

The background of the entire cover is a photograph of a sunset over a body of water. The sky is a gradient of orange and yellow, with some dark clouds near the horizon. The water in the foreground is dark with small, shimmering waves. In the distance, a range of low mountains is visible against the horizon line.

SILENT PARTNERS

An eco-spiritual adventure

A novel by

HUGH PERRY

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LIVING



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Throughout the three years spent writing
and living this story, I have maintained
one important rule: keep the discoveries of the
characters as similar to real life situations as possible.
It is my hope that you find this to be the case.

You may also experience yourself
identifying with events in the story
as if they were your own.
The details being different,
however, they may evoke personal feelings,
thus, authenticating your own experience.
If such is the case, feel free to contact me.

in joy,

Hugh Perry

Preface

STRETCHED OUT ON THE LIVING ROOM couch with one knee leaning against the soft leather back, I contemplated the book that still lay across my chest. “Could writing be much more difficult than producing a set of blueprints?” I thought.

I had spent a lifetime fulfilling a youthful dream of being involved in construction. Perhaps now I could fulfill even an earlier childhood dream by becoming a writer. So, I lay there constructing a preliminary outline of 12 chapters with 20 pages each. Breaking down the challenge in this way made it seem attainable, just like designing a building. If my dream was to come true, it would be an adventure where the characters discover their true relationship with Nature.

During the following day, December 14, 1998 a story began in my head. Not one that I thought up, but one that unfolded while I worked and prepared for Christmas. I experienced urges to write it down but I resisted, telling myself, I couldn’t be a writer. But the story continued for three days before I acknowledged that it was not about to stop, for it was heading somewhere with clear intent. That day, I sat at the computer ready to type, confident that the moment I touched the keyboard and logical thought kicked in, the flow would stop. It didn’t.

As the day progressed, I noticed that I was forgetting the beginning of the story, so I reverted to typing the first chapter, reliving every word and every detail. However, the new story didn’t stop to allow me to catch up. How could I type a previous chapter, while at the same time, a new one played itself out in my head? My solution: type paster, ignore mistakes, and work any time of the day or night, and as long as was required. Still the story unfolded twice as fast as I could record it.

After eight days, my fingertips seemed connected to my elbows and the chair felt lodged within my rid cage. My body demanded that I stop. So, I apologized to whatever part of myself created this event, and wrote a detailed synopsis of the balance of the book. I had eight consecutive chapters, plus a portion of the ending, a total of 120 pages. It took the next five months of rewriting this material before I had the first half of the book ready for proofreading.

It was not June, and I needed some physical activity to balance my in-depth focus on the book. Writing was far from my normal behavior, and I was uncertain if I had it in me to complete the balance of the project. With the support of my life companion, Gisèle, I hopped on my motorcycle and headed on a solo trip of unknown destination and duration. During the next eight weeks, I was led across North America visiting eco-villages along the way. I also observed the many splendors of Nature and the destruction it has been subjected to.

Returning home across the Prairies took four days, and during that time I was focused only on the horizon, the center line of the highway, and my thoughts. I reviewed my priorities for the future, and completing the book was high on the list. Two and half years later, ***Silent Partners*** is ready to be shared. It has been the most rewarding experience of my life, and now I let it go to settle where it may.

Contents

1 – Spirit Vision	1
2 – Like a Chill	7
3 – High on Life	10
4 – The Monastery.....	15
5 – False Power.....	21
6 – Adult Eyes	24
7 – Shared Purpose.....	29
8 – Riding the Wave.....	34
9 – The Laurentian Center	39
10 – Planned Chaos	44
11 – Being the Pawn	46
12 – Passage Through the Void	51
13 – Love vs Sex.....	57
14 – Whole Women.....	62
15 – Protectors of the Living Space	64
16 – The Bhakti Center	69
17 – Collective Vision.....	73
18 – Self-Imaging	74
19 – The Peace Center	78
20 – Native to Nature	81
21 – Domination Free	83
22 – Attraction or Connection.....	85
23 – Inspirational Health	90
24 – Social Auditing	94
25 – Opposing Force	98
26 – Letting it Happen	101
27 – Spiritual Innocence	106
28 – Ascending Gratitude	111

1 – Spirit Vision

THE EVERGREEN TREES are thick in this area of the forest; their slender trunks spaced sufficiently apart, permitting me to squeeze between them as I walk. The dense canopy of needled branches allows little light to penetrate the forest floor, thus the presence of this bright green moss that carpets my way. Bending down, I pat the floor covering like I would the head of a small child.

Caressing the moss with my bare hand, I congratulate myself for returning home to the First Nation Reserve. I laugh at the thought of people being shocked at hearing of my Native roots. Their usual response being, 'But you don't look Native!' My simple reply: 'I'm not!'

Proceeding through the growth of spruce and cedars, I reach an old road or what was once a road. Now it is only an opening through the thick spruce grove that follows the swamp. It takes on the appearance of a tunnel with two dimly lit entrances. The closest entrance, 100 feet ahead, reminds me of a new and uncertain beginning that is close at hand. The opposite entrance, 100 yards back, conjures up images of one particular day that began the cycle that I am now on.

This cycle began when I was eighteen. I had decided to leave the Reserve, telling myself that I needed to experience life beyond these forests. As memories of that day flood my mind, they are accompanied by the familiar and pleasant smell of old pine boards, left unfinished. Those boards line the walls and ceiling of my small home where I was raised by Grandfather, right here on the Reserve.

Then I envision myself standing in my bedroom. My arms are extended in front of me as I hold out a deerskin coat. Every inch of the coat is familiar to me, for it was my hands that scraped, and rubbed it until the leather became as soft as my own skin. Carefully, I ready it for my pack, promising myself to protect it with my life, unaware that within three years I would hock it without attachment.

I continue to sort through my belongings, laying them on the flannel blanket that has always draped my narrow bed. Only a few feet away Grandfather is sitting on his wooden chair, watching me quietly through the doorway of the kitchen. He raised me from the age of three, after Dad's death in a mining accident. There is no blood relation between us, yet to me, he is my grandfather. I've always addressed him so for First Nation's people consider all elders as grandfathers to the young. He in turn enjoys calling me, My Son for he has no children of his own.

As he sits, I sense his desire to pass on some last-minute wisdom, before I leave. From the corner of my eye, I see him stroke the side of his neck as he often does when he is about to speak.

"Do you remember when you arrived here, My Son?"

His slow manner of speaking, and his low tone of voice have always held my attention.

"Sort of!" I answered.

"Before that day, My Son, I met with the Band Council. They needed to hear my thoughts. I asked them to prepare a place for a white child. I told them: 'Someday this white boy will become like an eagle. He will ride the spirit of the wind like no other. In each country, people will see him grace their skies. And as they watch him, they will understand the beauty of our Native ways.'"

"Me?" I asked. He ignored my dismay.

"Some of the people in the community believe that you should remain here among the people who you love, and who accept you as their own. They believe that you should let Nature prepare you for your destiny.

"Others say that leaving for the city is going against the spirits that brought you here to us, many years ago."

Standing at my bed continuing to pack, I shake my head vigorously, intent on defying their wishes. "I must leave!"

Grandfather says, "I do not agree with them! 'No!' I tell them.

'My Son, seeks an even higher destiny than the one we saw for him.

A destiny that only . . . you can follow, My Son."

His words held special meaning for me. A destiny only I can follow, I silently repeat them, realizing that Grandfather isn't trying to divert my plans; he is preparing me for my journey. A sense of confidence rises inside

me. Grandfather sees me as an eagle. If I can, I will help the Native cause just to please him. Turning toward his awaiting eyes I find him smiling. As always, his love dissolves my fear. Now I am strong enough to leave.

A CHANGE IN THE brightness at the entrance of the tunnel brings me back to the present. A ray of sunlight momentarily breaks through, as the clouds slide overhead dissolving the grey day. I watch the contrasting brightness as it lights up the trees, penetrating the dense canopy to eventually settle directly on me. But a lower cloud formation pushes the sunlight aside, leaving me with a damp chill. Thoughts of Grandfather become a warming contrast as I return to our fateful conversation.

"My Son," he said to me from the kitchen. "Do you recall when you were a wee boy and your father brought you here to tell me your dreams?"

"Do you mean the ones when I merged with Nature?"

"Yes! Do you think about those dreams?"

"No! But I remember them."

"I'm glad. Your father did not understand your experiences. He had no one to discuss these things with . . . Your mother had been dead a year so he brought you to me, his old friend. I want you to tell me the story of your dreams," and he sat back in his chair, making himself more comfortable.

I know that my story will please him, so I settle myself on the bed, and let my mind backtrack to those days.

"Dad had brought home a rabbit and then built a pen for it. The pen had wire mesh on all four sides, and on top were large boards. This kept the rabbit in and protected it from the rain. Dad put me in charge of the rabbit's survival, and it made me proud. Every morning I cared for it by lowering food and water into the cage with a string. Then I would climb over the top, and fall into the pen.

"The rabbit became my daily entertainment, and now Dad could get his chores done without me tagging along. I can still remember

the background sounds of him splitting the winter firewood. He had only one rule: the rabbit wasn't allowed inside the house.

"Back in my bedroom at night, I crawled into bed, closed my eyes and pictured my rabbit outside. Once asleep, I would see myself inside the pen. I wasn't just looking at my rabbit, I was my rabbit. I would look through its eyes, and watch the backyard through the wire mesh. My surroundings were slowly swallowed by darkness as evening turned into night. I could feel the rabbit's fine hairs softly move with the rustle of the wind across my body, and the hollow dry texture of the straw beneath me. It was perfectly natural at the time.

"Each morning when I awoke back in my bedroom, I would open my eyes, gaze at the walls and the ceiling, smell the air, feel the roughness and the warmth of the sheets, all in the same way, as I had done in the pen when I went to sleep.

"I was confused. Who was I? Was I me, the rabbit? Or me, Chris?

"By the time I dressed myself I knew that when I was sleeping, I had definitely been the rabbit, and while awake, I was Chris. Until one chilly morning. I was back being a rabbit. My surroundings were becoming visible as the sun started rising. Through my rabbit's eyes, I watched a 10-inch round rock at the base of our rock garden 15 feet in front of the cage. I stared and stared at that rock and eventually I was no longer the rabbit. I became that rock. Its body became my body! I could not hear but I was aware! I couldn't move, but I could feel other rocks around me. I was more than a solid mass! I was alive!

I just was.

"When I awoke back in my bed, I really didn't know who I was anymore. So, I headed straight for Dad and sat on his lap. I hugged him for comfort while he tried to eat his breakfast. I wasn't scared; I simply needed reassurance that I was indeed Chris. That's when I started asking Dad questions like: 'Are rocks alive? Can I be friends with a rock? Do you think that I could talk to a rock? Do they know what we are thinking?'

"After a few more nights of this, I decided it was too cold outside.

I no longer wanted to be a rabbit or a rock. I wanted only to be Chris.

It was a conscious decision. I knew that I had a clear-cut choice. That morning while sitting on Dad's lap, I told him that I didn't want to be a rabbit anymore. That must have freaked him out. I don't remember what happened after that, except that the experience stopped. And telling you the story brings it all back. It's like reliving it again.'

"That is a sign that your experience is real," Grandfather remarks.

“Why did you want to hear the story?” I asked.

He placed his elbows on his knees and leaned on his fists. “Your story sounds much better coming from you now. You connected with the same Nature Spirits that our ancestors used to speak with. They communicated with Nature constantly before Easterners arrived. It has been difficult for me to hold on to my beliefs when people seemed determined to rape what I saw as beautiful . . . Even our own people have forgotten. Your dreams gave me strength, and confidence in the beliefs I struggled to follow.”

I felt privileged for having helped Grandfather’s views in that way. He continued, “When I heard of your dreams for the first time, I wished that you were my son. You were on that bear rug I used to have. I reached down, and I picked you up and said, ‘Come to me, Little Rock’. Your father choked up with joy, and turned toward that door to conceal his emotions. He was so proud of you at that moment. He knew his friend would not give a white boy an Indian name, unless

I was prepared to accept you, as an equal.

“We put you to bed and we sat up together all night. The next day, he explained to you that you were to call me Godfather. You couldn’t remember Godfather and kept calling me Grandfather which I preferred.”

“Oh, that’s how it happened.”

“And now you have come full circle. The time has come for you to leave this place. You have a special gift. A gift given to you as a child by Nature. Remember, My Son! As you move away from Nature’s stillness, its quiet voice may be harder to hear. . . . Not to worry though! . . . For, as the spirits govern air, fire and water; there are other spirits that will guide you.”

“Which spirits are they?”

“The ones you need . . . when you need them. Follow the wind on your soul, My Son. . . . As you do now!”

His words make me feel like a proud warrior. Someday I will be like an eagle, I thought. I can handle that! The spirits will guide me. Good! His words echoed in my mind for many miles after my departure, eventually to be forgotten.

BACK IN MY immediate surroundings, I proceed to walk again, and soon I emerge from the darkened tunnel of the spruce grove. In front of me lies my favorite foliage, that of the beautiful white birch hardwood. Clusters of white birch cover the slope to my right along the south side of a slow inclining hill. Just three weeks earlier the bright yellow birch leaves, with their thin green veins, still clung to their branches. After this week’s rain, the trees stand completely bare with the ground blanketed yellow and brown, out of which rise the majestic white trunks of the birch.

My mind is clear when I am with Nature. This forest with its swamps, its rock cliff, its animal life; this is where my roots draw their nourishment. Here is where I feel a connection to the earth, once again drawing strength from it. Since my youth, I have grown branches, and dropped my leaves in various cities and in different countries. I have seen many sunrises, and lived through many springs.

Arriving at the top of a hill, I remove my gloves and place them on the wet ground preparing a dry spot to sit. After scanning the area, I make myself comfortable, lean back against the smooth bark of an old yellow birch tree, and close my eyes while taking in a deep breath of the fresh earthy air. My surroundings fade into scenes of a time in my late teens.

I wasn’t doing so well in the city, for I didn’t know what to look for or how to read city people’s ways. I was naïve to the double meanings in the words they used. It took me several months to understand that words like, ‘You can stay if you care to wait’ meant ‘if you are still here after lunch, I might see you.’ ‘Let me think about it’ meant ‘forget it.’ A lack of a response meant, ‘Don’t bother me’ and ‘I’m busy’ meant ‘get lost.’

Life on the Reserve had not prepared me for this. Our interactions were honest, leaving no reason to guess one’s true motivation. Yes, life in the city was quite different. My youthful aspirations faded into the darkened shadows of poor decisions. Eventually I sought comfort in bars and taverns where emotions could be expressed frankly. However, often they resulted in some form of aggression.

One thing led to another and by the age of 20, alcohol and drugs were no longer enough to drown my loss of identity. It was a time when I went against my values, against everything I knew myself to be. I became what people told me I was: a worthless White Indian Boy and a nobody. I fell into the great native pit of self-destruction, and I allowed it to run its course. That is, until one night when I had a close encounter with my Spirit. What a night that was.

In the quiet hours of cold winter, I awake face down on hard packed snow. I sense the lack of feeling in one cheek, and without moving I open an eye. I am shrouded by the shadows of a nearby building. In the distance, parking lot lights light-up the snow in the empty lot. My forehead is pressing against a hard metal surface. Moving slightly, I discover that it is a dumpster, and its overflowed garbage is scattered around me. Pulling one hand free from under my chest, I discover that I am holding a half-eaten frozen hamburger patty. Mustard stains my fingers.

I roll over in disgust with myself. Once again, I have scavenged for food, apparently this time passing out. I mumble out loud, 'I will not allow this to continue! . . . This must end! . . . I need help!'

I close my eyes, wanting only to escape to permanent sleep. At that moment, I receive a sharp kick in the side of the ribs. What I saw next changed my life. Standing beside me, and towering over me, is me. My Spirit! And a feisty spirit it is too! Now I am my Spirit, and I am looking down at my body. I kick my body a second time.

'Enough!' I say. 'Get up, you fool'. It was clear that my Spirit, was not about to let me, the fool, destroy myself.

I drag myself up from my resting-place, and move from the alley into the brightness of the parking lot. It would be mid-day before I could take a free shower and later, before being assigned a warm bed. For the moment I would walk to keep warm.

My Spirit had remained silent for four years, honoring my desire to make it on my own without outside help. It allowed the body and mind to deal with the challenges without intervention. The experience had been difficult, but it reinforced a worthy lesson for I understood that there are separate parts to my consciousness. It was on that day that I transferred a seed of my identity to my spirit and we became one. From that point on, I have welcomed my Spirit's participation in all that I do. I left a part of myself there on the snow. A part I hoped I would never share time with again. I've been in the driving seat of my life ever since.

Through a combination of personal determination, assistance programs, donations, loving care from volunteers, and accepting opportunities as they presented themselves, I eventually cleaned myself out and began to turn my life around. Within seven years I started my own property management business. My efforts brought me self-respect, friends, new experiences and even a few man-sized toys.

However, two years into this entrepreneurial cycle, my enthusiasm for organizing, making money, and managing began to wane. A yearning grew inside me that demanded that I be truer to my roots. I found myself longing for more meaningful relations with friends. I needed to support values that reflected who I had become. I sought a greater challenge: that of completing unfinished yet unknown business.

This led me to explore self-help workshops, spiritual retreats, and alternative life style communities. It was at this stage of my life that the word 'mystical' became the only adequate way to describe my newfound strengths. It was a period of intense self-discovery, and the more I uncovered about myself the more time I wanted to spend searching. So, at the age of 31, I sold the business, sold or gave away all my possessions, and became a full-time explorer of metaphysics and intentional communities.

A LOW SOUNDING CRACK coming from behind the cedars at the bottom of the hill jars me back into my forest surroundings. Slowly I move my head in all directions, allowing my eyes to observe each cluster of trees for a sign of movement. There is none. I listen intently for several more minutes. The prevailing silence casts its spell over me until I find myself two years in the past, reliving another experience.

I was on a weekend retreat at a farm north of Toronto. The facility had been quietly renovated by its owner with the help of volunteers. They had converted the existing house and log barn into a large facility capable of accommodating small groups. Had its existence been known by some authorities, it would have been considered illegal, for it did not conform to local zoning bylaws. But the owners

had seen a need for a center and wanted to provide the service in their lifetime. So, under the disguise of a single-family dwelling with lots of weekend visitors, the facility provided a valued service.

On this day our small group waited for our next session on the topic of emotional health. I was resting comfortably on an old sofa with my legs draped over one arm, when one of the workshop participants approached me. She held out a newspaper clipping and smiling she said, 'I found this article in a local newspaper. It talks about an organization, calling itself the NRPA, the Natural Resource Protection Agency. I don't know why, but I have the feeling that I should give you this article.'

She handed me the clipping, and told me that if it didn't apply, I should not worry about it. Then she left, and I never saw her again.

It explained that the NRPA was an international organization lobbying the United Nations for the creation of a global authority that would oversee the management of natural resources around the planet. My heart skipped a beat upon reading this. I could not tell from the article whether the NRPA was an environmental organization or fronted by big business interest, but judging by how my guts felt, I knew something didn't sit right. That same night, my feelings of apprehension were reinforced in a dream.

I was seated behind the wheel of a car, moving down a desolate highway in mid-day. Dense forest bordered close to the shoulder of the road. As I drove, I realized that I hadn't seen any traffic, nor buildings along the roadside. No hydro lines, no intersections, and no sign of civilization anywhere. Reaching for the radio, I found that it had been removed. Only wires dangled below the dash. A sense of solitude came over me, becoming increasingly more ominous. I asked myself: Where have the people gone? What has happened to the rest of the world? Has Armageddon come and gone? Could I be the sole survivor?

Turning my attention to the forest along the roadway, I realized that something strange was going on. Leaves lacked luminescence, their greenery looked pale. Tree trunks were dull, even lifeless, appearing pasted to a backdrop. I slowed down the car to look more closely. Was

I seeing properly? Could this be the result of something I ate?

Continuing to question the rationale of what I was observing, I reminded myself: Nature can't change its appearance just like that; it has to remain constant. We humans draw great comfort and security from Nature. We believe that Nature will never drastically change or abandon us. It must always be there when we need it just like parents are there for their children. But there it was, grasses along the roadway appearing like they had been artificially placed into dead soil. What is going on?

Then on the highway, a newspaper tumbled in the wind, with pages flapping closed and reopening as it slid and rolled across my path. It flew onto my windshield, and a headline leaped from its pages. It read, 'NRPA.'

I immediately awoke from the dream in an agitated state, and began pacing my bedroom frantically, clenching my fist in anger, attempting to regain control over my knotted insides. I knew then that this agency was a threat to the Nature I loved so dearly.

Gazing out the window at the last stages of darkness, I make a resolution. I will reveal the identity of this ominous NRPA; I will stand against its plan to destroy Nature, my Nature, even if I must do it alone.

Finding solace in these thoughts, I lay back on the bed, observing a pinkish glow starting to form at the tops of cumulus clouds. I fell asleep and had yet another dream.

This time, I found myself walking through a room with tall clear glass windows. A strong wind is blowing, vibrating the panes of glass, drawing my attention. Colors form, and dance in the distant sky. They take on the appearance of fire in the air. The fiery shapes intensify and move closer. Eventually I am treated to a front row seat to the aurora borealis.

Then without warning the patterns of the aurora begin to turn fluid, like water filling the void on the other side of the window panes. Next the liquid colors flow through the glass toward me. I feel no threat as they caress my hands and head.

As this occurs, I become filled with a sense of joy. The kind of joy one might feel upon greeting a close friend, but this joy is far more powerful, ageless, knowing, and primeval. Then this joyous fluid enters my body filling me with the knowledge of the moment. I am being romanced by Nature. It is joining with me in a celebration.

A white glow begins to appear in the corner of the room. It transforms itself into an old man seated on a wooden chair. He leans forward and rests his elbows on his lap. Immediately I recognize his movements. It is Grandfather.

He grins and addresses me, 'Say hi to Spirit *Vision*, My Son!' Then he slowly faded away.

This was the day I received my Vision. A vision of Nature and I winning together. No details were provided. No guide map given! None were needed at the moment. I just knew the joy.

Later I reasoned that in the one dream, I had glimpsed the potential of harm that could be brought upon Nature. I then made a personal vow to prevent this from happening. In the second dream, Nature shared its joy in knowing that Nature and I would win this battle together.

LETTING OUT A DEEP SIGH, I rise from my resting place, brush off the wet leaves that cling to my clothing, and decided to circle toward home, for darkness will come early. On my way I realize that reliving past memories is unusual for me. Could there be something not yet learned, or are significant events about to occur?

I sense that the time is close at hand, when I will continue to follow my Vision. I will stop the NRPA, but where will this journey lead me or better yet what is my next step?

A part of me will always remain with these forests. I will miss Grandfather more than these walks. He is my reflection, my guide and my connection to the earth. At the age of 78, he will have a tough winter alone. His philosophy has always been: Man must show respect for Nature and its simple laws; even to the death. 'Nature Rules,' he would say, meaning that it is the ultimate leader. 'Nature gives life and it takes it away. When the body no longer can take care of itself, the Spirit wants out. No point in prolonging the departure by trying to cheat death,' he told me many times.

I cannot remain with Grandfather this winter, and I cannot leave him without food. The venison he will eat must come from my hands. He will recognize the spirit in which the gift is given. Deer is rare this far north and a moose would be too much meat for one man to eat. A male deer is my preference. The breeding season is over, and the does are in fold, their fawns being born after the hard winter. I silently make my wishes known to the One Spirit of all deer.

'Oh great spirit of the Deer, I need to take a buck from you. It is not for me but for a great man who has lived with you, as part of you for all his years. You know him well.'

2 – Like a Chill

‘YOU’RE FORTUNATE, Grandfather, to be living so far from the stale air of the cities.’

‘We have outhouses, My Son.’

‘Not the same! In the city, one can get sued for calling air, fresh. Now they just call it outside air.’

‘That explains why you came back home,’ he chuckled as we approached the house.

‘Yes, in a way I was internally polluted, and definitely off balance. My connection with Nature was weak; almost non-existent compared to my youth.’

‘Since your arrival your true strength returned to its rightful place, My Son . . . in your heart. Now you are ready for what will come to you.’

‘When I left here, as a teenager, I thought I knew all there was to know.’

‘Even I don’t know everything,’ he said.

Once inside the house, I sat on our old couch, and made myself comfortable. Our home contained no more than a bathroom, two small bedrooms in the rear and a kitchen in the front. Years ago, pelts decorated the walls as they dried. Coats still hung on the nails driven into the wall behind the only door, and our boots were on the floor below. A 14” color TV, which I had given him eight years earlier, rested on a shelving unit adjacent to the door. He used the TV more as a shelf than for entertainment. In front of me sat a small metal- legged table with chrome edging and an arborite top. It still sat under the window against the wall. A handmade wooden bench and the two wooden chairs sat where they always had, on both sides of the table; each painted green with scratch marks of red and yellow showing their previous colors. Behind the chairs, the wood stove sent a comfortable warmth throughout the room. He sat on his wooden chair with its thin cushion, and I rested my feet on the bench.

Silence prevailed for Grandfather had sensed that I would be leaving soon. I had arrived in late September, after my intense efforts to stop the NRPA. I researched, planned, and crystallized ideas that I was able to gain in dreams and meditations. I wrote articles, and spoke to groups on the subject. Throughout this process I kept the vision clear in my mind. It took a great deal of inner strength and discipline to keep it alive, especially when nothing seemed to be happening. Eventually I exhausted all the resources I could give to my vision. I had no more creative juices left in me. I wasn’t defeated, I was empty of ideas and in need of new clarity in my life. Before I could receive assistance from within, I needed to re-connect with Nature, and so I returned home.

I looked at Grandfather, sitting there in silence, just the skeleton of the man he once was. His inner strength being even more obvious as though it was all that remained. During recent weeks we spent many an hour in casual, rewarding conversation. But something was not yet complete, and it appeared he was contemplating just that.

Finally he said, “My Son, I have a question for you. When you received your Vision of Nature and you winning against the NRPA, why did it come to you and not someone else?”

“That’s easy! Because of my intense appreciation for Nature’s ways.”

“Ah! The Spirit of Appreciation!” He said. “What a gift to the people of the earth. It is like breathing, for we instinctively remember how to do it. It requires no dogma, no techniques, no tithing, no teachings, and has no special place of worship. We can only improve upon what we already know.”

I considered his explanation and remembered how some of the roughest individuals I had known were transformed while appreciating. All it took was a sunset, or the still waters of a lake, or a child making eye contact from a distance, or a dog wanting attention.

I said, “It’s as though we enter a different universe in those brief moments of appreciation.”

‘Yes! It is the most direct method we humans use to connect with our Spirit. When we lack appreciation, there can be no vision.’

He was in a philosophical mood, and to my delight he continued.

“The act of appreciating draws energy into our being directly from the universe, right from the core of Nature itself. It is this energy that gives birth to a vision.

“However, if we want that vision to remain part of our life, we need to experience the great *Spirit of Direction*.”

“Spirit?”

“Yes! This Spirit inspires us to act. Where there is no action there is no sense of purpose.”

“My vision gave purpose to my life,” I said. “Attempting to stop the NRPA filled me with hope for the future. I believed that my efforts would contribute to society.”

“My Son! Purpose is much more than the fulfillment you felt. The real purpose is in building a path for the vision to flow along. The vision needs this path if it’s going to manifest. Remember, a vision by itself is merely a glimpse into what can be . . . for it has not happened yet.”

“So, you are saying that having a vision doesn’t mean that we can sit around and wait for it to happen. We have to act on it. Start the ball rolling on our own.”

“Yes, and this is what you did before you returned home. You remained committed to your vision, and you worked hard to stop the NRPA.”

Reflecting on his meaning for a moment, I considered the many people I had met who expressed concern that they didn’t have a purpose in their life. Perhaps they ignored the value of appreciation. Perhaps they received a vision, and expecting clarity to arrive out of the sky, they waited too long and the vision vanished. They missed out on the joys of having a purpose.

“Let’s talk about the *Spirit of Flow*,” he said.

The name he gave the concept of flow caused me to grin, for he interpreted everything through the eyes of Nature and Spirit.

“My Son! The details of the work you did were not important.”

“Of course they were, Grandfather. They were everything.”

“No! There is a big difference between details, which are subject to change, and the energy that breathes life into them. Remember, you drew your energy from the universe. Don’t think that it doesn’t exist without a purpose of its own.”

“So . . . the secret is to put ourselves behind the vision, 100 percent. Then the energy will flow. But then what?”

“Next comes the hard part. Here again there is a Spirit who guides us. The *Spirit of Letting Go*. There comes a time, My Son, when we have to abandon our creations. All those precious details that seemed so important one day, have to be let go the next. You have already been helped by this Spirit or you would not be here now. Is this not so?”

Actually, he was correct, for I had run out of ideas in my attempts to materialize my Vision. If I hadn’t, I would still be in Toronto creating new ones. By letting go of my desire to keep producing, I understood that my next move couldn’t come from my head. Rather, I would be led, or set up, or given something in the same magical way similar to how this journey began.

His concept was beginning to make sense to me, I recapped my understanding to him. “So, energy is not stagnant. It is the true definition of life itself. When a vision becomes our purpose, we invest in it consciously and unconsciously, in our waking state as well as in our sleep. It becomes the topic of our conversations. And like you say, investing in it gives it direction, and our subconscious mind seeks out anything that will support it. Anything from magazine titles jumping out at us from the rack, to people who want to listen to our ideas.”

He added, “Humans are like flocks of seagulls. Two squawk over food and the rest of the flock heads towards the sound. For us, it’s the energy we hunger for and we flock to where we think the energy might be.

“When I speak to you of the many spirits that help us along our path of remembering who we are, you laugh at their names. But they are as real as the laws that make the waters run downhill. There are many more Spirits whom you have yet to meet, My Son.

“Now you are ready to meet the *Spirit of Timing*.”

“That’s why I’m here, then!” I said. “To build my emotional strength for what lies ahead.”

He let the silence linger, which signified that I was correct, and that nothing further need to be said on the subject. As in my youth, his love dissolved my self-doubts of the unknown future, and again I sat in his midst with feelings of the proud warrior. But he was far from finished.

“I TOO HAVE A VISION, My Son. Throughout the years, I have echoed my beliefs to the tribe: that the Indian nations are here to preserve and protect the Spirit of Nature. Our reward will not come in having past treaties honored . . . No! Our reward will come to us at the same time that people regain their senses and start connecting with the soul of the earth. Our reward will be in rejoicing with Nature when its essence has survived all that humans have taken from it. What possible reward could be greater?”

I was awed by his reflection about rejoicing with Nature. “We are starting Grandfather! We’re starting!”

He said, "Nature would not have survived the abuse if Aboriginals around the world, and some others too, had not remained connected to its Spirit. We kept Nature close to our heart; we lived with her; we breathed with her. Our struggle within the Reserve is not due to our failure to adapt to the ways of the whites. It's been because we tried to live in both worlds at the same time.

"Anyhow, that no longer matters, My Son. Those people who cling to the old ways of abusing the mother that nourishes them, are living in a world that is already dead!"

"What? . . . Are you saying that some people are living in a reality that no longer exists?"

He didn't respond so I tried again, "Are you telling me that their world is of their own creation, that Nature has moved on . . . and made a transition?"

There was another pause and then his response came with a smile. "My Son! Old ways are real for people who believe that nothing has changed. What is real for them lives no more for others."

"If the old is dying, then what is going to replace it, or is this the end?"

"Nature has moved on, My Son. It is no longer investing in the old. I have seen it in my dreams. Nature has made a transition already.

It is now up to people to catch-up and change their thinking, if they so choose.

"For those who don't, they will remain believing that their world is the same as it has always been, and for them it will be. Their world will be like the chill we feel after the wind has stopped blowing. I have danced with the Spirits and we have rejoiced together. A new era has arrived, My Son."

The simplicity of his words shocked me. "You are incredible Grandfather. People are talking about a transition but I never gave it much thought."

I pondered, trying to quickly fit his insight into my mental files, but there was no place for it. I would have to carry this concept with me, perhaps for a long time before sharing Grandfather's insight.

He smiled, "I feel full. I'm going to bed. See you in the morning."

As he left, I opened the wood stove and stoked the fire. I spent another hour contemplating his words: Nature has moved on, has made a transition already, we're living in a world that is already dead.

My quest to stop the NRPA seemed insignificant compared to his picture. How did this new insight of Grandfather's fit into my vision. I had seen a battle and much energy being spent in winning with Nature. For Grandfather it had already happened.

I pulled out my sleeping bag and laid it on the couch, for my old bedroom was now used for storage. My six-foot-long body barely fit. I would be glad to be in a real bed, but who knows where and when. But that had little importance then, for Grandfather had given me a clue to the journey ahead.

3 – High on Life

I AWOKE TO THE HARSH sound of scraping metal as Grandfather slid the cast iron grates across the old cooking stove and started the fire. The morning was chilly despite the rising sun sparkling behind the naked trees. As my feet touched the wood floor, I decided that this was the day to leave. By 11 a.m., the air was sufficiently warm and I was fully dressed and ready to ride. Grandfather and I exchanged emotional hugs and I departed once again into an unknown future.

Gravel roads are a challenge for any two-wheeled vehicle and a ten-mile stretch separated me from the closest highway. When the Gold Wing touched its wheels on the hard asphalt surface, we both felt a great relief. With a crank on the throttle the big six-cylinder 1500 cc engine lunged forward, the acceleration thrusting me back. In less than ten seconds I was out of third gear just as I reached 60 miles per hour, and at 90 I shifted out of fourth. Soon my need for an emotional rush was satisfied and I slowly shifted into overdrive and let the bike find its own preferred speed.

No one appreciates the beauty of motorcycling unless they ride. The feel of the wind slipping over one's body, the sound of the gears whirring, the tires on the road, the smell of the air, and the wide expanse of vision all combine to heighten the thrill. Then there is the sensation of the blurred movement of the roadway below your feet, the hydro poles marking their time from the corner of your eyes and the whitish clouds slowly disappearing over the top of your sunglasses. Dealing with the natural elements while riding heightens a biker's sense. As a result, we experience a connection with our surroundings. Few bikers speak of the connection; perhaps it is an unconscious benefit to riding.

Shortly I would be passing my old elementary school. As it neared, I saw that it was no longer in use; windows were damaged and weeds grew along the wire mesh fence that edged the playground. A chill rose up along the sides of my arms and back as unpleasant memories invaded my mind leaving my limbs momentarily weak. I see myself being shoved, until cornered in the playground, and then the taunting sounds of their voices calling me, 'Indian White Boy'. The children treated me with as much disdain as they did my native friends. We were all pushed, kicked, degraded and isolated at one time during our eight years there. This was where I learned to solve problems by using physical force, for words took too long. Whizzing past, I reminded myself that I had unraveled the effects of what went on in and around that playground, and I had no more reason to be concerned with it.

Continuing south I maintained a steady speed in order to avoid a possible cold weather system. There was no point being caught riding in a sudden snowstorm if it could be avoided. At five p.m. I rode into Temagami. The sun had disappeared behind the taller white pines; the air was cool, and I was glad to be calling it a day. I stopped for gas, and then proceeded down the main street to a hotel complete with tavern.

Grabbing the handrail of the stepped entrance I leaned back and looked toward the overhead hotel sign, and thought how this was another lonely hotel. Standing there, I made a commitment that I no longer wanted to ride solo. This journey had to be shared.

The scene inside was typical of any small-town hotel. Sixties' decor, dark wood walls, black ceilings, two people playing the slot machines, the sound of pool balls banging together round a dividing wall, one man sitting at the bar with no bartender in sight. Seating myself at the window, I waited to be served. The evening would be like any other in a small town; I would sit for an hour, drink a couple of draft, play some pool with the locals, have a meal, settle into my room, shower, check the tube if there was one and hopefully sleep.

My thoughts were back at the Reserve, when the voice of the bartender asking me what I would have brought me out of the web of memories. I decided to stop thinking of the past and get on with the present. With a fresh beer in hand, I moved to a seat at the edge of a pool table where a game was in progress. A tall brownish haired lad was winning games and maintaining control of the table. He had an air about him that was friendly and light, despite his stance of six feet, and weighing 200 pounds or so. After each game, he casually moved to his opponent's table, talking with them while his next opponent racked up the balls. He was different from the others; he appeared to have class. As the evening progressed, his opponents lost interest in giving him their money and I decided that, eventually, I would play this guy. At that moment, he noticed me looking in his direction and spoke to me from across the pool table, "I've no one left to beat, care to join me?"

I had long since made a point of not playing pool for money, so when he said, “a 5er?” meaning a five-dollar bet, I suggested we make it a gentlemanly game. Makes for more fun I told him. Generally, the problem with this line would be that my opponent would figure that I was a pro player, and I didn’t want to take his money. The truth being that I just wanted to enjoy myself without pressure.

“Rack them up!” He says, nodding his approval.

I popped in my coins and set up the balls and he made his break. After losing the first two games I asked what he was drinking. Holding the label toward me he indicated a ‘Dry.’ Something about this guy made me feel comfortable; we had no trouble joshing with each other, like old buddies. I began to relax and get into the flow, winning the next game and the next. The pace quickened forcing us to play doubles, but we managed to maintain control of the table. Someone asked him his name and he replied, “TJ,” then he glanced at me, and I offered my first name.

By one in the morning the hotel quieted, and we were back playing one on one, while trading off pool hall stories.

Finally, after the hotel was empty, TJ leaned on his cue before his shot, and said, “Imagine how much money we would’ve made here tonight if we’d been taking bets.”

I looked away knowing that he would have been playing without me if that had been the case. Playing pool for money was too closely linked with those years when I lived with the death wish of my teens. Surprisingly TJ added, you know, Man, I’m glad you showed up. This has been a great evening.”

“Me too, Buddy” and we gave each other the thumbs up and the no kidding around wink. We laid our cues down and the pool playing was over. “I’m hungry,” I said, “I’ve been having such a good time that I forgot to eat.”

Walking past me he approached the bartender who was wiping the bar top and said, “Hey Gerry! Do you think you might have some food in the kitchen for two hungry men?”

“The cook left four hours ago . . . Everything’s packed away.”

TJ pulled a folded bill from his shirt pocket and laid it on the lower counter behind the bar. “We’re not particular. I’ll just pop whatever’s back there into the mic.”

“Go for it,” Gerry motioned with his head. “Help yourself but make sure you clean up.”

SO, THERE WE WERE, eating smoked meat sandwiches, pickles and drinking coffee in the kitchen. I said without thinking “You’re quite the lad, TJ. I’ve never met anyone who has your kind of energy.”

“What do you mean? Energy!”

“Earlier in the evening when you beat those lads at pool, they still seemed to want to be your buddy. So, what I mean is: you have a way of making people feel comfortable, and well, they liked your energy.”

“It comes natural,” he says. “When someone has something to say to me, I listen, and I expect them to do the same. But sometimes when I am talking, I feel like I have an extra set of arms that kind of reaches across to a person’s shoulders and then turns them towards me.” He paused a moment, “You’re the first person I’ve ever told this to!”

“Ya!” Smiling I respond, “I have a way of doing that to people.” I understood what he meant about looking people in the eye, for people in intentional communities often demand eye contact when they speak. Anything less would not be an exchange, but rather *empty words*.

“You know something else that is weird,” he said, “I think in pictures. How about you?”

“I’ve never thought about it. What do you mean?”

“I see pictures when I speak. Seeing what I’m saying in my mind is important to me.”

“You mean like seeing words?” I said.

“No! Not at all! I see pictures, like the pictures that are generated in one’s head when we read. When people talk to me, they need to generate pictures if I am to understand them. When someone isn’t sending these mental images, I’m lost. I just stand there shaking my head up and down while really, I’m struggling to keep up. I knew a woman who couldn’t watch sports announcers on TV, because she couldn’t hear what they were saying. She was receiving words only, no pictures. Nothing registered, no matter how hard she tried.”

“I think I know the feeling,” I said. “Yes . . . words only, no feelings, no pictures. You’re right TJ! I never thought about it before.” He continued, “I feel that way with people and other things as well.”

“Like what?” I asked.

“Well, I’m terrible with street signs. I don’t use them: they mean absolutely squat. As a kid, I thought they were there to make people feel good, like a corner decoration. I was in my teens before I realized that people were

serious about using them as names. I navigate by the lay of the land, the hills, streams, crops in a field, type of trees, the feeling in the country, buildings, railways; you know what I mean, don't you?" And then he smiled, "But it sure makes it easier to explain to someone how to get to a place."

"Well, this gets worse, Chris. I find it hard to remember people's names. While they are introducing themselves, I'm paying attention to something entirely different. If they are close to me, I feel a slight change in myself. It's hard to explain. Often while they speak, I am studying these feelings. Eventually they walk away and I've missed their name, but I'll bet you that if I met that person in a dark room amongst a crowd of strangers, I could recognize them by that feeling."

"This is a talent more people should have! Do you realize what you're doing?"

"Doing?"

"I mean feeling! You're picking up the energy from people. It's ironic that our society places so much emphasis on intellectual abilities like remembering names, etc. while degrading abilities such as yours."

"I'm surprised you understand. I figured it was just me who felt these things."

"Not at all. Your telepathic senses are working overtime. You're picking up on other people's thoughts, Man."

Then I asked what I considered to be a profound question. "Do you think that this is your spirit at work, or simply instinct?"

"It's instinct for my because I've been doing it all my life."

After such a simple explanation I didn't know how to explore the subject any further. Life wasn't complicated for him, and it was obvious he wished to keep it that way.

Leaning back in his chair picking at his teeth with a toothpick, he appeared to want to add something so I remained silent. "I have no use for people who can't look me in the eye. It has gotten me into trouble on a few occasions, especially when I first did Time."

"You were in prison?"

"Been there, done that. Mostly B & E's. You know break and entry."

He deliberately brought this bit of truth to my attention for it wasn't something that needed to be said. Perhaps this was a test, and my reactions were being observed. It surprised me that he had done Time, for he had more charisma than anyone I had met. Break and Entry was a teenage crime, and he was no teenager, early thirties I figured. So, I concluded that he must have had hard times in his youth, and turned his life around as I had done. All of this would explain his unique character so I didn't ask any questions about his serving Time.

"You're not a local I take it?" I asked.

"No, just getting away from things."

"You're staying here at the hotel?"

"I stayed here last night, and was planning to head out many hours ago, but then you showed up."

"Someone had to give you competition."

"Competition my ass, I let you win a few games, that's all."

I chuckled and began to wipe the crumbs from the table with paper towels. Then I told him that I was going for a walk before hitting the sack.

While I stood on the front steps of the hotel, TJ walked to the leaning side of a Harley that had been parked there when I arrived. "Nice bike!" I said, as he searched his pocket for something. Saying nothing he bent down a little and on came the Harley headlamp.

"No way, Man! This is your bike?" I said. This was too much of a coincidence for me to be meeting someone out here in the middle of nowhere, whom I got along with and who also rode.

Looking over his shoulder towards my bike, he smiled, and said, "Let's head out together . . . I'm going South."

"I've had a few drinks," I said, more or less thinking aloud.

"We haven't had a drink in three hours. Look at the clear sky, no moon, no traffic, the road's ours."

Sitting on the wooden steps of the hotel, I looked across the quiet highway to Lake Temagami, only 100 yards away. The stillness of its waters reflected the sparkling moonless sky. Picturing myself on my back in a hotel room staring at the ceiling, pondering how this night might have turned out, seemed foolish. There was no way I was going to pay 30 bucks just to lie there and regret missing the unknown.

"North Bay for coffee!" I said.

"Right on! The first Tim Horton."

With TJ in the lead, we turned onto Highway 11 heading South. Soon my soul rejoiced as I reconnected with my inner essence. There is truly something special about night riding with no other vehicle on the road. This is a high that often leads to solving problems, having new insights, feelings of complete calm, and experiencing new inner strengths.

I popped a cassette into the tape deck, cranked up the volume and pulled alongside TJ, giving him the biker nod and taking the lead to the tune of, NSINK, as it blasted beneath the blanket of the night sky. My spirit soared even further, filling my senses with new sensations and perspective.

‘This is real freedom,’ I yelled. When one is free from debts, free from the job, we’re still not experiencing freedom, we’re only part way there. Real freedom is those special moments when one connects with their soul and becomes part of their surroundings. That’s when a stranger can suddenly become a close friend, when a conversation takes on new meaning, coincidences occur and opportunities present themselves much like they were doing now.

At the crest of the hill overlooking North Bay, the city lights were paling in brightness as the easterly morning sky began to show signs of pink along the horizon. At the first red street light we stopped and expressed our readiness for sleep rather than a coffee. On a downtown street we pulled into a privately owned motel, where the owner was already out sweeping the walkway. We took two small rooms, and within minutes of getting under the covers the day’s events turned into sleep.

IT WAS TWO IN THE AFTERNOON. I had showered, glanced through the local paper, had a coffee, finished lunch, and hosed down the bike. There was still no sign of TJ, and I was getting restless. Had I known he was going to sleep all day I would have said goodbye the night before, for I had places to go and things to do. Yet, something prevented me from taking off without saying goodbye.

Finally, I approached his room and knocked. A sleepy moan came from the other side of the door. I yelled, ‘I’m leaving TJ. Just wanted to let you know.’

‘Whoa! Whoa!’ he said as he scrambled toward the door. He unlocked the knob and by the time I opened the door he was already back amongst the covers. ‘What time is it?’ he asked.

‘2:15!’

‘I was dead asleep! Can you wait a bit? I was hoping we could ride together. I’ll have a quick shower, Ok?’

From outside his door, I said a little frustrated, ‘I’m gone in 15,’ and I proceeded to the bike. I just wanted to ride, not to sit and watch him eat lunch. In minutes he stepped out in the afternoon sun still combing his wet hair.

‘You’ve been up for a long time I take it?’

‘A few hours,’ I said with little enthusiasm.

‘Which way are you heading?’

‘South on Number 11 for an hour or so then I’m heading east through Algonquin Park.’

‘How about you go ahead and I’ll catch up in an hour or so if you don’t race. Before you head east wait for me. Just leave your bike where I can see it.’

‘Sounds all right to me. Riding will get the cobwebs out of my head.’

‘Me too,’ and he left for lunch.

Making my way out of town, I realized that his idea was a good compromise, for sitting around wasn’t what I was in the mood for. It would be interesting if my meeting TJ was part of a bigger plan. If this were to prove true, then I almost let the opportunity pass by; in fact, I would still be in Temagami if it wasn’t for the way TJ followed his feelings. Some people tell me that I move like the wind yet I have to work at it. It appears to come natural for him. Perhaps I can learn this from him.

The day was comfortably warm with no wind; it was the beginning of our Indian Summer, those two or three days of warm fall temperatures and sunshine that remind us Northerners that winter is only a few weeks away. After cruising for more than an hour I stopped to give my butt a break. I refueled the bike, and then parked it close to the highway where no vehicle could obstruct its view. There was time to check the tires, buy a pop and then walk down behind the restaurant and across the lawn to a picnic table. Within 10 minutes the rumble of TJ’s Harley Softail could be heard and moments later it rolled off the highway. He had made excellent time. Seeing me, he rode across the lawn bringing the bike to a stop nearby.

‘So, how do you feel now?’ he asked, as he pulled off his helmet.

“Great!”

He grabbed my pop, asking if I minded, then before I could answer he took a gulp. After a few stretches he sat beside me on the table top and looked me in the eyes and said, “I’ve been thinking! You’re an unusual kind of guy!”

“What do you mean by that?”

“I feel that I know you from somewhere. It’s like we’re brothers or something. I’ve never met a stranger whom I’ve felt a bond with.”

“Well, we like drinking, playing pool, riding, and you even look people in the eye, so that’s a fair start,” I said.

TJ continued, “So I was hoping that if you had no particular place to go, that we might ride together.”

“Suits me! I want to stop and visit some people on my way back to Toronto.”

“Would they mind some company?”

“No, in fact, that’s the business they’re in.”

With a raised eyebrow and a smile, he said, “Should I ask?”

“Eight years ago, I was hired to do a building inspection for two couples who were buying an old stone monastery near Barry’s Bay. It’s a beautiful place on five acres of land along the Madawaska River. The previous owners were monks and they took such good care of the place that it needed very little work. My friends bought it for a good price.”

“Why would they want a monastery?”

“They knew that low-income families living in the city needed to get out into the country for vacations but few could afford a cottage. So, my friends wanted to offer these people an inexpensive vacation while living in the country themselves. I have no idea how they have fared, for I haven’t been back.”

He said, “That’s a long ride! What are we waiting for?”

TJ gassed up his bike and went for a whiz, and then we were off. We stopped twice, once to watch a cow moose and her calf eat beaver hay along the side of the road, and once for fuel. We arrived in front of the old monastery after sunset. It was Friday evening and guests were arriving, and I considered that I should have made a reservation.

4 – The Monastery

THE TWO STORY, stone, Tudor-styled monastery appeared mediaeval as it lay shrouded in the darkened shadows of night. Vines stretched up the British-styled light standards, as though drawing strength from the poles themselves. The rounded stone arch above the front entrance looked as though it could remain there through the next millennium. Nearing its solid wooden doors, a sense of excitement awakened in me, accompanied with anticipation for what awaited me on the other side.

Activism can be an exhilarating adventure; for it combines constantly changing terrain, trust among ones' companions, and often creates the sudden need to depend on ones' inner strengths. It requires mental disciplines towards managing energies, and controlling ones' reactions. Once the adventure is experienced there is no letting go, and yet it remains undiscovered by the masses.

A gentleman approached carrying two bags of luggage. I held the solid oak door open for him, and we all entered the dark wood-paneled foyer. Within seconds, Ted, the owner, entered through a side door and began discussing room arrangements with his guest until he noticed me standing there. Pleasantly surprised, he asked if TJ and I were together, and then suggested I give my friend a tour until he and his wife Lyn could join us in the dining room.

Proudly, I gave TJ a tour with hopes that he could appreciate the magic of the place. We entered what once was the small chapel, that now served as the lounge. It remained unchanged with its cathedral wood ceiling, lead glass windows, dark hardwood floor and stone end wall. A wood stove now occupied the altar area. TJ examined the stone work, passing his hands over the smooth cut edges of the exposed surfaces.

Guiding him down the corridor toward the dining area took much time for he carefully studied the wainscoting and wood finishes of various pieces. I explained how the wood ceiling and the wood walls above the wainscoting were original finish, and the bottom portion was refinished by the owner.

"Nice match" TJ observed, as he rubbed his hand over both the old and the new finishes. All the rooms were built to be functional, for the monks were a frugal bunch when it came to assigning space.

Stepping into the dining hall, I explained how the south wing contained the eating and food preparation area, with boardrooms above. The owners' private quarters were on the other side of the foyer with the sleeping quarters above that. Having completed that portion of the tour, TJ showed his amazement in finding no slot machines, video games, not even a TV. But upon reconsideration decided that the place had a different purpose.

While studying the handiwork of the hand hewed beams in the dining room he stated how someday he would have his own shop and produce similar quality work. At that point, Ted and Lyn entered. Ted hadn't changed much nor had his well-trimmed mustache and beard. He still wore a vest, but his short brown hair had receded slightly. His quiet and polite manner contrasted Lyn's exuberant personality. Her slim build and stylish blond hair remained the same. They represented my image of the perfect couple, comfortable with each other, knowing the other's strengths and weaknesses but never taking advantage of that knowledge.

After TJ's introduction, and a round of greetings, I inquired about accommodations. They were filled up for the weekend, however, they offered us two summer cabins they had built the previous year. The plumbing facilities were shut off for the winter, but we didn't mind, and accepted the cabins gratefully.

Then excitedly Lyn said, "We call this place, 'The Monastery' Chris, thanks to you. None of the names we came up with expressed the feeling of the place. So, one day as I was looking through some old files, I came upon your report entitled 'The Monastery.' It looked official, so we adopted the name."

Then Lyn began to recount the story of their first couple of years when they had offered the facility to single parents with children, but as she said, "All too often there were last minute cancellations due to a dispute with the boyfriend, a car needing repairs, or a child being sick." It was disappointing for those families, and for us as well, because we were wasting too much food. So, we quickly realized that this idea wasn't working out.

"Then we approached charitable organizations in the hope that volunteers could be awarded an inexpensive all paid vacation for their hard work. The idea was noble but the need for charitable funds was so critical that no money could be spared for volunteers. So we then approached organizations that in addition to donations also generated their own cash flow, and here we found our market."

Ted explained, while passing around cool fresh water from their spring, “These organizations want a place like ours for think tank sessions. Hotels have too many distractions, are too commercialized and the settings are not conducive to focused interactions. The Monastery is perfect for sharing with people and creating positive group energies. We service organizations with interests in environmentalism, peace, affirmative action, women’s activism, you name it.”

TJ listened keenly to these stories, commenting on how easy it would be to relax in a place such as this.

“That’s another reason we’re becoming so popular,” Ted said. “People don’t object to the four-hour drive from Toronto. They even comment on how the ride through the country helps them unwind. After one night’s sleep here, many feel more alive than they have in years. You may experience this for yourselves, TJ. The energies here can lead to new experiences, and are most noticeable in one’s dreams. The monks spent much of their lives in devotion and prayer. I believe that they created a magical environment that continues to affect the property in a positive manner.”

We learned that one group present for the weekend was a team of biologists, who were putting together a paper on wetland management in rural areas. Apparently, there are plants called lemon-scented geraniums that filter some of the toxic chemicals found in polluted soil. The seven biologists were exploring how to introduce the plant into small communities’ programs.

TJ wanted to know about the other group.

Lyn looked at Ted with a questioning smirk, and said, “I’m curious, to say the least, about our other guests. A fellow calling himself Phil assures me that their work is directly connected to preserving the environment, but he was vague. I didn’t feel any threat while speaking with him over the phone. We do our best to screen our guests to satisfy ourselves that their motivations support positive goals.”

Soon Ted excused himself to attend to other duties, and Lyn gave us an informal orientation. When finished she left us saying, as she leaned back round the door, giving us her big mischievous smile, “We must take time to talk tomorrow, and the weatherman says we can expect another wonderful day.”

After Lyn’s departure TJ said, “I really appreciate you bringing me here. I thought places like this only existed in fairy tales. Ted and Lyn are really genuine people.”

“All my friends are, TJ.” He looked at me for a second longer, and then shook his head, as though he had just confirmed something he already knew. After unpacking our things, I left him in the lounge to further explore the architecture. Back in my cabin, the sheets were cold, but refreshing and before they could be warmed from my body, I was asleep.

WALKING THROUGH the orchard with a six o’clock coffee in hand, the thick morning dew forced me to stop at a bench cut entirely from stone. It was perfectly positioned to catch the morning sun as it shone through the treetops across the neighboring field. The sun’s warmth removed the morning chill and the goosebumps from my exposed skin. While the sun cleared the trees, I bathed in its soothing rays. Eighty years ago, the builder of this bench might have been an early riser like myself, and positioned it to receive the first rays of the morning sun. If Ted and Lyn had relocated it even a couple of feet, the subtle beauty would have been lost.

It was obvious Ted and Lyn had managed to connect with the feelings that emanate from the property. They had mastered the art of embracing the cultural heritage and married it with their own creative ideas. The fruits of their labor grew from the integration of their skills with those of the builders before them. Even their inexpensive small ‘A’ frame cottages reflected the roof slope and fascia design of the existing building. Many builders and owners have a need to overpower the past and to destroy it in order to express their creativity. What a loss that would have been if someone like that had bought this property!

A MAN IN HIS early sixties, stepped out of the side door of the lounge and looked up at the sky, sneezed and then went back inside. Oddly, he looked familiar, but that person couldn’t be here, I reasoned. A slight breeze began, cooling the air, and forced me to abandon my bench.

Entering the main building I heard someone call my name; indeed, it was the man I had briefly seen outside. He wore the only light grey suit I had ever seen him wear.

“You got my message after all, Chris!” he said.

“What message?”

“My secretary contacted all our associates whom I thought might know of your whereabouts. She spread the word that we were meeting here this weekend, and even booked a room for you. I see my little scheme worked.”

"Well, Phil, if it did, I didn't hear about it. I haven't been in contact with anyone for more than a month."

"Really, then why are you here?"

"It just worked out this way."

"You are gaining a reputation for following your hunches. Much has happened with our investigations into the NRPA, in your absence. I need to bring you up to date, but I would prefer to do so with the others present. We have our computer whiz, Luc, and Sheila our economist. Neither of whom you have met."

I agreed to join him in their afternoon session, but wanted to bring a friend. It was near 7:30 a.m. when I approached Lyn requesting to speak to either her or Ted in private. Ted was already in town on errands, and Lyn was busying herself in the kitchen heating scones and cutting fruit. She agreed on the condition that I repair her grill, and help with the meal.

THE LOUNGE WAS EMPTY when Lyn arrived, her guests having moved to their respective boardrooms. We sat comfortably across from each other on large sofas, with coffee in hand. I began with an explanation of how I was inspired with a vision of Nature and I winning together, and how the NRPA had become the target of my efforts. I explained that I had spent the last two years investigating their activities, and attempting to expose their identity.

The NRPA had formed in Europe after the establishment of the European Economic Community. We believed that their original purpose was to capture Asian and European business from Germany and the US, particularly in electronics and construction products. Their main markets were the countries formerly controlled by the USSR, however in the past six years they expanded to Canada, the US and Japan.

"What do they do?" she asked.

"They want to take full control of all the Global Natural Resources."

"What? This would be suicide."

"Lyn, they want full management rights which means that they would control production, its quality, who would produce it, where, and how, even the market prices."

"If self-interest wasn't the driving force, a plan like this could work," she said.

"Correct! Fear of profit losses and greed for power are their Gods. But this is only the beginning, Lyn. It is so big that I find it difficult to fathom how they have been so successful to date."

"Ok, tell me again, what would they manage?"

"Take fisheries, for example. One of their association members would manage all ocean and sea fishing activities, and in forestry they would manage all crown-owned lands."

"That means national parks as well?" Lyn questioned.

"They would have full control of recreational activities inside parks including hiking and canoeing. They could turn the parks into a commercial tourist venture, which would be far more profitable than keeping the parks for the natural wildlife."

"Chris, you're not allowed to ruin my day!" She placed her coffee down and began rubbing her wrist as though it was a source of frustration. "Ok, who would allow this stupidity?"

"The same people who are allowing big businesses to strip-cut forests, and to genetically produce faster growing salmon. It is you and I, our friends and our relatives. We allow this to continue. We elect and pay politicians to manage our interests and when we disagree with their choices, we remain silent. The real sin is that we then go out and purchase the products that are produced by the very same mismanagement we so detest. We are ultimately responsible!"

"I find it hard to believe that the Government will allow this to happen," Lyn said.

"Governments have been under pressure by special interest groups, and under the watchful eye of the media, leaving politicians cautious and desperate for solutions. The NRPA is aware of this and as any good business, they have developed ways to turn it to their advantage."

Lyn no longer looked my way, instead she contemplated for a moment before turning her attention back to me with a gleam of wisdom in her eyes. "So, then the real situation is that the NRPA are acting out *our unconscious desires*. The collective unconscious of the planet."

Her shift in perspective caught me by surprise. I cautiously asked what she meant.

"It is simple really . . . The NRPA are giving us what we think we want. People are not stupid. We all know that we are high consumers and the highest producers of waste. I mean, as much as we dislike the idea of

inconveniencing ourselves, we choose not to think about it. But this doesn't mean we are avoiding it on a subconscious level. Our health certainly reflects the reality of the problems.

"Politicians don't see the population expressing grave concerns, so they do like the rest of us, they avoid. As frustrating as it is, you are right, Chris, we are the guilty party."

"So how do you see their actions as giving us what we want?"

I asked.

"What we think we want," she corrected. "We think we want someone to ease the pain, remove the fear, reassure us that all is fine."

If people want improvements and are not ready to make the necessary sacrifices and changes in order to correct the situation, then we open ourselves to empty promises. A smart business person can create the illusion that improvements are being made."

"I guess you're right," I said. "Politics is an institution whose priority is to look good. So, the NRPA slip in under the cover of an agency, appearing to represent the best interest of the environment and all our unconscious interests. They play the role of the saviors, for the people, and the politicians. They form strong lobby connections and, in the end, we thank them for artificially solving our problems."

"They will use every means at their disposal to manipulate the truth, so that we can continue living as usual," Lyn added.

At that point, voices were making their way to the dining room and Lyn had to attend to them. Rising to leave she admitted that she was as guilty as anyone. I watched her as she mingled with guests and saw that she was not her usual uplifting self. It was obvious that this news weighed heavily on her. I had become insensitive to the effects that such news could have on someone hearing it for the first time.

AFTER BREAK, we resumed our discussion. I began by reassuring Lyn that there was good news as well.

She was deep in thought. "Ted is going to be shocked when I tell him about this. I mean, we moved here partially to escape the control city life placed on our lives. We have created our own world of freedom here. Now, the situations are about to reach out to our little sanctuary. We must get involved."

I said, "I would like you to attend a meeting this afternoon so you can meet some of the people working on this."

"You mean my mysterious guests are involved?"

"Yes, they even booked a room for me. I'll see that you get paid for it."

"Ok! Well, this is comforting news, to know that action has already begun. Where do you think the NRPA will hit first?"

"Similar conspiracy tactics have long been under way. Do you remember the CODEX announcement a few years ago?"

Lyn said. "Who could forget! CODEX is responsible for recommending global food standards to the UN. They proposed that the World Health Organization take full control of the herbal market. Had they succeeded, countries would have been obligated to make the use of herbs a criminal offence. They failed due to public protest but pharmaceutical companies continued their propaganda, planting skepticism in people's minds about the safety of herbs and alternative medicines."

I added, "And in another case a government program was offered to factories with the intent to encourage a reduction of carbon dioxide emissions. Instead, some of these companies went out and purchased large acreages of forest in order to disguise their records."

"How could this be done?"

"This enabled them to take credit for the carbon dioxide converted by the trees, because now the company owned them. When the numbers were placed on paper it appeared that their pollution level had decreased. Now they could advertise their company as leading the way in carbon dioxide reduction for a cleaner planet. The trees had always been there, the pollution levels remained the same, but on paper their pollution ratio decreased, and they looked good to the consumer."

"What a devious and clever bunch. We need to have that same amount of cunning, and determination so that we can outsmart them."

"We do!"

She smiled at last saying that she couldn't handle any more of this bad news. At that point we heard shuffling around upstairs.

She stood and said, "Are there really people who can prevent this plan from happening?"

I approached her, and in a comforting manner said, "Of course. We have ammunition that they don't even know exists." We gave each other a light parting hug, and at that her usual composure returned.

TJ walked in and the first thing he said was, "I leave you alone for less than a day and already you're hugging the owner's wife. What a guy!"

"Ya Ya!" Then I explained my plan to stay an extra day.

"Stay as long as you want. I've found something to keep me busy," he said with a smirk.

"I have a feeling it's not the architecture."

"No, it's not. But it's well built," and his smile increased.

"So, what happened?"

"Sweet Debbie, the biologist, arrived near midnight. No one was up, and of course, I wanted to help her without waking Ted or Lyn. Debbie and I hit it off immediately, and began snooping through the registration book until we found what room she was in. I took her luggage up to her room, and showed her around like I ran the place. We were like two school kids sneaking around the corridors whispering and giggling. I've never been silly like that before."

"Lucky you," I said, thinking; what kind of past did this guy have. As children we've all been silly, I reasoned.

WHILE ROAMING AROUND outside, I reviewed my discussion with Lyn, and it helped me crystallize the enormity of the problem we were up against. As she said, we needed to be as clever as they were. Much of my cunningness to date was based on maintaining a focus on my vision, and remaining in touch with my inner self. This ability had become second nature to me, and with my return visit to the Reserve had removed my fear of losing this balance.

A new form of determination rose in me, and a plan began to form. It revealed one basic element; no more reading between the lines, we needed facts. A sense of well-being flowed through me: a feeling that never failed to give me great satisfaction.

Sitting around the oversized wood table our meeting began with introductions which Lyn soon interrupted, "This news is overwhelming. I have one question before you begin. Who exactly are we dealing with?"

Phil spoke up, "This is precisely why we are here. We have the names of companies that are associated with the NRPA, however, we suspect they are fronted by larger interests. A few of these companies are newly formed, others have had poor track records in business, and suddenly are landing contracts at an unusual rate. This suggests that they are being positioned as part of a master plan. As to the people who are directly involved, we know only the names of the directors.

"Their board is primarily made up of the leading shareholders representing the Japanese lumber industry, US farming conglomerates, Venezuelan oil interests, European chemical producers and Swedish fishing fleets. These businesses are the driving force, although we have no evidence to that effect."

Luc commented, "We know that they have offices in Geneva, London, Helsinki and New York City."

Phil continued, "The NRPA are promoting themselves as noble humanitarians who have accepted the challenge of becoming the guardians of the environment. You can see what we're up against. "What you don't know, Chris, is that two months ago, they voted in a new chairman: a Montrealer, called Neil Fairview. A man in his early 40s, who has been successful in the garment industry, and who has large holdings in transportation and shipping. He is not a flamboyant man, and was unknown to us until his recent appointment."

Sheila interjected, "He made the news recently. Fairview's home was broken into this week. Some \$150,000 in cash and jewelry were taken. Obviously, he is doing well to have that much cash around the house." There was a quiet agreement around the table.

Luc said, "My friends have tracked a series of communications from a location in London. They were sent to all the major capital cities, with each message giving directives to find office space. Judging by the enormity of such a move, the timing of the Fairview appointment, and the fact that there have been no reports of any head office shuffle of that scale, we concluded that the NRPA is responsible."

Sheila added, looking at Lyn, "Once these locations are secured, we can expect some serious lobbying to begin. I believe that the NRPA may be influential enough to affect world markets, and currency values in small countries. If I am correct, and their influence is this strong, then their demands could be easily achieved."

Watching Sheila as she spoke, I became aware of my physical attraction to her. She had darkish brown hair, cut straight at the back and occasionally she pushed it off her ears. Her business attire did little to improve her appearance; however, as I studied her face, I concluded that she wore absolutely no makeup. I have always found the natural look in a woman to be most feminine.

“So, you see, Chris,” Phil interjected, “the situation has escalated.”

I spoke, “As you have probably guessed, we can no longer remain as observers. We have to get inside. Luc, how effective is electronics for sniffing out information?”

“Chris. All my contacts are clean-cut engineers with no smarts for espionage.”

Lyn, said, “We need to expose them for what they are.”

Phil interjected, “They will topple any attempt to discredit them without supportive facts.”

Lyn argued leaning forward in her chair, “Why should we play by the book, if they aren’t? By the time they bring charges against us, public opinion could be on our side and they would just drop the issue to protect their ass.”

Luc added, “There is an obstacle to overcome here. This news creates strong reactions in people. They can’t imagine how it has been allowed to escalate to this point. It invokes immediate depression in them which undermines their belief that it can be true. Plainly put, it is so discouraging it makes people impotent.”

Lyn expressed that she knew the feeling, then rose to open a window. Remaining there for a minute the silence lingered until her return.

I said, “The NRPA are not beyond making mistakes and the more people they bring in, the more vulnerable they leave themselves. We are watching and waiting for such an opportunity. As facts become known, this Center could be a focal point for secure information.”

“Better still,” Lyn said, “start a newsletter. Immediately! Call it . . . ‘Fighting for Green’. Ted and I will bring the topic up in our evening discussions. But this seems so insignificant compared to the challenges ahead, and yet I can’t imagine how else we can be of help.”

“Let’s do it.” Phil said.

Lyn looked at the wall clock, then left to take some fruit out for break. Before adjournment I expressed how I would no longer be directly involved with research or administrative activities. I attempted to share my reasoning, however my uncertainty about my future didn’t help their comprehension. I was thrilled that finally I was part of a fully active team, and amazed at how the process came effortlessly. These people were now in the driver’s seat, giving me the confidence that things were going precisely as they should.

5 – False Power

BACK AT THE CABIN, my attempts to meditate were unsuccessful, for images of Sheila's femininity prevailed. Giving up, I returned to the dining room and found her sitting with TJ. She had changed her top to a sleeveless sweater exposing more of her soft white skin. I moved into the empty seat beside her unconsciously giving her my full attention, and commenting on how it was becoming dark early.

"Earlier than last night," she remarked. "Would you care to join me on a walk? We can catch the last warmth of the day."

"Yes, most certainly," I said with just a bit too much enthusiasm. We left the property and strolled along a quiet asphalt road. We were each making awkward attempts at conversation. My focus was completely consumed by her presence. She surprised me by placing her arm in mine, and pulling herself tight to my side as we walked. I could feel my passion rising for I hadn't focused on a woman since leaving Toronto. My denial was beginning to show.

Silence prevailed which suited me, for I was absorbed in the feel of another human being. Eventually I stopped, turned to face her and said with honest emotion, "You're amazingly attractive." As though she had been waiting for my response, she slipped in close, and as our lips met, she moved slightly to place her thigh against my groin. The electricity was intense. She kissed sensually rather than passionately, like she had all the time in the world, and she intended to enjoy every second.

We walked arm-in-arm back to my cabin, and spent the remainder of that afternoon and into the evening in love-making. My sexual attraction towards her was strong. There was pure electricity rushing through my veins, and I felt carnal, like I had returned from a war or from fighting a lion for our dinner.

Sheila understood these feelings better than I, and offered her explanation. "It has a lot to do with our involvement on this project," she said rolling over onto her back exposing the contours of her body. "My normal involvement in economics is just that, normal. At times like today, when I focus on a much larger picture, I ponder the negative effects the NRPA can have on nations: their economy, the lives of families, innocent children, even generations yet unborn. Considering these global effects on humanity, and in every corner of the world, stretches me.

"As I become more involved with this resistance of ours, I am developing a sense of invincible strength, . . . of raw power. The animal in me rises to the surface and needs release, and well," she said sensually raising herself to face me, "here I am."

"I'm not complaining," I replied as we kissed again.

In the days that followed, I pondered the effects this carnal power had over me, realizing that it might prove to be my Achilles heel if not understood. Was this feeling of power in some way similar to the emotions world leaders face when making decisions that affect their country. The average person's choices affect only their own lives or that of their immediate family. But when a simple yes or a no can alter a situation: like housing for the poor, funding wind energy, deploying peacekeepers, imposing tariffs, turning down an insurance claim, or passing a bylaw, these choices affect people in very big ways. These types of decisions can create a euphoria of self-importance or a false sense of power. Could this explain some of the actions by politicians, military leaders and business executives who break away from their normal moral conduct, damaging both their personal life and those affected by their actions? Was this what I was getting a taste of? Are true leaders meant to achieve empathy for those their decisions affect?

The process toward positive change would move rapidly if forward thinking people were at the helm. People who understood how thought energy can affect the material world, affect goals, situations, and ideals. But back in my cabin with Sheila, I too, did not yet understand the scope of my own pondering thoughts. Lying across the bed I gently pulled her on top of me. She began giving me little pucks on the cheek and eyes as she raised herself, and started sliding the nipples of her scrumptious breasts back and forth across my chest.

* * * *

SATURDAY EVENING the two groups met in the lounge for a discussion. With lights dimmed low, Celtic chants playing in the background, the occasional aroma of burning maple from the wood stove, people seated on cushions placed on the floor near friends, we all pondered a question put to us by Lyn. Was there anything in our lives worth fighting for, worth sacrificing the comforts we worked hard to acquire?

Eventually, Lyn broke into an explanation of her life before she and Ted moved to the country and the Monastery. She told a story that most would regard as pure success but soon it became evident that their life grew into a quest for the kind of acquisition often sought as a substitute for emotional wealth. When there was little else they could acquire, they tried abandoning their careers for new business ideas but lost financially. Finally, they liquidated their assets, and built a life away from the city and its challenges. Now they were fulfilled with the many aspects of life at the Monastery.

Through the entire discussion, Ted sat silently erect in his hard backed chair, remaining alert, and focused. Lyn appeared to be linked with Ted as though drawing strength from him as she spoke. Each word drew her listeners deeper into the conversation.

She exposed the face of her newly found enemy, the NRPA, causing a round of ohs and has. Lyn stated that she and Ted were prepared to fight to protect their freedom. They would inconvenience themselves to the same degree that they could imagine their life being disrupted, and more if necessary. Her pride demanded that she act now before the threat placed her in a position of having to react. Previously, their focus was on paying down the mortgage as quickly as possible, but now they would invest in clean energies for the Monastery.

Her story encouraged people to share their own challenges, and all who did evoked emotions in the others. One was dealing with the challenges of being a caregiver to her aging parents, another spoke of child adoption, another of major health problems, and so on. As the evening neared to an end, I noticed TJ sitting alone behind the others, his face pale and strained.

Soon Lyn asked him, "You've been quiet, TJ. What would you fight for?"

With difficulty he spoke in a tone that compelled full attention by all. "I have nothing . . . I would fight for. I have only ever protected myself. There has never been anything else in my life. I can't even think of something I love enough to protect.

"Listening to all you people talk about what's important to you makes me realize that I'm missing something. I'm not saying that I want your problems, but hey, if that is what it takes, then it would be worth the pain.

"You're talking about having a cause to fight for. I need to fight to have a cause. I need what you've got. Something bigger than me. I always thought fighting meant winning and winning meant power. But maybe I'm wrong! . . . I mean you all have something that no one can take away from you. You have a cause you are standing behind. That brings out the real power. I need to care for something bigger than me. . . A cause!"

No one spoke, and after less than a minute he rose and left the room.

* * * *

BY MID-AFTERNOON of the following day when the guests began departing, I was already seated on the bike when TJ approached me looking agitated.

"Why did you pay for my weekend?" he demanded.

"Because I felt like it!"

"I can cover my own way!"

"Well, I figured that, TJ!" He stood there expecting more. I changed the tone of my voice adding, "TJ, I'm the kind of guy that likes to let things flow. You know: let it go, let it flow." With that I ignored him and started the Wing. I had just caught a glimpse of a less desirable side to TJ.

Traffic intensified as weekend commuters headed to their urban homes. We stopped at a truck stop and TJ took the lead into a restaurant. Immediately upon sitting, he said, "I've always been suspicious of people doing me favors. I figure they're using me or they soon will."

I asked, "So what the hell happened to you back there that got you all twisted out of shape?"

He let out a long sigh, "Well, I hated to leave the place. There was something about being there that I can't explain: it's homey. I felt like I had finally found a family, and it reminded me of how things should be. You know: happy family scene etc. I knew leaving was inevitable, and it made me angry inside."

"It's great that you don't lock up your feelings, but I'm not going to be anybody's beating post."

He answered rather aggressively, "What can I say? Ok, I over- reacted. It wasn't necessary. I mean: you brought me to the place, and I experienced new feelings. I'm accustomed to being around people who are after me for something. In fact, I've never been in such a peaceful setting in my life. Besides I don't understand everything that happens to me! Who else would I express my frustration to? Finding out that you paid my way for something I enjoyed so much just pissed me off!"

He was trying to intimidate me with a 'poor me trip', and yet he was being somewhat honest about his experience and his confusion. One part of me wanted to lash out at him, and set him straight by telling him to take responsibility for his own problems. Another part of me knew that paying his bill was a spontaneous decision and perhaps it happened for a good reason. That same part of myself reminded me that I had nothing to prove and that there would be time to resolve this in the future. 'Not to worry,' my little voice confirmed. TJ's spontaneous manner for dealing with situations intrigued me, so I decided to let it go with the blind hope that I might learn something from him, but what?

Leaning toward me, TJ said in a low penetrating tone, "Do you have a place to stay?"

"I have friends I can call on!"

"My roommate moved out, and left all his belongings. He's not coming back. You have introduced me to a world that I never knew existed, and I owe you. Let me return the favor. Come and share my apartment."

I gazed at him, searching for any reason in his eyes or in my own feelings that would support saying no. There was none. I responded by telling him to lead the way.

"At your service, Sir," he said, and we were off.

6 – Adult Eyes

CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES are generally buried beneath post childhood experiences, all of which are tainted by one's earliest memories. TJ's character suggested he had intriguing events in his life, that if ever shared could prove enlightening and entertaining. So, in the following weeks I convinced him to take a course at the Eye of Learning Center, knowing that the classroom arrangement would not be his preference, but hoping that the casual approach of the group would appeal to him.

One evening, he expressed his feelings about the course. "I have ventured off to this Eye of Learning because I wanted to know what made you tick. Tonight, will be my third evening there, listening to someone talk about what I already know. After they taught us how to meditate, I asked the instructor, 'What's with all this ritual of breathing and posture? The sensations you describe sound like the feelings I have been having all my life, and I don't use any techniques'. I explained to him that I close my eyes and it just happens. The instructor basically said, 'That's good,' and left it at that, no more.

"I thought that everybody had these experiences, and now I see people paying money to learn how to do it. Isn't this meditation what everyone calls power napping?"

I tossed the dish towel to him as I headed to the living room for I had washed the dishes, and now it was his turn to dry. I sat down and answered, "It can be if one doesn't spend the time thinking or sleeping. How was the session on recording your dreams?" I asked.

"I can't imagine myself needing to write them down. Mine are so vivid I actually try to forget them." "The lesson tonight," I said, "is about applying these two exercises together, in order to overcome past experiences that are no longer wanted or needed."

"Like what?" he said.

"When I took the course, there was a lady who was terrified of elevators, and throughout her life she had gained no understanding of why. After two months of classes, she came to the class all excited about a new discovery.

She had a dream where she was with her mother as a child, and a cat jumped on her arm with all fours. Later, that same day, she went into meditation reminding herself that she wanted to understand the dream. What she saw in her meditation was an old rickety caged elevator. What happened next is what made her understand the fear."

"Was she crazy, this lady?" TJ asked.

"No, of course not! In her next meditation she saw herself as a child. Her mother had finished bandaging her arm, and she saw herself playing in the caged elevator. Then she saw the same cat that attacked her, through the elevator cage. Seeing the cat again frightened her so much that she refused to ever ride another elevator again.

"Do you understand what happened to her?" I asked.

"Ya! She should have feared the cat not the elevator."

"Yes! The two separate events got cross-wired in her head, and she was left with this curious fear of elevators instead of cats. She was so amazed with her discovery that she rushed out to the nearest office building for a test run. She jumped into a crowded elevator without a second thought, and rode up and down many times. The fear was gone. Like magic, gone."

TJ smiled with a cocky expression and said, "Since I don't have any fears, there isn't much it can do for me, eh?"

"Oh no?" I said, not fully prepared for what was to come. "How about your fear of your mother?"

"What do you mean?" TJ asked in an unfriendly manner, his eyebrows tightening, his calmness appearing artificial, as though he was attempting to conceal something. I could feel a tinge of that same hostility I had felt at the Monastery yet I had never seen him really upset. It was obvious that I had touched a sensitive part of his past, and I wasn't sure how far it was safe to push the point, but perhaps this topic would lead somewhere important.

"You told me that you left home when you were twelve because you couldn't stand to live with her."

"So, what does that prove?" he remarked with disdain.

"She was always coming down on you hard, wasn't she?"

"Yes, and what's it to you?" he barked.

At that point, my solar plexus started to pump hard, and my throat was getting chalky. He was still drying the dishes, and he threw the towel down saying angrily, "Stay out of what you don't understand. It's none of your fuck'n business."

I didn't say another word for the tension in our small apartment became suddenly thick. I wasn't about to spend another minute there, so I grabbed my coat, and was out the door in a flash. A Yonge Street bus arrived, so without thinking, I boarded it. I exited near the Eye of Learning, then roamed the street.

I felt a strong bond with TJ by that time. We were very much alike. I wanted to explore more of his personality than simply having a few good laughs, but maybe I pushed him too hard too fast. What to do? I played out many possible scenarios in my head. He was obviously a powerhouse, but his energies were wild and out of control, almost destructive at times. Is he worth my time, should I move on, or do I actually have a say in the matter? He had a lot of crossed wires, but then don't we all.

Assuming that class at the Center was over, I entered the building, and immediately met Joe who was cleaning up. He was in his mid-50s with some East Indian heritage somewhere in his genes. He possessed an air of knowledge and confidence that comes with years of living, and he was a pleasant person to be around.

"Your buddy didn't show tonight," he said.

"He's a bit pissed off at me, Joe. I want to give him some space. Could I crash here for a couple of nights?"

"No problem, Chris. After six you can use the massage room. You'll have privacy there in the evenings, but you need to be out by 7:30 in the morning because sessions start early."

"That will be great, I'm usually up by 5:30 anyway."

IT WAS SATURDAY NIGHT, and the Center was readying for its weekly members' dance party. It never failed to be one loud, energetic, rock and roll hoot, despite the absence of alcohol. TJ and I were amazed that we could have such a good time without the stuff. I had decided that if TJ didn't show up on this particular evening, I would move on with my life, and wait out the winter somewhere else. I had already spent two nights sleeping on a massage table, and that night was going to be my last.

When the party was at its peak someone let out an enthusiastic howl and others began cheering and clapping their hands. I looked towards the excitement, and there TJ was, dancing up a storm, arms up and down, people nearby edging him on as they joined in his rhythm. He was totally into doing his own thing, and it appeared that he had an extra dose of energy for the occasion.

These parties were great for letting loose. People left their inhibitions at the door, and everyone had some personal reason to celebrate when they arrived. The energy would keep building in unison with the dance of the people. Near the end of the evening individuals were no longer dancing with anyone specific; instead, small groups formed, with arms around whoever stood closest. They moved like lovers on the dim lit dance floor, and this night was no exception.

After one a.m. a handful of people remained behind to clean up. TJ and I were rearranging furniture when he broke our silence.

"These people sure know how to shake it up, eh?"

"You were right in there," I said without looking in his direction. He casually moved to the couch and sat down. "Well," he said with a sigh, "I'm one ounce lighter and a whole lot wiser, my friend."

This is encouraging I thought. "Wiser! How so?"

Rubbing his forehead he said, "That first night after you left, I started contemplating my past. I remembered some of the fights I had been in. A lot of them started off with the same anger I had toward you that evening. I have never enjoyed those emotions."

I moved a steel legged chair and sat facing him, ready to listen to whatever he had to offer.

He continued, "When I was twelve, I was hauled up from a basement cell of a police station. They had kept me there overnight, and the next day they were going to press charges for shoplifting. Instead, the police officer lectured me and then let me go. He told me, 'Son, you can't keep doing this. No more stealing, you understand.'

"Leaving the station, I remember repeating to myself, 'Nobody tells me what to do' and at the very first store I came to, which was a small men's clothing shop, I walked in, and told the sales guy to give me everything he had in the till: all of \$45. When the police picked me up later that evening, they asked me why I did it. I told them, 'Nobody tells me what to do.' My reward for my stubbornness was two months in reform school: and it was a school alright. That's where I graduated into bigger stuff."

"No one likes getting ordered around!" I commented.

"All my life I couldn't take being told what to do. But it is only now that I relate this to my mother. You, my friend, pointed this out to me."

"Glad to be of service," I said in an almost humorous tone. "Tell me more!"

"The first night I had this disturbing dream. I was a small boy of six or seven and someone had their hand over my right shoulder and pushed down hard on it. The feeling in the dream left me lonely, unworthy, and generally just terrible. It bothered me all the next day.

"That afternoon when I had my power nap, I took your advice, and I told myself that I had to understand the dream. When I came out of meditation, I was sick to my stomach, with no idea why, except that I felt that I had just stepped out of a dark room. That ill feeling stayed with me until I went to bed.

"Last night, I dreamed I was a boy again. I was in my own room and my mother walked in and started lecturing me, 'Don't forget tomorrow to do this, this, and this!' and 'You didn't do as I told you to do today!' and on and on . . . I never was able to do anything right for her. No matter how hard I tried, I always fell short of satisfying her. Finally, when I turned twelve, I stopped trying and left home.

"These memories are not new to me; I remember them well. But in the dream, they were coming at me all at once. The room kept getting darker, and I kept feeling tighter, and I was burying myself deeper and deeper into the covers. Everything I disliked about her telling me what to do, and criticizing me, was compressed into that single feeling of the hand pressing on my shoulder. I awoke in a cold sweat. I was drenched. I knew that the hand was symbolic, but the emotions were real. You never saw anything like it. It was intense. Big time, Man!"

"I believe you."

"Combining dreams with meditation worked. Today the pieces started to fit, and I knew I was on to something. I realized that the feeling of the hand pressing on my shoulder was the exact same feeling I would get when I reacted to people. I would fight with guys, not because I was angry, but simply to get rid of the feeling. . . . Sort of!" he added.

"This afternoon when I meditated, I saw my mother as a young woman going off to work. The heat of the early morning sun warmed my skin, as I floated alongside her. I recognized the dress she wore. I could hear her thoughts, and I knew what she was feeling. It was like . . . I was her. She was leaving me, her little boy, behind to go to school by himself, do his homework by himself, warm up his dinner by himself, and put himself to bed. Yet she was a concerned and loving mother, working at two difficult jobs, doing her very best to keep me safe and worrying constantly about my well-being. It was her fear for my safety that as a child, I misinterpreted.

"I felt her love for me, Man, and her pain. It was excruciating. My insides felt ripped apart. I had been crying so intently that my guts ached. It must have been devastating for her when I disappeared. I can't give enough love back to her to make up for the love I feel now. It was very real, and the emotion was powerful. I cried my eyes out, Man. I actually cried for the first time. Me crying!"

There was a pause, and no words could express the emotions his story evoked in me. I was witnessing the gut-wrenching story of two people in love. A parent longing to care and protect, and the child wanting protection and love, but interpreting it as rejection. How complicated our human emotions are.

TJ continued, "I no longer have pain when I think of her. Those were the feelings of a confused child. Now I understand her, and see through adult eyes. The hate is gone and so is that uncontrolled anger I've always carried around with me. She is no longer around for me to tell her this, but I'm sure that she knows. I know this

without any doubt, Chris, because I feel good, I mean, really good. So, you see, my friend, I had something to celebrate tonight.”

I realized that a new life had just begun for TJ, and I felt my own joy for it. I think at that moment I started to love the guy, in a manner that one might love a spiritual being. I had never felt these emotions for a man before, and I was having difficulty sorting them out. In an effort to gain control over this new feeling I began joking with him by saying, “So you’re a new man now! That’s good because I want my comfortable bed back!”

He bounced back with a grin, “Blame yourself for trying to get into my head.”

“Right on. We’re back on track,” I said. Standing I grabbed his forearm, and we gave each other a male type hug with two slaps on the back for good measure.

JOE ENTERED the room, “So you two have kissed and made up, I see.”

Still a little shaken by my new emotion towards TJ, I wanted to tell him that we weren’t gay, but it didn’t seem important enough to verbalize. Joe walked past me saying, “Since I first met the two of you, I knew you were mystically thrown together. A guiding hand, call it destiny perhaps, has positioned you both for a purpose larger than yourselves. Seeing each of you now, I would say that your agenda is close at hand.”

“Nothing would suit me better, Joe,” I said.

“Being open to spiritual growth is interesting,” he continued. “We can’t force it to happen from the outside; it has its own internal timing. We can only remain attentive, keep ourselves clear of garbage, enjoy life, and act when opportunities arise.”

He moved a chair close to us and sat. We followed his example, for at that moment his charisma was magnetic. “I couldn’t help overhearing parts of your story TJ and I’m impressed. Generally, people take longer to gain realization into their past emotions. When we look back at youthful memories that have held power over us, we can make them disappear. You have done this, and now you have begun a new journey into knowing more about your essential self. I hope you never decide to stop.”

TJ said, “I didn’t know that this was what I was doing. But today I feel like a new man, and now you tell me that this is a journey. So, there’s more!

Joe and I looked at each other and grinned. TJ, in seeing this, demanded an explanation. Joe picked it up from there. “It is a continuing process. When a past experience is filed properly, we become a new person. So yeah, TJ, there is a lot more, perhaps not as dramatic as your experience, yet perhaps even more spectacular.

“Those of us who choose this journey all start for different reasons.

We are seduced by our own curiosity which opens a window to new insights. For myself this happened when I was a child, and then the window closed until much later in my adult life. But once that window opens,” Joe continued, “all things in our lives take on new meaning.

“We normally go through life reacting to our environment, more out of the need for survival and acceptance, but constantly fearing the absence of both. But now we are looking through the eyes of our spirit: that same essence that in the past remained more or less hidden from our consciousness.”

“Huh!” said TJ. “I think I know what you mean. I’ve always felt that a part of myself was hidden from me. Like it was observing me from behind a corner, and I could never focus on it. Today I feel that I have become that person.”

“You have for the moment,” Joe interjected.

“Do you think it will last?”

I offered some feedback of my own on this. In the past when gaining new perspective, my imagination would become super active, and I would begin creating ways of using these new insights. Soon I would find myself deserted on an island of my own creation, being just a bit wiser. Joe wanted to know if I had figured out why this occurred.

“Yes!” I said. “It was due to a lack of self-love. The new energies I tapped into allowed me to create. But my motivation was to produce a better reflection of myself. Deep down there was a need to boost my self-importance and confidence. Once I understood this, then I had to stop the cycle by accepting myself as I am, and just enjoy the experience. Everyone has their own challenges. Occasionally it still sneaks up on me though.”

“TJ! You will have your own challenges.” Joe said crossing his legs and then beginning to speak of shared knowledge.

“There are those who speak of these experiences with knowledge gained from others. They acquire this intellectual information through reading and listening to people’s stories. Their enthusiasm to have authentic experiences of their own, often drives them to become writers or teachers on the subject, yet they may never have shared it personally. Then there are those who have had encounters with their spirit, and were unable to accept what they saw or learned. As a result, they often deny that it ever occurred. Those of us who are fortunate to learn from firsthand experiences, and choose to continue this quest for inner knowledge, help each other. We share as we do now.

“This doesn’t mean that we are nice to each other. Nice means giving a person what they want. Instead, we are honest with each other, which means giving a person what they need, not what they think they need. People often forget that the feedback hardest to give is often of the most value.” Smiling he added, “I don’t think you boys will have a problem in that area. In fact, this is your combined strength.”

TJ said to me, “Chris, why don’t you ever talk like this?”

“I’m an explorer. I like to share with a person, not teach.”

Joe said rather surprised, “I have always been under the impression that teaching is all about sharing.”

“For me teaching implies taking responsibility for more than the words. It extends to the impact their words have on a person. I find this limiting and too much of a burden.”

“Some things simply need to be said without judging their purpose . . . No?” Joe questioned.

“Perhaps . . . if the words are positive with no hidden agenda or intimidation attached to them.”

“I’ll have to think about that one,” Joe said, and then added, “I just want to say one more thing, boys, and this is primarily for you, TJ.

“This new journey that we are on parallels the reality which we previously followed; however, it is different. It reveals knowledge and understanding about life in its simplest and yet most gratifying forms. We experience coincidences, meetings with situations and people that give us insights into our lives. Our connection with Nature is enhanced, and we even discover inner strengths that we had no idea existed. It is a journey and we are all better off now that you are on board, TJ.”

“Thanks, Joe! Talking about it helps reinforce that it is real. I wouldn’t want to wake up tomorrow, and wonder if I had been dreaming.”

“Perhaps in a couple of years we can meet again, and discuss our adventures. In the meantime, my wife awaits my arrival home. So, Gentlemen, let’s lock up.”

We left with the feeling that our shared agenda would soon become obvious.

7 – Shared Purpose

WHILE LOCKING UP THE BIKES after a sunny afternoon ride, TJ asked me an unusual question, for neither of us pried into each other's personal life.

"Most mornings you're gone before I get up. What's so important out there?"

"Generally, I have coffee at a restaurant, and scan the local paper."

"What are you looking for?" he asked.

"I'm not! I'm waiting!"

"For what?"

"All my big moves come from an inner feeling, so I'm waiting for that feeling."

TJ said, "My moves just happen. Someone says, let's do it, and if it sounds like fun, then that's what I do."

Walking ahead of me up the stairs to our apartment he stopped and turning to face me he probed again, "So what else do you do when you're out there being bored?"

"Occasionally, I take a stroll to the library and glance through the international newspapers."

He interrupted, "I'm glad you're not inviting me to share all that excitement. It would be more interesting staying here and watching cartoons."

"You mean, doing what you do best?"

"Yea, you got it," he said as we threw our coats on the couch. "Keep talking," he demanded. "I know there's more."

TJ didn't appear to be the type of person who would be interested in the information on the NRPA. I saw no reason to discuss the subject, however, I knew that the conversation might find its own timing. Perhaps this was it so I played along and answered all his questions.

"On occasion, I visit with friends who make it their business to provide background information on people. They're doing me a favor by keeping tabs on the agency Lyn spoke of at the Monastery."

Reflecting back to that weekend he said, "Ya! I've often thought of that discussion. Listening to those people tell their stories, made me want to have something worth fighting for. I even thanked Lyn afterwards for sharing her story about the NRPA. There were some real heartfelt stories told that night."

"Lyn had just learned about the NRPA from me that morning. So, she was sharing her honest thoughts."

"So, how are you involved?"

"The NRPA is made up of world business types who want to exercise what they do best: taking control."

"So, what else is new; this is the way things have always been," TJ expressed as a matter of fact.

I said, "They don't need warriors to win wars any more. Do you remember the oil crunch in the '70s."

"Ya! That was the end of the muscle cars; like the Mustang Boss, GTO, AMX and the Charger. Nice machines."

"All gone because, a group of oil rich countries had a meeting, and decided to set North America on its ass. The NRPA want even more."

"You're forgetting something, Chris. That turned out okay in the end. Look at all the efforts to reduce energy consumption, and cut pollution," TJ defended.

"Yes, you're right. Desperation is the mother of invention."

"So why the panic with these guys?" TJ asked as he reached for a handful of grapes from the center table.

"Let's say that the NRPA were to overturn Canada's efforts to protect our waters from being diverted to the US. Imagine what our St. Lawrence River would look like, if the Great Lakes were made to flow into the Mississippi, simply to allow larger barges down that water system, or to divert water further west to keep LA lawns green."

“Let’s go to extremes for a second, and say that if South America could produce more vegetables per acre than other countries, then Canada should only raise beef. No more taking visits to the local market for fresh produce.”

“You’re going overboard on that one, but I get your point. So, you think that this group could try screwing us just to fill their pockets.”

“That’s it exactly, TJ.”

“So you’re pretty keen on stopping these guys. This must have been what you were involved with at the Monastery?”

“Yes!”

“You’re fighting Goliath. You know this don’t you?”

“It may seem that way, but I think that they are going to slip up soon. The tables will turn and we’ll have the advantage on them. I have felt this for some time.”

“So, what’s your plan, Chief?”

“You mean you want in?”

“Sure, as long as it’s fun, and it has been fun so far.”

“I’m hoping that information will soon emerge, confirming our suspicions about their true motives. I want to know their actions, their movements, their deals, their contacts, anything. I mean this business of theirs takes coordination and communication on their part. Right now, they are setting up offices in major capitals. Their chairman is in our own backyard. A businessman in Montreal called Neil Fairview.”

I noticed TJ suddenly change position, as he leaned forward, and he cleared his throat before asking, “That’s not a French name. What did you say it was again?”

So, I repeated the name Fairview, and he rose from his chair en route to the fridge saying nothing. I continued, “As chairman, he will be receiving constant updates on the affairs of the NRPA. I would like to be a fly on his office wall, just to find out what he’s up to.”

TJ made no comment. As he took a beer from the fridge, I continued. “He recently had his home broken into and lost some jewelry and \$150,000 in cash.”

TJ came, and stood in front of me, asking with increasing interest when the theft occurred. “I learnt about it during the weekend at the Monastery. It must’ve just happened.”

He started to pace, turning back and forth across the floor. “That bastard!” he kept repeating.

Grinning with amusement and surprise at his reactions, I said, “What’s up with you?”

“Larock ripped me out of my share, I’ll tear him apart,” he said as he punched the back of the couch.

“What are you talking about, TJ?” His actions made no sense; in fact, if he wasn’t so serious they would have been laughable.

Falling back onto the couch, and in a serious tone he answered,

“I’ve already been a fly on Fairview’s wall.”

“What? You were inside his house? It was you who broke in? You’re the one the police are after?”

“Me and Larock, the fellow whose room you’re using.”

“Shit!” This was almost too much for me to handle. “I thought this work of yours was a thing of the past. This is crazy Man! Why didn’t you tell me?”

“Well, you know now! . . . We both had our secrets.”

He was right for I had kept quiet about the NRPA figuring that he wasn’t interested. How could I have ended up in a situation like this? He began to explain. “Larock convinced me that it was going to set us on easy street.”

“When did you do the job?”

“The day before I met you in Temagami.”

I sat back and thought about the circumstance. Now I felt like an accomplice.

“I need to get my share of that damn money,” he said.

“What do you mean, your share?”

“\$65,000, plus the jewelry.”

We both remained silent until he calmed down, and started to tell me his story. “Two years ago, during the construction of Fairview’s new home, Larock wired the security system. The house was 10,000 square feet and on a rural street. Easy pickings! In a home that size, there should have been a safe built into the wall. There wasn’t. Larock figured that their valuables would probably be art, and they would rely entirely on the security system. He was right.

“He built himself an electronic box to match the security terminal he was installing. The two terminal boxes were identical, same number of sensing points etc. When he made the installation, he matched the signals in his terminal box for each device in the house. Then he ran an additional lead wire outside, and concealed it in the outside finishes. He showed me how it worked, here in this apartment.”

“Oh shit! You masterminded this job here?” By this time, I sat across the arms of the sofa staring out the window. Only occasionally did I glance in his direction as he told the story.

“All Larock had to do when we arrived was make the connection outside the house. He had a ramping device that would slowly transfer the signals from the sensors in the house to his terminal and then everything looked disabled and not in alarm. It worked perfectly, but it took twenty minutes to set up.

“Getting inside from there was easy. He went upstairs and I stayed in the main study. I remembered the name, Fairview, because I saw the name inscribed on a solid gold nugget attached to his desk. I was attempting to free it when Larock started yelling. ‘They’re here, they’re here,’ as he raced down the stairs. The entire family had returned. They must have changed their plans or something. Larock knew that I wouldn’t stand for any dirty stuff, so we fled.”

“What kind of dirty stuff?”

“Well, we could have pulled them inside and tied them up and continued with the job. But I made it clear, before we started, that I didn’t want any part of that shit. Larock wasn’t the type either. So there we were caught in the act. Larock had stolen a van on the way in and it was in the driveway. I had parked the bike on a sideroad five minutes away.”

“Just as Larock came into the room, my foot touched a tin box under the desk. I grabbed it, opened it quickly. It had a sizable billroll of money and a CD. I ran out the back door with the tin box under my arm. As we reached the cover of the backyard trees, I stopped and looked back. A tall man was speaking on his cellphone while looking at the plates on the van. The police would be out there as quickly as possible. We hustled through the bush to the bike and rode off.

“At the first town we came to, Larock told me to stop in front of the Voyager bus, which was taking on passengers. I removed the box from him, grabbed the roll of cash and without counting it or looking at it closely, took what I thought was half, and dropped the rest of the money in the box and gave it back to him. We haven’t been in contact since.”

“How much do you figure was in the roll?”

“I ended up with just over \$9,000 so I figured about 20 Gs. There is no way that Larock could have had any amount of jewelry on him. I would have suspected something; there wasn’t enough time. He was surprised that we made off with the cash.”

I sat silently thinking about the media coverage that appeared in newspapers. The extent of the manhunt was excessive for any amount of money. Then a flash of insight clarified what had happened.

I said, “You weren’t ripped off, TJ. There was no \$150,000! No stolen jewelry! It’s the CD they’re after. There is something of great value on that CD. It wasn’t a music CD, was it?”

“It didn’t have a regular jacket . . . plain white.”

“It has been etched! It contains what we’re looking for! I can feel it in my guts. That’s why they’ve lied about the amount of money stolen. That’s why they launched such an expansive search and that explains the \$30,000 reward I saw in the paper recently. That CD is worth a lot more than a few bucks. Do you think your buddy kept it?”

“If he thought he could get money for it, yes.”

“Any idea where he is?”

“As long as the heat is on, he will be at his hunt camp north of Montreal. I was there once during the summer.”

“What are we waiting for?” I said.

“I want my money. You can have your CD. We’ll have to get there before it snows.”

I felt excited that I finally had a clear direction of my next move, despite the illegal implications. I said, “Let’s do whatever it takes.”

“Chris, once we start this search there is no turning back. Are you prepared for whatever happens?”

“TJ, I’m in this for the long run, at any cost. That CD is the reason we met, I’m sure of it.”

We slapped hands and made with the thumbs up. “All right, Man! Let’s take care of business,” TJ said.

AT THAT MOMENT a knock came from the door.

Cautiously TJ approached, opened it. In walked Joe.

“I know this is a surprise Boys, but I was driving down the street thinking about you two, when for no obvious reason your street number just jumped out at me. I knew I must stop, so here I am.”

We did our best to welcome him, which was difficult seeing the head space we were in. But I knew his arrival held importance otherwise he would not be there.

“I’m double parked so let me get to the point for this unannounced visit.”

Half seated on a stool in our open kitchen he began, “There are events occurring on the planet that are of great importance to more people than the three of us. As well, these events are crucial to the evolution of the planet. Both of you are part of these events, as I’m sure you are already aware.”

He briefly made eye contact with each of us before continuing. “Certain people, consciously and unconsciously, are directing energy toward the outcome of these events. I’m one such person, and have been most of my life. There are many others. Without knowing the details of your upcoming journey, I am confident that we will be sharing it with you. You are on a mission of a spiritual nature. Call us your silent partners.

“Are you following me?” he asked.

TJ said, “I’ve always been alone, until I met this guy,” referring to me. “Then I discover another part of myself, and my life is changing. Now you’re saying that I’m part of a team that I don’t even know. This would be great, Joe, but I don’t feel it yet, and don’t know that I want to.”

“Just as well,” Joe responded. “But, TJ, hear me out. It’s important that you hear this whether you can accept it or not.”

TJ gave him a pleasant grin indicating that he was no longer threatened by such directness.

Joe said, “Each of you are independent people. Neither of you need the other to survive. However, you are moving forward as a team, with one shared purpose. Seldom does a team have more than one leader, so each of you will share this leadership role.

“Do you know what your greatest challenges will be? . . .

“Surrendering control to the other! . . .

“This is my simple message to you both.”

We glanced at each other displaying our lack of comprehension, and then in a more affirmative voice his words registered their meaning.

“When the time is right for one of you to lead, do it. . . . Lead! There is no room for sympathy on this team.

“When you see the spirit of the other assuming control, . . . then surrender your control to the other without hesitation.

“When it’s your turn to retake control, just assume it.”

“There will be no need for niceties if you’re operating from your spirit. . . . It will be as natural as breathing, for a part of us will be there with you. So don’t waste our energies. Just take what’s yours!”

“That’s a fairly painless message! Eh boys?”

With no further explanation he stood, gave a little salute and let himself out.

8 – Riding the Wave

TJ QUICKLY LIQUIDATED his assets as he saw fit. Sheila volunteered to be our communication link, in the event that we went into hiding. Luc continued expanding his contacts throughout the world. With the growing interest in the NRPA came a need for additional information, and I hoped that we would soon be able to deliver. This network of sympathizers would be our initial voice, and during this period, we would remain an underground movement. News would surface when the mainstream media became interested enough to take it up.

TJ and I rode out of Toronto on November 18th when the temperature was just above freezing. In Montreal, we took a motel in mid-afternoon and remained there until late the next day. TJ insisted on taking advantage of the darkness which seemed illogical at the time due to the cold weather. However, he had sound reasoning, for we would be aware of any approaching vehicles by their headlights. TJ showed a keen sense of decisiveness in this caper we had planned which left no doubt that he was the one in charge. I followed his confident direction and rather enjoyed being led as he skillfully played his part. It became an exercise in following Joe's advice. Surrender control to the person best suited to lead the way knowing that I would be called upon in the future. It reminded me of cyclists racing around an oval track. The lead rider breaks the wind for the rest of the team, then falls to the rear of the line allowing the next rider to break the wind, and then the next.

Near 4 p.m., we were an hour north of Montreal and edging onto smaller paved roads. The day was overcast, and darkness would come early. It took TJ a couple of double passes to decide on the correct turn. At 5 p.m. we left the asphalt highway turning onto a rough gravel road. It was wide enough for two vehicles to pass, providing each slowed to a near stop. After the second turnoff, the road narrowed leaving a strip of grass growing in the center of the one lane, and it was now dark. Traveling was slow at about 20 mph, but we kept a steady pace. On a couple of hills, I had to use my feet to stabilize the Wing, as the rear tire spun out on the loose gravel.

We had the road to ourselves which was no surprise because it was remote. I was contemplating on the loud rumble from the Harley, and how it created such an eerie sound amongst the otherwise silent forest, when suddenly a thundering sound came from overhead, bringing us both to a stop. A helicopter crossed our trail just above the trees. Our eyes followed its path as it crossed an open field, down the slope and into a valley. There were many stationary lights in the direction of its path. I yelled to TJ, "Those lights are from trucks, possibly ATVs and another chopper. Looks like a small airport."

TJ shrugged his shoulders, and then continued. Twenty minutes up the road I saw a small bush trail which veered to the left and then up a slope. After another ten minutes the road ended at a camp. I followed TJ's example, and parked the bike facing back toward the way we came. We dismounted, and turned the engines off, and stood in total darkness.

Into the silence, TJ yelled, "Guy," which was Larock's first name, "It's TJ."

What kind of lad is this Larock, I thought? What might he do to us here? We're completely vulnerable.

TJ called again, "We need to talk Guy. You know that I'm not going to leave without seeing you."

There was not a sound anywhere. We waited in silence. Everything was quiet and dreary. Then I smelled steaming water, and leaning close to TJ I whispered, "Someone has put a fire out with water. I can smell the creosote."

"Good," then he yelled, "Guy, I know you're here, I can smell the fire you just put out. They say you took a lot of money, Guy. I want my share."

Suddenly a voice from the forest about twenty feet beside us, calmly said, "You got your fuckin share!"

We couldn't see him nor he us.

Then the voice added, "What's with the company? Turn on the bike lights and stand in front of them."

We followed through with his command, and then faced the direction of the voice, which left us looking into the dark eerie bush. TJ placed his fist against my shoulder, and pushed hard causing me to stumble sideways

away from him. When we were distanced apart, he dropped his arm. I figured this to be a prison move imposed by the guards.

“That’s better,” the voice said.

Suddenly, I could make out a long silvery glow of light reflecting off metal. It was a gun barrel, but it wasn’t pointing at us; Larock had it facing the ground. TJ must have seen it as well, for he said in a casual voice. “You have the advantage, Guy. We’re not armed. You and I are being framed. I don’t believe there was any \$150,000. You have the heat on you, and we’re here to change all that.”

Guy spoke casually yet cautiously, “Ok, walk into the camp, and we’ll see. Just do it slowly.”

He turned on a flashlight, TJ shut off the bike lights and we went inside, with Larock in the rear. I was told to light a coal oil lantern, and he had us sit on a bench behind a table. He still held the shotgun on the crutch of his arm.

“There was no \$150,000, TJ. I got almost \$10,000, how about you?”

“Same.”

I was about to ask about the disk, when TJ slapped his arm across my chest, and said abruptly without taking his eyes off Larock, “You’re the observer!”

Then he spoke to Guy, “What makes you think that they are on to you?”

“After staying here for two days, I went back working with the security company in Montreal. Within a week they were making visits to our shop and going through work orders. Their search was as thorough as if there had been a murder. They even questioned me, asking where I was that day and all that shit. I told them I had been at the bar, and for twenty bucks the bartender confirmed my story. When they returned a couple of weeks later, asking more questions, I told the company that I was taking time off to go hunting, and I moved up here. I’ve never been behind bars TJ,” Guy said, “and I don’t intend to be. This shit isn’t worth it.”

“So, you haven’t been identified yet. That’s good,” TJ said. “What did you do with the disk?”

“It’s here.”

“What’s on it?”

“My ticket to freedom . . . It’s coded. That’s what they’re after.” TJ looked at me, and I nodded that Guy was correct.

TJ continued, “This CD isn’t your ticket out of here, Guy; it’s the noose around your neck.”

“You want it, don’t you?” Guy said.

“If they catch you with it, they may decide to frame you with the entire theft, and call off the search for me. They’ll have what they’re looking for. But if you sick them onto me, you can buy your freedom because they have to keep looking. You will mean nothing to them.”

“Are you telling me, you want me to squeal?”

“Hey, I’m over twenty-one, Guy, let me worry about that. Show us the disk.” Holding the gun in our direction, he backed up to a doorway, and reached to the opposite side of the wall. Out came the tin box. He returned to the table, and laid it down in front of us. I opened the box immediately.

Guy rapped the gun barrel on the table, “Wow, not so fast.”

TJ interrupted him and said, “I’ll give you a thousand dollars, for keeping it safe for us.”

“What’s in it for you, TJ?”

“My buddy here is into saving the world. He and his friends aren’t the extortion type. They want to crush Fairview. This is over both our heads, Larock. Don’t even think about getting involved . . . No more heat remember?”

Suddenly I envisioned the chopper and the lights we had seen back along the road, and I said without thinking, “Is there a small airport on the way in here?”

“What?” Guy said.

“Back five or six miles there appeared to be an airport in a field at the bottom of a hill. A lot of activity, a couple of Choppers, Jeeps and ATVs.”

“There’s nothing on this road.” Then suddenly panic rose in his face, and we all caught on at the same time. Guy turned to leave, and then stopped, held out the palm of this hand at shoulder height, and said, “The money.”

TJ had it ready for him in his shirt pocket, and Guy disappeared out the door leaving the gun on the table. I grabbed the tin box and the flashlight, and as we ran for the bikes, we heard Guy starting an ATV at the rear of the camp, and leave on a different trail. TJ ordered me to throw that box as far as I could. It went high in the air and deep in the forest before hitting a tree, and bouncing down the slope.

When I fired up the Wing, TJ yelled to me, “Your plate.” He had installed quick release nuts on the plates, so that they could be removed easily. This would slow the identification process. We were certain that we were going to be confronted before we reached the highway. He said, “That machine’s too heavy to go around road blocks. Leave it!”

“I’ll ride it as far as I can. Don’t worry, I’ll drop it if I have to.”

“Just don’t wait too long,” he yelled over the bellowing sounds of the Harley exhaust. I wasn’t about to give up my \$16,000 Wing without a serious reason. He dashed ahead and set the pace at 30 mph. ‘So, this is what Riding the Wave is like,’ I thought. ‘This must be its crest. Ride it well, Chris,’ I reminded myself.

We hadn’t gone far when we saw, to my dread, lights shining on trees along one side of our escape route. A vehicle was coming toward us, and was about to round the corner in seconds. The trees continued to glow brighter until the lights of two vehicles rounded the corner, and were on us. We were all on a straight course toward each other with no other place to go.

The Harley stopped. That was my cue, and without a second thought, I dropped my beautiful Wing on its side, motor still running. As I let go the handlebars, and swung my right leg over the windshield, my left hand touched the high beam light switch, and the approaching vehicles and the trees behind them lit up.

I leaped onto the small rear seat of the Hog, wrapping both arms around TJ’s chest. My feet were scrambling about, attempting to locate foot pegs as TJ twisted the throttle, and we lunged forward.

Then I saw him hit a small switch on the handlebars, and off went all Harley lights. Clever I thought! The approaching vehicle may not see us, with the bright light of the Wing in their eyes. The truck was rolling to a stop. TJ edged the bike onto the grass, and went whizzing past the driver’s door and down along its side. Once clear of the back end of the first truck he moved the bike back in the path of the oncoming second jeep, and hit the headlight switch. The driver swerved instinctively to avoid the shock of finding another vehicle in its path. We went sailing past.

Elated at our first victory, I yelled from behind, “Are you having fun yet?” The adrenaline was flowing in both of us, and the pace quickened. Within seconds more lights were catching the top of trees up ahead. They were falling quickly from the treetops, as they advanced from the other side of the hill directly in front of us.

Searching the terrain for an escape route I remembered the trail I had seen on the way in and then suddenly there it was. I yelled in TJ’s ear, “Slow down, slow down. There! Right there! There!” He had to almost stop to make the turn off the road. Yelling again I told him to gun it, as I jumped off the back, and ran beside him. The lights were only seconds from being upon us. I pulled out the flashlight, and motioned him to kill the bike lights. With the aid of the dim light from the flashlight, TJ gave it his best shot. With his feet as supports and lights off, he dashed past me and up the trail another 30 feet.

I killed my light, and an instant later the Harley fell silent. Pressing my back against the closest tree, I could still catch a glimpse of the bike. Two jeeps made their way toward where we had turned off the main road. The lights grew brighter on the ground and trees around us. Now I could see TJ crouched in front of the bike trying to conceal any reflection off the chrome. The strong lights would cause our eyes to shine, so we both faced away into the darkness. One passed our turn; the sound of my heart beating drowned out the engine noise. As the lights from the second vehicle slipped away from us, I turned and followed their course through the silhouetted forest. Leaning my forehead against a tree, I breathed deeply until my heart quieted and the sounds of the engines faded.

TJ approached, and said in a lighthearted manner, “We make one hell of a team, partner,” as he slapped my back.

"If you say so." I was less enthusiastic, and near exhaustion from the excitement, and my brain was racing in an attempt to resolve my dilemma. TJ seemed as though he was just warming up. He was calm, and it was obvious that he was enjoying the adrenaline rush. Turning the flashlight back on and shining it ahead on the road, I said, "This trail doesn't look good . . . I'll walk beside you for a way." They were on to us now, so there was no point going back on the road from which we came. It was going to be a game of hide and seek from that moment on.

We proceeded slowly up the hill to its crest. At the top, the road was smooth. Two hard packed ruts were separated by grass in the middle. Getting back on the bike, I suggested that TJ ride on the grass so they wouldn't see our tracks. This might confuse them into thinking that we took to the forest.

A few miles further while heading up another hill, I felt a vibration in my eardrums. Turning around, I saw a glow in the sky behind us, and at that instant it started to rain. Watching the glow, I attempted to detect the type of vehicle making the sound. When it registered, I yelled, "A chopper! Get off the road!"

We had passed trails along our way, but we needed one now. Suddenly I felt a hard bump and TJ was heading into what appeared to be bush, but instead he had found an old abandoned road. The glow in the sky disappeared as groundcover thickened, and the rain fell harder. TJ stopped in the full protection of the dense bush, shutting everything down. We waited. The noise of the rain drowned out the slow approaching chopper until it was directly overhead. It passed and we were safe once again.

We negotiated the trail for another few yards until the front tire struck a fallen tree. We shut the bike down, and discussed our options. We decided to abandon the bike in favor of remaining on this bush trail. TJ took his saddle bags, his last remaining possessions, and I had even less.

After an hour of slow progress, we came on to a well-used ATV trail which made for excellent walking. Not knowing which way to turn we chose to go left because it led down a hill. In a couple of hours, we came alongside an abandoned field which indicated that we were getting closer to civilization. Soon we saw a light 300 yards in the open field. Leaving the trail, I stopped at a broken-down fence, stepped over it and sat on the top rail. TJ edged up beside me.

"What do you suppose?" he said.

"There is only one light. I think that it's a gas lantern?"

The rain slowed to a mist, and we could hear music over the sounds of raindrops falling from wet branches. "That's a bunch of kids having a party," TJ said. "Let's pay them a visit, maybe they'll give us a beer."

"Or hunters! Just sit a bit, and rest."

I asked him, "Why did you decide to take the heat off Guy?"

"I knew that he would go for it, and besides I'm a nice guy. You rested yet?" he asked.

We set out across the tall seedy grass toward the music. As we approached, TJ kept talking loudly about nothing, to ensure that they would hear us coming and not surprise them. Before we arrived at their plastic roofed shelter, some of them were standing waiting.

TJ had started to explain our situation from 40 feet away.

Interrupting him I said, "I think you should switch to French."

"Shit," he said.

"Parlez anglais?" I asked.

They yelled behind to someone called Fred, who obviously spoke English. The teenager was dragged out of a tent too drunk to communicate. TJ grew impatient with their attempts to wake up their buddy, so he approached an ATV, and sat on it. This got their attention. Then he motioned for them to come and sit, and drive. "Ici, ici," he said using the only French he knew. They got the message.

We were then chauffeured to town, each on an ATV, driven by drunken teenagers. They let us off at a motel before one a.m. TJ gave them each a twenty, and they were more than happy for the money. We asked the manager for an electric heater, and once inside the room we stripped off our soaked clothing, and set them on lamps and furniture to dry. We took turns during the night rotating our clothing to ensure they would be dry come morning. Getting caught by the authorities seemed secondary to having dry clothes.

* * * *

THE NEXT DAY WE trashed our valued leathers and TJ's saddle bag. We purchased a cheap sports bag and two light coats from a dollar store. By noon we were on our way, walking out of town heading north. TJ wanted to keep moving away from populated areas. At a restaurant at the edge of town I asked a salesperson for a lift. An hour into our trip we stopped at a garage, and while the others were inside taking care of their needs, I remained outside.

For some unknown reason I took notice of a fellow gassing up his blue station wagon. He was tall and slim with short brown hair. Nothing was unusual about him, nor had I ever seen him before, so why was I staring at this stranger? Often, I had been advised not to rationalize chance meetings to death. Could this be one of those opportunities? Was there a chance that this stranger held something significant for me, or I for him?

What the hell, I thought. What could be worse than what I've been doing lately anyway, so I decided to put the possibility of embarrassment aside, and I walked toward him. Perhaps he would look up at me with recognition. As I approached, he only glanced in my direction, barely noticing me. When I finally reached the rear of his vehicle, I became brave enough to speak, and to my surprise the first words that came out of my mouth were, "My buddy and I need your help. Can you give us a ride?" I hadn't even asked where he was going or even introduced myself.

The stranger returned the filling nozzle back into its holster, tightened the gas cap, while saying nothing. Perhaps he was thinking. Passing me on his way to pay for the gas he looked me in the eye, and said, "Jump in."

TJ approached, and with a smile I said, "Get your stuff, we're switching rides." He tilted his head and squinted his eyebrows questioningly. In a minute he joined me at the station wagon. We sat in the back, as the passenger's seat was packed with junk. There were no goodbyes to the salesman.

The station wagon headed east on a different road than we had previously traveled. After a few minutes the driver introduced himself as François. TJ was reluctant at giving his name. I sat back feeling more relaxed than I had been in the past two days. Something definitely was right about this ride.

François said to me, "How else can I help you?"

I watched for TJ's reaction as I prepared to answer his question. "We have information on the NRPA." TJ's shock was instinctive and he gave me a disgusted look that said, 'Who are you trying to impress?' François looked us over in the rearview mirror, and said nothing. During the next half hour only the sounds of the car and the wind were heard. Eventually he slowed and turned onto a narrow road covered in white potash stone dust with grass cut three feet wide along its sides. I sat up looking out the front window. It appeared to be a private road. After a minute François said, while smiling at me, "You will be well taken care of here."

The station wagon turned through a handmade gate, bordered by two majestic white pines at least three feet in diameter. We passed a large stucco building on our left. The road led us up through a beautiful stretch of oak trees clear of underbrush. My inner essence started to soar, higher than it had been in months. I turned to TJ and said to him . . . "This is it TJ. This feels like home."

We rounded the small knoll into an open area where the road split and we followed the road to the right. There were buildings close by: a log barn, a couple of odd shaped structures with solar panels on their roofs. At seeing these, TJ sat up at attention. François stopped alongside the long veranda of an old farmhouse.

Once outside and standing in the sunlight, François said, "Help me inside with these supplies, and we will fix you up with something to eat and a place to stay."

I looked around doing a slow 360 and then said to TJ in a laughing gesture, "Should we stay?"

He replied, "Judging from where we've been, this looks a lot like heaven."

"Welcome to The Laurentian Center," François announced.

9 – The Laurentian Center

ALTERNATIVE COMMUNITIES are unlike large rural or urban communities. People living this alternative lifestyle possess a pioneering spirit similar to their ancestors. It definitely requires a desire to venture into the unknown.

François invited us to an extended tour of the property. Thick clouds quickly moved in chilling the air. The hilly terrain, and small fields edged by dense forest awoke my desire to put down roots. Living a lifestyle where I could remain in one place would suit me just fine. How long before I'll be uprooted again?

TJ asked François, as he kicked at a stone along the gravel road, "How much does it cost to live here?"

"The original four couples," François explained, "had the right idea when they bought the property back in the early 70s. They paid \$50,000 for 100 acres and the main building and a log barn. Over the years we sunk another \$150,000 into repairs and new construction. Seven years ago, we purchased an additional 150-acre wood lot, a few miles from here. We husband that lot for much of our construction material. All in all, we now own 250 acres at an investment of nearly \$240,000."

"That is a lot of money," TJ remarked.

"Not really," he replied glancing at TJ. "The properties are owned between eight couples and two single ladies. But we figure that twelve couples would be ideal, and when we reach that number, we'll each be contributing 20 Gs. or so."

"That's fair!" TJ said.

"Well, TJ there are some additional costs. Another ten grand goes toward future property improvements and \$2,000 is kept for ongoing training programs. Then one needs to build a home."

As we walked, snow slowly fell, drifting back and forth through the windless air falling toward the brown grass, melting upon contact. TJ wanted to know why it was necessary to pay for future projects and training upfront.

"By setting money aside for projects and training when people join, we eliminate a major obstacle, the 'no money syndrome.' I think this has proven to be our best decision, for it's a lot easier to set aside money when you have it, than it is when you don't.

"To ensure our success we have agreed to keep up with training from different communities across North America. Alternative communities have developed interesting programs, like conflict resolution, partnering, teamwork, being open with each other, etc. Someone is always coming up with a new course, and we invite trainers to hold seminars here. Locals join in as do people from Montreal. We all benefit, for besides learning and having terrific weekends, we fuel an alternative education system."

We approached a mature grove of hardwood maples spaced 50 feet or more apart making it obvious that this was their maple sugar bush. Entering the forest, we could see the tiny sugar shack at the foot of the hill. We proceeded toward the shack enshrouded by magnificent 150-year-old maples, with their three-foot diameter trunks.

I asked about their alternative energies. "What we have here is the best. Every house has a completely self-sufficient electrical system. The hydro lines you see are used to power the kitchen equipment and one clothes drier which is used in bad weather. During the weekdays when the electrical loads are small in our homes, the excess power produced by the windmill and solar panels is diverted to the main fridges and coolers. What is left over is sold to the local utility.

"The buildings use various methods for heating. Our service building, the one that we ate in, has an old wood-fired boiler. We are moving away from conventional wood to using corn for heat. With six or more wood stoves smoldering away in winter and with a low ceiling of clouds the air is anything but healthy."

"It must have been bad in the old days when everyone heated with wood," TJ said while stroking the bark of a maple.

"Yes, we learned firsthand on that one. Pellet stoves are now our first choice. Since we generate our electrical power, we can deep the intake and combustion fans operating in any emergency. Corn causes gumming in the stove and flue as it burns, but it's still our preference because we need only 25 acres to produce enough for our needs. Wood pellets are made locally, so presently we use both types of pellets."

Walking through the ground-cover created a steady rustling sound as our boots kicked up leaves.

François continued, “Each building has a surface well and the main building has a reservoir to collect rainwater if needed for back-up. We only use a third of the amount of water compared to the national average due to energy efficient devices and fixtures. All the domestic hot water is preheated using solar panels. We are experimenting with various types of septic systems. One uses peat moss as a bio-filter, separating grey water and using half-quart flush toilets. We ensure that our systems are installed and working properly, so that the majority of effluent evaporates.”

Approaching the sugar shack, the sweet smell of old boiled sap from the previous spring radiated from the wooden walls and through the closed door. The shack was filled with equipment in storage until use in the spring. We sat outside on wood chopping blocks enjoying the silence of the forest and taking in the beauty around us as the snow continued to slowly fall.

François pursued his previous topic of energy efficiency. “I find city people ignorant of the necessity for renewable energy and when I’m this close to Nature, it makes me sad. I realize that they are blinded by political secrecy regarding subsidies being paid for oil production, natural gas and electricity.”

TJ interrupted in astonishment. “We’re paying extra money to these already profit-making companies?”

“You bet! If this money was diverted to wind energy production for example, we would cut emissions of carbon dioxide, sulfur and nitrogen oxide down, by more than 13 percent. That is a significant amount considering the number of fish and trees we’re losing as a result of greenhouse gases and acid rain, not to mention the long-term damages.

“We sell our engineering and installation skills to area cottagers, restaurants, and anyone else who is interested. The locals call me the Energy Doctor.”

We continued walking along the sloping hill, edging our way toward its crest. The ground beneath the dampened leaves gave off its rich decaying fragrance.

François continued, “We have few rules here, but there is one that we stick to. No one joins us carrying debts. Debt refers to more than just money. No unresolved divorces, bankruptcies or other emotional debris. These unresolved issues leach the energies of the group, simply because they exist. We’re here to make life easier and more enjoyable for each other. So, we start fresh, without old problems.”

“There is nothing like having a clean start,” I added. “What brings your group together?”

“Each of us is here because we satisfy a specific function or need of the group. Right now, we would like to have a full-time grounds’ keeper and maintenance man. We all help in the seasonal work and special projects, plus every couple gives one full Saturday every month. We’re not homesteaders or a back to the land commune. Some of us simply don’t enjoy physical labor, so we attract those people who can contribute to the community.

“For example, our chef is paid by the group. He is retired, and is happiest in the kitchen. That’s what he wants to do for us. Cook and nothing else. Because of him we gather together for our meals. Often people remain there for hours, socializing, and occasionally on weekends someone will pick up the guitar and we have a party. Eating together has become an important asset. We each give Albert our chef \$285 a month. With that, he purchases all the food, household stuffs, and prepares dinners and lunches for whomever is here. That generally leaves him with \$1000 a month for himself. On Sundays the couples rotate in making a family-style meal which gives him a day off.

“He is happy with this arrangement, and even more important than the money, he knows that his efforts are appreciated. We’re fortunate to have him. As he gets older, and can no longer be our full-time cook he will always remain here, and his presence will be contribution enough.

“All our foods are wholesome; no chemicals added to the animals or plants, no chemically modified products. We either produce our own, or purchase from the locals. Albert says he buys only happy plants and animals, and is gaining respect in the neighborhood due to his continual encouragement for organic produce.”

“I didn’t think such food existed anymore,” TJ said surprised.

“Only if you know where to find it.”

The forest ended at the edge of a rocky grazing field, with the buildings in view. “Well, that’s the tour for today. How about I show you to your rooms?”

The fragrance of the forest floor faded as we neared the main building. The comforting temperature inside was welcomed as François first took us through the exchange store.

He explained, “This is very popular with the ladies, and often there are some nice items here for us men as well. It’s not a free store, it’s an exchange. As people become tired of something, into the store it goes for use by someone else.

“You are our visitors, so what we have is for you to use. By the same token, you’ll be given some work duties to perform. Check in the dining room tomorrow, and you will find a schedule for the next couple of days, with your names on it.”

“That would be great. We’d love to help out,” TJ said.

Upstairs we entered what would be TJ’s room. He would have a tremendous view of the sun rising in the mornings. He then took me to mine. We entered from ground level outside. It even had a shower. I loved it for it had been many months since I had a place to myself, and already I wanted to be alone.

TJ asked, “François, does anybody call you Frank?”

“All the time, TJ. What do people call you when they’re not calling you . . . ?”

With a warm smile and an extended pause, he said, “TJ.”

“Ok, TJ it is. Can’t get much shorter than that. I’ll see you both at six, for dinner.”

THE NEXT MORNING I had unfinished business to attend to. Confident that I could trust François with a package containing the CD, I sought him out, and found him in the workshop. After the usual hellos I explained my need to get a parcel to Toronto. He assured me that he would take care of it himself, and then asked me to follow him. A young woman called Denise wanted to meet me.

We entered a mid-sized log building that had been converted into an office building from a horse stable. Denise was waiting upstairs. She was in her late 20s, petite build with short black hair. She wore a navy-blue skirt, white blouse, and white button-up sweater. Sitting at her computer she appeared almost old fashioned yet charming in a relaxed, self-assured manner. She smiled, and offered no further greeting, leaving me to believe that she was either shy or the quiet type.

“Chris, have a seat!” François directed. With no warning he asked, “We would like you to tell us what your involvement with the NRPA is.”

A rush of apprehension flowed over me, leaving me momentarily speechless.

“I know,” he continued, “that I’m being nosy, but Denise and I have been following various rumors regarding the NRPA on the Net. We are suspicious of their intent.”

Denise was allowing François to do the talking, and he was leading somewhere. I didn’t have to wait long to find out where.

“I have a hunch that your full name is Chris O’Brien! Am I right?” Attempting to act natural and unaffected by this news I responded, “Yes, it is! I don’t normally use my last name!”

“That’s Ok, Chris. You don’t need to justify. Like I said, I’m being nosy. I noticed your name on an e-mail Denise received a few months ago. When yesterday, you mentioned the NRPA, I immediately remembered that e-mail. I just had a feeling.”

Denise said, “It was from Luc in Toronto! He is starting a newsletter called, ‘Fighting for Green’.” The surprising discovery of my identity and my relationship to Luc made me feel uneasy. To gain control of myself, I started asking them questions.

“What is your involvement in all of this?”

Denise said, “Luc and I have been linked for months. He speaks freely about the NRPA, and a large circle of chatters on the Net. We all agree that we’re at the mercy of the NRPA, and that there is little any of us can do.”

François again asked in a direct fashion, “Chris, rumors have started about a bike being found abandoned back in the bush south of here. Helicopters are combing the area for another bike. The fact that I picked both you and TJ up yesterday, with no particular destination, and will little luggage, well . . . it’s hard not to wonder if there is a connection.”

“What’s your point?”

“I figure that since you have been investigating the NRPA, you now have something on them. I know that I am prying, but we are on the same side. If you have something on them, we are offering you our assistance.”

Denise turned and faced me fully. “You can speak to Luc now if you like. He can give you information.”

I knew that there was no point defending myself or denying the truth. They were genuinely wanting to assist. “No, that’s not necessary, Denise. Both of you can help, in fact you are helping now, but be patient. We may have some valuable information. I stress may! But I don’t want it kept here: this is too remote. It will be safer in the big city where many people and resources are available.”

Addressing each of them separately, I said, “Frank, I’m entrusting you with the safe delivery of a package of considerable importance.”

"I'll see that it is hand delivered," he assured me.

"Denise! Have you mentioned to anyone that we are here?"

"No, not yet!"

"Good! No one can know that you are in contact with either TJ or myself. Nor can anyone know that we may have found something. Not even Luc. He and others will be informed by others, when the time is right. If I have discovered something of value, you will know before I will, for any news will be introduced via the Net. If the wrong parties learn of your involvement, your privacy at The Laurentian Center could be lost. For the present, everything has to be business as usual. Ok?"

"Sounds great, Chris. I know nothing," Frank said, and Denise gave a yes nod. The package I gave Frank, was addressed to Sheila, in Toronto, with no return address.

It was weeks before confirmation of the content of the CD's would be known, and longer if they contained nothing of value. In the meantime, I chose to relax; finding a supply of books, some music tapes and a kettle. With these I settled into a long stretch of reading. Having my own private space again made me feel secure and comfortable. TJ spent his time exploring every aspect of the site and getting to know everyone, I, on the other hand, left my room only to do chores and to eat.

After two weeks of near seclusion, I ventured from the sanctuary of my room, and took a long walk in the recently fallen snow. On my return I met TJ, and we slipped into the log office building to chat out of the cold.

TJ said, "The old guy in the kitchen, Albert. His French accent never fails to put a smile on my face. He's quite the joker too. Always trying to get me going with a different version of 'he knows where he can get a cheap Harley for me.' I doubt that he's made the connection between the bikes found by the police and us."

"It's too early but it's only a matter of time. We'll be safe here, unless they come on the property looking for us."

Being apprehended by police was not what I wanted to focus on so I changed the subject. TJ had left the dining room on a few occasions with Louise, a slim, long-haired brunette. Curiously I asked, "Let's talk about something more romantic."

"Like what?"

"What's up between you and Louise?"

"Me mostly!"

"Well, that goes without saying."

"Actually, Chris . . . this is different."

He stopped himself from revealing more, perhaps doubtful that he could confide in me. We seldom shared heart-to-heart feelings, and when we did, they were disguised in humor. But this was an opportunity to change that, so I added, "She seems like she could be sincere, perhaps even intense."

"She's not like the other girls I'm used to."

"Well, that's a relief." My attempts to restrain my humor failed. He glared at me as though he was being my conscience. "Ok. Ok. I know what you mean. When I saw her looking at you at lunch yesterday, I recognized her glow. I had a friend who looked at me in the same way. There's a lot of strength and love behind those eyes."

"Yeah! Louise certainly can get me going. She's sensual more than sexual. I'm finding that out the hard way. But some other time perhaps."

He didn't want to explore the subject further, and chose to switch topics by saying. "Come with me. I have something to show you that will turn you on."

Stepping out of this rustic log building of an office, I realized how much I enjoyed the smell of old wood. I pointed out to TJ that the building was heated with corn pellets. But TJ was already aware of this, explaining how he had helped some lads fill the hopper at the rear of the building after unloading a shipment of sacks of corn from a local supplier.

He led me down the entry road toward a building between two large white pines. Approaching, I could see from the contoured stuccoed walls that it was built of straw bales. I sensed a certain magnificence from this uncluttered structure. Once through the door I was astonished. "Wow! They have left the bales unfinished. This place must be forty feet by forty feet. The walls are, ten, twelve, no fourteen bales high."

"I knew that you would get off on this place," TJ said.

"The feeling is so rustic I imagine that I have stepped back in time."

"The owners, Jean-Paul & Ginette are so well suited to this building, that when they are here, it is like going back 400 years."

The absence of synthetic materials gave the inside an ancient feeling, and a character that could reflect its owners' personality without restriction. The building was organic and I'm sure it could respond to any person's imagination.

Outside again, I asked TJ how he succeeded in communicating with the owners when they spoke no English and he no French.

"I met Jean-Paul on the road, and I said hi. He just stared me in the eyes in the way they all do here. I let him check me out, and found that I was doing the same to him. It was neat! In a few seconds I felt like I had known him forever. I reached out and grabbed him on the shoulder, and said, 'hey man, where are you going?'. He talked to me like I knew what he was saying, and would say whatever came to mind. We were both moving our arms all over the place as we spoke. We had no problem communicating."

"You're great at just being yourself, TJ."

"I'm not complicated, that's for sure. I see something I like and I go for it. No asking myself why." To my surprise he added, "Sometimes you think too much, Chris."

I wasn't prepared for his criticism. I responded, "Everyone is complicated, we're just different."

He said nothing so I continued, "Nothing prevents me from having new experiences."

My words didn't appear to reach him, and in the silence that followed, I pondered the possibility that he was correct. He had hit a thread of truth, for I continued justifying to myself, long after his departure to see Louise. I certainly didn't have his easy way of responding to life, but I had control over my thinking, and he didn't, or so I reasoned.

10 – Planned Chaos

TWO DAYS HAD PASSED when Denise came to my room, and excitedly announced that she had received an anonymous transcript on the Net. It was entitled, ‘activism vulnerability,’ and it contained information regarding the NRPA.

TJ joined Frank and me as Denise handed each of us printed summaries of the latest news. The Toronto group must have worked night and day to decode the disk so quickly, and obviously it contained something of value. The ball had started rolling, and the big moment was at hand.

It reported that the information was an edited version from notes taken at a NRPA Board Meeting which had been provided by an anonymous source. Reading through our copies sparked much emotion, from moments of disbelief to apprehension.

“Look at this!” Frank said with sudden dismay. “They are suggesting that activism is the primary threat to social reform. It says: *‘This segment of society resists organized global planning.’* If one didn’t know better, one would think that the NRPA’s were genuinely concerned for the environment. It’s this type of propaganda which will make fighting them more difficult.”

The transcript went on in detail about the threat posed by activism or more specifically environmentalists, stating that their beliefs swayed people into rejecting the use of natural resources. They were creating untruths by interpreting opposition to clear-cutting for example, as non-support for all forest products, which of course was a falsehood.

In turn they instructed their marketing people to capture the negative effects of overprotection, referencing the protection of wetlands and endangered species. Sarcastically, Frank commented that the NRPA would argue that leaving Nature to manage itself would be overprotection, and to do that would be poor management. As if having wealth as a primary motivation made them wiser than Nature. In dismay, Denise said, “They are crazy! They want to emphasize the shortfalls of environmental research programs. They say, *‘Environmental Reports lack an adequate resource base for proper research, testing and operations.’* They want to destroy the credibility of researchers who report honest findings. This is dangerous stuff.”

Frank added, “They also are discussing the economic base upon which environmental organizations are dependent. They intend to undermine these organizations completely. It says that they will *‘discredit them in the eyes of the public.’* This could stop public donations from reaching these groups! How much worse can this get?”

“Much worse,” Denise said. “Look at the bottom of that same page. *‘Our banking interests should be made aware of the high risk these environmental organizations pose under the present circumstances.’* They are not going to renew loans to these businesses. Hell, they could put our little businesses in that category as well, François.”

TJ said, “They have something here about insurance.”

“Where?”

“Page four, first paragraph: *‘Insurance companies should also be made aware.’* This means that they could refuse their services, right? How can anyone get a mortgage or a loan without insurance?”

“That’s right,” Denise said. “This is getting bad, guys. *‘Testing Agencies should be required to demonstrate that energy saving devices are safe alternative products.’* The NRPA have the influence, and money to stop production of energy efficient technologies by small businesses. This could prevent us from selling our solar panels, François.”

“This is one sad day, people. Thank God that’s the end,” Frank lamented. “Their strategy will hurt the alternative movements exactly as they have planned.”

“This is not the end,” I said. “It’s a decoy.”

All eyes were on me. “It is intended to be a diversion. They want to preoccupy environmentalists. While we’re face-down attempting to survive these obstacles they’ve created, the NRPA can lobby governments without opposition. They know that they can sway the politicians into approving what is best for financial interests. They are masters at it, and governments gave up their control long ago.”

“God, I wish it wasn’t true, but I’m afraid you’re right Chris,” Frank said. “Unfortunately, the majority of the people haven’t yet realized the extent to which their lives are being manipulated. We know that government

no longer represents the interests of the people. Even the well-intentioned politicians are at the mercy of the lobbyists.”

We all sat in silence, digesting what we had read. Finally, TJ got up saying, “We’re not going to solve anything today. See you all later,” and he left the room.

IT WAS EARLY EVENING when I knocked on TJ’s door telling him to come to the office.

“What’s up?”

“Situations have changed. Denise will bring you up to date. She needs your help.”

As we walked, I explained how his old roommate and crime buddy, Guy Larock had been caught by authorities. There was now a warrant for TJ’s arrest and I was sought for questioning.

“Shit, Chris! I don’t like the thoughts of leaving this place. Everyone here treats me as they find me. There’s no judging me about my past here. It’s a great feeling. They all have interesting jobs, and they’re interesting people to be around. I won’t allow harm to come to this place. If they trace me back here, they’ll tear this place apart. It will never be the same. Yet, right now Chris, I honestly don’t feel the urgency to leave.”

“Good, because I don’t feel it either.”

In the office, Denise continued to finish the correspondence she was working on while at the same time speaking to TJ about the Net. She explained to him how her contacts were sending short summaries of the CDs to centers around the world, via e-mail, and how the transcript was being translated into French. “As you know, things have escalated from a simple theft into tactical warfare,” she said.

Denise swiveled around her seat to face us, asking TJ to take a seat. She waited until she had our full attention. She was anything but shy when she spoke.

“As the pressure heats up, we are going to get you both out of the country. TJ, your identity was released this morning. You cannot even go to town, for you will be identified by the locals. The rumor mill has already begun about your past. This situation makes it near impossible for us to get you safely out of the country, especially if you are to use your name, Terry Jeffery.”

His complexion turned red. It was the first time I had heard it said out loud. Denise continued without missing a beat.

“Do you know how or who in Montreal can deliver a birth certificate and passport? Our people in Montreal are prepared to take the necessary risk in getting these for you.

He quickly responded, “I do, but it’s not a job for some intellectual, clean-shaven dude. You will need someone with street smarts, because these guys have their own way of doing business, plus they’ll be suspicious.”

I thought for a moment about the alternatives. TJ couldn’t take care of this himself because he might be identified. He and Louise were having an unusual relationship, one that could enrich both their lives. I’ve been on the street, and I’ve been in worse situations. Now I’m better equipped to handle myself. Taking in a deep breath I announced, “I’ll do it! I’ll take care of this.”

TJ looked at me, closely. “Yeah, you’d be able to handle it. Check out a guy called, Martin. He is a member of the ‘Hells Choice’ bike gang. They used to operate out of a house in Laval. Go to Mickey’s Bar and find Martin. Tell him TJ wants to know if he’s been back to the Milford Pen. I want to know if our tools are still hidden behind the sink in 222. That will get his attention. When he and I received our paroles, we left some tools of the trade there, in case we were ever sent back.”

“TJ, I’m glad I didn’t meet you during that period of your life.”

“If you had, things might have turned out differently. There are parts of my story that I could have done without.”

At that, I leaned back in my chair contemplating what I had just volunteered to do. Denise commented how there was nothing quite like walking blindfolded in a dark room. TJ stood and placed a hand on my shoulder saying, “Just don’t be too brave,” and then he turned to leave. Perhaps he knew me better than I thought.

11 – Being the Pawn

SOLID GREY CLOUDS HOVERED motionless overhead, driving a chill through to my bones. I assisted in the loading of empty boxes and refillable food containers into the station wagon for its weekly supply run to Montreal. Today I would accompany Richard on this trip, and remain there with friends of the Laurentian Center until my agenda was complete. The next few days would be in sharp contrast to the tranquility of the Center.

Reaching the main highway, I adjusted the seat and readied myself for a snooze or meditation, whichever came first. Placing my head against the glass while closing my eyes, the sounds of tires on the road, and the wind, quickly faded into nothingness.

Scenes of my past flashed across my mental screen. Many had been filed away, and labeled, ‘Never to be re-opened,’ yet there I was, pulling these experiences out of their resting place for use in the task ahead. Emerging memories showed school kids beating me for being the Indian White Boy. The taunting developed patterns toward aggression first, ask questions later, which helped stamp out the frustration before it seeped into my emotional roots, paralyzing me with fear. Other similar scenes appeared, from years later, living on the streets of Toronto. All these memories indicated my reaction to intimidation.

Throughout the years that followed, I eventually dealt with these experiences, by seeing them for what they were, through applying various disciplines and willpower. Much of the resentment I hoped was gone, but often when I least expected it a new challenge would spark the cycle to reappear.

The upcoming task of acquiring false identification papers from Martin would throw me back into that world. I chose this opportunity to test myself, to prove once and for all that I had worked through my past experiences, and had them in proper perspective. Surely my emotional wealth would allow me to maintain perspective of who I had become.

The station wagon hit a bump jarring me from my thoughts, and leaving me with the urge to get the upcoming events over and done with, even though they hadn’t begun. I would need to psych myself up for the events that awaited me so I said to Richard, “I hope you’re not in a hurry, I’d like to stop at a hotel along the way.”

“You wish that I stop?” he asked in his best English.

“Yes. There is a tavern north of St-Jerome that I need to check out.” Arriving at the tavern, Richard declined my invitation to join me. Entering the building I hoped I had forgiven myself for the past for if I hadn’t this trip would be a rough ride. Poor Richard remained in the car for almost an hour, before finally coming in to get me. I had just won another game of pool, and was handed my prize beer. Richard knew that I didn’t want to leave, but I chugged down the glass of draft, and let him usher me to the car. After we turned onto the highway, he looked across at me with a half questioning, half disgusted look, and said nothing. I knew that my actions were a shock to him, so I replied in a slurred fashion, “Just getting in shape, just getting in shape,” and then I made myself comfortable against the window and dozed off.

The Montreal group wanted to be sociable and even offered to take me out during the first couple of evenings there. It became ever more difficult to be polite with them, for I was not in a socializing frame of mind. Attempting to prevent offending my hosts, I simply stayed out most nights, and slept into the afternoon. It seemed a fair compromise at the time, for the negative effects of my mission were already making themselves visible.

TJ’s lead was a dead end, for Mickey’s Tavern had burned down and was never rebuilt. So in the first week I toured the roughest bars I could find, hanging out until closing time in the worst of them, always attempting to fit in. Eventually to the point that a part of me felt right at home. In fact, it was better than in my youth, for now I understood the games people played. However, I was losing perspective of myself, as I became the actor I portrayed.

I no longer felt proud of my actions: in bar hopping, taking control of pool tables, flirting with chicks, drinking and smoking. Yet the more I got into it, the wilder I became, and the more I wanted to win. Winning meant getting it over with, so it would end and I could return to my little room and be my old self again. When this desire turned to anger, I knew I had to act quickly or lose myself and all sight of my mission.

I had saved a particular establishment for this moment. In old Montreal I entered a small bar called ‘La Maison Blanche,’ the White House. Inside, it was anything but white, and it took a minute for my eyes to adjust

to the dim light. Stools at the bar counter were filled, strippers paraded about, some wearing nothing, others in various stages of their seductive dance with bra and panties appearing and disappearing.

The waitress took my order and I requested that she place a dollar on the snooker table to reserve me a game, where gang members played doubles at the only two tables. When it came my turn, one guy with a tattoo and a Harley bandanna around the forehead, told me that I needed a partner. Ignoring him, I shoved in my quarters, saying 'It's my game and I'm solo.' While he was sizing me up, deciding what his reaction should be, I racked up the balls, saying to him, 'You'll do,' and I laid twenty bucks on the table, then motioned him to make the break.

I had made my challenge. Now he had to win this game to save face with his buddies. There was much eye communication being made amongst the gang members, but without looking at them I knew I was in control.

When it was my shot, he placed his cigarette on the bank, right down the side of my cue, leaving the smoke snaking its way back and forth along the table. It was a daring symbolic gesture of power which made me want to win the game right there, and then kick his ass as an encore. Losing didn't really matter a hell of a lot by this point. But then, TJ's last words flashed into my mind, 'Don't be too brave.' It was good advice, for without it I might have blown everything right there. So, I let my anger pass, and instead I played him through, and deliberately scratched on the eight ball, allowing him to win the game.

Handing him his winnings, I told him that he had just won double. Giving him a sign to follow me to the bar, I asked him what he was drinking. He hesitated for an instant, then smiling to his buddies, he proceeded to follow.

All the barstools were taken. He tapped two guys with his pool cue, and immediately they moved. I ordered two double ryes, and we waited in silence until they arrived.

He spoke first. "You're not here to play pool."

"No! A friend sent me to give Martin a message."

"What kind of message?"

"He's coming into some money." His expression changed, so I followed by saying, "The sooner I find him the sooner you can collect on your debts."

"What do you know about my debts?"

"Everybody has debts!"

"How long?" He asked.

"Three weeks."

He made a motion with his head toward a girl at the far end of the bar and said, 'See the blue dress with the hooters?'

I looked, saw the same good-looking, black hair girl, I had noticed earlier.

"She likes martinis," and then he took his drink and went back to playing pool.

It was time for my next move, and while I considered how to approach the woman, I received a tap on the shoulder. It was her.

She whispered in my ear, "Like the way you worked the dude."

"Have a seat! You look like a martini lady," and a drink appeared without instructions to the bartender. "Are you working the floor?"

"I'm working, period, Anglo," she answered abruptly, causing me to respond with a similar directness.

I asked, "How about some pillow talk, outside at three a.m.?"

"If you're there," she replied and then she took her drink and left. At three a.m. I waited outside the hotel with the taxi driver, and when she arrived, we drove to her apartment.

SHE LIVED IN A LARGE second floor bachelor flat, with a combined living-bedroom. Opposite the entrance was a short corridor that led to the bathroom and a kitchen. It was clean, nicely decorated, and in no way resembled the personality of the woman I had picked up at the bar. Once inside though, she locked the door behind me, so that I couldn't make off with her belongings. She then picked up some night attire and headed for the shower, without saying a word.

While she was gone, I went through her small library. She had books on astrology, alternative health, and spiritual self-help. This was more my style, and I began to relax. When she returned, she appeared less defiant, almost holy compared to the earlier part of the evening.

I slid a book off the shelf by James Redfield, and shook it to draw her attention to it. The author raises the concept of how we steal energy from each other, so I asked her how she survived amongst people who were constantly fighting to take control of her energy.

"We all try stealing from each other. This is just how it is. It's part of the game. There is no bullshitting with my crowd. When someone tries to overpower us as a group, we quickly set them in their place. It's usually an outsider, and often it leads to a beating or a minor gang clash.

"Out there in suburbia, it's more difficult. In that world; society tells people to be nice, be good, don't rock the boat. They sit around in their sterile offices, and put up with co-workers and managers, as they leach their way into each other's soul. I've watched people just stand there, pretending to be nice, while the other person sucked them dry. Then they feel drained, depressed, and wonder why."

Her sharp criticism was infectious, so I threw in a little negativity of my own by saying, that they blame it on the lighting and the air conditioning. We explored this idea further and I recognized that she had a clear grasp of her reality and how to survive in it.

She said, "I lived in their world once. But I didn't let those leaches get away with their sucky habits. I criticized managers for lecturing me in their intimidating, degrading fashion. I stopped salespeople before they started their seductive dance of giving their energy, in order to take my money.

"When weak men in high places are threatened, they are far more dangerous than that dude you messed with tonight. I gave up on that deceiving business world, and chose a lifestyle that I'm comfortable in. We speak our mind, and we don't take any bull," she said.

She had explored the idea more than I, and I wanted to understand this concept of intimidation better, so I said, "When two people are truly sharing, I don't believe that there is a need to take anything from the other, because they are already getting more than they can handle."

"Everyone gives to receive," and at that she threw me a towel and told me to go shower. I was just getting started, so I challenged her. "When I give energy to a person, I receive more energy in return."

"From where?" She asked with a smirk.

"From a connection with my inner being. Call it anything you like, but it's equal to what I get from another person and more."

She shook her head slowly, as she thought about this, and then I left for my shower, to allow her to dwell on it. When I returned, she was sitting on the bed, brushing her hair and I began feeling close to this total stranger. So I sat beside her on the bed, feeling calmer than I had in many days.

She said, "I knew that you were not one of us when I watched you play pool. You are just dipping into this world, and you will leave after you've gotten what you're after. This is a game to you. It's a game to me too . . . but it's my game. . . I play by my rules. You're borrowing other peoples' rules, and you think they are yours, but you're fooling yourself. You don't belong here, this isn't you. Go back to where you came from, Anglo."

Lying across her bed observing the patched ceiling, I realized that she was right. Was this trip simply a voyage for me to realize once and for all, that all aspects of life are games, not to be taken seriously? That the bad experiences of my past were just experiences, neither good nor bad? Was I still caught up in feelings of guilt? She planted a seed of realization, but there was no time here to dwell on it. Again, the urgency to get this job finished rose in me.

As she continued brushing her long, shiny, black hair, with one bare leg tucked under her, and a towel wrapped tightly around her, I explained how I needed to meet Martin. She wasn't surprised, and as it turns out, she was his woman. The guy I beat at pool had signaled for her to approach me as she had.

THE NEXT AFTERNOON we taxied to Martin's gang-house. It had snowed overnight, and the temperature turned mild the next day. The melting snow made the street slushy, and the walkways hadn't been shoveled from previous storms. The neighborhood looked unkept, and the only sign of life was snow sliding off metal roofs crashing down on snow-covered lawns as we approached.

She gave one hard knock on the door. No one answered. Waiting made me tense. Then two men appeared from the side of the house. One stood in the snow and watched me, while the other studied the street. The one on the street came forward and quickly frisked me. Then he grabbed my biceps, and pushed me through the door.

At that point I began to consider that this had all fallen together too easily. I had allowed myself to be set up. A deep panic came over me, but I was in too far, and there was nothing to do, but see it through, and keep my

cool. Once inside, the girl disappeared, and I was held against the wall with the guy's forearm pushing on my throat. Then Martin came forward.

He started by saying, "So you know a friend of mine, eh? He can't be much of a friend to send you here." Hidden voices laughed. Someone yelled, "Stick him."

I remained silent, and Martin asked me something else, and I didn't even hear his question. I was trying to restrain my emotions by staring at this guy with his arm in my neck. Finally, Martin motioned him to release me.

While still rubbing my throat, I told him how a mutual buddy sent me to ask him a question. I said, "He wants to know if you've been back to the Milford Pen. Something about you and him leaving a couple of tools there for your next visit." Everyone in the house seemed to hear those words.

He said, "You know this guy, eh?"

"Yeah, TJ and I met up in Temagami."

He went on to ask where TJ was, and I told him, "It's not where he is that's important; it's where he wants to go."

Then he turned and walked into the living room, yelling to the gang, "This guy is here on business. Get him a beer."

That was it. I felt no more threat from that point on and I never saw the girl again. I arranged for one of the people from the Montreal Center to take care of the final transaction, and I returned home with Richard the following day, after another supply run.

FEW WORDS WERE SPOKEN between Richard and me on our drive back to the Laurentian Center, for I wanted only to be back in the recluse of my room, far away from the crazy world I was leaving. My body was tied up in knots, and I longed to rid myself of the load of emotions that this trip had triggered inside me.

TJ met me enroute to my room, and I ignored his questioning gaze.

"That tough, was it?" he said.

"I want to be alone."

"You sure? You look like you need to drop your drawers."

"Fuck off," I said, not caring how he took it.

"I know what you need," and he disappeared behind me.

Inside my small yet private space I tossed my bag on the floor, and headed for the shower. While showering, I took comfort in imagining the layers of persona I had become, for two weeks, washing off me and disappearing into the drain. If only it could be that easy. I knew I had to deal with my emotions before I could be free again, or had I ever been free? These feelings had always been there waiting to be dealt with, and now the time had come to do so, hopefully once and for all.

Drying my hair, I noticed a movement through the crack in the curtain. TJ was stretched out on my sofa with his boots resting on the coffee table. Part of me was happy to see him, and the other wasn't so sure. I finished towel drying myself, while finding it difficult to return to the room. He was the only person that I could tell my story to, and yet I didn't want to relive it so soon. When I was partially dressed, I rounded the corner and entered the room where he sat. He had his hand extended towards me, holding a drink as he rattled the ice around in the glass. I knew it would be my favorite.

Taking the drink, I sat, and let the ice slide along the inside surface of the glass, in silence. Finally, he said, "So you didn't take my advice?"

"Ah, but I did. It probably saved my ass," and slowly I began my story. It didn't take long before sharing the episode became rewarding and he allowed me to explain every detail without interruption.

When I finished, he said, "You did well, my friend. So why are you all bent out of shape?"

"I had to become someone I used to be. Someone who carried around a lot of unwanted baggage. Someone I should never have been in the first place."

"If you lived it, then it's you. If you don't like it, you can't just say that it's not you anymore."

"I became that person years ago in an effort to survive, but now, I'm much more than that person ever was, TJ. In going to Montreal, I chose to dip back into my past, and relive it as a test, and now I have to deal with the consequences."

"If you knew that going to find Martin was going to cause you so much trouble, why did you go?"

"Because I believe in teamwork. Besides there was a need. I knew I could handle it."

“You did, but why put yourself through the pain? I mean I could have gone myself!”

“We’re a team TJ, and you had other business.”

“What other business?”

“Louise!”

“That could have waited.”

I inquired about their time together and his brief overview made it clear that it was no ordinary relationship. I said, “You take your experience with her too lightly. Think about it, TJ,” I said in a challenging voice.

“If the tables were reversed,” he said, “I would have told you: Do your own dirty work. If we’re going to accomplish a victory over the NRPA, everyone has to be able to take care of themselves including me. Otherwise, we’ll end up being a bunch of sympathetic do-gooders, always carrying the next guy along and not going anywhere.”

“That’s not how I work, TJ. You’re not running solo any longer. Each of us has our own personal agenda, and we need to play our individual piece within that team. Victory will happen when we are true to ourselves, not when we are operating on a sense of duty.”

“So,” he asked, “Are you giving me shit for not going to Montreal, or are you patting me on the back for staying here?”

“You’re missing the point. Sure, you could have gone to Montreal, but you didn’t respond to the call. You were honest; you chose to follow your agenda with Louise. So, I chose to pick up the ball as I should have, because it was my agenda. It was my turn at being the pawn.”

“Had you chosen to go to Montreal out of a sense of duty, you would have robbed me of an experience that was rightfully mine. And another thing! If you had acted out of duty you would have missed out on a special moment in time with Louise. It may have never happened again. On top of that, you would have denied me discovering mysteries about myself that needed cleaning up.”

“I hear you, Chris. But I still feel that something isn’t right.”

“Like what?”

“Like you’re trying too hard.”

“What?” There was that feeling again and the wanting to justify my view. How could this be? Frustrated, I continued, “What I’m saying to you is: don’t criticize me for following my guts.”

“Ok, Man! I just felt that it needed to be said. Maybe I picked a bad time.”

He was walking about the room now, and I was following him with my words while I said, “We may have to kickstart one another from time to time, or even carry each other, but I’ll abandon you as fast as you would me if I feel you are taking too much of my energy.” My words sounded hollow, and I realized as I spoke that he was not challenging me. I felt threatened, but why? To soften my criticism I added, “I appreciate your honest feedback even if you are wrong.”

Despite his criticism I was feeling more relaxed. To lighten the conversation I asked, “What has happened to you while I’ve been gone? You sound like you’re picking up the torch of righteousness.”

“Much has happened between Louise and me,” he said while looking to the floor shaking his head as though not fully believing it himself.

He continued, “I feel this activism spirit rising in me. When I started this adventure with Louise, I figured that it would end in a couple of days. Now I know that it has no end.”

“I’ve finally discovered a passion, Chris. A passion to protect this amazing process I’m experiencing. Both with Louise and inside myself. There is so much to explore. At last, I have something to fight for.”

“I’m impressed.”

“I don’t think I could ever go back to being the TJ I was a few months ago. I won’t!”

“I welcomed you aboard the night we did that bike cruise down Highway 11.”

“That was an entire lifetime ago,” TJ interjected.

“By the way,” I said, changing the subject, “I’ll be gone tomorrow. Be back when I get here.”

“Where to?”

I managed to work in a smile and said, “I need to hug a tree.”

“Watch it don’t fall on you,” he warned. Then he left, and the room felt empty and cold in his absence. I had to deal with my dilemma without delay.

12 – Passage Through the Void

HELL IS A STATE OF MIND which most people seldom desire to visit. However, on occasion, our life brings us face to face with an aspect of ourselves that requires serious adjustment, and that process can take us into the fiery pits. In my case, I was there of my own choosing.

After a restless night of worrisome dreams, I awoke tired, my thoughts filled with doubts for past decisions including those beyond my control. Speaking to myself as I dressed helped maintain my focus, even though my words were negative jabbering. ‘I was a fool to leave the Reserve when I was a teen. I should never have told anyone about my childhood dreams. Maybe Dad would still be alive and I would never have had to know native life. Maybe then I would be normal instead of running all over the country after some stupid vision.’

I gathered a few supplies from the exchange store for my excursion into the snow-covered forest: doing so quietly and quickly not wanting to be seen in my present state of mind. My half-made plan was to walk in the opposite direction until all my frustration was gone. How long that took or how far didn’t matter. The miles that would separate me from Montreal symbolized all that I wanted to leave behind.

By 5:30 a.m. I was across the field, and at the edge of the forest. It was too dark to enter the canopied forest without running the risk of damaging an eye by an unseen branch so I sat upon a stump awaiting daylight. The darkened forest offered escape while the open field represented exposure to the world. Feelings of vulnerability to the openness became intolerable, and soon I left my perch to enter the protective cover of the trees.

As visibility improved, my progress quickened, until by daylight I had set a pace as fast as my snowshoes would travel without catching in branches causing me to fall into the three-foot deep snow. My movements barely distracted my attention from images of defeat and failure that magnified themselves, consuming all reasoning. Self-persecution took hold, producing repetitive questioning of why, why, why?

I discovered that holding a branch and using it to strike out at trees as I traveled helped relieve some of the pain, I was allowing myself to feel. There was no logic to my thoughts, simply raw emotion, unjustified frustration, confusion and rejection, like that of a fool. Eventually, I became contemptuous toward my parents for having died young, at Grandfather for being Native, and at God for making my life difficult. I struck harder and harder at the tree trunks, breaking my branch, then finding another.

Finally, one thin branch that I hit sprung back at me, slapping me hard across the face. The sting of it stopped me in my tracks. The pain increased my justification for being angry at myself. I threw away my hitting stick, and proceeded, holding a glove of cold snow against my cheek to numb the pain. I continued to wander while feeling trapped, worthless, and not concerned if my life was suddenly to end.

The years spent on the Reserve when my peers labeled me ‘Indian White Boy’ had marked me to this day. In previous depressions, when those memories circled through my mind, I experienced regret, and sometimes guilt, occasionally taking comfort in reliving the experiences as a way to re-balance my frustration. During that period, I stopped caring about life, and became mad at God as I was on this day, and as odd as it may seem, it all made perfect sense.

As the day progressed, my depression and my self-destructive attitude seemed bottomless. I had fully explored my contempt for the world, and my lack of self-worth; denouncing all past experiences, and blaming all things in existence. My physical endurance continued to deplete until my snowshoes moved ever so slowly. The activity in my brain lessened as I emptied emotions of anger, hate, and contempt.

Eventually I stopped in front of a large white pine tree, and gazed upward into its thick canopy. This gave me a sense of my individual presence, separating me from the person whom I had previously condemned. I walked up to its massive trunk, placed my forehead against its coarse bark, and asked for its forgiveness. At that instant, came an uncontrollable release of anxiety that brought me to tears.

As I stood with my arms wrapped around that tree, I knew only that I was empty of any and all emotion related to the past, and I slipped to the ground still clinging to the tree.

My next memory was of waking up from a deep sleep in the face of darkness and the cold winter snow beneath me. Curled up into a fetal position, I lay there on the snow cuddled against the trunk of that old tree. It was serving as my surrogate companion. I had no more hate left in me. I pulled out my sleeping roll and sought more comfort from the trunk of my friend, the tree.

DURING THE NEXT DAY, I was completely empty of all feeling. If a thought entered my mind, it left unchallenged for I had no energy to contemplate or ponder. I only wanted to remain free from thought, for I had finally found an obscure peace within myself.

Wandering slowly, without thought, was comforting. Progress was slow to the point that by noon I had circled back within a hundred feet of my friendly tree. I went to it and hugged it again, thanking it for taking care of me through the previous night.

With one ear pressed against its bark, I heard a voice echoing from within its dense interior. With eyes closed I see Grandfather climbing the hill toward me. He is within the tree, and is now a young man of perhaps my age.

‘My Son,’ he said. ‘I have an old friend who wishes to greet you.’ He turned towards the forest behind him, and said, ‘Here is My Son,’ then turning back to me, he said, ‘Meet the *Spirit of Appreciation*.’

Surprised, I immediately open my eyes. The world around me had changed. The snow-covered forest was now brilliant with sharp, crisp outlines. A high-pitched chatter filled the air, as though I was picking up previously inaudible sounds.

This was the same forest I was in just a moment earlier. Now I was allowing it to share itself with me. All aspects of itself were ready to greet me. Its vitality continued to increase as I slowly focused from tree to tree, from branch to branch.

I announce, ‘The forest is a living organism! . . .’

This new appreciation began filling the emotional void left from the previous day of self-persecution. The beauty around me and my openness to it gave me solid ground upon which to stand and peer over the edge of my precipice.

I moved from tree to tree, observing smaller, less obvious elements of Nature. Each step revealed something new: an unusual formation in the bark, the chewed end of a branch where a moose had fed, or a dead leaf swinging upside down. These discoveries appeared astonishingly beautiful, for I had never noticed such simplicity. By evening I was convinced that I would never again leave the forest, nor would I ever have a need to be with another human being again, ever.

I had found my home of peace.

ON THE MORNING of the third day, I became aware of my hunger, and that I hadn’t been drinking enough water. I lit a fire, removed the small pail from my pack, filled it with snow and let the snow melt on the fire. Breaking some branches from a birch tree, I made tea. My mental processes were functioning almost normally again. The previous day’s desire to remain in the forest was replaced with the realization that my appreciation for Nature was one small part of myself, and for balance I required challenges not found in the forest. I was pleased with myself for having experienced so much in a few days. I felt cleaned, refilled, rejuvenated, but still frail inside.

After my rest I continued to roam, with my attention returning to my life experiences. I accepted the good and bad, for making me the total person that I am. By mid-afternoon I began to consider my location in the forest. My steps in the snow took on a new determination and a new sense of purpose, yet I had unfinished realizations to discover. But would they be revealed to me here in the forest or in the months to follow?

It was mid-afternoon and I lay back on the snow watching the cloudless sky through the treetops, and explored a peaceful part of my being that made itself more noticeable on this trip, an aspect that preferred silence and tranquility, was brave but not challenging, and enjoyed emotion over information. More than anything, I wanted to fall in love with these aspects of myself. Just to bathe in my own self-worth, accepting who I am, with no projections, no planning, no expectations. Like the small branches not concerned with good or bad days. Perhaps I could discover how to accept myself without wanting more. Accomplishing this would give me ultimate joy.

Observing the tips of a high branch silhouetted against the clear sky, I considered the similarity between this thin branch and myself. I am often in situations that leave me suspended, with nothing below me; often letting the wind direct which way I will bend. But the branch had a talent that I lacked; it had discipline. It didn’t care if the sun shone or not, however I only wanted bright days. How does one allow situations to enrich one’s life while not being concerned about the easy times, likes and dislikes?

Following the horizontal branch as it joined with others, gaining in thickness, and then descending its lengthy trunk, I acknowledged that all my experiences support me, as did the trunk support this branch. It is my

past that allows me to soar to great heights, giving me the confidence to try new situations, explore new people, grasp new challenges. Every day I live adds strength to my trunk.

At the base of the tree, I let my eyes follow the shadow it created on the snow. It went straight away from me, then intersected with another from a half-fallen tree, which also crossed shadows with another branch that had become hung up in trees, thus connecting the shadows with the first. This all formed a triangle, but not just any triangle on the snow, for I sensed that this one held great meaning. As I approached the shadows a knowingness surfaced. An exploration was about to begin. Standing at the first intersecting point I suddenly began speaking out loud.

“This first point represents our need for *Honesty to Self*. Not honesty to others! At this level, others don’t enter into the picture. Ultimately, we are all responsible to ourself in relationship to the universe.

“Honesty grows along the Path of Reflection beginning at our basic need for sensation. Then our transitional need for creativity culminates in this final challenge of honoring what we have become.

“When we are not honest with ourselves, we attract that which we are not, instead of that which we are. It leaves us with an emptiness that can be no other way. Honesty to self means just that, being truthful to oneself, and then surrounding oneself with reflections that are no less than what we understand ourselves to be.

Calmly I walked to the next point, and labeled it, *Love of Self*. “Love of Self follows the Path of Relationships. It culminates in total appreciation of ourselves, nothing less. This is where we accept who we are: our physical imperfections, our liabilities, our assets, and our spiritual abilities.

“It doesn’t mean that we choose to keep the undesirables, but it does mean that we no longer disguise them as not existing. We discover that we are made up of all the bad mixed in with the good, no less, and just as importantly, no more.

“No more?” I questioned, only to immediately answer my own questioning.

“Yes! We can only love that which we identify with.

“How about our full potential,” I said out loud.

“Full potential is what we presently are. What we presently love in ourselves. No more!”

I had no idea that such profound answers were at the tip of my consciousness, waiting for me to simply access them when I was ready. The knowledge revealed itself as another aspect of myself wanting to be honored and accepted by myself. The information continued to flow.

“On the path of relationships our basic need for sex opens this door and leads us to the discovery of companionship, sharing, and intimacy. We learn to love, experience being loved, and how love exceeds the rewards of sex. Shared love also gives birth to a new life in the form of conceived ideas, and bonding relationships.

“The inner need for Love of self, is not self-adoration, or preoccupation with self. It is possessing such great love of our self, that we become God the Lover. We nourish ourselves as the true lovers that we know ourselves to be. We would not tolerate putting energy into situations that do not reflect who we have become.”

Approaching the third intersecting shadow, I understood how being honest to self and having love of self would automatically result in the experience of ultimate confidence. This point was called *Trust in Self*. It became clear that at the highest expression of survival and confidence, trusting in self was the final result.

“This is the Path of Thrusting. Thrusting outward to the world, and beyond into the universe. Our basic driving force to survive takes us along this path, then evolves into confidence. Confidence becomes the expression of our successes at these endeavors. Trusting in Self is not about possessing power. It is claiming what is rightfully ours, because it exists to be appreciated, and goes to the taker. It is similar to breathing, for air is there for the taking, without guilt. Trusting in Self is claiming that which we can honor and nourish.

“It is also knowing situations will work out. That spirit is in control, having nothing to prove, no need for acceptance from others. It means having no ideals to live up to, for we exemplify the highest ideals. We are our own person, responsible for the agenda we have chosen. We will do or not do precisely what is needed and no more. It is our full expression of wealth as a human being. It is being that which we have become.”

This was more difficult for me to grasp than the other needs, so I pondered my words for a few minutes. Then it registered. At every interaction in life, trusting in self, is like knowing that a street light will remain green allowing us to pass. If it turns red forcing us to stop, then look around and observe what we might have missed. That’s trusting in life.

There it was! My highest Inner Needs. It was all here, right before my eyes. A lifetime of searching all answered by shadows on the snow.

ON THE FOURTH DAY, I remained by my fire, content in my surroundings of hardwoods set neatly about me. The late morning sun created slender black lines that followed the smooth contours of my white blanket of snow. A low sounding noise came from a distance, then the silence returned.

These natural elements are kindred to my spirit; where else could I battle with my past and come up a winner? I sat calmly amidst the purity of my surroundings, until a movement between the distant trees registered the rhythmic sound of snowshoes. Someone was soon in view and approaching intently. The increasing sound of steps became the loudest noise I had heard in four days. In those last minutes of solitude, I thanked the process that brought me to this new sense of being, grateful for all my past, hopeful that I would always accept what came to me.

As the snowshoer approached, I was pleasantly surprised by my visitor, for at a hundred yards I knew it was Louise. Her colorful winter clothing clung tightly to her lean body, and her shiny black hair showed below her woolen tuque.

"Hi, Chris! I have to open my coat. I am so hot after climbing this hill. I brought some sandwiches, and water. I figured you might have left without either."

"Yes, I've been fasting, so I'll enjoy whatever you brought for me. I'm surprised you found me."

"I followed your tracks until you went into the swamp; and I told myself that there was no way I was going in there. You must have really wanted to be hard on yourself to head into those thick balsams and spruce."

"Yes, it has been an intense four days. I wandered aimlessly for the first day, feeling abandoned, upset with life, in Hell as they say, hating my past, and . . . well, the world too."

"The following day I felt drained of all emotions, in the pure sense. Like I had poured out a lifetime of anger and I was ready to be filled again. Then, I began to appreciate the small aspects of life and fall in love with Nature all over again, and eventually myself."

"That word appreciation is the secret, isn't it?" Louise said.

"Well, this is what was happening to me yesterday as I began to love myself and appreciate all my experiences, even the most difficult moments. With the love came a greater understanding, and my experiences took on new clarity. All my regrets turned into joys. It became a process of personal appreciation and forgiveness that eventually led into the Ever Present Now."

"That state of mind," Louise said, "where every situation is new. What a terrific state of mind to be in!"

"Yes! Today, I'm simply glad I had the opportunity."

"I figured that you would eventually lighten up on yourself, and head back on the easiest route. So I followed this trail knowing that we would meet sooner or later."

"You look absolutely radiant, Chris. Your face looks almost transparent and five years younger."

"I dumped a ton of problems on these trees. But I gained more than I lost. I have something to show you."

I removed from my pack a piece of birch bark and handed it to her saying, "I call this 'Shadows on the Snow.'"

"What did you use to draw it?"

"I took a piece of half-burnt fire wood, and whittled it to a point. It served the purpose."

She studied my drawing for awhile before speaking.

SHADOWS ON THE SNOW			
Our Needs	The Three Paths		
	Path of Reflection	Path of Relationships	Path of Thrusting
Basic Needs	Sensation	Sex	Survival
Transitional Needs	Creativity	Companionship	Confidence
Misinterpreted Needs	Destructive Abuse	Relationship Abuse	Confidence Abuse
Inner Needs	Honesty to Self	Love of Self	Trust in Self

“Sensation, Sex, Survival! These are our Basic needs. You figure that they evolve into transitional needs, as we strive to know ourselves better. Is that it, Chris?”

“Yes!”

“So!” she said, as she interpreted my drawing, “When we finally decide to be ourselves, we find that all we need is Honesty, Love and Trust. Wow, Chris! This looks simple.”

“It is, and right now I am what you read!”

She sent me a warm confirming grin. “So, these transitional needs are part of the paths to self-discovery?”

“Yes!”

“What this tells me, Chris, is that when we truly identify with our inner needs, energy flows back over our entire being enriching our creativity, our companionship and our confidence.”

“I agree!”

Louise said, “When I admire a piece of art, I occasionally receive more energy than I am giving. And when I’m working on a piece, the energy just keeps returning to me. I never quite knew from where. I had thought that perhaps it came from the universe or God. But this shows me that the energy rains down over me, coming from within. From me! At those moments when I’m honestly loving and trusting what I am doing, I am also satisfying my inner needs. That’s why the energy flows back to me. It’s all the same energy: Love, God the Universe, it’s all the same. It’s me! This is so beautiful, Chris.

We paused while a flock of tiny snow birds fluttered close by, feeding on seeds that clung to a young bush.

“What’s this other triangle at the bottom?”

“I added that idea this morning, after thinking about yesterday’s experience. That triangle represents our Misinterpreted Needs. They are just as real as any other and are born out of worry, fear and hate. Some people are completely controlled by their misinterpretations due to circumstances in their youth.

“As we all unconsciously attempt to fulfill our inner needs, we sometimes misinterpret them and end up supporting the opposite. We all dip into that area from time to time.

“Gee, Chris, this really applies to us all! This discovery is worth spending four days in the bush.”

“It sure put perspective on my life,” I said.

“Sex, intimacy and love of self! This leads me to why I’m here, Chris. I want to tell you a story. I couldn’t wait until you returned. But first let’s eat.”

We toasted our sandwiches over the hot coals, and when we were finished, she began her story.

“TJ thinks that you can answer an important question for me. We have had some interesting experiences together that I call ‘the tears.’ ” With a shy grin she added, “You better make yourself comfortable because this is a remarkable story of how TJ and I went beyond sex and beyond intimacy, and perhaps even beyond love of self.”

“I am honored that you wish to share this with me Louise and I’m curious.”

13 – Love vs Sex

LOUISE LET HERSELF fall backward into the soft snow, forming a comfortable seat for herself, while I placed my bedroll on a log by the fire. When I was settled, she began the story of her and TJ's relationship together.

"I fell in love with TJ's spirit the first time we made eye contact. It was the evening you both arrived. I saw in his eyes a spirit longing to be discovered. He identified his spirit as being his confidence which helped him survive. That confidence gave him a cool image that borders on being a tough guy, yet he's so gentle.

"Sex was not my priority, in fact, I have learned that prolonging the sexual act, draws two people closer together. I have had my share of empty relationships where good sex was all that kept the relationship going, and this was not what I was after. Instead, I wanted nothing less than the real thing. I had finally met a man with whom that might be possible."

Staring into the fire Louise added, "Society looks upon sex as the most intimate experience we can have. As a result, sex becomes our primary target. This has never been true for me, Chris. I know that the single most important desire for humans, is our need to be loved. We all get confused when we approach the fine line that separates sex from love. Believe me I enjoy sex, but love has more value.

"Late one evening TJ and I were alone in the lounge. He stood facing me while I held onto the pant loops and leaned backwards. I was absorbed in the beauty of his expression. Soon he did the natural thing: he pulled me close, and tried to kiss me. I turned away from him and placed my head against his shoulder. I sensed his predicament, but I just wanted to prolong the romantic adventure as long as I could.

"After a few minutes he commented on the natural odor of my hair." Louise laughed as she explained that it was his simplistic sincerity that she held dear to her, and then she continued her story.

On one occasion TJ misinterpreted my sensuality as seduction, thinking that he was being teased. His mood changed to defiance but this only lasted a short time.

I apologized. "French women are not shy, TJ. We express our feelings through hugging and touching. People often confuse our sensuality with sex. It's easily done, because the two emotions travel along the same road. They are just on different lanes, with sex being in the exit lane."

TJ said, "I'm prepared to cruise with you down that highway. Who knows what new turns lie ahead."

I said, "It is fairly obvious to most people, when someone makes the switch from friendship to sex, because sex grounds the energy like a lightning rod. It stops the energy from building."

"Like having a climax," he said. "Then let the energy build! I can handle it!"

And so, we did. We discovered that we were sharing the simplest of things, yet they fulfilled us in an unusual manner. One evening in my room, I became fascinated by his physique, and asked him to stand still for me. I walked in a full circle around him, observing, while he watched me, saying nothing. From about three or four feet from him; I said, "I can feel the aura of your body, TJ. It is allowing itself to be admired."

"You're touching me with your eyes. I can feel you from where you are."

"I'm simply loving the energy from your body."

He told me later, that as I was watching him, it became a major turn on. "You're leading me somewhere, aren't you?" he said.

At that point I knew where I was leading us, although he still hoped that he would get lucky and eventually score with me. However, he accepted that I was in control, and well aware of his thoughts. Whenever he focused on sex, I would push him away, ever so gently, while looking him in the eye the whole time. I expected better from him, because I knew he was special. I had not yet discovered just how special.

One evening we agreed to go snowshoeing the following day. The next morning, we walked across many neighboring fields. Previous winds had blown the snow into drifts along the edge of the forest so it was easy going. We walked for hours carrying our snowshoes, not realizing that we had them until we started back home.

We explored our similarities that day. Despite our dissimilar past, we resonate in much the same way, and we share similar views on life. Many times, we found ourselves arm in arm, facing each other, surrounded by the white landscape, looking into each other's eyes. We were without awkwardness despite still being strangers. We had just begun our discovery of each other, or rather the discovery of ourselves through each other. On the way back I took his hand and held it. Even through my woolen mittens I experienced a thrill.

He said, "I've never allowed myself to hold hands before. I always believed that this was for children with their mothers. I had sex before I even kissed a girl, so I bypassed this stage. With you this is sexual foreplay."

Much of the time was spent saying nothing, and doing even less, however that's not to say nothing was happening. We were totally immersed in exploring the energy we felt building between us. The new feelings we experienced filled us to the point that we often forgot to take our meals; for the energy between us was far more nourishing. One sunny afternoon as I sat across his lap, he explained how his passion for me was changing. He said, "It's not just in my groin anymore, Louise. It's in my arms, up the side of my body; it's the fire in my chest when I feel the pressure of your breast against me. I imagine that my passion is leaving my groin, and is going to my solar plexus, deep in here," he said rubbing his abdomen.

"I've always been in love with women in general. My philosophy was, why focus on one when they're all so great. There were women who tried to get me to settle down, and they made great friends, but my primary interest was sex. Now I think that I'm experiencing the difference between sex and love. What is it about being with you, that has me looking at things so differently? If I turn out weird after all this, I'm holding you responsible."

"You do that. We're just getting started," I said as I pinched his armpit and then found myself quickly sliding off his lap onto the floor.

After some joking around I said, "I want to give you a full body massage tomorrow night." His response was slow in coming for I sensed that he was a little nervous. I believe he was concerned he might embarrass himself if his dog started wagging its tail. He knew by this time that I was aware of those moments when he translated our experience into sex, for immediately I would move away from him until he regained control. Not to say that every moment wasn't an absolute turn on for both of us. Believe me it was, but I refused to focus on my sexual urges and I hoped he could do the same. He was getting better at it.

I said, "In a sense this massage is going to be a test for each of us. I know you won't judge me, and I won't judge you."

"You won't have to," he said as he accepted my offer for the massage.

That evening during the massage, I became consumed by the beauty of the man. I am referring to more than his excellent body, which is a ten plus. But while I worked his muscles, I was suddenly overcome with emotions. Through the entire massage I was looking through watery eyes. Feelings of intense joy were mixed with sadness. I didn't mention it to him because I had no understanding of what was occurring to me.

This was his first introduction to massage yet he became completely relaxed. So much so that when he rolled over on his back, he never even considered being self-conscious. When I finished, I covered him with a towel and then I rolled up in a blanket and lay on the floor. Three hours later he awoke. I helped him into his bed, and we fell asleep together.

The next evening, he wanted his turn. When he asked me, he looked like a school kid asking a favor of his teacher. He said humorously, "I think I'm ready, Teach! If you are?" It was cute watching such a brave man be concerned about controlling his natural instincts.

In my room the next evening, I had candles burning, heated oils laid out on a blanket on the floor when he arrived. Eventually I felt the time was right, so I removed my clothing in the washroom and came out wrapped in a towel. I lay face down on the blanket, and removed my towel. It was the first time I had been nude before him and I had difficulty controlling my sexual urges. But he was indeed ready, for I felt no sexual emotion from him, which allowed me to relax.

Keeping my eyes closed I turned over on my back when it was time. He hesitated as if not knowing what he should touch and how. But he swept all doubts aside, and dug right back into the flow. It was then I realized I was falling in love with him as a whole person. It was stronger than any other previous relationship.

When he finished, he rolled me up in a soft blanket and carried me to the couch where we sat and cuddled. He told me, "During the massage, I became lighter than usual. My senses were heightened like never before. My hands were touching a goddess, and as I watched these hands slide over your body, they appeared like the hands of someone else."

"Maybe you had a glimpse of a past life."

"No! I don't think it's reincarnation. It is much more. It has tremendous power, and clarity. When I focused on these hands on your body, I could feel tears forming in my eyes. I figured the power behind those tears would totally overtake me yet I was actually ready to cry. But the tears never came. Instead, I was left with the feeling of power. It was a bizarre experience, Louise."

Listening to his interpretation of what happened helped me crystalize my own experience. “I too felt like a goddess, TJ. I pictured myself standing under a stone arch. I was in a long flowing blue gown. There were stars beyond the arch, like I was suspended in the universe. I sensed joy for being there and sadness as well. I had a similar experience when I gave you your massage. There were feelings of great joy mixed with sadness. I didn’t mention it because I don’t understand them.”

TJ thought he understood the tears that almost came, but he couldn’t put it into words. He said he didn’t need to shed the tears, that it was symbolic of greatness.

Then TJ said, “There is something else bubbling up inside of me, and I don’t know what it is. It feels like a bomb in my gut, and if it goes off. Wow, it’s almost scary, and I don’t scare easily.”

After that night we decided to lighten our interactions, and for the next two weeks we had fun, shared experiences, and discussed previous realizations. However last night we further explored our sexuality. That’s when things became intense again. Something happened to us that was totally phenomenal.

After a romantic candlelight dinner, we undressed each other in a slow fashion appreciating the entire body as we undressed. We allowed our eyes to fully participate rather than concentrate on touching. Although I often slid my fingertips across his chest, and he would lay the palm of his hand on one spot and leave it there. The process was electrifying, and lasted hours. It became a childlike game for we discarded our adult images of how sexual relationships should occur, and placed no restrictions on ourselves or each other. We weren’t trying to excite each other. We were so far beyond that.

Eventually we turned off the lights and stood at the window looking out into the darkness, watching the light of the full moon reflect off the sparkling snow. The view before us was ethereal. TJ stood at my back with his arms around my front. I leaned into his firm chest. We fit so well together. Then, the emotion that I had while giving him the massage returned. It rose from deep inside me with such force I knew I was no longer in control. My desire for restraint of my sexual urges slipped away. I wanted him. I needed him. For the first time in my life, I found myself abandoning control of myself to another.

At that same instant, I could feel this powerful energy rising from deep within him, and my back tingled from the sensation. He took in a huge breath of air and his body became stiff as iron. When I turned to face him, it appeared that he was about to shed that tear, as if to cry, but the tear never came. Instead, he lifted his arms over his head and slowly emptied his lungs in a long sigh as if communicating with a powerful part of himself in the heavens. I watched the energy being released from his body as though a tremendous goal had been accomplished leaving him enriched in strength.

He looked younger, and totally in control of the situation. I wrapped my arms around his neck, kissing him in heated passion, telling him to make love to me.

Surprisingly he said, “I already am, Louise! . . . You brought us this far, and now I’m taking us the rest of the way. Relax! . . . We’re going to have it all!”

What a moment!

He picked me up with such ease, carried me to the bed, and lay on top of me, our nude solar plexus touching, filled with sensitivity. I truly felt that I was with a god, and that I was nothing less than a goddess, and I regained full control of my sexual urges. Now I wanted him completely merged in me, not just a portion of him but all of him. Just as strong was my desire to consume him, totally. Not just his body but his spirit and everything he represented.

We were beyond sex. In fact, there was no sexual differences between us. It became insignificant, and I felt like we had risen above the sexual act, and we had become pure energy. Suddenly, we both felt an explosion of sensations throughout our bodies, starting from our solar plexus and continuing up to our heads and into our minds. I found myself in a universe of lights, no longer with a body yet still having my identity. TJ was there with me. He expressed the same details. We encompassed all that was around the globe and beyond. We were One in the truest sense of the word. One with ourselves! One with each other! One with everyone and everything all at the same time. We represented the entire human race as One Woman and One Man.

Then we found ourselves back on the bed, staring into each other’s eyes, our solar plexus still touching. We felt like we had our orgasms, without the sex. We were emotionally satisfied, perhaps like having a ‘Spiritual Orgasm,’ although I had never had one before. That’s how it felt: true, marvelous ecstasy, complete satisfaction. I never knew that I had the capacity to love to such a depth. Wow! I’m still a little shaky inside from the experience.”

Louise ended her story, then looked at me with a sparkle in her eyes, and shyly grinned. Silence prevailed before she said, "So there it is, my most powerful mystical experience ever. So unusual, that pieces of understanding are still filtering down. My entire being was in total harmony with myself and the universe. I still feel like I had bathed in true love, and he feels the same, but that's his story."

Louise paused for a moment and then said, "I need a break just long enough to calm myself down." She rose from the snow and together we gathered a couple of dead branches, which we broke and built up the fire. When her energy was less excited, she sat beside me on the log.

"I may know what the tears are," I said. "I had a similar experience two years ago with an American woman, Dianne. It was less intense than yours but it is still the highlight of my experiences with women. For many months after we parted, I would unexpectedly break into gut wrenching tears, usually brought on by a memory of our two weeks together. Each time this happened, tremendous amounts of emotion would be released from my solar plexus. I often asked the same question that you ask, but now, for the first time I think that I understand."

"In each of our experiences we denied ourselves the natural drive to mate. No sex, right? When we deny our instinctual sexual drive, we force the attraction dance into ever-increasing levels, and our senses are heightened, and our ecstasy builds."

Louise said, "And it's not just restricting ourselves from having sex. It's allowing our urges to lead us into new territory. Territory that is uninhibited by rules."

"Sex climaxes too early. The energy is grounded before the dance really begins."

"So, we were tricking Nature!"

"Sort of. I believe that it is natural: however, a more evolved form of what we have become accustomed to."

"So, explain to me the tears!" she said.

"Remorse and Joy. At some point in your experience, you came face to face with the full potential of your true self, like the feelings you experienced during the massage, and when you abandoned yourself to TJ, and when both your solar plexuses were touching. This is the Joy: the discovery of our unlimited strength for just an instant or longer. The remorse comes with the realization that you have been absent from this reality until now."

"Yes," she said, "there is a feeling of regret. That's the sadness I experienced. So why do you think TJ doesn't feel any need to shed the tears?"

"His spirit is far more involved in his day-to-day life than most of us. He raised himself, and never received the social indoctrination that eventually separated us from our inner needs. In order to survive he lived moment to moment enjoying life as best he could."

"So, facing the challenges of being on his own forced him to rely on his spirit. He let it direct him in satisfying his basic needs," she said. "This explains his cool attitude, his charisma. It is his spirit, even though he wasn't conscious of it."

I added, "Yes! Now he is becoming conscious of this."

"He is a born natural, Chris. That is why he feels just a tinge of remorse. He has known his spirit most of his life."

"I believe so."

Continuing she said, "I like this explanation. TJ knew the tears were symbolic. Perhaps it is a sign of greater things to come. He also felt great power. I felt great love. We both feel completely fulfilled like never before. One woman. One man. We were at the peak of the evolutionary ladder. That is how it felt, I was both male and female."

"Nothing I have ever experienced has ever come close to these feelings. Do you think that we knew this part of ourselves when we were young? Did we glimpse it somewhere along the way? Is that why we chose a particular path, to finally be here talking about it now?"

I added, "Is this planet just now coming into an era where our human strength can unite, as you and I are now?"

"It's a great journey," she said. "I hardly know you, and yet I am sharing the most precious aspect of my life, with complete trust. Earth hasn't been ready, Chris, but I believe that we are now. We have a right and a duty to be our whole selves, again."

"We are beginning to live our inner needs and with that comes a wealth of understanding."

She moved behind me, placed a knee on the snow, laying her head against mine, and hugged me from behind. We remained there in silence, each of us breathing in unison, as the reality of what we were sharing further registered in our minds.

Slowly the energy dissipated, and our surroundings began to feel almost normal again.

SHE STOOD AND SMILED. "There is another reason that I'm here Chris. The heat is on. You and TJ leave tomorrow evening for the US."

"Talk about switching gears," I said. "What has happened?"

"The police are in the surrounding towns asking questions."

I said. "This is the first home I have had in a long time; I'm going to miss it."

"Few know the identity of the two bikers who stole the secret file from the NRPA, but to many Quebeckers you are heroes. They share our deep love of Nature."

Louise smiled, and added, "Also, TJ wanted you to get this very important message."

"Oh Ya!" I said.

"He says that you owe him."

"For what?"

"Albert the chef was upset with you for not being there to help prepare lunch two days ago. TJ filled in. I'm supposed to get you back in time to do TJ's dinner chores."

With snowshoes strapped on we started toward home with Louise in the lead. Within five minutes Louise stopped and turned toward me, and the words she spoke added to my already full heart. "I have been here for more than a year, waiting for you two men to arrive, and tomorrow you are both leaving. TJ and I have no idea when we will be together again, or where you are both going. A part of me deeply wants to follow TJ, but I know that this is not the time. Certain events have to occur before we can be together again.

"You have been true to yourself, and that has allowed TJ and I to meet. I want you to know that I am eternally grateful to you for this. I hold a special love for you, Chris."

I still cherish her words.

14 – Whole Women

CHANGING DIRECTION IS A PROCESS that comes easily when directed toward a cause. Such changes present themselves without warning, the logic not always being apparent, but one knows when the change is the correct move.

Reaching the edge of the forest, Louise and I could see the main buildings across the open snow-covered field. Someone was quickly approaching on cross-country skis.

"It's Richard," Louise said, "and he's pushing himself hard."

Soon he was within yelling distance and as we stopped, Louise waved and we listened. "He's telling us to hurry. Oh no! You must leave now!" She said in a panic.

François and Denise were waiting outside to greet us. Denise approached me handing me a folder as she said, "This arrived a few minutes ago by e-mail. An environmental group in British Columbia believes that the NRPA is becoming active in the West. You can read it later."

François placed an arm around my shoulders, "There is very little time, your flight leaves in two hours. TJ will give you the details during your ride to the airport. He is in your room, packing your belongings."

"That shouldn't be too hard Frank, I didn't come here with anything."

"Whatever you have is for you to keep."

As I entered my room, TJ was closing up a travel bag. I said to him, "I'll finish doing that. You spend the remaining time with Louise."

He turned and tossed me my bag telling me there was no time.

After quick departure hugs and handshakes, Richard had us on the highway heading toward Montreal. I noticed TJ grinning at me in amusement as he said, "I take it no trees fell on you!"

"No, they were all good friends," I said grinning back at him.

The brief period that had elapsed since leaving the forest already seemed like an event from the past, so I changed the subject and asked why we had to leave so quickly.

"A travel agent had two cancellations at quarter the price, plus my new identification papers are ready."

"That's it?"

"No! Albert overheard the police questioning a garage attendant yesterday in town. He figured from the conversation that they were looking for us so he quickly returned home and spoke to me. Denise acted by sending out word that she wanted two inexpensive flights anywhere. She is quite the lady. I'd trust her with my life."

"We are!"

Richard pulled to the curb at the main terminal doors. We removed the luggage amidst a congestion of travelers. One of the Montreal Center's members approached us immediately stating that the way appeared clear.

He hurriedly handed me the tickets and TJ's passport saying, "All

I know is that they want you out of Canada, fast. Nathan Grant will meet you at the North exit of the New York airport. He'll be wearing a white hard hat. Good luck!"

BY 7:15 P.M. WE WERE in the air over Montreal. TJ pulled a crinkled envelope from his pants pocket. "Did you see the girl back at the terminal doors, the one who greeted me when I got out of the car?"

"I noticed a stranger waving to us when we went inside the terminal."

Opening the envelope he said in surprise, "Look at what she gave me; it's money. There's \$340 US here. I never thought about who was paying for all this."

"You didn't buy the tickets?" I said surprised. "The group in Montreal must have paid for everything including your papers. I'm used to generosity, but this is exceptional. What did the girl say when she handed you the envelope?"

"She was short and charming. I had to bend down while she stretched up on her tiptoes and wrapped her hands around my neck pulling me down even further. Then she said, 'We're with you all the way! Keep fighting!'

"Then she kissed me on the cheek, and as I began to straighten, she hung on with one arm while she searched around in her purse with the other. She pulled out this envelope and slipped it into my hand as she said

that her group had collected it for both of us. Then she reached up again, and pulled my head to hers and said, 'We love you both'."

"Wow, I never noticed."

TJ added, "It's amazing how everyone's been helping us since we found the CD."

"We must be doing something right," I said. "What did her group call themselves?"

"She said it in French, *Femme Totale*," as TJ struggled with the accent.

"Centre de la Femme Totale, the Whole Woman Center. I remember them. They purchased and renovated an old school many years ago. First, they made it into a daycare center, and eventually it became a home for women: single ladies, moms and retired women.

"So they gave us money. Gee Man, that makes me proud."

Then TJ asked, "Why the name?"

"When I visited them a few years ago, the founder gave me a full tour of their center, and explained her story. She came from an abusive relationship with her boyfriend and realized that her son was affected by the experience. After she left him, she became determined to raise her son without the help of a man. She succeeded. Apparently, the male side of herself took control over situations, and guided her through some difficult times."

"She could recognize her masculine side?" TJ questioned.

"Yes, and because she was able to identify with that side of herself, she started seeing men differently. It became natural for her to use a tough approach when dealing with challenges. For example, if the rent money wasn't in the bank on time, she wouldn't fret about it. Instead, she would phone up the landlord and tell him that he would get his money when she had it. She knew she was doing her best and worry wouldn't change her situation. Previously, when there was no money, she would chew her boyfriend out for buying a pack of smokes."

"That sounds like a guy kind of thing to do," TJ said.

"She got right into this male side of herself, or yang side as she sometimes called it. It made her more active with her son, in showing him how to play baseball. Then she discovered other male qualities, such as being observant when approaching threatening situations like meeting a stranger. Now she was making snap decisions, and she was braver in taking risks.

"Eventually, she realized that all women should share in her discovery and she then started offering courses. They were aimed at helping women work through their resentment against men, emphasizing balance between their female and male sides of themselves. Her courses promised women freedom from their resentment of men. Apparently, it worked. You have the proof right there in that envelope."

TJ said, "I never considered how women can suffer because some guys are jerks."

"We want to be the boss," I said. "The Whole Woman Center denounces that kind of male behavior, while at the same time denouncing female resentment. So, they teach their students to explore and accept their male side. They advised me that we men should take up the same challenge and explore our female side. Then relationships will have a better chance at working out the first time around."

A minute passed before TJ said, "Louise is the only person that I have let my guard down with. I tell her stuff that I wouldn't admit to anyone. It feels like another part of me is demanding release. Perhaps this is my feminine side."

"Maybe you're just being honest with yourself. I'm no expert on my female self."

"You show your female side more than you realize," TJ said.

"I don't see how that's true. I cried once, does that count?"

"No! It simply confirms that you're a wuss." Then we lay back on our seats and waited out the balance of our flight to New York City.

15 – Protectors of the Living Space

NATHAN'S WHITE HARD HAT towered over the heads of departing passengers converging on the exit doors and waiting taxis. His robust voice contrasted with the warm and compassionate manner in which we were greeted. Soon we were weaving through the well-lit roadways of the terminal in his BMW.

"Where are we heading, Nathan?"

"You will stay with my family until you depart on flight 501 from Philadelphia to San Francisco. That's in five days. The tickets are booked under my company's name, Grant Sung Architects. We were asked to pull together a plan rather quickly and fortunately for all of us, you will travel to California on unused return tickets that we just happened to have from a previous job. We will lend you this vehicle to get yourselves to Philadelphia, which saves us having to fly our supervisor back from a project there. It has all fallen into place rather nicely."

"I don't know what to say," I added.

"Do you know what the plans are for us in San Francisco?" TJ asked.

"Well, the rumor is that your Montreal friends are arranging for you to stay in New Zealand. I am surprised they didn't make you aware."

TJ was overcome with excitement. "Yes. Yes. Yes. I love it. I knew this would happen to me some day!"

"What?"

"That one day I'd be treated like a King. I knew it. It's happening. This is it."

"TJ, the King," I said humorously.

The next day, we met Nathan's wife, Jean, who was out when we arrived the previous night. Jean was a dignified lady in her early 40s who graced the space she entered with a true sense of genuineness. She was a semi-retired architect who focused her main attention on their children. They spoke proudly of their endeavors and with good reason.

A group of eight families had purchased a downtown cigar factory, and converted the second and third floors into suites for themselves while using the ground floor as their offices. They specialized in retrofitting existing buildings, and providing general energy efficiency. Their specifications included recycled materials, ranging from door hardware to carpeting made from pop bottles. They had positioned themselves in the marketplace for what they labeled, 'Protectors of the Living Space.'

TJ asked, "How does that name fit?"

Jean placed her hand around TJ's elbow, and began leading us down the corridor toward the elevator. "We each have our own understanding of what this means but our view is similar to most. A building's primary purpose is to protect us from the elements, and its secondary purpose is to create a space for functions that cannot be performed outside. Since Nature is a living organism providing us with a healthy and inspiring environment, then it follows that while we are confined within a space, we should expect the same."

Nathan added, "And to accomplish this, the space must be alive."

Continuing, Jean said, "Generally, this is far from the case, so we strive to create spaces that are healthy and inspiring. We use natural materials that have the least impact on the environment.

"For example, these wood floors," Nathan said while glancing downward. "We removed these boards from a building that was due for demolition. We had to deliberately sneak a work crew into the building at night because the building was up for demolition the following morning."

"That must have been a gas," TJ said.

"The demolition company is still haunting us with silly letters demanding that we return the goods. Now they see how foolish they were in wanting to destroy the flooring in the first place."

Jean continued, "Most of the furnishings you see here have been refurbished. We encourage the work of artisans, for there is more life in a piece of furniture built by a craftsperson than one off an assembly line."

Reaching the top floor Nathan explained, "This fourth floor is designated entirely for family functions. The south side opens onto a deck of 2,500 square feet. Fruit trees and vegetable planters create a border along the edge of the roof that protects us from the wind. The balance of the deck has play structures and during the summer it is entirely grassed."

It had the appearance of a well-organized suburban backyard. There were no plumbing vents or exhaust fans on this roof.

TJ was surprisingly interested in watching two children interact with their mothers. He asked how they raised their children.

"We give them all the attention we possibly can," Nathan answered. "Jean and I believe that love is as important as food for a young child. However, it's not easy, with the entertainment industry trying to undermine our bond."

Jean said, "Sometimes I think producers, writers and directors must have had difficult family lives. Now they are deliberately abusing the nation by giving us empty, meaningless sensations. There are so many possibilities for entertainment that do not encourage emotional abuse." Nathan added, "One would think that production teams would tire of repeating the same unimaginative material. It shows the lack of creativity that has crept into an industry designed for that purpose."

"I guess that's why so many people keep the TV off," TJ said.

"We avoid substituting our love for the children with anything, especially the TV," Nathan said. "You may notice that the children and adults respond to each other as one extended family. Each adult will interact with a child as they would their own. This creates a sense of community for children and adults."

"These kids don't know how lucky they are," TJ said solemnly.

"You must have a couple of full-time gardeners to care for all these plants," I said.

"Well!" Jean said, "Each day I accompany the three to five-year-olds while they care for a different group of plants. They dust the leaves that they can reach, remove the old ones, water the plants of course, and they talk to them. Teenagers often sit, silently, by their favorite plant and work out their problems. It's rewarding to observe."

"How about we continue our tour in another part of the building?" Nathan asked.

TJ thought the tour was interesting, but chose to remain in the Common Area, and Jean excused herself, and returned to her suite.

NATHAN AND I GOT ALONG well together mainly because of our similar interests in construction and alternative technologies. "The building has no mechanical air conditioning," Nathan said, "Instead we use simple and inexpensive techniques; for example, we take advantage of the natural stacking effect of the building."

"How does the outside air enter the building?"

"Through perimeter tubing placed along the exterior of the basement walls, and under the concrete floors. The natural stack takes care of the rest by drawing the air into suites and corridors, and eventually out through the roof, thereby eliminating the need for power operating fans."

"So, the dry summer air dehumidifies the basement, and the surrounding earth cools the incoming air. This is so basic, it's baffling that it isn't being used in every building."

"It's inexpensive. That's the reason. Much of today's technology exists primarily to keep our consumer society afloat. However, now we must switch to simplicity to survive. The marketplace hasn't caught onto this yet."

Their engineers had turned the action of the elevator into a piston to create more air movement within the building envelope. Along the top edge of the exterior of the elevator cab were continuous flexible brushes. These acted as a gasket, much like the rings around a car piston. By placing openings at each floor of the elevator shaft the air was either forced out or drawn in at each floor which increased air movement throughout the building at zero energy cost.

They also altered the elevator shaft to bring natural light to each corridor floor by constructing the shaft walls of glass blocks, thereby allowing natural light to flow to all levels. The elevator was hydraulically operated from the lowest level permitting the roof to be a skylight.

Then Nathan showed me their window design. Windows on the south exposure had permanent latticed canopies to prevent the summer sun from shining directly on the floor of the rooms. The east and west windows had vertical motorized louvers on the exterior that rotated to block out the direct sun. A small solar panel powered a controller and a photo-cell which tracked the sun, and turned the louvers. They would spring open at sunset or on cloudy days and during winter. This was another zero-energy device.

"Nathan, your team must have worked long hours to create these systems."

“On the contrary, Chris! It still amazes us how easily it all fell together. The contractors and suppliers are so proud of their work that some have brought their entire families here for tours. During construction they were encouraged to use their imagination, and many hours of their time were given free of charge. It was a team effort and much magic was involved.”

“What emergency measures are in place?”

“For heating we use passive solar combined with natural gas boilers and the domestic water is preheated through internal solar panels.”

“Internal! How do you keep the water from freezing?”

He pressed on, “Our panels are in the heated space as opposed to outside. From the exterior the panels appear as windows; however, on the inside they are contained in a small 12-inch-deep closet.”

“So, you can keep them from freezing without using chemical antifreeze and heat exchangers. Amazing!” I exclaimed.

Continuing, Nathan said, “In the garage we have a 7,000-gallon reservoir for rainwater. Due to our energy conservation this can meet all our needs for a week should the city supply cease. We reduced our water consumption from the average 156 gallons per person per day to 48 or less, which saves on hot water, and city service bills.”

“Let me guess! You reuse water from all the sinks, laundry and showers, filter it using membrane filters and ultra violet disinfection and then you use that filtered water for the toilets.”

“Right on, Chris, and that saves us another 18 gallons per person per day. We could use your talents,” he mused.

“Perhaps, when this NRPA business is over! How about electricity?”

“We depend entirely on a wind generator located on the roof. After all we’re surrounded by high buildings and we’re never without a strong breeze.”

“So how do you avoid damaging the generators as a result of wind turbulence?”

“Through ingenuity. We have attached air straighteners in front of the propellers. This minimizes bearing wear, and they last forever.”

“You have set yourselves up as a showcase?”

“We have created a special team of designers, suppliers and contractors to deal with the demand. We’re receiving calls from Canada as well, not to mention the entire world.”

“You have surrounded yourselves with the kind of beauty and comfort that comes with being in balance with the natural elements.

It is a tremendous accomplishment.”

“Thank you, Chris. That is an accurate description of our work.”

THERE WAS A LONG SILENT pause as Nathan appeared ready to share a meaningful thought. “Have you ever considered the *Power of Visualization*?” he asked.

“If you mean visualizing as I create, then yes, always!”

“Precisely,” he said. “Throughout the design stage and during construction I envisioned every corner of this building in every detail. One evening a contractor explained after a few drinks, that he had made an error in framing a long bulkhead. He knew that the next day it would have to be rebuilt, causing delays for everyone. That evening, he rebuilt that bulkhead in his mind over and over again. Each time simplifying the process.

“Upon arriving here, the next morning, guess what? That bulkhead had changed. He said, it adjusted itself to precisely how he knew it should be. Did you ever hear anything like that before?”

“Did the materials respond to his needs?”

“How else?”

“Everything is energy and like you say there was a great deal of love expressed here. It makes sense to me,” I said.

“The workers on another crew joked about their foreman because he didn’t have to study the plans to know where the walls went. All he had to do was hold a stud, and let it find its own location. They accused him of concealing measurements on the floor.

“When I spoke to him about it, he had a good explanation. He figured that since there was so much love put into the plans that the materials knew where to go on their own. It was like dowsing for well water he told me. Isn’t that something?”

"It certainly is. But considering the final result, I can believe it. This is a special place."

We finished our tour and I returned to the fourth floor to find TJ soaking up the winter sun through the solarium windows. He wasn't at all bothered by the boisterous sound of the young children playing around him. I lay back choosing to do the same.

* * * *

THE NEXT MORNING, I joined TJ for breakfast. He was exuberant and ready for action.

Minutes later Nathan hurriedly entered the kitchen, "Change of plans I'm afraid. Denise wants to talk to one of you on the phone."

TJ took Nathan's cell phone and then motioned me to give him some paper. After hanging up he soberly explained, "The pace has just stepped into high gear, my friend. We fly out of Philadelphia at 2:00 pm this afternoon to Sacramento. The following day we leave from San Francisco for New Zealand. We'll rent a car for the drive between Sacramento and San Fran."

"That's terrific TJ. We can stay with friends along the way. They're near Santa Rosa. Strange! I was thinking about them last night."

"No problem as long as we make our flight out over the Pacific."

"Why the sudden rush?"

"A group in New Zealand thinks they have a way inside the NRPA."

"Hey! This is a big break, all this good news in one morning."

"Not exactly! Now for the bad news." His entire facial expression became stone cold.

"The RCMP had the bikers' gang's house staked out when you were there."

"Shit!"

"Yes, and on top of that, they had an informant inside. They know everything. There's a search warrant for your arrest."

"Where does that leave me?"

"They'll want you for forging federal documents among a slew of other charges. Thanks to Denise and our Montreal friends we're one step ahead of them. They didn't expect us to act so fast, otherwise we would never have made it out of the country."

"Now what?"

"There's more! The local police showed up at The Laurentian Center shortly after sunrise this morning. They had loads of questions. Someone saw Frank pick us up at the service station when we first arrived. They had an old mug shot of me from ten years ago. Frank told them that he dropped us off at a crossroad beyond their place. That should lead them away from the Center. Anyhow Denise isn't worried."

TJ sensed my concern for The Laurentian Center and then came around behind my chair and placed his big hand on my shoulder. "We're not alone on this journey. We have our protectors remember!"

... If we hadn't left when we did the situation would be different. But we're here, so let's get a move on. We have a continent to cross."

WHILE TRAVELLING INTERSTATE 95 from New York City, I suddenly remembered the folder that Denise had given me in those last hurried moments at The Laurentian Center. Finding it, I read the message to TJ as he drove. "It's an e-mail from Luc to Denise."

Re: Fighting for Green update.

A Vancouver group has brought to our attention unusual activities in British Columbia's lumbering industry.

Many readers are aware that governments are conducting public hearings to decide the future use of government-owned crown lands in provinces and states along the west and east coasts. Politicians are publicly voicing interest in the opinions of environmental groups and other special interests' groups in this regard.

Enthusiasm is mixed on the subject, with many being encouraged by the opportunity for dialogue, while others remain cautiously suspicious. In recent weeks, there are growing concerns that the roundtable of public talks are intended to deceive people into believing that their views are being taken into consideration, while in actuality, the future of crown land has a predetermined fate.

The Vancouver group's suspicions increased when they observed various buyouts in their province and along the American coastal states. This group is questioning why these events coincide with discussions on future activities for crown lands.

We feel that they may have a valid concern and are presently conducting investigations into corporate sales within the industry. To date, we have one confirmation of such a transaction. Please keep a watchful eye for such events, and forward any information in this regard.

A complete account of our findings will appear in the upcoming issue of 'Fighting for Green.' We will continue to keep our readers informed.

Bye for now, Luc

TJ said, "Perhaps the NRPA is attempting to monopolize the industry!"

"We know they have their target set on controlling public lands, but how could owning more companies serve their purpose?"

Neither of us had the answer. The mystery continued.

16 – The Bhakti Center

BY EVENING, WE WERE DRIVING toward San Francisco in the rain after having left the BMW at the Philadelphia airport as instructed, and flying across the continent to Sacramento. I reminded TJ about the opportunity to spend the night at a center in Santa Rosa which meant a short detour. In his usual easygoing manner, he had no objection to this new adventure.

On the west side of the clean and orderly city of Santa Rosa, lives a reclusive order of brothers called The Bhakti. In Hindu it means devotion, the yoga of self-action. I explained how I had often made visits during the past five years whenever I needed a little direction, sometimes staying for a month or more.

As we approached the center, TJ noticed the eight-foot-high stone fence that bordered the road along the property which prompted him to ask what the Center was like.

“They are halfway between Franciscan and Tibetan Monks; however, they are not religious. They follow a disciplined spiritual approach, and have chosen to be isolated from the world. Seldom do they leave their twelve acres, yet their lives are certainly not without adventure. You’re in for a surprise if you can restrain your expectations. Their physical needs are met through donations from people like us.”

“So, what are we giving?”

“We have nothing to give.”

“I say it again. I like your friends.”

“Tomorrow morning, we can take a walk through their four acres of old growth redwoods. In the midst of these giants rests a tiny chapel. They seldom allow me inside, as it is reserved for those special moments when one is entirely free of thought.”

TJ said, “You are beginning to appear almost religious.”

“Well, the truth is, I feel closer to my God Self when I am here than any other place. Trust me, you’ll see.”

When I turned off the main road, the car headlights glistened on the wet, black iron of the closed gates. Within seconds a brother came out in the rain to greet us. Recognizing me as I stood outside the car, he manually pushed back the gates, and eventually escorted us into the main lobby.

Once inside, we were greeted by my old friend Brother James. I introduced TJ, and they exchanged glances with slight nods. Brother James went on to remind me that I had neglected to inform the Center of our arrival. However, the message got through in other ways, for Brother Samuel had dreamt of me the previous night so they readied a room for my arrival.

He added, “TJ can stay in Dianne’s old room. The other monks are in meditation, so Chris, please show TJ around, and after you are settled, join us in the dining room.”

He then turned his attention to TJ, and while taking his hand in both of his, Brother James looked him in the eyes and simply offered a welcome. As we walked away from our host TJ whispered, “Waa! That guy has energy Man. When he looked at me and shook my hand, I felt him right down to the base of my spine.”

“Most of them are like that here. They have spent years developing their personal inner strengths and they can be intense.”

“You never mentioned any Dianne. I knew there was a woman involved,” he whispered teasingly.

“Ok! Ok! Being here is very symbolic. It means that I am definitely on the right track.”

“With the good luck we’ve been having how could you think otherwise.”

Of course, he was right. By the time I finished giving him a tour and we arrived in the dining room, the majority of the brothers were retiring for the night. TJ was making himself at home as usual, so I left him and returned to my own room.

Propping myself against the wall while sitting on the bed, I studied my tiny, dimly lit space while I waited for a visit from Brother James. Despite the late hour, I was confident that he would show up for one of our customary discussions. He could challenge my beliefs unlike any other person, for he understood life in terms of energy. In his view, energy is all that exists, nothing else. Physical objects, human emotions, Nature, children are

all manifestations of energy. For him, the understanding of energy provided access to good health, solutions to disputes, advances in science and explained all the realms of social interactions. He generally provided me with food for thought, and occasionally I contradicted his beliefs leaving him with a new perspective, and in so doing we enjoyed sharing our views on life.

He was a hippie teen in the late 60s, and studied major religions in the San Francisco area, being influenced by people like Stephen Gaskin. He actively participated in social change, and had supported Abbie Hoffman in Chicago. During the 70s he adopted a belief, common to teens of the time: that all social change comes from within oneself. This led him to tour the world, merging himself within cultures and religions, learning methods used in the exploration of the self and gaining greater understanding of the sufferings of people. His journey placed him amidst both sides of the struggle in Belfast where he experienced modern day prejudice. Then to the Palestinian camps to understand hopelessness, and amongst the Columbian guerrillas to understand fighting for a cause. After that, he went to South Africa to understand the Afrikaners' fear, and even lived in Alabama to see first-hand the effects of subtle hatred.

Fifteen years ago, various friends he made during his travels purchased the land and built this small community. Their funding came from the many people whom they had helped throughout the years, and still donations and bequests flowed in. Brother James had spent a lifetime exploring the internal theater saying, that for him, it surpassed all possible experiences. On this occasion, I came to the Bhakti with a question.

I NEVER HEARD OR SAW Brother James enter my room. When I noticed him, he was standing at the doorway in his traditional long beige robe, hands together, leaning on the door frame, relaxed, with an amusing smile.

"You were deep in thought, so I chose to wait until you were ready for me."

"How long have you been there?"

"Less than a minute," he said while sitting himself on the only wooden chair. "So you will be gone tomorrow, Brother Chris. What is so urgent?"

"So much has been happening these past two days that I think I am losing control."

"Isn't this the objective?" he smiled.

"Is it?"

"It is one way of allowing our inner essence to be part of every conscious moment."

"I'm not quite there yet. I'm somewhere between being anxious and excited. I have been wanting action for several years, and now that it's upon me, I feel nervous about what lies ahead. This apprehension is sapping my energy, and I can't afford to spend it foolishly. I am hoping that you can help me understand why I am unsettled. The details of my present situation are irrelevant." I didn't want to waste his valuable time discussing events related to the police. That was another agenda.

"Are you certain?"

"Yes! Two days ago, I was wandering around in the forests of Quebec, feeling on top of the world. That evening when we took to the air from Montreal, I felt that I was taking off into unknown territory with no guidebook."

"When we follow our vision, as you have been doing over the years," Brother James began, "it gives us a genuine purpose in life. So, we busy ourselves attempting to reach our goal. But eventually letting go of our creations becomes an important part of the process. It is highly likely that at some point our creations will no longer resemble the original vision."

"I guess that's where the saying '*Off Track*' comes from."

"Perhaps, but there really isn't any track. Energy simply flows to where it is needed. The original vision may change slightly for many reasons. One being occurrences in the global subconscious and beyond."

"So, we have to keep checking in," I commented.

"Intellect is equipped to follow logical thought. One limitation of logical thought is that it prefers to follow a straight line as it builds upon previous data. Energy from our spirit has no restrictions on where it flows. This means that occasionally we have to let go of where it flows. This means that occasionally we have to let go of straight line thinking and, like you say, check in.

"I follow," I said, "Grandfather and I discussed this before I left the Reserve. Things only began to happen recently because there was not enough flow of energy for the task at hand."

"Right!" he said.

"We haven't mentioned timing, and that's an important factor as well."

"Certainly! Is this where your friend comes into the picture?" he asked.

"Yes! TJ played an important part in all of this. If I hadn't left the Reserve when I did, we would have missed each other, and things would have turned out very different."

"If neither of you had met that day, you may have met under different circumstances, or someone else might have offered each of you an important key."

Recalling one of the main disciplines of the Bhakti, I said, "You're suggesting that there is no need to strain about being at the right place at the right time."

He grinned and said, "More important than timing is to go through life *without regrets*. To achieve this, we need only be true to ourselves, and accept our human weaknesses. Timing is not a goal, it is a means to an end."

He continued, "We are all given opportunities to alter our destiny. Your planning, crystallizing and actualizing of your ideas generated sufficient energy to affect your cosmic patterns, thereby successfully altering your future. This new flow cannot be reversed, once it has begun to unfold. When we are at this point of the process, we are being moved toward future events. We are moved along either as a joyous participant, or we are dragged along unwillingly."

I thought aloud, "Like a person wanting marriage, and then finding out that they have made a mistake. They have successfully created what they projected for, and as the events unfold their life is altered either positively or negatively, and once this begins, it's irreversible. Is that it?"

"You understand these things well."

"So, what is left?"

"Your problem," he said.

"What, my anxiety? Could it be that I haven't let go of something?"

"Yes, but it could also be something else!"

I asked, "So who is in control of our destiny or where do visions originate?"

He replied, "Does it matter, as long as we follow the course that draws us along?"

"Draws us along! Are you suggesting that some greater power teases us along a path?"

"You explained to me once that despite all the ups and downs and turn-arounds in your life, you were walking alongside your vision. You would leave it for a short time, but it never left you. Then you realized that there are many visions in life, long-term and short-term."

"Yes! So, what gives birth to these visions, besides appreciation?" I asked.

"Perhaps Chris, they are created by an *Imbalance in Nature*."

"Nature out of balance," I said reflectively. "This isn't possible!"

"Take our body for example. If our body is lacking in vitamins or our mind is in need of a vacation, our body and mind make us aware, and we take steps to correct the situation. Right?"

"If you regard Nature as the body and mind of universal energy, then you can see how this is an automatic process for Nature as well. It's called evolution. I believe that because we are an integral part of the evolutionary process, we instinctively become aware of imbalances, and respond according to our abilities and our interests."

I wanted to ponder this longer, but he didn't let my silence linger. "This is an interesting concept, but let's return to your problem."

"Ok!"

He continued, "We believe here at The Bhakti that the whole purpose of life is to reflect our Inner Essence via our consciousness, and thus we evolve. For this to occur, emotional voids in our consciousness are filled with each new understanding. Our true reward then, comes through experiences which add truth to our life, and thus fill our emotional voids."

This was heavy stuff, but I did like the thought of a reward. "Once this cycle is complete then, I will understand something that I want more than anything, but I will find it difficult to accept?"

"Most likely it is something that you haven't even thought of, but it will be a major key to your personal evolution. You will recognize it when it occurs," he said.

"So, this could be the cause of my anxiety! I am aware on some level of my spiritual reward."

"This is quite possible."

"Grandfather would call this, *Spirit Reward*."

"I can understand his view, for all of Nature has rules governing itself, as does everything in the cosmos."

“It’s amazing that I could be upset or excited about a positive event in the future,” I said. “Many times in my life I have had anxiety or felt nervous for no apparent reason. Perhaps we are all receivers of events in life . . . aware or unaware doesn’t make a difference.”

“That’s why the old warning of not taking ourselves seriously applies to everyone,” he added. “People find themselves depressed, and focus on some aspect of themselves in an attempt to understand why. In many cases, their subconscious is picking up on other events, like a war about to break out on the opposite side of the planet or a natural disaster.”

“It’s that simple, isn’t it!” I said, “So, when this is all over, I will have spent two years of my life for one purpose, and one purpose only and that is to evolve?”

“Much more will be accomplished, Brother Chris. Your every emotion, every idea and every future insight will have new clarity and perspective as a result. The imbalance in Nature will be adjusted just slightly, enough to positively affect every living element of life in some small but important manner.”

“Perhaps this is what Grandfather spoke of,” I said.

“He spoke of such things?” he questioned surprisingly.

“I’m not sure,” I said, still contemplating the possibility. “He told me before I left that Nature was no longer investing in the old. That it had already made a transition. He and the Nature Spirits had rejoiced together, he told me.”

Brother James stood and looked at a spot on the floor for a moment before saying, “So your Grandfather has been there. When you have a better understanding of this concept, Chris, I should like to discuss it further.”

“I would enjoy that very much.”

As he turned to leave, he added humorously, “Some people think our life here is boring!”

“They don’t know, do they?” He gave me a nod, and left.

That night I dreamt of a gigantic ball rolling towards me and I ran ahead of it trying to keep from being mowed over. I decided I didn’t want to run anymore, and the ball crushed me, face down into the ground. But I kept replaying the scene, and each time it repeated itself, I was forced to look at my motivation for taking on this journey. Did I seek being accepted by others? Was it pride that drove me? Was it for self-love or to be loved by others? Gradually, I felt more ready for the future, and more in love with myself, until the ball and I moved at the same speed. Then the ball slowed to a stop, and I had no longer needed to escape danger.

TJ woke me at 7:30 a.m. informing me that our flight was leaving in four hours. I told him that after my shower, I would give him a quick tour of the redwood forest.

He quickly responded, “I’ve already had my tour. Nice feeling inside that Chapel.” His comment reached its intended target, for it evoked a tinge of envy. How could he enter the chapel upon his first visit, when it took weeks of preparation before I was considered worthy?

17 – Collective Vision

DURING THE DRIVE between Santa Rosa and the airport I stopped at a telephone booth and made a call to Denise for an update on events. Returning to the car, TJ awoke from his brief sleep.

“Why the grim face?” he asked.

“Denise received news about a major advertising company hired by the NRPA.”

“What has advertising to do with us?”

“Lots! One of the ads suggests that the old growth forests are a threat to future generations of trees; therefore, they should have a close encounter with the chainsaw.”

TJ didn’t make the connection, so I offered an explanation. “Biologists have noted the differences between the seeds from old growth forests and the seeds from trees 75 years old and younger. They attribute the difference to residual pollution present in today’s air and soil.

“The older trees matured at a time when there was no pollution therefore, they are healthier, and produce stronger seeds. However, these ads take the opposite view. They suggest that older trees have absorbed more pollutants due to their age, rendering their seeds harmful to a renewable forest.”

“They know all the angles,” TJ commented.

As I pulled back on the highway I said, “It gets worse. Another ad is designed to follow this one which promotes the spraying of fertilizers in designated areas. The spraying is supposed to promote greater yields of up to 20 percent. This ad suggests replacing old growth with chemically protected growth. One ad gives credibility to the other and, of course both are intended to sway public opinion in their favor.”

TJ said, “If they can make trees grow faster, then it’s a positive move. No?

“No, because it addresses a problem that doesn’t exist. Pollution has been around for approximately 50 years; therefore, in the worst case, all trees contain the same level of harmful chemicals. The NRPA’s claims don’t have to be correct, they only have to plant a seed of doubt, and the final result is profit. By the time the public realizes that they have once again been had, the damage will have been done.”

“Hey, we both knew this battle wouldn’t be easy.”

“The NRPA will virtually give governments an option: buy their sprays to encourage growth, or remove all old growth trees. Either way they intend to win.”

“So, what can we do?”

“Let’s hope that the Kiwis plan to infiltrate the NRPA works. We’ll be there in two days and that’s a long time to be uncertain.”

I SENSED TJ’S PENETRATING eyes upon me. “Come on, Man! Stop thinking *bad guys, good guys*. The NRPA are simply using their resources the best they know how. That makes them a good opponent, it doesn’t make them bad. If they win, it’s because people want them to win, not because we’ve screwed up.”

“Well . . .,” I attempted to reply.

“Surely you don’t think that we’re flying half way around the world without having some powerful force on our side.” “Powerful force!” I said surprised.

“Yes! Just think about the people we know that see through the NRPA’s games. You’re the one who keeps saying that we have ammunition that the NRPA don’t understand. So, do we have it or don’t we? Think about it! . . .”

After a moment of reflection, I managed to leave my negative and hopeless head space. “Ya, you’re right! . . . We are being guided by a force greater than the NRPA. The collective mind of the planet. It wants only to protect the mother that feeds us, even when we’re not all conscious of it. Thanks for reminding me, TJ. I’m surprised that I forgot. The collective vision is just one of our guiding forces.”

I glanced across to the passenger’s side, and he was already making himself comfortable for another sleep. I marveled at how he was changing. Then without opening his eyes he offered one last thought-provoking statement. “And don’t forget the powers of Nature itself!”

18 – Self-Imaging

SILENCE PREVAILED FOR OVER an hour into our flight from San Francisco, before TJ shared an astounding experience that occurred only hours earlier at The Bhakti.

“Last night, Sam and I sat up all night talking.”

“You mean Brother Sam!”

“Well yes. But the brother part sounds a little corny, don’t you think? If he had called me Brother TJ, I probably would have thought it was cool.”

I said, “It almost sounds sacrilegious not to call him Brother.”

“It didn’t bother him; anyhow do you want to hear this story or not?”

“Ya . . . ya, of course!”

“Do you know anything about projecting images of yourself onto people?”

“I’ve heard of self-imaging. Is that the same?”

“Close! But first let me tell you about what Sam describes as the four auras. He calls them our Energy Bodies.

“The first body that many people see is called the aura, and it reflects our emotions, our feelings and our thoughts. Second by second! Sam called it the *emotional body*, and for him it’s a major distraction.”

“They should call him the Aura Man,” I said, “because he sees them all the time. I’ve read that this aura is constantly moving, changing in color and intensity. So, what is the next type?”

“The second aura is the character *body*. It records all our big emotional experiences, even our health. It becomes our emotional memory, and even goes with us when we die. Sam has no problem seeing this one as well.

“Can you give me an example of how it would show itself?”

“Well! Say, you’re watching someone and they look like an artist. You figure they’re an artist because they walk, talk and act like one. The same goes for heavy equipment operators or lawyers or almost anyone.”

“It’s true, isn’t it?” I concluded. “People in certain professions act in similar ways. So, our mannerisms change according to this aura.” He laughed. “I asked Sam why people’s dogs look like their masters.”

Immediately I envisioned people walking their dogs and often they did resemble each other. “The dog must be responding to the aura of its master. If we can affect animals this way, just imagine the influence parents have on children!”

“Sam explained it in terms of energy. All the powerful emotional experiences we have throughout our life are stored in this character body. Even those we had as a kid. It never stops broadcasting, and remains around all the time, even when we’re asleep. We don’t just add to this aura, we respond to it as well. It affects all our choices in life.”

“So, we could limit ourselves by the experiences locked in this aura.”

“Yes, and we’re controlled by it as well. That is until we find the magical mix in our life. When events in our life don’t match this aura, we just keep looking.”

I interjected, “So when we want the perfect job, we’re actually searching for a match to our character body.”

“Yes! It also can work in reverse! If we have a major problem, then we attract similar problems.”

Our conversation was interrupted by the flight attendant offering coffee. While I mixed the ingredients, my thoughts reflected on TJ, and how he seldom expressed an understanding about life beyond his immediate surroundings. On many occasions I enjoyed sharing his perspective on those experiences. Now he expressed an understanding that went far beyond his day-to-day consciousness. This could be TJ’s normal reality and Brother Sam simply awakened it in him. In any case, TJ’s identification had changed.

Then he picked up where he left off. “The third aura, is the *imaging body*, and, Man . . . this one holds a lot of secrets for me. Do you ever feel uncomfortable when someone gets too close to you, particularly a stranger?”

“Always!”

“That’s because the two imaging bodies are colliding. They’re too close for comfort. According to Sam, this aura is made up of who we want people to think we are, and not who we are.”

“I need a better picture!”

“Ok! Imagine that you want the boss to think of you as an experienced worker but really you have only been at it for six months. You’re going to fake it! Right? You’re going to act out the part wherever necessary.”

“It’s like wearing a mask then?”

“That’s right! The way I figure it, Chris, it’s like placing a picture of yourself out in front, so that people can see what we want them to see. Each of us walks around lying to the world about who we are. Then we end up fooling ourselves. The imaging body prevents us from growing because we keep placing these obstacles in our path. We put our energies into them because we don’t accept ourselves and we want this image to be true, to be real.”

“Man, this is interesting stuff.”

Encouraged, TJ continued, “Take me, for example. I have always seen myself as a rambler and I avoided the lifestyle of straight people. Nothing was going to tie me down that I didn’t choose. People pretty well got the message.

“Had I let that self-image control me when we were back in Toronto, I would never have gone to the Eye of Learning. I had to let go of my pride, and force myself to be straight in order to take those classes. I mean I had nothing in common with that group of people.

It was tough.”

“I never noticed.”

“That was the idea. I told myself that it was temporary, and I knew I could handle it for a few evenings. Are you getting the picture?”

I said, “So we project into this imaging body what we perceive as necessary to protect our weaknesses. This deliberately prevents us from exploring new territory where we might get hurt. Is that what you’re saying?”

“Ya! We put them there to protect ourselves; that’s why they’re there in the first place. Survival.”

I said, “Therefore, we can also become the image that we project. We could become a better person by projecting an image that we can live up to, like setting up role models.”

“Ya, but either way, it keeps us on a path leading to where we think we want to go, when, really, it’s preventing us from being real. Sam told me that once we identify with our spirit, this imaging body starts to reflect the nature of our spirit.”

“You really understand these things, TJ.”

“This is just the beginning. Did you know that when we were kids, we were in direct connection with a tremendous power? That it all ended the instant we lost our *spiritual innocence*?”

“Woo! This sounds heavy!”

“We lost it the moment before we became totally human. At that instant we forgot where we came from. When we discover how we lost that spiritual innocence we immediately reconnect with the power moment.”

“How did we lose the power?”

“Sam mentioned something about becoming grounded and identifying with our physical environment. But then he changed the subject, and said that we would explore it another time, and we both forgot.”

“Perhaps he meant that you would talk about it in the future. Seldom do they use empty words.”

“Are you ready for the last one?”

“Of course!”

“The fourth aura is the *spirit body*. It’s made up of a collection of emotions that go beyond our basic needs. Sam referred to it as those feelings of empathy we sometimes have, or if we go beyond what we consider our limits.

“It took me a while to grasp this one, until he asked me if I had ever thought of a profound question, and then actually got an answer. You would call this inspiration, enlightenment, insight, receiving love energies, but the way I see it, it’s simply opening up to new possibilities. Some people might call it being helped by Christ.”

I said “So the energy that we experience when we stretch our minds beyond these physical surroundings and into the universe or when we sense the absolute beauty around us, these energies get stored in our spirit body. Is that it?”

“Right! Some people have weak spirits because they seldom invest in making this body strong. Perhaps they never had the experience of being loved as children. Others, like me, have strong spirits because we’ve been investing in it all our lives.”

“Did Sam say you had a strong spirit?”

“Of course! I believe that from the point of conception . . . if a woman is happy with her situation and wants her baby, then the fetus has a spirit. When it enters the world, and gets more love the spirit keeps growing. When it eventually faces the full brunt of the physical world the growth slows, but it can start up again.

“My mom must have really loved me, because even though I had it rough growing up, she gave me a good base. Sam says my spirit is full.

“There is something wrong here,” I said. “You started off talking about our spirit body and now you’re calling it the spirit.”

“They’re the same except the spirit body is the result of spirit’s participation in our life. We can draw on the strength of our spirit for guidance to enrich our life, and we can strengthen our spirit by believing that it exists and using it.”

“You make it sound so simple.”

“Because it is. It’s remembering that we have a spirit that is hard. I mean, I never knew any of this stuff until this morning. When I heard Sam explaining how he understood what I’m telling you, I simply knew it was true. It all came back to me because I could suddenly remember. Once we acknowledge that something exists, we get the extra help we need; if we want it!”

“You had quite the experience with Sam!”

“Hey, Man! It doesn’t end here, or maybe you’ve had enough?”

“You can’t stop now!” I said.

“Believe me this is where it gets good.

TJ continued, “It was long past one in the morning and we were basically finished or so we thought.”

“For no reason, I asked Sam why he was wearing a costume.”

I interrupted, “What costume? They always wear their robes!” TJ ignored my surprise and continued his story.

“Sam answered in a different voice.

“What a strange question coming from you. You are looking at an English gentleman. This is the proper manner of dress, of course. You have been away too long my good friend.

“We hear that your commission has gone reasonably well despite our losses.”

“I answered in a voice that wasn’t mine.

“Yes, indeed! However, we did lose six fine vessels and much of their crew. Cargo all lost! It’s a shame really, but it was to be expected, facing the strength of our enemy’s fleet. We have accomplished what we set out to do, and more.”

“Sam said.

“The mouth of the channel is ours thanks to your splendid effort, and God being on our side. The tide has turned in our favor. You have seen to that! They can’t prevent us from entering our own ports now or in the future. The world will be a different place once we dominate the seas.”

“Our voices had changed, yet the words came out as naturally, as if they were my own. We studied each other for a long time, so long that we had no idea if it had been hours or minutes. Sam’s face and hair had changed and he was shorter. My body was larger, heavier yet a little transparent.”

“How did it all start?” I asked.

“Gradually! I was aware of the change for what seemed like half an hour before it registered that he looked different. That’s how natural the whole thing was.”

Astonished I said, “You were observing each other’s reincarnate soul!”

“No! We both believe it was a time warp.”

“How can one have a time warp?”

“I think we just happened to drop in on someone else’s conversation from the past. As real as it was, I don’t believe that was me. . .

There is more!”

TJ began introducing me to an entirely new concept: *Principles of Evolution*.

“Let me tell you how it went. We were back to being ourselves again still sitting in our chairs. I was in a strange new head space. I knew so much more than this normal TJ.

“Sam said, “There is a scar appearing on your face.”

I reached up and touched the exact spot, right here on my left cheek. I stroked it! It was there! I knew that it represented something much greater than a mere mark on my face.

“Sam recognized the symbology as well, and called it a ‘principle of evolution.’ It offered a clue to his understanding of the spirit world. But it also conflicted with the Brother’s belief on reincarnation.

“For me, I know that the scar is an important aspect of who I really am. Not those people we suddenly became. They weren’t us. That’s all I know so far. So, Chris, do you follow all this?”

“No, I don’t, but I envy the experience. You blow me away.”

TJ continued, “I’m beginning to believe that all these concepts I’ve heard from Joe, Louise, you and now Sam are more than just neat ideas. They are real, and they’re becoming more important to me than cruising on the Hog or having good times. This is a top-notch exploration that I’m on here, and it’s all about me . . . If I’m actually connected somehow to universal events, then how could any other experience compare? I mean, really Man!”

“I agree TJ. I’m with you a hundred percent.”

He went on, “While speaking with Sam, I felt intelligent; I became aware that these new understandings and abilities were the real me. To continue projecting self-images that are no longer who I am would be deceiving myself, and believe me, I’m not that big a fool.”

In the silence that followed I wondered how TJ had gained understanding of himself more rapidly than anyone I had known. It was as though he was introduced to each new insight at precisely the correct moment, and he accepted those challenges without hesitation. Lying my head back on the cushion, I felt privileged to know him.

19 – The Peace Center

NEW ZEALANDERS QUICKLY RESPOND to imbalances in their environment, for living on an island where both shores are visible at the same time leaves one with a sense of vulnerability. Knowing that your closest neighbor is 1,200 miles away also causes you to consciously care about what is thrown into your backyard. Few island people would discard clothing or household items; instead, they are refurbished, resold or given to charity. Thus, the average Kiwi, as they call themselves, instinctively has a healthy respect for Nature.

During the 80s I took an interest in the occasional report making its way into Toronto's newspapers, especially news regarding New Zealand's brave attitude toward countries engaged in nuclear testing. While France was conducting tests in neighboring waters of the Pacific, United States chose to flaunt the presence of a nuclear sub in the Auckland harbor. These events sparked support throughout the country for the peace and anti-nuclear movement, particularly in Auckland.

New Zealand's show of unified strength irritated these two United Nation members and as a result they chose to flex their muscles in an attempt to intimidate their small yet brave UN partner. France sank Greenpeace's ship, the Rainbow Warrior as it docked in the Auckland harbor, unfortunately killing Fernando Pereira, a Portuguese photographer, who became tangled in the straps of his camera bag as he attempted to escape. Then the US followed up by imposing import restrictions on New Zealand products heading towards the US. This created serious financial hardship. But the New Zealanders' ability to make personal sacrifices in the interest of the country enabled the islands to endure. By the time of our arrival, life was almost back to the peak it enjoyed in the early 80s.

Outside the Auckland terminal, the sun's warmth replaced the chill that had penetrated our bodies during the 19 hours spent in the air-conditioned aircraft. Even in the fresh ocean air, I remained lethargic wanting only to lie horizontally on a bed.

We instructed the taxi driver to take us to the Peace Center and to my surprise the cabbie didn't question our request. We entered a narrow street with small English and Japanese cars parked on one side of the road and large mature trees growing on lawns farther up the street. Our little Austin geared down as we slowly began to ascend the steep hill. Within the first block we stopped by the curb next to a long, narrow, two-story building with a sign below the fascia that read, 'The Peace Center.' The creamy white, stuccoed walls hadn't seen paint in many years yet the faded finish gave this simple building a functional character.

Standing on the sidewalk in the summer sun the cabbie noticed my interest in the building and he approached me offering an explanation of its history. He began by saying how it had been a tavern in previous years, and was now the home of a group of three volunteers. He went on to explain how his daughter and her friends often came here to participate in events.

Following the cabbie's advice, we entered the Peace Center without knocking. As we stepped through the main door, and walked into a large empty room, goosebumps rushed up my arms; excitement was in the air. I looked at TJ but he didn't respond to my glance. Many doors led off the room, and TJ headed intently to the nearest door. I followed close behind. No sound could be heard from the other side as TJ slowly eased it open. Sunlight flooded the room from tall lead glass windows on two adjacent walls. Three people sat at their workstations, with their heads down, intensely involved in their work. The only woman among them broke their concentration with an enthusiastic greeting, and came forward to shake our hands, and begin introductions.

Lorna's warm and bubbly nature elegantly graced her presence, and her humor pumped life into the other two members who worked and lived there. She was the fundraising organizer. We would come to benefit from her ability to breathe life into all that she touched.

Ryan was a slim lad in his late 20s with a receding hairline. Lorna explained how Ryan was a graduate of business school, and managed the major activities at the Center. We later discovered him to be a serious man, concerned only with the immediate situation in his conversations with us, and extremely dependable.

Matt, was the electronics wizard, at least from my perspective. He surrounded himself with ham radio equipment, monitors, hard drives, knobs and wires. His large frame, curly reddish hair and rough appearance was better suited to the rugby field, which in fact, was his favorite pastime. In the weeks that followed we played many

scrums matches with him and his mates. Wherever there were men and an opened grassed area, a pig skin ball would appear, and a match would begin.

After the introductions and our tour of the facilities, I asked about news from home. I was especially curious about the RCMP's investigation.

Ryan said, "They raided the Center in Montreal, two days ago. One of your mates was arrested for aiding in falsifying documents."

"That would be Jean Luc!" I said. "He completed the business with Martin," I explained to TJ.

TJ asked, "Are they still holding him?"

"No! His attorney Phil, a friend from Toronto posted bail. Today in fact."

There was nothing more we could do except extend some warm thoughts to those who had assisted us and now were in danger's way as a result. I then asked for news of their plan to infiltrate the NRPA, but they insisted that we give our internal clock time to adjust from our trip. Despite my enthusiasm, I conceded that they were right, for we were experiencing jet lag. After a day of enjoying the small shopping areas, their beautiful city beaches and parks we became genuinely ready for action.

"Well Mates, are you rested enough to get on with things?" Ryan asked.

"I appreciated the break after all," I responded.

"That's good," Ryan remarked, "because we have a lot to share."

"Let's just get started," Matt interjected.

Lorna said, "Waiting to share their plan has been harder on these two than on you, Chris."

Ryan began, "We want to approach an officer on the NRPA Board by the name of Randolph Simmons."

"He's a Brit," Matt said. "He lived here in Auckland for four years, and managed our methane gas production. Was a good Limey! Kept our contracts with Japan when money was scarce in the wake of the Think Big Era."

Ryan resumed, "When wages were being cut across the Islands,

in an attempt to pay back our national debt, Randolph fought to protect his workers' salaries rather than take advantage of the situation. This didn't make everyone happy, but it showed he had initiative and personal values. When he wasn't sailing his yacht or golfing, he spent time with the Maori. He frequented a health facility in Rotorua. Two women there say he always enjoyed a good laugh."

Matt added, "He often showed up at a local tavern to watch the all-blacks rugby matches on the big screen. He's a roll-up-the-sleeves type of mate," meaning that he was a man of action not words, "and he's right at home with his mates tossing back a few quarts. Some Maoris even say that he is a man connected with God . . ."

"Sounds like our kind of guy," I said.

"He could be," Ryan said. "Before his arrival in New Zealand, Randolph oversaw various family interests in South Africa. It was during the upheavals near the end of apartheid. Our contact in Johannesburg reports that he organized additional training for black workers, so they could assume positions of responsibility, once the transition of power took effect. Apparently, he had no doubt that apartheid would not survive."

Lorna said, "He compassionately influenced the late Princess Diana in her concerns over poverty."

"What is a guy like that doing with scums like the NRPA?" TJ asked.

Ryan answered in an indirect way. "The WMF, the World Monetary Fund came under fire for their efforts in extending loans to countries worse off than our own. An act that nearly caused a collapse in the world economy. The WMF positioned Randolph as an officer to symbolize their mellowing strategy for the future. He had already earned a reputation among the aristocracy as a negotiator for the common man. Corporate boards looked upon his abilities as good business sense, as he knows how to keep situations from occurring.

"The NRPA has recently appointed Randolph as their public relations man. They want to show the UN that their proposals for global resource management will work for the best interest of all nations. Unfortunately for us, Randolph is sincere enough at heart to persuade them."

"Do you really think that he buys into the image of the NRPA being the good Samaritan?" I asked.

"We believe he's not getting the whole picture," Ryan said.

Matt added, "We're going to enlighten him. Neil Fairview, the Canadian, is keeping him in the dark. Randolph's a good man. He's proved it here."

Ryan added, "Fairview is the chairman of the NRPA board."

TJ couldn't hold back a smile when he said, "Yes, so we've heard."

I asked, "Any idea on how we can enlighten him?"

“Our connections in Montreal are checking around. Since he is often there, our chances are good. All this started falling into place the day you left Canada. The Montreal group wanted you both here quickly, so you could help us out.” Matt said.

Ryan remarked, “Randolf is our best lead. We can only wait, and see what comes out of this latest approach.”

“If we get the right person to bring Randolf up-to-date with what’s happening, then it will be up to Randolf to show his true colors.”

We all agreed that their plan had potential and that events would begin to move quicker if we had support from the inside.

Matt changed the topic by saying, “You mates care for a tour of the night life? Ryan and Lorna aren’t drinking mates, and when I’m not here in the Action Room I’m either playing ball, or in the pub watching the games. Do either of you have a place in mind?” TJ said, “Any place suits me, Matt.”

I asked, “Are there any Maori bars?”

“I know of one, but I’ve never considered going in.”

“They seem like terrific people. Thought it might be interesting!”

“Tonight then,” he said.

20 – Native to Nature

THE BAR WAS PACKED, loud and rocking. A cloud of smoke hung three feet from the ceiling. Pool tables were busy with spectators crowding in too close for players to make a decent shot. It was obvious that there were no free chairs, standing room only. As we worked our way through the wall-to-wall people, a Maori woman grabbed Matt by the arm, and yelled over the noise for him to follow her. He passed the word back to me, and I to TJ. As we neared the bar, I yelled into Matt's ear, that I would get us a round of beers. The woman hearing this, yelled: No! No! Follow me.

She was in her late 30s with silvery grey strands in her otherwise black hair. Her petite build gave her a feminine appearance that drew out our male instinct to protect. Unaware to us, it was she who was being our protector. She stopped at one of the many stand-up bars, and jumped up on the empty stool where her husband sat opposite, patiently awaiting her return. His relaxed appearance reminded me of a man proud of his accomplishments, however insignificant they might be. They introduced themselves, and kept us engaged in conversation for as long as we could handle not having a drink. She was up to something, but I couldn't put a finger on it. Then TJ attempted to leave for the bar, but the woman jumped down from her stool insisting that TJ allow her to buy the first round: Keep them here, she ordered her husband. Not much was said in her absence.

Glancing at TJ, I realized that he was as confused as I. When she returned, she addressed her husband saying, "So far so good."

He said, "You three are the first Pakehas to ever enter this pub." Pakeha being the name given to non-Maoris. "Generally, this bunch don't need an excuse to tear each other apart. You could be their next bit of entertainment."

TJ leaned toward me, saying, "I would have settled for any bar! What are you projecting, Big Guy?"

That was a deliberate reminder that in his opinion I sometimes direct events to occur, rather than just allowing them to happen. Personally, I saw nothing wrong with the concept of making things happen; in any case I didn't want any trouble. I looked around the pub in an attempt to assess my situation, and the woman tugged at my shirt sleeve saying, "Don't stare at them; you'll give them another reason to tear ya apart."

The husband added, "Best not make things worse; you might be safe if we keep talking together. Everyone knows us here. This has been our table every Saturday night for the last ten years and everyone leaves it free for us." They exchanged smiles.

Matt looked troubled yet I sensed that he could and would fight if he had to. TJ remained alert and ready, appearing perfectly cool as always. I sensed that something was about to occur, and yet I had no immediate fear. We had just paid for our second beer when a big lad behind me stopped his pool shot, and for no apparent reason turned to face me. There was no doubt that I had been singled out. He moved within six feet of me, and people stepped aside leaving a clear space between us. Mentally, I prepared myself for a kick; instead, he casually leaned on his pool cue showing an unusual sense of confidence. He stared deep into my eyes, and the surrounding crowd followed his stare.

The noise level decreased; my muscles poised for attack; my heart pulsated against my chest, and my palms became slightly moist. These sensations were familiar, and I could deal with them; however, a new sensation began to surface and I began focusing on various aspects of this Maori. He was in his 20s, broad-shouldered, with a muscular face and determined, penetrating eyes.

Suddenly thoughts entered my head that were not my own. This Maori's mind was probing me. He led me with his thoughts, and unusual questions surfaced. Instinctively I knew I must answer truthfully, for he was listening to my silent answers. The safety of my friends and myself depended on honest responses.

'No, I don't have anything against the Maori. . .

'On, I don't dislike your broad-shaped nose, nor your brown skin. . .

No, I don't mean you harm. . .

'Yes, I do love this land. . . I love all living things. . .

'Yes, this is a private club. . . We shouldn't be here. . .

'Yes, I will respect it.'

Without breaking eye contact he straightened, as though ready to make a surprise move, but instead he sent another question into my mind and I silently answered.

‘No, I am not threatened,’ was my reply.

Then he slowly raised his arm, stretched out his hand at shoulder height, still not breaking eye contact. His slow movement left an element of uncertainty, and when his arm was fully extended before me, he turned his palm upwards.

I remained alert not knowing what move might occur next, yet sensing that it was my call to act and yet not being clear how. Suddenly a warm feeling came over me, and I found another question forming.

‘Do I deserve this?’

Hesitantly I decided: yes, I do; however, I had no idea what I was saying yes to. All feelings of impending threat vanished, and in a trusting move I extended my arm, and laid my hand on his. From the corner of my eye, I saw Matt’s posture change as if ready to protect me from danger. The short moment as our hands touched seemed to last for a minute, and I felt an old, yet undefined emotion stir from its resting place where it had hidden from my consciousness.

He removed his hand, backed up, turned away from me, and returned to the pool table. I stood there stunned, attempting to align my feelings, for something had occurred inside my being. He quickly looked back over his shoulder, and seeing that I was still watching him, pleased him, and he nodded his approval. That nod left me with more than just a sense of relief; it again touched that undefined core deep inside my being.

Activities went back to normal and the noise level rose to its high level with some additional laughter in the background. The husband and wife explained that we had been accepted by one of the young leaders, and, hopefully the others would respect his decision, and allow us to remain. However, they advised us to leave before people got too drunk and forgot the event. TJ insisted on getting the next round on his own. He was letting everyone know that we got the message and were making ourselves welcome. However, upon the couple’s encouragement we did leave early.

Outside the bar we joshed with each other over the incident. Matt joked that we should do it again sometime, and I thanked him for the exciting evening to which he replied, “At first that Maori looked like he was going to tear you apart, and at the end it looked like he wanted to be your friend.”

“He got inside me, Matt, and was checking me out. Did you ever hear of the Maori doing mind probing?”

Matt said the obvious, “No, but I’ve heard of guys getting their heads kicked in.”

TJ placed a hand on my shoulder, and gripped firmly to gain my full attention, and then said in a serious manner, “So tell me! . . . What did that prove?”

Missing his point entirely I shared my immediate conclusion with him, explaining how I had just come face to face with Chris the Native. My encounter with this Maori had stirred up the realization that despite living on a reserve, suffering humiliation from whites and struggling with the resulting scars, I managed to maintain my connection with Nature.

There was no response from TJ and his silence confirmed the realization that the experience was entirely a personal one, for my benefit only. We moved to another pub, joshed throughout the remainder of the evening. Neither the bar room laughter nor the alcohol could drown out the emotions lingering in my mind. A part of me was realigning itself, making me a more complete person. The significance of not being native in body was losing its importance, as it was replaced by the knowledge that all along, I had been native in spirit, despite my white birth.

Who we are on the exterior communicates an incomplete picture of the whole person or the full package. What you see is not what you get. Our passions in life open doors to new experiences that enrich our character no matter what their outcome. They mold us into who we are.

As we made our way home along quiet streets walled with small shops, I concluded that color and culture did not matter, for we are all Native to Nature.

21 – Domination Free

TJ AND I COULD OFFER little assistance to our Kiwi hosts, other than stuffing envelopes and performing odd jobs. As a result, TJ's spirit began to lose its spark. That is until a Maori fisherman took us fishing in the main channel. Early each morning we joined him on the beach near his home and shoved off in his small three-seater boat. Often, we returned before ten with a catch of flounder, and red snapper, which he took to market. In Auckland, fresh fish meant the morning catch, not frozen or kept half alive for months to retain their so-called freshness.

One morning as we made our way back to the Peace Center, walking around the center town to avoid traffic, TJ made an unusual query.

He asked, "I've always looked negatively on communes and cults. Am I missing something here? Is this what these centers are?"

"What a strange question."

"Well! Are they?"

"No! What else do you want to know?"

"Everything!"

So, I began the difficult explanation of how the word commune was short for community, and how community suggested sharing, and how sharing had become nearly impossible in towns and cities. I said, "The community spirit is dying. People are realizing that they have a need to share ideas, and resources, so they form their own communities. And if they find others with a focus similar to their own, then their voice can be heard."

"People share in small villages as well. So there has to be more."

"The individuals we've met no longer allow their lives to be dominated by others, or the ideals of others. This also means that they are dealing with their own desire to dominate. They have trained themselves to be open-minded, and consider the contributions of others, thus the creation of domination-free communities. You won't find that level of dedication in an average village."

"You're right there!"

"Another difference is their desire to be self-sufficient, and sustainable. Not just in energy and food production but in managing their life, in raising their children, and in planning their neighborhood."

I then asked him if he noticed any similarities in the communities we stayed in.

"I felt relaxed," he said, "and never had a reason to defend myself or watch my back. In fact, on our first visit I considered how easy it would be to take advantage of these people. They were so open that they appeared naïve, but they're not. Instead, they gave me an opportunity to be my best. I truly appreciated them for that."

"If I had been a complete jerk, and wanted to harm them, they would never have let me pass the front door in the first place. They're open but they're not stupid, and they are also harder to fool because they're sensitive to each other."

Then he asked again, "So what is the big diff between cults and communes?"

"Ok, be patient! This is a tough question! Communes as they were labeled in the 70s and 80s are now often referred to as alternative communities or intentional communities. They're alternative because they are truly creating a different community lifestyle. They are sometimes intentional because their focus could be religious, environmental, holistic, or human rights, research, etc. If they are attempting to achieve sustainability, they are sometimes known as eco-villages, which is short for ecological villages."

"These people don't need leaders, TJ, for they are strong enough to direct their own lives. This differentiates them from cults as well."

"Ok, let's talk about cults!"

"Cult members have the tendency to feel superior to non- members. Their way is the only way, and they want their ideals to dominate. There are very few cults left: leaders have died, groups have dissolved due to internal conflicts, members moved on with their lives, and left the cult."

"You make it sound like there was nothing to be concerned about."

“If there ever was any danger it was more to themselves than to anyone else. Some explored their spiritual side to the point of losing respect for their physical limitations. They entered what became known as the insanity band. We know what happened to them. They became the public interest stories.

“I have spoken to people who lived in cults, and left. They have no regrets. They were happy to be free of the cult, yet they miss the close connection they had with friends. Most of them told me that it was the best time of their lives.

“Cults were a part of our American coming of age, so let’s get on with life because they have.”

“Go back to this domination thing!” he said.

“Our friends have freed themselves from much of the domination placed on them. Often, they are more knowledgeable than the facilitators who want to govern them, like health and building inspectors, education administrators, and regulating boards. They have acquired sustainability not only on the land but more importantly within themselves.

“They no longer support a judicial system that confuses the rights of the victim with that of the criminal. They don’t approve of a health system that doesn’t treat the whole person, or an education system that destroys a child’s natural curiosity to learn. Their communities are a showcase for a new and better social system. There are groups who devote themselves to sharing what they have learned with others through teaching and writing. I believe that eventually the existing social systems will adopt many of their ideas.”

TJ said, “You sound like Louise when she gets passionate about her beliefs. It creates a nice energy.” He continued, “I agree with what you say about domination. If we allow someone to dominate us it leaves the impression that we need to be led. And there is always someone who is ready to say they can lead us.”

“Yes, and it causes us to perpetually do poorly,” I said.

“I’m glad that there are people like our friends who have decided to stop this never-ending cycle.”

22 – Attraction or Connection

THE FOLLOWING DAY, TJ surprised me by acting out of character. While sitting in the kitchen, he presented a proposal. “We need more people living in alternative communities, so let’s get Matt to create a web page, and we’ll promote community living.”

“This already exists, TJ.”

“I’m not talking about people who are already living in communities. I mean, people in general can benefit from sharing expenses, companionship and transportation whether they live in cities or villages.”

At that point our three hosts entered the kitchen to begin lunch. TJ leaned his chair back on its rear legs placing his hands behind his head, and continued speaking to everyone, “I think we should encourage people to move into communities like the Peace Center, so that they can start sharing expenses, etc.”

“Lots of people live like this; it’s not new,” one of them said.

TJ continued, “The NRPA are planning to make it difficult for environmentalism to survive, so why wait until they strike? Instead, increase our numbers by getting more people living together. That will lessen their expenses, free up their time, and get them actively involved.”

“We’re getting more people involved all the time: that’s what we do here,” Lorna said rather surprised at his comments.

“Maybe we need to widen our nets.”

Matt was a bit irritable. His team had lost a rugby match the previous evening, and it showed when he responded, “TJ, who do you think you are coming in here telling us what we need to do?”

“You’re not hearing what I’m saying.”

“Because you’re not saying anything that we don’t already know! That’s why!”

Sitting the chair back down on all four legs, TJ calmly said, “Ok, have it your way,” and left the room.

After his quick departure Matt angrily turned to me, and said, “Who does he think he is?”

I answered. “He wants to make a contribution, and he needs our help. He started the idea flowing in hopes that we would keep it going but that didn’t happen.”

“He can’t tell me I’m not doing anything. We all work our butts off here.”

“Of course! He did a poor job of presenting his idea.” That calmed Matt, so I left to speak with TJ alone. This was the first time he had offered a plan, and I wasn’t about to let it slip away.

Joining him in the back room I said, “Hey, Man, you gave up too easily.”

“If they don’t want to hear me out, what can I do?”

“Finish telling me,” and so he did.

“You said that most people are in these communities because they want to take charge of their life, and improve conditions for others. Well, there are a lot of other people in that same boat; they don’t need to be spiritually inclined or activists. Others can enjoy a better lifestyle too.”

“Like who?”

“Look at young couples who can’t afford a decent apartment because of lower than poor wages. Don’t you think these people would jump at the opportunity to live in a co-op housing arrangement with all the shared benefits? How about artists, musicians, writers, singles, gays, cultural and social groups! I see nothing wrong with these people enjoying this lifestyle.”

“No, but what’s to be gained from it? How is this going to help our cause?”

“Think about it, Man. Our parents were these kinds of people, struggling to stay alive and making small contributions. They came from big families and they wanted their own home. But today’s generation is isolated from each other: they have no sense of community. Simply because there is a movement of people who think they understand the problems, and have solutions, doesn’t mean that they get to keep it for themselves.”

“The information is there for people if they want it,” I told him.

“Chris, you’re missing the point. We need them; we’re in this together; one planet, remember.”

“Help me out here,” I asked still confused. “Why would they be interested? Why would they make such a move, and how would it change anything?”

“They don’t know the benefits because the information doesn’t exist for them. It’s not where they’re looking. I say put the information where they will see it, and they will get excited as much as the next guy. They’ll need assistance from the pros like Joe and Frank. Hey! We could generate income, and make it into a new business.”

“Once you start talking money, I begin to follow you. So, we present them with the idea, and they begin forming their own special interest communities with our help. What then?”

“I’m assuming that people, living in such an arrangement, can generate a magical bond between themselves. Especially if they have helpful tips from people who understand how to make it work. All this intuition I see in people; can’t we teach this?”

“Yes! If they want to learn.”

“Well then let’s give them the opportunity, let’s get the word out to them. We’re told to go buy stuff that we don’t want or need, and we buy it. So, we have a product here that needs to be sold. Judging from the amount of help we’ve received in the last six months; I figure that getting people involved is worth the try. There’s an untapped market out there, and like I say, we have the product, and the know-how. We just have to present it to them. If the average person was to see any of the things I have seen in these communities, they would pay to have more of it. Trust me. I’m just an average guy like the rest of the world. With more communities the NRPA doesn’t stand a chance, now or in the future. These groups we’ve been visiting are the pioneers; they are the cornerstone for new groups to follow.”

He had made his point and I supported him in a later presentation given to the group. Lorna suggested calling this new website the CornerStone Concept, after the pioneers in Intentional Communities. TJ took pride in his contribution.

RYAN GATHERED TJ AND ME in the Action Room to share the news from Montreal, about our hopeful contact with the NRPA.

He began, “We just got off the line with Montreal, and they know how to approach Randolph. Every year he attends the Montreal film festival, and during this week-long venue there are many gala events. They include film presentations, talent searches, dinners, and parties.”

Lorna broke in, “Apparently your people there have a scheme to join one of the celebrations. Seems daring to me, but they’re not worried.” Her joyous exuberance suggested that there was some romantic aspect to this story.

She continued, “The group will rent a limousine, complete with chauffeur, and one of the women will pose as a star. She’ll have her own private photographer. Exciting, isn’t it?”

She had us all smiling and waiting for more. “They hope to attract enough attention to themselves to get past security. The photographer is going to be constantly shooting photos, probably with an empty camera.” We all chuckled at the thought. “They want to create the image that this lady is a celebrity, and maybe attract Randolph to her. Sounds exciting, I wish I could be there.”

“Pretty daring plan, if you ask me.” Ryan said.

Matt added, “They say that this woman, Louise, can pull it off.” TJ, in shock at hearing the name, said, “Louise who?”

“I don’t know!” Matt said as he became aware of TJ’s sudden concern. “It’s 9:00 a.m. here and 2:00 a.m. yesterday there, so I will ask during our regular sched in six hours, Mate.”

TJ left the room obviously upset. As I approached, he stood silently staring out the window. I said, “Hey Man, you don’t know that it’s your Louise.”

“It is! She wanted to get involved. She’s an artist and an amateur actress. She knows the scene.” I said, “Why does that bother you?”

Frustrated, he answered, “Because she’s taking chances. She could get hurt. You know that! We’re not messing around with a bunch of amateurs. Those people in Montreal don’t know how to protect her.”

“What’s really bothering you, TJ?”

“I just told you, dammit! I don’t want her to be used. Fighting these guys is a noble cause but not if she gets hurt; it’s not worth it.”

I wanted to say more but was having trouble knowing where to begin. Eventually he continued to express his fear. “Louise is a good-looking woman. She could charm anyone. This Randolph is no idiot. When he sees her flaunting herself around at that party, he’s going to follow his dick right to her. She’s the one that’s going to get

trapped, not the other way around. Who's going to get her out of this with us half way around the world? We can't go home. Man, I got to stop this!"

"Wow, wow, slow down! You're trying to rule her life, and you're not giving her enough credit."

"Ya! Well. . ."

"If all Randolph sees in her is his next screw, then he's not our man."

"What do you mean? How are we going to know that?"

"Louise will! She knew where your mind was at."

This sat comfortably with him, and he started to calm down, and reflect. I let the silence linger before I added, "Think about what you learned from each other about the difference between attraction and connection." He wasn't quite calmed enough to figure it out on his own, so I spelled it out for him. "If Louise feels that Randolph is only after her body then he is of no value to her or to us. Nothing lost or gained. Louise and the gang had an exciting evening at the party and everyone moves on. We would be wasting our time to even explain to him what's happening."

"Why is that?"

"Because his priorities would be in the wrong place. Even if he was interested enough to help, his real interest would be in winning her over, and that would be a waste of her time. We can't afford anything less than a sincere commitment from him. If Randolph is who these Kiwis say he is, then he will see that there is more to Louise than her good looks."

"Are you trying to cheer me up or what? If he sees her real beauty this could get worse," he said seriously, trying to lighten up.

"You know that she is an expert at picking up on intentions. If she was able to resist your charm, do you really think anyone else has a remote chance?"

"You're doing well. Keep talking," he said somewhat more relaxed.

"Louise needs more than a chance meeting with this guy. I know you are aware of this, TJ. They must become close friends. We will gain nothing if he is merely attracted to her. It wouldn't work because the attraction would constantly get in the way. There has to be a connection between them: the kind of connection that I have with Louise, clear and non-sexual. If Randolph is as conscious of God as the Maoris suggest, then he will set his sexual desires aside, and focus on real values: his connection with another human being."

TJ was letting me do all the talking, so I continued. "Connections are the most rewarding moments in a person's life, and for most people they are very rare or non-existent. Perhaps Randolph has been going to Montreal all these years because he knew something important would happen to him there. Louise could be the turning point in this guy's life. If Louise has decided that she is the one who should check him out, then you have to trust her intuition. You know that this is how she operates, and I believe that she has the abilities to handle this challenge."

At this point TJ was sitting on our only sofa, and he leaned forward placing his hands over his face. In amazement, I saw him choke up with emotion, and I sensed the power of his feelings from where I sat. I quietly left the room, believing that he had just discovered the reality of his true feelings for Louise.

Later in the day Matt confirmed TJ's suspicion. There was no telling when these two lovers would be together again.

ANTICIPATION LINGERED as we waited for news from Louise on her meeting with Randolph. One day, Lorna rushed around the Center yelling for Ryan, TJ, and I to hurry to the Action Room. The long-awaited news had finally arrived. We gathered for the official explanation. She had been with Matt while Louise told her story.

Stepping into the room, I noticed Lorna sitting on the edge of a desk with her long white smock loosely following the contours of her medium build. With the extra energy of the moment, she looked absolutely radiant. The rest of us shoved papers aside on desks, or removed books from chairs to make ourselves comfortable, and once settled Lorna began her account.

"Canadians are so romantic. Our Montreal friends parked the limousine directly in front of the hotel entrance where this gala was being held. Louise was so excited she opened the door herself, instead of waiting for the chauffeur. Anyway, she was having difficulty getting out of the limousine because of her long dress, and at that same moment, a tall gentleman stepped forward and extended his hand to help her.

"Now can you picture this?" She emphasized to get our full attention. "Louise couldn't see his face because of the poor lighting, but he was well-dressed, and he took her by the arm and without an introduction he invited her to accompany him inside. Of course, she accepted, and guess who he was?"

Everyone cheered Randolph's name, and comments floated around the room. TJ sat quietly, only occasionally breaking a smile as Lorna gave her presentation.

She continued, "Louise had no idea who the gentleman was until the photographer found a way of letting her know. Throughout the evening, Randolph introduced her to many of his friends. Later, during the evening, as they sat together, Louise surprised him with an important message.

"She whispered: it is you I came here to meet.

"Why? he asked.

"To make you wise. And she offered no further explanation. Isn't this fantastic?"

We were thrilled with the news, for our initial contact was made. Lorna then questioned TJ about Louise's appearance. "Does she look anything like the singer Celine Dion? Every time Louise becomes enthusiastic, that adorable French accent reminds me of your French-Canadian singer."

TJ told her that many French-Canadian women express themselves in that manner. Matt and Ryan smiled in agreement that they were living in the wrong country. This left TJ with a wide grin, although he never explained to the group his special relationship with Louise, and I was not about to become his mouthpiece.

The following evening more news arrived, and Lorna waited until we all gathered in the Action room. "I just finished speaking with Louise. She has already visited with Randolph in his office at the NRPA headquarters."

Everybody in the Action Room had a comment.

"Louise came right to the point with him. As she explained to me: if he's not our man, she had better things to do with her time. Anyhow she showed him the 'Fighting for Green' website, and he was shocked to read the claims against the NRPA. Louise feels that there is no doubt he hasn't been aware of the NRPA's true agenda.

"He immediately canceled his meetings, citing urgent family business, and booked a flight home to London without an explanation to anyone including Louise. She then drove him to his hotel where he packed his belongings and she rushed him to the airport for his flight.

"Apparently there was no more talk of the NRPA. Instead, they explored their views on freedom. Louise tells me that he is a man of integrity, and called him an Evolved Spirit. She believes that he's our man!"

OUR ALL-IMPORTANT CONTACT was made. Now it would be a waiting game to see if Randolph's conscientious side would prevail. Our fight against the NRPA lay in his hands, with Louise as the orchestrator. It felt odd to be removed from the action, now only an observer to events as they unfolded. I continued to hold the image of my vision firmly in my mind, as I had done during those years when I felt that I was all alone. Yet had I really been? All these people that were helping us now; what was their vision during that time? Was I suddenly becoming their silent partner? Not to forget Grandfather, the Native Spirits, the collective vision of the planet, Nature itself, and of course Joe. Were there more? Were we not all sharing the same goal, silently partnering the others' visions?

These thoughts made it easy to surrender and allow the energies that had built up over the years to unfold as they would. There was no better place for this to occur than at the Peace Center for it was busy at all times of the day. People wandered in on their noon hour breaks, and in the evenings. Some gathered flyers and papers on various local and international groups, all of which dealt with alternative issues. The meeting room that was once the old tavern was now a gathering hall for many organizations. No particular cause was required, but everyone we met was dedicating valuable time toward assisting or searching for social and environmental change. We were living in a whirlwind of energies, and it was an exciting place to be.

During the following week Randolph traveled to London, Geneva, and Washington, and frequently called Louise where she was staying in Montreal. Initially he urged her to join him on his travels, but she declined, citing the reason that she had no desire to leave Quebec.

In the following weeks he often returned to Montreal to speak with her in person. As a result, Louise dined at the finest of Montreal's restaurants, and frequented the world of the arts in a style she could never afford. She was enjoying herself, trusting that it would not be detrimental to her connection with TJ.

Conversations between her and Randolph focused on various aspects of life, and he quickly came to trust her opinion. She never presented him with solutions to his questions, but rather directed him toward the cause. He was enjoying the opportunity of receiving reflections about life that were seldom accessible to a person in his position.

A constant concern in America and Europe during this time, was the NRPA's threat to crush environmental activism. Those plans included influencing banks not to renew their loans, discouraging insurance companies from

providing coverage, and challenging their research and studies in the courts. They had even considered a campaign to discredit them by announcing and disseminating the lie that environmental efforts were working against the protection of nature.

However, Louise's influence prompted Randolph to make his first move.

Her e-mail read:

'Our friend,' meaning Randolph, 'has convinced the chairman,' referring to Fairview, 'and the board that their anticipated fear of public opposition toward the NRPA is unfounded. Therefore, to proceed with plans of crushing environmentalism would call unnecessary attention to their issues.'

'The board has voted to put their campaign on hold.'

'Our friend recognized the NRPA's greatest concern, and knew that they anticipated an external threat in the form of activists' strength. External strength is the reality they understand best. Our friend however is aware of the hidden strength which is brewing. The demise of the NRPA is fusing people together around the globe, and he knows from his experiences in South Africa, just what this represents.'

'This latest move has awakened in me, a greater understanding of the meaning of power. In the past, I have often confused power as being that which I saw in others and could not grasp. But this is a frail power. The NRPA have such power, for its base is not in balance with the natural scheme of things, nor does it represent the greatest needs on our planet. Thus, it lacks integrity, and the strength integrity evokes.'

'I believe someone like our friend, who understands these things better than I, is aware of the NRPA's cracks and all its weaknesses. I sense that his first move is merely the tip of the iceberg.'

'In love and peace'

'Louise'

TJ WAS QUIETLY having difficulty dealing with Louise's interactions with Randolph. Sitting in his room one Sunday evening I tried to discuss it, in hopes of lightening his mood.

I said, "I believe that love and sex can be separated, and that love should not be confined to only two people. Especially if we have control over our sexual instincts."

TJ said, "I have no desire to have sex with anyone but Louise. Why bother! For the first time in my life, I would feel that I was cheating on a woman even though we never . . ." Stopping short, he glanced at me knowing that I must know the rest of that statement.

I completed my thoughts by saying, "When the connection is real for both parties, love just exists. It wants to be shared. Sometimes love has a birth of its own."

"Like what?" he asked.

"New ideas."

He made it obvious that he was no longer in the mood to be philosophical, for he cut my efforts short by saying, "Well! Look at it however way you want, but I'm here, and she's there. What more can I say?"

At that point Ryan nudged the partially opened door open. "You two are popular. I just got off the line with a Health Center near Taupo. They want you to visit them. They heard of your adventures from a contact in New York."

"So much for secrecy," TJ said. "Who are these people in Taupo?"

"The woman's name is Annalyse, and she lives in a community overlooking the lake. They call their Center 'Inspirational Health.' Don't know much more than that, except that it's beautiful around there. She did say that you wouldn't be bored."

TJ slapped me on the arm, "That's the magic word. When are we leaving, Partner?"

23 – Inspirational Health

THE MERCEDES BUS came to a complete stop in the small town of Taupo along the shores of Lake Taupo. An enthusiastic American tourist called it fly-fishing paradise, Jimmy Carter land. Stepping off the bus we were approached by a woman in her late 30s with an intriguing Kiwi accent.

“You must be the Canadian gentlemen from the Peace Center. Hi, I am Annalyse,” she said with a pleasant smile. Her blond hair and fair complexion framed her lively eyes.

Heading toward her car she positioned herself between TJ and me, and taking each of us by the arm, she pulled us close to her in an affectionate manner, and stated that she loved us already. What a great introduction! I was wishing her car was parked further down the street, for the closeness of another person made me long for physical contact.

We placed our belongings in the rear bonnet, as they call the car trunk, and drove out of town. Reaching the crest of a steep incline near their property, she motioned for us to look out the rear window. Below lay the clear waters of Lake Taupo with Mount Tongariro and Ruapehu reflecting onto the waters, and then rising high into the sky.

Heading to our accommodations a brisk wind made walking difficult. This was an ideal location for a wind generator, I commented.

“Good!” she said. “You can build us one.”

Why not, I thought. It was my idea.

TJ and I would share living quarters in a turn of the century bunk house now renovated into spacious rooms complete with sliding doors. Continuing our tour Annalyse pointed out that all their new buildings were designed according to the ancient art of *Sacred Geometry*.

She said, “The earliest cathedrals were based on this simple geometry derived from squares, triangles and circles. There are examples of it in every culture of the world from the Mayan to Zen and right through Christianity, however the application was slowly lost. Our own designer, Beth, who is an ingenious woman, applies these principles in all her designs.

“I’d like to know more about this,” I said.

“You would enjoy meeting her. She gets quite excited when explaining how the structural supporting points align exactly with intersecting geometric lines. Even the dividing walls, windows, and doors just naturally position themselves. Beth is presently assisting an Australian architect in applying these techniques to a commercial project in Sydney.”

I found myself bathing in Annalyse’s energy as she spoke. “What more can you tell me about this method?”

“Beth believes that the outside of a building could be left unfinished, and it would still be a piece of art, simply because of the balance that automatically results from applying these perfect forms.

I attended a course of hers on Feng Shui, and I learned how sacred geometry creates the ideal space for applying the Feng Shui philosophy.”

TJ blurted out, “I haven’t the foggiest idea of what you two are talking about!”

Annalyse moved beside him, and said, “Then let’s just let the buildings talk for themselves.”

We arrived inside the main hall, and she left us to explore on our own. The angles, the exposed beams, the open concept, the natural light, and the combinations of rough and smooth surfaces with pastel colors made the structure organic, natural, almost an extension of oneself. TJ described it perfectly when he called it a friendly space.

Covered walkways with no walls linked each building. There was no point in separating themselves from the elements when there was no extreme weather. Then we visited the main house which they called ‘The Quad’. Four couples lived here, each having their own private compact living space. One wall of each residence faced towards the Grand Hall which was the central common area. The high ceilings with stained glass skylights above numerous plants created an inviting area for relaxation. Artists had applied their skills to the wood columns and casings around windows, giving the space an ever- evolving personal touch.

On our way to lunch she explained how they supported themselves.

“It’s generally quiet here during the week, but on weekends the place is packed. We offer seminars on every subject we feel is essential for improving one’s quality of life; from health, celebrating the solstice, herbs, massage, Reiki, Rolfing, you name it; we’ve done it at least once. This is why we call the center, Inspirational Health, for we encourage a healthy spirit, mind and body. We even get into birthing sessions, not that either of you would be interested.”

“Not this week,” TJ commented.

“We are firm believers that what comes from the heart must be *given freely*, so we don’t charge for accommodations or seminars. Each person contributes as they can afford, and rarely do we lose money.”

TJ said, “I am constantly amazed that people can survive when they give away their money, open up their homes for free, and ask for nothing in return. I mean this isn’t how the system is supposed to work.”

“Well, it works for us. Mainly because people base their contribution on the true value of their stay here, and their ability to pay. One man left only five dollars for a weekend because that was all he could afford. Two years later we received another \$100 in the mail.

It was important to him to pay the extra amount.

“This land was left as a bequeathal that included funds for construction of most of these buildings. One person’s vision has helped hundreds of others.”

Addressing Annalyse I said, “Donating money is sometimes the only way people can help. It makes them part of the team even after they are gone.”

“None of us receive money for our work here, nor do we have expenses. Extra spending money is generated through helping people in the surrounding area. For example, I enjoy working with seniors. At the end of each week, we hand it all over to the accountant. The total amount is divided amongst us equally. I enjoy this system for it encourages me to focus on the personal reward of helping others. I can get on with the pure enjoyment of creating, rather than worrying about any monetary reward. Kiwis take to working naturally like a duck to water. This is a good thing because we can’t afford to be lazy: we’re Perma culturalists at heart.”

“That’s another new one,” TJ said.

“*Permaculture means* sustainable living, putting back into the land as much as we take out. Working with Nature as best we can. We still have a few weak areas; for example, we will never be able to repay the forest for the wood we used to build these buildings. But perhaps, in the greater scheme of things, our contributions may help balance other situations. I know that this is an idealistic view, but I am an idealist,” she said proudly.

The Health Center and Annalyse were appealing to me more and more every minute. After a meal of lentil soup and spelt crackers we walked through the orchard. They grew kiwi fruit, passionfruit, apricots, mangos, grapes, pears, nectarines, pomegranates, oranges, grapefruit, apples, olives, almonds, tangelos, boysenberry, loganberry and blackberry bushes twelve feet high, plus a long list of items I had never heard of, like uglis and kumquats. They even raised earthworms in the compost, and then spread them throughout the orchard to enrich the soil around the tree roots.

She explained, “We combine vegetable growing with raising chickens. It works for us. The heat from the chickens keeps the greenhouse warm. As well, they provide carbon dioxide which increases the plant growth. Conventional greenhouses run out of carbon dioxide half way through the day, but the chickens make for a constant supply. We were inspired by a book called *Sol Viva*, and later purchased building plans from the author Anna Edey. From her plans we created an Earthlung. It converts harmful ammonia present in chicken manure into beneficial nitrates for the plant’s roots. Watering the plants also provides humidity which is healthy for the chickens, and we use the fruit pulp and the plant cuttings to assist in the composting of the chicken manure.”

“You are working with the natural cycles of life.” I stated gratefully.

“Certainly! Copying how Nature performs a function is smart business and is now called Biomimicry. It’s more fulfilling than being out of sync with Nature!”

“So, you eat eggs then,” I asked?

“Some of us do. At one time we were all Vegans, but not anymore.”

“This is an unusual switch.”

She continued her explanation, “For most of my life I believed that humans didn’t need to kill animals for food, and I knew that an acre of soya beans could feed more people than an acre used to graze animals. I hated being the cause of an animal suffering on my account, just so that I could eat its flesh.”

TJ interrupted, “I visited a pig factory once, and have refused to eat pork since. Their cages were too narrow for them to turn around in, and the floor was made of steel piping. Their small feet had to balance on the

pipes or slip between the cracks. One female pig placed its front legs up on the rails just begging me to set it free, and there was nothing I could do.”

Annalyse said, “Except stop eating their meat, as you did.”

Continuing she said, “While being a Vegan I suffered from various symptoms that left me with a lack of energy. Then an American woman gave a course here on how our blood *types* influence the way we absorb the foods we eat. After that weekend, I believe that type O’s, like myself, require meat. It contains the essential nutrients I need to sustain myself. Slowly, I introduced organic meats back into my diet, and within two weeks I felt better than I had in twelve years. It still amazes me.

“I have experimented by switching back to vegetarian meals, high on protein only to be further convinced that my body isn’t designed to do without meat. Now I accept that some of us just aren’t designed to be true vegetarians. Type A’s, for example, should avoid most meats, because apparently, they lack a type of digestive enzyme. So, they take to a vegetarian menu naturally. Not everyone here is convinced by these studies, but we thrive on allowing each individual to live by their own preferences.”

She sensed something from TJ, and said, “Don’t worry TJ, this isn’t all that I have in store for you.”

TJ looked at me with a grin that showed his surprise at how she had picked up on his hidden feelings. I was too consumed by our guide to notice any change in his mood.

“We have a treat for you this evening if you are up to it. Each month we take turns giving full body massages. Buddy, whom you will meet later, and I have forgone our turn so that you may enjoy this experience.”

“Full body, eh?”

“Yes, one person works the feet, then another starts on the face and head. Others may join in, and work on the rest of the body. It’s one of those experiences that activates and calms different parts of the body at the same time. Most practitioners of massage would frown on such a practice, but we enjoy the group experience.”

“No problem,” I said with much enthusiasm. To our surprise TJ declined. I assumed this decision was related to his memories of Louise. Annalyse responded, “Well TJ, perhaps you would prefer to go fly fishing with Buddy.”

“Did I choose too soon,” I said, “fishing or massage?”

She was correct about the massage, for although it lasted more than an hour it was unlike any I had ever had. During the following hours the presence of the participants stayed with me, particularly the touches of Annalyse.

During the next few days, I had no time to consider anything but the pure gratitude of being alive, for having received a massage, socializing, walking around the beautifully kept grounds, and enjoying visits with Annalyse was more than enough for me. But TJ wasn’t his usual energetic self. Something was on his mind.

IT WAS FRIDAY NIGHT and guests began to arrive. Annalyse explained that the seminar this weekend was on emotional consensus. Knowing that TJ was not familiar with this term, I explained how most alternative groups managed themselves by using consensus instead of the old system of majority rules. But they often end up resorting to taking a vote because they have difficulty making consensus work.

Annalyse said, “This is why the seminar will be of value to you both.” The method we use works; majority rules no more. I wanted to let each of you share in the experience. When you return home you may find it a useful tool, for it is an important key to the success of a community. This is our sixth year giving this seminar, and each time we are asked to repeat it.

“You will have the opportunity to participate in a skit. Don’t worry TJ, I’ll make certain that you’ll have fun.” This brought another surprised grin from him.

“One of the guests this weekend is a deer rancher, by the name of Ian, who will be flying in from Dunedin in his helicopter. He wants to use consensus in his business dealings with his partner and managers. Two other guests added the seminar to their venue as part of their holiday experience. The remaining 16 guests are from the North Island.”

The next morning, we rehearsed a skit that resulted in more laughter than practice. However, during our presentation they expected us to be serious. It went something like this.

“So, what is the *Emotional Consensus*?” Alex the Maori speaker asked.

“Consensus is the process where decisions are arrived at through agreement between those present; however, there is no voting, and no showing of hands. Everyone in the group more or less agrees to follow the proposal, and thus forms a consensus.

“My ancestors used this method at a time when taking a week to reach a consensus became an extended social event, but today as you know, we don’t take time for such luxuries.”

The participants in the skit were made up of weekend guests, and we sat around a large table. First, one guest presented a proposal to purchase a horse for \$2,000. TJ’s role was to object to the horse purchase, arguing that a tractor would be more practical. A woman disagreed with both of them, and wanted the money to go towards the purchase of new dining room tables. I supported the horse purchase, and even agreed to help pay for it by bartering my time with the horse’s owner. The remaining twelve people had no proposals of their own.

Alex, the chairperson, had everyone in turn voice their view on the proposal. He then zeroed in on each individual, and cleverly attempted to uncover our real motivation for our position. We gave him a difficult time, exhausting all reasoning that we could imagine on the fly, encouraged by the background laughter of the audience. In the end we resorted to our script.

Alex discovered that TJ wanted the tractor because he was tired of moving sheep from paddock to paddock, and figured a tractor would help his situation. The group eventually agreed to help TJ with his work by exchanging certain duties, thereby giving him the occasional break. Thus, resolving one objection to the proposal.

Alex then questioned the lady and asked why she wanted new dining room tables. She told us that the tops of the old tables were damaged, and that the cloth covers used to hide the mess, now needed replacing. In her opinion the tables should have been replaced long ago. After a short discussion each of us agreed to make a group effort to repair the old table top and also spend \$100 to replace the tablecloths. Now the lady was reasonably satisfied.

Then Alex invited the man wanting to buy the horse to explain the advantages of his proposal. He explained that his two daughters passed the horse each day traveling to and from school, and that they really wanted the opportunity to ride. In addition, it turned out that he owed the horse owner hours from a previous barter, and he figured that working in the horse deal would give him the incentive to pay the owner back. They reminded him of his responsibilities, and everyone agreed that they didn’t need to purchase the horse. They proposed that the father approach the owner, and ask if the children could help in the care of the horses. Perhaps he would give them the opportunity to ride in exchange. The father considered this a fair alternative.

The objections had successfully been addressed and now it was my turn. I had been the fool to volunteer my free time, and they wanted to know why. Apparently, I had heard a rumor that the owner had an old Kimberly stored in the barn. I hadn’t been quite forward enough to come right out and ask if I could purchase it. So, volunteering work was my way of checking the rumor out. I was glad to be merely acting out the part. They asked if I would still volunteer for another project and I declined.

In the end we all decided to keep the \$2,000, and everyone lived happily ever after.

Alex summarized, “This method of consensus requires four key ingredients.

“First, the chairperson needs to have the ability to read the situation without getting pulled into the debate.

“Secondly, everyone needs to be encouraged to express their position of agreement or disapproval. Even a hint of unresolved disapproval is best dealt with. If an issue isn’t important enough to devote the time required to reach an emotional consensus, then chances are the issue is too trivial to even discuss.

“Participants should either support the position of the group, or recognize that the group isn’t ready for their proposed idea. In any case, agreement is not what consensus is about. It’s about emotional acceptance. In other words, self-interests can’t prevail.

“Thirdly, people need to be encouraged to share their true motivations without fear of judgement or alienation.

“Lastly the group cannot forget why they are having the meeting in the first place. They share a common focus with their friends, which is more significant than the individual details being addressed.”

Discussion followed and by the end of the weekend we understood the large gap that separated conventional consensus from emotional consensus.

24 – Social Auditing

Ian had arrived in his chopper Friday evening, and during the Sunday afternoon break I joined him and TJ in the lounge. TJ explained that Ian had an interesting contact in the US that I should know about.

Ian explained, “His name is Gerry Gordon and he lives in Spokane, Washington. We met in ’97 when he brought his son to Milford Sound to hike through the fjords. I have property in that area, and I spotted them during a routine fly over. They were on my land so I dropped down, to chase them off. I didn’t want to be too hard on them for they had no way of knowing where they were. Had it been another rancher, they might have been mistaken for deer poachers.”

TJ redirected the conversation by asking Ian to explain the type of work Gerry was doing.

“Show me a computer, and I’ll find Gerry’s site,” he said.

We located Annalyse, and at my request she remained with us. As we waited for the Web site to open Ian explained, “Gerry calls his company ‘*RPM – Resource Protection Management.*’ They encourage businesses to regard their companies as Entities of Nature. He is leading this new field of Social Auditing.”

That explanation grabbed my attention. TJ gave me a wink, indicating that RPM, was an important link. Annalyse, realizing that TJ’s response held some significance for me, passed her hand gently across my back.

The Home Page read:

Align with Nature
and know
Strategic Power.

Align your business strategy
to the Laws of Nature
and Enjoy its Bounty.

“These are powerful comments,” I said.

RPM was proposing that when a company follows the laws of Nature, it would outperform all others, and RPM’s profile proved it. Their \$30,000 three months immersion courses for managers had no openings for the next eight months. They guaranteed graduates employment; however, many employers enrolled their own employees. RPM had their own management team that acted as consultants, and reportedly turned corporate philosophy around, increasing their profits.

Ian pointed out how simple their philosophy was by selecting specific pages that he was familiar with. He said, “See here. They say, ‘in order for a company to follow Nature’s example, businesses require the following elements.’”

Replenish the soil
from where the profits are drawn.

Suppliers are the soil
from which businesses receive their nourishment.

The message read, ‘Suppliers are often small companies whose survival depends on a delicate balance of contracts. The lowest price mentality is like a series of droughts resulting in poor yield which reflects in low wages, inferior materials and faulty products.

‘With RPM, suppliers remain healthy and corporations flourish.’

If you want to see the
financial statement of a company
look into the faces
of their workers.

It read, 'We have proven that people who realize that their contributions are appreciated put more of themselves into their work. Providing an atmosphere where this occurs produces winners, and thus the success of the large company is reflected in the faces of its workers, not just in a handful of smiling well paid and poorly trained managers.'

"Strong words, but facts," Ian said.

If the soil is fertile
the tree will be healthy.

At harvest time
some of the fruit must
remain on the ground.

This, they explained meant that while companies produce, there is a constant need to ensure they do not starve the surrounding area where they draw their nourishment. Directing a portion of their product back into the local economy where each individual supplier originates, will assist communities to thrive and encourage workers to take pride in their joint efforts.

Just as important was the need to encourage seeds for future growth. Through local appreciation for being associated with the larger company, enthusiastic youth would look forward to making themselves available. Thus, fertile soil in the form of educated and enthusiastic youth was available.

"I love their comparisons to Nature," I said.

Annalyse expressed her surprise that people were buying into this. Directing her question to Ian she asked, "Isn't the business community too confident in themselves to accept this objective criticism?"

"Not any longer," Ian answered. "We have a young breed of managers these days that want original ideas that will set their companies apart from the rest. RPM addresses this well. Let me find something that deals with this," and he scrolled to another page.

Nature knows the bottom line.
What is taken
must be replaced.
If not, then you can be replaced.

Accountability to shareholders means:
How much have you damaged our earth?
How are you securing our investment
In the planet?

Turning around to face us Ian said, "Gerry told me that RPM is reeducating accountants and managers on the subject of true accountability and capital gain."

"RPM is way ahead of the pack," I said. "How did this all begin?"

He was pleased that I asked, "When I spotted them on my land, they were in the process of gathering wood to prepare a meal, and they asked me to join them. Well, I'm retired now, and I keep reminding myself to take life

less seriously. I was being offered an opportunity to do just that.

“When I told him about my business, his first question to me was: did I use emotional consensus? It was through him that I first learned about this Center. I mean the man is from the other side of the world, and he gives me a tip about a place that is right here in my own backyard.”

Annalyse was impressed that an important American businessman knew about the Intentional Health Center. Ian said, “His son, Kyle, encouraged his dad to explain how his business started. Ten years previous Ian was managing a plastics and glass company that manufactures furnishings, shelving and so on. In front of their office building was a mature maple that the architect had insisted be kept alive as an integral part of the design. The architect even threatened to sue the company and the contractor if unnatural damage came to the tree during or after construction. Apparently, Gerry wasn’t into Nature at the time.

“The furnishings at the front reception were made of clear plastic and each time Gerry walked toward the front desk the reflection of the tree out front would distract his attention. This irritated him, often to the point of threatening to cut it down himself. That is, until he began dreaming about that tree. Interesting, eh?” he asked glancing at each of us. We hastily agreed.

“While dreaming he explored the root system of the tree. He saw how the architect had made special provisions to ensure that the roots would receive ample rainwater despite the hard top surfaces of asphalt. He kept dreaming about those roots and the reflection of the tree off the plastic furniture, and with each dream he became less concerned about removing it. Instead, he ordered a picnic table and placed it beneath the tree, and began having his early morning coffee there before the staff arrived.

“Eventually during these morning coffees, he began to envision the business in terms of a tree with nourished roots, adequate water and rich soil. Right there under that tree his ideas grew into an elaborate business plan.

“He presented his plan to the board of directors of that particular company, and they laughed at him. So, he simply left the firm and bought into their competition. Within four years he had major control of that market.

“People advised him to write a book on how he did it. They invited him to talk at luncheons, but he opted to train his own managers, and contract them out to help other companies, and then he started his school. He is of the opinion, that Nature grows by giving of itself. This is how he operates his business, and now he’s a wealthy man.”

“What fantastic news,” Annalyse remarked.

People were moving towards the lecture hall signaling the beginning of the next session. It was terrific that such a business existed but the implications did not quite reveal themselves to me.

TJ expressed how we should pass this on to Louise for her to check out.

THAT EVENING, I RECEIVED a phone call from Ryan in Auckland. Responses were already coming in from interested groups wanting to know how to set up a community. He and the gang didn’t have the answers so I confirmed my intent to return to Auckland the following day. Ryan added that Matt was picking up disturbing reports concerning logging violations. They were attempting to confirm any connection to the NRPA.

When I explained to TJ that they wanted me back at the Peace Center, he appeared surprised that I would go, especially since I was enjoying myself at the Taupo Center. He appeared detached from any sense of responsibility in helping out his mates back in Auckland, even when the initial plan was his. He simply replied that there was nothing there for him.

At that point a staff member approached us with a remote phone. I took the call. It was Ryan and he sounded nervous. TJ was about to leave and I waved for him to stop.

The New Zealand immigration office had called the Peace Center to confirm the whereabouts of Terrence James. Hearing his name brought TJ to full attention. Fortunately, Ryan received the call, and clearly assured them that he knew of no such person.

Hanging up I said, “I wonder how they linked you to New Zealand?”

“Someone let it slip out to the wrong person,” TJ said.

“But officially you’re here under an assumed name? That means they’ll be looking for me as well.”

“Maybe, but it’s only immigration. They’re not going to leave their desk until they can confirm that I’m even in the country. My name isn’t on any visitor’s permit. Besides they’ve already checked the Peace Center, so that might be the safest place for you to be.”

“How about you?”

“We’ll see!” Then he left.

When I joined him later, he was sitting with Ian in the lounge.

He said, “I’ve got news for you, Man. Ian just invited me down to Dunedin to see his deer farm.” In Kiwi tradition Ian was providing TJ with the opportunity for a full tour in response to TJ’s genuine interest in the practice of farming deer.

Our agendas were suddenly different. I didn’t fit into his plans nor he in mine. Little did I know what impact our next meeting would have on both our lives.

The following morning the rotor blades of the old Hughie swished around and around for five minutes before Ian and TJ waved goodbye through the cockpit. Annalyse and I departed for the bus station where she made it clear that I was welcome to return anytime, and I hoped it was a personal invite. As the bus slowly moved out of town, I wished I could remain in this small bit of paradise with this woman whom I felt so at home with. But duty called.

25 – Opposing Force

MATT MAINTAINED A VIGILANT search for news concerning environmental abuses, and revealed a disturbing pattern of violations occurring in the lumbering industry of British Columbia, and down through the western states. Outcries increased across America regarding the management of natural resources. The department in charge of forestry and mining was down-playing these infractions, and local residents were up-in-arms.

Violations included the cutting of trees around lakes and protected lands, excessively wide access roads being cut through environmentally sensitive areas. Oregon was complaining of an increase in logging on a scale resembling the previously outlawed strip cutting. The RCMP were called into an Alberta Reserve because a logging crew started illegally removing trees. Washington state reported a skidder had overturned in a creek, and diesel fuel was emptying into waters feeding into the Columbia River. There were numerous other administrative infractions.

Being remote from the events gave us a unique perspective, for we saw a pattern emerging. These violations were deliberate. The NRPA were making their move.

We transmitted our concerns to our North American contacts, and quickly received their response. The media there were beginning to see a growth in public interest, and had begun to report the news. They uncovered conflicts of interest between lumbering companies and political parties. The news was disturbing. Matt summed it up best. “They sneaked up on us, Mates. I don’t know how it got so far. Those Yanks and Canucks should have seen it coming. I thought you North Americans were naturally suspicious,” he said in a questioning tone.

Ryan replied, “We don’t know the whole story, everyone seems to have a different opinion.”

“I can tell you what’s going on. I’ve been on this for weeks, day and night, talking to people and reading headlines and I’ve spent many hours thinking about it.” Matt expressed himself animatedly, “The NRPA purchased those small companies so that they could implement an even bigger plan. Those infractions against the environment are deliberate. That’s why the NRPA purchased these companies in the first place. So they can use them to set-up the government.

“Remember those accusations we heard of last week, about party contributions from companies? They’re true! So are the rumors about various supply contracts going to friends of politicians. You don’t just start taking higher bids for no reason. There is an alliance happening between the government and these new companies, and it’s been in the works for some time. Someone has invested big bucks here, and the only group that can benefit from this is the NRPA.”

Lorna had an interesting observation. “Whatever plans the NRPA have, they are moving too fast. They are leaving themselves vulnerable to mistakes, and we’re going to take advantage of those weaknesses,” to which she received a round of applause.

I could not imagine the purpose behind the NRPA’s actions, and in my confusion, I urged Louise for more news. Two days later, an e-mail arrived and I read it aloud.

‘Hello Chris and the Gang:

‘The present scandal here in North America is causing turmoil within the political arena, yet this is just a stage setting for events to follow. The NRPA have formed two large corporations, one in the US and another in Canada. They are presently lobbying provincial and state governments behind closed doors.

‘Their intent is to resolve all present government embarrassments across America, in exchange for major concessions. You better be seated for this next part,’ the letter warned.

‘These two large firms will purchase all the small logging companies involved in the controversy. With the purchase comes guaranties that all violations will cease under their management.’

Lorna said, “We know from experience that governments don’t enforce regulations on these corporations, and anybody can make empty promises. If they were to transfer the cost of policing directly to these corporations, then it might work. Instead, they leave the regulating to the violators, and wait until we discover the problems.” Lorna was being anything but her normal uplifting self, for this issue was dear to her heart.

Ryan broke in, “Now I understand where this is heading. The political parties in power will play this up for all it’s worth. They will claim victory over the problem at any cost.”

Having glanced ahead, I soberly continued reading.

‘The NRPA are negotiating compensation for resolving this problem. They want management rights of all crown lands for a period of 100 years.’

We were all in shock for this had been their goal all along. Matt said, “This would be like letting them run the country. It’s almost as bad as military rule.”

“They probably want renewable options as well,” Ryan said, in a cynical tone harsher than I had ever heard from him before.

Lorna added, “As if there would be anything worth leasing by the time they were finished.”

Louise’s e-mail continued.

‘The government is keen on making their good news announcement to relieve public pressure. However, the NRPA is deliberately stalling procedures to allow the pressure to build-up, for maximum effect. They are promising the government to work with social and community groups hoping this will be an effortless process.’

‘The two companies I mentioned are directly linked to international logging interests. You can imagine how secure our future will be if any NRPA associates are in charge.’

Matt couldn’t hold his excitement any longer, “What did I say, Mates? You didn’t believe me when I told you who was behind this. Didn’t I say exactly that, Ryan?”

“Yes! Yes! You are the clever one. Just keep reading, Chris.”

I had read ahead and explained to them that she was advising us to allow this procedure to unfold. Everyone’s initial reaction was to reach out, and stop this insanity.

I continued reading.

‘It is important that the present situation be allowed to unfold uncontested. Imagine for a moment the vulnerability of the government once they announce their plans.’

‘Neither the government nor the media are aware of our knowledge despite our efforts to inform them. But this is now in our favor, for after the political plans are made public, the press will uncover the truth about International Corporation. You can image the denials, and the finger pointing that will follow.’

‘The environmental movement can then bring our knowledge to the open arms of the media. The NRPA will receive the full blame for orchestrating this outrageous plan. The CD transcripts can be our evidence. When you see this occurring, join in, as the team sees fit.’

‘All the best to my Kiwi friends.’

‘Love Louise’

This turnaround of events took us all by surprise, and while comments buzzed through the room, I sat and mused over the effortless way events were unfolding. The battle wasn’t won yet, but the end was near.

I considered how the greatest weapon against any form of oppression is the ability to remain sensitive to Nature’s needs. For in any situation its needs are our real needs, no matter how frivolous, because we are one and the same. This in itself is a powerful opposing force.

Another thought entered my mind and I immediately left the room to telephone Louise, not considering the

time difference back in Canada.

“Sorry for waking you Louise. We need to get the charges on us dropped. Can you do anything at your end?”
She would try.

THE FOLLOWING DAY our mood was light, yet we had much to do. Ryan introduced me to a visitor who came to the Center. Hans explained that he immigrated four years earlier from Frankfurt. He was following our endeavors on the Net, and wanted to share his work.

He was of stocky build with greying hair, and multi-colored pens protruded from his old-fashioned shirt pocket. He was not an impressive man to look at; however, I was about to be impressed by his deeds.

Standing in the sunlit meeting room he said, “I am a mechanical engineer. With assistance from old friends back home in Germany, we have developed a guidebook for community living.”

“What do you call it?”

“Guide for Eco-Villages!”

His manuscript contained drawings on how to install solar panels and heating systems, indicating cost and manufacturers’ addresses, charts on calculating power requirements for wind and solar electricity, methods of purifying and storing rainwater. It had a section on alternative construction methods, and even a comparison on which building materials in a home created the least impact on Nature. There was a chapter on how to select land for rural community development, how to approach regional governments for approvals, and how to set up land trusts.

“Hans this is a ‘How to Book’ on setting-up a community and being self-sufficient, and it appears complete. When are you going to print?”

“This is why I am here. We want to share this with you and those promoting the Cornerstone Concept. We want to offer it free over the Net. People can give us money if they wish; we won’t say no of course.”

“I like your dedication.” I said.

“We’re not alone in this area,” he remarked.

“You have just made my job much easier.”

We added the book to our site, telling the story of its creation and offering excerpts over the Net and the rest through mail order. The payment option remained flexible. The concept of volunteering payment worked well for Inspirational Health, so perhaps it could also work here. Hans became a major part of the team that day. He was more knowledgeable than I about alternative construction and engineering in general.

The recent threats made by the NRPA and our possible victory only made us more dedicated. Our already intense agenda became even busier. Attempts to maintain any kind of order had long since been impossible. I took little time for fresh air, relaxation or exercise. Images of exploring black sand beaches, the Bay of Plenty, walking the farms along the Wanganui River, summer skiing on Mount Egmont were all impossible at the moment. Instead, I dug a little farther into my energy reserves, and kept burning the midnight oil.

It was difficult for the group, but it had its rewards, for it became commonplace to wrap an arm around whoever stood closest, or have it done to you. No one lost their cool, but rather each became more helpful to the other. We told ourselves that we were doing it for the right reasons. However, I was unaware of the extent that I was removing myself from the things I cherished most.

26 – Letting it Happen

SEVEN WEEKS PASSED with no contact from TJ. His absence was like a dark cloud around the Peace Center which no one acknowledged. It was as though we were aware that he was following his personal agenda.

The day of his arrival, he telephoned Ryan at the Center requesting that I pick him up at the airport. This was odd for taking a taxi would have been easier for both of us. We met at the terminal doors. Jumping into the car he took my hand, and shook it hard while asking, “How goes it, Buddy?” Immediately I sensed something mysterious about him. It was difficult to identify. Perhaps his self-confidence had improved. From that moment I became uncomfortable. His gaze felt like a burning probe or a penetrating sword, and I was intimidated by his presence. We didn’t trade our usual stories, nor did it seem fitting to kid around with him. He was not the same person who had left. He was evaluating me as well, and his silent probing left me wishing he had stayed away longer.

Back at the Center, he briefly discussed his absence with the group, saying only that he had some interesting adventures, and during the next day and a half we seldom saw him, for he spent most of his time outside.

On the second day after his arrival, he asked me if I cared to go for a walk. I told him no, because I had e-mails to answer. People wanted information on how to apply for zoning approvals and basic code requirements. There was no time for a walk.

He said, “I spoke with Louise today and she asked me if you were still carrying around that beautiful glow that you had when she saw you last.”

“I guess that has faded a little,” I said.

“A little? I told her the truth. You look like shit!”

I didn’t need this, now or at any time, but before I could respond he continued. “I’m not asking you out for a walk because I’m lonesome, I’m asking because you need to take a break.”

“I feel fine; I have work to do. This has been a busy place since you left.” Had he been here these past weeks he would share my feelings.

He continued, “You told me once that you would drop me if you thought that I wasn’t worth it. You also said that you would carry me if there was a need. Well, I don’t intend doing either for you. I’m just going to kick your ass till you start thinking clearly for yourself.”

That irritated me, and my voice rose as I said, “There is nothing worth getting excited about here. Sure, I could use a break, but I have things to do and when they are done, I’ll break! Ok?” and I began to leave the room.

“No, it’s not OK!” he snapped.

I could have continued leaving, but he was challenging me, and I seldom walked away from a challenge, yet I really didn’t want to deal with this now. I decided to meet him half way and perhaps ease my way back to work by saying, “Ok! You’re concerned! How are you going to help us out?”

I watched his expression change, and become dead serious, as he marched slowly and intently toward me. For an instant, I felt the urge

to protect myself, but somewhere behind those fierce eyes I recognized our bond. He stopped inches from my face, and stared me down in the most intimidating way. This got my full attention. He looked deep into my eyes while pushing his forefinger into my shoulder bone. The moment seemed to last forever. I was losing control, and in that split second my willpower to react slipped beyond reach.

He had penetrated my armor, but somewhere I realized that I had put myself in this situation, not the person who was standing in my face. TJ’s voice was equally as fierce as his gaze when he ordered, “Don’t use that psychological bullshit on me. Don’t allow that intellect of yours to play games and strangle you dry. This is your soul we’re talking about here, not some damn code requirement in the US.”

He straightened himself, and took a few steps back, still holding his gaze, but I could not maintain eye contact. There was no hiding place for me to seek shelter. He had seen right through me, to a spot I was unable to

see in myself. Turning away, he left me standing alone in the middle of an empty universe, and I remained standing there as though under a spotlight attempting to recover from this brief hammering. There was no running away from this challenge. It occurred to me as I stood there, that there had to be more to come, now that I felt like shit.

An observer might have called this abuse if they were unaware of what was really taking place. Through the many challenges we had faced, our goal was to make it through as buddies. As I thought of this, I relaxed a little, knowing that what was happening must be in my best interest.

TJ let out a sigh as though the scenario had taken more out of him than it did out of me. Sensing that his tough approach had worked he changed his tactic. He moved behind the bar and I slowly made my way to a stool in front of it and sat.

The room had been a tavern and now contained a couple of chairs, one fridge containing leftovers from the previous day's dessert, and a few drinks. He opened the fridge door and pulled out two pints of milk and held one out to me and asked nicely, yet sternly, "Will you give me some of your time?"

Those simple words drove me deeply into my chair. I couldn't look him in the eye, nor could I answer. I asked myself why was I feeling so confused and out of control, and why had I allowed myself to be in this state of mind in the first place?

I stared at the bottle of milk, aimlessly twisting it in my hand as I thought of Maori construction workers, and how they shook the bottle to mix in the cream that floated on top. Then they would stick their thumb into the cardboard cap, and with one smooth motion pop the lid away and then down the milk without stopping. I was still holding the bottle aimlessly when TJ began speaking from the middle of the room.

"I want to tell you what I've learned about Making things Happen and Letting things Happen. If you hear anything you don't already know, you stop me. Ok?"

Where could he be going with this? What could I learn from what I already know? For the first time since his arrival from the South Island, I was able to look at him in the eye, and, as I did, I realized that being anywhere else at that moment was of no importance."

"*Making it Happen*" he began, "occurs when we have a need, or we're following the boss's instructions. It's about solving situations that are based on fear. We create by using the physical resources at hand and utilizing our intellectual talents. The flow of energy is generated out of sheer willpower, and, in so doing, this process often drains its participants. But there are methods to replenish the energy spent: parties, vacations, drugs, bonuses, motivation sessions, stress management, prayer, religion; there are many ways of getting back the energy spent while making things happen.

"We hope the direction we gave to the energy pleases the boss, or satisfies the client, or accomplishes the goal. In the end, we have created a manifestation, and the people involved can view their creation. We observe it, and ask ourselves: how would I do it differently the next time, and hope the boss is pleased, and wonder if it was worth the effort. We are not always joyous participants when we make things happen."

He continued, "*Letting it Happen* is allowing the final product to take its own shape. We allow the energy to flow through us as instruments, and we become joyous participants. Doors of opportunity open on their own, allowing chance encounters, and in the end a manifestation occurs. The persons involved observe their creation, and they are filled with awe at how it turned out better than they had ever imagined."

TJ had obviously been there, and had simplified a complex process. I was witnessing a talent previously unseen in him. His vocabulary took on a sophistication that I had assumed was completely unfamiliar to him, yet he spoke like an experienced orator. He stopped and asked how I was doing. When he began this explanation, I hoped he would get to the point quickly, for I was wound as tight as a wound-up toy, and I wanted to be rid of my burden. But as he spoke, I relaxed. My mind was being kept occupied. He appeared to be pulling ideas out of the air, and then sending them to me in vivid pictures. Now, I didn't want him to stop and I told him to go on.

"This planet is at a new stage of growth. I call it, *Global Transition*.

"When expansion and growth were required on the earth, making it happen was a tool that most people used in order to survive. We needed new lands, new freedoms, and new technologies. To reach our goals we drew on the energies of those people defeated in wars, and from the suffering and hardships endured by those caught up in the momentum of progress. We drew energy from the lives of animals, plants and from the planet. Now, you

and I . . . we live in the creation of that process.

“The people we’ve met in these communities have positioned themselves for another transition. Whether consciously or not, they are learning what they already know within, but had forgotten, or had the volume turned down too low to hear. They are looking back at their childhood with adult eyes, and freeing themselves from old emotions that controlled their adult lives. They are looking beyond the problem, across the transitional stage to a vision of how it can be, and they hold that vision for others to follow. They are refining and polishing their skills in letting the vision happen.

“This transition process is manifesting a little here and a little there. Ideas and creativity are taking form in people’s minds as visions for the future. Direction is beginning to take form, problems are being solved, doors are opening as each of us have our personal chance encounters with one another and events. This is occurring, not just to individuals like us but to companies, and countries.

“Stronger energies are flowing into our mind and our soul. Each of us has become like small streams heading down toward the valley, and as we meet, there are larger streams and soon rivers. The stage is being readied, my friend. You and I are evolving out of an era of Making it Happen and into an era of Letting it Happen. We are flowing in the tide of a Global Transition.”

TJ had painted a scene of my life; where I had been, and where I wanted to be. When he stopped, my heart was pumping fast, I was warm! No, I was almost hot! He moved to the bar counter in front of me, and looked at me in a friendly yet serious manner. Then he placed his hands apart from each other, and bending closely to me, in a non-threatening manner, he made his coup de grâce.

“Now my question to you, Christopher O’Brien. . . Are you acting out your part because the energy is flowing through you and directing your actions, or are you still trying to be the good little Indian White Boy?”

Those words nailed me cold. I was numbed, but not hurt. I became incapable of thought, for the circuits of my brain were fried. I turned on the stool and placed one foot on the floor, and it shook. I looked at that foot like it was someone else’s. I focused all the attention I could gather, and stood straight and started slowly shuffling across the room heading toward the door leading outside. Someone held it open for me, and I stepped onto the sidewalk. I slowly wandered down the hill toward center town; not seeing people, nor hearing the noise of the busy street. My self-image had been wounded, and I felt shattered like fine crystal having been deliberately nudged off its secure resting place to let fall on the floor, crashing, and scattering in all directions.

MY FIRST THOUGHT was of me sitting on Grandfather’s lap, watching Dad as he became filled with love for his son. I had just been bestowed my Indian name, ‘Little Rock.’ That moment was one of well-being, of confidence, of being loved, of being pleased with myself. Then I was with Louise in the forest, and there was a feeling of wellness, of being loved and of loving.

My reasoning barely functioned, yet I asked myself, ‘Were these feelings of love the driving force of my entire life? Did my desire to be loved and to love rule me? Was that experience with my dad the highlight of my connection with love? Have I been looking to repeat that moment over and over again?’

These thoughts depressed me, for if my reasoning were true, then life is a continual childish game of simply looking for love. I felt demoralized at the thought that this might be my primary desire for existing.

Then I envisioned Brother Sam telling TJ about the Power Moment, and how it was that instant before we lost our spiritual innocence. This was the last instant, he said, when we were still connected to our Inner Essence. That moment before we completely lost our connection to the universal life force. As I walked, I reasoned that the love each of us experience and search for is only an interpretation of that pure energy that existed before we lost touch with it. This had eluded me all these years, for I had been trying to mimic what I lost as a child; my connection to my inner self. My father’s love was a memory of that connection. The entire human race was no better than I, for we all experience this same challenge.

I reasoned: this is why it is so important for a child to receive love. Without it, there is nothing to replace the loss of the Power Moment. That’s why some people seem void of human compassion, for they are void of any memory of who they once were. They had no love as children, no transition from pure energy to being human.

My attention was drawn to my surroundings, as I heard the pleasant sound of clanging ropes blowing

against the masts of sailboats. I was nearing the largest marina in the world. The clanging combined with the wind off the harbor, and the freshness of the ocean air gave me strength. When I reached the marina, I sat at the edge of the pier, and stared down at the water eight feet below.

Continuing my pondering, I considered what I had surrounded myself with during my life. There were my interests, my lovers, friends, the work that gave me security and acceptance. Being good at what I produced in my work gave me a certain reward of love. Trying to make things happen was an attempt at forcing this cycle to continually repeat itself and the more often the better. Again, this discovery made me a little ashamed, as I wondered if the human race were all addicts to being loved? Speaking to myself I said aloud: “Shit,” and a voice close by said in a low tone, “You look how I feel.”

I had sat on the pier twenty feet from a Maori who was fishing, and I hadn’t noticed him. When I tried to answer I found it difficult to form words but managed to say without looking his way, “Do you actually catch anything?”

“No, I come to relax.”

“I could use some of that.”

“Where you from?” he asked.

“Canada!”

“What are you doing here?”

It was hard to find a reason. “I’ve been working with some activists.”

He thought for a moment before replying, “My wife is an activist! . . . Do you believe in dying for a cause?”

“Maybe! If the cause is worth that much of a sacrifice.”

“Even if there are children and a husband involved?”

This was getting heavier than I could handle under the circumstance. I studied him more closely and noticed by his expression that he was under tremendous anguish. Seeing this touched me in a particular way, and I told him that I honestly didn’t know.

“I can’t imagine living my life without her, I love her that much. I don’t want to stop her, I just want to understand. You should talk to her,” he said.

I looked around and saw no one, “Why me?”

“I don’t see anyone else on these docks.”

He was right, we were alone. He continued, “I came down here to find an answer, and you are the only person I’ve met, and the fish aren’t giving me any messages. See over there in that Austin? She won’t mind.”

My head was all messed up. I felt as lost as he did, but he insisted, and I couldn’t think clearly enough to resist.

I entered the car without knocking or saying a word; I simply opened the driver’s door, slipped behind the wheel, and made myself comfortable. She began to speak as though she was expecting me, “My husband can’t let go.” “Does he need to?”

“Our Maori cause is more than just on this island. Aboriginals are working together all around the world, and I have come face to face with my vision. I can’t be a leader, and still raise a family, and be a good wife. I can’t be a wife and a mother and be a good leader. I have made my choice.”

Her words seemed like mine, yet I wasn’t sure that my being with her was a good idea, for it was I who wanted to cry on her shoulder. I looked over at her for the first time, as she stared out her side window. She was in her late 20s, slim, long black hair, radiant and physically beautiful. An emotion rose inside me from the depth of my solar plexus; it was directed to this being beside me. I had compassion for her, and with that emotion came a shower of understanding.

Of course, I sought out love: it is energy in the purest form that we humans can comprehend. We need it to survive. It is part of our inner needs. We originated from its powerful source, and each of us strives to reconnect with that power whether we like it or not. Being called Indian White Boy caused me great pain for it reflected the very opposite of who I knew myself to be.

With this realization I chose to accept my lifelong attempts at doing well and pleasing others, because I

was a part of all living things, and everything requires energy to grow. I reminded myself how I needed to continually forgive myself for my human weaknesses. All this confusion, only because I am human, and as a child I lost contact with my inner essence.

Wow! What a story! We all share the same journey, each one of us has our own unique path, and we are all doing the best we can with the tools given to us at birth. This makes the judgement of others such a purposeless act.

I asked, "Do you really think that you are the one that must make this sacrifice?"

"I'm prepared to die for my cause."

I explained, "I have been working for a cause. Sitting here with you makes me realize that I have played out my part, and it's time for me to put away my toys to allow others to play theirs."

"I will know when I'm finished," she said.

"How?"

"When it's over!"

"We're different you and me," I said.

"You don't know how we're alike, or how we're different," she said aggressively.

"I know that you have a cause, and that you know your time has come to play your piece. I have already played mine."

She glanced at me, and said in a less aggressive manner, "You have your own kind of strength. Our causes may not be so different."

Neither of us commented for some time as I thought about this stranger beside me; how she had knowledge of the piece she would play, how she knew it was her time to play it, and how she was allowing it to unfold despite her pain. She was choosing to break customs, to break her natural instincts for the care of her children, and her desire to remain with her husband. All this without an indication of any reward, or where this path might lead her, or the people she loved.

An ounce of indebtedness went out to TJ for being instrumental in my being here, observing this reflection of my own efforts over the years, and for seeing how far I had evolved as a result.

The silence continued until I said "Well, thank you. Bye!" She made no response, yet something remained incomplete, so instead of leaving, I leaned over the console of the car and touched her lightly on the shoulder. She turned, and allowed her eyes to meet mine for the first time. She came forward, and we gave each other a short but comforting hug. The love passed between us making our interaction complete. As I left the Austin, she smiled a smile that would fill me to this day.

Returning to her husband, I stood beside him, and placed a hand on his shoulder saying, "Enjoy the moments you have with each other. Whatever you do, don't stop loving her, for that will be your real joy and your lifelong connection."

I turned and headed back toward center town. Five minutes later, their car caught up to me, and stopped. She rolled down her window and blew me a kiss. Her husband gleefully waved, and smiled, and then he down shifted to low and drove off. She placed an arm around his neck, and lowered her head on his shoulder, and as I watched them leave, I wished that she would turn toward me just one more time, but they were gone.

I made my way back to my room that afternoon, crawled into bed and slept for eighteen hours.

27 – Spiritual Innocence

UPON AWAKENING THE FOLLOWING morning, my world appeared different. Leaning on the window sill and looking toward the sunny street, some portion of me merged with the porched homes, the concrete sidewalk, even the hardtop road. Such feelings were reserved for special moments in Nature. Had something changed?

After dressing and pouring coffee, I left the building, and walked around the neighborhood in bewilderment. The red blossoms of the Pohutukawa trees were still in bloom, and flowers broadcasted their presence from along the edge of the sidewalks. Logic told me they hadn't bloomed overnight. Obviously, my focus during the last month was intent on less important things, and I had lost touch with the beauty around me. It was a relief to be back in my preferred reality.

Rounding a corner, I noticed TJ sitting on concrete steps at the edge of a park taking in the morning sun. Joining him, I sat against the stone retaining wall to absorb some of its radiant heat. I had no apprehension about the previous day's activities when I said, "Everything looks different."

He glanced at me with a grin saying, "That's good! Same for me!"

Without any need for small talk I asked, "You must have had some exciting experiences, down South. What happened?"

"After a week of touring Ian's farm, I hitched a ride to Queenstown. One morning on the outskirts of the city a sheep farmer and his wife pulled up in their jeep, and asked if I wanted work. I hadn't thought of working even though I was broke, but I still jumped into the back of their jeep.

"Ken is a Pekeha who took over the farm from his folks when the work became too difficult for his dad. Joanie is Maori, and manages the business end of the operation, while Ken takes care of the farming. Both have degrees in agriculture which is a requirement to own a farm down here. They were unable to have children because Ken had a vasectomy long before they met.

"Anyhow, the sheep shearing season was finishing and the bunk house was full of men so they gave me a spare room in their home. There was no TV, not even a radio, and they seldom bought a newspaper. Instead, their living room was wall to wall spiritual and psychological books. During the evenings the house remained completely silent, with only the occasional dog barking outside or a farmhand coming in to exchange a book. When Ken and Joanie weren't reading, they were bouncing around theories. You would have felt right at home.

"I figured that I'd find some excitement in the bunkhouse, but the lads were almost as bad, for all they wanted to do after a hard day's work was read, or exchange stories about what they were learning. The work crew thought the world of Ken and Joanie, and each year they did their best to make it back to their farm for the shearing season.

"My job was walking the land bringing back stray sheep. I had a beautiful border collie who did most of the work. For three days that dog and I roamed their land. One night we slept under the stars, for the property was too large to return at the end of the day. We only found six sheep, and by the time I returned the shearers were packing to leave."

"So, they were just keeping you busy! Eh?"

"Ya, and I was about to become their next project," he continued. "When I was a kid living alone while my mom was off working, I would hear all kinds of strange and scary noises inside and outside the house. To avoid being too frightened, I invented a game where I would prevent myself from looking in the direction of the sounds. Instead, I would listen very calmly. I developed a talent for picking up on sensations like shadows, reflections, changes in air movement. I even widened my peripheral vision until I could almost see behind myself. I had developed a talent my friends didn't have, and it made me proud. It replaced my fear of being alone, and it saved my butt many times as a young man. As an adult, it gave me a feeling of self-importance, and until recently I figured that this image of myself was impregnable. It's the same thing Sam and I talked about, projecting our self-image to protect our weaknesses.

“When Ken and Joanie first saw me walking along the road, they immediately spotted that weakness by the way I walked. Joanie teased Ken about having had a similar air of self-importance or aloofness, as she called it. They said that I looked like someone begging to be set free. They were right, for I was searching for something, and I didn’t know what it was. But I knew I had to find it, and in a way, it found me. That desire had been with me since we left the Bhakti Center. It is incredible how these things work.

“Anyhow, they knew they could knock a few bricks out of my self-image wall, but I was almost too much for them to handle. They deliberately challenged me, and when I was backed into a corner, I wanted to tear them apart. Instead, I kept my cool long enough to leave the house. But I’d slam the door like a kid, and head down the road telling myself, I had enough. On some level I knew that I needed what they were offering me, despite the pain and anger it created.

“Because they were presenting it with love, I managed to keep myself from leaving. I would jump the fence, and head across the paddock. Each time, that dog would appear from nowhere, and we roamed for hours, even in the dark. Man, I loved that dog. It never left my side even when I was screaming my heart and guts out to the wind. Eventually, I would regain control of my emotions, and return to that house, determined not to let them upset me the next time. In my mind, I had to stand strong before them, and when I could accomplish this, I would win. That’s how it all made sense to me at the time.”

“So, they successfully shattered you, and then it was my turn?” I asked attempting to be humorous.

He grinned, “At least, I didn’t laugh at you.”

“There wasn’t much to laugh at.”

“My farmer friends would disagree. They enjoyed watching me squirm when I couldn’t face the truth. It was their humor that allowed me to stop the game playing. After four days of fighting them off, I had no fight left in me; nothing seemed to matter anymore. . . Feeling threatened and angry wasn’t working for me. I just let all my reasoning go, and joined in on their laughter.

“All it took was seeing the humor in my self-image. My battle was over, and I became a new person. I’m still adjusting to these new surroundings.”

“How do you mean, new?”

“Life appears different today, doesn’t it?” he asked.

“I’m more sensitive to these trees. I feel alive for a change,” I said.

“Life hasn’t changed. We have! Look around! This is the new Chris!”

“What makes you think that we are looking at the same thing?”

“Good point,” he said, “but we’re able to communicate so we must be close.”

I laughed and asked, “What clued you into my problem?”

“Well, since our stay at the Monastery, your decisions have always been right on. That impressed me, and that’s why I went along with your plans.

But when you chose to leave Lake Taupo, I knew something wasn’t right, and it was time for me to make my own path.”

“You mean, it wasn’t right for me to leave the Center?”

“No! Annalyse!”

“Why didn’t you say something?”

“I wasn’t certain. I only knew it wasn’t my time to return to Auckland, and in the end I didn’t have a choice.”

I envisioned Annalyse as I had many times before. I said, “So you figure that I should have stayed with her?”

He didn’t reply. My powerful experience with a woman, at the Bhakti, had become a measuring stick for all future loves. By placing expectations on relationships, I had limited myself, and I figured I knew better.

MY MIND LEAPED to a new thought, and I announced to TJ, “I want to rediscover my power moment.”

“What makes you think that you’re not there now?”

“Well, I’ve been there before, connecting with Nature, experiences at the Bhakti Center, those three days

in the forest at the Laurentian. Sometimes when I rode the motorcycle, my spirit soared above me. At those moments I sensed the power. But now? I don't know!"

He explained his new discovery. "One moonless night I stood on a high hill overlooking Lake Wakatipu. I was full of appreciation for everything: the glistening waves, the silhouette of the hills against a massive black sky full of bright stars and the Southern Cross. I was amazed at myself for just being there. At every turning point in my life, I have faced decisions, and it seems that I allowed all the right choices to happen. There I was, a free man with no fear, no anxiety, and no expectations. It was there that I suddenly felt the earth turn."

While he spoke, I diddled with a small stick, moving it slowly back and forth in the cracked concrete. I had no urge to comment on his startling statement, nor did I have a desire to relate to a similar experience and there was no need to keep the conversation going. His experience was perfectly natural at the time, like someone stating that they walked or talked, instead he felt the earth turn.

He continued, "We limit ourselves by what we can see with our eyes. Nature responds by shaping itself to suit our expectations. Walls and roofs are no longer barriers for me. Shortly after taking off from the Christchurch airport, I heard sounds from the underside of the old DC-8, directly below my seat. Immediately I found myself under the aircraft watching the wheels turn into the fuselage compartment." He paused for a few seconds, "I have discovered a sameness with my surroundings."

Raising my head, I looked down the street, and slowly became aware that I could see the grassed lawn behind me and a blue Kimberley parked farther up the hill also behind me. There was no need to turn my head even though both were beyond my range of peripheral vision. I took a deep breath to rid myself of the sudden surge of excitement. Then I extended my view up along the trunks of two tall Kauri trees, and observed the branches as I ascended. At their tops I continued to rise, and did a 360-degree view of the city, the harbor and the islands beyond. Letting the view go, I returned to my hard concrete step, and turned toward TJ half expecting him to be staring at me, as if I had two heads. He wasn't; he hadn't moved, nor had he noticed that seconds ago I was looking from above the treetops. We continued sitting in silence while I experimented with this new ability of extending my awareness without losing sight of my immediate surroundings. Finally, I said calmly, "It does feel natural after awhile."

"There is no reason for us to live without it," he responded.

Contemplating my recent experience, I recalled what Brother James had referred to. I said, "The shattering experience yesterday was my reward, TJ. Brother James told me that I would get what my spirit knew it needed to evolve, and that the reward could be painful. He also said that every living thing would be influenced by this event in some small yet important way."

"Joanie and Ken called it getting rid of one of my control dramas. They said my control drama replaced the spiritual connection I once knew as a child. That would be the loss of my Spiritual Innocence." In a low voice I said, "The table has turned my friend. You are now the teacher."

He responded, "Come to think of it Chris, you were the perfect teacher. You led me through this like a true master. I need to learn how to deal with these new strengths. At the airport, I was observing the games people play in protecting themselves. I wanted to shoot holes through their masks simply to set them free. But that's not the way. Each of us has our own agenda and our own timing. Helping others could become an ego trip, and if that happened, we're no better off than we were before."

"I agree! Ego can mimic any experience. Believe me, I've learned that one the hard way. Ego knows what we want, and will do anything to please us, and protect us. I suspect that it is already at work mimicking the feelings and understandings we are having right now. If we were to lose these new abilities, we could easily end up experiencing ego simulated copies. Ego could even convince us that it's generating new insights, new emotions, but there is only one difference: it wouldn't be the real thing!"

"No wonder people believe in the devil. Any tips?" he asked sharply.

"Perhaps the only way we can help someone is to remain sensitive to their needs. Drop hints from time to time, maybe just provide them with the opportunities to question their own beliefs. If they want more, just be there for them.

"We're still in transition, so we may slip back and forth between this new awareness and the old. But it

doesn't really matter. I think we will always be at the right place at the right time."

WE REFLECTED ON OUR adventures together and then we stood to leave our step. Changing the subject he said, "Louise says it will be a month before we can legally enter Canada."

"Legally?"

"Phil, your lawyer friend in Toronto, offered Fairview the original CD in exchange for dropping the charges against all of us. They may even return our motorcycles."

"Could this turn out any better? So, you plan to return to The Laurentian Center?"

"You bet! Albert the cook has convinced the group that I am their man for repair work. They will give me a one-year trial and if things work out, my wages will go toward membership. Louise's room is large enough for both of us until we can build ourselves a home in a few years."

"You have it all worked out."

"It's worked itself out. I've known for some time that I belonged there. Louise has had dreams about her and I exploring other dimensions of reality together."

"Sounds like she has been having her own transition."

"How about you? In what direction will you head?"

"I want to get to know Annalyse better. I have thought of her many times."

As we approached the Peace Center, he explained that Louise was making new discoveries. "She has a new understanding about Unconditional Love. She thought it referred to people, and her relationship with God. But now she understands that it applies to accepting all things in life, including herself."

"She called it love of self, and said you would understand."

"Yes, the shadows on the snow," I said. "The triangle of our Inner Needs: Love of Self, Honesty to Self, and Trust in Self. They are the characteristics of our Spirit. This is how we knew ourselves as children."

"How does it fit right now?"

"To accept my new experiences is to be honest with myself. To know that I am deserving is to love myself. For it to have happened in the first place is to have trusted myself and the process that brought me here."

* * * *

STANDING IN THE DOORWAY of the Action Room felt foreign to me, as though I had been absent for a long time, and yet I was there yesterday morning busily working. Immediately my energy level dropped, and I no longer felt any association to the events that had transpired there. Lorna came and led me into the room like I was a show piece and said, "Doesn't he look like a new man?"

My mates glanced at me and made no comment until Ryan changed the subject saying, "TJ told us you were taking a break. Hans has been answering questions on your behalf. He is quite good."

"Hans knows his stuff. I have enjoyed working with the team but my time has come to give it all up." They looked at me suspiciously. I was feeling too tired to give them a further explanation and as I began excusing myself Lorna handed me a letter from Louise. Holding the envelope gave me a sudden burst of energy for I knew it contained information too sensitive to send over the airwaves. I said to the group, "This is the letter we've been expecting. TJ, you read it." He began.

'Hello my friends down under:

'This letter is strictly confidential to the immediate team.

'In our last conversation we discussed how the press would receive news releases linking international interests to government and NRPA plans. This is now in motion.

'As news of the NRPA's involvement becomes public knowledge, they will be sent into a tail spin hopefully dissolving their efforts. Related companies will take a hit as well, for they are also being

identified. This will cause some serious shifts in the marketplace, especially in Europe. We don't want a market crash for it would serve no one. Financial institutions are presently receiving portfolios on alternative investments as part of an effort to balance this reaction. Emphasis has been placed on Ethical Investment companies. They will be in a position to give investors around the globe a clear choice.

'We have been in contact with 'RPM' whom we refer to here as the Strategic Power People. Their philosophy for aligning management with Natural Laws could move us into a transitional era in the political arena as well.

'Moves are being initiated to position 'RPM' as the alternate resource protection management team. It is a logical choice that government can ill afford to overlook as the solution to their problems. We wish then to present the potential of RPM to the environmental groups. RPM's involvement in management will be an ongoing endeavor for years to come.'

Matt broke in, "Everything is under control, Mates. It's obvious that our friend Randolph is running the show from within the NRPA headquarters. He must be involved in leaking the news to the press about the international purchase of those companies. He will be triggering the NRPA's demise."

Ryan said, "He's positioning the Ethical Investment companies as well. He wants them to get the jump on the upcoming market shift or perhaps even save an economic crash. Big names are going to be exposed in this scandal."

"Don't forget 'RPM,'" Lorna said. "Randolph is obviously organizing them to take control of what the NRPA have tried so desperately to gain, and lost."

I said joyfully, "He has turned the NRPA's weapon against themselves. They will be totally discredited."

Lorna added, "Who would have thought a couple of months ago when we presented our plan to Chris and TJ, that so much would happen so quickly."

TJ read Louise's closing lines,

'Our friend Randolph, has placed himself in a position that could destroy his career and more if the connection was made to these endeavors. If my own involvement were to be known, this could implicate him as well.

'I beg of you to look deep inside yourselves and judge whether any personal gains would be served by sharing what you know today with any other person.

'Randolph's contribution has earned him our silence. I hope you agree.'

We all nodded in acknowledgment. TJ hesitated about reading Louise's closing remarks, but we insisted.

'When TJ arrives, tell him I miss him dearly, and long to be with him again.

'Love Louise.'

Everyone looked at him with expressions of shock for they had no idea that they were lovers. He said with a big smile and a shrug of a shoulder, "She didn't know I was here!" He rose to leave, but I was one step ahead of him for I really needed to rest.

"I'll be right next door," TJ said with a concerned look as I plopped myself down on the bed.

28 – Ascending Gratitude

I DIDN'T HEAR TJ'S LAST WORD, for I quickly fell into a deep sleep. When I awoke an hour later, I was re-energized and felt lighter than normal. Opening the door, I discovered TJ sitting on the floor in the hall. He said I had been talking in my sleep, repeating the word Gratitude. I attempted to recall the dream, and while doing so I fell into a daydream of sorts. My next memory was TJ's mumbled voice in the background, the soft grass beneath my back and the clouds moving above. I was now in the park, and had no recall of leaving the Center.

Managing to sit up, I fought to bring my immediate surroundings into normal awareness, but I kept edging back into my dream. Then the sensation became familiar. This is how I felt as a child of three or four when I spent nights with my rabbit inside its cage. Now I was making that same conscious effort of leaving one dimension for another. At that instant of recognition, I arrived into the physical dimension with a jolt, like being dropped to the floor from an escape door.

A low stone retaining wall edged the lawn in front of me; tree roots made the ground uneven under my legs, and the grass was damp beneath my hands. The air was fresh and cool, and the sun warmed one shoulder and my chest as it peered through the tree branches.

TJ was staring at me. "You ok? Where were you? I didn't know if I should try snapping you out, or let you be."

Staring blankly and having difficulty to form words I said, "My rapture is complete TJ. I have gone full circle! Gratitude is the only word adequate to describe my feelings. Everything that has occurred in my life, leads to this moment. We're all bringing the power moment forward into our adult lives. We are evolving. Nature wants the entire human race . . . It wants all of itself to evolve.

"As evolved beings, we can't permit the insane destruction of a planet that sustains us. This was my vision. Nature and I are winning together. Stopping the NRPA was a mere detail. The real victory is consciously evolving."

He said nothing, but walked alongside me around the small park until I became more stable inside my body. I explained how I understood the importance of people reaching new understandings, to continue functioning in the physical dimension. The world that some people live in has already transcended. Nature wants the entire planet to make it through the transition, not just explorers like us. Nature didn't invest all this energy in getting us to this point simply so we could remain in blissful heaven having a good time. It needs us functional.

WE SAT ONCE AGAIN, and I lay back on the grass while TJ propped himself on his elbows looking into the distance. I watched with astonishment as a scar formed on his cheek. "TJ, the scar you told me about is back on your cheek."

"I know! It began returning while you were talking earlier. Now it's your turn to watch over me. I want to explore this fully."

So much had happened already; how could either of us have room for more?

TJ began speaking in a tone lower than normal as if distracted by something beyond. "Chris, I had no idea that what I'm seeing was possible. This is powerful stuff. It is a bit like having my head inside a three-dimensional glass globe. While I speak, I'm seeing the tree in front of me and another dimension of reality all at the same time. Oh! . . . Wow! . . . I am being presented my Principle . . . This is who I really am. This is me, in the greater scheme of things. I have no personality. A voice is telling me that I'm governing an aspect of Nature's evolution.

Holding his stomach, he commenced rocking gracefully back and forth like a child, his voice expressing empathy as he spoke.

"Chris, I am experiencing events in history. The scar! . . . It's a symbol! It's the agony of millions . . . of innocent people . . . who suffered and died because of progress. What has gone before must step aside. Nature is ushering in changes with no sympathy for beliefs or cultural values. Oh, Man, it's Nature's way of survival . . . This is evolution."

“Are you Ok?” I asked.

“I am watching technology move into North America. It’s pushing the Native Americans west, and I feel their suffering. I feel their confusion for they have remained loyal to their spirits while the white man’s destructive ways are being allowed to continue. I know their guilt. They blamed themselves, and anguish over the white’s abuse of life which they have honored. They are at the mercy of this principle of evolution.”

He was silent for a moment still observing what I could not see, and yet longed to share. Finally he said, “I am not alone . . . I sense the presence of others. We are ushering in a new era, and there is no stopping this change. Now I am seeing other events that are happening too quickly to keep up with words.” Then he went silent and lay still on the grass. Watching him without alarm brought me increasingly more in line with my human elements.

SHORTLY AFTERWARDS HE SAT Up, and eventually smiled. “Man, I wish I could take you to where I’ve just been.”

“It looked dramatic.”

“I feel more complete than I’ve ever felt in my entire life . . . for who knows how long! I saw the pain brought on by confusion toward change: the pain of people resisting letting go of their old way of thinking. There were other destructive scenes, and yet constructive in their own way: some ancient and another one involving the invasion of Afghanistan by Russia which led to the collapse of the Soviet Union.”

He stood and stretched before adding, “Do you see how tragic events open paths for other opportunities? How a tree falling in the forest allows for new growth? It’s evolution! All things have a beginning and an end. Even what we perceive to be real and never changing! This is amazing stuff we’re talking about.”

“Your scar is gone.” I stated.

“Ya, I know and so are the pictures,” he said, as he paced back and forth across the grass continuing to speak.

“It was like watching a lion bringing down a zebra except on a much bigger scale. I wasn’t the lion, and yet I felt part of that Principle which dictates to every living thing that evolution makes the big moves. The scar symbolizes the pain suffered at the hands of evolution.”

“Are you saying that much of our human suffering is because we misunderstand evolution?”

“Yes! Because we are unable to identify with it, we go against it. Instead of being able to accept and allow Nature to evolve we perceive pain. . . Evolution is real, Chris! It’s not slow; it’s not just a religious/scientific word. It exists, and we are ultimately subject to its progress!”

I said, “These events are going to take some time to fully understand.”

“YOUR GRANDFATHER WAS RIGHT you know! TJ added,

“How do you figure?”

“He told you that he had danced and rejoiced with the Spirits because Nature was no longer investing in the old.”

“Yes, I know, but . . .!”

“You have often spoken of him and how he explained that it was up to people to realize that Nature had already made a move, and those who were unaware would live in a world of their own imagination. The old world is being replaced, my friend. Don’t you see that?”

“No! I don’t get the connection.”

“Look at me for example! Less than a year ago I was comfortably struggling with the routines of life. Each day reinforced yesterday’s limitations, struggles, and my hopes. Then I began seeing beyond the limitations and now I have gained incredible insight about myself, people and life. The world I once lived in is no longer real to me. I have consciously joined in Nature’s transition. That’s the whole point! You know that as well as I do!”

“So, you figure that Nature is ushering in a new stage of evolution. That the old has already been pushed aside, except that it still exists in some people’s minds, just like Grandfather said?”

“The way I see it: Nature has changed the rules. It couldn’t survive allowing humans to continue thinking

the way we have; constantly making our decisions out of fear of what might happen. That's how we humans think: everything is in terms of fear of losing something. We would have destroyed more than we were worth if we were allowed to continue.

"So, Nature simply pumped up the volume so to speak, or started broadcasting at a different frequency. Those who are getting reception on the old channels are picking up last week's broadcast, or reruns, because Nature's not operating that channel any longer: nothing is. You and I and thousands or perhaps millions are listening to a new beat. We've seen how it can be, and we're going to back a winner. We've made it, Man."

"You paint a pretty picture, TJ. So, in a sense the battle is already won. All that remains then is to bring what we value across to this new way of being. Saving an endangered species is a process of appreciating them enough so that they are allowed to live in this new era. In the absence of this they would become extinct, fall away with the old. It first occurs in our minds and yet it really is two different realities. Anything that isn't valued, or resists change, is simply abandoned or allowed to run out of energy, and eventually no longer exist. I like this! It's simple!"

"Yes, and for us, we are consciously aware that the change has already occurred! There is no denying that now!"

"Wow! Our culture has taught us that humanity represented the highest form of life on the planet. But that is no longer true. A new species of humanity is being born. The old species relied almost entirely on intellect to survive. This new species has evolved out of the old to be silent no more. Grandfather has really been here! All this time he knew!"

Grandfather's face appeared in my mind and his words echoed, 'Nature rules, My Son! Our reward will be in the Rejoicing! Nature has already made a transition; I have seen it in my dreams. Now you know, *Spirit Evolution*.'

Thank you Grandfather I acknowledged.

At that moment a car horn honked, jolting both us back to our surroundings. The park, the trees, our facial expressions all took on humorous appearances, and so we left our perch and walked in silence with no destination in mind. We passed small homes with mature trees, and plants with giant blossoms. I looked toward the heart of the city where the blue water lay in the harbor, and sensed my presence on this island surrounded by many thousands of miles of ocean. I commented to TJ on the vastness of water that separated us from home and said, "Our visas will expire next week. We will have to go to another country until you leave for home."

At my remark, he stepped forward and began walking backward facing toward me. With a grin and a familiar mischievous gleam in his eyes he said with raised eyebrows, "So where do you want to be? I know someone who will loan us their yacht for a month!"

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374 Hudson St., New York
N.Y. 10014

About the Author



Hugh Perry knows his topics well.

A student of metaphysics for more than thirty years,
he has gained a deep understanding of his relationship with nature and spirit.

Having experienced eco-village life firsthand in various parts of Canada
for nine years, he has discovered the ingredients
for successful community living,
and knows the power of a shared vision.

Hugh's involvement with environmental activism began
with paper recycling in office buildings in the late 60s
and continues to this day with his exploration of alternative
forms of construction and energy efficiency.

Building on his lifelong involvement with architectural
and mechanical design, he is presently engaged in writing
a specification guide for Eco-logical Home Construction.