

The OWL

A Sacred Stories Magazine
Summer 2021

CONSCIOUS
EVOLUTION
FOR HUMANITY

Training for a Year
and a Day in Wicca

JOURNEY TO THE SACRED
SITES OF THE GODDESS

Artist in Residence

INTERCONNECTING
WORLDS

UP CLOSE
AND PERSONAL

with Grandmother Flordemayo



WELCOME

Welcome to The Owl!

A collaborative sharing of contemporary ideas, fresh perceptions, art, beauty, Universal wisdom, and modern inspiration across traditional and non-traditional spiritual and religious teachings. We invite everyone to the table to share in the rich feast of Life and Living.

Ariel Patricia



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Cover Photo by Elijah Rael.

Come On In & See What's Inside

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Owl
A Sacred Stories Magazine

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A Sacred Story

by Laura Staley

I grew up inside a chaotic world of cruelty, an “I hate you, don’t leave me” dynamic in which I was split into the “all bad” child, the scapegoat. Nothing I did, said, or achieved ever hit the ever-changing expectations of the significant adults in my life. Shaming criticisms about my hair, laugh, frown, posture, walk, joy, tears, and passions were constant. When I spoke about the roaring anger fires erupting, members of my family persisted in denials, rewrites, and an insistence that I was the crazy one, the crybaby, the worthless one.

Chronically terrified, I vacillated between dissociation and hyper-vigilance, becoming fiercely committed to being good, to earning my right to exist. As a very little girl, like Cinderella, I did most of the family chores. I swam on the swim team beginning at 4 years old with a suicide dive off the starting blocks. At 10 years old I earned the “Most Valuable Swimmer” on the team award. I excelled in school, earning excellent grades, then my high school diploma, a BA, an MA, and a Ph.D.

Amidst all the human raging and bullying storms Nature was my respite. Sitting under trees breaking open horse chestnuts, touching the smooth reddish, brownish nut with that tan eye, the silky skin layer of the inside of

the opened shell after that prickling of the spiny outer shell was an escape and something I could relate to. The deliciously quiet public library filled with books became another sacred space along with my lively inner imaginative world. I talked to God regularly, developing a personal and intimate relationship with what I came to understand to be Love, Consciousness, and what I now call Inner Quiet Charlotte.

Still, the dynamics of my family of origin persisted into my adulthood. To free myself from these chronically abusive experiences I attended numerous leadership trainings and read almost every self-help, spiritual enlightenment book I could find. This fed my hunger to live with greater inner peace and healthy behavior patterns and I immersed myself in healing modalities with a pit crew of gifted therapists and healers. I learned about the wisdom of Feng Shui and living with belongings I love. Unknowingly, I had filled our family home with hand-me-downs I loathed, living a hand-me-down life. Purging belongings became a passion as I dove into the transformational wisdom of essential Feng Shui.

The unraveling of the marriage began years before it finally fell to pieces

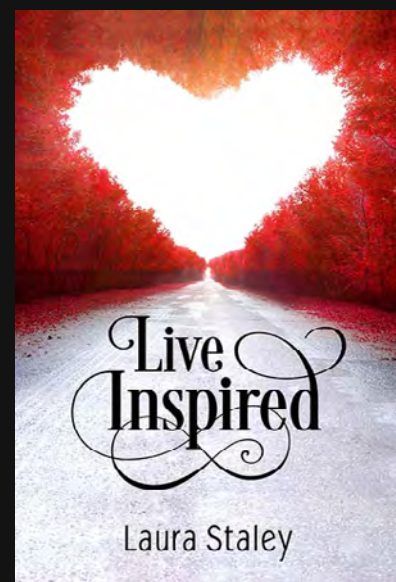
on the ground. The day I asked my husband to leave, I began the most difficult eighteen months of my adult life navigating a contested divorce alongside my teen son's troubled world. These difficulties shattered many of my limiting beliefs including "I don't matter" "I'm not enough" and "I will never be safe or worthy." As I let go and let Love-inspired actions lead the way, I broke free from toxic relationships and continued to detox my being and soul. I lived this version of the Serenity Prayer: "God grant me the serenity to accept that I cannot change another person, the courage to change the one person I can, and the wisdom to know that one person is me." I claimed my dignity.

Feeling emboldened I continued to be all in for my children. I expanded this to include my life as an emancipated woman. I chose to run, meditate daily, and anchor inside myself an unshakeable sense of agency and worthiness. Consistent self-nurturing practices strengthened the experience of belonging to myself. In the aftermath of both my parents dying within six months of each other, my two siblings and I began gently reconciling in grace and kindness: an unexpected gift. Courageously vulnerable, I grieve the many losses in my life and live with an appreciation for high quality relationships.

I flourish in my new location in western North Carolina. Surrounded by trees, mountains, many types of birds, black

bears, deer, rabbits, rhododendron, hydrangea, and roses, I found safety in my own skin and a home for my soul. Joyfully, I dance in the sunshine and post videos daily to inspire contributions to important causes that make a positive difference in the world. Creating a life I love, living in gratitude, open-heartedness, compassion, and contribution, I continue to be awed by the experience of being alive.

*Laura Staley is the author of three books including, [Live Inspired](#) and a fourth one in the wings titled, *Abundant Heart*. As the founder of *Cherish Your World*, she passionately supports people thriving in their hearts, homes, and lives. As a columnist for a global award-winning multi-media digest, she writes personal essays focused on self-discovery, feng shui, emotional health, and transformation from the inside out.*





UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL

with Grandmother Flordemayo

Grandmother Flordemayo is a Curandera Espiritu, or a Healer of Divine Spirit. As a seer, she has the ability to see other realms of color, light, and sound. She was born and raised in the highlands of Central America by her mother, a midwife, and in a family of Mayan healers.

Flordemayo is a founding member of the Church of the Spiritual Path, the Confederation of Indigenous Elders of the America, Institute of Natural and Traditional Knowledge, The International Council of Thirteen Indigenous Grandmothers, Grandmothers of the Sacred We, and The Mother Earth Delegation of United Indigenous Nations.

Ariel Patricia: Welcome, Grandmother Flordemayo.

Grandmother Flordemayo: Thank you so very much, Ariel. It's a great honor for me to be here. Many blessings to everyone.

AP: Thank you. Tell us: who is Grandmother Flordemayo?

GF: That's an interesting and beautiful question. I have to say that as an elder human, over 70 years old and being on this spiritual journey from the beginning, I am a good listener to the guidance of Spirit. I am devotional, dedicated in love, and have an incredible relationship with God.

I have found in my journey that my God is male/female, mostly represented by the feminine. We are guided through the light of the heart of the heavens, which is the male aspect, and the heart of the earth which is the female.

We constantly feel the heart of the earth coming through the soles of our feet and the heart of the heavens always travels from the crown of the

head. These energies meet at the heart and when we use this energy properly, we can send it out not only to our loved ones from the pure heart of love, but to all beings and all that exists. We send it to the waters, to the oceans, to the rivers, to the valleys, to the mountains, to all the trees, flowers, animals, big animals, little animals, and all of creation. It's a continuous meditative kind of existence and prayer.

I'm not saying that it's an easy road, it's very hard because you're balancing your married life, your children, your community, and you are involved with a lot of people all the time. But at the same time, it is a one-on-one relationship between you and the Creator, and it can be a lonely life at times.

So, this is who I am. I accept myself for who I am. I live in the invisible world a lot. I have one foot in the invisible and one foot in the physical world, and my life is to manage the needs and desires of both worlds day and night.

AP: I love how you speak of your interconnectedness with all. That is

profoundly beautiful, Flordemayo, and I want to take a moment and acknowledge that. As a Mayan elder, please tell us about your spiritual beliefs and background.

GF: We are taught that we are children of the creation of the mother and the father. We are taught that we are a part of all of life, all of creation. We are taught to live in harmony with all life and be respectful, and that everything, everyone is here serving a purpose, and to have the respect for that and help, if possible, if we can. By help, I mean, for example, putting out some clean water for the wild birds or wild animals. Or being mindful with wild plants, taking only what we need and not being destructive. We have a tendency as a human nation to just wipe out everything we see and replant it with something else. We disturb what is natural and what has been there for many, many generations. I'm thinking of the desert life, some of the desert grass has these incredible roots that holds everything together. So being mindful and thinking about the balance of what I can do to be part of nature and be in balance.

AP: You were born in Central America and are a *Curandera Espiritu*, or Healer of Divine Spirit. Tell us a bit about your upbringing.

GF: I was born and raised in Nicaragua. From the time that I was about two years old, three years old, I started to communicate with my brothers and sisters, my mom, about what I saw when I was asleep or perhaps maybe not even asleep. I remember very clearly that I would see a light field around some people; with others, I did not see a light field. I knew that the light field was more like a defused image not only around them but within them. And so, I started to recognize that there is both good and indifference within us.

When I was four years old, my mother initiated me with these very sweet words. She leaned over the bed and said to me, "Daughter, awaken. The stork is coming." It was her way to say to a little girl, "I have to go and deliver a baby." And then she said to me, "I need you to come with me. Doña Garcia is bringing Light forth." In other words, she is giving birth. and we say in our

language that she is bringing Light into the world.



So, with those words, I walked with my mother outside of the house. I remember that it was full moon. I was very, very excited about going—in my mind—to see the stork bring the baby. By this time, the community knew that I have the capacity to see light outside of the physical body. I would imagine that Doña Garcia would have already asked my mom, "Can you bring Flordemayo over so that she can witness the baby and see what is going on with the baby?"

About 10 years ago, the baby came to see me, and he said to me "I come to say hello to you because my mom always spoke about you, that you were there at my birth." The father's name was Andres and the baby's name was little Andres, Andres Junior. He was exactly four years younger than I am. By now, he is an old man, but he said, "I come to visit you and say hello and let you know that the story about you has always been with me and I'm so happy that you came to my birth."

The way they did that in Central America is, of course, a midwife goes to see the mom. And everybody else stays in the kitchen and has something to drink like a hot cocoa. My mother came later on with the baby, and he was wrapped up; all you could see was the baby's face. And my mother said, "Daughter, look at the baby and tell me what it is that you see." I experienced the Light around the baby and gave my mother the details of what I saw.

My mom was very gentle about the way that she recognized my gift, and she was extremely intuitive. She

knew everything I was experiencing and to a certain level, perhaps experiencing it herself. She just had this incredible way about her. That day, she reminded me to not be in a rush but to allow this communion with this baby to be something sacred.



AP: I love this concept of bringing Light. That's a paradigm shift right there. If more of us understood that being born is the act of Light coming forth, then how we look at each other, how we walk in this world, would be profoundly different.

GF: Exactly, and to realize that everything in nature is also made of Light. There were two beautiful words that the Beloved Mother said to me about 15 years ago. She woke me up in the middle of silence and she said to me, "Flordemayo, humanity is made of love and light." Something like 10 years ago, I started using that as a signature statement because it's just so profound.

AP: Absolutely, on such a deep level. I feel that statement alone can and will awaken people to their own inner Light.

GF: Right. In Central America when the babies are born, we also do sacred bathing. A woman receives a sacred bath with herbs. The genitalia is washed and the babies are bathed in a sacred way in these beautiful herbs. Doing so clears the trauma from the beginning.

And my mother was wiser than wise. She's probably saying to herself, "If this child can see the Light of a baby, how many midwives and parents do sacred bathing when they have delivered

their baby and does the baby still have any traumatic energies around them at birth? And can they clear that out?" The whole wisdom behind all of that is absolutely incredible. Not one little baby got away without being bathed by my mom.



AP: In Mayan astrology, you were born with the seed sign.

GF: Yes, it is known as the Q'anil sign; the sign of the Goddess of the Corn. Early in my life the Goddess appeared to me, and she called me

daughter. She looked like this big corn stalk, about maybe 14 to 20 feet tall. She had this beautiful young face and hair done with two braids. She opened the front part of the corn stalk, and I could see the little kernels like two little hands. From the crown of her head, she had little sparkles of light emanating from where the pollen is being carried. By the end of the vision, it was all around her almost like an aura of sparkling light.

What she said to me is that she comes to humanity when the world is in turmoil. The vision was so impressive that it kept me thinking for so long. When you're young, under 20 years old, you don't understand the devastation of what's going on around the globe; especially someone from Central America because at that time, I still had memories of the rivers moving, of the birds being at an arm's reach in the trees, the wild animals, the monkeys. Life for me as a child was surrounded by beauty.

But at the same time, I did not have the capacity to understand that the river in the little place that I lived

had become a rock bed. I did not have the comprehension that this could happen. So, when I saw her at such a young age it became baffling to me how can the earth be in turmoil. I don't come from this western wisdom place. I have no sense of geography or anything like that. So, I didn't understand it and I felt a sense of what can I do, how can I help? And it wasn't until I got older that, of course, you start thinking about being self-sufficient, trying to do the best that you can with raising a family, having your garden, making the clothes at home and tending to things so that you're not overdoing it and just living within your means in a simple way. I did not understand it at the time, but I did feel the pain that the beloved mother, the Goddess was feeling. I did feel her concern for humanity.

AP: Flordemayo the Beloved Mother and the Goddess have appeared to you, and they both had messages for you. Has there been a specific call to you that you know is yours to do or the work that you would like to do in this world?

GF: The work that I am here to do, and that I understood at a very young age, is to be a bridge between the physical and the invisible and to not be shy about sharing what I see, what I feel.



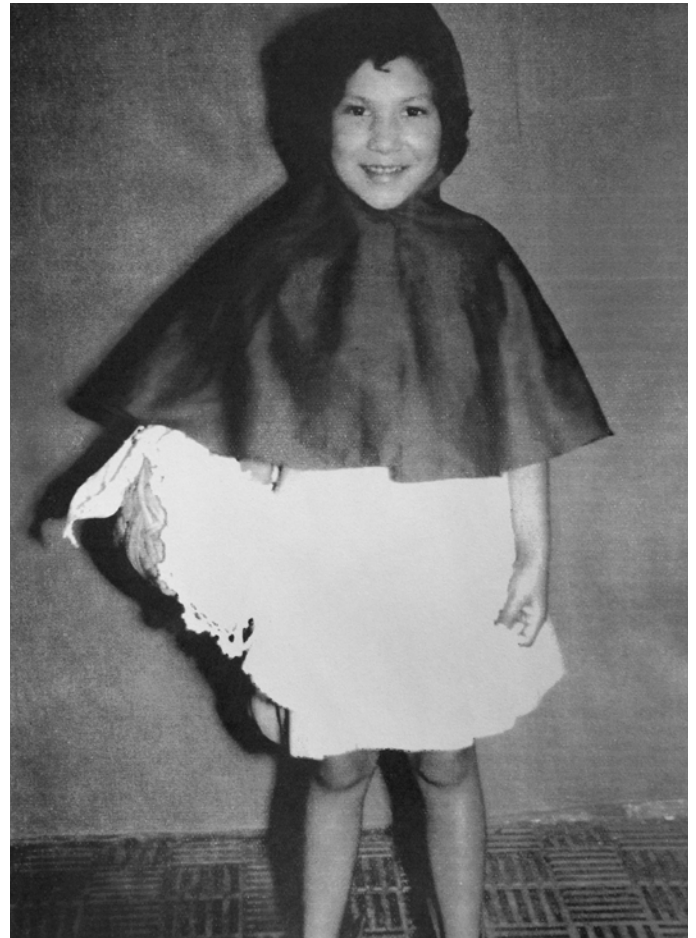
AP: It's incredible listening to you and thinking about how differently many of us in the West are raised. For someone like myself, the question is, "How do we do more of this? What is the work that can be done so that more beautiful souls when they become Light in this world can freely

experience the essence of who they are and be supported in doing so?"

GF: I think that we just have to do it. It's done in Central America and there's no reason why it can't be done in the rest of the world. We have an opportunity right now to do things in a different way. The pandemic has taken everybody to their knees, and everyone is thinking, *What should I do? What should I be doing?* We should be doing something different because whatever we've been doing before has not been working. We have the opportunity to be at home with our children to teach them what we know and what we understand, and to do it in a gentle way.

Sometimes children love to play more than they love to sit and listen. When I was out playing, I played with what was there. In other words, if all I had was little rocks outside, I played with the little rocks. If all I had was water and mud, I made families, houses and communities out of mud. Those were my toys. Sometimes it took me days to build the whole family and a community, extended family,

cousins, and everybody. I took little sticks and made little faces on them from adobe—even to the point of tasting the mud. I really got into it. I got so involved that I would be talking to my little clay people and my mom would say, "Child, are you listening?" What she meant by that is that she was making medicine in the kitchen and am I listening to her. She would remind me and say, "Are you listening?" And of course, I would say, "Yes, I'm listening, but I was playing with my toys."



And I think that that's the respect that we have to give children, that they have to be children, and that we can be talking out loud as a parent and remind the children, "Hey, are you listening?" and they will either say yes or no. And if they say no, then it's okay, because we listen in many different ways.

AP: It's such an honoring of all. Even as you're describing your childhood and the way that your mother would relate to you there's an honoring in both ways, your mother of you and you of your mother. I think we know ways to be, we have the wisdom here, we have the people such as yourself who have the knowledge and the experience of how to be different. We don't have to figure it out. It's almost as if we just need to be aware of it, we need to know what's already here and then be able to make our choices.

GF: Absolutely. And we all come with a chart when we're born. It shows us what we are here to do and what our gifts are. And the Western world does not know that with their babies. From the beginning it was right there; I was born to see and do the

medicine and born to be a teacher and to speak about these things.



AP: Flordemayo, who do you admire?

GF: I love, love, love that question. I admire the truth. I admire everyone who can speak the truth. What I mean by that is a person who is free, like spiritually free to

express themselves, who has no binds with any kind of organization that tells them what to do, how to act and what to say—a person who can speak from their heart, that has a connection to creation, a connection with God, a connection with everything around them.

I feel that many of us are coming into this place where we live in this absolute state of freedom, and nothing is going to make us think one way or another because we understand that we are devoted and dedicated to God. So, we have this beautiful relationship, like a marriage relationship, where it is you and the beloved guiding you every step of the way, day or night. As humans we experience the good and the indifferent in every moment of our lives. No one is immune to that. The great challenge comes in staying centered and not being rocked by one thing or another.

AP: When I asked you who you were, you mentioned the interconnectedness with all things. When I asked you who you admire, you brought it out to the person

who is spiritually free. Flordemayo, I again want to acknowledge the way that you walk in the world. With each step and each answer, you are honoring of the all. What a beautiful example you set for others.

GF: Thank you. It's been a long journey and over 70 years of praying and taking apart every situation, every experience, every word that I have heard and read. I think that we as humans are born to investigate and to explore, because we have an imagination, but we also want to find out the truth of what's going on around us. And I love the invisible world, I absolutely love it.

AP: Me too.

GF: Because it takes us on a journey that some people would say, "No, it doesn't exist." But, you know what? It does exist and this grandmother has a dragon in her 40 acres, and it does exist and it's there. A couple of nights ago, I had this incredible dream where I was out in the field. I was observing the plants and I saw a vision of the little people who take care of the plants. We call them *duendes*. They said to me,



"Flordemayo, you have to pray for us also." So, I pray for the *duendes* who take care of the plants and flowers and things, but I did not pray for their light bodies. It was something that the little ones were saying, "Don't forget to do that." And it was so awakening for

me because I did not think of that. I was reminded.

I love to share my visions and dreams because they're not only for me, they're for everybody. What that means is that it's okay for us to spend some time, if not a lot

of time, in the invisible. It's okay to come back with messages like that and to keep in prayer the light beings. It's imperative. All is life.

And the other thing is if little children can see the dragons and they love the dragons and they know that they're there, why not grandmothers and grandfathers? So, I like to say to everybody, "We could have these two worlds and live in them throughout our lives." We're not separate from it. So, these reminders are not only for me but they're for me to remind everybody.

AP: Flordemayo, your final thoughts for us?

GF: In one of the visions that I had a few weeks ago, I received confirmation for our prayers. I was taken to this unfamiliar place. It was not of my physical world. To me, it looked like an arena and when I went into this arena there were people all around me. Huge amounts of people, too many to count, and a lot of the people I knew. I was happy. I was greeting them. I was smiling.



I looked down at the center of this place and there was a very big oblong table made of luminous material. Around the table there were these luminous beings. Before I knew it, one of the beings stood up to speak with its natural voice, without a microphone,

but I could hear it all the way in the back. The voice said that we were brought there because they wanted to thank us for our prayers. Our prayers have been heard and our prayers were responsible for moving humanity into a higher dimension. That was the whole message. I remember that I had tears in my eyes, and I started to say, "Thank you."

As humans we go through those periods when we feel like, "Oh, my gosh, am I being heard? I'm doing the same prayer for months and a

year and I don't get an answer." But here are these holy luminous beings saying thank you. We have been acknowledged as a human race that our prayers count. If you don't think that your prayers count, know that you're being acknowledged. I remember the love that I felt in my heart and the gratitude, happiness, and encouragement to continue my work.

Ariel: The encouragement to continue. Thank you, Flordemayo, for sharing your visions and your wisdom.

FUN FACTS

AP: Coffee or tea?

GF: Coffee.

AP: Homebody or globetrotter?

GF: Oh, homebody.

AP: Beach or mountain?

GF: Mountain.

AP: Book or movie?

GF: Book.

AP: Early bird or night owl?

GF: Early bird.

AP: Favorite time of day?

GF: My favorite time is four o'clock in the morning, between four and six o'clock. There's this fluidness about everything that transports me, and I have the most incredible visions at that hour.

JOURNEY TO SACRED SITES & CEREMONIES

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**Heaven is under our feet
as well as over our heads.**

— Henry David Thoreau



A vibrant, ethereal illustration of the Goddess, likely a Hindu deity, with her eyes closed in a meditative state. She is adorned with a golden crown and jewelry. Her hands are positioned to hold a glowing lotus flower in the center of her chest. Inside the lotus, three smaller deities are seated in a row. The background is a deep, dark space filled with swirling purple and blue nebulae, stars, and celestial bodies like planets and moons. The overall atmosphere is one of divine light and cosmic mystery.

JOURNEY TO THE SACRED SITES OF THE GODDESS

by Tricia McCannon

For thousands of years, before our current civilization even existed, and long before the rise of the three masculine-based Abrahamic religions,

there existed many cultures around the world that honored the Divine Mother of Creation. As archaeology has now revealed, these peaceful,

balanced agrarian civilizations spread from the Mediterranean Sea to ancient Britain, from the Indus Valley in the East to the island of Crete and the country of Egypt in the south. In these cultures, men and women ruled together in a partnership model, and there was no war for thousands of years. These cultures believed that the Creator of the Cosmos was the Divine Mother of All – or at the very least, the Divine Mother and Father. This is because they could look around them and see that in the natural world “all things are born of woman,” or the female. This includes all the four-legged animals, the flyers or the winged, the swimmers, the crawlers, and most certainly the human beings. It is a natural law that the female gives birth to every species in the world, so naturally, it would follow that the Creator who birthed the Universe would be the Divine Mother.

So just as today we have hundreds of churches, cathedrals, and monasteries dedicated to a God who is male, for thousands of years there were hundreds of holy places dedicated to the Divine Feminine in all her many forms as the Goddess. This includes the goddesses Aphrodite, Athena,

Vesta, Hestia, Isis, Bast, Sekhmet, Nuit, Brigid, Diana, Demeter, Inanna, Astarte, Hecate, Hathor, and many more. These are all aspects of the Divine Feminine, pouring forth her love, wisdom, and bounty to the world. And like the many archetypes for many, this allowed women to have models of courage to live up to.

THE WOMB OF THE SACRED CAVE

Many of the holy places dedicated to the sacred Mother were close to caves or freshwater springs. Caves were thought to be the womb of Mother Earth, much as Native cultures create sweat lodges today to commune with the Earth and the ancestors. The sacred rites of the Eleusinian Mystery in ancient Greece took place in a cave. These rites were dedicated to Demeter and Persephone, the Divine Mother and Daughter of the Mysteries. In Japan, the sun goddess Amaterasu, who is the Lady of Life and Mother of Crops, emerged from a cave. Zeus, like Mithra, and later Jesus, was said to have been born in a cave. And many of the Egyptian, Persian, and South American Initiation rites took place in a sacred cave or underground temple. Later, in



Roman times, these womb-like rites of Mithra were incorporated into the building plans and catacombs of the European cathedrals.

In the Jewish and Christian eras, we find that the Old Testament prophet Elijah lived in a cave. Later John the Baptist would inhabit this same cave in Galilee on the side of Mount Carmel. And John, the Beloved apostle, who was tasked

with taking care of Mother Mary until her death in Ephesus, then retired into a cave on the Isle of Patmos. There, it is said, he wrote the Book of Revelation.

THE HOLY SPRINGS OF LIFE

The presence of flowing water is also sacred to the Goddess, and throughout history, we find many references to it. Aphrodite, the



Greek goddess of love, is depicted arising from the Ocean of Love and Mercy, emerging from a half shell. Similarly, Lakshmi, the supreme goddess of love in the Hindu culture, is painted emerging from a lotus blossom that floats on this same Ocean. Isis, the I AM Presence of the Divine Mother in Egypt, is said to have been responsible for the flooding of the Nile each year that brought bounty to the Egyptian

fields. In Britain, Brigid is connected not only with the fires of illumination but with all sacred springs and wells. Her priestesses were Well Maidens who gave food and water to weary travelers. And in Egypt, Isis and Hathor, both goddesses of healing, lean out from the Tree of Life to offer water to those souls who have crossed over to the Otherside.

In the last two thousand years, there have been over 250 appearances of the Divine Mother in countries around the world, many of them at ancient holy sites. This reminds us of the Divine Mother's continued presence in the world, bringing a message of grace, hope, and peace. Some of these appearances have happened over mosques or temples. But many have happened near trees, in grottos or caves, and some even by holy springs.

Collectively these have been called Marion apparitions. Sometimes they happen once and are witnessed by many people, but they also occur over time, and there may be one or even several seers who see the vision of the Lady. Depending on the location, the appearance, and the message given,



the Divine Mother will usually take on different names. She never says that she is Mary herself. Only that she is the Mother of Mercy. Some of her many titles include Lady of Grace, Lady of All Nations, the Virgin of Guadeloupe, Lady of Hope, Virgin of the Golden Heart, Lady of the Rosary, Lady of the Immaculate Conception, and Queen of Heaven. Sometimes the Lady will appear in a white gown, but she also appears wearing a blue gown covered with golden stars, and sometimes wears a black or white veil under a

golden crown. These symbols are also among the expressions of Isis, the Mother of All.

Again and again, the Lady urges us to return to peace, prayer, and the release of old negative patterns like war and conflict. Sometimes she opens up a fountain or holy spring as she did in Lourdes, France in July of 1858. There the Lady of Light appeared at the mouth of a cave to Bernadette Soubirous. She was dressed in white and blue. She



revealed a fountain in the ground that grew into a holy spring. Now, each year, millions of pilgrims flock to this sacred site, seeking the life-giving power of its healing waters.

To learn more about these holy sites around the world, click [HERE](#) and join us on July 18th for our conference on Sacred Sites and Ceremonies around the world. There you will learn more about the sacred sites of the Goddess that are dedicated to the Divine Mother.

Tricia McCannon is an American mystic and bestselling author of four books. Tricia teaches six courses at Sacred U including her incredible course Ten Goddesses That Can Heal the World. Click [HERE](#) for the Ten Goddesses course and use coupon code Owl20 for 20% off!



CONSCIOUS EVOLUTION FOR HUMANITY

By Glen T. Martin



There has been a great deal of talk about “conscious evolution” in recent years. Diverse thinkers from Barbara Marx Hubbard to Robert Ornstein and Paul Ehrlich have urged us to focus on a conscious evolution that alone can bring human beings to a higher level of existence from which our present omniscidal problems, such as the threat of nuclear war and climate collapse, can be addressed. However, the limitations of what these thinkers propose involve what the western philosophical tradition might refer to as their “nominalism,” their perhaps

unconscious assumption that the world is a collection of 7.8 billion *individuals* who are organized in various *individualized* social groupings such as different nation-states, religions, races, ideologies, etc.

This nominalism came into Western thought in a virulent form with William of Ockham in the 14th century and infected the thought of the reductionist scientific cosmology that began to emerge in the 17th century—culminating in the so-called “Newtonian world view” that came

into force in the 18th century and whose basic assumptions still remain with many thinkers, movements, and institutions today. It denies, perhaps unconsciously, what Jürgen Habermas and many other thinkers from the late 20th century to the present have shown—that each of us as an “individual person” is inseparable from what we are in terms of what Karl Marx called our “species-being.” In other words, the world is not composed of individual entities, contingently lumped together in collectivities called nations or races or religions. What we are already includes a universal dimension—we are literally part of one another from the very beginning.

In addition, we see that the emergent holistic paradigm that began with Max Planck and Albert Einstein at the dawn of the 20th century continued to the advanced insights of quantum physics that the matrix of all things includes a unitary “Akashic” dimension. This dimension involves an integral oneness beyond anything we can imagine in the spatio-temporal world (Laszlo 2014). These two insights (the species-being and the Akashic) form only two components in a transformative conceptual process

that has blown nominalism out of the water as simply false. Neither the world nor humanity are a collection of atomistic individuals. Many conscious-evolutionary theorists have yet to understand this.

This is why conscious evolution necessarily involves the demand for ratification of the *Constitution for the Federation of Earth*. Our evolution is a species-evolution. It is *humanity* that has evolved from a primitive unconsciousness of 100,000 years ago into an “age of magic” evidenced in the cave-paintings that took place around the world some 15 to 40,000 years ago. It was *humanity* that then transmuted into an “age of mythology” evidenced between 10,000 and 3000 years ago and then into an “Axial Age” in which persons came to be able to clearly separate subject from object and begin the process of the accumulation of “objective” knowledge of nature, human beings, and perhaps God (see Martin 2021). Our evolutionary upsurge as been *collective* and so our future evolution must likewise be *collective*.

The *Earth Constitution* unites humanity into the community that we



EARTH CONSTITUTION

truly are. It *completes* the actualization of the human community as philosopher of law John Finnis contends (1980, 149-50). It is regressive nominalism to claim that we can be a planetary community while retaining the system of militarized sovereign nation-states and the system of global economic competition for the accumulation of private wealth. The *Earth Constitution* recognizes the collective people of Earth as sovereign and establishes an economic system directed at the common welfare of all, not simply the top 5% of super-wealthy persons who control 90% of the wealth in today's broken world disorder.

The great philosopher of a cosmic evolutionary upsurge behind and empowering the human evolutionary process was Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.

Humanity, the spirit of the earth, the synthesis of individuals and peoples, the paradoxical conciliation of the element with the whole, of the one with the many: all these are regarded as utopian fantasies, yet they are biologically necessary; and if we would see them made flesh in the world what more need we do than imagine our power to love growing and broadening till it can embrace the totality of men and the earth (1969, 145)

Teilhard recognizes the evolutionary upsurge as impelling the emergence of human unity, a process that is both “biologically necessary” and a phenomenon of “love” that must grown and broaden until it embraces the “totality of men and the earth.” This process is why I have repeatedly in my writings spoken of “democratic world law as the 21st century form of love.” The *Earth*



Constitution recognizes, sanctions, and institutionalizes the love that is required to establish an effective

human community, the totality of humans now governing themselves consciously and democratically to further actualize the synergistic harmony required to end war, disarm the nations, protect universal human rights and restore the broken planetary biosphere.

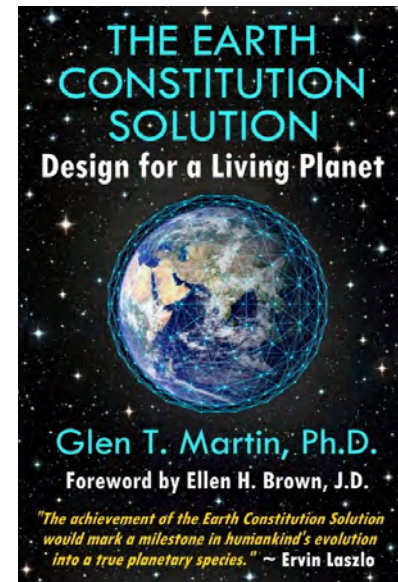
In harmony with Teilhard's perspective Christian evolutionary philosopher Errol E. Harris links the divine *nisus* or impulse behind the cosmic evolutionary process with the development of the human mind: “The conception of God with which we conclude, then, is one of a completely perfect mind realizing itself in and through the cosmic process, manifesting itself in human consciousness and fulfilling itself in the perfection of personality as revealed in the person of Christ” (1959, 98). The emergent human mind is not your nominalistically conceived mind versus my individualistically conceived mind. It is our common humanity that must consciously come to self-actualization.

The *Earth Constitution* is a key to the entire process. Human beings, even with thousands of “Unity Earth” type organizations and

Conscious Evolution for Humanity

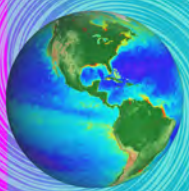
collaborative NGOs around the planet, remain institutionally and semi-consciously fragmented into sovereign nations, races, religions, and private corporate competitive entities. “Conscious evolution” does not mean merely your or my individual efforts to become more self-aware. It means taking the next step in the unification of humanity on this Earth. It necessarily means legally and politically uniting in such a way that people will necessarily begin thinking as world citizens because they will be born into that framework from the very start. The *Earth Constitution* alone makes possible the next step in human conscious evolution.

Glen T. Martin, Ph.D. is Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at Radford University and the author of a dozen books. In 2013, he received the Gusi Peace Prize International for his work with the International Philosophers for Peace, the Earth Constitution Institute (ECI), and the World Constitution & Parliament Assoc. (WCPA). ECI and WCPA are global NGOs that sponsor Provisional World Parliaments. Learn more at www.EarthConstitution.world



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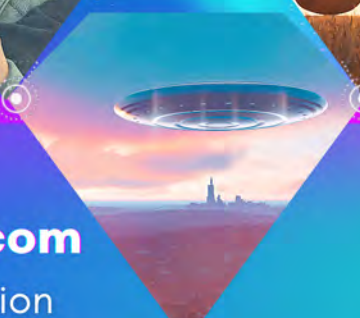
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WisdomKeepers Training for a Year and a Day in Wicca

Rev. Wendy Van Allen



The timetable of Nature is one that we can't rush or force. Perennials need to take root; fruit trees need a few seasons before they are ready to produce their bounty. Sometimes seeds don't take, or won't bloom in one spot, but will do so beautifully in another. Sunshine may fill an area in the Spring only to be completely in shade later in the year. It is important to listen for the response of the land, the creatures who dwell there, and for many of us, to the spirits of the land itself. So, too, does the practice of Wicca, a Nature-based religion of Witchcraft, take time to learn, master, and grow.

Many people are reclaiming the practice of witchcraft and consider themselves witches, and some of these belong to the tradition of Wicca. Wicca is based on the remnants of folk beliefs, traditions, country practices, and occult wisdom rooted in Nature's rhythms and cycles which remained among rural people in Europe, even after centuries of religious persecution by Roman Catholic and Protestant Christianity. Considered a modern reconstruction religion, Wicca began in the early part of the

twentieth century with the writings of Gerald Gardner, Doreen Valiente, and other scholars of European folklore and occult history.

Today, there are a variety of traditions: some Wiccans continue the British-based founding traditions of Gardnerian or Alexandrian, while others are inspired by various European pantheons, like Greek tradition or Italian "Strega." The Dianic branch came out of the feminist revolution and embraces a Goddess-centered approach. All are rooted in the veneration of Nature and Her seasons.

As with most Pagan religions, Wicca is an initiatory mystery tradition. A period of study with an elder or established group known as "The Year and a Day" training is recommended before being formally admitted into the mysteries of the Craft. Initiation represents a liminal time in the transformation of consciousness for all those seeking entry into mystery traditions. This wisdom is right-brained and non-rational. Initiation itself, in any Nature-based system, means a

shedding of the old self, and birth into a new state of being. One must go through a period of unlearning and take the time to walk through the yearly cycle which allows the opportunity for full completion.

In Wicca, the year is divided by the Wheel of the Year. These are ancient holidays recognized by European Pagans that coincide with the four quarter days of equinoxes and solstices, as well as cross-quarter days, those which fall between, and represent the coming in of the new natural energy. Beltane for instance is celebrated as the coming in of summer and the awakening of fertility and life, while Samhain, its' opposite on the wheel, represents the coming in of winter, and the honoring of Death and remembrance of ancestors. Each season also coincides with certain activities, rituals, and ceremonies. There is the season of fertility, a season of harvest, and a fallow time, each has its energy and appropriate time. This is also true for the cycles of the Moon, which are an essential part of knowledge and practice in Wicca.

Witches have different specializations, some learn the wisdom and magic of herbalism, others work with gemstones, weather, animals, shapeshifting, journeying, dreamwork, divination, charms, or all of the above. It takes time to figure out which path is ours to grow into. For the neophyte Witch, each of these can only be experienced and known in their own time to fully grasp their meaning and utilize these energies for health and wellness practices in life and in community.

Additionally, while it is perfectly acceptable and a long-standing tradition in Wicca, that people may practice solitary or self-dedicate, and many choose this route, there are benefits to becoming part of a larger group. Humans have a need to belong, and becoming part of a grove, coven, or larger community, provides us with learning experiences and opportunities to develop our gifts under the guidance of more adept practitioners. We learn from one another, share stories, songs, and personal and creative journeys. We feast together, which is the

original sense of communion, and is an essential part of all Nature tradition, we become as kin.


Another benefit for allowing time before formal initiation is to address our psychological defenses, fears, and internal baggage which must be met and confronted. The words “witch” and “witchcraft,” after centuries of demonization and persecution, have taken on a sinister shadow energy in many cultures. Even those who weren’t raised in or outwardly conform to organized religion may have internalized these fears.

Wicca is an art and craft for self and community healing to those who practice, it is the practice of the Craft itself. This tradition takes years to fully incorporate into our lives, allowing us to be deeply changed by it, and to bring us closer to Nature, ancestors, and our understanding of Deity. It is not a tradition for everyone, and it is believed by those who have practiced for many years, once you initiate and send the call out to the Universe that you have chosen this

way and asked to be accepted, it’s not something that can easily be undone.

If you are serious about your study and wish to dedicate to this path, it is worth your time and effort to find an elder or established group willing to take you through a Year and a Day training. Formal initiation is an occult tradition, and a true transition, as powerful and as important as birth and death. Through this personal commitment, training, and transformation, we renew ourselves and earn the right to be called a Priest or Priestess. It should not be taken lightly, and it can open up a new way of being, a window into another world, and new access to personal wisdom and power.

Rev. Wendy Van Allen is an ordained interspiritual minister and counselor through One Spirit Learning Alliance. She is an initiate and long-time practitioner of Wicca and the Lukumi Afro-Caribbean tradition and is a practicing Spiritist. She has a book on nature spirituality coming out with Llewellyn Publishers in early 2022.



**The clearest way into
the Universe is through
a forest wilderness.**

— John Muir



ARTIST IN RESIDENCE

by Franne Demetrician

As our country begins its re-entry into what some call “normal life” I’m thinking about what that means in my life. We have sustained tremendous loss and trauma and it will be a while before our psyches heal from it all. I’ve taken the time to focus on what has been gained and one gift I have found is the “eye hug”.

Having to wear masks, I’ve learned to communicate with my eyes and to read other people’s communication through theirs. I have some familiarity with this as my seminary colleague Martha has a unique lung condition requiring her to avoid physical contact. Without physical distance, she might contract a virus or bacteria that could inflame her condition and become life-threatening. She’s had this condition for many years so social distancing was a way of life for her long before COVID-19. At One Spirit Interfaith Seminary hugging is a way of life. We hug hello, we hug goodbye, we hug for happy, we hug for sad, we hug for comfort. We hug. And as deans of first-year students, which Martha and

I were, we hugged our students often. By necessity, Martha came up with a substitute for actual hugging — the “eye hug”. Rather than the usual up close and personal squinch, she would look deeply into your eyes, and vice versa, and end the moment with a bow. It was a lovely pause to connect.

I thought of Martha often as I made my way through a world of masked faces. Initially, it felt strange, and I was amazed at how wearing a mask unhinged me from my senses. When masked I felt like I couldn’t hear well, couldn’t see properly, and even my “spidey senses” felt compromised. In time it became easier, although what was uncomfortable was the fact that I couldn’t see anyone’s facial expressions. Or so I thought.

Then I thought of Martha’s eye hugs and began to look for people’s eyes. Coupled with body language I began to feel more connected to people out in “the world” when I’d head to the grocery store or places where other intrepid citizens went for supplies or respite.

Coming face to face with someone I sought out their eyes. And wonder of wonders I found them seeking mine. Then came the best part — the wrinkled corners of eyes that said they not only see me but are seeing my wrinkled eye corners as I smile at them from behind my safe boundary, and they are smiling back at me. Even now that is one of the most heart-warming results of this time — cultivating the ability to connect with the people by looking into their eyes.

It's hard to imagine, but there are things I will miss when we fully "re-enter". I'll miss the silence and peace that came with the lockdown. For a while, there was no air or road traffic, and the silence that resulted felt at once eerie then just plain sweet. It made space. I will miss the sense that we were indeed all in this together. That gave me a strong sense of community. I'll miss the eagerness people felt to acknowledge those who were "taking care of us"; doctors, nurses, and first responders, people keeping hospitals clean, driving trucks, delivering groceries and stocking shelves, and the many others we take for granted. My prayer is that we never forget that we are in this life together,

working for the benefit of all people in our own way.

I've seen news reports depicting people burning their masks as a symbol of freedom. I will not be one of them. The mask symbolizes life as I believe without them the numbers would have been dramatically higher. Rather than a loss of freedom, masks represent hope, safety, and love. And while I'm not ready to stop wearing masks completely, I will miss the eye hugs and I know I will continue looking for people's eyes. It's said that the eyes are the window to the soul. I plan to do my best to meet people soul to soul as much possible.

In truth, I have no desire to go "back to normal" if that means the way it was pre-COVID. I prefer to move forward with a "new normal" that includes looking into people's eyes and remembering that we are all souls making our way home.

Rev. Franne Demetrician is an interfaith minister. She has been a licensed holistic health practitioner since 1995 and wrote a spiritually oriented weekly blog from 2015 -2018. Franne is a working artist, photographer, writer, spiritual counselor, mentor, and teacher.

Interconnecting **WORLDS**

by Dr. Kurt Johnson



Photo of Light on Light Staff and International Day of Yoga Committee at the United Nations with Yoga Day issue at the Deepak Chopra "Metahuman" event in New York City.

We're now in the period of our history where a cosmopolitan, integral, holistic, and global worldview must emerge, or our very survival will be at stake. Required is an interconnecting of world—cultures, histories, and backgrounds—hitherto persistently separate. Year 2021 highlights this emergence, following a global pandemic demonstrating how we are inevitably one but *also* still so divided. The global need and demand for harmony and unity are now palpable. The future presses forward and will not let us continue to lag behind. We *must* bring together the disparate threads that can hasten the harmony and unity process.

The world's interfaith, interspiritual, and integral visions have themselves been birthed by the world's inherent developmental processes towards greater unity. "It's an exciting time to be alive" proclaimed integral pioneer Ken Wilber, joining me, Deepak Chopra, and diverse speakers from the world's many spiritual communities in a broadcast from the United Nations community for the 2021 International Day of Yoga. "Healing, Health and Harmony" are Yoga Day's themes, based on the

essential principles and values of the world's wisdom traditions and perennial philosophies. My colleagues and I have tracked and celebrated these aspirations and goals through four years of special issues of our *Light on Light* magazines both for the annual international days of Yoga and our "Change Makers" special issue, which featured Dr. Chopra and his inspiring work. It's an exciting time to be guiding media with the goal to hasten the process that is inevitably before us.



Cover of Change-Make Issue of Light on Light



Photo of Light on Light Editors with Ken Wilber at his home in Denver.

Today's Light on Light media services originated in the global interspiritual community, originally birthed as "The Interspiritual Dialogue Network (ISD)" through the United Nations' "Spiritual" and "Values"

caucuses, which have since become full UN NGO Committees. The foundational pioneer of interspirituality, Br. Wayne Teasdale, co-founder of ISD also a long-term Trustee of the Global Parliament of the World's

Religions, was a close friend of Ken Wilber. They both cooperated with the late Fr. Thomas Keating, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, and others in the three decade's long "Snowmass Inter-religious Dialogue" from which came "The Nine Points of Agreement Among the World's Religions", published in *The Common Heart* in 2007.

In 2015, the "Nine Points" joined Teasdale's "Nine Elements of a Universal Spirituality" and three sets of principles on interspiritual and integral education as "[The Interspiritual Declaration](#)" (p. 32) now considered, by many, to be a foundational global document.

Teasdale's last public dialogues about interspirituality were with Wilber (YouTube: "Ken Wilber and Wayne Teasdale") and, in a further interconnecting of worlds, in 2019 (just before COVID) I traveled to the Dalai Lama's home in Dharamshala, India with communications to him from Fr. Keating who had transitioned just a few months before. Aptly this visit was part of a dialogue with His Holiness and evolutionary scientist Dr. David

Sloan Wilson. Wilson has himself become intermeshed in this unfolding circle because of his pioneering work on conscious and cooperative evolution. His Holiness invited Dr. Wilson to discuss "[Toward a Global Ethic: The Role of Conscious Evolution](#)".

Of interconnecting world's, Wilber has spoken of the emergence of the "great inter-subjective discussion"—the global discussion of "who we are, where we came from, and where we're going" across all the world's religions and perennial philosophies. Wilson and Wilber themselves met in 2015 and a resulting video (YouTube: "Introduction to Integral Spirituality") shares Wilber and Wilson's interconnecting worlds. Combining psychology, religion, and the latest frontiers of evolutionary science, Wilson champions the "[Prosocial Movement](#)". As much as Wilber's grand system of "[integral theory](#)" gives us a view of all the elements of the human enterprise on this planet, Wilson's discoveries in evolutionary science describe, for the first time, the mechanisms



Dr. David Sloane Wilson with His Holiness the Dalai Lama in India 2019.

by which nature itself moves toward the altruistic—the good of the whole. As Wilson and His Holiness have summarized, these discoveries of science put the winds of history in alignment with the greater good. Accordingly, we

can sail into a promising future, sailing with the winds of the evolutionary process itself, and not against it.


Furthering these unfoldings Wilson has now joined with Dr.

Paul W. B. Atkins — his partner in writing the book *Prosocial: Using Evolutionary Science to Build Productive, Equitable, and Collaborative Groups*—me and Jeffrey Genung, founder of ContemplativeLife.org in writing the first seminal discussion among Wilber’s integral theory, Teasdale’s interspirituality, and the message of the Prosocial Movement in mainstream science. This article will appear in [The Integral Leadership Review](#) in July 2021. We think this discussion is likely the next iteration of the [global interspiritual discussion](#).

Wilber has said, in introductory notes to my book *The Coming Interspiritual Age*: “The Coming Interspiritual Age is ... about just that—the emergence, happening now and gaining momentum—of an interspiritually unified world. It has its basis in a background coming transformation— that of the Integral Age.” Thus, their original synchronicity discussed by Wilber and Teasdale in their seminal conversations in 2004 (YouTube: “Ken Wilber and Wayne Teasdale”) is even further enhanced today.

There is no doubt that we are entering the age in our history for the emergence of a cosmopolitan, integral, holistic, and global worldview. It’s exciting to be a part of the elements so clearly gelling in that direction.

Dr. Kurt Johnson is a Director and Founder of *Light on Light Press*, *Light on Light* magazines, and the *Convergence* series on VoiceAmerica. He is a noted evolutionary biologist and comparative religionist. Kurt is co-author of the influential book *The Coming Interspiritual Age* and co-founded, with Br. Wayne Teasdale, what is today *The Interspiritual Dialogue Network*. He co-edited the 2021 Gold Nautilus Award and COVR Visionary Award-winning book *Our Moment of Choice*. A former monk and with a Ph.D. in evolution and ecology, Kurt was associated with the American Museum of Natural History for 25 years. In science, he is co-author of two award-winning popular science books, *Nabokov’s Blues* and *Fine Lines*. With a fifteen-year association with New York City’s *One Spirit Interfaith Seminary* and Dr. Johnson also serves widely on international forums and committees, especially at the United Nations.



**Live in the sunshine, swim
the sea, drink the wild air.**
— Ralph Waldo Emerson



EXCERPT FROM

THREE MEN SIX LIVES

Bernie S. Siegel, MD

New York Times Bestselling Author
of *Love, Medicine, and Miracles*

CHAPTER 1

Salvatore Petonito's life revolved around routines. Every morning he began the day reading the *Topeka Sentinel* while having breakfast at the Athenian Diner. Sal didn't need to order breakfast because his ritual included the same specific meal each day, so the staff was always prepared for his arrival the same time every morning. The first Friday of every month Sal would tear off the page containing the local animal shelter's photographs of pets available for adoption, fold it carefully, and place it in his jacket pocket. When he arrived home from work that evening Sal would swing over to the kitchen table on his crutches, where he would

unfold it, and place it for his wife Rosa to see. Sal always relied on her well rehearsed response:

"Sweetheart, I will not have a barking dog in our house and little pieces of fur all over the furniture."

Though he remained ever hopeful, Sal truly believed that if his lifelong dream was to ever become a reality, it would require divine intervention.

Today's entire animal shelter page was devoted to the story of terrier, who had been struck by a car and severely injured. Interviews with the people who rescued the dog, the shelter's staff, and the veterinarian filled the page:

I didn't expect him to survive due to his internal injuries, but his will to live was amazing. That's why the staff named him Survivor. The majority of people in town either prayed for him or donated money to cover his medical expenses, but his deformity has diminished their interest in adopting him. The thought of euthanizing him is heartbreaking, but the shelter is filled to capacity and he's been here well beyond the legal time limit. If he isn't adopted this week, his story will have a tragic ending.

Mid-bite, Sal set down his fork and folded the page. After tucking it into his shirt pocket, he placed his waitress's tip on the table and exited the diner. Spiro, the diner's owner, shrugged at his silent, unexpected departure.

Sal drove straight to the animal shelter. Upon entering the waiting room, Sal held up the newspaper page.

"I'd like to see this dog."

Survivor was brought to the visitor's area and walked directly over to where Sal was sitting, as if he knew him and was following his commands. Though they both remained silent, it was obvious their wounded souls

were communicating. After several minutes, Sal spun around, grabbed his crutches, and started swinging them across the room. The staff assumed Sal was leaving and started to take Survivor back to his kennel, but the dog evaded their grasp by slipping into the space beneath Sal's stump, moving in rhythm with Sal's crutches as he swung over to the front desk.

"For the record, his new name is Tripod," Sal said.

After filling out the papers and paying the adoption fee, Sal and Tripod exited the animal shelter their strides in perfect sync, as if they had spent a lifetime together.

"Young fella, we're family and going to be spending a lot of time together. So, let's get to know each other."

The two headed over to the town green where Sal seated himself while patting the bench. "Jumpee upee." With a little help, Tripod jumped onto the bench beside Sal then placed his head in Sal's lap.

"Let me tell you where I'm coming from. The only time I have ever left

this town was out of a sense of duty, which overcame my hatred of war, but not my horror at having to participate in it. A drunk driver did your damage. A world war and a landmine did mine.” Sal patted his stump. “Nations, races, and religions fight wars, but people suffer and die. Lives were meant to be love stories. Someday maybe we’ll wake up to the fact that we’re all members of the same family, with the same Father, the same color inside, and the same at both ends of the rifle. You’re more likely to die in the arms of a loved one than I am. Hey, you listening?”

Tripod placed his lone front paw on Sal’s chest and began licking his chin. It was a moment Sal had waited a lifetime for, something his parents and wife could never understand. He knew he would never feel abandoned again.

He hugged Tripod to his chest. “I’m not going to hide the truth and let them amputate my spirit. There’s no prosthesis for that. We’ll never be perfect, but we can still be complete. Who knows? Maybe what we shed enhances our other features, and it sure doesn’t stop us from being able to love and be loved.”

Sal stroked the dog’s thick, white matted fur. “Somebody didn’t love you.”

“My psychiatrist couldn’t understand. He had eyes and ears to see and hear with, but no heart to understand with. Said I had post-traumatic stress disorder and sent me home on medication instead of honoring my attitude and potential. He was treating the result but not the cause of my troubles. He medicated a diagnosis but didn’t treat me and my story.”

Tripod glanced up at Sal as if he truly understood.

“Drugs don’t change anything. They just make you numb. Nobody understood. If I’d been a dog, my wife probably would have put me out of my misery. When Rosa’s brother came home on leave, he came over to visit. I can still hear Rosa.” Sal grew quiet as he recalled the time of his discharge... “If they don’t readmit him, I don’t know what I’m going to do. I can’t live like this. I know it sounds terrible to say, but I wish he were still overseas or hospitalized. Worrying about him is easier than having to live with him. When anyone comes to visit, he leaves the house. He’s become a vegetarian

and won't eat the things he used to love because he can't stand the thought of animals dying to provide him with a meal. He didn't just lose a leg; he lost his mind. I can't deal with it," Rosa had complained.

"Rosa, you need to talk to his psychiatrist or Father O'Mara, the Army chaplain. Maybe one of them can help."

The psychiatrist had responded as she expected—more medication or hospitalization. So, Rosa went to see Father O'Mara before making a decision.

"Rosa, I know a woman who had a similar problem," the priest assured her. "Like you, this poor, frustrated, exhausted woman was searching for an answer. In desperation, she sought the help of a healer who told her, 'I can make a potion that will heal your husband, but it requires a white hair from the chest of a bear.'"

The priest continued his story:

"'Where can I get such a hair?' the woman asked.

"The healer told her, 'There's a bear living in a cave on the mountain. If

you can get close enough to pluck a white hair from his chest, I can save your husband.'

"So, the woman spent months outside the bear's cave feeding and befriending him. She showed great patience and one day was able to get close enough to pluck a hair from his chest. When the bear reared up in anger, she turned and ran. When she arrived at the healer's house, the healer took the hair and threw it into the fire.

"'You promised me a potion. I risked my life for that hair,'" she cried.

"'Now go home and be as patient with your husband as you were with the bear.'"

Rosa followed the priest's advice, and several months later the townspeople were stunned to see Sal swinging down Main Street. From that morning on, you could set your watch by his daily routine. Every day at seven o'clock he would kiss Rosa good-bye. And regardless of the weather, he'd start swinging down Main Street to the radio station.

The station manager, a former WWII Army buddy of Sal's, knew better than to get in his way. At the station Sal would give his daily weather report: "Today's weather: sunshine, sunshine, sunshine." The hopeful and gentle look of Sal's eyes silenced those who didn't agree with his report.

He then swung over to the green, across from the church, to sit on his accustomed bench, from which he would hold court among the park regulars and passersby, cheerily dispensing good mornings, advice, and opinions. No one dared take his seat or disagree with his weather report. Likewise, his hour of conversing with God—another of his well-practiced routines—was sacrosanct. When it was over, he swung down to the Athenian Diner and hopped up the steps for breakfast, which Spiro always had ready and waiting. Like his weather report it never varied: half a pink grapefruit, a slice of melon, hot oatmeal with raisins, buttered whole wheat cinnamon raisin toast, ginger marmalade, black decaf coffee, and the *Topeka Sentinel*. After breakfast he was off to work at the hardware store.

On Sunday he followed a somewhat different routine. Instead of oatmeal and toast, Spiro had waffles, a blueberry blintz, and syrup waiting. On the way home Sal stopped at the bakery for a half dozen fresh pecan tarts. It was his silent thank you and never-ending love note to Rosa.

Tripod's whine interrupted his daily chat with God—something no human would ever dare. "Sorry, old boy," said Sal, grabbing his crutches. "God and me will have to pick up where we left off tomorrow. Now, let me show you where I work."

Luckily for Sal, his good-hearted boss shared his passion for animals. Tripod was given the run of the store and proved as popular with the customers as Sal, whose how-to expertise on home repair was highly regarded in the community. When the store closed that evening, Sal turned to Tripod and said, "It's time for you to meet the *real* boss."

When Sal introduced Tripod to Rosa, she had to admit the pooch was cute. She dutifully oohed and aahed—then she read her husband the riot act.

“Sal, you ought to call him Minus because you’re both missing something, and it’s more than a leg.”

“Tripod don’t worry she has a good heart. You’ll see.”

“Sal let’s get serious. He doesn’t have a chance of becoming family unless you agree to my conditions. If you do, he can stay. After my mastectomy you didn’t start calling me Flat Busted or introduce me as your single-breasted wife. I won’t let you give him a name that makes him less than whole and focuses on what’s missing and not who and what he is. He’s more than a symbol for you to use. You need to realize you can’t change anyone; you can only love and coach them. So, condition number one, you find another name for your foxhole buddy.

“Number two, you start wearing your artificial leg and dump the crutches. Everyone in Topeka has seen you and heard what you have to say. Enough already! It’s time you start being complete. We’re all wounded, Sal. Lives are healed when we share our wounds, words, and feelings, not by just exposing our deformities. I don’t have to bare my chest to help other men and women.

I just have to say the word ‘cancer’ and we all become kindred spirits who understand each other. You want to wear your Purple Heart, fine. But the crutches are out, and the leg is in, or else your buddy goes back to the shelter.

“It’s time to show people you are enabled and not disabled. You can’t keep living a loss. It’s time for you to get a life and become authentic and complete again and turn the curse into a blessing.”

As she waited for Sal’s response Rosa realized she had come a long way to be able to speak like that and let her heart make up her mind.

“I can’t talk about it.”

“Sal, stop holding it in. Burst the dam and find the energy to move forward.” Rosa embraced him as his past overwhelmed him. Through the tears and sobbing Rosa heard, “I love you, and since you called him my buddy his new name will be Buddy.”

“Sal, that’s another meaningless name. You need to think of something that will make him unique and special. So, figure it out and then we can discuss it.”

After dinner Sal came back into the kitchen. "Okay, I've got some names to discuss with you. The options are Furphy and Sex. You didn't want little pieces of fur in the house so he can be named after them or we can call him Sex. So, which do you like?"

"Sal, you're nuts. Who wouldn't prefer having Sex around the house? But you're insane. I cannot accept a name like that. Sal, we have neighbors."

"Yeah, and when Sex barks at night, and the next day when they complain about it at the supermarket, I can ask them, 'Did you have a problem with Sex last night?' That ought to shut them up. And when I license him, I can ask the town clerk if I need a license for Sex if I just have Sex on my property. And I can have Sex at work, and if he ever bites anyone and we end up in court, I can ask the judge to have Sex for a week and see how he feels after that."

"Sal, you are a basket case."

"Honey, it's a done deal. I've had Sex for one day and he's already got me smiling and the two of us talking. So, Sex it is. Let's open a bottle of wine and celebrate having Sex."

Sal and Sex became inseparable, cutting a distinctive figure about town. Rosa pointedly called the dog Furphy in public, while Sal never tired of the shock value inherent in introducing his three-legged companion as Sex. Spiro even made an exception to his no pets' rule, knowing you served both or lost two customers. Each morning he made a few wisecracks about having Sex in the diner and had a meaty snack waiting under the table for the doggie, who was not a vegetarian.

Rosa, however, knew that discipline was an important part of training a dog, no matter how Sal pleaded with her about letting Sex sleep with them. "I have no problem with you spending more time with the dog than you do with me, but our bed is off limits," she stated flatly. "There will be only the real thing in our bed."

A few weeks later Sal was late getting home from a veterans meeting. When Rosa started to get ready for bed, Sex was snoozing with his head on Sal's pillow.

"I have to admit, you're a plus, not a minus. You can stay until your Daddy

gets home. Hey, having Sex in bed tonight could be fun.”

When Sex didn’t greet him at the front door Sal went to the bedroom and found his two loved ones curled up on the bed. He gently awakened Rosa with tears in his eyes, “Rosa, bless you for your love and acceptance.”

“Honey, we’re both learning.”

As they embraced, Sex’s snoring startled them.

Rosa burst out laughing. “Now you know what I go through sleeping with you.”

When Rosa awakened the next morning, seeing Sex nestled in the empty space provided by Sal’s amputation made her abundantly aware he was a plus in their lives.

CHAPTER 2

Sunday morning found Danny Hoffman still in his pajamas, half-listening to the top forty countdown on the radio on his nightstand. Elvis, Sinatra, and Crosby crooned while his cat, Penny, the only creature besides his mom he felt comfortable with,

purred contentedly beside him on the bed. Every now and then the high school senior’s attention strayed to the composition book, open on his belly, on which he’d scrawled his tortured thoughts the restless night before.

“Danny, honey, breakfast’s ready!” Mom shouted from the kitchen. “I’ll be leaving for church in a minute. Want to come?”

Danny shouted back: “I have to write a letter for Mr. Schultz to put in the *Sentinel*.”

“You can write it later. Come on, you’ll feel better.”

“Mom, I don’t feel comfortable around people.”

“Honey, stop judging yourself.”

“I’ll get the letter done and see you later. Love you.”

Mom suddenly appeared in the doorway of Danny’s bedroom. The teen reflexively sat up in bed, discreetly closing the comp book in the same motion.

"All this shouting back and forth is for the birds," said Mom, whisking off her apron. "I'm not going to force you to come but I do insist that you keep your appointment with Dr. Karl tomorrow. I'm sure he can help you."

"Okay, okay, we'll talk later."

"Someday you'll understand what blessings are and find meaning in all this. God is forgiving. No one is blaming you. Dad's death taught me more than all my years as a social worker have. Danny, you can abandon your past, or learn from it. The one thing you can't do is change it." With an exasperated groan Danny fell back on the bed; the impact sent Penny scurrying. "Yeah, yeah, Mom, I've heard all this before. I know you mean well, but—"

"How about a picnic later? Being outside might help."

"Okay, okay. If that'll make you happy."

"Danny, don't you understand? It's *your* happiness I want." She stood there for an awkward moment before adding: "Your breakfast is on the

stove. Pancakes. Better eat them while they're hot."

Danny's mom closed the door before she lost control of her emotions. She stepped outside into the autumn air's crisp, clean embrace, while the vibrant foliage dazzled her eyes. On this October Sunday the earth felt like a sanctuary and walking to church a part of the service. She hoped the beauty of the day would lift Danny's spirits. Nothing else seemed to be able to.

Upon arriving at the church Martha followed the graveled path to her husband's grave in the adjoining cemetery. Kneeling on the kerchief she pulled from her purse, she placed a single flower on the headstone—a yellow chrysanthemum plucked from a planter on her front porch.

"Gil, Danny feels he's to blame, not only for your death, but for all the pain and suffering everyone feels due to the loss of a loved one. Please help him to see that he is a beloved child of God."

Closing her eyes, she clasped her hands together prayerfully. "Dear Jesus, give us the strength to go on and find a way to fulfill thy will in the

midst of our pain. Help us to see that we can be saved. Help us to live as you did. Please take Danny's hand and help him to find faith and know that his sins are forgiven."

When she finished conversing with her savior and her husband, she took out a mirror, corrected the damage caused by her tears, tucked the kerchief into her purse and walked to the church. Like others in their small church community, she had her special seat, hers next to the window overlooking Gil's grave. She prayed silently while listening to the choir, wishing Danny was with her.

As soon as his mom left the house Danny went to the kitchen. He lifted the towel covering the short stack of pancakes in a Pyrex dish on the table, releasing the tempting aroma. Having no appetite, he recovered the dish, but did take a sip of the orange juice Mom had poured for him. Spying the dirty skillet in the sink, he felt compelled to wash it. *The least I can do, he thought, in return for all she's done for me.*

Next, he went to his dad's old desk and began writing on a fresh page in his composition book.

To The Greatest Mom In The World,

I'm sorry but I can't look in the mirror without remembering. I feel guilty. I have hurt so many people by what I have done even though I was trying to help and not hurt them. I'm wounded and scarred inside and out and know what Mr. Roget meant when he said he was tired. I don't have the courage to choose life. I'll be with Dad and I won't hurt anymore. You're the greatest and I love you, but I don't have your faith. I know you'll forgive me even if God doesn't.

Let Dr. Karl help you, Mom. I can't find peace and forgiveness here. There's only one way I know of to stop hurting. Death will be my healing.

Please put on my headstone: Together Forever. Thanks for your love—I can take it with me.

Mom, you and Penny were my life. Please love her and care for her and let her be your new child. She was my Penny from Heaven. Let her be yours too.

*Your Son,
Danny*

The letter to Mr. Schultz, who oversaw all submitted columns and letters to the editor of the *Sentinel*, asked the townspeople for their forgiveness too. When he finished the letters, Danny placed them on the table in the front hall, went back upstairs and opened his bedroom window. The sun-drenched oaks and maples lining the street were draped in crazy quilts of orange, gold, and red. It was a beautiful day to die.

He pulled his Sunday best out of the closet and dressed quickly. Before the fire he looked just like his dad. It was hard to tell from old photographs which one you were looking at. Both were six-foot, blue eyed, curly haired blonds. But now his face was a scarred, cruel caricature of that kinship. He fought to hold back the tears, recalling the day of the fire and his dad's death.

He returned to the den, pocketed two shotgun shells, created a harness out of belts and hung the rifle down his back between his shoulders. He slipped into a loose-fitting coat to conceal the rifle and stepped out onto the porch. Penny ran out before the door closed. He scooped

the tabby up and hugged her to his chest. "Can't have you following me, sweet girl," he said, kissing the top of Penny's head before placing her back inside. From a window Penny watched him trudging down the driveway, her eyes wide with curiosity. Danny paused to turn around and mouth a goodbye.

"Penny don't feel bad I was going to take you because you give me love and strength, but I couldn't treat you that way. I love you too much to leave you on your own. Let our last moment be a pleasant memory."

Danny had expected grief to dull his senses. Instead he felt as if he were seeing things for the first time. Maybe our Creator was an artist for whom time didn't exist, but until he could understand why, dying was less painful than living.

He adjusted the rifle and started walking. As he passed the town green, he felt drawn to Sal, as usual sitting on his favorite bench. Sex capered about, excited about the approaching company.

"Morning, Mr. Petonito."

“It is a g-o-o-o-d morning, Danny.” Sal invited him to sit with a wave of his hand. Danny nodded but did not sit or bend to pet Sex; the rifle encumbered his movements. Danny hoped Sal wouldn’t sense anything unusual and spoke quickly to avoid being questioned.

“Mr. Petonito, what are you and Sex doing today?”

“We don’t plan ahead. Every day’s a new experience.”

Danny had long admired Sal’s rosy outlook on life. Here he was, the one-legged town character and treasure with every reason to be embittered, but he always listened and had a kind word for everyone he met. Danny couldn’t stop his own pessimism from slipping out.

“I just can’t understand how God could let things happen the way they do.”

“Still beating yourself up about the fire, I see. Danny, a perfect world would be meaningless—a magic trick with nothing for us to do or learn. People need to learn from their wounds and become wounded healers and teachers, serving love, rather than

hiding their wounds. If everything were perfect, we’d all go nuts. If the pain leads you to create a new life, it’s a labor pain and worth having.”

“I’m sure you’ve heard it all from your mom. What you’ve experienced ought to be a reminder of how uncertain life is. Life is about beginnings. Don’t let your past hold you back and don’t waste the best days of your life, Danny. Today is always our best day so live and enjoy it. If you ever want to talk you know where to find me.”

“Mr. Petonito, I’d...”

Sal burst into tears as Danny stepped forward.

Embarrassed by his tears, Sal motioned for Danny to wait as Sex jumped onto the bench and began licking his face. Sal held him against his chest, rubbed his nose against the terrier’s, and broke into a smile.

“See what I mean, Danny? Only God knows why, but I do know that life is about love. Go touch someone’s life. You’ll see. Did you want to ask me something?”

“No, not really. It’s just ... I don’t know where you find the strength to go on. I just want you to know how much I admire you, and I want to thank you for all that you’ve taught me and done for us. You are a role model for us all.”

“Danny, I’ve sat here for a lot of years and some people enjoy my company, some avoid me, some go by in silence and some in tears. Some make speeches, proclaiming me a hero, or offer their condolences, but you’re the first person to ever thank me. How people react to me says more about what’s in them than in me. It was for you I went to war.”

Danny managed a little smile. He thought of saying “I appreciate your service,” but he knew how trite that could sound, especially to a vet like Sal.

“You are so smart. I guess I do have a question for you, Mr. Petonito. What’s your motto? What’s your philosophy on life?”

“Danny, understand why, imitate how, and know when. That’s it.”

Danny puzzled a moment over the cryptic advice. “Uh, thanks, Mr. Petonito. See you around.”

“Take it easy, kid.” As the boy walked away, he noticed that his gait was unusually stiff, and there was an odd bulge on his back.

Danny turned to enter the church cemetery, wishing he could understand Sal and God better. “Hi, Danny.”

Danny stopped along the graveled path at the greeting from his classmate. His hand darted self-consciously to his face in a vain attempt to hide the scars.

“Hi, Bev, I didn’t see you. How come you’re not inside?”

“I couldn’t bring myself to go inside on such a beautiful day. I’m waiting for my mom so we can walk home together. Why aren’t you with your mom?”

“I need some time alone. She understands. I have something I need to take care of at my dad’s grave.”

“I’m sorry about everything, Danny. I hope you feel better soon. When

you're ready maybe we can go to a movie or something. I'd really like to help. I used to blame myself, too, and keep all my feelings inside."

"Thanks, I just can't talk now." He stalked away, feeling Bev's eyes burning into the back of his head.

Meeting Bev started him thinking again and compelled him to look at the headstones for some last words that might help him make sense of it all.

"If I could just be God for a day maybe I'd understand why."

He felt responsible for two deaths and now a third. For the first time he realized he had to be willing to end his own life; that would take all the guts he had, and then some, but he didn't see how he could live in peace. What would his dad tell him to do? Maybe he should talk to Dr. Karl first. His thinking stopped when he came to the grave.

He knew his mom had been there from the flower. He slipped the rifle from beneath his coat, inserted a shell, leaned back against the

headstone and rested the warm muzzle against his forehead. He recalled picking out his dad's headstone. He and Mom wanted everyone to know how precious each moment of Dad's life had been. He ran his fingers over the epitaph's etched characters: His Life Taught Us How To Live and His Death How To Die. Gilbert Hoffman, 41 years 6 months 15 days. Died July 11, 1954.

"God, I know You talk to people. So why don't You or my Dad talk to me? The only thing I've done is hurt people. I need another life. What they do after I'm gone is up to them. I just want to stop hurting and be forgiven. I can't understand what needs to die and what needs to live anymore."

The rifle slipped from his hands, snapping him out of his reverie. He cried, remembering the times he and his Dad went hunting together.

"Mom, I know I shouldn't do this but I'm tired, tired of hurting. Death is my gift. I'll be unalive, perfect, free and with Dad again. Living hurts too much. There isn't anything worse than hurting people you love. My mistakes have been the cause

of so much suffering. God, do you understand me?"

He recalled his mom's constant answer: "Don't question. Let your faith sustain you. Problems are God's redirections." It didn't help now. It never had.

"I'm praying for a new life and a chance to start again. Do You really love us or is my mom just saying that? I don't know where You are, or if You even exist. My mom believes in 'Thy will be done' and 'not why me but try me,' but I don't have the strength she has. I know You make deals, so I don't have anything to lose. I'm no lawyer so I'll make it simple. You may be merciful and just, as my mom says, but I need a sign.

"You gave us Ten Commandments, so I'll give You ten minutes and then I'm going to pull the trigger. I have my faults but I'm not a bad person. I love You and if I'm Your child, like my mom says, then forgive me. I need forgiveness more than understanding. They tell me what I remember You are willing to forget and forgive."

Danny took off his dad's wristwatch and rested it on his leg. It was time to disconnect from his life and memories.

The motion of the second hand reminded him of Sal's leg swinging in rhythm as he swung along on his crutches. A centipede climbed onto his arm. He was about to brush it off, but was entranced by its rhythmic movements, and let it walk across his hand.

"You're so perfect. I bet you never hurt anyone. You did a good job creating this little guy. I guess You do love all your creatures, and maybe You do love me, but I sure could use a sign. Maybe if we changed places for a minute but that's never going to happen. So..."

The centipede walked up the barrel as the choir began singing its closing hymn.

"Thanks, God. Bye, Mom."

Danny again pressed the muzzle against his forehead and squeezed the trigger, just the way his dad had taught him. For the first time since his Dad's death, he felt loved, forgiven, unalive, and perfect.

Martha sat in the church pew, wishing Danny could hear the choir

sing 'And though it makes Him sad to see the way we live, He'll always say, I forgive.'

"I'll sing this for him this afternoon when I get home," she thought.

At the sound of the gunshot Martha looked out the church window and fell to her knees, screaming Danny's name. The choir stopped singing. The parishioners rose in their seats. Bev started running towards the grave. Sal recalled painful memories. The centipede walked unhurriedly back to its nest to resume this tragic comedy we call life.

CHAPTER 3

Dr. Jonathan Hokmah sat at his desk organizing his papers while thinking about how hectic the next few weeks were going to be. First the move to Middletown, Connecticut, to take on the job of chief psychiatrist at Peaceful Acres, a residential therapy center, and the following week attending the American Psychiatric Association meeting in San Francisco. He knew his decision to relocate his practice and move was the right thing to do because the excessive time he

devoted to his private practice was having a deleterious effect on his marriage and family.

He was mature enough to accept the fact that he had become a psychiatrist because of his own problems. Particularly the feelings of failure his childhood had generated; his mother had effectively committed suicide by ignoring her breast cancer and his father drank himself to death after telling Jon he didn't love him enough to want to live.

His wounds had taught him to respond to his gnawing unrest in the same way one satisfies the pangs of hunger, by finding ways to nourish one's life. He had learned to let his patients express themselves freely, knowing that their stories and not their diagnosis revealed the truth. He listened to his patients until they heard their true story from themselves and knew what they needed to do to resolve the problem. This gave them a chance to hear about their own woundedness and start the process of transformation—far better than him prescribing a pill.

Hokmah was not your average psychiatrist. He had learned how to use aggression in a disciplined way as a former linebacker at Penn State. His imposing size, dark chocolate skin, shaved head, and piercing gaze made patients and staff alike feel like they were in the presence of a black bear. And when they heard him speak in a basso profundo voice, they knew from his erudition he was a cuddly and intellectual bruin, not a ferocious one.

The flashing light on his desk, announcing the arrival of his next patient, interrupted his thoughts. He glanced at the record to be sure he had the correct name, and then opened his office door to find three men sitting in the waiting room. Two were muscular, well-dressed young men while the third, a distinguished looking older man, projected an aura of authority and power. His eyes, concealed behind sunglasses, revealed nothing while observing everything. His hair and mustache, lightly peppered with gray, were neatly trimmed. He wore an impeccably tailored double-breasted Saint Laurent suit. It was obvious he was moneyed and liked to flaunt the fact.

“Mr. Birsamatto, I’m Dr. Jonathan Hokmah. Feel free to call me by my first name.”

They shook hands. “Thank you, Jonathan. I prefer first names as well. So please call me Carmine. These are my associates, Michael and Gabriel.”

The young hulks nodded almost imperceptibly. Carmine motioned to them to remain seated and followed Hokmah into the consultation room, where the doctor seated himself behind his desk, and Carmine settled into the chair in front of him, taking some care not to wrinkle the flaps of his jacket.

“Carmine, I want to help you so my first question is not what’s your chief complaint but what is the story you bring with you and how can I help you?”

“I’ve heard you’re an unusual shrink who hugs his patients but that’s not why I’m here. I presume you know who I am and what I do for a living. So, I’ll get right to the point. First, I want to make it clear I don’t deny I’m a racketeer but I’m not a thug. You were recommended to me as someone I could talk to. You need to understand

I'm not some character in a gangster movie or TV-14 cop show procedural. I expect to be treated with the same sense of professionalism you show all your patients."

"Certainly, Carmine. Your past is not a problem; I'm here to help you, not judge you. Tell me your story and what you're looking for, and I'll do my best to help."

"I'll start from the beginning, so you'll understand where I'm coming from. It all goes back to my teenage years. My dad was a landscaper and wanted me to work with him, but his workaholic lifestyle never appealed to me. He was going day and night. All year long people drove him nuts; between mowing and planting shrubs and laying sod, he never took a vacation. The neighbors rather looked down on us because my pop was always filthy, and our yard was littered with landscaping equipment.

"Now, on the other hand, my grandfather was a businessman. He dressed well and he spoke well. You might say he cultivated a certain elegance. I liked how the neighbors treated him. How the hell was I to

know he was treated that way because people feared him? He was an honest-to God Mafioso—real *Godfather* stuff. But the more I saw of him and studied how he interacted with people, the more impressed I was. He was the one I admired and when I was old enough, I started working for him.

"Working for my grandfather was different. He was a professional and treated everyone with respect. Not all this 'fuck you' stuff you see on TV. And he expected me to be a gentleman. Did he do some things that bothered me, and am I troubled by some of the things I've done? Yes, and that's the reason why, after all these years, I'm here. I don't feel comfortable doing this anymore. People I talk to can't believe me or think I'm nuts to want to change my life, so I need professional help. Someone I can talk to about things and in ways I can't talk to the people I work with, or with my family.

"I feel a need to change. I know how to walk away from the old life, but I don't know how to begin a new one. You know, like disengaging and creating a new engagement in my life and not a termination or retirement. I want to disengage, not retire.

"I have so many things in the works, all organized by the old Carmine, that I need to complete or let go of to start a new and meaningful life. I need to become a grandfather and quit being a godfather. I've got a great wife who supports my decision. There's more to my story but that's it in a nutshell. You're the only person, besides my wife, I've discussed this with. Can we do this? Are you willing to help me? If you're worried about my business connections being a problem, don't be. Also, finances are not an issue. I need to know if you can be there for me and that what we share stays here."

"Carmine, my answer is yes but as I told you over the phone, I will be going away for at least a week. What I'd like to do is see you again in two weeks and see how the two of us hit it off before I make a long-term decision. I'll be moving to my new office in Middletown. Are you willing to drive up there?"

"Sure, Doc."

"Okay, then let's set up an appointment and go from there."

As Hokmah scanned his calendar he was startled when his desk light started flashing. He hadn't scheduled the next appointment until well after Carmine's, to avoid him meeting anyone in the waiting room.

"Carmine, I hate to bring this up, but do you want to leave through my private entrance to avoid meeting anyone?" He added quickly, "For your own privacy, of course."

Carmine flashed a barracuda smile. "I would, Doc, but the boys are waiting for me."

Hokmah handed Carmine his appointment card, then opened the door to the waiting room. A man whose expression and jittery movements reminded Hokmah of a frightened squirrel sprang to his feet as they entered. George Dingfelder, a Jewish physician with a name longer than his lean body, stood before them, a nervous smile on his angular face.

"I can't believe it. This must be a sign. Mr. Birsamatto, you're one of the reasons I decided to see a psychiatrist. You sure look younger and slimmer in person than on TV."

Carmine burst out laughing. “Saw me on the evening news, did you?” he said, slapping him on the back and knocking him forward a good two feet. Hokmah, despite his training, was at a loss for words.

“Dr. Dingfelder, your appointment isn’t until three.”

“I came early to go over what I wanted to say so I would get my case history right the first time. Mr. Birsamatto, I didn’t mean to be impolite. I apologize. Perhaps I can be of service to you some day. Here’s my card if you ever need a consultation.”

“George, go and sit down in my office please.”

As George left the room, Carmine and Hokmah shook hands again.

“Who’s that character?” Carmine asked.

“You know as much as I do. It’s his first visit and it looks like I have an interesting afternoon ahead of me.”

“Good luck, Doc. Be seeing you.” He jerked his head at his associates and

the trio left, leaving in their wake the scent of Man by Jimmy Choo.

When Hokmah went into his office he found George sitting in the patient’s chair, gnawing on his fingernails. Hokmah resumed his place behind his desk.

END OF EXCERPT

***Dr. Siegel**, who prefers to be called Bernie, is a NY Times bestselling author for his groundbreaking book *Love, Medicine & Miracles*. A leader in the field of Mind-Body medicine, Bernie has since written many enlightening books including his most recent *When You Realize How Perfect Everything Is* with his grandson Charlie Siegel.*



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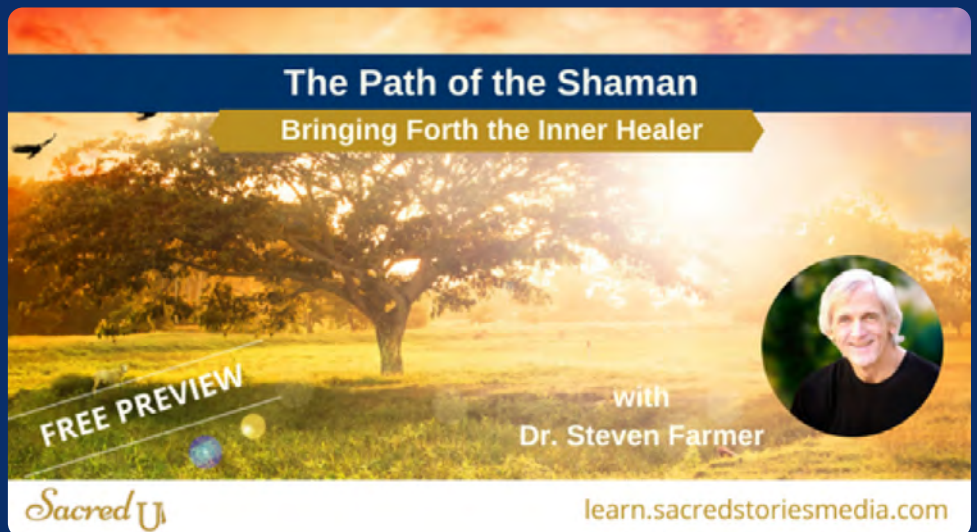
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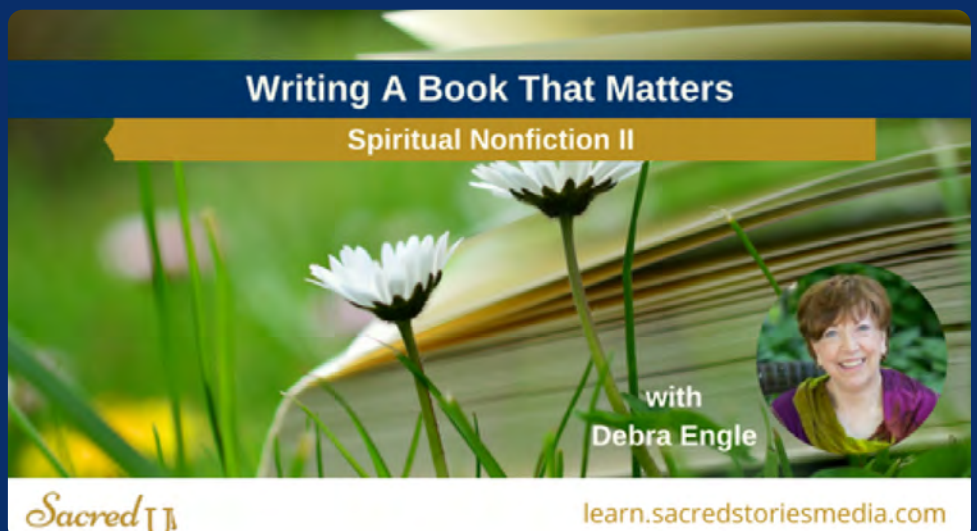
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