

## **The Boy Nobody Wanted:**

### **Journey to Zelcon**

The dark blue ocean of Zelcon had a magical translucency that always filled my heart with confidence, the kind of confidence that I would need to sustain me through the doubt and terror of childhood.

Zelcon is situated in the orbit around the third star in Orion's Belt. It is the most brilliant of constellations, known to man as far back as the Book of Job, and undoubtedly millennia before that. Orion, whose very name means "coming forth as light," was named by the ancient Akkadians as Ur-Ana, "the light of heaven." Orion is known as the Conqueror of the Enemy, who crushes his foe beneath him, and whose gamma star, Bellatrix, bears the name that means "quickly coming" or "swiftly destroying," as quickly as my liberation has come, and as swiftly as all the pain of the Earth has been destroyed, conquered and crushed by the magic forces of this special place.

Always as a child, when I saw Orion in the night sky, blazing and majestic within its home, Taurus, I felt a magnetic pull deeply within my spirit, whispering to me, communicating inchoate secrets, planting seeds in the fertile ground of my soul that one day would blossom and bear fruit.

Of course, the symbolic truth of Zelcon was a manifestation of my need and yearning for a place to call home, a point of origin, a redirection of and coming to terms with my feelings of alienation from family and home. It was a place to find root, stability, and a world where I was fully integrated with my surroundings.

My inner guide had suggested to me early in life (cf December 1954) the concept of a distant home, and my higher consciousness disseminated details of my mystical home planet to my objective mind over a period of many years. Zelcon became a permanently integral part of my psyche as a result of the revelatory experiences I will be describing in this book.

Between the age of four and eight, I was never able to understand why I was subjected to exorcisms, but I most certainly was. These were not the elaborate Catholic ceremonies with priests rigged out in fancily embroidered stoles and ornately carved mother-of-pearl crucifixes. I had no skin-searing holy water splashed on me, the sonorous tones of Latin did not reverberate through a vomit-splattered bedroom, nor did furniture move by itself and, to the best of my knowledge, my head never turned all the way around. My experiences were not even fire-and-brimstone Pentecostal affairs with speaking in tongues and calling the demon to identify itself before being cast out.

But they did happen. The things I relate to you in this introduction will provide a deeper understanding of what shaped my art and my life.

First of all, the person given the name Myron Conan Dyal fell very far short of the child my parents had hoped for. While my brother was considered a shining example of splendid young manhood, he was also considered in need of a sister to balance out the family gender books. I was intended to be the one who would water the family tree with estrogen, but my genetic makeup had other ideas. So, from the very outset, I didn't fit in with the plan for my family.

Admittedly, there is nothing unique about this. Many couples try to plan how many sons and daughters they will have and oftentimes things do not work out. Usually, the parents are glad merely to have a healthy baby bounce into their lives, but sometimes husband and wife will aggressively try to thwart the will of nature and somehow turn their offspring into the opposite sex. We can all guess where this can and often does ultimately lead.

When, added to that trauma, the complications of a serious and highly misunderstood illness such as epilepsy, "the game is afoot," to quote Arthur Conan Doyle. Could there be the slightest doubt in any sane mind – even if there were one in my immediate environment – that I was going to turn out to be the archetypal "problem child?"

With all of this going on and affecting the mind of a child in the earliest of the formative years, something powerful and horrific happened, and sent me into a coma at the age of four. Upon my return from merciful oblivion, I found myself among the untouchables, a delicate balance between sickly and possessed. When awoken, I did not recognize my own parents or have any memories of the past. On top of that, I began to have seizures.

It goes without saying that a child with any sort of physical affliction is going to present significant challenges to all around and play havoc with the usual family political machinations, but when a child's mind and personality is changed, and seizures are involved, numerous other dynamics, almost all of them unpleasant, come into play and, unfortunately, are aimed at the already suffering youngster.

As an age-old, identifiable, medically categorized malady, epilepsy is frightening enough, but when a dimension of suspected "demonic possession" is added to the scorecard, the game can get very complex and extremely ugly with surprising alacrity. I was destined, by God, fate, or karma, to show up in this old world as a member of a family whose unsophisticated simplicity would eradicate any semblance of a chance to develop along normal lines. Rather, the entirety of what I was boiled down to be included the following common denominators: incorrect genitalia, demon possession, bizarre seizures, an academic underachiever, and an angry, confused, sort of Satanically-inspired rebel without a cause.

The above list of alleged shortcomings stretches back to my earliest recollections, and to a certain extent, still exercises a degree of influence over my behavior to this day. The promise of a perpetual, incurable (but by no means medically uncontrollable) illness acts as sandpaper to the nerves of all involved in such a scenario and after a while, no one really wants to have to wrestle with it any longer. To have to deal with an ill child can be as draining as caring for an elderly parent and for essentially the same reasons.

And when you are the one who needs the special care and attention, it must be nice to receive it along with love and compassion. Either way, you cannot simply stand up and whisk yourself away to some pleasant retreat; it's damned hard to get away from yourself. In my unique circumstances, my parents sincerely believed that exorcisms were the answer, and I was ill-equipped to argue the opposing point of view. In some ways they might not even be aware of, they provided every opportunity to help me evolve into the social misfit they had decided I was. The attitudes of parents towards their children carry immeasurable force, and can shape or misshape a young psyche for the remainder of his life.

Other than the exorcism and religious fervor directed toward me, I found myself virtually alone. I suppose that in a left-handed way, it was better that they left me alone to become whatever it was I might have wanted to be, but the downside was the paucity of loving support and parental guidance that is the foundation of a successfully lived childhood. To be absolutely blunt, my mother and father had virtually no expectations for my life. Perhaps their greatest fear was that I would devolve into some sort of hopelessly retarded cretin requiring unpleasant physical care and financial support for the rest of my life.

Or maybe they just hoped I would make it to the age of eighteen and be able to get myself some sort of little sustenance job, thereby removing myself from the family room-and-board roster with the added benefit of no longer having around a major embarrassment to their friends, folks, and fellow Christians at church. Like a lot of young children, I was highly telepathic and empathetic, and was able to pick up far more from the thoughts and emotions of those with whom I spend time in close proximity. On top of that, my parents' overt display of hostility towards me only compounded the subliminal effects upon my youthfully sensitive consciousness.

A major part of these displays was the physical abuse meted out by my father, and as I later discovered, my mother, from time to time as punishment for behavior they considered below their standards of acceptability or threatening to their religious beliefs. It bred within me a tremendous craving for acceptance from whatever quarter I could secure it and that, in turn, led to further problems.

So, the bell had tolled and I did not have to ask for whom. You now have a fairly complete idea of the matrix within which my life was shaped. I have not appended my story to my artwork in an attempt to elicit sympathy, nor to bash my parents long after the fact or cast them in the role of inhumane monsters. But I do feel that because of the nature of my art, it is important to understand the roots of whence it comes. If it is true that all artists feed off of their inner agonies, it helps one appreciate their art if one has an idea of what those inner agonies are, how they originated, and what role they played in shaping the artistic consciousness expressing itself.

Certainly, no one wakes up in the morning of their eighteenth birthday having gone to sleep the night before with an absolutely clean psychic slate. Artisans of all media, like anyone else, have

their personalities shaped very early in life and this cannot help but find expression in their creative endeavors.

Ideally, childhood is a time filled with magic and wonder, the joy of new discoveries and accomplishments on a daily basis to the chorus of parental and sibling praise and delight. Children are intended to grow up happily, feeling safe in their environment, loved and wanted by their family, secure in the certainty that all of their needs will be provided for, even if all their desires are not. The latter might mean a candy bar uneaten, a toy not played with, the opportunity to tag along with older brother or sister not extended, all of which might bring forth a small pout and a few tears, which are quickly forgotten as the next thing catches the short attention span and all is forgiven.

I think we all want that for our children and we all undoubtedly wanted that for ourselves. It is my sincere hope that this is the kind of childhood you experienced, because it is what every new life brought into this world deserves and should receive. No one's young years should be about death, isolation, loneliness, and fear. Frankly, my childhood did have elements of the positive, but the negative, dark and painful atmosphere definitely predominated. The fruits of such psychological conditioning are not hard to fathom. Distrust of the world and its people, of goodness and truth and knowledge, lack of stability, and feelings of inferiority in every avenue of life. Simply fighting for one's life on a daily, hourly basis destroys the luxury of trust, and nullifies the feelings of confidence in oneself that are supposed to emerge along normal lines of development. Orwell spoke of controlled insanity by means of perpetual war, and my war was certainly perpetual.

The precise cause of my coma was never determined, but the prevalence of opinion was that it was either epilepsy or some mystery illness whose diagnosis remained stubbornly elusive. During two and half months that I remained in the coma, all my memories of families, friends, and the magical moments of childhood were erased.

Upon awakening, I remembered no one. My consciousness was a clean slate, ready for anything to be written upon it, for good or ill. It should come as no surprise that I have always cast myself in the role of the changeling, one without a family, an orphan of the world, a soul in exile. This concept of myself would later manifest itself in failed relationships, feelings of existential futility, and the establishment of a mental kingdom that always succumbed to the invasion of adversaries unseen but very real and powerful and effective in their capacity for destruction.

I was the outsider, wandering in a wasteland whose vastness I couldn't begin to grasp because it had no borders to lend it definition or substance. The strong connections that underlie the family unit were non-existent as far as I was concerned. This lack of connectedness to the very concept of "home" more than likely appears in my art and its disconnect from any of the established "schools" of painting and sculpting.

Yes, I am, indeed, one of those dangerously subversive individualists who insists on thinking their own thoughts, painting their own pictures, and exploring their own inner consciousness, and if I am to be damned for it, that same mindset is what causes me not to give the proverbial shit, if you will pardon my English. With a mind trapped in terrible darkness, I had an extended fall from what should have been the grace of early childhood into the prolonged recovery from the coma.

One thing we all have is a past, some good, some bad, most mixed. I did not have a dark night of the soul, but a dark life, of spirit, soul, and body, and this admixture displays itself in my artistic creations. I placed all the unfulfilled longings and the all-too-real pain into my own version of Pandora's box, locked it tightly, and vowed never to open it. That plan was flawed, of course, in that a soul imprisoned will do anything to break out of its cage.

I learned, as do most artists, the necessity of internalizing the messages of darkness and then transcending them. If the box remains unopened, it swells until it bursts, and then the contents fly wherever they may, with constraint. Rather than being the building blocks of creativity they were intended to be, they become the harbingers of destruction; the psychological cancer then spreads and consumes every fiber of our being, physical and spiritual. From thence spring addictions to drugs, liquor, sex, and any other artificial or natural anesthetic one can get their hands on. One mask is as good as another.

The contents of the box are always the ingredients entering into one's own development, and it is probable that the only means of real salvation (there are many ways leading to unreal salvation) is to open the box and release its contents, knowing that instead of scattering to the four winds and polluting the world, they will fly right into your face and unleash their forces in your own life, daring you to transmute their destructive nature into creative energy.

Many of my visions involve trees without roots, disconnected from the ground, freely floating or suspended in mid-air, thusly summing up in an appropriately symbolic way my feelings towards myself. Never did I have a place where I felt secure, or a refuge to which I could run and feel safe. Normally, that place would be home and family. Although I have never had a proclivity for chemical substances, I do confess to an addiction to returning to my hometown of Inglewood, California hundreds of times in a search for something, anything, that could be considered roots. Fast trips, slow odysseys, treks up and down the street I grew up on, wandering in the cemetery where my grandparents are buried, going downtown, or visiting my old school, always in search of that lost cord. Undoubtedly I was searching for something that was not available to be found, because it never existed nor never could have existed within the circumstances of my childhood.

Some of my earlier childhood visions were centered on isolation, fear, and loneliness, but also contained an inexplicable quality of vastness. In the "real" world I never felt contentment or happiness; I always felt on the edge of being somehow lost, perhaps because I did not want to be found. I could never quite believe in the world as it was, as my life within it made no discernible sense.

Outsiders were those who dared to challenge the world, who could look all humanity in the eye and, like Sigourney Weaver in *Aliens* defiantly shout, “Come on!” Most were swept away by the irresistible tide of the world-as-it-is, but they made their stand, fought their fight, and every now and then, one would emerge victoriously, having passed through their personal crucible whole and cleansed and, like Job, coming forth as gold.

I was the outsider, hence my specialization in what is often referred to as “outsider art.” I didn’t coin that term, but if it hadn’t already been invented I probably would have. As with most outsiders, I never felt comfortable with the typical ideal of God as a loving, welcoming Father. He was an accusatory figure, almost like a prosecutor, adjudging me guilty of crimes without the benefit of a trial. Even without understanding the concept of guilt, I identified with its consequences and incorporated it into myself.

My struggle had many ramifications and shadings. Sometimes I fell in battle, crushed by defeat; just as often I would rage with all my strength, storming the ramparts made of guilt, shame, and even God. “When you’ve got nothing you’ve got nothing to lose,” as Bob Dylan said in “Like A Rolling Stone.” This struggle at least allowed me to face outwardly rather than having to stare continually at the interior void. Eventually, however, I came to love and fear that emptiness, from deeply within which came something that assisted me in the warfare – an ally.

I am certain that I would not have the kind of creativity I have today if I had not been forced by circumstances to swing to the extreme of the pendulum and dwell so long and so deeply in the vibrations of destruction. I find it interesting that in the Hindu trinity of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva, Shiva the destroyer is also known as the transformer. I wish I had known this in my youth, as the very concept might have led me to seek the valuable in the destructive, harness the energies, and do something useful with them rather than permitting them to rampage all over, around, and through me. But I didn’t, and at that time I could see no way out of the destructive mode. Self-doubt and self-hatred were reflected in my inner world, so were darkness and destruction, and this may be why some of my art appears to have a foreboding, even sinister quality about it. If so, I am delighted to have it outside of me in physical forms rather than remaining within me to ferment its power.

You will also notice that much of my work portrays nocturnal scenes, a remnant of my early obsession with creatures of the night, real or imagined. It sometimes seems that wickedness is stronger and has a greater chance for victory when the Sun is not around, and I accordingly was driven by certain parts of my nature to act out stories where the hero was vanquished. Later I memorized works of literature that elevated the outsider to hero status, my imaginary world identifying with theirs. As with most outsiders, they didn’t completely understand the whys and wherefores of their outsider status but they usually made the most of it and appeared to quite thoroughly enjoy themselves as they inflicted varying degrees of discomfort on the so-called normal world.

Despite all this, occasional rays of light would fight their way into my world, especially through music. I played the piano and violin and composed musical pieces. In retrospect, there was always a modicum of wholeness, somewhere, though no matter how eagerly I seized upon it,

attempting to capture, savor, and amplify it, it never seemed to linger very long. Never did I come anywhere near realizing the peace to which I aspired.

I also found comfort in picturing myself as the archetypal trickster, the shaman, jester, magician, and the Merlin-type character who figures so prominently in the mythology of dozens of cultures, manipulating kings and peasants alike, absolutely secure in his magical power, controlling the spirits of nature, feared and respected by all, and even loved for his good natured pranksterish ways.

I used the magic to control my friends. Fear was my ally and vastness was my home. Magic always resides inside the mind of those who behold it, believer and skeptic alike. Who cannot be controlled, in some measure, by the unknown? Is not fear of the unknown the basis of all religion? I specialized in the creation of illusions, despite the fact that sometimes it would backfire upon me, with my own machinations exerting control over me. When one fills one's minds with ghosts of their own creation, occasional terror is to be expected.

Then one summer there appeared in my life a being, a creature, a personality, infinitely above and beyond anything I had created out of my own mind. This spiritual playmate, guide, teacher, best friend, mentor, lover, father, mother, has sustained me throughout my life. He became anyone or anything I needed, and his very presence in my life is invaluable and irreplaceable. After years of association, I finally named him: Charon, the boatman in Greek mythology who carries souls safely across the River Styx.

My association with him was a wonderfully refreshing break from my own family lineage. My parents were both southerners, from Georgia, my mother hailing from a rural farm. They were strictly fundamentalist Christians, and Baptists, who would have no use for a Charon except for a futile attempt to condemn him to the pit of hell in the name of the Jesus Christ.

In their spirituality there were no gray areas, no matters for dispute, and no unanswered questions. They dwelt at the farthest perimeters of reason and open-minded investigations. The Bible was the word of God. It could only be interpreted one way, and anyone who chose to believe anything else would be consigned to eternal damnation. We attended church, where my father was some sort of leader in this and that group and activity, so was my mother. My father spent enormous amount of time at God's house, perhaps to keep away from his own home. He taught Sunday school and all in all received large amount of ego nourishment from his religious activities. Mother was always reading her daily devotionals and Dad never failed to recite the dinnertime prayer. It was prim and proper in a maddeningly southern way, and was just as mindlessly simplistic. I couldn't have cared less about their faith. All I knew was that I didn't belong there with them and their religion.

One thing I could not figure out was why they never saw visions. How come they didn't experience the Holy Ghost, as did all the people in the Bible to whom they gave slavish allegiance, and who had supernatural experiences on a daily basis? Maybe they were the bad Christians? Somehow they had no contact with the infinite as I was certain that I had.

Nor did they experience the night terrors as I did, or the grand mal seizures.

Grand mal, or tonic clonic seizures as they are called today, are what most people think of when the discussion turns to epilepsy, which I expect is rather infrequent in most circles. For an epileptic, one moment he is behaving normally, the next he comes out of something that's confusing, embarrassing, and totally unknown. The exterior sight is difficult to describe to one who has never witnessed it and the interior experience is impossible to convey to one fortunate enough never to have gone through it. They were a very common occurrence in my youth and as you can expect, I spent most of my time living in fear that one would come upon me. Every morning I woke up, I would ask myself, "Am I going to have a seizure today?" and hopefully I wouldn't. The sheer strain of the uncertainty of never knowing when a seizure would strike cannot be imagined by anyone who has never felt it.

Seizures do not gently linger on the horizon like a storm, which makes a gradual and graceful landfall; they are more like tornadoes that suddenly appear and violently inflict their carnage before departing. Were it not for my brother's on-site reportage, I never would have known what an awful scene such a seizure presented to those who were unlucky enough to watch one take place.

Not all my visions you will be reading about are epilepsy-related, and I have not had a grand mal seizure for many years, so please do not visualize me convulsing on the ground each time I have an inner journey, getting up, and running to my easel, as though seizures were necessary preludes to my work. On the other hand, you will find some experiences that are associated, directly or indirectly with other types of less visually dramatic seizures which are almost imperceptible by an observer. Many of my experiences, however, proceed naturally out of my unconscious mind. For reasons not entirely clear, the normal protective barrier between conscious and unconscious mind is, in my psyche, extremely thin.

As related earlier, and to my great misfortune, my parents were of the attitude that anything not attributable to God was of the Devil and had to be dealt with swiftly and sternly. I was never treated for epilepsy; instead I experienced several demon-crunching exorcisms. All told, my parents had three ways of dealing with my illness: denial, claiming demonic possession, or punishment for unusual behavior.

Demonic symptoms were handled with prayer, laying-on of hands, casting out of the offensive spirit, and so on. Unusual or odd behaviors (usually the result of seizures) called for beatings with leather straps. Let me make clear that my parents, for all their brutality, always believed that they were carrying out the will of God, not wanting to risk spoiling the child by sparing the rod and all the rest of it. My supposition is that they sincerely felt that they were doing the good and godly thing and were somehow securing my salvation by their actions. They were far from being the first parents or the last to think this way, and may the God they thought they were serving have mercy on their souls.

(My mother never accepted the undeniable fact that her son was epileptic. Even after comprehensive medical testing proved beyond a doubt that I had a seizure disorder, she stubbornly held to her position that no son of hers could have any such affliction caused by demons and evil spirits, principalities and powers, and so on and so forth).

Having to pull myself up out of the stifling pit of Christianity as I had experienced it, albeit a very primitive backwoods form of it, and the offbeat personal values of my family, I needed a cornerstone upon which to build some sort of foundation for childhood sanity. That's where music came in, my creative endeavors in which long preceded my involvement with the visual arts.

I spent a great deal of time writing and playing music. It was my Zen practice, and the only thing that could absorb me in the moment. For me, music had a unique reality; sound itself stimulated my imagination and I was ready and more than willing to travel wherever the music decided to take me.

As did my visions, music had the power to carry me into other worlds, other dimensions of being and feeling. While not visions in their own right, these musical sojourns had their own very special quality; they formed a sort of counterpoint, a balance, to the visions themselves. I was captivated by the idea of the purity of sound and its lack of restrictions and forms. Non-material is created out of physical implements, going forth in absolute freedom to the ends of the universe; the sound waves travel onward and upward, unhampered and unchanged, forever.

I was able to wander just as freely through these abstract landscapes of free tonalities, possessing nothing external unto itself, a place where I could climb the mountain of unified reality and see all the way home. Although as you will see, my childhood encounters with the unconscious were few and far between, they were always deeply meaningful.

There are many obvious differences between the behavior of the elements of the outer world and their inner world counterparts. A storm, for example, in the physical world, will brew, spend its fury, move on, then eventually dissipate and come to an end. In the interior world of thought and emotion, storms can rage an entire lifetime, and this was certainly true with me. The severe disturbance of my emotional nature not only continued to churn, but would appear and reappear in myriad guises.

In the mid to late 1960's I had developed some type of continuous shaking with no discernible physical causes, which only recently was diagnosed as a symptom of chronic PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder). Living with the constant uncertainty of the sudden appearance of a seizure was bad enough, but these tremors were unceasing. The need to tie down the source of this tremor was imperative, as I could not even write my own name or play the violin.

After explaining this new condition to my physician, he prescribed one of those wonderful new miracle drugs, which somehow almost invariably wind up creating a new condition as bad or worse than the one they are intended to cure. The one my doctor recommended for me was a hot little item called Valium.

I was told Valium would calm my nerves, which it certainly did, bringing with the relief unexpected bonuses, such as addiction. By the time I was able to sever my relationship with it, my original dosage of 2 milligrams per day had grown to 30 plus milligrams. Perhaps it would have demonstrated prudence on my part to have discussed this exponential increase in my

Valium intake with my doctor, but I kept putting off this conversation with the medic for ten years or so, before I finally extricated myself from this dependence.

It goes without saying that Valium and I stayed together for so long, with so greatly intensified a relationship, for the simple reason that it did what it was supposed to do, calming the storm or, rather, exercising restraint upon it, while simultaneously lulling me into a wonderful sense of false security that I had signed a covenant of peace with the world and all grim remnants of the past were somehow obliterated.

Wrong. It took only a few short months following the closing of my Valium epoch for the old hurricane of fear, disturbing imagery, and anger to swirl once more through my dreams.

One morning in February 1975, a life-and-death struggle began to manifest in a variety of physical symptoms, including headaches, muscular strain, digestive problems, and nightmares. I was roaming the dangerous, dark and mean streets of the unconscious mind with not the slightest indication of what it was that was stealthily and relentlessly stalking me.

At the time I was performing in several symphony orchestras throughout Southern California. Except for the above-mentioned ailments, with a few dizzy spells thrown in here and there, my affairs were in order and, for the most part, all seemed well. "Every storm must be preceded by a calm."

I began to notice that, at certain moments during my orchestral performances, I began to lose track of time and forget where I was, and later suddenly snapping out of it and returning to my normal self. If I am not mistaken, the technical psychological term for this is "alteration of consciousness." We are all eager to engage in self-diagnosis and I am no exception. Despite my personal health history, I decided to call these episodes "lack of concentration" or "over-tiredness."

My colleagues, being concerned, and perhaps more than a little upset that one of their members was drifting in and out of something that could throw off the whole orchestra and ruin a performance, they inquired about my health status.

It only got worse. I began to lose memories of entire events. I would play a concert on a Sunday evening, only to awaken Monday morning unable to remember clearly not only what occurred the previous night but the entire day before. The frequency of these memory lapses increased, and as they did my fear multiplied exponentially. When dealing with health issues, I can demonstrate what I like to call stoicism (the healthcare industry often refers to it as "denial"), and I avoid bringing this new problem to the attention of my doctor.

My usual explanation to others was that I was investing too much of myself in partying, or consuming too much alcohol, even though I did not drink. I would rather have been known as a carouser or a drunk than to admit that I had a health problem. This pattern of concealment set during childhood due to my seizures once again came to the fore, and even though there was some uncertainty about my self-diagnosis, I had spent my life hiding in the epilepsy closet and had no desire to come out of it this late in the game.

The terrible old memories of my younger years began to rumble to life, percolating to the surface in bubbles that should have burst and left me in peace, but somehow they continued hugging the surface of those dark mental waters. Fear once again emerged with full force out of the nooks and crannies into which I had forced it, falling into step beside me with an ease and comfort that seemed both casually friendly and mockingly brazen. I had been working on a woodwind quintet and by the time I had finished the composition, the situation was out of control, anxiety having led me to the breaking point. The quintet, entitled Summer Evening, is somewhat reflective of the dissonant darkness but also included melodic respites and interludes of peace. In certain ways, it exemplified the state of my interior consciousness during that extremely difficult year of 1975.

Sometime later I was invited to compose the score for a stage production, "Come Before Winter," a one-man play dealing with the final days of my fellow epileptic, St. Paul. The title, taken from Second Timothy 4:21, is a request by Paul that the young pastor of the Church at Ephesus hasten in his impending visit to the apostle, imprisoned in Rome and awaiting execution for following his personal path according to his understanding of God and Christ. Another dangerous individualist.

The play's production manager insisted that the score reflect a tonal center, largely in the key of A minor. I was able to write the score for solo piano in about six weeks and though it was well received by audiences it was a little too saccharine to suit my taste. In spite of my absorption in composing, the inner storm was beginning to gather renewed strength and was making its way towards landing.

The visions returned, crowding out the relief I had found in the creation of music. Out of tender moments flew flashes of insight, gently hovering near me before plunging me into the black abyss; small wisps of pleasant times-past lightly caressed my memory, but then they too were swept away in the advancing path of the storm. My music was fading away, dying a slow death in the overarching shadow of grief, and my only refuge from the monsters of the unconscious was wrestled away from me. Sound was not a suitable receptacle for the images that poured out of the darkness; my attempted solution was to try composing music that would give voice to the coming tempest, to cooperate with the approaching onslaught, but it seemed useless.

I had done this before, however, and successfully. My 1970 piece, Quintet for Piano and Strings conveyed the desolation of war by the use of glissando (the technique of sliding fingers up and down the strings of an instrument) which represented the tears of the world.

Although music does powerfully impact the consciousness through bypassing the objective reason and entering directly through the emotions, it cannot begin to have the direct effect upon us as does that which reaches us visually. It is a matter of simple scientific law; the speed of light is much greater than that of sound. We can take in an immense work of art, such as a Turner canvas or the roof of the Sistine Chapel, with one look, whereas music must, by its nature, unfold sequentially. It is impossible to compress an entire Wagnerian opera into a single note or chord.

The abstract nature of music, of sound, was not equipped to help me deal with what was coming. Only art, visual art, could portray the stream of imagery sprung from my unconscious, and it would be my light in the ensuing years of darkness. However, at the time, I had no idea just how physical this process would become.

As the old wise men of certain traditions, I found myself performing ceremonial rituals and dances, creating totems, painting, sculptures, drawings, and even blood sacrifices (of my own blood), the importance of which fully documented in volumes of my journal entries. They would not be flat, two-dimensional things; they would be living expressions of myself. The difference between them and my musical creations was that the latter were mostly creations of my own intellect and rational mind, whereas art was more atavistic, emotional, epigastric, often sardonic, and sometimes downright ruthless in both its appearance within me and its actualization without.

I have no formal education or training in the visual arts as I did in music, which had carried me through the turmoil of my earlier life. I had never expected, much less planned, to work in the visual media. But 1975 was my year of change in many ways.

The dam was about to burst. Everything I had experienced up to that point had, according to the necessity of retaining sanity, organized itself into what was, for me, a pattern of normal expression; yet this pattern was torn to shreds by the outrush of a new set of images, so extreme in their dark foulness and power to terrify that they could only be dealt with by the creation of sculptural images, which expressed the inner truths repressed for more years than I cared to count. During those years, my ego, my lower nature, had no defenses against their destructive power, and could only hide itself behind masks.

It is through these times that “Charon,” my old childhood friend, came once more to aid me.

Charon had been with me since 1948 when I came out of my coma, and he/she is the manifestation of all within me that was good, that was light, that was pure, or even holy if you will. Charon would act as a check and balance to the dark forces, oftentimes restraining them to allow my consciousness to recover from their ravages.

When events rampaged out of control and threatened to crush me beneath their awful weight, it was Charon who was, in the language of the old Psalmists, my sword and shield, and the hedge of protection around me.

The injection of art into my life would be what constituted the “work,” which was my version of the Great Work of alchemy, the removal of the dross from the material through successive stages of purification that would eventually produce the gold of the perfected self. In my work, I would be transmuting the inner demons through the “application of fire” in the crucible of artistic creativity. (It is no coincidence that in the Rosicrucian Order, which produced virtually all of the great alchemists of the past, the most advanced class of students is still referred to as Artisans).

As images flowed out of my unconscious in a never-ending stream, the only way to keep from being carried away in the floodtide was to objectify them in whatever way I could, hence the tremendous import of my journals, where they safely reposed. From 1975 to the time of this writing, my journals have become home to over five thousand drawings contained in some thirty-seven volumes.

I began with simple stick drawings which evolved into more sophisticated renderings in my journals, on canvas, and as sculptures. I found that the physical work involved in bringing these images into the world eased the psychic pain, which prompted me to work for hours, days, or even weeks at a time.

Thankfully, my physical body was a cooperative player in all of this, making available levels of energy to match my need. All in all, the process can best be described as manic. I continued to work at my day job in the telecommunications industry; after arriving home, I would go to Stony Point, a mountain in the foothills of Chatsworth, California, for meditation, and then return home, ensconcing myself in my study to work on my journals until the next morning, and then begin the next round of "civilian" work and artistic creation. I literally had the proverbial energy of a madman. It was amazing how much artwork I was able to produce as a part-time avocation. Those who knew of my creative endeavors could scarcely believe what I was able to accomplish in short periods of time.

They didn't understand the drive behind it, that I was compelled to bring forth the visionary images in the most applicable formats. I did not want to stop myself, nor was there any way I possibly could have.

There were, of course, dormant periods when the visions gave me necessary rest. This was possibly, indeed probably, due to the intervention of Charon, who knew that the physical and psychic vehicles would have broken down under the constant strain, to which he commanded a halt at certain well selected times. During these more restful periods, I devoted myself to large sculptures that required extended periods of time for completion. Even with the protection of my guardian angel, I could still drive myself to exhaustion, leading to an inevitable descent into darkness.

It could take weeks, sometimes months before new material would present itself to me out of the conflicts within my unconscious. I learned that it could take that long for a particular vision to properly organize itself into a coherent whole, and there are still things, images from long suppressed and half-forgotten memories that I still have not completely worked through.

There are journal entries, which, even after repeated readings, will still bring forth an unsuspected element that has remained elusive for many years.

There are also drawings and entries that to this day I cannot even look at, much less cogitate upon. The pain associated with them still cuts too deeply. There are times when I opened one of my journals, a drawing or written entry would leap off the page and hurtle into the depths of my being, wrenching forth what I did not even know was there. Even just glanced at, these

images can be ferocious and to be avoided; certain disturbing visions have continued to date to bring forth tears and anxiety attacks as I turn those pages.

I know that deeply within me there are dark, secret passageways within whose dank atmosphere and cobwebbed walls lurk monsters I am as yet unprepared to deal with. Even as I acknowledge that I have achieved wholeness in many areas of my being, there are experiences that wait so silently and exist so deeply, that they may never be retrieved, confronted, or handled, at least not in this life. I am cognizant of the fact that they still affect my behavior; I do, however, remain vigilant in my efforts to overcome or at least contain and manage their influences.

What might appear to the readers as “one event after another” is in fact experiences stretched out over a period of many years. I have selected incidents that reflect particularly important moments in my overall development. Many visions and episodes have been intentionally left out due to the enormous number of them. It would require ten books to record them all.

I ask that as you read these journals, as my inner life unfolds itself before you, you will not be overly harsh in your assessment of their content. I hope you will try to understand the deeper meanings they express and that by accompanying me on my journey through word and art you will find, as have I, a more profound meaning to your own life.

Myron Dyal

Revised and Edited by:

Joy Kong-Dyal, M.D.

New Friends - Early Childhood Experiences, circa 1950

(My recollection of these early events is not as clear nor as straightforward as I would prefer, and certainly not nearly as much so as I would like to present them to you, but I am recounting them as honestly and in as detailed a way as possible).

It was late at night, I was tired, my mother had put me to bed after an exhausting day. I had a peculiar feeling.

I was frightened of the night; it was the covering for the “dark ones” as I had named them. In the night they sought me out, their red eyes coming at me from the shadows, drawing nearer before swallowing me up in a vivid crimson haze.

They became my obsession and I found myself both terrified of them and, in a strange way, somehow becoming dependent upon them, looking forward to their visits in the same way as a small child both thrills and fears with anticipation as the roller coaster begins to move up the trestle. I would pull the covers over my head to hide from their gaze but when curiosity got the better of me, or I got tired of waiting for them to make their theatrically delayed entrance, I would cautiously peek to see if they had taken their usual stage around my bed, like in a psychic theatre in the round, with myself as player and audience.

These were the heady early days of what was to become my longstanding relationship with these red-eyed creatures. They were not merely of nocturnal ways, though; they appeared with equal routine during the daylight hours. As a child I would see them in various forms, ranging from dark, hooded beings to angelic looking forms. In my older years they would show themselves to me in – or my consciousness would alternately register them as – creatures both constructive and destructive. I admit that my emotional and/or mental state at the time may have significantly affected their appearance at any particular time, all the more so if they were creations of my own mind.

On this particular night, their appearance out of the darkness was rather ubiquitous; everywhere I looked, there they were. The room filled with them as the old time séance rooms filled with spirits, physical objects, and ectoplasm. I noticed one of them approaching the bottom of my bed and reaching out towards the blanket. I was surprised and pleased at the gentleness of its touch and the aura of respect that seemed to emanate from him to me. Certainly, not something I had been used to dealing with in my short life. I then heard a soft voice inquire as to how I felt and ask if I needed anything. All of this temporarily curbed the edge of my fear.

Although I did not verbally reply, there must have existed a telepathic rapport between us, because he already seemed to know the answer to the questions. The ache in my head and muscles remained from the seizure the day before -- that's how I was feeling. His companions were also seemingly in the know as they surrounded me and gently laid their hands upon me, healing hands, from which came forth a soft glow that spread a wonderful warmth all over me. This warmth seeped into my very soul, bringing healing to every level of my being and sent my into a deep sleep.

The next thing I knew, the morning sun was intruding into my dreams and dragging me sleepily into the new day. Instantly remembering the events of the night before, I was keenly aware of the fact that the healing session had not been a hallucination as I was still pain free with all limbs functioning correctly and responding well.

Later that morning while I was happily at play, I noticed I was having trouble seeing my teddy bear, a solid brown fellow with soft fur and green plastic eyes. I shook my head to clear my vision, but it remained cloudy. As I reached for my stuffed animal toy I fell over and felt the side of my head hitting the side of the bed. My bedroom melted away and was replaced by a scene of beautiful clouds and angelic beings seemingly comprised of light. I would later give these surroundings the appellation of "my high place." But for that moment, I was too enraptured with the gentle strains of music wafting over me, as breeze whose source lay somewhere in the indefinable distance.

My inner-world friends were coming towards me, appearing through the clouds, which also seemed to serve as their vehicles. They wore robes that were spun from light itself, hence the brilliant effulgence that overwhelmed me and made me cover my eyes.

"Be at peace," one of them spoke to me reassuringly. I tried to respond by standing and greeting them... As I did, the one who had spoken reached out and embraced me. Once more I found myself within that delicious field of healing warmth, which surrounded and penetrated me down to the very spiritual vitals, healing me through and through. I felt my hand being placed in his as we made our way toward the others. They greeted me with joyful countenances and I was bathed in a torrent of unconditional love and acceptance.

Their joy intensified. As it did, I noted that the otherworldly music became louder. The two were linked in some way, two different but intertwined manifestations of the vibratory current of their healing love. The blissful communion came to an end by the sight of my body being washed in a tub of water and the sound of my mother's voice rapid-firing a string of questions.

The weight of the day lay upon me heavily as late afternoon gave way to evening. My hopes that my precious friends would come again and take me into their magical world were dashed. They would not reappear for some weeks, even though I frequently felt them and their enveloping love.

My next episode came a few months later as I was amusing myself swinging in the old rubber tire affixed by rope to the maple tree. I suddenly began to shake, my head being forced backwards and the power of the unseen energy sent me tumbling onto the hard rocks that bordered the base of the tree. I was immediately running across the clouds in my high place, actually dancing in the joy of the moment.

In the distance I could see other children playing with what, until then, I had thought of being exclusively my special friends. The happiness of their play was an irresistible magnet and I sped towards them anticipating a pleasant encounter with my contemporaries who were as lucky as I, to be permitted entrance to this amazing place. I also noticed that, for the first time, I was

able to discern clearly the faces of my friends, devoid as they were of both their dark cloaks and robes of light, which were probably two sides of the same garment.

Their beautiful faces were filled with love, and they so designed and sculpted that the overall impression of their countenance was of confident strength. Their expressions were perfectly reflective of the happiness that they, too, derived from their play with the children. Laughter seemed to come from everywhere in this wondrous landscape.

Even as they played with the others, they clearly divined my presence and approach. Suddenly I found myself surrounded by these extraordinary creatures, covering me with their love. I had myself an unforgettable time as we played and danced amidst the clouds.

I was brought back to earth by a far-off voice calling to me.

“Are you alright?” the voice floated across a physical space of only a few inches, but a chasm of consciousness of countless light years separating those who experience and understand, from those who doubt and gape and wonder and deny.

I could begin to see my parents, but I was as yet unable to speak. By the time I found my voice, the image of my mother and father and the room had completely and unwantedly blocked out my landscape with the others.

The look of love on my friends’ faces was infinitely preferable to that of the concern displayed by my parents, and their inquiry as to how I was feeling couldn’t begin to match the love and genuine concern of those in the better world.

What was I to say to them? All I could think of was, “Where are my friends?”

Ache in My Legs – Summer 1951

My legs were painful and showed an unusual color. I was unable to recall how I had hurt them, neither did I have the slightest idea as to the source of the strange markings on my flesh. But lately everything in my small corner of reality had been permeated by a feeling of being somewhat out of kilter with sequential time, and my memory always seemed to teeter on the edge of disappearance.

My life seemed to be hedged around with fear and I was unable to track down its ultimate source. The nagging feeling that there was something in my mind, something unknown and ungraspable, that I should be able to identify and pull into my awareness, was continuous.

The heat of the day was made bearable by the presence of a soft breeze that rustled the dark leaves of the trees surrounding the far edges of our backyard. I made my brief but meaningful journey from what I called the inner backyard, which was carefully tended to and well landscaped, into the slightly sinister precincts of the outer yard, where trash was burned and where I would meet with my inner-world companions. As my contact with these non-corporeal playmates began, I could feel the release of tension and dread and a renewal of my spirit. I knew these elements of my psychic life were present for my protection and well-being and I always felt safe in their arms, literally and figuratively. When I was with them, there was no one to rail at me about my odd behaviors; I experienced naught but the gentleness and complete acceptance of these friends, who demonstrated far better manners and a much higher state of spirituality than any of the specimens of so-called humanity with whom I had interacted up to that time.

The ache in my legs was pronounced as I passed the white picket fence designating the point where the two yards met, but I paid it as little mind as possible. It was a day of black crows framed by blue skies. When I reached what I affectionately dubbed "the tree of magic," I settled down for a needed repose. Just as I set to rubbing my legs, the world began to recede from my vision and I felt my head hit the tree supporting my back.

The first thing I noticed was that the brightness of the summer day had been replaced by the darkness of my inner consciousness; I found myself treading an unseen road through the shadowed landscape of a very strange world.

I was alone and very much aware of it.

The aural impression translated to me as some demonic talons slicing through the darkness in an attempt to inflict harm upon me. My head snapped around. My straining eyes attempted to penetrate the black sheets hung all around me. The little I could see contained nothing familiar, nothing to which I could relate, and there was no way out.

Judging by the sounds, whatever was making them seemed to be edging nearer, their appearance remained elusive. Without warning, I saw red eyes piercing the black atmosphere, fixing themselves upon me. I was surrounded.

The sensation of terror was paralyzing; I was unable to run or even move. Like dogs or horses, they were keenly aware of my emotional reaction and responded accordingly, leaping upon me, claws slashing my skin all over.

The frenzied attack ended with the same rapidity as it began and I found myself lying on the floor of my bedroom. How I had gotten into the house from the backyard I had no idea, and at the time, it was the least of the mysteries attending the event. The red curtains blowing in the

breeze and the presence of my dog, Sandy, sleeping peacefully beside me, added an air of normality to the entire scene.

My foggy mind elongated to infinite distances to hear my mother's voice calling out that dinner was ready. My green corduroy shorts and white tee-shirt were somewhat disheveled, but my old dirty tennis shoes seemed no worse for the experience. My shorts were wet and my head throbbed steadily.

It had happened again, another seizure and the events of the afternoon were lost in a fog of jumbled confusion.

My family was awaiting my presence at the dinner table, so a change of clothes was imperative before my mother came to get me, in order to avoid major trouble. I changed my underwear, pulled on a pair of Levi's, and stumbled out of the room, straightening and steadying myself on the way to the table.

Mom wanted to know what I had been doing in my room. "Sleeping," I appeased her with the kind of answer I knew she wanted to hear. I really didn't know where I had been or exactly what had happened. I couldn't even be certain which was the reality, having been in the garden and somehow made my way into the house without being intercepted, or having been in my bedroom the entire time.

Needless to say, my appetite was less than voracious. No amount of parental cajoling could get me to eat a bite. I excused myself, retired to my room, and was almost instantly asleep.

One Sunday, we made a post-church trip to the Forest Lawn cemetery in Glendale, California to see the Last Supper window and the Crucifixion painting. I enjoyed these visits to Forest Lawn; something about the place appealed to me. It wasn't a macabre attraction, but I did feel a definite comfort in the presence of the dead. Perhaps it was the deep quietude of the atmosphere, the tranquil, comforting feeling of eternity. Maybe I considered the dead lucky, as they had already passed through this world and left behind all of its uncertainties and pains. Their enjoyment of a better place was perpetual, unlike my brief sojourns with my special friends.

My parents, of course, were always prattling about Jesus Christ -- their version of him, his death, the vicarious atonement for the sins of a wicked world, his resurrection and ascension into heaven where he sat at the right hand of the father. The standard Baptist spiel, nothing original or particularly exciting, certainly nothing that enticed my interest or allegiance. I preferred being among the dead to seeking the company of the so-called-alive.

Somehow I was able to break away from the others and explore a long hallway near the Last Supper window. It was there that I saw what looked like a caretaker, strolling near a stained glass window in the great mausoleum. His eyes met mine. He winked at me then busied himself with his work. I decided to follow but my plans were thwarted by my mother, who appeared out of nowhere and pulled me back up the hall.

“I wanted to talk to the man,” I wailed plaintively as she guided me back towards the doors.

“What man?” she asked.

“The one near the window.”

I turned and saw he was still there. “The man standing right there!” I shouted, pointing directly at him.

In a loud and irritated tone she said there was no one there and demanded I stop all the nonsense. Her loud voice bounced between the marble walls of the mausoleum. It finally sunk in that she was unable to see the figure that was so clearly visible to me.

At home in the aftermath of the incident, I was subjected to as fine and relentless a cross-examination as anything ever played out in a court of law. To keep the peace and avoid delving into areas I did not want to discuss with my parents – and of which I had little enough understanding of my own – I lied and claimed I had made the whole thing up. It would be easier to admit to a fib than having my parents preach me another sermon about Satan and the dead and whatever else they used to tack on as codicils to such diatribes; whatever they heard in church, I suppose.

As I closed out the tiring but eventful day by slipping into a very welcome sleep, the ache in my legs took second place in my thoughts to my newly found friend at Forest Lawn. I hoped we would meet again.

### The Rain and the Bruises – Winter 1951

The cold, wet winter around me was painting upon the world a perfect representation of my attitude toward life. I was still at a loss to capture and name the mysterious quality of my life embodied in the seizures, the visions, and the clairvoyant experiences. If I had had the good fortune to be born into a family with truly spiritual tendencies, it would have greatly eased my burden, and perhaps opened up avenues of understanding that would have put these episodes into some sort of reasonable context. Placed against the backdrop of my parents’ religious

fundamentalism, there wasn't the slightest semblance of a chance to come to terms with it all, nor even of any loving support.

The overcast sky heralded the rain, and as I headed out to play in the backyard I watched the gray and white clouds jockeying for position in the leaden sky. Like many people, I have always loved the rain and the psychological states it induces. Soft drops of rain began to hit my forehead; I leaned back and allowed their gentle, refreshing touch to work their blessing.

It was something I needed to relieve the anxiety of the last few weeks. There had been a disjointed fragment of memory swimming around my consciousness and, again, I was unable to stop it in its tracks long enough to identify it, much less to deal with it. My hands had also been shaking nearly continuously, and my entire body was gripped by tension. My world was once again girdled by fear and as per usual, I couldn't discern its origin.

The wind suddenly picked up and whipped the boughs of the trees into a "danse macabre" that fit in perfectly with my inner atmosphere. Seated as I was in the far back yard, I was assailed by the flying ashes of burnt trash. While I was attempting to extricate from my right eye a few stray specks of old embers, I became aware of someone or something standing next to the peach tree at the rear fence of our property.

My blurred vision was unable to focus in on the figure, but my interest was cut short by a terrific blast of wind that subjected me to quite a battering, nearly knocking me over and forcing me to find balance by grabbing the white picket fence.

The uninvited guest had disappeared by the time my vision cleared. "It must have been my imagination," I assured myself as I continued my bodily jousting with the wind, twisting this way and that to keep myself balanced. Then the pace of the rain hastened; I knew that in its wake would come my mother to rescue me from the moist wilds of the backyard. My stomach cramped with the thought of having to leave my version of the enchanted forest... Fences, garbage cans and all, it was still more pleasant to me than the house itself.

For some reason, I feared to go inside. The prospect of remaining in the yard, no matter what weather, was preferable to facing my fear of going indoors. I didn't know why I felt afraid of the house but I was, and rationalization brought no relief.

While I was pondering this and waiting for my mother's call into the dry safety of the family domicile, the sky was brutally broken to pieces by thunder and lightning. As the first clap of thunder faded, it was followed by another disturbing sound, that of my mother's voice. I dreaded the consequences of obeying her as much as those of disobeying her. Still, I was keenly

attuned to the fact that failure to comply with her wishes would more than likely be termed an odd behavior, and I was not up to dealing with that. So I headed for the house.

It required only the time it took to traverse the backyard to the back porch to get soaked to the skin. My mother demanded to know what was wrong with me, as she began to remove the drenched top layer of my clothing. What was wrong with me?

“Nothing,” I mumbled.

Like most mothers, she admonished me about the dangers of catching my death of cold, whatever that was, and insisted I tell her what I had been doing out there. I answered rather meekly that I had been doing nothing in particular. I didn’t want to discuss it with anyone, especially my mother. All I wanted was to get into the relative safety of my room and hide away in myself. Fortunately she let me go and I found a certain comfort in the steady tapping of the rain against the shingles as I set course for my bedroom.

I was encompassed by a strange aura of things forgotten, a dim remembrance of things past. As always, the periphery of my awareness was a playground for thoughts and feelings just out the range of cognition. They remained unspoken as I went into my room and hurled myself down onto my half of the bunk bed, sinking into the brown blanket. I turned on the radio and let my head dent the pillow, settling down to savor the silky sounds of violin music, finding comfort in the soothing notes that wove their way in and out of the drumbeats of the rain on the roof.

Just as I closed my eyes and began to greet the encircling arms of approaching sleep, the room was lit by an extremely bright flash of lightning, accompanied by a clap of thunder. My reverie was rudely interrupted, and once again I thought I saw someone standing in close proximity, but a glance around the room turned up nothing.

Suddenly I felt as though the blanket beneath me had changed its nature into pure fear and wrapped itself around me. Of what I was afraid I had not the slightest idea. Then I noticed the black marks on my arms and legs, dark splotches shot through with red, orange, and yellow. They were painful to the touch, and I became absorbed in the rhythmic expression of pain as I pressed each bruise again and again, trying to figure out where they had come from. My right hand was shaking -- the tremors more than a match for my willpower. I couldn’t control them. I felt a tear roll down my cheek, threatening to bring on an emotional storm as intense as the meteorological disturbance hammering the outer world.

The tempo of the rain had increased to the point of drowning out the radio. The blackness of the sky was fitting. The fusion of rain, music, and the rhythm of my heartbeat coalesced into a discordant symphony that found its eerie way into my psyche.

I turned my attention back to the mystery bruises, pressing them several times and permitting the pain to convince me that they were more than products of my imagination. A slight movement registered by my peripheral vision led me to glance up and see, right next to my bed, a being of light, so beautiful and perfect in appearance that its mere presence drained me of all fear and pain. Every movement of its glowing altered the room. Although the intensity of the brightness emanating from this creature prevented me from obtaining a clear view of its features, I intuitively knew that he was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen.

In his presence, nothing mattered, a flood of love filled the room and my being. Where there had been physical and emotional pain, now it was well. No words were spoken, yet a sharing of consciousness filled me with an understanding beyond anything that could be conveyed by speech, mortal or otherwise. His departure was perfectly synchronized with the blaze of lightning pouring through the windows, and my sadness at the loss of him was somewhat compensated by the sweetness of the fragrance that lingered in the room for several minutes. Alone once more, without fear and enjoying the sound of the now distant thunder, I drifted off to sleep.

The rain was still falling when I awakened later that evening. The pitch black of the room was interrupted only by the faint light shining underneath the door. I heard the sound of a car in the driveway, then my father's footsteps toward the kitchen. Somehow this brought back the full force of the day's earlier fear. I could feel my palms becoming drenched... I went into the bathroom and ordered myself to calm down while I splashed water on my face.

What on earth was I afraid of now? I hadn't the slightest idea. I turned off the light and went into the living room. Just then I found myself in the grip of a small seizure.

Dizzy and disoriented, I aimed myself in the general direction of the kitchen. I made it and settled into a dining chair, something flashing across the screen of memory just as I seated myself at the table.

I was struck as though by a bolt of lightning left over from the storm. The image forced its way into my mind and would not allow me to break free of it until I had seen it in full. As my father passed by me on his way into my parents' bedroom, my hand began to shake violently, and I saw what looked very much like a belt slashing through the blackness of night.

Although not entirely certain what I was seeing, as I watched my father walk into the back of the house, I knew, deeply and certainly, that he and the belt had caused the discolored welts on my arms and legs. Again I felt hot tears stinging my cheeks. I squeezed my eyes shut attempting

to block out the emotional upsurge as I began to comprehend what had happened, of what my conscious mind had blocked out...

I made no response to my mother's request to set the table for dinner. "Myron, get up and set the table," she said again. But it was impossible; I couldn't move. I felt fossilized, absolutely immobilized by fear.

"Myron, I'm talking to you!" Mother might just as soon have been talking to the brick wall for all the effect it had on me. I remained quiet.

Then as she approached me, I fell from the chair and hit the floor, sinking into a darkness.

### To the Surface – Winter 1952

The summer had been long and difficult, filled with negativity and, in its way, with mystery. I had not been able to come to terms with the idea of another year of school. The very thought of it brought to the surface physical pain, anxiety, dizziness, and small seizures.

One afternoon, in the familiar surroundings of the far reaches of the backyard, I felt as though I were being stuck through with pins and needles. I began to feel faint.

It had been one of those hot California winter days, and the temperature was working its debilitating effect on me. Just as I sat myself down on the picket fence, hoping for a moment of rest, the sky took on a red glow, beginning as a thin line barely discernible against the usual blue, and growing to a sheet of deep, dark crimson. It was frightening, but I managed to get up from the fence and go back into the comforting familiarity of my private rain forest in the wilds of Inglewood (????), accompanied by the presence of something making itself felt just within the boundaries of my mind, something that wanted its freedom.

The soft breeze grazed across the yard, slightly ruffling the tranquility of the colorful array of flowers bordering the picket fence. It felt good, and went well with the sunlight reflected off the linen sheets hanging from the clothesline. The glare was a little on the bright side, though. I covered my eyes with my hand, which didn't help, as the light not only grew in intensity, but also inflated to immense proportions. I could see nothing but the blazing radiance in which I was encased.

Small fiery spheres shot from what I estimated to be the center of the light, across the span of my vision and hurtling into one another. They exploded upon impact, and the explosions created hundreds of new fireballs in a self-regenerating process. The entire tableaux resembled

nothing as much as the gyrations of atoms as their constituent particles collide to produce energy.

The scene firmly held my attention and I found myself standing straight and tall as I watched the cacophony of photonic chaos. The haphazardness of the shapes created by the explosions gave way to a more coherent form as the energies began to group themselves into some sort of object, an object that was coming towards me.

I tried to fix my attention on this object, to distinguish its form, its nature and, hopefully, its intentions concerning me. I felt myself outside the straightjackets of temporal existence as the form continued to evolve before my eyes. Then, who should come out of that light but my mother, asking me if I had not heard her calling me into the house for lunch. I tried to answer her but words failed me.

“Myron!” I heard her snap. “Answer me!” I was trying to throw all my energy reserves into the formation of a few words, but couldn’t materialize anything. I can see that my mother was being swallowed up by the light, and I began to frantically beseech for her return... It worked; instantly she was beside me, asking her usual question, “What’s wrong?” To which I gave my standard reply, “Nothing.”

During the walk to the house I felt dizzy and unsteady, and my vision was blurred. The moment I sat down at the table, I knew trouble was coming straight towards me. I felt sick to my stomach, and the room began to spin. I tried to hide my physical and mental distress, but that charade fell apart when I dropped my glass of milk.

While watching my mother clean up the milk that had spilled all over the floor, my head was pulled back and I fell to the hard linoleum of the kitchen floor. The moment I made contact with the floor, my consciousness was turned completely inside out and I was oblivious to the home surroundings.

I found myself reclining on the black wings of a gigantic crow gracefully gliding through a beautiful patch of clouds. The cool wind delightfully stroked my face as we soared majestically across the tops of the black mountains surrounding us on all sides. Below us, the valleys and darkened canyons were covered with a red-tinted fog.

Many valleys in the real world are filled with orchards, vineyards, crops of various types, but I could feel, instinctively and definitively, that the chief product of the valleys below was fear, and there seemed to be a bumper crop of it sending its vibrations up to me. Just as I realized this, the crow began a descent towards one of the canyons, turning over and spiraling madly straight toward the ground. The force of the wind was pushing me off the wings; it was all I

could do to maintain a death grip upon the creature. The thought that we were inexorable heading into a horrendous crash was terrifying.

I woke up screaming, to find my mother holding me in her arms and desperately trying to pull me out of the pit of terror in which she seemed to know I was held fast. At first I did not recognize her or my environment but I quickly got my bearings. Still dizzy and soaked in perspiration, the mental fog began to lift.

There was, of course, no mention of anything as unacceptable as epilepsy or seizures. She merely asked if I were tired and wanted to get some sleep. I answered in the affirmative and got ready for bed, more than ready to see the end of this day and look forward to the wonderful forgetfulness of slumber.

#### My Introduction to Music - 1952

I cannot remember a time when I was not enthralled by the sounds of musical instruments. I developed a way of organizing the common sounds of the world into musical pieces heard only within my head.

At a very young age I became entranced with the piano, producing random sounds by manipulating the keys in whatever sequence that struck my fancy. I quickly discovered that I had the ability to reproduce on the keyboard any melodies I heard, and repeat them at will.

My mother would play hymns on our old upright piano, and when I was as young as five years old, I could already distinguish the chords accompanying the melodies. I was able to make out the structure underlying the melody and intuitively knew it to be vertical, that is, notes stacked one upon another to produce the harmony.

One morning I saw a film on television, a movie called *Carnegie Hall*, a type of movie where the motion picture is nothing but a bloated throw-together by commingling several performers. The makers of this film, however, had actually assembled talents worthy of the name, and certainly people I enjoyed hearing.

Arthur Rubenstein played Tschaikovsky's *Piano Concerto*, which was fine, but what really gripped me was Jascha Heifetz's performance of Brahms' *Violin Concerto*. This was the birth of my passion for classical music, a life-long love affair that continues to the present. I found myself utterly captivated by the sounds pouring forth from the master's violin. The music bore a quality that possessed me. The nature of the sound, the vibration of the strings, and the use of the bow, all of it held me transfixed. And this was far more than a serious infatuation.

Determined that one day my name would be spoken in the same breath as the greats of the instrument, I requested violin lessons. At first my mother was reluctant, but youthful enthusiasm can be difficult to overcome and she capitulated. I started my studies almost immediately.

My grammar school had a good musical program as part of its general curriculum, offering classes in both band and orchestra. I joined the school orchestra and, fortunately, the school itself loaned me an instrument. Mother did her part by securing the services of a private music tutor and I was on my way, hopefully to the London Palladium.

The violin is notoriously difficult to learn, as many generations of well-intentioned young students have discovered to their chagrin or their delight if they were being railroaded into lessons by starstruck parents of above-average sophistication but slender formal musical experience.

The left hand, of course, provides the fingering positions, but the sound itself is produced by the bow wielded by the right hand. The nerve-shredding cat screeches often produced by beginning students is the result of the inability to exercise proper control over the bow, which can seem to have a life of its own.

At least the piano can be more easily bent to the will of a man; if you push down a key, the construction of the piano demands the production of a pure sound. Whether or not the player can properly fit that isolated sound into a harmonious arrangement with others to produce something identifiable as music is another story, but a definite note will be produced each and every time. With hand-held string instruments, including the violin, viola, cello, and upright bass, it may take years to master the playing of one piece so as to be in tune and recognizable. All the individual notes, octaves, and scales are produced by precision fingering and can present intimidating obstacles to mastership.

There are three secrets to the acquiring of expertise with stringed instruments: practice, practice, and even more practice. Of course, innate talent and dexterity are also handy things to be able to take into the practice room; without them, the door may as well remain locked.

Most children become discouraged and give up, often quitting with more enthusiasm than they began, or else they move on to a more easily learned instrument. I was one of those rarities who actually loved the violin and, far from shirking practice for contact sports and similar pursuits, applied myself to my practices as often as possible.

Music became my prime focus, for it was the only thing that soothed my nerves and diverted my attention from feelings of inferiority. With music, I had finally found my *métier*, something upon which I could completely focus my thoughts and my energies, and into which I could be absorbed without fear. The downside (isn't there always one?) was that my lengthy practice sessions were causing me to neglect my schoolwork, which I didn't mind in the least, though it

did raise concerns in my parents' minds and made them think twice concerning my musical proclivities.

The strange thing is, my parents did not listen to music at all. But my older brother also had a strong interest in music, and his taste in radio fare leaned heavily towards Bach, Beethoven, Ravel, Debussy, and many of the other giants, which paralleled my musical interests.

I still recall my forays into the local record stores where nonplussed proprietors directed me to the children's section when I asked where I could find classical music. My objections would usually result in a reluctant escort to the land of the classics. I never could understand their hesitancy to indulge my tastes.

Was I somehow "too young" for classical music, or did the shopkeepers think their classical records were somehow as fragile as Ming vases and I would wind up breaking them? Truth be told, I couldn't have cared less what they thought. My money was as green as anyone else's and that, after all, was the bottom line for the merchants.

I loved poring through the seemingly endless stacks of records, and particularly enjoyed the reproductions of elegant paintings, illuminated manuscripts, and other appropriate renderings that graced the album covers. Just looking at the records made me feel good. They were all 78-speed records and all I could afford were short compositions. I distinctly remember my first purchase, Beethoven's *Lenore Overture No. 2*, along with a few short violin pieces by Fritz Kreisler.

My records became worn out from repeated playing. As long as the turntable was spinning and the fruits of the world's musically creative geniuses were coming through the speakers, I was free to become one with the music. This feeling assisted me through my first solo recital before an audience. I don't think I was afraid; nervous maybe, but not fearful. I would become so identified with the music itself that, for a brief time, I did not exist as a separate entity. I wasn't concerned with anything as pedestrian as audiences and their approval or disapproval of my playing. My only interest was the music itself. Everything else could take care of itself.

In the 1950's and 1960's, schools provided musical programs all the way through high school. Apart from that, the church choirs extended additional training in harmony and vocal sight-reading. As musical production is a group effort, it does provide social contact and collaboration. Admittedly, I gained valuable social skills through my musical pursuits, and music was always able to restore in me certain levels of self-esteem, especially following a seizure or some other situation where it would crumble, allowing me to pick myself up and get back to living.

The final word is, without music, I would have never been able to fight my way through the introversion that otherwise would have engulfed me. Music has been an integral factor in the attainment of the worldly success I have been fortunate to achieve.

Be At Peace – December 1953

That night in the living room, the lights were exhibiting choreography that would have put Jerome Robbins (???) to shame. They were of various colors and hues, and stood out against the walls, though blurry to me due to a vision problem I was having.

I immersed myself in following the trajectory of the lights in order to take my mind off of the troubling event preying on me. I had been awakened out of sleep by someone, or something, that had been pursuing me for some time. Who or what it was and how it would eventually appear, I did not know, but I was sure it was on its way and there was no power on earth that would be able to interpose itself between us and our appointed rendezvous. The house was silent and the Christmas tree lights had, for some reason, been allowed to burn all night.

Outside I heard the arrival of a storm that had been brewing for the better part of a week. The rain began to fall and, as the song says, it was beginning to look a lot like Christmas. The holidays filled me with excited anticipation, yet the feeling of foreboding stood side-by-side with the festivity of the season.

My favorite tree decorations were bubble lights, candle-shaped, and so designed as to emit bubbles when a certain temperature was reached. Their effect was hypnotic and I could sit and watch them for hours. While watching the bubbles floating through the living room, I suddenly heard a banging sound outside the house. It was faint but steady and its droning repetition was making me uneasy. My nerves began to feel the tension produced by the mixture of the heavy rain and the unidentified noise.

The bubbles were unable to distract me, try as I might. I looked out the side window trying to locate the sound that was producing the stirrings of fear, but this was not helped by the heavy downpour and strong wind.

All of a sudden, my blurry vision seemed to clear and the interior and exterior of the house came into sharp focus, even though nothing was visible to me except the wet driveway and the streetlamp perched a few yards away at the street corner. I finally noticed that one of the boards from our neighbor's white fence had come loose and was prancing around in the windblown night. I sighed with relief at having determined a perfectly normal explanation for the mysterious noise, and turned my attention back to the bubble lights. I wanted this to be a fondly remembered Christmas, not like the year before when the gift opening was interrupted by a seizure.

At last Christmas, my brother and I had attacked our presents with gusto, sending brightly colored wrapping paper flying everywhere. Everyone had gotten what they wanted. Dad liked his new pipe, Mom was overjoyed by her new coat, and my brother was more than satisfied with his chemistry set and art supplies. As for me, I received two things. One was the hoped-for gray castle with four turrets and drawbridge for my toy soldiers, the other was the unexpected grand mal seizure. This last one did not score a big hit with the rest of the family, as the major

inconvenience ruined their Christmas and, quite frankly, put something of a crimp in my own enjoyment of the holiday.

But, this was another year and another Christmas, and I had been seizure free for months, a nice present in itself. I was confident I would make it into the new year without an epileptic event. I would not let even the faintest prospect of such an occurrence dampen my spirits.

I was out of school on vacation, Christmas was a few days away, and I placed great faith in Santa's psychic ability to know exactly what I had written on my wish list. I had been collecting British toy soldiers and had asked Dad for the complete set of the famed Scottish regiment known as the Black Watch. At thirty-four pieces it was rather expensive for my age and for the household income. Having already accumulated over two hundred toy Brits of various types, I needed the Black Watch to complete the collection. It would truly make my holiday to have them materialize under the Christmas tree, with no questions asked as to who actually brought them.

My thoughts on Black Watch were interrupted by the realization that the fury of the storm was accumulating. I loved the sound of storms in a scary sort of way. The flashing lightning and crashes of thunder took me into a mental state with which I was very familiar, one of awe mixed with fear. The house was extremely dark despite the twinkling tree lights, and each new flash of lightning lent a spooky pinch to the living room.

All of a sudden, my mother appeared out of the darkness and asked why I was up at such a late hour. I told her I was enjoying the tree lights and listening to the storm, but I knew fun time was over and a return to bed was next on the agenda. Mom didn't let me down, ordering me to turn off the lights and get back to bed.

My brother was fast asleep in the upper bunk, the lower one being my domain for the practical reason of possible night seizures. Several times I had fallen out of bed and hit the floor hard. My mother tucked me in and planted a kiss on my forehead, leaving me in the dark with all the lights out and the storm still lashing the house.

In the flash of another sheet of lightning, I thought I saw a figure standing in the corner of the room. My first thought was that my mother had either returned for some reason or had not yet left the room, but with the next bolt of lightning I was able to get a better look. I could see what appeared to be a very tall man attired in a dark green overcoat, with long black hair, black beard, and red eyes. I felt rather than heard him call to me. He didn't speak verbally, neither did he move. Motionless, tears of blood flowed down his cheeks.

Needless to say, I was terrified by this unspeaking apparition. I dived beneath the covers, hoping he would take the hint and find another house to haunt. The only thing stronger than my fear at that point was plain old fatigue, and as hard as I tried, I couldn't fight off the docking of sleep. Just as I was dropping off, I heard what at first sounded like a voice resonating solely within my head.

The words were incoherent, gibberish, nonsensical. Gradually, however, they began to form themselves into something comprehensible and rode on the wave of a deep voice. I heard the words "Be at peace" repeated several times.

"Who's there?" I asked the night.

"Be at peace," came the reply.

I threw one last look over to the corner. The man, or whatever had been standing there, was gone. I fell into a peaceful sleep.

My next sensation was of the sunlight streaming in through the windows, the storm having moved on to conquer new territory. "Be at peace" would be my mantra for the season and I was certain that Christmas, as this new morning, would be magically filled with peace and light.

Sunday School – July 1954

Sabbath mornings at our house always saw an early start of pre-church preparations. For some reason I did not want to go to church that day, so in the tried-and-true way of hooky players throughout the centuries, I pleaded sickness and did my best to sell this line to my mother.

Apparently Mom had been around awhile; she didn't believe a single word of my excuse. In point of fact, though, I had not been feeling all that well. The night had been difficult and I had a headache for hours; as I awakened from the pain in my sleep, the dizziness started.

My arrival at Sunday school class found me in some sort of altered state of consciousness, one that would not have fit into the spiritual rulebook of any theological seminary. The Sunday school teacher was more than boring, and my attention was fastened to the white walls, when all of a sudden the walls began to part like the Red Sea, giving way to a cavernous blackness. I had heard of illustrated sermons, but if this somehow was an illustration for the lesson, it was rather over-the-top.

The teacher was enjoying the stories he was telling, which probably made him a minority of one.

I was still focusing on the vast empty space behind him when out of the darkness emerged an arm, covered with reptilian scales and capped with a deformed hand in place of claws. Somehow I realized the archetypal nature of the deformed hand as depicting my own inner reality. The less-than-human nature of it was the tip-off, for I had never really been able to think of myself as a complete person. I was more like a jumble of fragments that had somehow been thrown together and managed to affect enough cohesion to hang together.

My days were as elusive as my identity, both always seeming to teeter on the edge of being lost.

I never seemed able to extract joy from the crystallization of any moment of a day's activities. No matter what I did, an air of unreality surrounded it. If I went to the local swimming pool, I could feel the refreshment of the water and the warmth of the sun, but always I seemed once-removed from it, and somewhere in the back of my mind lay a strange sense of unreality, a feeling that I didn't really exist.

Perhaps the best way to phrase it would be to label myself (or the perception of myself) as a companion who was tagging along for the ride that was my life, or a hitchhiker riding in the passenger seat of my own existence. I had a way of referring to myself in the second person, "he did this" or "he said that;" my relationship with myself was comprised of the aforementioned fragments, particles of memories and sensory experiences.

Years of such unintended existentialism results in the mind creating its own imaginative reality, as though one were trapped in a Fellini movie gone wild. The strongest beliefs are instantly challengeable on the flimsiest of grounds, and nothing ever manifests stability. My home was a vastness surrounded by endless darkness; I considered myself the offspring of phantoms and they were my closest companions.

Among the phantoms was my greatest friend, Charon. A shape shifter, a specter who existed in the moment of the eternal now, he was my family, my angelic guardian, and my playmate. With Charon I would create my own worlds, which might have occupied the same space as the backyard, but in them I spent moments that would stretch into eternity.

One day at school I was sliding down a metal railing outside one of the classrooms, strictly forbidden by school rules, of course, but it wouldn't have been fun if it had been allowed. So, everyone did it after class. Usually the trip down the metal tube went smoothly, but this day as I was sliding down I fell off and hit the ground.

From the moment I touched the pavement, I was in a different space of reality. In the distance I could make out the figure of Charon and three angels watching over me, laughing, enjoying the ridiculousness of the moment. I picked myself up, dusted off, and walked toward them. The schoolyard went away in a shimmer, and we were wandering through the clear blue heavens, joined by wild birds sporting green wings and blue bodies. They came down and spoke to us, and we laughed, ran across cloudy fields, flew through the air, and in general took immense joy in one another's company.

When I came back to myself, I was in the school nurse's office; its stiff metal cots, aroma of alcohol, and tongue depressors convinced me that it was the kind of place that could not possibly exist anywhere outside of a school ground. For a moment I didn't know who or where I was, as the room was filled with the blue sky and fluffy white clouds of my vision, but these faded away quickly enough and I was solidly back in the real world. It was then that I sensed that there was no difference between the so-called "real world" and the metaphysical worlds of

my fantastic adventures. Both were equally valid, but neither ever offered a homecoming, a truly secure harbor. They were both as real or unreal as I needed them to be.

As my Sunday school teacher jabbered on, he placed himself near the corner where the reptilian hand had appeared. Now it was reaching for him; it took hold of his head and broke it open, splattering blood everywhere, drenching him, anointing the walls, forming a thick puddle on the floor. Blood covered the students to the delight of the dark angels standing around him who were sharing a hearty guffaw. A shake of my head returned the scene before me to normal.

I left the classroom dizzy and somewhat confused; the horrific nature of the play that had been performed for me was more than a little breathtaking, although I couldn't say I didn't enjoy the scene where the teacher met his gruesome end. On the way home, my mother asked about the Sunday school lesson, if I had learned anything from it.

"What?" I replied to her repeated question, as I had ignored her the first time around.

"How was Sunday school?"

I told her I didn't remember, although I would have loved to regale her with the story of the teacher's death as I had watched it unfold. She didn't believe that I couldn't remember something that had only ended a few minutes ago, but I refused to be drawn into further discussion. Who really cared about a Sunday school lesson anyway? Certainly not the children forced to sit through it, and any one of whom would have gladly joined me in the blood soaked private theatre I had had all to myself. I could feel the anger emanating from her but I didn't care about that either, wanting nothing more than to get home and return to my own inner world.

Paper Route – December 1954

One of the more normal aspects of my younger years was my paper route. Yes, I was actually a paperboy, just like the one who tossed newspapers onto your front porch. My papers were dropped off at the corner, so I had to pick them up, fold them, stuff them in my bag, then tread my route, summer or winter, rain or shine.

This incident occurred on a cold Thursday morning in December. I arose at 5 A.M. in order to have the entire route finished by 6:30. The morning was cold, dark, depressing, and perhaps a little frightening, and I would sit beneath the corner streetlamps to fold my papers. Of course, this was the 1950's, so the danger of being a ten or twelve year old out on the street in the predawn hours was much less than today.

Nor did I encounter very many problems of any kind during my years as a deliverer of journalistic fare, no encounters with dog fangs, speeding automobiles, or umbrellas wielded by

deranged old women. But of course, a threat does not have to be in the three-dimensional world in order to be very real; the dimly lit streets of early morning can conjure a host of potential threats out of a stimulated imagination.

On this particular morning, as I was minding my own business folding the newspapers, I caught sight of a man walking toward me. Although I had seen some strange things in the early hours of other mornings, this figure was something different. He was attired in black overcoat and a black hat pulled down over his face, and I wasn't able to get a proper look at him until he passed beneath the streetlight.

His face had an indefinably strange quality about it and I was a little trepid, but he did not seem menacing in any way, so I shrugged it off and continued working on the papers. Without warning, the man stepped out into the street and that's when the adventure began. I started noticing what looked to be hundreds of snakes protruding from beneath the hem of his long coat, and these creatures seemed to shift from multi-colored to a combination of gray and dark green, a contrast to his own red eyes.

I was rooted to the spot with fear, my rubbery legs refused to run or even move. The already unnerving event took a turn for the worse when he removed his hat and emitted the screech of an owl. He then opened his coat, revealing a distinctly avian form. I had no idea whether he was manifesting the feathers of a bird or it was an optical illusion within an illusion, but I did have the feeling that this thing, whatever it was, was experiencing difficulty keeping its form together, as though the cloak were the only thing preventing him from melting into the early morning darkness. The snakes were then released from him and they appeared to be under his mental control.

I would later have other encounters with similar creatures, and no matter what form they assumed, dogs, wolves, ghosts, angels, or what have you, the red eyes was something of a consistency, as if they were part of the uniform. Those who took the shape of a human most often were devoid of noses and mouths, but they always had those two unforgettable eyes dominating their triangular mask-like faces.

The apparition began to move directly toward me, and once more the spirit was willing but the flesh was unresponsive in the matter of running for my life. As he drew nearer, his serpentine attendants were writing about him. They did not display any viciousness nor did they attempt to attack me. If anything, they seemed to be there for his protection.

His eyes looked down into the very depths of my being, uniting his consciousness with mine. I felt as though I were one with the universe itself as he spoke, in a very calm voice, "Welcome to Zelcon." Then he faded away.

Welcome to Zelcon? What was Zelcon? To be truthful, it sounded like a medication. It was only many years later that I would actually discover the meaning of Zelcon, but at the time I was absolutely baffled. One thing I did know was that the effect of his words relieved all the tension

of the episode and I was able to move again. As though nothing out of the ordinary had occurred, I got up and went about my paper route, somehow instilled with a new confidence. I delivered my papers as usual, but I knew there was something different about me; I no longer felt alone.

When I arrived home, the wonderfully homey smell of eggs and bacon re-established my contact with the normal world. My mother sensed something, asking me if I was all right. I distractedly answered in the affirmative and went off to my room to get ready for another school day.

While washing up in the bathroom, I caught sight of what I thought was a dark green snake wriggling out from under my bed. I took a closer look, but found nothing under there but very pedestrian balls of dust. I continued looking around, prompting my brother to inquire as to the nature of my quest. Of course, I did not know he was there and his sudden interrogative made me jump. I gave him my usual answer to my mother's questions, "Nothing," and returned to my hygiene.

Fortunately Dad had already left for work so we had breakfast without him, a break for me in that state of mind, as the morning's events had left some lingering residue in my consciousness. My daydreaming was cut short by mother's admonition not to play with my food and to get a move-on with eating, as it was already 7:30. Mom was always harping about my daydreaming, prompted by my teachers' steady stream of reports that I was paying less than acceptable attention in my various classes. Of course, what they thought was mental wandering was really the after-effects of seizures, but since the establishment of my condition as epilepsy laid years in the future, its effects had to be scapegoated to other causes.

"Finish your breakfast. Have you done your homework? Did you put your clothes away?" Compounded by my confusion, her relentless questioning caused tears to break forth and course down my face. Then mother wiped the tears from my face, and when she did so, she looked deeply into my eyes. There she observed something that was more than startling, judged by the expression of fear she was wearing. I not only saw her fear, I could actually feel it. She had seen something disturbing, but what? She said nothing about it and I did not ask. All she did was telling me to get my jacket and get ready to leave.

She remained silent as she drove me to school, dropping me off at the curb and drove away. Her behavior made me feel confused, frightened, and in a word, things as usual.

### Grandpa's Garage – July 1955

It was an ordinary summer day, with me perched on my grandfather's front porch while he worked on his cars. He had a great old private workshop, filled with dust, old tools, an ancient radio, and junk everywhere, just as a grandfather's workshop should be.

This place was every youngster's dream as there has never been a child anywhere in the civilized world who would not have loved to paw and pore through this wonderland of ageless treasures. It not only looked as it should but engaged all the senses, with its musty aromas and the sound of the funny old person music he played while he worked.

Although the day seemed fairly routine, I had one of my premonitions that something was about to happen, and I soon learned I was right. I glanced around to see if I could catch a clue to whatever was coming, but all I saw was a car parked out on the street with red primer on one door. The red splotch against the rest of the paint had the appearance of an offbeat face.

I continued looking around and was suddenly struck by the beauty of the flowers in grandfather's garden, their color bearing a resemblance to the primer on the car. I was enjoying the colorful scene of man-made machinery and God-made flora, when out of stage left came a man walking slowly and easily down the sidewalk. This was hardly an uncommon event, and I appreciated the normalcy of his appearance -- no black garments, no glowing red orbs where regular eyes should have been, just a man out for a stroll on a summer day.

He halted in front of the house and asked me how things were with me. I told him all was well. Then he asked about Grandpa. I assumed the man knew Grandpa, as he referred to him by his first name, Homer. I told him my grandfather seemed fine and asked if he would like me to call him.

"No, he replied. "I'm really here to see you."

When I asked what I could do for him, he promised there were things he could do for me, and started reciting a litany of intimate details about my life. Rapt with attention, I wondered how he could possibly have knowledge of my interior life, the creatures I interacted with, the strange worlds to which I was admitted as a privileged guest. He seemed to know everything. I was afraid, I felt violated, intruded upon in the most private areas of my thoughts and feelings. He spoke of the night when I saw the man who held fire in his hands.

Even my brother, with whom I shared the bedroom, had never witnessed any of these things, and I certainly had not confided them to him. This man related the tale of the night when I saw the shadow of a body swinging back and forth from the bedroom door in the dim light from outside the house; I had asked my brother to go outside and see what was causing the shadow playing upon the door, although years later when I mentioned this incident, my brother denied all knowledge of it. Apparently it never occurred in the "real world."

I also was told of the time when the room filled with leaves. I was initially mesmerized by the gently falling torrent but when the leaves continued to fall with no end in sight, the old fear began to make itself felt as I could see myself drowning in leaves.

I asked him how he could know these things, so private, so unspoken to anyone. He responded that he was my friend, my protector, and if I were ever in need of anything, all I need to do was to direct my thoughts to him.

He refused to tell me his name, merely repeating his instruction to think of him as a guardian. Then he said something odd, "Be good, little one. I am always near you, protecting you." Waving and smiling, he turned to leave, making his way back up the street the same way he had come. Before I could call out to him, he simply vanished from view. There was no natural way he could have outdistanced my eyesight so rapidly.

I then realized that I was not at my grandfather's house but at my own home in my bedroom. I felt dizzy, and my orientation was further muddled by a strange-looking red fog that swirled around the edges of the room. I felt the familiar grip of that old friend Fear as I tried to stand, ending up hitting the side of the bed, and then falling to the floor. Out of the corner of my eye, I glimpsed a vision of Grandpa's house as tears welled up in my eyes and the world faded into darkness.

School Day – October 1955

My head throbbed with pain as I left the house to walk to school. Being late, I was moving at a pretty brisk pace. Tardiness was unusual for me as I was habitually punctual. Even though the light was red, I began to cross the street. My headway was cut short by someone loudly barking "Stop!" and seizing my shoulder. I got pulled back just as a car sped by at the very spot I would have been standing.

I turned round to thank my unexpected savior, but no one was there. Puzzled, I thought about the commanding authority of the disembodied voice and the force that yanked me from danger. I thanked God for the mysterious intervention, then continued on to school, and upon my arrival drew a reprimand from the teacher for being late.

While listening to my math teacher discussing some problems I neither understood nor cared about, I noticed a man standing in front of the class, right next to the teacher. I immediately recognized him as the one I had conversed with in the vision at my grandfather's house, though at the time I was unaware that I would later see him quite often, at church, in crowds, at school or a litany of other places.

This time he was laughing and making fun of her, acting out what most of the students secretly do in their minds. I had been unable to concentrate on arithmetic from the beginning of the class and this comical show was not helping. As part of the act, he gestured wildly with his thin white hand, making the room disappear, and took me into an evening stroll towards the local mountains, with us drenched in the fiery red glow of a beautiful sunset.

We were in an endless desert plane, and the heat of the desert was increasing even as the sun dropped into the west. I removed my green jacket, tying it around my waist. Perspiration ran without restraint, and I turned to my friend to complain about the heat but I suppose he hadn't wanted to hear it, as I found myself alone, except for the old companions that suddenly appeared: fear, dizziness, blurriness of vision.

In the distance I saw what appeared to be black dots, moving towards me. I stumbled, blinked rapidly, and soon was enveloped in blackness. A soft wind began to blow, and I could feel the smothering presence of something huge, covering the landscape, brushing against me, and nearly pushing me to the ground. Then just as suddenly it veered away from me, taking the darkness with it and molding it into a more coherent form, that of a giant wing. The wing floated on the balmy air, expanding into a beautiful crow gliding smoothly through the blue sky.

The crow moved with serene grace, assuaging my fear as I breathed in its magnificent appearance. It was an awe-inspiring picture, and made me feel peaceful and confident, centered and very much aware. I felt the surface upon which I was standing, and found it covered with countless small dark stones, smooth to the touch and warm with the entrapped heat of the late afternoon. So fixated I was upon the stones that it took a few moments to sink in that I had not the slightest idea where I was or how to get back. Nor did it seem to matter.

From the distant horizon came a whisper, rolling as a wave across the desert, up and over and down the mountains, making its way to where I stood, lifting me up into its vibrations. It rumbled; the ground beneath me began to shake. The sound bullied its way into me, attaching itself to my consciousness, and then arranging itself into words.

"Are you alright?" I heard. The question pulled me roughly out of my pleasing terrain and back into the harshness of reality. "Wake up! Wake up!"

I was dimly cognizant of my math teacher standing over me. So, she was the one brutally tearing me away from where I wished to be. When I fully came to, I was drenched in sweat and very dizzy. My visit to the nurse's office and the nurse's conversation with my mother yielded permission for me to spend the rest of the day at home.

It was another strange day.

I had no idea what had sent me into that mystical desert, but I did know clearly and surely that if I had not been pulled back from the certain encounter with the car, I would not be writing these words now. Scientific explanations aside, and rationalization be damned, it was my spirit guide who saved my life that day.

The Last Violent Act – Sunday Morning 1956

The Sunday morning had its usual Sabbath day radio accompaniment of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. Strict Baptist though he was, my father loved the sound of those singers. Doctrinally, he would have consigned them to eternal perdition in a heartbeat, but he at least recognized fine music when he heard it. The radio program, "From the Crossroads of the West," was also a favorite of mine. Enamored as I was of good music, I drew real enjoyment from the Mormon Tabernacle Choir.

Sunday always had more than a whiff of chaos about it in our home. Mom couldn't bear the thought of leaving the house with an unclean kitchen, so after the hubbub of breakfast came the ritualistic straightening and cleaning of the house. Finally we arrived at church and did our usual church thing -- the parents heading to the main sanctuary, the kids to Sunday school.

After the typical boring lesson that taught nothing (and this week I didn't even have the diversion of watching the teacher's skull squeezed into a bloody pulp by a phantasmagoric hand), I wound up in the main sanctuary with the folks. Whatever was happening was giving the children's lesson a run for its money in terms of dullness, so I amused myself scribbling drawings on a small piece of providentially placed paper, a tithing envelope or some such thing.

Unable to gather any interest in whatever the minister was pontificating about, whether some obscure point of theological doctrine voted in as Ultimate Truth by a show of hands in some church council or other, or some thunderous fulmination about the Red Menace, I fully exerted my powers of concentration to block him out.

After that attended to, I set myself to tracing an image of light as it played upon and came through the stained glass windows, falling at last on the seats. I also found distraction following the lazily meandering trajectories of the dust particles that played amidst the fanning rays of sunlight. It was really quite beautiful to watch, indeed, mesmerizing.

The back of the choir loft was decorated with a painting of an outdoor scene, where a river hung over the baptistery. The painting was the next focus of my attention after the fleeting absorption of the dusty light had run its course -- anything to help pass the time in church, certainly the most boring hours of the week for me.

There are qualities displayed by light as it manifests in a church sanctuary that is not quite the same as in other locations, something that makes it interesting to watch, even as it flickered over the face of the minister and downwardly to be reflected off the top of the grand piano where the pianist was preparing to play another hymn. The light struck her glasses and, in an odd bit of reflection, was directed unerringly into my eyes.

I momentarily averted my gaze and when I looked back, the pianist had disappeared and taken the entire front of the sanctuary with her. The familiar churchscape had been replaced by some sort of primitive structure, obviously some sort of temple but of non-Biblical roots. The place

was obviously very old and came equipped with a couple of personages, one seemed to be the priest, beside whom someone arrayed in some sort of elaborate ceremonial dress.

The priest was speaking in a language I couldn't even make a guess at trying to identify. I intuited that the quietude of the voice was due to a veil of obscurity between my consciousness and theirs.

The two beings produced an animal, a pig I believe, obviously terrified judging by its high-pitched squeals. They held the frightened creature down on a rock, the flat surface of which was equipped with a drain. Frantically twisting this way and that, the animal desperately tried to escape, as though it knew what lay ahead for it was to prove terminally unpleasant. Its worst fears were realized when another of these foreign men of God approached, knife upraised. The blade plunged into the pig's flesh, tearing from its innards one final scream before it expired. The priest rolled the dead carcass over and cut into it, slicing it to pieces, the freely flowing blood escaping through the drain in the rocky surface.

I must say his dissection of the animal was a meticulous affair, almost as though he was performing delicate brain surgery and, indeed, perhaps he did that as a sideline, as did other ancient priesthoods. The precision of the work did nothing to diminish the flow of blood; it was everywhere, covering both priests.

A third priest, this one unbloodied, produced from beneath the rock a bowl filled with the blood. He held it up to the heavens, and began sprinkling the blood on the crowd of people I suddenly noticed standing watching this spectacle. The priests poured the blood upon one another and followed this up by drinking it.

What was such a horrifying scene doing in the mind of a twelve-year old boy? I did not know. All I knew was that someone or something felt it necessary for me to witness it. Think about it, of course, the scene was not one bit less bloody or violent than countless stories in the Old Testament, much less the western world's greatest single bloodletting as related in the four Gospels. But somehow the fact that all of that went under the name "Judeo-Christian" made it far more acceptable than anything called *pagan*. What a difference a particular nomenclature can seem to make.

The effect of the scene made me shake so conspicuously that my parents thought I was violating the eleventh commandment, "thou shalt not fool around in church", and led to a hushed scolding. Horsing around I was not, but having a seizure I most certainly was.

I watched, paralyzed with dread, as a torrent of blood rushed out as in the scene in *The Shining*, and down a short stone staircase and flowed over the crowd. Minutes later, I came back to what passes in this world for reality, and my thoughts and flesh were gripped by dizziness, confusion, and complete uncertainty as to what had just happened.

I was physically nauseous from the preceding spectacle, my head ached, and the dizziness continued unabated. I retained a mental picture of the outlines of the priests superimposed over the staid Baptist minister whose preaching hadn't skipped a beat. Gradually, the remnants of the vision faded and the church was once again whole, its familiarity very comforting after the *Mondo Cane* barbarity I had just witnessed.

I threw a glance in my father's direction and the look of anger in his eyes augured certain punishment when we arrived home, for conduct unbecoming of a Good Christian Youth. This in no way hindered him from singing the closing hymn, a moving tribute to the loving grace of a forgiving God.

I had to endure the endless stop-and-shuffle of the post-service receiving line, knowing that no matter how godly was the after-church shop talk from my father, I was still in for it when I got home. Although my legs already felt sore from the anticipated beating, I agreed with myself that under no circumstances would I give him the satisfaction of seeing tears from my eyes. I had no idea at the moment that this day would be my final encounter with Dad for many a year to come.

Upon returning home I was escorted to my bedroom. With the same meticulous care I noticed in the priest-butcher, Dad removed his belt, and the accustomed punishment for odd behaviors began. With each downward stroke of the leather I withdrew deeper into myself; in the distance I could see Charon coming towards me. I was pleased to see him and even more pleased by his succor.

Holding me closely, he spoke soothingly. "Hold on tightly to me, little one. It will soon be over." With those words I was out of the house, drifting with my spirit protector in the evening air, leaving my father and the belt behind. As we soared over the hills below, the tranquility was swiftly shattered by the far-away sound of my father's voice.

"Have you learned your lesson?" he enquired. What lesson I was supposed to have learned from this or any of his other floggings, was never made clear, nor did I ever feel he really knew what they were supposed to accomplish.

I exercised my constitutional right to remain silent. I felt another blow land, but still I said nothing. Charon was still holding me tightly. Suddenly, the mental fog lifted and for the first time I felt the actual physical pain of the torment inflicted upon me.

"Have you learned your lesson?" Another question remained unanswered.

"Answer me!" he shouted.

I finally responded to him, but they were hardly the words he expected to hear. "Are you finished?"

The next blow struck me with sufficient force to send me to the floor.

“Are you finished now?” I asked.

My cheeks were devoid of tears, my voice filled with undisguised hatred. At that moment he knew he would either have to cross the line and take this all the way or give it up. With one last look at me, he turned, and went into the living room.

I found myself savoring the all-too delicious feeling of hate that pervaded my thought and possessed my soul, as I got up off the floor and went to the bathroom. The warm water brought a modicum of relief to my wounds and was joined by the hot tears that burst forth. I sank to the floor and sobbed, propped up by the enamel of the bathtub and the hatred that welled within. After what seemed like hours, I settled into the refuge of my bed, pulled the cover over my head, and sailed off into the welcome oblivion.

From that day on, he never touched me again.

Lying to Mother – May 1957

I ran through the late afternoon happily, enjoying the last rays of the sun as it bid goodbye to the hemisphere and tucked itself away on the other side of the world. It had actually been a good day, for once, and I was able to relax and thrill in the joy of the moment like any other kid. I slowed my pace to something of a skip, and then rolled onto a piece of freshly mown lawn. Lying still on my back, I exulted in the breathtaking sunset, which displayed expertly mixed shades of red, purple, bluish green, and yellow.

The awesome spectacle worked its magic on me and I hoped it would last forever. I remained amidst the soft texture and naturally intoxicating aroma of newly cut grass until the afternoon melted into evening. I indulged in the luxury of casting my mind adrift in a rare state of peace and feeling a real oneness with the world and all within it. Finally I hoisted myself up and started for home. The sidewalk was a little tough going for my bare feet, but my skin retained the fragrance of grass, and it added a special ambience to the night air that closed in around me.

Without warning, the blessed peaceful feeling turned dark. My right arm began to shake, my head was thrown back and I plunged into darkness. I tried to focus on what I thought was Venus, to concentrate on its bright, steady light, the most luminous thing in the dusky sky, but to no avail. I fell and hit the curb near the rain gutter, then surrendered myself to the vision that was taking shape all around me, pushing out the oncoming night and transporting me into another realm.

My first impression was of being surrounded by a golden aura. Then I became aware of a host of beings coming toward me from what seemed miles away. The light shining from and around them was in stark contrast to the darkness that silhouetted their forms, not that I could tell much about their figures, as their own illumination obscured the details of their appearance.

As I watched them draw closer, I realized that I was not gripped with the usual fear, and it was almost as though I were with an old friend, or more accurately, a familiar companion. As I mused over this, a great ball of fire shot out of the darkness and hit me like an express train. The impact sent me flying through the air, not necessarily with the greatest of ease, and I landed on a desert plane. The ball of light did not linger; it faded swiftly, making an odd hissing sound as it sputtered out, leaving the scene cloaked in a forbidding darkness. The atmosphere was absolutely dead, nothing moving in any direction, nothing disturbing the flat terrain with low slung hills in the far distance.

My head was experiencing the usual dizziness and my muscles felt tight and were throbbing painfully. I surveyed this new world, catching sight of another group of beings, wearing white robes tied with golden ropes around their waists. They had me surrounded. I still felt no fear, assured by the light of their countenances and the feeling of love encircling around me.

“Welcome to Zelcon,” said one of these beings, whom I mentally dubbed the Elders. He reached out his hand toward me. I shook his hand, and the contact warmed me and brought an influx of joyful peace in me. In some way I was unable to explain, I knew that I was very well acquainted with these loving beings, and that indeed, I was related to them.

Thanking them for their kindness towards me, I asked if they would tell me where we were and requested an explanation of Zelcon.

“This is not the time for explanations,” the Elder replied. “It is a time for healing.”

I noticed that he still had a hold of my hand. The power that flowed through that contact sank deeply inside of me, healing my dizziness, and imparted a feeling of connection with all existence. The feeling of happiness left me breathless as I basked in the light of the Elders. Then the surrounding golden halo began to recede into the darkness and, in a moment it and the Elders were gone.

“Wait!” I cried. “Wait!”

The echo of my pleas rang in my ears as I came out of the vision to find myself lying in the gutter. I arose to the sound of barking dogs, only to fall again, cracking my knee on the concrete; rather than lingering over the injury, I got back up and hastened home.

When I got home I tried to get to my room for a period of recovery, but just as I settled myself down, I heard mother’s voice calling me to dinner. It was not until then that I noticed the blood on my leg and face. Somewhat panicked, I went to the bathroom to wash up before appearing

at the table. Previous experience assured me she would subject me to a third degree at the first sight of my injuries and I wanted to have ready a set of answers. I was actually more afraid of her than the seizure that had gripped me on the street.

I must have looked worse than I thought, judging by her reaction to the sight of me. She demanded to know what had happened to me and I made up an answer that, although the details of it now escape me, must have been outlandish because I recall that even I couldn't have believed it at the time.

But Mom didn't seem in the mood for a monologue because she glossed over whatever cock-and-bull story I'd made up on the spot, said grace, then passed me the mashed potatoes. (Mom, incidentally, was an extraordinary Southern cook.)

I never liked lying to my mother, but it became a necessary tool in my survival kit. She had set the salvation of my soul as her highest priority, and my sanity and physical well-being were relegated to secondary slots. If she could see to it that my soul were saved, then one fine morning when I was running the streets of gold, I would have the mind of Christ and a glorified body, and then by crikey, I would be pleased that she and Dad had physically and psychologically beaten the fear of the Lord into me.

One example of the above approach to Christianity had occurred a few years previously. After much soul-searching prayers and body-denying fasting, it was concluded that my seizures were the product of demonic interlopers and so I was taken away to church for an exorcism. Yes, an exorcism, in twentieth century Southern California.

I clearly recall the words screamed to the high heavens – or should that be the low hells – by our erstwhile minister. “Demon, come out of this child! In the name of the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ,” as though Satan needed that last bit of exposition to clear up his confusion as to who was meant by the appellation “son of God.”

I vaguely recall him adding, “It is the power of Christ that compels you,” but I know this was one of Max von Sydow's lines in *The Exorcist*, so either I have confused one hardly believable urban nightmare for another, or it is a generic line well known in the annals of exorcism. I do remember that in the film, this admonition carried not the slightest weight with old Pazzuzu, who kept poor Linda Blair hovering between bed and ceiling, until Max bellowed, “It's the power of God Himself that compels you,” which did the trick, as always.

The exorcism, or whatever name would best fit such a carnival of lunacy, went on for hours, and in the simple minds of the perpetrators it was a howling (as it was) success. God had pulled another demon possessed wretch from the very brink of Hades, and the boy had been emptied of nefarious spirits, which hopefully was diverted into a herd of swine or whatever suitable animals that were handy in Inglewood.

There were, of course, a few inconsequential details that had been overlooked, either by design or sheer idiocy. First and foremost was the fact I was not demonically possessed and secondly I was just as afflicted with seizure disorder as when the scriptures started flying and the devil-bashing fulminations began.

I suspect my parents neglected to pay for my exorcism because, months later, while I watched great yellow full moon rise in the night sky, I was repossessed. Or so the story went. And off to the exorcist's house we went. It seemed that with all this go-a round they laid on the demon-casting routine, there would be some kind of success. I decided right then and there that this would be the last bout of such nonsense that would ever witness my participation.

And this day, with its close brush with another likely exorcism, I would remain silent on the subject of seizures. Never again would I come anywhere near mentioning anything that could be construed as a seizure, a semi-seizure, or the son of seizure. Solemn was my vow to myself that I would make the journey to wholeness alone.

#### The Commerce of Souls – Summer 1957

The tree house was a refuge for my friends and myself. Situated in an oak tree deep in our backyard, it was for me, my homestead, a place where I could go, alone or with others, to feel as far away from the maddening crowd as necessary, without giving up the reassuring closeness of hearth and home, and the first aid kit.

Knowing fully well that our mothers wouldn't climb the wooden ladder to pry into our private activities (which, quite frankly, were probably a lot less interesting and rebellious than we liked to think at that age), and equally secure in the knowledge that our fathers were too busy playing golf, indulging ancient cowboy fantasies on the saddles of power mowers, or watching sports to give a flaming hump what their offspring were up to, we could do pretty much whatever we wanted in the physically confining, yet imaginatively liberating walls of the tree house.

On a hot summer day my buddies and I were in our oaken penthouse admiring what in that day and age would have been called "girlie pictures" carefully shorn from a "forbidden" magazine we had found in a neighborhood alley. Losing little time wondering why anyone would callously discard such a treasure, we papered our wooden walls with pictures of 1950's feminine pulchritude. Absolutely quaint and unquestionably tame by today's standards, the tanned, firm flesh of those *Leave It To Beaver* era babes were more than enough to warm the blood and fire of we Cold War youths. Besides, T&A is one of those things, like swing dancing and roller skating, that never seem to go out of style.

That morning, as I gazed with admiration on the photographs of distant, unattainable women in their expensive lingerie, appreciatively drinking in the sights of well proportioned breasts and hips and legs and whatever else could be seen in those pre-Flynt pictures, I suddenly had a feeling of guilt, as though what I was doing were somehow wrong. A boy, worshiping ladies who were so far out of his league as to be ludicrous, wrong? How could such a thing, well accepted and widely practiced since time immemorial, possibly produce the slightest tinge of parochialism? Was there something wrong with me?

At least one thing had not changed: I still had not the slightest idea what I would actually do if one of those fold-out goddesses suddenly materialized in front of me, led me to her secret seaside grotto, laid me down on her thick bed of lush, tide pool watered moss, and boldly stated her intention to initiate me into the mysteries of life, although in retrospect I more than likely would have done whatever she suggested.

My brief surge of nascent Christian guilt, which probably had its roots in a preacher's half-forgotten reference to some scripture along the lines of Psalm 101:2-3, "I will walk within my house with a perfect heart, I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes" (which David presumably wrote *after* his little encounter with Bathsheba), set me to thinking. Suppose I really was some sort of a sinner, and maybe one day the Big Guy really would require my soul? Perhaps I could interpose others between His righteous wrath and myself? Wasn't that vicarious thing the entire gist of Christianity or, at least, of its probably unholy great-grandchild, Churchianity?

The idea was conceived, gestated, and born in an inspired flash. I could purchase the souls of my friends and, when my sinful spirit was about to be cashed in by the Great Croupier in the Sky, I would have chips with which to bargain my way out of Hell. A born salesman, methinks to myself. There was a problem, though. Such concepts as souls and spirits and God and judgment and hell and eternity, while having kept philosophers burning the midnight oil for millennia, didn't mean a damn thing to kids. What prompt could I employ to get them to cough up their souls and turn them over to my good offices? What else? Cash.

Interrupting my friends' revelry in mammary intrigue, I put forward the proposition that they should sell me their souls for what I had decided was the going rate for souls -- the princely sum of twenty-five cents; and, of course, something in writing to seal the deal. Skeptical but interested (after all, a shiny U.S. quarter dollar would purchase a lot more at the local candy store back then), my friends discussed the details quickly, handed me the money, and I received the spiritual deeds of trust, written in pencil rather than the customary blood, which I figured neither God nor the Adversary (I was prepared to deal with either) would mind as long as they got the goods.

Giddy with the success of my initial venture, I began a marketing campaign at school, the effectiveness of which was proven by the fact that I wound up netting some thirty souls from people too short-sighted to care whether they spent eternity in a heavenly mansion or a sulfur pit. (Needless to say, this gave me an early taste of the verities of human nature.) I now had a

good supply of fresh souls ready to wheel-and-deal and had also created a suitable plot for an Ingmar Bergman movie.

Being a successful but novice salesman, I had no idea that there existed such a thing as buyers' remorse – the strange malady that afflicts purchasers within seventy-two hours of purchasing an automobile or home, or selling their souls. I was, therefore, somewhat surprised when one of my band of satisfied customers called and told me he wanted to buy his soul back. Sensing a wind of profit blowing my way, I upped the resale price to fifty cents and wound up getting seventy-five. A two hundred percent profit! By month's end, just about everyone I had traded with had reclaimed their souls. My pockets were stuffed but my social life emptied as people began to consider me odd. Go figure.

Anyway, I learned at an early age that wealth could trail loneliness in its wake. Actually, my classmates had always considered me different. I had an unusual way of speaking, appeared to be off in another world much of the time, was never selected to play on a sports team when sides were being chosen and, in general, never quite fit in with the rest of the crowd. I discovered early on in life what it means to be an outsider. Still, maybe that was what attracted to me the friends I did have. They knew that if they were in the mood for an offbeat adventure, I would never let them down.

One day, when I knew a clutch of pals was heading over to my house, I decided to share with them a taste of the constant fear in which I dwelt. I took a square metal cover left over from my old family barbecue, threw it on the ground in the farthest part of our backyard, not far from the tree house. I decided I would tell them that it was an entrance to Hell.

Fortunately, old Mom Nature decided to conspire with me, providing a gloomy, overcast day with the smell and feel of a summer storm on the horizon. When my friends arrived, I concluded that the overall atmosphere was not conducive to a casual approach to the subject of a stairway to hell, so pitching my voice to what I hoped was the mysterious tone of a Chaldean oracle – or at least the guy in *The Incredible Shrinking Man* – I solemnly proclaimed that I had discovered a way down into the bowels of Gehenna and had placed over it a specially-anointed cover, charged with magical forces, to keep the demonic hordes of darkness trapped in their vile netherworld.

For some unfathomable reason, my friends' first reaction to my statement was laughter. Who could understand such an attitude? With a flourish that would have embarrassed the great Houdini, I led them to the portal of the pit and with a dramatic wave of my arm, and introduced them to Satan's front door.

"Here it is," I proclaimed. "All you need to do is lift it and the denizens of Hell will be released!"

The weather continued to be my unwitting ally in this urban gothic mind game. The sky became darker and the first drops of rain began to fall. Just as I ceremoniously perched myself next to the crummy old metal cover that I had turned into the front door to Brimstone City and pointed

the way down into everlasting anguish, a loud clap of thunder sounded directly above our heads.

As a gentle rain began to fall, I challenged my friend Dennis, whom I knew to be the weakest link in the psychological chain, to demonstrate his mastery over the forces of evil by stepping forward and opening the cover of the chasm. My friends were growing restive and I suddenly feared that someone would call my bluff. Thankfully, the rain began to fall harder and we all retired to the house.

With a certain restraint, my friend Tom asked what would happen if he went outside and opened the portal. I causally told him nothing would happen, as I had sealed it by the mere act of leaving. I patiently explained that the portal was harmless so long as I was not near it, as it required my power for opening. I didn't stop to think that this type of proclamation could cast me in the role of the Devil, but neither did anyone else consider this. So I dodged a lightning bolt that could have proved highly embarrassing. My friends left, still skeptical, but placed enough faith in my power not to fear a neighborhood invasion of hell-spawned locusts.

However after my spooked friends left, I began to feel a deep sense of uneasiness, which turned to fear, then to an understanding that I was the one that was the most terrified and the most vulnerable to my own mythological soliloquies. I, the entrepreneur of the human spirit, the guardian of the gates of Hell, was the one who lived in a horrific underworld. Fear was my companion, gestating out of the womb of my own interior demons.

#### Night with A Whimper – Fall 1960

I had planned what for we ordinary guys in the early days of Kennedy's Camelot was a romantic evening – dinner, a movie, and a make out session in the front seat of my father's 1957 Pontiac which, if all went well, maybe would wind up in the back seat.

I was feeling debonair and looking sharper than five tacks (as I was told the guys in south central Los Angeles would say) as I headed for Judy's house. My new girlfriend was tall and willowy and seemed to like me. A lot. We had known each other for a couple of years and even though we had met at church, I decided she had too much potential to hold that against her. Although this was not our first date nor our last, it would prove to be our most memorable, or most worthy of being forgotten, depending on your point of view.

Judy had wanted to go see *The Apartment*, with Jack Lemmon and Shirley MaLaine in her pre-guru days. I couldn't have cared less what movie we saw, as long as it put her in the mood, although thinking back it probably would have been better for her (and me) to have seen someone like Cary Grant in action rather than Jack Lemmon.

Judy lived about half an hour's drive from me, so to amuse myself I turned the radio to KFVB, which specialized in pop music. A brief afternoon shower had left the streets wet with curvy rainbows in its floating oil slicks. I was feeling rather jaunty, and tapped my foot to the music, enjoying the cool freshness of the early evening.

But getting a little nervous as I walked up to the front door, I arranged my features to read *supremely confident*, and rapped on the front door rather loudly. Her father answered, led me into the living room, and launched into a running commentary on football, intent on eliciting my most private thoughts on the upcoming Big Game between UCLA and Stanford. Although I was grateful he wasn't giving me the hackneyed concerned-father-grills-daughter's-date thing, I honestly didn't give a damn about UCLA and Stanford. Fortunately, I was well versed in the art and science of faking hearty enthusiasm on just about any subject, so I eagerly threw my support behind the Bruins, praising them to the moon, and generally letting him think I was really into it, even though I was doing nothing but following his lead and feeding him back his own lines.

Just as I was assuring him that Stanford's train wreck of a team didn't stand a chance against the Westwood eleven, Judy appeared. She looked good in her green dress, tight at the waist, hem coming just above her knees. I bade her good evening, adding a slight bow for the right touch of flourish, took her by the hand, and guided her to the door while comforting her father with the promise of cheering for UCLA on the morrow.

It was a good thing I'd placed Judy's coat around her shoulders as the rain started again on our way to the car. We scampered inside and it was off to the races. Although both Judy and I were pretty animated conversationalists, this evening I was a little taciturn. Something was bothering me, but I was having trouble identifying what it was, so I let her carry the small talk ball. She sensed something was amiss and asked me if I was okay. I was experiencing a slight degree of dizziness, but with the prospect of a successful evening looming before me, I cavalierly wrote it off as a lack of food and drove on to dinner.

We arrived at the pizza parlor without incident in time to make the 7:30 PM theatre time. The table talk was normal, we held hands, the usual agenda, and then left for the movie theatre. *The Apartment* proved to be a very popular date movie; the line stretched around the block. I didn't mind as the night was turning out to be very cold which led to a significant session of cuddling.

The movie turned out to be very good and a suitable preamble for the next item on my itinerary.

One line from the film kept repeating itself in my mind -- Jack Lemmon's statement that his take-home pay was \$94.70 per week, which was not bad for those days. I decided I would never be able to make such an enormous sum, as my knowledge of money -- particularly how to earn it -- did not exist, nor did my understanding of the practical mechanics of living in the "real" world.

My penchant for living in realms of fantasy had left me somewhat ill-equipped to deal with more here-and-now issues, although I was able to switch my focus without difficulty to Judy's knees and shapely legs, which were comfortably crossed and seemed to be begging for attention. Was she to be denied? Not while Myron Dyal drew breaths.

I was fully appreciative of the way light from the movie projector was reflected by her stockings. My hand began edging towards her lap, carrying out my intention to hold her hand and establish the physical aspect of the special connection of youthful love.

However, my hand never reached its destination. My arm began to shake uncontrollably, causing me to withdraw my hand and place it securely beneath my right thigh. Thankfully, Judy was too absorbed in the movie to notice this.

Quickly excusing myself, I made a dash up the aisle and into the men's room. I had barely closed the door when the seizure struck. I fell into one of the stalls, slamming into the toilet, and lost consciousness for a few seconds, which turned out to be plenty long enough for me to lose control of my bladder.

I washed the stained area and dried my pants with a handful of paper towels. I had providentially chosen a pair of black pants, concealing any staining and residual dampness, both of which could be blamed on the rain if need be. When I returned to my seat, Judy was expressing concern about me, which provided an opening to take her hand. I reassuringly told her all was well and she immediately turned back to the film.

Although she seemed to be ignoring our hand holding, I didn't really mind as my head was pounding and I had not yet shaken off all the dizziness. When the first movie ended I was almost entirely back to normal and when the second feature was over, my pants had completely dried and I was feeling much better.

In the car Judy couldn't stop reciting the endless merits of *The Apartment*. It was wonderful, it was romantic, it was dark and complex, etc., etc. All I was thinking about was survival from the seizure.

At Pann's Restaurant, our after-movie hang-out was still dominated by Judy's running commentary on the movie, with detailed analyses of scenes that especially appealed to her. Her self-absorbed chatter gave me the opportunity to withdraw into myself and walk some of the interior ways of my secret life.

Judy wasn't as oblivious to me as I'd thought she was, as she reached over, tugged my shirt, and demanded to know if I was listening to her unsolicited film review. I had lost awareness of her until she shook my arm and asked if I were all right.

"What?" I asked, confused.

“Are you alright?”

I told her I was fine. Then why wasn't I listening to her?

“I was listening,” I lied. “You were talking about *The Apartment*. Weren't you?”

Thus I was trapped in a conversation I did not want to be involved in, stuck there because I was not about to start explaining to her about my seizures. We finished our coffee and apple pie, left for her house, then parked a discreet block away and settled down for a session of fun and frolic. Just as events were building to a critical moment, along came another seizure.

I did not lose consciousness this time, and my bodily functions did not take off on their own again; but I did momentarily lose awareness of my surroundings, and Judy got a good look at me staring blankly into space. I faintly heard her calling my name repeatedly, though for some time I was unable to answer.

Finally I made my voice work and told her I was fine. She kissed me, which snapped my concentration fully back into the present. I told her I was tired; it was 11:30 and getting late. As Judy had to be home by midnight, I started the car and drove the remaining block to her house. The walk to the door, hug, and passionate goodnight kiss all went well

That evening heralded the end of our relationship, and by mid-winter I would be deeply involved with a girl named Bonnie. Judy was probably better off for it. My epileptic cover was blown with her and I felt safer to move on to a woman who didn't know about my oddities.

I went home and found respite in my private land of dreams. The night was finished, with a whimper rather than a bang.

#### White Shorts and Normal Days – Winter 1961

Church camp had been in session for several days and the mountain snowfall surrounding Thousand Pines had increased significantly and was beginning to cause concern. Taking a short walk before breakfast, I felt the lining of my shoes drenched from the ever-present moisture.

A veil of light had draped itself over the snow banks along the outside of our cabin. The morning was unbelievably cold. In fact, I'd thought temperatures that low were downright illegal in California, but I guess word hadn't yet reached these mountains. My breath traced a path through the windy air, and icicles along the underside of the roof were releasing trickles of freezing water into the bucket someone had placed beneath, for who knows what reason, as cold water dripping into snow didn't seem to require any sort of interception. I figured that if the brains that ran church camps were capable of rational logic they would have real jobs.

As most people in California (the southern part of the state at least), I hadn't the slightest idea what kind of clothing to take into the mountains in the middle of winter. This day was scheduled to be our last, with the plan being to head for the more temperate climate of the greater Los Angeles area right after lunch. The active partnership of the weather gods would be needed to materialize that intention; if we couldn't rope in their support, we would be staying in that winter wonderland another day and night. Personally, I wasn't bothered as to how the day played out. In fact, I wanted the isolation and expanse of the mountains and some extra time to get my head organized and to bring some sort of order into my life in general.

Walking down a trail, I noticed the snow was covered in a blue light reflected from the branches of a nearby fallen pine tree. Although God had been the main subject of the seemingly endless discussion groups that were the main fare of this "spiritual" retreat, I had taken little part in the bull sessions, as my mind was firmly fixed on my girlfriend, Bonnie. Bonnie's physical softness, beauty, and tenderness were a far more important trinity than any speculations about the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, all of whom had done very well for themselves and the universe long before I was born and would continue keeping the cosmic lid on long after I bid adieu to this world.

To me there was something magic about Bonnie, her every movement transfixed me. I loved the way her black hair fell in gentle piles over her shoulders, a wonderful contrast to her creamy skin. Try as I might, I couldn't get her out of my mind that weekend, and did not try very hard or for very long. Wasn't God's whole point in creating these kinds of landscapes to bring forth longings for that one special person? God understood. After all, I'd been taught all my life that He was a man.

Believe it or not, I was the youth pastor at our church, which might be something analogous to putting a pyromaniac in charge of the dynamite, but even Christians like to live dangerously. To add some sort of insult to injury, I was also one of the weekend's camp counselors and it really wouldn't have mattered how many young souls slid into sin that weekend, I would still have been fixated on Bonnie. I would have even eaten from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil if she'd requested it. Anyway, I think you get the picture that my mind was on more worldly pursuits that weekend than that of chasing God round and round the theological mulberry bush.

Let me say that the reason Bonnie seemed so close was that she was close; she was there. After the previous evening's typically embarrassing community sing, she and I broke away from the group for a walk in the cold night air, always a libido builder. The clear mountain sky was alive with twinkling stars and a yellow full moon. As we walked, I slipped my hand into the rear pocket of her jeans, appreciating the curve of her hip as she walked, which had the inevitable effect of turning myself further away from the Lord but somehow closer to His command, "Be fruitful and multiply." Being with her was far more real, far more important to me, than any of the unimportant twaddle we had kicked back and forth in the "meaningful" spiritual discussions. All I wanted at that moment was to be here with her forever.

The morning-after blues (which I have perennially) would have to wait though, as upon my return to the cabin I found everyone awake and ready for breakfast. The warm fire raging within the safe confines of the cabin's stove felt great as I warmed my hands. The conversation around the fire centered on the worsening weather conditions and whether or not it would be safe to attempt a descent of the mountain that day, or even anytime in the foreseeable future. The sky was darkening by the minute and fresh snow began to cover the frozen mountain passes.

As I left the cabin to meet Bonnie, I let everyone know that 9:00 was the deadline for arrival at the mess hall for another rousing session of prayer, singing, and what everyone was most interested in, breakfast.

The women's cabins were situated at the furthest possible point from the men's, undoubtedly to prevent any "terrible things" from happening. On my way, the snowfall increased its intensity and I knew I had to get a move-on before the women's cabins were rendered inaccessible. The wind picked up pockets of snow and spun them around in the air as whirlpools, small white tornadoes swirling their way through the pine forest.

The freezing rain had now turned to sleet, the sharp ice crystals fighting it out with the snow for supremacy of the mountain skies. There was so much weather going on all around me that navigation was impossible. Finally, I had to admit I was lost in the driving sheets of white with not the slightest idea where I was heading or which way I had come. A furious blast of wind nearly knocked me to the ground just as I heard a voice calling my name.

I cried out a response in what I felt was the general direction of the sound I had heard, then saw a ghostly form beginning to materialize out of the snow. It was Bonnie. I reached out for her hand, making contact simultaneously with the snapping off of a large branch from one of the pine trees. It hit the ground with a reverberating thud and I am pleased to be able to report that if a tree falls in a forest and someone is there, it makes a sound. What becomes of the sound if no one is there is a quandary I'll leave to the Zen masters. I was just very glad to have heard anything recognizable in that situation. I certainly heard Bonnie's startled scream ricocheting through the canyons.

I hugged her firmly, trying to reassure her as much as myself, then we continued our sojourn towards the mess hall. Her sense of direction seemed better suited to the wild than mine and we finally reached our destination. It was with a sense of relief that we pushed through the glass and wood door and entered the room filled with people and waves of heat streaming from the fire pit in the center of the room.

As we ate, the camp's supervisor announced that our leaving was to be delayed for at least one and possibly two days. The group expressed its concern with a rather well-orchestrated gasp. We were told our parents were being notified; in the meantime, we would all sit tightly in our present location and wait for better weather.

I, of course, was pleased to have additional time with Bonnie and my own thoughts. I warmed myself up with a cup of coffee and began to relax as the course of the next twenty-four to forty-eight hours had been decided. Further adding to my sense of contentment was the mid-term exam scheduled for Monday for which I was unprepared. Nature had handed me a perfect excuse for missing the test. My scholastic performance had been less than stellar and my grades were suitably unimpressive. This was to be expected with my concentration so frequently affected by visions and the physical toll exacted upon me by the seizures. The superfluity of schoolwork, however, was beginning to find some balance with the sobering realization that I had to complete my education if I were to have any chance of a future. Even I couldn't conjure up a fantasy world where employers paid wages for visions and seizures.

Camp food, no matter how non-epicurean it might be, always seems to have a special taste. This morning's offerings were eggs, hashed brown potatoes, toast, cereal, and the usual morning meal accouterments. When the food was gone, we sang some more uninspiring songs and headed for our morning discussion groups. Church always seemed very long on talk and extremely short on meaningful action, but I perhaps am not the first person ever to have noticed this.

As luck would have it, Bonnie and I were assigned to the same group, so I was able to bask in the sunlight of her presence that cold morning while feigning deep concern over the manifold troubles plaguing the African mission field. As morning progressed, so did the snowfall. Late morning break time found Bonnie and I outside enjoying the harshly inclement weather that young love turned into a fairytale landscape.

Pulsating passion aside, the events of the early morning caused us to exercise prudence and remain in close proximity to the mess hall, an A-frame structure equipped with picture windows on both sides, permitting a panoramic view of the surroundings. Two stories tall, it not only provided meals but also living quarters for ten campers at a time.

Even with all of the weather and having Bonnie with me, I found my thoughts drifting off, looking back at the several seizure-free months during which the visions had become non-existent.

My cogitation was brought to a sudden halt by a kiss from Bonnie. I was startled but did not allow that to cause me to skip a beat in returning the kiss and enveloping her in a hug. I felt myself in snowy heaven.

Our relationship had begun the previous year, when Bonnie unloaded her then-boyfriend and started dating me. The other boy was tall, handsome, an outstanding student. I really had no idea what she saw in me, perhaps something I had overlooked in my own makeup.

We had known each other earlier, as choirmates and friends. Her wonderful voice won her most of the solo parts in the church music programs. It was during a rehearsal that I worked up

the courage to ask her out, to which she replied with kind politeness that she was seeing someone with whom she was “very involved,” whatever that meant in a Christian context. That she was in a serious relationship was not surprising; I would have been very surprised, or suspicious, if she were not.

It was several months later, taking a break from the Easter oratorio we had been rehearsing, that she interrupted our discussion of her phrasing of the solo by placing her hand on my leg. Her touch was gentle and was a major bridging of the gulf of isolation between myself and the world, but at the time I did not read into it anything more than friendship. That notwithstanding, the conversation continued without my conscious participation. My lips were moving but what words came from them I had no idea. I was too wrapped up in the moment, lost in the feel of her touch.

Later, at a church beach party that summer, I noticed that Bonnie was not escorted by her boyfriend. I took a walk down by the shoreline to ponder what all this might mean. Even though he wasn't there, I still experienced anger and jealousy and felt alone and lost, and was self-centered enough to believe that all of this might have something to do with me. I was a far cry from Casanova, having broken up no relationships and garnering no reputation as a Don Juan. But still, we all tend to think that the universe revolves around us, especially during our youth, so my thoughts were not far from the norm of teenaged angst.

Pockets of illumination created by the campfires scattered throughout the beach. In the distance were the city-lights and even farther, the sliver of first-quarter moon. Waves crashed against the dark stones in the breakwater.

I sat down, enjoying the coolness of the sand, and looked out to the dark horizon, paying careful attention to the presence I felt coming up behind me. With not the slightest symptom of a seizure coming on, I could be fairly certain there was a flesh-and-blood mortal very close to me and it turned out to be exactly who I wanted it to be, Bonnie.

I turned around, only able make out the contours of her body and windblown hair, perched atop a sandy mound. “Would you like some company?” she asked, as though I would have refused. Of course, I answered in the affirmative.

She walked down towards me and I could see the white shorts against her tanned flesh. She looked like a goddess, the night goddess of the beach, and I was her most humble servant. We began with small talk, not that I cared. All I wanted was her near me. Then, suddenly she began to cry. I wanted to enquire as to what was wrong, but something told me to keep my peace and let her do the talking.

She then regaled me with a several-hour-long discourse on her break-up with her boyfriend. She provided me far more information than I wanted or needed to know, but I played the part of a good listener and let her pour her heart out, which she did long into the night. This was the birth of our close relationship and I was in love with her from that night on.

Back in the present, we frolicked in the snow until time for lunch, rejoining the others to eat and close out the day's agenda. We did not actually return to Los Angeles until late Tuesday, a long weekend and for me one of the best I had ever had. It had been a very special time, filled with love and mercifully devoid of seizures, visions, and things that go bump in the night. I had actually felt normal and that felt good.

#### Message from the Unknown Man - July 1961

I was in the sanctuary of the Baptist church in Inglewood, California, not for another message from the sacred desk, but for a musical interlude. Actually, I was on my way to pick up Bonnie when I saw was running a little ahead of schedule.

Not wanting to chance encountering her father and become embroiled in a hot discussion of the upcoming national football playoffs, I had decided to drop by the church and spend a few minutes at the piano. Being on the church staff, I was entrusted with the priceless treasure of a key so I would not have to bother the senior pastor, the associate pastor, the minister of music, the janitor, or anyone else.

Having looked forward to a little time alone, my hopes appeared dashed when I found the door unlocked. I remembered that there was a service that night but had not expected to find anyone on the premises as yet. On my way through the foyer and down the long runway that led to the grand piano, I looked around to see if I had any company, but no one appeared to be there. This was not alarming, as most churches are sizeable places, and it was very possible that someone was in one of the offices, in the kitchen, or somewhere else on the grounds, so there was no cause for alarm.

I illuminated the piano area with one of the spotlights, lending a touch of theatrical drama to what was to be my one-man concert. As I settled myself on the piano bench, a voice spoke my name.

"Yes?" I replied, looking around, a little startled but not nervous.

There was no answer.

I shrugged and turned back to the keyboard.

Suddenly I became aware of a man standing next to the piano, one very familiar to me, as he was the one I had encountered in front of my grandfather's house some years earlier (July 1955).

He laid a hand on my shoulder and enquired as to how I was doing.

I responded with a laconic "Okay" and waited, knowing there was more to come.

"Your playing is very nice," he said. "Would you mind if I asked you some questions?"

"No."

He began by asking my feelings concerning an incident that occurred some seven years before, at Centinela Park. I had been in the vicinity of the concession stands near the swimming pool and, as ever, the park was crowded and somewhat frantic. It was the early 1950's, and the park was the site of an amphitheatre with a very large stage. I was in the habit of getting up on stage and playing, mainly goofing around, for hours on end.

That day, while busily hamming it up for what I thought was an audience of none, I felt a chill race up my spine. The cause was a voice with no discernible source, requesting I leave the park and make my way to the railroad tracks, about a half a mile distant. Now more intrigued than frightened, I decided to comply and see what would happen.

Along the way I passed a grove of gnarly old trees, nothing unusual except for the fact that one of the trees seemed to have a human face, which as I look closely, was the grandfatherly visage of an old bearded wizard. I found it very comforting. The face seemed to respond to my emotions, as it grew until it covered the entire tree, after which it began to fade away.

I blinked, shook my head, and concluded I had either absorbed too much sun or had swallowed a surfeit of chlorine while swimming. Unfazed, I continued on to the railroad tracks. The path took me up a hill. I managed to make it halfway up when two more trees manifested faces.

These countenances were joyful, wise, and of the type of jolly oldsters whose happiness stems from certain knowledge of secrets beyond the ken of most ordinary worldlings. This pair of smiling personages was the embodiment of wisdom itself, as old as, and having seen as much as, the oldest redwoods. Far from being frightened, I was elated and experienced an inexplicable sense of fulfillment in their presence. I was pleased that these creatures not only manifested their joy but also permitted me to share in it. I was certain that we would meet again someday... I then snapped out of my nostalgic reverie.

"I remember you," I told the man who jogged me back in time when I communed with the trees. "You're the one who came to me years ago, at my grandfather's house."

"Good," he said, and was silent for a few moments, during which I familiarized myself with his appearance.

He cut an extraordinary figure, with his bright red eyes and strongly featured oval face. He exuded strength and confidence and seemed to exist in several dimensions at once, judging by

his shape shifting. He manifested one appearance after another, each one maintaining the aura of safety and security he projected around me.

He put his hand on my shoulder and said, "I will remember you in the fellowship of Zelcon."

Again that word! Would I finally be favored with some insight into Zelcon? Before I could petition an explanation, he returned from whence he had come.

As puzzled as I was, my time with him was far from unsettling; in contrary, I felt wonderful. His nearness and his words had provided me centering, grounding, and a sense of stability.

I continued my playing, finished the piece, then left to pick up Bonnie, all the time considering my ethereal friend's words.

"The fellowship of Zelcon." What could that possibly mean? I did feel, however, that his visit was somehow tied in with the dismantling of old barriers I had held in place most of my life. For some reason, I thought of one of the few passages of scripture that had meant something to me: John 1:11, 12. "He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name."

In my case, I had come unto my own, or they had come unto me, and I was receiving power from this being.

I did not understand at the time, but many years later, in Oregon, I would finally put a name to the spiritual guardian who had been watching over me these many years, a name that would be with my for the rest of my life.

## Prophecy - June 1962

I was very comfortable where I was and had no immediate plans to go anywhere. It was the proverbial "day at the beach," a cloudless summer's day, beautiful blue sky, calm ocean and, of course, the girls, those California girls immortalized by the Beach Boys, who glided across the sand in their colorful bikinis.

This hot day was the first time I had been to the beach since I had broken up with Bonnie ten months earlier. She had moved on to stalk better game, a man who actually had a materially comfortable future or some other such thing. I allowed the sight of a girl in a red bikini rolling over on her towel to push aside thoughts of the past, allowing her sensual movements to work as a healing balm. It was only partially successful, as I still felt sad thinking about the love I had lost. The seaside hijinx of the people actually enjoying themselves was becoming painful.

I glanced at my watch. It was 12:30. I decided to leave. I got my things together and headed off the sand toward my car. The noonday sun was beating down mercilessly on my already sunburned shoulders; I hurried up the stairs leading to parking area.

I drove up the Imperial Highway to the accompaniment of the rather dark, sensuous sounds of jazz on my radio. The intricate twists and turns of the improvised melody making me feel somewhat better. This lasted until I got home, facing my empty room, an expression of the emptiness I was feeling in my life.

The shower felt as good as the embrace of the former girlfriend I was still thinking about, damn it. The heat outside was forgotten in the coolness of the gentle cascade washing over me. I threw myself on the bed, tossing aside the towel, and turned on the stereo. The music cut me loose from the moorings of the day's harsher realities. As welcome as this was, the agreeable trance did not last long as by the end of the day I was already feeling the approach of unwelcome forces.

I dressed for dinner, then decided to take a drive before eating. I went up into the hills overlooking the city, driving too fast through the canyons as evening began its rapid descent, almost as though I were trying to outrun the onset of night. Or maybe I was just acting out the undeniable truth that, like the car, I was going nowhere and very quickly.

I punched the radio's on button and set the dial to a pop station playing an up tempo song that matched the actions of the car as I skidded over sand and rock, sliding past a sharp curve and then heading down into the valley. The music gave me strength, made me one with the powers of the night.

I stamped down on the accelerator and headed for the summit of Ridge Drive. Even though I had a momentary destination I was still unclear where exactly I was headed, in both the immediate and larger sense, but right then it did not matter. I was caught up in the speed, the music, and the road ahead of me.

The music changed tempo and with it my strength began to ebb. I switched off the radio and drove to the summit in quiet. The sun had fully set and whatever good the day had held seemed to disappear along with it.

It was 8:30 PM and I didn't really care if I missed dinner. I got out of the car and walked through the warm night, feeling my shirt clinging to sunburned flesh while I meandered through the parking lot and up to the reservoir. I stood by the wire fence protecting unstable personalities from hurling themselves into the water, ordinarily dark blue but now black as it reflected the night sky.

It had been over a year since I'd graduated from high school. I was far from making scholastic waves at college, and the answers to the issues troubling me were as elusive as ever. I cared about nothing, cared for no one, with myself at the top of the list.

I knew Bonnie had been right to divest herself of me, as I would have only dragged her down with me. I bent down and picked up a small stone, tossing it up and down in the air. What was I going to do with my life? I wondered for the umpteenth time.

I seriously considered suicide as I tossed the stone over the fence and into the water, thinking it wouldn't take much to climb over and follow the rock down to the bottom of the reservoir. The sleep of death held more attraction than anything I was facing during my waking hours, my so-called life.

The full moon had arisen, and with its light, a bit of sanity crept into my thoughts, enough to eschew self-murder. All of a sudden, my stomach cramped, my arm jumped, and I was shaking all over as the old song said -- "quivers down my backbone" and all.

The last thing I saw before hitting the asphalt was the moon calmly smiling down upon me. The next thing that came into view was something resembling a falling leaf or blue-black bird sailing towards me, gliding on an unfelt wind of the night where two worlds were converging.

The wings floating by somehow released all the tension and anxiety that had been building to a crescendo since the afternoon. The leafy look of the thing had now completely given way to a bird-like shape, soaring on the currents of wind that buoyed it up and carried it onward and upward. It then banked and headed towards the ground, coming to rest not far from where I lay, gracefully folded its wings, then turned its round head towards me, fixing its gaze directly on me.

As I looked into its eyes, they seemed to become portals into the future. My consciousness filled with light as this temporal vortex opened itself up to me. Whether I mentally dived into it or it grew to engulf me I do not know. What I do know is that this window into my own destiny showed me a great room filled with paintings and sculptures and books, the sound of music and an underlying stillness that was as the "peace that passeth understanding."

I spied a man seated at a large desk, writing intently in a large, black book of some kind. Somehow I knew, intuitively or at an even deeper level, that this was me, later in life, filling my journal with his/my most intimate thoughts, things that I would not even come near to wanting to share with others until the later years, and even then with much trepidation and hesitancy.

I felt, I hoped, that the paintings, sculptures, and drawings were my own work. Though at the time of the vision I had had no training in or experience with the visual arts, my gut feeling was that these unusual works of art would be the fruits of my mind and hands, integral parts of my eventual attainment of a state of wholeness and reconciliation with all that would transpire up to that future time.

The already folded wings of the bird that had been my guide began to enfold into themselves; I knew this signaled the end of the revelation. The bird disappeared on the current of cosmic

wind, and was instantly out of my sight. I came back to worldly consciousness to the sound of the water lapping up against the side of the reservoir. My head was not pounding as usual; it felt rather mushy. I could not yet focus my eyes and had difficulty standing.

I decided a good rest was in order. I leaned back against the fence and closed my eyes, listening to the sounds of the night. As relaxing as that was, I knew time had not halted for my vision and I had to get out of here. There would probably be security guards making their rounds, or a patrolling police car rolling through to make sure all was well, or perhaps some psychotic would come there to have a vision.

Despite my good intentions, I was in no shape, physically or mentally, to attempt to drive, not without endangering myself and someone else on the road. I tried to stand. My head hit the fence, which retaliated by scraping my back. This had a less than therapeutic effect on my sunburn. Physical debilitation and mental confusion be damned, I had to get off that mountain.

Summoning all my strength, I was able to rise and half walk, half stumble my way to the car. Trusting that God watched over little children and fools, I drove off, winding my way back down through the hills towards home.

Still shaky but at least feeling a little better, my thoughts turned back to the man at the desk. I was still somewhat baffled by the large amount of art portrayed in the vision. I was a musician, a fledgling composer of sorts, but had never drawn anything more complex or visually arresting than my church scribbles. Yet I knew all the art I had seen was of my own creation. But, the music in the vision, had that been of my composition?

The matter of the art would be settled in 1975 when, after a profound encounter with my own unconscious self, I began filling a log book with stick drawings, a continuing record of dreams and visions, crude renderings that would eventually evolve into proper drawings, as well as paintings and sculptures.

Still driving and intent on navigating through the hills, I suddenly became aware that my sense of direction had not matched my concentrated effort to keep from tumbling over the side. As I slowed to make a sharp turn, I realized that I had no idea where I was. The scenery was unfamiliar as were the street names. I followed the road to a four-way intersection of main thoroughfares. Which way to go?

Following my still blurry eyes, I turned right and headed for wherever the street would take me. Confusion increased as I passed one unfamiliar building after another. Finally a stoplight appeared. I braked at the intersection of La Brea and Slauson. Although I seemed to know where I was and what route I needed to take to get home, it was more of an intuitive feeling; objective knowledge failed me. I just couldn't pull myself together to grasp the concrete realities necessary to get home.

The green light pushed me on my way. My mind was enwrapped in a dense fog as I battled vainly to get a grip on my memory. I drove the streets of a cityscape I couldn't fathom, not a thing looked familiar; yet I knew I lived here, as this was my home turf. Still, the knowledge I had on the back of my hand eluded me.

I strained to find a familiar landmark, any one thing that jars the memory of an amnesiac into remembrance, but it refused to let itself be found. My memory shut itself down, and as if the lights were going out, and I slipped into a seemingly bottomless well of darkness, out of the car, plunging down, down...

The room was filled with light as I awakened from what surely had to be one of the worst nightmares of even my highly eventful dream life. The room was spinning as though I had an inner ear infection; merely standing up was a major chore. I grabbed a window ledge to steady myself, but fell and hit the wall and then the floor.

A brief flash of brilliant sunlight assaulted my eyes and forced me into a clearer state of mind. I shook my head from side to side and tried to scrape together a few shards of composure. Finally I started to come around and as my head slowly cleared I realized that the events of the prior evening were not a dream. I also realized I had no idea how I had gotten home.

When I was able to inject a little more clarity into my thought process, I took a stab at assembling the incidents of the night and early morning into some sort of reasonable picture. My recollections were still vague, disjointed, unwilling to be united into a meaningful whole. It was frightening.

Despite the brightness of a new day, I was still drifting through memories of yesterday and could not fight my way back through the mist to bring myself fully into the present. Even the ordered sanity of the bathroom was of no help, though its facilities were useful for cleaning myself up.

After washing my face and combing my hair, I dressed while deciding what I should do. The best option was to get back out on the road and see if I could somehow retrace my journey and figure out where the heck I had been and, hopefully, what I had done.

One thing I did remember, hazily, was some sort of prophetic vision that placed me in the role of visual artist, which had no connection with my life as a musician. I could understand the need to give artistic expression to the tumult that resided within me, but the only way to do that was through music. I was no painter, sculptor, or lithographer any more than I was a writer or poet or a pawn and a king.

I got in the car and made my first destination a local restaurant. I might have been beginning an adventure in consciousness, but my stomach was making the demands of one that had missed both dinner and breakfast. As I ate, I noticed the contours of the room beginning to change their shape, becoming elongated. The texture of the plastic booth took on a strange quality.

People were surrounded by strange auras, obscuring their features and making them look like ghosts in an unreal setting.

I gulped my hot coffee, which burned my mouth, adding that little bit of pain to the scenario. I set the cup down, reached for my water glass, knocked it over, then reached for a napkin on another table when suddenly my eyesight turned on me. I was unable to see the restaurant or the other patrons. All that was visible was a green fog that completely filled the eatery.

I began to hyperventilate.

“Calm down,” I ordered myself. “Take it easy, this will work itself out.”

I closed my eyes and leaned back into the soft plastic of the seat. The next thing I felt was someone shaking my arm and calling out, “Are you all right?”

I opened my eyes to see a waitress standing over me.

“You’ve been sitting there over an hour,” she reported. “We thought you’d fallen asleep or had passed out. Are you okay?”

“Yeah,” I said. “Just bring me the check,” which was all I could muster.

I paid the bill and left. Outside, the day looked strange, and nothing seemed to fit or connect with anything else, least of all me. It was last night all over again. I took a look around, hoping to spot at least some small corner of the world that made sense to me, but all I saw were non-human creatures roving around the parking lot. That certainly was not reassuring.

I sat down on a bench and tried to collect my thoughts. I closed my eyes and leaned back when without warning my head cleared and all returned to normal. I was back, but from where I couldn’t begin to say.

My old fear appeared and filled me to overflowing. As per usual at that time, I had no one to turn to, no one to talk to; and as usual, I kept the whole thing bottled up inside. Until now.

### The Day of the Crows – October 1963

It was 2:30 AM, not quite the witching hour but in my life all bets had been called off and anything was possible at any hour of the day or night and in a multiplicity of possible worlds.

I had had a melody playing between my ears for hours, struggling for rulership of my head with the headache accompanying it as an underlying bass line. It was obvious I wouldn’t be getting any sleep before dawn.

I heard a slight scratching sound from the hallway outside my bedroom. A rat sharpening its evil little claws? Who knew? Or cared? I had been battling recurring dizzy spells for the past few days and there had been no let-up. It had been another long and difficult night overcharged with anger, rage, and physical discomfort that just wouldn't release me from its grip.

I was also experiencing pain in my legs, situated just beneath the skin of the lower limbs, like an itch that couldn't be scratched. The pain was increasing in intensity and all my attempted remedies had yielded zero results. Having tried everything else, I placed my large green pillow beneath my knees, hoping the elevation would do whatever it is supposed to do for the blood circulation and bring a little relief. It did. Very little.

As the minutes ticked by I grew noticeably more comfortable and even my headache was receding. Then, the music in my head started up again. Composer that I was, I had no choice but to succumb to the wooing of the muses, get up from my bed, and plop myself down at the piano, picking out the tune on the black-and-whites and scribbling down notes and chords.

The room was cold so my old robe was a necessity; no replacement for a concert pianist's stylish tuxedo, but at least it was warm and fit the setting. It was ancient and in tatters, the kind of garment you don't throw away until it is condemned by the health department. But it added a sort of classical music feeling of antiquity as I sketched out the melody line on stained yellow music paper.

I had been devoting myself to the composition of a new mass, which had been posing problems ever since its original conception, presenting difficulties that continued to plague my progress. Any composer will tell you that the nuts-and-bolts of composition are as far removed as possible from the lilting rhythms of the finished product. Indeed, it is a minefield thickly studded with pitfalls, hazards, and almost irreconcilable conflicts, all of which must be solved in order to produce the final product.

From the beginning I had been uncertain as to the proper tonal center of the piece, but oddly, this night of aches and pains and dizziness had made the decision for me: B minor juxtaposed with elements of free material, which lent an aura of transcendent freedom and spontaneity. Most composers would have selected B minor after Bach's famous mass, but when it came to me, the decision was made based upon physical infirmities, dizzy spells, and strange sounds in the night.

This particular composition had displayed a life of its own ever since I wrote the first notes of the opening melodic structure. The music's complex resonance seemed to fill my very being, and its rich sonority made its way from my soul, through my mind, then through my hands and out into the world.

Interestingly, the mass was quite eloquent of new life and optimistic faith, which are usually reserved only for the "resurrection" moments of a mass, focusing as they do on the great drama of the "passion" of Christ, the crucifixion, and other more somber themes.

The music had taken possession of me and I continued working on the first movement until daybreak. It might have been a trifle manic, but for the first time in weeks the mass was beginning to assume a definite shape and I did not want to stop in mid surge of inspiration.

The light of the newly emerging day stealthily sneaked around the shades and penetrated my study, its rays coming to rest atop the piano in a stunning kaleidoscope of colors. Exhilarated with the uplifting vibration of creativity, I turned to greet the new day as a welcome friend, only to be blinded by the sun's rays. In an all-too-familiar fashion of dizziness, I fell from the piano bench onto the hardwood floor.

Suddenly I was adrift in a sea of blue, and eventually, I was able to see more than just color. Off in the distance, were dark-blue mountains girdled by deep green meadows. A mild breeze blew over me while jet-black crows flew unerringly towards me. I sensed a deep connection between the crows and my inner consciousness.

Crows have been with me since the beginning of my visions. When I was young and couldn't be more than eight or nine, there would be multitudes of crows landing en masse on the tree in our backyard, sounding their reveries in their loud cries, which were music and comfort to my ears. As they gathered, I thought I was a part of their gathering; some of them would swoop down and touch my body, and later would even land on my shoulders as if they knew something about me that I did not know. Their beautiful black blue wings permeated my mind, and appeared over and over again in my visions. Sometimes in my youth I would say "the crows are flying again," my way of telling people I was in an altered state of consciousness in which the birds and their wings were playing an important part.

The crows continued to fly toward me; the flapping of their wings produced a strange music that was reassuring and seemed to have a relationship with the mass. The sound wound itself about me, cloaking me in a cocoon of mystery. I felt impregnated with light and healing energy, and on the wings of the melody I was transported into the heavens, the only suitable place for such sounds.

The light was all encompassing and bathed me in a divine radiance, its omnipresence crowding out all impressions of blue mountains and black crows. The next thing I knew, I was waking up on the floor of my study, surrounded not by healing warmth but freezing cold morning air. It was time once again to lift myself up off the floor after yet another seizure, but this time my body refused to obey my will, an inconvenient disconnect when one is shivering mightily. I fell back down, the impact of the floor leaving a bruise on my arm, and my leg pinned beneath me.

I felt completely inert and probably looked like a broken doll sprawled across the wooden planks. A few minutes ago I had been the brilliantly inspired composer, bending recalcitrant notes to my will as I ironed out one musical problem after another. Now I was as helpless as a newborn baby whose only command of sound was to issue forth precious little moans and gurgles.

But still lingering around the fringes of my thoughts was that optimism I had brought back from the vision, a feeling that all was as well as when I had been aloft on the wings of my crows soaring through the clear blue skies of my higher mind.

#### How I Joined the Army – Summer 1964

The depression was running deeply, a contrast to the tranquil beach scene all around me as I walked the sand of the Southern California shoreline that early foggy morning of July. The hour was early enough to guarantee my complete privacy as I trudged the sand, going I knew not where.

As per usual, I was plagued by questions that shouldn't even have been able to find a place in the mind of a young man who should have been too busy with school, with romance, with preparing for life to brood over anything, least of all himself. Why was I so alone, I wondered. How had I gotten myself so lost? I might not have been able to come up with answers but there was one thing of which I was certain – I needed a change. A change of direction, a change in my thought process, something.

College had not given me anything worth developing or even hanging on to. School had been a disaster; I had abandoned all my classes, simply walking away from the whole education scene. I found the continuous rhythm of the waves caressing the shore comforting. It was steady, calm, useful, the antithesis of everything I felt myself to be. As my attention became focused on the sweet rumble and hiss of water against sand, it became a meditation, almost a Zen moment.

The morning continued on its way, bathers, sunbathers, and surfers began to arrive as the sun climbed higher in the sky. This was my cue for departure as I wasn't up to facing the bronzed beach-boy & glamorous sand-bunny crowd.

Driving back to Inglewood, I didn't even turn on the ever-present car radio. I didn't feel like music. I reached the Big Donut drive-in around ten o'clock and busied myself with hot coffee and a glazed doughnut, continental breakfast U.S.A.

Now what would I do? I didn't really have anywhere to go and certainly no personal or professional engagements, pressing or otherwise. I wound up cruising Manchester Avenue, going nowhere in particular. The streets were filled with people working, running errands, shopping, doing all the ordinary things normal people do. Although I perhaps should have been envious of the supposedly normal people, those without waking dreams of other worlds, I actually felt disgusted, at them, at myself, at the seeming uselessness of life on this planet.

All those people busy with this and that, what good was it all, ultimately? Taken up with thoughts of the superfluity and tragic hopelessness of everyday existence, I wasn't really fully aware of where I was directing the car. My subconscious was obviously very alert to where we were going: the old family Baptist church on Grevillea Avenue. This church, the center of whatever spiritual life I had in my younger days, it too had lost its sheen with the passage of years.

I walked up to the front door, one of those acts you do in a state of semi-alertness, not expecting them to be open. This was a Monday, after all, and as a rule churches are closed on Monday, with Sunday being a workday. The doors were open, however, and I went into the sanctuary.

It was a bright morning and the sunlight was split up upon entrance through the stained glass windows; shards of multicolored light then reassembled themselves wherever they fell, the piano, the carpet, the pew. I made my way down to the choir loft at the front of the sanctuary. The entire church had the air of a ghost town populated solely by memories, my memories, of events frozen in time.

Every spot on which I rested my eyes seemed to hold its own recollections. I sat on the old piano bench to reflect on an endless catalogue of personal events. Despite the panoply of circumstances passing by me for review, some of them of extreme emotional content, I felt virtually nothing. It struck me that I really hadn't felt anything of note for years, as though my emotional nature had become thickly overgrown with a hedge of numbness. I believed at that moment that I could have taken a Bowie knife to one of my limbs, watch the blood flow as though I were a disinterested onlooker, and feel nothing but mild curiosity.

Came another one of my endless "why's" ...Why was I so dead inside?

I lifted the cover of the keyboard. The two-tone keyboard smiled up at me like an old friend. Ordinarily I would have returned the greeting and renewed the friendship by playing a piece, but this day even my passion for music seemed to have been deposited in the morgue. I closed the cover, but remained seated, dwelling on the very real possibility that I might not get through the summer without doing something drastic and perhaps irrevocable to myself. And this was far from the first time I had considered bringing my life to a close by my own hand.

At some point I would have to inform my parents that I had quit school, but I hadn't yet had a moment when I felt up to facing the emotional histrionics that would be directed my way. It would just take its place in the long line of skirmishes we were having over my future. I could appreciate the fact that, from their parental perspective, they were on the side of the angels; I was doing nothing, not surprising as I cared about nothing. I had been lying to them for years and the time had come for me to face it. The problem was double-edged as I not only had no answers to their questions that would make any sense, but also I had no urge to discuss anything with my parents.

I was interested to note my reaction to my own thoughts. My normal response to such commiserations would have been a flood of tears; today I felt not one pang of pain, guilt, fear, or any other identifiable emotion. I was personifying the old Graham Greene title, *A Burnt Out Case*.

I rose to leave, knowing that this would be the last time I would ever be within the sacred precincts of this church. Upon reaching the back door, I turned and faced the empty sanctuary one final time. I was as empty as the room, but at least a few teardrops had appeared when I closed the door behind me and returned to my car. I knew I was leaving behind a life I may not have loved but at least knew. My last church-related thought was of Bonnie and how much I missed her in my life.

I took a long drive down the coast to Palos Verdes Estates, toying with the idea of continuing even further south to leave the morning as far behind me as possible. Now I felt like music. I turned the black radio knob this way and that, from one end of the selector to another, searching for music suitable for my mood. The local classical music station was playing *Le Mer* ("The Sea") by Claude Debussy, a piece he had composed in honor of his father. This musical portrait of the sea was just what I needed, and I relished the interchange of the voices of nature, wind and surf, as they spoke of things only the soul understands.

For the first time in days I was actually feeling something, that special magic that can only be produced by the things of the sea. Once more the tears began to well up, tears of joy this time, as I felt the music and the vibrations of nature releasing me from the cage of self-centeredness and self-deprecation, and allowing emotion once more to rise up and make itself known.

I ate lunch at a burger place in Torrance, a city north of Palos Verdes Estates and, at that time, a quiet, small town overflowing with families that had taken advantage of the post-war housing boom. The food was good but the atmosphere was wrecked by the overly loud rock and roll belching forth from the jukebox. I finished as soon as possible, refilled my coffee, and headed for the car.

While walking across the parking lot, a sight on the other side of the street caught my eye and piqued my interest. It was an Army base adjacent to the Torrance airport. What began as a pilgrimage to check the place out turned out to be the potential answer to all my problems: I could join the army.

After all, this was the summer of 1964 and phrases such as "Gulf of Tonkin," "Tet offensive" and "escalation" were not yet part of the national language. At that time, most Americans couldn't even locate Vietnam on a map if they had to.

I was a prime candidate. Captain Dunn was a silver-tongued devil of a recruiter, and within minutes I had sworn to defend the Constitution of the United States and the State of California against all enemies, foreign and domestic, and to obey the orders of the President of the United

States, and all the rest, so help me God! It was one of those spur-of-the-moment events one cannot plan even if they wanted to, that turned out to be a defining point in the course of a lifetime.

I was already envisioning my first combat assignment: telling my parents I had joined the army. It didn't have to be right away; Captain Dunn had told me it would take a few months for my orders to be cut, and at which point I had to report to Fort Ord in northern California for basic training. In the meantime, I would have semi-monthly reserve meetings and time to acquaint myself with military life and procedures. Following basic training, in late Fall or early winter, I would be stationed at Fort Jackson in South Carolina where I would be attending radio school. I had had vague notions that joining the service required nothing more than passing a physical examination and signing on the dotted line. As it turned out, the enlistment paperwork consumed the better part of an afternoon. This made me late getting home and I found myself stuck in the infamous quagmire of Southern California traffic.

The lengthy trip home gave me time to mull over what I would tell my parents. It looked like a good chance to kill two birds with one stone, so I settled on a compromise of truth and lies. I would tell them that I had been in school the past year but hadn't yet registered for the new semester. That firm decision lasted until I decided to chuck the part about school and merely tell them I was going to fulfill my patriotic duty to my country and so forth.

Not since I had graduated high school did I feel my life had some sort of direction, a purposeful plan that, for good or ill, contained definite sign posts along a clearly defined road. The fact that this particular direction would lead me away from home and parents was the icing on the cake. I knew I was facing a rite of passage, crossing the stream from adolescence to adulthood and come what might, I would finally be on my own and responsible for my own life. It felt good.

#### My First Wife – Fall 1965

Even while at rest, the normal state of my consciousness could best be described as "anxious." Starting school once more made it even worse.

My first enrollment at El Camino College in 1962 had been a prelude to scholastic disaster as I proved to be brilliantly unsuccessful at all things academic. This time in El Camino, however, I was to apply myself to the study of a subject I not only knew something about but already had developed a love for, namely, music.

I had spent one and a half years on and off active duty in the army, and that was more than long enough to convince me it would not be a lifelong career. My long scroll of doubts and failures did not magically vanish in the atmosphere of military life and I knew if I were ever going to do anything with my life it had to center around something I actually cared about.

When I joined up with the 163rd Signal Battalion in 1964, I was well aware that my immaturity was probably going to take a desperately needed pounding in basic training. The first thing I learned was that the world, seen in the cold and unrelenting light of reality, was a much different place than I had tricked myself into believing. Either the world would have to change to accommodate me, or I would have to change to accommodate it. The world won. I was forced to make a decision about my future and it was to study musical composition as soon as I left active service.

Although music has many unique qualities and features, one thing it shares with all other disciplines is the need to learn the foundational aspects through study and practice, tediously repetitive but essential for developing the basic skills and reflexes. The constituent parts of music comprise a very detailed, special, and unique language that simply has to be learned if one wishes to turn random notes into something more than a chaotic mess.

Although there are most certainly born composers, no one is born able to compose. Even an extraordinary prodigy such as Mozart had to know how to read music before he could write it; that is just a basic fact of the mechanics of musical creation.

My first day of study featured the harmony instructor playing a simple prelude by Johann Bach. Though lasting not longer than one or two minutes, the mental and emotional impact upon me was nothing short of monumental. The teacher had chosen the piece to illustrate three definite aspects of baroque composition: absolute melodic clarity, very specific rhythmic parameters, and the exactitude of harmonic structure.

The healing nature of music is very well known and it was on these compositional parameters that I would build the foundation of an entirely new psychological house. They were to be the building blocks of my personal development.

My life up to that point had seemed like a haphazardly arranged musical piece, all disjointed vibrations and incoherent patterns. The qualities of baroque composition offered the perfect examples for the establishment of well-ordered harmonies; I felt that immersing myself in them would bring the clarity I so desperately needed.

Clarity was the paramount requirement. Years of seizures and the resulting effects, both from within and without, had inflicted severe psychological trauma. From the very beginning of my association with it, music had filled the emotional void and been the center around which I could organize my consciousness. It was time for me to earnestly apply myself to mastering its principles the proper way.

Although I had been playing music for years, having begun my study of the violin while still in grade school, my real love was composing. Say all that can be said about inspiration (and there is much to be said for it), music is a craft like any other, requiring study and continual practice in

order to bring forth a worthwhile product. In addition to classroom work, I put in many additional hours in the study of orchestral scores and the works of past masters.

One class, called "Form and Analysis," dealt with an analysis of all twenty-eight Beethoven piano sonatas. What impressed me most about Beethoven was the continual evolution of his musical ideas, as well as the clarity of his works. In contradistinction to Bach, he never locked himself into any particular form, melodic or chord structure. Beethoven was really the first of the romantic musical visionaries, and he had to revise and evolve his structural and melodic ideas to conform to his musical visions. The differences between Bach and Beethoven captivated me and it showed me that there were many ways to perceive the world, musically and in the broader spectrum of all of life's affairs. This was especially important to me as one who needed the exploration of new concepts of reality to properly define my own existence and evolve towards new experiences.

One thorny problem of my school life was the need for integration of the varied elements of my life into a normal class schedule. For example, if I had a seizure or vision I would never take a day off for recovery, I would tough it out and damn the consequences. Bear in mind, I had long since ceased discussing my seizure disorder with anyone, a habit begun in grammar school and one I had no intention of breaking. Fortunately, the grand mal seizures were in remission, leaving in their wake the "simple partial" and "complex partial" manifestations of epilepsy. These latter seizures are rarely detectable by those witnessing them.

As El Camino is a junior college, it was required that I take various general education classes in addition to those in my major field. Although I encountered difficulties with courses dealing with subjects outside of my beloved music, I worked hard to achieve academic success. It must have worked because after the first year I was on the Dean's List. Auditioning with fourteen other young musicians for the campus' most prestigious vocal group, I was selected to fill a slot in the baritone section of the school chorale. Our travels to statewide competitions were extremely successful, always leaving the audience wanting more; our chorale became one of the best known in the western United States and introduced me to the inner circles of music in the Los Angeles area.

Our chorale rehearsed seven days a week, two to three hours a day, and by the way, it counted only as one school unit, whereas the orchestra required only one three-hour rehearsal a week but counted as much. This experience proved invaluable to my musical education. Besides my choral work I played violin for the school orchestra and also enrolled in a class on chamber music. For once, life was wonderful, all music, music, and more music still.

After graduation from junior college I continued my education at Long Beach State University to work towards my bachelor's degree in music composition. Now in regular college, my courses were almost entirely music-related. Once I was ensconced in my classes, I rounded out my activities by joining the university orchestra and landed a job playing at a piano bar. With all ends tied, I settled down to enjoy the life of an *artiste*.

It was during this period that I met and married my first wife, a lady with the interesting name of Deene, to whom I had been introduced at church. She was something of an enigma to me from the moment we met. She was beautiful, long-legged, and had a graceful form, but there was an elusive dark quality about her soul. She, too, was concealing a painful past and I doubt if I ever really knew her or if she ever grasped the reality of who I was.

The first time I saw Deene she was wearing a soft white dress with a large white belt, and a pair of white three-inch heels. Her hair was styled short and she had gray eyes. Her looks stunned me into speechlessness. She was surrounded by a clutch of male admirers who appeared to be waiting on her hand and foot, something like Scarlett O'Hara at the Twelve Oaks barbeque. For some reason she was attracted to me, and if she hadn't been, nothing would have transpired between us, because as intimidated by her as I was, it would have been impossible for me even to approach her.

When Deene and I established contact apart from the church, I was in college and playing at a piano bar in Redondo Beach. I don't know if that made me seem exotically dangerous and desirable to her nor did I care. All I knew was that I wanted her. We dated sporadically for a few months, then one night went to a coffee house in the Fairfax district, a place called The Garrett, for espresso and folk music. Appearing that night was The Garrett's owner, Terry Lee, a woman with a wonderful voice and a fine hand with an acoustic guitar. Her music was powerful and passionate. While Terry was singing a love song, I kissed Deene, causing Terry to stop the song and direct the spotlight to shine on us. It was all done in good spirit and was part of a nice evening that concluded with a long drive along the beach. Deene wanted to park and take in the beauty of the ocean and full moon; we parked and our stay at the beach until two o'clock the next morning.

After that we saw one another on a regular basis. She was an avid reader, which gave her something to do while I practiced my violin or composed music. Deene secured a position as a medical transcriber in Beverly Hills and would spend her after-work hours at my place. We would talk about music (which I don't think she really cared about) and make love.

We got married in 1967 immediately after my graduation from El Camino College and she supported me through my studies at Long Beach State. Our passionate love began to fade after the first year of married life, and we pretty much lived our own separate lives until we finally broke up. Again, she was a complete mystery to me. The relationship that had begun so lovingly just seemed to wither away as time went on. By the time I graduated from Long Beach State, we were finished. Several factors were involved.

Deene had had nothing comparable to my music with which to fill her own emptiness. She never spoke of the source of her pain and, frankly, I was too wrapped up in my own to be of much help to her. There was a tacit agreement between us that neither would ever try to cross the barrier we both felt existed between us, thus we never communicated about anything of importance.

Compounding this, I was called up for active military duty on several occasions and had to absence myself from home months at a time to meet my service obligations. Our relationship seemed to be ringed by forces dedicated to its failure.

Further, I had been directing all my energies into obtaining my degree and keeping my interior life under some semblance of control. This allowed me to dedicate very little time to Deene and our problems. Maybe also, I was too caught up in the fact that all aspects of my life seemed to be working well and success attended my every effort; my time had come, and I was looking toward the future with confidence.

It would be years before I learned she had been the victim of childhood molestation, perpetrated by her own father; the effect of this upon her psyche was the same kind of guilt, humiliation, and pain that I had needlessly been made to endure as an epileptic. We never got back into contact following the break-up of our short relationship. I do still have a wedding picture depicting the two of us standing near my car just before we left for our honeymoon. Her bright eyes were filled with hope for our future and I was displaying my awe that this beautiful woman had consented to be my wife – another moment lifted out of eternity and entombed in three-dimensional form.

My graduation from Long Beach State was in 1971 and all the struggles were rewarded with something concrete when I was handed my bachelor's degree in Music Composition. However, quite rapidly after that, life seemed to take a down turn into another long dark tunnel as my seizures started up again, slowly but surely coming to exercise dominance over me. Within a few short years I would fall from whatever grace I had managed to achieve for myself and plummet to the bottom. The clock was ticking.

Maybe Deene did the right thing after all, leaving me while she could.

Leaving the Army – June 20, 1970

I was sitting waiting for my final interview before leaving the service, amusing myself with a reflective glass widget that displayed some sort of winged animal. Turned one way, the glass had a violet-blue color, and the other, a greenish blue tint.

Finally my name was called and I had the distinct displeasure of interviewing with Lieutenant White, a true bastard who was always arrayed in the finest of government-issued military finery, not one spot or wrinkle on his uniform, every hair perfectly in place. There's nothing wrong with that; what I didn't like was that he was one of the biggest sphincters I ever had the displeasure of interacting with.

But, I knew I was getting out of the service and that mitigated just about anything negative I would have to put up with from him.

“Good afternoon, sir!” I said crisply, snapping off a perfect salute to the last officer to whom I would ever have to pay such tribute. After a seemingly endless debriefing he said, in his highly cultivated officer’s voice, “Get out of my office, Dyal, and stay out!”

I did, with pleasure. The armed services are no place for compassionate tenderness.

Case in point, one afternoon in basic training our drill sergeant was having sadistic fun with us, walking us around in circles hour after hour. Finally, the heat and dust overpowered me; my head felt like it had exploded, my nose bled and, as far as I was concerned, the exercise, or drill, or whatever it was supposed to be, was over. I halted directly in front of the DI and threw all my equipment down right at his feet.

I don’t recommend this to anyone who wants to survive basic training, but this time I got a break. The sergeant took one look at me and simply said, “Dyal, get your ass the hell under that tree and take all this shit with you!” I dragged myself under the pine tree and rested while the others continued their long trek to nowhere.

Back to the day I was discharged, I left my barracks and walked out into the afternoon sunshine to my car. I was having a little fun by marching instead of walking, but I don’t know if it was the warmth of the sun or what, suddenly I felt nauseous. Inserting the key in the door lock, I was overcome by dizziness, falling against the door, but avoided hitting the ground as I was able to pull myself up using the car itself to remain steady and balanced.

“Get the fuck down!” I heard someone shout.

As in a dream, I witnessed myself hitting the ground just as explosions began erupting all around me. Looking around, I saw nothing but fire and smoke and the charred remnants of a small hut. All around me people dressed like peasant farmers were either dead or dying. The fear was thick enough to cut with a bayonet. Till this day, I still don’t know if this was a vision or a flashback of what I saw while stationed in Southeast Asia.

I shook my head, trying to clear my thoughts. Once more, I was leaning against my car, drenched in perspiration, unsure of what had occurred, and wanting only to leave this place and head home.

Deene and I had split up a few months before my discharge and I had been staying at my parents’ house. Painful as that was, I needed time to get a handle on my life, obtain my music degree, and commence my post-graduate work.

I got home around 6:30 that night, just in time for dinner. I ate but was still feeling disconnected and disoriented. I decided to sleep it off, but slumber remained out of my reach.

My head began to spin and the room simply vanished. I was now in a jungle whose foliage was large leafy plants; I was serenaded by the distant cries of animals. I tried to focus my concentration on leaving, on getting home, but I was hopelessly lost.

I felt the incessant tapping of raindrops and crawled under one of the more sizeable leaves for cover. It was only then that I noticed how dark the scene was; I was unable to see anything in the pitch blackness. Most worrisome was my complete ignorance as to my location and how I would get home.

The rain was cool against my face as I peeked out from under the protection of the leaf. What stood before me was a large, human-like creature. Although it remained silent, I clearly understood that it desired me to follow it. Rising up, I heard a cracking sound from somewhere in the dense rainforest. All of a sudden, as swiftly as the episode began it was over and I found myself at home in bed. My head felt gelatinous and I hadn't the slightest idea what had happened.

A dream? A seizure? I didn't really care.

As I had done after so many other such episodes in that room, I turned over and lost myself in the glorious oblivion of sleep.

#### Whistle of the Train – February 1972

The unbearable pain was splitting my head open in a haze of agony as red as a pomegranate. The headache had awakened me at three in the morning. I pulled myself up out of bed, walking through the dark house to the bathroom. Switching on the bathroom light was a mistake, as all it yielded was a blinding effect that exacted an even worse toll on my head, which already felt as though a diesel engine were running full blast in each temple.

My grab for the bottle of aspirin knocked over just about everything else in the medicine cabinet. I wrestled four aspirins out of the container and downed them with a glass of water, then retreated back to the bedroom. The mere touch of the pillow against my head ignited another explosion of cranial pain.

I cradled my head in my hands, hoping the immobility would somehow ease the attack on my nervous system, but no such luck. My next maneuver was an emulation of old European royalty, who used to sleep in an upright position, why is anyone's guess. But I hoped a change of position might somehow fake out my system and bring even if just a modicum of relief.

The moon was visible through the parted curtains, and the small amount of moonlight gave the room a ghostly quality from which unearthly creatures made of floating dust were borne. They seemed to call to me, but severe pain is a jealous thing that dislikes its victims focusing on anything else.

Within half an hour, the pain diminished ever so slightly, though my head felt as though it had expanded to the size of a watermelon, and I felt a closer kinship to the Elephant Man. The pulsations in my head were still of maddening intensity. Tears filled my eyes with no accompanying emotions and I knew what was coming.

The contours of the bedroom began to sway and shift and take on new forms. I laid my head in my hands, hoping without praying, for someone, anyone, to extend to me a hand of comfort and healing.

The clock read 3:30 AM. It had already been a long night, and the morning augured no signs of deliverance from the torment. As I lay there in the midst of my private grief, I heard the faint sound of a distant train whistle, that hauntingly lonely sound that has stirred so many imaginations over the generations. I was distracted from the pain by memories of the endless train whistles I heard in my childhood, blown by engineers commanding the freight trains that passed Inglewood all through the night. I doubt if there has ever been a child who was not captivated by train whistles in the night, dreaming of the exotic places that kids always think trains would take them.

Perhaps in those instances were born my more intriguing fantasies of mystical trains running on ethereal rails, coming to take me away to lands unknown to and undreamed of by others. For me, the train is magical, embodying some kind of infinite freedom. What kid who ever witnessed a sunset from a train and not have their heart impregnated with that memory forever?

When I was a child, I had a special place in my heart for the insignia of the Great Northern Railroad – the white goat. While cars sped by on the screen of my imagination, I would inevitably wonder from where the steel leviathans had departed and what their destinations might be.

By day I would walk the lengths of the tracks, lithely leaping from tie to tie, collecting spikes, squashed animals, and other entrancing debris. To my mother's chagrin, I placed these things, including track kill, in what I called my magic box.

One afternoon while visiting the family ranch in the San Fernando Valley, I walked along the local railroad tracks. All of a sudden, a cold chill ascended my spine, then turned tail and fled down my arms. Feeling dizzy, I fought to maintain composure, balance, and consciousness, as it would not do to pass out on a railroad track.

I made my way off the tracks and set course for a grove of trees clustered about an ancient and rusty water pipe. The faucet handle was broken and leaking, but there was enough pressure in the old boy to allow me to wash the dust from my face and cool down a little.

As I cleaned myself up as best as I could, I noticed something next to one of the sycamore trees flanking the tracks, which appeared to be forming the figure of a man, one who was walking in my direction.

I was startled and afraid, having no idea who he was. Perhaps he was some sort of railroad policeman intent on arresting me for trespassing or some other heinous infraction of civilized law. A shake of my head cleared the remaining drops of water, my handkerchief taking care of the residual moisture as I kept one eye on the mysterious stranger.

Still dizzy, I began backing away from the unwanted intruder, making my way quickly down the line until I felt it was safe to turn my back. I made it my business to stay as far away from the rails as possible, lest a seizure come over me and leave me sprawled across the ties.

After a while, I nervously turned back around for a quick glimpse behind me. I was alone, and glad to be. I slowed the pace of my walk and breathed in deeply the invigorating aroma of sycamore, which lined the fences of the horse trails in that part of the Valley.

Feeling more secure, I began to whistle, and once again took to walking the tracks. Solomon was right again; pride goeth before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall. Just as I got back on to the track, I found my body not obeying the dictates of my will. Lightning streaked across the stage of my inner vision, a fierce wind howled through my brain, and all control over my nervous system was lost.

In some way I was unable to understand, I turned up at the bottom of a dry wash, several yards away from the track itself. An indecipherable shape of dark green was hovering nearby, just out of arm's length. Everything was spinning. I was unable to gain a mental grasp of my environment, not to mention to try and steady the images whirling before my eyes. My circumstances seemed well outside of my power to control or even comprehend.

Attempting to stand, I caught a glimpse of the green figure, yet lost sight of it as I fell to the ground. My pants were damp and dirty from the wash. A pennyweight of strength seemed to flow into me, enough to permit me to stand without again keeling over. I could see the greenish blob organizing itself into a definite form. I made this thing the focus of my concentration, bringing all my awareness to bear upon it. As I did, I was suddenly surrounded by what looked like thousands of yellow monarch butterflies, their small majestic wings beautifully and mesmerizingly translucent in the afternoon light.

They gathered themselves into a circle around the now humanlike figure of the green entity.

"Are you alright, young man?" came the question.

As the voice made its way through my objective consciousness into the deeper layers of my mind, I was able to gauge the appearance of my companion, a man dressed in blue overalls. His kindly face sported a three-day old patch of whiskers under his blue eyes. He appeared to be about fifty years of age. In point of fact, he looked like every child's idea of a railroad engineer, friendly, grizzled, magical.

"Are you alright?" he repeated.

"I think so," I replied.

Although the world had resumed a normal outer appearance, I myself was still shaky. I reached up to grasp the hand he extended me. With one tug of his strong arm I was standing upright.

"What are you doing down here on the track, boy? You could get killed."

I didn't answer his question, the habit I had formed from unprofitable encounters with my parents. I merely shook his hand, said goodbye, and turned for home.

With the sound of the train whistle still being drawn through my thoughts, I returned to the present. The moonlight is still pushing its way through the curtains; judging by the faintness of the glow from outside, not much time had passed. A glance at the clock proved the truth of that; it was now four AM.

My headache was still very much in evidence. The breeze blowing the curtains was cool, and brought a bit of refreshment into the room. I went over to my desk and packed my pipe with cherry-blend tobacco.

I blew a cloud of smoke out in front of me when, for some reason, I suddenly realized I had been without a seizure for months. Perhaps that part of my life had finally closed itself out? Then came a will o' the wisp, a revelation, a dim memory, something that prompted me to look outside. I laid down my pipe and crossed over to the window, spying something hovering in the dark, moving through the shadowed street.

Overcome by the familiar dizziness, I fell to the area rug covering the floor in front of the window. My mind was filled with the not-unpleasant sight of Bonnie's shapely legs; as my thoughts began the upward climb of her anatomy, I sensed a presence joining me in the room.

I must have unknowingly righted myself because another wave of dizziness swept over me and again I fell, rolling over on the floor. My head cleared quickly and I was able to realize that dawn had arrived.

The sun had chased the moon over the date line; bright sunshine filled the room, its intensity blinding me and filling my head with throbbing pain. The taste of blood was in my mouth, and

my left arm felt broken. The worst had happened: another seizure. Fortunately I was able to move my arm and clear my mouth of the blood.

I sat on the bed, looking at the room knocking out one spin after another. A new day began. Would it be filled with fear? Were the seizures back?

At that uncertain moment I had no way of knowing that I would not have another grand mal seizure for decades.

### Colt 45 – Summer 1973

For more than a year, I had been residing at my grandfather's old house on Tamarack Street in Inglewood. I was studying advanced music composition at California State University at Northridge, while my job at a local warehouse paid the bills. I was also busily sliding into a deep depression, the cause of which was unclear. What was easily observable was the fact it was getting worse on a daily basis and I was rapidly approaching the end of the road.

As the root of the depression was elusive, I ceased trying to pin it down and began casting about for a solution. One that recurred a little too frequently was suicide. I would find my thoughts drifting towards an old Colt.45 revolver I had owned for years, which seemed to hold within its chambers the answer to all my problems -- a loud, bloody answer, but one that was quick, final, and irreversible. I was reacquainting myself with friend death, and I felt it worth considering that what the army had failed to do could be easily accomplished with the slightest movement of one forefinger.

That Monday evening was extremely dark – in more ways than one – when I entered my study to load the gun that rested quietly in my desk drawer, innocently waiting to ward off burglars with no idea of the mission I had planned for it.

Who would care if I put in my head an aperture nature had not intended? I had nothing to live for, no one to live for. I was going absolutely nowhere on a barren road that stretched ad infinitum into a bleak landscape decorated with nothing. My hand shook perceptibly as I loaded the gun one final time while trying to decide how long my countdown should be to the send-off to wherever it was I would be going.

When I finished loading, something made me set the gun down on the desk and scrutinize the colts carved into the wooden grips on either side of the butt. The gun seemed to be infused with its own life force. It was a fine piece of workmanship, really quite beautiful. I picked up the firearm, very much aware of the power it could wield when the exploding gunpowder shot forth a forty-five-caliber bullet at who knew how many feet per second. At that range, muzzle velocity would not be an issue.

As with most handguns, this one was heavier than it looked and certainly heavier than John Wayne or Clint Eastwood made them look. I began to spin the gun around and around, catching it to stop its motion and whirling it around again, something I've enjoyed doing ever since I was a kid, somewhat like the Johnny Ringo character in *Tombstone*, but without the moustache twirling bravado. It was a strange gesture, ghoulishly macabre, considering my frame of mind.

Finally, the dawdling came to an end. With an air of finality, I grasped the gun, wedged the end of the barrel against my forehead, and began to cock the hammer, when a voice spoke, "Don't do it!"

Half believing the voice to be real even though I was quite certain I was alone, I said, "What?" Once again the voice spoke, "Don't do it."

Bewildered, I set the gun back down, leaned back in the chair, and took a deep breath. Then it occurred to me to reach out to someone. Right then I made a deal with the Universe that I would call one friend, and if they answered, I would not kill myself. That might seem grandiose in retrospect, but at the moment my thoughts were less than entirely rational. Besides, I no longer gave the proverbial shit about my life.

The only person in my life at that time whom I considered a friend was Dan, the minister of the local church. Of course, ministers as a rule are absent from their churches all day and night on Mondays -- the only days they have off. I had no illusions that I was picking the likeliest person to be available at that moment, but again I was laying all on the line, knowing that if Dan were to be there to answer the phone, it would have to be because God put him there. And if He had not, I would finish what I had started.

Staring eternity in its cold, unreasoning face, I called Dan. After half a dozen rings, each of which seemed both inordinately long and ridiculously short, I took the receiver away from my ear and was about to hang up when someone answered.

"Dan?" I asked, of two minds as to what I wanted the reply to be.

But God had already decided. "Yes," Dan said.

I identified myself and he said it was great to hear from me, asked what had I been up to, the usual pleasant banter, in one sense completely inappropriate for the occasion but in another, just the sort of everyday banality that can be so calming when one is overwrought.

I candidly related the facts of the situation and he was insistent that I come to him at the church immediately. He was just walking out of the church door to drive some kids home from an evening activity, but he promised to leave the back door open for me. He told me to make myself at home at the church and wait for his return, which would be as fast as possible.

With the pistol safely reposing, unfired, and in its drawer, I drove over to the church. I went straight for the piano, and launched into an unplanned concert of favorite hymns. Playing the piano was soothing and reassuring and I couldn't have cared less that my only audience was the poor church mice. Or maybe Someone had placed angels around me.

Dan returned within the hour and we talked into the early hours of the next morning. I no longer recall the words he used but they must have been persuasive as I am here to write these words.

Suicide was no longer an option; I would have to find other solutions to my problems, ones that actually demanded the maturity and courage that suicide does not require.

The upshot of that meeting with Dan was that I wound up joining the church and assumed direction of their youth choir. It was while I was settling into that next phase of life that I met Paula.

Paula was young, slender, with brown hair and a sweetness of looks and personality. Our relationship was very much in the same vein as my other relationships had been, both outwardly and psychologically. Between us there always seemed to be something we both knew needed to be verbalized but somehow always remained silent, which has remained unspoken to this present day.

I was fond of Paula, not deeply in love, perhaps never in love to any degree. I have no doubt that she sensed this lack of deep feelings on my part, but she never mentioned it, perhaps because she did not care either. I do feel our relationship never would have lasted if it were not for the birth of our daughter, Susan, or for the fact that I needed a normal-appearing cover for my bizarre interior life.

Against the wishes of Paula's mother and the advice of my close friends, Paula and I were married. Susan was conceived a few months after the wedding, and we both were rather nonplussed by this turn of events, as though marriage and children which somehow went together for other people, was a shocking combination for us.

Paula seemed far too young to be a mother and I didn't exactly possess the maturity or skill set necessary for effective fatherhood. If one good thing did come out of our marriage, it was Susan.

Following Susan's birth, my in-laws kindly permitted us you move into their home in El Segundo, California. Paula's parents were planning an extended trip and wanted someone to house-sit until they sell the property. The house was small, cozy, and came with a room in the back that was pressed into service as my study.

We spent about a year and a half there, and it was during that time I had my first major encounter with my unconscious since childhood (cf. February 25, 1975).

## Foggy Beach in My Study – Summer 1974

In the summer of 1974, I received an offer from a local theatre company to compose a score for their production of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Although I appreciated the offer and their confidence in my compositional abilities, the downside was that their budget contained almost no funds for a conventional score. I told them I would have to approach the score from an unconventional aspect in order to make it work. They gave me the green light and I went to work immediately.

I decided to compose the score entirely for the piano. Reaching into my past, I turned the inside of my piano into a magic box, not with road kill and plastic monsters, but materials that would produce interesting sounds: sticks, cardboard, glass, soft tympani sticks of varied sizes, and just about anything else I could think of that would produce distinctive and unusual sounds.

One morning during composing, I was placing glass rods in the piano, when all of a sudden I lost my grip on them, sending them tumbling to the soundboard beneath the strings. What I thought was ordinary clumsiness or the difficulty of working in so confined a space as the interior of a piano, instead was the paralysis of my left arm. Needless to say, I was more than a little concerned.

Deciding that this was a one-time-only event, I didn't think it worth mentioning to anyone. I replaced the rods and continued writing the musical score. One night while being up late working on the structure of one of the movements intended to duplicate the sound of a storm, I fell, with my arm and shoulder sharply striking the side of the piano. Once more I played diagnostician and wrote the spill-off to fatigue, and once more I continued working and told no one.

The next morning there appeared to be no lingering after-effects of my impromptu collision with the piano. I arose at 6 AM, feeling great. I dressed, made coffee, and rode my bicycle down to the fog-enshrouded beachfront without so much as a slight dizzy spell.

The earliness of the hour gave me free run of the streets. The only forms visible seemed to be growing right out of the fog, and they were not easily identifiable. A bank of fog spawning creatures was rather unusual, even for me, but I was now firmly in the habit of shrugging these things off, so I just concentrated on my cycling. But within moments I was forced to deal with it, as the fog began to thicken, turn green, and give off a strange aroma.

The smell was a musty, outdoorsy scent, reminiscent of old leaves, and I was unable to determine its source. I had more than enough experience with the ocean to know it can send forth all manner of odors, and I was also aware that fog can play more than a few tricks on one's senses, so again I ignored what was happening right in front of my eyes and nose, and continued pedaling.

The fog quickly thickened to the point that riding became dangerous, so I stopped somewhere along the boardwalk to get my bearings. Pushing the bike beside me, I walked cautiously, squinting and feeling my way forward slowly. At one point I inadvertently stepped off the boardwalk and onto the sand. Perhaps it was the feeling of being slightly startled by the sudden change of footing that caused me to realize I could no longer hear the sound of the waves, which led to the realization I could no longer hear anything.

Not having the least idea of where I was nor what direction I should take, I took what seemed the safest course of action: none. I merely sat down in the damp sand, laid the bicycle next to me, and hunkered down to wait for the sun to dissipate the fog. A check of my watch showed the time to be 7 AM. This may have been a little on the early side for the workaday world just wrenching itself out of warm comfortable beds, but this was the beach. There should have been a pretty good amount of movement by now, surfers, swimmers, fishermen, lifeguards, joggers, restaurant patrons, other bicyclists, and skateboarders. They could not have all been swallowed up by the fog. Even my most bizarre adventures had never found me feeling so lost and alone and with a feeling of disconnect from the rest of the world.

The first vibration of civilization that penetrated the fog within me and without me was the faint sound of music. I was unsure whether it was external to me or being produced by my own mind.

Either way, it was the only sound I could hear. I strained my ears trying to localize the origin of the sound, but that proved impossible. I rose, and started walking randomly, hoping to find a portal out of this madness. I hadn't gone far when I heard a voice, my first contact with humanity that morning.

The disembodied voice was calling my name, but once again I was not successful in putting a location to the sound. Meanwhile, the fog continued to thicken and felt as though it were closing in on me. Now I began to feel very uneasy, or just plain scared.

The moment had a strange timelessness about it, as though I were dwelling outside the confines of the three-dimensional world. I had even begun to forget what it was like to be in the actual world, though it had not been that long since I had been cycling along and enjoying the morning.

A soft wind began to move through the fog, surrounding me, hovering above me, then insinuating itself into my being. The heavy green mist gave way to the authority of the wind, yet I still remained caught in its ethereal cloak. It was entrapped by it, being engulfed, pulled in, and dragged down. I screamed into the fog.

Before the scream had been completely carried off on the wings of the wind, I found myself at home seated on the piano bench. My head was reeling with the familiar dizziness, and nausea was dragging my stomach into the act.

On the edge of the piano sat my cup of cold coffee, the one I thought I had drunk before heading out on my bike.

Tears that would brook no restraint began to roll down my face. I gingerly rose from the bench and slowly tried to walk as far as the door of the study. My legs were putty; I was unable to maintain my balance.

I plopped myself down on a small chair near the sliding door, trying to get a grip on myself. I threw a glance down at my watch. 10:30 AM. Where had the morning gone? What on earth had happened to me? As I had so many times before, I tried to assemble a jigsaw puzzle without the benefit of looking at a guiding picture. Not only was there the typical paucity of pieces, but also they did not seem willing to fit together into even the beginning of a coherent whole. I would have much preferred to have remembered nothing than mere fragments, and then not certain of what was real and what imaginary.

I headed towards the kitchen to make a fresh cup of coffee, check on Susan, and to somehow plug myself back into the world. The motion triggered another dizzy spell, the room began to spin madly, elongate into infinity, and once more, consciousness was eluding me.

I retreated back toward the study, but slipped on the back steps, falling backwards. I was able to break the fall with my right arm, pulling a muscle in the process and sending the coffee cup careening off the stairs.

“Damn it!” I cried. “Damn it to hell!”

I was able to regain my balance and get myself back into the study. I sat back down on the piano bench and slammed my fist against the top of the lid covering the keyboard.

“Goddamn it!” I bellowed as my anger at the situation overtook my fear.

I knew that the trouble, whatever it was, was not minor, but I preferred to remain in a spirit of comforting ignorance when it came to causes; it seemed so much easier to deal with things by ignoring. The need to finish my musical score suddenly pressed itself to the fore, giving me a reasonable, businesslike excuse for not paying attention to my physical woes.

Weeks later, while editing the tapes of my score for *The Tempest*, my inner world made itself manifest. I was listening intently to the score when the music took an additional texture, becoming part of me in ways other than that a musician expects and welcomes. The sound whirled around me as I was losing control of my consciousness.

The room began to elongate, undermining my balance and adding to the dizziness and confusion. All of sudden, I felt as if I was in the middle of a tornado, and my study was blown off into the distance. The next thing I knew, I was on the floor.

The following day I called a friend of many years who had acted in the capacity of a spiritual mentor. I filled him in on the events of the last few days, hoping he would say something reassuring, or at least reasonably logical. I was to be vastly disappointed.

Not only did I find his advice as befuddling as my experience, but his confusion only added bulk to my own. I listened attentively, thanked him, then hung up, no closer to a solution than before.

He had been no help and I realized no one could really be of help. My seeking of counsel was nothing more than an excuse to avoid dealing with my own problem. I would have to journey into my own psyche and find out what was going on with me.

It was then my thoughts turned to the one I would later name Charon.

It had been years since I had encountered my childhood friend and I was frankly unsure as to whether or not I still believed in his existence, at least as an entity separate from my own inner self. Although I was continuously aware of a presence, energy if you will, that accompanied me, or was part of me, I had long since ceased to affix to it a particular persona.

I switched on the tape recorder and went back to my work editing the *Tempest* score. The room had taken on a feeling that I can only describe as lovely in terms of the ambience that had made itself felt when I began to think of Charon.

The feeling was one of love, emanating from every corner of the room. I had no doubt of the reality of the presence of another entity that had joined me in the study. I was not alone; indeed, I might have never really been alone throughout those long years.

There was no voice, no physical manifestation of any kind, undoubtedly because none were needed. But for the first time in I could not estimate how long, I had the feeling I was part of something greater than myself.

And I was at peace.

Tricksters In the Park – February 1975

The musical ideas were flinging themselves around my brain like a swarm of angry wasps. Tired eyes and sore hands, products of extended hours composing at the piano, urged me to take a break, even if only for their sake.

I traded the piano for my desk, the keyboard for a nice pipe, composed to reflect on the morning's work. I had spent fruitless hours attempting the resolution of a modulation problem, and was not even close to a satisfactory solution.

The sudden ringing of the phone jarred me out of my contemplation. I angrily dealt with the call, slammed down the receiver, and settled back down with my pipe. Although most men do not inhale pipe smoke, I did, and the deep inhalation of the fragrant tobacco smoke felt good. I finished it up by blowing a stately procession of closely marching smoke rings into the fan atop my desk.

I was feeling pressed to complete the piano prelude I had been struggling with, and then proceed with my new string quartet. But my creativity was blocked and nothing I could do was able to make the psychic obstacle budge one inch. From the outset, the juxtaposition of the harmonies and various points of the melody line had presented problems. More than once during the creation of the prelude, I had written myself into an uncomfortable corner and needed to find a way out.

The present focus was on trying to create a dissonant quality to the melody while simultaneously resolving the dissonance with a homophonic structure of the harmonies. If that sounds difficult just reading it, you can imagine trying to do it, and I should be excused the break I felt needed.

I was greeted by the morning chill as I made my way to the park in El Segundo. I had liked this place from the first moment I saw it, and it seemed to have a special quality of its own. The surroundings were dark and somber, yet uplifting and comforting at the same time.

As I drew near the park, still fairly well socked-in with morning mist, I could see looming up out of the fog the old Spanish-style fountain, surrounded by its stalwart guardians, pine, maple, and very old oak trees. The trees were silently speaking forth from their deep wells of wisdom, which wafted towards me on the waves of serenity generated by the sounds of the water cascading from the fountain, made translucent by the faint light penetrating the clouds and fog.

The scenario was one of great natural beauty presented to all the senses at once with equal grace and tender balance, the perfect mixture of profound peace and great inspiration. The broken layers of fog meandering through the park gave the water a grayish hue, carrying the moisture up into the trees and from there to the boundaries of the imagination. It was a truly mystical atmosphere.

My metaphysical revelry was disturbed by the very physical coldness of my hands, not surprising on a morning where a small puffy cloud was exhaled from each breath. The entire scene reminded me of something that happened during my army days at Fort Ord.

It was 1964 and an epidemic of spinal meningitis had swept the base, inculcating fear in officer and enlisted man alike, as the disease seemed to be playing no favorites based upon rank and pay grade. The base was quarantined and the fear and uncertainty had everyone on the base on edge.

Military life is made up of a set of routines, making beds, going on patrols, drilling, KP, and a host of other incessantly trivial duties whose commonness and banality were both exceedingly boring and yet somehow reassuring, as there were very few surprises to catch one off balance.

It was Sunday and I was looking forward to my day of rest as I returned to the barracks from morning church services. Fort Ord was, at that time, in Carmel, on the Monterey peninsula in California's central coast, a peaceful beachside community of artists and writers and other creative types who have the good fortune of residing along one of the world's most beautiful shorelines.

That morning, a ghostlike fog had wrapped its arms around the stark manmade hills that was formed by the Army Corps of Engineers, who had expertly turned part of a breathtakingly beautiful landscape of rolling hills into a rehearsal ground for death and destruction. The rigors of training for combat made it not unusual for a soldier to be accidentally killed here even in mock fighting. The vibration of violence permeated the place, and it stuck to everything.

The morning service had concluded with my playing "Onward Christian Soldiers" on the organ while the chaplain made a closing benediction for all soldiers everywhere, and I must admit he had been effective. I still carried with me traces of the feeling of camaraderie with all my soldierly brethren who had served in all wars. But the brotherly glow that had arisen as I played the hymn began to fade quickly after I left.

The day room near the barracks was filled with soldiers playing pool and ping pong, watching television, reading, or doing whatever they could to connect their minds with something other than their regular daily grind. My head was already in pain, as usual, and the sudden increase in the noise level did nothing to assuage the discomfort. I decided to get off by myself and walk the open areas lying along the fence that wound over, down, and between the fort and the soft sands of the beach beneath it.

The landscape appeared as if years of shelling from artillery practice had rearranged a once pristine landscape into the dark side of the moon. The sounds of the 30-millimeter shells pounding craters in Mother Earth's gentle face seemed to linger in the air along with her pleading cries for relief. On the other side of the fence and down the rounded crest of a hill was the Pacific Ocean. Before I could see the endless tapestry of deep blue, I could hear the waves crashing against the beach; by then my eyes were filled with tears, and my heart with longing for the trappings of home.

The phantom of homesickness was not the only malady in evidence here, however. My head had been wracked with pain since the church service, and the incessant throbbing in my brain was now invading the back of my neck and spreading out into my lower body.

I grabbed for the fence as a wave of dizziness washed over me, cutting my hand on the barbed wire that snaked along the fence top.

“Goddammit!” I screamed, insulting the quiet air with my harsh language.

Even with the wound of my hand and my headache, there was deeper harm being done by a festering anger that seemed to have no specific target. The hills and beach began to rotate with ever increasing speed and I lost control of my consciousness; the cool morning air, sounds of the sea, smell of blood, sears of pain, all amalgamating into a bursting swirl of chaos.

For a moment my awareness seemed to steady itself, to bear down on a circle of clarity. I thought I could see soldiers filing towards me, their steel bayonets reflecting angles of light. Emblem-embroidered banners flapped in a wind artificially produced by the staccato concussions of warfare.

What seemed at first a company of men then expanded in front of me into an entire division. Their marching was well-practiced and done with care and precision. They drew nearer, their features becoming discernible. There were no ruddy cheeked Irishmen, no olive-complexioned, wavy-haired Italian boys from the Bronx, no surf jockeys of mid-European descent sporting blonde locks and impressive physiques, no scholarly, bespectacled Jews, none of the ethnically colorful stock characters populating every good war story. These were the faces of the dead.

They were ghosts, phantasms, fighting their war in the realm of the deceased. Malevolent grins spread over their white skull faces as they continued their march to a destination I cared not to know. Smoke filled the air as artillery shells crashed down all around them.

A spectral officer shouted the command to charge and the soldiers quickened their pace to meet the as yet unseen foe. An explosion of apocalyptic proportions brought the scene to an end and me to my senses, my head still pounding as I lay on the ground flanking the fence. My head felt as though that eerie band of skeletons was marching through it.

Shaken by the recollection of that horrible scene from years gone by, I reached into the fountain and splashed water on my face, trying to wash away the painful memory. The coolness of the water was delightfully bracing, and I let it remain for a few moments before I wiped my face dry with the handkerchief I carried in my old green khaki uniform. I was dressed in my old soldier’s clothes. Had that somehow triggered my recall and was that old visionary episode somehow heralding events yet to unfold this morning?

Two rows of oak trees lining a wide pathway formed the middle of the park. The leaves played hide-and-seek with me through the lazily drifting patches of fog as I threaded my way between the trees. Suddenly, a flash of intuition sounded as an alarm bell in the back of my thoughts.

My arm jumped, my leg began to quake, and my head was shaking uncontrollably. Reaching out blindly, I was able to grasp the limb of one of the trees and steady myself. I calmed down enough to notice that the fog began to thicken its consistency all around me; in seconds I was barely able to see the tree right next to me. Something moved in the fog, close to one of the trees, but I could not make out what it was. Then I saw a sliver of light reflecting off what

seemed to be a shiny button on a colorful jacket covering a red-and-white checkered shirt. The image was immediately hidden by the fog.

Then I felt things, something, jumping all around me, hopping, flitting, as though I were in the midst of a cloud of locusts. All of these scenes appeared as if they were random jump cuts in a movie concocted by a demented director. There was no time to get my bearings and put the fleeting pictures together into something I could recognize and mentally do something with. Then, I swear in the Name of God, I saw emerging from the fog a white rabbit, dressed in a blue blazer and carrying a silver pocket watch and, to make matters worse, it was hopping towards me.

I blinked my eyes. The apparition vanished, only to be replaced by a small leprechaun, rigged out in green suit, white beard, long stemmed pipe, the whole nine yards of Emerald Isle blarney.

What I was seeing created out of the fog were, of course, images from my childhood; stories I had read or heard were literally being formed out of the mist. Someone or something was painting these things on the canvas of water vapor floating through the park and somehow condensing around me. Perhaps my own unconscious was generating the images and manipulating the foggy medium, or someone was reading my unconscious mind and fashioning what they saw there. Colors were being formed into images, images into scenes, seemingly at random although I knew at some deeper level that something more organized was transpiring.

My unconsciousness was breaking down old barriers, sending out certain ideas, thoughts and images into my conscious awareness. What the purpose behind this was I did not know. Still, if I was caught in a childlike frame of mind I would inject my body into it as well.

I started chasing these mischievous imps from my extreme youth through the park, slipping and sliding on the damp grass, through the fog, around tree trunks, over the fountain, around and around the park until I was stopped by exhaustion.

When I rested to catch my breath, the creations began to multiply. Leprechauns, elves, white unicorns, all of them classical symbols of the elusive Trickster figure of folklore. Their numbers began to overwhelm my eyesight; I feared I might be losing my mind.

“Stop!” I heard myself shouting at them, “In God’s name, stop!”

I fell near the fountain, hitting the wet ground hard. Tears were tracing liquid paths down my cheeks. I raised my hands to my eyes, blocking out the images, holding them there till my palms were wet with tears. Then they disappeared, being withdrawn into the fog of my memories.

Utterly confused, I walked back to my studio. What sort of lunacy was this, this attack of the tricksters? What was I being told, and by whom?

What was most disturbing was not the event itself but the form it had taken, as it had been many years since I had had visions of these tricksters, these manipulators of thought and emotion, who forced their victims to dance to their pipes and play according to their rules, whether their human playmates understood them or not.

Why had they returned? Why had they chosen this particular moment to do so, and this particular setting?

Still dizzy, I sat down on a wall to regain composure and try to think things through. Tears again began to flow as the icy tongs of fear closed around my heart and thrust its sharpness deeply into my soul.

I wondered if I should relate this to Paula, or to anyone. Frankly, one of my most haunting fears was that I might be a little mad. Or more than a little. The morning's events did not serve to diminish the guilt and shame of that dread.

My head still hurt and my thoughts were not yet fully back under my control. The fog was beginning to burn away under the rays of the sun as it rose higher towards mid-morning, its brilliant illumination doing nothing to chase away the shadows from the dark corners of my mind. Dark and forbidding had this golden day become for me.

I had a wife and small daughter to support, to care for, to protect. What would they do should I become physically or psychologically incapacitated? What would it augur for them if hubby and daddy were locked away in an asylum?

Correctly or incorrectly, I needed to rationalize what I had just lived through. My mind had played a horrendously funny trick. That was all. I was hardly a stranger to that sort of thing. I would keep this to myself. I had to. I would lock it up inside with all the other episodes and the chips would just have to fall wherever they fell.

As I neared home I felt some confidence begin to show up in my psyche. I pulled open the sliding glass door of my study and immersed myself in things familiar. I would put this incident behind me right away. I had work to do, music to compose, a prelude to complete, a quartet to finish. I had less than a month in which to do it and they would not write themselves.

My schedule was too busy for this sort of nonsense, I decided firmly, little suspecting that the events of the morning were the birth of a process that would wind up taking me into worlds whose existence I did not even suspect, to places beyond my wildest flights of imagination.

My fingers began to produce sweet music from the black and white keys of my beloved piano. Music hath charms to soothe the savage beast, as someone said, and its beauty and mathematical perfection have a sweet sanity all their own.

I fused the dark chords of the harmonies with the lighter textures of the melodies, the integration that I myself needed. Perhaps I had found what I had needed, what I had been looking for, knowingly or otherwise.

The fear of the park gave way to the confidence of the musician's workshop. It felt so good to be playing.

### Move to the Valley – 1976

It was a surprise to have Paula's parents back from their travels across the country, and as soon as they returned, they laid in our laps a real bomb, namely, that they were planning on selling the house in El Segundo that we were living in. When translated, this means "start packing and look for a new home."

As I was working full time in the telecommunications industry, the task of finding a new house fell to Paula and her mother. The location that was eventually selected was in the Reseda area of the San Fernando Valley, the north-west end of Los Angeles County for those who don't know much about Southern California.

The house was situated in one of those cookie-cutter neighborhoods that sprang up as suburbs of the larger cities in the post-war 1950's. The place itself was rather poorly constructed and consisted of three small bedrooms, a kitchen with a blushing modest dining area, and a carport in place of a proper garage, just the kind of place that would have been snapped up by a GI Bill, VA loan soldier, his wife, and their statistical 1.8 children in the years following WWII. One bright spot was that, as we only had one child, Susan, I was able to convert the third bedroom into my study, and this physically cramped space became an alchemical vessel upon which I embarked on the journey of self-transformation.

The house was obviously very affordable even for that time. Another redeeming feature was the fact it sat on a quarter-acre lot, giving us an unusually large amount of yard space. This made the house somewhat isolated, but bringing with it a sense of peace and quiet.

My early explorations of the Valley led me to Chatsworth, once the home of family farms and extensive motion picture and television filming. One area of Chatsworth, a bucolic, rustic part called Stony Point, immediately called to me.

Stony Point, with its native shrubs and trees, hiking trails and bridle paths, was a sacred site for the local Indians who had made it their home for centuries and virtually upon arrival I could feel their energy.

Chatsworth is located at the foot of the Santa Susana Mountains and its terrain made it a natural choice for the filming of westerns for both television and motion pictures. The windswept sandstone rock formations created a special landscape that is at once austere and majestic. As many before me, I could not resist falling in love with this place.

One of my most vivid and cherished memories is of my first climb up the long dirt trail that lead to “the faces of the gods,” three large sandstone formations with the appearance of faces. I could feel an instantaneous connection with the energy stored within and emanating from those silent rocky countenances. This is the area I refer to as “the mountain” or “my mountain;” it is a numinous site, part alchemical laboratory, part Native American ceremonial ground, and the scene of extraordinary visions and spiritual experiences within a stone’s throw of the ever-busy Topanga Canyon Boulevard. This street, which winds from the Pacific Ocean all the way to the far border of Chatsworth, is one of the longest streets on Earth; in fact, the Stony Point area is in the 11,400 block of Topanga Canyon!

As for my study, the spiritual sanctuary in my home, I carefully prepared it by performing cleansing ceremonies designed to remove any lingering energies from its former residents. This might sound very odd, but if you have ever moved into a place where others had lived before you, you will be very much aware of what I am talking about. Also, decades before most Westerners (myself included) ever heard the words *feng shui*, I carefully arranged the furniture to optimize the flow of energy.

The room had definite drawbacks, however. The flooring was of green-and-white tiles, which was not only hideous-looking but also very cold. I covered the floor with a red-and-white checkered rug that was a perfect fit for the room and provided at least some shielding against the cold that sprung from the stone foundation.

While still living in El Segundo, I had established the habit of recording my visions and other experiences in a small journal. However, I had found that merely reducing them to words was not enough to capture their impact, thus I began drawing what I saw.

In order to do better justice to my visionary drawings, I began compiling them in a large black journal purchased specially for this purpose. My first drawings were in pencil, later I graduated to watercolors and ink. This journal was the beginning of my entire process of self-transformation, the record of my evolution, and ultimately, the origin of all of my artwork in various media.

My days were occupied with the business of earning a living by installing telephone systems while my nights were spent writing and drawing in my journals until the wee hours of the morning.

From my earliest days in the Reseda home, I could feel a decidedly feminine energy making itself manifest in my study. So marked was its presence that I could feel the germination of a subtle shift in how I perceived my own sexuality.

My anima energy was awakening and nothing was going to stem its tide. (Anima, a word coined by Carl Gustav Jung, refers to the feminine aspects of the male persona). Paula and I had now been married four years, and in a way difficult to define, we were exchanging the typical gender roles, both in our own personas and in our relationship.

For one thing, Paula was physically bulking up at an appreciable rate even as I was losing weight. My hair had grown long and rather wild, and as I am naturally thin and found it easy to lose pounds, I was displaying the more “metrosexual” look of the 1960’s.

This transformative period lasted about a year, at the end of which I had taken on the physical characteristics of the feminine persona. I was unable to analyze the cause but the effect was clear enough: I was overwhelmed by my own feminine energy, the side that most men either suppress or find some way to sublimate into more traditional avenues. This, of course, was all related to psychological energies rather than behavior; I never had the slightest interest in, much less engaged in, transvestism, for example. Being tall and slim, though, my body did conform well to tight pants, and I was also comfortable in clogs, and was not averse to carrying my art supplies and other things in a bag slung over my shoulder, which most males in those pre-backpack days would have shied away from.

I could strongly feel a feminine persona within me, trying to break free, to be born, and to come to fruition as a separate entity. Charon had created this entity within me, and it became my feminine guide and the catalyst for my creative process.

In time, this feminine side of my nature became so dominant and distinct that the person that I was seemed to be fading, so she could emerge. All of my sexual energy was channeled into this emerging personality. I was terrified at what all of this might portend, yet I also felt very comfortable with this new psyche.

I had an enormous battle with guilt over allowing this intruder from within to push me into the background, and I was at a loss as to how to foster the integration of all this with my male side, which was obviously not gone or annihilated, and I was certainly bewildered as to how to fit these feelings into my relationship with Paula.

Honestly, I don’t know if anyone even detected any changes in me, other than to remark how thin I looked. Long hair on men and an overall unisex look were in at the time, and the fact that I was a musician meant that I could get away with just about anything and not risk being seen

as odd. So, while I was covered as far as the world was concerned, I feared for my whole gender identity.

My then therapist, Russ, assured me that I was not in need of a homosexual relationship or any such thing, but a Homo-Eros experience, i.e., that of love directed towards self-realization. I was still very much confused but as time passed, I became accepting of and settled into harmony with, the new me.

One productive aspect of this was that my artistic life was powerfully stimulated. During this “feminine period” I performed with many symphony orchestras in Southern California, wrote string arrangements for Christian recordings, and began my output of drawings and paintings. Furthermore, I found that my inner visions were reaching into heretofore unexplored worlds.

I should state that although this feminine energy possessed a very dark quality, it was in no wise evil or destructive. Its function was to lead me into as-yet unknown and unexpected depths of my own psychological underworld.

As this unfolded, it became increasingly harder to function in the supposedly real world, especially in the telecommunications business. I had found that most of the technicians in that field had decidedly red necks and displayed no sympathy for my newly emerged feminine side. Needless to say, I had to take a lot of flak over my appearance.

By the end of 1979 I had cut my hair, left behind the hands-on technical stuff for the more rarified halls of management where, of course, it was needful to dress far more conservatively. I now looked more Madison Avenue than Haight-Ashbury. It would still take another ten years, however, to complete the integration of the masculine and feminine energies of my being.

Meanwhile, though my exterior appearance had changed dramatically, my interior life continued to enlarge and expand, and I had no idea that I was about to have the most profound encounters with the unconscious of my life.

#### The Black Minotaur - May 1976

The events that I am about to describe to you might seem like an extraordinarily wild flight of fancy worthy of Philip K. Dick or a plunge into a nightmarish abyss out of the darkest corners of William Burroughs’ fevered mind, but I assure you it is neither. However, they had a profound and long-lasting effect upon me. This had to happen, as given the human nature’s stubborn resistance to change, an apocalyptic encounter with one’s own deepest “nether regions” is often necessary in order to facilitate evolutionary growth.

This episode occurred in the late afternoon on my mountain, Stony Point, in a location to which I have appended the name “place of the four stars,” because of the four stars someone had painted on the rock formations many decades ago. What would have prompted someone to so decorate these formations, laid out along the four cardinal points and each star facing North, East, South or West, I have no idea, although it does not appear to be the usual childish graffiti or the effects of malicious vandalism.

I had been feeling dizzy throughout the day and sat down to my meditation with a blinding headache. The wind was blowing very hard, and almost seemed to be causing the sun’s disappearance over the western mountaintops. Soon it was dark, very dark, and the fact that I was alone somehow made the darkness even more intense.

I was seated on one of the star-decorated rocks, facing what had been the rapidly setting sun, now engulfed by the lonely night. A quick movement caught by my peripheral vision caused me to turn around in time to see something black and without form emerging from the green foliage along the base of the rock formation. Even with the wind I could discern that something else was moving the branches.

Fear wrapped itself around me. This could have been anything, including a mountain lion, a fox afflicted with rabies, anything. I could easily have been severely injured by any number of potential causes, trapped up there with no chance of calling for assistance.

Not knowing what was coming, I decided it would be safer to be up and ready to move than being locked in a lotus position atop the rock. I untangled my legs and stood up, then carefully made my way down the sandy face of the sandstone pillar. At one point I lost my grip and fell at least 15 feet down the rock, scraping my arm along its rocky surface and drew some blood (not a scent you want wafting on the wind in a dark night with wild animals roaming about).

An involuntary scream of pain and surprise was halted halfway through my throat by the sight of a black figure poised in the brush to my left. As it was positioned precariously close to a forty-foot drop, it seemed safer to set my course in the opposite direction, northwest, rather than to try to run past him. Taking as much care as possible under the circumstances, balancing my need to get away with the need to do so in one piece, I moved as rapidly as possible, up, around, then down the trail.

Without warning, a Black Minotaur appeared directly in my path.

The Minotaur, as you may know, is a figure found in Greek mythology, half man and half bull, and you probably remember something about Theseus going into the labyrinth to kill it. I had

no idea why I would have a vision of a Minotaur, as I had no particular interest in the Greek classics.

The Minotaur stood eight or nine feet tall and was very striking in appearance, largely colored black with shades of gray, with red eyes that burned as coals in the night. Perhaps from them came the illumination of his features, which were hard and rough. For a moment, my shock was leavened by the sheer spectacle of his presence; then, I realized this creature's pose was entirely threatening. Concurrent with this realization, I pulled up a crude weapon, a stone club, and I knew I had to kill this monster.

This was not just an intuitive flash or hunch; the desire, indeed, the very need to kill this thing took full possession of my reason, triggering within me an irrepressible rage that demanded I kill it, violently, tearing it to pieces. There was no purpose behind this feeling, no thoughts accompanying it. It was raw emotion.

Firmly grasping the club, I approached the Minotaur as determinedly and defiantly as David did Goliath, raising the club and smashing my opponent squarely in the face with all my strength.

He laughed at me, an odd reaction that seemed out of synch with the torrent of Minotaur blood that cascaded down over me. Emboldened by the blood, I landed a second blow with the club, causing the creature to turn and run away, again laughing, calling to the Gods, and mocking me.

I took off after him, scrambling through the dense, dangerous brush, plunging on through the darkness, staying close to the creature as it headed in a westerly direction, towards another cliff that ended in a perpendicular drop. My pursuit ended with my being enmeshed in weeds and unceremoniously pulled to the ground, where I was instantly embedded with thorns and thistles.

I pulled myself up, glimpsing at the blood that had flowed from the earlier gash inflicted by the rock. The sight of the blood fueled my anger and energized me to continue the chase. I was as a hound from hell sniffing out a trail of blood and consumed by the lust to kill my quarry. It was a purely animalistic drive, devoid of reason, and utterly, primitively instinctual.

He continued to evade me and I continued giving chase, down one side of the hill, up another, to the north then the northwest, down thin, winding trails, through crevasses in the rocks, through openings in the ragged brush, all the while the Minotaur goaded me, egging me on, daring me to pursue him, challenging me to catch him.

As I pursued him once more down the hillside, I could see the red blood standing out in stark relief against his black flesh, the blood I had drawn with my club.

As the chase continued, seemingly without end, I was becoming tired. My breath deeply sucked in and forcibly pushed out; this heavy breathing united with the wind to produce an eerie confluence of sound.

Our dance of death led us into a clearing, where he suddenly stopped and turned to face me. Standing absolutely still, looking like a Grecian statue honoring mythical days of yore, he watched me approach, and smiled, his two red eyes blazing out through the dark like twin laser beams fixed unblinkingly upon me.

I ran up, pounded the club into his face, and then sent a tremendous blow crashing into his chest. For some reason, he allowed my attacks without resistance. I followed this up with a veritable rain of blows, each one opening up flesh and sending forth small rivers of blood; the red liquid spraying up and down, to the right and to the left. I kept up the frenzied attack until I literally did not have the strength to raise the club any more.

It was dead, finally, and I was drained of all my might, enervated by the chase, by the combat, by the unfiltered emotion that had been coursing through me, and by the sudden let-down after the continual adrenaline rush.

I sat down heavily, rib cage expanding and contracting powerfully as I attempted to steady my breathing, surrounded by gore and blood and troubled sand eddying around me as a turbulent audience to my victory.

I had a knife in my belt, perhaps four to five inches long, no more. I drew it with a weary flourish and cut off his head. What followed was a systematic butchery of the creature, arms, legs, testes and the rest.

I built a campfire and roasted the severed parts of the Minotaur, filling the night air with a shower of sparks and a pungent cloud of dark, rolling smoke.

Throwing the roasted parts into a providentially appearing kettle, I prepared the Minotaur for feasting, washed it down with its blood, smearing what I did not quaff all over my face and body.

This was not a meal to curb any physical hunger. It was a ritual, a taking-in of the Minotaur's very life force. I knew I had to make it a part of me, had to merge the creature's innermost essence with mine, and become one with it. He had given up his life for that very purpose, of that I was convinced beyond the slightest doubt.

I savored the smoothness of the warm human-animal blood as it slid down my throat. When I was through, I became aware of music whose rhythm lifted me up and made me dance around the cauldron. The movement made me aware of my exhaustion, and I sat back down to drink more blood and extract more succulent body parts from the cauldron, including the now lifeless red eyes.

Sated in every possible way, I collapsed down into the dust and slept for what I estimated to have been about an hour. Awakening, I noticed the fire had died out and left me encased in darkness. The trees and bushes were strewn with the remains of the Minotaur, a few shreds of which still remained in the kettle.

In the midst of the gruesome evening's last remaining evidence, I felt well, elated, one with the universe. In some way I could not explain, I had undergone regeneration, a rebirth whose effects ramified deeply into every part of my being, both known and unknown, familiar and beyond my present ken, yet somehow destined to be revealed in the future.

I was keenly aware that the Minotaur had given up his life so that I might be made anew. I sent up praises to his name on the unseen waves of the wind.

I stood up and poured water from my canteen over the bedraggled coals of the dead fire, then spread the cold, wet coals over the ground. Walking back down the mountain, I was bursting with a new energy that continued to flow through me as I walked through the dry riverbed and up to Topanga Canyon and my white truck, which had been quietly parked on Topanga all through the night's bizarre events. I threw the truck into a U-turn and drove south down Topanga Canyon and towards home.

Paula and Susan were on the couch watching television. Silently, I passed by them and went into my study. I shut the door and sprawled on the red-and-white checkerboard rug. The floor was warm, the room dark. I lit a candle and collapsed back to the floor, watching the seemingly disembodied candle flame bob and weave in the blackness. Then I fell asleep.

When I awakened, the candle had burned almost all the way down, the melted wax forming a soft mass on the tabletop. Suddenly I found myself experiencing an overpowering feeling of guilt. What had happened to me tonight? Then I knew the awful truth: I was insane! I had to be. Minotaurs were the stuff of legend; they had never existed, and could not possibly exist. I had been hallucinating!

The sudden invalidation of my entire experience on the mountain flooded me with fear and anxiety. As I grappled with my confusion, some of the candle wax flowed off the table and

down onto my hand, burning me and snapping me out of my daze. I rolled upright, sat myself in a lotus posture for meditation, and focused in on trying to recreate the night's events, the strangeness of which put me in such a mental state I did not even flinch when I noticed the dark figure standing near the study door.

He stood right next to my stereo, from which point he reached out his hand to me. With his other hand he pulled back his hood, exposing his gleaming red eyes. I shuttered, is the Black Minotaur back again? Or was it his restless spirit coming to do something horrific to me?

The figure moved my way just as a gust of wind blew through the window and extinguished the already faltering candle. The room was plummeted into pitch blackness, broken only by the twin red eyes now freely floating in space. Only the knowledge that my wife and daughter were nearby squelched the scream I felt rising. I reached out to see if I could make contact with the thing, which I could not. It glided back into my bookcases, and then made itself one with the night, becoming as transparent as a ghost.

I asked what it wanted, what its purpose here was, and what I could do for it. I received no answers to my questions. The only reply was the silence and those crimson eyes which gradually dissipated until it was replaced by the dark.

The full impact of the day's events finally settled in on me and I felt sick, physically ill. I desperately needed to discuss all this with someone, but whom? Paula and Susan were quite obviously out of the question. I called my friend William, starting the conversation hesitantly, then describing my adventure in detail. He listened in such silence I wondered if he had simply put down the receiver and walked away from me and my madness. I asked if he was still there and in a rather subdued voice, he assured me he was.

I asked what he thought of my experience. He told me he wanted to formulate an answer that made sense, not the most comforting of responses. He then suggested that I seek "professional help" and referred me to his therapist.

I told him I couldn't afford a therapist and their outrageous charges. William had an appointment scheduled for the next day, which he volunteered to give up so I could have the session. He promised to call the doctor and arrange it; all I would have to do is to show up. As thankful as I was for his assistance, I nonetheless had more than a few concerns at the prospect of actually seeing a therapist.

After work the next evening I arrived early for my appointment with the therapist, whom I will call by his first name, Russ. I decided to kill some time with a walk around the park across the

street from his office building. I was still anxious but more reconciled to the need to tell my story. Precisely at 6:30 I knocked on Russ' door.

Russ was a tall man, with strong features and, in his way, handsome. His casual attire of Levis and brown shorts signaled that he was not a Gentleman's Quarterly kind of guy, which helped put me more at ease. The office was filled with books and religious bric-a-brac. The film of dust covering the books and the soft light from the corner of the room gave the office a homey feeling. I knew he was a Jungian analyst and regarded the interior life of the human psyche with the utmost seriousness. I liked him immediately.

He asked me to explain what was going on with me and how he could help. With some reluctance and more than a little embarrassment, I explicated the entire tale of the previous day's events.

He listened intently, concentrating on my words, never once interrupting or taking notes as he absorbed every aspect of my tale, no doubt including those I only inferred, hoping he would extrapolate the rest, which I'm sure he did.

When I was finished, he asked a thoroughly unexpected question. "What did you do with the energy the Minotaur gave you?"

This was not the interrogative I was expecting, thinking it would be more along the lines of how many drinks had I had before going to the mountain.

"What?" I asked, more than a little startled.

"The Minotaur gave up his life," Russ said. "You consumed him. So, what did you do with all the magic and energy he gave you?"

"Nothing," I replied, rather lamely.

"Nothing? Why?"

Completely confused, I had no idea what to say. Fortunately, Russ said it for me.

"You had a real opportunity to expand your consciousness by ingesting his energy, and you let it pass by. Too bad."

This made me feel even worse, and yet I was comforted by his unquestioned acceptance of my encounter with a mythological beast.

The time passed very quickly and we arranged to meet the next week. As we shook hands I thanked him for his kindness.

It was a long drive home from Santa Monica to the San Fernando Valley, but for the first time in I didn't know how long, I was at peace.

#### The Dark Journey to the Underworld – November 1977

Although I was very pleased with the progress I was making with Russ, the overshadowing presence of an indefinable darkness remained with me, not as a relentless pursuit but as an additional dimension to my life. I had lived my life up to that point with the nagging certainty that I was, in actuality, a denizen of some underworld of evil, a lost soul wandering through a world I didn't really belong to. But on this November day, I would have this fear put to rest by the very ruler of the underworld. This feeling, implanted in my young consciousness by my parents and nurtured to terrible fruition by the tenets of organized religion, would be uprooted and cast aside in no uncertain terms.

The morning was overcast and misty, but despite the weather I felt drawn to my mountain, whose mystical ambience seems to be always enhanced by "adverse" weather conditions. I felt I should be able to make it out to Chatsworth, climb the mountain to my favored spot for meditation and, if necessary, find a cave or other suitable place to sit out any precipitation.

The trip to the mountain was imperative, as all through the morning I had felt disturbing energies marshaling their forces around me. This was more than a psychic impression; I could actually feel their effects viscerally, as well as in my limbs, the back of my head, and my eyes. With the physical discomfort and mental anxiety, there was also a feeling of alienation from the world-as-it-is, accompanied by dizziness and disorientation.

I dressed, grabbed my bag, stuffed my hat on my distressed head, then hopped in the truck and made for Topanga Canyon.

When I arrived, the area was dark with clouds, some of which travel beneath the level of the mountain tops, creating some truly spectacular tableaux. The early morning chill was upon everything and turned the soft breeze into genuine cold.

The aroma and feel of the oncoming rain was very pronounced and I knew I would only have enough time to climb to the top of the mountain and make my way to the rocks before the first drops of rain began to fall.

I threaded my way up the familiar old trail to the base of the rocks, and then commenced the climb, carefully and firmly placing first hand then foot in one strategic crevice after another, pulling myself up from one plateau to the next, traversing the space between the ground and the top of Stony Point in about ten minutes. The rain began immediately upon my arrival, sending me hurrying through stands of old cacti and sagebrush and up some more rocks to “the place of the skull,” as I called it, a cave providing rock climbers shelter against inclement weather.

As the rain began to pelt the mountain, I settled myself down in the dry confines of the cave to sit and let my mind clear. It was while thus engaged that a dark figure came out of the moist atmosphere.

There was little cohesion to the form, but enough for me to see that it was cloaked, without face or hands. Although the figure remained silent, I intuited its desire to have me follow it. Where, I hadn't the slightest idea. A skeletal hand appeared, its forefinger pointing to a space between two of the larger rock formations. Somehow, I knew he was pointing to an entrance of what I termed “the underworld.”

Despite a foreboding feeling of terror, I followed my guide into this world. As we walked, I began to hear tortured cries of countless souls in the distance of the nether regions; the sound interwove with the rain, or perhaps riding on it, through which the torment of the souls was broadcast to the upper world. The closeness of their wailing despair was so strong that I myself began to weep, joining the chorus of lamentation.

I began to realize that I was on a trip into the bowels of the earth of my own being. I followed the spirit guide, as we started our descent into hell.

The darkness was that described in the Book of Exodus as one of the plagues upon Egypt, “even darkness which can be felt.” Corpses were strewn everywhere; the ground beneath us was muddy, horrifically woven with streams of blood and entrails. Brimstone and writhing tangles of otherworldly maggots, stygian birds of prey whose beaks and talons pecked and ripped the souls unfortunate enough to be confined in the caverns of the damned, souls whose numbers were beyond human estimation. The stench was overpoweringly vile, demanding a stop to vomit up everything I had ever ingested, but the spirit insisted that I continue, and this was no setting in which to display disobedience.

We continued on through this chamber of horror, surrounded by the stench of death, bathed in wave after wave of inexpressible sorrow, hopelessness, and terror, magnified to the nth degree by the certainty that it would never end, and that there was no deliverance, and no possible escape.

As we proceeded deeper, the rocky walls began to pulsate, the undulation revealing the millions of human body parts embedded within it, eyes, hands, feet, torsos, heads, and rivers of blood flowing from each as though they were freshly ripped from their former owners.

The end of the journey was the bank of a river of deep red blood, where a dark, skeletal abomination stretched forth its hand of bones, requesting payment. I reached into my pocket and grasped the first coin I felt, handing it over to this nightmarish ferryman. I then knew I had to request passage across this river of death.

An immense bird of prey screeched hideously as it accelerated down towards me. I had the intuition that these birds wanted to tear up my flesh and destroy me, but something was preventing them from carrying out their desires. As I stood motionless with terror, they came within inches of me and abruptly turned away.

The ferryman pointed to the boat and we climbed aboard. The boatman took the oar, directing the ship toward a destination I dared not even guess at.

As we journeyed along the crimson current, the piteous voices of the condemned gave way to a frightening feeling that I was the object of fixated gaze of the miserable souls who had preceded me in this place, their illimitable eyes boring into me. Then I noticed a few gleams of light against the blackness, lighting up the layers of steamy darkness, smoke and the gag-inducing putridity of all-embracing death. It was like being within the rotting folds of a decaying body.

The ferryman knew every inch of the way. I still had not been favored with the slightest explanation as to where I was, where I was going, or why I was here. No one spoke, not the ferryman, the spirit guide, and certainly not me.

All of a sudden, another stomach-churning screech split the air, and a winged creature, undeniably female, flew down toward the boat. Its open mouth displayed vampire teeth, a perfect match for the bat wings spanning a good fifty feet and the burning red eyes. This giant harpy approached with its claws outstretched, and its horrendous body smeared with the blood of victims beyond number.

I felt crushed by a blanket of utter fear, and placed my hands over my heart in an insane attempt to keep it from being torn out. However, as if some unseen power deterred her from her real intent, she dipped and flew right by us, even though one can sense her palpable desire to rip me to shreds and devour me while I still lived.

We plunged further into the stifling darkness, which, unbelievably, grew even darker and more menacing, reaching a scope of terror beyond human imagination. The red blood in the river turned black, as in the deepest nooks and crannies of the human body.

Finally, and thankfully, the ferryman smoothly and skillfully guided his boat to dock on The Other Side. "The Other Side" of what remained in question.

Again the boatman stretched forth his fleshless arm, pointing to the dock, and wordlessly informed me, "You have arrived. Get out."

He didn't have to coax me.

I disembarked, followed by the companion that had led me this far. The ferryman turned and guided the boat back into the unknown.

We walked through a narrow corridor lined with shadowy winged figures. The tortured groaning of those who had been judged for their sins was no longer heard here. Indeed, the only sound was the peculiar ringing in the ears one senses from complete silence, in this case an eternal quiet, which did not, for a bit, alleviate the all-encompassing stench of rotting flesh.

I was led to a bronze door equipped with barred windows of darkly stained glass. At the touch of my companion's hand, the door opened noiselessly and we passed through into a sizeable chamber filled with thousands, perhaps millions of people or things screaming as loudly as they could, perhaps in some sort of chant; the din made certainty, or even concentration, impossible. I had a feeling, though, that the dissonant chorus was some sort of shout of praise. I covered my ears trying to block out the deafening wall of shrieks, which all of a sudden ceased.

From the center of this mass emerged a tall, demonic entity, cloaked in red. His face was chiseled and enveloped in a greenish glow. His hands were massive with long fingers and huge claws, and his body black and sculpted. He must have been sixteen feet tall, and had an aura of confidence that was beyond human understanding. His beauty was breath-taking and disarming; I was more mesmerized than terrified.

He stretched his arms out towards me. Instinctively knowing the protocol, I knelt before him both in fear in reverence. He commanded me to rise and asked me why I had come here.

"Your guide brought me," was the only sensible answer.

Laughing, he pointed to my guide and said, "*This is not my spirit, and I would ever have sent anyone to fetch you here, as this is not a place for mortals.*"

He continued, "*This is a place of forgetting. A place to forget, never to remember.*"

My first reaction was a feeling of being rejected and hurt, as I realized that I couldn't stay in his presence. Was this another place that I did not belong to?

He placed his hand on my shoulder and embraced me. When he released me, he lifted his hands towards the chamber's ceiling and the crowds of worshipers began chanting his name, though for some reason I was unable to hear exactly what they were saying. They were using a language that was outside my ability to register in any meaningful way. But I knew it was not for me to know his name as I had no business to transact with this being nor any place in his shadowy kingdom.

He lowered his arms and placed both hands on my shoulders.

*"Leave this place now!"* he commanded, kindly but firmly. *"Leave and never return!"*

I wanted to ask why I had been brought to this place, and what place was, but before I could translate my thoughts into words, he was escorting me from the chamber back to the landing.

Upon reaching the dock, I found the ferryman rowing the boat upriver to pick me up. Amazingly, he saluted me. When the boat arrived I climbed aboard, more easily than before, an old hand at it now and filled with relief that I would be making the return trip. My guide, in whose charge I apparently remained, paid the boatman and we started back towards home.

I awoke from this dream, this vision, this experience, safely inside the cave. The rain was still raging outside. I sat up and savored the wonderful aroma of the rain as it touched the earth.

To this day I have no idea why the lesson was presented in that particular format, though I suspect that the sheer drama of the spectacle was necessary to overcome the powerful programming from my past – the kind of programming that came from the constant assurance of my beloved family and holy church that I was demonically possessed and destined for hell unless I was "saved" according to the way they cherished.

As frightening as this experience had been, it accomplished its purpose: the knocking down of the walls that had been built all around me by hands other than mine, confining me to a narrow path of guilt and fear.

I had personally seen the abode of the "ungodly" dead, a realm whose overlord had personally assured me that I had no place in. The very liege of the place so many feared told me that my previous assumptions were *wrong*. I was not spawned there, and I was not even wanted there. Whatever kinship I had felt for... call it hell if you wish... whatever anyone had tried to tell me

about it and my relationship with it, no matter what I thought I had known about it, fantasized about it, feared about it, I had been wrong, completely, absolutely, and irrevocably wrong.

And as to who or what had taken it upon themselves to go against the desires of the lord of the underworld and take me where I was not intended (by him) to go, is a question that remains unanswered and perhaps unanswerable.

### Three Days in October

With Russ gone, I was left on my own once more to deal with my visions and my life. My interior existence had taken on a life of its own and I was, effectively, split into two people, now without that crucial disinterested third party to provide wise counsel.

Looking back, maybe it was time for me to explore my inner self on my own. This began in earnest during four very special days in October, 1978, when the forces of my own energy undertook the process of demolishing my psychic ivory tower and initiating a lengthy series of encounters with my unconscious whose eventual goal was the complete transformation of the self. I freely admit that I was extremely slow to grasp the essential message of these experiences, the point of which required years to work through to transcend my ego and bring about the necessary changes.

### October 16, 1978

I had arisen early to seek inspiration at the mountain. I trudged through the early morning chill toward the top of the trail where it begins its decline into the rocky space surrounding the three large sandstone "faces" that keep silent watch over the entrance to the higher reaches of the mountain.

Standing atop Stony Point, I saw a strange glow originating behind an old oak tree and growing close to the top of the three fossilized faces. I had noticed this tree before and had been intrigued by its rather unreal scaly appearance; at least, it seemed unreal to me, but so did most things in the "real" world. Trees were friends to me, as I often felt closer to them than to most sentient beings I had known. As a loner, I have learned to draw real satisfaction from solitude. An altered state of consciousness is a normal state of mind for me rather than an aberration.

The blue sky somehow seemed much further away from the Earth that day. Sheets of green fog tightly hugged the mountain and out of the fog Charon emerged.

"The essence of your nature is that one and one seldom equals two," Charon said.

Understandably nonplussed, I asked what he meant by that statement.

“It means,” He said, “that you have the ability to focus your attention on the other side of reality and see it as though you were at home and it was real.”

“Is it real?” I enquired, concerned as usual for the stability of my sanity.

“It is real if the effect of that world changes your consciousness and then reaches your inner being,” Charon replied. “Change is one of the measuring sticks by which the evolution of consciousness is evaluated. First, there is the experience, then the result. If no result occurs, then nothing is gained and no end is served.”

“Shit that hurts!” I blurted out without thinking, as I found myself tripping over a dead tree branch and hurting my foot.

Charon merely laughed and proceeded with his teaching. Pointing to a small hill, he asked me what I saw.

I saw nothing but a small hill, and informed him of that fact, rather curtly. My injured flesh was throbbing and more than likely developing a colorful bruise and, quite frankly, I was in no mood for being on the receiving end of metaphysical philosophizing.

However at that moment the world seemed to split open, a flash of brilliant light painlessly blinded my eyes and, as I had been so often before, I was set upon by fear.

“Relax,” I heard Charon say softly. “Just allow the energy to come to you. Focus on that point in the distance I referred to a moment ago.”

I could feel tears spring out of their ducts, probably from shame that I couldn’t vault over the wall of fear and get down to this undeniably serious business. It was all so strange, and all I wanted to do at that moment was to run away, aching foot and all.

“Stop it!” Charon yelled. “Don’t give in to your fear!”

As the gleam of light began to lessen, I discerned a male human shape standing in the distance, regarding me with some interest. One thing I knew was that this was not Charon. He glided his way toward me, neither really walking nor flying, skimming above the cramped sea of small stones and then over the ever-present larger rocks of Stony Point.

His red eyes shone brightly in the morning light. The momentum of his approach made me think for a moment that he intended in some way to merge with me, but thankfully he halted within a few feet of me and then began to diminish and fade away.

The overwhelming feeling was that the light of the world was being extinguished and myself along with it. I was helpless to do anything but to stand rooted to the spot, crying.

I must have lost consciousness at some point as the next thing I remember was coming to sometime in the late afternoon. The sunlight was striking the mountain at a low angle; the heat of the day had noticeably lessened. Now that I was awake, the next step was to see if I was in control of my body. I made several attempts at coordinating the dictates of my will through the movement of my flesh, bones, and muscles, but I wasn't even close.

I was never able to determine definitively if my experiences on the mountain were seizure-induced dreams, psychologically-based hallucinations, the influence of the old Indian spiritual forces, genuine journeys through inner worlds, or what. There was always an element to these episodes that never quite added up to a completely understandable picture; the actual, final source of my visions was as elusive as the dreamscapes themselves.

I had tried many a door to find my way out and into a normal life. Pills, liquor, meditation, anything I could think of that was short of lethal or illegal to the point its possession would lock me away forever or take my mind to a place from whence it would never return, but nothing had helped, nothing would alleviate the nervous shaking nor curb the hallucinatory episodes.

October 17, 1978

The evening approached with a rare sense of satisfaction in this particularly dark time. I have never exhibited marked bravery during these times; actually, I was frequently on the edge of derangement. Fear or no fear, I began my walk up to Stony Point, tramping through wave after wave of oppressive foreboding. I would be damned, however, if the emotion would be an obstacle to my determination to reach my destination, physical or otherwise.

The wind was making itself felt that evening, sweeping thick carpets of leaves ahead of me. Something much larger than a leaf was moving in the deep shadows to my right. I passed it by without so much as a glance, hoping it would choose some other night-wandering soul to conduct business with. I already had enough on my plate just being me.

During these days my headache was like a visiting relative that refuses to leave, always there, always bothersome, and absolutely unwelcome. As to the overall state of my mental health, it was, in the parlance of the time, "fucked."

As I made my way up the serpentine dirt path of the mountain, I began to take on an edgy feeling that I was being watched, and followed. All I knew was that I wanted to get off that mountain and go home to my study. Yet I felt dizzy and faint, and suddenly spotted a large silhouette behind the old oak tree.

My first thought was to turn and take flight, yet I fell as though pushed by spectral hands. Suddenly everything went black.

When I regain consciousness some time later, I was aware that the yellow moon was rising. I felt sluggish as though awakening from a deep and lengthy sleep. Alone in the night, I tried standing upright and was pleased I was able to do so. My legs felt quite weak, but thankfully the mountain provided many natural crutches; half stumbling, half hopping from tree to rock, branch to shrub, I was able to get back to Topanga Canyon and tumble into my car.

October 21, 1978

I have only been addicted to two things in my life, Valium and coffee. The former I was able to give up, the latter I will never turn loose of. A morning is not a morning without coffee, and that nectar of the gods had been with me on many a significant event on the mountain. Tracing the old paths of the Indians through the brush while reveling in the coolness of the early morning or late afternoon or early evening while indulging my taste for the small brown bean was as close to nirvana as one is likely to get in Chatsworth.

My approaches to the mountain had become somewhat routine, as though I were some kind of animal roaming its territory day in and day out throughout the months and years. Yet this day, I could already feel the oncoming of the vibration of another world, or another plane of reality.

All of a sudden, the trees were dissolving and flowing away, and the rocks pulsating and scurrying off to the furthest reaches of the day. Then the mountain disappeared!

Trying to regain my composure, I began to conduct a breathing exercise with which I was familiar. Charon himself, years before this, had taught me the technique of breath control to overcome anxiety and fear. And today I would need all the help I could muster.

I then caught sight of a man, the same man that had been appearing and disappearing at various times throughout the week. A blue light glowed beneath him and expanded to surround his form; it then reached out toward me, moving very slowly, as if it was a living thing.

My head began to swim with dizziness. I could not move and did not continue to try, determined to stand my ground and go through whatever that was coming.

As my fear reached its peak, I began to quiver. All of a sudden, I felt my flesh being torn off from my skeleton and sucked into the field of the blue light; I was being skinned alive, left with nothing but my bony frame. The bones gleamed with an unearthly fluorescence that made them translucent. I found myself walking in the direction of the edge of a valley that was materializing off in the distance.

It was an indescribable sight, my self-luminescent skeleton walking through the etheric landscape. My head (or skull) began to clear as the distant valley metamorphosed.

The valley was now rocking back and forth and uniting itself with the blue light that surrounded me. Oddly, even though my head felt clear, there was still a touch of faintness. As I kept on walking, a tremendous amount of information was transfer to me in the speed of light. Everything was suddenly clarified, seen in such perfect order so that misunderstanding or puzzlement was impossible. I felt I was in the Garden of Eden at the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, of all things positive and negative, all manifestations of the universal yin and yang. Then with a clap of thunder it was all gone.

The gentle breeze awakened me in the late afternoon from what seemed like a deep sleep. It required over an hour to get home, and I when I arrived, I went to my study, had a cup of coffee, and thought through the day's experiences.

One thing I did know was that all of the data that had been infused into me, each bit in its proper time, would emerge into my awareness and help me on my way to wholeness.

#### The Day of the Wolves – December 1978

Having lived through the bizarre events of October, the yuletide season found me standing on ground that was not as steady as it could have been. It had become much harder to deal with my interior life while also juggling the responsibilities of my career and my family life. Up to that time I had been more successful than not in maintaining a separation between worlds, although even when running the most mundane errands I kept my journal close at hand. I was still living a double life, and no matter what the reason for doing so or how successful one is at doing it, there is always a strain in this sort of thing under the best of circumstances... and mine were very far removed from the best.

My ego was still resisting implementing the changes needed for the transformation of self via integration of the inner and outer man. In addition, no matter how numerous or captivating my visionary experiences, I was still not permitting them to bring about the positive changes in my psyche as they were obviously intended to do.

It was early December and I was already into my schedule of Christmas concerts that had proven so important to our holiday finances in prior years. My nights and weekends were spent either in rehearsals for upcoming performances, or in trying to control my interior life. Things were actually proceeding quite smoothly until one day I had a major seizure.

I was on the 405 freeway on my way to meet with a business client, when I turned off to visit a Catholic cemetery on Slauson Avenue in Culver City. I was in the habit of stopping there whenever I had an appointment in the vicinity. I went directly to my favorite spot: a statue of the Virgin of Guadalupe.

The statue was situated in a small alcove, next to a waterfall, with flowers around its base. Today, again, I had the old familiar sensation of being tracked by something dark and foreboding, an unseen bloodhound that had been set on my trail by someone who wished me ill. In fact, there was a threatening atmosphere building up around me that I could neither outrun nor shrug off and ignore.

Needing reassurance, I knelt down in front of the virgin and prayed. When finished, I sat on a nearby bench to rest my head. I was dizzy and felt unwell. Suddenly, I was surrounded by woods comprised of high, narrow trees towering hundreds of feet.

Specks of light flickered through the branches and fell onto the ground, illuminating the woods in such a manner as to make it difficult to discern the terrain. I found myself walking down a trail flanked by trees stretching deep down into the forest.

As I penetrated deeper into the woods, the surroundings became darker. I was aware of the fact that I was alone, and fear began to consolidate in my stomach. Charon was nowhere in evidence, nor were any of my other allies. Why I had to walk this way alone and where it would lead, I knew not. I only knew I had to go wherever I was being led and had to make the trip without companionship.

I continued on through the woods. A wind swept up, setting the trees aflutter. As if playing peek-a-boo with the leaf-laden boughs, the light would strike me full in the face one moment, blinding me, and then just as quickly hid away. The floor of the woods was uneven and I was unsure of my footing; I tripped over rocks, clods of dirt, raised roots of trees, and had no idea where I was going or why. One thing of which I was very much aware is that there seemed no way out except along the path I was walking.

Finally, I entered a clearing, a spacious grassy plain roughly two hundred feet in diameter, surrounded by remarkably tall trees. Although I was glad to be in the open space at last, the downside was that the trail ended there, leaving me no clues for further navigation.

I felt an inner prodding telling me to go into the clearing. I obeyed. The grass was some three to four feet high, reaching roughly to my waist. I ran my hand across the tops of the blades, and watched it sway back into its normal position. The texture of the grass was unusual, more like wheat than anything else, and it seemed to be emitting sounds, whispers and cries as though a voice were attempting to speak from the wheat or through it. I listened carefully and was almost able to make out actual words, but not quite.

More intrigued than frightened, I hastened to the center of the clearing, intending to cross it and pick up whatever words I might be able to, but not slowing down my journey. I had to get back into the forest and pick up the trail once more. As I hurried across the grassy expanse, I heard a wailing sound in the distance; fear once more made itself felt.

Unfortunately, on the far side of the clearing, I wasn't able to find the trail. I looked around, noting the extreme thickness of the tree trunks, but not the slightest trace of a path. There was no way I was going to backtrack; I wanted nothing more to do with that whispering wheat or whatever it was.

I decided to walk around the perimeter of the circle, hoping to detect a clue of a trail; and delighted, I saw an opening between two of the trees at the three o'clock point. Pushing, pulling, and crawling my way through branches and twigs and dirt, I managed to get back on the trail. By this time, night was beginning to fall. All the childhood terrors of being lost in places like this began to enfold me in their chilling hug. I realized that I had nothing to set a fire, nothing to eat or drink, and certainly nothing to protect myself against wild animals.

I concentrated on taking one step at a time, hoping to negotiate the distance between where I was and wherever I was supposed to wind up as quickly as possible. I could barely see the tree trunks, and the flickers of light were left well behind. All of a sudden, through the dense black thickets I could see something, something all too familiar: red eyes. And not just one set, but dozens, materializing out of the night, all around me. And then I felt vibrations coming from the forest; it sounded like some very large animals were approaching. The sound grew louder as it drew nearer.

Then I saw them.

They looked like wolves, but much larger, with powerful claws and great fangs. Their coats were a mixture of black and gray, and their red eyes unflinching. Their speed was unbelievably rapid and relentless.

I turned to run and collided with one of them. My flesh was ripped apart, my arms torn, and blood gushed out in torrents. Another one attacked. Wildly, I tried to slam myself into it, as though I could overpower or at least deflect it, but it crushed me. I attempted to poke its eyes out, with not much better success. I thought of getting a hold of its jaws but only provided it a closer target. Its fangs sliced into me, tearing me to shreds.

Fighting them was impossible, but there was nothing else I could do. I managed to grab hold of one of them and threw it into another. But they pressed their attack relentlessly, hurling themselves at me as a pack.

I was overwhelmed by them, consumed. Skin hung from me in tatters, my bones were snapped between their powerful jaws, my skull caved in; my eyes were their appetizer, and my heart their entrée. I was being eaten. They chewed great gouts of flesh out of me, then with quick jerks of their massive canine heads they threw them into the night. Finally, I was no more.

Now there was nothing but blackness, no forest, no path, and no wolves. Nothing was visible. I was a disembodied consciousness floating in a sea of void. Then in the midst of this stygian nothingness appeared a source of light, a being of some kind, glowing white and magnificent.

This being resembled an aged man with white beard in a white robe, and was tall, with long, strong fingers. Somehow intuitively I knew he was a great man of wisdom. He had a definite form, unlike me, as I was still all thought and no matter.

Very gently he spoke, explaining what had happened. I had been torn to bits by wolves of the forest, and his mission was to restore my life, renew my soul, and change my heart, the heart that had been voraciously eaten by my attackers.

Then he began to reconstruct me. I was being reborn as if a sculpture is being built, piece by piece, section by section, from the ground up. After my head was restored I was still without features and without flesh. But he was not yet finished with his task.

He continued his work of remaking me, slowly but surely, expertly; I had absolute confidence in his ability and knowledge to fulfill his task. He rebuilt my frame, and it was glowing with a bluish light, very beautiful to behold, which turned out to be the matrix for the finishing touches – skin, muscles, and sinews, each put in its proper place, pulled taut, and made smooth.

I once more had a form, but yet without a heart. He seemed to sense my thought, for he produced a red heart, saying, “This is your new heart.” He opened my chest and placed the heart in its chamber, then seamlessly sealed me up once more.

He then replaced my facial tissue and assembled new eyes with which to see new and miraculous things. My throat was reconstructed, as were my tongue and lips, ready to speak new truths with the new voice he gave me. New aromas would be smelled through the new nose, music of the spheres would be heard through the new ears, and new genitals were next. I was completely rebuilt; I was born again.

He then blew into my lungs the breaths of new life. I saw my new hands, strong and ready for new work. With my new eyes I looked round the forest, expecting the wolveren creatures to return, but they had done their work and would never reappear.

“You may go now,” the old man said, “I have made you a new creature. I have restored unto you the days that the wolves have eaten. ***Go now, and remember this day.***”

I wanted to ask him where I should go but as I began to speak I became aware that I was at home, in my study, safe and sound or, at least, safe. I hadn't the slightest idea how I had gotten home, could not remember leaving the cemetery or calling on the client with whom I had the appointment. I had lost an entire day out of my life, and even for me that was quite an experience.

The next day at the office, my morning coffee was interrupted by continual congratulations on the excellent sale I had closed the day before. Sales managers and other colleagues were liberal in their praises of my handling of the deal.

So, I had gone to the client, closed the deal and returned home. I remembered nothing and was more frightened than ever. All the while I had been traversing the woods, fighting with wolves, being pulled to pieces by them, and being remade by the old wizard, I was in actuality putting over a business deal, leisurely driving home, having dinner, sleeping, and doing who knows what else.

I had lost hours out of my life, had been functioning in two worlds at once, and neither one remembered what the other had been doing, much less had been aware of it at the time.

For the first time since Russ had left I considered contacting a doctor and discussing my condition, whatever it was.

But I didn't.

### Looking Back at 1970's

It was a new decade and, if I may be blunt, I was not overcome with sorrow to see the 1970's pass into history, especially the last half of that decade, which had been ominous, darkly sardonic, psychologically overwhelming, and just plain rough. I hoped that my entry into the 1980's would somehow wipe the slate clean and begin a whole new life for me. But that was not the case.

In 1974 I had begun my career in the telecommunications industry and on that front I was progressing, having been promoted into management. I was also demonstrating adroitness at balancing my outer and inner lives. I'm not implying that there were no difficulties; I was working upwards of eighty hours per week as well as performing in several symphony orchestras, doing my artwork, and raising my daughter Susan.

The long workweeks exacted a physical and mental toll, but they also gave me the financial independence to research new fields of healing and spirituality. My seizures and visionary experiences were still occurring, but I had persuaded myself that I had gotten some kind of a handle on the epilepsy. I felt rather like Nebuchadnezzar, surveying Babylon and feeling in absolute control of his world. Of course, I had forgotten that this absolute despot later on spent seven years covered with feathers, eating grass, and babbling like an idiot as a recompense for his pride.

That which had begun in the 1970's was not going to go away with the wave of a magic wand; I had to discover a way to break through the wall of ignorance and secure definitive answers as to what was

happening to me. Every weekend I would get up early and make my journey to the mountain to attune with the vastness within, and show up at home as husband and father to participate in family activities. I involved myself in therapy and pursued the psychological rather than physiological avenue of solving the riddle of the visions. But still no answers broke upon my consciousness, and the visions continued to arrive at will.

Those who knew of my situation never ceased to wonder how I could be successful in the strictly business sphere while trekking through what seemed to be wholly other worlds of time and space. But by the early 1980's, I had forced myself into a corner where I had to admit that the control I sought was not yet in my hands, as my interior consciousness had begun to shatter my outer life.

Fortunately, my business responsibilities provided a good grounding in reality without which my inner experiences simply would have devastated me, taken me over completely, and leaving me of no earthly good. I was certain that if that ever happened, if I ever fully gave myself over to the visions, I was finished, personally, professionally, and in every way. Thus the need at that point was to keep both worlds in balance, to permit the inflow of both streams of consciousness and somehow, in some way, bring about integration.

Paula and I had been separated for years, having almost no contact; we both knew that our relationship was heading for permanent dissolution. As it happened, I did not have many romantic affairs during this time, despite the fact that I prefer the company of women to that of men, and that all my close friendships were with women, providing plenty of opportunities. Even though my female friends outnumbered the males by some four-to-one, still I had few liaisons with them.

Instead, my sexual energy was sublimated into the forces of my inner world. Imperceptibly at first, then in a more pronounced way, my regenerative power was turned almost entirely inward. Of course, living the spiritual life is a guaranteed ego booster; however the caveat is that it can easily lead to outright narcissism. Typically, it demands ever greater amount of time and energy, crowding out all "worldly" competitors while one's self-image can become massively overinflated.

One day early in the year 1980, I went to the top of my mountain to seek inner visions. I was resting atop a very large sandstone formation located beneath the mountaintop. For no discernible reason, with no onset of fatigue or any such thing, I simply fell asleep, awakening minutes later with the feeling that something was covering all over me. Whatever it was, it felt heavy and seemed to have a power from whose influence I could not free myself.

I was literally blanketed with sexual energy. This energy interpenetrated me, forcing itself into me. I was completely controlled by it, unable to resist. Fear gave way to arousal, and soon I gave in to it completely.

My entire body was aquiver when suddenly I found myself having an orgasm. Never had I experienced such a powerful release of sexual energy. Upon awakening out of what felt like a very deep sleep, I was confronted with the fact that I had, indeed, engaged in some type of sexual union with a non-human or superhuman entity. These are called by many names in many cultures but perhaps the best known label is "succubus" which is officially defined as "a demon assuming female form to have sexual intercourse with men in their sleep." I had not been aware of any form, female or otherwise, but there can be no doubt that that is what it was.

There would be other such encounters in the following decade, not all of them with beings remaining invisible; they would assume numerous forms, including harpies, vampiresses, goddesses, and beings without definite shapes. Anything imaginable and some unimaginable, would come and unite with me at their will and whether I desired it or not. I must admit that I began to look forward to these visits. It is said that once a man has experienced one of these entities, no human woman can ever again satisfy him. While this might be true, I can say for certainty that when I met my third wife, Leslie, in 1984, she not only gave the succubi a run for their money but also for a while pushed them out of my life entirely.

Suffice to say, my visions were not altogether of sexual nature; there were those with other themes, all of which needed to be experienced, addressed, and dealt with in my journals. All, however, added their own layer of confusion to the overall picture.

Each vision had its own message and its own story to tell; their presentation to me formed a coded language that needed to be deciphered and the lessons put into practice as part of my battle for wholeness. Many a time I was unable to fathom what I was being told, and therefore, unable to add that piece to the puzzle at the time. Years might elapse between the episode and the realization of what my inner self had been trying to communicate to me.

What I did find was that if I applied myself sincerely, the answers would always come, in some way and at some time. Naturally, I was not always pleased with what I was told, but bitter experience taught me to take the meanings seriously and undertake any course of action outlined by my deeper awareness.

In retrospect, I did understand the meanings of the symbols presented to me in dreams and visions alike, as resistant as my ego might have been. What was required was for the subconscious to burn through my lower self's stubbornness in the face of impending change; the way it chose to do so was through these visionary encounters.

My journal entries commenced in January 1980 during a trip to the desert and concluded in 1988 in the company of Leslie, our white cat Chessie, and blueberry muffins. The most significant period encompassed the coming of the Twelve and my giving my spirit guide the name Charon, in July of 1982.

In between these events came visions of pain, alienation, magic, acceptance, insight, illumination, and healing. As you read these journal entries of the 1980's, you might become confused by the presentation, as did I. Permit me to say that all that transpired was that each of these visions, in its own way, was life-saving, and became part of the key in my evolution.

## The Old House, 1982

I was sitting in the office of a family therapist (I'll call him John) listening to Paula pour out the seemingly endless litany of the failures and disappointments of a marriage that sounded like a night with Macbeth. As she droned on, I lost interest and began a pleasant drift into more engaging mental landscapes. Professional that he was, John immediately picked up on my disengagement from the conversation and directed a series of questions my way – inquiries that seemed somewhat incongruous at the moment but became perfectly clear later.

I answered his seemingly off-the-subject interrogatives as completely and honestly as I could. However, my suspicions were aroused when he asked if I wanted my marriage to Paula to continue. When I answered "I don't think so," he asked even more bluntly if I cared about her at all. I told him that I wasn't certain. He responded by inquiring into my recent sleep patterns and then asked if I were subject to hallucinations.

Hallucinations? What did that have to do with marriage counseling? In the time-tested way of the therapist, he didn't answer me, but kept asking questions along similar lines, which, frankly, made me feel edgy and uncomfortable.

The general trend of the next few sessions was along the same vein, things proceeding apace until John calmly informed us that he would continue working with me while Paula would counsel with another therapist. No preliminary discussions, no asking of approval, not even the slightest hint. It seemed more like an imperious command delivered in a conversational tone. Paula said nothing before she rose and left the room. Certain there was much more to this than met the casual eye, I waited for shoe number two to drop. I didn't have long to wait.

The marriage counseling had, indeed, been nothing but a mask behind which lurked an evaluation of my mental health. I was, in turn, angry and then humiliated, and spared no verbiage in telling him so. Calmly and with sensitivity, John assured me of his good intentions and promised that if, after a frank explanation of the situation I chose to terminate our professional relationship, he would have no objections.

John revealed that Paula's mother, who was his student at the time, had rendered her "expert opinion" that my mental health was in serious jeopardy and needed professional evaluation. Yes, the entire thing of marriage counseling had turned out to be nothing more than an excuse to get me in the door. Call it karma, call it poetic justice, but my mother-in-law's interference boomeranged on her. Not only did John find no evidence of mental illness in me, but he now seriously questioned his student's clinical skills.

The next day found me with remnants of anger and a feeling of betrayal. Needing a cooling off session, I headed for my mountain, considering the fact I had been less than completely candid with John concerning my experiences with inner consciousness, much less frankly admitting my own doubts about my sanity.

I cleared my meditation rock of overhanging branches and sat down to enjoy the dawn as a faint band of blue appeared in the far distance.

Feeling the onset of a good day, I smiled as I watched a half-foot-long lizard doing its early morning set of push-ups, hopefully finishing his calisthenics before he noticed me and darted off into the protective little jungle of old tumbleweeds and thick shrubbery.

I assumed the lotus posture and just as I entered into meditation, my consciousness was blanketed in darkness. I was no longer on the mountain, and some kind of form was taking shape in front of me. I jumped off the rock and walked towards it, but the darkness prevented me from getting a clear look.

As I continued forward, I was able to see a ray of light some distance away. No sky, no moon, nothing but the ray of light. As I drew nearer, the light transformed into a two-story house, an old wooden structure that I estimated to be about a hundred years old.

Although my intuition was ringing very loud alarm bells warning against even approaching the house, a much higher and deeper aspect of consciousness insisted that I enter. I expected Charon would accompany me on this sort of excursion but he was nowhere to be seen, heard, or felt. Knowing I had to face whatever lay ahead on my own, I gathered strength and I walked up the old broken wooden steps. The porch was painted yellow, and what paint remained was faded and peeling. The old remnants of a porch swing, hanging like a corpse on the gallows, gave out a repetitive creak whose near-inaudibility in no way diminished the nerve-shredding undercurrent it lent the scene. There was no yard, no fence, no gutted old farm truck, or any of the other accoutrements one expects to see in such surroundings. Just the house surrounded by nearly impenetrable blackness.

The first stair broke apart beneath my weight, encouraging a more ginger approach to the front door, or rather, the yawning aperture where the door once stood. I pushed the gnarly wooden thing aside and entered the house. There were no lighting fixtures that I could see, no candles, or any other obvious source of light; yet a soft light glowed in the room, seemingly from the structure itself. Somehow I knew that the light was an integral part of the mystery of the house.

I proceeded deeper into the bowels of the place, passing under a large proscenium arch that led me into a library. Everywhere I turned, there were books, stacks of them, by the thousands, all bound in black leather material. I opened one, and found nothing but blank pages; tossing it aside, I opened another, and it was blank as well. Actually, the entire room was filled with books of utterly blank pages. I had an intuition at the time that these books were my books, and their empty pages being the unwritten future experiences of my personal journey.

The hardwood floor was cracked, heavily scratched, and even had plants growing up through some of the gaping holes. I heard a noise behind me, and loudly inquired if anyone was there. My question was answered by nothing but a continuation of the eerie silence. I went back into the hallway and threw a glance in each direction, but saw no one. I went on to explore the living room, where a dusty old fireplace, rotted couch, moldy pictures decorated the cracked, broken walls. There was one unusual appointment, an old area rug adorned with a six-pointed star, perhaps meant as an occult symbol.

The next stop was the second floor. Just as I climbed the stairs, a strong wind suddenly whipped the outside of the aging home. I looked out a window and finally saw the moon and the stars, shining with surprising brightness in contrast to the pitch black that had greeted me upon my arrival. The staircase was in the final stages of corrosion, retaining just enough cohesion to allow me to climb through. All the windows were streaked with dirt and broken, the jagged edges gleaming with a certain casual artistry. There were family portraits on the staircase, not hung on the wall along the stairs but actually resting on the stairs themselves, perhaps having been removed from their decades-old perches by the same presence I thought I had felt downstairs.

My examination of the first bedroom yielded little result. The door was rusted, almost completely shut. I could barely open it, and just as I managed to push it open a few inches, the entire house seemed to respond to my efforts with a deep, sorrowful sigh, which, while echoed all around me also seemed to come from deeply within my own being.

The hallway stretched into a darkness that hinted of infinity. There were numerous doors along the hallway, and I lost count of the number of them I had tried. I found most locked, and those that opened presented nothing but emptiness. As my search progressed, the force of the wind intensified; the house was rocked to and fro as though the earth beneath it were in the throes of some violent, visceral convulsion.

Just as I nervously laughed to myself that I was meandering through a good old-fashioned haunted house, one of the hallway doors shuddered under the force of an immense blow, and was torn off its hinges and hurled with incredible force down the hallway. Coinciding with this, was the appearance of a huge creature of some sort, outlined in the darkness and looming before me as something so hideous that not even the most slavish H.P. Lovecraft aficionados would permit to appear in their own nightmares.

It seemed that the creature had crashed through the walls in various pieces, and assembled itself into a whole in front of me, his stature overpowering the hallway. The plaster melted before him, perhaps

burned by the same fire that smoldered in his eyes, portals through which poured a hatred such that I had never before experienced.

Even in the dimness of the hallway, I could see that its entire body was covered with festering sores, each being a face unutterably nightmarish, with vile tongues wiggling and reaching. But even more perverse, more soul-chilling, was the monster's own face, a composite of other faces, a crazy quilt whose every section was torn from a face more terrifying than the next, the entire spectacle adding up to a visage that could only have been created in the darkest, vilest pit of hell. I detected no stench emanating from these bleeding, oozing sores, nor was any necessary; the sight alone provoked such stark horror that no sensory assaults could possibly enhance the effect.

As this mind-numbing creature began tearing up the floor with its claws, I could see the dozens and hundreds of face-sores spewing forth blood-curdling screams, devilish laughter, as they conversed with one another, speaking together of who could possibly imagine what?

Where could I go? What should I do? Completely unconsciously, out of a sheer sense of self-preservation, I began backing away from this monster, whose original great height and mass seemed to grow even larger. It came after me, its claws crushing beneath them whatever lay in its path. Nearly upon me, this thing lifted its arms and its horrible mouth let forth a cry that was filled with anguish and horror.

I fell to my knees, my emotions now well past what could be called terror. The creature's red eyes seemed to bore holes in me as it spoke. "Do you not know who I am? Do you not recognize me?" When I said no, it instructed me to look closely at those faces. I squinted and peered more intently at those malevolent countenances covering its hide, then instantly knew the truth. I knew who these countless identities were.

This creature was a composite of the infinitude of "I's" within me, and was, in its entirety, my own soul looking at me. Every corner of my existence that had ever been subjected to real or imaginary hatred, despise, rejection, and all the ugliness, soreness, sin, or every other negative emotion that had ever existed within me had taken this malignant form to rise up within the old house of my consciousness and force me to look it in the face.

Fear turned to acceptance, and my emotions went out to this creature in front of me. I embraced it, told it I loved it, and then it was gone.

I found myself back on the front steps of the house, sans the creature. Surrounded by a deep quietude, I was back on the rock, seating calmly and comfortably in the familiar lotus position. The warmth of the sun and caress of the wind were reassuring as I realized that the day was over.

The creature and I had been one and the same. When I accepted its ugliness, guilt, shame, embraced its distorted form, and loved it for who and what it was, I had engaged in the deepest possible form of self-healing. An initiation, perhaps, as the process is arduous and ever-ongoing, but the reward lies in the liberation and evolution it brings.

## The Coming of the Twelve – The Coming of the Crystal – July 3, 1982

We were on our way up to Oregon to visit Paula's sister and her family. The ride was smooth, the road spreading out behind us as the gentle current of a river as we headed towards what was expected to be a typical family reunion sort of vacation. Little did I know that I was heading towards events that would unfold in an entirely new direction.

The speakers softly diffused Ravel's piano music throughout the car, and the sound of air rushing by outside provided the counterpoint. Hours unreeled one after another, conversation came and went, and then the passengers fell into silence and sleep. Our odyssey finally got us to the mountains surrounding Ashland, Oregon. I was unaware that I was inching closer and closer to dangerous ground as I approached my rendezvous with the unconscious.

We'll gloss over the usual greetings and other familiar nonsense that always comes off with proper decorum in a family reunion. With the pleasantries dispensed with, I slipped out the backdoor, already able to feel the vibration of the coming event reaching out for me. The full moon bathed the yard in its soothing glow and I settled down to a relaxing time with my pipe, the fragrant tobacco mixing with the natural scents of the garden to produce a wonderfully pleasing cornucopia of aromas. For once Goddess was in heaven and all seemed right with the world.

The quietude of the night was disturbed by a cracking sound that I had heard before as a prelude to a seizure. My hope that it was nothing more than a twig snapping or the slithering of a lizard was quickly dashed.

Blood began to flow from my nose and trickle down my lips. I wiped it off, thinking, "Damn, not again." I looked at the blood on my hand, and began to use it as paint to draw a malevolent face in the journal I somehow had with me; my old nemesis epilepsy had hitched a ride and come with me to Oregon. Would there ever be an escape, I wondered dizzily. Feeling faint, I decided to rejoin the family.

After a night's sleep I got up early. With my necessary cup of coffee in hand, I got in the car and drove to a nearby park, my destination being the river that flowed through it.

It was cold and the steam rising from my coffee blended itself into the morning mist. I enjoyed the walk up the path paralleling the river, each step bringing me closer to something that teasingly loitered just outside the grasp of my consciousness, almost coyly drawing me towards it. I felt ready for whatever awaited me and it was a little unclear as to whether circumstances were pursuing me or I them.

The current of the river lapped over the smooth stones in its path and over my nerves, imparting a deliciously calming effect, very welcome after the events of the previous evening, of which the faint taste of blood in my mouth was still a reminder.

From a northerly direction I heard the muffled sound of something approaching; I knew whatever had remained on the horizon until now was ready to make its move into my consciousness. My stomach tightened, my hands quivered, and my whole body gave a little jump in the face of the unknown. I became aware of small details around me, as pebbles turned from the vibrations and fog leisurely meandering through the trees. The sound increased in volume and was gaining ground on me. Yet I felt an odd sense of ease, still tinged with fear, as to what was to come.

I was resolved to continue up the mossy pathway, and glanced at my watch. It was 6:30 A.M., still early enough in that neighborhood to be fairly certain I was alone. I continued on through the foggy trail, which gave way to a clearing, within which was a ring of stones used to bank fires, the charred remnants still remained.

I passed through the ring and stayed on the path to my final destination, a beautiful waterfall at the back of the canyon. The sweetness of bird songs cheered the new morning, the first sounds of life I had heard since arriving at the park and in some way bolstered my confidence that all was normal after all. And yet, I could not ignore those unexplained rumblings in the distance.

The slight southwesterly wind lifted the fog up into the higher ground of the canyon. I sensed a growing certainty as I climbed through a narrow passage leading down to the river, a certainty that did not hold up for long. The sound that had been a low, almost visceral rumble now exploded like thunder.

The morning fog then unleashed a blinding light, furious in intensity and igniting a firestorm in my brain, filling every cell and every synapse with searing pain. All I could see was the blinding light, which fused with the thunderous sound to form an apocalyptic visionary experience.

I could do nothing to escape the light and the sound, their turbulence in my head raged unchecked. I felt myself falling to the ground as my consciousness was wrenched right out of my being. The next thing I was aware of was being in the park, but the setting was unfamiliar. Confusion was immediate and grew steadily. With vision blurry, I tried to stand, weakly at first but then with greater strength I drew myself into an upright position and took my first few baby steps since crashing to the ground. I heard the sound of the river, but it seemed to be coming from a greater distance than before, and its appearance was what I can only call symbolic, as though it were a stand-in for the actual river, and whose representation had a strange transparency.

The fog had taken on the by-now familiar greenish shading and an unusual brightness.

I vainly tried to concentrate, narrow my gaze, and fix my thoughts on the events of the morning as a familiar point of reference, but my attention was forcibly drawn to the sound of a thousand horses pounding through my head, hooves thunderous in the canyon of my thoughts. In a scene of epic proportions, they galloped from the sky, making their way down through the fog toward the earth, forming a circle around me.

The horses were of startling dark reddish color, equipped with black armor. White vapor was snorted out of their panting nostrils. When the horses were on the ground, I was able to get a better look at their riders. They were massive, had skull faces, wearing black robes over their black armor. Their heads bore helmets lined in red velvet, securely strapped under their white jawbone. From the midst of this ghostly squad came forward their leader, who removed his helmet and introduced himself.

“My name is Charon and I am at your service.”

Confused and dizzy, I was overcome by this introduction. I asked who or what he was and why he had so dramatically appeared out of the sky. He dismounted from his horse, placed his helmet on the saddle, and strode over to me, white skull face gleaming in the morning light. I leapt with fear, backing away from him.

“Be at peace,” he said as he sat down on one of the rocks of the fire circle. “Join me, here,” he invited, patting the rock beside him. Transfixed by this creature, I obeyed, somehow knowing that he wanted only the best for me.

He removed his skull-faced mask and I immediately recognized him as my spirit guide who had watched over me since childhood. My heart leapt, fear dissolved, and the feeling of confidence I had enjoyed earlier came flooding back.

My first question was why he and his cohorts had come to me in such a ghastly form. He made clear that it was I and myself who had mentally clothed them in that fashion and, if I wished, I would see them in their real nature.

At that point, the riders dismounted, removed their garments, and revealed their true forms. What had been a clutch of bizarrely attired skeletons now showed themselves as twelve stunningly beautiful crystals creating a veritable rainbow of colors. Their radiance was so powerful that I could not look directly at them. As they greeted me, their voices resounded, filling the air, reverberating to tremendous distances and back. As I stood in astonishment and reverence, they reassumed their skeletal forms; the power of their voices reduced to normal and faded out.

It was now late morning, not that the passage of time had been my prime consideration in all this.

Charon introduced me to the twelve.

“They are the circle of elders,” he advised, “and they are here for your salvation and assistance.” Just as he said this, the twelve rose up as one, ceremoniously bowed, and formed a circle around the fire pit. Charon raised his arm and pointed to the very center of the pit, and at that moment, a powerful fire ignited. Flames danced and took on a life of their own; music began to emerge from the fire as Charon lifted his arms heavenward speaking words of blessing. He invited me into the circle, look into the fire, and release all extraneous thoughts from my mind.

I did so, and found myself standing on an immense desert plain surrounded by the twelve. I sensed I was actually on a planet other than the Earth. Their forms once again took on the beautiful crystalline appearance and as they did, my midsection seemed to stretch and relax several times in succession. I became aware of the unusual texture of the sand beneath me. The next sensation was of being hit with a tremendous wave of nausea, my gut feeling as though it was being turned inside out.

Knowing that I felt ill, Charon placed his hand over my solar plexus. To my shock yet relief, an unpleasant black liquid poured from every orifice of my body, dribbling to the sandy ground. I could feel the negativity that had been built up in me for years being lifted. It was a cleansing, spiritually, psychically, and in every other way.

I was being liberated from the old me and made anew. I felt drenched in love, unable to remain standing. But Charon reached down and took hold of me.

“You have a good heart,” he said, laying his healing hands upon me once again. “You have been brave this day, as always. Rise and be strong.”

I obeyed his command, rising, feeling my strength returning rapidly. The fire in the center of the circle continued to burn.

“We are going to teach you the ritual of power,” he said, taking his place at the center of the elders. “Come follow me to the center of the world, the matrix of power, come now.”

I went to him. He lifted both arms, turned to face the blazing fire, then intoned the infinity of the morning, calling for power to come forth and manifest itself.

I was a little worried that we were trying to manipulate energy in some sort of magical incantation... as though I knew better than Charon and the elders!

“No, this is not magic,” he assured me, keenly aware of my every reaction and thought. “This is an invitation to power, to join us in the infinity of the morning, nothing more, nothing less. No one manipulates this energy, no one.”

Charon fell silent and gazed once more upon the roaring fire. Soft strains of music came forth from its blazing instrument as Charon continued the ritual, sending forth his call. The intensity of the music increased and became a voice, followed by the manifestation of a form from the fire. The form danced with a certain playfulness among the flames and then transformed into a face, blazing with wisdom. I tried to look at it directly and was almost blinded by the effulgence pouring from it.

Then the fiery countenance spoke, quietly telling me, "These are your guardians, allies, your specters of comfort. Bless them, obey their counsel, and they will assist in your development, and help you find your power of transformation. Be brave and let no power on earth or in heaven deter you from your journey." He admonished me from hiding in my life, "this life has been given to you for your further development and advancement. Protect it, love it, guard it with all the power you can muster, the power contained in your inner being." He explained, "This power has lived many times in many places, but now in this life it belongs to you. If you look deep into your inner soul, you will find it resting in the hands of the infinite in the form of a crystal. Think now, don't you feel its power germinating inside of you?"

At those words my body opened up and from its center streamed forth a rainbow of light, rising and expanding, then coming down and shining through every cell of my body. It was the power of the crystal, the power of life.

Then I felt myself caressed by the mild wind coming from the high mountains surrounding Ashland, and once more I found myself standing by the river in the park, the desert planet having receded into whatever plane of existence it had come from. Although the sound of the river still seemed rather muted, I had no doubt that I was back on terra firma.

I felt the usual dizziness along with the blurriness of vision. As my mind cleared, I saw I was still standing within the circle of stones. Charon and the twelve were gone.

People began to arrive for a day's recreation; the happy sounds of children playing wafted to me on the breeze. I walked back to my car, winding my way through the leafy patterns projected onto the ground by the afternoon sun. Foremost on my mind, I was pleased that I at last had a definite, permanent name for my spiritual guardian. Interesting that it was Charon, I thought, the ferryman of Greek mythology, and reminiscent of my experience with the boatman on my journey to the underworld.

Some children suddenly scooted past me on the trail, with their usual laughing and screaming. "Damn kids," I cursed silently. Finally I reached the parking lot, and aimed the car for my in-laws' house.

I knew that things would be better from then on and that someday in the future, at the perfect time and in the perfect way all my questions would be answered, all conflicts resolved.

All would be well.

Candle Light - April 1982

I lit one of my candles, watching the flame dance in the darkness, hoping to use it as a fiery portal to the inner reaches of my consciousness. The hypnotic rhythm of the flame had me almost convinced it was a living thing. Its leaping shadows produced a sort of epileptic charm; I would reach through them out into the night, and see images, of things, beings and places marching out of the deepest recesses of my mind.

I gazed upon the candle as figures came out of the corners of the study, climbing out of darkness and then dissipate as puffs of smoke. Scent of burning incense wafted through the erratically lit room. I do not place judgment on the night or its special powers. Night gives life to its own brand of creatures, angels, spirits, that are endemic to the nocturnal hours and just as viable as those associated with the day. After all, the night has its own special light, from the stars and the moon. Of course, there is no such thing as absolute darkness or total light, each has at least a trace of the other, as the symbol of the Tao so elegantly illustrates.

Peering through the candlelight, I saw a shadow stand in the corner, detach itself from the blackness and make its way towards me. Only its motion and overall configuration were visible, no features or any distinct outline. It was black yet not black, red but not quite so, and the features of its appearance were a moving target. Then the room began to elongate and recede, elongate and recede, as though it were breathing.

I reached out to the entity, which receded with the room. The closer I tried to get, the further away it pulled. It was a game of cat and mouse. Unable to reach it, I sat down on my "rug of power," a Zapotec Indian rug with an image of the sun woven in the middle. My intent was to rest and center all my energy in myself until the entity decided to make itself available to my view, or to do whatever it was going to.

Seated in the middle of the Indian rug, I was relaxed and simply waited. If I could pray and fast, I could certainly rustle up the patience just to wait. One thing my participation in these visionary events had taught me long ago was the need to be able to wait. Events might take all day or all night before they got moving on their accord; I could do as little to hasten them as to prevent them, and the attitude of waiting became second nature. If I were not disciplined and patient, nothing would happen.

I waited at the pleasure of this entity and now my lack of hurry paid off – a feminine form stepped out of the shadowed corner. Standing some twelve to fifteen feet high, her head, neck, and shoulders would have penetrated the ceiling if not for the fact that the room was rapidly expanding. I saw and heard small chunks of the room breaking away and flying off, from now a vanishing structure.

The apparition's hair looked like it was streaming in the same hypnotic wind that blew through what had been my study. I sensed she was not being mindlessly destructive but was doing away with my perception of three-dimensional reality in order to create a condition conducive to our communication.

I was in no way afraid; the emotion was more a sad longing causing me to burst into uncontrollable tears. Through the wet haze I could see my female companion had not yet fully materialized. She was not completely there yet, but I was certainly very much aware of and affected by the presence of her energy.

The room now disappeared totally, leaving nothing but the rug beneath me, and even that was beginning to go in a shower of tattered rips. Would I be the next to be hurled out of existence, I wondered.

She now emerged from her wraith-like condition but remained silent.

"If you will not speak, I will have to consider making you up," I thought whimsically.

But I did not have to make her up; she now stood before me, of awesome beauty and awesome figure. She was dressed beautifully in red. The room now disappeared totally. She was humanoid in appearance but with a green face and bluish-green arms. She looked like nothing less than a sentient painting, one that was not static. The colors of her form changed, blue here, then green there, red here then there, somewhat along the lines of the Illustrated Man.

Her eyes were extremely bright, so much so that I could not look directly at her. I bowed my head in prayer and mentally asked what it was she wanted of me. She spoke but I was unable to hear her words; the wind seemed to be blowing between us. She smiled as the continuing interplay of hues and shades moved across her face, from nose to brow, back over the head and down her hair. And I still couldn't make out what it was she was trying to say.

I was overcome by emotion, my stomach was churning. I was now supine on the floor, or whatever surface had replaced it. Oddly, the center of the Indian rug remained, and I was still sitting on the

image of the sun. Peering over the edge of the remnant, I saw the floor was gone, replaced by a sheer drop into infinity. Frightened of falling, I turned back towards the she-spirit and reached out for her, but my arms could not breach the windy barrier. Desperate to hear what she was saying, I strained to reach her, but she began to disappear.

“Oh, God, don’t!” I pleaded. “Don’t leave without telling me.”

Then she was gone.

The room reappeared section by section, the chair, the windows, the walls, and its original shape.

I myself was bathed in perspiration and well nigh exhausted. Tears remained on my face, mute testimony to my feeling of having failed. I had not been able to make contact with her nor understand what she had been sent to reveal. I assumed I did not have the proper energy or was not concentrating enough; surely I was to blame for the incompleteness of the episode. The crushing sense of failure overwhelmed me and again I sobbed inconsolably.

The Battle on the Mountain - August 20, 1986

The nightmare was back.

I was running down a long red tunnel, my reserves of endurance exhausted and I was at the point of collapse. A strange wheel hurtled towards me at light speed. Avoiding a collision with this speeding discus was impossible. There was nothing to do but to kneel as a repentant sinner and humbly await the inevitable doom.

The wheel grew larger as it neared me, finally becoming so monstrous it seemed to blend with the sky, obscuring everything except the red dust kicked up by its inexorable spins.

I screamed and, as so often happens in dreams, no sound came forth. I tried to run and, of course, was frozen in place. The huge dust-covered wheel thundered on; nothing would deter it from its mission, nothing could be interposed between us.

I awakened screaming into the night, the usual end to a reprise of the dream that had been recurring for the last month.

Perspiration soaked me as though I had been strolling through a monsoon. I rolled over, inhaled deeply, and luxuriated in the relief that it had been nothing but a dream.

I heaved myself out of bed and showered, made the inevitable and soothing coffee and settled down with it and my favorite type of muffin. I started building up my hope for a normal day, encouraged by the friendly warmth of the black coffee that almost never failed to give me pleasure.

The effects of the nightmare continued to linger as the morning wore on. Outside, the sky was wrapped in a grayish white cover of clouds with patches of blue peeking through. The call to my mountain was strong and I heeded, reaching my favorite place of power somewhere in the vicinity of 8:30 AM.

There was no traffic on Topanga Canyon or in the hilly expanse I called my spiritual home. I walked my usual route through the formations of rocks and plant life, truly enjoying the feel of the soft earth after a week on the concrete sidewalks of supposed civilization. I could feel the life force of the animals all around, above, and beneath me. The giant rocks called up wonderful pictures in my imagination, whirling and weaving and leaving me delightful giddy.

I arrived at a large group of formations that have graced those hills since time immemorial and would be there, probably along with bats and beetles, long after man has disappeared from the face of the earth. I pulled and lifted myself to the top, sat down and summoned my energy to me.

As I slowed my breathing and quieted myself, I noticed the atmosphere darkening with the approach of a bank of fog that seemed to be coming from a grove of bushes growing around another rock formation. I realized the reason for the odd mist: Charon was approaching.

Except for the fog, there was nothing unusual about his appearing.

"I hope this day finds you well," he said. "We have much to do," he promised, "for this day will be very difficult for you. Get a hold of yourself and listen to me very carefully." At that point, Charon took me by my shoulders and looked me in the eye; suddenly I found myself in an altered state of consciousness.

Charon's promise of a difficult day ahead was producing uneasiness, a cramping stomach and buzzing head that seemed to rotate as fast and threateningly as the wheel in the dream.

"We are going to fight a great battle here today and the outcome of that battle will determine whether you will live or die."

The statement was made as matter-of-factly as an invitation to lunch. If my life were to be on the line I would have preferred a little more melodrama, but Charon in his wisdom was well aware of that and knew that I would probably be producing enough of that of my own accord and was therefore speaking calmly and rationally.

“You mean, this very day will decide my life? If I die during this battle or am defeated, my life is over?”

Charon nodded affirmatively. The sluice gates of fear were jerked open, and a sense of fright flooded every corner of me.

While we spoke, the fog Charon brought with him continued to expand, grow and close in, eventually shutting out the sunlight. I looked up in the sky, and saw figures coming out of the dense fog in the distance. The fog had a living, sentient quality, a life it shared with the humanoid figures it was generating; the figures were black-robed, skeleton creatures atop black horses riding down to Earth from the southwest, reminiscent of the figures that appeared to me in Ashland, Oregon a few years earlier.

Charon rose up high in the air, facing the north, and cried out “Oh, great army of Zelcon, join us in this day of death, come with us to battle!”

Instantly as the last syllable ended, the sky filled with riders on black horses. “Come to me,” Charon called to them, “come now, join us in the great fire of Zelcon!”

Fire burned all around and the riders were suddenly surrounding us. Charon bade me draw my sword (which I did not know I had) and join him. He and I mounted steeds provided for us, and joined our black-garbed comrades in the sky, which was now filled with dust and flame so thick it was almost impossible to see the proverbial hand in front of the face.

Startled and confused, I wasn’t sure who or what we were going to fight.

The enemy was amorphous at first, almost indistinguishable from the murky dreamscape that I found myself in. Then they began to manifest as some anthropomorphic primal creatures, riding on nameless animals that do not exist in this dimension. As they approached, all I could see was their glowing red eyes, numbered as the stars.

Charon’s army began to move at his behest, and these two vast airborne armies clashed in the astral skies over Chatsworth that morning, battling furiously in the dust, light, flashing flames and meteor showers of reddened eyes.

For hours the battle raged, and the final defeat of the enemy did not come until late in the afternoon. Blood infused the gray clouds until the entire atmosphere was gleaming red and the mountains were covered with gored bodies.

Charon ordered the collection of the dead enemy's bodies, which he hung by their legs from the oak trees that stood as witness to the war; he then drew his sword and split the bodies open from the groin to the neck. He ripped open the suspended carcasses and drained their blood into containers, passed the containers to each of his soldiers, and ordered all of us to drink it down. Fires were then lit and the mountain became a funeral pyre for bodies and decapitated heads, smoke and ashes flying madly. I was sickened by the sight of their efficient & professional dismemberment of the fallen enemy.

Reminiscent of the Black Minotaur I had killed and dismembered, various body parts were thrown into cauldrons for boiling, the smoke from the cooking fires billowing up into the surreal atmosphere. At last all preparations were in order and the feasting commenced. And we feasted well. We fed on the enemy's energy, drank their blood, and consumed their flesh well into the evening hours.

Darkness settled over the mountain, ringing down the curtain on an unspeakably horrific day. My cohorts and I were covered in flesh and blood and dust. As the celebration of our triumph continued, there was dancing and revelry amidst the aroma of the dead and the roasted flesh. As the feast ended, Charon ordered their departure, and they returned into the unknown from which they had come.

As they departed into the night sky, Charon raised his hands to salute the victors. The embers of the many fires were going out when my spirit guide and I began our descent from the mountain.

The day had been malevolent, violent, but undoubtedly absolutely necessary for me, as it had been the day of my salvation. I had succeeded, and I had survived; I fought off a darkness that could have consumed. Exhausted, I held onto Charon for support as we made our way to my car, still innocently and uncomprehendingly parked on Topanga Canyon Road.

When we reached the car Charon smiled at me and vanished, leaving me with a heart filled with gratitude and love for him for all that he had given me.

The victory was his, for on that day, he had saved me from eternal darkness.

## Looking Back at the 1980's

The 1980's turned the corner into the Nineties and changes were in the wind. My business career was on a positive track, Paula and I had divorced, and I had moved from a fairly good-sized house to a small apartment in Chatsworth, a location with a picturesque view of the mountains. In some ways I was back to square one but on other fronts I was making headway. My inner life was generating exciting imageries and my artwork was progressing very satisfactorily.

Five years earlier my business interests entered a new phase as a partner in a Los Angeles-based telecommunications firm. Although we encountered the usual problems inherent in launching a new business venture, by the start of the new decade we were in full operation and doing well. For once, all seemed well in the outer world for me.

1985 was also the year I had met Leslie and, on my part, it was love at first sight. I saw her in place of my *anima* (the feminine side of myself) and she embodied my every fantasy. She was beautiful, intelligent, seductive with an air of mystery, musically inclined, dark, and sarcastic. In short, the perfect match for me. Our relationship had a normal intimacy about it but we never achieved any kind of symbiotic unity.

Concomitant with meeting Leslie my inner world entered disturbing territory. Even though being with Leslie had an aura of magic about it, the internal mental and emotional pots were still boiling and I knew I was marking time until the crash came.

In certain ways our relationship was troubled from the outset, but I wasn't preoccupied with that. She was special and I wanted her, end of story. The downside, of course, is that rather than dealing with the reality of another soul, I used her as the screen upon which I projected my desires and, as Paula before her, I probably never encountered the real Leslie vis-à-vis. Inevitably, she and I broke up early in the Nineties and my life once again headed for the Gehenna-like pit whence it came.

I learned that loneliness can become a religion; just as ungrateful and unmindful as adherents to other faiths, my refusal to use all outstanding teachings and applicable techniques given me by my energy resulted in me slipping further back on my life's path. And yet I was also visiting the mountain several times a week and producing art and journal entries. So, in some ways things were coming together and manifesting results, and in others they weren't.

Then from nowhere, epilepsy came roaring back into my existence as a devouring beast. It did not reappear on the isolated mountain or in the privacy of my apartment, but right in the middle of a sales presentation. I was pulled under by a riptide of dizziness and disorientation; my speech was slurred and lost control in general and was forced to excuse myself. After that I was on a roll; unfortunately, a downhill roll. I visited my physician who referred me to a neurologist. After tests, tests, and more tests, the diagnosis was that I had a seizure disorder.

The medical fraternity reached for its ever-handly bag of chemicals and I was given a slate of medications whose effects were as bad as the epilepsy itself. After nine years of medical treatment spanning different medications, varying doses, and so forth, I was no closer to health than at the beginning. For some reason, my kind of epilepsy was strongly resistant to treatment.

As you would expect, these were very difficult years made even more so by dint of the fact that my personal "process" which, for decades, had at least offered a modicum of support and stability, had begun to erode because I had to put so much more energy into my extraverted life. For the first time in my life I had reached a stage where I felt completely alone.

My only trustworthy companion was depression, who wandered with me through the farthest reaches of myself. Charon was still close by and willing to help but the fear aroused by my seizures led me to stop going to the mountain in search of my energy. I lived in an understandable state of constant dread, never knowing when or where a seizure would strike. This fear worked its way into and negatively colored every aspect of my life. The only thing I had to hang on to was my art and, as in the past, creativity was my lifeline and the alchemical catalyst for my salvation.

I worked at my art nights, days, weekends, spending my every free waking moment with it, but it still did not assuage my alienation. I had fully retreated into my old pattern of destructive thinking. Willfully isolated from friends, I threw myself entirely into my art along with my "secular" employment.

As it happened, this schedule turned out to be quite therapeutic. The force of sheer hard work punctuated the dark clouds and permitted light to shine through once again. With the change of consciousness, I returned to the mountain and found my allies there. The fire had been rekindled and the gods greeted the return of their prodigal son.

My visions that had been dark for years began to transform to more positive images, gradually taking on a new, lighter energy, with the two polarities beginning to merge into a state of wholeness and completion.

Occasionally anxiety would raise its ugly head and there were always failures along the way but even these were stepping stones to further advancement. But the unification of complimentary opposing forces was underway and I was feeling optimistic.

## Creature out of the Tree – 1990

I was tired that morning. And I had one of my classic headaches. I felt it was not the choicest of times for Charon to awaken me and insist that I take a trip with him. But that's what he did.

"You must get up," he insisted. "Come with me to the valley of the trees."

He refused to respond to my inquiry as to what he meant.

"Just get up, get dressed, let's go," he demanded, vaguely reminding me of my army days. So, I arose, dressed, got in the car, and drove to the mountain. The morning was cold and windy and, for some reason, this gave me a sense of reassurance. Perhaps this was tied in with the mountain, which always held a double-barreled load of fear and expectation. When I was on my mountain, I was a model of confidence, yet I never knew what might happen, hence the other side of the coin, a marked feeling of vulnerability.

I hiked up the mountainside to the "four stars," where four stars were painted on four rocks representing north, south, east and west. Apparently, this was to be another instance of the conjunction of astral forces. It seemed to take quite a bit of doing to make it up there today, probably owing to my fatigue and aching head, and the fact that I was, for once, obeying a direct order rather than following an intuition.

Arriving at the top, I was not only physically exhausted, but my head was in a whirl. My only desire at that moment was to find a comfortable position, preferably prone, and rest. Charon was more than lenient, but would not permit me to linger unduly, telling me that focusing my energy and elevating my thoughts to a higher level were paramount.

I willed myself into a clean slate of my mind, focusing on the four stars, drawing forth their individual vibrations and merging them to form a portal. The wind spiraled around me, hurling bits of foliage and small clumps of dust in my face, hindering my concentration. Indeed, I could barely keep my balance, seated as I was atop the rock, not to mention focus on the portal.

Charon was adamant that I ignore the elemental forces and direct my thoughts to attune with energies of a higher realm. Summoning all my concentration into a single point of focus, the wind immediately stopped and Stony Point vanished. I had been transported to another space in my consciousness.

I could see a large mountain far removed from where I was standing, whose triangular lines expanded, and projected in every direction. I laid my hand upon Charon and we were airborne. Even with my spirit guide's skills and the fact that the flat plain contained no aerial obstacles, it still took an appreciable amount of time to reach our destination.

We ascended and flew over a mountain, landing on the other side, a hilly, rocky, open area of vast dimensions. At the center point, four to five miles from the small hills where we landed, was an isolated strand of trees.

"Those are the trees you must go to," Charon said, pointing to the wooded grove. "You must go there by yourself," he added.

I asked why.

"Because there is something there you must witness," he replied. "There are things you have seen that gave you hints of their meaning. This time, you are to face the unknown alone, and then accept its outcome. You must go on these journeys yourself, as frightening and terrifying as that might be."

Even though uncertain, I was somehow reassured by his presence. With a feeling of peace, I was willing to meet and deal with anything that might be awaiting me.

To be honest, I never embarked on one of these journeys without considering the very real possibility that I might not return, either encountering something in an inner world that might react upon my physical body so as to cause death, or perhaps going so far out (or in) in terms of consciousness that I would not return mentally or spiritually. These are definite risks, but risks worth taking. What path without danger holds any value?

As the wind began to blow, I embarked on my journey, toward the mysterious forest. The wind was ethereal, life-providing, and not merely a feature of the weather; it was the breath of life, the *pneuma*. I breathed deeply, filling my lungs with its life-giving *prana*, felt myself imbued with dynamic strength and elation, and prepared for whatever lay ahead.

Nearing the trees, I saw they were denuded of leaves. Hundreds of trunks with unclothed boughs reaching upward, fitting for the environment as the entire area was without vegetation. No greens or reds, no birds, insects, no signs of life at all, just rocky desert and lifeless trees. This world was desolate, a landscape stripped down to the bare minimum.

I moved closer to one of the trees for a closer examination and as I neared it, it split in two, and something human-like emerged from its center. With body covered in bark and arms that terminated

in branches, its face was comprised solely of two eyes. Though it had no mouth, it still seemed to be issuing forth a wailing cry of painful torment.

When I glanced around, I noticed the stumps of trees that had been split in half, each with a creature somehow connected to the stump; they waved their branch-like arms, howling with bitter suffering, looking beseechingly to the sky. They were half-human, half-plant, rooted in place literally as well as figuratively, unable to move from their allotted spaces. I knew that there was nothing in their own power that would cause their torment to cease.

Not knowing what I might do to help them, I studied them more closely. Their faces were dual-toned, yellow on one side, and green on the other. Again, each had a pair of dark eyes, but no other facial features. Their faces looked more like masks than anything else. They swayed to and fro in the wind, able to do nothing but mournfully testify to their pain, and give witness to the huge, unforgiving landscape.

One of the trees I had not noticed before, one that had a normal appearance, drew me toward it. In front of me, it split in half, its upper portion levitating skyward. Out of the bottom portion came another living being, multi-colored, of striking presence, with face similar to the others. He unfolded his arms, seemingly trying to communicate with me.

Eyes filled with painful anguish, he lifted his arms to the heavens in a pose of worshipful adoration. From the midst of the bark-covered body emerged a phallus-like shape, elongating, stretching, and penetrating the rocky surface of the ground. Lengthy limbs also emerged from his back, growing downward and dug into the ground.

As he tried to lift himself out of the tree stump, an angelic being arrived on the scene and pulled off the remainder of the branches, freeing him from its shackles, and allowing him to transform into a complete being.

He now looked like a human, but was surrounded with heavenly images, star above the head, sun to one side of him, and moon to the other. In a way I couldn't understand, the completion of the images healed the pain. The creature's feet set down on the ground, with which he instantly became one. This union was a *hieros gamos*, a sacred marriage of heaven and earth, and this knowledge brought with it a great flush of joy, to him as well as to me.

I looked more closely at his face, coming into stronger attunement with his pleasure at being released from the bondage. Although he still did not speak, there was a telepathic bond between us; he mentally communicated a message of hope, redemption, and freedom from this place of torment.

I made my way back in the direction I had come, pausing only once to look back; now the entire grove of trees was gone. The freed creature was the only one remaining, now somehow attired in a white robe, surrounded by an aura of stunningly vivid colors.

Gradually he also disappeared into the immensity of the deserted plain from which he came, until he was out of sight entirely.

### The Garden of Remembrance – April 10, 1993

I was on my way to a business meeting in the general vicinity of downtown Los Angeles, when from the center of my consciousness came the voice that speaks without words, whose messages are always clear and commanding, even if sometimes one chooses not to obey its wise dictates.

I already knew what was coming. Without a second thought I changed the route to go where I felt I would be directed.

Then I heard, “Go to Forest Lawn. Now!”

Already on the way, I was ahead of the game. It only required a few minutes to arrive, and as I approached the gates, I felt the presence of a spirit.

During my youthful visits to Forest Lawn with my parents, I always felt a strong connectedness with the deep green grass, the marble statue of Christ, the stained glass window depicting the Last Supper, the painting of the Crucifixion and, of course, the departed ones.

Of course, having grown up as some kind of an outsider, I always felt comforted being in the presence of the dead. I was also greatly interested in the horror-oriented comic books of the era and collected pictures of all manners of monsters, werewolves, Dr. Frankenstein’s monster, Dracula, the invisible man, and any other odd or frightening creatures I could get my hands on.

This day however, I was not summoned by any kind of external monster, but by something or someone, that’s much closer and infinitely more real. It was the spirit dwelling at the core of my own being.

It was going on 9:30 AM when I reached the small Garden of Remembrance on that cold, wet morning. The sun was taking its first peek through the morning clouds; as the rays touched the wet grass, tiny orbs of color sparkled in the damp green.

The walk up to the statue dubbed *Christus* was comfortingly familiar. Gazing upon the superbly rendered face of Jesus, a beam of sunlight reflected from his eyes, making me feel it was a moment of special revelation.

The shards of sunlight narrowed and disappeared as the cloud cover repaired the holes in its fabric and the sky darkened once more. The entire tone of the garden changed, charged with a different energy.

I heard a buzzing sound and my head began reeling. Almost keeling over on to the wet grass, I was able to stop myself. Turning to leave, I was face-to-face with a giant angel standing directly in my path.

Nearly overcome by the rainbow of light surrounding this being, I covered my face and trembled until I worked up enough courage to peek through my fingers. The clouds were gone; I felt disconnected from my self. My awareness was malfunctioning, as was my body, the latter would not follow the commands of the former. I felt absolutely inert, as a lump of clay.

Then the angel spoke in a sound range well above that of regular hearing, the sound flowing directly into my mind.

“Assuage your fears,” was the simple message, which immediately calmed my fears, though the physical trembling did not abate for another moment or two.

I stood in a center of tranquility where nothing mattered save the angel’s voice; its gentle music soothed my nerves and had me awash in tender waves of peace.

The Angel of Light spoke again. “You will be beginning a new direction that will take you to a higher level of experience. The dead that have always been a comfort to you will for a time leave you; you will be alone.”

I felt myself overcome with emotion, struggling to keep myself focused on the angel’s words, though there was a part of me that felt alone and forsaken. There was no further explanation as to the changes I was told to anticipate, but I felt as if I was flying on the wings of the morning, caressing the face of the infinite.

Without another word, my angelic companion began to melt into a rainbow of light, the garden scene returning within seconds to its ordinary manifestation.

With a business appointment still awaiting me, I reassembled my thoughts and returned to the car.

Charon Speaks - November 15, 1994

With shaking hands and palpitating heart I pulled myself up off the couch and went into the kitchen for a drink of water. I had been unable to shake the peculiar feeling that had dogged me the entire morning, compounded by a vague, premonitory sense that something, unidentifiable, was wrong.

The cool water felt good going down, but did nothing to calm my nerves or relieve the dull throb reverberating through my head. I resumed my place on the couch, looking around the room in the hope of finding something to divert my attention. I saw a beam of light shining through the sienna-colored window shade glint off one of my paintings by the entryway, and this altered the colors and I liked the new contrast. While idly considering whether to make the change permanent, I felt myself involuntarily jerk, and the control over my body slipped away.

It passed instantly though, leaving behind slightly blurred vision and the headache that had already plagued me. I let my head sink down into the comforting green cushions on the couch and closed my eyes to clear the waves of confusion and tried to hide from the feeling of despair that seemed to be seeping from every pore. I was unaccountably anxious, too much so to permit sleep, and the biofeedback exercises I had learned long ago was of no help.

I reached for the wooden cane propped up against the couch, and ambled my way towards the staircase leading down to what I call the underworld, my study.

This area is some four to five hundred square feet and was the repository, at that time, of the artistic output of nearly a decade's work. Windowless and devoid of natural light, the lighting is provided solely by Christmas lights and strings of blue light bulbs. The walls are thick with my paintings and the floor space filled to the ceiling with sculptures. Faces peered out of the pools of darkness, and their bodies placed amongst full-sized renderings of trees – in summary, it was a forest of my mindscapes.

One thing about my underworld: whoever sees it has a definite reaction. It is intimidating to some, and life-changing to others. Because the room and its contents represent and, in fact, embody the energies of the unconscious itself, most who see it grasp the purity of thought behind it and, thus able to sense, as sinister as some of the images might appear at first glance, that there is a real sense of innocence. In short, it is a demonstration of honesty, honesty as to what, however, is to be determined in the viewer's own mind.

Countless hours have been spent by me in this underground world, whose walls echoed the songs of mysterious happenings, and the winds of memory swept every inch, uniting with the creative powers that brought the art into existence. That was the ideal and one that had been realized many times. Today, however, the refracted images were of pain and confusion, spiritual desolation, and desperate forlornness. Again, art is but a mirror for what already exists in the consciousness of the one standing

before it, the artist himself being no exception of the rule. Even face-to-face with so many of my children, as I call my art, the soul that had given them birth somehow felt dry and lifeless.

I leaned the cane against a rectangular pillar beside a sculpture, and crumpled into a heap on the green rug. The force of life itself felt as though it were being sucked out of me, and I faded into the darkness.

Coming around sometime later, I was aware of an ache in the small of my back. The first visual impression was of the room spinning around me. An old hand at operating under such circumstances, I rolled upright and focused my attention on stopping the room-spins. As my eyesight sharpened, I could see that the walls were breaking up and disappearing. What remained of the room was aglow and, thankfully, I saw Charon stepping out of the darkness.

“Be of good cheer and listen,” he said, wasting no time. “When you were born it was given unto you the opportunity to be of a new and different nature full of grace and beauty, loving and being loved. The early event of your falling was a great spiritual upheaval and forever changed your life and destiny.” I understood that Charon was referring to my “falling” into a coma at the age of four. “Why it happened is of lesser concern; however, that it indeed did happen is real and should be dealt with on that basis alone. Without going back into your past and reliving old events, I will be talking from the present time frame and only referring back to old events as they become relevant. With this short introduction, I will begin.”

With my back aching, I was not particularly focused on Charon’s speech up to that moment. He then continued.

“Let me say first and foremost that I love you and have always loved and cared for your soul. Even before this present life you and I were friends. We have fought battles, pursued our destinies together, and walked the golden road of paradise. Even when you were a child, I protected and kept you. Today I will continue to provide that measure of protection that you require for your well-being and fulfillment.

“You come under attack and at times you don’t even know that it is occurring. I send out your allies and allow you to continue with your life without so much as a whimper. Without my intervention, you would be blown away like a leaf in the autumn sky.

“I am always with you and even now as I speak these words you and I are one. It is true, the sky is turning dark and soon the fall winds will blow. It is our time, the time of the dark ones, the autumn people. We are very powerful during this season of the year and I am looking forward to the new revelations that are coming our way.

“You may ask, ‘What kind of revelations are out there for me?’ Behold, the sky is parting, the angels are in the temple, and new wonders are being released on Zelcon. Wonders so great and wonderful that it is difficult for me to speak. For us that are from the vastness, our time is almost at hand. We are now being prepared for the time of the autumn jubilee and only we know where it is that we come from and where ultimately we are going.”

I still had not the faintest idea where he was taking all of this, but the lengthy discourse did put me at ease and it was with gratitude that I felt my entire self relax.

“Space and time are so vast and we have traveled far from home. We are exiles, the wanderers and it is doubtful that we will see home for many millennia to come. We will always be a part of the activities of heaven, and the angels of the vastness are standing next to us even as I speak these words.

“You, on the autumn equinox, asked a favor of the great ones. Your heart has been good and your motives are well-known to all. What was asked will be answered in the time of the vastness. What does this mean? It means what was already begun and is continuing to unfold cannot be stopped. You must have faith in the great ones, believe that they care for you and they will always seek to bless whatever endeavors you pursue. So continue as you have in the past to follow the spiritual voices that are within you and you will always be a part of the fellowship of Zelcon.”

The words filled my heart with love, clashing with the pain that still wracked my brain. Charon’s form was drawn back into the inner depths, transforming itself into light as he grew more and more distant. Then with a burst of illumination that spread throughout my consciousness, he was gone.

I thought long and seriously on the extended teaching presented today. Charon was always serious and passionate in his counseling and these compassionate assurances and clarifications buoyed me with hope. The sound of my teacher’s voice still resounded within me.

“I am always with you. I love you and have always loved you.”

Thank God for those words, I thought, tears streaming down my face as I turned thought into words, crying out, “Thank God for those words! Thank God for Charon!”

My head was still leaning against the rectangular pillar; I knew it was time to rise. Summoning strength from reserves heretofore unsuspected, I drew myself up. Taking the walking stick once again, I retreated from my underworld, back up the steps and into the daylight.

Charon’s words of loving acceptance still rang as church bells announcing the gift of God’s grace on a beautiful Sunday morning. As I stepped from stair to stair, the light of the world enveloped me ever more, both in actuality and spiritual reality.

I reached the landing and entered into the fullness of the light of day. I could feel part of the untold blessings delivered daily by the golden rays of the sun. My heart was overflowing with joy and, for once, I would experience a day of real peace.

## Anger

The ache in my legs was already making itself felt that morning. I had no inkling as to what kind of day this would turn out to be nor did I much care, quite frankly. The hope for better things was once more diminishing rapidly in the face of the return of the old dark thoughts.

The feelings of optimism, powerful upon arrival, can often quickly dissipate. The psychic pressure builds inexorably; this time I feel it coursing through my being. Anger rears its head, as does the tendency towards isolation. I despise such a mindset and though by necessity I have learned to live with it, still its onset brings depression in tow.

March had arrived and with it the evening songs of the nightingales, whose happy chirps in the dead of night lead one to think all is well with the world. This day had been good and I was now climbing a trail above the Santa Susana Mountains. I was struck by the vivid green shades of the grass in anticipation of the spring, and was a little impatient to put colors down on canvases again. Weeks had passed since I last held a paintbrush.

A gentle wind sighed past my ankles, and I continued down toward the valley, marveling at the bright shades of blue, green, and yellow brought out by the rays of the midday sun. Winding my way down to the floor of the valley below, I reached out to steady myself with the aid of old sandstone rocks.

Then all of a sudden, the world went silent. No songs of birds, no rustling of leaves, nor distant sounds of traffic. Nothing. It was as though I had been struck deaf. I was a little panicked, wondering what had just happened to me, and in the meantime autumn leaves began to fall all around me... these reddish brown leaves were of such large size that I knew they couldn't possibly be real.

I watched the leaves swirl and congregate into a female form, green-eyed but with no other features visible. Surrounded by a cloudy formation illuminated from within, her form and the light within

moved in unison. Any possible fear was pushed out of my psyche by the sheer beauty of this creature. I was literally unable to tear my gaze away from her.

Then she spoke, her voice as music gliding on the wind. But I couldn't quite capture her words, as though she was speaking a foreign language or a language from another dimension. I strained to listen, but her utterings were obscured by some unseen barrier.

She walked towards me, coming to a halt a scant few feet from me.

"You must learn to control your anger," all of a sudden, her voice was clear as day, "it will be your undoing."

At that moment, a strong gust of wind hit me head on, so forceful that it sent me to the ground.

"You see what anger can do when it is not under control," she said with a smile that turned into a laugh.

I was as bowled over by her beauty as by the wind, and my voice was nowhere to be found.

Thoughts ran through my mind that her warning was timely. I had spent the better part of a year wrestling with my anger, trying to exercise a greater degree of control over it. My success had been partial at best. Whenever I thought I had the upper hand, something would come roaring out of the dim caverns of my inner consciousness, triggering a new spate of upset. And that commenced the blame game, creating more anger.

I looked into her green eyes, knowing by the look in them that she was keenly aware of my thoughts.

"Don't take it all so seriously," she said lightly.

At that moment, I sensed she was dimming away. I tried to hold on to the vision, but the more I tried, the more it slipped away. Finding my voice, I called out, asking she to please linger a moment. She did not respond, vanishing in an instant.

The vibration of her being remained strongly behind and I found myself having difficulty breathing. Also, the underbrush was thickly studded with brambles and thistles, hooking themselves to my garments and hemming me in. Pulling myself this way and that, scratched by thorns, movements restricted, frustrated, the old anger began to assert itself, thereby proving the point of the entire lesson. Indeed, I could hear the faint sound of the spirit woman's delightful laugh as I continued my struggle against the tumbleweeds and heavy shrubbery.

Having reached my limit, I ceased fighting and sought rest on a large rock formation in the center of the canyon. Upset, I attempted to free my arm from the encroaching brush with a mighty jerk, tearing my new shirt from elbow to shoulder.

“Goddammit!” I shouted.

The surrounding rocks echoed my blasphemy throughout the canyon walls, disappearing into the sound of the wind. Again I heard the sweet sound of her laughter, seeming to fill every little niche of the canyon.

Suddenly I hated that laughter and its mockery, but my mind was clear enough to realize that I needed to rein myself in, calm down, and center myself. I was only making a bad situation even worse in every possible way.

Just as I was thinking these thoughts, as if by way of a reply, the laughter became encouraging words, soft and soothing. Then, as though by magic, I was released from the sharp embrace of thorns and brambles, free in more ways than one. Anger was replaced by peace.

The wind brushing against the rocky ridge well above seemed to sing my inner sigh of relief and release.

“Be at peace,” I heard it repeated on the breath of the breeze, over and over until it blended away with the sound of the mountainside.

Finally, the entirety of the lesson sank in. I turned away and climbed down the trail to the canyon’s edge, then trudged up the ridge to my car.

The anger was still gone. Peace still reigned.

Inglewood Park Cemetery – 1996

I have found that my personal places of power have been carefully selected by my unconscious in order to maximize the essential part they play in my visionary experiences. I do not arbitrarily select them because they look nice or have intoxicating aromas; they are an integral part of my inner life and of me. Nor do I restrict them to my immediate environment; when I travel I incorporate visits to such places into my itinerary, allowing my energy to lead me to whatever location it feels is best for me at the time.

I have to be sensitive to the vibrations of these special areas upon arrival, to assess if the place is suitable for me, and then, patience is required for me to remain still and allow the subtle forces to speak.

One of these centers of power for me is a park across from a cemetery in Inglewood, California. A little research into the area's history revealed that the entire park was comprised of a water hole in the Mesozoic era, a natural spring through which have coursed water and psychic energy since prehistoric times. I was unaware of these facts when growing up in Inglewood, but was most pleased with my later discovery.

I never know where one of these natural places of power would turn up. It may be at a site of a church, a cemetery, an office building, or along an ocean shore, in the desert, anywhere... It is impossible to predict, yet they exist in a self-evident fact. They are provided for all who travel a spiritual path, and should be sought out by all such pioneers.

On this summer day, I was on my way to a business meeting when I felt the silent but unmistakable call of my energy; and as always, when the summon comes while I am on the road, I rearrange my schedule immediately.

I pulled off 405 freeway and took Slauson Avenue to the Inglewood Park Cemetery. To be honest, I frequently plan my route to take me near or through Inglewood, as I believe there is still a goodly amount of unfinished business for me in my old stomping grounds. I drove through the familiar neighborhoods, down Brett Street to Centinela and on to the cemetery.

The cemetery's iron gates and immense fountain greeted my arrival as they had many times before, welcoming me into this world of solemn peace and tranquil, tasteful beauty. My grandparents are buried in this cemetery. I visit them often, clean their headstones, and make sure the groundskeepers maintain the immediate area in excellent condition.

Today, I was free of family responsibilities, so I made my way towards a marble mausoleum that was one of my favorite places at the cemetery. I was relieved to escape the heat of the day and enter the inviting coolness of the crypt's smooth stone interior.

The foyer was dominated by a cloaked figure of Mary. While passing the statue, I gently brushed my hand along her cloak, and saw behind her stained glass windows, inside which early afternoon sunlight swirled colors & shimmers. The windows depicted Inglewood as it appeared in years gone by, and I was particularly drawn by the scene of a small forest glen bisected by a winding road that was splashed with shadows of red and purple.

I settled down on a marble bench to enjoy the interplay of colors in and through the glass. However as I watched, the glass itself became dark as though night was falling or the sun had been obscured by heavy clouds. I knew of no forecast of stormy weather for that day, so I shrugged it off and resumed my enjoyment of the artwork. However, the next thing I noticed was a marked drop in the temperature of the hallway.

This quietness was suddenly torn up by a clap of thunder that shook the building, then lightning flashed, and something began to stir in the darkness, quickly evolving from vaguely defined shadows to rows of figures lining the sides of the mausoleum. They did not move; they were silent and as if at-attention. Every time the lightening flashed, I was able to take a good look at these speechless sentinels: they are dressed in what appeared to be fine funeral clothes.

I felt terrified. All I could hear was the vigorous sound of a storm sweeping against the windows. I felt engulfed by the sound, yet it was at the same time inexplicably far away...

"This can't be happening," I insisted to myself. "These things don't exist."

I tried to suggest myself into believing my mind was playing a trick, that all I needed was a minute or two of calm concentration focusing on something constructive. I retreated into mental quietude and sought the comforting balm of meditation.

I initiated my breathing exercises, focusing my energy on a red piece of stained glass in the ceiling. I concentrated on the red, nothing but the red, not the rain, not the thunder or lightning, nor the ethereal companions with whom I shared the mausoleum.

As I focused, the red began to pulsate, then it filled the room with itself. The outlines of the interior of the mausoleum and the silent phantoms intermittently flashed in and out of the scene.

I could not relieve the fear and anxiety that engulfed me. "I'm going to get the hell out of here." My heart pounding and my body shaking, I rose and ran back towards the stone Mary, drawing alongside her just as another thunderous explosion rolled through the building, nearly sending me to the floor.

All I knew was I wanted to get away. As I always do before leaving the presence of a deity, I knelt before the statue of Mary, kissed her feet, then set course for the door.

I pushed hard against the steel doors, banging them open and ran out of the building. Yet in front of me, there was the same clear and quiet day as before. I was shocked. There was no wind, no rain, no thunder or lightning, just the bright sunshine and the dry heat of Southern California.

I was still feeling dizzy and disoriented as I got into my car and drove away.

What had just happened? What was its meaning? Were the dead attempting to communicate with me for some unknown reason? All I know was that my view of life after death was permanently altered after that day.

## Looking Towards the New Decade

A new decade had begun as had a new century and a new millennium and yes, I am intelligent enough to know that decades, centuries, and millennia actually begin on 01 year, but like everyone else in those long-forgotten Y2K days, I was caught up in the excitement of all those goose eggs on the calendar.

Some felt the Piscean Age was giving way to that of Aquarius, although since no one really knows just what year the avatar of the Piscean Age was born or what year crucified, such attempts at precise calculations can be dicey. No matter, as all was definitely not right with the world in any case.

As the Nineties came to a close, the number of my seizures was on the rise. Although I was taking my prescribed medication, I had had just about enough of its rather odious side effects, and was seriously considering stopping it. I was never convinced that the medication was doing the slightest bit of good, but I had lived with myself long enough to understand that the nature of my illness did not leave my processes of evaluation and judgment unimpaired, thus I was not the most objective of observers.

The only certainty was that my seizures were here to stay and it was necessary to find a way to deal with them, with medications or without. My personal spiritual evolution had brought me to a point where daily trips to the mountain were no longer needed, although I continued to seek out places of power and, of course, carefully to record my visions and other experiences in my journals.

Personally, I had been living by myself for over ten years, and solitude seemed to have become my religion, yet I had no awareness that in the new decade this was all going to change. But at that time, I was unsure whether I should be in a relationship, or even if I could maintain one. I was not actively seeking out feminine company. Fortunately, my friendships sustained me through many a difficulty and it was in those relationships that I found a great deal of stability. Artistically, my work continued to

mature and evolve. I was also putting in many hours at the piano, often playing into the early hours of the morning. Still, there was a strong sense of incompleteness.

In terms of my professional life, 1999 had seen me join a new telecommunications company, with the title of Executive Vice-President. The processes of turning a twenty-year old company into a viable Twenty-First Century business were long, strenuous, and, fortunately, quite time consuming.

Thus, early in the new century I felt I had reason to believe my life might be on the upswing and even dared to hope for a future of personal peace and artistic and professional achievement. My lifestyle permitted me to enjoy the seemingly inconsequential day-to-day things of life, but this aura of comfortable ordinariness was not destined to last.

2002 saw me slide into a lengthy and deliberate withdrawal from the world. Though I say “deliberate,” at the beginning I was not aware I was doing it but, once the reality of it dawned, I did not hesitate to immerse myself in it and encourage it in every way possible.

I ceased teaching music classes, disengaged myself from any direct involvement with the Epilepsy Foundation, and stopped interacting with my friends. All in all, I was becoming a hermit. I was alone, adrift, and heading towards trouble. My participation in building a new company was confessedly fatiguing and a good deal of time was eaten up with business traveling, but even so I knew there was more happening here than simple exhaustion or the vague disorientation of frequent trips out of town.

What I was, was fractured. Something indeterminable seemed to have undone me. Despite so many years, and decades, of extremely hard work to unify my being, I felt as though I had not only backslidden but backflipped all the way back to square one.

Festering old wounds were being torn open as though caught on nails; my unconscious was spewing forth severe anxiety, fear, and hopelessness with the force of a waterspout. Added to all this was Charon’s unanticipated announcement that everything I had already been through was but a prelude to even more difficult scenes lay ahead for me to play.

But there were respites.

My fifty-seventh birthday visit to Forest Lawn Cemetery in Glendale produced a most welcome and comforting vision of loving peace. Then, on New Year’s Day of 2004, while atop my mountain, I found myself in the center of a circle of beings of light who lifted out of the ethers a new matrix for healing for me. Then, my art would receive unexpected recognition and take on a life of its own, and furthermore, I will be meeting the love of my life.

## The Death of Tom and Molly

I was leaving the office to go directly home after an uneventful Monday. I threw a glance towards the peaks of the nearby mountains, at which point became aware of a sound, the kind of sound I had never heard before. It was soft, of unclear origin, starting out quiet and non-threatening, but quickly drowning out everything else.

The sound not only forced its way into my head, but also surrounded my car, penetrated the glass of the closed windows, affected the vibration of every cell of my body, and every part of my being. I gunned the engine and took off for home, while the sound staying right with me. When I reached home my head felt as though it was splitting, and the world as I knew it was receding from the grasp of my awareness at an accelerating pace. Just as I pulled into my garage, I felt myself being pulled out of reality.

The prudent thing to do was to sit and wait, for what I knew not. I decided to allow whatever was happening to take its course and pass on by. I had no idea how long I had sat in the car or how I got inside the house, but later I found myself in the study, comfortably seated in my rocking chair surrounded by a vision of leaves floating through the air in a rhythmic dance.

From the center of this dance emerged Charon, in the form of a woman, but she was mostly made up of light. Charon asked me how I was feeling and if there was anything she could do to help me. My answer seemed to tumble from my lips...

"I know we are approaching a new year. Things are not going particularly well. As a matter of fact, I seem to be in the same down cycle as before, with no improvement in sight. I'm very troubled, my head isn't clear. I know the problems are mine alone, I know I must blame myself entirely for my failures. The question is, what to do next. What direction to take in the future and what, if anything, can be done to improve my life presently?"

As I spoke, Charon approached me with an intimidating presence, but the look in her eyes filled me with joy and I suddenly was aware of my shame over my constant complaining at my lot in life.

"You must be getting tired of the many questions I pour out to you on a regular basis," I said, "but I don't know where else to turn."

"Not at all," Charon assured me.

“After my development was completed in the past,” I continued, “I was certain I was on the mend, that all things would be going forward. I’m not certain of anything anymore. Maybe that’s as it should be. I just don’t know.”

My spirit guide looked at me with her powerful eyes, and I felt as though I were losing control of the moment. Although I felt my ability to speak slipping away, I continued spewing forth my dissatisfaction with it all.

“I feel I’m just getting older and nothing will ever change. Do I really want to evolve? Is there some change in the wind or will this confusion continue forever? I hope that is not true but I seem further and further away from any kind of solution. Time never stands still but I seem to be doing just that with no end in sight.”

As Charon kept her gaze on me, my concentration waned and my speech was slurring. I was drowsy, but continued complaining.

“My painting is going well, work is fine, but spiritually I feel dead.”

Then I was unable to concentrate sufficiently to speak. Charon was altering my energy as well as the vibration of the atmosphere in the room. I tried to keep talking but it was futile, and whatever I was trying to say seemed absolutely unimportant. I couldn’t take my eyes of Charon, whose power simply transfixed me.

Then I suddenly realized what had been really bothering me – the deaths of two friends from my epilepsy support group, who had died very recently as a result of their illness. Their deaths occurred in the same week and the double blow had a devastating impact on me. Snapping out of my daze, I spoke once more.

“I have received news that both Tom and Molly are dead. I can see this is going to a very difficult Christmas for us all. It seems that death is closing in all around us. Like my friends, I was having a lot of seizures of my own lately. I know we should be living in the moment all the time,” I opined, “but this had hit me hard and I know it has as much to do with my feelings about myself as it does Tom or Molly.”

Charon’s hand moved gracefully through the air at this point, lighting up my study, and changing its vibrations. The transformation took away my fear of death. She came towards me, the energy emanating from the spirit expanding, filling the entire room.

“It is just another thing to deal with during the winter solstice,” I said. “I had hoped things would be getting better during this time of year but I guess they’re not. Maybe this will end what has been a very difficult year and the New Year will bring peace.”

I would not speak another word in this encounter. My awareness of my surroundings began to fade and I heard Charon say, “Sleep now.” I felt an out-rush of tension and anxiety, a purging of the unpleasant. Sleep pursued and overtook me as Charon continued to say soothingly, “Sleep, sleep now.”

In an instant I was gone from the world. My sleeping consciousness was now a field for angels of light, flooding me with their efflorescence and joy. I was now in a world without illness, death, and the hopelessness that so cripples and inhibits the enjoyment of material life.

I was resting with the angels.

#### An Unexpected Sunday – May 2003

I found myself spending the first hour or so of what I had planned to be a Saturday of errands at the car wash. The sights and sounds were less than engaging; someone pulling and pushing a rag over an automobile, the mechanical cacophony of the equipment duking it out with some sort of nauseating music coming from a store behind. The only pleasing sensation was that of the morning sun.

The day had been planned to be uneventful. On the itinerary were grocery-shopping, picking up a lampshade, a trip to the bookstore for browsing and possible purchasing, lunch, and so on until the evening.

But I didn’t want aesthetic stimulation, just a common, run-of-the-mill day for a change, one of reassuring ordinariness. I leaned back on the bench hoping this would be a day without detours into uncharted vistas of consciousness. What began as an idle thought turned out to be more along the lines of famous last-words.

I saw a hand waving in my direction, fortunately for me one of flesh and blood and eminently visible to all and sundry. My car was ready and it was time for me to get out into the warm day and take of business. With the list of errands handy and plan to walk to the mountain after dinner firmly in place, I plunged into the madness of traffic and headed for my first destination, little suspecting that within minutes I would be enfolded within someone else’s plan for the day, a prisoner of its power.

The Bach I was playing was healing and supportive to my nerves. I was already enjoying the commonness of the day and looking forward to more hours of everyday activities without angels and harpies and armchair visits to distant worlds.

For some reason I found myself musing on the evermore rapid pace with which the years were rolling by. Nearly sixty years had elapsed, and I thought those years were securely locked away in the deepest corners of my memory, leaving me free from the power of their influence.

Passing a familiar restaurant that I frequented, I resisted the impulse to stop and eat, feeling I must continue on. To where and what I was heading I had no idea at that moment.

Somehow a field of anxiety began to form on the outermost fringes of my awareness. I sloughed it off and pushed on to the bookstore. An oil slick in the parking lot made me slip, and the pink color of the building felt slightly nauseating as usual. My excursion through the store neither diverted nor lessened the strange feeling that was increasing within me.

I wandered into the art section and thumbed through various volumes of Munch, Picasso, Chagall, and others, catching out of the corner of my eye the motion of something hovering near one of the book-laden shelves. I ignored it initially, but when it started to glow and produce an aura of rainbow colors, it quite naturally captured my attention. The swirl of color heightened my increasing level of anxiety.

The scintillating patch of colors was now expanding to encompass the entire interior of the bookstore. I lost myself in its dazzling radiance, which without warning exited my field of vision. As it did so, I was overcome with dizziness and pain that began in my legs then made itself felt along my shoulders. I reached out to the bookshelves for stability and managed to remain upright long enough to leave the store, shaky but under my own power.

The light of the day hit me with full force as I got into the car. I slumped back into yielding gray leather, closed my eyes to regain equilibrium and to map the pain and discomfort that had spread over me. My head was still in a tailspin. I decided to remain there and relax as long as necessary for my system to right itself, for whatever was going on to play itself out. It was 10:30 AM.

As I allowed the tension to spend itself within me, I returned in memory to an incident that occurred in the fall of 2001, when I was led to visit the Wee Kirk of the Heather Church in Forest Lawn Cemetery which, as you now know, is one of my personal places of power.

At that time, even while pulling up to the curb I sensed a special presence, a vibration in the air. I passed through the gates leading into the sumptuous garden, the gentle sounds of water in the fountain accompanying my passage into the world of serenity surrounding the Wee Kirk.

Morning sunlight glinted off the statue of Jesus placed at the rear of the garden, its base surrounded by a bed of fallen leaves. I ran my hand over the trunk of one of the trees, its bark rough and quite sharp in texture. Seating myself on one of the benches, I settled down for meditation and simple enjoyment of the healing peace of the garden. My attempts to still the mind were unsuccessful; I could actually feel the nerves of my arms leaping beneath the flesh, their staccato pulsations matching the confusion of my thoughts dashing just about everywhere except into the tranquil garden space.

A ray of sunlight reflected back from the shimmering water of the fountain struck my eyes, making me jump. I felt I was going to lose consciousness just as the statue of Christ started to move towards me. The passage of the air over his form swayed his robes easily back and forth in a motion that equaled the gracefulness of his movement, although strangely the statue retained the form and texture of a marble sculpture.

Then I noted that one of his fingers was missing. The statue floated towards and touched down some three to four feet from where I sat, without leaving any indentation on the grass. His gray marble face broke into a smile of benevolence, his eyes taking on an all-too-familiar red glow that reached out and filled the entire garden with its light.

He bade me welcome, informing me that this was the time of the rose, "the red rose of the sepulcher." I saw a rose in his hands, its fragrance pulsating with life. The flower seemed to be in an attitude of prayer, opening its petals to pay obeisance to its Creator. Then it closed up, seeming to have given up its life with the heavenward benediction. Upon the closing of the rose, the statue of Jesus returned to its place at the back of the garden, retreating into silence, and the life that had animated it departed.

It was noon when I emerged from what felt, from its lingering physical and psychological effects, like a deep sleep. I felt good on the drive to my mountain. I had completely forgotten about my list of errands, none of which were as important as my need to get to Stony Point as quickly as possible. I arrived just before one o'clock. Half the day was gone and I had accomplished nothing of practical nature other than having my car washed.

I got out and walked through the gentle east-west breeze in the canyons. A large flock of crows lazily flew overhead, hundreds of pairs of black wings occasionally blocking out the light, so thick was the clutch of birds. I began the long climb to the top of Stony Point, surrounded by the whisperings of an invisible voice.

The climb was not easy, chunks of brittle rock breaking away in my hands, filling my lungs with dust. The world was spinning madly when I laid myself down atop the great rock formation at the edge of the hundred foot cliff. I rolled on to my knees, a small rock poking deeply into my kneecap, drawing from me an indecorous cry of, "Shit!" I got up and walked to the edge of the precipice. The flow of

traffic both ways on Topanga Canyon lent an air of casual normality to the scene. My view was unobstructed, the day warm and clear, and I could not help but raise heart and arms in a show of praise.

I sat back down on the rocky surface and gave exultation to the west. Then I heard a branch slapping against the side of the rocks to my left, as the wind picked up some steam. When the Santa Ana winds howl through these canyons their force can literally knock you to the ground.

The mountain suddenly began to shake and I thought it was one of the minor temblors that strike Southern California, but the fact I was slipping in and out of consciousness along with the rumbling shaking negated that theory. The mountain reared itself up away from the Earth's surface, crumbling apart. Then out of the center of this shower of rocks appeared a path. By now the mountain was floating freely in the air, rocky formations girdled by white clouds, black sky and twinkling stars.

I could see the pathway reach beyond the horizon and into infinity. Angelic beings calmly trod the cloudy atmosphere in the distance. I called to them but received no reply. I started up the aerial road towards an unknown destination, the wind now roaring with tremendous ferocity, knocking me down onto the path, which felt like highly polished stone. Riding the wind currents was a crystalline being, flooded with light, gracefully gliding in my direction. This creature radiated unspeakable beauty, light emanating from every part of it, illuminating the canyons between the mountains.

When this being reached me, the intensity of the light shining from it was painful. He advised me not to look directly at him, and floated effortlessly to my side. I was unable to speak, so overwhelming was its presence.

"I am glad you have come today," he said, "for you have much to learn."

Averting my eyes was not enough to block out the radiance. I lifted my hands to my face, covering my eyes. He continued his discourse.

"Time is closing in on you and you must begin the journey to your final days, the release of the body and its assimilation into the vastness."

His words were frightening to say the least and he was very sensitive to my reaction.

"Do not fear my words; it is your destiny to reach the boundaries of the vastness before you release your soul to the infinite. You can no longer waste precious time in trivial activities; you must focus all of your attention on this final stage of your development. It is the culmination of all of your work to date and will fulfill your life's journey. Go now and be at peace. We will meet again. Listen for my call."

These final instructions reverberated through me as I watched him fade from sight. Then he was gone and I was back in the familiar surroundings of Stony Point.

I digested this event as I drove home. I had previously felt that my inner conflicts had finally ceased, and I had a hard won victory as the crowning achievement of many years of struggle. Thus the fact that I had just been told in no uncertain terms that this was not the case was deeply troubling.

Now at home, the images decorating my study and the very vibration of the room itself compounded a general feeling of wearied languor. I wanted it all to end, tired as I was from the decades of fighting for wholeness. I was not ashamed to admit that the years of unending interior conflicts and physical and psychological turmoil had taken their toll. I had paid my dues; it was time for someone else to struggle and hurt and cry. But I could not pass on to another my destiny, my fate, my karma.

My pity party was brought to an abrupt end by the unannounced arrival of Charon.

“Please do not despair or be alienated from yourself,” he said. “Have you forgotten the lost ones who support your soul and mind? Remember who you are, where you’ve come from and, hopefully, where you ultimately are going. Don’t you feel the soft winds of Zelcon coming off the desert, that wonderful heat and warmth that soothes your soul? It will ultimately give you peace.”

As he spoke, I was made aware of the fact that I was, indeed, treading the waters of self-pity. What was my problem, or the source of my problem, I wondered. Epilepsy, age, my medications? Some combination of those possibilities, perhaps with the addition of something I hadn’t considered? I did not know and at that moment I didn’t care. I was tired of the fight, weary of waging the spiritual warfare that had stretched over so many years. Charon was very aware of my thoughts and he addressed my concerns.

“I wish I could say that it was all over but, unfortunately, I cannot. You will need to face even more difficult times before it is finally over.”

“I know that you are always with me,” I said, picking up a stone that reposed beside my desk. “You have all my love and affection forever. I really don’t have any idea what I would do if you did not appear during these difficult times of anger, doubt, and psychic pain. I will always be eternally grateful to my energy for all the help and support it has given me through the years.”

Our conversation concluded, and I sank back in my chair and watched Charon nod in agreement. Although I knew he was always right, I still experienced unease over what my future might hold. He melted back into the darkness.

I felt exhausted, physically and in every other way. I laid my head back against the chair, closed my eyes, and drifted off into a well-deserved sleep.

## Conversation with Charon and Encounter with Harpy

Friday found me with a spinning head and a generally unwell feeling. The early morning sun illuminated every spot and streak on the windshield as I drove to the office. I could see angelic beings floating lazily but gracefully by the side of the road, gleaming in the sunlight.

On arriving at the office, I was greeted by Charon. I had a premonition that I would meet with him today and was very glad to see him, so much so I began talking as soon as I parked the car, without waiting for him to set the stage for this encounter. But instantly, before I could say anything, I was pulled from my mundane surroundings and hurled towards a distant source of light that seemed to end in a field of well-tended rolling greenery, bordered by trees gently swaying in the wind. In the middle stood Charon. He invited me to speak.

I didn't quite know what to say at first, still a bit astonished by the sudden journey. But I quickly found my voice and, for some reason, a rather loud one. I was not sure if such volume was actually produced by me, or if I was speaking in a normal tone of voice that was somehow amplified by the qualities of the place.

"There is a longing in me," I began, "I feel a 'distance' that hangs around and surrounds me." "I would like to be able to use the energy in this 'distance' to expand my work. I'm hoping to use it as a catalyst for change and growth."

Charon was amused at my enthusiasm, and laughed pleasantly and suggested I calm down and be peaceful. I slowed down, lowered the pitch of my voice.

"I have always interpreted these feelings as negative. However, I'm beginning to feel that they are anything but. I see these feelings as a creative matrix that can be utilized for growth." Even in my own mind this all begins to sound a little bit intellectual and overblown.

My voice trailed off, but since I had begun this speech I figured I had better finish it where I wanted to.

"I am letting go of all the past resistance to the new. I am welcoming the time of change and I know that this year I can sustain my level of commitment to the Autumn and accomplish all of my goals."

Charon's smile was comforting, and he encouraged my pursuit of all the great things available during the time of Autumn jubilee. I was born in Autumn, and that is the time when my insights into who I am is at its greatest heights. Charon told me that the energy during this time leads me into balance and artistic creativity, deep regeneration, and the expansion of consciousness. He appended to this

encouragement a warning that all would not proceed smoothly for me, but noted that there did not seem to be any hindrances to the positive evolution I was anticipating.

“You might just find that the good is always available in any situation,” Charon instructed, “so feel free to be who you really are. Hopefully, you will finally accept the fact that you are a very special individual and then see clearly what you need to do.”

As I began the process of internalizing Charon’s advice, and my head began to throb.

“What kind of difficulty are you talking about?” I asked through clenched teeth, fighting the ache pounding through my skull. “I hope that this is not going to be another overwhelming year, like last year! I’m not sure I could take another year of negative energy.”

“Stop taking every challenge in your life so seriously,” Charon replied. “You don’t need to concern yourself with things that have not been made manifest. I was not talking of any particular thing or event; I was only reflecting on potentials.”

The kindly expression on his face was reassuring and I was filled with joyousness as he faded away.

Wanting to hear more, I called out to him, but he was gone. Reflecting on the theme of our conversation, I became aware of a vivid impression forming in my mind’s eye, the dark but beautiful landscape of a different planet...

High mountains and desert, the floor of which was lightly caressed by a hint of wind. There was also water, large bodies of it, dark as the land. Even the light of the day displayed an indescribable darkness. Rolling tides of dark water gently licked then withdrew from dark sandy shorelines.

Then from everywhere came a procession of lights, living souls coming from all directions. I gazed out over the expansive desert, barely able to discern a form moving through the evening sky.

Throughout the mists hovering over the desert, weaving in and out, I saw thousands of beings crisscrossing the surface. I never found out who or what they were, but I somehow shared enough of their consciousness to know that they and the planet were one.

Eager to learn more, I started to walk out into the endless planetscape before me, wind caressing me, air warm but easily breathed. My intention was to learn more about those with whom I was sharing this experience. I called out to them, but they either did not hear me or chose to ignore my overture. As they were much too far away for me to see them clearly, it was not beyond the realm of possibility that I was too far away for them to hear me.

I felt a desperate need to contact and communicate with them. I began to run in their direction, taking but a few rapid steps before finding myself back in my automobile, covered in moisture from every pore and with dizzy head.

I reclined back in the driver's seat and began to pull together my fragmented thoughts, needing to get over my latest encounter with the unconscious.

The next day was of a decidedly different tenor. I had arisen early that Saturday, up with the sun as it rose over the San Gabriel Mountains flanking the eastern side of the San Fernando Valley; the sun would turn Stony Point bright with brilliantly glittering hues later, at mid-day, a significant contrast to the gray pall cast over it by the fog in the early hours.

My leg was hurting, the remnants of an accident the week before, sustained while climbing the mountain. Fortunately, the pain of a pulled muscle had reduced to the discomfort of a feeling of soreness. I would continually massage the leg as I climbed that Saturday.

I arrived at the mountain at about 7:00 AM, found a seat and centered myself, called out to my energy and began my mental exercises. I started with reflection on the events of the day before, the episode that had transpired in the parking lot outside my place of business. My exploration of these fresh memories didn't proceed very far as my attention was engaged by the sight of a very large bird flying down out of the southwest. Large birds are not an infrequent sight around Stony Point; many families of hawks, owls and vultures make their homes in the abundant rocks of the area, and residents are used to seeing them, especially the hawks as they soar and circle majestically throughout the day. But this bird was no local fixture. As it drew nearer, its form and appearance made that all too apparent.

It was a harpy, with a wingspan of 30 feet, straight out of Greek mythology, where they are generally portrayed as filthy, rather raggedy entities with the head of a woman and the body and limbs of a bird. I had encountered these creatures before, such as in my vision of the trip to the underworld. Very similar to that one, the present apparition exuded hatred and anger, with droplets falling from her blood-soaked mouth; there could be no doubt what this one had been feeding on and that her hunger had not been satisfied.

I tried to leap up for the safety of one of the caves or indentations between rocks, but she was moving at far too great a rate to allow me to do so. She swooped down and had a grip on me before I could even move. Her razor-sharp talons penetrated my flesh, tearing out great chunks, and fountains of blood gushed forth from my internal organs and drenched the rocks beneath me. The life force was flowing out of my body just as rapidly and I could actually feel myself dying.

Yet unexpectedly, she let go of her grip, released me and flew back up in the air in a graceful swoop. She circled above, readying for another attack. I tried to scramble down the moss-covered rocks, while covered in blood and wracked with pain; my goal was to reach the bottom of the rock formation on which I was perched. As I moved feebly, I caught the rays of the morning sun full in the face, their brightness temporarily rendering me blind. Just as my eyes recovered, as a lightning bolt, she collided with me again.

This time the target of her unimaginably powerful claws was my head, her talons piercing my skull and entering my brain. A cascade of blood coursed down my face and over my torso, becoming a raging torrent flowing over the land, flooding everything before, behind, and around it.

It was impossible to get this thing off of me. My head virtually exploded as the skin was torn away from my skull. Again, she let go and I was momentarily free from her infernal grip. I desperately wanted to run, but where? What remained of my consciousness loosened itself from me and I felt the last residue of life ooze out of me. Then all was darkness.

I awakened drenched in perspiration and totally exhausted. For a brief moment, nothing seemed to have happened, but then the memory came crashing down on me: the harpy, the blood, the gaping wounds, the terror. I screamed, and turned to examine the wounds from the attack. They were nowhere to be seen.

By this time, morning was giving way to afternoon and the memory of the episode replaced with things more tangible. Once again, it would be up to me to investigate what had happened and piece together a story and the meaning of it.

The walk down the mountain was slower than the climb up, and was accompanied by marked dizziness. Still shaken, I was vigilant of all possible angles of attack from the harpy as I made my way down the rocky cliffs. She may have been gone and the wounds may have been strictly metaphysical, but my soul felt torn and my inside bleeding.

The contrast between the events of Friday and Saturday was as obvious as it was disturbing. Yesterday, Charon had helped alleviate my absorption with the self but I had also felt that by leaving me alone on that desert planet, he had abandoned me to vastness.

I still hadn't been able to determine the symbolism of the sojourners over the planet's surface or my unsuccessful attempt to establish communication with them. I was completely in the dark as to who they had been and how they had related, if at all, to the conversation Charon and I had had. Nor did I know why Charon had not stayed with me.

By contrast, I had sought out the mountain today of my own volition, rather than feeling drawn there, which perhaps had brought on the battle against the demented mythological beast. There must be a connecting link, but I was unable to find it, or recognize it if it were there. I could not shrug this one off; it was going to have to be squarely faced and dealt with in an honest, forthright manner. Whatever the lesson was to be learned, I had to discover it and make it mine.

On Friday, I had indulged myself complaining to Charon, bitching about my personal circumstances, adding insult to injury by over-intellectualizing my emotions and, quite frankly, hoping to manipulate my spiritual guide in his reaction. His response was to brush aside my pontifications and transport me to a place where I had to stand alone, and then return with an absolutely blank sheet when it comes to understanding the implications of the episode.

As my thoughts continued down this track, the landscape of the desert planet asserted itself in my memory, placing me back in that current of energy, feelings and all. I felt an instantaneous connection with it all once again, wanting to join those wondrous souls who still eluded my contact.

The harpy, for her part, had forbidden me to play fast and loose with my intellectualizing and she certainly did not provide any opportunity for me to manipulate the circumstances. Her strong talons had literally ripped away the façade of intellect, and, because of the unspeakable pain, I was could do naught but feel my way through the experience. Emotion was all I had to go on, rational logic had been out of the question. Who can think clearly when their skull is being caved in?

My soul remained open and bleeding until day's end. I had bouts of uncontrollable weeping.

The harpy had been sent to make certain that the pain I felt was a perfect representation of the great longing of my mind of which I had spoken to Charon.

Tree of Knowledge - January 2004

I have been called to the mountain today and, heeding the voice of my energy, I was reflecting on the gentle beauties of nature that are manifested in my special spot in such an unforced and, so, powerful and effective way.

I entered into a state of attunement with the vibrations of...God, Gaia, the Cosmic, the Tao, Brahman... every culture has its word, its cherished name for the Creator of those simple things on which my

meditation was focused – the rocks, trees, the happy chirping of the birds, and even the unsatisfiable longing brought forth by the sound of the approaching train.

The blue-and-silver Super Liner sped by quickly, plunging into the tunnel carved into the side of the Santa Susana Mountains, its diesel rumble enhancing rather than disturbing the pleasantly bucolic scene; then it was gone, ostensibly on its way to Simi Valley and points normal, but in my meditation, it receded into the eternal tunnel where travelers go and never return.

Above me, the sleek black forms of crows and mobile bodies of the screech owls hover and circle against the azure backdrop of the sky, and above them, the majestic hawks effortlessly glided along their invisible paths.

The day is anointed with its own sweetness, as have been most of my days here. No matter how black my mood, my main place of power has always welcomed me and embraced me in the arms of home. My habit had been to visit every weekend, with few exceptions. Whenever I came, however much time I felt I would be able to spend amidst the rocks and trees, my visits here were always sojourns, seeking something, something I had had and lost, something I had never possessed or, as you have read, something I was brought to find.

And sometimes I left empty-handed. On other occasions I would simply enjoy the setting, the sunrises and sunsets, allowing the tranquility to seep deeply into my psyche. But when my energy specifically called me to this location, there was always a definite purpose behind it.

The lesson is trust and obedience. There might be a major visionary experience, as with the Black Minotaur or the epic spiritual battle that had been fought over Topanga Canyon. Always there would be a message, either unmistakably laid upon the surface of the event or encrypted in symbols demanding my own efforts to decipher, but at the core of each episode is always a scintillating point of light, a kernel of truth that I am expected to sow, cultivate, and, at the proper moment for harvesting, reap and do something with.

As I gazed into the distance this day I focused on a crow, shiny black wings bright with sunlight. I see someone hiking on the trail beneath my position. So many more people come here than in years gone by, rock climbers, hikers, scout troops, emergency crews training for rescues in rugged terrain. In days gone by, this area was practically deserted save for the occasional hobo and the odd backpacker now and then. Unlike the others, what I experience on the mountain bears a far stronger imprint of reality than the rest of my life. The soft rustling of leaves in the wind, the old burned-out trees, the mossy green bedspreads covering the rocks, it all has meaning to me.

My vantage point allows me to see the entire vista of the mountain. Looking to the right I see the face carved into the rock by the winds that howl and shriek through the canyon. To the east is a large tree, which I call the Tree of Knowledge, which I often make the focal point of my contemplation.

I open myself up to the energy of the Tree of Knowledge, which flows forth into me, forming a vortex and a tunnel into my unconscious. I had hoped it would open portals, to force them apart if need be, in order to cauterize the pain that has me in its grasp.

All of a sudden, the tree opens up, splitting itself for my edification, unleashing some sort of red substance that flows unimpeded from its center. The red liquid cascades down to the green grass at the roots of the tree, then flows over the earth as water; but it is not colored water, nor blood. Somehow I divine – perhaps the knowledge communicated by the tree itself – that this red is the medium of the life force that flows through the leaves. The red begins to vanish almost immediately, leaving behind nothing but the opening in the tree, which I know, also intuitively, is a womb containing a creature awaiting birth. It has not yet fully gestated, not quite ready for emergence into the world, but I can see it moving behind a veil of crimson. Although I cannot make out any details, I can see its size is impressive.

Then the sudden birth is sprung upon me, the creature literally erupts from its wooden confines. It wastes no time flopping about on the ground, and does not crawl or stumble on hesitant legs. It takes to the sky, flying off to the east, skimming over the hilltops and making for the distant mountains. This creation has been born from the tree and is on its way into a new life.

The birth canal, no longer needed, closes, the reddish placenta dissolving back into the greenery of the mountain, and all returns to normal, as it was before the vision commenced. All I see now is an ordinary tree covered by the shadow of the rocks.

Charon emerges from the shadow. He stands on a white cloud just above the rock situated beside the Tree of Knowledge. My spirit guide gestures for me to accompany him. I arise and with a step of faith join him on his cloudy platform. Without a word, he covers me with his cloak; we come to rest on a familiar road that we have traveled before, flanked on the left by a long hedge whose visible pulsations seem keyed to our breathing, and its branches, trees, and brambles appearing impenetrable. From the tangle of growth I can hear low voices, the murmur of forgotten memories, the prophecies of tomorrow's dreams, and the dialogue of eternities yet to come.

An orange light seems to be sitting on the road, inhabiting the space between the brambles on the left and the abyss on the right. As we near it I feel a sense of apprehension, obviously mine, not Charon's, who assures me that all is well. We reach the light, now tinged with yellow, and are absorbed into it. The power of its intensity is overwhelming; I tried to shield my eyes, but Charon commands me to look directly into this glowing fireball.

It is as a sun at dawn or dusk, especially intense at its first appearance of final bow. I obey Charon but see nothing but the bright yellow-gold that swallows all else up in the field of its radiance. The orb turns white and seems to penetrate my cranium, revolving through my head. It is a fire that engulfs the universe and I am located at its center. I am the solitary human witness to the white fire burning

on the mountain, above it, beneath it, all around it, through it. We plunge into the blaze, remaining as intact and unconsumed as the mountain itself, unharmed and untouched by the hot flames.

Charon tells me to step into the fire. I do so, then look back to see a pillar of fire preventing ingress for any others who might follow. I turn back and we proceed up the road, which gives way to a dirt trail that takes us to the top of a mountain. Without Charon's speaking, I know this is the journey I have been on for many long years and this time, and I feel I am approaching the final steps.

Perfectly aware of my thoughts, Charon shakes his head, indicating there are still many more steps to take on this path.

"We have a long journey ahead of us," he says, "so you must not tarry and distract yourself with a lot of unnecessary thoughts."

Far in the distance is a range of blue mountains, their peaceful aura beckoning to me. I also see a bend in the road up ahead. Our destination is a great tree covered with the golden leaves of Autumn. I am a creature of Autumn. The tree is as me; it is me.

I follow the inner prompting to lay my hand on the tree. The bark is rough, scaly, and yet I sense its healing virtue. The tree and I unify our consciousnesses.

A bough drops into my hand a reddish brown leaf, a tear shed by the soul of the tree. I gaze deeply into the center of the leaf and see an eye looking back at me. Charon suggests I look deeply into the eye. I focus on the deep blue iris; the blue fills me, unleashing memories inscribed on the pages of my soul.

Also out of this sea of color, three beings, silhouetted in white, come towards me. Although it is difficult to assess their position in relation to ours, I feel they are not far away and are rapidly closing the distance between us.

They reach us and I am surrounded by them. They place their hands upon me, hands of healing power, their regenerative forces infusing me, restoring and renewing my entire being as they direct their light into my eyes.

I am flooded by their brilliant essence, aglow from crown to heel; I can almost see the light seeping through my pores. The sensation is beyond words and I am perfectly at rest within its glow.

Their work is finished, and they back away; their light is fully absorbed by my being and the encounter almost feels like death. The healers take their leave. The panorama of blue collapses in on itself, reducing to a circle, then the eye, then the leaf.

I find myself back where it started, looking at the eye in the center of the leaf. Then I retreat back into the fire, pass backwards through the inferno, then I am on the road.

Finally, I am back at Stony Point, hearing the traffic on the freeway, the whistle of yet another train winding through the mountain pass. I have returned to what passes for normalcy.

I return home, turning the episode over in my thoughts, and pondering the life that has brought me to this present moment. I consider the many years of painful struggle, the magic and wonder and mystery.

All in all, from the earliest experiences to the final analysis, it has been worth it, more than worth it, and I have finally wrestled and fought my way to a consciousness, to a stage of healing and wholeness where I actually look forward to the future.

## The Conclusion

For very practical reasons, no one is able to write the conclusion to their autobiography and, so long as they live, they can never say they have written their final word on what is most people's favorite topic, themselves.

For myself, I can only hope that the processes of moving towards wholeness instituted sixty plus years ago will continue until the close of this incarnation and stand me in good stead at the outset of my next life. My focus has always been the path as the thing-in-itself. The journey itself has been the thing of import, not conjuncture over what or where the ultimate destination might be. As is well known to all those who have seriously trodden a spiritual path, once a definite commitment to evolutionary growth is made and acted upon, life becomes as difficult as possible; for one's own good, a journey without pain would hold no worth at all, would have no cause for celebration and meaning.

Looking back, I can see that my life possesses a meaning much greater than anything I might have thought of in my earlier years. As you have taken this journey with me, you will understand when I acknowledge how hard these years have been. Indeed, there were times when I was seriously courted by death and the invitation was tempting and, if I had not knowingly been working my way through the process of change and healing, there is no doubt that I would have put an end to this life long ago.

Thankfully, I never reached a point of no return; always my allies were there to interpose themselves between death and myself. Granted, there were times, perhaps too many, when they had no recourse

but to compel me into action, but that was the result of my choice, not theirs. Never have they coerced me or forced me to do anything against my will, though I freely admit to times when, exercising my own will, I have led myself into calamity. As for Charon and my other spiritual helpers, their assistance is invariably kindly, infinitely patient, their words reassuring, and their agendas positive. And I have always been aware that they have never asked of me anything they knew was beyond my ability to achieve.

Naturally, I have often pondered the unrealized possibilities of life without epilepsy, without my childhood coma and whatever effects they wrought within me. Although there have never been firmly established any links between epilepsy and my visionary experiences, I have absolutely no doubt of their connection and, hence, I have presented these visions, dozens among many hundreds, as the source of my art.

During my seizures, information usually lying safely behind psychic barriers is loosened and made available to my objective consciousness and this has been the catalyst for my evolution.

I've not discussed dreams as an avenue of personal development because when my unconscious is active, my dream life is reduced virtually to nothing. I have spent time studying the mountains of research literature concerning dreaming and deeper layers of consciousness but have not touched upon it here because it would require inordinate amounts of space to treat it thoroughly and, of course, I am not an expert in the field. I am instead, by virtue of hard personal experience, an authority on epilepsy and its effects on the human psyche.

I will say that dreams have played a vital part in my own story and I have worked with the dream state to achieve certain states of consciousness. Of course, the basic definition of dreams is the depiction of sensory images, based upon thoughts and emotions, occurring during particular levels of sleep. In my opinion, my visions are waking dreams, far removed from the typical daydreams which are little more than reveries occupying a partial space of the attention span, and which have been defined as states of mind marked by abstraction or release from reality. Closely allied to this is the somnambulistic state of a sleepwalker. The theory has been advanced that mystical states are actually somnambulant in nature, guided and directed by the unconscious mind.

Again, my visions are dreams experienced while fully awake, and the readers will have noted many similarities to their own dream experiences, such as the instantaneous mutability of objects and rapid changes of scenes, as well as the recurrence of certain motifs and symbols. For me, visions supersede dreams as the primary vehicle of output of material from the deeper mind. It was only during periods when my visions were relatively dormant that my regular dreams took center stage in the realm of communication between the inner and outer selves.

There has also been an intermediate type of experience, what I call night seizures, when the visions and dreams would fuse and render me incapable of determining whether I was awake or asleep. I have also dreamt of having a seizure only to awaken and find myself in the midst of one. Conversely, I have had seizures and believed it was only a dream. I could be wide awake, at home, at the office, anywhere, and suddenly find myself in a dream state, as real as any other circumstance of daily life, sometimes more vivid in terms of impact, which I would not only witness but participate in, as is the nature of dreams.

I have gone through periods where my grip on reality was tenuous to say the least, when I was unable to ascertain what was real and what was illusion. As you have read, my childhood fantasy world was much more real to me than the world of actualities, which for me included so much that was unpleasant. I despised the so-called real world and found comfort only in the presence of imaginary friends, even monsters from literary works. My night terrors would invoke the aid of non-human friends; what had its origins in a frightened child seeking comfort matured along with him into an entire cosmos of creative imagination and magic. The entire world became an anthropomorphism with deeply buried imageries making themselves forcibly present in my waking hours.

Time and experience have been the foundations of my overall development but neither can of themselves bring about the insights I have gained. Hard work is also required as is an unswerving dedication to positive, progressive transformation; but there must be a willingness to go all the way and complete the work and permit nothing to act as a detour.

That sounds tritely obvious, but if it is trite it is not so because so many countless souls have done it successfully. Just the opposite: so many have departed and failed to get anywhere but the step before the first roadblock. To accomplish the work of self-transformation, being able to stick to it day in and day out, during the long stretches of drudgery when nothing “exciting” is happening, and to pass through the dark days and even darker nights, is so demanding that only a hardy soul can stand up to it over the course of a lifetime. And it makes me think that, if I had been a “normal” person, i.e., not an epileptic, perhaps I would not have been able to make it; maybe the seizures and all their attendant difficulties were the catalyst for the journey and kept me clinging to what I perceived to be the highest virtue.

There are always myriad reasons (both real and imagined) for failure, for ignoring, deferring, or even conveniently forgetting that life is an unfolding process, a continual work in progress. It can be so much easier not to acknowledge that life is to be lived.

The *raison d'être* behind this book has been to discuss my personal experiences as a lifelong “outsider” whose artwork has been deeply influenced by my visionary episodes. I have been as honest as possible

in my presentation and I hope my insights into what are admittedly very complex psychological processes have been of some value to the readers.

Every dated entry is a uniquely individual portrayal of an interior experience whose goal has been my attainment of wholeness. As varied as these episodes are, they are links in one chain, one that is still being forged and no doubt will continue to be until my last breath.

Irrespective of the actual details on any particular vision, those very complicated and others of a more straightforward nature, those extremely graphic and others of a tamer expression, the central theme has always been, that of healing.

Interspersed throughout these chapters are examples of cleansing, of spiritual and psychic purification, a process where the inner being is purged of destructive elements and renewed in a state of cleanliness. What is not addressed during one episode will be dealt with in another, until the entire being is revitalized. All the work cannot be done at once, and there have lived few people for whom one lifetime was sufficient to accomplish all that needs to be done.

I have always taken upon myself the responsibility for needing these cleansings, receiving them in an attitude of acceptance, and then going forward from them, living within the enlarged space of wholeness as it had been achieved up to that point. As painful as it may sometimes be to face the darker, destructive elements within one's own make-up, it has to be done, and done with courage and the will to action. The usual human tendency to pay lip service to repentance, to fling a gesture toward the notion and then swiftly abandon the process to depression and alienation must be overcome.

The necessity is always to continue the work in the face of all seeming setbacks, despite the costs, and even when all appears hopeless and overwhelming. Attention to detail is essential in this work, helping to focus in during periods of stress and turmoil. I have been through countless times when I was certain I would never emerge from the other side of the underworld or be able to engage, much less defeat, the demons that haunted my inner sanctums; it was the nuts and bolts of the daily work that allowed me to focus on the process even when I was convinced all was lost and that the big picture was falling to pieces. The nocturnal journeys on the mountaintop, the art and music, the visions were all anchors that kept me from drifting, aimlessly, through a sea of darkness and isolation.

There are also times when, even after all efforts have been toward growth, there is no discernible evidence of progress and one can only conclude that failure has been the final result of all the effort expended. Usually, these are the times when a major breakthrough is imminent. In the achievement of wholeness, the watchword is diligence.

How many were the times I found that by patiently waiting just one more hour, day, or week, I would arrive at the next plateau! Simply hanging in there a little while longer can, and usually does, make all the difference between success and failure. If waiting is required, then you must be patient and wait; the only alternative is to be busily about the work of undoing all the good you have achieved. Like everyone else, I was impatient, as far too often I undertook my own brilliant ideas to speed up the process, only to wind up ingloriously on my face, chastising myself for my foolishness as I had so many other times in the past.

Needless to say, my timetable rarely, if ever, was in synch with that of my energy. Fortunately, I learned that I should not force events or shrink from them when they seemed thrust upon me. On those occasions when the goal seemed obscured, I would wait and allow my energy to clear up the confusion and then continue forward when the time was right. It was during these times of supposed stand-stills when the most unexpected breakthroughs in understanding would occur. What else can be expected when one demonstrates the courage to give up control to the inner wisdom and allow oneself to be guided by an infallible source?

I have learned that during all the years of struggles towards wholeness, pieces of the puzzle will begin to assemble into a coherent picture within the framework of personal experiences. My deeper wisdom senses that achievement of wholeness would only be a result of personal cosmology and none other. Only the discipline of following my own path, accepting the guidance of my own inner voice, allowing it to speak its own maxims and write its own scriptures, could bring me where I needed to go. Of course, this did not preclude finding valuable things in others' systems, but I could not be as so many billions before me and base my own salvation on the lives and ideas of others.

My journey has been solitary. For most people, the collective spirit and strength of some sort of support structure is needed if they are to maintain their commitment to a process of self-betterment. For them, it is entirely proper. But for those called to tread a more solitary path the introverted process is the best way to go.

As for me, the beat goes on and the path to complete wholeness reaches forth into a tomorrow I have finally learned to trust. My commitment to the journey grows and expands and I remain faithfully optimistic that this journey of which I speak, which had its genesis fifty years ago, will lead on to new and even more wonderful adventures in both the inner and outer worlds.

My greatest wish is that, in some small way, what I have related about my life and experience will be of help to others and encourage them to take that first step on their own road to wholeness and that they, perhaps you, will also be able to see all the way home.

Myron Dyal

Chatsworth, California

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