



Nature & Animals

Essays composed between 1983 and 2002

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ABOUT THE COVER

I chose this photo, taken when the temp was -35°F, by Tom Murphy, in Yellowstone, as a reminder of long ago, when I lived in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, from 1983 through 2002, most of that time in a 20-foot diameter yurt, close to wild Nature. One of the essays in this collection involves a male buffalo that looked me in the eye from six feet away, only the thin skin of the yurt separating us. The experience, as you can imagine, was transcendent, primordial.

These essays were all composed during those years.



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PARANORMAL

Essays that feature unusual or magical encounters with animals, all but the first one, wild. In order, these are: cats (*They Transmit Information through the Eyes*) a chipmunk, a deer, a coyote, a gaggle of geese, a moose, a snake, a hummingbird, a yellow finch (*A Conspiracy of Animals*); dolphin (*Again, As I Step Upon the Wall*), and bison (*The Bull's Eye*).

The next two sections I group according to the four elements.

FIRE and WATER

These essays all involve relationships among humans with wild nature as powerful, interactive backdrop. These include: *The Phoenix Fires of Yellowstone*, *To Be One with the river*, *A Whale of a Story*, and *THE SEA: A Metaphysical Metaphor*.

EARTH and AIR

These essays, on the other hand, concern first, my relationship to both my own body and the earth upon which I reside (*Centering and Grounding*), (*From "Security Systems" to Real Security*) and second, one long dreamlike paragraph glancing over the entire panoply of human life inside the natural world (*Life on Earth*). With the element of AIR, I introduce what besets us now, that which is turning life on earth more and more problematic, namely our relationship with technology.

CONTENTS

Grouped in three sections.

Paranormal

These four essays feature unusual or magical encounters with animals, all but the first one, wild. These are, in order: cats (*They Transmit Information through the Eyes*); a chipmunk, a deer, a coyote, a gaggle of geese, a moose, a snake, a hummingbird, a yellow finch (*A Conspiracy of Animals*); dolphin (*Again, As I Step Upon the Wall*); and bison (*The Bull's Eye*).

The other two sections I group according to the four elements.

Fire & Water

These four essays all involve relationships among humans within the natural world as powerful backdrop. These include: *The Phoenix Fires of Yellowstone*, *To Be One with the river*, *A Whale of a Story*, and *THE SEA: A Metaphysical Metaphor*.

Earth & Air

These final four essays, on the other hand, concern first, my relationship to both my own body and the Earth upon which I reside (*Centering and Grounding, From "Security Systems" to Real Security*) and second, one long dreamlike paragraph glancing over the entire panoply of human life inside the natural world (*Life on Earth*). With the element of Air, I introduce what besets us now, that which is turning Life on Earth more and more problematic, namely our relationship with technology (*On the Nature of Nature*).

Essay

“THEY TRANSMIT INFORMATION THROUGH THE EYES”

Crone Chronicles #44, Autumn Equinox 2000

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Back in 1966, when I was a first year graduate student in philosophy, I took a course in something called “Formal Logic.”

I was 23 years old, a “good girl,” outwardly following the rules of society. Inwardly, however, I was beginning to hold the system at arm’s length. The rules of logic bored me. They felt arbitrary and suffocating. Not that I was aware of this feeling. The “proof” of it came during class one day when all of a sudden I could no longer sit silently, squirming. I raised my hand.

“Yes?”

“What’s wrong with contradiction?”

(The rules of logic entail one long continuous avoidance of contradiction.)

The teacher’s mouth fell open, and he just stood there staring at me. Time slowed down. I watched his face turn beet red. Finally, he sputtered, fuming: “From a contradiction, anything follows, ANYTHING!”

Contrast this “logical” approach to thinking with a remark attributed to the great physicist Niels Bohr: “The opposite of one great truth is another great truth.” Bohr implies that by embracing contradiction (paradox), integrating apparent opposites within ourselves, we actualize innate evolutionary capacities. The philosopher Nietzsche reminds us: *to learn is to change*.

But such integration is not easy. It usually requires lengthy incubation. Many long stories are born this way. Here’s one of my own.

Once when my cat Lukas, as a tiny kitten, was sitting on my lap, he turned his little face to mine and stared into my eyes. Lukas often looked right at me, so that was not unusual. But this time was different. This time the hair on the back of my neck stood on end. Instead of a tiny kitten, I sensed the uncanny presence of some vast being beaming into the center of my soul.

The experience lasted less than a minute, but my disorientation was so powerful that afterwards it was as if I had returned from a journey of a hundred years.

The next day I told a friend who likes cats about my strange experience with Lukas. In a voice more sure of itself than my personality wanted to allow, I told her: “I now understand what ‘temple cats’ are for. *They transmit information through the eyes.*”

That evening I told my husband about it. But by that time the experience was already 24 hours old and my ordinary self was trying to deal with what had happened without it affecting me. I was both busily building a mental box to secure the experience within and trying to deny that it meant anything. So by the time I told Jeff I was hesitant, even embarrassed. Like what’s wrong with me? Am I crazy? Deluded? Making something out of nothing?

I would have stowed that experience in its little box forever had not Lukas and I had the same experience six months later. This time the trance lasted for perhaps ten minutes. Again, I had the same impression, that a vast being was transmitting information through the eyes of my cat. I sensed it as possibly the oversoul of the feline species.

The very next day after this experience, I was contacted by a woman who wanted to attend the Rocky Mountain UFO Conference, an annual event, held in Laramie, Wyoming. The conference would be that coming weekend. Instantly, I decided to accompany her.

Two days later she picked me up in her car and we talked all the way down to Laramie. Joan was a new friend, so of course, the seven-hour journey was filled with stories from our lives. At one point I told her about the uncanny experiences with Lukas, and in response, she told me about numinous dreams of walking with big cats, lions. That reminded me to tell her the story of my extraordinary encounter with the lion-headed goddess Sekhmet, in a small temple in Luxor, Egypt.

Looking back on the experience of that weekend, it was as if we flew to Laramie on a magic carpet, so that by the time we landed, we were already in an altered state, ready for anything. From contradiction, *anything follows*, **anything**.

Joan, a Ph.D. botanist, had been interested in crop circles, and had investigated one near her home in Helena, Montana, which turned out to be a hoax. This did not inhibit her interest. Indeed the element of intrigue and deception gave the subject a fascinating new twist.

As a small child in Idaho, I had heard about UFOs from the father of my first boy friend. He had had a number of sightings, and was sure they were real. Since this man was the soul of sobriety and integrity, I had no reason not to believe him.

Meanwhile, I had had an experience of my own while driving on an isolated Idaho road at night, of a soundless, erratically moving light. Another time, on the same road at night, I watched a soundless bright light travel parallel to me, at the same speed, for many miles, until I approached a small town, when it blinked out.

On neither occasion did I have any experience of “missing time,” nor a sense of unremembered trauma. So my UFO experiences were limited and had not made a great impression on me.

I was in Laramie, I thought, to see who the attendees of such gatherings were. I wanted to sense the UFO community, especially since I had just received from Carol Rosin the audiotape with her astonishing interview of Steven Greer. Dr. Greer, an MD, wrote the book *Extraterrestrial Contact*, is the founder and head of CSETI, and, I discovered in Laramie, had been a presenter at the same conference two years ago.

I wondered who these people were. Were they a bunch of kooks like our media and government want them to appear? I had been recently reading a book by David Icke, one of those folks who talks about an “interior government” which runs the world. Icke goes further than most conspiracy theorists, in that he says that this secret cabal is heavily influenced by, even composed of, shapeshifting reptilian extraterrestrials!

Despite the outlandish assumption at the heart of his book, I had found myself unusually fascinated, so going to a UFO conference seemed the obvious next step.

A part of me was hoping the people at the UFO conference *would* be kooks, because then I could dismiss what I had been reading and get out of being called a kook myself.

This particular gathering was founded 21 years ago by Dr. Leo Sprinkle, a Ph.D. psychologist who had been teaching at the University of Wyoming until he retired a few years ago. This UFO gathering, unlike others, was formed specifically for the “experiencers” themselves, those who claim to have had personal contact with ETs and/or UFOs. It was conceived as a safe place for them to tell their stories — with no one taking notes, or videotaping, or asking questions. The idea was that by sharing stories of contact, experiencers would both discover they are not alone and begin to heal from any trauma as a result of contact.

Over the years, lectures and workshops have been added to the conference. One of the presenters this year was a 36-year-old woman, Anna Hayes, who, she says, has been in training with various types of ETs for 28 years. Prior to this weekend, had anyone told me about Anna, and mentioned that her credential — and therefore the source of her credibility — was ET training, I would have told them she must be a kook! Or, she’s here

to bilk people of money! — from her books and tapes which were vividly presented on one of the vendor tables.

That was before I heard her speak. And before I heard what she has to say, a tale so vast and complex, and for me, so compelling, that the minute she opened her mouth I was transfixed. The impression I got was that of a firehose, spewing information at such a rate that I'm sure no one there — including the scientists — could keep up with her.

Anna spoke of many types of ETs who are currently and have always been interacting with Earth and her inhabitants.

She said that there's not just one type of human, but many types; that; all humans are ET hybrids of one sort or another from ancient times. (Those familiar with the work of Zecharia Sitchin, Barbara Hand Clow, or Barbara Marciniak will recognize this idea.) She said that the original human template included a 12-strand DNA. That it is our birthright and our heritage and our future potential to connect up all 12 strands. *That each DNA strand represents both a specific frequency and a dimension of consciousness.*

Speaking articulately, precisely, and with enormous force and speed, Anna presented technical details of what she calls multidimensional physics, the actual bio-mechanics of creation of the various dimensions.

Immediately after her first talk, I went to her table and bought everything she had to sell. Both Joan and I attended her second lecture and bought tickets to both her workshops.

After listening to her that first time, I felt like the top of my head had been blown off. Like I had been thrown into a kaleidoscope, and whirled into an infinity of universes.

As I write this, I realize that this sort of experience had happened to me once before, 29 years ago (one full Saturn cycle!); that time, it wasn't the top but the bottom of my mind which blew. That time I became transfixed by the books of a philosopher, Ludwig

Wittgenstein. Not because of his philosophy, but because in reading him, I was astonished to discover that mental ideas revealed/betrayed emotional realities. That who Wittgenstein was as a man set the tone for what he *could* say as a philosopher. This discovery propelled me into dismantling the detached, so-called “objective” world-view I had inherited from my forefathers by diving down into my own unconscious emotional life. — Or I thought I had dismantled it. Obviously, parts of it remained, or I would not have prejudged ET experiencers as kooks.

Since that experience with Wittgenstein, I had become my own philosopher, determined to learn purely from my own (emotional) experience. I have rarely attended workshops and refuse to read How-To books of any kind.

So here I was, in June 2000, one Saturn cycle later, once again transfixed, this time by Anna Hayes, her whole new way of seeing the world. A way that, as with Wittgenstein, I did not fully understand, but knew, on some level, that it was true, for me. That I had no choice but to follow where this fascination would lead.

At all of Anna’s presentations I sat straight up, spine erect and tingling. It was as if I was absorbing what she said through the cells of my skin and bones.

At one of the question and answer sessions, Joan stood up and asked Anna about one of the ET races she had mentioned, called the “Leonines.” Anna opened her mouth, the firehose spewed, and this is what came out, in her usual precise, clipped delivery: “They are very high beings, of the 10th and 11th dimensions. That’s what ‘temple cats’ in Egypt were about. The Leonines contact us through cats and *transmit information through the eyes.*” The italics are mine. I heard her say that phrase in italics. It was meant for me. There was that very same phrase I had used to describe the trance state I had twice experienced with my own cat.

Later, when I got home, I got to wondering: was I impulsed by the being which spoke through my cat to go to the conference in Laramie? I had had the second experience with Lukas the day before I decided to go, a decision that was made with no thought. It seemed obvious. I had to go. Why?

Now I *knew*. I did not go for sociological reasons, to find out who *those* people were. That was a cover. I was one of those people. I am one of those people. I have a domestic ET living in my house! I feed him cat food and he feeds me information through his eyes! What kind of information, and how it will change me and find expression through me is at present unknown except yes, this story is true. This is the first story of this new life that I now have entered in the year 2000.

Essay

A CONSPIRACY OF ANIMALS

Crone Chronicles #14, Spring Equinox 1993

Sagewoman #38, Summer 1997

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The morning dawns fresh and clear. Above, hundreds of birds call forth the sun and the Tetons shimmer in rosy light. Below, the valley floats in beauty, a flawless green jewel, a paradise.

Inside my yurt, I wake up tense, tight, in no mood to appreciate paradise. Moving like a robot, I prepare my usual breakfast. Sit down to my usual hour of reading.

No use. Body squirms. Eyes glance off the page. Psyche diffuses into the void.

Outside, the birds keep singing. They mock my mood. I don't want to hear them.

Push on to the next item on the agenda, my daily five mile walk.

I am anxious to get to the river. Want to release this pent-up anger and frustration into its forgiving flow. I have no idea why I am so angry; I just know there is a huge internal energy which threatens to explode.

I reach the river. I see a fisherman in waders casting his line. He is in the water only a few feet from the ledge where I always sit. I seethe; my anger focuses on him.

I turn back, to find another, less comfortable ledge out of sight of the fisherman, and sit down.

And that's when it began, the conspiracy of the animals.

The first incident was tiny, hardly worth noticing, a chipmunk peeking out from beneath a bush. He ran out to within a few feet of me, chattering. As if to get my attention.

I try to concentrate on the river and ignore him, but he won't let me. He runs back and forth chattering incessantly until I finally acknowledge his presence, and then, reluctantly, grin at his frenetic activity. That chipmunk is acting out what is going on inside me!

On the way back, following the usual path on the ledge above the river, I happen to glance down to discover a coyote silhouetted in the river. He is standing still, poised on the brink of swifter waters. I stop to watch, startled to find him here, this close. I sense his awareness of me. After a minute or so he plunges in, head bobbing, swimming across the current to the other side.

Without thinking, I sit down in the sage and watch him wander along the bank until he fades into the willows.

By the time I stand up again something has changed. I am no longer treating my walk like a forced march.

I start walking again, following the trail. A few moments later I find myself veering off the trail to the right. Responding to an inner nudging, like the coyote I am plunging into the flow of things. I descend from the ledge to the bottomlands.

I am wandering like the animals. But I am still self-absorbed, hardly aware of my surroundings. The early morning tension has shifted into melancholy. I am feeling sorry for myself, alone and abandoned.

Coming to the river's edge I sit down again, this time under a big tree. I want to give my sadness to the river, to become one with the river, to let myself go.

Closing my eyes, I concentrate on the river's deep hum, its laughing hiss.

After a few minutes I open my eyes and am startled to notice a huge flock of geese on the other side of the river, camped on a sandbank. Some are sitting, some sleeping; one is standing watch. They are only twenty feet away! I sense their awareness of me. None of them stirs when I finally stand up and they can see me.

I wander on, startled both by the closeness of the unruffled geese and by my self-absorption, how it blinded me to their presence. I am not alone.

I walk a few minutes more and my eyes suddenly glance to the left. I find myself looking into the gentle eyes of a doe, huge ears alert, nostrils twitching. I almost cry out with amazement. She too, seems unconcerned, and begins to chew on a bush as the path takes me within a few feet of her.

The presence of the deer feels like a benediction.

I am moving now in an expanded state of awareness. The feeling is paradoxical. I am aware of myself moving, feeling each footfall connect surely with the ground. At the same time I am aware of all that surrounds me as a part of myself. The deer and I met, briefly, shared one world. And what is remarkable, what I've always noticed about such encounters is that they are in place prior to my becoming aware of them. "Something in me" directed my eyes to look up, exactly into the doe's eyes. Her gentleness has seeped into me. So has her matter-of-factness. She and the geese are both "doing their thing". She chews; they rest. Both species belong. Do I?

Recalling the sheer number of animal encounters on this one walk, I feel exultant, flushed with the magic of the day. I am almost delirious, impervious to harm, oblivious to the differences between me and not-me. I wander carelessly among the willows along the river's edge.

Suddenly my body freezes. I find myself eyeball to eyeball with the most magnificent moose I have ever seen, ten feet away. His antlers, still in velvet, are each as wide as the stretch between my hands!

Shocked and trembling, my former grand self cowers with fear. I turn off to the left and begin to walk rapidly away, looking back over my shoulder. He steps forward slowly, as if to sniff me better, as if to get to know me. There is no animosity in this animal. I am certain of this. And with today's magic I could probably go up and pet that huge black muzzle. But I don't dare. My conditioning overwhelms my nature.

That was the last encounter with an animal on my morning's walk. The experience left me at peace with the world and in touch with my appropriate place within it. The animals had helped me bridge the gap between inside and outside. For this one day, at least, I was relieved of my human moods.

That afternoon I walked across the little bridge by my yurt and almost stepped on a snake. Had I not been still so attuned, I would have crushed it "accidentally." Another reminder.

The final set of incidents happened while the sun was going down, its rays streaming through the cracks in the Tetons, softening the air to a rosy gold. I was lying on a hammock hung in the cottonwoods near the bridge. Nearby was the hummingbird feeder I had hung up a week prior to this, though others had told me that August was too late, that hummingbirds find their feeding spots in the spring. And up to this day, despite a careful watch, I had not seen a hummingbird around the feeder.

Five minutes after lying down in the hammock, a hummingbird flew to within two feet of my head and hovered there. As if to get my attention — and to say "now follow me!" Then it flew straight to the feeder and hovered, poking its beak into one of the holes to feed.

My delight to see the feeder in use was small compared to my astonishment at the continuing saga of this day. The animals had taken me on an inner evolutionary journey, through my feelings to a larger, mysterious presence. I had moved from anger to melancholy to awareness to self-glorification to the shock of my fear of the moose — and now, twelve hours later, to a simple sense of community with these creatures, our shared world. Matter of fact, no big deal.

I had been both humbled and connected. And yet, the final incident was so wondrous that when it came it was a manifestation of grace. It was as if, in that one moment at sunset, the heavens reached down to caress the earth.

The whole time I was lying there on the hammock I was aware of two brilliant yellow finches flying around, playing with each other in the trees. Suddenly one of them swooped down and landed on the hammock, within inches of my knee. It perched there and looked at me, cocking its head. The connection was galvanic, piercing. I burst into tears.

AGAIN, EXACTLY AS I STEP UPON THE WALL . . .

Crone Chronicles #39, Summer Solstice 1999

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March, 1999. I am in Florida for a week, for talks and workshops and a radio interview on both Crone and “How Astrological Cycles Structure Crone Consciousness.” After 25 years, my understanding of astrology has reached a certain Mastery, which I am glad to share when asked.

Meanwhile, I have another story to share from Florida, an encounter which took the wind out of my sails and plunged me into Mystery . . .

I’ve saved the mornings in St. Petersburg for myself. Dressed in shorts and short-sleeved shirts, I walk for hours on top of the flat stone seawall of Tampa Bay, soaking up the warm sun after the long Wyoming winter. I am utilizing this week to re-source myself, allowing my mind to drift out to sea, down into the wordless realm of the unconscious.

During my walks I also ask for a sign from the universe. Not directly, not fervently, as there is nothing specific I need to know. Besides, I am embarrassed to ask — probably a holdover from not feeling worthy. After all, who am I to ask the universe to rearrange itself? And then, too, there is my inner cynic, who scoffs at anything not rational. So, despite my having asked — and received — such signs many times before, this time my request is unusually muted, even ambivalent.

Morning after morning, I walk the seawall, four feet from the surface of the smooth, glassy, tide-swollen sea. Except for the occasional fisherman, my solitude is complete.

On the fifth morning, as I walk across the grass to the seawall, my awareness has already widened, dropped into reverie — so that what happened next was a jolt beyond imagining . . .

Exactly at the moment I step upon the wall, a dolphin breaches, not six feet away. I am stunned, of course, paralyzed into wild, joyous shock. Swimming in circles, again and again she breaches, breathes noisily, dives. Then she churns powerfully in a line, back and forth along the seawall, fractions of an inch from its barnacle-encrustations, her sleek muscled body knowing the exact relationship of her own boundaries to the razor-sharp shells.

Then, as suddenly as she appeared, she turns and glides off. The entire encounter has taken perhaps two minutes of clock time. Two minutes in which the usual space/time illusion was ripped open to reveal eternity.

I am so stunned by this extraordinary encounter that I spend the rest of the day in a daze.

I have had my sign, obviously. I know this. And I don't want to be greedy, but . . . The next morning, as I set across the grass to the seawall for my walk at a slightly different time I can't but wonder if perhaps I might see her again. Will the universe repeat the miracle? "Oh no, Ann," I berate myself. "Don't be so greedy. You've had your sign. Now let go."

And can you believe? Once again, just as suddenly, and as exactly, exquisitely timed, as I place my left foot upon the wall, the dolphin breaches, breathes noisily, swims in a circle once or twice, churns up and down the wall, and swims back out to sea.

This encounter is shorter, not quite as dramatic. It is as if the first time she was determined to catch my attention, and now she doesn't need to.

The seventh and final morning of my stay in St. Petersburg. Of course as I set out for my walk I am again hoping and praying and berating myself all the while for wanting to see her one more time.

Again, she appears, this time even more subtly, about 20 feet away, only her fin showing. She swims to me, breaches once, circles once, swims up and down the wall, and disappears.

It has been two weeks since my dolphin encounter. I returned to my work feeling safe in the world, wrapped in the arms of the Goddess, haunted by Her presence. Yet something in my understanding is missing, something I was meant to receive. What? I cast about, looking for clues.

The word “dolphin,” I discover from the dictionary, comes from the Greek, “delphinus” (Cf. “Delphi”), which means “womb.” No wonder I feel safe.

But questions remain: Why three times? Why the precise, exquisite timing? Why the seemingly deliberate progression from dramatic to subtle?

I tell this story to Barbara Berger on the phone. Her response fills the space of my questions, takes my breath away: “You,” she responds quietly, “encountered a larger awareness that knows both you and the dolphin.”

Essay

THE BULL'S EYE

Crone Chronicles, Autumn 1998

© Ann Kreilkamp

One morning in early May, this year, I was awakened by a strange sound, one I had never heard before. At the time I identified the sound as a sort of “powerful crunching,” and it was coming from somewhere outside, but near. Very near. Quietly I arose from our platform bed in the white, 20-foot vinyl- and canvas-covered yurt where Jeffrey and I make our nest, and tiptoed to the window nearest the sound. I crouched on the couch and stared: there, in the twilight of predawn was an enormous bull buffalo, grazing, about 15 feet away.

Over the years I have learned to live with deer and even moose outside the yurt, where we live on the edge of the village of Kelly, Wyoming, near Jackson Hole, directly across from the Grand Tetons. And I have always loved the rush of wind, the patter of rain on the roof, coyotes howling, the wings of ravens flying overhead or their raucous caws from nearby trees. I have loved the feeling of living lightly on the land in a tiny yurt, the sensation of placing my bare feet on the uneven bare ground cushioned with sawdust and covered with carpet. I have loved chopping wood, carrying water, hearing the fire hiss and crackle in the wood stove. All of this I have grown used to in the eleven years I have lived in the Kelly yurt community. All this I have actually craved, night after night, coming home from our hi-tech office in Jackson, where my nervous system synchronizes with electronics and my mind zips through space and time, networking with others via email, snail mail, fax and phone.

For each night I can come home, home to the yurt. Home to the wonderfully round and gracious space that contains my energy and grounds me into the mother of us all. It's not always easy, living in this "primitive" fashion, as if we were a part of the "third world" in the middle of corporate America. Schlepping dishes and the "honey-pot" (the portable toilet) into the community bathhouse is a daily chore. So are bringing water and groceries back to the yurt, sometimes through drifted snows, sometimes with a flashlight, on the lookout for stray wild animals. A bear tore a piece out of a neighbor's yurt a few summers ago. Skunks regularly travel through at night. Last winter, there were four moose — two adolescents, and a mother/son pair — who regularly dined on the willows alongside the creek just outside. For those few months, especially during the weeks when the Moon was not visible. I was hesitant to go home at night, not wanting to trip over one of these big, unpredictable, sometimes vicious animals.

So there I was on an early morning a few months ago, staring at a huge bull bison as it lifted its head from the grass and started to walk towards the yurt. Needless to say, I was paralyzed, transfixed, utterly transported by my nearness to the animal, and the thin, relatively fragile walls separating me from his extreme bulk and power. I tiptoed over to the bed, where Jeff was sleeping, aroused him, and whispered the news about the bison. He opened one eye, looked sort of intelligently at me, and then closed it again, dropped back into sleep.

Now I could hear the buffalo grazing along the outside of the yurt. RIGHT NEXT TO THE YURT. What if he decided to roll on it? (Jeff once witnessed a large buffalo run right up to a car and knock it on its side.) Or even scratch his head against it, like they do with trees and fence posts. What would happen then? My fears ran rampant.

The bison was slowly crunching its way around the yurt. I was standing in the middle of the yurt, about ten feet away. Listening. On high alert. And now, as if in a vision, that great brown curly muscled body stepped in front of the other window, the one beside the bed . . . And as if on cue, the buffalo then turned to face me, his colossal head with its crescent horns filling the entire space of the thin plastic window. Jeff was sleeping, on his back like a baby, defenseless, between me and the buffalo. The buffalo was looking into the yurt. There was enough light now so that I was visible. For one long

instant, we stared into each other's eyes. What I saw there I cannot describe. Ancient. Primordial. Beyond imagining.

This experience reminded me of those few times when I have been high in the mountains during a lightning storm. When I have been transfixed, simultaneously terrified and exhilarated. To be so close to such power. To not know what was going to happen next. To be so filled with life and death and their inexorable interpenetration. To be so fully and completely *present* — to what is actually, right this moment, happening.

The communion with the buffalo (he moved off after a few minutes) reminded me of a dream that I had in early 1990. In that dream — one of those rare ones I call Big Dreams — I am a member of a large archeological expedition, in the Arctic, or Antarctica. The expedition has been excavating a huge ice field, and has just uncovered the colossal head of a bull, its curving horns like crescent moons. The head, hundreds of feet high, is frozen, covered with a coat of ice; but it is clear to me that the ice is melting and the bull thawing, coming back to life.

This dream made an enormous impact on me. At the time I instinctively thought of it as a symbol for what I articulated as “sex force.” In fact, the next day I drove to the home of a man with whom I had recently broken off an affair, opened the door without knocking, tore his clothes off and “raped” him (to his immense surprise and delight). And I didn't realize it then, but this dream was the driving force that set my intention soon afterwards to save enough money to be able to spend a month in Crete and Greece searching for the goddess. Nine months later, I wandered through the ruins and museum at Knossos and was struck by the ubiquitous iconography of the bull, its crescent horns, as a symbol for the goddess. Later, I realized that the bull's head, seen from the front, mirrors that of woman's reproductive system (uterus, fallopian tubes and ovaries).



This spring, eight years later, that Big Dream came true. The Bull is very much alive, powerfully crunching. And for one eternal nanosecond I participated in the unfathomable ancient shining from that blessed bull's eye.

May the Great Goddess shine on us all.

Essay

THE PHOENIX FIRES OF YELLOWSTONE

Welcome to Planet Earth, 1988

© Ann Kreilkamp

Note: First published as an op-ed in local and state newspapers, Wyoming.

Friday night, August 26, 1988. I awaken to the smell of fire. Sinuses bothering me horribly. Outside, the full moon drips blood. An eerie red glow illumines Shadow Mountain, only a few miles north. Ash falls gently through what looks like a thickening London fog. The Tetons, even Blacktail Butte, invisible! Overhead, the clackety roar of helicopters taking off from what used to be the Gros Ventre campground and is now a U.S. Army staging area for a new kind of war.

Suddenly, a gust of smoky wind blows against the north wall of my yurt home. Oh my God, has the wind changed? Is it pushing the fire in this direction, towards Kelly? Fear grips my gut, a sickening, sinking feeling. As if everything I have known, taken for granted, is being, or could shortly be, pulled out from under me. My home. My safety. My survival.

Fear feeds a feverish imagination. What if all of Yellowstone burns? (Only one week ago, that thought was inconceivable. Amazing, how basic assumptions about the world, fixed in place for centuries, suddenly shatter.) What if our valley burns, too? Moran, Kelly, Moose, Jackson, Wilson — small human settlements snuffed out, just like that, in one long roaring flash.

Various reports — of a line of fire 65 miles long; of a wall of fire 250 feet high; of one fire advancing at a rate of seven miles per hour (my God, you'd have to run to stay ahead of it!); of trees igniting in seconds, throwing sparks which land two miles ahead, kindling new fires; of the thermal energy from a deliberately set backfire releasing trillions of BTUs, the equivalent of a hydrogen bomb — my God, what if the entire arid west, what if the drought stricken midwest, burns?

Is this to be our nuclear winter? A slow, raging apocalypse, relentlessly consuming mile after mile of what used to be, before industrialized man destroyed it, our good green earth?

But these are nighttime fancies, not real, of course. (Or are they? Do others feel afraid?) Walking around Jackson these days what I hear is lots of grumbling, mostly from businessmen. How business is down, because the tourists are avoiding Yellowstone. How the summer started out to be a record breaker, and ended up dead. Angry. Angry with the Park Service, its policy of "let burn." They should have snuffed out that first fire before it got out of hand.

In contrast to such short term views are those of environmentalists. These people take an impersonal approach. They understand the dynamics of ecological processes and think in terms of the health of the whole system over the long run. The situation, for them, is wonderful, exciting. These fires are exactly what was needed, they say, and long overdue.

This valley seems to breed polarities in the people who live here. And no matter what the issue the same polarity seems to continually surface. On the one hand, there are those who see things from the standpoint of their own immediate personal needs; on the other, those whose self-interest includes a larger perspective.

For each of these groups of people, the other group is "them," and "they" are wrong. The first group dismisses the second as impossibly utopian and impractical. The second group looks down upon the first as ignorant and self-centered.

There is an old metaphysical principle which tells us that what we see in the outside world is a mirror for what is happening inside — on the unconscious level. That

whenever we cannot accept a part of ourselves we tend to project it onto another as scapegoat.

Applying this principle to the current situation, we can say for each of our polarized groups, that the other group is inside them — in a denied form. Our judgments against each other are reflections of what we hate and fear within ourselves.

Applying this principle more broadly, we can say that the dryness in our external atmosphere mirrors the dryness in our own souls. We are in a drought because we do not acknowledge and value the “water” inside ourselves. Once we do that, once we tune into our real feelings, the rains will come again.

Our western scientific culture has encouraged us to identify with the life of the mind, at the expense of our feelings. And whereas it is the mind which sees, it is the heart which feels. Our views, whether short or long-range, separate us from one another — and from the natural world which surrounds us. Our hearts, however, beat as one.

In this deeper, seemingly more private realm, each of us feels, first of all, the same fear I do: that gut wrenching thud in the solar plexus with which any biological creature automatically responds when sensing a possible threat to its survival.

Fear, when not acknowledged, leads to a state of numbness, even paralysis. We contract into a defensive posture and feel separate from others, who are then perceived as out-there, against us. To acknowledge fear is, paradoxically, to transcend separation. We all experience this feeling; and despite the current cultural bias against showing what is perceived as weakness, we can also find within us the courage to let our fear show.

To truly surrender to what we feel inside, to the common hidden life within our own bodies, is to heal the splits which divide us from one another. To open to the watery flow of our feelings is to reconnect us, not only with our fellow humans, but with earth herself and all creatures upon her — as one pulsing, living being.

The earth, we know, with our rational brain, has been raped and pillaged for far too long to be able to support new growth without a great purging of the decayed matter

which lies upon and within her. And yet, such knowledge itself does not, by itself, inspire us to action.

In order to contact that great wellspring of compassion necessary for us to move into right action, we need first to acknowledge our fear and, then, to penetrate even deeper into that inner watery realm of our acute and common sensitivity to all that is. We become receptive to the slightest perturbations of the atmosphere. We resonate with each stalwart tree's shuddering surrender to the flames. We live inside each velvety deer, each tiny pika, nostrils flaring, quivering, sensing danger. We open to our mother earth's pain, and become one with that cry — of agony, of joy — as she succumbs to the deep life force within her surging to the surface.

Earth's agony — and her joy! — is also ours: as our inner aliveness is aroused, we move into right action, helping to shape the forces which now decree the fiery purification of our overly industrialized planet.

We mourn the death of Yellowstone as we knew her. Along with millions of others all over the world, we hold vivid memories of her forested beauty. Her transformation, now, symbolizes the coming changes for other wild lands — and perhaps our cities, other human habitations. It incites the wildness within ourselves as we feel the great release of energy ignited by these massive fires.

The slow holocaust in Yellowstone is producing mushroom clouds to rival anything our nuclear technology has produced. These fires illuminate consciousness. We realize a choice has been made. We feel gratitude to the great spirit. Rather than suffering the instant purge of nuclear conflagration, we are being guided towards a gradual cleansing, slow enough for us to respond, in full awareness, to what is happening. Motivated by true compassion, incited into full aliveness, we each work to uncover the specific role each of us was designed to play in helping Earth pass safely through her long-awaited fiery rebirth.

Essay

TO BE ONE WITH THE RIVER

Crone Chronicles #4, Spring Equinox 1990

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I sit entranced in a small orange rubber raft, floating slowly down a dark swirling river. A line of bubbles marks the narrow curve of current. Eddies suck backwards from either side. Every so often a whirlpool forms somewhere, anywhere, and just as quickly disappears.

Dark vertical cliff walls rise 500 feet on either side. Water meets rock with no intermediate zone. No soft sand. No opportunity for gradual acclimatization. This is March, 1990, and I am on the Colorado River of the Grand Canyon, Day One of a projected nineteen day journey into the mystery of eonic time.

If you need help, the ranger told us, use mirrors to signal a passing commercial airplane. “Believe it or not, they do see the flashing, even at 20,000 feet.”

I am sitting in one of five small rubber rafts, surrounded by three women and twelve men, all of them strangers. By the end we will know each other better than we know our friends back home. “Personalities” will prove useless in this world of primal instinctive response. What will emerge is character — including our shadow side. Our flotilla is the Ship of Fools, and our journey to become a struggle for dominance. Who will assume the honor? Who is Lord of the Flies?

In the midst of a vast labyrinthian sweep of impregnable chasms, massive jutting edges, yawning caverns, high mystic tablelands, side canyons leading to miniature paradises of succulent spring green and falling waters, the changing light playing extravagantly with form, texture, color — amidst all of this, we will tend to become preoccupied with what goes on in our tiny human world. Our psychological and political games. Our petty little grievances. Our jockeying for position.

On the way down in our chartered bus we had all signed a quasi-legal piece of paper entitled “Common Adventures.” The document stated that this is to be a leaderless expedition, that all of us are responsible for the outcome, that each is to offer whatever he or she has to give to the group.

The infinitely changing textures of dark cliff walls move, they undulate with patterns, the faces and bodies of gods, African, Egyptian, Greek, Mayan, Anasazi. Squat fat mesopotamian mother goddesses from ancient matriarchal times emerge, fade — into Quetzalcoatl, or Kali. There marches an army of Chinese soldiers, exactly repeated, yet no two the same. Pluto, god of the underworld watches, malevolent.

Tiny spiny plants stand solo, defiant in tufts of soil clinging to rocks. There is the Utah Century Plant, blooming! Above, a sundog circles the sun, its halo wider than the arc of sky allowed by cliff walls. Canyon wrens greet us with simple song, notes trilling down the scale in perfect pitch.

We are entering the upper inner granite gorge of the Grand Canyon, we are to travel 300 miles down a gradient of 2,200 feet into the Mother, this river her cleft; the gorge which holds it and above us, the eerie tawny pink folds and crevasses of canyonlands her secret inner anatomy.

I am here as one member of an expedition which I knew beforehand, would be an amazing experiment in the dynamics of human community. And I sensed it would be difficult, skewed in some way, due to the extreme imbalance between men and women.

I am here to contact the Mother, she who resides deep within my female nature. I am here, I will find as we go on, to experience the interaction between that deep swirling river within me pushing inexorably down, and the deep fear which many men have of precisely this feeling which they too, cannot help but contact inside.

I am here to experience a wide spectrum of male energy, from the most sexist and controlling — who seek to dominate this river through technique and sheer muscular power — to those men whose energy protects the female, and who surrender to her river, allowing her to wear away the judgments freezing us all into polarized categories, “male and female,” “sexist and protective”. . .

I am here to see/feel that same spectrum of male energy within me, as it seeks to merge and blend with the female in her various guises.

Much of the time the river rolls along placidly, content, her undulations rolling within us to dissolve the patina of our so-called “civilized” identities in that other world beyond the canyon. She washes us of our self-conscious views of ourselves, and our points of view. She induces that trance-like state wherein time flies . . . away, and we are vulnerable, fully present within the infinitely expanding space of this one moment now.

And she can be wild and destructive, her hysteria arousing us to attention long before meeting it. Each rapid signals its presence beforehand through what first sounds like a faint hiss and grows, to sometimes include a deep bass thundering from below.

Her energy goes out of control — or, I should say, out of our control, as she certainly seems to know what she is doing. Lashing gigantic frothing wave upon wave of sheer power, she fills our rafts, she knocks us out of them, she even overturns them, she sucks us up and takes over.

We are one with the river, I tell myself, as our boat enters a rapid such as this, my faith and trust in such unity clashing with my fear, fueled by adrenaline, mouth dry, a terrible sinking in the solar plexus . . .

We are one with the river, I remind myself, as later, by the campfire, the men who fear deep female energy polarize against me, project upon me as scapegoat . . .

I feel the wound in my deep female nature. It resounds in my womb like a gong, centuries upon untold centuries of this wounding of the female . . . Yet, at the same time, I am, paradoxically, healed.

We are healed.

For we are one with the river, there is no separation. The Mother's pain is the measure of her power. The deeper her wound, the more profound her embrace as she opens to receive us, once again, in her watery arms.

Once we enter the rapid we have no choice but surrender. We surrender to this rapid shift in consciousness, its energy so powerful that it overwhelms and annihilates fear. We are released — into this light bright white majesty, miraculous meeting with the divine.

We are one with the river, one in our experience of her, one in our joy, our exhilaration, it leaves us shaken, open, exposed.

Three weeks have passed since we left the river. I feel split in two, I feel haunted. The old routines are in place, yet the me who performs them has changed. The wound opened there has not closed but opened wider, deeper. It is sore, it bleeds.

The healing we all went through is present too, as an aura that surrounds and interpenetrates being. As a radiant glowing from within the heart of things. A dimly sensed ancient memory of unity, community, acutely poignant, a longing . . .

Both are there, both are true. Both pain and love. This cross of being human in this anguished age. The Mother haunts us. She is a whispering. She will not let us go.

Essay

SATURN/URANUS: A WHALE OF A STORY

Welcome to Planet Earth, 1988

© Ann Kreilkamp

Thursday, October 27, 1988. Barrow, Alaska (AP): “Superpower saviors opened a path to the sea and freed two trapped whales Wednesday, as Soviet ice-breakers bashed through an ice ridge and Americans hacked ice holes toward the Russians.”

As usual, the whole world watched as this dramatic “human interest” story, pulling on our heart strings, unfolded. Would the whales be freed in time, or would the unprecedented international effort come to naught?

“Human interest” stories are considered “soft,” i.e., not as important as “hard” factual stories. But they do sell the product. So, as much as most reporters would rather cover something important, they are sometimes assigned to such stories, and token slots are created to give them room.

Once in a while, one of these “human interest” stories grabs us so profoundly that it becomes front page news. Last year we were riveted to the tube night after night as rescuers attempted to free little Jessica from the underground shaft. We rejoiced at their success, and looked closely at the pictures of the child, her head

and limbs wrapped in bandages, when she emerged, cradled in the arms of her rescuer. Was she okay? Would the long days and nights spent in the dark tunnel damage her psyche?

This year it is the whale story. Coming on the heels of some “hard” news too: pilot whales washing up on Cape Cod shores, dolphins subject to some kind of immune-deficiency disease; fully one half of the seal population of the Baltic Sea sacrificed to industrial waste . . . Yes, a soft story about the plight of some sea creatures is entirely in keeping with the message our oceans are sending us, S.O.S., now.

The compassionate side of us is activated. Our collective heart opens wide, radiating out to touch these large, dignified mammals. We feel their panic, their irregular heartbeat, as they surface, time after time, noses cut to the bone in continual futile attempts to break up jagged icy prison walls. Daily pictures show one of the whales, its battered nose up above the water, facing — seeming to be in some kind of silent communion with — whichever Eskimo or whale expert is standing there this time, leaning in the whale’s direction.

The story hits the front pages. Media flock to Barrow, an isolated Eskimo village at the top of the world, 300 miles north of the Arctic Circle. We hear of Eskimos cutting holes in the ice with chainsaws “and their strong backs”; we hear of an American ice breaking barge trying to reach the area — and foundering. The effort, great as it is, looks futile. The nearest open water, we are told, is 200 miles away. Even our great expertise and massive technology seem impotent in the face of this emergency. Should all else fail, we are told, nets are being built right now to airlift the whales out of danger.

The whale story has magnified to become an “international incident” of the third kind. Whales are as foreign to us in their consciousness as aliens, and yet an interspecies bonding, however temporary and fragile, seems to be taking place here.

As the story drags on with very little change, the media grows restive. Reporters are bunking in tight proximity. There’s only so much they can say about a story that is the same, day after day. They grow bored, start covering each other. The story is a media event. The media is part of the story. We see one reporter grinning and talking about how there are two trout caught in a stream a couple of hundred miles away, maybe we should go there next?

We start to look at the story differently. Hey, what’s going on here. What’s this nonsense about? Just one more media hype.

“How could the media focus so much on this one incident and yet hardly notice Greenpeace’s constant and ongoing heroic efforts to save whales and other endangered species?”

“Had they taken all that money they spent trying to free those whales they could have fed thousands of homeless for a year.”

“The hypocrisy of this story is incredible! How many of those who were trying to help those two whales make it their business to hunt the rest of them?”

Disgusted, we turn off the tube, feeling like fools for getting all emotional about this, when we should be focused on the business of daily living.

Our idealism seems fragile. With one flip of the switch, it transforms into cynicism, an attitude which, actually, feels safer to us, more normal, more in line with the daily living we are supposed to attend to.

Each of the above cynical responses can be viewed as both true and appropriate, within the “normal” frame of reference. Yet so was our initial idealism both true and appropriate — within another, larger, frame of reference.

We need these “human interest” stories to help us break out of our myopic focus on daily concerns. Our awareness expands, lifts, lightens, as we travel in our minds far from home to imaginatively enter a situation which stirs our hearts into compassion. As we psychically enter and participate in the inner world of another being, our experience of ourselves stretches to encompass this larger reality. As our own personal boundaries dissolve into this immensity, we feel invigorated somehow, more alive.

Indeed, coming back to ourselves after such a journey is a sort of shock. There is such contrast, such clashing between the smaller self focused narrowly on daily life and the larger self sympathetically resonating with all that is! To acknowledge the shock, to stay with it and quiet our busy lives down to the point where we can allow this shock to penetrate deeply into our cells and psyches, is to trigger a transformation in the way we live here and now. No longer will we be so obsessed with trivia; instead, we will see whatever we are thinking and doing now with equanimity. We have gained the wider view within which to place today’s pressing, but passing, concern.

Our cynicism, fed by the media, and seemingly more and more prevalent in America, is actually but the flip-side of our inherent, God-given, but much maligned, idealism. We cynics are disappointed idealists. The great hope which initially inspired us has been dashed on the rocky shores of so-called “reality,” and we are pissed. Pissed, we think, because we were foolish enough to be idealistic in

the first place. Pissed, in actuality, because the world is not measuring up to our ideals. The world. Our world. Us . . .

It is ourselves which we have so much trouble with. No matter how much we try to deny our foolish utopian dream, tinges of it remain, hovering around the edges of consciousness. No matter how much we try to close down, we are human, our hearts can still be tugged by another, even one as alien as a whale.

Now let's view this whale story in a new light. Let's "get metaphysical," and ask why this particular story was chosen by the collective unconscious to be one which the media would pick up on. Let's assume the choice was no accident, and view it as a symbolic event of great significance to the human race.

The whale story has the makings of a modern myth, a healing tale for our times. It prophetically illustrates the possibility of an entirely new kind of planetary cooperation.

Placing the story within its larger heavenly context, it is notable that it began on or around October 6, the day when Saturn joined Uranus at 27° Sagittarius, to line up exactly with the heart center of our Milky Way galaxy. The story unfolded over a period of three weeks, surrounding the final Saturn/Uranus conjunction which climaxed on October 18, 1988.

Let's look at the story from a Saturn/Uranus in Sagittarius point of view. Let's see how it illustrates, in a number of different ways, our need for a philosophical perspective which gives value to not only all ways of life, but all creatures which live.

The subjects of the story were creatures of the deep blue sea, whales, an endangered species whose eerie and haunting songs have graced our ears through

the marvels of recording technology for decades now. Their songs have been analyzed technically, and are found to be astonishingly complex sonar patterns, so intricate that some experts conjecture that perhaps they constitute a true language whose code we have yet to break.

The story took place at the top of the world, its rays of significance raining down upon the entire planet. Converging upon the scene were a group of rescuers as unlike one another as humans are to whales: oil companies, whale experts, small businessmen, Eskimos, whale hunters, environmentalists, the military — not to mention the joint efforts of the two superpowers, Russia and the United States.

This joint ice-breaking effort, dubbed “Operation Breakthrough” (how Uranian!), was further indication of how the ice has been broken between our two nations. “We feel very good about it. The cooperation has just been fantastic. The Soviets came in here with a very positive attitude and went to work immediately,” said an American spokesman. The Soviet ice-breaking ships were even flying the flags of both countries — “as a sign of cooperation between nations!”

The third-world Eskimos used small primitive tools to cut ice holes in the ice. This kept the whales alive, but it did not free them. The industrialized United States and Russia used their giant machines — though ours broke down before reaching the whales . . . The Russian ice breakers made mincemeat of that giant ridge of ice. This was the final act which gave the whales their freedom. The aboriginal and the technological ways of life joined here. Both were necessary in their own ways, both appropriate.

In the AP story of Thursday, October 27, there were several comments on the behavior of the whales which hint that we humans are beginning to acknowledge that perhaps a kind of interspecies communication took place here. “The whales

are acting in a very excited manner, almost like they can sense freedom,” said a spokesman for the Alaska National Guard early Wednesday, when the Russian ships were still miles from the trapped whales.

As the Russian ships broke through the massive ice ridge preventing the whales’ escape, the same spokesman said, “The whales seem to be doing fine. It’s like they expect something to be happening. . .”

Perhaps the whales engineered the whole thing. Perhaps they sought contact with us now in this way to demonstrate the kind of interspecies bonding that is to be necessary if we are to attend to the drastic needs of our planetary home. Perhaps it will turn out these whales are not only our fellow creatures, and thus deserving of our compassion and care, but more. Perhaps, as they circle the globe deep within the deep blue sea, singing and dancing with each other, they sing to us too, they dance with us, too.

The ocean represents the collective unconscious, where we all meet nightly in our dreams, where we all mingle together, each of us a mere drop in the ocean, all of us together a mighty surging sea.

The ocean represents the watery depths within us, linking us to one another, washing through us all. We are all biological creatures. We feel. As we feel for and with each other, as we personally sense Earth and her cries for help, we are motivated to both bond and to act, together.

Newsweek’s article on the whales was titled, “Just One Mammal Helping Another.” That article concluded: “It was clear that our species had an emotional stake in helping these creatures survive. It was as if we had resolved to demonstrate to the rest of creation that technology doesn’t just mean better

weapons, and that when our best instincts are engaged, man no longer is the planet's most treacherous animal.”

Yes. And let us remember: the source of our power for destruction arises within a greater power — that of our human imagination, our capacity to both envision and manifest a new way of life upon the planet. We meet and unite as one, humans and other creatures together, first in our dreams, singing and dancing, then in action, to change the face of the Earth. To allow her to breathe again, to smile again. That we may love her as she has loved us.

Column

THE SEA: as metaphysical metaphor

Sagewoman #59, Autumn 2002

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August, 1970. I am 27 years old, recently separated from my husband, and trying desperately to free myself from fear. I have gotten myself a boyfriend, Tracy, on whom I project my unrequited longing for love. (The first husband didn't count. He and I were in combat from day one, and he always won — until I left him, and he snapped at me, accusing: "You have balls of steel." Though shocked at his intended insult, I felt secretly thrilled that he saw me as strong when my knees were actually quaking.)

Tracy and I were "co-dependent" lovers (though our generation had not yet named it that). I needed him, and he needed me to need him. I held on for dear life and he, in his strength and manhood, held me close. I saw him as my father and he saw me as his little girl. The relationship "worked" in that we were both caught in gender-based cultural roles.

This was my energetic reality, even though '60s feminism had already seeped into the culture. For several years I had been in a consciousness-raising group of women and had devoured Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* and other feminist tracts. And I had proved my feminist credentials by leaving my husband — not because he beat me or was unfaithful, but for more subtle, feminist reasons: he didn't respect me, didn't treat me as an equal.

But these new understandings take time to sink in. And sometimes we have to plunge back into the murky waters of the past before we can come up again and stride yet further ahead. Certainly this was true for me. Only months after separating from my husband, I dived into another unequal relationship, and this time I loved it. Looking back, I can see it as a healing. For in my relationship with Tracy, I could unconsciously replay a pattern from my childhood, that of lost little girl, vulnerable and scared and needing protection. And Tracy played the role of good father: unlike my husband or my father, he was openly caring and affectionate.

We often took the one hundred steps down from our summer commune to walk the beach at night. Though I was scared of the dark, I felt safe with his arm around me and grateful for his strength to lean against. All this changed one August night.

We had “dropped acid” (LSD) for the second time that summer. (The first time was in July; while making love I had hallucinated my father’s face superimposed on Tracy’s. For the first time I both grokked the significance of Freudian psychology and was alerted to the real nature of our relationship.)

Again we were making love, and this time we swooped into a dimension for which I have no words. All I can remember is that we felt like dolphins sailing through the ocean of the sky, borne on celestial currents, wave after orgasmic wave bursting into creation. I know this sounds crazy, but those days were crazy — real, too — and that experience was one of the milestones of my life; both for the blissful, timeless abyss we had unwittingly (if momentarily) surrendered to, and for what happened next.

Afterwards, in the bathroom, I discovered an astonishing amount of fluid flooding from my vagina. This was more than semen, this was at least eight ounces of orgiastic residue, a chemical transformation inside my body that paralleled the intensity of our sexual/spiritual experience. I was ecstatic.

I went back into the bedroom to tell Tracy about it and, to my surprise, discovered a woman there. Nancy lived in the next bedroom with David, both good friends of ours. Nancy said that Tracy had come to their door and asked to see David, who had taken him downstairs to the kitchen. I was nonplussed. Why? I asked her. Because Tracy was scared and confused, she said.

Tracy and I were philosophy students, and his specialty was Neitzsche's "eternal return." Somehow our sexual experience had thrown Tracy into feeling that he was going round and round into an eternal return of no consequence, where nothing happened except that everything kept happening again and again, always the same. David was trying to bring him back to reality.

The disjunction between our responses to this fused initiation into endless creation profoundly disconcerted me. The profundity of our lovemaking had switched our roles. Worse, in now being the one to need support, Tracy preferred David to me. I blurted out to Nancy, "He doesn't realize how strong I am" — and had no idea what I meant.

We went downstairs to find David and Tracy in the kitchen, with Tracy bent over like an old man, head down, solemnly stirring water into frozen orange juice. David had wanted him to do something mundane in order to bring him out of his terrifying loop and back to us. But Tracy seemed to be in shock.

For me to behold him in this state was extraordinary. The contrast between us could not have been more profound. In a commanding voice that rose up from some unknown place within me, I announced that Tracy and I were going to the beach and I would get a blanket.

I wrapped him in the blanket and we started down the long stairway. All the way down he huddled close, with my arm around him. No flashlight, no Moon, just the stars. He kept saying that he couldn't see, or he couldn't make out what he was seeing. We were alone in the dark with only seagulls and the gently lapping sea.

We started to walk down the beach. Every so often he would stop, trembling, point to some vague mass ahead, and ask what it was. Having no idea, I would make something up on the spot, like "Oh that, it's just a log with a bucket on it." (In the morning, I discovered that my fanciful explanations were all true.)

Finally, I told him we were going to lie down. I took the blanket off his shoulders and spread it out on the beach. We both lay on our backs looking up at the night sky. I was again ecstatic, my eyes seeking the stars, spirit lifting, shooting into the heavens in resonance with all those times as a girl when I dragged my sleeping bag out into the back yard.

Abruptly and disconcertingly, my reverie was disturbed when Tracy suddenly sobbed, threw his arm over his eyes, and said that he couldn't look, it was too overwhelming. He turned and spent the rest of the night on his stomach, eyes closed against the vastness. Once again, the contrast between us could not have been greater; I was seeking to go beyond the beyond and he was avoiding it.

As dawn broke, golden rays illumined thousands of silvery rivulets as the lowest tide of the year rushed to meet the far-off sea. The sky was golden, reflecting into silver. The end of the night was the beginning of time.

We arose, and, hand in hand, squished through the soft damp sand towards the gold sun disk rising over the watery horizon. We were equals. Night was done, Tracy was no longer afraid and I had found my strength, my true being. We were Adam and Eve, partners in a new myth. Gold and silver streamed through us for one long perfect moment.

Later that morning, a voice inside me announced that our relationship was over; that this perfection had completed it. I refused to believe it, and went on to spend many years in a search for a perfection that would not end, not realizing that once something completes itself, it moves. That change is eternal. Even as the tide, that day, would turn and rush back in, engulfing me in all the feelings that would inundate me as I strove, gasping, sputtering, to keep my head above water.

Over thirty years have gone by. Much water under the bridge, as they say. Now even my prayers have changed.

I no longer search for perfection but for wholeness. I seek to center myself with awareness, so that I may encompass both my strength and my vulnerability, the tides in their coming and going, the eternal return of the ocean to itself, always changing, never the same.

Update 2010:

When tracing the origins of western philosophy, most academic courses stress the two “pre-Socratic” philosophers, Heraclitus and Parmenides, as spokespersons for the archetypal dichotomy of Becoming and Being. The “problem of philosophy” then, is how to reconcile the two.

If one utilizes the sea as a metaphor for this polarity or paradox, then I’d say that for most of my life, I have been focused on how to navigate within the endless back and forth wave action of Becoming. I had to recognize over and over again, with Heraclitus, that one never steps into the same river twice. This recognition teaches the lesson of detachment. As the Buddha put it: Life is suffering. The cause of suffering is attachment. The cure for suffering is detachment.

As I compose this update I realize that in my sixties I have gradually concentrated more on attunement within the opposite polarity of this primordial metaphysical spread, that of the Parmenidian Oneness of Being.

Though I still value the sea as metaphor for the various lessons we learn in moving through life as a human being, I now concentrate on learning — or is it remembering? Yes, re-memorizing, putting myself back together with all that is — to descend to the oceanic depths and dwell there, in the silent, serene fullness of Being, no matter what happens on the surface.

The lesson of detachment that Heraclitus teaches is thus balanced by the Parmenidian lesson of compassion, or love. The first teaches me to center within the single point in the continuous plethora of becoming; the second, to go beyond the point to the wide-angled view — and further, much further, to surrender even my stance as witness to the plenum of Being.

Column

CENTERING & GROUNDING: with the Jupiter/Saturn conjunction in Taurus

SageWoman #60, Winter 2002-2003

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I can actually say when my centering and grounding process began: May 2000, the month of the rare Jupiter/Saturn conjunction. These two planets come together once every 20 years to inaugurate a new cycle that fuses the principle of opportunity (Jupiter) with the principle of responsibility (Saturn). The May 2000 conjunction occurred in Taurus, the most earthy earth sign.

I decided to celebrate the Jupiter/Saturn conjunction by spending an entire weekend at our yurt, which sits in the rural village of Kelly, Wyoming, directly across from the Grand Tetons. I had made my home there for nearly two decades; but in the years preceding this event I had been sleeping in the yurt and leaving early every morning to commute to our office in Jackson, 15 miles away. I was so preoccupied at work that, despite my promises to do so, I rarely spent even a full Sunday at home.

So this decision to be actually on the yurt grounds all weekend was momentous. I planned to start a flower garden, and generally do upkeep — pick up cottonwood branches that continuously litter the little yard, mow the lawn, tidy up the woodpile, and so on.

I managed that, and enjoyed it, too; my Taurus Moon had been craving just such an extended tactile, visceral experience, and finally I was giving in to that primal need. But as I raked and shoveled and pulled weeds and seeded, something peculiar was nagging at me.

Though I loved this glorious mountain valley, for the first time I was consciously noticing something subtle but definite, something I could not ignore. I was attempting to consciously and deliberately ground and center into my home space during the Jupiter/Saturn conjunction in Taurus, and . . . I was not succeeding. Something kept me up in the air, nervous. And, I acknowledged, I had been feeling this way for a long time; perhaps as long as I had lived in the Tetons.

What was the cause of this chronic disaffection? Was it an internal problem or did it result from my interaction with this environment? How had I managed to get so far out of my body that only now did I notice that I wasn't in it?

I kept on gardening, bemused and intrigued, and, I must add, appalled. When did the disembodiment begin? How could I reinhabit myself? Digging in the dirt wasn't really doing it.

I came away from that weekend with a conviction that though I was uncentered, to be sure, I also realized that I hadn't been able to ground in that place. That though I had lived in the mountains of western Wyoming for 18 years — longer than I had ever lived anywhere else — there was something about the entire Jackson Hole valley, or about my interaction with it — which didn't allow me to truly settle.

That evening I mentioned this discovery to my husband, Jeff — and suddenly, these words flew unbidden from my mouth: “We are going to leave Jackson Hole in two years.”

I was as shocked as he was by this pronouncement. Certainly I didn't mean it. Or didn't think I did. And over these last two years there have been many times when I

tried to wiggle out of what my intuition had told me, tried to convince myself that since I loved it in Jackson, I must remain.

Furthermore, I thought, it's *my* problem that I'm ungrounded. I need to find ways to re-enter my body, and through my body to re-connect with the natural world. Shortly after that, without conscious intent, I began to do a simple personal ritual, on a daily basis. This involved rising from my bed to tiptoe outside the yurt at dawn. There I would stand on a large flat rock and face the direction in which the Sun was soon to rise.

Even before the glow of the eastern sky gave way to fire, the Sun would announce its dominion by first spotlighting the sharp upthrusting tip of the Grand Teton to the west, then spread its rosy alpenglow over the sheer granite faces of the Teton range and leach down the bluish tree masses on the lower slopes. Then the ecstatic moment would arrive: as Sun slowly and inexorably flooded the entire valley floor while simultaneously burning a hole in the eastern horizon, I would joyfully raise my arms in greeting, while stealing brief glances directly into its fiery heart.

As time went on, the sense of anticipation that accompanied this ritual grew immeasurably. The Sun was calling me from slumber, pulling me from my bed to stumble into my clothes and creep outside onto that flat rock.

The Sun's fiery heart was activating my own heart, and it swelled in response to each day's greeting. I can only describe this process as that of profound gratitude. I was grateful for the life force pulsing around and through me, for my family and friends, for the breeze caressing my cheeks, for the little yurt and the trees and stream nearby, for the wild animals and glorious mountains of my dwelling place, for the infinite sheltering sky.

As the months wore on, this uprising of appreciation for the whole of creation grew so immense that there were times when I burst into tears.

This was the beginning. First the Jupiter/Saturn in Taurus event that left me aware of my continuous feeling of restlessness in the Tetons; secondly — and paradoxically —

the repeating morning ritual that deepened my sense of oneness, not just with the Tetons, but with the spacious fluid in which all sentient beings are held.

Unlike the Jupiter/Saturn weekend, my little daily ceremony stole in imperceptibly. I didn't *decide* to do ceremony. It's just that one morning I found myself outside the yurt, standing on that rock at dawn, facing east, awaiting the sun's rise over the low sage-, pine- and aspen-covered hills. And then the next morning found me there too, and the next, and the next. Soon arising before dawn to greet the sun had become a regular part of my day.

The next change was about a year later, initiated when I noticed that my right hand was beginning to subtly shake when held outstretched. I was 58 years old, with tremors in my family line, so I was not surprised to see this evidence of my own aging process. Instantly, the thought occurred to me: *I need to learn Ti Ch'i. Now.*

I had always known that someday I would learn this ancient Chinese art, and had actually attended a few Tai Ch'i classes over the years. But each time the fiery restlessness of my five planets in the Sagittarius/Gemini axis had impatiently pulled me away.

This time I was ready. The tremor announced the need and my internal resolve rose to match it. I began to take lessons in both Tai Ch'i and Qi Gong. The classes met twice a week, and on the other five days I practiced what I was learning, diligently, one hour each day. I would do this at dawn, outside, as a more extended ritual for my regular honoring of the sun's warmth and light.

I was immediately grateful for the Qi Gong practice because it is very easy to learn. There are hundreds of moving poses, and within one month I had mastered enough of them to be able to practice on my own for an hour.

Indeed, I was astonished to discover that within only a few weeks of Qi Gong practice my legs felt as solid and grounded as tree trunks. The process of moving back into my body had begun.

It took longer to begin the process of learning Tai Ch'i (I am told that mastering the fine points of Tai Ch'i and Qi Gong is an endless process). The particular form I practice can take anywhere from 5 to 20 minutes, depending on how slowly I move through it. And, as I gradually discovered, the slower the better: the more intense the experience, the more benefit for the various bodily systems, the more concentrated and relaxed the meditative state.

Whereas before I had been impatient with the slowness of Tai Ch'i movements, now I was using Tai Ch'i to descend into my visceral reality, to experience its fullness and intensity.

Within four months I had "learned the form," at least to the extent that my body/mind now could recreate the Tai Ch'i choreography from beginning to end. I was happy that I had found this discipline, as it can be done in a small space, needs no equipment, doesn't depend on good weather, and every day upon completing it, I can feel the Ch'i — the life force — flowing freely and smoothly throughout my entire being.

Now, one year after starting this practice, my tremor is only barely noticeable and my inner restlessness and impatience are subsiding. My huge innate fiery/airy energy, which all my life had been fractured into impulsive and scattered forays into many different directions, is now focused to an extent that I am actually in balance — most of the time. The ragged edge is smoothing out as I learn to dwell within the center of my being.

My original question in May, 2000, "Is it me or is it my environment?" has now proved to be a false dichotomy. For as I moved internally, so too I found myself inexorably moving to fulfill that prophetic intuition, "In two years we will be leaving Jackson Hole."

Jeff and I are now 1,500 miles from Jackson, living in Bloomington, Indiana, where he is a first year law student at Indiana University. What this change portends for me is unknown. I focus on remaining open, on becoming looser and looser, so that whatever does want to move through me will find an expansive route. I practice Tai Ch'i and Qi Gong every morning in our new back yard, enclosed within the fertile green of a

Midwestern summer. I breathe deeply the soft humid air. I listen intently for the next internal directive.

Update 2010:

Four months later, after one semester in law school, my husband died. Grounding and Centering became imperative. Without these meditative practices, I would not have been able to hold my center while inviting in the chaotic winds and waters of the grieving process. See my book, *This Vast Being: A Voyage through Grief and Exaltation*.

From “Security Systems” to Real Security

Chapter 9, Part IV

MY SECRET LIFE: Ten Tools for Transformation

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“Maintaining” and “Losing” “Security”

Many people are so frightened of “losing security” that they stay in jobs which they hate, or marriages which they hate, or live in places which they hate, or keep on paying medical and other insurance policies which they hate — all in order to “maintain security.” What happens, when we make “security” our priority is that nothing ever happens. Instead, we repeat ourselves endlessly; which means of course, that we become bored; we maintain the status quo, but we are not challenged. Without challenge, we become mentally, emotionally, and physically stuck, and end up unhappy and diseased.

If we are going to live that way, with security as our top priority, then of course we're going to need those insurance policies, because we certainly will get sick. Something will happen after all! There is no such thing as “maintaining security,” because nature is not mechanical, and no matter how much we attempt to wall ourselves off from nature it is impossible. Our bodies are part of nature. So is what lies behind the wall. There are no closed systems in nature. Natural systems are open, energetic, in motion. Life energy is like water; if thwarted in one direction, it will find another route. If we don't continuously grow emotionally, mentally, and spiritually, then life's energy will work upon our bodies, creating cancers and other long-term diseases.

(Of course there are individual karmic exceptions; situations where the arrival of disease and even death is actually healing — for the person, and sometimes for the family and others affected. I do not subscribe to the idea that if you get sick, you should feel guilty, because “there must be something wrong with you, or you wouldn't get sick.” I cannot tell another person why something in his or her life is happening, as the laws of evolution for that individual's nature are unique.)

Part of why we are so frightened of moving out of a position of “maintaining security” is that we feel so isolated from others, even threatened by them. It's “every man for himself,” so we dig in and maintain control. Mainstream culture assumes separation; mainstream media reinforce separation, emphasizing mayhem and violence, thus promoting violence, chaos, and paranoia. From an early age, we are taught “never trust a stranger.” This happens because we do not accept our own shadows, the parts of ourselves we do not understand, the unconscious aspects of our own psyches. So we project what we refuse to see in ourselves out, onto others, and “evil lurks everywhere.”

Maintain security “or the bogey-man will get you!! This might as well be our motto, as that old childhood fantasy lives on inside.

Once we let go of security, and resolve to do what we are afraid of — including facing isolation, paranoia and the demons inside — then we stretch our boundaries and move into an exploratory mode. Everything changes. Over time, we begin to realize that we *can* trust our instincts, we can trust our natures. Paranoia dissolves. We begin to sense our unity with the whole universe and are surprised to discover how little we know, how much there is to learn. Like small children, we begin to feel the life force coursing through our bodies and we respond to that original joyous exaltation of simply being alive. The whole universe becomes our playground, and we the players, actively at one with the forces of creation.

Follow Your Nature

Prior to being able to consciously articulate this earth-based mysticism, I had sensed it, at some level. From the beginning of my career as a professional astrologer in the mid-70s, I would tell my clients: “Follow your nature, and nature will take care of you.” They would look at me, mystified. Such pretty words, but what did they mean?

I would explain. “What I mean is, if you follow your unique nature, as indicated by the lawful pattern and ongoing process of your unique astrological birth pattern, you will take your place within the natural order of things, and not be separate from it. In fact, until you do this, there is a tear in the fabric of being, a hole in the universe which you and you alone can fill.”

I had discovered this hookup with nature on my own, years prior to my meeting Joseph Campbell and his famous remark, “Follow your bliss. Follow your bliss and doors will open to you that will open to no one else.”

Campbell had followed his nature, which was off the beaten path, and I had followed mine by leaving, not only my husband, but my children. This decision had opened me to the charge of being not only crazy (as some said anyway, because of my ideas) but *unnatural*. And it's true, there is a natural bond between mothers and children which I chose to break, in order to follow another and stronger part of *my* unique nature, as a fiery, freedom seeking, double Sagittarian (both Sun and Ascendant plus Mars in that sign). In order to do so, however, I had to deny and neglect my own Moon in Taurus, its huge mothering instinct. I was not mature enough at that time to consciously incorporate and simultaneously express these two paradoxical qualities.

I had been acting out Moon in Taurus all my life as mother's little helper and then as young mother. When the intensely fiery Sagittarian energy finally broke through, it would not be denied. This breakthrough, naturally, occurred on schedule (though I didn't know it, not being a student of astrology at the time) when another Sagittarian planet, Mars, “progressed” *for the first and only time in my life* over my Sagittarian Ascendant. The “Ascendant” is the point where one meets the world. One could say that I was born on December 19, 1942, at 8:02 AM in San Antonio, Texas, *so that* in

September of 1969, Progressed Mars would cross my Ascendant, I would dance like a dervish on mescaline all night long, and subsequently fall ill with peritonitis which, in turn, would transform my life.

I say this, not to make excuses for “why I left my children.” That was a tragedy, and had I been older and more experienced at living out the complexity of my nature, I would not have left them. But the fire, once aroused, would not go out. I could trade the fire of starting out on a new path for the fire of abdominal infection, but I could not go backwards into wifely and motherly obedience.

That first hospitalization with peritonitis had taught me that “God” was not hovering over me, judging my every thought, word, and deed. The soul's voice had boomed: “Live or die. It's your choice.” If I chose to live, I would be free. And to be free, was to take responsibility for my life. Two years later, I discovered that leaving my children with their father was part of the bargain. Some 20 years after that I visited with a psychic who said to me: “If you hadn't left your husband and children back in your late 20s, you would have died.” She gave me this information without knowing anything about me, except my name.

Intricate, Invisible & Visible Support

Time and again, I have been presented with information from unexpected sources which confirm the rightness of the unusual course my life has taken. When this happens, I am always stunned — and exhilarated. Not to be proved right, but to be handed a revelation, once again, that another thread is inextricably woven into the web of my life. I begin to sense the marvelously intricate texture of this web, how it has been there all along, supporting me.

For many years, while I was learning astrology, I lived on very little money. For me, the priority was my studies, and everything else had to fit within the framework of that long-term objective. As a result of setting that priority, I also learned to make an art out of living lightly and simply, so that I would have plenty of time left over from sporadic part-time jobs (like painting houses, or being a gofer for a construction company, or cleaning houses, or substitute teaching) to study. I learned to live well on \$300 a month

— in a room of my own in communes; doing without a car; buying second-hand clothes; trading and/or sharing goods and services; walking, biking, hitching, catching rides with friends.

I did have plenty of friends, and I knew that if things really got tough financially, I could stay with friends until I got back on my feet. There were times when I took advantage of their generosity. The longest period was after I finally got up the courage to leave Phil, and went to live for a few months with my ex-husband Dick and my old friend Judy, now his new wife.

I was doing what these friends did not dare to do; and while they admired me for it, we were all aware that their secure lives helped make my freedom possible! So I appreciated them, too. At Dick and Judy's I spaded the ground for their first garden and washed all the dishes, and of course, did astrology for their family for free. Judy found paying astrology clients for me, and provided a private room for me to consult with them. We were a tribe. We still are a tribe. During those years my “security” consisted in knowing that I had this friendship net underneath me; that if I fell, it would be into the net and come to no harm. And clearly, that was true.

As time went on, I began to realize that there was an even more valuable supportive net, though invisible. And that was the way my life was weaving itself, daily, hourly, monthly, yearly. That with each experience my life was becoming stronger, fuller, richer. That I could trust the whole universe, not just my friends.

The strands of my net reach out in many directions and travel vast distances — to the stars and beyond. I know, with every fiber in my being, that we are all connected. I know that I am a part of nature, of the Earth, that Earth is a part of the solar system, and the solar system a part of the larger cosmos. Sitting in the middle of my net, I sense the reverberations from everywhere. The universe is alive.

Security, in this vast, expanding, opening system, consists in simply being present in the moment. The point of power is in the present, is the moment itself, as it stretches into space.

But How Do I Dare?

But how, you might ask, did I discover this? How did I dare to leave my “secure” life in the first place? Well, it was not because I wanted to leave, or because I knew what lay on the other side of the wall I had so dutifully and unconsciously constructed as a young wife and mother. Simply, there came a time when my life was intolerable, when death was preferable to the life I was enduring. “I,” my ego, did not recognize that, but my body did. And through the crisis of what was becoming a terminal illness, my body brought me to a complete stop. Both duties and distractions were burned away. There was nothing I could do but lie there, feverish, tossing, and unknown to me, opening, to admit the soul, its booming voice, its singular Truth: “Live or die, it's your choice.”

From that moment on, I began to take the first hesitant steps in following my own unique nature, no matter where it might lead, no matter how strange it might turn out to be. From that moment on, if I was to live, then I had no choice. No choice but to be and become my whole self. Those who struggle with what they assume to be a dichotomy between fate and free will have not yet experienced this *conjunction* of fate with free will. Fate, freely submitted to, transforms into destiny. No longer is one a puppet manipulated as on a string by outside forces. Rather, one is pushed from within, flowing like a river, blooming like a flower.

Following the personal rule of doing what I was most afraid of meant that I would be continuously pushing my own envelope, instructing myself to push through fear and undergo new experiences. Some of the situations I got into as a result were objectively dangerous, like the time I hitchhiked to Mendocino from Marin with one dollar bill in my pocket. (See Introduction.) And some situations yielded lessons so dramatic, so brilliant, I could only bow my head in wonder.

Once, during the years I was studying astrology, living on very little money, I took a trip to another town, to work as a visiting astrologer, staying in a cheap motel. On the morning I was to leave, I got a sudden urge to steal a washcloth, towel and bathmat from the motel room. Immediately, the urge was followed by my conscience telling me not to steal. “Of course I shouldn't steal these things. I've never stolen anything; why do I feel

the urge to take them?” I owned neither a washcloth nor a bathmat, so I could have used the items. But more than that, there was the thrill of doing the forbidden, of overriding conscience to see what would happen,. Fascination won over fear. I stuffed the items in my suitcase, all the while shocked at my behavior.

When I arrived home I was amazed to discover that a window had been broken into, my tiny basement apartment ransacked, and the shelf where my boombox had sat now bare. This shock was followed, immediately, by exhilaration. “YES! “ I exulted. “The universe works!”

I knew why it had happened. Never had I stolen anything before. Never had I been stolen from before. The connection between the two was only too evident. The universe was giving me a lesson in instant karma, letting me know that my action had set a train of consequences in motion, that action does happen at a distance. As I had sowed, so immediately, did I reap. I now speak of these kinds of experiences as “whip-lash karma.” Action, reaction, *right now*.

In learning this lesson and others, I was bit by bit exploring the forces (spirits, powers) which guide this world from an unseen level. Learning that the appearance of this world is *not* the reality. The more I learned what lay behind the veil of appearance, the safer I felt. I was actually learning to trust the universe, learning that in following my individual nature, I was taking my place within the larger nature, and so Nature herself took great care of me.

By the time I was in my late 30s, I would be driving down the highway in my old car, with no home and no destination, my last ten dollar bill in the pocket of my well-worn levis — in a state of exhilaration. I was on the edge, the walls were down, there was nothing separating me from the mysterious ways of nature, and my own inner guides. “Okay, okaay,” I would yell exuberantly: “Now what? Show me the way!” And inevitably, something would happen. Food, gas, money would be provided as necessary. I had given up control, so the universe could find me.

I tell these stories, not to recommend hitchhiking to Mendocino in winter with a dollar in your pocket, nor to recommend stealing thin white bath mats from cheap

motels, but to let you know just how far I pushed my luck in my quest to discover how the universe works. I wanted to discover, through my own lived experience, that I could trust the unseen forces guiding my life.

Now, when I talk with others about my experiences, they look at me skeptically, unable to imagine even contemplating such foolishness. They are astonished at my “nerve,” and assume I have no fear. They don't realize that it is precisely my fear that alerts me to what I must do next. That fear, as I have said before in these pages, is my compass.

Levels of Difficulty

When I began this chapter, I wondered why I placed it after, rather than before, the third BODY essay, on earth mysticism as accessed through the body. But then I realized, as difficult as it will be for some readers to bear with me in talking about descending into our bodies, and sensing our bodies as part of the earth, etc., it will be even more difficult for them to entertain even the bare idea of letting go of security structures which prevent this descent from happening! So I place these chapters in the order of their psychological “difficulty,” you might say. For until we risk tearing down the walls that separate our minds from both our bodies and the world around us, we do not realize that our isolation is self-imposed, and that what awaits us is beyond our wildest dreams.

Editorial (final paragraph)

LIFE ON EARTH

Heartland, 1983

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The smell of a newly-opened rose, and of Thanksgiving's Day turkey — the howl of a coyote, of a Wyoming wind, of a woman in love — the image in the dream I had last night, it woke me up, trembling, and drew me close for comfort — the unhurried wisdom shining through my just-born son's eyes, so long ago, the drama of his birth the first of what is now a cascade of miracles — the rush of memory one flutter of a single leaf in spring calls into being once again, just like it did last year about this time — the haunting tones closing down that particularly long and demanding Mozart Sonata for piano solo, a scudding procession of keys, an eerie look into the curve of space — the automatic rhythmic swing of hips, air cold, bracing, shocking lungs this early snowy March morning, love running through your fingertips and into my arm NOW as you speak out sharply, fiercely, against our common oppression — yes, energy is Blake's eternal delight, pulsing to us and through us in waves, our feelings flood us, they quicken us, awaken us. To life. Life on Earth.

Editorial

ON THE NATURE OF NATURE

Crone Chronicles #36, Autumn Equinox, 1998.

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“Dad?” The five-year-old boy looked up at his father. “Are machines a part of nature?” I heard this question 20 years ago — and was astonished. In one lightning stroke, that five-year-old had illuminated a bedrock assumption of mine: machines were not, definitely NOT a part of Nature.

There is a big part of me which has always “hated” machines — especially loud ones and/or complicated ones. Machines “get on my nerves”; when they malfunction they “drive me crazy.” Something about my nervous system seems to be incompatible with machines.

I don’t ever wear a watch. Sooner or later, it stops working. Which “makes me mad.” I’m glad to throw it away. Then I won’t be always looking at it, to find out “what time it is,” “how much time I have” — to wish it were later, or earlier. Focusing on the passing time “makes me nervous.”

To me, watches symbolize the changes machines have brought into human life. I see the off/on, precise, invariable tick tock of the Newtonian clock as what has rigidified our lives, made them *unnatural*.

I came to this view of the world over 30 years ago. I was a second-year doctoral student in philosophy and I distinctly remember my sudden interest in words like “natural,” “organic,” “biological.” I called what my mind had undergone as a “sea

change,” and talked about its new way of working as “bio-logical.” My professors were alarmed. “What happened to you?” the head of the department asked, only half-joking. “You used to be such a good up-tight graduate student!”

At about the same time, I read an article in *Scientific American* describing the two halves of the brain, and the differences between them. So I had more words for what had happened: my dominance had switched, from left- to right-brain.

I used to run another magazine, and one of my jobs was to typeset all the copy on a huge typesetting machine — which constantly broke down. Finally I decided to do a ritual with it, and to consciously think about the machine as my friend. The result? It never malfunctioned again.

And I think about the stories I hear about cars breaking down in the driveway, at the very end of a long cross-country drive. It’s as if the person and the machine are one being, as if the car entrains with its owner’s will and intention — until the completion of the journey, when that energy is released.

I prod myself into remembering these stories of harmonizing with machines — when a deeper part of me wants to retreat, live “close to nature,” with no electricity, appliances, just simple tools, a simple life. My unconscious ideology is stubbornly Luddite.

But if I assume that human beings are natural, then I could argue that any human expression is also natural. Machines, no matter how complicated, are ultimately designed by human beings. Ergo, machines are part of Nature.

Yet I know I am not the only one who senses contemporary life as becoming more and more frenetic, distracted, disconnected, and that the crazy, manic quality seems to have something to do with our increasing interface with more and more complex machines.

It used to be that I could contrast life in cities with life in my Wyoming small town, where we live “closer to nature.” That distinction dissolves as the same machines crowding cities nose their way in here. The office Jeff and I share is crowded with

phones, computers, a fax, a scanner, modems, copy machine, and so on. We email and surf the net and connect with anybody anywhere. Life in the office contrasts with the slow pace of our home life in the yurt village. Every day we travel back and forth between these two lives. Everyday I greet the sun in the morning and hear birdsong and the soft rush of the nearby river. Then I drive in my machine 15 miles to Jackson; the minute I open the door to the office, I can feel my energy rise, become nervous, frenetic, slightly crazed.

I just purchased another machine, this one a pendant to be worn around the neck. It's supposed to reconfigure incoming electronic vibrations to harmonize with my nervous system. I've just bought a machine to connect me with machines, hoping to feel more "natural" around them. We'll see if it works.

Meanwhile, the question will not go away. Are machines a part of Nature? What is Nature? I tend to want to take my body, my own tiny portion of Earth, as a sort of template for what is natural.

If machines are part of nature, then do they entrain to Earth's natural elements of fire, earth, air, and water, or must even the elements mutate in order to "catch up" with where we(?) are going?

A better question might be, what is "bottom line"? I used to think it was Nature. My body, its laws. But since my body is changing all the time, and some of these changes concern my brain's interaction with machines, then . . . then what? What is even my question here? I used to be so certain about so many things. Now I know nothing. There is no bottom line. All I can do in this Aquarian Age is learn to flow with the currents of change, visible and invisible.