

The Bridge

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Acknowledgements

Many people have contributed to the trilogy
 — *Merlin's Parole, The Bridge and Complexity* —
 beginning with those mentioned in the autobiographical narrative and
 including everyone encountered along the way.

The understandings that inform its pages
 derive from the work of countless researchers, teachers, writers, artists...
 In a way, all who have done whatever they could
 to leave the World a better place than they found it.

Several close friends have given significantly more than encouragement.

Lillian Sizemore provided artwork,
 including the graphic depictions of the Walks linked to the homepage.

Anne Topham of Fantome Farms shared her knowledge of goat keeping.

Delightfully serious conversations
 with Franca Barricelli and Roberta Hanus helped refine the ideas.

Finally, we cannot thank Martine Meyer enough for all her help.
 Her critical readings and editorial suggestions
 greatly improved all three volumes.

The books were written while living on land stolen from the Ho-Chunk People.
 In an area known as “Taychopera.” Meaning, “Land of the Four Lakes.”

Derek Gebler created the website.
 Design Garden hosts the site.

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Revised editions —

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Construction

The flash of welding torches shattered the night air. Machines hissed and hammered at the bedrock. Spotlights followed the movements of towering cranes. Only a cool haze, tinged with the smell of wet cement, softened the scene. This wasn't the bridge he'd expected — the one with worn slats and frayed rope quivering precariously over a chasm.

At first, the sounds alone had led him on. His heart quickened with the emerging daylight. An owl, swooping low over the undergrowth, drew him to an open gate. Beyond the chain link fence and stacks of building materials, a group in hardhats consulting scrolls had let him pass. So he kept walking, following the gravel road. Soon he was among workers lugging plywood sheets. Connecting bars and rods together. Assembling scaffolding. Not until he was standing at the edge of the divide did he stop.

There, people wearing lamp-hats appeared. Using a series of pontoons, positioned like stepping stones, they were arriving from what he could only imagine was the other side. He thought he might make his way back through them — get to where they were coming from. But the line was too long, too tight and moving too quickly. Then they disappeared, along with their pontoons.

He looked for another way. Directly in front of him, the gaping rift. To his left, the skeletal mesh of the future floor. To his right, a cement pillar — too wide to get around, too high to scale. Little choice. He evaluated the steel web weaving. Lines of silver beams ran perpendicular to one another forming a great checkerboard pattern — a grid of squares that appeared to extend all the way across.

With both arms stretched out like a tightrope walker, he began placing one foot in front of the other. It felt like a long time to traverse maybe a quarter of the distance. Gaining confidence, he tried longer steps. At what seemed halfway, he redoubled caution.

Just as he told himself, 'there can only be a few more rows of squares,' the beams ended — but not at the other side. A distance too wide to jump had not yet been completed. He froze. Couldn't believe it.

'If only there were something that I could...'

A glance down brought him to his knees. He stretched out flat on his stomach and began reaching for anything that he might grab onto. Nothing.

Then, a hand. A hand grasped his own. And pulled him across.

What a Deal!

A simple, slightly off-key melody drifted in through the bedroom window — two long notes, one high, one low; then, lower still, three clusters of three — a pattern repeated, but never quite the same.

“Caalllllll-iiinnng somebody, somebody, somebody,” the Sparrow seemed to say.

Rolling onto his side, he tried to fall back to sleep. But cool air playing on his shoulders and bright morning sunlight insisted. Surrendering, he opened his eyes.

At first, he held perfectly still. Rough wood walls, an open window, dark blue cotton curtains wafting in the breeze. He shifted onto his back. Low ceiling with even lower rafters.

The Bridgekeeper’s cabin.

Today, he would finish telling her how he had gotten to her door. He had fallen asleep confident that she would be able to help him.

With a quick stretch of his arms, he climbed out of bed. A note waited on the bathroom mirror.

Good Morning my friend,

I'm tending to a few chores. I should be back by the time you're ready. We'll have breakfast then, if you like.

The Bridgekeeper had risen just before dawn, as was her habit. Her goats depended on her. They were awake well before she arrived, eagerly waiting.

As usual, once she slid open the small barn door, they were nudging and pressing for attention. She petted and spoke with each.

“Well, what do you think of our guest?” she asked.

Kate was already running up the ramp to her milking platform. And soon the others’ heads were in their favorite stanchions.

“Okay, Dana, okay. Maybe he’s not everything one might wish for, but...”

He was extremely impatient. She understood why. The world was in peril... not much time left. Yesterday’s account had made clear that he meant well and he wasn’t giving up. But he certainly did need help. The problem was figuring out exactly what kind of help.

As the Bridgekeeper washed her hands, took out clean towels and milking buckets, she was trying to recall her last night's dream. She knew that it had to do with what her guest was missing, what he needed to get across. It had several distinct parts. Some of it almost cartoonish, as if the vitally important message were child's play.

“Piiiiinnnggg!!” The elevator door slid open. “Sixth Floor. Sign Systems and Accessories,” a digital voice announced.

A young Person stepped off. He was wearing a too-large tee shirt that hung asymmetrically from shoulder to thigh, faded jeans and running shoes.

“Hi.” A man in a navy blue suit, off-white shirt and carmine tie appeared out of nowhere. “Looking for an upgrade?”

The young man removed his earbuds.

“I’m sure we have something here that would interest you.” The Salesrep gestured with a sweep of his arm. “Could I show you a system or two?”

The young man gave a half-hearted nod.

“No doubt you’ve been here before,” the Salesrep said as he led the way down the main aisle. Turning to make eye contact, he realized that the young man hadn’t followed. Then they were both standing at their destination.

“For Today’s Communication,” the large display flashed in pumpkin orange letters on a cyan background, “You need a Supra-dimensional Sign System.”

“This is our latest model,” the Salesrep launched into his pitch. “Just released. And it’s got everything. I mean everything. There’s not a message you can think of that the Model 2048 can’t handle. This system not only communicates, mediates and constructs, it deconstructs, too. You could really wow your friends with this one. Comes with a guarantee of complete cultural competency. Nice, huh? Just look at that list of add-ons.”

“What exactly is it?” the young Person asked.

The Salesrep seemed a bit surprised. “You want to communicate, right? And of course you want the latest state of the art sign system to do it, right?”

“Sign system?”

“Yes, sign system, sign system,” the Salesrep replied.

The young man scrunched his eyes.

“But what *is* a sign system?”

“Hmmm,” the Salesrep raised his eyebrows. “Good thing you asked. Well, uh... maybe we’d better start with a simpler model. Let’s walk over here,” he beckoned. “You know, if something means something to you, you’re going to have words for it, right?”

“Uhhh. I guess so.”

The Salesrep stopped in mid-step and looked the young Person squarely in the eyes. “Just try to think of something you don’t have a word for.”

Silence.

“You can’t,” the Salesrep declared. “Because, if you can register it at all, you’ve got to have words for it.” He flipped both palms up in a gesture of, ‘There you have it.’

Then they arrived at a showcase, where a simple black and white sign stated, “A System to Meet Your Everyday Needs.”

“This is a Starter Kit.” The Salesrep began. “Probably a lot like the one you’ve been using. Works automatically in the background.”

The Customer looked pointedly underwhelmed.

“This one comes with built-in priorities. Food. Danger. Good. Bad. That kind of thing. It’ll give you basic object recognition, too. Fork. Spoon. Knife. Nose.” He pointed to his own. “Know what I mean?”

The young man rolled his eyes, crossed his arms.

“Now, wait. Just because it’s for beginners, doesn’t mean it’s an inferior product. You can make total sense of your world with this one, just like you do with the big ones. Never again find yourself feeling swamped by too many impressions pouring in at once. No more not knowing who you are, when or where. No more getting distracted by faces in the wallpaper and animals in the clouds...”

The young Person remained unimpressed.

Stepping behind the display case, the Salesrep slid open a glass door and took out one of the small boxes. He held the package at a distance and squinted at the label.

“These starter systems go way beyond absolute basics. This one’s got an operative vocabulary of... Ahhh... Well over... ten thousand words.” He looked at the customer. “How many words are you presently using?”

“What’s that got to do with it?”

“What does what have to do with it?” the Salesrep looked puzzled.

“Words. Isn’t that what you just asked me?” The young Person eyed the Salesrep suspiciously.

“Words? Words are what sign systems are all *about*,” The Salesrep said a little too loudly. “You know, signs,” he said more quietly.

“Signs? You mean like this?” The customer pointed to the black and white display.

“Well,” the Salesrep responded. “Uhhh, listen. Most people use these systems without worrying about the details of how they work. Like your car or your phone. You don’t need to know —”

“Don’t start telling me what I don’t need to know. I *want* to know what you mean by sign — if I’m gonna buy a sign system.”

The Salesrep raised then dropped his eyebrows. “Okay, so signs. Signs are no big deal. No big mystery. Take any word and the meanings of that word.”

“Yes?”

“Call the word, spoken or spelled out, the signifier and call its meaning the signified.”

“Okay.”

“Well, the signifier signifies the signified, and that’s the sign.” He ended his sentence with eyes hinting of pride at how smoothly he had explained it. Remembering it word for word from the training manual.

“I knew that,” shrugged the customer. “I get what you’re trying to say. You don’t say it too well, but what you mean is that the sign, hand, stands for this.” He raised his right hand. “Right?”

“Hmmm... Not so simple,” the Salesrep shook his head. “What about this?” The Salesrep then dangled his own right hand. “Or this?” with that, he raised his left.

“Trouble is, there’s no necessary connection between the signifier, h-a-n-d, and any particular hand,” Salesrep went on. “Know what I mean?”

It didn’t look like it.

“Well, would the word ‘hand’ have anything to do with that,” he pointed to the customer’s hand, if we didn’t agree that it did?”

The young man tilted his head slightly to one side, said nothing.

“Wait, before you answer,” the Salesrep said quickly. “Consider this — hand, main, mano, Urdu... a long list... they all refer to the same thing.” He raised his eyebrows.

“You see, it’s just an agreement,” the Salesrep answered for him. “There’s no necessary connection between any word and what it refers to.”

“Wait. How can you say that?”

“Okay, more evidence,” the Salesrep replied. “Can you imagine having a sign for every referent in the world? No, it’s not possible. Not workable for communication either.” He looked carefully at the Customer. “So we agree that hand will refer to as many individual *hands* as there are out there. Each one. And tree for the trees. Leaf for the leaves.”

“I get it,” the young face lit up.

“Good. It’s vitally important to keep that in mind. There is no necessary connection between the sign and the referent.”

“I don’t know,” the young Person said, “I don’t see any problem with that. I mean, from the time you’re a little kid, you learn to point to your hand and say ‘hand.’ A hand is a

hand. If we agree, that's that. So what? It doesn't matter to me that there's no necessary connection between the thing and its word?"

"Hmmm. You don't see a problem." The Salesrep bit his bottom lip. "Say, how about we look at another system? Something a little more sophisticated?"

"Sure."

The Salesrep waved a hand toward the department indicators hanging from the ceiling. "There are other kinds of signs besides words," he said as they began walking. "Whole sets of signs out there. Some that are objects. You know, things that people produce."

A display with a wall of television screens and voice-over drew the young customer's attention.

"The Absorbatron Seven," it announced, "Welcomes you to the World of Objectivations."

Screens flashed images of doctors in surgical garb, judges in robes, professors in graduation gowns, businessmen in suits, technicians in lab coats, workers in various colored jumpsuits, football players in their helmets and uniforms. Then, glowing molten steel pouring from huge dippers; power cables and data streams; highways filled with trucks and cars; a bullet train; a jumbo jet landing; waves breaking over the bow of a battleship; four screaming F35 jet fighter planes...

"A world full of things to serve you." The voice was official, knowing, authoritative.

"Objectivations," observed the Salesrep. "They're signs, too. We create things. And then they act on us. As if they had an independent existence. Like we didn't make them in the first place. It's like they take on a voice, a narrative of their own."

The young Person seemed not to hear. He was watching the screens, spellbound. Barely able to keep up with the images.

"Like guns," the Salesrep said more loudly, "that guns exist normalizes guns existing." He looked questioningly at the Customer. "Know what I mean?"

"How much does a good one like that cost?" He pointed to the display case.

"The price?" The Salesrep bent down and pulled out an even smaller box from under the counter.

"Yeah. How much?"

"Well, you buy these on time. That's the way it works." The Salesrep's face became serious. "You pay as you use it."

The Customer inspected the little package. "So what do I have to pay?"

"You have to pay attention."

"I mean, how much?"

“How much attention?” the Salesrep asked.

“No,” the Customer shook his head. Looked at the Salesrep as though an alien from another planet. “To what?” he asked.

The Salesrep was stymied. “To your world. To the Referent,” he replied, “To, the people, the animals, the plants. Your own being. the Stars, The Planet.” The Salesrep made a sweeping gesture with his hands.

“Remember, *you* have to make the connection between the sign system and the referent if there’s going to be any at all.”

“Oh, that again. What’s the big deal?”

The Salesrep looked worried. “The big deal is that a sign system, no matter how high end, will run out of control unless you pay attention to what you’re doing with it. You have to pay attention. That’s the price.”

“No down payment? I just take it?” The grinning young man plugged his earbuds back in, tucked the sign system into his back pocket and walked toward the elevator. His parting comment, “It’s a steal!”

The Bridgekeeper closed the sliding door on the little barn. The sky was already bright blue. And the goats, after staying inside all yesterday, could hardly wait to get into the open field. Nora and Dana were bumping against the gate. The Bridgekeeper hurried to let them out.

“Now don’t wander far,” she reminded them. “We’ll take our guest to the high meadow this afternoon.”

Cut My Hair

Back at the cabin, the Bridgekeeper's guest had finished setting the table. Plates, silverware, napkins, a plump loaf of brown bread on the cutting board; everything readied. The familiar song of a cardinal accompanied a breeze from outside.

"What are you dreaming about in there?" came a voice through the screen door. He blinked. She was standing right next to him, beginning to slice the bread.

"Let's get some breakfast together," she said. "Do you know how to soft-boil eggs?"

The Dreamer used a fork prong to pierce a tiny hole in each of the shells, then lowered the eggs one by one on a spoon into the boiling water. A turn of the timer and the wait began. The Bridgekeeper was sitting close by, gazing out the window. Quiet. He wondered what she might be thinking.

Although her eyes were on a chickadee working at opening a seed, her mind was preoccupied with an image from her last night's dream that kept coming back to her.

'Suspended in the air somehow. Over and over again.'

DOER > ACTION → OBJECT OF THE ACTION - ACTED UPON

Walking over to the counter near the sink, she rummaged through one of the drawers. Retrieved a small pad of paper and pen.

"Let me show you something," she said. "See if this rings a bell." She wrote out the little diagram for him.

"Well," he responded. "It kind of reminds me of how we used to diagram sentences back in grade school. You know, common English sentence structure — subject/verb/direct object. Why do you ask? — Oh! The eggs!"

He grabbed the pan and quickly dumped the boiling water into the sink. Replaced it with cold. "Whew! Saved — I hope."

With toast browned to perfection, they pulled their chairs close to the table.

"We give thanks to you who feed us with your lives," the Bridgekeeper prayed.

"May we live in a manner worthy of your offering."

The eggs had turned out perfectly. The Bridgekeeper sliced hers in two and scooped its contents onto her toast.

"I believe you left off in Phoenix," she cued.

"Yes, Phoenix," the Dreamer set his egg down. "It was late April, 1976..."

“Now you’re sure?” Bobbie, my cousin’s partner, held her barber scissors in one hand, her comb in the other. My uncle, who had teased me for years about the length of my hair, peeked from behind her shoulder. Their half-worried looks offering one last chance for second thoughts.

“Yes, please. Do it.”

The first long inches came off quickly. Some falling heavily in my lap. I had liked it long. But I reminded myself that choosing to cut it was much like what had led me to letting it grow long.

It had begun the summer that I was living in Milwaukee’s inner city. Where the opportunities many of us take for granted — decent housing, quality schools, a safe and secure neighborhood, adequate medical care, connections for getting jobs — just don’t exist. Oh, I had already been changed by singing folk songs about civil rights and other issues in the monastery with Brother Brian. But *being there*, meeting and talking with people, was different than learning about racism and poverty second hand.

“Clip-clip-clip...” Bobbie was moving steadily around my head. Gobs of wet hair falling to the floor.

My senior year at Marquette University contributed to its growth as well. The war in Vietnam was raging. I joined others taking a stand against it. And got arrested for civil disobedience.

“Still with me there?” Bobbie seemed to be looking at me and past me at the same time. I could only guess what I was beginning to look like.

After dropping out of graduate school, I just let it grow. A Movement was happening among people my age — and in its ideal expression — advocating Peace, Love and Happiness, rather than accumulating material possessions. There was palpable hope for a whole new world. No more war, poverty, racism, sexism and environmental destruction. Harmony with Nature. Freedom. Self-determination. You don’t need a marriage license to live with the person you love. Marijuana. Music. Long hair represented a public endorsement of those values.

“Okay, we’re going to have to make some decisions now about how we want it to look when we’re done.” Bobbie was circling the barstool, moving her own head up and down and side to side, viewing her work from various angles.

Cathy, my younger cousin, came in from the living room and covered her mouth with her hand, horrified at what we were doing. A year earlier, she and I had gone downtown together and found new wheels for the child’s wagon I was pulling from Oakland to New York. “For Mother Earth and all Her Children...” Words I now

considered too abstract. If we were really going to create a new World, Peace on Earth, “liberty and justice for all,” we would have to make it concrete.

“Like this?” Bobbie held the mirror up for me to see as she parted my hair down the middle, as I had been doing. Shocking.

“Uhhh. No.”

“How about this?” She tried the part off to one side as I had done years before. And continued snip-snip-snipping.

I thought that we had only been waiting for the means, and that an Article V Constitutional Convention was it. But four months of intense effort to tell people about this option had gotten nowhere.

Hence my decision out on Highway 61.

I emerged from the bathroom after having shaved and returning the color to the bleached center lock of my hair. I hardly recognized myself.

And I stopped calling myself Merlin.

“I can see if I keep you talking, you don’t eat. Better open that egg before it gets really cold.”

As he broke open his egg, she caught another thread of her dream.

Cocoon

At first, all she could see were galaxies of water molecules drifting through dull sunlight. Then, enormous tree trunks emerged. Shadows retreated as wet fronds and grasses came into sight. A cool breeze carried away what lingered of the mist and revealed a human who looked a lot like her guest. He was on one knee looking at an insect dragging something along the ground. Somehow, she knew what he was thinking.

The ant labored with the seriousness of someone single-handedly saving home, community, world. It carried a burden three times its size. Pulling and urging the precious cargo over obstacles. Now the human looked up and noticed that the ant was traveling down the center of an earthen trail, one that wove through the woods as far as he could see.

He had recognized the path.

Soft soil cushioned his first cautious steps. Shafts of sunshine waited for him up ahead. The path alternated between shadow and luminosity. The light glimmering, dancing and splashing along the ground.

Everywhere he looked Life engaged him. He felt he was a part of the World. Tiny wildflowers grew along the way. Their vibrant purple faces, trimmed with velvet and embellished with delicate black and white lines, spoke a language he could scarcely comprehend.

So continued down the path, responding to the unpredictable beauty, taken up with loving Presence. The more he revered the freedom of every being around him, the more wonder they gave back to him. He was Alive. Alive as a bumblebee gathering hyssop nectar. Alive as the lichen and mosses clinging to the rocks and trees. Alive.

It was a twist and several turns later that he came upon a huge log totally blocking the path. An obstruction with no apparent way around. All this time, he'd been so fully engaged with the wonder that he hadn't said anything — hadn't felt the need. Now, he spoke.

“I —”

“...it”

Subject and object. Himself wishing to continue down the path; the log impeding his progress. Then he grasped a short branch sticking out obliquely from the trunk and pulled himself up. Waving his free arm to keep from falling backward, he regained his balance and made it over.

Once on the opposite side, it occurred to him to say something more. Something about where he was, what he was doing, where he was going. So he could know what to expect, maybe. Perhaps it could help him meet the next challenge. He began naming — everything.

He picked one of the delicate white flowers growing next to the log. A red liquid from the flower's stem stained his fingers.

'Hmmm, now if I remember from my botany course...' He pushed the petals aside. 'Looks like radial symmetry...' He started tearing the flower to bits. "Compound pistils. Joined sepals. Stamen..."

In no time, "moss, flower, worm, mouse, deer, bird, cloud..." Anything that he could "see, taste, smell, touch, hear, feel, even imagine..." had become an object in his world. After labeling, he had a mind to fit everything into categories — according to various qualities that he assigned. Colors, sizes, shapes... And he arranged it all into a great hierarchy. Not until his world felt thoroughly mastered did he continue down the path, talking, naming, telling himself stories, explanations...

In time, he noticed wispy threads appearing. Lying all about. They reminded him of the finely spun glass that his mother used to call "angel hair." Arranged around the base of a candle or statue or something, it made things look like they were floating in clouds. And you weren't supposed to play with it. If you even touched it, your mother would know. Because you couldn't get it back to its original arrangement. Fibers attached themselves to your fingers, to your clothes, to one another. Pieces ended up on the floor. As if it had a mind of its own.

But what was this stuff on the path? Like glass, the shiny threads mirrored what surrounded them, but not exactly. Picking up one piece inevitably meant drawing several more along with it. Fibers entangled with other fibers that went inside yet other fibers. Loops, clumps, knots... Short fibers, long fibers, wrinkly fibers, shades of silver and gray... Intriguing.

He took to shaping the stuff, stretching it, working it. Playing with it. Draping it on whatever he could reach. Wrapping it around everything. Soon it blanketed the ground. Pieces of it floated about.

His sense of himself and the whole world was becoming all but indistinguishable from the fibrous extravaganza that he was producing. He had no idea how totally out of touch he was becoming.

An uncomfortable edge started tugging at his awareness.

"It's nothing," he told himself.

To the trees, squirrels, birds, insects, ferns and flowers around him — he now appeared cocooned. Inside, he couldn't even see the path anymore. Except for his hands, he couldn't move. Outside, the flowers that he had so loved? They could hardly breathe or get sunlight. He had enshrouded his entire world in the webs he'd been spinning.

At one point, he did try to shake off some of the fibrous mass. When it didn't readily let go, he told himself there was no other way. "Nothing to worry about. Obviously natural. Just how things are. Childish imagination that there was anything more to this forest, anyway." He could no longer think outside his wraps.

Still, something said it just wasn't so. The song of a bird reached through his musings. Vague memories stirred him. And he kept getting glimpses of a happiness that he had experienced earlier — in the trees, the shadows, the sunlight, with the animals. Somewhere other than where he was right now. All those things troubled his mind a bit, no matter what he told himself.

Beverly Wilshire

“Would you like some coffee?” Although the Bridgekeeper was near the stove, her voice sounded as if it came from far away.

“Please.”

“We’ve got a lot of ground to cover. You were still in Phoenix...”

They stacked the breakfast dishes in the sink, and returned to the table.

Besides changing my name and appearance, I had also reached a strategic decision. In order to call for the Convention, the people would have to know that such a possibility existed. Clearly, the media would have to assist in presenting the option. That was the main problem. “We can’t make the news,” they had repeatedly told me during my hitchhiking tour. “We can only report on it. If the idea becomes news, you can count on us. We’ll cover it.”

Obviously someone whom the press already considered to **be** news was essential to introducing Article V. ‘If a superstar took up the Proposal,’ I reasoned, ‘word would get around.’

I knew there were many such individuals in LA. Musicians, actors, celebrity artists of all kinds. And Joanne had moved there. So that’s where I went.

Joanne and I were still married, but hadn’t seen one another for over a year. When I called, we both expressed how much we missed each other. I was welcome to come and stay with her, she said. I could take care of whatever business I had. And we could talk.

Late into the night, we reconsidered. Our past — could we have anticipated where our relationship was leading? Had we failed one another? Our future — could we start over? Had what led to our separation changed? On the morning of May 5th, we took separate buses. Joanne to her job. Me to the Beverly-Wilshire Hotel.

I knew that superstars frequented the Wilshire. Years earlier, a friend who knew someone who worked in the parking garage had told me that the Beatles were staying there and suggested that I go and talk with them about *The Eternity Book*. I hitchhiked down from Berkeley. The person at the front desk said that, indeed, the Beatles had been there, might still be there, but weren’t receiving any guests. I returned home. Not a very auspicious precedent, but now things were different. Now I had a concrete plan of action. The time seemed right. And the Beverly-Wilshire seemed the place.

The bus ride to the hotel brought back everything I loved about LA. Warm sunny skies, flowers in unexpected places, palm trees in rows along wide and busy boulevards. Traffic

which, when moving at all, moves a little too fast. And the people. People with a look in their eye that the unbelievable just might happen — that very day.

I pulled open the thick glass doors of the hotel and stepped into what felt like the quiet of a funeral home. After asking permission at the front desk if I could wait in the lobby area, I made my way past several silk-covered couches, a circle or two of antique chairs set on Persian rugs, miniature palm trees, marble pillars, delicate teakwood tables, softly lit lamps. I chose a place, discreet but visible, sort of in the middle of the room, toward the back.

It must have been around 9 a.m. Except for the man at the front desk, I was alone. ‘It’s not as difficult as it sounds.’ I went over what I would say. ‘We could begin exactly where everyone wants to begin...’ After ruminating for a while, I looked around. Still no one else there.

Back to my thoughts. ‘To start, we would have to stop. Start by stopping?’ I laughed to myself. ‘What?’

‘Stop thinking about ourselves in one way; start thinking about ourselves in another.’

As the morning wore on, people arrived. They whispered, read and appeared to be waiting.

I pretended I was meeting someone. Considered what that person might ask. ‘So what’s this new world going to look like?’

‘Well,’ I would answer, ‘we —’

A moment of street noise punctuated my musings. Someone must have gone out.

‘How are you ever going to get people to agree?’ asked my make-believe interlocutor. There was much to say about that.

Sometime later, the great doors again opened and closed. I looked up. No one I recognized.

‘So, are you going to brainwash, manipulate, indoctrinate everyone?’ I could hear the objections.

‘A Revolution of Love depends on freedom.’ I rehearsed. ‘You can’t make people love. They have to *choose* love. Creating this new world requires more not less freedom. It means moving from a fragile democracy subservient to money, to a strongly democratic society open to change. Teaching ourselves how to think. How to see through words that divide or mislead —’

Again the doors. Again no one.

I remembered what I hadn’t said yet. ‘Above all, we need to teach ourselves how to empathize with each other. We ...’ And off I went with that.

It was a large lobby. People drifted in and out now. Once in a while, someone sat down in a setting off to my side, or directly across from me. I had on my best clothes, but probably looked pretty shabby in comparison with their three-piece suits and designer dresses, high heels and wingtips. We waited together all the same. Sometimes they read a newspaper or talked among themselves.

‘Would people living in that whole new world imagine Hell as something like our world now?’ I wondered.

I remembered a story someone had told me.

“Before Heaven or Hell existed,” the fable went, “a discussion took place about whether all beings would inevitably choose to enjoy eternal happiness. Or, was it conceivable that some might actually choose pain and torment? A trial was set up to decide the case.”

“In the center of an enormous banquet hall was placed a table filled with every possible delight — and at which, everyone was seated. But there was one catch. You couldn’t feed yourself. At first the banquet went untouched. Frustration. Irritation. Torment. But then the idea of feeding one another occurred — and some started putting food into each other’s mouths. Some individuals didn’t get it right away. And others refused. But that was the beginning of Heaven and Hell.”

I was beginning to feel a little hungry myself. But I didn’t want to be walking around. Maybe someone would come and I wouldn’t be there. So I just waited. I could stand a little discomfort. Every once in a while, I would hear footsteps cross the marble floor. Muffled voices came and went. That kept my hopes up.

“What exactly were you expecting?” The Bridgekeeper wore a baffled look. The coffee cups clinked as she set them down with one hand, then poured from the carafe with the other. “Were you waiting for someone in particular?”

“Anyone would have been fine. Anyone whom I recognized or who recognized me. I was turning over stones, knocking on doors, seeking and expecting to find.”

“Well, yes, but. Well... go on.”

Lunch time came and went. I slowly realized that I was going to have to think about something that I really didn’t want to think about. Something that led out the door and down a street that I didn’t want to have to walk down. Not yet. I gulped. Felt a blush. ‘But who’s watching anyway? No one knows why I’m sitting here. And even if people think I’m crazy, so what.’ That’s certainly how I *had* been seeing it. But now, right now, the tables were turning.

‘It had been an all or nothing proposition ever since...’ I couldn’t remember how long anymore. I had no doubt about the connection between Personality and the Stars at the moment of birth. Or that Einstein’s Theory of Relativity implies we’re living in Eternity. Or that we urgently need to make serious Changes if we’re to pass a better World unto the Children. And there had been so many dreams. So many signs. So much help and encouragement from so many people. Or at least that’s what I thought it was **then**. But now...’

My legs needed re-crossing.

‘Of course, everyone attaches personal meaning to what they experience. But maybe I had gone too far. Maybe it’s one thing to find meaning in dreams, signs, encouraging words — and another to act on it. Maybe I’d read the signals wrong. Maybe it was all an illusion. Maybe —’

“Maybe you were trying to force something,” the Bridgekeeper interrupted, “as you yourself had said about ciphers — out on the road, when you decided to stop being Merlin. Didn’t that occur to you?” She sipped her coffee.

“You mean that expecting to meet someone — by happenstance — was the equivalent of trying to evoke a cipher?”

“Of course.”

“Well, maybe my thinking was affected by my feelings. But everything that I’d done up to that time had failed to produce any results. So I really needed the answer to one question. Did the Universe want me to go on this way or not?”

“You sure came up with a strange way of asking. But continue.”

A little dangly thing, high up near the chandelier, suspended on a thread that only a spider could spin, caught my eye. How? I don’t know. Maybe it was the lighting and where I happened to be sitting.

‘Was it alive? If it is, what’s it doing up there?’ I couldn’t imagine a spider waiting for someone in mid-air. This one certainly didn’t seem to be spinning a web or doing anything. What did I know about spiders anyway?

‘Wait!’ I was sure I’d seen it move. After a moment’s steadying of its delicate tether. ‘Yes.’ It was lowering itself. I watched the spider slowly drop — what to me appeared a few inches; though for the spider, probably an immense distance. Again. And again. Quantum descents. Down. Down. Almost to the ground. Then it reached the floor and was gone. Only the long soft delicate line that inscribed its journey from ceiling to floor remained — stretching and arching in the movement of the air.

‘Kind of mirrors my own predicament,’ I thought, ‘I come back down to earth... leaving barely a trace.’ As if to emphasize the point, someone got up and walked right through the spider’s trail.

‘Whatever it was that the Universe had wanted of me,’ I resolved, ‘It’s finished. I can’t be expected to keep on doing this if no one else is going to do it with me. Anyway, there’s nothing more I can do. I have no resources to publish books. I don’t even have money for rent. I’ve done my part. Like that spider, I’m just going to disappear.’

More minutes ticked away. Time, awakened after slumber, was now up and running.

‘That’s it,’ I finally decided. ‘It’s over. Whatever it was, it’s all over.’

“— all over.” Someone’s words haunted me as I stood up and made my way across the lobby and out the door. ‘All over...’

If the morning had passed with hopeful slowness, mid-day with painful introspection, the afternoon and evening went with unstrung swiftness. Joanne and I discussed getting back together again. It seemed a bitter irony to me that she took my day at the Beverly-Wilshire as evidence that I hadn’t changed, that I would still keep on trying to do something about the world. I saw the day as a turning point, as Cosmic permission to return to the joys of ordinary life. But I couldn’t honestly say that I would refuse if other people ever made clear that they wanted to do something. Since Joanne was looking for assurance that I would give it up completely, she decided that we would not get back together. I left LA the next morning.

“In the end, she guessed right. Or I’d never be sitting here with you.”

“I think she saved both of you further suffering. For you, it was either no partner at all or someone who could fully embrace this... this Quest.”

“That would be Jody. When I recounted this Beverly Willshire morning to her, she told me about Charles Fourier, a nineteenth-century French utopian who waited at a Paris café every day at noon for the last ten years of his life, expecting that some wealthy and powerful person would come and help him realize his vision.”

“And no one ever showed up?”

“No one.”

A Guide

The Bridgekeeper stood up.

“Forgive the interruption,” she said. “But I need to catch up on a couple of chores. At least get the laundry going. I’ll be back shortly.

“Sure,” her guest replied. “I can take care of the kitchen, if you like.”

As she filled the washer, the Bridgekeeper connected again with her dream.

She was walking the path where she’d last seen him. But where was he? Then, a singular apparition.

His hair grew free in an electrified sphere around his head. ‘A supernova with spiraled lines of radiation,’ thought the Bridgekeeper. Around his neck, a scarf that looked like nebulae. He wore a rose shirt, raisin colored slacks and vest with some kind of logo. His face shone with years of paying attention. Eyes sparkled.

“Hello,” he said. “Are you lost? Do you need help? I’m a Guide.”

“Greetings,” she returned. “I don’t think I’m lost. But I seem to have lost my friend.”

A wide-strapped case with an embroidered bird carrying lightning bolts in its talons hung from the Guide’s shoulder.

“And what did your friend look like — if I might ask?”

“Medium height. Long hair. Brown eyes. Trimmed beard, graying. Tattoo on his left hand — an Egyptian eye.”

“You’re in luck,” the Guide said immediately. “I spoke with someone who fits that description not long ago. Or I should say, as much as I could see of him.”

The Guide opened his satchel and took out a tablet.

“How long has your friend been missing?” he asked.

“Seems like just now...”

“Just now...” He tapped the screen.

The Guide swiped the screen several times, magnified the view. “I’m afraid your friend’s in a little trouble. Let me briefly explain.” He returned the tablet to its case.

“Last week on my routine walk, I encountered an unnatural condition. Flowers torn up. A white, sticky fibrous mess clinging to everything in sight.” He paused. “Plants unable to gather photons. Animals trapped. At the center of it, a cocoon of sorts — with human feet, shoes. I recognized the white stuff. I’ve had experience with such cocoons. Were they permanent? No. Impermeable? Not at all. I knew you could easily poke holes in it. Four-year-olds do it all the time.”

“So I took careful aim and gave the cocoon a quick jab with two fingers. Eye level. That’s when I saw the tattoo. He put his hand up to block the sudden influx of light. When he lowered it, I observed his brown eyes, looking lost.”

“Are you okay in there? Do you know where you are?”

“Your friend remained silent.”

“I’m a Guide,” I said. “Want *me* to tell you where you are?”

I peeked into the holes. His eyes said, “Yes.”

“Your... uhhh... cocoon is located alongside a Path. The Path runs through a Forest. The Forest is located on planet Earth, a place you might call Paradise. You don’t see any of it anymore because you threw webs of meanings over it all,” I concluded bluntly. “Entangled yourself, too.”

“Your friend denied that.”

“Maybe you don’t remember doing it, but I’m afraid you did. That’s how you got lost. You’re lost. Lost in a Narrative Field.”

When he asked what I meant by Narrative Field, I explained as simply as I could.

“It means you started telling yourself a story, a discourse about the Forest, who you are and what you’re doing here. But that’s not the problem. Lots of travelers out here need to do that in order to put one foot in front of the other.”

I checked his facial expression. Saw a faint glimmer of comprehension.

“The problem is *what* you started telling yourself. Objectification. Hierarchy. Look around. These narratives you put out have caused suffering. Mutilated flowers. Mired animals. Everybody suffocating. And you. Look at yourself. You’re stuck in that thing and can hardly move. But it’s mental. Understand? The problem’s in your mind. You can get free and stop making this mess. If you change your mind.”

“I peered in. He looked less assertive, sort of apologetic. But I don’t think he fully grasped the situation. Anyway, I’d done all I could for him. In fact, had kind of stretched the rules already. I’m not supposed to coax anybody.”

“I’ve got to go now,” I told him. “But when you make up your mind to get yourself out of there, you will.”

“I wrote up my report. Requested the appropriate support team bring immediate assistance. He’s still there. Not far from here, at a widening in the Path. Maybe you can get through.”

Splitting Apart

By the time the Bridgekeeper returned, her guest had nearly finished washing the dishes. She got out a clean dish towel and dried the glassware.

“So the Beverly-Wilshire. You said it was a turning point. Which way did you turn?”
“North.”

In San Francisco, I was welcomed by Roberta, Donna, Lynn and Joplin who had moved there from Milwaukee. When I arrived, they were busily working at their new cottage industry. A juicer and lots of hard work were transforming gunny sacks of carrots into “Dykes Delight Carrot Juice.” A popular health drink all over the Bay Area.

One morning, I accompanied Roberta to Golden Gate Park Zoo. She was responsible for feeding the fresh cut carrot tops to the buffalo. We lugged the greens from the back of the station wagon up to the chain-link fence and, standing on a box, tossed them over. Several buffalo watched us from inside their compound.

“Do they know we’re bringing them something to eat?” I asked.

Roberta grinned. Even before we’d finished, two of the awesome beasts had come right up to us. They were huge. Their eyes looked straight through you. They seemed to know Roberta.

“Well, what are your plans, Merlin?” she asked as we stood there together. “You’re not giving up on the Article V idea, are you? I’ve met a lot of people who say it makes sense.”

“I don’t know, Ro. If people would come forward and really want to do something, I’d be willing to help. But otherwise, I think it’s time to retreat.”

Roberta could relate to the idea of retreat, but hoped it would only be temporary. Donna encouraged me to continue doing Stars. Lynn observed that the Bay Area offered opportunities for employment. They prepared a space for me to stay until I could get myself settled.

Falling back on my only marketable skill, I began looking for a job in the printing industry. I searched the want-ads and went on foot from printshop to printshop. At Cleo’s in Oakland, Doug expressed a wish to re-hire me. In fact, he gave me a temporary fill-in position the very day I appeared. My former co-workers now all had cars, insurance coverage, retirement plans and houses they were either looking at or paying for. We talked about old times. But there was no permanent position available. After a week of unsuccessful searching, I called Dawn Eden, my friend with the bookstore in Los Gatos.

“Yes, of course, Merlin,” she said. “You’re always welcome here. And there’s a job for you at Walden Pond, too.”

My short hair and clean shaven face came as a surprise to her.

“Wow, Merlin! What a change!” Sometimes she spoke with an almost elfin voice.

“What does it mean?”

“Bob, Dawn. Call me Bob, now.”

“Oh, all right. I forgot, Merlin — ooops,” she laughed.

Shortly after my arrival, we discussed working at the bookstore. It would be full-time and permanent. I would find an apartment. Until then, I could stay in the extra bedroom.

Joëlle had found an apartment across the street. We hadn’t seen one another since our time together in New Mexico. She was still reading cards for people and invited me over one day. We sat down at a small round table.

“Okay,” Joëlle begins, “we will see.” She passes you a plain deck of cards and tells you to shuffle it.

‘What now for me? What next?’ I ask as I move halves, quarters, eighths and thirds from top to bottom and bottom to top. When it feels right, I return the deck. She places it in front of her and turns up eight cards, two rows of four. For a few minutes, she quietly studies them.

“This August, Merlin...” She speaks slowly, cutting her words more sharply than is her habit. “I mean, Bob, sorry. There will be travels.” She looks at you, yet far away. You feel she’s closer to you than anyone’s ever been. “I see big travels,” she repeats. She shakes her head, squints her eyes a little and bites her bottom lip. Then her expression changes dramatically. “And a great success.” Relief. And wherever she had gone, she’s back now. “That’s all,” she concludes.

“That’s all?” I ask. Sometimes her readings go on for thirty minutes.

That morning, she just raised her eyebrows in response and gave me a loving smile.

Time had also brought new faces to Los Gatos. Karyn, Dawn’s daughter, had returned from her stay in Paris. Cese was away traveling; and her shy sand-colored German Shepherd, Frances, was now living with Karyn. At Walden Pond, Ella, Cindy and Barbara had all been hired since I’d last worked there.

Cindy, the new manager, usually began her day with coffee at Dawn’s house and sometimes ended her day there, too. So we often traveled back and forth from work together. Even before she invited me to visit her place up in the Santa Cruz mountains, I knew that she had taken a liking to me. You usually know where you stand with Aries people.

The Saturday afternoon I went up there, May felt like summer. Too beautiful to stay indoors. The four of us — Cindy and I; Ben, her partner; and Rosemary, her daughter — decided to go for a walk. Newly paved Stetson Road snaked smooth, clean and black through the deep greens and dark browns of the thick Redwood forest. The air, heavy with spring, secreted an occasional winter memory hiding from the sun.

After a while, we left the main road for a crude driveway that cut down the mountainside to our left. Not much more than a double-rutted path with low lying branches and mud puddles, it opened onto a construction site where bright new lumber was framing someone's dream house. The basement, poured and capped, gave the impression of a stage. Long, angular props held up skeletal walls. The roof could only be imagined. Since the carpenters had gone home for the weekend, we climbed about the studs and guessed at what might be what room. After a couple of minutes, Ben made the five foot leap from the platform and strode off into the woods. I stood at the edge, looking out over a valley long and deep. You knew it met the ocean somewhere out past the horizon.

'You shouldn't be wondering where Ben is off to,' I thought to myself. 'You ought to be worrying about where you yourself are going.'

I felt as if I had come to that proverbial fork in the road where a guide waits — the one who either speaks the whole truth or tells only lies. You're permitted one question. Take the wrong path and it's perdition. And I couldn't remember the formula.

'Whatever the last three years amounted to,' I thought to myself, 'the miracle — everyone doing everything in their power to bring about the needed changes — just didn't happen.'

I searched myself for the cause of failure, going over the same ground — over and over. Same questions/same answers. A line about delusion in the *I-Ching* haunted me.

Soft clouds floated across a wide sky. Looking down, I watched a hawk slowly soar.

He paused, as if he had lost his place in the story.

I had been trusting in magic, a magic that could happen — that was just waiting to happen. But didn't. Hadn't. Or if it had, not the way I had imagined it would. Yet some things remained clear. The Stars worked. So I would continue doing people's Stars. And so did the I-Ching. So I'd continue doing hexagrams and trusting. 'But I can't save the world by myself; so I have to put that on hold. See if anyone else is interested before I try something again.'

"There's plenty of pine cones nearby, Rosemary," a mother's words retrieved me from my soliloquy, "so don't wander off."

Cindy joined me at the edge where we admired the view. After a few minutes, we returned to speculation about the house. We began playfully leading one another through would-be walls. Then, unexpectedly, we suddenly met face to face. ‘Maybe this relationship with Cindy is just the thing,’ I thought. ‘Here she is, standing right in front of you, asking if you want to...’ We kissed.

With Sun in Aries and Moon in Capricorn, Cindy, was like springtime on a mountainside, an enthusiastic, adventurous and determined spirit. She had developed her philosophy of life midst the days of “Be-in’s” and “Love-in’s” in San Francisco. A hard worker, dependable, she had been a single parent for six years. And her daughter was a joy to be with. At the time, Cindy and Rosemary were living with Ben.

“Yes, what about Ben?”

“As often happens with Cancer males, Ben felt the need to make sure no one suspected his vulnerable soul. His huge hands had a lot of practice crushing beer cans with a single squeeze. Yet he was good with children.”

“But what I meant was did Ben and Cindy have an established relationship at the time? You called him her partner.”

“Yes. Well, Cindy never told me much. And I never asked. They were living together. But she said it was wearing her thin and that she had talked with Ben about breaking up. I should have known that it had to end, definitively, before something else could begin...”

By week’s end, we were making love.

Cindy told Dawn about it as they were on their way to the bookstore. Dawn was so astonished that she stopped the van right in the middle of an intersection.

A Saturday or two later, Dawn was hosting a party — something she often did. Guests had been arriving all afternoon. Having just finished doing Stars for Janet, I found a vacant chair in the kitchen by the telephone desk, just inside the back door. The weather had been strange all day. One hour bright and sunny, the next a stormy overcast. Outside the glass patio door to my right, it was getting dark again.

Around 5:30, Fletcher, Dawn’s son called. He wouldn’t be able to make it. People drifted into the kitchen. As always, the round table provided the perfect space for conversation.

Joëlle was recounting a visit to the beach that morning. Linda, whose Stars I’d recently done, distracted me from the story. “This is a thank you.” She placed a silver charm bracelet on my wrist.

Meanwhile in the living room, John was intensifying his extemporaneous piano playing. Either creating an edgy jazz piece or discovering that a piano could mimic a thunderstorm. With the sound growing louder, Ben walked through the back door, stepped into the kitchen and looked around. His face that of someone determined to do something. Our eyes met. My hope that his and Cindy's relationship had come to a good end dissolved.

Without a word, Ben grabbed the kitchen table and gave it a long, hard steady shove. Everyone sitting on the opposite side now found themselves pinned against the far wall. The entire center of the kitchen was now open, like a floor ready for washing.

"Hey, Ben, what are you doing?" Someone protested.

Time came unhinged. Ben took two quick steps toward me, grabbed me by my shirt and pulled me from my chair. I didn't wait for his cocked arm and clenched fist to slam dead-center into my face. I raised my hands in an instinctive gesture of defense. The first blow, slightly deflected by my forearm, crashed into my forehead — just above my left temple. A second punch followed and then another and another, glancing off my neck, head, arms and shoulders. I dropped my head down and tried to shield my eyes.

"Not in my kitchen! Not in my kitchen!" I heard Dawn screaming.

A powerful blow to the side of my body sent me toward the telephone desk. But on the way, my legs got tangled up with the legs of the chair and I fell to the floor. Ben kicked and kicked. I was on my knees, trying to get back to my feet, when two hands took hold of my head and neck and began pulling me up. But the hands were also dragging me to the right — and then they pushed. I went face first through the full-length patio door. Glass shattering everywhere.

"I don't believe this!"

"Stop it! Stop it!"

The kitchen was a madhouse turned upside down.

Without a second's hesitation, Ben yanked me back again. I felt warm blood slide off my chin. Facing down and turning away from him, I tried to curl myself into my arms. But there was no escape. Ben clamped one hand around my neck and began battering my back with the other. Drops of blood were splattering off the floor. I tried to wrench myself free, but couldn't. Ben kept pounding and pounding. I felt myself weakening. A second was a minute.

By this time, Paul, Joëlle, Cindy and others had freed themselves from the table and were trying to restrain Ben. Trying to pry his fingers from my neck, all screaming as loudly as they could.

"Ben! Ben! You're going to kill him!"

A maelstrom.

Then, suddenly — everything went silent. In a strange moment... everyone... including Ben and his blows... somehow, vanished... everything experienced a second earlier... disappeared. Not even the kitchen floor remained... I was alone in a silence. Nowhere I'd ever been before. Standing at the edge of a long, vertical tunnel that had just opened at my feet. A dark, bottomless well. An abyss I was about to enter. I knew I was about to die. This was no dream.

The scream didn't come out of my mouth — but I can't say no one heard it. Bolting through every cell of my body until it echoed in the cavern that had become my mind. It came un-thought-out from under years of thinking.

“God!!! Help me!”

In the next instant, I was back in the kitchen and Ben's deadly grip gave the slightest hint of loosening. I grasped the chance and gave a quick lunge forward. His hand slipped. And now, with so many others crowding around, I got away.

Once outside the door, I headed for the driveway. Blood was dripping from my face. ‘Assess the damages,’ I told myself in a hurried walk. I unbuttoned my shirt, took it off and gently touched it to my jaw. The shirt's beautiful purple and lavender colors turned blood soaked. ‘Big trouble!’ I realized. I quickly rolled the shirt into a ball returned it to my face, hoping it would do for a compress. About half way up the driveway, seven or eight neighborhood children were crouched on their hands and knees engaged in some game. They saw me approach.

Rosemary, Cindy's daughter, was one of the first to stand up. “Oh no!” she cried, “Oh no, Merlin! Oh, no!”

Now the other children stood up. A metal toy clanked on the pavement. Innocent eyes, wide as full moons, told me all I needed to know. A few were about to panic, run away. I realized I had to be careful with my only chance.

“Okay, now wait, wait,” I began, “I'm hurt. I'm hurt real bad. But I'm going to be all right,” I tried to reassure them. “I just need some help. Okay? I need to get to a doctor, right away.” Their little faces were in shock. All eyes glued to mine. A couple of heads nodded.

“Okay, now, listen.” Most of them were still with me. “Who has a father or a mother or a friend — who can take me in a car to the hospital, right away, real fast, right now?” I posed the question with as much succinctness and urgency as I could muster.

Three hands shot up — high above their heads. They understood — and they were certain.

“Okay,” I said. “Good. Now, run. Run home, right now — and tell your mother or your father, or whoever can help, that there’s an emergency. That someone’s got to get to the hospital, right away. Okay? Now go! Go!”

They ran off in different directions. I continued climbing up the drive. Down below, the back door slammed shut. I looked back, hoping not to see Ben. It was Cindy.

“Stay right there, Merlin,” she called out. “I’m coming.” She jumped into one of the cars, started it up with a roar, turned it around and raced up the drive.

“This one will make it... twenty-three.” The emergency room doctor had been stitching away for over an hour. Now he’d finished.

‘Twenty-three,’ I thought to myself. ‘The Hexagram of Splitting apart. Misfortune.’

The gash ran perfectly along the jaw line, from just below my left ear to under my chin. “You’re pretty lucky,” the doctor said with an air of accomplishment. “A quarter inch one way and you would’ve needed a plastic surgeon. A quarter inch the other,” he paused, “and you wouldn’t have needed anyone.”

Before I left the hospital, the head nurse urged me to press charges. “Listen,” she said, “I’ve worked here long enough to know what I see when I see it. We’ve got laws against battering. It doesn’t matter what the reason. No one has the right to do just anything they want to another person.” She looked at me with serious and empathetic eyes. “One phone call and the police will be here. We can talk with them together.”

“Thanks,” I said. “But until men stop thinking of women as their property, it will only happen again anyway.”

“I now know there was more to it than that. At the time, though, I hadn’t fully thought through the part violence plays in the construction of masculinity. As for pressing charges, I didn’t think it would do any good. I didn’t know of any treatment programs for batterers like Ben.”

Back then, I was only hoping that Ben, after having expressed himself, would now accept Cindy’s decision to leave him. A few days later, he moved out. Two or three weeks after that, Cindy, Rosemary and I were living together. The house Cindy rented belonged to some people living in the Bahamas. They were happy enough for someone to send them a small monthly check and make sure everything was kept up. There were plenty of little projects to do — re-roofing the chicken coop, fixing a broken key on the piano...

Cindy and I were still working at the bookstore, so we traveled back and forth to work each day. Mornings began with the drive down the mountain. On one such morning, after

dropping off Rosemary at her day camp, we decided to take a back-road short cut. We were running a little late.

Summer had hardly begun. The sun had risen, but not yet high enough to produce more than a strobe effect through the trees. The road hair-pinned its way down one mountainside and then another. Switchbacks stacked on switchbacks, none of which I had seen before. It should have made me more cautious. Instead, I kept taking a little of the opposite lane.

Then it happened — a car suddenly appeared, right in front of us. I hit the brakes and pulled the wheel sharply to the right. But the car didn't respond. It felt as though the road had turned to molasses. Instead of gripping the pavement and turning, our car slowly slid into the front left fender of the other car. Little did I know that the tires on Cindy's car were nearly bald. There was a loud crunching thud.

I was sitting on the side of a wide black path that seemed to come out of nowhere. It was certainly no road that I had ever seen before. I scrutinized the scene for anything recognizable. Nothing. As a matter of fact, I realized, I had no clue as to *how* I had gotten there either. No idea *where* or *when* this was happening. Or *who* I was. I reminded myself not to panic. Maybe if I would just be patient, the confusion would pass. Everything would work its way out. Somehow I would remember. Any second now... I coolly looked up the road again. It reminded me of a fairy tale, or a medieval setting. I watched.

'If only someone on horseback would come by,' I was thinking, 'or someone walking... then I could ask...' No one came.

Then I recognized the person sitting next to me. "Here," Cindy said, "keep this on your forehead." She handed me a handkerchief.

More blood. "Oh, no," I said. "Are you okay?"

"Don't worry. You're the only one hurt."

Maybe Cindy read the writing on the wall. Soon after the car accident, she was finding excuses to stay in town late. After the third time, I asked her directly.

"Are you still seeing Ben?"

"Yes," she answered.

I packed my things that evening and left the next morning. Maybe I could find a job in Milwaukee. I began the long hitchhiking trip back to the Midwest, with a handful of puzzle pieces — all out of place.

Reset

The Bridgekeeper put away the broom as her guest finished drying the last of the silverware.

“You mentioned chores before you went to start the laundry. Is there anything else I could help you with?”

“Would you care to join me in dusting books?”

“I’d love to.”

A kind of deck ran along the cabin’s front wall. Level with the doorsill, but several steps above the hearth room floor. It looked like a narrow stage. Built into the wall holding up this platform were bookshelves that ran the length of the room. Filled with books — all sizes, shapes, colors, ages. Anyone could tell that the Bridgekeeper loved books. He did, too.

They began on opposite sides of the room, taking them off the shelves, dusting them one by one.

“So you’d almost been killed twice. Were you starting to get the picture?”

“Only sort of. When I returned to Milwaukee...”

Trees, ink-drawn on watercolor-wash grays when I left in early spring, now draped graceful green. Once again, swings defined porches as places for hanging out with friends. Trellises hung purple with clematis. Alyssum’s white blooms grew where snows had piled high. Warm daylight stretched into evening.

As altered in appearance as Milwaukee was for me, so was I for my Milwaukee acquaintances. The person who had come to town the year before — bearded with a bleached lock in his long hair; calling himself Merlin and saying that something truly Magical could happen; talking about a Constitutional provision for making radical change — had come back with a clean-shaven face, cut hair, a scar running down his jaw line. And little to say. On the inside, firm determination had given way to uncertainty. A soul shipwrecked on an unknown shore.

I wasn’t returning to the Midwest to settle down. Nor did I mean to “go straight,” as my hair suggested. I was trying to re-find my place in existence, trying to sort out what had happened, trying to piece my life back together. I was thinking that I might find a printing job and get an apartment. Meanwhile, my brother David and his partner Sharon converted their cat’s lounging space into a summer room for me.

“However long you need it.”

“Thank you, David.”

“Well, get yourself settled. We’ll eat in an hour.” He gave me a warm hug.

Their two-story, two-family house was located on the near Westside — a neighborhood I knew well. Within blocks, people lived without the resources for three meals a day. Nor did many of my new neighbors share the privilege of simply expecting to land a job. For years, I had been intent on eliminating such social inequities. But now my mind was self-absorbed, lost in its own shadow.

Travel-weary, I plopped down at the desk and looked around the room. A single-bed. A dresser. A misshapen hanger dangling from a hook on the inside of the closet door. A dozen others lined up and waiting on the bar — stone still in an empty space. Bare green walls. My backpack and bookbag sitting on the oblong braided rug that covered the center of the refinished wooden floor.

My eyes lingered on two new items. An 18 by 24 inch piece of solid copper plate that my father had given me. To replace my drawing board, now lost forever. And a small blanket I’d won as a child at a hospital benefit bazaar. My mother had sent that along.

Red and orange rows of brick stared back at me through the open window. Late afternoon sunlight was squeezing between the buildings. But nary a breeze. The gossamer curtains hung there as if painted.

‘Disappearing Merlin is certainly a less happy process than Merlin appearing,’ I observed.

From a nearby church, the Angelus rang. But the image it evoked — the bearded white man in the sky, the mighty king surrounded by a hierarchy of saints and angels; God outside of His creation — no longer worked for me. The bells offered no solace.

I could also imagine voices of a counter-cultural spirituality saying, “All is illusion. Let it go. Pass on.” Oh, I agreed that this world filled our minds with a multitude of unwarranted worries that drained our energy and should simply be dropped. But I couldn’t lump that together with my concerns about war, racism, starvation, the Planet. ‘Isn’t compassion at the very core of Buddhism? Doesn’t Yoga teach us that no one reaches Nirvana until everyone does? So what are we going to do about the world, then?’

“Yeah?” I could almost hear the reply. “What *are* you going to do about it?”

I didn’t know anymore.

Inside the bag with my Starbooks, the *I-Ching* reminded me that I still had a compass. I did know that much. But where was I?

“Dust,” the Bridgekeeper said. “Just contemplating its origin ought to bring men to their knees.” She opened a large glossy print book and beckoned to him. “Oh,” he blinked free of his narrative.

Wild orange reflected softly on a brown and golden hillside. Above this, fluorescent pink blended into a delicate lavender until several shades of blue completely gave themselves over to ebony. On the next pages, crater pocked landscapes. Boulders sprinkled across a shiny smooth surface. Strangely shaped sculptures.

“From falling stars. Wind-gathered particles. Sea-spray condensations,” the Bridgekeeper pointed from picture to picture. “Microcosmic life...”

By the time they arrived at the second half of the book, the meaning he had attached to dust would never be the same. Dust brings the rain. Forms the nucleus around which snowflakes grow. A million particles of dust might equal one grain of sand. Dust was connected with the origin of Stars, with the stuff that formed planets, with the make-up of the solar plasma. Space could be thick with it.

“Dust thou art...” he commented.

The Bridgekeeper just looked at him, closed the book and went back to dusting. He fell silent.

“Can’t read your thoughts.”

Within days of returning to Milwaukee, I had visited Andi, spoken with Norman, and met with Cass and Genie of “Stars for a New Age.” Everyone agreed that for all the efforts at communicating the Article V Constitutional Convention idea, nothing had materialized. Only a few individuals across the entire country had responded. And that was the end of that.

In my heart, I just couldn’t help but worry that whatever had gone wrong was somehow my fault. For weeks now, maybe a month, I had been running the same thoughts around in my head. Getting nowhere.

In addition to the *I Ching*, I still had the Stars. And with all the Stars I’d done for people, since leaving and returning, I had been given that much more evidence that the location of the planets, Sun and Moon at the moment of an individual’s birth does tell us something about our being here. The Stars sing our connection with the Universe.

A Pisces named Barbara was living upstairs from David and Sharon that summer. We had met years earlier when she was working with the Welfare Rights Organization and I was at Babylon Printing Cooperative. Barbara appreciated the chart I now drew and explained for her. And in the following weeks, she introduced me to her circle of friends and hosted several Starchart presentations in her bright, airy kitchen. We would set the

chart on a painter's easel and arrange her elf-sized wooden chairs around the perimeter of the room.

On one such morning, "A new alphabet!" He sprang into the room with brilliant enthusiasm. "Right? Am I right?" His large dark eyes spoke yet more dramatically than his words. In an instant, they caught my own and said, "Sorry for interrupting. And don't worry, I'm a friend."

"Okay, Daryl, calm down. Have a seat." Barbara lovingly welcomed him.

I continued my presentation. The idea though — that the symbols were letters in an alphabet, letters forming words, a language — struck me powerfully. I sensed the significance of viewing the Stars as a celestial alphabet in the service of a cyclic, rather than linear grammar. A language beyond the 'subject / verb / object' paradigm of separation.

"That diagram I drew for you at breakfast..." The Bridgekeeper was holding an armload of books she had just dusted and was in the process of reshelving them. "You saw the star alphabet as getting beyond that?"

"Yes, because the identity that the Stars represent doesn't make the world and others into objects. The Stars describe identity in terms of connection."

As the lowest shelf was floor level, he was working on his knees.

"If the position of the planets at the moment of birth permits us to describe elements of personality, then the Starchart takes us to a meaning outside the reality assumed by language structure," he continued. "Even as we communicate that meaning with language."

"You were saying that to people?" she asked.

"Oh, no. No. It would take several years later and some additional pieces before I could fully appreciate Daryl's inspiration. As for what I was telling people..."

Weeks earlier, journeying back to Wisconsin, I was hitchhiking my way through the entangled interchanges adjoining San Francisco International Airport. A black BMW pulled up. Two men dressed in business suits were sitting in the front seat. But neither moved to open the back door. Instead, the passenger rolled down his window.

"Hey, you know how to get to Sacramento from here?" They had stopped in the lane exiting the airport in the direction of the Bayshore Freeway, northbound.

"Yes," I responded, "I'm going exactly that way!"

'What a break!' I thought as I turned to pick up my backpack and bookbag.

“Which way? Which way is it?” the driver asked hurriedly.

I felt a touch of chagrin as I realized they were only interested in directions. Nonetheless, I started to explain that they’d need to get onto Interstate 80, cross the Bay Bridge —

BEEEEEEPP!!!! Beep!!! Beep!!! Beep!!! Cars, three, now four deep lined up behind them.

“What!?” the driver didn’t hear what I had said.

“Wait. I’ve got a map,” I said quickly. As fast as I could, I reached down into my backpack — but before I could get the map unfolded, patience ran out.

Beep!!! Beep!!! BEEEEEEPP!!!! BEEEEEEPP!!!! BEEEEEEPP!!!!

“Get in! Get in!” the two men shouted. The passenger unlocked the back door. I threw in my things, jumped in and we were off.

With the aid of my map, I carefully showed and explained the route. I could tell that they were beginning to trust me.

“In half an hour to forty-five minutes, we’ll be out of the most difficult part.”

They were grateful. They might just make their appointment after all. Their flight from somewhere on the East Coast had been re-directed. Instead of landing in Sacramento, they’d ended up in San Mateo County.

‘Probably some high-powered business conference,’ I thought to myself. As was my habit, I offered to tell them about their Stars.

“Why not?” one said. They gave each other knowing little smiles.

As luck would have it, both their Stars were clustered — several celestial bodies appearing in a single place. Often in conjunction with one another. Which results in very pronounced personality characteristics. The descriptions become very focused and therefore all the more likely to ring a bell.

The driver had the Sun, Mercury, Venus and Mars all in Virgo. As I elaborated on how organized, critical and careful that said he would be, his partner started laughing. “You’ve got him dead right!” Half turning toward me, he gave the driver a manly shake of the shoulder, and laughed some more. The driver glanced at me in the rearview mirror. I returned his smile.

“What about him?” he asked.

“Okay. Just give me a minute.” I flipped to the birthdate. His partner had Sun, Moon, Mercury, Venus and Jupiter all in Scorpio. I talked about his theatricality, emotional intelligence. “You’re always on a stage. And you put on a good show. You can’t help but believe that there’s magic and mystery in the world. And you’re very secretive — sometimes making secrets out of things that don’t need to be secrets.”

The driver gave a sidelong glance at his partner. They were both very attentive.

Then I explained that the Planets we Humans discovered beyond Saturn could be associated with what Human Consciousness was discovering at the time.

Uranus, with the eighteenth century, the Enlightenment. The awareness that our political, social, economic structures, even our religious institutions, aren't pre-ordained by God or some deterministic forces, but are made by us, Human Beings. And that we can use reason to make our world better.

Then Neptune, the nineteenth century. The understanding that we're related to Nature. That we're part of something larger than reason can put into words. That the Living Poem we are a part of can end in an Earthly Paradise.

Finally Pluto, with the twentieth century. Existentialism. Relativity. Quantum Mechanics. Ecology. The recognition that we're creating what we understand as reality. We're authoring the story we're telling ourselves. We're producing the world we're seeing. And we could do better, if we wished.

When I finished, they were both quiet.

After a little while, the driver slowly began to speak. "I want you to know something. About what you were just telling us, about the world and... all."

I said nothing. I knew it was my turn to listen.

"I don't want you to get us wrong — you *didn't* get us wrong —"

"No, not at all," the passenger agreed, with an inquisitive glance to his partner.

"What I want to say is," he continued after making eye contact with me in the mirror, "We love this planet as much as you do. And we love our kids, too. We're not making decisions to try to destroy this thing. But we're stuck in a situation. We have to dig ourselves out of..." he paused for a moment, distracted by the traffic, "this economic slump..." He checked over his shoulder, changed lanes... "Goes back to the oil embargo."

"That's right," his partner seconded. "The oil embargo."

"The economy took a hit back then," the driver went on, "and we're still trying to recover." His voice was sincere, apologetic. "Once we get this thing turned around, we can take care of the environment. Make the kinds of decisions we need to make."

I would never forget their words.

"For a long time, I thought they were lies." Several of the books he was straightening banged loudly as they fell sideways on the shelf. He stood them back up again.

“When the economy was booming, the stock market breaking through the 46,000 mark, profits were still the only thing that mattered. They didn’t even want to take action to address global warming. First, it was denial. Then, they said global warming might be a good thing. Finally, that there was nothing we could do about it.”

“But now you don’t think they were lying?”

“No. I came to understand how they could sincerely believe what they said. Even while making the worst decisions. But that comes later. A lot later. But back in Milwaukee...”

You can’t see across Lake Michigan. Standing on the beach, you look out on a body of changing colors. Variations in light accompanying different skies and shifting sandbars. Sometimes an illuminated Mediterranean blue green with an evening blue stripe farther out. Other times, as gray as the heavy clouds hanging low over its churning waters. The hottest days urge you to hold your ground at the shock of the water’s touch. Then, with the sand slipping from under your feet, you feel the lake’s icy grip overtaking your ankles. Even with people nearby, it can feel like a private psychic space.

Between the Wind and the Earth, the wave I was watching crested and broke. Fell back and rolled into itself. I watched several others. None did it exactly the same.

Glittered and sparkling edges... a cluster of full moons... a shower of diamonds... liquid crystals.

Waves close by washed onto the beach. Further out, they gathered. Infinite motion. A coming-from, going-into.

This moment I was experiencing perfectly fit the model of the World that Martin Buber had suggested. Life as a dialogue. An Engagement with Someone, not some Thing. In every Relationship, with Others, with Nature. I-and-Thou. Every individual encounter.

‘But you’ve embraced that model for years...’ I began slowly walking down the beach. ‘Only now are you beginning to understand it?’

Lacy patterns in the sands before my steps. Shifting grains.

Then, out of nowhere — ‘My feeling of disappointment,’ I realized. ‘When others didn’t do what I thought they should. That was my problem. That was where I had gotten off. I wanted to be able to make a free response to what *I* was seeing... But I hadn’t been granting the Universe and Others that same freedom.’

The awareness stopped me.

‘I had been creating an I-it relationship rather than I-Thou. I hadn’t been acting out of my most cherished understandings.’

The lake sound filled the sky as if the World had just cracked open.

‘Suppose you more fully acknowledged that the Universe is not the object of your actions or wishes, but a Personal presence you can enact with. Could you learn to respect the mutuality, the reciprocity, the give and take that such a Personal Relationship requires? Would you be willing to cease demonstrating your disappointment? Pick up the pieces and go on?’

The Bridgekeeper, standing on the hearthstone, had just lifted a melon-sized rock down from the mantel. What looked like a cracked-in-half eggshell with a rough textured chocolate outside held an amethyst crystal lining. While she held it, he dusted the interior with a soft tip of dust rag.

Since I’d received no call-backs for a printing job, I decided to look for some other path. Thinking I might perhaps be able to make a better presentation of Article V as a lawyer, I looked into the possibility of law school. In case retreat would be appropriate for a while, I wrote to friends living on a commune deep in the north woods of Wisconsin. And I wrote to Dawn. Although I regretted what had happened back in Los Gatos, I hadn’t behaved maliciously. Maybe I could return.

My summer days fell into a pattern. David and Sharon left for work around 6 each morning. I got up shortly thereafter, washed, breakfasted, cleaned the kitchen and did whatever else needed doing around the house. Then, if I weren’t working on someone’s Starchart, I embroidered the night sky on the blanket my mother had sent.

Stitch by stitch, star by star, constellation by constellation, I let go of what I had been dragging with me since May. I began telling myself a new story. By the time I completed the embroidery, I had come to a resolution. I would persevere at trying to save the World. But not exactly as I had done before. This time, I would try to follow as well as lead — to listen.

Medicine

The Bridgekeeper showed her guest how to use the trap door beneath the hearth and clean the fire pit.

“While you take care of that, I’ll hang the laundry out to dry. Then, if you like, we’ll finish in time to go for a picnic lunch in the high meadow.”

He nodded, smiled enthusiastically.

Outside, as she pinned each item to the line, she remembered more of her dream.

“Talk about a mess!”

“Yeah, this stuff is bad. Clings to everything.”

Garden workers were pulling long pieces of sticky white stuff down from tree branches. Some were using rakes to gather it from the ground. Others were carefully picking tiny strands, one by one, from delicate flower petals. One worker was assisting a Squirrel.

Several feet away, four individuals faced the Cocoon. All dressed in what looked like hospital garb. Three in green, a fourth in periwinkle blue.

“You’ve got to step out of there.”

“I’m not anywhere that I can step out of,” the Cocoon answered.

“Let’s be clear about one thing.” The one in blue spoke. “You’ve caused considerable damage while constructing that... You’re in a kind of trap. One that you can get yourself out of. Do you understand?”

No response.

The one in blue signaled to those in green. They moved into the visual range of the Cocoon, the tallest one behind the others.

“We’re going to try again to explain where you are. Okay?”

“Why don’t you just give me a map?” the Cocoon asked.

“We’ve already gone over that,” the one in front replied. “If you were lost in two dimensions, then a map could help. But you’re lost in another dimension altogether.”

“The dimension of meaning,” said another. And after a little dance with upper body and hands, pointed toward their head. “Get it?”

The Cocoon said nothing.

“Let’s try going back to signs,” suggested the one in front.

“I told you I didn’t see any signs.”

“Road signs are one kind of sign,” the assistant said, rolling her eyes. “We’re talking about signs as units of meaning. Like a word and the meanings connected to it.”

“And when you put signs together, you create larger units of meaning. Sentences.” the tall one contributed. “Tell yourself or tell somebody something. That’s narrative.” He bent his knees and leaned in close, trying to make eye contact, “And all the narratives that —”

“Hello, my friend, I’m back,” someone called from down the path.

The Medical Staff and Clean-up Crew stopped and turned.

“Oh! Excuse me!”

The newcomer looked as surprised by their presence as they were by his. His long gray braids. Moccasins on his feet. Embroidery adorned shirt.

“This is your friend?” the one in the blue hospital uniform asked.

“I met him here earlier. I promised I’d come back and help him, if he didn’t free himself before I returned.”

“What was his condition then?”

“Same as now.”

“But he expressed a wish to be free?”

“No. But I knew he must wish it.”

With a slight bow of his head, he took a deerskin satchel from around his shoulder and got down on one knee. Taking out a large feather, a grass braid and some matches, he lit one end of the grass braid, softly blowing until it emitted a sweet smelling smoke. Singing, he stood up and, with the feather, waved the smoke in four opposite directions, then skywards and earthwards.

“Now my friend,” he said as he stepped toward the Cocoon, “are you ready?” But the one in blue moved into his path. “Please! Wait! Ready for what?”

“I’m going to release him. Whatever this thing, it will not resist my medicine.”

“That’s what I’m afraid of,” the medic replied. “Please, before you do anything, hear me.”

“Speak, then.” He gently wafted smoke toward her.

“Do you know his condition?”

“He cannot tell his Mother from a twisted vision spun of words and trinkets.”

“True. But unless he understands how he came to be this way, any release will only be temporary. He’ll do the same thing all over again. Could even make a worse mess. So there can be no rescue from the outside. He has to do it himself, from within.”

“I’m not so sure about that. But I will yield for now. Because it is true that he could get out by his own effort.”

“Thank you.”

The Medicine Man gathered his things. But before parting, he walked up to the Cocoon, looked in and said, “For now, we will wait — for you to free yourself. But I will not forget about you.”

Return to the Way

The Bridgekeeper heard the fireplace trap door clank shut as she maneuvered the empty laundry basket through the cabin door.

“Beautiful out there,” she declared as she entered the hearth room. “Let’s get our picnic together.”

Back in the kitchen, she took a bowl from the refrigerator and showed it to her guest.

“Tabouli. I’ve had it in here marinating. All that’s left is to cut up the tomatoes and cucumbers. And maybe add a little goat milk feta, too.”

As they stepped out the door, the Bridgekeeper carried a kind of backpack basket. It looked heavy with its two side pouches holding metal water bottles. The Dreamer offered to carry it. Found it surprisingly light.

“Where were we now with your story?” she asked on their way to the goat house.

“Merlin, how are you?” Dawn’s voice on the phone made the California card she had sent come alive in my hand. She had some carpentry and landscaping projects I could do, if I wanted to return. But thought I should not work at the bookstore with Cindy. She and Ben were back together.

As luck would have it, my friend Divina and her partner were traveling west just a few weeks later. They took me with them as far as Denver. When the van disappeared, I realized that they had dropped me off exactly where I had been dropped off four years earlier. That time it was the edge of a winter storm. This time a beautiful summer afternoon. People chatting as they walked along paths lined with flower beds, bushes and lush Evergreens.

I found an empty park bench, set down my backpack and took out my map. For a minute or two, I considered not going back to Dawn’s at all.

‘Just go where the road leads,’ it occurred to me, ‘go where no one knows you at all. Just start all over...’

Several days later, Dawn and I were sitting together in her living room. All the way there, with each ride, I had been telling people about their Stars. Since Denver, on three different occasions, it turned out to be the person’s birthday that very same day. Dawn loved stories like that.

“Coincidence is when the Universe writes *you* a poem,” she said.

I always enjoyed Dawn’s company, but would not be staying long this time. I would follow the guidance of two important dreams.

In the first, I was on my way to The Final Exam. The dream led down hallways, around corners, through countless doors. Every few steps, another test. One passage could only be negotiated with the help of a group of women. They spoke from a picture hanging on the wall. After a while, a straight smooth sidewalk replaced the hallway. Then, as the pathway wound through a park on a fine sunny day, the end of the rainbow appeared. I stopped to admire it. And as I did, a grade school classmate walked up.

“Yup, it’s the end of the rainbow all right,” Pat, who had always been one of the smartest in class, shook his head affirmatively.

I stuck out my tongue and licked it. It tasted wonderful. By that time, several people had gathered. Someone mentioned that there should be a pot of gold nearby. Another person suggested that I pick up the rainbow. So I carefully lifted it with both hands, as it was rather heavy. Totally awesome. But then, in the midst of admiring it, I happened to notice that the path continued. It didn’t end where the rainbow did. That’s when I woke up.

In the second dream, a billboard appeared — a big billboard, with six large lines in the configuration of a Hexagram. I didn’t know which one it was, so I memorized the lines. As soon as I had, my eyes opened. Even before I dressed, I opened the *I-Ching* and was reading its narrative.

“True quiet means keeping still when the time has come to keep still, and going forward when the time has come to go forward. In this way, rest and movement are in agreement.”

I connected this and the other dream with one more ingredient. A week earlier, a friend from Santa Cruz had told me about apple-picking up in Washington State. Anybody could find work up there around this time of year, he had said. I did a hexagram asking for clarification.

“Revolution,” the random coins indicated. “Times change and with them their demands.”

When I asked about leaving, “Joyous in passing through danger. Going brings esteem.”

By eleven o’clock, I had packed my things and was walking up the driveway. Joëlle’s prophesy that there would be ‘big travels this August’ accompanied me as I reached the ramp leading out of Los Gatos. Within two minutes, a man going to San Jose picked me up. I took that as a sign that I had gotten it correct.

By late afternoon, I had reached the outlying districts of the Bay Area. By nightfall, I was bedding down beneath a sparkling sky on a high hill, north of Concord. Early the next morning, someone dropped me off near a little café. Having almost no money, I couldn’t risk that the waitress might not want to thank me for a Starsketch by paying for my eggs and coffee. So I asked before I ordered.

“Would you accept a poem about your Stars in exchange for breakfast?”

She told me to ask the owner.

“Now, what would I want something like that for?” he looked at me with a screwed up face. “Why don’t you get yourself a job like the rest of us?” His white apron soiled from yesterday’s labors.

“Well, we each have our work, sir. And this is what I do.”

“Yeah, well,” he replied in a more kindly tone, “that won’t get you no breakfast around here.”

I turned and started to leave. But he called me back.

“You want to earn your breakfast?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Go out back and sweep that parking lot. You’ll find a broom in the garage.”

“Thank you, sir.”

It was an enormous parking lot. Took me back to childhood winters when the first thing everybody had to do was shovel the snow off the ice skating rink. Sometime later, I began to think that the owner had forgotten about me. But I kept sweeping. Finally he appeared.

“Hey! You did a good job. Hey, that’s okay. That’s good enough. Go in there and order anything you want.”

By early afternoon, I had made it to Interstate 5. Somewhere farther north, two men in a beat-up logging truck picked me up. They were on their way back home, “near Weed.” As the vehicle had no bed, only some kind of an I-beam arrangement and crane in back, we crowded together in the cab. The two of us who were passengers found room for our legs and feet atop the pile of logging chains and ropes, come-alongs, two dented red gas cans, a battered gray steel tool box, jackets, a well-used loose-leaf binder, hardhats, gloves — and now my backpack, starboard and bookbag. There was just room enough for the driver to shift gears. Road dust coated the dashboard. The speedometer didn’t work. The cab reeked of oil, cut trees, gasoline, mud and sweat. But I was next to the window and it had no glass.

We traveled together for about a hundred miles. The cramped conditions prohibited offering to write sketches. But they enjoyed what I was able to tell them — shouting over the truck’s roar — about their Stars.

“Very interesting,” they shouted back. “Very interesting.”

Traffic thinned considerably by the time the day was waning. For the past half-hour or so, we’d been traveling through mountains that forced even the Interstate to coil. A deep ditch held back the thick forest that might otherwise have reclaimed the road. Higher and

higher... It seems we just kept climbing and climbing. Then, quite suddenly — the driver pulled off the pavement, onto the shoulder, stopped and turned the engine off.

Leaning over the steering wheel, he looked over at me. “This is it,” he said.

I looked back. Not sure what he meant.

“This is where you get out.”

I made a quick survey of the scene. The curve and breaking hilltop in front of us gave a good view of what lay ahead — probably no different than the thirty miles of ascent behind — pure wilderness. I glanced across the road. The edge dropped off so steeply you could see the tops of tall pines. To my right, an impenetrable forest. It was past dinner time and probably not a good place to spend the night. I asked if they could help me with shelter — I could draw and explain full charts for them and continue my journey in the morning.

“Nope.”

Less than fifty feet in front of the truck, an unmarked gravel road headed deep into the woods. In another three minutes, that’s where the sound of the truck and my friends had gone.

Now I was alone with only an occasional whisper from the trees interrupting a close-to-heaven stillness. The Sun, a huge ball of fluorescent orange-red pulsations, was setting behind forested mountains stacked on more mountains. Stretching out into infinity. High above, the sky was deepening its shades of blue. I figured that there was less than an hour of daylight left. I got out my sweater. Waited. But there were so few cars...

After a short while, I wandered up the road. As I walked beyond the cutoff that my friends had taken, my eyes happened upon some writing on the pavement. Not children’s chalk marks, but bright white spray-painted letters, about ten inches tall. It would have been hard to miss. And the message made me smile broadly. “All the way, Bob,” it said.

“All the way Bob?” the Bridgekeeper echoed.

They were walking on the path along the meadow’s edge.

He got down on one knee and drew in the dust the message scrawled that evening on the highway.

“It looked like this.”

ALL THE WAY
B o B

“It was written parallel with the pavement,” he said standing back up, “and the arrow underlining it was pointing north.”

They continued on their way to the goat house. A finch commented with a seemingly unpatterned melody.

“Maybe left by a road crew, I thought. But what a great place to hitchhike. So I walked back down the twenty yards to my things and carried them up by the writing.

Often after the dinner hour, traffic picks up. But not that evening. It was too far from anywhere. Few cars in either direction. Then, well after headlight time, my spirits lifted as a Volkswagen van approached through the dusk. I stretched out my arm and put up my thumb. Showed my best face. Bent my knees a little. ‘It’s a guy by himself. Aaannnd... He’s STOPPING!’

I grabbed my things and ran to the waiting van. The side door was open and waiting.

“Thanks so much.”

“Arf-arf-arf-arf!!” A little dog, the kind you see perform in circuses, was dutifully alerting his human to the presence of a stranger.

“Cool it, Fred! Don’t mind him. Just put your stuff in back,” the driver directed. “You can sit up here with me.”

“Great. Thanks again.” I slid shut the side door and jumped into the front. “I was afraid I was going to be out there all night.”

“Hey, no problem, man. Where ya’ goin’?” The van chugged back onto the pavement.

“Seattle.”

“Seattle, huh? Live up there?” He got the van into second gear, then third, and we were on our way.

“No. Actually, I’m trying to get to the orchards in Washington State. I have no idea where they’re located though. So I figure if I can get to Seattle, somebody can tell me which way to go. I’m interested in working in the orchards. You know, picking apples.”

He looked at me strangely, then shook his head.

“How far are you going?” I asked.

He was quiet for a moment, then unsuccessfully suppressed a smile. “The apple orchards,” he answered, “the apple orchards in Washington state.”

“Wow.”

At the goat barn, the Bridgekeeper filled a small shoulder bag with grain. Crossing the corral, they stood at the well-gnawed wood fence for a moment. Beyond was a deep valley. At its bottom, a meandering creek with a small bridge. And several goats grazing.

“So you were on your way,” she said as the gate creaked open.

Mark was sure that I could find work, if not at the very orchard to which he was returning, at the next one over. After several hours, I offered to take a turn driving. He preferred not. Sometime after midnight, both Fred and I fell asleep. Morning came with raindrops momentarily clinging to the windshield, then disappearing in the rhythmic swing of the wipers. Along the sides, small veins of water pressed themselves into rivulets. Clearing steam from the window, I could see a green world drenched in gray. The sun had obviously risen, but you couldn't tell where.

“Know where you're at?”

“Are we close?”

“Welcome to the Wenatchee Valley,” he replied proudly. His long hair was half-undone from its ponytail. His frizzy beard lay flat against the undersides of his chin. Eyelids a bit swollen from driving all night. Fred was standing up in the back, barking.

I had hardly formed a first impression of the row upon row of apple trees, when we slowed to a crawl and turned off the main highway. Across a silver bridge, past several dozen small houses, a fire station, community building, library, school, then under a black railroad trestle, a right turn up the road, a left... And we were surrounded by apple trees again. Beyond a ranch style house, we pulled into a makeshift driveway alongside several small cabins.

A wall of large red wooden boxes formed a backdrop for three men huddling in the drizzle. Their business permitted no more than a cursory notice of our arrival. An older man, with short black hair and angularly handsome features was gesturing expressively to the other two, who were staring at the ground. Thier long hair lank with rain, arms slack at their sides, shoulders rounded. If this was our welcoming committee, it didn't look too promising.

“Thirty minutes then, okay!” The active man, looking as though he were making a quick mount of a horse, jumped onto a waiting tractor. With a turn of the key and a roar of black diesel exhaust, he drove off down the road in the direction we had just come.

Mark slouched over the steering wheel, all worn out. One of the men walked toward a cabin that looked like the back of a gypsy wagon. A woman waited for him in the doorway. The taller man came over to the driver's side and put his hand out for Mark to slap.

“Hey, ya' made it.”

“No shit, man, I've been driving all night. What's happenin'?”

“George wants us to start picking... today... in this stuff.” Mark's friend leaned with folded arms on the driver's side window. “We've been at it for over an hour. The ladders are wet. It's raining. And I'm fucking freezing out here. Who's that?”

“Bob, right?” Mark rolled his head toward me.

By the time we had finished a cup of instant coffee and a peanut butter sandwich, I had learned that at least a quarter of the trees were pear trees; and that the pears regularly ripen ahead of the apples. But the rate of pay was the same whether you picked pears or apples. And if you worked hard, you could earn good money. It was still drizzling when the owner of the orchard returned. Rick, Mark’s friend, introduced me. George would give me a try. The other picker, Roy, showed me how to cross the straps and use the grayish white canvas picker’s bag. Mark was fast asleep.

Shaky heights of ladders had always made me uncomfortable. Now I had either to make friends of my fears, or else leave the scene. You can’t pick fruit from the ground. So I quickly learned how to set the three-legged aluminum mini-tower and use it without worrying about holding on. The first time I filled my bag and went to empty it into the bin — one of the big red wooden boxes — the forward drag of nearly thirty pounds of fruit hanging from my shoulders gave a clear picture of what this work was going to be like.

It takes about twenty five to thirty bags to fill a bin. One good tree can produce a bin, nearly a half-ton of fruit. It was piece work, then about seven dollars a bin. If you were exceptionally fast, experienced and the trees were good, you might pick seven or eight bins a day.

Soon enough, your hands, eyes and memory learn a special coordination. Your right hand is lifting up its first pear as your left is reaching out for its first. When your right hand has its second and is gently depositing the both of them in your basket, your left hand is lifting up its second. Your eyes are always a move ahead of everything. Forty or more pears fill your basket.

“Click-click-click... click.” The stems snap briskly when you turn them just right. If you don’t, you can break the short twig-like spur at which the several stems of pears attach to the branch. Then no fruit from that spot for three more years. You stretch as far as you can. When your bag is filled, you make your way to the bin and detach the two rope latches connected to the bottom of the bag and out comes the fruit. You work as quickly as you can. But you have to be careful. If you drop the fruit into your bag or your bag bounces too much as you move around, you bruise the fruit. Bruised fruit goes for juice — and the cannery pays the orchardist less than the cost to grow it. You set your ladder as strategically as possible. On the topmost rung, you steal glimpses of the mountain peaks of the Cascade Range.

Experienced pickers avoided George’s orchard. Some of its old grandmother trees dated back to the first plantings in the valley. Difficult to pick — too high and the fruit too small. Picking forty tiny pears when thirty from newer trees could fill the same space...

Additionally, there was the problem of its location. Although a small orchard bordered the rugged mountains along the northern edge of the valley, late spring frosts habitually leapt over the neighbor's twenty rows of trees and dove down on George's. That meant a lot of ladder setting on trees with little fruit. To this reduction of each year's harvest, the steep hills of the orchard added their own challenges.

"Tractor! Tractor!" George instructed us to call, whenever we needed him to fork-lift our bin to the next tree. Sometimes it took three or more moves to fill a bin.

"How are you doing?" He always got there as quickly as he could.

"You finish this row and I move you to another place. Better trees."

My first rainy-morning impression of George proved quite mistaken. I thought he was just one more boss like so many others, interested only in what you could produce. I soon learned, however, that George had a true heart and the finest of minds. Sun in Aquarius and the Moon full in Leo. He often put on a picker's bag and helped you fill your bin.

Olympus Orchard was George's dream. He wanted to live with Nature, breathe fresh air, watch the sun cross the sky each day, labor at his own pace, and raise a family away from the city. This was his first harvest. But the orchard he'd purchased had been mismanaged. The pruning, fertilizing, watering, pest control, and grass-cutting — all the standard upkeep had been neglected for years.

When we finished harvesting the Bartletts, the D'Anjou weren't quite ripe. During the first week of waiting, George's father-in-law, Harold, who lived with Jackie, his wife and Lucy, his sister-in-law, in the "Big House" at the top of the orchard, asked if I would like a job helping him do some weeding. I was most grateful, since I had arrived with only a couple of dollars in my pocket; and it would perhaps two weeks before the D'Anjou would be ready. After a few days, I received the gardener's reward. Carrot tops waved a delicate thank you. Cosmos and chrysanthemum promised flowers. Shy lettuce leaves greened with gratitude for the sun.

The little community breathed a life of its own. Rick and Mark taught me how to move the irrigation pipes. Roy and Sarah stretched window screens across wooden frames and began drying pears and apricots. In addition to Fred, there was also Boo, a faithful and honest Australian sheep dog; Sam, a petulant white Scotch terrier; and Sparky, an innocent and lovable Black Labrador. But no birds, partly because there were no worms — or other bugs for that matter. Early orchardists had used Arsenic and DDT to protect the apples from codling moths. The soil was contaminated rather deeply.

Since plumbing for the cabins consisted of a centrally located water spigot, days ended with a walk down to the river. That year, the Wenatchee ran fast and sparkling over a rock and gravel bottom. A tiny strip of sand made a perfect beach. Several enormous boulders

served as drying places. You returned clean, refreshed, renewed, cool — your hair still wet with melted mountain snow. I noticed that the poison ivy on my ankles, contracted earlier during Bartlett picking, was almost gone. And my eyes, which had swelled terribly after I stopped wearing the sunglasses that Lee had given me, looked healthy again. Even the scar down the side of my face was fading.

When the D’Anjou pears were finally ready, the pace accelerated. Rising and breakfasting while it was still dark, we were picking as soon as we could distinguish the fruit from the leaves. You’d be atop your ladder as the golden rays of the sun broke over the horizon. In an hour, your dew-wet sleeves would be drying. Your face running with sweat. Your water jug and bin labeling tickets, like your ladder, moving along with you from bin to bin, tree to tree.

I find that if I think about how many bins I’m trying to get done, the trees don’t cooperate. A pear will hide itself behind a tuft of leaves, then after having moved the ladder, I have to go back. If I’m ungracious — because a tree has only tiny pears, is too tall or on a steep hill — I scratch my hands, my forearms, even my face. But if I think good thoughts, like — ‘How beautiful this tree is. I know you have worked hard this year to feed the people.’ Then the trees seem to help me fill my basket. And the bins seem smaller.

Only four days elapse between the end of the D’Anjou pears and the start of the apples. The days grow shorter and surprisingly cooler. Now we don’t stop until the sun has nearly set. But I understand why. A whole year’s crop waits to be harvested. And there’s the legend of the great wind that came up one night — back in ‘63, or something like that — and blew down every apple in the valley. All was lost. Still, George gives us Sundays off.

Sometimes Kathy, George’s wife, cooked dinner for everyone. On a couple of occasions, Harold, Jackie and Lucy invited everyone for dinner at their house. Roy, Sarah and I often shared a meal. Afterwards, there was plenty of time for looking at the stars or reading, although the soft light of the oil lamp served better for contemplation.

“And what were you contemplating up there?” she asked.

“Laying on the hillside beneath that night sky, I began to feel that perhaps I had been mistaken to think that the Universe hadn’t responded to my efforts. Maybe I hadn’t taken into account the role that one’s frame of reference plays in perception. Maybe a year in my lifetime was a nano-second in the Life of the Universe. And I needed to be more patient.”

They arrived at the creek where its fast-flowing water spilled through a semi-circle of stones and large boulders. Kneeling down, they splashed several handfuls on their forearms and faces. The Sun sparkled in bits and pieces off the stream’s surface.

*“Let’s stop for a rest,” she suggested. “You can take that load off your back.”
She pulled a bag of walnuts from her pocket and offered him a handful.*

“You were telling me what was going on in your head up there,” she said after they had both taken a drink of water.

“Yes. I started trusting that as long as I was willing to do whatever task the Universe might put before me, I would find my way.”

A dragonfly — hovering for a moment above a buttercup, then hiding behind a blade of grass — had zig-zagged its way toward them. Curious? Now it sat motionless on one of the stepping stones that crossed the creek.

After a moment’s silence, he continued, eyes on the dragonfly, almost whispering.

“And the simple joys of life were healing me. At Olympus, there was solitude, yet friendship. Poverty, yet so many treasures. With no electricity and no large city nearby, the stars were spectacular. Everywhere one looked, the sky twinkling.”

The dragonfly carefully lifted the front right of its six legs, and after placing it back down, lifted its farthest back left. Then twitched its wings. Delicate, graceful lines dividing transparent sections. Reiterated design. Smaller, smaller and smaller.

“Clink-a-clink, a-clink, a-clink, a-clink.” Louise came bounding across the grass — but stopped abruptly, and rather theatrically, at the edge the creek. Several others followed.

The dragonfly lifted itself into the air and disappeared.

The Bridgekeeper pointed to a grand butte that overlooked the valley. “We’ll have our picnic up there.”

Reality

With the Bridgekeeper in the lead, her guest next in line and goats all down the way, the procession moved slowly up the western slope.

Perhaps it came from the watchful presence of Mount Rainier. The waters of Puget Sound. The whisperings of ancient rain forests. Maybe even the Spirit of Chief Seattle. Whatever the explanation, you heard it in people's voices, saw it in their behavior — as well as in the community's superb schools and libraries, beautiful parks and publicly funded art exhibits. After the apple harvest, I fell in love with the People and the City of Seattle.

At a food coop bulletin board, I learned about a community house looking for someone to replace a departing member. The bus, dangling from its electric webs, sparked and clicked as it left the stop. An oversized turquoise house with wide front porch matched the address. "The School House," the sign read. I wondered what lessons it might bring.

One year earlier, I was on Jones Beach, the last day of the walk. This Halloween, on the opposite shore of the continent, meeting the people with whom I would soon be living. Most of them had come to Seattle from Baltimore. Jenny, Eva, Bill and Doug had worked together at a vegetarian restaurant called "Stone Soup." Then followed one another to this enchanted corner of the world.

Although Jenny was working full time at a local food cooperative and single parenting four-year old Herman, she still found time for the other house members. Everyone depended on her, especially Eva, an artist who worked in oil and acrylic. Doug worked at a child-care center. Chris had a job at a photographic studio. And when Bill, a student, wasn't busy with schoolwork, you'd find him absorbed in learning to play guitar and harmonica at the same time. One room belonged to a person named John whom I never met. Nancy owned the building, originally a boarding house for sailors. When I arrived, she was using the first floor for her Montessori school. Her nine-year-old son, Karl, sometimes lived with us, sometimes with his father.

Herman, Jenny's son, soon became my best friend. With his blond hair ever falling into his eyes, he regularly joined me for breakfast. We'd buckle the straps of his favorite shoes — patent leather — and make pancakes together. He showed me a freedom of mind that I needed. In his world, reading a story took high priority. At least as important as drawing a picture or conversing with his dog, Daisy. Sometimes we'd go for walks together to nearby parks or down to Lake Washington where we fed the ducks.

Jenny had a clear idea of how a community house ought to function and tried to make that vision a reality. Despite her efforts, however, the “School House” remained more a boarding house than a real community. Some of the men felt no responsibility whatsoever for cleaning the common rooms. The condition of the kitchen, the bathroom and the television room reflected that attitude. It was disappointing, but freed me of certain obligations that communal living would otherwise have entailed.

“You mean, if they weren’t going to clean up after themselves, neither were you?”

“Well, no. Not exactly. I cleaned the bathroom relatively often. When the kitchen floor grossed me out, I washed and waxed it. Dusted the stairs every now and then... things like that. But I drew a line.”

“Besides this de-limited housecleaning,” she turned with a teasing look, “what else were you doing?”

“Stars...”

While still in the orchards, I had decided to travel all around the world, as a way of opening myself to whatever the Universe might want of me. I calculated that by drawing and explaining the Stars for about thirty people per month, I could earn enough to leave for the Far East in late spring. After I realized that I would never be able to do that many charts, I resolved to travel by working on a ship. But when I serendipitously met the secretary to the President of the Seafarers’ Union...

“First, you need to earn your Seafarer’s Papers,” she explained. “Three months of schooling — if you qualify.” And there was little chance that a ship would hire someone who planned to go only one way. “But private yachts cross the ocean every spring, from Seattle and other ports all down the coast. Keep dreaming,” she told me.

Until I was ready to look for a boat, I would do as many charts as I could. I went to office buildings downtown offering to do charts, as I had years earlier in San Francisco. Evenings and weekends, I worked at my desk with the radio playing in the background.

“And here’s a new single from Bob Dylan,” the disc jockey announced in December.

Months earlier, I had vowed with each stitch in my star blanket to listen more closely to others. Now I lifted the pen from the chart I was working on.

“Rita Mae, Rita Mae...” Dylan sang. “I’m gonna have to go to college. ‘Cause you are the book of knowledge, Rita Mae...”

Who knows what that song meant to anyone else. To me, it brought the thought that maybe there was something more that I could do. A wave of blood rushed my face.

It was simple. I had learned a lot during the previous four years. People had refined the explanations of the Stars. And feminists had taught me about gender. I could give back the knowledge that everyone had given me.

‘Maybe I owe that much to all who helped make it possible — from the Walk across the country, to becoming and un-becoming Merlin.’

I put my pen down and contemplated the project. Dawn had loved *The Eternity Book*, but... “If ever you’d like to rewrite some parts, you know, make them more clear... I’d be happy to publish another edition for you,” she had told me. Now I seriously considered her offer. But a rewrite?

By then I knew that *The Eternity Book* had other shortcomings. Most importantly, its central idea had failed. The premise of using witchcraft to rethink the world had only frightened those who still feared witchcraft as some diabolical force. And to those liberated from such fears, it sounded like a step backwards into superstition.

It would be better to write a whole new book. A book that would address Joanne’s criticism — “You never say what reality *is*.” She had said to me once. And this time, I would follow the rules I’d learned in college. Quote. Reference. Document.

Soon I was spending my days in libraries researching. And my nights writing. I began with phenomenology. It seemed to me that, to say something about reality, one had to start with “meaning.” Where does the meaning of things come from? What is the meaning of meaning?

During breakfast one morning, I had jotted down a few notes.

Take any phenomenon, a pencil for instance, and put it within brackets — “[].”

Now pretend you don’t know anything about what you’ve just put inside the brackets.

Bracketed off from its meanings, the pencil doesn’t tell you what it is, what it’s for, its meaning.

As I started doing the dishes, my pencil was still resting on the note pad when two year old Melissa appeared. Her mother, Bill’s friend Laura, had set her down in the Montessori Room. But Melissa never stayed in one place for too long.

“No! No! Melissa, don’t eat that!” I gently removed the pencil from her mouth and hand. She reminded me of a baby sparrow I once saw nibbling on a dandelion flower.

Karl came along with another idea. “Errrunng. Errrunng... Operations commander to ground control...” The pencil — or, errr — rocket ship was now flying about the kitchen. When the craft had landed, you half-expected to see little creatures marching out a side door.

I hadn’t quite finished cleaning the stove when Chris blew into the room — late for work. “Hey, man! Can I borrow this. Thanks. See ya!” << Bing-bong-bang >> He drummed on the pots and lids in the dish drainer as he walked out the door.

I found my pencil about a week later in the back hall. Someone had planted it, eraser end up, alongside a young jade plant that needed support.

Things don’t tell us their meaning, Husserl taught. It is we who attach meanings to things. Heidegger took that understanding a step further. He saw us as responsible for the meaning of the World. Including the meaning of our own being.

“Sounds like what you told me yesterday,” the Bridgekeeper commented as they continued walking.

“It is, so I won’t go back into it.” Glancing over his shoulder, he was amazed at how far they’d come. Louise, right behind him, took a double step. Behind her was Sally. “Much of this second book,” he continued, “did re-articulate what was said in the first. But since I hoped to find legitimacy in academic eyes, I framed it in academic language.”

Using drawings of trains, diagrams of simultaneous events and page after page of words, I tried to present Einstein’s Theory of Relativity and show that, because of it, our common understanding of the Universe required a dramatic rethinking. Which resounded curiously with Herman’s favorite question.

“Why, Bob?” Herman was always asking. “Why?”

“Everywhere we went, everything I said, he wanted to know, ‘Why?’”

I tried my best always to answer him, but found myself wondering, ‘What exactly does he mean by it? Does he mean, for what purpose? Or, How come? Like, How did this come to be like this? Or was he wondering, What’s the cause of this effect?’

A notion that Relativity seemed to have thrown into question. For if events that are seen as occurring sequentially in one frame of reference, are seen in another as simultaneous, indistinguishable — what happens to the causality?”

Since the time of Descartes, of course, ‘Why,’ had ceased being problem for scientific questioners. Reasoning had turned to identifying measurable causal links. Purpose, meaning, anything that even hinted at teleology was excluded from the field of inquiry. ‘What,’ became their mantra.”

“As I look back on those days with Herman, I regret that my mind was still absorbed with trying to think my way to the larger picture, by way of the standard pathway. Maybe because I wanted this book to meet academic standards, I wasn’t yet asking, ‘Who? — at least, not in the way we need to ask it. All the way down to the subatomic and outward to our World, the Galaxies, the Universe at large.”

The Bridgekeeper stopped and reached into side of the pack the Dreamer was carrying, pulled one of the metal water bottles from its pouch, unscrewed the cap and passed it to her guest. He drank some and handed it back.

Suddenly, someone was pulling on him from behind. “Louise!”

She was munching on his shirt. At first, he tried to get it back from her by tugging. But when she looked up at him her rectangular pupils spilling over with uncommon love — she enchanted him. He reached first under her neck, as the Bridgekeeper had taught him, then scratched her head. She liked that; and released his shirt, only slightly chewed.

Now a concert of goat bells. The Bridgekeeper was petting Nora. The Dreamer turned to Heidi — until Louise began munching on his shirt again. But when Carrie spotted a cluster of lavender and white flowers growing out along the hillside, all the goats went to investigate.

“You were saying?”

Scientists still search for causal links, of course. But their standpoint is slowly maturing. It started with the problem of how Matter can behave as both particle and wave — at the same time. Until you look at it.

High overhead, a Hawk was soaring in ever widening circles.

“I mean.’ the Dreamer went on, “How can something that spreads out and fills up space, as waves do — also be a particle located somewhere specifically within that space? The concepts are contradictory. It can’t be both. Logic requires it’s the one or the other. And why should it matter if you look at it or not.”

“There’s a problem all right.”

So Physicists found themselves, in fact, still find themselves, questioning some basic assumptions. Some of their most pivotal experiments have led to conclusions that contradict common sense. The Universe, most physicists now acknowledge, is ‘nonlocal.’ Which means that very Particle is entangled with every other Particle; moreover they can influence each other instantaneously, even at a great distance. Some conceive of the entire Universe being present in each of its parts.

The hawk, now far out over the valley, suddenly folded its wings and dropped like a dart. Disappeared.

“Not an entirely new idea,” the Bridgekeeper observed. “Were you thinking about that in Seattle, when you were writing?”

“No, not yet. Back then, Physicists were mostly talking about discovering an endless variety of sub-atomic particles. So many they suspected something was underlying what they seeing. As part of my research, I attended a lecture about Quarks, hosted by the Physics Department at the University of Washington. Having taken the cue, ‘go back to school’”

I also visited professors in their offices and read the books they suggested. Perusing the shelves of the downtown library one day, I came upon the *Spinoza Dictionary*. It had a forward by Albert Einstein.

‘Now why would Einstein have written a preface to this?’ I asked myself. ‘Unless...’

Of course. Here was a cosmological model that arguably fit what Quantum Mechanics was revealing. Spinoza’s formulation: ‘The One Substance, that which exists, has two known attributes — Extension and Thought,’ could be modernized as, ‘The Universe exists in two interchangeable states — Matter and Energy, Particle and Wave.’”

*“But didn’t you say you meant to communicate what you’d learned after *The Eternity Book*? What was new in this book?”*

“Well, the largest section of the book presented what I’d learned about the Stars.”

And in another section I entitled, “The Feminist Vision,” I focused on the understandings that the feminist community in Milwaukee had taught me. By mid-March, I’d finished typing the manuscript and —

“And Article V and the Constitutional Convention idea?”

“I didn’t include it. Didn’t write about Article V at all.”

“Why not?” She turned to check his face. “Weren’t you still convinced it was the way to go?”

“Oh, yes. I didn’t doubt that. But the response I’d gotten when I’d tried to tell people about it — or rather hadn’t gotten — had taught me something. I figured I had to prepare the ground first. You know, ask a little before asking a lot.”

“Oh,” she laughed. “Merely ask people to change their entire world view. Then ask them to call for a Constitutional Convention.”

Try Again

Pines slowly broke over the hill line. Twenty more steps and they were walking the ridge. The Bridgekeeper pointed to the end of the butte. Her favorite picnic spot.

The view was breathtaking. A deep valley wide and free below. The creek a dark line wandering a sea of green. The goats contentedly grazing. Overhead, edgeless blue.

Taking off the basket backpack, he realized how hungry he felt. And thirsty.

The Bridgekeeper unfolded a cotton blanket. And was soon pouring cups of iced tea from a thermos. "Try some of this. Blackberry with a touch of honey." Next she took out cloth napkins, bowls and silverware. Opened several containers and served lunch. For a time, they fell silent, simply enjoying the tabouli they had put together.

"Delicious," he said. "Not at all what I expected when you said we'd have a picnic."

"Thank you."

Sweet green grapes gave their lunch a finishing touch

"So you'd written a second book," she said as a breeze sent a wisp of her silver hair across her forehead. "Did you tell me its title?"

"I called it, 'Reality.' And for publishing it, the I-Ching affirmed that I should go and see Dawn."

Los Gatos hadn't yet awakened from the spell of a late-sleeping Sunday morning. Soft sunlight, dew, birds singing, empty sidewalks all the way across the village. Centuries ago, Dawn's street might have been a forested ridge. Now it held a circle of homes, a small apartment building. A quiet nook hosting families, children, dogs, cats, flowers, oaks, elms and manzanitas. I hurried down the steep drive. Dawn's house, with its cedar shingle roof seemed to grow out of the hillside itself. Since I hadn't written to anyone, I wasn't quite sure what this first day of spring might bring.

No cars. No lights. The place looked deserted. I knocked. No one answered. I peered through the porch into the kitchen. 'Had I knocked loudly enough?' Before a second try, Karyn was opening the door.

"Merlin! Come in. How are you? Come in. Your hair. It's back."

"Yes, well. I hope I'm not too early."

"No, it's okay." Her eyes dispersed my doubts. "My mother isn't home right now. I expect her back later this morning. I hope you'll stay and wait."

We talked over coffee and warm croissants.

In a few hours, our quiet kitchen reunion turned into a welcome-home party. Dawn arrived with friends. And by lunch time, even more friends had come over.

Somehow in all the commotion, Dawn and I managed to sit and talk.

“I’m really glad you’re growing your hair back, Merlin. It suits you better. But tell me about your book. *Reality* is quite a title. Is this book going to tell me what it is?” Her eyes twinkled.

“It’s what we make it to be.”

By the next morning, Dawn had finished reading the manuscript. And we could talk specifics. Page by page. Chapter by chapter. Until...

“Okay, Merlin, I’ll help you with your revolution.” A smile of excitement tinged her words. “A Revolution of Love. Right?”

“Yes! Oh, yes, Dawn. Thank you.” We hugged.

The Dreamer got to his feet. “Hey, the goats are on their way up.”

“Not too surprising,” she commented, while making a quick count.

I stayed at Dawn’s for the six weeks it took to typeset, proof and prepare the manuscript. When it came time for the book to go to press, Dawn suggested a beautiful ivory textured recycled paper with matching cover. I insisted that the copyright be put in her name. It was something that I had promised myself in Seattle. She protested at first, but eventually granted my wish. If she hadn’t published it, it wouldn’t have existed.

From the outset we had agreed that it would do no good to print a book without also distributing it. After my experience with Article V, I had no mind to bother the artistic community with another mailing. So while Dawn had her vintage VW microbus tuned-up, I made ready to hand-deliver copies to feminist bookstores and women’s groups from one coast to the other.”

“You didn’t mind bothering the women?”

The sound of bells had begun to reach their ears.

“Well, the women who were out there working at creating a new world — volunteering, sacrificing, postponing careers... I thought they might find an essay about reality helpful, particularly one that made sense of the Stars and attempted to present some of the implications of Relativity Theory. Plus, they had inspired so much of the book. I hoped it would at least provide encouragement.”

By the time everything was ready, Ebony, Dawn's dog, had so demonstratively befriended me that Dawn sent her along. We went first to San Francisco, where Roberta, Donna and Lynn gave us their steadfast support. In Berkeley, a woman told me that the book presaged a very special summer. For Ebony and me, it really was. We visited clinics, bookstores, Women's Centers and publishing offices from Seattle to Minneapolis and Green Bay; south to Milwaukee, Chicago, St. Louis, New Orleans and back to LA. We would have gone all the way to New York, but it was clear by the time we reached Denver that our budget was going to fall short. Dawn had helped as much as she could.

We returned to Los Gatos in July. For a few weeks, I lived in the apartment above Dawn's garage. Waiting for the mail every delivery day. Disappointed all but once when an astrologer from Illinois sent me the review she'd written for her newsletter. Otherwise nothing came.

Deep down, I felt a growing sadness. I had wanted *Reality* to go all the way. It's one thing to hold up reality, look at it, think about it — another thing altogether to act on that knowledge and create a new world. I was hoping for some response: letters, orders for more books. Something. Instead, it was as if the book I'd delivered had dropped into oblivion.

In early August, I left Los Gatos and hitchhiked back up to the orchards. After the apple harvest, George drove me down to the bus stop in Peshastin. I stayed with friends in Baltimore while I gift-wrapped and mailed the books intended for the East Coast. Then headed back to Olympus, feeling more and more alone.

“Ding-a-ding ding...” All seven goats had made their way up the butte.

“We brought a little treat for them,” the Bridgekeeper said as she picked up the sack of grain.

Within minutes, Louise, Nora, Carrie, Dana, Sally, Heidi and Kate were crowding around, each delighting in their small single handful of corn and barley.

“Such delicate tongues,” the Dreamer commented.

After each had their treat, the Bridgekeeper wiped out the used salad bowls with a napkin, filled them with water and made sure that all seven got a drink.

Olympus

A chorus of goat bells mixed with the wind in the pines. The Dreamer fell silent again, enchanted by the view. Nor did the Bridgekeeper immediately prompt him to continue. She, too, gazed outward, taking in the awesome beauty that familiarity could not diminish. Having talked almost constantly for what seemed a long time, he was grateful for these moments of reflection.

As she began quietly putting away what remained of the tabouli, he moved to help. "You'll have to keep talking," she said, "if you wish to finish today."

It was toward the end of my second year picking that George spoke with me about working all year round in the orchard.

"We can fix a better cabin for you. Get some electricity. Put in water..."

I was quite content with where I was living, but George insisted that I move into the gypsy wagon. Roy and Sarah had lived there one year; John and Molly the next. Now it was vacant. It was the largest cabin on the orchard, about nine by twelve feet. A retired orchardist told me that it had originally been housing for a railroad building crew. That autumn, George and I wired and insulated it, then connected a water line. My new home had a large wood-burning stove. A loft above a desk. A closet and cupboards, but no cupboard doors. I made a blue curtain to keep dust off the dishes. On it, I embroidered a moon with a tear falling from its eye.

The first task after the harvest was gathering and re-stacking the hundreds of wooden props that had helped the trees hold up their fruit-laden branches and now lay strewn throughout the rows.

"So, Bob." George, a retired airline pilot from Greece, pronounced my name like no one else ever had or would. He impressed me with his political insight. His flying days had given him occasion to see the world firsthand, from shantytowns to palaces. Higher education in Greece had prepared him to think like a Socrates. And his Aquarian soul inclined him to serve the cause of creating a better world. Once we started working side by side, our talks developed greater cohesion.

"So what do you want of life, Bob?"

"Probably the same thing everyone wants, George. Peace on Earth. A better world."

George was a good teacher. He didn't argue with everything you said. But he questioned assumptions.

“I don’t know that everyone means the same thing when they say they want a better world. Do we even know what ‘good’ means?”

‘Yeah,’ I thought to myself. ‘Like what “good” means to the black child raised in the ghetto, as opposed to the white legislator cutting taxes; the worker and the corporate board member; or, in the years since I left the monastery, my mother and me.’

It took us a couple of weeks to put the orchard to rest for the winter. After I returned from the East Coast and George and family from a trip to Athens, we began pruning. Each morning George picked me up at my cabin. He always brought along a thermos of coffee for our mid-morning break.

“Changing how people do things, Bob. That’s no small thing. In some places, the exercise of power can be brutal. And that kind of desperation can exacerbate greed, corruption... Or sometimes people can sincerely have in mind to make things better, but end up making them worse.”

Each tree is a microcosm, a garden in itself. Suckers, unless clipped off, grow helter-skelter along the limbs and trunk, sapping the tree of its vitality. In addition, you can optimize what each tree yields by paying careful attention to its shape — snipping twigs and removing whole branches in order to encourage others.

“So how would you like the world to look, Bob, if you were to get your wish?”

“No more armies killing or threatening people. Only armies of people helping one another.”

George gave a one-quarter worried, three-quarter approving look.

“And in the cities, no more high-rise projects or rundown neighborhoods.” I was thinking jobs and education. Opportunities. Hope. Belonging.

We usually sat in the jeep for our coffee break. A jeep George had taken apart, down to the last nut and bolt, and then rebuilt. Painted a pleasant green.

“And peoples’ work places...”

It wasn’t easy to say everything to George, of course, since he was my employer. Yet, there was something special about our relationship, a deeper ground beyond the usual owner-worker protocol. Something I felt I could count on.

“There has to be democracy in the workplace. Everyone has to be able to participate in the decision making. Or if not — because the business is too big and it wouldn’t be practical — then the people that make the decisions have to be elected. And they shouldn’t take any more money for doing it. There just can’t be the kind of economic disparity we have right now. Everyone who works deserves to be treated as a person with equal dignity.”

George's look and nod said that he understood. Even though that wasn't how he ran the orchard.

"And something else..." I couldn't forget what Donna, Roberta, Andi and other women had taught me. "Women would be able to walk the streets of our cities, day or night, and not be afraid."

We talked as we worked. George leaned his pole pruner against the tree and picked up his lappers.

"Everyone would like to see a world like that, Bob. But how do you plan to do it? That's the problem."

"Well, if what I'm trying to do is a good idea, and everyone would like things to be that way, then there's a good chance it can happen." I answered.

He laughed. We laughed together.

"You tell me your idea. I'll tell you how good a chance it has."

The first time George asked me about a plan, I had been reluctant to respond. When I got to know him better, I felt comfortable enough to talk with him about Article V. He agreed with my interpretation of its meaning.

"If you had no tool for the people to change their government, the people would just be a tool of the government."

He smiled at the form of the Constitutional Convention that I was advocating.

"Two Councils, one of men and the other of women..." He thought the idea novel. "That might work." Now he looked at me with all seriousness. "Men will never agree with one another. But women might. And maybe you could get men to agree to listen to the women."

George clarified my understandings of politics. He had precise names for things. Autocracy: one ruler with absolute power. Constitutional monarchy: one hereditary ruler who shares power with selected others. Plutocracy: government controlled by the wealthy. Oligarchy: political power in the hands of a small exclusive class.

"Lots of governments go by the name of democracy," George noted. "A government can be a dictatorship — one man making all the decisions, even killing people who oppose him — and call itself a democracy."

"Or you can have a government that only lets people with money have access to the media. And they call it free speech," I added with a note of sarcasm. "What's the name for that kind of system?"

George was quiet for a moment. "Okay. You have that here." He looked at me with the eyes of the former president of the pilots' union. "And when you have no way to eat unless

you work for someone, it can be a slavery that holds people by their stomachs. But communism holds people by the throat. Which do you want?"

I said I believed we could come up with something altogether new. Something better. Something that had never been tried before.

"Economics... Ekos nomos." With his Greek, George could always draw on the origin of our words. "The rules of the house," he translated. And by the time we'd finished pruning another tree, it was clear that "house rules" meant the social arrangements surrounding the way we produce and distribute the goods and services we need to survive. How we compensate one another for our efforts, sacrifices and labor. How we take care of those who are unable to work.

"But if you are going to write new house rules, you have to start at the beginning. You have to start by asking 'What is the purpose of an economic system?'"

"Not me alone George. We. There must be thousands of experts out there who could help come up with a better idea than what we've got right now."

I was thinking of economics professors, financial advisors, religious leaders, managers, workers... And students, social workers, philosophers, historians...

George was probably thinking, 'Is the idea to promote the common good, or does it permit the accumulation of wealth and advantage of a privileged few?'

By late spring, George would have sprayed the orchard three times. Once with insecticides, herbicides and fungicides. Another time with hormones, forcing an annual instead of the natural bi-annual bloom. And a third time to reduce the blooms themselves. I was grateful that he had refused to spray with a product called BAM.

I learned about BAM from other pickers. Every year around harvest time, a particularly pesky little fly makes its unwelcome appearance among the pear trees. Pyslla not only ruin fruit, they can destroy trees with the sappy-goo that they deposit as food for their larvae. And since the Pyslla lay their eggs on the underside of leaves, they seemed invulnerable —since insecticides are delivered in misty airborne spays, which droplets fall onto the tops of the leaves. Until chemical engineers devised a poisonous molecule capable of penetrating right through the leaves and killing the eggs underneath. Smart?

Pickers, who were getting it all over their hands, were asking, "Hey, if this stuff can penetrate the leaves, do you think it can go through our skin?" And packing houses were finding that pears sprayed with BAM were "unattractively bloating." So couldn't be sold.

"So they sent the BAM pears to make baby food." The Dreamer looked to the Bridgekeeper. "Baby food! Unbelievable, don't you think?"

"Not so unbelievable," she replied, "in an economic system where profit is the measure of virtue."

“It’s not going to be easy, Bob. How do you think people with money are going to feel about having to give up some of their nice things?”

We were walking across the orchard after getting the irrigation system up and running. We’d cleaned the small reservoir alongside the cement ditch that ran along the valley walls that carried the water from the mountains. Checked the valves. Set the first lines of pipes.

“Well, right now,” I replied, “People are chasing after the latest thing, because they’re constantly being told that’s what life is about. But I think most people already know that Love is more important. Love is the only thing that really makes us happy. We just need to find a way to express that understanding — all together, all at once.”

The trees need water. Each day I would move the long lines of irrigation pipes from one row to the next. Disassembling and re-assembling the lengths, section by section. Trees also have other needs. One time we came upon a small tree with sparse yellowed leaves, discolored bark, weak branches and a trunk far too thin for three years old. Maybe mice had chewed the bark near its roots or it had caught a disease — you couldn’t really tell. George suggested that we sing to it. He, in his rich baritone, launched into a Greek song.

“Now your turn,” he said when finished. I improvised several verses — wishing the tree would be healthy and strong, promising that we would take care of it...

One day, when we were walking back from the “Flats,” the low section of the orchard, George said, “I think maybe you should get the churches to help you.”

Churches had helped me on the Walk. Many pastors had been genuinely encouraging; although not all agreed that feeding the hungry meant addressing our institutions. But...

“I don’t know, George. A lot of churches preach that Heaven is all that matters. And that Heaven and Eternity are somewhere else. They’re interested in people’s souls, have no love for our bodies or for Nature; no real concern for Justice here on Earth.”

George was quiet for a few more steps.

“Then maybe God will help you, Bob.”

At first, I wasn’t sure if he was serious. I wasn’t aware that he belonged to any particular church. Nor had we discussed God before.

“I’m afraid that when people talk about God, George,” I answered, “If they don’t mean an old white man up in the sky, they usually mean some transcendent force or principle. Like Aristotle’s ‘uncaused cause,’ or Something. All in all, it ends up serving to justify the status quo. That things are like they are because it’s okay with God. And that can’t be too helpful.”

George didn’t answer. Instead, he stopped and looked at a healthy, robust tree growing near the end of a row. Walking over, he began brushing back the tall grasses beneath its lower branches.

“Here, Bob,” he said. “Come. Look at this. ”

A colony of strange, dark green, thin stalky plants with a delicate lacy foliage were shooting up above the grass tops. And down below, along the ground — asparagus!

“God is Good. God is Good,” George intoned as we continued on our way. “God is Good.” A bright blue sky, the Sun, a warm breeze on our faces, the whole world seemed to join him. “God is Good,” he sang. For more than a week, we delighted in freshly picked wild asparagus.

The orchard in full bloom was like some perfumed winter morning. Petals drifting through our days. Until the last of them left one night with the wind.

Soon it was time for thinning. Each spur on each twig generally produces five pieces of fruit. Unless you reduce that to two or three, a tree makes an abundance of small fruit. Olympus is thirty acres. That’s a lot of trees to thin — thousands and thousands of tiny apples to pluck. We were at it most of the summer.

“You don’t care about all the peoples, Bob,” George said to me one morning. “You just want things to be better for the people of the United States.”

“No, George, that’s not true.” I immediately defended myself. “Oh, yes,” he said, “you talk only about America and American problems. You don’t mention Latin America, Africa, Southeast Asia. In some places, people are much worse off than they are here in the United States. Much worse. They don’t know from one day to the next if they’ll survive. If they’ll be able to feed their children. And you don’t care.”

“But I do. If I —”

“No. No. You don’t care.” He countered my every objection.

I clammed up. Hurt to be accused of not caring when I truly did. And embarrassed that George could deduce such a thing. For the next twenty minutes, silence.

“Time for coffee,” George said. We were near the top of one of the higher hills, where a great-grandmother tree grew.

“That’s okay, George, no thanks.” Hoping my voice didn’t disclose that I was near tears. “So...” George came over where I was working. “What’s the matter?”

“Nothing.”

“Oh, yes,” George said. “There’s something the matter. Tell me.” He pretended to inspect the bark flaking from the trunk of the great tree.

“You hurt my feelings with that, George — when you said that I don’t care.” George shook his head, acknowledging what he had done. Then said.

“I’m sorry to do that, Bob. But you need to understand something. Look at the bark on this trunk. Too thin. It can’t protect the tree.” He looked at me.

I didn't get it.

He explained. "What you want to do, some people are not going to like. They will not understand you. They will be mad at you. They will say unkind things. They will even tell lies about you. If you do not have a strong, thick skin, you will not be able to do it." He looked at me with loving eyes.

Bells had gone quiet. The goats had wandered off to graze again.

It was a rainy Saturday morning, early September. The pear picking was complete, the apples had just begun. It had been a strange season. The Red Delicious had ripened before the Golden. But I would see neither of them finished. I was setting out on another Walk. A decision that had come from trying to make sense of a series of mysterious occurrences.

The first had loomed over me all summer. One afternoon back when George and I were pruning, he stopped work and stared, transfixed, out toward the west. I thought maybe he was resting. Or maybe worrying about how the bills were going to get paid.

But after a long minute, "Look." George pointed at the nearby mountainside — the one that local high school classes regularly used as a bulletin board to announce their graduation year. But the careful arrangement of white painted rocks no longer read, "78," as it had the last time I'd noticed. For all the world, it now appeared to say, "BoB" or —

"It says, Bob," George declared. "B-O-B. You have a friend," he grinned. "The mountain says your name."

This asked for explanation every time I set foot outside my cabin door. 'If the B's are 8's and the "o" an extra pile of stones... But the class of '88 won't be graduating for another ten years.'

And then, late one night while I was fast asleep...

"Merlin! Merlin!" The calling woke me with a start.

'Someone must be out on the porch,' I thought. I jumped down from my bunk, threw on my pants, opened the door and stepped outside.

No one.

When I got back into bed, I started laughing as I realized that no one knew me by that name up in the orchards anyway. But I stopped laughing when I tried to figure out who or what it was that I had heard.

'Maybe it was just a dream. Or maybe the Universe was saying something. Calling me. Maybe there was something more that I could do.'

It had already occurred to me that maybe I should write another book. I knew that I had left something important out of *Reality* — a plan of action. Now I was beginning to think that

there was a way for us to facilitate agreement by submitting that plan to the Universe for approval.

And once it occurred to me that I should read the strange happenings as some kind of cosmic cues, I had to consider another possibility. ‘What if I left Olympus and went out on the road again?’

After the first Walk, I had been telling myself that I would never have to do that again. ‘What would be point?’ I had asked myself. ‘Wouldn’t it be redundant?’ And when I weighed that against the personal cost... My feet had been so badly blistered that I limped for two months afterwards. Plus the dependency, the burden that it placed on others.

But I was beginning to reconsider. ‘If another Walk would be a sign for just one other person, surely it would be worth any price I might pay, wouldn’t it? And who knows the effects of our least action on the world.’

As for the imposition on others, many people that I’d met on the first Walk had told me that they valued what I was doing because they were able to help make it possible.

And there was something else. I had hoped that people would respond to the *Reality* book with concrete action. But I myself had offered only words. Maybe if I did something concrete... The *I-Ching* responded enthusiastically to the idea.

To earn enough money for a wagon, tent, canteen and so forth, though, I would have to work at least through the pear harvest. But logistics required that I forego the additional earnings that apple picking would provide. If I waited that long before setting out, I’d never make it to California before winter.

Meanwhile, I composed a letter that I would give to people I met along the way. It appealed to people to register and vote and develop a new respect for women.

One summer evening, I wrote a short resignation note and brought it down to the house. About an hour later, there was a knock on my door.

“Bob —”

“Please come in, George.”

“I just came to say that I will miss you. When I was driving the tractor back to the house tonight, I saw Venus setting in the sky, all alone. I stopped and looked for a long time. Then when I got home, a strange thing happened. The wind chimes, you know, the chimes hanging on the porch. They fell, almost hit me. Then when I got into the kitchen, Kathy gave me the envelope you put in our box. I didn’t need to open it. I already knew. I said to Kathy, “Our Bob is leaving us.””

Walk Two

As I undertook this second Walk, I addressed a prayer to the Universe.

“If this is what You want me to do, I’ll know, because You’ll provide what I need to be able to do it.”

As before, the response dispelled all doubts. When I told Harold what I planned to do, he bought the wagon. When the printer in Wenatchee read the letter, he printed it for free. And so it was throughout the Walk. With every meal and every night of shelter, every new pair of shoes and every set of wagon wheels, every time I left wagon unattended and returned to find everything intact —

“But wait. If I tell you about this second Walk like I did the first, we’ll be out here all night. And I’ll be repeating the same kinds of stories. Time after time, people’s kindness making it possible. The encounters with Nature. The physical challenge. And the Walk that I told you about yesterday only took seven months — this one a year and a half.”

The Bridgekeeper removed a small wooden flute from her backpack. She played several long mournful notes. “So cut it short,” she said. “Just tell me what you feel should be told.”

“Okay. But please keep in mind what I’m not saying.”

“One always must,” she replied.

Then softly played, as he thought for a moment and began.

It was a rainy autumn, even for Washington State. “Think of it as your baptism,” offered my first Hosts. I tried to remember that as I made my way over Stephens Pass, shoes squishing, feet blistering.

In Oregon, I spent days tiptoeing through a fuzzy mass of migrating caterpillars. A week later, during a lunch break on a guard-rail overlooking a wide deep valley, a butterfly landed on my hand and stayed until it was time to go.

At Grant’s Pass, I took the fork toward the coast and began the slow climb to the California border. The Redwoods, Mendocino County, the bridge at Albion.

As I was going down Highway 101, people told me that a group of Buddhist monks from the Far East had recently come through on foot, bending and kissing the ground every fourth step. I reminded myself of that whenever my feet, legs, arms or mind grew tired. I wasn’t accepting rides.

“Thank you for offering,” I repeated over and over. “But I’m walking to encourage people to develop a new respect for women and to register and vote.” Then I would give them a copy of the letter.

Often people got out of their cars to talk about how these two points — respect for women and voting — connected with concerns about racism, war, the environment and so forth.

“Things need to be changed, all right. But how’s voting gonna’ do it? Everybody knows the politicians are corrupt.”

Even when people’s remarks seemed to invite it, I wasn’t proposing an Article V Constitutional Convention. I still wasn’t sure that we were ready for that.

In San Francisco, I stayed with Roberta for a over a week and did Stars for the women’s community throughout the Bay Area.

One day, I rang the doorbell of an address I was given in Berkeley. When the door opened, two faces looked out with an uncommon curiosity.

“Good morning,” I began. “I’m sorry to bother you. Gina and Laurel gave me your address — ”

“No, no,” responded the woman closest to the door. “You’re no bother.”

“Please, come in,” added the other. “Would you like to sit down?”

“Thank you,” I replied. “I just wanted to — ”

“How about something to eat?” the one offered enthusiastically.

“Or drink? I know, let me get you some banana bread. We just made it this morning.” Even before I was able to tell them why I was there, she was on her way.

“I came to offer to tell you about your Stars, if you’d like.” I was finally able to say.

Several days later, I returned and explained Karen and Vickie’s Starcharts for them. When we were finished, they brought me into an adjacent room where they showed me a small statue in a glass case.

“Last week, we had just asked the Goddess for guidance when you rang the doorbell.”

The Bridgekeeper’s flute playing seemed to help him decide what to tell.

It was an early mid-December morning that I left Dawn’s house in Los Gatos. A few miles into the Santa Cruz Mountains, a police officer pulled me over — a common occurrence. This one invited me to sit in his warm car with him and share a cup of coffee while we waited for the results of his ‘10-27.’

He had one of his radios tuned to the truckers’ channel.

“Yeah, I seen that little guy with his wagon. Up in Oregon. PShhhshcch. Couple months ago. Roger.”

“Copy. Talk to me.”

“Some Smokey’s got him pulled over at the PShhhshcch mile post.”

“Probably speeding — PShhhshcch. PShhhshcch.”

“Ha-ha-ha!!! PShhhshcch.”

As I continued south, the highway sometimes cut from the coastline slightly inland and through acres of vegetables. One day as I walked along, I saw workers laboring in the field. Reminded me of the migrant workers in the orchards. Up from Mexico, willing to do the hardest jobs. Filled more bins than anyone I’d ever worked with. The workers here were cutting celery, their bodies bent low, their hands, arms and legs moving in a fixed rhythm.

One of them straightened his back for a moment and happened to look my way. I waved to him. He slowly waved back. The person working next to him stood up and looked. I waved to him, too. When the second man waved back, he used his knife hand. The blade caught the sunlight — and his greeting shot brilliant across the distance. Then, people all across the field started standing up. Men. Women. Children. They turned the field into a sea of shining silver light.

In Los Angeles, the feminist community maintained a Women’s Building with their own graphic arts center, printshop, art studios, workshops and such. I did Stars for the women I met there and others. E K Waller, a Pasadena photographer provided shelter for me.

February 4th, the day before I left the LA area, I met Sandra-Louise, a black poet. She knitted a scarf and hat for me as I explained her Starchart. When I finished, she gave me a little poem that she had laminated onto a small card and framed with cowry shells. “

“What one can conceive,” she had written, “one can achieve.”

“I still have it. I was struck by the difference between what this poem/artifact would mean to a black woman and to a person raised with the privilege of a white male.”

A week later, I was out on the Mohave, talking with Paula, who, after finishing graduate studies in anthropology at UCLA, was living alone in a kind of spiritual retreat. We sat at a little wooden table. Coarsely woven cotton curtains hung down the stucco walls. It was chilly.

“The human structure is built of other animal structures,” Paula explained. “In a very real sense, all of evolution is present in us. If we can set aside the convention that sees hierarchy everywhere, and begin with the premise of equal significance and value for all life forms, then we can read the evolutionary path as a text containing the definition of being human. This form, the human, has capabilities that suggest a role we obviously don’t recognize yet. And will only learn if we relate to Life as a whole rather than broken into separate pieces.”

She showed me a thick folder filled with articles about human's degradation of planetary life support systems — the air, the forests, the oceans, the water.

"It looks daunting," she said, "but we have help. It's only the thinnest layer of our Consciousness that's caught up in this destructive mentality. All of life is present in our physical being. We have knowledge in our muscle tissue of who we really are. We just need to learn to tap into it."

Next day, walking again through the endlessly changing — but ever the same — Mohave. My mind kept going back over what Paula had said. 'The whole present in each of the parts. Information in our tissues. Help if we can tap into it. All of life taken together.'

Late one afternoon, a long line of Southern Pacific box cars went sliding past me on the desert floor. When the caboose appeared, a man stepped out, leaned over the little balcony. He began waving with both arms. Then threw something off the train. I walked over to the tracks. There on the ties, dented but still intact, six half pint cartons of fresh, ice cold water.

Days turning into weeks. The Colorado River. Saguaro cactus. Pine graced mountains around Flagstaff. The Painted Desert. The Navajo Reservation.

I didn't realize that I was speaking with the pastor when I inquired about shelter, just down the road from the Church of the Nazarene. The man's weather-beaten face suggested outdoor work. He invited me into his home and pointed to an overstuffed chair on the enclosed porch.

"Sit. You need to rest," he said.

A collection of desert plants, some creeping from their pots, kept me company until a younger man knocked on the doorway. The son. He was interested in what I was doing. I told him about his Stars. Before long, we'd become friends. Later, after a quiet dinner at the kitchen table and in the warmth of the wood burning stove, the father began to speak.

"Long ago, my father was a medicine man for his people." His glance cut across whatever distance might have separated us. "He healed the people when they were sick. He knew many plants and told many stories."

The son's eyes blazed with love for his father.

"But those were the old ways."

Only the fire crackling broke the silence.

"When the preachers came, they taught us how he was wrong. Now we know better."

As a guest, I always tried to be modest, unassuming. But Moon with Mars in Leo isn't a configuration that just lets anything go by.

"What things did the preachers say were wrong?" I asked.

"The mountains," the father answered, as he slowly rose from his chair, walked over and placed another piece of wood in the stove.

“The Navajo thought that the Mountains were living beings.”

The iron door clanged shut.

“They believed the rivers are alive,” he continued as he sat back down. “They believed the rivers are our brothers. Can you think how silly that is?” His eyes met mine. “That a river is a person.”

It didn’t seem silly to me. And I wasn’t sure that it was really silly to him either.

“Well, I don’t think that was silly,” I answered. “It’s as valid as a lot of other ideas of what a river is. I like to think that rivers are like the veins of Mother Earth.”

All was quiet for an uncomfortable minute or two. Then the father spoke again, but this time, as if he were standing on a high stone mesa, addressing many listeners.

“I am no medicine man like my father. I am a pastor now. I believe in Jesus Christ. Not the foolishness of spirits in trees and rocks.”

I just couldn’t hold my tongue.

“Christianity doesn’t have to mean that other ways of seeing the world are wrong,” I dared. “White men have been mistaken about a lot of things.”

The father was quiet. The son looked worried.

“Would you tell me more about the old ways?” I asked after a while.

The father didn’t speak any more that night.

Next morning, after breakfast, as I was packing my things, the son approached.

“Do you have room for a gift?” He gave me a beautiful shirt, black with a pattern of tiny white birds in flight, red piping. Narrow red ribbons hanging free from either breast.

For the next three days, the Navajo People, again and again, stopped and spoke with me. Encouraged.

Walking through canyons and in the shadows of awesome rock formations. Rounding bends where the world would change.

At a café in Durango, I was working on a Starsketch for the waitress —

“Merlin! Hey, Merlin! Right?”

I looked up.

“Remember me? You did my Stars. Musta been three years ago. Silver City. Hey you guys, I know this guy,” he announced, almost too loudly to the café crowd. “It’s Merlin. He tells you about your Stars. Wanna tell my friends about their Stars?”

I did. Tables were pushed together. By the time it came to go, it felt as though the whole town had wished me well.

Then began the first serious ascent. Purgatory. 10,800 feet. Mid-March, snow along the roadside still four or five feet deep.

“Columbine,” the mailbox read. The driveway led to several log cabins. Looked like some kind of resort. Within the hour, I was doing Starsketches and sharing dinner with Bob and Jere, the owners. In the middle of the night, however, whether from the flu or exhaustion, I awoke sick. In the morning, I had little choice but to tell my host.

“Don’t worry,” Bob replied, “stay here as long as you like.” Although he and Jere were leaving on a trip, Marie, who helped with upkeep of the buildings, would be around.

“Just one thing,” he pointed to a patch of clouds high above a stand of pines.

“Don’t leave here until you can see the face of the mountain up there, beyond those trees. It’s fine with me if you’re still here when we return.”

Later that day, I felt better enough to help Marie with some of her chores. Two of her friends came by for dinner. After they left, Marie told me a story about one of the guests.

Opening night at a small art gallery. Kay’s friends sipping wine and commenting. Kay answering questions.

A visitor takes a particular interest in one of her paintings. “Who did you have pose for it?” he asks.

“Pose for it?” She thinks he might be drunk.

“I mean, yeah. Who’s the man in the picture?”

“What man? Point him out to me.”

Thinking she’s testing him, he does.

Kay’s eyes open wide. She pales. How could she not have seen it before? How could she have painted it? She struggles to regain her cool.

“Uhhh... no one. No one posed for it. Except the cliffs.”

Three days later, she burned the masterpiece.

Marie passed me a five by eight color photograph of an exquisitely painted southwestern landscape. The perspective placed you on one side of a great canyon, viewing the other side. A light blue sky with wisps of clouds bordered the uppermost part of the painting, the remainder an opened wall of Earth.

Viewing it for more than a second, though, and the details of the chasm somehow slip away and you’re looking into the face of a Native American. He’s wearing an Apache style scarf wrapped about his head. And his look, one of a terrible honesty.

Astonishment eclipsed by, ‘Oh my God! How could she have destroyed it?!’

On the third morning, clouds no longer obscured the mountain above Coal Bank Pass. I thanked Marie and continued on. Dragging wagon up passes and rolling down through valleys — great sculpted hallways. One afternoon, my eyes happened upon an eagle, with prey in talons, gracefully winging across the sky. But in the next moment, the rabbit slipped

from its grasp and falls. Instantaneously, the eagle somersaults, plummeted wings folded dart-like and recovers its treasure.

Somewhere along the Arkansas River, in a pinewood paneled café, I heard something utterly unexpected. Truly momentous. Three men were sitting in a nearby booth. One sported a cream colored Western style hat, wool-lined denim jacket, jeans and cowboy boots. Another wore heavy duty snowpants and snowmobile boots. All three were older than me, in their forties maybe. I couldn't help but hear what they were talking about.

“Well, you know who they really represent, when you know who pays their bills.”

“You mean, where the money's coming from?”

“You damn right! Insurance companies, banks, corporations... They're running this whole goddamn show. And I don't think that's what Thomas Jefferson and those guys had in mind.”

“I'm telling ya, I've just about had enough of it. The whole lot of 'em's corrupt. Lining their pockets, that's all.”

“Well, I think you two hounds are barkin' up the wrong tree.” It was the snowmobile guy. “It's the only game in town, so what're ya gonna do?”

“Well, I'll tell ya what I been thinkin',” said the cowboy. “What we need is one of them Constitutional Conventions I been hearin' about. You know, let the people decide what's gonna happen, not those clowns that somehow or other got themselves elected.”

The other two sipped their coffee and nodded.

A couple of years earlier I would have burst into their conversation. Now I kept my excitement to myself. ‘Article V! People had learned about Article V!’ And these men understood it in the same way I did — The Premier Assembly of the People.

Weeks later, headed east on Highway 14, with the craggy horizon of the mountains slowly sinking behind me, the rolling grasslands of eastern Colorado stretching into infinity in front, I happened to glance up at the sky. I dropped Wagon's handle.

B O B the clouds spelled out.

‘This must be some kind of a joke,’ I said to myself, ‘or some rancher hereabouts getting a birthday greeting from a friend or something.’ I searched the sky for a single-prop plane, a sky-writer. No such thing.

Although I wouldn't realize it until somewhere in Nebraska, Colorado had given me a parting gift that would transform the whole walking experience. I stayed for two weeks in Fort Collins with a community of college students who called themselves the ‘Plum Street Crazyes.’ Rest and their care healed the blisters that I had resigned myself to as part of such a Walk. Before leaving, I was about to buy another pair of gym shoes when a sign, “Half-price,” caught my attention. Running shoes were a new thing at the time. The sales person

explained that they were only marked down because of their bright blue leather and dayglow chartreuse stripes. They'd be great for walking, he assured me. After wearing them for a week with no new blisters, I knew these were the shoes for the job. They pretty much solved the blister problem from then on.

"Maybe you're getting into too much detail here," the Bridgekeeper observed. "I'm sure your feet played their role in getting you to my door, but that's not exactly what I meant."

"Sorry."

"Don't worry. Let's take a quick break," she said, as she stood and stretched her legs. He rubbed his face and stood up with her.

They walked over to a spot where they could see the goats below. Louise and Nora were resting in the shade of some scraggly bushes. Dana, Sally, Heidi and Kate were close by. And Carrie, with her floppy ears, was grazing farther down.

Assured that all was well, the Bridgekeeper led the way back to their picnic blanket on the cliff top.

"Now where were we?"

"Crossing the Great Plains."

Farmers in Nebraska told me it's not flat where they live, "It's level."

South of LeMars, Iowa, a curious brown curtain appeared on the horizon. Not long afterward, the wind picked up, turning a perfectly clear sky into a darkened gray. Lightening bolts struck. Thunder rolled. I pulled off the road, took out my raincoat and covered wagon with its tarp. Kept walking. Soon the strange cloud enveloped the entire western sky. And it was rapidly approaching. The wind grew stronger. Howling. It half lifted the wagon off the pavement. I pulled off the road again, this time crouching behind the wagon. Watching. A boat and trailer overturned in the opposite lane. And then the curtain arrived. Dust and sand turned day into twilight. I held onto wagon for life. In about ten minutes, the dirt blast eased and huge drops of rain began splattering on the pavement.

As I made my way through Minnesota, people confirmed my impression that there was more agreement this time.

"Yeah. But how we gonna' make that new world happen?"

Some were not enthusiastic about registering to vote. "You show us the candidate worth voting for and we'll show you the vote."

As I crossed the bridge into Wisconsin, a broadly smiling State Trooper, with his patrol car lights flashing, greeted and escorted me down the road to the Welcome Center. Days later in Green Bay, I rested with my parents. My father calculated how many steps I must have taken. Then, a couple days with my brother David and my old friends in Milwaukee.

As I entered Chicago, that city notorious for having no mercy, wagon was just about falling apart. Only by wiring it all together and carefully negotiating curbs did I make it to a garage at the intersection of Devon and Ridge.

“Need a transmission job?” Mechanics at the service station greeted me with a laugh.

“More than that,” I replied. “I’m walking across the United States to encourage people to register to vote and to develop a new respect for women. I’ve been walking since September 9th of last year.” It was late July by then. “I started in the orchards of Washington State, then came down the California coast to Los Angeles, from there across the Mojave and up through the Rocky Mountains and then across the Great Plains to Minneapolis. Now I’m headed south to Florida. From there, I hope to walk north to Boston. But my wagon needs fixing. Somebody up the way said you were the people I needed to see. Could you help me, please?”

“Be with ya in a minute,” the taller of the three answered. The others nodded and smiled. “He’ll get ya back together,” one added as they returned to their work. Within a couple of hours, everything was fixed — every bracket welded, every weak joint brazened, even a wide flat washer ingeniously fitted into the yoke to reinforce the cracked metal.

“Wow, it’s beautiful! Better than when I started.”

“It oughta make it now, I think.” A glow of satisfaction radiated from his eyes.

“How much do I owe you?”

“Count it as my part. And good luck.” Although wagon went through two or three more sets of wheels, it wouldn’t need welding again until Florida.

As I crossed Indiana, I helped a farmer with haying. In Michigan and Ohio, I met young people at colleges and universities. Found hope for a new world alive and well.

In Ohio, an owl flew in and sat across the campfire from me. “Who? Whooo?” Horses in Kentucky ran to meet me alongside their white board fences. I wondered if it was they who taught the humans the etiquette of bowing. In Tennessee, I picked up turtle after turtle from the road and placed them on the other side or at the next pond.

In October, I spent three days with my friends Pam and Guether in Tuscaloosa.

About a week later, a man was out checking his mail box as I walked by. “Remember now,” he said, after we’d talked a bit, “this is the new South you’re walking through. We’re different than how things used to be.”

Another day, after talking with a man who'd pulled over to offer me a ride, "Now you keep your eyes open hereabouts for them hippie types," he advised. "They might look a lot like you, but they sure ain't. They're trouble."

Sure enough, within the hour, a van pulled over with young people that did look a lot like me. "Good luck now," they said as we were parting company, "And y'all be careful. This is red-neck country and they'll make trouble for you."

Just past Tallahassee, beneath a full moon in early November, Joe and Kathy took me to a chili-on-the-fire hoedown. Three men with guitars around a campfire singing, "Orange Blossom Special" and a host of other familiar ballads.

That same week, at a little country grocery store, I purchased a bag of freshly boiled peanuts and asked if it would be okay to sit out on the bench in front to rest for a while. After pulling wagon up close enough so I could put my legs and feet up on it, I heard a strange voice over my shoulder. "Oh, a wagon." There in the open window, a parrot was peering down at me. "Wagon. A wagon," the parrot repeated in its unmistakable bird voice. My mouth dropped. 'Parrots aren't supposed to be able to use language like that.'

"Yes," I looked at the bird in disbelief. "It's my wagon."

"Wagon. Wagon."

"Did you know your parrot knows what a wagon is?" I asked the proprietor as I was getting ready to leave.

"He's a smart one, all right."

Late one morning going down Highway 19, an eighteen wheeler pulled onto the shoulder. The smell of spent rubber trailed the thirty yards it took to bring the rig to a standstill. As I neared it, the driver appeared, grinning ear to ear.

"Hey," he was walking toward me, holding out his hand, "Didn't I see you last year, out in California? Pullin' that wagon?"

"Sure did," I said as we shook hands.

"I can't believe it. Just can't believe it! That was you!" He slapped me on the back. "You been walkin' it, from there to here?"

"Yes." And I told him why.

"You just stick with it, buddy. And here." He opened his wallet and gave me a few dollars. "Get yourself a cup of coffee on me. Yeee-hoo!"

Across the Everglades on Highway 41, it was a rush each night to get tent up and in it before the mosquitos descended. Jungle calls and sounds I'd never heard before, punctuated the night. People of the Seminole Tribe told me to remember, "We never surrendered."

Turning north at Miami, I changed wagon's ribbons from yellow, white and green, to orange, lavender and pink. I was looking for a new day.

Their shadows now stretched to the ends of the blanket.

*“It’s getting long,” the Dreamer said. “It **was** long. A year and a half.”*

Finishing the Walk only happened because of the weather that permitted me to make it from mid-December in Georgia to mid-February in Massachusetts. And the constant generosity of strangers, feeding and sheltering me.

There were wonderfully sweet moments such as the night that someone invited me aboard a schooner in the marina at Beaufort — where sleep came gently rocking, the bells on the mast a soft lullaby. Or the night in the woods, my second Christmas of this Walk. Pines particularly tall and thin graced a sky perfectly clear. When I doused the campfire, the trees twinkled with star ornaments. Or the gray afternoon, when the road slipped under a canopy of gnarly oaks, their thick trunks, long strong arms with elbows bending in every direction. It seemed I’d been walking for miles of this enchanted forest when, just over my head, a snapping of branches and rustling of leaves urged me to duck and run several quick steps. I looked back. A single wild turkey tail feather slowly floated down from above.

In New York City, a moment of distress metamorphosed as if touched by someone’s magic wand. Having left the City earlier that morning and walked to the northern suburbs, I sought shelter at a church. I often slept on the floor of the childcare room or the nursery. The pastor’s instructions: “Leave the wagon inside the school doors, take the train back downtown to this address, return in the morning and continue.”

Turned out that Koping House was a large cafeteria where the hungry could get something to eat — but there was no shelter. I left the dining room at 8 pm, as the workers were clearing the tables. At the glass doors of the lobby, I hesitated. Powerful floodlights fixed on the sidewalk outside created the illusion of a stage. But they were shining on an uninviting play. Strangers with heads bowed low hurried past, bundled against a New York winter night.

Friends of Ella at Walden Pond had sheltered me the night before. I knew no one else; but I didn’t want to impose...

‘Wait,’ it suddenly occurred to me as I stood there contemplating the scene. I had heard that Mary had been living in Manhattan ever since she had graduated from St. Norbert’s. ‘We haven’t spoken for many years.’ I walked over to the wall of phones and hefted up the directory. ‘Will she remember me?’

Sort of. Mary gave me several leads for finding shelter. If nothing materialized, I was to call her back. It was too late for any of the places she referred me to.

“Hello, Mary. This is —”

“Oh good! I’m *so* glad you called back...”

As it turned out, Michal, a dear friend of both my brother David and me, lived in the same building as Mary. His loving enthusiasm banished the chill that had gripped my heart.

A week later, I was making my way through a park in Springfield, Massachusetts on a mild Sunday afternoon. Snow beginning to surrender its grip on the frozen ground. A man passed me on his bicycle, then suddenly stopped and came back.

“Pardon me,” he said warmly, “but are you the person that’s walking across the United States?”

“Uhhh, yes,” I was surprised. “I’ve been walking since September of 1978 to encourage people to register and vote and to develop a new respect for women.”

“I thought so — I mean, by your wagon and all. I read about you. Hey! This is incredible. I cut out the little clipping and carried it around with me for months.”

John invited me home where he lived with his two sisters, Linda and Kathy — whose birthday it happened to be. We did the Stars together and talked. Toward evening, several more guests arrived, among them, a reporter and photographer for the paper.

Next day, Kevin met me out along the highway for pictures and an interview. There’d been occasions for speaking with the press throughout the journey.

Always questions about the purpose of the Walk —

“How do you foresee voting as creating a better world?”

And now questions that seemed to sum it up —

“What did you learn from your walking?”

“Well, I met a lot of good-hearted, kind people. Everyone sees things differently. Yet we’re in agreement on one thing. That we need to make changes in the way we’re doing things.”

By February 10th, it became clear that I would probably arrive in Boston on Valentine’s Day. Something totally unplanned.

The last day felt as if the closer I got, the farther I had to go. Finally, at nightfall, Jane and Michael, friends who lived in Hyde Park, received me lovingly. Jane baked a cake to celebrate. I gave her the wagon. She would turn it into a planter. A day or two later, they brought me out to Cape Cod where Joëlle and her husband Paul were living. After a week’s visit and rest, I set out hitchhiking to the Midwest.

Review

Leaning in the doorway of the goathouse, the Dreamer was watching the setting sun — a great ball of orange, fire yellow at the top. Too bright to look at. Melting into tones of red and shades of purple lower down. Ever so slowly slipping beneath the horizon.

The Bridgekeeper was milking the goats. And retrieving one of two remaining episodes from her last night's dream. After the scene on the path, she had suddenly found herself with her guest, seated somewhat in the center of a small lecture hall. She wondered how he had gotten out of his Cocoon.

“Where are we?”

She heard her guest whisper to the young man stretched out in the next seat.

“Cultural History 201. Out a little late last night, huh?” the other grinned. “Mid-term review. Going over stuff from the first few weeks.”

On the screen at the front of the room was a diagram.

doer | action | object of the action or acted upon

Immediately, the slide changed to one with a list of terms:

Microtheatres of Power

Sign Systems > words, gestures, artifacts, rules, etc.

The Referent Problem

The Professor pointed her laser at the first item.

“I’m sure you’ll all remember *Discipline and Punish*. Particularly the graphic description with which Foucault begins his discussion of the shift away from overtly brutal exercise of concentrated power to easier and more effective means of controlling people. A control more diffuse, more mental, more rational, Humane — and therefore more complete. Instead of the few trying to police the majority by physical force, people could be induced to police each other and themselves — in innumerable smaller theaters of power. Microtheatres. Such as?” She looked up.

Family,” someone said.

“Workplaces.”

“Schools.”

“Clubs like the Scouts, or Elks and stuff.”

“Circles of friends.”

“Good, good,” the Professor smiled.

“You yourself in your own head,” someone in the front row added.

“Great! Which ties in with our work on sign systems because of the kind of power exercised in these microtheatres. Control by means of words, gestures, grammar, narratives, artifacts, rules, architecture and so forth.” She pointed to the second item. Then glanced at her watch.

“Now I want to make sure we go over our most important question: why does this matter? Does anyone want to get us started answering that one?”

She waited. No one did.

“Okay. I’ll start. I’m sure you’ll help me once we get going.”

“To me, our analysis of these systems matters because it raises the question I find most interesting. ‘How can change happen?’ As historians, we see that change does indeed happen. But without the language for something, it’s nearly impossible to think about it. Harder yet to talk about it. It might be right before our eyes, but we can’t even perceive it... and so forth. As we’ve discussed. So how is change possible?”

Hands went up.

“Mei Li.”

“People can come in contact with another culture.”

“Good point.”

“Brett.”

“You can sort of feel something, you know, sense something.”

“Yes...” The Professor’s tone suggested that she wanted a little more.

“Jemal.”

“Art. Music, painting, poetry. Art can bring awarenesses we don’t have words for. At least fleetingly.”

“Can and sometimes does.”

“And spirituality,” asserted another voice.

“Yes, although that one immediately raises the point that none of these modalities necessarily leads to change. And some of them more often lead away from it.”

A hand was waving in the second row.

“Tim.”

“We can invent words. Or deliberately mess around with the words we’ve got. Mess them up. You know, break the rules. People do it all the time.”

“Yes. That’s partly how modern art works its effects. Particularly poetry. And you’re right, we do it all the time. Alter the sign system, that is.”

The Professor scanned the classroom.

“Any other thoughts on why all this matters?”

A voice, “It shows us things that prevent us from acting freely, you know, acting on our intentions. Our best ideas of ourselves.”

“Ahhh, yes. Our behavior can work at cross purposes. Why? How?”

Another student, “Because most people don’t ever think about the meanings carried by grammar rules, for instance. We mostly just take for granted what language — uh... delivers us. Like the relationship between a word and its referent. We can think we know the truth about something; but in fact, we might really be far off and not even realize it.”

A hand shot up in the first row. “All this stuff... thinking this way. I think it’s dangerous. It could lead to dismantling everything. People killing each other in the streets. Chaos.”

“Would anyone else like to respond to Tom’s comment? Daryl.”

“Nothing says we have to use these tools stupidly. Just because you have a hammer in your tool box, doesn’t mean you have to hit yourself on the head with it.”

Several students laughed.

“You can say that and laugh; but I still say this kind of thinking is risky business. That language might not be capable of delivering the truth? Even to talk about it!”

“So you think everything’s just fine the way it is,” blurted someone a few rows back.

“You don’t think we need to change anything?”

“I don’t know. I just don’t like it.”

The Professor’s glance moved to a hand raised in the back of the room.

“Jessica.”

“It’s about freedom. I think we should do anything we can — learn anything we can — if it’ll make us more free.”

“Brrriinnnggg!!!”

The pitchfork clanged as the Dreamer finished cleaning the floor of the pen room. When the Bridgekeeper had put away her milking equipment, they watched the goats saunter out into the corral one by one. Kate made eye contact with him, hesitated a moment, then asked to be petted.

Her fur felt brushy and coarse, yet silky smooth and clean.

As they walked slowly through the dusk, the sky turned muted bands of gold, pink and lavender behind them.

Love Again

By the time they'd gathered the clothes from the line, Venus had made her appearance above the trees. Fireflies were courting in the yard.

In the twilight of the kitchen, the Dreamer noticed that it was already 7 o'clock. 'No wonder I'm hungry,' he thought.

"Ready for dinner?" the Bridgekeeper asked as she came into the room and turned on the light. She took a container of last night's soup from the refrigerator. A moment's banging of pots and covers and dinner was on its way. Once the bread was warming in the oven, they sat down together at the table.

"So after your second pilgrimage..."

"Yes, if you remember, there was a lot that the Reality book hadn't done. Already back in the orchards, I felt that I needed to write another book."

In February 1980, with the second Walk behind me, the time had come to begin. But before I could start, I needed a place to live. And a job. I tried Milwaukee again. At Anderson Graphics, the first place I applied for work, Esther hired me on the spot.

"Do you believe in miracles?" she asked.

And Norman, my friend from the Babylon Printing Coop days, offered to share his two bedroom apartment with me.

A week or two earlier I had written a letter to Jody.

"I'm sure I told you about her yesterday."

The Bridgekeeper nodded. She gave the soup a stir.

We had met at St. Norbert College in the Sixties. From the very start, Jody was someone I really liked. Radically honest, creative, enthusiastic, intelligent. Always questioning received ideas. Her poetry, our long talks and shared experiences — honors class, peace demonstrations, getting stoned together, sharing treasures found along the beach — had established a deep friendship between us.

Our paths recrossed a few years later during a Blind Faith concert in the summer of '69. And again, a few years after that when someone gave me her address in Madison. She was living with John, who was also my friend.

"If you remember, I stayed with them a few days the winter I left Milwaukee to go out West. The summer following that visit, something magical brought us back together, again.

In late August of that year, Jody, John and a childhood friend of his, arranged for a drive-away car from the Midwest to San Francisco. Jody, who didn't drive, found herself alone in the back seat — but caught up in fear as the car sped down the interstate. That she'd never had such a problem before didn't change anything. Either have a terrible time for two thousand miles, she realized, or get it under control.

At the time, Jody had been reading about Native American religions. She especially loved Black Elk's description of the Four Quarters, each associated with a particular dimension of the Universe. Now she tried mentally singing to the Four Quarters to steady her mind. It worked. After a few hours, she felt her consciousness expand outward as far as she could see. And from that perspective, the car seemed tiny. Not going fast at all. Her fear dispersed. But she didn't stop the exercise. And since they were traveling West, she began specifically addressing that Quarter, the place of Power, Home of the Thunder Beings — asking for a lesson. Meanwhile, she also found herself wondering what had become of me. All she knew was that I had left for the West with no particular destination in mind.

'Scanning for Bob LePage. Where are you, Bob LePage?' Jody began thinking. 'If you're anywhere near us, show yourself.'

Without consciously connecting these thoughts, she continued them all the way to California.

At the moment, I was married to Joanne and living in Berkeley. Working for Cleo's Printing and Copying just off Telegraph Avenue. A month earlier, one of my co-workers had asked if I would take care of his bike for him while he was away. "You can ride it back and forth to the shop," Steve had said, "It's really fast." Since the Avenue ran one way toward work, I would half-walk /half-glide the bike along the sidewalk each afternoon on my way home.

It was ninety degrees the day after John and Jody arrived in Berkeley. While their friend who had done all the driving rested at the house where they were staying, Jody and John went to explore Telegraph Avenue. After awhile, Jody began to feel ill. Thinking it was the heat, they bought a white bandanna to keep the sun off her head, ducked inside a restaurant and sat down at a table. The air conditioning felt good, but as soon as they looked at the menu, they realized that neither of them was at all hungry, couldn't possibly eat. They closed the menus, stepped back out onto the street, and —

"Bob. Bob LePage!!" I suddenly stopped, turned — there was John. And in the next instant, Jody, too.

They were our guests for the next several days.

"Magic, indeed."

“Yes, I was as amazed as Jody. So were John and Joanne, of course.”

“I think our dinner is ready. Would you like to take a short break and eat?”

“Please. Yes. Even a Gemini gets hungry,” he smiled.

After a few spoonfuls, “This soup is even better today than it was yesterday.”

“Soup usually is.”

‘And the bread so wonderful, too,’ he thought.

“Ready to get back to your story?” she asked a little later. “You had just finished telling me how Jody had found you in Berkeley.”

The following year Joanne, Angela and I stayed at her place in Madison while distributing *The Eternity Book*. She and John had broken up after five years together. Then we lost contact again.

Our mutual friend Michal, who took me in that second night in New York City toward the end of the second Walk, told me that she was now working at a women’s restaurant in Madison. He gave me her address.

In my letter, I offered to do her Stars. Almost immediately, she wrote back. Invited me to visit her. One Friday night in April, we sat down at her tiny kitchen table and talked until morning. Much about dreams, magic and the sacred.

I told her about becoming Merlin.

“Jungian,” she said, “very Jungian.”

She recounted how friends from St. Norbert’s had told her that I’d gone insane.

“No,” she had asserted, even as they insisted. “No. Not Bob LePage. I’m sure of that. Whatever he’s doing — however incomprehensible it might be to other people — he’s not crazy.” It delighted her to tell me how certain she’d felt about it.

She also told me that she was about to take a job with an international chemical corporation, as a translator and cultural troubleshooter. She intended to save money, buy some land up North. If nothing could be done to save the Earth, she explained, at least she would die in the midst of the life forms she loved so dearly.

I told her about the Walks and Article V. That I still believed a great Change could happen. That we had to go on believing. And trying.

The next morning, she admitted that, just hours earlier when I told her what I was doing, she at first thought, ‘Poor Bob, he’s so naïve.’ But before the night was over, she’d realized that, since no one could be *certain* we couldn’t save the Planet, we had to bet that we could. Because we would immobilize ourselves, if we bet the other way.

Saturday morning, warm and sunny, we walked out to the University of Wisconsin Arboretum. Found the perfect spot. Sat beneath a tree and did her Stars together. Sun in Aries — Heart and Soul like the Spring. Alive with energy. Able to see possibilities. Enthusiastic. Moon in Capricorn — dependable, reliable, hard working. Able to take on difficulties. Neptune in Libra, rising — Honest, true, an artist.

And now she was making clear that if I so desired, she would be my partner in dreaming this dream. I carefully guarded my response. I felt that I must first finish the work I saw in front of me. Maybe after that?

The dilemma occupied my mind the entire bus ride back to Milwaukee. Being together had been better than ever. The intervening years had only served to make us that much more appreciative of one another. I realized that I was in love with Jody — perhaps had been in love with her all along. And this time, neither of us were with someone. But I hadn't finished the quest. I had another book to write and another Walk to take. For a long time now I had believed that fully committing myself to saving the world excluded the possibility of an intimate relationship with anyone.

'Could I expect someone to sacrifice everything for this very amorphous project? Even believe it possible? Walk along the edge of an edgeless Universe with me? That would be asking a lot...' Some of my reasoning and feelings grew out of sad experience.

Yet I was also wary of the traditional male hero syndrome. The solitary figure, individual, brave and courageous — who doesn't need anyone. He goes out alone to slay the monster... or whatever. Often has to free himself from a clinging woman. Not a very respectful or accurate portrayal of women. And not surprising in a sexist culture.

'But was our re-union as profoundly meaningful to Jody as it was to me? Could she really suddenly believe the world could be saved? Would she be willing to... I didn't know what would be asked of me, of us. Was I willing to risk it?'

Two weeks of thinking. Meditation. Phone calls. Letters.

"You've helped me remember that real happiness comes from doing something with your life that matters," she said.

I had to be honest about how much of my time was already committed. I was working full-time and had only evenings and weekends to write.

She read the *Reality* book and decided that I could use an editor. "I'll help you with your work. I'm a good writer, you know."

I knew.

In my heart, "Yes!" Hexagrams, "Yes!" A long distance card reading by Joëlle, "Yes!"

That Friday next night... Seven, eight, nine, finally ten o'clock. The end of Jody's shift at the restaurant. Later, talking in bed together, she asked if I'd like to hear a story.

She took out a small blue book, a very old one with yellowed pages, and began translating from the French.

“There are always two voices that speak to people. One comes from the Sky, the other from the Earth.

Once, these two voices took the form of two beautiful women. She from the Sky was called Radiance. She from the Earth, Viviane. Both loved a bard named Merlin...”

What I hadn’t told Jody about my Merlin years is that Joanne had been calling herself Viviane. So she couldn’t know my astonishment as she went on translating. The story told how young Merlin, having finished his education, passed the night in the place of ordeal, where he was threatened by monsters and counseled by devils. After he had resisted both fear and malice, Radiance appeared. She promised to be his strength and inspiration. She gave him a ring as a sign of eternal love; and a silver harp with which to enchant.

Jody showed me that one of the persons who had helped prepare the little French textbook was named LePage.

Weekends sped by too quickly. Weekdays dragged. Friday meant the bus depot. Saturday the Madison Farmers’ Market, long walks. Picnics. Smelling the lilacs at the Arboretum — until our heads swam lavender and purple. Cherry blossoms. Cedar waxwings flocking on the little tree above our heads. Nights too full of joyful energy for sleep. Slipping out of time and into each other’s eyes. Roses, poems, love letters and music. Jody loved classical music and jazz as well as rock and roll. So we listened to Bach, Vivaldi, Pachelbel, Pharoah Sanders and Alice Coltrane — along with Traffic, Fleetwood Mac, George Harrison and a host of others. Curiously enough, although Jody worked at Lysistrata, a feminist restaurant, she hadn’t yet gotten into women’s music. She had covered shifts when the community went to concerts. So for her it was a new awakening when we went to see Cris Williamson together. She immediately bought *Strange Paradise* and played it over and over.

For my birthday, she had jeweler friends of hers make me a ring she’d designed.

“This one.” He held out his left hand to the Bridgekeeper. “These three tiny stones are black star sapphires. In exactly the tight configuration that Regulus, Jupiter and Mars formed during the weeks when we finally permitted ourselves to fall in love.”

Some weekends, Jody came to Milwaukee. It was on one of those visits while we were walking down Brady Street, not far from the corner of Farwell, when Jody suddenly stopped. Interrupted whatever we were talking about with a look.

“Do you know how *good* you’re going to have to be in order to do what you’re trying to do?” she asked.

“Yes, I think I do,” I answered.

“You’re going to have to be like the lion and the lamb together,” she declared.

After that, I never doubted her.

By July, we were living together in a remodeled attic on Milwaukee’s lower east side. Four gables met in the center of a single long room. Lots of windows for Jody’s plants. A wooden floor, where she could practice for the ballet classes she was taking. Perfect for me, as it was quiet and inspiring. By September, we had settled into a routine. Weekdays, Jody went to the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, finishing her undergraduate degree. I continued working at Anderson Graphics.

As a printing press operator, your day begins with the strange formaldehyde-like smell of the pressroom. By the time you’re setting up your first job, you have other things on your mind. Paper stock. Ink color. Quantity. Bindery requirements. And, ‘How long’s it taking?’

Your boss and the machine you’re working with... all day long. The one watching you watching the other. At speeds of eight and nine thousand impressions per hour — and sounding like so many hammerings — the pressroom noise drives anyone unfamiliar with it to cover their ears with their hands. But as a press operator, you can’t afford to block out the racket. You have to listen for cues beneath the surface. After days, weeks, months with the same machine, you know its every click and hum. When something starts going wrong — which it inevitably does in an eight hour shift — the faster you can shut it down, the easier time you have getting it back up and running again.

Standing at the front end, you check that the stack is square, tight, no piece of paper even slightly out of place. You listen for its ratcheting, observe its height and note the blast of the blowers — gently fluttering only the top four sheets. Is the feeder lifting only single sheets? Each breath of air indicates another fed into the stream.

You step to the delivery end, note that there’s still the finest, almost visible, wisp of offset powder falling between each sheet. Then open the gate, grab one, slip it out and close the gate again before the grippers deliver the next.

You do a quick check. ‘Scumming? Dense enough? Wrinkles? Any nicks?’ Then make a measurement or two or three with your ruler. ‘Still straight.’ Next, you set the sheet down on your worktable and lightly draw your fingers across the ink, noting how it drags. If all is well, you go back to your press and pass your ink knife two or three times through the ink fountain. Making sure ink and roller are staying in touch. You check the water. Then the ink train. A nice velvety look? Or stripping. Hints of imbalance. Then back to the front again.

At Anderson’s, the workplace was clean, modern, well-lit and well-organized. Esther worried about the health effects of the noise level in the pressroom. Hired a consulting firm

to try to do something about it. In the end, their efforts were ineffectual. During coffee breaks, Esther enjoyed serious conversation. She could see the injustices that the Black Community was suffering. She and Harold were concerned about the world, opposed the nuclear arms race and cared deeply about the environment. Anderson's often donated printing to non-profit organizations. Their son, Tommy, worked alongside me as a press operator. He, Brian and Robert, the other press operators, were a joy to work with. Our wages, however, were very low in comparison to the rest of the printing industry.

Even after Jody found a waitress job, we literally counted our pennies from payday to payday. She maintained that one of the most liberating experiences of her hippie years had been the realization that even with very little money and possessions, one could be truly happy. And this we were.

Jody walked a few blocks to meet me as I returned home from the shop each day. We dined by candlelight every night. Evenings and most of Saturdays and Sundays, we spent absorbed in our work. Chopin, Satie and Margie Adams solo piano in the background. I sat at a high backless stool at a drafting table, furniture left us by the person from whom we were subletting. Jody preferred the couch for studying. When I glanced over toward her, my eyes also fell on the enormous fern she'd cultivated for years. Looking the other way, I would be treated to the sight of sparrows eating at our fire-escape feeder.

When we weren't studying and writing, we went for walks in Lake Park. An occasional concert or show. My brother David bought us season tickets to the Milwaukee Ballet. And we also enjoyed programs at the University — presentations by the Dance Department and visiting performers, too. On the first floor of our building lived Barbara and Mike, founders and members of Friends Mime Theater. We attended all their productions.

One night a week, while our laundry dried at the laundromat, we would browse the racks of a nearby record store. There, we found Laura Nyro's album, *Nested*, one of the musical treasures I had had to leave behind when I left the orchards for the last Walk. We were always waiting for Laura or Bob Dylan to come out with a new release. Patti Smith, the Rolling Stones and others. We bought Steve Winwood's *Arc of a Diver* when it appeared. The week we bought *Double Fantasy* by John Lennon and Yoko Ono, every one of our dozen eggs turned out to have a double yolk.

We didn't always agree on everything, but found we could always listen and work out whatever disagreements arose. Perhaps that was because we agreed on so much and so totally on the important things — who we are and what we're here for. We decided to use the *I-Ching* to resolve anything we couldn't readily handle ourselves. Jody had come to trust the Hexagrams as much as I did, despite an initial skepticism. She had known people who would do one Hexagram after another looking for the response they wanted. Now, she too was

using it for assessment of situations and everyday guidance. And she quickly saw its potential for arbitration of differences, although we rarely needed to use it that way.

Across the street from our apartment, the city had transformed an unused school building into what they called, “Lincoln Center for the Arts.” We enrolled in an improvisational dance class with instructor Melanie Panush. Every week her “Saturday Morning Special” lifted and inspired. Without ever saying so, this Aries dancer was teaching people about freedom. We danced our names. Our dreams. How we understood ourselves, one another, our World, the time. We wrapped Holly Near’s “Rainbow” around ourselves. Afterwards, we’d cross the street and continue our romantic improv together.

In May, after ten months living together, we married. The ceremony began and ended with a walk through the woods. Family and friends gathered in a grassy park in Madison, surrounded by woods at the edge of a path. The path where Jody used to run. We had invited Medieval dress, and it appeared — alongside three-piece suits, jeans, skirts, cycling and running clothes. Two of my co-workers bicycled over from Milwaukee. Jody made a banner with a pale orange star on a pink, lavender and deep purple background. What she sewed for us to wear also echoed the colors of my East Coast wagon ribbons.

At first, Jody and I thought that the others would begin walking down the path by themselves, and we would follow. After a while, we realized that everyone was waiting for us. So we started walking, and a procession followed. All around us so much to love. Trees adorned in fresh spring leaves. Flowers blooming. Children. Runners. Laughter. Chatter. Birds singing. A Baltimore Oriole. Sunshine breaking through the canopy. The path led down the center of a narrow peninsula, stretching about a half mile into Madison’s Lake Mendota. Harp and flute music greeted our procession as we approached the point. Water on three sides, woods on the fourth, such was the setting for our vows.

My Capuchin friend, Father Michael, performed the ceremony. After gathering us into a circle, he wove the beauty of the place into a homily that repeatedly mentioned history, even invoked the “God of History.” All the while he spoke, motorboats — some close, others farther away — droned in the background. It sounded like electronic violins. And with the birds mixing in their sweet notes, it made you feel like you were in a dream.

Jody and I promised loving kindness, sensitivity, patience and perseverance in our daily life together. And committed ourselves to willing unity with each other.

Finally, we joined our voices together in a third vow: “In a Sacred Manner, we dedicate our life together to the creation of a new age of Peace, Love and Freedom for all.”

The World

“What about the book you were working on? Were you writing at the time of your wedding?”

“Ummm... by then, it was time for publishing. So I’ll have to backtrack a little.”

In January, during Jody’s semester break, I had passed her a first draft. I called it *The World*. Later, she told me that as she began reading it, she’d felt almost overwhelmed by the task she’d taken on. The writing seemed so far away from where it had to be. But she resolved to persevere. And in the end, the content positively surprised her. By the time I came home from work, she had finished a first reading. She greeted me with yet more enthusiasm than usual.

“You’ve got something really important here,” she said. “Right now the writing doesn’t bring that out. But this book manages to do something really valuable. It organizes and makes sense of an enormously complicated set of problems. Turns that monstrosity we face into something we can handle.”

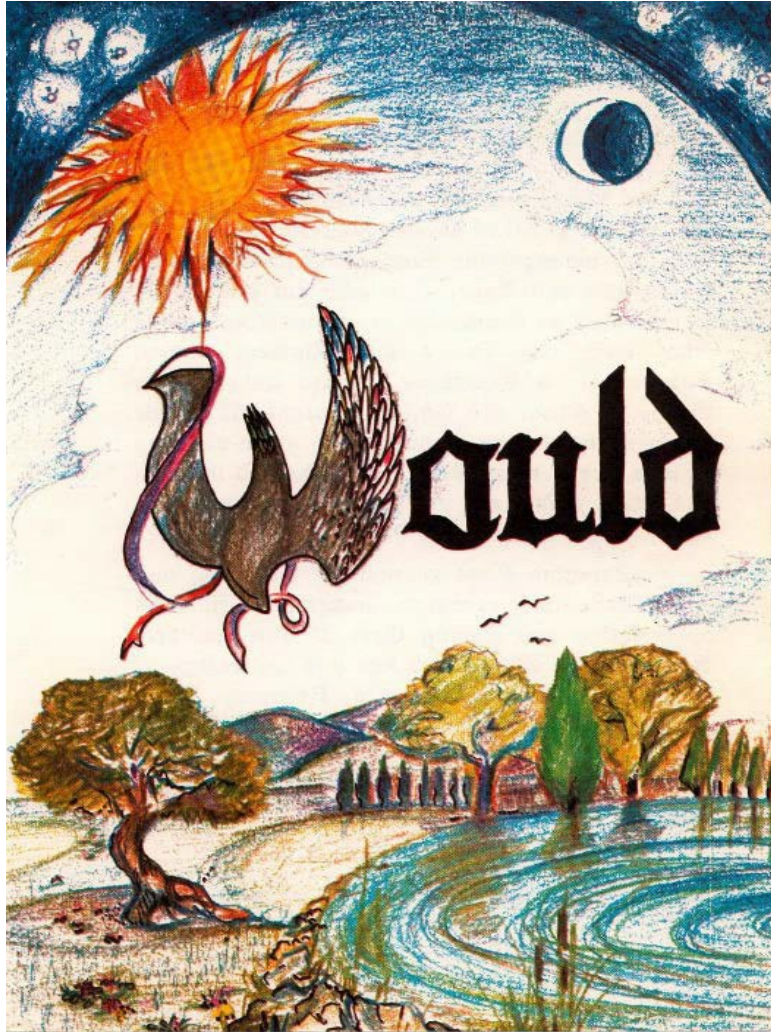
She confessed that she had had doubts all along about my project, doubts she’d never mentioned because she didn’t want to discourage me. ‘How could a book, any book, help that much to get us out of the mess we’re in?’ she’d wondered. Now she saw it could provide a kind of organizing principle. A way of looking at our problems that could make them seem less daunting, more manageable. This is what the book she’d read that day contained, she said. It was buried under a lot of problematic writing, however. We’d have to work hard to dig it out and make it clear.

Before the week was out, Jody had written specific suggestions on the manuscript. We began spending evenings and weekends going over it line by line. Working together on this project, we experienced the depth of our accord. And fell ever more deeply in love.

When we finished, Lilly, an artist who had been Jody’s roommate during a Junior Year Abroad program in Italy, and who had become like a second sister to her, read the manuscript and prepared beautiful pastel drawings to begin each chapter. Jody drew a tree of life for the cover. I did a number of drop cap letters to highlight various sections. We had the entire text set in Old English typeface. I was looking for something magical to happen and so hoped that the book’s appearance might connect with peoples’ imagination.

“Would you like to see it?” the Wanderer asked. “I have a copy in my satchel.”

He carefully withdrew a thin volume. "It's kind of falling apart," he said as he untied a lavender ribbon and set the little book down in front of her. After a moment studying the cover, she opened it, turned several pages, then paused at —



*"Lillian's work?" she asked as she turned it over and began reading...
"Yes, the book begins with a wish. "*

Would that the World were Everywhere Cared for; that Everyone and All of Life were greatly Respected; and that amongst the Humans, there were only Gentleness and Love. And why not a Garden?

“Let me show you the drawing that introduces the book’s central idea: that scientific evidence now suggests that our visual perception of the separateness of things is not an accurate representation of the actual world.”



“By extension, the whole idea of a separate self, the ego identity, is mistaken. As is our inclination to ‘isolate events out of the oneness of the world, and line them up chronologically, creating time,’” he quoted.

“I hope you also made that a little more concrete,” she said.

“Yes, this chapter pointed out that today we have electron microscopes, orbiting telescopes, particle accelerators... greatly extending our perceptual range. Quantum Mechanics tells us that every particle that makes us up is entangled with every other particle in the Universe. Bio-chemistry tells us about the constant exchange which we carry on with our environment via eating, drinking, breathing, absorption, excretion, diffusion... Little actually remains constant of us besides our genetic information.”

“Things that one really couldn’t know in the past,” she commented, “except intuitively — or magically, if you would. But what about the plan of action that you’d mentioned?”

“Yes, now I did call for an Article V Constitutional Convention, one with clear mandates, a form and a suggestion of how to get there.” He opened the book to another section, and read:

‘If we were to wish for a comet to come and help us join together in an effort to get back into harmony with all of Nature, we would surely get such a response unless our specific plan of action is bad. The appearance of a comet in response to our wishing would clearly indicate that we should move ahead with our plan.’”

“Wait! What?! Where did you come up with this comet idea?”

“Well, it was part reason and part magic. The reason part derives from emerging scientific understandings that point — even more so now than when this book was written — that all of Nature has some kind of Consciousness. So I saw it as a logical step to propose that Nature could respond to our need. Serious need. Given the perilous conditions that we and species many we’re entangled with are facing. The magical part was a moment up in the orchards, when all these thoughts came together while I was looking up at the Stars one night.”

People at Anderson Graphics were happy to help publish a book that aimed to make the world a better place. Esther and Harold permitted use of their equipment and purchase of materials at cost. My co-workers offered to assist in whatever way they could. Production began with Robert and Jan typesetting the handwritten manuscript. Once the galleys were complete, Jody and I transformed a corner of our attic home into a graphic arts studio. I laid out a photocopy of the book, then divided the actual pages into signatures and pasted it up.

After that phase, our life took on a new pattern. Jody would meet me downtown each day after school and we’d go to a baked potato place, all we could afford, and dine on every manner of topping. Then return to the printshop. For the first week, we did the camera and

platemaking. Then Brian and Tommy worked with us several nights doing the printing. It seemed everyone helped Eleanor with the collating — even Yolanda, a friend who happened to stop by the Saturday morning that the book was finally being put together to send to the bindery.

Two weeks later, about a thousand books came back — finished. Now the attic took on the appearance of a shipping department. Boxes and stacks of books waited as we carefully wrapped each one in tissue paper, tied it with a sky blue ribbon, and slipped it into its pre-addressed envelope. We sent books to everyone we could think of who could influence significant numbers of people and who might be sympathetic. Artists, writers, musicians, leaders in civil rights, politics, religion...

Late in the afternoon of June 22, Barbara and other helpers from Friends Mime Theater drove us and the cases of books over to the Post Office. That evening, when we returned from a celebratory dinner, one of our neighbors was on the porch, looking up at the sky. A strange cloud had drawn his attention — and now ours. At first it seemed a giant brushstroke of white on a vast blue canvas. We walked down to the corner where the intersection gave us a better view. A single long cloud narrowed almost to a point at the horizon in the west and widened to cover the entire sky in the east. It looked just like the magnificent comet we needed. We watched as the sunset turned it a dark emphatic red.

Walk Extracts

The Dreamer realigned the pages of the little blue book with a tap on the table, tied the ribbon round it and returned it to the satchel. They began to clear the table.

“So with the book published...”

And wanting what I wrote to be more than just words.

We made preparations for another Walk. We bought a wagon like the other two I'd used and made it road-worthy. Attached red, yellow and green ribbons to its handle, in honor of Rastafarian rhythms and words like, “Emancipate yourself from mental slavery.”

I would be better prepared and equipped this time. A new backpack and sleeping bag, a foam bedroll and white gas camp stove. As training, Jody and I signed up for an aerobic dance class and began running several miles every other day.

Then came a happening-fast magical twist. Jody had developed a friendship with the professor who was directing her independent reading of French Existentialist literature. Even before I had a face to go with the name Martine, a dream had told me she was someone special.

“Tell Jody: ‘Don't lose touch with the person she's drinking the coffee with,’” the dream had said.

I met Martine when she asked Jody if I would do a Starchart for her daughter, Stephanie, as a birthday gift. By chance, Martine invited two of Stephanie's friends to the presentation dinner. Having brought my Starbooks with me, I was also able to describe the friends' personalities. Martine knew all three young women well. And what I was able to say about them convinced even this specialist in the Age of Reason, this fan of Voltaire, that the Stars had something of real significance to contribute to our understanding of identity.

“Martine would later dare to tell her colleagues on an academic search and screen committee that something about the Stars was valid. But that comes later. I was talking about the touch of magic Martine added to our preparations for the third Walk.”

We had already secured a tiny apartment for Jody in Madison. She felt certain she could find waitressing work while I was away — and hoped we would stay in Madison when I returned. Now Martine suggested a different scenario.

Since Jody had accumulated enough credits to graduate, conclude the undergraduate studies program and graduate. Begin a Masters Program in French. And since the French Department was hiring graduate teaching assistants, there would be a job for her. And

as for a place to live, Martine offered her guest room as a place where she could stay. A gift we'd go on realizing for years to come. Jody was in good hands and safe. Her rooms had plenty of windows for her beloved plants. Jody's friendship with Martine would grow and bloom into such wonder as Love can create.

On the previous Walks, I hadn't had the kind of support that Jody would now be able to provide. She would send shoes when needed, copies of the comet proposal, what money she could and letters. And I'd send her things — letters, drafts of the Starsketches I did for people along the way, maps of states passed and photocopies of the few words I wrote to her each day —

“In this —”

He reached into his satchel again. Took out a small leather-bound book.

“Would you like to look at it while I do the dishes?”

“That's quite the magic bag you have there. What are you going to pull out of it next?”

She began looking through the tiny pages, reading a few of the daily entries.

Milwaukee. June 9, 1982. That a Miracle happen on this Planet Earth... that we come together in recognition of our Identity and heal one another and all the Life Forms with us here. For this alone do I walk...

Evanston. A man called to me from across the street: “Heaven, Heaven's up that way!” Pointing to the sky.

Indiana dunes. Fierce sun... skin a hurting bright red, lips split. Every time I open my mouth, I bleed. O Northern Ones, you of the place of ice, of snow, of mountain peaks difficult to climb....

June 15. Day cracked open with thunder & lightning. Wind took the blue cloth I was using to cushion the wagon handle. Tied your white bandana there and now I'm half-holding your hand.

South Bend. Unemployment and the Nuclear Freeze Movement much in people's thoughts.

A chicken farmer showed me how the chickens live. I'm ashamed that I didn't begin to cry. Sharing mulberries with birds for the past three days.

Ohio. Loved you in the new day's mist and, as afternoon cleared, in bright sunlight.

June 20. Pouring rain ended a 35-mile day. Yesterday, 34 miles.

June 24. Day of rest. East Harbor State Park. You wonder if you've said “I love you” too many times. No one can hear it enough.

Cleveland. Poverty and desperation. Saw fighting in the streets. But even here I met with kindness.

June 28. First wagon breakdown generously fixed.

Into Pennsylvania. Plains turned to hills, pastures to wooded glens. Deep and bright blue sky. Air alive with a constant gentle breeze. 70°. Lips healed now.

July 3. Rained all day. Upward climb.

Day of rest at “Jacob’s Rocks” — all of which look like animals.

Traveling through forest: ferns, hardwood trees, carpet of last year’s leaves. Using the little magnifying loupe you gave me. Totally enchanting.

July 7. 90°.

Denton hill, 2400 feet. Showered in a waterfall this evening.

July 17. 93° by noon. Air hung thick.

“Hey! Want some cold water?” Ten-year-old Brian and his brother also gave me dinner and a backyard camping place.

Stroudsburg. Thank you, my Love, for the shoes. A psychologist I met today loved her Stars, invited me to dinner with her husband, from India, and two friends from Bangladesh. The most wondrous banquet of Indian food I have ever eaten. We have arrived at the East. O Eastern Ones, you of the rising sun, the morning star; place of illumination, enlightenment...

New Jersey. Suburb after suburb. Permission to camp once this baseball game is over.

July 23. Across Staten Island, where people have always been good to me; to Brooklyn and rest.

Brighton Beach with Michal, his friends and looks like a half a million people — most responding in a very high way to the situation. Yet danger lurks and fear crouches in the corners.

In Willingboro, I encountered Mary Jo driving a mile and a half from her house. Sand castles, bedtime stories with the children; utmost kindness from my good sister and her husband. The gift of speaking twice with you.

Today the Sun asserts 90°. Oil and gasoline distilleries, smog-like brown clouds here and at the horizon. Mercy at Mary Magdalen parish in Wilmington.

August 6. Maryland. Last night the weather broke. Mellow temperatures, a gentle breeze, graceful hills and woods.

Neptunian “Ras-ta-fah” connections with a Black community very much *alive* in Washington.

August 14. Waves of bumper-to-bumper traffic. Into the night doing Stars with young people in Leesburg.

Today, atop a little ridge: “Merlin! Merlin!” My friend Gene, jazz-musician and maker of African instruments. He sang a prayer, put the letter I gave him next to his heart.

Night at Holy Cross Monastery. Tomorrow we’ll be together! An entire week with you.

“So Jody met you along the way?”

“Yes, at her parents home in Berryville. Wonderful to be together. That’s not in there, of course, since the journal is speaking to her.” He paused a moment. “When I finish dishes, would you like me to make some coffee?”

“Definitely. We may be up all night.” She returned to the little journal.

August 23. Leaving you again. Heart breaks; mind quakes.

Fredricksburg. Newspaper interview. Great efforts to return my mind to the holy place where I must stay if I’m to do this.

Rain. Sun. Rain. Sun. 90°. My head and skin behave as if it’s something new. Camped on the edge tonight.

Back on track this high and holy day. Rolling hills, wonderful pine trees, sweet breeze. All loved in a prayer for the Comet.

Richmond. Shelter at a church sponsoring a unilateral disarmament lobbyist in Washington. This evening the radio played: “You can do magic; you can have anything you want...”

A strip-city day. Now horses nearby. Heart, soul and mind centered again. I so look forward to tomorrow’s walking.

Virginia hills smooth into North Carolina. Farms. Tobacco harvest. Hosted by a doctoral candidate in theology.

Tall white mansions and broken down shacks.

The miles and miles and miles of rural South: thick forest — tall pines. O Southern Ones, you of the place of love, of the whole cycle of life, death and feeding one another....

Pastor in Bethune, a former media major, “documented” my journey.

September 16. Roads pleasantly crowded. But the heat!

Started before the roosters crowed today. Stopped for water and was called to the back of the oasis parking lot. A gathering of Black people listening to music. We share a beer, Stars & great conversation. Sleeping in a church nursery. Outside it rains and thunders.

Camped in a park with a creek running through it. Police told me that the one side was “for Blacks,” the other “for Whites.”

Early morning deep fog hides the further hills; a ghost-like presence seeping out of the forest. My words meeting with a certain degree of opposition hereabouts.

September 21. Rain all day, puddles dancing, the forest hissing with droplets. 29 miles. On the way to the Bulldog Restaurant for breakfast, saw a bulldog killed in the road. The man whose dog he was stood there almost crying. Later that morning, a bulldog kept walking with me.

Yellow butterflies swarming across the road. Newspaper interview and rest in Baxley. Cypress trees and still black waters now amid the farms and forests.

Pines, pecans and palms into Florida. Rain.

In Tallahassee, four days with Nazan. Gracious hospitality. Persian feasts. I more fully appreciate your love for her — a most intelligent and powerfully loving person.

October 5. Intermittent showers. Autumn trees! I drop south. Lots of truckers have come to recognize me — one from the last walk.

Intense heat crossing Hathaway Bridge.

Now, air enlivened by Gulf Winds and a turquoise sea with silver sands. Camping on the beach. Waves crash. Swish. Caress the shoreline. I think of you. Love you.

Alabama turned into rolling hills, hayfields, cows, horses. Gorgeous weather. Sheltering in a church bus tonight. Wedding in the church hall. Thinking about our marriage.

October 21. Fine weather. Swamps, woods, water and mosquitoes.

In New Orleans, two men put me in a position where, if I had been willing to steal their money, they would have stolen mine. But I wasn't and they didn't.

Camped behind a pet shop out on Highway 61.

Once across the Mississippi, I did a Starsketch for a waitress at 9 AM and ended up doing Stars for 11 hours.

Lots of trucking now. One day a wide and smooth shoulder; the next unpaved and on a two-lane highway. Off again/on again. Walk the gravel, duck the winds, hold your breath as a trailer passes too closely — whew!

Halloween in the woods with a full moon and campfire's light. Forested hills now, autumn gold and red. All along the roadside, balls of cotton.

November 3. It rains and rains. May the thousand steps made between pages of this journal — and the hours of prayer offered while taking them be heard and answered. May a Super Comet in 1983 open our eyes to our connection with the Universe and affirm the way to re-harmonize ourselves with Nature and the Cosmic Order of Love.

Golden sun setting fluorescent liquid in the west. Burns your eyes, but no heat reaching here. Supposed to drop below freezing tonight. Wagons at Bill and Daniel's cotton gin help to break the wind.

This morning, Daniel brought me way back into the woods. Back, it seems, some fifty years in time. A falling down plantation store. Black men waiting to start work.

Today, rough pavement shook the wagon so that twice the bolts came loose. But just down the road each time, kind and capable help. A Texas hippie manages this Salvation Army here. Young people running all around downstairs.

Today an angel-child appeared alongside and handed me a bag of sandwiches through the car window. Tonight a priest had me rake his lawn to earn shelter.

November 13. Ice and frost on the tent this morning. A bicyclist walked about 3 miles with me. Cheap motel tonight. Speaking with you is a Sacrament.

Walking into terrain graced here and there with cacti. Little, bald, sandy mountains peak up. The "big sky" effect. O Western Ones, Thunderbeings, you of the place of the setting sun; place of magic, mystery — powers that we cannot understand...

November 19. Breathtaking vistas east and south. The road west goes up and up and up. The only sound a great wind rushing past my ears. To say I love you one more time is never enough.

Father Stan made me a salad and took me to a Thanksgiving ceremony at St. Elizabeth's. You must hear all the words to "God Bless America."

Yesterday, Thunderbeings formed a great horse with wild, wide wings and a unicorn's horn.

November 24. Heavy morning sky, a few snowflakes, but good road. By 2 PM, serious snow. About an hour and it was almost impossible to drag the wagon. Had declined several rides but now the *I-Ching* advised accepting. A car pulled up. Out stepped a man who had stopped earlier with his wife and tried to persuade me to ride into town with him. This time he brought his minister with him — to confirm that it would be all right to accept a ride. Provided me this room in Seminole. Three days and it's still in the low 30s, raining, snowing and blowing hard. Body grateful for the rest.

It's now surely the last lap. O may the prayers, wishes and hopes of Everyone be answered this coming year by a Great Super Comet.
A flock of Crows welcomed me to New Mexico.
Again and again People sheltered me in their homes.

December 1. Trucks dripping with oil-field mud sending wet brown clouds over me all morning long. A young angel brought me cocoa; came back later with coffee.

Camped 10 miles from Hope. Freezing cold and tent zipper completely given out. Then as I was breaking camp, a wind gust took the tent. Luckily, I managed to chase it down.

Sheltered by kindly rancher tonight. Snow on the ground everywhere. Your dearest and so missed voice this morning.

Now at 7, 500 feet, about 13 miles from the summit at Cloudcroft, in a cabin.

Walking the Tularosa Valley, four squad cars of military police appeared. They were going to be “testing” in the area and a truck would take me to Las Cruces. After I told them what I was doing, they “called in.”

What happened? Someone canceled the test to permit this prayer to continue.

Laborious climb to St. Augustine Pass in snow and rain. The Organ Mountains actually make organ sounds.

December 9. Early start in the dark and cold hard rain. By midmorning, my hands and feet felt frozen. After dark, rain stopped and it got warmer. Kept walking. Night on the Interstate. A great halo in the fog, a magic circle of light kept appearing ahead of me as vehicles approached from behind. Walked til 11:30 PM. 55 miles.

Cold finally exceeded the limits of this sleeping bag. And now I have a cold. Hard to concentrate. Grateful for shelter indoors.

December 13. What blessings! Only a day and my cold is almost completely gone. Your package with new shoes. Then all the way into Arizona and a motel room. Below freezing outside. Warm inside and reading your letters.

Morning frosted all over. Steep climbs, dramatic vistas, great precipices, buttes, huge rocks, gravel washes, yucca plants. Then level terrain. Walked into the night again. Brought to this church for shelter by Chief and Crazy Dog, two young Apache men.

Again today further than expected. Rock people, sacred formations, rocks bleeding water, sands in purple, orange-yellow, silver. Now high up where the buttes reach the sky and you can talk to God.

Aunts, uncles and cousins in Phoenix. Speaking with you, even at such a distance, makes it Christmas.

December 27. Many people stopping today — including a surprise appearance by E K, my feminist photographer friend from Pasadena.

Finally, California. Rained hard last night, brief snow this morning.

New Years Eve. 41 miles today, urged on past campsite after campsite by the *I-Ching*.

This morning, your voice, your words. Tee-shirt warm; road flat and blessedly smooth.

Broke camp early for another 41 miles — the last eight of them a constant ascent. At the summit, a quaint hotel in the most inviting little town of Julian.

January 4. Unbridled romanticism. A spring breeze kissed me and whispered secrets through the pine trees. Valley after valley opened its temple gates. Snow melting. Up high enough to see a hawk's topside. Walking downhill — into manzanitas, eucalyptus, flowers.

Today, orange and avocado groves. Careful now, patience. Only two more days.

Chaotic traffic early; later, the ocean!

January 8. Huntington Beach. A magical ending, enveloped in the thickest fog all day. M.J. and Simon received me from the road. Seven moons past the day we left. We — all of us collectively — have arrived. Soon we'll click our heels and head for home.

The Bridgekeeper set the book down and took a sip of coffee.

"Would you say that being in love made the walking easier? Or more difficult?"

"It was difficult to leave, of course." The Dreamer was sitting across from her.

"Especially after our visit in Virginia. But in so many other ways, our love made this Walk more wonderful — and not just because Jody sent me things I needed. During the two years that we'd lived together, she heightened my appreciation of Nature. Which raised my spirits all along the way. And she wrote and spoke so many encouraging words. In the end, I'd much rather be in love."

The Comet?

With his satchel on one shoulder, the Dreamer carried their coffee cups into the hearth room. The Bridgekeeper put music on softly in the background.

“What is it?” he asked as she returned.

“Debussy’s ‘Rêverie.’” The piano matched the mood perfectly.

Jody found me an inexpensive plane ticket home. What joy to see each other again! Martine welcomed me graciously, as did her daughter, Stephanie; her nephew John; and their housemate David. “The Terrace Avenue Commune,” they were calling themselves.

Of course, after our separation, Jody and I wanted to be alone together — a feeling that Martine could readily appreciate. By month’s end, we had moved to our own apartment. One so tiny that at night we had to move our dining table to make room for the bed that pulled down from a closet in the wall. But this little space was graced with abundant sunlight and our happiness.

Jody’s graduate studies and teaching took almost all her time. So at first, we decided that I shouldn’t look for a full time job. I would take over the housework and supplement our income by doing Starcharts. I put ads on bulletin boards of the local food coops and in one of their newsletters. Mostly, it was by friends telling friends that people arranged for me to do their charts. I soon had charts enough to keep me busy, especially since I also began studying economics — something I felt I didn’t know enough about. Wishing and waiting.

In May of 1983, the comet IRAS-Araki-Alcock dropped down through the constellation Ursa Major. Though small and faint, it stirred interest among astronomers for coming so close to Earth. Mary sent the front page story from the *New York Times*. Dawn wrote a congratulatory note from California. But I couldn’t believe that this was the comet that I’d been waiting for. We needed a comet of much greater magnitude. One that everyone could see and would be talking about. One that would fill us with wonder. Awe.

I believed that such a comet was still on its way. It didn’t occur to me to question the proposed plan of action — or even the comet idea itself. I kept waiting.

By Autumn, it was beginning to appear that the comet I wished for might not come. I had learned my lesson earlier, however. This time I would keep trusting. Keep trying. I hadn’t set out to dictate to the Universe how things should unfold. I had asked for help in reaching agreement over a plan of action. None seemed to be forthcoming.

‘Was there something wrong with the plan?’

People I had spoken with while walking pointed out what they thought was a flaw. “Who’s going to represent this plan at the national elections?” I had expected that someone everyone knew — someone all of us could trust, someone accustomed to crowds and public appearances — would learn about the plan and come forth to play that role. But by the end of October, there was neither candidate nor comet.

The situation reminded me of the story about the mice unanimously agreeing that it would be a good idea to place a bell around the cat’s neck. Until one of them asked, “But who will put this bell on the cat?”

I composed a letter offering myself as a candidate. This we mailed out, using the same list we’d used for *The World*. And continued wishing and waiting.

In December, we thought maybe our wish was finally coming true. News reports told of a mysterious large object that astronomers had discovered far out in space. They didn’t yet know what it was. Having heard about it on the radio, we walked over to the nearby Astor Hotel coffee shop to pick up a newspaper. There, we happened to encounter MJ and Simon, the couple whose LA home had been my final destination back in January as I ended the Walk. They were visiting friends in Milwaukee. Running into them, at that particular moment, seemed an auspicious sign.

On January 1, the power went out on our street. Sun through the windows kept the apartment well-lit, but with no electricity, the furnace switch for the entire building failed. At first we kept busy heating kettles of water on the gas stove and placing them near the plants to keep them from freezing. But then, as we huddled in our coats for a moment’s rest, we both broke down and cried. No comet had come in 1983. At least not the great comet wished for.

Maybe the comet hadn’t come because we’d corrected the plan’s flaw too late. Maybe that had only changed the timing, made the comet late as well. Or maybe something else was wrong.

“I wonder how many people actually wished?” the Bridgekeeper sighed as she drank the last swallow from her cup.

She stood up. “I’ll get us some more coffee.”

Disappearing into the kitchen, she returned abruptly. “Would you like to go with me out to the goats? It’s almost eleven.”

Picking up the lantern and putting on jackets, they stepped out into a crisp, clear night.

“You were talking about the comet not coming.”

“Yes.”

Jody and I recovered our emotional equilibrium before that New Year's Day was over. We still had each other. Nor had we lost any of our desire to see a radically better world. Until we were certain that nothing more could be done — which we would never be — we would persevere. What now? We didn't know. Somehow the Universe would show us another way.

The Bridgekeeper slid back the goat house door. Turned on the soft overhead light. Eyes met their own, but no one stirred. Louise and Nora sat together in their favorite corner. Dana was along the wall by herself. All were contentedly chewing.

Within several weeks, one mundane thing did become clear. When I figured out the taxes and social security due on my Starchart business, ends didn't meet. Paying my part of our living expenses by doing Starcharts wasn't going to work, unless I charged more than I considered appropriate. I needed to find a regular job.

“Had Jody finished graduate school?”

“Not yet,” he answered as he rubbed Kate's head. “She was studying for her comprehensive exams while teaching.”

Col D'Var Graphics, a small design studio, hired me to do ad design, layout and pre-press work. It was fortuitous. Col D'Var's most important account was producing a weekly newspaper, *The Wisconsin Jewish Chronicle*. I worked daily with the *Chronicle* staff and each week read the paper from cover to cover. I was impressed with the theology I found there, both explicit and implicit. Writers celebrated a relationship with a G-d who had everything to do with our everyday interactions with one another. Clearly, it was not just exceptional Jewish thinkers such as Spinoza and Buber, but “everyday” Judaism that inclined toward creating a loving world. I began to think that I should perhaps look again to see what was at the heart of each of the major religions.

Meanwhile, as I walked back and forth from work each day, one question followed me. ‘What was I going to do now that a comet hadn't come?’

After petting each of the goats, they spread a layer of fresh bedding about the pen room. Checked that the feeding stations had adequate hay. Then bid good-night.

Now or Never

“As always, new music swirled into our life,” he said, as they made their way back by moonlight. “At that time, it was Bruce Springsteen, The Boomtown Rats, Christine McVie, Tret Fure and Cris Williamson.”

“And what did the music enswirl?” The Bridgekeeper reached for the cabin door.

About this time, Jody’s friend Nazan surprised us with a Sunday afternoon phone call. She had come up from Tallahassee for a family visit. An hour later, we were sitting together at a café in a shopping mall on Milwaukee’s far west side.

Jody was delighted that Nazan had abandoned the more mature look of a few years earlier and returned to wild curly hair framing her face as she had in the Sixties. The perfect image of a Leo. And only a Leo would have delivered so clear a message.

“Bob,” she said, “you can’t stop just because the comet didn’t come. You have some important ideas. The Stars, your analysis of the ego culture, the idea for a Constitutional Convention. These are as valuable as ever. You have to keep trying to get them a hearing. You really must.”

When it was time to part, I walked ahead to give Nazan and Jody some space. They had been friends for decades. After good-byes, Jody and I boarded our cross-town bus.

“She told me I mustn’t let you stop,” Jody relayed. “I said I agreed with her assessment; but that I really don’t tell you what to do.”

“I was on my way for more coffee before we went out. Still want some?”
He nodded absentmindedly. Kept talking as he followed her into the kitchen.

Nazan’s message gathered loose ends floating in my mind. It had occurred to me that linking the plan to the appearance of a comet meant that the people themselves really didn’t get the chance to decide. Wouldn’t the appearance of a great comet have weighed heavily on people’s free choice?

I also saw problems with the book *The World*. I had not used footnotes. I had proposed new “house rules” without thoroughly examining those presently in use. And maybe I should have recounted the history behind Article V, before suggesting we call for a Constitutional Convention. By late June, I had made the decision: I would try again — write another book.

Events at work soon gave me some extra time to get the project off the ground. At Col D’Var, the other graphic artist quit. In her place, Gary, co-owner of the company, hired

Clarence, with whom I expected to develop a friendship. But Clarence was like no other Black person I'd known. He opposed affirmative action, stood against social programs for the disadvantaged and favored lower taxes for the wealthy. And he stated his views in ways clearly intended to provoke an argument. He constantly spewed misogyny — in jokes, stories, behavior. Had nothing but scorn for feminism. When he opened up and stuck a hardcore porn magazine in my face to show me what he said women were really “for,” I resigned and went looking for another job.

After a flurry of submitting applications, my job search took less time. This allowed me a few weeks to outline the book and do initial research. This new book would follow much the same plan as the previous effort. It would focus again on how we could trace our problems to the mistaken perception of the Self as Separate, which informs the Ego idea of ourselves and becomes elaborated into an Ego culture. Additionally, it would take a more extensive look at how the major religions of the world had worked against that syndrome. Then follow similar threads through the history of philosophy. It would strike me again and again as I did the reading for this book that so many had already said so much to lead us out of the ego culture.

The smell of coffee momentarily brought the Dreamer back to the hearth room. He took a sip and returned to the past.

Not long after quitting Col D'Var, I found employment doing the same work at Pace Publications. A small publishing house doing two monthly magazines and daily pre-press work for several affiliated Photocopy Printshops. Evenings and weekends though, I had time for reading and writing.

I worked at presenting a short history of both capitalism and communism — in theory and in practice. And sketched a possible alternative that addressed the failings of those two systems. Jody and I regularly discussed the studies she was doing on nineteenth-century French socialist thinkers, dubbed “utopians” by Karl Marx. Drawing on their ideas, I suggested a set of house rules designed to maximize the freedom of individual persons, while controlling the power of economic institutions over the government. Subsistence could be guaranteed to everyone, while allowing for individual differences, even maintain incentives. As there could be different levels of pay. People doing the least desirable jobs, for instance, would receive a higher “heroic” wage.

In order to present Article V better, the new book would include a bit of the history of the first and only Constitutional Convention of the United States. And propose both form and content for the needed Second Convention — a means of delegate selection, procedures for the Convention and a way to ratify the new Constitution, as well as mandates for the kinds of changes we would want the Convention to make.

“The mandates I saw earlier?” the Bridgekeeper asked as they returned to the hearth room.

“Yes, the mandates remained essentially the same. The book itself, though, had an important new dimension, thanks to a grad school course that Jody didn’t take.”

In January 1984, Jody found herself in a seminar that made her feel as if she’d accidentally signed up for an upper level course in a language she didn’t know. At each meeting, the two professors and two of the seven students carried on a discussion incomprehensible to the rest. Jody asked one of the professors for titles of books that she could read in order to catch up. The professor said she wasn’t sure what to suggest for someone unfamiliar with the literature. It was so vast. The whole field of semiotics, of structuralism, of post-structuralism, of post-modernism and now... Jody felt she’d been told that if you didn’t already know about it, there was no way to learn it — at least not quickly enough to come through a grad seminar with your grade point intact. She dropped the course.

The idea of walking away from an intellectual challenge was unsettling — to both of us. And so I decided to look into what Jody had unexpectedly encountered. Martine got me off to a good start. She recommended, *Literary Theory: an Introduction*, by Terry Eagleton, a book she had read about in the *New York Times Book Review*. It provided an overview and supplied authors’ names and titles. From there, I systematically read Saussure, Kristeva, Foucault, Derrida, Barthes, Lacan — and writers who wrote about them. They certainly used a highly specialized language. And their discursive practice made their ideas anything but easily accessible. But I had grown accustomed to that kind of writing as a grad student in philosophy. I soon learned enough to make a set of notes for one of Jody’s friends who had stayed in the class. Meanwhile, we discussed what I was reading, although Jody still had to give most of her attention to her course work and teaching.

“At the time, I didn’t realize how important these ideas were to the larger project of radically changing the world.”

I did recognize that we could more effectively work for change, if we kept in mind Michel Foucault’s point that pressures and convention, social circles, institutions of all kinds, work to enlist people in the service of the status quo — whether people would so choose or not — in thousands of small theaters of power.

The Bridgekeeper kept a tight rein on her facial muscles. She didn’t want to talk with him about her dream. Not yet. Not before she finished retrieving it and had heard him out. Absorbed in his narrative, he continued.

I felt that the various Liberation Movements of the '60s and '70s had to some extent engaged with this kind of social control — even though I'd never heard anyone mention Foucault. Those of us who wanted to end the war in Vietnam, for instance, found ourselves struggling within our families, sometimes with friends, as well as with institutions such as the draft board. But I also felt that my experience of those years had disproven any suggestion that the individual acted upon by such systems becomes incapable of deliberately resisting or changing them.

Many of the postmodernists I was reading seemed to believe that cultural systems utterly overpower individual initiative. That was the crux of my problem with this school of thought. However, I could appreciate the observation that all of history, literature, philosophy, even science consisted of discourses composed of signifiers that got their meaning from other signifiers — none of which had any necessary connection to the Referent. But could not go along with the conclusion that such sign system narratives could provide no means for articulating an ethics, morality, or even political criticism. That there was no way out of this mess.

Jody and I felt this problem all the more forcefully through our deepening friendship with Martine. Having lost people she loved in the Holocaust, Martine remained inescapably mindful of the need to take a moral stand. Her personal presence gave an emotional charge to our own convictions. So we moved cautiously with our sense that understanding such cultural systems as language and microtheatres of power could prove useful. But touches of these ideas found their way into *Now or Never* —

“Now or Never. That was the title?”

“Yes. Wait a second.” Rummaging through his satchel again, he pulled out a dark blue book, its title in red letters shadowed with yellow.

“Like Superman’s shirt,” the Bridgekeeper observed.

“Uhhh... actually that didn’t occur to me until after it was published. My friend Father Michael called my attention to it. What I had in mind was a simple and clear message — the primary colors. But, back to the content...”

While writing *Now or Never*, I was influenced by Terry Eagleton’s effort to reconcile post-modernism with Marxism. Jody and I disagreed profoundly with the basic Marxist principles that only Self-interest could ever motivate people; and that the relations between rich and poor could only be antagonistic; and that only force could produce change. We agreed, however with Marxists that everything anyone said or wrote — even in science — expressed an ideological position, whether consciously or not. A position that reproduced

and defended a particular set of concrete relations. Socio-economic relations, Marxism said. Gender hierarchy, feminism said. The Self-as-Separate Ego syndrome, we said — elaborated as classism, racism, sexism and so forth. But we did recognize the concept of ideology as key.

Years later, in one of Jody's graduate seminars, the discussion turned to whether or not ideology actually worked — that is, whether it 'fooled' the lower classes and kept them from rebelling. One of the students said that he himself came from a wealthy family. And his experience had convinced him that ideology worked by 'fooling' the children of the wealthy. It prevented them from acting on their natural inclination toward compassion."

"Brilliant."

"Yes. Especially since the privileged have so important a role to play in creating the changes we need. By the time Jody was in that seminar, however, we had already moved beyond thinking in terms of ideology. Donna Haraway had given us the term 'narrative field.' She also briefly described how new narratives can affect that field. This led us to a more encompassing cultural analysis of our world, its problems, its politics and conflicts."

"Hmmm... But you were talking about 'Now or Never'"

She passed him back the book.

That summer, Jody had finished her Masters' degree and could give her undivided attention to the manuscript. Evenings after work and weekends, we edited the book. Ordering pizza so we wouldn't have to stop and cook. Drinking caffeine to squeeze a few more quality minutes out of the day.

Writing and editing *Now or Never* took about a year. When it was finished, Mike Green, the owner of Pace Publications where I was working, gave me a break with the printing of it. Carol, my co-worker, sacrificed her coffee breaks to put it into book format. She cried when she came to the part that said garbage collectors should get heroic pay. Her father had done that work all his life.

In the end, we were able to afford five hundred books, including their mailing. We again sent them to people we thought potentially willing and able to reach larger groups.

Long Walk Abridged

“‘Gotta’ walk that talk,’ someone had told me. So after publishing Now or Never, I undertook another Walk. As before, I carried a letter to give people about why I was walking. This one worded so that it could serve as the Call for the Convention.”

“With you as presidential candidate?”

“No, not in the letter. Nor in how I responded to people with whom I spoke. Out on the road, I expressed the purpose of the Walk as a call for profound change. If people stopped and talked longer, asked about how — then I didn’t hesitate to talk about calling for a Constitutional Convention. I explained that a presidential candidate could carry the call for the Convention as their singular platform. After being elected, request from the State Legislatures to fulfil the Will of the People and submit their petitions — that same petition which the Candidate represented.

“But it just didn’t feel right to offer myself first. My thinking was that if the idea to use the Constitution to make change got traction, it wouldn’t be that there was no one willing to stand behind it. I was clear about that. I would run as the candidate to call for it — if no one else would. But I wanted people to focus on the message. We have it in our power to create a world of loving and caring for one another. No more war. Responsibility for the environment. My reasons for setting out. It was a pilgrimage. A prayer. We were already in need of profound change.”

This time, I would go all the way. From Milwaukee to Minneapolis to Seattle, down the west coast to San Diego, then across the south to Florida, up the east coast to New York and finally back home again. Jody’s job as a lecturer at the university would afford me more generous support than last time. Martine would shelter her again.

I left on May 8, 1986 —

“But telling you about another Walk. And a long one. Too many stunning encounters with Nature. Too many stories of people’s goodness.”

“That’s a problem?” Her eyes twinkled.

“How much of your time it would take is,” he smiled back. And then jumped out of his chair. Face ignited. “I know,” he said with both hands and words, “How about if I make it into a kind of poetry? Just touch on a few special moments. And sort of dance it, for you, too. Distilled. Condensed.”

“Sure,” she said, “go for it.”
After a still moment. ...

“Okay. So what follows is drawn from the tiny journal I kept,” the Dreamer said. “Every week or two, when coming upon a copying machine, I’d xerox its new pages and send them to Jody. Here goes —

Onto the line,
 into the traffic
 a pilgrimage
 for a New World

With one hand as if pulling his wagon and the other slowly swinging freely at his side, he looked right and left.

the child who said
 you must be real
 since I saw you

on TV

He mimed receiving a gift.

the army colonel
 on his way to work
 at North Dakota nuclear missile silos
 who heard my message
 including unilateral disarmament
 gave me a few dollars
 apologized for having so little on him
 drove off and then came back
 gave me his paper-bag lunch

Holding his hand as if shading his eyes from the sun.

the six “Bike for Peace” participants
pedaling cross continent

Then dropped to one knee. Held his head in both hands.

the Blackfoot oasis where,
sun-sick
I found a loving welcome
cold soda,
air conditioning
and hours of Starsketches to do

He rose and used hands to mime.

the sparrow I held in my hands
the butterfly that landed on my lips

He looked up. Made his arms wings. Caught the breeze under them.

the falcon
that hovered just 15 feet over my head
looking me in the eye
for an eternity of seconds

Then he bowed his head.

Olympus where George
showed me the tree we had sung to
all those years ago
now grown strong

He turned and turned again. Waved, smiled.

the same bicyclists again and again
all autumn

down the coastal highway
 sharing meals, campfires, thoughts, hopes

*Now his arms moved flowingly, left to right, right to left,
 as his feet danced sideways across the room.*

paint the sea yellow
 the high high above sky soft blue
 but around the sun it must be green
 the inner ring fuchsia
 off to the horizon mauve turning purple
 left and right grey out at infinity
 a mist reaches down sand shades
 to places that are silver
 like a mirror

*The Bridgekeeper looked a bit surprised, nodded.
 She understood what he was trying to say.*

the elk grazing at my campsite
 Golden Gate Bridge
 and again, Roberta,
 always there
 ready to help others
 this time gathering people together

Danced his fingers like falling droplets.

rain-soaked days
 Santa Barbara mechanics
 welding wagon back together

Wrapping his arms around an invisible someone. Made three turns.

the week of Thanksgiving
 with Jody visiting
 in Huntington Beach

His arms re-opening, his hands seemed to be giving and receiving.

the people I met
 who were benefiting abundantly
 from the present system
 but listened seriously
 to my call for profound change

Bending his body slightly at the waist, both hands behind him — pulling his wagon, he took three steps toward the doorway to the kitchen.

the Apache people
 who gave me a name in their language
 “Ing-dee-ay”
 it means,
 “Keeps Walking”

He returned, bent more deeply at the waist, arms and body shaking.

the ice on my beard and mustache
 mountain January
 in the Land of Enchantment

Then stood with arms bent and palms facing upward.

the postal worker who asked
 how did you know
 this package would be here?
 the answer:
 Jody

Suddenly, he dropped to all fours.

the three hours on my knees
 in the gravel on the side of a Texas road
 talking through the window of a custom-made luxury car
 with a man diamond flashing
 who assured me
 he tells the politicians what to do
 and that there is no such thing as morality

Someone seemed to be helping him back to his feet.

the Black Louisianans
 who blessed my arrival
 with gumbo, music and dancing
 and as many Starsketches as I could do
 at their nightclub in the woods

Now he mimed walking a bicycle.

the three European bicyclists
 on the road for 17 months when I met them
 in Mississippi
 trekking from Argentina to Canada
 to bear witness
 to Third World hunger and poverty

Placing both hands in front of his face — he looked through his fingers.

the two former “hippies”
 now Gulf Coast resort proprietors
 who said how they wished
 they could still believe in saving the world

He pressed his hands to his heart.

the week with Jody
at a Tallahassee motel
reading her manuscript

He bowed his head, folded hands together in a gesture of thanks.

the Augusta man who said
Just write to me
I'm ready to do
whatever needs to be done

the woman who said
I can write letters
I'm really good at that

He imitated sitting in a chair with an open hand behind his ear.

the five men on their well-worn wooden chairs
at a Carolina gas station who said
We hear you
We hear

Got down on one knee, hand shading his eyes.

the Korean war vet who said
It's a no-good economic system
if we have to kill people
to keep it going

Switched knees, nodding negative, turning affirmative.

the man who told me
I would not be able to do any good
then said

Don't get me wrong.
I'm with you all the way

Then on both knees —

the Black family in Virginia
who offered me a ride and said
they'd pray for me

He slowly got back onto his feet. Resumed pulling his wagon.

The Staten Island chorus:
"Somebody's got to do it."
"Peace."
"Good luck, pal."

He balanced himself on one foot.

the two factory workers on vacation
in the Pennsylvania mountains
who said
We'll do anything you need.

He fell into a heap on the floor.

the heat that three times
brought me face to face with my mortality

*He spoke as if out of breath.
sat down on the floor*

the great oak tree that appeared
just when I could go no further in the sun
and the hand that touched me

just after I'd staggered into its shade
 a hand holding a large tumbler of ice-water

*Both hands on an imaginary vessel, he drank.
 Got back up on his feet.*

the farmers who let me address their meeting
 the TV and newspaper reporters
 the pastors who
 let me speak to their flocks
 the ministers who sheltered me
 over and over

*He kept one hand pulling the wagon,
 the other, looking all around.*

the more homeless people than ever before
 the farmers losing family farms
 the truckers going broke
 the grocery store workers choosing pay cuts
 over store closures

Then he spun around with arms out-stretched.

the white panel truck
 with only the word MAGIC
 painted large in black across the side
 zooming out of the west
 just after I'd read your letters
 and I was crying a little.

The Dreamer dropped to the couch. Enough dancing for this time of morning.

*The Bridgekeeper applauded.
 "As I got closer to home..."*

Martine offered to host a reception for my return. I appreciated this sign of how seriously she took my efforts. But it seemed to me that if this way of calling for a Constitutional Convention were going to work, much more would already have happened. The *I-Ching* counseled a “quiet return.”

So I thanked Martine, but declined her kind offer.

On July 30, 1987, Jody came alone to meet me at Watertower Park. Together, we walked the last six blocks to Martine’s house. When we came in sight, Martine set out with her black Labrador to meet us. Joyous. Stephanie, camera in hand, waited in the front yard. As did Joan, who had worked for Martine since Stephanie was a baby. They greeted me with hugs. A strip of crepe paper hung across the driveway. The finish line. After breaking it, I turned and just said to everyone — now including neighbor children caught up in the excitement — the purpose of the Walk.

‘We can create a new world.’

I’ll never forget the grave attention in Martine’s face as she listened.

I was home. I had completed the journey. Made it back alive. But I couldn’t help but wonder, why? Since what I’d hoped to see happening — wasn’t.

The Bridge

He gazed into the retreating fire. Resting. A little worn out. Just a little more to tell.

“That used up quite a bit of energy,” the Bridgekeeper observed. “How about something to eat? Something light. Fruit maybe?”

Her guest’s eyes lighted. “Thank you. Fruit sounds perfect.”

“If you’ll get down some small bowls,” she asked, as she opened the refrigerator door.

He noticed the clock. Almost three.

As they washed strawberries, peeled and cut up kiwi fruit and a mango, the Bridgekeeper revisited the last bit of her dream.

This time, she was in the cabin of a plane. A man resembling her guest looked up from his work and out the window. She followed his thoughts. He could see a riverbed scrawled in the Southwestern landscape thirty-five thousand feet below. It appeared a long sprawling root, a crack in the sidewalk, a line one could easily step across. Down there, he knew, it was an immense gorge. His eyes drifted. Purpose commanded every cubic inch of the cabin. Lines met lines by design. Back on the desert floor, brush and rocks fused with sands and hills in patches and blends of colors that no one could calculate. Wispy clouds first dabbed at the vision, then completely covered it over.

The blinking cursor on his laptop brought him back. He texted a quick reply.

“On time. ETA 3 hrs.”

The transition was happening much more rapidly than people had imagined, accelerated by the enthusiastic cooperation of the world’s wealthiest and most powerful families. Until recently, almost everyone — including they themselves — had believed it quite impossible that anyone would ever willingly set aside privilege. It had seemed equally out of the question that people all over the world would be able to forgive each other. Forgive even the unforgivable. With individuals everywhere following one another’s example, Humanity was moving energetically to a new World. One of Equality, Freedom, Love and Peace.

He opened the folder, “Update: Climate Change Reversal.” Selected the files, “Voluntary Family-Size Limitation” and “Global Economic Democracy.”

The Bridgekeeper blinked, returned to the kitchen. Their colorful snack was ready.

“Your last wagon ribbons,” she said.

He smiled. They sat quietly at the table while they savored the fruit.

“I think we’d be more comfortable in the hearth room,” she observed when they’d finished. “And we should have something to drink, too. What would you like?”

“Just water, please.”

“So what happened after that last walk?” she asked as they left the kitchen.

First, I found employment again in the printing industry. Then, I waited for some response to *Now or Never*. Day after day. Week after week. As time passed, it looked more like never. Not quite two years later, Jody and I would move to Madison.

At the wood box, he gathered a handful of shavings and kindling. Scattering bits and pieces along the tops of the logs. Tried not to put out the remaining flames in his attempt to revive them.

One, two edges of shavings sprang to life. The room brightened.

After finishing her Masters degree in French, Jody continued teaching in the French Department at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. She loved it. With only a Master’s degree, however, she was restricted to part-time lectureships, on a semester to semester, if-needed basis. To obtain a permanent faculty position required a Ph.D.

Since Jody’s interest in the utopians made History a better fit for her than French Literature, Martine spoke with a colleague she knew in the history department at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Jody was soon admitted to Modern France specialist, Professor Ed Gargan’s graduate seminar. The first year, she kept her job in Milwaukee and commuted part-time to Madison.

In May of 1989, we moved to the lower floor of a little Cape Cod house in a quiet Madison neighborhood. The outside hadn’t been painted in years. But the lawn was abloom with violets. Sparrows, doves, cardinals, hawks, chipmunks, squirrels, rabbits as well as many migrating birds — all loved the wildness of the backyard. On the windowed back porch, we often sat within inches of them. My new job as a press operator would be our sole source of income. Jody would be busy, extremely busy, with her studies.

The fire, no longer uncertain of itself, enlivened the room. The Bridgekeeper and her guest felt renewed energy and focus.

Evenings and weekends, I did Starcharts, sketches and explanatory audio tapes for people — gifts that I packaged in long triangular black boxes. There were also some studies.

A chance meeting with a mathematics teacher and conversations with a visiting physics grad student introduced me to Complexity Theory. A Field of Study developed to make sense of highly complex systems such as the weather or the anomalies that occur during extensive reiterations of mathematical formulae. Their understandings seemed equally applicable to the reiteration of sign system phenomena such as narratives.

Meanwhile, Jody regularly shared insights with me that she encountered both in the volumes she was reading, as well as in her seminar discussions. We treasured understandings that contributed to our all-important end. There must be some way out of this mess that we Humans had made of our World, some way to Save the Planet. What could we learn that could help us? How does change happen?

Jody specialized in European History, with France as her major field. At the suggestion of Professor Gargan, she also enrolled in Professor Suzanne Desan's *History and Theory* seminar. There, students from several areas of specialization read and discussed changing views of how historians work. Among evolving trends, History had begun borrowing terms and concepts from other academic disciplines. Cultural anthropology, for example, contributed the idea that any given individual could be more or less "embedded" in a culture. Believe the beliefs; practice the practices; feel the feelings, and so forth. Or more or less "disembedded." Jody and I quickly adopted these two terms.

Brilliant flashes regularly came from Jody's PhD advisor. Ed Gargan was a cultural, intellectual and social historian, with a well-established scholarly reputation. Now he was near retirement and seemed convinced that, more than anything else, the discipline of history needed new approaches. Hearsay dubbed Ed the youngest mind in the department — jokingly, since he was actually the eldest. A creative thinker, he had a way of posing questions at oblique angles to the line of reasoning. Questions sometimes too unexpected for seminar students to answer, but that yielded valuable insights over time. He also had a repertoire of predictable, signature questions: "What was this person's Universe like?" "What did they dream?" And above all, "Why does this matter?"

Noticing that the Bridgekeeper's mind seemed for a second to have gone elsewhere, he stopped.

"Oh, please continue," she said as she making eye contact with him.

Jody entered the field of history at a moment when historians were grappling with the implications of postmodernism for their work. Many were now questioning the tradition of writing history as a third person narrative. Even reconsidering the relationship between the actual past and any kind of historical evidence. But when the strictest postmodernist

proposed that the power of sign systems was so determining that individual Human Beings could not act deliberately to affect history — some historians found the notion so unacceptable that they rejected postmodernism in its entirety.

Jody and I thought it quite possible that cultural systems could shape our thoughts, feelings, even perceptions — *and* that Human Beings could still act intentionally as agents. Perhaps there was more potential for change in such systems as they actually functioned than in abstract theory. Hidden exits in the microtheatres. Weak links in the chains. Cracks in the enclosure.

On Saturday and Sunday nights when we took time to enjoy rock n' roll, Patti Smith demonstrated how the first instant of a song could kick an opening in sign system walls. Rickie Lee Jones showed us play in the system. Such musicians made clear that art could subvert, undermine, alter. Create moments opening to the Referent.

“Something’s puzzling me,” the Bridgekeeper interjected. “I had a dream last night about the piece you’re missing. Or at least that’s what I thought. Oddly, the dream seemed intended to teach postmodernism. But it seems you already know about that.”

“A dream about postmodernism?”

“Yes. Mostly in simplistic almost comic episodes. More like children’s theatre than academia.” Her soft laugh faded into thought.

“Maybe the dream meant that everyone needs to be able to understand it,” he said after a few minutes thought. “And until everyone does, it’s the missing piece.”

“What makes you think an obtuse school of thought like postmodernism could be all that important?”

“Well, not all of it, of course. But certain Postmodernist insights suggest a way for us to approach our most pressing problems. I mean, what we need is to get in touch with Nature, our Planet, our own physical being, One Another. Harmonize with Life as a whole. Do you remember Paula from the second Walk?”

“Certainly. The anthropologist in the desert.”

“Yes. Paula was certain that if we could just tap into the information inherent in our cells, in the evolution that makes us up, we could find our place in the larger picture. Postmodernism provides tools that could help us with that. Beginning with the recognition that there’s no necessary connection between our sign systems and the Referent. We make that connection. And so we need to be careful — as we could get it wrong”

“A point that one part of my dream particularly emphasized,” the Bridgekeeper noted, “But observing that Humans need to make the connection with the Referent, aren’t you just restating the problem?”

“No,” the Dreamer answered, “I think Postmodernism is contributing something significantly more. Not only waking us to the fact that the Stories we’re telling Ourselves are not necessarily anchored in Reality; but also by showing us how sign systems work. Language structures are fraught with underlying meanings, assumptions, beliefs. And that affects how we think. Even perceive. Small steps, true; yet they bring us closer to breaking free of the chains that are holding us back from responding to our Times. And that matters because —”

The fire interrupted, crackling loudly and showering the hearthstone with sparks.

“Because, if we’re going to save our Country, if we’re going to pass a sustainable World, a Loving World to the Children — everyone needs to be free to be able to do whatever they can, in whatever way they choose, toward that goal. It’s the only way we’ll ever create the Earth our Hearts desire and Heaven promises still can be.”

Looking into the fire, the Bridgekeeper momentarily seemed far away. Then she turned to meet his eyes. Smiled.

“Is there anything else to tell about how you got to my door?” she asked.

“Outside what I have no words for.”

“Gather your things then, it’s time to go.”