer flew by in a blur of rock stars, models, and driving fast in a red convertible. Rome, Florence, Venice, Bastille Day in Paris. Indescribable food, glorious art and architecture, a dinner cruise with Def Leppard on the Seine. My boyfriend—let’s just call him Mr. Wonderful—was an architect who designed recording studios starting with Electric Ladyland for Jimi Hendrix. He seemed to know everyone and liked to introduce me as a killer blackjack player. We’d met in Vegas where we followed the 1985 Hagler-Hearns fight that went down in history as “The War” with a helicopter ride over the city. A trip to Hollywood the next month led to an invitation to move to New York with a European vacation thrown in. He needed a girlfriend/mother figure to accompany him and his 11-year-old daughter and I found myself swept up in his glittering world.

Four days after our return to New York, I had a dream in which Mr. Wonderful announced that our relationship was over.

Devastated, I wailed, “Isn’t there anything I can do?”

“Well, if you mop those stairs,” he replied, pointing to a bucket and mop next to a staircase that climbed upward until it disappeared into the clouds, “then we can talk about it”.

I rushed to the bottom of the stairs and grabbed the mop.

Wait a minute. I stopped, took a breath, put down the mop, and slowly shook my head.

I awoke with gratitude. Whew! Just another crazy dream. I went about my day in the wooded luxury of Westchester County.

When he came home from the city that night, Mr. Wonderful announced that his old girlfriend had stopped by his office. With cocaine. He knew our relationship had been restoring

his health and happiness, but as he put it, “I’m afraid that what I really want is to walk into restaurants with a tall, skinny redhead in fur coats and have everyone turn and stare at us.”

I didn’t see myself in that picture. I’d quit cocaine after a very brief fling in my early 20’s, and had more recently sworn off of trying to save men from themselves. This was a good opportunity to renew my vow. Later that day I called my friend, Mark, who was working as a school principal on the Navajo reservation, to ask about jobs.

There weren’t any current openings. But before we hung up, he mentioned that he and his wife were getting divorced.

“Oh...that’s... too bad.”

I stifled the curious thrill that arose at hearing this—I was hunting for employment, not another boyfriend!-- and we said our good-byes. For seven years I’d kept my feelings about this man secret even from myself, and now I needed to get my own life together. Time to grow up and stop following hot dudes around the world.

My next call was to a friend in California about retrieving my computer that he’d kept for me while I traveled. When he realized that I was living across the Hudson River from his mentor, a little Jewish lawyer named Arnold Patent, he suggested that I run over for a visit.

That night, Arnold graciously spent an hour listening and reassuring me that all would be well on my rocky path. He had shifted gears after a mid-life spiritual awakening and wrote his insights into a book with the grandiose but sincere title “You Can Have It All”. As a parting gift he handed me a copy.

Decades before “The Secret” and the Law of Attraction craze, Arnold had distilled his understanding of the principles of manifestation into short, straightforward chapters. The bottom line was distilled into a three-step procedure:

- 1) *Look what I’ve created.* Whatever it is, just look. You don’t have to figure out *how* you created it, just be open to the fact that there it is.
- 2) *No judging.* No good, no bad. If judgments do come up (and they will), let them go.
- 3) *How would I like to feel?* Simply create the feelings you prefer, whether you think you have reasons for them or not.

I soon found a perfect time to test Arnold's theories, since right before leaving Vegas I had loaned nearly all of my money to help a guy move to Alaska and never saw him again. No worries though, since I was flying off with Mr. Wonderful! Down to my last \$100 in Europe, I spent half at the models' favorite hairdresser and half of the rest on a bottle of French perfume. When the plans for Happily Ever After went up a cloud of white powder, I moved into the windowless spare bedroom of a friend-of-a-friend on Union Square with my remaining twenty-dollar bill.

"Look what I created..."

On my first night in Manhattan I was picked up in a stretch limo and whisked to an obscenely expensive dinner. My Vegas connections, young backgammon players, were now showing off their Wall Street expense accounts. "How much caviar can you eat?" Not something I care to do very often, but I got the message: I wasn't going to starve.

I tucked Arnold's book away in my luggage as I zigzagged across the country. Painting carnival rides with an old buddy in Memphis raised enough money for a one-week Greyhound bus ticket to get back in Vegas. There I would be reunited with my car, my cat Lucille, and all of my possessions that hadn't fit into a suitcase. On the way I gave half of my last \$80 to a woman with two little kids who was escaping from an abusive relationship and sold my camera to pay for a flight from Denver when my bus ticket expired a day sooner than expected.

Viva Las Vegas! After replacing a dead car battery I found myself with exactly thirty-six cents....which meant Lucille and I were down to one can of cat food. I had left all my belongings in a spare room of a house owned by the guy who'd vanished in Alaska, and over the summer other people had moved in and tossed everything out on the back porch where chickens and rabbits had made their home in it.

Time to pull out the Three Step.

"Look what I've created."

I found myself, quite literally, looking at a pile of shit.

"No judging."

Still a pile of shit. But okay, there it is.

"How would I like to feel?"

Um.....hmmm.....mmmmm.....aaah...yes, like *this*.

I took a breath and relaxed, then giggled as a flood of joy rose through my body. The waves continued while I washed my hair, dug out a leather mini-dress, and coasted down to Caesars Palace. I passed up the valet since I didn't have a buck for a tip and parked out in the big lot, thankful that the heat of summer had passed. I walked in the front door smiling, without any thoughts except gratitude for being alive.

Within a few minutes I passed a roulette table surrounded by players. A middle-aged guy in a sports coat turned and smiled.

"What's it gonna be?"

"Number ten." Without thinking, the words flew out my mouth.

He slapped two \$25 chips on the black square and watched the ball circle the wheel until it dropped into the number ten slot with a click. The dealer counted out chips until there was \$1800 on the green felt.

"Hey, you're lucky! Come hang out with us. Whatever I win I'll split between you and my buddy here."

At the end of twenty minutes he scooped up stacks of hundred dollar chips, split them into roughly even piles, and handed them over.

"Are you ready for lunch?"

These Californians were on a winning streak, up a few hundred thousand dollars, and Caesars wanted to make sure they'd stick around long enough to give it back. Everything was comp'd: rooms, meals, shows, massages and more. I wish I'd known about the full range of spa treatments in those days.

"Just sign our name if you want anything in this place. You're welcome to move in with us—no strings attached."

Through the weekend I relaxed in a poolside suite with its own sauna, Jacuzzi, and a pink marble soaking tub with a gold swan's head faucet. I lounged in the round, curtained bed and smiled at my reflection in the mirrored ceiling. Whatever their fantasies might have been, these gentlemen didn't ask for more than a dinner companion and an audience for their gambling stories of ups and downs, triumphs and losing streaks.

By the end of the weekend they had given Caesars back all of their winnings at the tables and sports book but were still in the game. They covered a table of six blackjack hands

with their last \$18,000 of chips in a final cliffhanger chapter of the trip, ending up with \$220,000 after a half hour streak.

Personally I wasn't up for riding a roller coaster. I was satisfied that the Three Step had passed the test, and after winning a bit more at football, blackjack, and craps, I had what I needed to start my new life. On Monday morning I bought two pairs of fancy shoes and a supply of cat food and loaded up the car.

Smiling at Vegas in the rear-view mirror, I set off to create the next chapter.

D

Death

Margaret and Mom

My mother-in-law, Margaret, was a cheerful, no-nonsense church lady who devoted her life to raising four children while serving as a pastor's wife and Christian educator. After her husband's passing she lived independently in Baltimore until the age of 86. After experiencing some serious heart issues, she moved into a nursing home and was in and out of the hospital for the next year. Some of our conversations during that time sounded the same as always, while others were punctuated by non-sequiturs such as, "Do you speak Polish?" No, I don't.

On Mothers' Day weekend I felt a sudden urge to check in with her. When I told my husband, Mark, that I was going upstairs to have some quiet time, he said that he also felt an impulse to connect and would do that at the other end of the house.

I lay down in our bedroom. As soon as I closed my eyes, I was aware of a bright light coming from the east, moving up through my feet and into my body. I opened my eyes—*what is that?*-- but seeing only the familiar view of the Arizona desert, I closed them again and settled back into the bed. Mark called up to ask when I was going to contact his mom and I replied, "I'm there".

I felt Margaret's presence, joined together in our thoughts and body awareness as she turned attention to each of her four children and nine grandchildren. One by one, she referred to them by name with a sense of approval. When she came to her son Andrew, the eldest, she looked at his imminent career move, leaving the presidency of the University of Alabama to serve as head of the South Carolina university system.

"Andrew will be okay; he'll have the new job to keep him busy." Then she flared up for a moment: "But Andrew—remember what is *really* important!" Then, satisfied that everyone could go on without her, she settled back.

I felt something move deep in my gut, an odd discomfort yet not painful, as Margaret groaned and called out, "Father!" Knowing her as I did, I assumed she was reaching out to God. With that, we floated upward out of the space of our shared body.

After a short journey we were met by her father, who had died suddenly when she was a child, along with her husband who had passed on fourteen years earlier. They embraced with exclamations of joy. Soon a light shone down on their reunion, and the presence of Jesus, accompanied by angelic beings and what I can only describe as *Glory*, entered the scene from above. At this point I felt myself returning downward as Margaret continued to rise in their company.

I snapped back into my body, blinked a few times, and looked at the clock: 4:06. I wrote down the time, then went downstairs and found Mark. He described going through a process of saying goodbye to his mother, letting her know she had his blessing to pass on when it was time, and that he was open to staying in communication. This was curious since neither of us had talked about her death or expected it.

I wondered if the phone was going to ring, and resisted the urge to call Margaret with our unreliable ranch service. Three hours later Mark's brother called to say that Margaret had died in Baltimore. She had passed on during a fifteen minute period around 4:00 between nursing checks, at the time we were having our experience in Arizona.

Margaret came to mind right now as I'm writing this. She is admonishing, "Remember what is *really* important!" and instructing me to read a Bible verse, John 2:19. I follow her directions.

"Destroy this temple (the body) and in three days I will raise it up."

I hear her laughing from her heaven.

Thanks again, Margaret!

Mom

In early January, 2010, I was privileged to sit at my mother's bedside during the last four days of her life. Hospice was a great gift to us, assuring her comfort and providing care without

any pretense of fighting the inevitable. She lay in her own bed, breathing quietly with eyes closed, as I stayed in touch with relatives and friends over the phone.

What can be said over the phone to someone whose mother is dying? The most frequent comment I heard was, *"This must be so hard for you"*. I know these were intended as kind words of empathy, but in fact it was perhaps the easiest week I've ever had with my mother. It wasn't hard to sit in a comfortable lounge chair, surrounded by flowers and music, watching the snow fall out the window. Everything was being done to give my mother the smooth exit she had been begging for during six years of dementia. There was no question whether this was exactly where I needed to be.

Hospice and assisted living workers occasionally stopped in, and although they hadn't known my mother, some were interested in hearing stories and looking through the scrapbooks I had brought in. I shared how she had started an early emergency medical system that has saved countless lives, balanced with the fact that she left our family to run off with a rich married man. The decades of alcohol and lies didn't matter so much now, as I tried to relate what a sparkling, dynamic spirit she had in an honest picture with a positive spin.

Most of the time the two of us were alone in the room, and when I turned my attention to her body on the bed, I felt my eyes drawn upward toward the ceiling. What I perceived there was hard to describe, not primarily visual although it had a sparkling quality along with a kinesthetic sense of liveliness. This was accompanied by auditory impressions, as if listening to a cheerful, intelligent gathering from a distance. A cocktail party in the room upstairs, perhaps? I wasn't sure how to put this into words, and didn't mention it to anyone. Nobody needed any more evidence of my weird ideas or vivid imagination.

After sitting through the fourth day with no change in Mom's condition, I was hoping that a shower and perhaps some sleep would help my mild headache. I picked up my purse and computer and was taking steps toward the door when her breathing suddenly changed. This seemed like a good time to follow hospice directions and give them a call. The phone was answered by a nurse who had not been on duty with us that week, but had known my mother in previous years. Although it was after 10:00 PM, she said she'd be right over.

The nurse (who goes by the name Susanne One Love—I could not make that up!) arrived a few minutes later. She checked vital signs and adjusted the pillow, then looked straight up.

Pointing with a finger, she asked, *"So, who are they?"*

I was surprised at the abruptness of the question, but also appreciated that Susanne knew me well enough to be so direct. I told her that I had no idea who “they” were, but that they had been hanging around all week.

“It’s like a party going on up there!” I could only agree.

We settled in for the next three hours. Finally Mom’s breathing paused, as it had sporadically over the past days. This time it didn’t start up again.

“Goodbye, Janet.”

“Love you, Mom!”

We looked up and silently felt them sail away.

What does it all mean? I’m just telling my story, not selling a belief system. However, due to these events and the reports of others, I’m inclined to believe that upon death we first experience what we hope for, or maybe what we expect. Margaret’s idea of paradise included Jesus and angels, while my mother’s would be a fabulous, sophisticated party, with herself as the guest of honor. After that...heaven knows.

E

Embrace

One of us is in trouble

When the Black Mesa Community School spring vacation came around, I was more than ready for a break from my job as Principal. There were only three classrooms, and most of my day was spent teaching students in grades five through eight, all native Navajo speakers struggling with English, some of whom had spent much more time herding sheep than they had in the classroom.

My first day started with a spit wad to my forehead as I walked in the door, launched by an unseen boy barricaded behind desks, books, and cardboard boxes in one corner of the classroom.

Do I get tough and lay down the law, or admire a good shot?

The girls were bunkered down in their own fortress in the opposite corner but peeked out long enough to giggle at the bull's-eye aim.

I did my best, but was doomed to be yet another idealistic, young, white schoolmarm. Some of the girls came by my trailer to talk and hang out after school, but the boys—when they came to school at all—felt free to leave through a window if I tried to interest them in our old, mismatched textbooks. Why should they take me seriously when they'd been abandoned so many times? I had no convincing answer to that.

Spring arrived, and our twenty-mile dirt road thawed from snow to mud. I bought an old Volkswagen beetle on the Rez, left it behind while I drove my other car to be sold in San Francisco, then hitch hiked down to Florida. After visiting friends, I called the DriveAway Car Company and headed back out West in a vehicle to drop off in Las Vegas.

The trip went smoothly, with just one four-hour rest stop with relatives in Texas. But how to travel from Vegas to my VW in Arizona? With no public transportation options in

Navajoland, I didn't see any way to get home but to hitch hike. *One last time*, I told myself. I'd brushed off warnings from my parents and friends for years, and although I'd been taken places I hadn't wanted to go and escaped from moving vehicles on occasion, this was the first time that I had a sense of foreboding. Reminding myself that I'd be home before dark, I stuck out my thumb.

My first ride was with a man who begged me to stay with him in Vegas, promising to share the wonders of life in the city. He drove thirty miles out of his way to Hoover Dam, then grabbed a goodbye kiss as I opened the door. The next car was filled with a guys from New Zealand, drinking out of bottles and arguing over the shortest route to the Grand Canyon. They let me out in Flagstaff (not the shortest route, dudes) at an I-40 on-ramp where I was picked up within a few minutes by an eighteen wheeler.

The driver directed me to lay down in the sleeper behind his seat since insurance regulations prohibited him from picking up riders. I'd heard this before, and was happy to comply since the sleeper offers the only comfort in these big, jerky trucks. I stretched out while we enjoyed a pleasant conversation, grateful for some ease after my travels.

In an empty stretch of the Painted Desert between Winslow and Holbrook, the truck pulled over to the side of the road as the driver explained that something was coming loose on his load of gigantic pipes. I lay back, closed my eyes, and relaxed as he went outside to take care of it.

A couple of minutes later the passenger side door swung wide open and the driver scrambled in with crazed eyes. He jumped on top of me before my stunned mind could engage my resting muscles. He muttered unintelligibly as I recovered from the initial shock and searched for options.

I had always managed to talk my way out of threatening situations. I saw everyone as basically good at heart. Perhaps naively, I didn't believe that anybody really wanted to hurt me, and to be safe I just needed to connect with my fellow human beings. All you need is love, right? That had worked in the past, but this time my attempts at conversation were returned by panting mumbles. The wild, vacant eyes right above my own were unmoved. As the trucker started to unbutton my shirt, his intentions were unmistakable.

In spite of countless close calls, I have—thankfully-- never been raped. I wasn't going to simply lay there without at least trying to escape. I took a deep breath and pushed with all my strength.

In a flash, I felt a knife pressed to my throat.

My mind froze in panic with only one thought: *“Do what you have to do, just be careful with that knife.”* No sound escaped my mouth. My eyes opened wide in fear as we looked at each other, inches apart. The man continued his ramblings and mutterings, bits of saliva flying out of his mouth on his hot breath.

I realized I might be killed at any second.

I wanted to live.

Then, out of the cold terror, my perspective shifted:

There are two people here, and one of them is really in trouble.

We all will die. This guy is crazy and he has to live with himself. He will have to live with whatever he might do to me.

I reached out to comfort him.

“Hey, it’s gonna be okay. It’s gonna be okay.” I repeated this phrase as I slowly, gently patted his shoulders and back, and smoothed his hair. He blinked a few times, then looked at the hunting knife in his hand with surprise. I felt the tension drain from his body as he moved it a few precious inches away from my throat.

His story spilled out in a flood.

Life hadn't been the same since spending two and a half years in a North Vietnamese POW camp. He didn't feel like himself anymore. He'd thought he was starting to get his life together, but then came home to find that his girlfriend had run off with his buddy, taking his belongings on their way out. When he saw me at the side of the highway, he was struck with the thought *this was the woman he had waited for all these years*. And now look what he'd done!

I listened until he eventually climbed off of me and got back behind the wheel. A bit past Holbrook, where my journey led north to the reservation, we had dinner at a truck stop. I didn't have much appetite, but since he needed to do something for me, I ordered a plate of enchiladas. His story continued as Bruce Springsteen sang on the radio.

Looking back, I wonder what would I do if something like this happened now? I'm fairly certain that I'd call the police the minute I was free, to protect potential victims. But back then I was only grateful to be alive and didn't consider the danger. I pray that this man healed before others triggered his rage.

Today I recognize the classic PTSD symptoms. I can theorize about how calming him allowed his rational brain functioning to return. Embracing, rather than fighting, led both of us to safety. With safety as a first step, we know that trauma resolution is possible although only a small percentage of veterans get completely effective treatment rather than drugs and superficial talk therapy. I hope this man found some peace and didn't become one of the suicides among veterans that have far exceeded the number of combat deaths in our lifetime.

After dinner we said our goodbyes. I crossed a two-lane highway as the sunset faded and without hesitation stuck out my thumb once again. I quickly got a ride from a tiny, old Navajo man who drove 35 miles per hour, watching for wandering sheep on the dark reservation roads. He said he'd show me some mystical caves and crystals if I'd spend the night at his camp, and added, "I'm eighty years old, and I'm afraid I'll die without ever kissing a white woman."

I wished him good luck and we rode on in silence. One embrace, where it was most needed, was enough of a good deed for the day.

F

Forgiveness

Justin

I met Justin in the late 1980's when we worked together in the southwest corner of the Navajo Nation. He had a gift for helping students learn to love getting their hands in the dirt, overcoming their grumbling with a combination of tender encouragement and no-nonsense expectations. Teachers and administrators got involved as well, planting thousands of trees around school buildings in an annual tradition inspired by the Israeli Tu BiShvat holiday.

When my then-husband, Mark, and I started our own Navajo charter school, Justin was part of the plan from the beginning. We shared adventures, traveling to Native Hawaiian communities on the Big Island. Tall and fierce looking with a long, black braid, he made an immediate impression that led to lasting friendships. MORE VIVID AND FORESHADOWING, LAUGHTER AND WOUNDS. VOLCANIC SWEAT? HAWAIIANS LAUGHING, JUSTIN SHADOW PAIN. WE WANT TO CARE ABOUT HIM.

As the son of a notable WWII Navajo Code Talker, Justin carried on his family's military tradition in Vietnam. I never heard him speak of his time in the service—few veterans did in those days-- but people say he wasn't the same after that. Whatever pain he carried hid behind a warm laugh as he brought life to the desert with the kids who loved him. He knew that I was a trauma therapist who worked with veterans, but like most of the community he never reached out. We were friends, that was enough, and I wasn't going to harass him about getting help.

One Friday at the school, our Business Manager, Marie, came in with a solemn face.

"I'm sorry to have to tell you this. I just heard that Justin was found frozen to death. In Winslow."

I caught my breath and managed to say a few words before the tears came.

Justin had gotten out of touch with our family after being so close for decades. A few

years earlier his wife left him, life had fallen apart, and when he got four months behind on his truck payments he came looking for help. Mark and I had a dismal track record loaning money to friends, but he had a job with Northern Arizona University and promised he could pay us back soon. Without the truck how could he make the fifty-mile trip to work? One last time-- and only for our dear Justin-- we loaned him \$1,600. He never repaid a dime and didn't come around the school any more after that.

During the last couple of years we'd heard that Justin was drinking, sometimes living on the street, and our friends were worried about him. We knew he'd be embarrassed for us to see him. We regretted that by trying to help, we ended up more disconnected. Consequently, we've adopted a policy of giving gifts when it feels right but making no more loans. I wondered what we could have done differently, if there was some way we could reach out.

Now, hearing that he was gone, it was too late.

One day later, a Saturday, we heard that Justin was alive! Another man, also with a long black braid, had been found and misidentified. I felt relieved that we still had a chance to connect and determined to do whatever it took to get together. There were relatives to contact, and lots of mutual friends. Whatever shape we found him in, we loved him.

On Sunday, as Mark and I were driving home from Flagstaff, we were astonished to see a large, familiar figure standing at the side of the road with his thumb extended.

"Hey! That's Justin!" I exclaimed as Mark zoomed by. He'd heard that sometimes Justin was disoriented and was feeling cautious. He asked if I wanted him to stop the car.

"Yes! Of course!"

I jumped out, and Mark said he'd be back as soon as he picked up our son who was visiting a friend nearby.

Justin blinked in surprise as I walked toward him on the shoulder of the highway, with a big smile and my arms open wide. His face was blank at first but then our eyes locked in recognition. His hair hung limp and who knows when he'd last had a shower. It was clear that he had been through hell; later we found out his girlfriend had whacked him across the nose with a frying pan.

But looking deep into his eyes, I found a bit of the familiar spark. His voice was resonant even when it cracked. We were both crying as we hugged. I'm crying now at the memory.

We had a few precious minutes to say what I would want to say to all of my beloved friends:

It doesn't matter what happened.

I love you forever no matter what.

He said he understood and I believe he did. Standing on the shoulder of the highway together, I felt blessed. Money has only the meaning we give it. It's important to handle it honorably, but in the end it comes and goes. Love is still here.

When Mark and Miles showed up, we hugged and cried some more. Then we all squeezed into the car and gave Justin a ride toward the Rez. Mark talked about how much Justin's work had meant to so many people. We spoke of how difficult life can be-- but there's always hope for healing, and we all have choices to make one day at a time.

Justin got out when we turned onto a dirt road just past the school, and said he'd be in touch about getting together soon. He walked on down the two-lane highway toward his home. I noticed the body of a dead dog on the roadside as his back slowly retreated into the distance.

The following Friday I was at the school when Marie came in.

"I heard that Justin died today," she said, sounding as if she could hardly believe her own words. My mind wobbled. No, she wouldn't joke about something like this, but how was a replay possible? He got sick, she said. He went to the hospital in Winslow and then was flown to Flagstaff. He didn't make it.

No thoughts.

No words.

A few minutes later as I sat alone, in a straw bale building where Justin had worked with students in the early years, I watched a tiny lizard crawl up to the ceiling and then drop down into the greenhouse plants. At that moment I heard Justin's voice inside, deep and clear:

I'm okay. Life continues. It's all good- hozhó.

They say he had a heart attack. Mark thinks he died of a broken heart, and that might be the best theory. What I know is that in this world full of mystery and sorrow, Justin's warm laugh echoes in my own heart now. With gratitude for our time of forgiveness on the road.

G

God

Only God Eternal

Through the steamy Florida summer and into autumn I practiced a simple, consistent morning routine:

- *Walk to Island Park in downtown Sarasota
- *Sun Salutation yoga sequence in each of the four directions
- *Element Breaths learned from Pir Vilayat Inayat Khan at a Sufi Meditation Camp

I followed this by chanting *wazifas* based on the Islamic 99 Holy Names of God. These sounds vibrate in various areas of the body considered to be the upper chakras, the heart, throat, Third Eye, and crown. Each begins with “Ya”, with the “aah” sound resonating in the chest and even down to the pit of the stomach. The *wazifas* I worked with regularly were “*Ya Allah*”, “*Ya Azim*”, and “*Ya Hu*”. After this routine I would feel the vibrations continue, feeling light and expansive as I walked home and got on with my day.

In September I fell out of a moving vehicle, landing on my head in the story that starts this BoOK with A for Attention. Later that fall, I went through two bouts of pneumonia. During the first episode I couldn’t breathe and was taken to the emergency room where a doctor instructed me to drink seven glasses of water. This succeeded in opening up my lungs and I walked out of the hospital later that day to go to the New College Halloween party. The pneumonia returned in November, and this time I treated it with ginger compresses on my chest and a three-day apple juice fast. After that I felt well enough to go to Miami for a weekend of Sufi gatherings.

On our first night I joined a women’s group for practices based on Mother Mary. The Sufi women chanted in a much higher tone than groups that included men, and I felt different inner vibrations. I hadn’t paid much attention to Mary before; in our Methodist church she

seemed to be a nice Jewish girl but essentially just a conduit to get baby Jesus into the world. The virgin birth story didn't trouble our rational minds; it could be a metaphor, a myth, whatever. Most of the mothers in my personal experience were distant, scary, or self-sacrificing. Mary fell in the latter category, and only much later did I feel connected to the vast archetypal power of the Great Mother. But as our circle of women moved together, mindful of each step while repeating Mary's name, I felt my heart opening and something stirring within.

The following morning I woke up shaky and weak, still recovering from the pneumonia. I decided to rest at the house where we were staying while my friends attended the program of the day. In the afternoon I let myself sink into a bed and closed my eyes.

I immediately started drifting in and out of dreams, and eventually I found myself in a vaguely defined grey, rectangular space. My father stood in front of me to the left, with my mother to the right. My father was silent—a familiar stance from my childhood-- as my mother unleashed a barrage of words. They all carried the same basic message.

“This is reality and you have to accept it. Everyone knows this—what's your problem? I'm telling you, and you have no choice but to believe it, too. That's just the way it is.”

I listened, feeling heavier and heavier as she continued her litany of *musts, shoulds, and can'ts*. On....and on....and on. The heavy words blanketed my shoulders and bent my head toward the ground. I felt myself succumbing to the weight, consciousness dimming.

Then- somehow- I found the energy to stand up straight and look her in the eye.

“NO.”

The word traveled like a wave between us. When it hit her, she froze and fell silent.

Thoughts kicked in immediately in a chilling flood of guilt.

“I shouldn't talk to my mother that way! What if I hurt her? What if I've killed her?”

Before this could get too far, however, a new wave of energy rose through my feet, through my legs, into my body, and on upward. My consciousness lifted out with it through the top of my head. I looked down and saw myself standing with my parents, arms crossed over my chest, leaning forward. I had a momentary impulse to stay with my body and make sure it didn't fall over and get hurt but decided that my parents could take care of it. Hey, they liked doing things like that.

With this thought I was lifted away from the scene in a blazing column of white light. The brilliant energy seemed to be moving up and down at the same time, and I was carried with

it. The light was brighter than anything I had experienced in my life, but not uncomfortable. I felt wordlessly exhilarated.

Next, I became aware of a roaring, buzzing sound coming in from all directions, getting louder and louder as it moved toward the central column of light. It was similar to vibrations I've experienced when crossing boundaries in out-of-body experiences, although vast and more intense.

In the roar I heard a voice saying three words:

Only

God

Eternal

(I could see some art here, maybe a whole page)

What happened after that has always exceeded my ability to describe it, a sense of moving through to some other dimension. The energy shifted, becoming finer, less dense.

What I do recall is eventually coming back to my body in the room in Miami, opening my eyes, and being aware that everything looked different. Bright, clear, shining, spacious. A new kind of vision existed beyond the eyesight I was used to. I seemed able to sense *through* things, not limited by space and time in the usual way.

When my friends arrived later on, I became aware of expanded perceptions: sensing their presence before they entered the room, thinking words someone was going to say before they were spoken, knowing what was going to happen and then watching it unfold. It felt like I was able to access deeper levels behind words and actions, sensing where energy was flowing and where it was stuck. Everything appeared to operate through *intention* as a behind the scenes motivating force. I was conscious of interacting on an energy level with people and the environment, influencing situations either by speaking, moving, or simply by contacting stuck points with a gentle focus. Throughout this process there was a harmonizing effect for the whole field I was part of, as polarities resolved into a flowing unity.

For about three weeks I existed in a world of magic. During this time, I traveled to visit my mother and father, with whom I'd had a strained relationship for years and who were in the middle of a divorce. I hesitated to tell them that I was dropping out of school, less than a year

before graduation, but decided they should know that I was no longer planning to spend my life in a physics lab. I questioned what a degree would mean, and going through the motions because college had always been expected wasn't an adequate rationale anymore.

Although my parents hadn't been supporting me in college, I expected their usual reaction of distress and judgment. I chose a moment at dinner in a restaurant to share the news with my father in Indianapolis. His response shocked me:

"Drop out of school? That might be a good idea. They don't make schools for people like you. You're a street fighter! Your place is out on the front lines. I can't tell you what to do with your life, nobody can. But we don't need to, because *you know*."

I stared at him, wordless. My sensible German-American Purdue engineer dad has never spoken to me like this before or since, and doesn't remember the conversation. Perhaps this says something about our deeper relationship, but at the time it felt like *Who are you, and what have they done with my father?*

I returned with a former boyfriend to the house in Florida that I was sharing with yet another ex-boyfriend. My altered state didn't come with perfect discernment, and I was slow to realize that both of these young men still had hopes of getting back together with me and were intensely uncomfortable with the situation. I had no solution to offer, only guilt and regret for my insensitive actions in the past. This challenge was too much for my newly expanded awareness and I felt it fading away like helium leaking out of a balloon.

The image that has stayed with me for forty-five years is of the three of us on my front step with miserable expressions on our faces. I had been to Heaven, couldn't handle it, and got kicked out. Again! Now I was back in the struggle of everyday life, a guilty sinner knowing that it didn't have to be that way but feeling powerless to wake up again.

Within a month I moved back to Indianapolis to help my dad start his new business. My mother had left him for a rich, married alcoholic, and I knew he could use some company while stoically getting through the breakup. With this caring intention, I crawled back into a familiar box, spending my days in a bare office in a modern building, looking down over the trees from glass windows that didn't open. Without consciously making the decision, I stopped doing my regular spiritual practices—until I recently picked up the daily breath and chanting again.

Even when I don't quite remember, I can't forget that I've forgotten.

Only God Eternal remains the bedrock of my world.

H

Healing

There is Healing for You

Ouch!!! During the first week of October, 2010, the thumb on my right hand popped out of joint. I had no idea why it started flopping away from the rest of my hand, I just knew that it hurt like hell when it did. I didn't remember injuring or straining it in any way.

Every time this happened, I took a few deep breaths before carefully and painfully maneuvering the thumb back into its normal position. Then it would stay put for a while, but over the next few days this happened more frequently. It woke me up repeatedly at night and was always out of place when I awoke in the morning. I screamed out loud when it caught me off guard, startling my husband, Mark, a few times.

I rarely go to the doctor, preferring to take care of my own health needs when possible. My body usually manages to get back in balance on its own, but this was excruciating and not getting better. I planned to see a doctor as soon as we returned from a long weekend in Tucson, where we were staying with friends and visiting our daughter Jessica, who worked with college students as a minister with Faith Christian Church. During that time the thumb problem continued to get worse. I tried not to make a big deal out of it in front of our friends, but sometimes the pain was too much, and I'd have to explain why I was grimacing and holding onto my thumb all day.

On Sunday our family went to our daughter's church where both of our older children became ministers after graduating from the University of Arizona. We are inspired by this church's tremendous energy, supportive community, and positive effect on college students yearning for meaning beyond the consumer culture and party scene. Mark and I were not

members of any church, however, although we've tried to do our imperfect best to live according to the core teachings of Jesus. Somehow the *love your neighbor and judge not* teachings seem to get lost in many churches, and the threat of eternal damnation doesn't match our experience of an infinitely loving God.

Mark and I hope our kids don't suffer too much worrying that we're going to hell, but we honor their right to live their own lives. Still, I appreciate anyone who cares enough to pray for my well-being and salvation. Our own parents were great examples of how pointless it is to tell kids that they're wrong when we have so much of our own work to do. When I catch myself thinking "I can't stand intolerant people!" it's a good time to laugh and let go.

Since we'd been celebrating with our Burning Man friends in Tucson, we had not seen Jessica or talked with her before we got to church. She sang beautifully on the stage during the opening Praise and Worship, then came and sat next to us. After hugging her, I sat with my hands together in my lap.

When the musicians had all settled into their seats, Pastor Steve made an announcement: we would have a time of silence, and if anyone received a "Word of Knowledge", they were invited to come up to a microphone and share it. Being unfamiliar with this concept, I just sat with a meditative sense of openness. Our family was on the left side of the large auditorium, and as the microphone was on the far right below the stage, we couldn't see anyone who came up to speak although the sound was amplified through the loudspeakers. The first voice belonged to a woman.

"There is a person here who has....." I don't remember every word that followed as she described my condition briefly and with accuracy, including "the thumb on your right hand". What I remember most clearly are her final words:

"God wants you to know there is healing for you."

That hit me to the core as a jolt of energy blasted down from my shoulder, through my arm, and out my thumb. I burst into tears, laughing at the same time. My right hand tingled, alive and whole. I released my grip on the thumb and held it up, rotating it freely in all directions with no difficulty. Mark looked on with amazement. Jessica saw that something powerful had happened, although she had no idea what it was. I could hardly talk but did my best to explain in a few words.

Having been raised as a reserved midwestern Methodist, I did not play out the scene

where a lady throws down her crutches and runs to the pulpit shouting, "Thank you Jesus!" That didn't seem to be expected in this church, so I just sat in gratitude with tears streaming down my face.

I never went to the doctor and have no explanation for the problem or for the cure. Perhaps it came to help me remember:

"God wants you to know there is healing for you."

I

Intention

Vegas, Baby

Dan and I agreed to get married before we ever went out on a date. I'd known him for two years at that point, during which he'd had recurring dreams of angelic beings floating down from the heavens bearing a wedding invitation. On the invitation he could read his name.... and mine. After one of these dreams he called to tell me about them and we talked for a full hour. By the time we hung up, we were both convinced this was *it!*

I hadn't found Dan attractive before, but now his round cheeks, bright blue eyes, and curly blond hair lit up my life. Who was I to argue with dream angels? This seemed as good a way as any to choose a spouse, and better than the hormone-driven mating frenzy I'd been in with other men through my 20's. It seemed that our goals in life matched up: leaving Las Vegas for spiritual awakening and a house on a mountain. His business was currently raking in cash, he said, and he wanted someone to share it with. I was repulsed by the idea of marrying for money, but if the angels were calling me to Lake Tahoe-- with a helicopter to whisk us from our mountaintop chalet to the ski slopes—why not?

At the end of our first dinner date we went back to Dan's house where he led me to a little altar with candles and flowers. A page of calligraphy described how he was going to make my life perfect in every way. A girl's dream coming true.... and I couldn't ignore the queasiness stirring in my gut. Can anyone *make* someone else happy forever, outside of fairy tales? I hushed those thoughts and told myself to stop being fussy. Dan then showed me a journal with three single spaced typewritten pages describing his "ideal scene" in a marriage. Incredibly, it sounded exactly like me—with the minor detail that I would need to dye my hair blond, as I later found out that Dan had done.

I moved in two weeks later. Dan was reinvesting all of his income to build the business faster, so with my own money I bought a near-flawless investment grade diamond for an engagement ring. This did not raise the slightest alarm—simple math told me to maximize the exponential profits he was getting from every phone line and employee that he—now *we*—could add. I giddily announced our engagement to family and friends.

A big bouquet of flowers arrived every day. Within a month we found a bigger house off of Rancho Drive, with elegant wooden floors that required special cleaning products. There we bought a new washer and dryer although Dan still had me take his blue jeans to the dry cleaners to make sure they were pressed properly with sharp creases. He wore them with cowboy boots and a hat as he oversaw huge rooms of employees, each with a phone in a sea of manic energy. At night he came home with just enough energy to eat whatever I had cooked and fall into bed for a few hours of sleep before taking off early the next morning. At the end of the week, the numbers added up and more phone lines were ordered to grow the empire.

Starved blue jeans had not been part of my fantasy... well, if that was the only crack in our American Dream, no big deal. But it became clear that although I matched much of Dan's Ideal Woman, some aspects of my personality-- a sensitive Crap Detector, for instance-- didn't fit the picture. While his business was indeed profitable, it turned out to be a telemarketing operation that functioned on the borderline of legality. He justified the sleazy sales tactics and exorbitant pricing by saying that the loot would pay for our spiritual freedom and ability to help others.

Over the next four months my doubts grew into a certainty that we were living a lie that couldn't continue. I've deluded myself countless times, but once awake, I don't have the ability to go back to sleep peacefully in the illusion. I washed the floors, did the laundry, and flew to Puerto Vallarta for a week with a nice guy I used to ski with in Lake Tahoe.

Later I found out that at the moment my plane took off, FBI agents were pointing guns at a hundred of Dan's employees while they ripped the phone lines out of the walls. When I returned, Dan was out of jail but his business was destroyed. Everything he could get his hands on was going to the lawyers.

I was grateful that I had taken off before the raid—how could I have abandoned a guy in that situation? The engagement and romance was over, but since I was vomiting my guts out from *la*

tourista, Dan let me sleep in the guest bedroom for a few days until I found a new place to live. “The sooner the better-- what if I want to bring some woman home?”

Once again, it was time to build a new life from the ground up. The annual International Backgammon Championship tournament happened to be in town that week, which attracted the top players including a pack of brilliant, young guys from New York. We’d shared some adventures over the years as fellow professional gamblers, and until they flew off I could count on stimulating company in the gourmet rooms. There were also plenty of free hotel suites to save me from going back to Dan’s house.

Descending from dinner in the revolving restaurant at the top of the Landmark hotel one night, we were drawn toward a blackjack tournament being held in the casino. It was obvious that some of the players were decent card counters, but I mentioned that a different strategy was needed to take the top prize.

“Hey, you ought to get in there and win that thing!”

“Thanks for your confidence, but I’m broke.”

My buddy, Roger Low, reached into his pocket and peeled off hundred-dollar bills.

“Here, is \$5000 enough? We’ll split the prize when you win it.”

I had nothing to lose, and no other plans for the week except to eat well and stay out of Dan’s way. I stuffed the cash in my purse.

The tournament allowed each player to re-enter up to five sessions every day, with a new entry fee and \$300 buy-in each time. It had already been going on for over two weeks and the current winners were posted as targets to shoot for. Monday’s last round was just ending, and the whole thing wrapped up on Saturday. Prizes were based on winnings accumulated in a one hour sitting with all contestants playing against the dealer with a single deck. The casino didn’t seem to mind the obvious card counters; the entry fee and \$100 bet limit took care of any overall edge they might have.

The next day I showed up early and was knocked out in exactly three hands.

I repeated this feat two hours later.

In the round after that I lasted a few minutes longer before being wiped out. By the end of the day, I had lost \$350 per round all five times. The card counters looked at me with a combination of pity and lust; too bad this cute girl was wasting her money.

I went home with a weak smile. If I ever managed to catch a winning streak, I'd kick their butts. The same statistics they relied on made this not only possible, but a good bet by the end of the week. If I could just hang in there.

The next day I took my seat in agony with tournament anxiety added to Mexican digestive distress. In the first round I was almost relieved to get knocked out quickly.

During the break I dragged myself to the coffee shop, sipped some hot tea, and considered my options. The tournament loss was a minor blip compared to the rest of my broken dreams. Not only the engagement with Dan, but pretty much my whole life appeared to be a series of hopes followed by discouragement. At age 29 I was still asking myself what was I going to do when I grew up?

In a search for clues, I'd undergone two days of aptitude testing at the Johnson O'Connor Research Foundation. This organization had roots going back to projects at General Electric in the 1920's, based on the observation that each person has innate abilities that correlate with achievement in certain areas. These gifts also come with pressure to be put into action—if we don't exercise the aptitudes we are given, we suffer. The Foundation has identified patterns of high and low aptitudes related to a wide range of professions, and gives recommendations based on the results of each client's set of tests. Although it's not widely known, Johnson O'Connor testing is still being done after a hundred years.

I enjoyed the various challenges of nineteen assessments and looked forward to some enlightening results. Tests have been my strong point since I was a kid, so I was surprised to see my evaluator sitting behind his desk with a dour expression.

"It's surprising that you aren't locked up somewhere. "

I laughed. He didn't, and added, "You have one of the worst cases of Too Many Aptitudes we've ever seen."

He informed me that I showed no patterns that fit any identified career. Their only recommendation was to pick a major world problem to tackle, realizing that I would never succeed in solving it. At least I could give the project everything I had while using as many aptitudes as possible. He wished me good luck.

Sitting in the casino café, I wasn't worried about using all my aptitudes, but just getting through the week. I picked up a keno pencil and a napkin and listed the basic necessities, starting with avoiding homelessness. Maybe I could move back in with former roommates?

Not likely-- we hadn't talked since their cat sneaked into my moving truck and jumped out at the other end of the ride, never to be seen again. My Commodore 64k was the latest in home computers-- perhaps I could make a few bucks tutoring kids? I scribbled a few more ideas before laying down the pencil with a sigh. I imagined dragging myself out of bed in the morning day after day, scraping to survive, and slumped in the burgundy vinyl booth.

There must be something better.

I turned the napkin over and tried a different question: *What do I WANT to do?*

The response was instantaneous.

**Win blackjack tournament*

**Move to Santa Barbara*

**Study at the Advanced Ability Center*

**Then do whatever I want for the rest of my life.*

I felt a click of alignment and a surge of energy. I paid my tiny bill, danced out of the café, and took a seat at the next tournament round. The cards landed on the green felt, one by one.

A knife edge of intention sliced through the statistical soup.

A door opened and the money poured through.

One hour later I was in the lead.

After the next round I'd beaten my own first place.

Another player copied my strategy and got a lucky streak, so I had to beat him the next day. But after that the bar was set too high for competitors. At the end I had five of the top six spots, plus ninth. I felt satisfied but not jubilant. I just did what I came to do.

The next day a bit of quiet joy kicked in as I watched the teller count out stack after stack of hundred-dollar bills. After the split with Roger, I celebrated New Year's Eve and left to create a new life in Santa Barbara on the first day of 1984.

I send my intention for blessings to that young woman, who sat in a casino café exhausted and wounded physically, emotionally, spiritually, financially. Who had reasons to question her own integrity. Who still had the inspiration to ask:

What do I want....

J

Journey

To the Rez!

On the surface, my life in Sarasota, Florida looked like paradise, making stained glass windows while living in an amazing, if impractical, house that I'd helped my friend Rick build with his inheritance. The days and nights were spent hanging out with old and new friends, and an occasional visit to the beach. Still, I struggled with a nagging feeling that there was something, somewhere else, that I was supposed to be doing. Winter warmed into spring, then heated up toward summer.

I had no more clarity about college than when I had dropped out a year earlier. I resisted the urge to go back simply as a default. The one crumb of a clue I held onto was from a meeting with my Sufi teacher, Salik (eternal blessings upon him), who had given me the name Kismet. We had visited in New York City during his lunch hour on February 5th, 1977; I remember the day since it was the anniversary of the passing of Hazrat Inayat Khan who founded the Sufi Order. At one point during our conversation, Salik looked at me with some intensity and said, "We will be in Albuquerque in a year and four months." I didn't ask what we would be doing in an unfamiliar city two thousand miles away, I just acknowledged, "Okay." We never spoke of this again.

There was nothing keeping me in Sarasota and some good reasons to leave. Cocaine dealers had moved into a house at the end of street, bringing guns, large wads of cash, triple beam scales, and hypodermic needles to our formerly laid-back neighborhood. When friends asked what my plans were, I answered, "I'm going to get my car fixed and... um.... move to Albuquerque." This line worked for quite a while since my car, purchased for ninety dollars, broke down thirteen times in four months.

Then one morning a dream shattered my excuses.

I sat cross-legged, face to face with a woman. She had long, dark hair. I knew she was Native American although I had no idea what tribe.

She spoke: *“What do you want to do?”*

I searched for words.

“...blah, blah, blah...Albuquerque...blah, blah, blah...”

I shut my mouth. We both knew I was making up nonsense.

She looked right through my smokescreen.

“Well, do you want to teach Indian children then?”

The words shocked me awake in my bed. The only part of my body I could move was my mouth, opening and closing like a fish.

I struggled for words but all that came out was, “I’ve never dreamed of that!”

This, of course, was a joke.

Fifteen minutes later I was on the phone with the DriveAway Car Company. My trashed Toyota had blown a head gasket the day before and wasn’t worth repairing, but it didn’t matter anymore. I signed up to drive a car to St. Paul, Minnesota where my younger sister was graduating from Macalester College at the end of the week. I finished making a stained glass chess set for Rick, put all of my belongings in the car, and left town the next morning. I didn’t tell anyone where I was going—to deliver a car, and then....?

My route followed a line I remembered from a map in an earlier dream in which I was traveling North after falling asleep on the beach. This included a stop at Lookout Mountain, Tennessee, which I had never seen in waking life. I got out at the top, looked around long enough to recognize the view, got back in the car, and continued my journey.

While driving through the night, it occurred to me that I needed to find out what was required to become a teacher. Having judged schools as suppressive and teachers as stupid, I’d never wondered about this before. Indiana University was not far out of my way and my mother had gone there, so this seemed to be a good place to start asking questions.

I pulled in to the IU School of Education around 9:00 AM, and found an office where I was given a thick catalog. Since I’d never attended a university that even had a department of Education, there were about two years of required courses, most of which looked quite generic and dull. This, however, didn’t dampen my determination to do whatever it took to become a teacher.

As I was leaving, I noticed a sign for the Office of Special Programs on the top floor and figured I might as well check it out. I walked through the door to find a wall of bulletin boards covered with photos of children in schools--Navajo children, I soon discovered. A smiling blond woman greeted me from behind her desk.

"Can I help you?"

"I'd like to know about your programs."

She looked at me closely before responding.

"How would you like to teach on the Navajo reservation in about two weeks?"

"Well... I'm not a teacher."

"That's okay. It's part of our Masters program summer school."

"I don't have a Bachelors degree."

"That's okay. You can just come to the orientation days at the end of this week."

"I'll be in Minnesota."

"That's okay. Just register and read this packet when you have time." She handed me a folder of papers.

"I don't have much money. I was born in Indiana but don't live here any more".

"That's okay. We'll give you in-state tuition."

I was running out of excuses.

"Here, just take the paperwork and let me know when you decide.

I felt a wave crash over me—was I still dreaming? No, I'd just driven all night, a thousand miles since leaving Sarasota. But I didn't want to make a hasty decision even as I saw my dream coming true. I walked out of the building into a grey drizzle before bursting into tears and laughter. *Yes! It's happening!*

The following week I was back, driving a car that my mother had given me even though we were hardly on speaking terms. From a list of schools that was offered, I chose a small town with a picturesque name on a traditional part of the Navajo Nation. Betsy, the blond woman, handed me a small piece of paper:

Rough Rock, Arizona

Mark Sorensen, Principal

"Find him and he'll tell you what to do."

I finally had a solid clue. I imagined an older man with a receding hairline and expanding belly like all of the principals I had known, growing soft in a sedentary life of shuffling papers and giving directions.

I knew I was stepping into the unknown.

I had no idea how far.

I headed west.

After leaving the interstate somewhere in Kansas, I camped for the first night next to a windswept lake. The next morning I meandered for forty miles on a dirt road, at one point surrounded by a vast herd of cattle. I regretted seeking a more scenic route but it was too late to turn back. Finally I emerged onto the pavement, where a sign greeted me on the outskirts of a small town:

Kismet, Kansas

Once again I thought I was lost, only to find Kismet.

After a night with a Sufi friend in Santa Fe, I stopped in Albuquerque to pick up information at the University of New Mexico School of Education before heading west to Arizona. North of Gallup, I entered the Navajo Nation for the first time, grabbing a few provisions at the big FedMart store in Window Rock. Sunset blazed over Black Mesa as I drove into the Navajo homeland. I was fascinated by the distinct character of this part of America: kids in the back of pick-up trucks accompanied by grandmothers wearing elaborate silver and turquoise jewelry over their velvet blouses, with long, tiered skirts fashioned after 19th century settlers' wives.

The road continued through the Chinle valley until I took a left at Many Farms, passing through an otherworldly desert landscape in the heartland of Navajoland, *Dinetah*. It looked like another planet, all rocks and no trees in contrast to my green midwestern roots. At the same time, I knew I was coming Home. The pavement turned to dirt at the Rough Rock Demonstration School.

I parked and walked through government housing on a road drifted with red sand, clutching my scrap of paper in search of the Principal. And there he was, blond Afro floating above white bell bottoms, at the journey's end.

P.S.

The end became a beginning as the Journey continued.

Seven years of waiting.

Thirty years of marriage.

The next chapter is being written now.

K

Knowing

What a Long, Strange Trip it's Been

This chapter rambles and will get some more attention when I have a fresh mind and time to devote to it. But here's my story of knowing and not-knowing, and what a long, strange trip it's been.

Call me a nerd, I don't care. Call me a geek or a freak-- I just want to *know!*

As a three-year-old I fell in love with numbers to the point of obsession. I counted myself to sleep at night, balanced them on a toy scale, and added them aloud into the thousands in the back seat on family vacations.

1+1=2...

2+2=4...

4+4=8...

16...32...64...128...256...512...1024!

1024+ 1024=2048+2048=4096+....

I had a number balancing toy at home but don't remember being taught how to do this. It just felt like shining a light into new territory and climbing up into the sky. I remember my mother holding my baby sister in the front seat, asking my dad if the math was correct. He listened a minute, then replied yes, it was. I kept quiet in my private world after that.

Kindergarten was mostly games and socialization in those days, so I could hardly wait to finally get to first grade and dive into *learning*. The first time I found an unsupervised blackboard during recess, I covered the blackboard (as far as I could reach anyway) with my addition problems. I was startled to see the teacher's black, sensible shoes and mid-calf hemline appear in the middle of my concentration as she erased the board.

My protests—“*Look!*”—were met with the comment, “You won’t need to learn that until third grade.”

Not even adults said *WTF* in those days, of course. I just stored her words away, revisited them from time to time over the years, and noted that they still didn’t make any sense. Recently, it occurred to me that if she couldn’t tell that the answers were correct, it would just look like a kid fooling around.

Mrs. Carson’s words and that feeling of incredulity have echoed through my education and beyond. Maybe school was not so much about knowledge after all. Disillusioned at age six, I realized I was in a system run by...I’ll just come out and say it, *stupid people*. But they did run things and they took their jobs seriously. I wasn’t going to join the misbehaving boys sitting in the corner or staying in the classroom during lunch or recess. I followed the rules, kept my mouth shut except when the correct answer was called for, and learned as a voracious reader of books while having some fun under the radar.

By third grade I’d finished every book that I was allowed to check out of the school library. My favorites at home were a fat compilation of Sherlock Holmes mysteries, the Complete Works of Shakespeare, and a biography of Gandhi. I wrote an exuberant ten-page paper on Gandhi in fourth grade before my enjoyment of writing froze under the barrage of judgment from school and home.

I owe a debt of gratitude for the ‘60’s that transported the country from my midwestern ‘50’s beginnings to college life in 1971. I found plenty of company in which to question authority—or ignore it altogether. My drive to *know* was unleashed with fortuitous timing.

Know what? Well, for a start, to know what’s really worth knowing. As a child, I thought this must be related to the laws of the physical universe. Real, hard, scientific facts-- what could be more important than that? From age seven through high school, my answer to “What do you want to be when you grow up?” was “a subthermonuclear physicist”, like my Uncle Alan at Stanford. Nobody asked me what a subthermowhatever was, but the look on the adults’ faces confirmed that it was BIG and important. It fit with my love of math, the more disconnected from my daily life, the better.

In my fourth year of college “The Tao of Physics” was published, the book that brought science and the world beyond our physical senses together for me. The act of observation changes that which is observed??? It’s a particle *and* a wave? There’s a statistically probable answer but not a number we can predict with certainty? That blew my mind out of the box where there was always one correct answer. Holy moly, we observers—the ones who formulate hypotheses, test them, and collect data—are part of the experiment. The most potent frontier of knowledge includes our own minds!

Realizing that I knew very little about humans except that the ones in my family could be scary and confusing, I wrote one last paper on “Physics and Mysticism” and changed my major to psychology.

Which didn’t quite feel like a science. Lots of opinions, rat studies, where’s the frontier of real knowledge worth knowing?

I explored the meditation studies, Eastern spiritual teachings, was initiated into the Sufi Order, and experienced cosmic blasts mentioned elsewhere in these stories.

I dropped out. Dropped back in. And out.

I followed a dream to teach on the Navajo Nation, tuning in to indigenous ways of *knowing*...

The quest to *know* continued from college studies to Esalen workshops as I feasted off of the psycho-spiritual smorgasbord of 70’s San Francisco. There I picked up a book written by an author who claimed that a woman (unlikely to be suspected) who learned his card counting system could win a million dollars. No problem-- I still found running numbers through my head to be absolutely delicious. Doing ten thousand calculations an hour while the Vegas pit bosses wondered if I was a hooker was fun. The only person who spotted me as a card counter was Stanley Tomchin, may he rest in peace, the legendary bridge and backgammon champion and mastermind of the original Computer Group that won untold millions with their sports betting strategies. In the casinos, stupid people were still running things but now their prejudices worked in my favor. I played by choice and financed education in classrooms and across the globe with my winnings.

I always wanted to have the statistics on my side when gambling nonstop for hours, but the games also gave me a chance to explore mind-matter connections with cash pay-offs. Sometimes I would just *know* what number was going to hit on the roulette wheel, or I held the

dice and rolled whatever the players wanted for a spell at craps. But I didn't fool myself into thinking that I was going to make a living this way (although who knows....). I studied everything that had been published about blackjack at the time, partied with the MIT card counters who shared a trick to get an advantage off the top of the deck, and came up with tournament strategies that wiped out the competition.

My original plan for moving to Vegas was to start a school for kids there—this story is long enough without going into that any further, although it *is* on the learning theme--which led to a dive in and out of Scientology. I never called myself a Scientologist, believed that L. Ron Hubbard was more than a clever huckster, or got to the point of signing their billion-year contract, but I was involved enough to learn some extraordinary techniques and see the underbelly of the archetypal Big Bad Cult. Working with refugees from what we've called TOS (The Old School) at the Advanced Ability Center in Montecito, California felt like being at ground zero for the frontier of consciousness studies in the 80's.

But I've never been a true believer, even in a cult of ex-cult members, and as my biological clock was ticking, I left to chase the man of my dreams. And the dreams took me to Mark in Arizona.

My 30's were the domestic decade: wife, mom, homebuilder, counseling professional, still learning through involvement with the Institute of Noetic Sciences, Institute for Research in Metapsychology, and the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies (MAPS). Husband, kids and laundry came first, but I always felt most at home on the evolving edge of knowledge. Again, what was important to *know*? By 1990 I recognized the need to deal with psychological trauma, and although they weren't taught at the university, there were methods that got results.

The streams flowed together: science, psychology, spirituality, social relevance. The synergy was soul food. At last.

I clicked into a groove in the emerging field of Traumatology as the first Certified Trauma Specialist in the Southwest, Director and President of several professional associations, and keeping it real in my own local practice in Flagstaff, Trauma Relief Services. When I found valuable techniques, I studied as much as possible, taught my colleagues, and encouraged everyone to learn from each other. I started the International Energy Psychology Conferences in

Las Vegas, to bring the field together rather than spending all my time and money traveling to workshops.

As the new millennium dawned, I felt the pull to work closer to home. Mark and I started the STAR School, a Navajo charter school that I envisioned being a community center that also included a trauma healing and training institute. I'm not going to say that the stupid people were in charge there.... just that we never got around to the foundational discussion of what the kids needed to know, and how they could learn things that mattered for their lives and the community. I thought the point of starting our own school was to think outside of the box, but the security of the Box, the pull of Normal, is compelling. There was always one more crisis, one more classroom needed first. The community trauma center remains to be built.

It took me seventeen years to get the hint. If this story sounds like I think I'm smart....well there's the kind of smart that show up on tests, and then there's how the world actually works. When we're told how smart we are, we can be blinded to our disabilities.

By my late 40's I was starting to settle into middle age under Mark's shadow. Still, there were always studies on the side, and dreams that broke through at times. On into my fifties I could be found drinking ayahuasca in the Amazon—other dimensions of Knowing for sure.

I went to Burning Man and Burning Man came to my home, the Gateway Ranch. Was this a distraction or a healthy, inspired balance with the community responsibilities of the STAR School? It took time and resources, and sparked life and possibilities. The threads of connections are still being woven at this moment.

Now in my sixties, keenly aware that life doesn't last forever and every day is a gift, there's an urgency to pull all of the threads together. To Know what I Know. And Don't Know. The Not Knowing, and being honestly okay with it, is an essential part of the story.

So shall we do the dance of Knowing and Not-Knowing together? What's being called the Psychedelic Renaissance is here, lots of possibilities for enlightenment as well as disaster. Ingesting drugs, or plant medicines, can open doors but it isn't required, and in any case our own bodies are filled with powerful chemicals and the systems that can put them to use.

Among the natural highs, I'm offering trauma healing and transformational retreats, inviting friends to experiment with consciousness altering tools and toys including a flotation tank at the Gateway Ranch. Let's explore in the RATLAB: Research and Transformation, Love and Beauty.

Although I still have a passion to **know** what can be known, I've become more comfortable embracing the Unknown in everyday situations, as well as in the more dramatic ones.

The Kismet alphabet is sprinkled with the theme of Knowing. For example:

*"God wants you to **know** there is healing for you."*

*"I can't tell you what to do with your life, nobody can—but we don't need to, because you **know**."*

Knowing and Not-Knowing are elements that make up a lot of fun games when we look at life that way. Can we enjoy the play? What does it take to recover from years of schooling that penalizes and shames us for not knowing, when that is a necessary requirement for learning? Without having to know for sure, I'm guessing that I'll explore this dynamic for the rest of my life, until I depart for the next adventure into the greater Unknown.

L

Love

Only Love

I scrambled desperately to find a finger hold on the rough sandstone, picking up speed as I scraped down the steep slope. People on the cliff above watched in horror as I disappeared over the edge.

Launching into space, there was nothing to reach for any more, nothing between me and the ground hundreds of feet below. I surrendered to the fall. Time expanded as I entered that slow motion world that accompanies impending collisions and death.

So this is how it ends.

My vision expanded to soak in the Sedona-like bowl of red cliffs in a 180-degree view.

It's so incredibly beautiful.

It's all about Love....it's ALL about LOVE.

I crashed through tree branches and slammed to the ground.

Dimly regaining consciousness, I was aware of laying on my back, on sand. I thought of those who would find my body and felt an intense urge to leave them a message. I wasn't concerned about living or dying, I just wanted everyone to know.

It's all about love.

My vision was dark and my body was pinned to the ground. But somehow I had to tell the world what was real. The only thing that mattered.

I reached my right hand over my head and scrawled in the sand with my index finger:

L

O

V

Are the letters clear? Am I writing them on top of each other? This is important—what if nobody can read the message?

E

In my foggy state I had no confidence of writing legibly. I imagined my broken body being found with LOVE arching over my head but feared that I was botching the job.

My worries were interrupted by the sounds of men's voices, footsteps, and branches giving way as paramedics clawed their way through the underbrush. My vision returned enough to see that I was surrounded by good looking young men, getting to work taking care of me without delay, efficiently identifying broken bones and applying the appropriate precautions to prepare me for evacuation.

Before they trampled the sand, though, I wanted to make sure that they got the message:

It's ALL about LOVE.

Whew- another wild dream! I awakened with relief but a sense that nothing had changed. Dead, alive, in my bed or waiting for the medivac, it's still ALL about LOVE.

This is just one of many times that message came through. Whenever I remember, I have no doubt.

Love wins, because Love is the one thing that never gives up.

Everything is created from Love. Love is the ground of Being beyond good or bad.

Everything that exists comes from Love and returns to Love.

Love is calling to us, in every place and at every moment.

I am Love Loving Love.

M

Mission

3 Things...

Are you old enough to remember Pan American Airlines? They flew pretty much everywhere, and thanks to my sister and her Pan Am job I paid thirty bucks for a round trip ticket from San Francisco to Sydney, Australia. I'd saved another \$600 while working as a waitress in a tourist trap strip joint after graduating from college, and that would cover the rest of my expenses.

When an attractive young Aussie couple showed up in the club, I told them of my plans and we hit it off. They gave me their address just outside of Sydney along with a piece of advice: invest in an Ovation guitar to take along on my flight. They assured me that such a guitar would sell for twice what it cost me in this country and pay for my trip.

I bought the guitar and case for \$550, hauled it to Australia, and found my way to the charming home at their address. I rang the doorbell and waited. I knocked.... knocked some more....no answer. Eventually I went to their neighbors' house and discovered that they were Australian soap opera stars who at that moment were visiting Larry Hagman--during his "Dallas" days-- along with other Hollywood actors in California. They were expected back in a couple of weeks.

During the next two days of wandering around Sydney, I met many people who admired the guitar but nobody who had the money to buy it. Finally I dropped it off at the home of a friendly guy's sweet mother, and hit the road with the forty-four dollars I had left after spending six on a hamburger. In 1981 this wasn't cheap.

Thankfully, I found a land of cheerful, generous people and my tiny bankroll turned out to be plenty for the next three weeks. I had a wondrous time hitchhiking north along the coast through New South Wales and Queensland as far as Fraser Island, where I ran for miles on the

beach and came face to face with astonishing life forms. I still don't know what some of them are called—was that long-necked slinky creature a mammal, marsupial, or reptile?

Eventually I traveled back toward Sydney with an adorable long-haired young man who took me inland to the Blue Mountains. Along the way he showed me how to slice a mango and I still think of him with gratitude every time I eat one. Who knows what ripples our small acts may send around the world?

After a day climbing a postcard-worthy waterfall surrounded by exotic birds, butterflies, and fat lizards sunning themselves on rocks, we drove for hours through the dark. As we wound around yet another black curve, the dazzling lights of the Jenolan Caves appeared, reflected in a pool at the cave's entrance. Slowing to a crawl, we entered a wonderland of stalactites and stalagmites illuminated by hidden, colored lights. With the reflections below us, it felt like driving into the center of an otherworldly tunnel.

We emerged from the far end of the cave into a parking lot where our headlights caught a group of startled kangaroos, sending them bounding up the surrounding hills and out of sight. This seemed to be a good place to settle in for the night. My companion, incredibly cute but faithful to his girlfriend, graciously offered me the back seat of the small car while he scrunched into the front.

I was awakened from my sleep by the sound of thumping and chewing, so close that I wondered if the kangaroos might be eating some parts of the car. I listened for a few minutes before drifting back to sleep. Later, deep in the night, I had this dream:

I was flying Superman style, blasting off from the ground on heroic missions to save people from various disasters. As I zoomed around the sky, a glowing, angelic being floated toward me, commanded my attention face to face, and spoke:

“There are three important things for you to do in the next ten years.”.

I'm listening!

“The first is this....

...then this....

...and this.....”

I popped awake, elated. Yes!

My prayers for guidance had been answered. Thank you, God!

The only problem was.... I couldn't remember what I had been told. I struggled to retrieve a clue, then lay quiet in hope that the message would emerge.

Finally I accepted that the only fragment I could access was something about "Indians".

Even this was a valuable tip, however. The dream said *Indians* not indigenous Australians (who we called Aborigines in those days, but this is not the place to discuss political correctness or respect for native peoples). It was time to head back home.

On the way to the Sydney airport I made a quick stop to transfer the guitar to the now-returned soap opera couple so they could sell it to their friends. "We'll send you the money," they promised-- and actually did. Then my friend took me to the Sydney airport to board a plane for the long flight back to San Francisco. We said an achingly chaste goodbye.

The day after returning I was surprised to get a phone call from someone I'd never met, who had tracked me down at the apartment of someone he didn't know. He was calling from a tiny school up on top of Black Mesa, Arizona in the middle of the Navajo reservation. He asked if I would come immediately to be the principal of the school, a job that also involved teaching grades five through eight. The last principal/teacher had left abruptly in the middle of the school year and they were in desperately need of a replacement.

Indians! A perfect fit with my dream. I said yes, I'd be there right away.

Fifty miles out of town my car died in the rainy night. I got towed back for repair and to pay for it I went back the clubs on Broadway. I got a job at the Condor, where Carol Doda had pioneered enormous silicone breast implants, and another at a place with a "Man-Woman Love Act" advertised in flashing lights on the opposite corner. I also filled in as needed at a Chippendales-style club for women.

A week later the car was repaired and packed up again. After wrapping up work at 2 AM I stopped to pick up a sewing machine from a friend's place, took a quick nap, and returned to find that I'd been robbed of nearly everything that I owned—clothing, jewelry, even the health food that I'd stocked up on. I filled out a police report and left in the early morning drizzle.

I was glad to be back on the reservation, yet unprepared to teach a class that spanned four grades and had seen three teachers come and go by mid-year. The most recent one was said to be in a mental institution in California. There was zero budget for books, pencils and paper, or anything else. The school board members only spoke Navajo.

I threw my heart into the job, and in retrospect don't know how I could have done better under the circumstances. There were days when students engaged with creative projects and I had hope, like the day we created a scale model solar system with planets hung from the ceiling. But by the next morning they were trashed on the floor.

When summer came I moved to Las Vegas with the aim of winning enough money to start my own school. After a few years, when I knew what I was doing, I planned to bring my knowledge and confidence back to the kids on the Rez. I hadn't forgotten my commitment to *Indians*. I just needed to regroup and prepare—in the casinos of Sin city.

This wasn't quite as absurd as it sounds. I have a head for numbers and actually did win money as a skilled blackjack player who attracted more suspicion of being a hooker than a card counter. I took UNLV courses to qualify for a Nevada teaching credential, interviewed teachers to hire, and made an offer on a building that was (thankfully) not accepted. I lined up funders and tackled curriculum development before realizing that I wasn't going to stay in Vegas long enough to start a school there.

Eventually I moved back to Arizona, worked in Navajo Nation schools for over twenty years, got married to a school director and started the award-winning STAR School together. I could make that sound like the fulfillment of the dream but need to stay truthful here. I'm on an indefinite break from the STAR School after years...and years...and years... of waiting to have a conversation I assumed we'd have at the beginning: the foundational discussion about what and why we're building our own school. How can we help children become powerful, creative, clear thinking human beings who will have the vision and courage to serve their own mission?

I hope you won't be discouraged if I report that dreams coming true don't always have happy endings.

And of course, this chapter is not the end of the dream, only the beginning. While some people say that the STAR School is proof that I have fulfilled my dream, I think I'm still just getting warmed up. I'm not discouraged, although I hope I'm thoroughly disillusioned.

What were the "three important things in ten years"? Indians...gambling...spiritual technologies...trauma work...marriage...Gateway Ranch? The school I didn't start, children I didn't birth?

Those ten years have passed, along with thirty more. I hoped I didn't miss the Important Things.

What is important now is to remember what's important in the *next* ten years.

N

Nature

Lucille and the Watermelons

I noticed a curious new sound in the house, like little bells, most often when I first came home. The mystery was solved when I spotted a scrawny cat making its escape through the garage after sneaking in and eating the food we left out for our kittens. Although it wore a collar with a bell, the cat was terribly thin and didn't seem to have another home. I started putting out an extra dish of food, and before long the cat became healthy and sleek and joined the family.

Because of its back-from-the-dead condition, we gave him the name Lazarus. But when we took him in for neutering, the vet informed us we had a girl and her name was changed to Lucille.

My beloved Lucille and I lived and traveled together for the next five years. She forgave my occasional absences, even walking through the rain, meowing plaintively, to greet me at the mailbox when I returned home. Ours was the longest intimate relationship I'd had up to that point, and by far the most straightforward and mutually satisfying. We curled up and kept each other warm; we were there for each other after boyfriends came and left. When either of us crossed a line and offended the other, we expressed our displeasure and got right back to the love. She was, and is, my role model for happy, adoring relationships.

Lucille and I eventually moved in with my fiancé, Mark, in Flagstaff, Arizona. To his surprise, he became quite fond of her. He had never considered himself a cat person, but sweet Lucille melted his heart.

Our purring, snuggling bliss was shattered one morning when I was awakened by loud shouting and snarling. I looked outside to see a neighbor carrying Lucille wrapped in a towel after an attack by two large dogs in the field between our houses. We made it to the vet but

there was nothing they could do for her injuries. She died there after just a few minutes despite outpourings of love and prayers.

I was devastated, more than I've ever been by the death of a human friend or relative. Two months later I realized that a day still hadn't passed without crying for her. Even now, after decades, a few sweet, warm tears spill out as I write, remembering how much she meant to me.

On that chilly, grey October day, Mark and I drove with Lucille's body out to the desert to bury her there up on a hill in sight of the Navajo Sacred Peaks of the West. This property was destined to become the Gateway Ranch, and our purchase of eighty acres included an abandoned wreck of a house. You could tell that someone had cared for it before vandals busted out all of the windows and doors and shot holes in the ceiling. We had been trying to fix up the house when we could get out there on weekends, but it continued to deteriorate with hypodermic needles amid the broken beer and wine bottles piling up outside. We arrived for Lucille's burial to discover that someone had smashed the toilet and torn out pine paneling from the walls since our last visit.

I stood in front of the house with a blank mind, a broken heart, and a dead cat body wrapped in my favorite pink, embroidered shawl. Mark stood framed by the doorway, surveying the wreckage of the house.

"What a mess. This is so *discouraging*..."

Feeling the weight of that word, my head dropped as tears leaked from my closed eyes. When I opened them a moment later I saw.... a large watermelon at my feet. Nearby was another watermelon. I blinked and realized that I was standing in the midst of sprawling watermelon vines!

I looked up to the heavens.

"Thank you. Oh, thank you! We needed a miracle, right on time!"

That was the most succulent, sweet, crisp watermelon I've ever eaten. We realized they must have been planted in May when I'd brought some little girls out from the nearby Navajo reservation school dormitory for a picnic. The vines had grown, somehow unnoticed over the summer, and thrived after monsoon rains.

For the next five years we invited all of the kids and staff from that Leupp Schools dorm to an annual Watermelon Festival cookout, stuffing ourselves with as much watermelon as we could consume and holding seed-spitting contests to make sure they got widely scattered. We

ended up with hundreds of kids and adults each year. Eventually, the hood of Mark's '50 Ford pickup caved in under their weight, and we had to replace our gutters after mobs of kids swarmed all over the roof, we decided that was enough. Although the vines grew small, green globes during years with good summer rains, the ripe, edible fruit had been a one-time miracle.

I give thanks to dear Lucille, and gratitude to all of the creatures who grace our world. It is an honor to share the web of life with you.

O

Out-of-Body

Untethered

I awoke one night during my final year in high school to discover that I had no body. At least I couldn't find my body, or anything else for that matter. I attempted to reach out --with what?-- but there was nothing to touch in the darkness. My first coherent thought was, "Am I dying?" followed by, "Maybe I'm already dead!" Even without awareness of a body, I started experiencing a sense of suffocation.

Eventually I opened my eyes, glad to be back in my own bed. My heart was pounding, I was gasping for breath yet otherwise everything appeared normal.

I considered telling my mother but expected that she'd accuse me of being on some sort of hallucinogen. I wondered if there could in fact be a drug connection, since I'd smoked marijuana with friends in the past, although we'd never experienced or heard of anything like this. So I kept it all to myself, as usual.

Several weeks passed uneventfully. Then one night I felt myself pulled upward as a buzzing, roaring sound filled my head. Again, I had a sense of suffocation and fought the experience until it faded, leaving me shaking in my bed. A few weeks later the experience was repeated, accompanied by an even more intense, buzzing vibration. Sporadic reoccurrences continued during the following year. Sometimes I seemed to be flying and on a few occasions there was fleeting scenery, but otherwise only darkness. Ordinary waking consciousness was always a great relief.

About a year after the first event, I felt myself being lifted out the top of my head after dozing off in the college library. I started to worry: what was going on? Could this happen unexpectedly while I was driving? I finally told my mother.

“You’ve warped your mind with drugs!” she wailed, and promptly called a doctor. Soon I was whisked to the hospital and wired up to an electroencephalograph. Since the technician wanted to check my brain waves while I was asleep as well as awake, they offered me a sleeping pill which I declined.

“Just tell me when, and I’ll be asleep in a minute or so.”

I had learned to hypnotize myself at age twelve through a technique of progressive relaxation and suggestion and using this to fall asleep wasn’t difficult.

Besides sleeping on command, the EEG showed nothing abnormal. The next step was to see a psychologist.

I’m grateful to Dr. Duckers (his real name) and realize that I could have landed in the office of a doc who insisted on pills or hospitalization, as happened to my sister a few years later. After talking to my mother privately, he asked questions and listened carefully before advising, “I don’t know what these things are, but try hypnotizing yourself with the suggestion to turn them off.”

I went home, gave myself the recommended suggestion, and the episodes ended. Then a year later I ran across Robert Monroe’s “Journeys Out of the Body”, the first popular book on the subject. I was amazed to read descriptions of experiences strikingly similar to my own. *I’m not broken. I’m not alone.*

With this reassurance my curiosity returned. What might happen if I explored further? I released the hypnotic suggestion to stop the experiences and gave myself permission for the journeys to continue. When I relaxed and didn’t fight them, I found that their character changed. I was more likely to fly or meet other beings, although I still felt the choking sensations at times which usually brought me back to my body. On these occasions I found that my neck was relaxed to the point where my chin dropped and throat was closing in, physically obstructing the air flow. My body was not ready to let me go permanently and could call me back if needed.

Around this time I was also given a book on Eckankar, describing an elaborate cosmology with practices involving sound vibrations to facilitate “soul travel”. I chanted a few times in Eckankar meetings, and more often joined Sufi groups for practices that I also did on my own. Intention and vibration seem to be the keys.

It's now been over fifty years since that first experience. When I've set the intention to explore and given myself sufficient time in a comfortable and totally silent location, at home in the vast, open desert, I've experienced some degree of OOB phenomena in 29 out of 30 trials. On a few occasions I've traveled to very vivid and detailed scenes-- I'm still wondering when the log house and dirt road with the **Honey** sign will show up in the physical world. Other times I've simply risen through the ceiling and looked down at the landscape or gone into dream states. When I caught myself dreaming, I discovered that diving through the floor of my dream world is an effective way to "change channels".

Entering my later years, I'm now thinking that being able to leave the body at will could be a practical skill to have. I look forward to more adventures to come in the (Psychedelic) Geezer Commune.

P

Protection

God Takes Care of His Children

I turned sixteen and followed the helpful hints to smile and wear a short skirt when taking the test for my driver's license. I bombed the parallel parking and got stuck sideways during the 3-point turnaround but somehow passed. By January I finally had permission from my parents to take the car out at night. The high school dance was only two miles away, thoroughly chaperoned, and would be over at a reasonable hour. No worries!

It might have been an unmemorable night if a neighborhood kid hadn't given me a capsule of something he described as "organic mescaline". Organic? That sounded natural and healthy. I didn't know anything about mescaline beyond that it was obviously something you could get high on. I'd gotten drunk once and started smoking pot with my girlfriend, Carlye, the previous summer, but hadn't tried any other kind of mind-altering substances. This white powder would have no telltale smell, so it seemed like the best option for a school event.

I drove to William Fremd High, where I did my best to be part of the crowd without putting myself in a position where I might be expected to actually dance. The one time a boy had ever asked me, my stomach knotted up in terror and my throat constricted before squeaking out, "I have to go now. My mother's waiting for me!" After sprinting for the door, I hid outside for hours until my mother eventually arrived.

This night I didn't attract any scary offers to dance, in fact that night's music wasn't getting many dancers moving their feet. I thought about swallowing the capsule, which would go down easily with the cups of Hawaiian Punch that were being served from a big bowl. Sure, why not make things a little more interesting?

An hour later, boredom started turning into paranoia: “Am I laughing too loud? Why is that teacher looking at me?” Around this time a group of boys invited me to a party a few suburbs over in Buffalo Grove. I’d seen it on a map but didn’t recall ever going there before. It sounded like a good escape.

My entire memory of the party is of staying planted in one spot, listening to the great music of 1970 and watching as everything became liquid and colorful. All was well until, Cinderella-like, I suddenly remembered the time. I had to be home with the car by midnight, or – worse than turning into a pumpkin-- face the wrath of my mother.

I jumped up, said a quick goodbye, grabbed my coat, bolted out the door.... and found myself in the second floor hallway of an apartment building with no idea which way to go. I retreated back inside to beg for help from my friends. After laughing at me, these gallant gentlemen helped identify my mother’s car under a layer of newly fallen snow, dug keys out of my purse, and dealt with the lock and ignition, all while braving a blasting wind. Then they pointed to the direction of my home and disappeared into the swirling snow.

Brilliant fluorescent flashes and streaks added to the usual blinding effect of a Chicago blizzard. It matched any spectacularly trippy movie scene, but I had only one thought: *Get the car home now or I’ll be in trouble with my parents.* My sense of speed fluctuated wildly. It didn’t help that mom’s car had a short in the wiring that made all of the interior lights flicker on and off. Mostly off.

“If I go too fast, I’ll skid off the road. If I go too slow, it will look suspicious to the cops. Whoa, maybe I’m going backwards! How can I tell?”

Even my sense of up and down was lost in the mesmerizing clouds of psychedelic snowflakes attacking the car. I gripped the steering wheel and prayed to stay on the icy road.

Don’t stop.

Doesn’t matter how scared you are.

Mom’s waiting.

Just keep going.....

Suddenly *something* sailed left to right beyond the windshield, blazing like a banner across my field of vision. I saw it, heard it, and felt the impact in my body. Six words.

God takes care of His children.

My mind and vision cleared up in one breath.

The snowfall lightened. The dashboard lights blinked and stayed on. My mind and driving were under control.

I carefully made my way home, parked in the garage, and met my mother at the top of the stairs.

“How was the dance?”

“It was loud.” If I said something that didn’t make sense, maybe I could pretend that I didn’t hear her. Blame it on rock and roll. Fortunately, that wasn’t necessary.

“I’m glad you’re home safe. Goodnight.”

Up in my bedroom I spent hours marveling at what had happened but made little sense of it.

“What’s this *God* stuff?” I believed in God, sure, in the sense that there was Something or Someone bigger than humans. In our mindbogglingly enormous universe it makes sense that there’s some kind of Creator or Source we all came from, right? I’d never tried to put these ideas into words, though. I don’t remember any deep conversations about God-- and who would I have had them with? When I went to the Barrington Hills Presbyterian church it was all about hanging with other teens, sneaking outside to smoke a joint, and listening to *Jesus Christ, Superstar*. For years I had taken long, solitary walks out to a pond beyond the houses of our own suburb of Inverness, and often felt a presence that felt vaguely spiritual, even comforting. But the Big Daddy in the sky taking care of “His children”? I was a cool sixteen-year-old and didn’t want to be anyone’s child.

And yet that night

I couldn’t deny that

I had been a lost kid playing with things I didn’t understand.

One week later I was eating breakfast when my mother walked in. Her eyes widened with surprise.

“You’re here!” She exclaimed, blinking and looking around the room.

Um, where was I supposed to be? I kept my mouth full of cereal so I wouldn't say anything incriminating. I felt relieved when she went on.

"Oh, of course you're here. I just had the strangest dream. You were out late at night and I was worried about you. It was dark... you were in some sort of danger but there was nothing I could do. Then I heard a voice that said, "*God takes care of His children*". And I knew you'd be all right.

I managed to sputter "That's interesting," while choking on my cereal, and headed upstairs to brush my teeth.

I've thought of this message often, especially when I lost six friends during one year at college and many others since then. Was God not paying attention as they faced the crashes, overdoses, or bullets that took their lives? Aren't we all His children?

I have no answer to those questions. Nor do I assume that I can act recklessly and count on a heavenly rescue every time.

What I do know is that in my heart, if not through words, I was crying for help at the moment the message blasted through. And those words are seared into my soul.

Q

Questions

Mother Wisdom

"I went to the Amazon jungle and drank a horrible tasting brew. I threw up a lot."

My friend, Irene, didn't say much more about her adventure with ayahuasca. As I pictured her doubled over outside of a thatched hut, I found myself thinking, "That sounds horrible!" At the same time there was another inner voice: "I'm going to do that someday."

This made no sense at all.

And by now I know enough not to question these things.

A few years later, as we entered the new millennium, a retreat brochure arrived in the mailbox. Unlike Irene's experience with an unknown shaman, this came through the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies, MAPS, organized by anthropologist and ayahuasca author Luis Eduardo Luna. Visionary artist Alex Grey was part of the group. Sign me up.

In the months before the trip, I read tales of first-hand experiences in Ralph Metzner's book [Ayahuasca: Human Consciousness and the Spirit of Nature](#). Okay, this could get intense, weird, uncomfortable, but everyone had returned to tell their stories. I was a responsible adult with experienced companions. Once a decision has been made, is there any point in being afraid? I fell back on my mantra, "It will be what it will be".

At the Miami airport I discovered that my reservation to Manaus had been lost due to an Orbitz reservation glitch. What if I couldn't make the trip? I detected a hint of relief attached to this idea, although the intention to keep moving forward won out. I ended up buying another ticket so I didn't miss the flight.

Hey, what are credit cards for? As I made my way through the terminal hallways I was aware of a distinct uneasiness, and it wasn't all about whether I'd get my original ticket price refunded. After finding my way around the world through testing the limits of creative problem solving and making room for miracles through necessity, and it was strange to solve this dilemma by simply handing over a bit of plastic. It felt almost like cheating.... or was it just *normal*?

It's okay to use all the resources we have, I reassured myself, remembering that there were plenty of challenges to come.

At the gate, I found my fellow travelers loosely gravitated around Alex, who was easy to spot with his distinctive long ponytail. They seemed friendly enough, about half men and half women, dressed for comfort. I was reassured by the presence of other Boomers in the middle of a pack that ranged from 20-somethings on up to one adventurous 83-year-old. As our boarding groups were called, they peeled away by ones and twos. See you in the Southern Hemisphere!

Aisle seat or window, there's an easy choice I thought with my forehead pressed to the glass (or whatever that clear material was). As we flew over new territory, I wondered how many islands are there in the Caribbean? Way more than I ever imagined! After a few hours, the South American coastline appeared, the planet turned from blue to green, and what I assumed was the Brazilian Amazon went on forever. Roads and buildings appeared at last and we made a smooth landing.

My childhood concepts of the sticky, dark, oppressive jungle—how could people actually survive there?—were disrupted by the sights, smells, and sounds of a city of one and a half million on a warm but not unpleasant day. I'd followed advice to book a room at the Holiday Inn for some rest after two days of travel, one last compromise between convenience and authenticity. I smiled at how the hotel logo matched the shades of green invading its moist concrete walls.

After a good night's sleep a few women from our group met up to wander through the city. Number one on the sightseeing list was the spectacular Teatro Amazonas opera house built in the late 19th century by rubber barons who lured Caruso there for its opening performance.

From there we meandered through a vast marketplace that stretched alongside the Rio Negro, then joined our group to board crowded ferries that carried us across the vast river and upstream. We transferred to smaller boats that took us to our destination where we would spend the next ten days.

We settled into our simple lodgings and enjoyed a prescribed *dieta* of rice, fish, and plantains in the open-air dining hall. Back in our cabin, my roommate, Rita, and I chatted into the night. Her questions reminded me that I'd been taking my next step without thinking too much about where this was all leading. Now it was getting real.

Are you ready to go on a journey together?

The circle gathers in the thatched, screened *maloca* at 8:00 in the evening. We each settle onto a mattress, heads to the perimeter and feet pointing to the center. This is to be a solitary journey; the group leaders are available if needed but please don't interact with your neighbors. All forty of us set our intentions, one at a time, while tying knots in a long rope reminiscent of the ayahuasca vine. The music starts, a recorded playlist ranging from classical symphonies to Moby, carefully selected world music from several continents, all without English words. Then the brew is served, about a half a cup or so adjusted by body size and intuition, and possibly past experience although most of us are new to this. We drink in silence. I note to myself that the taste is not as bad as Irene said it was.

I kept my intention open and said something about experiencing love, sincere yet playing it safe. In response to this, the first of the four ceremony nights beats me up thoroughly. Critical inner voices battle in a hall of mirrors, arguing ad infinitum. No fear, just wave upon wave of familiar, annoying, mind chatter. A chilly downpour drenches me through the screen at one point as the voices mock my misery. *Soft, privileged white lady! Can't handle a little rain without whining?*

The expected purge comes, with enough warning to make it into the dimly lit bathroom rather than using the plastic bucket next to our mattresses. It's a relief after what seems like hours of nausea. Finally I find enough clarity to lay down the line.

"I want something *real!*"

"Oh, you want something *real*, do you? Why do you think there's anything besides this? You're just making it up, fake and empty. This is all there is."

I reach out with my physical arms as well as my inner vision as the mockery continues.

"I want something real!"

"What are you looking for? There's nothing here."

"I want something real!"

Echoes of my voice fragment into cold laughter.

"I want something real!"

"How would *you* know if it was real or not?"

This time I have an answer: *"Does the wolf know the taste of fresh meat?"*

That shuts them up for a moment, long enough for me to get a glimpse.... of....
something....

I struggle to sustain my focus through the barrage, but little by little a presence of love emerges. Like a collage made from scraps of magazine advertisements, phony smiling moms serving food in colorful plastic containers, scenes of city traffic and belching smokestacks. Out of all that, a larger pattern with a feminine face emerges.

Don't be fooled.

Love is here.

Love is here and all is love.

Love is calling. Always.

I look at my world back home through the lens of love. There's nothing but love for my family, my home, my life.

Everything comes from love and returns to love.

I feel only love for the talkative woman on the next mattress, who didn't want to tell the group leaders that she was on Prozac and is suffering the consequences.

I feel love for myself. No separation, just love loving love loving love....

The night ends as jungle creatures awake and sing to the dawn.

After a day off to rest and explore the world of crocodiles, piranhas, three-foot diameter lily pads, and pink river dolphins, the circle convenes for another round. Going into the ceremony, I ask my body for a signal to indicate the optimum amount of brew to drink. Ayahuasca dosage isn't always logical, and results vary among individuals. While most of us found that 100 ml, less than half a cup, was plenty, the eldest man in our group drank four times

that amount with little effect. I want a full experience, but don't need a repeat of the first night when I was bombarded in a chamber of kaleidoscopic visuals for hours. Tonight I reduce the cup to 80 ml and the brew goes down easily enough, although I find the taste less pleasant than the first time. Less pleasant...later that will sound funny.

The middle-aged woman to my right tells me that she misplaced her passport, missed her plane in San Francisco, and paid \$5000 for a replacement first-class ticket. She takes a dose half as large as mine while voicing doubts that coming here was a good idea. On my left a slender, 21-year-old Asian man drinks the brew with great difficulty. I silently wish him strength and peace as he struggles sip by sip. Then I settle back on my mattress and close my eyes.

Some people see Ayahuasca as a powerful serpent, a god-like figure, or Grandmother. Tonight Ayahuasca show up as the Gatekeeper. I sense this noble presence just beyond my visual field, ready to open the curtain.

Within the first half hour, colored patterns emerge, pervasive and brilliant like the first night but this time flowing in silver-edged paisley swirls, each unfolding into the next. Saturated reds, blues, and purples, every form outlined in liquid silver, jewel-like and indescribably kaleidoscopic. Beautiful... yet meaningless.

I don't feel attracted or repelled. I just watch.

Eventually the patterns fade.

The veils are drawn aside.

The doors to the universe stand wide open.

And there She is.

Words like *radiant glory* and *all-embracing love* only hint at her presence.

Any sense of my separate self is lost in awe of Her.

"I am Lady Wisdom." she says.

"I am your Mother."

I know this is true as I dissolve in gratitude.

"You are my Child, and my Emissary."

Emissary? Did I hear that right? Does that mean I'm important? Does it mean I'm... responsible? Ego food? I set the word aside for future consideration.

"If you have any questions, just ask,"

And for the rest of the night, I do.

Everything question I have is met by words, images, an experience, answered to my full satisfaction. The answers I seek are available in as much detail as I care to know.

Along with responses to my questions, she pours her love over me, through me, hour after hour.

At times all I can do is melt into a wave-pool of laughter, gasping for breath.

Oh my God! Oh my....*Mother*

We cover territory from suicidal children to the songs of stars. At one point I'm lost in a glorious symphony being played through the speakers and realize I'm vomiting at the same time. Fortunately my mouth is closed and after hours of purging there's hardly anything left to come up. I think "That's enough", and it stops.

Throughout the night, I witness the universe—*multiverses*-- born through our Mother Wisdom. From the One to the Many and back again, I watch intricate patterns manifesting and being harvested into the whole. A dance of unity and polarity, all woven out of Intelligent Love Essence. The one *real* thing. Excruciating beauty. Over and over I stop just to breathe before melting down in another puddle of blessed bliss. I'm sure I can't take any more, but it continues. Laughing until it hurts, and then laughing about that.

Note for my To Do list: *I've got to expand my capacity for ecstasy.*

At last the jungle birds stir at the first hint of dawn. Mother Wisdom and I say our goodbyes. I'm fully spent, exhausted, uplifted, given all that I could have imagined and much more. How could I thank her enough when she knows me better than I know myself?

The new day bursts into song.

After resting I wrote pages of notes. Some of the lessons had words or images to draw, but many of the notes are, at best, crude clues, reminders to tune back into the actual experience.

On Love

Love is calling. Ringing like a beacon always, everywhere. We just need to tune in.

Love will win—it is the only thing that doesn't give up. Everything else comes and returns to the Ground of Being—Love-- according to the intention cycles that created it.

Love is coming: prepare ye the way.

Love is One, and yet Love has a Shadow (don't ask me how this works)

Every blade of grass dances in the field of Love.

From Love to Wisdom, Alpha to Omega. Why go through all this—including 14 billion years of cosmic evolution and all the suffering of life on Earth-- if everything comes from one perfect love and returns to that eternal home? A home that we never really left....how could we leave eternity???

Something of value is earned through our experience and harvested into the Whole.

What we see as synchronicity and morphic resonance is love working behind the scenes.

In every moment, we have free will to move toward love or away from it.

We can try to get love-- or make love-- with illusion, but that's an exhausting game we'll never win. It's a different level of existence.

Be Here Now. Again. And again. Here, now, in Love.

On Reality

Reality is a multidimensional binary system- polarity rather than duality.

In a spiritual as well as physical sense we're doing the Dance of Unity and Polarity.

The holographic universe model: the laser of consciousness is directed into a field of potential and creates our world.

Stars are guides. They sing to us. We can Star bathe, exposing our skin to starlight and singing with them.

Surface appearances in human life—the popular stories we tell, the themes that fill our news media—are a different level of reality than the layers of purpose and meaning behind the scene.

The Wish Fulfillment Department is always open. It is staffed by a couple of guys who are waiting for someone to knock so they can open the door. "Gee, we thought this would be a popular site!" But they can have a tricky sense of humor, as in fairy tales where getting wishes granted leads to regret. (Later I played with them until it wasn't much fun getting laughed at.)

Life on Earth

Humans live in the midst of sets of polar opposites. We make our choices with our tiny, limited knowledge. Don't beat yourself up if you feel like you're taking a test where you weren't taught the answers! This life is about harvesting wisdom rather than avoiding mistakes. We learn and grow from being pushed to the max, stretching our limits, breaking down to rebuild, and navigating this challenge course.

Massive Earth changes are ahead as the planet wakes up. Humans can be wise stewards and co-creators rather than parasites...but we have choices to make. The Earth, Gaia, will not allow her own body and her children-- all life, ecosystems-- to be destroyed by human greed and folly. She loves us and will accomplish the necessary changes with the least amount of pain, but this doesn't mean that there won't be tremendous destruction, death, and chaos in the process.

The essence of therapy is resolving polarities, thus removing blocks to love. We have techniques-- an alphabet soup of acronyms (EFT, TAT, TIR, EMDR, and more)—that give us various ways to view and release polarized energies.

Energy Psychology breaks up rigid, fear-based structures and makes the system fluid to allow movement and possibilities. Then love can heal.

Treatment for alcohol addiction: love, community, nourishment, chemical balance, trauma resolution, and acceptance/forgiveness that heals shame.

On Family and Work

Stand up for our son, Miles, at school (later I found out how much he was bullied). Get real with him about emotions, respect, truth, effort, Love

Every man is a mother's son. Grieving at the foot of the cross with Jesus and Mary. Feeling the pain of Navajo friends who lost their son.

The Old Folks: the "future selves" that brought me together with my husband. Love and karma transcends time.

I saw, and felt, how kids are forced to fit into boxes at schools. Ouch.

The school that we built has angels, many helpers. I'm instructed to paint angels on the doors- they might look like stars, sunflowers, etc. but they will be angels blessing everyone who passes through. (I have yet to do this.)

Me:

The lid is blown off limits to my faith and trust that I didn't know I had.

One foot in front of the other. Take the next step into the unknown.

Coming to Brazil was the shortest path to Love

There's an old warrior grandma in the mirror

I am one of a group of 532 incarnated beings- all human?- on the planet at this time.

This "I" is integrated at the next higher level.

Be as detached as a child looking at the stars....and as connected.

Get out of the closet—be Who I really am!

R

Relationship

Dave + Katz

I reached a crossroads during my second year of college: go Ivy League or stay a hippie? My Nigerian friend, Simeon Ugwu, was planning to visit Harvard for an admissions interview and invited me to come along. But when the funds from his family didn't get wired from London on time, fate—showing up as a guy named Dave-- swooped me up in another direction.

Up to this point I'd followed a clear path; at seven I decided I was going to be a physicist like my uncle, a professor at Stanford, and never wavered from that plan. What could be more fun than exploring the secret codes that create the fabric of the universe? I was fascinated by science, the more abstract the better. I loved math and scored at the top 1% on every standardized test from third grade on. Stanford, here I come!

At the end of my junior year in high school, I realized I could take one required course over the summer and graduate early. But I hadn't even looked at the college application process, and my parents informed me that they'd saved a total of \$300 toward my further education. Conveniently, a brand-new community college had opened two miles down the road, and compared to another year of high school it looked like a good choice.

By 1972, the West Coast trends of the '60's had reached even into the suburbs of Chicago. My Sociology 101 class included a weekend encounter group at the tiny, rural home of a professor who liked to lecture while on LSD and was dating a student. Since my weekend calendar had cleared when the Harvard trip was called off, I jumped in.

A shiver went up my spine as Dave and I locked eyes across the circle of fourteen participants. This was the first time we'd really *seen* each other although I had known him since 7th grade. Back then he stood out as the guy who carried a briefcase and wore a sports coat, a cool 8th grader who, like the rest of the world, didn't notice that I existed. Now, however, we

were in our own cosmic bubble. Others had trouble following his rambling train of thought, but to me it was profound. We were on a deeper wavelength beyond the comprehension of ordinary humans!

Eventually we found ourselves paired up for an exercise: sit silently, facing each other, and use only our hands to communicate. After a few minutes of this we were allowed to talk and share what we had experienced.

Dave and I smiled and opened our mouths at the same time. Identical words came out. Our mouths shut as our eyes grew wide. We started talking again and the same thing happened. Again. And again. Finally, we stopped talking while the conversation continued internally. We dissolved in laughter.

The next day we took a long walk in the snow. The phenomena between us was intriguing and I thought it was worth exploring further. Dave was way ahead of me; he'd decided we were going to get married and move to Nova Scotia and had already announced it to members of the group.

Although a farm in Nova Scotia sounded idyllic, I spent the next weeks saying "no". And I certainly wasn't ready to get married. Well, could we at least have sex in the meantime? No. I just wasn't feeling it. No. No.

On the other hand, my parents detested Dave's long hair, full beard, and good heavens that damn guitar! My dad felt a need to protect his daughter to the point of running out and pounding on Dave's car as he backed out of our curved, gravel driveway as fast as he could. As a self-respecting teenager, I either had to keep seeing this guy or give in to my parent's unreasonable control. My resolute "no" melted into "well, okay".

In spite of our initial moments of mystically unified consciousness, Dave and I struggled to find alignment on any practical level. We listened to Pink Floyd and read spiritual books, but that and the fact that we were broke and living with our parents was about all we had in common. He was jealous and demanding, while I kept one foot out the door ready to leave with no appreciation of how this might add to a young man's insecurity. Winning the first twelve games after he taught me to play chess didn't help either.

By summertime I decided to move out west after reading a National Geographic article about Idaho. I couldn't recall anyone who had ever been there; what better place to take my

copy of *Be Here Now* and mediate on a mountaintop? After I became enlightened--I figured it would take about six months-- I could decide what to do with the rest of my life.

I gave a week's notice at my job selling stereo gear in what was then the biggest mall in the world and bought a \$250 car. I dreaded having to say goodbye to Dave, expecting an unhappy scene. Astonishingly, he responded to the news with warm support and agreed that I needed to get some distance from my parents and the 'burbs. We spent a few happy evenings together.

During that week I poured over the road atlas and got a sense of how many miles of the Dakotas, and omigod *Montana*, lay between me and Idaho. The car was making some odd noises. Dave checked it out. He could be so sweet, so understanding.

The day before taking off, I asked if he wanted to go along.

"I'm all packed. I knew you couldn't leave me!"

We picked up a tiny, black kitten on the way out of town, stashed a litter box under the driver's seat, and started an argument in Wisconsin that lasted through much of the Badlands of South Dakota and across the magnificent Bighorn Mountains of Wyoming. During one day of turmoil, I dumped Dave off on the roadside near Yellowstone, only to realize ten miles later that I was lost and had to turn around. There he stood, smiling with his thumb out; how could I heartlessly abandon him in the wilderness?

We zigzagged up to the Idaho panhandle and settled for several scenic but miserable months in a log cabin above Lake Cocolalla. The monthly rent of \$25 included an electric line to plug our lights and stereo into. Dave sang and played his guitar in a bar in Sandpoint where we took a weekly shower at a friend's house. I wore a two dollar coat with a moth-eaten fur collar and we ate loads of brown rice, oatmeal, and free commodity cheese. I ground barley to make bread as heavy as a brick which lasted through a hitchhiking trip to visit my uncle and talk with an admissions counselor at Stanford (test scores look fine, go back and actually attend classes for a semester of A's before applying). We cut firewood and dug a path through the snow to the outhouse for a few months before selling the car and fleeing back to the Midwest on a Greyhound bus packed with families heading home for Christmas.

I returned to college and worked to pay the rent for Dave and other roommates while they stayed home and smoked weed. I bought another car but ended up hitchhiking to my job and school through the winter after Dave left it broken down in a parking lot....somewhere. I

only came home to sleep after the landlord grabbed me in a heater closet when he came to make repairs, and a roommate shared his visions of riding on a tank with Jesus, crushing the bones of the evil people-- me among them since I'd stopped buying groceries for the house.

Finally, I didn't come home one night. I can still see Dave's face and hear his voice as he greeted me in the college stairwell the next day.

"Kate, we need to talk."

"I don't know what we have to talk about."

The inner voices were silent, and the outer ones finally were too.

I never made it to Stanford, choosing to stick with the hippies at New College of Florida. Dave met a woman on a train that year and got married. That news didn't register with any emotion one way or the other. He had become part of a past that I was grateful to leave behind, along with the rest of my life in suburbia. I had no reason to look back.

Fast forward a decade to 1982: Vegas gambling years, but that's a different story. A phone rang at six A.M. in my bedroom on the Sahara golf course.

"Kate? This is David." He explained that he had woken up with a ten-digit number in his head, dialed it, and my stepmother answered from her home in Indianapolis. She gave him my number and he called me. In the 21st century it might be easy to locate somebody like this through the internet, but back then it would have taken skilled detective work to track me down. My parents had divorced, both had left the state and moved repeatedly. My dad had met his new wife and married several years after Dave and I parted ways.

I still questioned whether there was *really* a phone number in a dream, but considering the rest of our story, it fits. We didn't pick up the romance, that was long gone and good riddance, and I respected marriage even though I hadn't seen many healthy ones. We did, however, pick up the conversation.

Reconnected, I visited Dave at his home in Denver a few times although his wife was uncomfortable having me around. Only in hindsight did I consider why she might not welcome a Vegas gambler ex-girlfriend, even without her husband's far-fetched story. I was no threat, at least the way I saw it. Dave and I were on a different level. He was my....cosmic comrade? cryptic companion....soul mate without the *mate* part? Maybe there weren't any words to define us, but we were at least some kind of mystical friends, right?

I stopped in once when I was freshly engaged, floating in a bliss bubble and eager to share the news. I was disappointed when Dave's response was to say, "Good luck", in a monotone, rather than to celebrate my joy. I figured this was a case of sour grapes, and it may have been, but later I wondered if he knew something that I didn't. As it turned out I lived in a fantasy world for a few months and then ended the engagement (see *I for Intention*).

Dave had an opposite reaction a couple of years later when I swung by on my way to California. This time he said declared flat out, "You need to go be with that guy in Flagstaff!"

That guy is the one I was married to for 30 years.

Dave and I talked a few times after that visit and then life moved on. Twelve more years passed without contact through the 90's and into the new millennium. The Internet made it possible to connect through sites such as Classmates, and one night around 2:00 AM I was musing over people who had been part of my early life. Dave came to mind.

"I don't know where you are, but if you'd like to get in touch, I'd be open to that." With this last thought, I drifted into dreams.

The next morning, I discovered an e-mail from David that he had written while I slept. He'd moved to Greece where he was writing books, running a small publishing company, and living with a woman half his age. Our inner dialogue had started up again, unaffected by half of a planet between us.

Over the next years we stayed in touch, although the frequency dwindled from occasional to rare. We chatted about family and weather and possible visits to the villa where he and his partner had guest space. When she went through a rough patch we explored how I could possibly help her with long distance or in person therapy. Then the subject was dropped.

For a few more years I held onto the idea that there was something significant going on with us. There must be a purpose to this unique relationship, right? Unmistakable *kismet* weirdness. Still, after all these decades, is there anything to do with it?

Dave offered to help publish books through his company if I wrote any, but I received no feedback on the Book of Kismet rough draft I sent him. He named a character in *The Virtual Life of Fizzy Oceans* after me, and I appreciated the copy he sent but found the writing style tedious. I did give him credit for actually being a published author, which reminded me of my own procrastination.

Although this story clearly has the required elements of synchronicity, destiny, and inexplicable connections, I've been thinking of dropping it from the [Book of Kismet](#). Is there anything of value to the reader here? *Relationship* is an essential subject, and I admit that even now, forty-nine years after the teenage Dave and Kate connected across the circle, this one is still a mystery to me. There are other relationships that appear a lot more significant—with the man I married, for instance—with life experiences as well as the behind-the-scenes weavings. Is it just the as-yet-unrewarded search for meaning that keeps me combing through this tale, looking for the gold in the straw?

During our last video call I noted that Dave was turning into a grumpy old man. Originally I had found his world-weariness to be sophisticated and charming, but now the word “curmudgeon” came to mind. I wasn't exactly a sparkling conversationalist myself. We plodded along at the computer for two hours, hoping for a spark to arise, before Dave came right out and asked, “What's the point of talking anymore?”

I found myself flashing back to that day as a teenager when there was nothing left to say. Is this a tragedy, or do we just need to recognize when it's time to move on? Maybe it's enough that our relationship blasted me out of the Midwest, saved me from a doomed marriage, and steered me into the family I created with my husband. I was shown how two people can speak in silence through their shared mind and connect across the globe. That could be enough.

Or maybe the next chapter of the relationship remains to be written. It would only take a minute to send Dave a link to this [Book of Kismet](#) and see what happens. I'll let that idea simmer. If I get an e-mail from Greece tonight, I'll let you know.

S

Synchronicity

Syn City

While aiming to work on the *Book of Kismet* today, I somehow drifted over to answering e-mail. A message popped up from the organizer of our camp at Burning Man, Colonel Angus-- a name adopted from an old Saturday Night Live skit: "They say *all* the womenfolk just *love* Colonel Angus!"

Uh-oh, I had told the Colonel to sign me up for the Feed the Artists camp this year, but now I needed to let him know that I absolutely can't make it. Immediately after Burning Man, with one day in between *if* all goes smoothly, I'll be hosting the Restival at my home, the Gateway Ranch. Billed as "the Love Child of a Retreat and a Festival", a hundred international visitors are coming to enjoy camping--make that *glamping*--with queen size beds, luxury linens, fabulous healthy cuisine, spa, floatation tank, and more. Five days of yoga, sound baths in a temple, Navajo artists and astronomy, a full program of workshops morning to night.

My full well-rested attention will be needed to oversee setup and care for guests who have paid premium rates for an extraordinary experience. Yoga at dawn, prayers with real Indians, followed by a visit to the elixir bar. The organizer, Caroline, has used her divine British accent to wrangle write-ups in publications ranging from Vogue to the Wall Street Journal. Professional photographers make it all look like heaven on earth.

The site itself will fulfill the promise: a vast space overlooking the Painted Desert at the edge of a volcanic field with views of the Navajo Sacred Peaks, *Dóók'óó'slíd*, to the west. We have the required tipis covered—five of them live at the ranch, stored in a shipping container. We can rent a revival tent from our friends on the Rez, we've done that before. I think there's a plan to secure a food truck for the chefs coming in from California.

Showers for a hundred people are another matter. The ranch is eighteen miles off-grid and normally all of the household water comes from ten inches of annual rainfall that get channeled from the rooftop into tanks. And toilets? We've had porta-potties brought in for Burning Man events here but they aren't exactly high-end. We'll need to build a potty palace outhouse along with renting a bathroom trailer.

In other words, there are a lot of untested systems here and at this point I don't even know all of the questions that need to be asked. I'm sure the production staff will be working right up until guests arrive and beyond. My eyes will be needed on the ground for weeks of preparation. It would be sheer insanity to try to fit Burning Man into that calendar.

As I put my regrets into words—the Colonel does not suffer fools lightly-- I noticed a new book laying on the bed. "The Last Safe Investment", invest in *yourself*, clever concept. Giving in to pure procrastination, I reached over and picked it up.

The book fell open to page 139.

I froze as my eyes landed on the words.

Go to Burning Man.

"Oh sh*t."

It looks like I'm heading to the Black Rock Desert again.

Postscript: The Restival rearranged its schedule so we had a four day window of prep time. Still nuts, but we did it.

Ah, Burning Man....stunning hypocrisy at times, I'll say that up front, but also a world of true magic. I could fill an entire book with stories from this playground of synchronicity, and maybe someday I'll get around to that. A mind blowing force field forms when humans of all shapes, sizes, talents, and appetites are given permission to create outside the box. We're talking about a population of 80,000, and lord knows how many by the time you're reading this, since it has become quite a *thing*. In this swirling vortex of dust and dreams, possibilities explode--often literally. The sublime dances with the absurd, and creativity is pushed to the edge and beyond on the perfectly barren canvas of a dry lake bed.

It took me awhile to realize that the forces of chaos are essential friends of Kismet. Otherwise, we might be satisfied with believing we can run things in a linear, rational fashion. Isn't it safer to think we're in control? But, frustratingly yet thankfully, our proverbial apple carts keep getting overturned so they can roll out and land in a heart shaped pattern in the dust.

2015: a flat tire on the drive leads to the perfect moment of arrival at the gate, to be met by a sweet young man wearing angel wings, cowboy boots, and not much else.

"How many years has it been for you?"

"Ten." Should I include the time I flew directly over the city while going from Arizona to Alaska on a commercial plane? No, but it does count as a sobbing moment of synchronicity.

The greeter leaves me waiting while he attends to the next arrival, then returns and hands me a round lapel pin with the iconic Man in the middle of it.

10 Years

Thank You for Your Service

"Here. The woman in the van behind you is coming for her tenth year and she made these to give away."

The official Burning Man organization has never thanked me for anything, but I guess they don't have to.

Too many such stories, like I said. So let me share just one more, pure and direct.

I didn't bring any dust masks in 2010 after realizing I rarely wore the ones I always packed. It didn't take long to realize that I'd picked the wrong year to leave them home. As I walked through yet another blinding dust storm, barely able to see my fingertips reaching out for hazards in front of me, I grumbled to myself, "What was I thinking? I need to find a mask."

Two steps later a man emerged from the white cloud.

"Would you like a dust mask?"

He reached into a large bag filled with them and handed me two.

Hope to see you in Syn(chroni)City!

P.S. There's another story in the making here, about the Empyrean Temple of
2019-20-21-22. That story remains to be finished.

T

Time

Got a Plane to Catch

“Too bad you didn’t call earlier. There’s a plane leaving in 45 minutes.”

I slumped over onto the desk while a wave of homesickness washed over me. The Toronto conference was nearly over, and I couldn’t wait to get out of there. My co-organizer—let’s call her Sandra—had asked me to team up shortly after we met at the first International Energy Psych Conference I’d organized in Las Vegas. A mid-year Canadian gathering seemed ideal for riding the wave of enthusiasm, so we agreed that I would help her organize an event in her hometown. Over the summer it became obvious that we had very different ideas of what that meant.

Since Sandra hadn’t organized conferences before, and I knew the procedures and had the connections, it made sense for me to take the lead in lining up the program. She could handle the local logistics with my support, and we’d both do promotions. Over the next few months, however, the process got increasingly sticky. I felt like I could, and should, be working full-on to spread the word and enlist speakers and registrations, but my efforts were met with silence or resentment rather than appreciation.

A month before the conference, I returned from a scheduled training in the mountains of Utah to find messages accusing me of both abandoning Sandra and assuming too large a role in the preparations. I was at a loss to see how I had done either, or how I could possibly do both at the same time. Several friends forwarded e-mails they had received: “I’m taking back my power. Kate no longer has anything to do with this conference. From now on, all communications are to be sent only to me.” Apparently, this had gone out to the leaders of the field, many of whom I considered good friends.

I thought about letting go of the whole event but felt a duty to my colleagues and to the emerging Energy Psychology field. I followed through and did my best to breathe deeply and keep smiling in public, but conference itself was an agonizing week of politics and obstruction. I wasn't up for the three more days we'd planned to spend at Sandra's house.

When I called the airlines to see about changing my ticket, they could only offer a flight one day earlier at a higher price, and apologies that there wasn't time to catch the flight that was getting ready to leave. I hung up the phone in tears and looked at the bedside clock.

2:46

The plane leaves at 3:30.

Do I know for absolutely sure I can't make it? I can pack while I think about that.

Tossing a week's worth of clothes, toiletries, computers, conference papers, and personal items into two large suitcases took...four minutes. How long did it usually take me to get out of a hotel room? No time to think about that. Just keep moving.

Out the door, down the hall. The elevator opened on cue.

The first-floor conference center was bustling in preparation for the closing session. I found Sandra in the bookstore and told her I was leaving.

"Would you please say goodbye to everyone for me? And can you have the books packed up and shipped back to my office?"

"Uh...sure."

Just then a woman touched my arm: "Can I ask you about this tape?"

"No."

With unwavering and unapologetic focus, I grabbed my overhead projector from a presentation room, made my way to the front hotel desk, and paid the bill.

3:03

"Taxi!"

After reaching the airport, I realized we had passed all of the terminals and were going around in a circle as precious minutes ticked by. I considered this opportunity to freak out and give up, but instead just got a notch more relaxed as I asked the driver "Do you know where you're going?" His answer wasn't convincing, but my terminal appeared.

3:15

I jumped out and headed to the glass door, asking—no, *instructing*-- the driver to grab a cart for my luggage and meet me inside where I'd give him a twenty.

An angel in the form of a small Filipina woman stood behind the counter.

"I need to change my ticket and get on the 3:30 to Vegas. "

She took my papers and clicked away at her terminal. One man stood at the next station.

"I'm on that plane too. They said they'll hold it for me."

"Good to hear that." My focus didn't waver as I paid the cab driver.

Clutching my new ticket, I turned to find that my three suitcases and projector had been taken off of the cart, which was nowhere in sight. The angel in uniform stepped from behind the counter; we each grabbed two handles and flew down the corridors.

What happened next would not be possible in the age of security lines. But in those pre-9/11 years, we raced through international customs and all other checkpoints before arriving breathlessly at the gate. My angel handed the luggage to the attendants and pointed me toward the plane before vanishing.

The door closed immediately behind me.

"There was a guy who said you were holding the plane for him."

"Once the door is closed, we don't open it again."

I found my seat and the plane pulled away. Right on time.

Filled with wordless gratitude, I relaxed into the flight.

P.S. Two hours later a voice came over the intercom:

"Since we're headed to Las Vegas, let's have a little fun. Those of you who would like to get started gambling now are invited to take a dollar bill and write your seat number on it. We'll have a drawing, and the winning number gets the pot."

As I marked my dollar, I had the feeling that there was a wonderful person on the plane who was going to win this money. I was happy to contribute. Minutes later 21F was drawn and I put \$119 in my purse.

U

Universe

Realize the Perfection of the Universe

“I’m not going to dive into any more jobs, relationships, or projects until I know *why* I’m doing it. Dear God, what is my purpose?”

Battered but—hopefully—wiser, I had emerged from a string of boyfriends that all started with promise and ended with broken hearts. At age 30 I was starting to see patterns in the wreckage, and the common element was *me*. In parallel with the relationships, my work life also left a tattered trail of unfulfilled dreams.

My last job was at the Advanced Ability Center in Santa Barbara, run by and for former Scientologists. We avoided referring to the cult by name, preferring to call it The Old School, or TOS. Some in our group had been subject to death threats, and one woman told of carrying briefcases filled with cash at the age of thirteen for delivery to L. Ron Hubbard during the time he was in hiding. The leader of the center had lost his teeth after being forced to run around trees for hours in the 100+ degree desert near Palm Springs. This all added to a sense of heroism and epic adventure.

I was dedicated to the AAC’s lofty mission and enjoyed serving our fascinating international clientele. The attacks from private investigators, hired by TOS to aim giant microphone dishes at the center and follow us to lunch were rather flattering. Even the slashed tires, broken windows, and cult members running in yelling “Squirrels!” were signs that we were making a difference. But the legal attacks were relentless and crippling. As they intensified, the cost and stress were compounded by our own staff members who drained the bank account by renting and furnishing a mansion in South Africa.

I was never part of the inner circle of those who had signed billion-year Scientology contracts, so when business dropped off, I found myself unemployed. I returned to my professional gambling career in Vegas a few times although my heart wasn't in the game. It was nice to know I could walk out with cash after being treated to fine dining—I was never going to starve in that town-- but I wanted to move ahead, not backwards.

So, what's next? I wasn't up for yet another jump into my latest passion only to get spit out the other end. When it came to work or love, I wanted to know this was *it*.

I had been on a pretty good first name basis with God at this point. If I could formulate a question, I usually got a quick response. I just had to let go of my mental chatter long enough to hear the answer.

"Hi God. Please tell me my purpose and I'll pursue it faithfully.

.....

.....

I'm listening....

.....

It sure is quiet....

I'm ready to know what my purpose is....

I'm eager to serve the highest good. I know that sounds like a cliché but I really mean it.

.....

Yo, God? Remember me?

.....

Okay, sorry to be impatient. I know patience is a virtue. It's just, well, this is really important to me, and I need to hear from you. I'm going to stay right here in this house and keep asking and listening until I get an answer.

....I'll be right here....not going anywhere until I hear from you.

....Okay, I'll just wait. No more running off chasing anything that doesn't have your direct orders!

....

No rush, dear God, I'm sure you're busy.....I'm comfortable here on the bed. But I'd sure appreciate hearing from you.

After two and a half days of gazing up at the ceiling, interrupted only by quick trips to the bathroom and kitchen, I informed God that I needed to take care of some business but would keep checking in frequently. I went back to the casinos, but for the next six weeks I made a regular practice of stopping several times a day and repeating the question:

“What is my Purpose?”

Still no answer.

I wondered if God had gotten fed up and stopped talking with me. I couldn't blame Him after some of the absurd and self-destructive things I'd let myself get tangled up in. Still, I kept asking.

...and listening....

...and asking....

In April my journey led through the volcanic landscape of Northern Arizona and on up to the Hopi Cultural Center. As I sat in the restaurant waiting for hominy stew and piki bread, with a napkin and pencil ready in case inspiration hit, the mantra continued.

“What is my Purpose?”

After a few quiet minutes it occurred to me that I had given this question a fair chance. Maybe I should back up and try a different approach.

“What do I need to do before I find out what my Purpose is?”

The answer was immediate:

“Realize the Perfection of the Universe.”

Oh. That. I wrote the words on the napkin. It seemed lofty and impractical, nothing I'd thought of before, and yet it made sense. Since reading about Jesus, Gandhi, and Joan of Arc as a child, I'd felt a special mission to save the world. I might be a little girl from Indiana, but as soon as I grew up I'd get to work fighting injustice and making earth-shaking discoveries. In my personal version of the vow of the Bodhisattva, I would not be free until every single suffering being entered Nirvana. With all of the messes in this world, God has apparently screwed up... hey, no worries, I'm here to correct His mistakes. Just tell me how and I'll get right on it.

But wait...*perfection of the universe?* Is it possible that God is actually *God?* Omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient—*that* God? Would an All-Knowing and All-Powerful Being design a world that required *me* to save it? Or might there be another way to look at my purpose here?

Although I was glad not to have to explain it to anyone, I knew I had received my answer.
“Realize the Perfection of the Universe.”

V

Vision

Jeff and Jaime

In spite of our best efforts as parents, life will swoop in and take our children places that we don't expect and can't control. Thankfully. I was sixteen when my mother arranged for me to join the Barrington Hills Presbyterian Church youth group on a charity trip to Appalachia.

Maybe she thought it was time for me to get out and meet new people, since my one and only friend, Carlye Calvin, had gone off to a Massachusetts prep school. Maybe, in contrast to our manicured suburb, I'd benefit from exposure to life back in the "hollers" of Eastern Kentucky, girls my age with barefoot kids living in shacks with a dozen broken down vehicles in the yard. Maybe it wasn't really about me, but rather the warm do-good feeling of arranging for medical supplies and playground equipment to be sent to the underprivileged.

Our overprivileged neighbors were happy to pitch in with funds, although certainly not the volunteer labor that was part of the plan. Well, aren't kids happy to go anywhere they get to hang out together away from their parents? I wasn't asked how I felt about this, simply informed that I was going on a church trip to help poor folks. Okay, Mom and I could both use a break from our never-ending friction.

I didn't know any of the other ten kids, who all went to a high school in the next town. I figured that they'd stick together and was prepared to end up by myself as usual. Sure enough, on our first night at a seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, everyone disappeared after dinner. I decided to walk around by myself outside and was drawn toward the sound of voices in the bushes where I found the group sitting in a circle. They froze when I walked up. As I stood searching for words, I noticed a distinctive smell. After an awkward pause, a girl reached out a hand.

“Want a toke?”

I’d first smoked marijuana with Carlye one week earlier when she returned home from prep school. I hadn’t noticed any effect at all, but still had a feeling of entering a new world.

“Sure, thanks!”

Laughing, they passed me the joint-- I was cool, instantly one of the gang. If this was peer pressure, I was happy to succumb to it.

We named ourselves the Nightcrawlers, and over the next few days at Alice Lloyd College in Pippa Passes, Kentucky, an evening ritual developed. After dinner and some songs led by a guitar playing adult, the girls and boys went to bed, chaperoned in separate cottages. As soon as the adults were asleep, the boys would sneak out and light a match outside our window. Giddy with the thrill—“The boys are here!”-- we girls would tiptoe out to join them, holding our breath while closing the creaky screen door.

For the next few hours, we’d meet with locals and enjoy an authentic cultural exchange. They offered to trade moonshine for our meager stash of pot, but mostly we all just shared the smoke. We strung a volleyball net over the one road that wound through the holler and played hide and seek with the local sheriff, stifling our giggles which led to more giggles. We gave each other honorary Nightcrawler titles: Brewmaster, Chairman of the Board, General Bullmoose. I left home as an invisible nobody and returned as a High Priestess, with a Freak of the Week Award elaborately drawn on a placemat. Appalachia was the most exotic and life-changing place I’d ever been. I even came back with a bit of a drawl that hung on for a surprisingly long time.

Near the end of our time in Kentucky we helped to dig out a foundation for a new church building. At least I hope we were somewhat helpful before the Chairman of the Board’s eyes rolled back in his head while we were shoveling, and he went into convulsions. It was never clear whether he just wasn’t used to working in the heat or if he had swallowed some unidentified pills, but we piled into our station wagons and took off for the hour drive to the nearest hospital.

I was squeezed in the middle of the back seat-- between two of the boys, no problem— but managed to doze off. As we bounced along the rugged roads, I was startled awake by a sudden, sharp jolt. Had we hit something? Vivid scenes flashed before my closed eyes: shattered glass, a young woman’s face, a gravesite, a bunch of red roses. The images quickly

faded, and I opened my eyes, surprised to see that we were driving along as before. Nobody else seemed to have noticed anything. I was puzzled by the experience but kept it to myself as the group dealt with what turned out to be a non-emergency by the time we got to the hospital.

My suburban life was never the same after our return. Our group, now known as the Nightcrawlers of America, convened official meetings at Carlye's house. The agenda included getting high, listening to music, and feeling slightly subversive. What could be more fun for teenagers in 1970? Carlye's older brother, Jeff, had lots of friends and one of them asked me to go on a double date for Jeff's 18th birthday. Procul Harum (of "Whiter Shade of Pale" fame for those of you over a certain age) was doing a concert at Ravinia Park and I was thrilled to say yes. The 60's had passed without ever attending a rock concert—you couldn't really count Sonny and Cher with the Girl Scouts in Junior High-- and I'd only been on one excruciatingly awkward date up to this point. I told my mother about my plans and she seemed happy that I was finally developing a social life.

A couple of nights later I found myself urging Jeff to be careful. I was surprised to hear my own words and wondered where they came from. I wasn't even sure what I was asking him to be careful *of*. Over the next couple of days, I repeated the warning, adding that he should be particularly careful when driving. Finally, he got annoyed.

"That's enough! I hear you. I'll be careful, okay?"

I stifled any further impulses to say anything and the Nightcrawler fun went on. But toward the end of the week, again hardly believing the words coming out of my own mouth, I told my date that I was sorry, but I couldn't go to the concert. I hadn't planned to say this and when asked why I'd changed my mind, I just mumbled that my mother said I couldn't go. That ended the conversation since everyone knew and feared my mother and I could blame nearly anything on her.

Cancelling the date that I was so eagerly looking forward to didn't make sense, but I stuck with the decision. Then the next day my mother told me that, while she wasn't going to forbid me to go to the concert, she felt uneasy about it and would rather I stay home. I assured her that I had already decided not to go.

On the night of the concert, I had a splitting headache and went to bed early. After a short time, only half awake, I got up and walked into the hallway to stand with my hand on the telephone. It rang a moment later. Carlye's voice was high pitched with anguish.

"Jeff and his girlfriend, Jaime, have been in a terrible crash."

Jeff had crossed a highway in front of a speeding car which slammed into the passenger side of his MG. I later saw a photo of the tiny, crumpled sports car in the paper, with every window broken out, and wondered how anyone could have survived. Jaime died immediately. Jeff was in the hospital with broken bones but recovered, physically at least. His life has carried scars ever since and in recent years I've heard that Jaime's family still speaks of being shattered since that time.

Jaime was a year ahead of me in our high school of two thousand students. We hadn't known each other, but the face I saw in the vision was hers. Later I heard that Jeff took red roses to her gravesite. I never brought it up with him, although I visited him in the hospital where he kept repeating how beautiful Jaime was that night.

Until now, the vision has been tucked away in the vault of mysteries. Who can say what my life, or Jaime's, would have been like without it?

W

Wealth

Do Not Store Up Your Treasures on Earth

As a small child I was always on the lookout for clues to the world of adults. What was *really* going on here? I knew they weren't telling us kids the whole story, and direct questions didn't get satisfying answers. There were so many things I wondered about, but my parents had limited patience, and questions could get an unpredictably prickly response.

How does Santa bring presents when we don't have a chimney?

"She got the recipe for this cheesecake by sleeping with the chef!" Huh?

Why can't we send food to the starving children in China if we don't want to eat it ourselves?

The world of nature made sense to me. The world of people, grown-ups anyway, often did not. I knew I had to sleuth out the answers for myself, and a key to the mysteries could be found in the world of reading and writing,

This, of course, was all on paper in those days before electronic screens. Our home had a shelf of fat books and a few smaller paperbacks, colorful magazines on the living room table, and a landing spot for mail near the front door. The world at large came into our house through the tiny black letters of the newspaper that showed up on the doorstep every morning. At breakfast, the rules of proper table manners were broken as my parents remarked over the events of the day from behind huge, rustling sheets. War, tornadoes, the stock market, the price of Wonder Bread at the grocery store. These words had gravity: they could even threaten our survival. At the same time, they hovered in a cloud beyond my reach and there was nothing to do until I was initiated into their mysteries.

I had learned the A-B-C song in nursery school, but 1950's kindergarten was for fun and socialization: singing songs, coloring, learning how to stand in line and take turns. My mother noted the time I reported, "We've been kissing boys these days when the teacher is playing the piano and not looking!" so it wasn't as if we always followed the rules, but we didn't have Montessori manipulatives or any way to teach ourselves academic skills. In these years before test pressures, parents were content to leave reading and writing up to the professional teachers. We would meet Dick and Jane soon enough.

In the meantime, I earnestly attempted to copy the spikes, circles and dots of my father's signature. I'm not sure if I ever succeeded in scribbling anything legible, but the feeling in my hands came back through the years whenever I saw him sign his name. He complained that his ability to make a proper "S" disappeared at age 93, and it did fall short of German engineering standards. But otherwise, his *Roy E. Schwettman* always looked --and felt--the same, embedded in my body memory for life.

The holy grail of first grade finally arrived, shining like moment when we were free to get back in the pool after our mothers timed us for an hour after lunch (did any unmonitored kids ever get cramps and drown?). I dove in, and by the second month of school I was getting the hang of making my letters on the special paper with widely spaced lines and a dotted line halfway in between. I checked the model alphabet above the blackboard at times to see whether the sticks were supposed to be short or tall, which side of the circle they were on, and whether they went up high or down low. This was serious work, the key that would open a world of reading and writing that held all of the mysteries I'd been waiting to explore.

We didn't have homework yet, but nobody had to force me to practice. I still have a vivid memory of sitting on a small, wooden chair at a child-sized table in our playroom, just big enough to lay down a sheet of typing paper with a children's book of Bible verses to the left. I'm not sure where this book came from, since the most important thing about religion in our family was making sure we were dressed properly for church, but to me it had a special feeling. One page jumped out and called to me with the ring of holy truth. I was determined to copy it word for word.

Clutching a fat pencil, totally absorbed in the task, I laboriously carved line after line into the page with my pencil. Each round letter carried considerable weight. In fact, I can still feel

the movements in my hands and arms today, along with the determined set to my jaw: Circles and sticks. Circles and sticks.

ST LUKE 12

It's actually Matthew 19, but apparently the authors didn't think children would notice this.

Do not Store Up Earthly treasures

Do not store up treasures for yourselves upon Earth, where moth and rust destroy them, and where thieves break in and steal.

Uh-oh, this took up nearly three quarters of the page—no lines this time—and I realized I'd need to be more careful with my spacing.

But store up treasures for yourseles (one misspelling—these are big words)
in heaven, where neither moth nor rust can Destroy them, and Where thieves do not beat through and steal; (what's that comma with a dot thing?)”

The last words squeezed in at the bottom of the paper:

“For where your treasures are your heart will be there too”

The sound of breathing broke through my concentration and I realized that my mother had been quietly looking over my shoulder. Before I could add the final period, she swooped in and grabbed the paper.

“What neat handwriting! Very nice work!”

She whisked the treasure away to show off to neighbors and grandparents. My memory ends there, and I can only imagine how I felt. My mother's wishes were law in our house, and there was no point in protesting. I didn't see that page again until I was an adult, when I discovered she had labeled it “Cathy- age 6 ½” at the top. It had been stored up along with other treasures in my Baby Book.

Whatever her reasons, I'm glad she saved the paper. Now it hangs on my wall. Yes, it's a physical object that I'm rather attached to, but not the kind that a thief (besides my mother) would steal. It's still a reminder of a lesson I need to learn.

X

X-it

Only One Thing to Do

There's a key to transforming life on Earth from hell into heaven. I know what it is. If everyone knew this, what a paradise we would live in!

In a word, what's behind our suffering and harmful actions is *trauma*. Okay, you probably hear that word a lot but hang in here with me. First, let me say that by *trauma* I mean the residue of incompletely processed experiences and the decisions we've made under confusing and overwhelming conditions. When we clear up this network of triggers and limitations, we are left with our shining, wise selves.

It all seemed so simple back in 1991.

At Trauma Relief Services I saw miracles every day. Burnout was rampant in the profession, but rather than *Compassion Fatigue*, I had an extreme case of *Compassion Exhilaration*. As a fellow counselor and I walked to the parking lot, he remarked, "Well, another day down", while my own heart was singing, "This is so cool! I can't wait to see what happens tomorrow. Bring it on!"

In the 2020's, of course, talk about trauma is everywhere. PTSD (Post-traumatic Stress Disorder) has entered our everyday vocabulary, whether the term is used accurately or not. Anyone who's been paying attention is aware that trauma is a factor behind a wide range of individual and systemic problems. And we still aren't dealing with it effectively. Most commonly we find "Talk therapy" that stirs up the surface for 50-minute hours, week after week (as many as your insurance will cover), and medications with a long list of serious side effects and a terrible withdrawal process.

We can do better than this. But that's the subject of a whole other book so back to our story now...

In 1995 I used my position as President of the Arizona Mental Health Counselors Association to organize a conference designed around effective trauma therapy techniques. My favorites included an alphabet soup of methods: EMDR, NLP, TIR, TFT. (FYI these are Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing, Neuro-linguistic Patterning, Traumatic Incident Reduction, Thought Field Therapy—no wonder we use acronyms.). The event was enthusiastically received and led to a series of two day *Trauma and Transformation* workshops.

By 1998 this had evolved into monthly Power Therapies Conferences, an admittedly cheesy name that had become associated with the four methods when they were studied in an influential research project. The EMDR and TIR folks excused themselves to focus on their own specialties, but the Energy Psychology field, led by a Stanford trained engineer, Gary Craig, was bubbling with creative juiciness.

Riding a wave of visionary zeal, I organized the 1999-2000 International Energy Psych Conferences in my old hometown of Las Vegas. Ever since the first trauma event the registration numbers had grown exponentially each year, and we were headed toward the stars. Trauma transformation is here!

.... and then.... the field devolved into politics and turf squabbles. Sniping, backstabbing, slanderous lies. Ugly, ugly stuff I won't go into here. You've probably seen plenty in your own life.

Why can't people just be nice? Aren't we all on the same team?

The game I thought we were playing was one where everyone could win. Come on in, bring what you've created, learn from each other, let's all share it with the world. Along the way we can enjoy a fabulous meal in Vegas with our gang of gutsy do-gooders. Dinner is on me. Life is good.

Play + Purpose = Adventure!

Here we are in the ocean of healing and awakening!

Riding the waves!

Although I'd poured my heart and soul into the conferences, as the new millennium dawned I didn't see how I could be of service any longer. I even wondered if my presence was contributing to drama rather than to the mission. We were just getting started on our road to glory, but maybe it was already time for me to let go.

And yet I felt a responsibility to the band of courageous Energy Psych pioneers. I still counted the founders of the field as my dear friends. We were committed to something much bigger than petty political games, right? Could we get back to our original focus, just helping as much as possible? The pressures of ignorance, fear, and vested interests makes it an even more noble quest. Let's climb back up on our horses, guys.

But in contrast to the energy that had blasted me out of the ranch at 2:00 A.M. with the battle cry "*Trauma and Transformation!*", barely keeping my speed under 80 on the ride to the office, I was tired. My colleague and office mate, Dr. Susanne Drury, was called before the state Board of Psychology and threatened with loss of licensure if she continued our work. She had been the sole staff member of the first conference team, holding down the registration table while I ran around hugging new arrivals, posting signs outside workshop rooms, and making sure the sound system was operating. But when Sue apologetically withdrew from conference involvement I didn't blame her for protecting her family's income.

I was much more troubled by the battles of those in the core of our tiny group who squabbled over scraps of influence. *Mine! Mine!* Hey, there's enough to go around, folks. We're not going to run out of human misery anytime soon. But in my exuberance to share the spotlight, I had invited foxes into the henhouse. They weren't willing to wait very long for their feast.

I realize now how naïve I was, believing that the good guys always win and I just needed to hang in there. This continent—the entire hemisphere in fact-- was decimated and overrun for heaven's sake. If you are being attacked, you fight the best you can...until you see that you're outnumbered by an enemy who is relentless, heavily armed, and willing to stoop to tactics that you would never consider. Then it's time to negotiate, or get out if you can.

Fortunately, I wasn't dealing with my family being threatened with cultural genocide. It was just a conference and professional reputation. A mission to heal the world, not to forget that. But being a martyr wouldn't help anyone.

Thankfully, I remembered that I have some tools. I chose a basic technique that addresses pairs of opposites, viewing each in turn through a series of angles and layers. Holding both sides in the same mental space, they merged—as these things tend to do. From that perspective, I knew that I wasn't going to fight on the level of the attacks. I didn't want to fight at all.

But what other options might there be? How to get out of this mess?

Another dream came calling:

I sat strapped into the cockpit of rocket ship, directly behind a woman with long, black hair. I couldn't see her face; only in hindsight did I notice her resemblance to Native women I've known in dreams and in waking life.

Countdown:3....2....1

We blasted off with a tremendous roar.

Within seconds our vertical ascent angled backward. As we veered off course, I realized we were going to crash. With appreciation for the enormity of the situation, but without fear, I spoke my mind:

"Only one thing to do now: think about God!"

The dream skipped beyond the point of impact and continued amid wreckage on the ground. As I regained my ability to move, I felt my body for broken bones and didn't find any. Across a field, I could see the other woman already standing upright.

We're alive! I picked myself up and walked toward a cheerful street scene filled with a variety of people. Some kind of fair or market was going on, with booths and families eating at open air tables. I woke up, filled with happiness at the simple goodness of life.

Sometimes that is enough. I don't want miss this precious moment, this day. I'd been missing a lot of those while aiming for a grand blast-off.

After the dream, I reconnected with the pleasures of being a mother of a seven-year-old. I spent more time at home and worked on building a school and healing center in our Navajo community. I left the conference scene behind, bit by bit, although not without regrets and heartache. I've used Energy Psychology to deal with some of those issues; these tools really do work when we remember to use them.

Sometimes the ride we're on isn't going where we thought it would, but we always have a choice as we exit:

Think about God.

Y

You

The Old Folks

The first dream took me from Florida to work with Mark in a school on the Navajo Nation. The second brought me back from Australia in time to get a phone call that offered me a job at a school in the next community. The third dream wasn't fooling around—now I was going to my wedding.

Although Mark hadn't appeared in the dream, it gave me the clue that I needed to go to Flagstaff. I wrapped up my job painting carnival rides in Memphis and got on a bus, calling him from the Albuquerque Greyhound station to see if he was up for a visit. He was happy to hear my voice. Now, seven years after we had met, his ex-wife was living with the guy next door and his old girlfriend had already moved in and out. Finally, the coast was clear.

Mark picked me up and took me to the eight-sided dream house he had built. We kept a cautious distance, sitting as far away from each other as possible, while connecting across the living room with conversations that lasted into the night. Then I went up to sleep with the Care Bears in the bedroom where his four-year-old daughter stayed on weekends.

The next day, after Mark drove off to his job as a school director on the Navajo reservation, I took some time in the quiet house to consider my future. Infinite possibilities, few solid clues. As I gazed up toward the ceiling, I noticed subtle sparkles with an impression of laughter cheerfully tinkling at a distance. My imagination again, okay. Then I was struck with a sense of my future self—a very old lady, maybe 95..... and an old man with her....feeling distinctly like Mark. Curiously, they seemed to be two individuals, yet somehow one being, and spoke with a unified inner voice.

"Are you surprised to see us?"

(Yes!)

They responded with bell-like laughter. “We’re glad to see you, too!”

The conversation continued. I wrote as fast as I could on a lined pad to capture their words and my own thoughts, filling four pages before they said good-bye.

The day passed, with another close-but-careful dinner and evening conversation with Mark. The next day I had found some quiet time to wonder what was *that*? Looking up, I discovered “them” in the same spot, as if triangulating between Mark and me and some higher dimension.

Another four-page conversation emerged before Mark returned home in time to head into town and catch my bus. I planned to visit Taos and then Denver before ending up in Las Vegas.

As Mark and I shared a departing Italian dinner at Mama Luisa’s, I pulled out the pages I had written.

“This might seem strange, and I have no explanation, but would you like to hear something interesting?”

He was curious, and later remarked that he felt they were speaking directly to him. As soon as I finished reading the pages aloud it was time to take off. I caught my bus that night, unaware that, shortly after it pulled away, Mark had realized, “What am I doing letting her go?” and tried unsuccessfully to chase me down.

One week later I returned. The conversations with who (or what) we fondly called “the Old Folks” continued every day for months as they guided us through our shaky courtship. They never predicted the future or told us what to do but joked around lightheartedly while consistently inviting us to love, whatever that might look like.

“You could have a beautiful romance here—but you don’t have to!”

“Tell Mark, “Don’t ya be a fool!” This particularly connected because it reminded him of guys he’d known on the South Side of Chicago.

After writing daily for a few months I got busy with grad school. Mark still asked, “Did you talk with the Old Folks?” at times but I’d dropped the habit and only connected with them sporadically. I proposed that he try communicating with them himself, but he believed that it took a special gift to connect.

One day I simply handed him a yellow pad and pen and suggested that he hold the intention to have a conversation, get his thoughts out of the way, and see what happened.

After a few minutes his pen started moving. What he wrote was in the same Old Folks voice, indistinguishable from my own writings. From then on either of us could contact them with identical results.

In the 30 years that followed the Old Folks appearance, Mark and I had our ups and precipitous downs. The Old Folks have always held steady and laughed at us in good spirits. We have free choice, they remind us. And they always encourage us to look at the choices that serve love.

Z

Zzzzzzzz....dreams

Christmas on the Bridge

The Waves Come and Go

I reached for one of the guns in the box—plastic toys, I thought-- and was astonished when it fired a bullet into my temple. Everything went dark.

Oh my God, I've killed myself! I had no idea it would be so easy. Just...like...that.

Patches of scenery started to fade back in as I realized I was laying on pavement at the edge of a highway. Surprised that I wasn't dead, it didn't occur to me to wonder how I got there. Traffic whizzed by, fading in and out, as I attempted to lift my head and wave down a ride. A city bus stopped and opened its doors. I dragged myself up the steps and explained to the driver that I'd accidentally shot myself in the head and needed to get to a hospital.

"I'll take you there, but we have to get these people where they're going first. Have a seat."

The handfull of passengers scattered around the bus minded their own business as I slumped into a seat near the front. Feeling relieved, grateful, and still gravely concerned, I pressed my hands to my head to slow down the oozing blood.

Half awake, I inspected the clean, crisp pillowcase and sheets and patted my temples. Whew, no bleeding hole in my head. ((What a wild dream.)) I'm alive! And it's Christmas!

My glow lasted through a full day of celebrations with my fiancé at his mother's house in Woodside, California. That night I dropped him off at home in San Francisco and took the car --a rental while his old beast was in for repairs-- to visit some friends in the East Bay suburb of

Walnut Creek. We had both lived there for a time in communal purple houses and I had small presents to deliver for various friends.

While exchanging gifts I told a former lover about the dream. He insisted that the gun must be some sort of a sexual symbol; a reasonable Freudian theory but it didn't resonate with me. By the time I headed home it was well after midnight.

As I drove through a maze of freeways in the Oakland fog, a message repeated itself. I knew it was in my own mind, and at the same time it had a quality like those illuminated signs that scroll from right to left. The words were distinct:

"Slow down. If you don't slow down, something is going to happen, and you won't be able to avoid it."

"Slow down. If you don't...."

I reduced my speed to around 50 and the message faded as I headed toward the Bay Bridge. I passed toll booths where the road started to rise from the water with a steep embankment on the right side. Through the dense fog I saw a dark shape on the road.

Did something fall off a truck?

I braked.

It moved—an animal? Too big for a deer.

I swerved to the left, barely missing a large Black man lying in the road. Later I found out that he was attempting to lift himself upright with a detached prosthetic leg. Dream images flashed through my mind as I pulled over to the shoulder of the highway, screeched to a stop, turned on my flashers, and jumped out to wave at traffic.

A city bus pulled over.

Then another bus.

I ran up to the first bus and called out to the driver, who resembled the bus driver from my dream.

"There's a man in the road and he needs help!"

"Leave him alone, don't go near him!" the driver barked as he shut the door in my face. He drove away. I ran to the other bus and repeated myself to an elderly lady driver.

"Oh, my goodness, I'll call for an ambulance. Come on in and sit down."

As she radioed for help, my head was spinning. I scanned the five or six passengers on the bus, who again matched my dream.

A man with a knit cap pulled down over his ears spoke up:

“What’s wrong with the dude?”

I replied that I didn’t know, and he offered to go find out. I looked out the door to see that the injured man had managed to pull himself up on the trunk of my car where he was coughing and moaning, holding his detached leg in one hand.

My normal impulse would have been to jump out and assist in any way possible. This time a voice of caution kicked in.

“I don’t have a bullet in my head. Maybe I should be careful.”

I sat down to catch my breath and make sure I wasn’t still dreaming.

The bus passenger returned. “The dude’s car went over the edge into the bay. He’s hurt. I’ll go back to see what I can do to help.”

I really appreciated this. Looking down from the doorway, I could see red taillights poking out of the dark water of the bay where a car had landed nose first, mostly submerged. I took a seat and the bus driver shut the door.

A couple of minutes later I noticed flashing yellow lights outside and asked the driver to open the door so I could get out. Walking back, I saw a wrecker rather than the expected ambulance. The injured man was lying on the ground, still moaning and gasping, while two other men told him to hold still so they could cover him with a blanket. I didn’t see my car.

I did have a car, didn’t I? I was pretty sure I hadn’t ridden to the bridge on the bus. Maybe the car was behind the wrecker? No, nothing back there. I asked one of the wrecker operators if he’d seen a car parked on the roadside.

“That was *your* car? A guy got off the bus, jumped in, and drove away!”

We peered up the highway, but the car had disappeared on the foggy bridge. I returned to the bus driver who called in to report a stolen car. In my rush to keep traffic from hitting the man in the road, I’d leaped out without removing my keys from the ignition. The temptation must have been too much.

Three weeks later a man was caught driving the car, apparently living in it. I couldn’t provide positive identification at his trial—young black man in a hat, average height and build. I hadn’t seen his hair or any distinctive features and didn’t want to say, “That’s him!” without being certain. I’d been in my dream world altered state.

One night the following Spring I was in New Delhi, traveling alone with virtually no money. I accepted a ride from a young man who would later try take me to the Taj Mahal instead of the airport, causing me to miss my flight home. He went to do an errand as I waited in the car with his brother, a scrawny teenager with a tough guy attitude who pulled out a pistol and started waving it around nervously.

“It looks real, doesn’t it?”

Yes, it did: small, heavy, dark metal.

“It’s a fake, just for show.”

I took a deep breath. The cycle was complete. A dream gun looked like a toy but shot a bullet into my head; a waking life gun appeared real but was not.

I offered a silent prayer: may this scared kid never have to fire a bullet.

And blessings to the bad Samaritan who found a car on a bridge on Christmas night.

We’ve come to the end of the alphabet, but I’d rather not have our last impression be of guns and a stolen car in the night.

So here is one more dream for you:

The Waves come and go, but the Ocean remains...

I traveled to Oklahoma City, where pictures of preschool children attached to a fence still surrounded the site of the horrific bombing three years earlier. They were the reason behind choosing that city for the Association for Traumatic Stress Studies conference. Piggybacking on the conference, the Traumatic Incident Reduction Association scheduled this as a convenient time for our annual clinical and administrative meeting. I was near the end of my contract as Director, a rough journey that had started out with high hopes. The Board repeatedly approved the plans I proposed and then, from my point of view, spent the year trying to thwart them.

“Go get ‘em!”

“No, stop!”

“Bring in more professional members and spread the word!”

“But wait! You can’t talk about other therapy methods, the ones that they might have heard of.”

“We need more trained practitioners!”

“But you don’t have permission to train them anymore.”

I attributed this to professional insecurity and turf rivalries, a tendency of group members to talk *about* each other rather than *to* each other, and leftover cult mentality (dare I say *Scientology?*) from the earlier roots of the core members. The tension was thick, and I was exhausted from working 60+ hour weeks while dealing with endless criticism.

The stress appeared to be getting to others as well. My roommate stayed in her hotel room bed during the Board meeting, while others showed up with sniffles and piles of tissues.

In the midst of this, a series of dreams wove themselves through one night. The scenery and content varied, while the same phrase repeated throughout:

The waves come and go, but the ocean remains...

The waves come and go, but the ocean remains...

The waves come and go, but the ocean remains.

I woke up with a fresh perspective: There are plenty of fish in the sea. Who wants to come play in the waves with me?

My contract was completed shortly after this. One day later a new wave arrived and swept me into the next story.

I wish you sweet dreams, Beloved Reader.

May the testimony here in the Book of Kismet open your sense of possibilities.

And may your finest dreams come true in the light of day.