



THE PATH TO MYSTICAL CANYON

DR. ANAB WHITEHOUSE



© Dr. Anab Whitehouse
The Interrogative Imperative Institute
Brewer, Maine
04412

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For my mother, who would, I believe, have liked this book very much even if there might be issues or themes with which she may have disagreed.



Chapter 1: Call of the Owl

The click of a tape recorder being turned on breaks the silence. A male voice starts to serve as counterpoint to the faint hum of the machine.

“The date is September 19th, 1999.

“I am dying. I don't know how long I have before my wounds succeed in their coup d'état of my life processes.

“On the other hand, maybe one of the search teams will find me before I die at my own pace. I'm sure any of those who might be looking would be quite eager to help escort me to death's doorstep and beyond in order to expedite matters. In either case, the time left to me is a rather tenuous commodity.

“Not too long ago, time seemed to stretch out and disappear into distant mists of possibility. Now ... now I hope there is enough time to fulfill my final responsibility.

“I suppose what follows is something of a "death bed" statement that, traditionally, has been accorded a certain legal standing of some weight. Apparently, the assumption is that someone who is about to meet his or her Maker will not lie. I've always felt the assumption was rather argumentative and, as the lawyers say, calls for conclusions based on facts not yet placed in evidence.

“Be that as it may, there is something that needs to be said before my time is up. What people do, if anything, after hearing these tapes, is up to the crosscurrents of their hearts and minds.

“My name is David Phelps. I'm 48 years old, unmarried, and slightly overweight for my six feet ... qualities that, under the circumstances, are not likely to change.

“I am pretty ordinary in most ways, although I do possess what people in my trade refer to as an eidetic memory. Essentially, this means that I can recall many, if not most things, with an exceptional degree of clarity, detail and accuracy. While the passage of time has dimmed this facility of memory somewhat, it still remains largely intact, and I believe this ability might serve us well during the process of conveying that which follows.

“I'm an assistant professor of psychology at a small liberal arts college just outside of Boston. My main area of interest is clinical psychology. Among other things, this field of study explores the theories, research, problems and issues that surround, and permeate, therapeutic settings ... e.g.,

mental hospitals, clinics ... as well as the dynamics of therapist-client relationships.

"In fact, my story really begins with a person who was seeking this sort of help ... or so I thought. She came to my off-campus office toward the middle of what, up until that time, was shaping up as an uneventful June day.

"The spring semester had just finished at the college. I was in the downtown office to look after some administrative details concerning the few clients who had been coming to me during the school year.

"By mutual agreement, we all had decided to take the summer off and meet again in the fall. In most of these cases, a lot of constructive progress had been made during the preceding year. Nonetheless, everyone felt the time away from therapy would be beneficial and allow us each to come back to the sessions with a rejuvenated commitment to continuing work.

I heard a soft knock on the door. "Come in," I shouted out.

The door opened, and a woman poked her head through the opening in a sort of tentative kind of way. She had a quizzical look in her eyes.

"Dr. Phelps?"

"Yes, please come in." I motioned her to a chair near my desk.

She sat down, gave the room the once-over and, then, seemed to become preoccupied with the exterior of her purse. Presumably, she was gathering her thoughts and feelings in order to figure out what to say to me.

She was silent for a few moments. Several times, she raised her head and cleared her throat as if to begin to speak.

On each of these occasions, she looked into my eyes for a few seconds, like she was looking for a sign of some kind. Or, perhaps, she was wondering to what extent she could trust me. She, then, averted her eyes and lowered her head again.

She appeared to be in her mid-forties, a little over five feet tall. Her body, her whole manner of appearance, seemed vulnerable. Yet, there was an aura of peacefulness draped about her like a loose fitting gown. In addition, there was something exotic in her facial features, but I couldn't place her ethnic background.

Finally, she spoke. "I hope I'm not interrupting anything or keeping you from your work."

"Not at all! I was just going through some administrative work and, quite frankly, I welcome the break.

"I don't care for this paper work stuff and often look for ways to procrastinate before getting down to the nitty-gritty. So, you are fitting into my strategy quite well." I smiled slightly and tried to look at her in as warmly and receptive a way as I could without overdoing it.

A subtle current of humor rippled through her eyes and disappeared. She continued to hold my gaze a little longer still seeming to search for something below the surface.

Finally, her focus changed, and she stared out the window behind me. Her eyes had a distant look to them, but slowly they focused on me again. In the interim, she seemed to have come to a resolution about whatever it was she had been debating within herself.

"Dr. Phelps, I need some help."

My initial thought was that her timing was bad. After all, despite my tendency to procrastinate, I had been doing my best, during the last several weeks, to disengage myself from official commitments for the next month or so.

I was mentally tired and somewhat emotionally fogged in. I needed some down time.

I was about to explain to her my situation and recommend she see a colleague of mine who had an office on the floor above me. Instead, my curiosity and professional ethics came to the rescue.

The thought crossed my mind that, perhaps, at least, I should try to assess what kind of help the woman was seeking. After that determination, I could decide what, if anything, I might be able to do to assist her, including, possibly, still referring her to my colleague. Moreover, I ought to be sure that crisis intervention involving rape trauma, suicidal tendencies, or a psychotic break was not warranted.

After only a few seconds of pause, I said to her: "Well, before we try to see what kind of help is needed, maybe you could help me by filling in some background information concerning yourself."

She nodded her head briefly in assent and, then, became a little guarded. "Dr. Phelps, I'm sorry, but before we go on, I need to know how much this is going to cost."

While looking for a pen that worked, I said to her: "Let's not worry about that right now. I will say, however, that most of the therapists and counselors who operate in this office building, including me, have sliding scales to accommodate different income levels of people who are seeking help.

"So, I wouldn't worry too much. I'm sure we can work out something with which we both can live."

As a sort of addendum, I looked at her and said: "Most of us in this building also work on the installment plan with no money down. We try to be as user-friendly as we can be."

For the first time, a smile flickered across her lips. My afterthought appeared to relax her a little.

Having located a working pen and a pad of paper, I leaned back in my chair, crossed my legs and used the top of my knee as a desk. I began: "Perhaps we could start by you telling me who referred you to me."

She looked uncertain how to respond. As well, there might have been a trace of embarrassment present.

"Actually, Dr. Phelps," she finally stammered, "no one referred me to you. I saw your name on the board in the lobby downstairs. In fact, I was just walking around and happened to see the sign outside your building concerning the therapy and counseling services being offered. I walked into the lobby and, for some reason, your name stuck out."

I'm sure I must have looked a little deflated, but I recovered quickly and said: "It's always nice to come highly recommended. I imagine you must be busting with confidence in what I can do for you."

She laughed. It was the laugh of someone who liked to do so.

I continued on. "Let's start over ... hopefully, on less risky grounds. What's your name?"

"Beth Idaho, Dr. Phelps."

"Please, let's drop the 'Dr.' thing. If it is all right with you, why don't we just make it Beth and David?"

"Okay.", she replied.

"Beth, why don't you tell me a little about yourself. You know, things like: what you do for a living; where you come from; where you went to school; how many people in your family, that kind of thing."

She seemed to think for a moment about the sort of information I was seeking and began. "I'm Native American. The particular nation or tribe to which I belong will be meaningless to you since it is not a well-known heritage, even among many Native peoples.

"There aren't too many of our Nation who are left. We're kind of an endangered species. The Spanish, the settlers, the cavalry, miners, epidemics, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, corporate interests, forced displacements, alcoholism, drug abuse, and suicide have all taken their toll."

There was no undercurrent of hostility or bitterness in her tone or words. She was merely relating historical truths.

"My mother and father both have passed away. My father was beaten to death outside a bar by some white guys who hated Indians. My mother committed suicide about three or four years after my Dad died.

"Both my Mom and Dad had been taken from their families by the government and placed in boarding schools far from their families. They were both sexually and physically abused at those schools.

"They were indoctrinated by the teachers to be disgusted with their Native origins and to assimilate into the white way of thinking about, and doing, things. Their Native names were replaced with English ones."

I interrupted: "Is that how the name Idaho came about?"

"Yes," she confirmed. "I have a Native name, but it is hard for speakers of English to pronounce correctly and, so, to save everyone a lot of embarrassment, the name 'Beth Idaho', is used in most circumstances, except with my brothers."

She gave her words a half a minute, or so, to sink in and returned to talking about her parents. "My Mom and Dad were punished at the boarding school whenever they were caught speaking their native tongues. As a result, by the time boarding school was through with them, they had lost the ability to communicate with their families and their people."

Beth closed her eyes for a time and continued to speak. "All through boarding school, which lasted about ten or eleven years, my parents were not permitted to learn about, or practice, their spiritual traditions and customs. Instead, they were forced to become Christians.

"In my parents' case, it was Catholicism. However, some boarding schools were organized by the Mormons, while still other boarding schools were run by various Protestant denominations."

She opened her eyes, pressed her palms on them for a few seconds and started again. "By the time their -- shall we say -- 'education' was completed, my parents had lost their names, language, spiritual tradition, families, community, and identities.

"My mother and father were completely alienated and alone. They neither belonged to the Native community, nor did they belong to the non-Native community.

"Somehow my parents found one another. Their love for each other helped ease the pain, but, in the end, it wasn't enough.

"Their lives had been consumed by the many abuses that had dominated their lives for so long. They had been made into the living dead during a period of their lives when they were completely defenseless and at the mercy of people, who, in their hearts, hated my parents, no matter how those people tried to rationalize what was going on.

Beth was about to continue on, when I stopped her. "I notice there doesn't seem to be any intense emotion associated with anything you are saying, and, yet, these are all very traumatic, horrific issues to which you're referring.

"I'm a little concerned that maybe you have separated off your emotions from the informational content of your account. What do you feel about what you are saying?"

"I feel a deep sadness. How could one not feel sadness, but I have learned to hide my feelings from most people in this society. I know what I feel, but I choose not to show it except to a few individuals, like my brothers."

Beth paused and lowered her head for a moment. She began speaking with her head still lowered but gradually raised her head to engage my eyes briefly before looking out the window again.

"Dr. Phelps ... I'm sorry, David ... you have to understand ... what has happened to my family is not unusual among Native peoples. There have been very, very few indigenous peoples anywhere in North, Central or South America -- in fact, anywhere in the world -- who have not suffered tremendous losses and abuses due to the way many aspects of non-Native societies have treated Native peoples for hundreds of years.

"My heart feels tremendous sadness and grief, not just for my family, but for all the Native families who have pain and sorrow similar to, or greater than, mine. My heart cries every day, but my eyes cry only now and then.

"You asked what I feel, David. I also feel very ashamed about what has gone on."

Beth must have noticed the puzzled look on my face. She stopped speaking, considering how to proceed, and, then, she went on.

"Please don't be too defensive about what I'm going to say, David, but I feel ashamed for non-Native peoples in North America. I feel ashamed for them because they have permitted their educational, political, judicial, religious, and military institutions to oppress and destroy so many Native peoples without trying to stop these tragedies.

"I feel ashamed for non-Natives because too many of them have allowed their culture to become so morally bankrupt that relatively few non-Natives feel any sense of outrage about what is being done in their names to preserve the freedoms and rights of democratic society at the expense of, among others, Native peoples."

The tone of Beth's voice remained even. There still was no resentment or anger present. She was mentioning things without there being any accusatory quality to her words.

"I don't know if you are aware of it or not, David, but a great deal of the gas, oil, metals, energy, minerals, and timber on which an extremely sizable portion of the GNP of North America is based comes from Native lands. Apparently, as long as non-Natives can continue to reap the financial, career and life-style benefits that have been bought and paid for by the suffering, hunger, and poverty of Native peoples, they really don't want to look too closely at what is helping to make it all possible."

She smiled apologetically. "Sorry, sometimes I get carried away and say, perhaps, more than I should."

"There is no need for you to apologize," I said. "However, I'm afraid, your earlier request of me to the contrary, I'm feeling rather defensive about what you have told me."

I was feeling very off-balance and awkward. Beth's words and story had resonated with something very deep but unarticulated within me. I was sensing a truth in what was being communicated by her, as well as in the

simplicity and sincerity through which the message was being delivered. On the other hand, part of me was kicking and screaming against accepting this truth.

Nonetheless, I had learned a long time ago that the therapeutic relationship can be as difficult a struggle for the therapist as it is for the client. So, I gathered my courage and spoke the truth.

"Not many people enjoy having their moral shortcomings exposed," I admitted. "Unfortunately, I'm probably as good a candidate as anyone toward whom your feelings of being ashamed would be appropriately directed."

Her eyes never left my face while I was confessing. There was a sense of appraisal in her gaze. It was, simultaneously, both compassionate and, yet, exacting.

Suddenly, I felt as if I had become the client and Beth was the therapist. I was asking the questions, but she was conducting the interview.

"Maybe," she suggested, "we should get on with the rest of the information you requested earlier."

"Are you sure you want to continue?" I asked. "Do you feel I will be able to help you in the way that you need?"

Beth's brow wrinkled a little, and her eyebrows arched somewhat. She said: "I suspect the jury is still out on that issue for both of us. Why don't we proceed and see where it leads?"

I reflected on her proposal for a few seconds. I was beginning to wonder what was going on.

Finally, I said: "You referred to some brothers earlier, where are they?"

"I haven't seen Warren for a long time. The last thing I heard about him, which was several years ago, he was down in South America, traveling about in Peru, Chile, and Brazil. He was spending time with various indigenous groups."

Beth lowered her head. When she raised her head, she looked at me, then, she looked down again briefly before raising her head once more.

She began slowly. "My other brother, Brian, who is Warren's identical twin, is in prison. He is doing 10 to 15 years for, allegedly, killing a federal agent."

"From your use of 'allegedly' am I safe in assuming you don't believe your brother is guilty?"

Beth shook her head up and down a few times and followed with a question: "Have you ever heard of Leonard Peltier?"

A faint memory trace of recognition flitted across my mind. However, I couldn't quite grab hold of the threads of the reality to which the trace related.

When she saw my hesitation, Beth continued. "He was convicted of killing two FBI agents in 1975 at a place called Jumping Bull Ranch out Dakota way. However, there is a great deal of evidence to indicate Leonard was framed by the federal government."

"Why would they do that?" I queried.

"Leonard was a member of A.I.M., the American Indian Movement", Beth responded. She went on: "A.I.M. was creating a lot of problems for federal and state governments by exposing a variety of unseemly affairs.

"For instance, A.I.M. was bringing forth a great deal of evidence concerning the virulent forms of racism being practiced by many representatives of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The members of A.I.M. also exposed the corruption of the puppet Tribal Councils that were betraying their own Native communities while serving as agents of a variety of vested corporate and government interests. In addition, A.I.M. helped raise the consciousness of a lot of Native and non-Native peoples alike with respect to the wretched living conditions on the reservations."

Beth cleared her throat and continued: "Leonard Peltier was one of the leaders of A.I.M. . The federal government wanted to stop the embarrassments and revelations associated with A.I.M.'s activities. Moreover, the authorities wanted to send a message of intimidation to other A.I.M., or would-be A.I.M., members.

"Leonard had the 'good' fortune of becoming a leading candidate in the government's search for someone through whom to set an example. But, the authorities also tried to set up other members of A.I.M., as well, on trumped up charges.

"Russell Means, Dennis Banks and a number of other members of A.I.M. all got the same treatment. My brother was one of members of this group of individuals."

I had no doubt Beth was sincere in her belief that her brother Brian was innocent. Nevertheless, I was working in almost a complete vacuum of hard data about her brother's case.

I decided to change the subject. "What kind of a job do you have Beth?"

She was looking out the window again. She answered without turning away from the view.

"I work in the public library. I'm what's called a library technician.

"I operate some of the equipment in the library, like microfiche, microfilm and photocopy machines. I work a little with some of the educational multi-media computer programs the library uses as well."

While writing down her last response, I asked: "What about your educational background?"

She continued to gaze out the window, as if only marginally interested in the queries being made. However, she answered the question.

"I went to a university out west for a couple of years and studied comparative religions, but I didn't care for the atmosphere all that much. I spent a few more years at a community college getting a library technician's certificate."

I probed further. "What bothered you about the atmosphere at the university?"

Beth stopped staring out the window and looked at me. "I didn't like the way people just seemed to want to talk about religion without, as far as I could determine, actually acting on any of the things about which they were talking."

"Your judgment seems rather harsh," I countered.

"Perhaps," she said, "but I never saw evidence that any of the professors spent much time helping the poor, or volunteering at the hospital, or helping out in some of the youth centers, or fighting for housing for the homeless."

I pursued the issue some more. "Maybe, they like to keep their acts of charity and compassion hidden from the view of others."

"I'm sure you are right in some cases," Beth said. "However, do you think we would have as much hunger, homelessness, poverty, alienation and social problems as we do if most people were busy doing their myriad acts of compassion and charity in secrecy?"

After a brief pause, Beth added a further thought. "Besides," she said, "for the most part, education in many parts of the world doesn't appear to be geared toward helping people learn how to put spiritual principles into action."

Beth seemed to be warming to the subject. "Don't you agree that much of education is only about networking and career and status and jobs and lifestyle and the seeking of power? If anything, many people seem to learn fairly early that one runs the risk of encountering substantial penalties if one tries to implement spiritual principles rather than to submit to the ways of the world."

I didn't know what to say to her. Her points and questions had a definite legitimacy and could not be easily, if at all, dismissed.

Nevertheless, now was not the time for that kind of a discussion. I felt it would take us too far afield from the task at hand.

I changed directions once more. "While you have not specified where you were born, some of your responses lead me to believe you're from somewhere out west? What brought you to Boston?"

Beth was quiet for a couple of minutes. From time to time, she would look at me and, then, looked away ... sometimes up at the wall above my head; sometimes down at her hands; and sometimes out the window.

Her delay in responding to the question indicated that whatever was coming probably was not straightforward. In other words, this part of her account likely was complicated or dealt with sensitive material or involved issues that, for whatever reason, she did not want to get into at the present time, or, perhaps, some combination of these possibilities.

Beth began by asking me a question. "Do you believe in visions David?"

"What kind of visions are we talking about here?" I inquired. "Spiritual visions," she responded.

I sought some clarification. "Do the visions you're referring to ... do they come while asleep or during the waking state?"

"While awake," she answered

Under other clinical circumstances I might have proceeded a little more cautiously in the light of the mentioning of "visions". However, I had a strong, positive, intuitive feeling about Beth.

Upon initial examination, she appeared to me to be a very intelligent and relatively stable, individual. Her responses tended to be insightful, if not thought-provoking.

Beth seemed to be in control of her emotions, although there might be some degree of repression going on. On the other hand, at least on the basis of my on-going cursory examination, she appeared to have adjusted well to a variety of traumatic and difficult life circumstances.

As far as I could see, there was no evidence Beth was out of touch with reality. Moreover, I suspected she probably did not suffer from any debilitating neurosis, although this was, perhaps, a somewhat premature conclusion.

Her reference to visions notwithstanding, I felt relatively comfortable in raising a potentially problematic issue with Beth. So, I said: "This might seem like a dumb question, but how does one know when a vision is a spiritual one?"

While she was considering the question, I elaborated a little further. "People can have anomalous or odd visual experiences through all kinds of means."

I went over to my bookcase and selected a few volumes. I came back to the chair, sat down, and began paging through them, talking as I searched the pages.

"Alcoholics sometimes have visions during delirium tremens. Acid-heads report them as well.

"Sensory deprivation tanks can induce visions. Intense fever also has been known to generate them.

"These sorts of visual experience sometimes accompany temporal lobe epileptic seizures. Moreover, visions have been linked with various kinds of brain tumors."

I paused, having found what I was looking for in one of the books retrieved from the shelf. I pointed out to Beth a table on the indicated page. The table listed a large number of different conditions and circumstances known to have some sort of visionary dimension associated with them.

As she looked at the table, I continued on as before. I said: "Holotropic breathing exercises, continuous fasting and nitrous oxide all

appear to have the capacity to induce, among other things, odd visionary experiences."

Beth looked up from the book, and I stopped itemizing the list from the table. "I could go on, but I'm sure you get the drift of the meaning of this exercise. Thus, my previous question about how one goes about distinguishing spiritual visions from other kinds of induced visual experiences might, from certain perspectives, be a dumb one, but, from my perspective, the question is not entirely without merit."

She had been listening intently to everything being said but seemed undisturbed by the implications of the evidence being presented to her. "I'm not sure you have answered my original question."

I thought back for a moment and said: "Do you mean the question about whether I believe in visions?"

She nodded.

I exhaled forcibly through my mouth and ran my hand through my hair. I deliberated for a moment and began rocking my chair slowly.

"Beth, I suppose the short answer to your question is: I really don't know. Something in me would really love for the whole realm of spirituality, including visions, to be true. Yet, part of me fears those possibilities, and another part of me is rigorously skeptical about, and cynical toward, the whole idea."

I picked up the books on the desk and returned them to the shelf. As I walked back to the desk and sat down, I said: "A certain amount of my resistance comes from the education and training I've gone through. My way of thinking about these issues is very much influenced by my belief in the need to be able to empirically test them. And, as I'm sure you will agree, spirituality doesn't seem to lend itself too well to being examined in the laboratory."

Beth retorted: "Have you ever considered field studies?" I laughed. "No, not really."

Beth seemed to be studying me again, as if trying to gauge something. Finally, she shrugged her shoulders in an almost imperceptible way.

Apparently having flipped an internal coin, she started speaking. "About a year ago, I had what I believe is an authentic spiritual vision.

"I suppose we could debate the matter until the cows come home without resolving what the truth is concerning my experience. However, if you will permit me to cut to the chase, you might find what I have to say of some interest."

I was trying to imagine what she could be going to say to me. Her words proved to be completely unexpected.

She began by saying: "I don't know, David, how you will deal with what I am about to say, but here goes. You were in the vision."

I kind of went mentally numb. I didn't know whether to be shocked or to laugh.

Again, the question arose in me: what is going on here? I briefly ran through a variety of scenarios.

Maybe she was seriously delusional, and through some sort of weird chain of events, I merely had the bad fortune of being available to be drawn into her delusion. Or, maybe she was obsessive, and, for whatever reason, she had chosen me to be the focus of her obsession.

Another possibility that bubbled to the surface was that this was some sort of confidence game. I was the mark du jour.

Perhaps Beth was just very lonely. By inventing the vision story, she felt she would get some attention from me.

Almost as quickly as each of these ideas entered my consciousness, none of them really felt right. These possibilities didn't fit in with the overall sense of Beth that I had begun to develop since she first stepped into the office.

I didn't believe Beth was obsessional or delusional, although I couldn't be 100 % certain without further observation and analysis. Moreover, I didn't feel she was scamming me or lying to me.

My options seemed to be dwindling in an uncomfortable direction. If her alleged vision was not due to pathology or scheming of some sort, where did this leave me?

I seemed to recall that Sherlock Holmes had addressed the issue confronting me. His conclusion was something like: after one has eliminated the impossible from consideration, what remains, however improbable, must be the truth.

I was getting desperate. Sherlock Holmes is a fictional character. What does he know? On the other hand, my present situation was unreal enough for me to benefit, perhaps, from an unreal creation.

Suddenly, I realized Beth had called out my name several times. "David? ... David? ... Are you all right?"

My mind still was whirling about in a sort of dazed condition. More likely than not, my eyes probably had glazed over as I had become increasingly preoccupied with the possibilities percolating in my consciousness in relation to Beth's revelation.

I smiled at her, somewhat sheepishly, and said: "You seem to have thrown me for something of a loop. I'm having a hard time trying to figure out why I would be in your vision when, as far as I know, we've never met before."

A faint glimmer of hope was triggered by these last words. It needed to be checked out. "That is right, isn't it Beth, we've never met before?"

Her nod in the affirmative snuffed out the momentary hope I had been entertaining. I was stuck once more with my puzzle.

Gradually, some of my clinical training began to filter back into my awareness. There were some more questions that needed to be asked. I opened with: "Can you tell me about your vision, Beth?"

A sort of troubled expression came across her face. "Unfortunately, David, I can't really go into most of the details of the vision with you. It came as guidance for me, and, as those, it should remain, for the most part, a private matter."

She hesitated for a few seconds and then said: "Visions are sacred. With the exception of a qualified elder, visions are not meant to be talked about or become public knowledge. They should be acted on and used to help orient one's life in a properly spiritual manner."

Her expression showed empathy for the problem with which she was confronting me. Yet, firmness was present in her expression as well.

I was feeling perplexed. With a small trace of exasperation, I queried: "If you can't talk about it, why did you mention it to me?"

Beth leaned forward in her seat, clasped her hands together as if in prayer, while resting her elbows on the edge of my desk, and looked intently into my eyes. She appeared to be entreating me to listen very carefully to what she was about to say.

"I've talked with several Native elders about my vision," she indicated. "They have given me counsel about its significance and some of the etiquette surrounding my vision.

"The elders informed me that if I were to find you, there would be no harm, and there could be considerable good that might come, if I were to tell you the part of the vision in which you were involved. The elders also said that if I didn't meet you, things would, nonetheless, turn out as the Creator wished."

I was still working on how something would not make any difference if it didn't happen, but it might be of value if it did occur, when Beth said: "According to the elders with whom I have talked, you have some role to play in helping my brother Brian...the one who is in prison."

I began to feel nervous. "And, just what help am I suppose to give to your brother?" I inquired.

Beth sank back into her chair. "I don't know," she said. "Maybe you need to have your own vision to tell you that."

Wonderful, I thought. Not only am I supposed to believe in Beth's vision, but I'm supposed to have a vision too. I began to wonder where I might purchase one ... on sale, if possible.

I put down the pen and pad on the desk. "So, Beth, what help is it that you think I have to offer you?"

She was looking very vulnerable. Nevertheless, since she had come this far, Beth might as well spin the wheel.

Her words set the game in motion: "I was wondering ... hoping really ... if you might be willing to go and see my brother in the prison."

"What do you think that would accomplish?" I responded.

"The elders have told me Brian is in danger," Beth offered. "He needs help," she added a few seconds later

I was getting more and more confused. "What kind of danger?" I asked.

Beth said: "Among many, if not most, Native peoples -- at least in North America -- the owl is a symbol or harbinger of death. There was an owl in my vision that seemed to have something to do with Brian."

A trace of what appeared to be discomfort seemed to radiate from Beth's body for a few seconds. When she elaborated further on what she just had said, there was a kind of shyness to her manner.

"The indications surrounding the owl's significance in the vision, however, were somewhat ambiguous. There were several other people in the vision for whom the owl might have been intended."

"Anybody I know?" I said more confidently than I felt.

Her look told me more than I wanted to hear. As a particularly acute wave of confusion, colored with a little bit of panic, rolled over me, I blurted out: "I'm sorry, Beth, I just don't understand what help I possibly could be to your brother, especially if he is in danger. Couldn't you contact the authorities or get help from one of the Native associations in Boston or New York?"

She had a funny kind of smile on her face. "David," she said, "if the authorities are the ones who framed Brian, just what help do you think they are going to be?"

"But, surely," I retorted, "not all authorities have it in for your brother."

Just as quickly, Beth countered with: "How do you propose that I go about separating out the good guys from the bad guys? Which of them should I trust?"

She made sort of a dismissive motion with her hands. "In situations like this, law enforcement officials tend to close ranks. They're like doctors, lawyers, academics and the military in this respect. Truth and justice become less important than protecting their interests, image and territory."

Beth paused briefly, then, as she went on, there seemed to be a quality of challenge to her words. "As far as the various Native associations are concerned, there was nothing in my vision about them."

By saying it this way, she didn't mention me. Nonetheless, the implication was clear.

I was in her vision. I was supposed to help Brian in some way.

Beth elaborated a bit more. "A lot of the Native associations in the cities are just urban versions of the Tribal Councils on the reservations. They are all caught up in petty, self-serving politics. Generally speaking, they are not really interested in trying to help someone like my brother unless they can get some sort of political mileage out of it that will enhance their image, power and so on."

She sighed and, then, said: "In addition, Brian has made some statements that have not exactly endeared him to quite a few Native groups.

They feel he has turned his back on Native spirituality and become an 'apple' ... you know ... red on the outside and white on the inside."

The undertow of life was pulling me in a direction with which I wasn't very happy. I was struggling on a number of levels.

While splashing about in my subjective pool, I said: "Maybe this is impolitic of me to mention the obvious, but, Beth, why don't you go and help him? He is your brother, and it is, after all, your vision."

Without skipping a beat or wasting any effort on being annoyed with my petulance, Beth said: "Are you saying you don't believe in the brotherhood and sisterhood of humanity? Is brotherhood and sisterhood only a matter of genetics?"

I began to say: "Well, of course ..." but my voice trailed off as I started to consider her question in a more reflective manner. Her comments were both fair and unfair, and this dimension of dualism made them particularly difficult to sort out and deal with.

Beth tried to clarify her request for my assistance. "David, I'm not really asking you to save my brother or raise money for an appeal or break him out of jail. I just would like you to talk with him.

"Quite frankly, I'm as mystified as you must be concerning how you might be able to help Brian. Nevertheless, I'm asking you to listen to your heart and spirit, not just your mind or habits.

"See what happens. Be open to possibilities. Leave room for the unexpected to come into your life."

Before saying more, she gave me a few moments to begin digesting what had been said. When she sensed I was ready, Beth said: "Coming here has not been easy for me. Although you are woven into the fabric of my vision, you are, for the most part, a stranger.

"Yet, out of respect for what I believe is the sacred nature of my vision and because of my love and concern for my brother, I have spoken to you about family and personal matters that are very hard to talk about to anyone, let alone a non-Native. I have done this because it is a way for me to try to help my brother in a constructive fashion."

In her own way, Beth actually was calling me to my better self. Yet, I was feeling rather shaky and uncertain about responding to the call.

There was one point about which I was still curious. "How did you locate me, Beth? I mean, how does one go about finding someone who shows up in a vision? The odds on doing that must be a kazillion, or more, to one."

Beth shrugged her shoulders, arched her eyebrows, and raised her hands in mock surrender, as if to say it was all a mystery to her. Then, she said: "What I told you earlier, David, was just the way things happened. I was walking by your building. Something drew my attention to the sign about counseling and therapy services.

"For some reason, I felt inclined to, at least, take a look around, so I came into the lobby. The board listing building occupants was, more or less, in front of me, and your name sort of jumped out at me. I guess I was kind of open to the possibilities of the moment."

She had an apologetic look on her face. "I'm sorry, David. There might be much more to this than what I'm saying, but what I'm saying is the only part of the story that I know."

The meeting seemed to have run its course. I wasn't really sure what to do. I needed time to think about things.

"Beth, if it's all right with you, I would like to have some time to go over our discussion. It won't be long, maybe a day or two. I'll let you know at that time what, if anything, I'll be prepared to do. Could you give me a number where I can reach you?"

She pulled out a pen and piece of paper from her bag, jotted something down and pushed the information across the desktop toward me. Beth rose from the chair and offered her hand. As we shook hands, she said: "Well, however it turns out David, I want to thank you for your time."

I acknowledged her thanks with a 'danada' look, that seemed incongruous with what was going on inside of me, and added: "However it turns out, Beth, there won't be any charge for my services."

She smiled with gratitude, turned and left the office. I was left with my thoughts, feelings and conscience.



Chapter 2: Life's Gambit

During the next few days, I thought about Beth's request and our conversation a great deal. My eyes, ears, hands and feet were busy with mundane affairs at home and at my two offices, but my attention was far away.

My condition was like that of a driver who becomes aware, after a time, of having traveled some distance with absolutely no recollection of what has been going on with the driving process during that time. One's body has been operating on automatic pilot while one's inner awareness has been visiting elsewhere.

During the second day of my deliberations, I began to jot down a ledger of pros and cons. Putting problems in this kind of concrete form often helped me to work toward a resolution in some cases.

On the con side of things were a number of issues. First of all, there was the bizarre character of the whole situation.

Although I felt Beth was being quite sincere in everything she had said, she was asking me to act on the basis of her vision. Yet -- and, putting aside, for the moment, alcohol and drug-induced experiences -- I had never had a "spiritual" vision, and the same was true, as far as I knew, of my family, friends and colleagues.

I accepted the possibility of all kinds of anomalous, out-of-the-ordinary sorts of experience along the lines I had pointed out to Beth from the book I had showed her. However, the idea of receiving communications and transmissions from some other-worldly spiritual realm seemed to me to be ...well ... bizarre.

This attitude of mine did not mean I considered a person's report of those kinds of experiences to be nonsense. Those experiences frequently were of great psychological significance in helping to shape an individual's sense of meaning, values and purpose in life.

Indeed, these kinds of experiences often signaled points of tremendous growth and transformation in the life of a person. Nevertheless, people often confused the psychological significance of experiences with ontological issues and, on the basis of those sorts of experiences, try to invent worlds that, very likely, did not exist anywhere except in dreams, the mind or imagination.

The creation of a "reality" by psychotics is, in many ways, an exaggerated and pathological form of a potential for fantasy that we all have.

Problems arise, of course, when we lose the ability to understand how these created worlds come into being through the exercise of our subjective processes.

From a psychological point of view, the idea of God can be a very, very powerful organizing force in a person's life. Unfortunately, when we fall in love with an idea, we tend to forget it is an idea for which we have fallen.

Democracy, communism, capitalism, science, philosophy, mythology and literature also are filled with extremely powerful ideas through which individuals become seduced or with which people become enamored. But, the existence of a sincerity or intensity of psychological experience does not necessarily mean reality must have the character we attempt to project on to reality.

The fact Beth has a spiritual paradigm out of which she operates and that is of great importance and significance to her, doesn't mean I should find her paradigm important or significant in any way other than that the paradigm has meaning for her. If she were having problems working through a motivational or emotional problem in the context of her life-paradigm, then, I might be able to give her some therapeutic assistance.

This, however, was not the case. What Beth was seeking was extra-clinical assistance that is outside the normal boundaries of a therapist-client relationship.

She didn't want therapy as a client. She was asking for help as a human being.

This presented something of a problem. Should every person who is in need of some kind of help and who comes into one's life have a right to expect help?

I recalled a friend of mine who had gone to India and traveled through various parts of the country. He had related to me that practically everywhere he went there were poor, hungry people seeking money.

Apparently, there were so many poor people that even if he had given just a few rupees (roughly, 20 cents per rupee) to each of them, nevertheless, in very short order, he would have gone through a huge amount of money. He said he would have exhausted his resources to those an extent he would have had to become one of the indigent himself.

The next sunrise would have found them all, including my friend, back on the streets seeking a few more rupees, as if yesterday had never happened ...

except the day might have found all too few of them not quite as hungry as the day before. A small thing, perhaps, but it often could spell the difference between life and death for the lucky ones who happened to cross the path of charity at the right time.

With finite resources of time, money and energy, who does one help? Moreover, how much help does one give? How does one find the point of balance in one's personal life akin to what economists call 'sustainable development'-- that point which allows one to continue on without requiring one to cannibalize one's future for the sake of the present?

To what extent am I my brother's or sister's keeper? Beth had asked a legitimate question.

Yes, the question was legitimate and, yet, at the same time, the act of asking the question seemed somewhat unfair. Did she have the right to raise the question with me under the circumstances of our meeting?

On the other hand, if we are not asking this question of ourselves, then, presumably, the responsibility for doing so falls on someone else. Consequently, if Beth does not ask the question, then, who will ask it?

Is the decision to help, or not to help, someone a purely arbitrary and personal one? Or, are there transcendent standards of some kind -- religious, philosophical or scientific -- by which we should abide in those matters?

If there are standards, do we follow them because of the negative consequences that might follow if we don't do so? Or, do we help irrespective of the consequences ... just because it is the 'right' thing to do?

Like most of us, when faced with this kind of choice, I'm inclined to do less rather than more. I often give help, financial or otherwise, more as a bribe for my conscience to be quiet than as an expression of a clear understanding of the moral issues at stake. In fact, I often give so I won't have to think about those issues and, yet, still be able to feel good about myself as being the kind of guy who is a compassionate person.

I have a lot of respect for those precious few individuals who are prepared to sacrifice virtually everything in order to help people in need. Nonetheless, something in me vigorously resists following their example.

There is a saying among members of the underworld subculture that goes: 'if you can't do the time, don't do the crime'. I suppose, in somewhat analogous fashion, I'm afraid that if I go too far in the giving department, I won't be able to live with the consequences ... the price I might have to pay as a result

of the personal inconvenience to my lifestyle that might have to be paid for giving to others.

Unfortunately, this generally means other people might get sacrificed on the altar of my weakness and convenience. Moreover, I don't really seem to be very willing to explore how much the envelope can be pushed in this respect. Maybe I'm tougher than I think, but at the rate I'm going, I'm never going to find out.

When I chose to be a conscientious objector during the Vietnam war, I went through a lot of difficulty as a result of that decision. Later on, after I got my doctorate and began teaching full -time, I began restricting myself pretty much to the requirements of my job and spending time with friends.

I seemed to feel I already had done my quota of suffering and sacrifice for humanity. It was time to get on with life and leave the sacrifices to others.

Ironically, on the basis of conversations I have had with a number of Vietnam vets, I suspect there were more than a few who returned from that war with the same sort of attitude as I, the conscientious objector, had. They had done their duty as they understood it. They had sacrificed and suffered as a result of fulfilling those duties.

Now, according to the logic of the attitude in question, one had a right to focus on one's personal life. Furthermore, like me, many of the Vietnam vets began to go through life with blinkers on concerning the need for making more sacrifices for the sake of others.

A lot of people, on both sides of the matter of Vietnam, left the issue of acting on principles behind in the 1960s and 1970s. Many of us seemed to be working on the quota system and believed, apparently, we had satisfied our life's assignment in one flurry of activity in relation to the war.

Yet, if I were to say no to Beth, how would I reconcile this response with my actions during the Vietnam war? Did my foray into being a caring human being end there? Was I no longer prepared to take risks for the sake of principle?

Beth's feeling of shame on my behalf was another issue that was posing considerable difficulty for me.

According to Beth, I, along with tens of millions of other non-Natives, had permitted our institutions to destroy the lives of many generations of Natives, and we had done nothing to stop it.

In one way, her sense of shame on my behalf seemed a little presumptuous. How could any one individual – a person like myself, for example – possibly know everything that different social institutions were doing that was wrong, unjust, illegal or questionable?

On the other hand, the German people were reported to have said words to the effect of: 'We didn't know what was happening with the six million Jews and three million others who were being factored into the final solution'. There were many people in North America who did not accept their explanation.

Therefore, why should Native peoples be prepared to accept from non-Natives a similar rationalization for our inactivity on their behalf? How is the logic of the situation different between World War II Germany and 20th century North America?

How many facts about the abuses and injustices being done to Native peoples did we let slip through our minds during the course of our lives? How many movies, newspaper items, magazine articles, books, television programs, documentaries and personal experiences concerning Native peoples did we file away, never to be explored, reflected on, questioned or acted upon?

After getting out of a movie about cowboys and Indians, how many non-Natives asked: Gee, I wonder what's happening with those Indians nowadays? Are they okay? Are they happy? What's been going on in their lives during the last several hundred years or so? I know I didn't ask these questions.

The world of Native Americans began and ended, for the most part, with movie and television westerns. Exceptions to this rule, those as: the Jim Thorpe story, or the life of Olympic runner Billy Mills, or the life of Ira Hayes, tended to be seen as isolated cases involving interesting individuals. Consequently, the Native theme seemed to be little more than backdrop scenery to the movie's primary treatment of, and focus on, individuals.

So much of what we do is steeped in denial. We see evidence all around us concerning so many injustices, yet, for the most part, we do little or nothing.

We are trained from a very early age to become initiated into a hypocritical dualism. On the one hand, we are taught to hold, in high esteem, ideals of compassion, commitment, charitableness, justice and truth. On the other hand, we are discouraged, in so many ways, from acting on these ideals.

There are a whole set of penalties and punishments that are ready to be administered by families, friends, teachers, employers and various authorities. All one has to do to be a recipient of this largesse is to point out the inconsistencies in our social institutions between what is professed to be right, or true, or just or good, and what are the standard operating procedures for our culture and institutions.

These penalties, or the threat of them, are so prevalent during the socialization or development process that most of us are terrorized into not only accepting this dichotomy, but to serving in an evangelical capacity for the spreading of this gospel. Some people see the hypocrisy but feel isolated and unable to carry the battle by themselves.

Only a very few brave or foolhardy souls speak out against the dualism, and even fewer have the courage to act against it. In one way or another, both of these categories of individuals end up getting buried.

More often than not, the people who are buried in this fashion by an earlier generation are the individuals who are written up for the next generation as the sort of visionaries the young people should seek to emulate. Pity the ones who take the gambit seriously.

If I accepted Beth's challenge, I was not naive enough to suppose there might not be a chance, maybe even a very good chance, for some sort of potentially unpleasant ramifications to arise from those a decision. Even the simple events of life had an annoying tendency of cascading out of control before one's eyes.

Just going to talk with Brian seemed, on the surface, simple enough. However, I wasn't forgetting about the symbolism of the owl in Beth's vision. I might not be a believer in Beth's spiritual path, but I had been through too much in my life to ignore the fact that trouble loves to eat the unprepared mind and heart for brunch.

In the end, there were four reasons why I finally decided to try to help Beth Idaho. First, my post-Vietnam quiescence had gone on long enough.

Secondly, I realized that an offer of assistance from me really did nothing to redress all the past wrongs inflicted on Native people. Nonetheless, I felt the time had come, for me at least, to begin to struggle, through the means available to me, against the perpetuation of those wrongs into the future.

Trying to help Beth didn't necessarily mean I believed Brian was innocent of murder. Beth was the one who had come to me for help, not Brian. Going to see Brian was the expression of my willingness to try to help her.

The third reason for offering to help revolved around Brian himself. I wanted to meet him and try to get a sense of the man and whether or not I felt he was guilty of the crime for which he had been convicted.

No matter how my evaluation turned out, I wasn't really clear about what I would do with the outcome of those an informal assessment. On the other hand, if nothing else, talking with Brian might turn up something of practical value that could be used to help either Beth or Brian or both of them.

Finally, there had been a stale, somewhat emotionally toxic cloud that had been hovering over my life for the last few years. I was going to take Beth's advice and leave a little opening for the unexpected to enter into my life and, then, do my best to listen with my heart and soul to whatever came my way, but not just with my mind and usual biases. Maybe this change would help the cloud dissipate.

All of my reasons for embarking on the trip to see Brian were quite legitimate as far as they went. What I failed to understand is that as I was booking passage for one destination, the boat on which I would be making the journey would be sailing to another port -of-call.

I phoned Beth and told her of my decision. I requested that she not become overly optimistic in her expectations concerning what might be accomplished in my meeting with Brian.

Beth's response to my request managed to be both cryptic and annoying. She said: "The man in my vision will find a way to do what is indicated, or what is indicated will find a way for that man."

The response was cryptic because I had no idea what she was talking about or why she would say what she did. The response was annoying because she was operating out of her own world view and seemed to feel I ought to be governed by its logic as well.

I asked her the name and address of the facility where Brian was incarcerated and told her I was planning to take the trip early in the next week. I said I would contact her upon my return, probably toward the end of that same week.

Chapter 3: Spirit of the Journey

Despite a few delays, arrangements had been completed for visiting Brian. I was approaching the meeting with a mixture of nervousness and curiosity. Both feelings were linked to the same question: How would the whole thing turn out?

After signing in and going through some security procedures, I was ushered into a visiting area. I sat down at one of the tables and waited for Brian to come.

About five or ten minutes later, a man came through one of the doors on the far side of the room and looked around. Although there were around ten other people in the room, the man came directly toward me.

As he reached the table, he extended his hand to me and said: "Dr. Phelps, I'm Brian Idaho. How are you?"

I rose to shake his hand and stammered: "I'm ... ah ... fine." Glancing briefly at the other people in the room, I said: "How did you know I was the one waiting for you?"

His face had a somewhat impassive look to it as he remarked: "Spiritual powers have their uses." Then, as he saw the look of disorientation in my eyes, a slight smile came to his lips, and he said: "Sorry, I couldn't resist. Actually, Beth got a telephone message to me a few days ago that included a brief description of you."

Although I laughed, there was an uneasy tone to it. Brian must have picked up on it and did his best to make me feel comfortable: "Look, Dr. Phelps, I really appreciate your taking the time to come all the way out here. A lot of people in your situation would have turned Beth down without thinking twice about it."

Brian was about six feet tall and appeared to be forty-something, but a very athletic-looking forty-something. He was neither handsome nor homely, but his eyes had an electric quality to them.

They seemed to glow with a combination of compassion and perceptiveness. I had the feeling he missed very little, if anything, of what went on around him.

I'm not exactly sure what I was expecting in relation to Brian.

However, he struck me as being somehow different from whatever unconscious preconceptions I had brought to the meeting.

He appeared to be gentle, with a sense of humor. In addition, he seemed to be relatively open, without any trace of an attitude concerning his current situation.

I looked down at the tabletop for a few seconds and, then, looked up at him. "Quite frankly, I don't have the foggiest idea where to begin. Beth has told me a few things, but I'm still pretty much operating in the shadows."

I shrugged my shoulders with a sort of helpless motion. "If I can help in some way, I would like to. Yet, I really don't know what, if anything, I possibly could do for either you or Beth."

Brian's look suggested he empathized with my predicament. He shook his head back and forth slightly and said: "I wouldn't worry too much about that, Dr. Phelps. These things often have their own way of working themselves out."

He reflected briefly before saying: "Sometimes we try to take responsibility for things that aren't in our control. A lot of things become clearer with patience."

His words had a slightly unsettling effect on me. I had come to the meeting with a vague notion of somehow being of help, yet, Brian was the one who was helping me to put things in perspective. The role reversal was somewhat disconcerting in the way it exposed some of my assumptions concerning my place in the scheme of things.

I nodded my head to acknowledge the truth of what Brian had said and asked: "Where should we begin, then?"

Brian thought about my question for a moment and offered the following. "I think you need more information, Dr. Phelps, so why don't you ask some questions? If I can, I'll do my best to answer them."

I started to ask one of the questions that had brought me to the meeting and stopped. "Is it okay if I call you Brian?"

He said: "You have my permission to do that as long as you let me call you Dr. Phelps."

Almost automatically, I was about to respond: "Of course", when I realized what he had done and laughed. "David will be sufficient."

He made a gesture with his head as if to say: 'I bow to your wishes'. He smiled and motioned me with his eyes to go ahead with the questions.

I swallowed nervously, cleared my throat, and smiled somewhat apologetically. "Could you tell me a bit about why you are here ... you know ... the circumstances that led to your conviction?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "There's not much to say. It's pretty cut and dried."

He leaned back in his chair slightly. He started slowly but began to pick up a little speed as he gave his account.

"The federal authorities claim I killed, albeit somewhat accidentally, an FBI agent. This agent supposedly was involved in an undercover investigation of alleged terrorist elements within the membership of the American Indian Movement."

As he outlined the events, whenever a new fact was introduced, he unfolded another finger from his clenched hand that was resting on the table before him. "I found out about the undercover operation. An altercation ensued when I supposedly confronted the agent with the discovery. Things got out of hand, and the man died from a head injury received when he fell after allegedly being hit by me. The charge was manslaughter."

"Did the events take place as the government indicated?" I asked.

Brian shook his head and said: "No. There was no hard data or forensic evidence, except of a very circumstantial sort, that tied me to the scene of the crime. However, I had no alibi for the time of the incident."

He grimaced a little before adding: "The case turned on the testimony of two people from a local reservation. They claimed they overheard the fight and saw me leaving the room just before the body of the agent was discovered."

A look of sadness descended on Brian's face. "I had considered the two people in question to be friends. Unfortunately, they perjured themselves."

He was quiet for a while and sighed. "Who knows what kinds of pressure or enticements were being brought to bear on the two. I feel badly for them."

With a note of perplexity in my voice, I queried: "Why should you feel badly for them? You're the one in prison."

He looked at me as if I were missing the obvious. "Yes, I'm the one in prison, but I still have my integrity as a human being. Those two have bartered theirs away."

Brian explained further. "I'd rather be in prison with my integrity intact than be free to roam around without it.

"There are all kinds of prisons in this world. Some of the worst prison conditions on the face of the earth are the ones we construct for ourselves through our wrong intentions and actions."

I countered with: "Wouldn't it be even better to have your integrity and your freedom?"

He smiled. "Yes, of course. However, if it hasn't escaped your attention, and I'm sure it hasn't, the Great Mystery doesn't always consult us about the arrangement of events."

Brian saw the puzzled expression on my face and instantly guessed the problem. "The Great Mystery is that which makes everything in existence possible. The Great Mystery creates, organizes and arranges everything."

I gave a slight nod of tentative understanding. I added: "While I agree events often seem to have their own mind, I'm afraid I'm not much of a believer in things spiritual."

Brian seemed unfazed by my comment. "That's all right, David. Even if you don't believe in the Great Mystery, nonetheless, the Great Mystery believes in you."

He hadn't said it with condescension or arrogance. He wasn't challenging me in any way. There was no sense of put-down in his remark. In fact, there was a haunting quality of gentleness to his words.

I studied Brian for a moment and briefly became lost in thought. People in prison were notorious for professing their innocence. They were equally well known for being charming con artists who quickly could spot exploitable vulnerabilities in other people and begin manipulating those weaknesses. Sometimes, religion, or spirituality of some kind, was part of the con.

I didn't have any gut feeling Brian was running some sort of scam on me. He seemed quite genuine and without artifice.

On the other hand, if he was really good at the con game, his 'sincerity' probably would be part and parcel of the set-up. I'd never see the sting coming until it was too late, and, perhaps, not even then.

I returned from my musings and asked another question. "Is it possible your conviction could be overturned on appeal or that a new trial might be ordered by bringing forth evidence about the perjured testimony?"

Brian shook his head in the negative. "My lawyer has gone over the transcript and feels no procedural or legal errors were made during the trial on which to base an appeal that had much legal credibility. He said he could go through the motions, pardon the pun, but that's all they would be: motions."

Brian looked slowly around the room while he continued to speak. "As far as a new trial is concerned, shortly after I was convicted, the two witnesses were murdered. Nobody seems to know who did it or why, but there are a lot of rumors flying about. In any event, one might say the idea of a new trial has pretty much reached a dead end."

I decided this part of the conversation also had come to an end. I remembered something that Beth had mentioned during our discussion.

"Beth indicated you had come into disfavor with various Native associations," I said. However, feeling my comments were too vague, I added: "She said it had something to do with their belief you had turned your back on Native spiritual traditions."

He seemed to be waiting to see if there was something more that I wanted to say. Suddenly, I felt embarrassed for having broached the subject.

Somewhat hesitatingly and apologetically, I tried to reverse directions. "Perhaps, I should not have brought the matter up. Maybe you would rather not speak about it."

When I had completed my retreat, he dismissed my concerns of having committed a faux pas of some sort. "There's nothing secret or private in the differences that have arisen.

"Before prison, I had given quite a few public talks on certain subjects through a variety of different venues, some involving Native audiences and some before non-Native groups."

He began to expand on his answer in a way that he apparently felt might be more resonant with me and, therefore, easier to understand. "When Jesus was spreading the word of God in the Holy Land, he was very clear -- at least in the accounts that have been passed down through the ages -- that his mission was not to negate Judaism or the teachings of Moses.

"Jesus said he had come to confirm what had been sent previously from God to the Jews. At the same time, part of his Divinely-given task also was to add to those prior teachings."

As he spoke, he seemed to be watching me for any signs of puzzlement. Or, maybe his gaze was just an expression of his earnestness and desire to communicate with me.

Brian continued on. "Despite the words of Jesus to the contrary, some facets of the Jewish community felt threatened by his presence. Consequently, for whatever reasons, they failed to understand that Jesus was not an enemy to the spirit of Judaism. He was its ally. He was merely giving expression to a variation on the same Divine truths in which Judaism is rooted."

In a teasing way he asked me: "Is the unbeliever with me on all of this?"

I gave him the thumbs up sign backed up by a facial expression of affirmation. He nodded his approval.

Brian was quiet for a moment as he readied himself to present the next aspect of his explanation concerning the differences between him and various Native associations. Finally, he said: "The issue you are inquiring about, David, is somewhat analogous to the situation that existed between Jesus and some of the people in the Jewish community that I outlined just a few moments ago."

At this point, Brian raised the index finger of his right hand and placed it about six inches in front of his nose. It was a sort of cautionary gesture. At the same time, he engaged my eyes in a way that suggested I should pay special attention to what he said next.

"David," he said, "I'm not saying I am a Jesus-like figure. You must be clear about this." He held my eyes with his until he felt confident I had accepted his disclaimer.

Then, he spoke further. "What I'm saying is this: Just as there were certain factions within the Jewish community in the time of Jesus who perceived him to be a subversive threat to Judaism, despite his statements to the contrary, so, too, there are people in the Native community who perceive me to be out to undermine and deny the authenticity of Native spirituality, despite my statements to the contrary."

I stroked my chin a few times, placed my right elbow on the table and, then, rested my chin on the palm of my hand. I said: "Your general point is

clear enough, but a few details concerning the specifics of your problem would be helpful."

"If," Brian began, "we strip away all the particularized features of various Native spiritual traditions, we are left, I believe, with a number of common elements. For instance, virtually every Native tradition of which I am aware emphasizes the importance of: (1) various processes of purification; (2) healing, both individual and communal, as well as spiritual and physical; (3) gratitude to the Creator; (4) petitionary prayers on behalf of creation; (5) reverence for, and harmonizing with, Mother Earth and all her creatures; (6) a seeking of guidance through visions; (7) singing, dancing and drumming as ways of coming into resonance with different dimensions of reality; and, finally, (8) ceremonies of spiritual etiquette concerning planting, and/or fishing and/or hunting."

Brian paused for ten seconds, or so, before proceeding ... perhaps in order to give me a breather. "There are, of course other commonalities with respect to the general aspects of spiritual practices concerning life transitions of birth, death, marriage and coming of age. For the sake of argument, however, let's just limit ourselves to the eight areas mentioned earlier.

"Permit me, for the moment, to play in relation to my community, a role broadly like that which Jesus had with the Jewish community, but keeping in mind my earlier disclaimer. The previously mentioned eight areas of spiritual activity are, in their own way, comparable to the aspects of Judaic tradition that Jesus, as well as I in my similar role, would have confirmed as authentic expressions of Divine guidance. Nothing is being rejected or denied."

He interrupted his explanation once again to check on my progress. "Are you still with the program, David?" Again, he said it in a gentle, teasing fashion.

I responded with mock indignation. "I think I've managed to grasp some of the subtleties of your position. I'm getting somewhat impatient, however, to hear what happens next."

"Well, laddie, listen carefully," Brian gently warned, "because this is where the story becomes interesting." As if to belie his statement, Brian yawned at this point.

Brian's manner became serious again. "The crux of the matter," he said, "revolves about whether or not Native spirituality, as it is presently practiced and understood, exhausts the possibilities of spiritual potential within human beings.

"One can accept all of the foregoing eight areas of spiritual activity as encompassing, and giving expression to, very, very important truths. Nevertheless, that kind of an acknowledgment does not preclude one from raising the issue of potential. More specifically, are there spiritual possibilities that lie beyond the horizons of those eight areas of spiritual activity and, yet, that are still accessible to human beings under the right circumstances?"

Brian tugged on his right ear lobe a few times with his thumb and forefinger. Shortly afterwards, he scratched the nape of his neck.

He started talking as he finished scratching his neck. "There were quite a few Native groups who took exception to my raising this question about spiritual potential.

"They seemed to feel my raising such an issue constituted a denial of the authenticity of Native spiritual traditions. However, I don't see it that way, any more than Jesus believed he was denying Judaism through the act of adding, by God's leave, to the tradition that Jesus already had confirmed."

Brian looked at me in a strange sort of way. I couldn't fathom the significance of the look.

The expression disappeared almost as quickly as it had arrived. "You know, David," he began, "given your philosophical orientation, what I'm about to tell you might be of little significance to you, but it should be said because it helps complete the story."

He took out a handkerchief and blew his nose. He folded the handkerchief and returned it to his pocket.

Brian started speaking again. "Even a very profound knowledge of the powers and spirits inhabiting the realms of minerals, plants and animals will not tell a human being what she or he needs to know about true identity or essential spiritual capacity. Furthermore, as sacred and as important as Mother Earth is, and as much as we have a duty to struggle to protect and preserve her, Mother Earth and the realms over which she has dominion are only a very small part of the story of spirituality.

"Unfortunately, thanks to the legacy of cultural and spiritual imperialism that has been inflicted on Native peoples by other cultures and religious traditions, many Native people are very resistant to the idea of exploring beyond their own tradition. This is even truer these days in the wake of a revival of interest among many Native peoples concerning their own spiritual heritage. For a variety of reasons, they believe the only viable and reliable source of purpose, meaning, direction, guidance, identity and self-esteem will be found within Native spiritual traditions."

Brian placed the fingers of his hands in an interlocking pattern and rested his hands on top of his head, leaning back in his chair as he did so. "There are a number of modern-day cases, both in the United States and in Canada, documenting the devastating ramifications that ensue from the forced disruption of the links between indigenous peoples and the specific lands on which they have been living for centuries. These forced disruptions have been created through migration projects that are imposed on indigenous peoples by federal governments who are trying to realize political/economic ambitions and desires at the expense of Native peoples."

He pulled his hands down from his head, placed his arms on the table and rested his chest against his forearms. "The incidence of suicide, youth problems, depression, alcoholism, poverty, illness, joblessness, homelessness and family breakdown among the people who are forced to move reaches epidemic proportions.

"Native peoples, even nomadic ones, are tied to the ecology of their habitats, or migratory pathways, in very intricate ways. These ties go beyond the obvious needs of physical survival. Every dimension of our lives is oriented by our relationship with the powers and spirits of the minerals, plants and animals that make up the environment in which we dwell."

Brian rubbed his eyes briefly with his fingers. "Our identities, our purposes, our values, the meaning of life, our way of education, and even our languages are all tied to the land on which we live. If a Native person gets forced off that land, that person becomes totally disoriented, alienated and lost."

I interrupted Brian and said: "But, as long as they were given new land to live on, surely these people could adapt to the new circumstances."

A look of weariness crept across Brian's face. He sighed slightly. Finally, he said: "David, are you married, or do you have any children?"

I shook my head in the negative.

Brian closed his eyes and his lower face went through a few minor contortions, as if he were considering various possibilities, rejecting them, and moving on to evaluate the next candidate. He opened his eyes and started to speak. "Well," he began, "suppose you did have a wife and several children.

"Let us also assume you have been married for, say, twenty years and you still were deeply, deeply in love with her. Furthermore, in this scenario we are painting, not only do you love your children, you live for your children and derive great joy and satisfaction in seeing them grow through various stages of development. In short, your whole life and the meaning of that life revolves around your family."

"Sounds very inviting," I said.

Brian moved his eyes and head in a way that seemed to say: 'Yes, doesn't it.' He looked out the set of barred windows on the far side of the room and spoke further: "Now, let's suppose someone from the federal government comes to you and announces: "Dr. Phelps, we need your wife, children, house, and job for an economic project we have in mind. I'm afraid you, just you Dr. Phelps, will have to vacate the premises and move to another country. If we can, the government will help you relocate and provide some assistance in searching for a job, language training, finding a place to live, and, maybe, hooking up with a new family."

Brian held his hands up in a way that sort of gave support to what he now said. "David, do you think it would be fair to say you might be totally devastated by those a sequence of events?"

He waited for me to nod my assent to his question. My voice was somewhat paralyzed as I intuited where he might be going with things.

Brian went on as soon as I nodded. "Would not your whole sense of identity, meaning, purpose, self-esteem, direction and understanding come to a screeching halt?"

Again, before proceeding, he wanted me to respond in some fashion to the question being asked. I complied by nodding my head ever so slightly.

Brian observed the affirmation to his query. Another question quickly issued forth. "Do you not suppose that, under those circumstances, you would have to begin to fight a life and death struggle with deep, intense storms of doubt, alienation, depression and emotional upheaval concerning your relationship with existence?"

I managed to voice a single word: "Yes."

Brian acknowledged my response with his own nod of affirmation, as if to say: 'Yes, indeed, what else could one say to this situation?'

"Now," he went on, "let's add a few wrinkles to the story. For example, let's assume the allusion to relocation assistance made by the government representative either never materializes or comes in forms that are of little, or no, use to you. Consequently, you have a very limited amount of money, few food supplies, no job, no job prospects, no stable place to stay, and no family. In addition, you don't speak the local language of your new country very well, and you feel completely lost with respect to having any sense of affinity for the life-style of the community around you."

Having set the scene, Brian raised a further question. "Under the conditions that I have outlined, don't you feel you might be quite vulnerable to the call of physical breakdown, psychological problems, suicide, substance abuse and the life of the street?"

Once more, I could only agree with what Brian was suggesting. There was a whole host of feelings and thoughts that were tugging at me while Brian went through his question-riddled scenario, but voicing them didn't seem appropriate -- at least not now.

Brian began to work toward the conclusion of his series of hypothetical constructions. "Everything that has been touched upon in this story concerning you is a reflection of what has confronted tens of thousands of Native peoples in many localities in North America. The major difference is this: in place of the intense love for, and connection to, the land of specific locations that Native peoples have, I have substituted your love for your wife and children. Native peoples have an abiding love for their families, but their attachment to the land goes even deeper.

"Nonetheless, the parallel remains true. You, in the story, and Native peoples, in reality, have been separated from that which is deeply loved and from which the whole fabric of one's existence is woven."

For a short time, Brian watched me reflecting on what had been said. Eventually, he said: "David, you previously wondered, as long as new land was given in exchange for the old land, whether, or not, Native people still might be able to make the adjustment.

"Okay. Having heard everything to this point, let me ask you one more question. If a government agent showed up one day and introduced you to a woman and several children and said: "This is your new family', do you feel you would be able to adjust to the situation?"

This time Brian didn't wait for me to respond to his question. He continued to develop the idea.

"After all, could one not argue that since you started off with one wife and two children, and you ended up with one wife and two children, no real damage had been done? Moreover, couldn't we extend the logic of this position and contend that just as you seem to be assuming one piece of land is pretty much the same as any other piece of land, so too, any combination of wife and children ought to be capable of being substituted for any other those combination, and, presumably, therefore, you really ought not to have any grounds for objecting to this arrangement?"

The question being asked by Brian was somewhat rhetorical in nature. Not really looking for a response from me, Brian continued to talk.

"We all derive unique benefits from the complex intricacies of our relationships with the specific people in our lives with whom we are in love. In addition, Native peoples derive unique benefits from the complex intricacies of the relationships that are established with specific geographical localities.

"Indeed, these localities are like living beings to us. They have a spirit, character, potential and power all of their own. No place else on Earth can duplicate this set of properties. Other localities have their own set of living properties and possibilities."

Brian paused, as if not quite certain of the direction in which he wanted to go at this juncture. He lowered his head and rubbed his neck.

He started speaking again as he raised his head. "Let's go back to the fictional account concerning you that I developed earlier. If we assume your wife is a very spiritually gifted individual, there are a few more points that can be made.

"For example, if you depended on spiritual counsel from your wife to get you through life, and if she were suddenly wrenched from your life, as we have supposed previously, then you would have lost a, or the, fundamental source of spiritual guidance in your life. The ship with which you have been sailing through life is now without compass, charts, sextant, sails or rudder.

"Similarly, when Native peoples are forced from our lands, we lose one of the most fundamental sources of spiritual guidance available to us. Although we have a reverence for all of Mother Earth, a large portion of our spiritual sustenance and direction comes from our relationship to specific geographical locations.

"Even our languages are heavily shaped and colored by this relationship. Sounds and expressions that have relevance in one locality lose some or all, of their validity and applicability in other localities.

"The ecology of one locality is not the ecology of another location. This is not only true in relation to the way land, water, climate, atmospheric conditions and different species of life combine together to form the ecological dynamics of a particular geographical area of Mother Earth. Certain aspects of the dynamics of spiritual ecology also change from place to place.

"Places of power manifest themselves differently as one travels across the land. What one might obtain or experience or learn at one place of power might be quite different from what one might receive or from which one might benefit at some other place of power.

"The spirits that are given expression through various kinds of plant and animal life do not all offer the same manner of spiritual guidance. Moreover, as the flora and fauna change, so, too, do the processes of spiritual alignment and etiquette change that are necessary to access those wisdom."

Throughout his account, Brian was watching me for signs of boredom, saturation and/or puzzlement. Whatever he might have seen in this respect was not sufficiently intrusive to cause him to stop.

I didn't have to accept the spiritual paradigm he was outlining in order to appreciate it and want to treat it with respect. My training in clinical psychology had taught me the importance of trying, as much as possible, to

come to see and understand the world through the perspective of the client.

Brian wasn't a client, but he was helping me to gain some insight into certain aspects of a Native world view. This understanding might prove to be helpful in some way later on.

We both had become preoccupied with our private thoughts and feelings for a few moments. Brian broke the silence with: "David, if you will just bear with me for a few more moments, we are near the end of our conceptual journey."

Apparently, he saw there was still an aura of interest and attention about me and that my eyes had not, yet, glazed over, because when I indicated for him to go on, he did so without hesitation. "Unfortunately, the fact many, although by no means all, facets of indigenous sciences are tied to specific localities has led to a number of problems. More specifically, as Native peoples have been pushed from the land or as the multi-dimensional ecologies of those places are being intruded upon, if not destroyed, by various governments and corporations, the learning and practice of Native spirituality has become increasingly difficult.

"In its own way, the situation among many Native peoples is like non-Natives trying to do modern physical science either with faulty equipment or without properly equipped laboratories. The environmental laboratories on which so much of indigenous sciences depends are being destroyed, and this reality is interfering, more and more, with the pursuit and mastery of our traditional sciences.

"In addition, many of our elders are dying. In all too many cases, they are passing away without being able to transmit their wisdom to subsequent generations.

"There are many reasons for this problem of transmission. For instance, through the influence of compulsory public education, many of our younger people have lost touch with, and interest in, most of our traditional teachings. Furthermore, for a variety of reasons, fewer and fewer of our younger generations have acquired the language skills necessary to receive the oral teachings of the elders.

"Finally, a wide variety of economic, social, technological and political forces have disrupted and undermined the family and community lives of many Native peoples in very profound ways. The continuous assault of

these forces has led to a tragic number of dysfunctional individuals, families and communities among Native peoples.

"These people are in great need of the spiritual help that elders have been able to offer traditionally. However, not only are there not enough elders to handle the problems, the people in need often have been forced to leave the places where the few elders, who do exist, reside.

"Native peoples are caught in a horrific negative feedback cycle. The greater the number of spiritual casualties in our community, the fewer candidates there are to be recipients of transmitted wisdom. The fewer the number of accomplished teachers and healers there are who are available to the community, the greater will be the number of people who will not be in an emotional, linguistic or spiritual position to seek out, and benefit from, traditional teachings.

"There are some people within different Native communities who are valiantly struggling to preserve, restore, reconstruct, revive and transmit various aspects of indigenous sciences and languages. They are doing so with varying degrees of success."

Brian made a circling motion with his hand. "This brings me back, David, to your original question concerning the differences between myself and various Native groups. Although I admire the efforts of those individuals who are trying to revive indigenous sciences, and while I have no doubt about the wisdom inherent in those sciences, I feel their work is misdirected in several respects.

"First of all, even if these people are successful in their project, nevertheless, as I indicated to you earlier, David, I believe there are very important limitations concerning the extent to which those sciences can help us uncover the full potential of spiritual nature. Knowing the sciences that deal with the spirit and power realms associated with the minerals, plants, animals, and so on, of Mother Earth will not permit us, I believe, to fully realize our true spiritual identity, nor will that wisdom unlock the secrets of our essential capacity.

"Secondly, almost every religious or spiritual community is very resistant to recognizing, understanding and appreciating the historical fact that the formal manner through which spirituality manifests itself changes over time. These formal aspects go through a series of stages: from

appearing, to ascending, to declining, and, sometimes, to disappearing completely.

"The Essence of spirituality is always what that Reality is, but the modalities of outward expression change. These outward modalities serve a purpose and are not incidental, but the historical and social circumstances that they were intended to address change, and a new, formal mode of manifestation comes to minister to those changes.

"The essential nature behind these formal changes is one, but people come to identify with the form and begin to assume that Essence must, of metaphysical necessity, be limited to that form. Thus, formal differences come into conflict with one another each believing it alone gives expression to, embodies and serves the essential truth.

"People tend to forget that the whole process of transition in formal characteristics itself is a manifestation of Essence. There are Divine reasons for this history of transition in formal expressions of spirituality.

"One makes a mistake when one tries to hang on to the form and, in the process, one fails to recognize the new form or forms through which Essence is being manifested and to which Essence is calling peoples of ensuing generations. Having said this, however, one should not construe what is being said to mean that everything that purports to be a new modality of the expression of Essence is what it claims to be.

"The individual must exercise discretion and try to discern the real from the counterfeit. Nonetheless, one also needs to understand there can be more than one genuine currency in circulation that is backed up by the spiritual equivalent of a gold standard capable of ensuring the redeemable value of any of these genuine currencies.

"Many Native traditions constitute genuine forms of spirituality and, as those, they assume a rightful place among a number of other genuine forms of spirituality, but, in my opinion, these Native forms, like a number of other spiritual traditions both now and in the past, are, and have been for some time, on the downward slope of their life -cycles. Yet, at the same time, as long as these forms of spirituality retain their correct, original forms, various genuine modalities of Native spirituality always will constitute legal spiritual tender that I feel will be honored by the Exchequer of the Central Bank.

"Notwithstanding the foregoing remarks, I believe that trying to rejuvenate forms of spirituality that are in the last stages of their life-cycle

is like trying to make an old man young again. Both swim against an extremely strong current ... a current that has other destinations and priorities in mind.

"A third reason behind my tempered enthusiasm for the attempt of some people to revive certain forms of Native spirituality is that I feel there are, presently, a great many forces, both internal to Native communities, as well as external to those communities, that are actively aligned in opposition to the successful completion of these attempts to revive Native spiritualities to their original grandeur. Native spirituality has not gone into decline because there is something that is necessarily inherently wrong with indigenous sciences per se. Rather, there is a powerful array of political, religious, historical, educational, social, economic, technological and environmental forces that have effectively marginalized, if not destroyed, the teaching, learning and practice of many aspects of Native spirituality.

"As a result, in many respects, I believe indigenous sciences are a spent force as far as their capacity is concerned to be a major factor shaping the unfolding of events in North America." When he said the word "major", his voice, eyes and body all gave stress to the word.

As a sort of addendum to his body language, he said: "The embers of Native spirituality might continue to glow and might, from time to time, flare up a little. Nevertheless, I do not believe these fires, except in isolated cases, will be either sustainable or of central importance, although they might continue to serve as a source of important kinds of wisdom and inspiration for some people."

A smile appeared on Brian's face. The smile, together with the rest of his facial expression, conveyed a sense of irony.

"You know, David," he said, as he scratched his arm, "my use of the term 'fires' in this context is quite interesting. It has a lot of significance and resonance within Native spirituality, especially given the nature of what I'm talking about."

Brian ran both of his hands through his hair and, then, stretched. When he was done, he began again.

"There are Native prophecies and legends that speak of the lighting of the seventh fire. Among other things, this fire symbolizes the advent of a future time in which certain Natives and non -Natives will join together to help

protect Mother Earth, as well as to help inaugurate a period of spiritual purification."

He smiled again. "I often am reminded of these prophecies by people from within the Native community. These prophecies are offered as rebuttal to my, shall we say, pessimistic views concerning the revival of indigenous sciences.

"As I have explained to people in the Native community on many occasions, I also believe in the prophecies and legends about which they speak. However, unlike many people in the Native community, I do not automatically assume that the coming together of Natives and non-Natives at the time of the seventh fire will be under the banner of some form of Native spirituality.

"In fact, the details of the coming transformation are entirely absent from most of the Native prophecies and legends with which I am familiar. The prophecies of the elders say that certain events will happen and they describe some of the surrounding circumstances, but much is missing from those accounts.

"The elders might have known more and -- for reasons best known to them -- chose not to speak about what they knew. On the other hand, their knowledge of these future events only might have gone up to a certain point, and beyond that they did not know and, therefore, could not say any more than they did. Very few, if any, individuals living today know that is the case.

"I believe there are good, decent, humble, courageous, compassionate, sincere, committed, generous, kind, tolerant, patient, forgiving and loving people among Native peoples. I believe there are people with similar qualities among non-Natives.

"I believe these kinds of individual will, at the appropriate time all seek one another out, as well as be brought into contact with one another. However, the spiritual forces that will bring these respective peoples together in order to work in harmony for a common cause are, for the most part, I believe, hidden from these groups at the present time.

"People, both Native as well as non-Native, often tend to interpret prophecies according to their own interests and desires. We tend to read into, and read out of, those sorts of prophecies whatever is consistent with, or inconsistent with, our particular beliefs, values and aspirations.

"A prophecy has its own reality and truth. On the one hand, our task is to discover that reality and truth. On the other hand, once discovered, this reality and truth should be incorporated into the way we live our lives.

"My counsel to people in the Native community, my counsel to people in the non-Native community, has been that one should not discontinue, prematurely, one's search for the truth and reality of things. Unfortunately, many of us often act as if we have arrived at journey's end when this is not the case.

"Due to the foregoing ideas, some people in the Native community have interpreted my remarks as an attack on Native spirituality. They believe I have turned my back on my spiritual tradition. They feel I have allowed myself to be corrupted by white, western influences, and, as a result, some of them refer to me as an 'apple'.

"The odd thing about all of this name-calling and finger-pointing is that I've never advocated Native people should stop practicing or pursuing our spiritual traditions. Moreover, I've never recommended that Native people should embrace Christianity or any other spiritual tradition. In fact, I believe what is coming at the time of the seventh fire is going to be as much a surprise to many Christians as it is to Native peoples and to people from other spiritual traditions."

Brian extended his arms out to the sides, elbows bent, palms up, and shrugged slightly, as if to say: 'what's a body to do?' His expression changed quickly to one of apology, as he folded his arms across his lower chest area. "Sorry, David," he said, "I really hadn't intended for things to go on quite so long, but once I got started, one thing kind of naturally led to another. You've been very patient."

I was silent for a bit longer. Brian had given me a lot upon which to reflect, and I wasn't going to be able to digest it all today.

In my mind, I began to go back over some of what he had said. Suddenly, I realized I had left Brian's apology hanging without any sort of response. This prompted an apology of my own.

"Quite frankly, Brian, your answer to my question has intrigued me to those an extent that I got caught up in thinking about it and forgot to tell you that you really have nothing for which to apologize."

I rubbed the fingers of my hand across my forehead a few times. "Interestingly enough, irrespective of whatever other effect your

explanation might, or might not, have on me in the future, there is one effect it already has had that, for the most part, has little to do with the original question you were addressing."

Looking at Brian in a very direct manner, I said: "This might be of absolutely no use to you, Brian, but I believe you are innocent of the crime for which you were convicted." My feeling was not rooted in the facts of his case but in the fact of the man before me.

I had an intuitive, gut feeling about him. I only had been interacting with him for a short while, and, consequently, my observations of his words, attitudes and behaviors were a very limited sampling of his life. Therefore, I was surprised to find within me those a strong feeling concerning his innocence.

If my relationship with Brian were a professional one, then, out of commitment to the principles of sound professionalism, I probably would have resisted my feelings more strenuously. But, my relationship wasn't a professional one, so I went with my feelings.

As a psychologist, I knew very well how much feelings could cloud judgment and distort perception. Sometimes, however, feelings see more clearly, and deeply, than reason does. I believed this was one of those times.

Brian extended a smile of gratitude and appreciation to me. Making a gesture with his head that alluded to the surrounding walls, he said: "As far as getting me out of here, you're right, David, your belief in my innocence is likely to be quite useless. Yet, your words do a lot for my inner sense of freedom, and that kind of freedom is a precious commodity within prison."

Chapter 4: Requiem for a Future

I was wondering where to go next in the discussion. A couple of possibilities occurred to me.

While I was thinking about which of the two to ask, a third question came into view. I opted for the latter.

Feeling somewhat like I was assuming the role of a devil's advocate, I proceeded to raise a potentially volatile question. "Brian, this might be rather impolitic of me, but there is a question concerning Native peoples that I've wondered about from time to time."

Brian rolled his eyes in a way that suggested: Oh no! What now? Then, he smiled, saying: "Will I be able to get out of this alive?"

There was a slight hesitation, and a mischievous look came over his face. He added: "That stuff about my innocence was just greasing the pole, wasn't it?"

I felt a little embarrassed despite the fact I knew he was just kidding. In reality, the embarrassment was because I didn't know how he actually would react to my question.

I went ahead anyway. "I've read about some of these land claim disputes that take place between various levels of government and different Native nations or tribes. What I don't understand is: if native peoples traditionally have not had any notion of ownership of the land, then, on what are they basing their land claims?"

Brian arched his eyebrows and smiled briefly. His eyes, and an ever so slight motion of his head, suggested he found the question to be an interesting one.

Brian's smile turned to a grin. "Now, you've gone and done it," he said. "You've managed to open a real can of worms. I hope you're satisfied," he said in mock disgust and with a twinkle in his eye.

I sucked air in through a grimaced mouth and opened my eyes wide in a display intended to convey both a sense of pseudo -alarm and pseudo-regret. I waited for Brian to say more.

He looked at me with a somewhat somber expression. "Do you think you're up to a little in-your-face history lesson?" he inquired. He quickly went on: "Because if you are, you might find the answer to your question to have an educational, as well as, perhaps, an unsettling quality to it. I warn you,

in all sincerity, you might not look at your country in the same way after the explanation as you do now." The look in his eyes seemed to ask: 'Are you ready for this?'

I responded to the challenge by saying: "Maybe I'm already a lot less enamored with my country than you suppose is the case." I paused slightly before adding: "I once felt strongly enough about the injustices being perpetrated by my country that I left it during the Vietnam War."

A mild look of surprise, perhaps with a small trace of approval, flashed across his face. He pursed his lips in a way that suggested he was mulling over something.

Finally, he said. "You know, David, there are certain Native peoples with a warrior tradition. During the Vietnam war, quite a few individuals from these warrior traditions enlisted in the armed services and sought one, or more, tours of duty in Vietnam."

His eyes were looking at the wall behind me, but his thoughts seemed to be far away. Gradually, he came back from wherever he had been and looked at me. There was a mixture of puzzlement and pain in his eyes as well as his voice when he spoke.

"I'm sure those young men had many reasons for doing what they did. I'm also quite certain some, maybe even many, of their reasons for going to Vietnam were noble ones.

"For example, some of them might have wanted to show the rest of America that Native people could be counted on to stand shoulder to shoulder with other Americans in times of difficulty, as had been the case during the Second World War or Korea. Maybe, some of them reasoned that fighting in Vietnam might be a way of earning a certain sort of credibility that could be drawn upon later, in some fashion, to help Native peoples.

"Yet, I've always had difficulty in understanding why these youngsters would allow themselves to be used to go and do to the Vietnamese what had been done to our own people by the same United States of America. One is helping neither oneself nor one's people if benefit only can be gained at the expense of the lives and suffering of other people."

Brian looked away at some of the other people in the room, but his gaze returned to me. "Well, given your rebellious background, maybe there is hope, yet, for an unbelieving heathen those as yourself."

For a few seconds, he lightly drummed on the table top with his fingers. He seemed to be thinking while drumming.

He stopped the movement of his fingers and asked, in a somewhat rhetorical fashion: "So, may I assume you are prepared to face the relentless onslaught of my history lesson?"

In my most formal manner, I responded: "You may so assume." I followed with: "Lead on Macduff...."

Brian briefly reflected on what I had said, smiled and nodded his head, as if in silent acknowledgment of the rest of the literary allusion.

"Due to time constraints," Brian began, "you will be getting the abridged version of An Introduction to Native Affairs 101. So, please buckle your seat belt and keep your arms inside the moving vehicle at all times." Brian tugged at the brim of an imaginary conductor's hat, as if to pull it tighter over his head, and, he flicked his right wrist and hand a few times like he was revving up an engine of some sort.

"The first stop on our mini-tour is the year 1887. During that year, the US Congress passed what is known as the Dawes Act, or, alternatively, The Allotment Act.

"On the surface, this Congressional bill seemed to give expression to the best qualities of a democratic system in which the notion of personal property played a fundamental role. More specifically, the Dawes Act established provisions for dividing up most of the lands of Native peoples into 160-acre packages. Furthermore, the Act required individual Native families to apply for these parcels, and, once the application was approved by the government, the families in question would own the land outright.

"To a non-Native, such an act of Congress would appear to be a godsend and one of the things that makes this country of ours so great. Apparently, people are being given something for nothing. Seemingly, people are being offered a golden opportunity to help build America and to help contribute to increasing the 'wealth of nations' through their own individualistic efforts."

Brian made some motions as if he were casting with a fishing rod and then reeling in the line. "The offer of ownership of land was the bait. The hook was this: What is owned can be sold."

Brian gave a quick shake of his head. There was an expression on his face that appeared to be displaying a sort of admiration toward something or other.

He continued on. "The logic of the strategy underlying the Dawes Act was elegant simplicity.

"(a) The government wanted access to, and control of, the lands and the resources on which Native peoples lived. However, they needed a means that appeared to be democratic, legal and just.

"(b) Traditionally among indigenous peoples land does not belong to individuals but was collectively owned. Decisions concerning the use of that land were decided communally. In addition, whatever decisions were reached had to be done through a process of consensus. This meant that in the end, everyone had to agree about what to do. As long as unanimity had not been achieved, deliberations and discussions would continue.

"(c) Native tribes and nations considered all land to be sacred, and, therefore, it could never be sold. Moreover, because land is sacred, one should not dig into it and remove things those as gold, iron, coal and so on.

"(d) By divvying up land that didn't belong to them in the first place and giving it "freely" to individual Native families, the federal government was able to get rid of the two obstacles that stood in the way of their gaining access to Native lands and resources. In other words, they were able to circumvent the problem of collective ownership, and, as well, the government was able to undermine the Native method of consensual decision making."

Brian hadn't been speaking at a fast pace, but, evidently, he felt a lot of information had been thrown in my direction. Consequently, he raised his hands and gave an expression in a way that seemed to ask: 'Is everything clear so far?'

I nodded for him to continue. He paused briefly to relocate the place where he had stopped his narrative.

"The Dawes Act had a further provision that was intended to place pressure on Native peoples to get them to comply with the Act. In effect, the Act indicated that whatever lands were left over after disbursement of the 160-acre parcels to individual Native families, these 'surplus' lands would revert to control of the government that, then, could lease or sell the land to whomever they deemed appropriate.

"Native peoples were in a damned-if-you-do and damned-if-you-don't dilemma. If they failed to act, they lost the land. If they

complied, then fundamental dimensions of Native traditions were lost or severely threatened.

"The Dawes Act also introduced, probably by design, a number of foreign elements into the lives of Native peoples. Not only was the idea of ownership alien to the Native perspective, but so were the elements of competition, individualism and economic self-interest that ownership engendered.

"All one needed to do was nurture these capitalistic seeds a little, and, in time, a virulent disease of worldly entanglements would run rampant through Native communities. In fact, this disease has proved to be far more destructive to Native peoples than the smallpox-laced blankets that certain government agents used to hand out to Native communities in order to remove Natives from the lands that the officials coveted.

"The intended effects of the Dawes Act manifested themselves, as anticipated, over the next few years. Native peoples were neophytes in the temple of capitalism. As those, they understood virtually nothing about that economic system. This ignorance is especially relevant when it comes to the way many capitalists use the legal system to eliminate or destroy people who are in their way.

"Practically before Native peoples could say: "Mother Earth", almost 90% of our land had been lost through foreclosures, linguistic trickery, economic pressure tactics, and various fraudulent maneuvers, all of which were upheld by the courts.

"About the time this great nation of ours declared its independence, different Native tribes and Nations controlled some three million square miles of land. By the end of the 1800s, Native peoples were in control of approximately 200,000 square miles. The rest had been taken from them, and the Dawes Act played a major role in this 'democratic and perfectly legal' acquisition of Native lands."

Brian adjusted his sitting position. "Shall I go on, or have you had enough?" he asked.

There was no doubt I was finding the lesson depressing and saddening. In grade school and high school, one learns about the great courage and pioneering ingenuity that supposedly opened up the West. One is taught to equate the zeal of the pioneers with the indomitable spirit of America and its relentless push to explore, create, build and invent.

For the most part, teachers and textbooks of American history rarely mention things like the Dawes Act. Or, if they mention them, they do so from the perspective of the biases and prejudices of vested interests who wish to protect their privileges and secrets.

Who wants to hear, or read, about a nation built upon murder, theft, cheating, dishonesty, and injustice? Such a history is not conducive to the development of civic pride.

Talk about: glory, triumph, victory, success, greatness, heroes, and, if you must, heroines. Whatever doesn't fit into this marketing scheme should be swept underneath the carpet, with no harm done, except to the truth and to the peoples whose lives have been destroyed.

I grimaced. "You're a cruel, heartless man, Brian, but I think I should hear the rest of it."

Brian responded with: "I wish there were refreshments to be served during this journey, David. Unfortunately, you have signed on for only an economy fare."

"I'll try to live with it," I indicated. "Besides," I said, "I think I'm going to be too busy trying to digest the next installment of the lecture series to want to bother with refreshments."

He started out the next segment by saying: "Act two of our riveting drama takes place around 1934. In that most distinguished of years, the federal government passed something called 'The Indian Reorganization Act'. This marvel of democracy is also, sometimes, known as the 'Wheeler-Howard Act.'

"Ostensibly, the purpose of this bill was to introduce uncivilized Indians to the subtleties of democracy. In short, the United States government wanted to help Native peoples to modernize and democratize their way of conducting tribal government affairs.

"The Act outlined procedures for establishing Tribal Councils. The representatives selected for these councils would be nominated and elected through democratic elections in which the simple majorities of eligible voters would determine the successful candidates."

Brian smiled at me and asked, in a semi-rhetorical style: "Sounds as American as Mom and apple pie, doesn't it?" There was an edge of irony to Brian's words.

I motioned assent with my head. I played my role knowing that the hammer was about to fall.

Brian went on with his account. "The real intent of the Wheeler-Howard Act was to try to further undermine the collective-consensual procedures used by Native peoples to make decisions about tribal affairs.

"Apparently, the federal authorities and interested business people found a decision process based on consensus to be too democratic for their liking. They also found it to be too slow and, thus, an obstacle to their plans for rapidly developing the lands and resources of the Native peoples."

Brian laughed and shook his head in amazement. "America already had taken 2,800,000 square miles from Native peoples. Nevertheless, the 200,000 square miles of land onto which Natives had been pushed during this, shall we say, 'transfer' were soon discovered to be filled with all kinds of natural resources needed to serve the American economy."

Brian laughed again. "The same thing happened a number of times. Natives would be forced onto lands that, at the time, everyone thought were worthless. This is why the government, in its benevolence, assigned those lands to Native peoples.

"Much to the chagrin of the movers and shakers of democracy, subsequent developments would reveal the value of these 'worthless' lands to which Native peoples had been removed. So, new ways had to be devised to marginalize the Natives even further by finding new worthless lands for them to be forced onto ... all nice and legal of course.

"But, lo and behold, the new marginal seemingly worthless lands, onto which Natives were pushed would be found, later on, to have heretofore unsuspected value to the government and business people. Consequently, the problem would arise all over again."

Despite the fact that the bottom line on all of this was the introduction of injustice upon injustice and suffering upon suffering into the lives of Native peoples, Brian seemed to find considerable humor in the situation. He appeared to be mining various veins of levity in the way non-Natives kept bungling everything as they dashed about in a virtually permanent state of economic oestrus that saw them lusting after everything that did not belong to them.

Gradually, a more somber mood came over Brian. He sighed and said: "In order to induce Native peoples to abandon their traditional way of government, the Wheeler-Howard Act promised federal aid to any tribe or nation that would adopt the non-Native version of democracy being proposed in the Act.

"Eventually, about one hundred and seventy tribes voted to accept the Tribal Council form of government that was being foisted onto the Native peoples through the Indian Reorganization Act. However, in many of these cases, the vast majority of the Natives simply boycotted the vote on whether or not to adopt the non-consensual approach to government.

"Consequently, one might find, say, a total of 20-25% of the eligible voters actually participating in any given referendum. Of this 20-25% figure, a little over half of them would vote to adopt the Tribal Council idea."

Brian leaned back in his chair and stretched his legs, letting them form a forty-five degree incline relative to the floor. "David, in order to appreciate what I'm saying, there is something that you should understand about the Native perspective. More specifically, among many Native peoples, refusing to participate in a voting procedure actually constitutes a negative vote. It is an actively passive way of expressing non-confidence in the whole process.

"Therefore, if one adds the non-confidence or boycott vote to the negative votes that were registered in any given referendum, then, oftentimes, this meant that 80-85% of the Native people in that tribe were just saying no to the federal government's offer. However, in true democratic fashion, the federal government opted to either: (a) treat all abstentions as positive votes, or (b) to accept, as official, whatever results issued forth from those who did cast a vote in the referendum.

"In effect, the federal government's totally arbitrary and self-serving way of tallying the various referendum votes meant the following. Consequently, considerably less than 12-15% of the members of any given tribe who were eligible to vote ... and there were a number of members who were too young to vote or who might have been excluded from voting for other reasons ... would be determining what would happen to a people who normally operated according to consensus.

"Naturally, the people who, eventually, were elected to sit on these Tribal Councils were drawn almost entirely from those who had co-operated

with the federal government. They were the ones who were instrumental in getting the new form of 'democracy' installed in a tribe or nation.

"These elected 'representatives' were, in reality, agents of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. They did what the BIA told them to do.

"Given that the Bureau is, and always has been, very much inclined toward pursuing economic development whenever possible, one doesn't have to have much of an imagination to guess what the BIA told the Tribal Councils to do. Mineral/oil explorations, drilling expeditions, mining operations and inviting corporate interests onto Native lands became the standing order of the day ... any day.

"In one fell swoop, The Indian Reorganization Act helped to undermine traditional ways of government, economy and relating to the land. Not a bad day's work, wouldn't you say, David?"

I didn't know whether to nod my head in agreement or shake my head in disgust. I managed a feeble: "Yeah."

Brian continued on. "Always the clever ones, federal officials took steps to ensure the Tribal Councils would never be able to step out of line and act in the interests of their people.

"Constitutions for the Tribal Councils were written. These documents stipulated that all decisions of the councils would have to be approved by the federal government.

"In fact, these council constitutions were yet another expression of what the federal government meant by democracy in relation to Native peoples. These documents were put together by officials of the Department of Interior. No Native individual was permitted to take part in the process, either as authors or as consultants.

"Apparently, the federal government had forgotten how much the framers of their own United States Constitution had benefited from, and relied on, the guidance and assistance of Native peoples. Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and James Madison, among others, were all studying, and urging others to study, various aspects of the Great Binding Law of the Iroquois Confederacy as a model for their own constitution.

"There were more than forty representatives of the Iroquois Grand Council who had been invited to Albany in 1754 to serve as consultants. They were active participants in the deliberation process leading to the Albany Plan of Union, an important stepping stone along the path to the actual Constitution.

"Moreover, members of the Iroquois Confederacy also had been invited to attend the Continental Congress. This gathering had been instrumental in helping, eventually, to give birth to the Declaration of Independence.

"The Great Binding Law dealt with issues of the selection and recall of selected representatives; tribal versus Confederacy rights ... comparable to our state's versus federal rights; multi-cameral legislative bodies with different responsibilities; rights of universal suffrage, including sexual equality; principles of civic or community responsibility, and rules regulating both immigration and emigration. There were many other features of the Great Binding Law that also were of interest to some of the key contributors to the United States Constitution."

Brian grinned and said: "Boy-oh-boy, you might be getting the abridged version of things, David, but this seems to be the expanded, rather than the condensed, form of that version."

I laughed and replied: "I'm beginning to worry about the size of the bill I'll be getting in the mail for all of this." I added: "I thought prisoners were the ones who were supposed to be rehabilitated in prison, not the visitors."

As soon as the words came out of my mouth, I began to worry that I had said something inappropriate. My concerns quickly disappeared when Brian seemed to indicate a genuine appreciation of my comment with a hearty laugh.

Gradually the laughter was replaced by a somewhat reflective mood. We were both lost in our respective thoughts.

Brian moved in a way that suggested he had remembered something he had meant to say earlier but had forgotten to do so. "David, just so that we can finish off the Indian Reorganization Act aspect of the discussion, there is one further point that should be made.

"Once the Tribal Councils came into existence, they became a major source of division and hostility within the Native community. This was true not only within a given tribe or nation, but this also was true with respect to the relationship between tribes and nations. Conflict, antagonism, stress, strain, political in-fighting, and rivalries began to dominate a great deal of the day-to-day lives of Native people."

Brian made a crumpling motion with his hands, as if he had been fashioning a ball-like object from a piece of paper. He, then, tossed the imaginary

ball of paper back over his shoulder. Presumably, he was finished with the topic of the Indian Reorganization Act.

After he had thrown away the 'garbage', Brian asked: "Do I have your permission to proceed to the penultimate act of our tawdry little drama concerning American history? This chapter is much, much shorter than the previous two installments ... if that should be a concern of yours."

I said: "My time is your time." But, as I said this, I remembered where I was. I quickly looked at the walls and told him: "At least, up to a certain point, my time is your time."

I'm sure he was all too well aware of what I meant. However, he didn't appear to be offended by my rather clumsy, if not thoughtless, effort at humor.

Having received the go-ahead signal from me, he said: "In 1946 the U.S. Congress passed a bill known as the 'Indian Claims Commission Act'. This Act was very straightforward.

"According to the provisions of this Act, there was only one procedure open to Native peoples for redressing grievances concerning land claims. Native people could negotiate with the federal government for a cash payment of some sort in relation to disputed lands. However, Native peoples would not be able to seek the return of any land that had belonged to them previously, irrespective of whatever the treaty rights might have indicated in this regard.

"In addition, lawyers who appeared before the Land Claims Commission were to receive an entitlement of 10% of the negotiated fee. Therefore, these lawyers had a vested interest in dissuading Native groups from seeking any other method of grievance resolution those as through the International Court of Justice at The Hague, or the United Nations Human Rights Commission in Geneva, or political action. Consequently, these lawyers were, and are, more like agents of the government than people interested in serving the best interests of their supposed clients -- namely, Native peoples.

"Incidentally", David," he said, "you might be interested in the way the Indian Claims Commission arrives at its 'fair' assessment value for disputed lands. They work on the basis of what the land would have been worth in the 1800s, rather than modern market values.

"The government really has Native peoples coming and going. Unfortunately, at the present time, there doesn't appear to be anything much we can do about the situation."

Brian scratched his nose, grimaced slightly, and proceeded on with his account. "The intent of the Indian Claims Commission Act was to provide the federal government with a so-called legal means through which to gain control of the lands of all those tribes and nations who, up to that point, had been able to resist the formation of Tribal Councils. Irrespective of the wishes of these tribes and nations, lawyers were appointed to negotiate settlements on their behalf.

"There are approximately twenty tribes or nations that have refused to accept the sums that have been negotiated for them. A number of other tribes have accepted the arrangements."

Brian was silent. I waited for a moment, and when nothing more was forthcoming, I asked: "Is that it?"

"Yup," he said, "I told you this chapter was going to be pretty short."

He had a mischievous look on his face when he said: "Your sentence is almost up."

I laughed. Somehow, this kind of humor sounded better coming from him than from me.

"The last stop on our journey is Alaska," he indicated. "The time is no longer 1946. We are now in the year 1973.

"Congress has passed a bill called: 'The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act'. The bill has been ushered into existence through the lobbying efforts of a variety of oil, mining, fishing and other corporate concerns.

"However, in order to place this Native Claims Settlement Act in a proper historical context, we really need to go back to 1867. In that year America paid a sum of \$7.2 million to the Russian government in exchange for rights of dominion over the lands of Alaska.

"One of the interesting features of this transaction is that Alaska was not really Russia's to sell. With certain exceptions, those as the visits of Russian fur traders to the Aleutian Islands, as well as a few of their excursions along certain portions of the south coast of Alaska, Russians had virtually nothing to do with Alaska.

"Furthermore, there already were a variety of different Native peoples inhabiting the lands of Alaska ... tribes such as the Inupiat, Aleut, Athabascan and Yupik peoples. Therefore, even if the Russians had explored and established themselves in Alaska, the land still was not theirs to own or sell.

"Sixty-four years prior to the selling of Alaska, in 1803, something very similar had happened. For \$15 million dollars, the American government negotiated the Louisiana Purchase with French Colonials.

"This transaction covered a huge tract of land running through west central North America. The boundaries of this purchase ran from the Mississippi to the Rocky Mountains, on the east and west, and from the Gulf of Mexico to Canada, on the south and north.

"As was the case with the selling of Alaska, the essential qualities that made the Louisiana Purchase possible were: arrogance, ignorance, presumption, prejudice and arbitrariness, on the part of both the seller and buyer. Like Alaska, the lands encompassed by the Louisiana Purchase already were inhabited by a variety of Native tribes and nations.

"Today, when someone buys something, even if that person should do so in good faith, nonetheless, if the property involved in the transaction turns out to be stolen, the person who purchased the property does not get to keep it. That property must be returned to the rightful owner.

"Unfortunately, for hundreds of years, governments all over the world have been conducting these sorts of criminal transaction for their own selfish ends. These activities aren't called criminal. They are referred to as diplomacy or international relations or foreign trade. But, 'a rose by any other name'..."

Brian did not finish the statement. Whether he did this by design or for other reasons, I do not know.

He was about to start speaking again when a prison guard walked by. The person announced: "Fifteen minutes, gentlemen."

Brian acknowledged receipt of the message by nodding his head toward the guard. He turned to me and said: "I'm going to have rush this last part, David, so, without further ado...?" As he said this, his expression and body language were seeking permission from me to proceed.

With a wave of my hand, Brian was off and running. I was hoping, however, that I would get the opportunity to ask one last question.

He began again: "When one commits a logical error, and if the step of reasoning in which the error was committed continues to play a role in subsequent deliberations, then, the original error taints, colors and undermines everything that ensues from that point.

"American jurisprudence is saturated with those errors when it comes to its dealings with Native peoples. Some of these problems are inherent in the assumptions underlying the structure and content of the Constitution.

"Other instances of these errors are contained in the precedents that have been established and that shape later decisions of, say, the Supreme Court. Still other examples of those errors are found in the interpretation of the legislation passed by federal, state and local governments.

"Then, of course, there are the three hundred and seventy-something treaties that have been broken and violated by various branches of the government of the United States. For motivations that are not hard to guess at, the courts rarely, if ever, reached the conclusion that the federal government really ought to be required to live up to its many promises to Native peoples.

"In 'The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act', there are a number of the kinds of error to which I'm referring. First of all, up until 1973, the year the Act was passed, there was general agreement among various levels of government, and also as expressed in a number of court decisions, that Native peoples in Alaska had legal title to almost the entire state. Through the Native Claims Settlement Act, the federal government unilaterally extinguished all Native entitlement concerning legal ownership of the land.

"There were no hearings in any of the more than 200 Native communities that would be affected by the proposed Act. No one from any of the Native communities was consulted about, or allowed to have any say in, the process. There were no referendums that were held to permit Native peoples to reject or ratify the provisions of the Act.

"The federal government apportioned nearly 200 million acres of Native lands to itself, distributed across a number of departments. The state government of Alaska was the beneficiary of almost 125 million acres of Native lands. Together, these lands constituted 90% of the available property.

"The remaining 10% was divided among a number of corporations that had been established to manage this property on behalf of the Native groups. At least half of these managers were non –Native bankers, economists, lawyers and so on who had been hired as consultants ... usually, quite expensive ones.

"The purpose of these corporations is to turn a profit. This is the legal obligation that management has to the shareholders. Therefore, development of the land is the name of the game.

"If the corporation fails in its purpose, the shares of the corporation decrease in value. If this decrease should proceed far enough, Native shareholders will be confronted with the choice of either selling their shares in order to get something out of the whole thing, or risking having the shares lose all value if the decline should continue.

"Both of the foregoing possibilities lead to further loss of control of the land, in even the very indirect sense that has been imposed on Native peoples of Alaska through the Act of 1973. Moreover, because the value of many of the Native corporations has been declining since the promulgation of the Act as law, there has been a steady erosion of Native control over their lands, both direct and indirect, since 1973.

"To add insult to injury, one has to appreciate how Native peoples have been forced to actively participate in the destruction of their own spiritual foundations. Corporate values are all about development, growth, profit and the exploitation of land and resources that these activities entail.

"All of the goals of corporate life are in direct conflict with the principles, values and practices that are rooted in Native spiritual traditions. Consequently, in order to survive in the corporate world that has been foisted on to them by the federal government, Native peoples must work against their own spiritual interests.

"If Native peoples should be successful in their corporate duties, they will die spiritually because they must violate their spiritual traditions to be successful. If the Native peoples do not succeed in their corporate duties, they also will die because the land to which they are linked spiritually will be taken from them even more so than is now the case.

"David, this brings us back to your original question. You had inquired how one goes about reconciling Native beliefs concerning the issue of

ownership of land with the many land disputes that are being contested by a variety of Native tribes and nations.

"Basically, there are three broad perspectives that are manifesting themselves in different Native groups concerning land dispute issues. First, there are those Native people who are totally caught up in the non-Native games involving the idea of individual or corporate ownership of land as a commodity to be developed or disposed of as assets or liabilities.

"Secondly, there is another group of Native people who recognize the spiritual responsibility that they have to Mother Earth. They do not accept the idea of individual or corporate ownership of land. However, these people believe that seizing legal control of the disputed lands gives them the best opportunity of fulfilling their spiritual responsibilities.

"Finally, there is a third group of Native people who realize that the lands and resources of Mother Earth belong to neither Natives nor to non-Natives. All human beings have, within certain limits, a right of access to, and use of, the lands of Mother Earth. At the same time, the people in this third group maintain that all human beings have responsibilities for protecting, preserving, and living in harmony with Mother Earth.

"For this group, the solution to the problem of fulfilling our duties of care in relation to Mother Earth does not lie in the multiplicity of issues revolving around the vying for control, legal or otherwise, of land. The sought-for resolution lies with the spiritual transformation of human beings. Without this spiritual transformation, who controls the land becomes a moot point."

I looked at my watch and saw we only had about five minutes left. "I apologize, Brian, but, I've left one of the most critical questions to the very last."

Brian's shrugged his shoulders. His hand movements, plus the expression on his face, suggested there was not much either one of could do about the situation.

I hurried on to my question. "I don't know if Beth has told you about her vision or not, but one of the primary reasons for my coming here was to see if there was anything I could do to help you in relation to her concerns about your safety. Are you aware of the danger to which Beth is alluding, and, if so, is it something that you can discuss with me?"

Brian said: "Yes. Yes. No. However...."

When he saw the bewildered expression on my face, he smiled and said: "Sorry, I was trying to save time. As is usually the case in those situations, one ends up having to spend more time rectifying the problems created by one's time-saving measures than would have been required if one had not tried to save time in the first place.

"The answer to the first query is: Yes, I am aware of Beth's vision. The answer to the second question is: Yes, I am aware of the danger to which she is alluding. The answer to your third question is: No, I cannot discuss the matter with you, but Beth doesn't know this yet."

Brian looked at me with what seemed to be an odd, mysterious kind of expression. I didn't know what it meant, but it made me feel uncomfortable ... as if I were under scrutiny for some unknown reason, or as if something were being expected from me, but he couldn't tell me what.

He said: "The 'however' of my time-saving masterpiece was to get you to ask me: 'What do you mean by 'however'?' And, my response would have been, as it is now. There is something that you can do that might be of help later on."

I responded with: "Which is...?"

Brian countered by saying: "You must try to find members of the Botclofots and speak with them. They will be able to help guide you with respect to how, among other things, you might be able to help out in this situation."

I said: "Botclo-whats? Who are they?"

An enigmatic grin appeared on Brian's face. "Let's say I am giving you a non-specific, specific task or exercise and leave it at that. If you're successful, you might come to understand some of what is going on."

He expanded a bit more, in a vague sort of way. "David, believe me, anything that I might say to you now probably would be more of a problem for you than a help. Besides, at this point, the less you know, the safer you likely are going to be."

Brian looked over at the other people in the room and saw, as I did, that they were in various stages of getting ready to say good-by. He leaned forward in his chair and came closer to me.

"I gave you the mini-tour of Native history, David, for two reasons. The first reason was to provide you with a brief, but reasonable, answer to your question about issues of ownership and land claim disputes.

"The second reason for the abridged history was a warning to you. What has been done to Native peoples can be done to anyone, including you.

"My history is a reflection of your future as well as that of America. Of course, the names of the bills and acts will change.

"Perhaps, these laws will be referred to as The Democratic Reform Act, or the Constitutional Renewal Act, or The Emergency Provisions Act, or the Citizen's Rights Claims Settlement Act, or the like. The name will change, but the underlying intent will be the same as existed in relation to the way they dealt with, and are dealing with, Native peoples.

"I would ask you to seriously think about everything I have said to you. Your turn ... the turn of many people in America, is coming ... Maybe sooner than you might ever have imagined possible a few weeks ago.

"If you think, David, that those who wheel and deal in the corridors of corporate, government, judicial and religious power are going to stop with Native peoples, you are very much mistaken. Anything and anyone who gets in the way of their vision of things will be marginalized, eliminated and destroyed, just as Native peoples have been.

"These people will use the vocabulary of democracy and legality to rationalize what they do. They will use their skills in the realm of the speakable to defend that which is unspeakable.

"Native peoples were repeatedly butchered, raped, cheated, defrauded, betrayed, oppressed, tortured, abused, and brainwashed. Yet, while all of this was going on, both legislative assemblies and the courts repeatedly spoke, with great oratorical skill, about freedom, sovereignty, rights, precedents, justice, fiduciary responsibility, truth, progress, duty and integrity.

"The legislatures and the courts did not flinch in carrying out their task of permitting Native peoples to be destroyed. They will not flinch in the future when called upon to do the same in relation to other people, including, if necessary, people like you."

Brian rose from his chair. "You probably will be offended or hurt by what I'm about to say to you, David. However, I offer it as a friend.

"You have lost your sense of the spiritual." He studied me for a few seconds and then emphasized: "I didn't say 'religious', I said 'spiritual'."

"As long as you are in this condition of separation and dispersion, you are a liability to yourself and to humanity in general. Furthermore, as long as you are in this condition of spiritual absence, your complicity in the matters I've been discussing, as well as in relation to other related issues, is a lot deeper than you might like to believe is actually the case."

He extended his hand to me. "I owe you a debt of gratitude for responding to my sister's distress call. I won't forget your kindness."

I was about to ask him about whether we should meet again, when he held up his hand, motioning me to stop. It was like he knew what I wanted to ask and was answering me before I had a chance to say anything.

He looked into my eyes and held my gaze for a fleeting moment. His face was expressionless. He turned and walked away. Soon, he was gone from the room.

Chapter 5: Invitation To Terror

My thoughts and emotions were in turmoil throughout the drive back to the Boston area. Driving, paying tolls, getting gas, eating, stopping for coffee, and changing highway routes all blurred into one another. My body was in the car attending to the physical necessities of the return trip, but my mind was engaged in a journey of its own.

While I had been with Brian, my emotions had, for the most part, been at low ebb. At that time, I might have been in a state of shock from the intensity of the impact that his words were having on me.

Now, however, a riptide of emotions was pulling me every which way. Shame, doubt, anger, uncertainty, confusion, helplessness, anxiety, bewilderment, sadness, and frustration were creating both individually, as well as in different combinations, their own currents and undertows.

Brian's discussion had spanned across an incredible range of topics, ranging from: Native spirituality, to: ecology, democracy, history, jurisprudence, politics, education, justice, bigotry, Vietnam, and economics. Probably, there were a few other themes as well that had become lost, temporarily or otherwise, somewhere in my memory.

As soon as I began to think about one set of issues, other ideas would barge into consciousness and disrupt my focus. I couldn't sort it out. I didn't know what to do with the information and ideas that had been given to me. I had no inkling of how to form a plan of action, let alone how to go about implementing any such plan.

Brian seemed to hint that a, or, perhaps, "the", key to gaining a working understanding of everything was caught up with the Botclofots. Wonderful!

All I had to do was go down to one of those hardware stores that always seem to have everything and ask for a couple of Botclofots. If I was really lucky, they might say: "Sorry, Dr. Phelps, we're all out. Why don't you try again on Wednesday?"

Botclofots? ... Botclofots? The word drew a complete blank.

Were they an obscure Native tribe? An organization of some sort? Political activists? A community or human rights group? How would I go about trying to locate them? Somehow, I had a feeling they were not in the phone book.

Why didn't Brian give me a person's name or an address or a phone number?

Why was he so mysterious about the whole thing?

This aspect of the discussion was kind of irritating. I had gone with the intention of being helpful in some way. Yet, Brian seemed to be toying with me by remaining elusive in relation to the one area where he appeared to feel there was some possibility of my being able to lend assistance.

In fairness to Brian, however, he had indicated that whatever he might say on the issue was more likely to create problems for me than it was to be of assistance. Brian also had said something about my being safer in not knowing.

The ominous note that was being sounded in this aspect of things didn't exactly thrill me. Besides, if safety was a factor, why bother to say anything at all? There seemed to be an inconsistency of sorts here.

Perhaps Brian didn't trust me with certain information. If so, then the coyness made sense. Yet, once again, the same question arose: Why say anything at all?

Brian's statement, right at the end of our meeting, about my having lost my sense of spirituality had bothered me as he had predicted it would. Yet, the cause of my being upset was not necessarily entirely for the reasons he might have thought.

To be sure, I felt he was being rather judgmental, if not presumptuous, in saying that I would be a liability to myself and others as long as there was an absence of spirituality in my life. I also didn't care much for his contention that my complicity in all the things about which he talked might be a lot greater than I imagined.

However, what bothered me the most was that I felt a very unsettling resonance with his words. In ways that I couldn't articulate or clearly understand, something in me recognized the presence of a truth of some kind contained within his comment to me.

The image of Beth came to mind. I didn't know what I was going to tell her. She had seemed annoyingly confident that the person in her vision would be able to help her brother.

However, I was coming back from my visit with, pretty much, empty hands. The only clue was the mysterious Botclocfots.

A glimmer of hope flickered in my darkness. Surely, Beth would know about the Botclocfots.

In any event, the only option available to me was just to relate to her what had happened during the visit. She might be able to throw some light on the situation or give some suggestions. Moreover, the very act of going through a sort of debriefing process with her might generate its own set of possibilities.

I got back to Boston around five in the morning. I was physically tired and emotionally exhausted.

On the way to my apartment, I decided to check for mail. There were a few pieces of junk mail in the box along with a letter from a foundation whose name didn't ring a bell with me.

More than likely, someone was looking for either a cash donation or some sort of professional volunteer assistance. I would take a look at it later in the day or, possibly, tomorrow.

As I rode up in the elevator, I decided that I would delay calling Beth for a day or two. There were a few loose ends from the school year that needed my attention. Furthermore, I wanted the contents of my visit with Brian to percolate a bit longer before I said anything to her. There didn't seem to be any urgency to our getting together. I didn't think she would mind waiting a day or two.

Nonetheless, she might appreciate being informed about what I had in mind. Since she had given me both her work and home phone numbers, I would call her from my college office. When I contacted her, we also could set a time and place to meet.

By the time I finished doing what had to be done at the college, mid-afternoon had arrived. I called Beth's work number and was informed that Ms. Idaho was on vacation and wouldn't be back for about another ten days.

I hung up and, then, lifted the receiver up again while I punched in her home number. The phone rang about five times before switching over to an answering machine. Beth's voice apologized for not being there to take the call and requested the caller to leave a message after the beep, promising to respond to the call as soon as possible.

I told Beth what my intentions were in relation to our getting together. I made several suggestions about possible times and places for the meeting, and I hung up.

I began tidying up the desk and throwing a few things into my briefcase as a prelude to my trip home. As I was sorting out the clutter on the desk top, I spotted the letter from the foundation that I found in the mail yesterday.

When I left for the office in the morning, I had brought it with me, thinking I would get to it at some point during the day. Now seemed to be as good a time as any other to see what it was about.

I opened the envelope and pulled out its contents. The letter was handwritten and displayed a rather fancy letterhead. The individual writing the letter was someone by the name of Dr. Timothy Jameson. He was an executive officer, whatever that meant, of the Bettinger Foundation.

The message was very brief. I was being asked if I would be available to join Dr. Jameson for lunch at the Foundation this coming Friday in order to discuss a mutually beneficial proposition.

Under Dr. Jameson's signature was a number. I checked my watch and saw that the time for normal office hours had not yet passed by.

I deliberated for a moment or so. Finally, I decided to give him a call and try to obtain more information.

After entering the Foundation's phone number, I waited for the connection to be made. The line rang once and a man's voice answered: "Jameson here."

"Dr. Jameson, my name is David Phelps. I'm responding to the note you sent me that invited me to lunch on Friday at your Foundation." "Oh, yes ... yes, Dr. Phelps, I'm glad you called," he said.

He was about to go on when I said: "Actually, Dr. Jameson, I was hoping you would be willing to tell me a bit more about what the purpose of the lunch might be?"

The voice chuckled: "Worried about being hit up for a contribution, are we?"

"Well," I said, with some degree of embarrassment, "the thought had crossed my mind. But, if you don't mind my being a little blunt, I'm also concerned about not wanting to waste your time or mine in a meeting that might not be going anywhere."

"Perfectly understandable, Dr. Phelps, and I appreciate your forthrightness," he said reassuringly. He added: "While I would prefer not to

talk about the specifics of the meeting over the phone, I will say this. The proposal I have in mind concerns a position as an external consultant on an issue that I know is very close to your heart."

When I didn't say anything right away, he indicated: "Dr. Phelps, if the proposition doesn't interest you, you can reject it with no hard feelings on our part, plus you will be getting a free lunch in a pretty good dining room."

I was curious about what the issue could be that was so close to my heart. Finally, I tossed a mental coin and said: "Sure, why not? Where are you, and what time is lunch being served?"

"The address is underneath the letterhead logo," he pointed out. "As for the time, how does 1:00 p.m. sound?" he inquired.

"Yeah, I think that will okay," I responded. I further asked: "Where will we meet? ... your office? ... the dining room?"

"I'll be waiting for you in the lobby of the Foundation, Dr. Phelps. I'm very much looking forward to having an opportunity to meet and speak with you. I've wanted to do so for some time now, but we can talk about all that when we meet. I'll see you on Friday, Dr. Phelps. Good-by."

I said: "Good-by," as I heard the click of the disconnected line. I hung up as well.

When I got home from the college, I checked for telephone messages, but there were none.

I phoned Beth's number several more times before retiring for the evening. Apparently, she still hadn't returned.

The first few times I called her, I hung up when I heard the click indicating her answering machine was about to be activated. On the final call I left another message that informed her that I was going to sleep and that I would call her the next day.

I phoned her periodically throughout the following day without success. Each time I hung up before her machine switched on.

When I got home late that evening, there was, like the day before, no message from Beth. Before going to sleep, I left another message somewhat similar to the one I had sent the previous night.

In addition, however, I told Beth I had called her at work several days ago and had found out about her being on vacation. Consequently, I wouldn't call anymore because I was going to proceed on the

assumption she had gone somewhere, and, therefore, I would await her call whenever she returned from wherever.

On Thursday all was quiet on the Beth-front. On Friday I went to lunch at the Bettinger Foundation.

I managed to find a parking spot that turned out to be about a five minute walk from the designated address. I reached my destination with approximately a minute to spare.

Just after pushing through the revolving doors of the Foundation's main entrance, I was greeted by a man who looked to be in his mid-thirties. "Dr. Phelps, I'm Tim Jameson," he said with a smile as he extended his hand. While my hand and mouth were reciprocating his gestures, he added further: "I hope you didn't have any trouble locating us."

"No problems," I said. "As usual, the biggest challenge always is to find a parking spot."

He slapped his forehead with the palm of his hand. "What a dummy," he said in self-chastisement. "I forgot to tell you we have underground parking. I must apologize most profusely for my mistake."

I did my best to keep a straight face and said: "Oh, just grovel a little, and we'll call it even."

Without missing a beat, he bowed before me and took two humble steps backward. While remaining bowed, his right hand extended outward to his side, inviting me to move in the indicated direction. He said: "Sire, I am not worthy of your kindness."

"Your groveling, my son, has brought light to my life," I responded. "Arise, now, and let us proceed on our good way."

While Dr. Jameson was straightening up, I noticed a security guard looking on with bemused, if somewhat perplexed, detachment. I looked quickly at Dr. Jameson and, then, back to the guard. I tapped my temple a few times with my index finger and gave a pitying glance toward Dr. Jameson.

Realizing he was the object of further attentions, Dr. Jameson smiled somewhat sheepishly and pointed a finger at the guard and said: "I'll get you for this, George." The guard made motions of innocence.

Still smiling, Dr. Jameson turned toward me and indicated: "The dining room is this way," pointing off to my left.

We walked in silence for a moment. Soon, we were at the dining room, a surprisingly large area.

He held up two fingers to the maitre d'. He added: "Something by the windows, John, please."

There were quite a few people in the dining area. I didn't know whether all the people in the room worked in the building or were mostly guests, but, in either case, if this room were any indication of things, the Foundation seemed to be fairly actively engaged in whatever it was it did.

The maitre d' brought us to a table near the far corner of the room, where the building-length windows met up with the back wall. The windows overlooked a set of flowered terraces leading to a grassy area that sloped gently down to a shallow valley that appeared to run behind the building.

The maitre d' placed a couple of menus before us and indicated that a waitress would be with us shortly. John left us and returned to the reception area.

We spent the next couple of minutes in silence, examining our menus. Eventually, we each made our selections and put the menus down.

While waiting for the waitress, Dr. Jameson said: "I heard you speak last year at the Network Support Conference for the Survivors of Terrorist Attacks. I was, as were many of the people who attended that conference, very moved by your talk."

I remained silent. The view outside the window attracted my eyes.

He was silent for a moment while he joined me in looking out the window. Eventually, he said: "Speaking to strangers about the tragedy of losing your mother and sister during a terrorist incident must have taken a lot of courage."

I turned away from the window's view and looked at Dr. Jameson. "Actually," I began, "the experience of preparing and giving the talk proved to be quite cathartic and therapeutic for me. I don't know if what was said on that occasion helped anyone else, but it helped me a great deal. It was kind of the last stage of a process of letting go."

The waitress came and asked for our orders. We each, in turn, complied. She departed almost as quickly as she had arrived, taking our menus with her as she left.

As soon as she had gone, Dr. Jameson confessed: "I had wanted to meet with you soon after your talk, but I didn't feel right about intruding at that time. I thought I would let some time pass before approaching you."

"I appreciate your consideration," I acknowledged. I waited for him to focus in on the reason for the meeting.

"Do you know anything about the Bettinger Foundation?" he asked.

"I'm sorry," I apologized, "I've never heard of it. Can I still eat here?" I inquired teasingly.

He smiled. "But, of course. If you'll remember, Dr. Phelps, I had told you on the phone that, if nothing else, you will get a free meal."

The waitress arrived with some rolls and butter. When she had left, we each started the process of selecting the desired kind of roll, breaking it apart and adding butter.

Dr. Jameson consumed one of his prepared pieces of roll, chewed a few times and swallowed. As he reached for a drink of water, he said: "The Bettinger Foundation is dedicated to the issue of terrorism." He took a sip from his glass and returned the glass to its original spot.

He continued on. "In terms of funding and budgeting, we probably are on even terms with the big guys in this area, those as the Heritage Foundation and the Hoover Institute." He added: "Maybe, you have heard of them.

"They are often cited in various newspapers and magazines. In addition, they provide commentators for a lot of television shows those as Ted Koppel's Nightline or for what use to be known as the MacNeil/Lehrer News Hour, but is now minus its Canadian content with the departure of Robin MacNeil." He looked for signs of recognition from me.

Between bites of my roll, I responded with: "Naturally, I'm familiar with the programs you've cited. Moreover, I have heard of the two organizations that you mentioned, but, quite frankly, I know little about what they actually do. They're sort of think -tanks or lobby groups, aren't they?"

He waved his head back and forth slightly, like he was weighing what I had said. Finally, he answered: "Well, those organizations perform a lot of functions that, among other things, are connected to the issues and problems of terrorism."

While gradually working his way through his role, he started to talk more about the Bettinger Foundation. "Our organization has a wide array of services that it offers. We do primary research of many different kinds. We write articles, reports, monographs, and books.

"We provide speakers for universities, corporations and various community groups. We testify for different Congressional committees and sub-committees.

"We brief the military whenever called on to do so. In addition, we do consultations for both the State Department and the National Security Agency on a semi-regular basis.

"The Foundation sponsors and organizes conferences, symposia, and lectures. We publish the proceedings from these gatherings as well.

"Bettinger serves as a resource on which the media draws, both directly and in a deep background capacity. We also have individuals who, on occasion, serve as expert witnesses in various legal proceedings."

He took another drink of water. "The theme that weaves all of these activities and services together is, as I indicated previously, the issue of terrorism."

He reflected for a few seconds and said: "We also are engaged in a fair degree of risk analysis." When he saw the quizzical look on my face, he expanded somewhat.

"Risk analysis," he began, "is an assessment or evaluation procedure. For example, suppose a company wants to start doing business in a foreign country.

"Obviously, those a company needs to know how stable, politically and socially, the country is in which it is interested. If, say, revolutionary movements, guerrilla activity or labor unrest is prominent, one might be well advised to put off investing in the country in question.

"Risk analysts take a look at the political, educational, economic, social, historical, religious, ideological and military currents that shape a given country and the region in which that country is embedded. At the end of their study, these analysts, if they know what they are doing, will be able to tell a company, with a fair degree of accuracy, what kind of risk is associated with doing business either in a general region or in a particular locality."

Just as he finished, the waitress came with our orders. After putting the plates of food down and getting a negative response from both of us with respect to her question about whether there would be anything else we would like, she disappeared once again.

We both set about starting to eat our meals. With the exception of the noises associated with our eating activities, there was silence for a few moments.

He began talking again, picking up, more or less, where he had left off. "The Foundation has been able to establish working liaisons with most of the groups and organizations who, like us, are, each in their own way, deeply concerned about the problems that terrorism has generated all over the world."

In an almost rhythmical manner, he would take a few bites of his food, chew, swallow and, then, provide a few more details about the Bettinger Foundation's connections. A short while later, the cycle would repeat itself.

He talked about the Center for Strategic and International Studies at Georgetown University, as well as the State University of New York's Institute for Studies in International Terrorism. He spent a few moments on the Foreign Policy Research Institute at the University of Pennsylvania. There was also mention of something called: The Institute for Social and Behavioral Pathology in Chicago.

Dr. Jameson discussed the American Security Council that was said to be an extremely powerful lobbying group on behalf of the defense industry. In addition, he waxed eloquent about the Rand Corporation, an organization with connections to the Pentagon via the Air Force.

He gave an overview of a think-tank called the National Intelligence Studies Center that supposedly had close ties with the intelligence community. And, along somewhat similar lines, he spoke of a group calling itself the Association of Former Intelligence Officers.

Next, came a variety of foreign organizations to which the Bettinger Foundation was linked. All of them, like their American counterparts, were dedicated to containing, or eradicating, terrorism wherever it reared its hydra-like head.

There was the Institute for the Study of Conflict that was located in Britain. In South Korea there was the World Anti-Communist League that was linked to Reverend Moon, or vice versa. Finally, he discussed an Israeli

organization, The Jonathan Institute, started by Benjamin Netanyahu in memory of the brother he lost during the terrorist hostage -taking incident that ended in Entebbe, Uganda.

The last leg of the tour of Bettinger Foundation connections covered a mixed bag of groups and organizations. At one moment he talked about what used to be called the School of the Americas in Panama, but which was now located in Fort Benning, Georgia under another name but which continued to offer training for the military and police forces of Third World countries, especially in Latin America. During the next moment, he would speak about the American Enterprise Institute that, among other things, was a ideological stronghold of the politics of free market economics. A few moments later he made references to Fort Benning's training programs on counter-insurgency (anti-terrorism) techniques.

Although I had absolutely no knowledge of 95% of the organizations he discussed, a few of the ones he mentioned made me feel very uncomfortable. In particular, the Bettinger Foundation's links with the Army, Air Force, the Pentagon, the defense industry, and the intelligence community were, to me, quite unsettling.

I had finished eating and pushed away my plate. I said: "Dr. Jameson, aside from the terrorist incident concerning my family, do you know anything about my background?"

Apparently, he intuited what was on my mind. "Yes, Dr. Phelps, I'm aware you were a draft-dodger. I surmised you would have objections to some of the organizational connections that the Bettinger Foundation has. I know that more than thirty years after the end of the Vietnam War, the wounds on all sides of this matter still have not entirely healed.

"In fact, I deliberately took the time to run these problematic organizational affiliations by you so all our cards would be on the table. I wanted us to have an opportunity to talk about contentious issues openly and forthrightly.

"Dr. Phelps, the world is no longer capable, if it ever was, of being divided neatly into communist and anti-communist camps. Now the world is being fractured by a complex set of forces, both internally, as well as internationally.

"There are drug lords, Russian gangs, Chinese triads, militia, ecological movements, and a plethora of religious fundamentalists, each with their own

brand of terrorism. In addition, there are the Tamil Tigers, PLO, Action Directe in France, Peru's Shining Path, Basque ETA in Spain, Armenian nationalists, Sikh separatists, Red Brigade, IRA, Aum Shinri Kyo in Japan, PPK or Worker's Party of Kurdistan, neo-Nazi racists, Quebec's FLQ, Hezbollah, Hamas and a hundred other groups capable of terrorist acts.

"The barbarians are at the gates of civilization, Dr. Phelps. I would think someone like yourself might understand this much more clearly than most of us.

"Your insight into these matters is direct and experiential, not indirect and theoretical. You have come face to face with the darkness that is the real enemy of our times.

"I believe you know terrorism for what it is: unreasoning, pathological, fanatical, consumed by hatred and completely without remorse for the death and destruction that it inflicts on innocent people and communities. I believe you know these things both on a personal basis, as well as in your professional capacity as a psychologist.

"Your talk last year at the Survivors Conference gave clear, unmistakable testimony concerning the existence of such knowledge within you. I understood that and so did everyone else in the audience who really listened to what you had to say."

He became silent for a moment, apparently giving me an opportunity to respond. When nothing was forthcoming from me, he spoke again, but he changed his direction somewhat.

"Yes, Dr. Phelps, we have links with the military, the Pentagon, the intelligence community, and the defense industry. If we at the Bettinger Foundation are to do our job properly, then, we have to have access to as much information as is humanly possible.

"Having links with those organizations, however, does not necessarily mean we are under their control or that we make decisions in accordance with their agendas. Moreover, one does not always have the luxury of choosing whom one will fight next to when the hordes are crawling up the ramparts of twilight's last gleaming."

He leaned his head back at a slight angle and rotated it a few times, as if he were trying to remove a kink from his neck or, possibly, to relax tired muscles. When he had completed the exercise, he said: "Besides, Dr. Phelps,

there is one aspect of our connections with the groups in question that might or might not have occurred to you.

"The relationship between the Bettinger Foundation and these other organizations, the ones about which you are concerned, are multi-dimensional. As a result, there are degrees of freedom in our channels of communication that provide us with the opportunity to help shape and influence the policies and activities of those organizations."

He studied me for about ten seconds and shifted gears once again.

"Dr. Phelps, you have three primary qualities that are very attractive to us here at the Bettinger Foundation. First, and I have alluded to this already, you have had a close encounter of the third kind with terrorism. Secondly, your background in psychology, both experimentally and clinically, constitutes a very valuable resource on which to be able to draw as needed. Thirdly, and you might be surprised by this, precisely because you were a draft-dodger, we feel you have a perspective that, very likely, contains insights, principles and values that ought to be taken into consideration in the fight against terrorism."

I smiled and said: "Are you trying to say I have a unique window onto the soul of deviance, both as a war-resister and as a psychologist, and, therefore, I would be able to provide ... oh, shall we say, insider information on the pathological condition of terrorism?"

Dr. Jameson laughed. "As far as your professional credentials are concerned, we believe you could offer valuable insights into the pathology of terrorism. As far as your war-resistance is concerned, no those judgments are being made. We don't necessarily consider it to be a manifestation of a pathological condition.

"Look, Dr. Phelps, a lot of people made decisions about Vietnam on the basis of deliberating about issues of morality, democratic principle, religious beliefs and human values. Some of these people went to Vietnam. Some of these people did not go to Vietnam. You fall into the latter group.

"Both groups loved their country. Both groups made tremendous sacrifices. Both groups were committed to issues of duty, freedom, conscience, human rights, justice and truth. The nature of those commitments were expressed differently in each group.

"I'm not trying to weigh these groups and say that was right or wrong. I do believe, however, that the two groups have different takes on, or reads

of, democracy and America that, in a strange sort of way, are complementary to one another. I think both perspectives have something important to say concerning the future of our country, especially in these troubling times, and it is in this context that I, and others at the Bettinger Foundation, find your past, if you will forgive the term, 'exploits' as a draft-dodger to be of value."

The waitress came and inquired if there would be anything else that we would like. Dr. Jameson made a sort of deferential gesture toward me with his hands and eyes, as if to say: 'It's up to you'.

"I'll have some coffee, please," I said. I raised my eyebrows, signaling him that it was his turn.

He responded with: "Make that two coffees, please, Catherine." She nodded while clearing the plates from the table and went away.

Dr. Jameson picked up where he had left off before the waitress had arrived. "To be perfectly honest with you, Dr. Phelps, there is another angle to your previous draft-dodger status. It helps lend credibility to our activities.

"The Bettinger Foundation wants to be known as a place where different points of view can be aired and be given a fair hearing. We believe creative solutions are generated by the synergy that arises through the dynamics of diversity."

I shaped my facial expression into one of approval and admiration. "I'm impressed with the concept," I admitted. However, in an attempt to remain noncommittal, I added, in a half joking/half serious tone: "If your 'creative solutions' statement is not already in your PR package, it ought to be."

The look on Dr. Jameson's face suggested he didn't know whether to take my remark as a nice compliment or subtle criticism. I wasn't entirely sure myself.

In diplomatic fashion, he let my comment pass without seeking any clarification, apparently giving my intentions the benefit of a doubt. With very little pause, he smiled, as if to officially acknowledge my comment as a compliment, and said: "Dr. Phelps, what we have in mind is the following. The Bettinger Foundation would like to retain your services as an external consultant to our organization. This position would not require you to resign from your position at the college.

"On average, we estimate the time commitment that would be required of you would be in the range of fifteen to twenty hours per month. This probably would work out to be about one evening, or, possibly, one Saturday or Sunday afternoon, a week.

"There might be some months involving very little activity on your part in conjunction with the Bettinger Foundation. On the other hand, there might be other months entailing much more involvement on your part. If you like, we could try to arrange things so that some, or most, of the heavier commitment came during the summer months.

"In fact, Dr. Phelps," he said, "we were hoping ... assuming, naturally, that your response to our proposal were positive ... there might be a few Bettinger activities slated for this summer in which you would become involved. Of course, if you were to accept our offer, we don't know whether or not your schedule would permit you to join us, but the interest is there from our side of things."

Catherine came with the coffee. She put the cups down and left.

He watched her go in a way that seemed to suggest that while his eyes were registering her image, his mind was not. "If you were to join our team, we would leave it to you to select an area of interest to you. Writing, speaking, research, planning, in-house education, and consulting are just some of the possibilities. Furthermore, the manner in which you would like to contribute to your choice of activity would also be left to your discretion."

We both began fiddling with the coffee and adding things to suit our respective tastes. When we were satisfied, we took a few sips.

As he put his cup down, Dr. Jameson said: "The amount of the retainer would be in the vicinity of \$55,000 and could be paid in whatever way or form was most advantageous to you as far as taxes are concerned. If you were to accept, I'm sure our accountants could come up with some creative, but completely legal, suggestions in this regard.

"Naturally, whatever traveling you did on behalf of the Foundation and any residual expenses incurred by you while performing Foundation-related duties would be covered by Bettinger. Nonetheless, like most organizations that allow for these sorts of reimbursement, our accounting department is a stickler for keeping track of receipts."

Having outlined the general financial terms and responsibilities of the proposed arrangement, he introduced a sort of escape clause for both parties. "We envision a trial period of one year. This will give us both an opportunity to determine if the arrangement will be ... shall we say, a reciprocally felicitous one.

"If we both are satisfied with the relationship at the end of the year, there are a number of options open to us. One possibility would be for you to continue on as an external consultant with the Foundation. Another possibility might involve some kind of full -time relationship. The situation could be very fluid under those circumstances."

We both drank a bit more coffee. Most of the people had now left the dining area. Waiters were busy making preparations at various tables for future mealtimes.

Dr. Jameson broke our silence. "I'm sure you would like time to think about the proposal. However, I want to make one request of you.

"Before you decide one way or the other why don't you come to a lecture here at the Foundation next Monday afternoon? Things usually get started around 2:00 p.m.

"The program will give you a taste of some of what goes on here, and I think you will find it interesting and thought -provoking. Some of the exchanges during the question and answer session following the lecture can get quite lively. And, if you like, feel free to jump in."

I took a last mouthful of the coffee, swallowed and said: "You're quite right, I'm going to need some time to give your proposal the serious consideration it deserves. And, I believe I will accept your offer to come on Monday."

He seemed pleased with my response. We both rose from the table, and he escorted me to the front entrance.

As we shook hands, he said: "I'll leave word with security to give you clearance to come to the forum up on the second floor."

He was about to turn away when he checked himself. "Oh, yes. On Monday, please park in the underground garage. I'll make arrangements for you there as well."

I thanked him for lunch. He dismissed it with a wave of his hand, and we went our separate ways.

Over the weekend I looked after a variety of domestic duties. Shopping, laundry, and apartment- cleaning were not high on my list of desirable things to do, but they each had a way of worming their ways into one's life whether one liked them or not.

One did have the choice of spending more time on them or less time on them to suit one's 'deprivation tolerance quotient' concerning consumable supplies, wearable clothes and livable space. However, avoid them for too long, and one might begin to have direct insight into the life of the alleged missing link of evolutionary history.

While engaged in my battle to maintain an acceptable distance from primitive man, I had to leave the apartment on a number of occasions. Each time I came back, I hoped there would be some message from Beth waiting for me. On each occasion, I was disappointed.



Chapter 6: Nothing Beats a Good Game of Golf

Monday started out wonderfully efficiently with requisite attention being distributed across a number of errands. Things seemed to be shaping up quite well with respect to my arriving at the Bettinger Foundation in time for the lecture.

Unfortunately, I ran into a few obstacles along the way. One problem was a character-testing traffic jam. When I finally was able to extract myself from that mess by detouring through some side streets, I ran into a variety of construction projects, one-way signs, and a cul-de-sac or two.

By the time I reached the Foundation, located the entrance to the underground parking facilities, parked, made my way to the lecture room on the second floor, and tiptoed to a seat, the time was around 2:40 p.m.. The speaker was in the process of thanking the audience for its kind attention and opening up the proceedings to questions from the floor.

The speaker was an attractive woman who appeared to be in her early thirties. The program I had been handed as I came into the room identified her as Rachel Donaldson. She was an assistant professor of moral and political philosophy at some college I had never heard of in Colorado.

Hardly any time passed before someone from the audience of about forty people accepted Professor Donaldson's invitation concerning questions. Moreover, if the opening salvo was any indication, Dr. Jameson was dead-on accurate about the liveliness of the Q and A period associated with the lectures.

A man in the first row arose and said: "Professor Donaldson, maybe I missed something during your talk, but there seemed to be quite a few points made by you that sounded like you were trying to blame the United States for the Gulf War. If memory serves me well, we were not the ones who invaded Kuwait. I'm wondering if you would elaborate on some of your views in this regard."

"Dr. Clarke," she began, "I believe the term I used with respect to the moral responsibilities of the United States in the Gulf War was 'complicity'. In fact, the idea of complicity could be applied with varying degrees of relevancy to all of the participants of that war.

"Let's be clear about something right up front. And, please, Dr. Clarke, bear with me a little on this.

"Somewhere between 15,000 and 25,000 Iraqi civilians died as a result of Coalition bombing of targets in Iraq. Since the end of the 43-day Gulf War in 1991, there have been hundreds of thousands of further deaths of Iraqi children.

"Many of these children have died from a variety of infectious diseases that have been epidemic in Iraq since the cessation of bombing. These diseases have arisen because of the unsanitary living conditions that have been created by the Allies' destruction of sewage systems, potable drinking water facilities, pumping stations, and power-generating capabilities.

"Malnutrition also has been a very important contributing factor in many of these post-war deaths. Due to a variety of reasons, including our continued application of sanctions against Iraq, food is both scarce and very expensive for the average Iraqi. Many Iraqis are poor or unemployed or both and cannot afford the simple necessities of life."

She paused slightly and stared at the wall to her right, as if there were information there to be read off. When she found what she was looking for, she turned back to the audience.

"When the US encouraged and promoted an uprising in southern Iraq following Desert Storm and, then, abandoned those people to Iraq's still largely intact Republican Guard, a further 6,000, or more, people died. In addition, there were another 2,000 Kurds who were killed in an uprising in the north, again encouraged and abandoned by the Allies, that occurred at the same time as the uprising in the south.

"Furthermore, although the actual number of Iraqi military casualties probably will never be known because of the bulldozing tactics employed by the Allies, informed estimates indicate that anywhere from 75,000 to 110,000 Iraqi soldiers died during the war. There are further estimates of some 300,000 seriously wounded Iraqi soldiers who undoubtedly overburdened an already overtaxed and under-supplied Iraqi medical system.

"We need to add to the foregoing the 144 Americans who died during Desert Storm, as well as the roughly 300 Kuwait citizens who lost their lives. And, we must not forget the two Israelis and eight Palestinians who died in Israel and the occupied territories."

Professor Donaldson slowly began pacing back and forth, along a six-foot strip of the raised platform from which she was delivering her ideas. She spoke as she paced.

"In addition, let us consider the large scale displacement of people that went on just before, during, and just after the 43 days of war. For instance, about 400,000 people, mostly Egyptians, fled Iraq prior to the bombing. Another 1.5 million refugees left Kuwait, many of whom were foreign nationals working in Kuwait who, as a result of the displacement, lost jobs, homes, possessions and their savings.

"The Saudis deported about 700,000 Yemeni residents from Saudi Arabia simply because the Yemen government was not in favor of the Coalition's War Plan. In addition, the Kuwaitis forcibly, and with considerable abuse, deported some 150,000 Palestinians from Kuwait after the war.

"This forced exodus came as a result of two major reasons. On the one hand, the Kuwaiti leaders objected to the way many Palestinians, both inside and outside Kuwait, were pleased with the Iraqi attempt, before the onset of Desert Storm, to link the solution of the Palestinian problem to a negotiated withdrawal of Iraq from Kuwait.

"Since the Kuwaitis had been among the biggest financial benefactors of the PLO prior to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, the Kuwaitis interpreted the Palestinian support of the linkage issue with a betrayal of, and ingratitude toward, Kuwait. Apparently, the Kuwaitis were prepared to help the Palestinians with a few dollars, but the Kuwaitis just were not interested in making the sort of sacrifices that might help solve the problem once and for all.

"The other reason for the forced exodus of Palestinians from Kuwait revolved around the fact that some Palestinians apparently collaborated with Iraq during the latter's occupation of Kuwait. However, there was no serious effort to determine who exactly was involved in these acts of collaboration. Furthermore, there was little, if any, remorse on the part of the Kuwaiti leaders for the repeated violation of human rights that accompanied the forcible expulsion of the Palestinians from Kuwait.

"Between March and April of 1991, there was a further displacement of roughly 2.5 million people. Most of these displaced people were Kurds from the north who as a result of the forced

migration were reduced to living in sub-subsistence conditions along the borders of Iraq, Turkey and Iran."

Dr. Donaldson stopped pacing. She removed her glasses from her face with her right hand and began massaging her eyes with the thumb and first two fingers of her left hand. After a few seconds, she put her glasses back on.

"Finally," she said, "let us consider the tremendous environmental damage that has ensued from the Gulf War. To begin with, there are the obvious ramifications that come from the burning of oil tankers and terminals.

"The delicate marine ecology of the Gulf area has been seriously compromised. Phytoplankton, algae and sea grasses that are fundamental parts of the food chain have been affected. Consequently, the shrimp, fish and other aquatic forms of life that depend on these biological species for their continued existence are also threatened.

"While the oil fires were raging, calculations indicated that more than 100,000 tons of soot particles and some 50 tons of sulfur dioxide were being released into the atmosphere on a daily basis. Some of the projections for the dispersal distances of these chemicals suggest that 2000 kilometers, or more, is quite likely.

"These substances play a central role in the formation of acid rain. And, shortly after the war, there were reports from Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, and Russia concerning the destructive effects of these pollutants in their countries. Ground water, soil, and life forms are all being affected.

"Coalition bombing destroyed four nuclear research facilities and two nuclear reactors. Estimates indicate that there might have been 200-300 kilograms of radioactive waste materials, those as plutonium, strontium, cesium and iodine, being stored at these sites.

"Coalition military experts claim these facilities were bombed in those a way that there was no possibility of contamination or leakage being generated. However, given the general tenor of fabrications, disinformation and misleading statements concerning the effectiveness and accuracy of the so-called 'smart bombs' and given the fact that the military authorities are quite vague as to how their bombing techniques could guarantee there would be no contamination from, or leakage of, radioactive materials at the various nuclear sites, one has to take the assurances of the military experts with more than a grain of salt."

Dr. Donaldson was about to say something but checked herself, as if a further idea or piece of information suddenly had occurred to her. Her face brightened with the enthusiasm of someone who was intrigued with different facets of the topic being discussed, despite the depressing nature of the realities being explored.

"Incidentally, you might be interested to learn that in November 1990, several months before Desert Storm began in earnest, the International Atomic Energy Agency had inspected the nuclear research facilities in Iraq, including their Tammura-2 and IRT-5000 reactors. The Agency's investigation determined that the Iraqi nuclear facilities and reactors were being employed for peaceful research purposes.

"The International Atomic Energy Agency is the organization authorized by the United Nations to force compliance with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Consequently, the Agency has the task of ensuring that all nuclear research facilities and affiliated reactors are being used for exclusively peaceful purposes.

"In 1985, six years prior to Desert Storm, the IAEA passed a resolution that stipulated clearly that any armed attack on a nuclear facility being used for peaceful purposes was a violation of the Agency's statutes, as well as a violation of both International Law and the Charter of the United Nations Charter.

"This statute of the IAEA arose partly as a result of the Israeli bombing of Iraq's Osirak reactor facility in 1981. There were, however, other factors that shaped the IAEA statute, and, presumably one of these additional factors was to avoid situations where radioactive waste materials from peaceful facilities would be leaked, entirely unnecessarily, into the environment to cause serious contamination.

"Thus, the bombing of the Iraqi nuclear facilities represents an interesting paradox. On the one hand, we have the New World Order that had accrued to itself an alleged moral authority for waging the Gulf war.

"The New World Order allegedly was predicated on principles of peace, justice and respect for international law. Yet, in order to impose the New World Order, all three of its principles had to be violated in fundamental ways.

"Certainly, these violations were evident in the Coalition bombing of the Iraqi nuclear facilities, and there are many other aspects of the Gulf

War that are further examples of those violations. These are precedents that do not augur well for the future."

Professor Donaldson ran both her hands through her hair several times. She tucked some of her relatively short cropped hair behind her ears, getting set for the next part of her response to Dr. Clarke's query.

"Last, but not least, on the ecological hit parade is the issue of the Iraqi chemical and biological weapons that were among the primary targets of the Coalition forces. The Iraqi facilities at, among other places, Samarra, Kamisiyah, Bayji, and Salman Pak were well -known to the military leaders of the Coalition forces.

"Those in command knew precisely what was being produced or stored or researched at each of the Iraqi facilities. Moreover, they did not come to this knowledge overnight. It had been with them for quite some time.

"There is something terribly ironic in this whole issue of chemical and biological weapons. The Coalition forces were extremely concerned about the possibility of the Iraqis releasing chemical and biological agents. In fact, the Coalition leaders were so worried about this contingency they informed the Iraqis that Baghdad would be hit with nuclear strikes if any chemical or biological weapons were used by the Iraqis.

"So what did these deep thinkers of the Coalition go and do? Why they went and released these toxic agents into the air, ground water and soil through their destruction of the Iraqi chemical and biological research, production and storage facilities."

As she said "deep thinkers", there was a derisive tone to the words. Her body language matched the tone of voice. Both conveyed a sense of not quite being able to comprehend how someone could act in a way that would bring to realization the very purpose those a person allegedly was committed to preventing.

"There is a growing body of evidence," she said, "that indicates that tens of thousands of American participants in the Gulf War are suffering from something called 'The Gulf War Syndrome'. This Syndrome exhibits a wide variety of debilitating neurological and physiological symptoms, along with a disturbingly high incidence of birth defects among their post-war children.

"The American authorities have been doing their best to deny the existence of any those disease. Yet, for more than twenty years these same

authorities denied any culpability in the tragedy of the thousands of Vietnam veterans who had been exposed to, and suffered from, the toxic effects of Agent Orange that had been used extensively in Vietnam.

"The Gulf War Syndrome might be, in part, a function of the contamination resulting from the more than 25 Iraqi storage, production and research facilities destroyed by Coalition bombing. Or, the Gulf War syndrome might be the result of some of the experimental drugs being foisted on the Coalition forces as alleged protection against the possible release of Iraqi chemical and biological agents.

"Possibly, the Gulf War Syndrome is a function of being exposed to the depleted uranium used in the heavy artillery shells of Coalition forces. On the other hand, the Gulf War Syndrome might have something to do with breathing in all the toxic substances that were released by the burning oil tankers and terminals.

"The Gulf War Syndrome also might be a combination of all of the foregoing factors coming together in a destructive synergy. Sorting it all out might not be an easy puzzle to solve.

"The problem is, nobody with any power bothered to think it all through before the fact of implementing Desert Storm. Apparently, nobody stopped to consider the possibility that the actions of the Coalition leaders and forces could generate something like the Gulf War Syndrome or the other destructive aspects of the war."

A mood of frustration, sorrow and anger seemed to descend on Professor Donaldson. She shook her head a few times before proceeding.

"The Coalition leaders were too preoccupied with their power and technological wizardry. Their moral arrogance, ignorance, carelessness, heedlessness, biases, presumptions, and hatreds would not permit them to consider the possibilities that were staring them in the face.

"Apparently, nobody sat down and said: 'We are about to kill hundreds of thousands of people, more than half of whom are innocent civilians, including hundreds of thousands of children. Is there some way in which this can be avoided?'

"Seemingly, nobody sat down and reflected: 'We are about to create some 5 million refugees, forcing many, if not most of them, into extremely

marginal and tenuous subsistence conditions. Is there something we could do to avoid disrupting the lives of millions of innocent bystanders?"

"Presumably, nobody sat down and had the insight to realize we are about to set in motion forces that will substantially degrade the ecological viability of thousands of cubic miles of air, water, land and life forms. Is there any alternative plan that would permit us to avoid this?"

"Unfortunately, nobody seems to have stopped to realize: We are about to unnecessarily expose tens of thousands of American soldiers and their unborn children, as well as thousands of Iraqis and others, to toxic chemical, biological and radioactive agents. These agents will debilitate, deform and kill them. Can we find some solution to the problem that would avoid such a tragedy?"

She turned and looked directly at Dr. Clarke. The words that followed were directed toward him, but the arguments conveyed by those words were directed toward the thinking of the leaders of the Coalition, along with the thinking of those who supported the perspective she was critiquing.

"Dr. Clarke, the power of life, death and destruction were entirely in the discretionary hands of the Coalition forces and their political leaders. It was their decision to unleash those forces. They could have refrained from doing so, but they didn't.

"From the very moment that Iraq invaded Kuwait, there were a large number of efforts of negotiation and diplomacy on the part of Jordan, the PLO, Algeria, France, and, even, Iraq to find a peaceful solution to the invasion. From the beginning, Kuwait and the United States were impervious to all of these overtures.

"Hundreds of thousands of people lost their lives. Hundreds of thousands more people were wounded. Millions of lives were displaced. Incalculable damage was done to the environment. Billions of dollars that could have been used to solve the crisis in a peaceful and just manner were wasted on war."

In a dramatic gesture, Dr. Donaldson flung her arms out to her sides. Her whole body looked like it was posing a question.

"And, why did this all come about?" she asked, as her voice gave expression to what her body already was asking. Responding to her own question, she said: "All the destruction, death and horror came about as a result of unresolved

disputes over: (a) two islands by the name of Warba and Bubiyan that would have provided the Iraqis with access to the sea; (b) several miles of border clarification involving the Rumaila oil field, and (c) 10 billion dollars of debt incurred by Iraq from Kuwait while the former was, among other things, effectively serving and protecting western interests, especially those of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, during the Iran/Iraq, eight-year war."

The tone of her voice became both incensed as well as imploring. "Wouldn't it have been quicker, cheaper, more peaceful, more effective, less destructive, and, therefore, ultimately, more just to say to the Iraqis: 'Here, take the islands, forget about the debt, and we'll readjust the border of the Rumaila oil field in a way that will be largely in your favor?' Wouldn't this have been something of a bargain when compared to the actual costs of death, destruction, disease, displacement, debt and ecological degradation that resulted from the war?"

Dr. Donaldson left her questions to hang suspended above the hearts of her audience, hoping they would act as sort of a moral counterpart to the sword of Damocles. She quickly surveyed the audience, scratched her head, smoothed her hair in the spot just scratched, and shrugged.

"Perhaps, some of you might be thinking: how naive and impractical. Why give up two islands, an oil field and 10 billion dollars to a murdering dictator?"

"Those people, I believe, are working on the assumption that property, possessions, and money are more important than ecology, people, and sharing. We all are far too preoccupied with trying to figure out how to kick people off the life raft of existence than we are concerned with finding ways to make room so that more people can be given safety on that raft.

"Suggestions that propose a sharing of resources and land among all the people of Earth are not what is impractical and naive. What is impractical and naive is the belief that we are ever going to solve our problems through greed, selfishness and hostility."

Professor Donaldson sighed slightly. She scanned the audience again. This time her sweep was slower, almost geared to make personal contact with different individuals in the audience.

Eventually, she spoke again. "And, for those of you in the audience who feel all of the foregoing is 20-20 hindsight, there is one simple question I

have for you. If we didn't know the extent of the death and destruction that we were going to cause in the Gulf War, then, why did we go ahead and act in ignorance without careful consideration of the terrible consequences of our actions?"

Almost as soon as she had raised her question, she began shaking her head in a deliberate, but emphatic, manner. She stopped the movement, seemed to reflect for a few seconds and, then, shook her head in an emphatic manner a few more times.

"However, I do not believe we can escape behind a mea culpa of ignorance in relation to the ramifications of our decisions in the Gulf War. Politicians and military officials are very good at constructing computer models concerning the likely outcomes of different military strategies.

"The people who were in charge of the Coalition knew what they were doing. They knew the human, ecological, and infra-structural damage that they intended to inflict. In fact, it was their precise, technical knowledge of the devastating effects of their intended actions that was the motivation shaping all of their decisions for 43 terrible days.

"Personally speaking, I find this knowing willingness to inflict almost unimaginable pain, suffering, death and destruction on both the innocent and the not-so-innocent to be far more horrifying and worrisome than any those act done out of ill-considered blindness. However, whether we did what we did with cold calculation or with blind, unthinking foolishness, we have a terrible complicity in the tragedy of the Gulf War."

Dr. Donaldson began pacing again. Her hands were behind her back, and she was looking at the floor as she paced. She appeared to be getting ready for the next part of her reply to Dr. Clarke.

She stopped pacing and faced the audience again. "There is a tendency when commenting about international events to try to reduce things to a black and white, good-guy and bad-guy, scenario. As those, we say that whoever happens to be designated as the current bad -guys by the ruling powers must be the cause of everything evil in the world.

"Alternatively, we tend to consider ourselves to be innocent, pure, and, entirely blameless for the evil that the bad-guys do. More often than not, we are in deep denial about the role we play in helping to set events in motion.

"We say the Iraqis could have, and should have, refrained from invading Kuwait. They had a choice, and they were wrong in the choice that they exercised.

"Moreover, we say that once in Kuwait, the Iraqis had the ability to withdraw from Kuwait. They did not, and, therefore, once again, they made the wrong choice."

She paused and looked into the eyes of different people in the audience. She did this for, maybe, ten seconds and continued on speaking.

"The Gulf War did not arise in a vacuum. There is a history behind

"The lives of countries and individuals consist of a chain of events. The links of these chains are not independent of one another. They have interlocking meaning.

"Conveniently, we forget about all the ways in which we helped to support Iraq militarily and economically after its invasion of Iran over unresolved issues of access to the sea and disputed borders ... issues eerily similar to those surrounding Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. We forget about how our Ambassador to Iraq told the Iraqis, just days before the invasion, that the United States has no opinion in the matter of Iraq's border disputes with Kuwait.

"We forget about how, in the years leading up to the Gulf crisis, we provided Iraq with billions of dollars in loans and credits with which they, with our knowledge, built up their military capabilities. We forget about the fact that we had precise intelligence reports concerning what Iraq was doing in its programs of research, production and storage of chemical and biological weapons, and, yet, we did nothing.

"We forget about the fact that we knew all about the oppression, murders, and human rights abuses taking place in Iraq, but, nonetheless, we became Iraq's biggest trading partner just prior to the Gulf War. We chose to look the other way about all the terrible things that were going on in Iraq because American business could make a buck.

"We forget that in our great concern for the Kurdish people and the despicable way in which they were gassed, abused and forced to live in squalid conditions by the Iraqi military, we never did anything before the Gulf War to help the Kurds to establish a homeland or to alleviate their suffering. And, we didn't do this because it would have created tensions in our

relations with Turkey and pre-revolutionary Iran, each of which was serving our interests in a variety of ways.

"We forget how the Coalition leaders were so confident of their moral position vis-à-vis Iraq that they felt compelled to call upon witnesses to lie during Congressional hearings and falsely accuse the Iraqi occupiers of having bayoneted and smashed the helpless bodies of babies in incubators in a hospital in Kuwait. This is all too reminiscent of the US government's decision to lie to the American public about the fabricated Gulf of Tonkin incident that helped convince Americans of the wisdom of becoming more deeply mired in Vietnam.

"We allow ourselves to forget that as a result of Kuwait's greed to sell more and more oil at prices that were favorable to western vested interests, Kuwait's actions were pounding further nails into the coffin of Iraq's already war-torn economy, with devastating effects on the Iraqi people. We forget that more than two weeks prior to the threatened invasion, Iraq had tried to bring its concerns to the attention of Kuwait and other members of the Arab League. Promises were made, but nothing was done.

"Conveniently, we forget that the United States had rejected all discussion of sanctions, negotiations, and diplomacy as means of resolving the Iraq-Kuwait invasion crisis. We, like Iraq, had choices, and we, like them, consistently made wrong choices."

She let her words sink in. While she did this, she slowly ran the fingers of her right hand back and forth across her forehead, as if it helped her to concentrate.

Professor Donaldson discontinued the motion and began speaking: "We made the wrong choices because we helped construct the international environment out of which the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait arose. We made the wrong choices because the invasion crisis could have been solved, even before it arose, with little, or no, cost in human life and ecological damage. We made the wrong choices because the invasion crisis could have been solved, even after it arose, with a little bit of compassion, imagination, creativity, understanding and flexibility on the part of the Coalition leaders."

Each sentence that began with: "we made the wrong choice", was followed by a dramatic pause. Apparently, she was trying to give emphasis not only to what had just been said, but to what was to follow, as well.

In a matter-of-fact tone of voice, she said: "The Iraqis were wrong to do what they did. We were wrong to do what we did. Consequently, we have complicity in the terrible sequence of events that transpired in the Gulf."

She became a little bit more animated and emphatic when she said: "In fact, in my opinion, we have greater complicity in the tragedy of the Gulf War than does Iraq. The greater moral responsibility in any conflict always rests with the one who is in the position to avoid the greater evil. And, quite frankly, the damage inflicted by Iraq in invading Kuwait pales in comparison to the totally unnecessary damage inflicted by the Coalition forces in responding to the wrongs of Iraq.

"The exercise of force carries with it a fiduciary responsibility with respect to all those who might be affected by the sphere of influence of those an exercise. The Coalition leaders violated, in virtually every conceivable way, their fiduciary responsibilities with respect to their exercise of force in the Gulf crisis. It was excessive, disproportionate, indiscriminate and unnecessary, and, in many ways, totally ineffective as far as the stated goals of securing peace, justice and respect for international law are concerned."

Professor Donaldson smiled, somewhat apologetically, both to Dr. Clarke and the rest of the audience, and said: "I'm sorry for going on at such length. I hope I have satisfied your desire for an elaboration of my point of view."

Dr. Clarke stood again and said: "Thank you very much, Professor Donaldson, for your detailed response. You've given us all, I'm sure, a great deal to ponder on.

"Of course, I don't necessarily agree with everything that you have stated in your analysis of the Gulf War situation. Some of these points of difference would, perhaps, be better left for another occasion.

"However, if I might be permitted to touch on just one such issue, I would question the validity of your belief that the Coalition had any choice in the course of action to be pursued with respect to Iraq. Surely, Professor Donaldson, if Iraq had been allowed to swallow Kuwait whole without a lesson in table manners from the Coalition, everybody in the Gulf region would have been at risk of being next on the menu.

"Moreover, the greater Gulf area contains something like 40-60% of the known, world oil reserves. The civilized world simply could not afford to

have a brutal and, quite possibly, psychopathic thug in control of those resources, wouldn't you agree, Professor?"

Professor Donaldson was thoughtful for about 15 seconds before starting to speak. "I would agree with you, Dr. Clarke, that the Iraqi people are oppressed by a brutal dictator who depends on violence in a fashion similar to the way an alcoholic depends on booze. I'm not sure I would agree with you on much of anything else you have said."

Before launching into her reply, Professor Donaldson was quiet for another twenty seconds. She looked at some of the walls of the room as well as the room's floor. Her eyes were traveling about the room, but her attention appeared to be focused on something within her.

She pulled out of her brief, reflective mode and started with: "Both during the time leading up to the Gulf War, as well in its aftermath, lots of analysts seemed to assume, almost automatically, that Iraq had nothing but grandiose delusions of grandeur driving it. These commentators all jumped on the bandwagon of a popular theory going around at the time that claimed that Iraq's intentions were to absorb all of the Gulf region into the greater glory of an expanding Iraqi empire that, subsequently, would proceed to bring the hated West to its knees.

"I'm not sure the evidence necessarily supports such a view. First of all, look at the parallels between the conditions that started the Iran-Iraq War and the circumstances that initiated the Gulf War. I alluded to these parallels earlier.

"In both Gulf Wars Iraq invaded another country for very similar reasons. In each instance, Iraq desperately wanted access to the sea in order to supplement, if not replace, the more costly and cumbersome piping of oil through Turkey and Saudi Arabia. Moreover, in the circumstances leading up to both Gulf wars, there was a dispute over boundaries that carried significant economic ramifications for Iraq: the Shatt al-Arab boundary in the case of Iran and the Rumaila oilfield in the case of Kuwait.

"In both the Iran-Iraq War and the second Gulf war, Iraq was extremely upset with the problems that the country being invaded was creating for Iraq. In the first Gulf War, Iraq was angry with the social and political difficulties that the Iranian Revolution was stirring up among the substantial Shi'a population of Iraq.

"In the second Gulf War, Iraq was angry with Kuwait for playing havoc with the Iraqi economy that had been run into the ground as a result of the Iran-Iraq War. Kuwait was dumping quantities of oil onto the world markets far in excess of the agreed-upon quotas and, as a result, driving down the price of oil at a time when Iraq needed money to rebuild its economy and country.

"In addition, Iraq felt Kuwait was not only trying to wage economic war against Iraq but that Kuwait seemed to have a very short memory, or little sense of gratitude, concerning the sacrifices that Iraq had made during the Iran-Iraq War. These sacrifices of Iraqi life, property and economy had considerable direct benefits for Kuwait and the whole Gulf region."

Having laid the foundations for what was to follow, Professor Donaldson gave the audience a short mental break, before developing her position further. When the mini-break ended, she asked a series of questions.

"If Iraq had a mind-set focused on conquering Kuwait, why did it bother to stop at the border for a number of days in order to give Kuwait an opportunity to reconsider its intransigence? Why was Iraq open to the negotiating efforts of a number of Arab intermediaries? Why was Iraq willing to attend a mini-summit in Jeddah in order to discuss the matter?"

"If I were a brutal dictator with imperialistic designs on conquering the whole Middle East, I wouldn't think twice about running roughshod over whatever stood in my way. I certainly wouldn't hang around a disputed border region and give my intended prey, or anyone else, an opportunity to prevent, or interfere with, my plans to seize my intended targets."

She shifted gears and steered in a slightly different, but related, direction. "A number of people have suggested that Iraq was trying to extort or blackmail Kuwait into concessions. As those, the show of force along the border was intended to intimidate Kuwait and elicit the desired response from them.

"If the foregoing is the case, then, the intention of Iraq would not appear to be one of conquering Kuwait and, subsequently, the rest of the Middle East. Rather, Iraq had a specific purpose: namely, to gain access to the sea; to have a favorable settlement to the boundary dispute issue; and, thirdly, to get Kuwait to either forgive Iraq's war debt or to stop driving the price of oil down or both.

"In other words, the available evidence suggests Iraq might have been playing the situation straight up, although rather brutally. Iraq was not merely going through the motions of massing on the Kuwait border. If Kuwait refused to deal with Iraq in a way in which Iraq felt was fair under the circumstances, then Iraq, by force, would take steps to convince Kuwait of the desperateness and urgency of Iraq's economic problems.

"In short, Iraq was not bluffing. It was fed up with the situation. Iraq was fully prepared to take action immediately if Kuwait did not respond with what Iraq considered to be signs of good faith concerning Iraq's specific complaints against Kuwait.

"I believe the evidence that has been cited previously is quite consistent with my somewhat less sinister interpretation of Iraqi intentions and actions in relation to Kuwait. But, let's explore a few other possibilities."

She spent a short time collecting and organizing her thoughts. When she was ready, she began exploring some of the considerations to which she had alluded.

"If I were a brutal dictator with aspirations to conquer other countries in the Middle East, and if I had several hundred thousand troops at my disposal, half of which were supposedly stationed along the Saudi border ... and I'll revisit this issue of alleged border massing shortly ... then, after having secured Kuwait, I wouldn't have hesitated to move into Saudi Arabia and conquer it, while the opportunity presented itself, especially since there would not have been anyone available to stop me.

"If I'm willing to run the risk of invoking the wrath of the world for my invasion of Kuwait, do I have anything more to lose, as far as world condemnation is concerned, by adding Saudi Arabia to my list? 'In for a penny, in for a pound', would be my motto if I were a brutal dictator intent on conquering and controlling the Gulf region."

As a sort of afterthought to what had been said previously, she declared: "Incidentally, in passing, one ought to remember that US intelligence actually misled, in several respects, the Saudis concerning the alleged offensive posture of Iraqi forces. More specifically, among other things, the US satellite photographs of Iraqi troop deployment along the Saudi border could only show possibilities. Those photos couldn't possibly have disclosed what the intentions of the Iraqis were concerning Saudi Arabia.

"The significance of the photos had to be interpreted in order to forge a link between troop deployment and Iraqi invasion intentions vis-à-vis Saudi Arabia. As it turns out, these interpretations of the satellite photos were wrong because Iraq never did invade Saudi Arabia.

"More ominously, the fact of the matter is that Russian satellite photos of the border area between Iraq and Saudi Arabia clearly indicated that contrary to US claims there were no – I repeat no – troops massed at the border. Either the Russians doctored their pictures or US intelligence doctored its pictures, and, quite frankly, the Russians had no pressing motive for indicating that there wasn't any border massing of Iraqi troops when, according to US officials, there was those massing. On the other hand, the US administration did have a substantial interest in providing fudged intelligence.

"This misdirection by the United States played a key role in convincing the Saudis that an invasion of Saudi Arabia by Iraq was imminent. As a result, the Saudis acceded to US pressure to begin deploying US forces on Saudi soil.

"In any event, it is unfortunate that the Saudis didn't appear to ask themselves a few questions. For instance, if Iraq really were intent on invading Saudi Arabia, why didn't the Iraqi forces take the plunge when it could have done so with a minimum number of casualties? Why didn't the Iraqis go ahead and invade Saudi Arabia when its international public image would not have taken much more of a beating than already was the case for having invaded Kuwait?

"There are quite a few people, both within Saudi Arabia as well as outside of that country, who would not shed any tears if the ruling Saudi monarchy were to be removed from its throne of power. An Iraqi invasion of Saudi Arabia might have brought a surprising mixture of responses from the four corners of the Muslim world, with the reaction of people in the streets being, very possibly, markedly different than the official statements issuing from those countries.

"Furthermore, the United States' rapid deployment force would not have been able to adequately defend Saudi Arabia. It would have been up against a much larger Iraqi army with already established lines of communication and logistical support."

Professor Donaldson pursed her lips quickly, several times in succession. Her eyes were narrowed somewhat. Both of these physical features seemed to be external markers for an internal process of focus.

She arched her eyebrows, and her face appeared to have a quality that suggested she were considering various possibilities. Sharing these with her audience, she began: "One might reasonably anticipate that in the relatively few hours that a few Divisions of the Iraqi army would have needed to travel the roughly 175 miles to the Dhahran oil field complex from the border, the Iraqis already would have pretty much secured the area and been chowing-down before the US would have been able to evaluate, coordinate, plan and launch an offensive of any kind even capable of reaching Dhahran, let alone be able to accomplish anything of an effective nature.

"In point of fact, the United States required 119 hours of preparation before it was ready to get Desert Shield off the ground. Roughly 19 hours were needed by the US in 1989 to prepare for its invasion of tiny Panama.

"Even using the latter, much shorter preparation time rather than the former, much longer prep time, the United States would have been in a difficult situation if Iraq had decided to invade Saudi Arabia. In my opinion, I believe the Iraqis were aware of this, and, therefore, if they didn't invade Saudi Arabia when they had the golden opportunity to do so, this is because, contrary to popular public opinion in the West, they never had the intention of invading Saudi Arabia."

Quickly expanding on, as well as attempting to fortify, her ideas, she followed up on her earlier points: "If I were a brutal dictator really intent on conquering the Middle East and bringing the West to its knees, then, by quickly invading Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, I would have accomplished two strategic objectives. First, I would have, at least for a time, a stranglehold on a great deal of the world's oil reserves and, therefore, would have been in a position to deal with the rest of the world from strength. Secondly, by conquering Kuwait and, especially, Saudi Arabia, my tactical situation would have created tremendous problems for both the Arab world and the West to respond to militarily.

"Among other things, the Coalition forces would not have been permitted to do to Saudi Arabia what they did to Baghdad and the rest of Iraq without encountering serious political, economic and social

repercussions. Getting a conquering army out of Saudi Arabia would have presented a very different set of problems for Coalition leaders than getting those an army out of just Kuwait.

"On the other hand, although Iraq might have been capable of over-running both Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, and, therefore, in the short run, creating many problems for the world, I do not believe Iraq would have been able to hold those countries even against a Coalition of countries from just the Middle East. After all, consider for a moment the fact that Iraq had been unable to defeat Iran despite receiving the support of the United States, the Soviet Union and most of the other countries of the Middle East. Consequently, if only Egypt, Syria and Iran, with, perhaps, help from Turkey and, maybe even, Israel, were to co-ordinate an attack against Iraq, I think Iraq would have had a very difficult time of retaining control of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia."

Dr. Donaldson had an expression on her face that seemed to indicate she was tired of those talk or, perhaps, that she had strayed too far afield. She made a sort of dismissive gesture with her hands, more to herself, possibly, than to anyone in the audience.

"If we leave those speculative scenarios aside, there are a number of other considerations that undermine the contention that Iraq was intent on either swallowing up a number of Middle East countries or on bringing the West to its knees. For example, since the first Gulf war, the fact is, Iraq had developed much closer and more cordial relationships with a number of countries, including the United States.

"America had given Iraq considerable help during the Iran-Iraq war, despite being rather duplicitous toward Iraq in the Iran -Contra fiasco. Furthermore, as I indicated earlier, the United States had become Iraq's number one trading partner just prior to the second Gulf War.

"The United States had made available to the Iraqis billions of dollars in loans and credits. America also had helped Iraq to rebuild its military capabilities.

"Iraq wanted to be treated with respect and fairness by the United States. For the most part, things were moving in this direction.

"Iraq did have serious differences with the US over their respective policies concerning Israel and the Palestinians. Quite frankly, however, I don't believe the Iraqis would have considered it in their best interests to

jeopardize their developing relationship with the United States by going on an imperialistic binge in the Middle East.

"I believe the second Gulf came about like most wars. A combination of misunderstanding, miscommunication, miscalculation, stubbornness, pride, posturing, stupidity, selfishness and blindness were exhibited by parties on all sides of the Gulf War issue.

"Iraq, despite all its faults, is not the enemy in the Gulf War. All of us are the enemy.

"We all collectively join in to create mess after mess in both international and domestic affairs. The second Gulf War is not an exception to this central truth of world events. It is, regrettably, a most horrendous exemplar of what I am maintaining.

"Let me make one last comment in wrapping up my answer to your follow-up question Dr. Clarke. Everyone is convinced that allowing the control of much of the world's oil supplies to fall into the hands of countries like Iraq or Iran would be disastrous. I wouldn't wish to take issue with those a contention.

"At the same time, I'm not convinced the interests of the vast majority of the people of the Earth are better served, ultimately, by having control of much of the world's oil supplies in the hands of the United States. The governmental, military and corporate institutions of the United States are not necessarily the benign force of goodness that their spin-doctors try to convince everyone is the case. In fact, one could easily say the same thing about the governmental, military and corporate institutions of almost every country on the face of the earth."

Chapter 7: Dark Side of the Moon

While Professor Donaldson was refreshing herself with a drink of water before taking the next question, I looked around the room.

I spotted Dr. Jameson, my lunch host from last Friday. He was whispering something to the woman next to him. He seemed to be in somewhat of an agitated state.

The woman appeared to be trying to calm him down. She took a few glances to her left and right, as if she were checking to see whether they were attracting any attention.

Several times Dr. Jameson alternated between looking in the direction of Rachel Donaldson and staring at the floor in front of him. Given my viewing angle relative to, as well as my distance from, Dr. Jameson, his expression was hard to make out. However, he didn't seem to be a happy camper.

He could have been angry with his female neighbor. He might have been upset, for some reason, with the speaker. There might have been something that had occurred before my arrival that had disturbed him. Or, maybe, there had been some sort of Foundation difficulty that had arisen independently of the afternoon gathering.

Rachel Donaldson was done quenching her thirst and pointed to a person three or four rows in front of me who had raised her hand. Dr. Donaldson said: "Yes, Karen, you have a question?"

"Actually, Rachel," Karen said, "I wanted to hear something more about what you have to say with respect to some of these Muslim terrorist groups. A few of the comments in your talk briefly dealt with this issue, and I found your ideas somewhat intriguing.

"I've read quite a few reports recently that state that -- tragedies like the Oklahoma City bombing notwithstanding -- the FBI considers Islamic groups to be the number one source of terrorist threats to America today. Moreover, there are many places internationally that seem to be suffering from the same kind of problem.

"I don't really have a specific question to ask you on this. Nonetheless, I would be interested in listening to whatever you have to say on this general issue."

Dr. Donaldson took a deep breath and exhaled somewhat forcibly through her mouth. She arched her eyebrows slightly. She studied the ceiling for a few seconds, lowered her head, and began to speak.

"I guess the first thing that should be addressed is people's tendency to look at the issue of terrorism in very superficial terms." As she finished her sentence, she looked at Karen, smiled and said: "Don't worry, Karen, you are not the sort of person I have in mind when I speak about superficial views of terrorism."

After a bit of scattered laughter had subsided, Professor Donaldson continued on. "The first part of my response, Karen, might not seem as if it has anything to do with your request, so I would ask for your indulgence and the patience of the rest of the people here. However, I believe, or hope, that before I am through, you will all see the relevance of the earlier portion of my comments to Karen's request concerning the issue of terrorism among certain Muslim groups."

Having, to a degree, prepared her audience for what was to follow, Professor Donaldson began. "There are a lot of complex currents that run through both individuals and organizations. Historical, psychological, political, economic, religious, cultural, educational and ecological factors all are woven together in subtle dynamics that create an endless array of patterns in the life of an individual or organization.

"These patterns are not static entities. They change in various ways over time and across circumstances.

"Nevertheless, there usually are enough similarities and constants from one situation to the next enabling us to recognize various character traits in individuals, as well as in organizations. These traits serve as a kind of identifying signature through that we distinguish one group from another or one individual from another.

"On the other hand, despite the presence of certain identifiable, relatively constant traits, people and organizations do not necessarily act in the same manner on all occasions. In other words, they exhibit what is referred to as dispositional behavior.

"Dispositional behavior is the tendency of an individual or an organization to act in certain ways in some circumstances and, yet, still allow for the possibility of acting in different ways in similar circumstances on other occasions. A dispositional trait occurs often enough to serve as

something of an identifiable or distinguishing feature, but those a tendency is mixed in with an array of other behavioral possibilities.

"Thus, to have a disposition toward violent behavior does not mean an individual or organization will be violent under all circumstances. What it means is that in the past an individual or organization has been violent on enough occasions to permit someone to make a judgment that establishes an association or linkage between the descriptive term "violent" and a given organization or individual."

Professor Donaldson took a quick sip of water from the glass sitting on the rostrum. As she was putting the glass back down, she remarked: "One problem with making judgments concerning people's dispositional behavior, however, is this. In making those judgments, people have very different ideas about how many occasions of, say, violence, need to be observed in order to claim that a linkage between the descriptive qualifier 'violent' and a given individual or organization is accurate or fair.

"One person will observe representatives of an organization act violently, in some way, on only one occasion. However, for whatever reasons, such an individual will feel justified in describing those sorts of organizations as 'violent'.

"Another person might see members of an organization exhibit a number of violent acts on various occasions. Yet, when the observed episodes of violent acts are considered in the context of a wide variety of other, non-violent acts carried out by members of the same organization, the observer in question might not judge either the organization or its representatives as being characteristically inclined to violent behavior."

She paused for a moment, removed her glasses, took out a handkerchief, moistened the glasses with her breath, and began cleaning them. While going about the process of wiping her glasses, she continued speaking.

"Another problem in making judgments about the dispositional behavior of individuals and organizations revolves around the criteria and values we use for deciding what is to count as a violent act. Suppose, for example, individual 'A' attempts, unsuccessfully, to punch person 'B', and, in the process, person 'B' defends himself or herself and hits individual 'A'.

"Some observers might be inclined to call the act of the first individual a violent one, irrespective of whether or not that person landed

a blow. Alternatively, if person 'B' is perceived not to have initiated the fight, an observer might not count the act of person 'B' to be a violent one even though 'B' landed a blow.

"On the other hand, still other observers might count the acts of both 'A' and 'B' as violent ones. For these people, the question of who started the whole thing, or who, if anyone, landed a blow, is irrelevant."

Satisfied with the condition of her glasses, Professor Donaldson placed them back on her head. She spent a few seconds adjusting them, still talking as she finished the task.

"Of course, an act does not necessarily have to be in the form of a physical blow to qualify or count as a violent act. For instance, some people might wish to count unkind or mean words as instances of violent behavior.

"In addition, emotional outbursts, acts of omission, betrayal, indifference, rejection and indoctrination all might count as instances of violent behavior under certain circumstances. Similarly, creating conditions that cause or perpetuate hunger, poverty, homelessness, injustice or illness could be judged by some people to be acts of violence.

"Alternatively, an individual might be considered to have done violence to the truth through acts of lying, disinformation, propaganda, and prejudice. Furthermore, requiring people to attend educational programs that do not necessarily serve the economic, political or spiritual needs of the students might, for some people, count as a form of violence.

"Some vegetarians might wish to charge meat-eaters with doing violence to animal life." Dr. Donaldson flashed a brief smile and said: "On the other hand, some vegetables might want to remind vegetarians of the violence the latter inflicts on the former."

There were some audible laughs in the audience. Perhaps, there were a few appreciative vegetables in attendance that I had failed to notice on the way to my seat. Dr. Donaldson let the noise subside.

"Another problem surrounding the issue of dispositional judgments concerning, say, violent behavior is the following. We often evaluate situations very differently depending whether we are talking about others or about ourselves.

"Frequently, we are quite prepared to label someone else's behavior as violent, while denying that the same kind of act done by

ourselves is violent. We have a tendency to rationalize our acts and, as a result, we color them as reasonable or justifiable or appropriate.

"Generally, this process of sanitizing our acts means that either we do not count our acts as violent or we call them legitimate acts of violence. In the latter case, we often like to argue that those legitimate acts of violence should not be considered as being relevant to any assessment, by ourselves or others, of our dispositional tendency toward violence.

"This process of rationalization and denial that allows us to dissociate our self-image from some of the acts we perform can lead to very bizarre situations. A person can be quite abusive of others, even to the point of torturing those people, and, yet, believe himself, herself, or themselves to be a decent, peaceful, compassionate, non-violent individual. All it takes is a little creative emotional book-keeping in relation to whether we label our acts as liabilities or assets.

"One trick that is used to cook these emotional ledgers is the following. We say to ourselves the other person's acts of violence reveal something essential about that person. Those acts, we say, are inherent features of that person's being, like some species of original sin.

"Our own acts of violence, on the other hand, are judged to be nothing more than peripheral, temporary lapses. Momentary storms in an otherwise peaceful sea. We tend to always see ourselves as playing Abel to the other person's Cain."

Professor Donaldson started to lean on the rostrum but found it a little unstable. She straightened up and moved to the side of the rostrum.

"Not surprisingly," she declared, "we often do not extend to others the same liberties, privileges or degrees of freedom involving dispositional judgments that we generously extend to ourselves. Instead, we frequently label the explanations of others, concerning their behavior, to be expressions of denial or propaganda or mere excuses intended to help them avoid responsibility for the real nature of their acts.

"Judgments about who does violence to who can become quite problematic. For example, one person censors another and, in the judgment of the latter, the former is doing violence to the freedoms, rights or beliefs of the latter. On the other hand, from the perspective of the one whom is doing the censoring, the views of the one being censored do

violence to fundamental values, principles or standards of the ones doing the censoring.

"Those differences of opinion concerning the perceived locus of violence about, in this case, the issue of censorship, often lead to other actions by the concerned parties. These further actions raise the same question of who does violence to whom, in, yet, another context. The process is called 'escalation'."

Moving back behind the rostrum, she said: "The act of labeling can itself be an expression of violence. When rumor, gossip, slander, libel, innuendo, and unfounded speculation destroy a person's life, violence has been done to those an individual.

"Consequently, when governments or the media refer to an individual or an organization as a terrorist group, there are a number of questions that need to be asked and explored. For instance, what behaviors are being counted as constituting acts of terrorism?"

Dr. Donaldson scrunched up her lips in a way that suggested she were considering something. "Suppose," she began, "an organization is trying to defend itself against oppression or attempting to confront some sort of social injustice and, as a result, uses violence as part of its response to those perceived wrongs. Does the display of violence necessarily mean those an organization deserves to be labeled as 'terrorist'?"

"Revolutionaries, freedom fighters, underground resistance groups, and guerrillas all use violence. When does their use of such violence qualify as acts of terrorism? How do we differentiate between possible legitimate uses of violence and illegitimate expressions of violence?"

She took another drink of water. This time she continued to hold the glass in her hand while expanding on her previous comments.

"Why were the mujahidin's acts of resistance with respect to the Russian invasion of Afghanistan widely considered to be the acts of patriots, but the mujahidin of Palestine or Lebanon are said to be terrorists? They both employed extreme acts of violence. In both cases, innocent people, along with not-so-innocent people, lost their lives as a result of the actions of the mujahidin. What factors are influencing our dispositional judgments to treat similar acts of violence in comparable situations in quite different ways?"

"Consider another, related case. There were individuals who journeyed from various Muslim countries to Afghanistan in order to lend support to the mujahidin. They were said to be freedom fighters.

"Yet, when these individuals returned home and fought against injustices, oppression and abuses of human rights similar to those in Afghanistan, they became terrorists. What led to this transformation in our judgments of their dispositional behavior with respect to the use of violence?"

Professor Donaldson gave her question a chance to percolate in the minds of the audience. She returned the glass to the rostrum and quickly swept her eyes across the faces in the room, sighing slightly.

"When Jewish resistance groups, those as Irgun, Lehi or Haganah, took the lives of innocent people or Jewish collaborators, they were said to be fighting a war of liberation against British occupation. When the PLO took the lives of innocent people or Palestinian collaborators while trying to fight a war of liberation against Israeli occupation, the PLO was said to be a terrorist group. Why are we treating similar cases in very different ways?"

"Between 1948 and 1956, various Israeli military operations massacred a total of over 1000 Palestinian civilians. These deaths occurred at places like: Deir Yassin, Doueimah, Qibya, al-Bureig, Kafr Kassim and Khan Yunis.

"The PLO did not come into existence until 1968, more than twelve years after the acts of Israeli violence against Palestinians to which I've just alluded.

However, between 1968 and 1981, various PLO military operations massacred a total of some 280 Israeli citizens. Yet, despite beginning quite a long time after the initial Israeli acts of violence against Palestinians, and despite being less than one-third as deadly as the attacks of their Israeli counterparts, the Palestinians are the only ones who are considered terrorists.

"There seems to be considerable inconsistency in the way the same kinds of acts of violence are being labeled in situations that bear many resemblances to one another. Considerations of race, religion, ethnic origins, national aspirations, political affiliation, economic interests, and media biases all can skew this labeling process."

She ran her hands through her hair and pushed the bridge of her glasses back up her nose toward her forehead. She took her right hand and cupped it

around the nape of her neck and just left it there for a short while as she talked, letting her elbow sort of hang in front of her.

"Governments, police forces, the military, security people and intelligence agencies all use violence, just as revolutionary and resistance fighters do. Naturally, not all acts of aggression or violence qualify as terrorist acts. And, this is true for both those who are in power, as well as those who are not in power.

"Acts designed to protect sovereignty, peace and tranquility might, or might not, constitute an act of terrorism, depending on circumstances. The problem is: one person's tranquility is quite frequently founded on the misery and oppression of others.

"When does, for example, a government's use of violence qualify as terrorist acts against its citizens? Is a government or police force entitled to do anything it likes simply because it is a legally constituted body?

"Were the deaths at Kent State, more than twenty years ago, regrettable consequences of a legal use of force or were those deaths the result of an act of terrorism? Was the violence used against Native peoples at Wounded Knee in South Dakota in 1973 part of a federally-sponsored campaign of terror against Native peoples, or was such violence merely an attempt to stop the illegal activities of a number of Native people?

"When a government, friendly to the United States, employs tactics of death squads, torture, disappearances, abuse of human rights, sham trials, censorship, and indoctrination in order to protect its vested interests, are these not acts of violence that are of a terrorist nature? Should they no longer be considered of a violent or terrorist nature simply because the vested interests being protected might be beneficial to our country?"

Having asked a number of questions, Dr. Donaldson was quiet for ten seconds or so, allowing her ideas to have a little more time to bounce around in the minds and hearts of the audience. She looked down at the floor and massaged her forehead. She raised her head.

"Let's consider a hypothetical Muslim group. This group, and the individuals belonging to it, will be assumed to be dispositionally inclined toward playing an activist role of some sort in their communities. In other words, the group and its members have a tendency to act in ways that are intended to help influence and shape what goes on around them socially, spiritually, politically, economically, educationally and/or ecologically.

"To be an activist, does not necessarily entail that one will be inclined to use tactics of violence or terror to achieve one's aims. Some activists are inclined toward violence, and some activists are not inclined toward violence.

"Furthermore, even among those activists who might be inclined toward acts of violence, there is a spectrum of dispositional possibilities. Some activists might exhibit violence only in situation-specific circumstances, those as when they are provoked or attacked. Other activists might be prepared to inflict violence on others but only in accordance with certain values or principles concerning who is and who is not to be a target. Still other activists who might be inclined to violent behavior might be quite indiscriminate in their destructive activities and interested in terrorizing everyone in an attempt to gain their objectives.

"For purposes of discussion, let's consider our hypothetical Muslim group to be a collection of socially concerned citizens. What are some of the issues that have brought individuals to those a group?

"There are a number of recurrent themes that keep surfacing in Muslims groups with an activist disposition. To begin with, there tends to be a general disillusionment among the members of these groups concerning the ability of existing political, economic and social institutions to deal effectively with a wide variety of social justice issues those as poverty, homelessness, hunger and other inequities.

"In addition, not only are many of these groups disenchanted with the performance of various social institutions, they also tend to reject different kinds of 'isms'. Materialism, modernism, secularism, imperialism, racism, and colonialism all are seen as being sources of problematic, if not malevolent, influences in the world."

Professor Donaldson held up the first two fingers of her left hand and shook them a few times very gently. As she did this, she said: "Secondly, questions of identity, purpose, meaning and values are driving forces for the members of these groups. Moreover, people in these groups seek to derive their answers to these questions from an understanding of Islam.

"However, not all Muslims and not all Muslim groups have an identical understanding of what they believe Islam says about issues of identity, purpose, meaning and so on. A lot of inter- and intra- group conflict arises as a result of these kinds of interpretational difference concerning Islam.

"Up to a certain point, those groups, or, more accurately, the individuals within them, will agree completely on what Islam entails in the way of beliefs, values and practices. Yet, despite these commonalities, differences of interpretation, application, interests, priorities, commitment, goals and intentions arise.

"These differences have a significant impact on how various individuals or groups go about trying to resolve, among other things, issues of social justice. In fact, whether or not a given Muslim individual or group feels violence is justified in solving, for example, social justice issues, will depend on how they interpret Islam.

"As is true in every religious tradition, there are many Muslims who tend to treat their understanding of their own religious tradition as the only correct understanding of things. Consequently, when, for example, their own interpretation of Islam seems to give them permission or license to commit acts of violence, they believe this means that God is giving them permission or license to do so. They are assuming their way of seeing things reflects Divine perception of those same things."

Professor Donaldson again held up her left hand at about face level. This time her hand was showing three fingers.

"Thirdly, many of the people in these Muslim groups seem to feel a deep sense of urgency about solving the problems of society. As a result, there often is a sort of revolutionary fervor about their attitudes, feelings and activities.

"Moreover, not only do many of the individuals in these groups tend to believe that social transformation must happen now, very frequently many of them tend to believe they have unique roles to play in helping to bring about those change. Therefore, those individuals often believe their vision, piety, commitment, talent, leadership and knowledge will help make the difference between success and failure in the desired process of transformation.

"The belief that one's potential contribution has an important role to play in bringing about change tends to create a deep sense of responsibility in an individual. As a result, those people and groups often feel pressure to act and discharge their alleged duty to destiny."

Professor Donaldson held up her right hand in a closed position. One by one her fingers came up as she ran through a summary of what she had said previously.

"The disillusionment with the efficacy of social institutions, the alienation from many of the 'isms' that are currently influential, the belief in the correctness of one's understanding, the sense of urgency, the revolutionary fervor, and the deep sense of having a unique contribution to make to the group's cause- all of these combine to form a very powerful motivational dynamic, both within the individual and the larger group. The force of this dynamic often tends to manifest itself as a belief that the group and its members are participating in a revival of, or a return to, the original, pure spirit of Islam.

"This conviction that one is an instrument of the original spirit of Islam might be exploited in a variety of ways by both an organization and the individuals in that group. In fact, on a fairly regular basis, one encounters a primary method that is utilized by these groups in an attempt to channel the powerful dynamics surrounding the belief that one is serving the original, true, pure spirit of Islam. This method involves linking the aforementioned dynamics to the belief that one is going to earn the undying gratitude of God for serving the true Islam.

"In short, these groups claim that paradise or heaven is just around the corner for anyone who sincerely commits herself or himself to the group's interpretation of the original spirit of Islam. Many people find this kind of offer something that they cannot refuse. Indeed, some Muslims are prepared to excuse a multitude of sins, in themselves and in their groups, in order not to jeopardize their chances for the desired reward."

Professor Donaldson checked her wristwatch. "My time is just about up, so I'll try to wrap this up fairly quickly." She took another drink of water.

"Many Muslim groups talk about the 'true Islam' and the original spirit of Islam. However, mixed in with this talk, one also finds, quite frequently, a number of other motivational forces hiding beneath the outward talk.

"This scenario of wolf-like motivations attempting to benefit from being hidden by the innocence and purity of sheep's wool is not exclusive to Muslims. It plays itself out in every religious tradition.

"Some individuals are powerless and desire to be powerful. Some are alienated and want to have a sense of belonging. For each of these groups of people, Islam is not important except as a possible means of satisfying a variety of needs that are not necessarily of a spiritual nature.

"Some Muslim groups want to bask in the euphoria of restoring what they believe is the lost glory of Islam. What they don't seem to understand is that Islam can never lose any of its glory. In reality, the glory that those people seek is the pride, arrogance and conceit of self-glorification.

"Some of these groups and individuals are driven by national, ethnic, tribal, racial and/or religious hatreds. They wish to exploit Islam and hijack its moral authority to serve their dark purposes.

"The true Islam, the original spirit of Islam, is completely preoccupied with, and absorbed in, qualities of love, compassion, charitableness, chivalry, justice, forgiveness, tolerance, kindness, gratitude, gentleness, humility, self-purification, patience, harmony and selflessness. Knowing Divinity, serving Divinity, trusting in Divinity, remembering Divinity, cherishing Divinity and loving Divinity are the woof and warp of the true Islam.

"Consequently, to speak of Islamic terrorism is a contradiction in terms. On the other hand, to speak of the terrorism of someone who refers to himself or herself as Muslim is not necessarily a contradiction in terms.

"So called Muslims who advocate the use of force and violence in order to impose their distorted interpretation of Islam onto others do a great violence to the spirit of Islam. This is so for four reasons.

"First, the use of force and violence to induce compliance from others in matters of religion is inconsistent with one of the central precepts of Islam. More specifically, there can be no compulsion used in bringing about the realization of the essential spiritual nature of human beings.

"The kind of submission that God seeks comes only through an individual's free will or unforced offering. To intimidate, extort, or terrorize people, in order to get them to adopt a Muslim's interpretation of things, completely violates the spiritual etiquette of Islam.

"Secondly, with respect to those who resort to the use of force, violence or terror in order to secure acquiescence from others on a variety of social issues, those people display a profound lack of trust in God. These sorts of individuals do not have confidence in the capacity of the will of

Divinity to effectively carry out Divine purposes independently of what people do or don't do.

"People who rely on violence and terror to achieve their allegedly spiritual objectives have a very inflated opinion of themselves. They seem to assume that if they did not use violence or terror, God would be helpless to realize Divine wishes. Those people have a pathetic and extremely warped understanding of the ways of Divinity.

"Thirdly, whoever employs force and violence as tools of persuasion reveals an enormous poverty of imagination, creativity, wisdom and spiritual artistry. Submission comes through the heart's attraction to the beauty, nobility and integrity of the example that reflects the light of Divinity. Force and violence will never generate those attraction.

"Someone once said: 'Violence is the last refuge of incompetence'. People who are inclined to terror and violence as instruments of spiritual evangelism are admitting incompetence.

"In effect, they are acknowledging they lack the personal resources of integrity, inventiveness and a generosity of spirit that are needed to exercise spiritual competence in finding artful, non-violent solutions to problems in the face of adversity. There is absolutely nothing resourceful about killing other people.

"Fourthly, and finally, anyone who uses force, violence and/or terror as part of their yellow-brick road to paradise is debasing the nature of the intention that should be behind all of a Muslim's actions. Everything should be done for the sake of God's satisfaction and pleasure.

"If one is committing acts of violence because one believes this will be one's ticket of admission to heaven, the intention underlying one's acts is the achievement of paradise, not the pleasure of God. God's pleasure merely becomes a means to one's own ends.

"In addition, if a group or individual actually believes that God finds either pleasure or satisfaction in acts of terror or misguided violence, then, those people have a very distorted understanding of how to go about pleasing God. Unfortunately, those beliefs have been very prevalent throughout history, and not just amongst Muslims."

As Professor Donaldson concluded, Dr. Jameson stood up and went to the front of the room, near where Rachel was standing. On behalf of the Bettinger Foundation, he expressed an appreciation for her willingness

to share her ideas with the people in attendance. He also reminded people of the coffee and other refreshments awaiting them near the back wall. Finally, he thanked everyone for coming to the program.

While watching Dr. Jameson express appreciation to Professor Donaldson for sharing her ideas with the audience, my clinical training wouldn't permit me to miss the fact that his body language was very much out of sync with his words.

Apparently, for whatever reason, Dr. Donaldson was the source of the irritation that I had observed in Dr. Jameson about half way through the Q and A session.

There was a question that I wanted to ask Professor Donaldson so I made my way, against traffic, down to the front of the room. Introducing myself to her, I said: "Hi, my name is David Phelps."

She smiled, offering her hand. We briefly shook hands.

I followed up with: "I won't keep you very long Professor Donaldson, but I wanted to compliment you on your responses to the audience's queries. I'm afraid a rather untimely set of traffic foul-ups prevented me from hearing the prepared part of your presentation, and on the basis of your post-lecture performance, I would say my loss is considerable."

She smiled and replied: "You're very kind. However, I strongly suspect there might be a number of people who came today who do not share your opinion of what went on."

Thinking of Dr. Jameson and, possibly, Dr. Clarke, I silently agreed with her but found myself saying: "Really, what makes you think so?"

She arched her eyebrows, slowly angled her head in a way that seemed to allude to unknown knowledge and shrugged. She smiled and looked away.

I used the silence as a natural lead-in to the question I had wanted to ask. "Actually, Professor Donaldson, if the topic is not too personal, I was wondering how you came to have so much knowledge and insight into Muslim groups and things Islamic. Are you Muslim?"

She looked at me for a brief instant, as if she were trying to assess what was motivating the question and the interest. Eventually, she said: "No, I'm not Muslim, but my husband is. We have a number of Muslim friends, some of whom are women.

"Whatever understanding of Islam and Muslims I have comes mostly from them and my husband. I've also done a little bit of research on my own to supplement my personal connection."

Although she had answered the question forthrightly, I sensed there was some sort of discomfort on her part in relation to the topic. Feeling I might have intruded into sensitive issues, I decided to make good my retreat.

I smiled and extended my hand toward her, saying, as I did: "Well, wherever the understanding comes from, I found it very informative and enlightening. Again, I just want to say I really did enjoy the part of your presentation that I was able to hear."

She met my hand with hers and gave a smile in acknowledgment and appreciation of my words. I turned to leave when another question occurred to me.

Stopping, I turned around. "This is neither here nor there as a question," I said, "but are you associated with the Bettinger Foundation in any way?"

An undecipherable, and somewhat strange, look winked into and out of existence on her face. "No," she answered simply.

I decided not to pursue it further. I nodded my head in thanks for her answer, waved my hand in a gesture of departure, and left.

Having decided to skip refreshments, I was on my way toward the exit, when Dr. Jameson addressed me from behind. "Leaving so soon, Dr. Phelps?"

Turning, I said: "Yeah, I've had a long day. Moreover, getting stuck in traffic on the way here didn't help things any."

"Ah!" he said, in a way that seemed to indicate an important puzzle had been solved. "We were wondering what had been keeping you."

"Oh, what a shame," he exclaimed. "There were some people who had come today, and I wanted you to meet them."

I shook my head. "Sorry Dr. Jameson ... maybe another time." Dr. Jameson just stood there, not saying or doing anything that could be interpreted as a signal that helped bring the exchange to closure. In fact, he seemed to want to say something else but looked like he was having trouble formulating it in an acceptable manner.

Since Dr. Jameson appeared reluctant to let me go on my way, I lied a little: "Well, I do apologize for running out on you like this, but there are a few errands I have to look after before I can consider myself a free man."

"Yes, yes," he replied, and added: "Of course," in a sort of preoccupied manner. He stuck out his hand to bid me farewell.

As I took his hand, he said: "I hope there was nothing in Professor Donaldson's talk that upset you and is causing you to depart prematurely. I noticed you were speaking to her at the end of the session."

His words felt like they had a probing quality to them. He was hoping, perhaps, that I might give an account of what had gone on between Dr. Donaldson and myself. His curiosity or interest had an odd quality to it.

"No, not at all," I remarked. "Why would you think that?" I asked. My question appeared to embarrass him. He was flustered for a moment.

Finally, he stammered: "Yes, yes, you're quite right. There is no reason for me to think anything of the sort."

He followed, somewhat hurriedly I thought, with: "I'm glad you could attend Dr. Phelps." He was ushering me toward the door.

As we neared the door, he inquired: "So, when do you think we might be hearing from you concerning the consulting proposal? I don't wish to rush you on this, Dr. Phelps, but, if you will recall, during our luncheon conversation, I did indicate there were going to be some activities this summer that are being sponsored by the Bettinger Foundation.

"I do believe you might find them to be of interest. Furthermore, I have absolutely no doubt those programs would benefit tremendously from your presence and participation."

We walked through the open doorway, and I took a few steps toward the down escalator before stopping. Facing him, I asked: "Would ten days be too long?"

"Ten days is fine," he responded. "The programs I have in mind won't be kicking in until the end of the month, so, if you decide to join us, ten days from now will leave us plenty of time to work out some possibilities."

"Good," I said. "I'll be in touch with you somewhere around the 16th or 17th, Dr. Jameson."

I turned, took a few steps, and hopped onto the escalator. I smiled and waved good-bye as I sunk out of sight.

By the time I got back to the apartment, it was around 6:30 p.m. . I took the elevator from the garage and pressed the first floor button, intending to pick up whatever mail might have arrived earlier in the day.

Stepping out of the elevator, I headed for the mail area. Nick, part of the building's security staff, saw me step off the elevator.

Somewhat nervously, he informed me there were a couple of men who wanted to talk with me. I was told the men were waiting for me in the manager's office.

"Who are they, Nick?" I asked in a puzzled tone of voice. He answered with three letters: "FBI."

Now, I was really puzzled. What could they possibly want with me? "Is the building manager with them?" I inquired.

"No, he's gone for the day. They just got here a short while ago, so I let them into his office.

"They said they intended to wait a little bit to see if you would show up. They wanted some place where they wouldn't be conspicuous and also that was private so they could talk with you in case you came."

I thanked Nick -- although 'thanks' was not what I was feeling. I made my way to the manager's office and opened the door.

I was greeted with: "Are you David Phelps?" by the shorter of the two men.

"That's right," I acknowledged.

The shorter of the two flashed a badge and announced: "I'm Special Agent Williams." Turning slightly toward the other man, he added: "This is Special Agent Bradley."

He started to put his identification away. "Excuse me," I said more calmly than I felt, "Could I see your identification again please Mr. Williams? I would like to see your identification as well Mr. ... is it Brady?"

"It's Special Agent Bradley," he said, as he handed me his identification.

Agent Williams seemed a little irritated as I collected his identification from him. Agent Bradley seemed slightly amused.

I looked at their identification papers and badges as if I knew what I was doing. I handed the documents back to the agents and said: "Well, everything looks to be in order, but, of course, with technology being what it is today, they could be forgeries."

"I assure you they are not," Agent Williams said. However, you are welcome to phone our Boston office if you wish to confirm the authenticity of our identifications."

"That won't be necessary," I indicated. "What can I do for you?" I sat down.

Agent Bradley was the designated observer. He stayed in the background and studied my reactions while his partner posed the questions.

Agent Williams began: "Federal records indicate you recently visited Brian Idaho at the federal penitentiary? Is that correct?"

"Do you feel your records are in need of my confirmation in order to become official?" I asked. I continued on with: "Why do you people always ask questions to which you already know the answer?"

Agent Williams was fast becoming annoyed with my manner. Agent Bradley remained cool and expressionless.

"Just answer the question, Mr. Phelps," said Agent Williams. "Doctor," I said.

"I don't understand your response," Agent Williams remarked.

"It's Dr. Phelps, Agent Williams, not Mr.. I worked hard for the degree. And, the answer to your question is: Yes, I did visit with Brian Idaho at the federal penitentiary."

"What did you speak about with Mr. Idaho?" Agent Williams asked.

"Why don't you ask him?" I retorted. "He's your guest."

"We would love to do that, Dr. Phelps," Agent Williams said, with a slight emphasis on 'Dr.': "The problem is, Brian Idaho escaped from prison two days ago."

Somewhat sarcastically, he added: "Naturally, we take exception to that sort of thing. It's against the rules."

"We feel you might know something about the matter. You see, you were the last person to visit him. The information we have is that you spoke with Mr. Idaho for a very long time."

"A few days later, he disappears. I'm sure you can guess how the pieces of the puzzle are beginning to fit together for us.

"You could be in a lot of trouble, Dr. Phelps. Helping a felon to escape, or giving aid to an escaped felon, are federal offenses.

"Consequently, I highly recommend parking your attitude and beginning to co-operate with us. Do you think you could accomplish that?"

"Why don't you lighten up, Agent Williams," I shot back. "If you people have evidence I helped Brian Idaho escape, arrest me and let's go to court."

I glared at him for a moment, doing my best to convey a sense of dignified defiance. I took a deep breath, seeking to gain some degree of emotional equilibrium, and proceeded in a different direction.

"I met Brian Idaho. I talked with him for several hours, mostly about history and Native spirituality. End of story. There's nothing more to say."

Almost immediately, Agent Williams inquired: "Where did you first meet Mr. Idaho?"

I was silent for a few seconds. On the one hand, I could continue on with my wise-guy routine and enjoy whatever forms of irritation and frustration I could introduce into the lives of Agents Williams and Bradley. On the other hand, I could try to get through the interview as quickly and as non-problematically as possible.

The war-resister aspect of my personality was partial to the former possibility. My professional side was leaning toward the latter course of action. I decided, on this occasion, that, perhaps: "discretion was the better part of valor" and chose to cooperate as best I could.

"The one and only time I met Brian Idaho was during the prison visit," I replied.

Agent Williams followed up with: "So, how did you come to visit him in prison?"

"Brian's sister Beth asked me to visit him," I said

"How long have you known Beth Idaho?" he asked.

I thought briefly and told him: "About ten days. She came into my office seeking help. I tried to help her out by going to the prison and speaking with Brian as she asked me to."

"Why did she want you speak with her brother?" he inquired. "She was worried about Brian," I informed him.

"What was she worried about?" he wanted to know.

"I'm afraid you'll have to get that information in some other way, Agent Williams. It falls under the protective privilege of the therapist and patient relationship."

"She was a client of yours?" he asked.

"Isn't that what I just told you?" I stated rhetorically. I realized I was dancing a fine line between truth and fiction in saying Beth was my client. However, I wasn't about to start talking to the FBI about spiritual visions and the symbolism of owls.

Ignoring my retort, he pressed on: "How did she believe you could help her brother?"

"There was no definite plan," I remarked. "Going to visit her brother was very much of an exploratory venture. Neither Beth nor I had any specific idea in mind except that something might turn up if I spoke with Brian."

"Did anything turn up in your conversation with Mr. Idaho?" he inquired.

"Nothing that I recognized as those," I answered.

"What does that mean?" he asked.

"It means 'N' 'O', Agent Williams," I blurted out.

Returning to the attack, he said: "Do you know where Beth Idaho is?"

"To the best of my knowledge, she is on vacation," I informed him. "I have no idea where she is spending her time.

"I've tried to contact her on several occasions and left messages for her. I've yet to receive any return reply from her."

Pressing relentlessly on, he asked: "Do you know the present whereabouts of Warren Idaho?"

"Not really," I responded. "Beth mentioned something about him being in South America working with various indigenous peoples. She didn't specify a particular location. I don't even know if she knows, for sure, where he is."

Agent Williams looked over at Agent Bradley. "Do you have any questions, Paul?"

Agent Bradley shook his head in the negative and rose from his chair. Agent Williams stood up as well.

He reached into the inside, left breast pocket of his suit jacket and pulled out a wallet. He took out a card and handed it to me.

As he did this, he said: "If you make contact with Beth Idaho before we do, I suggest you tell her we would like very much to question her about this matter. Furthermore, it's conceivable we might have some more questions to ask you as our investigation develops, so don't wander too far, Dr. Phelps, if you get my drift."

The rebellious side of me bubbled to the surface, having broken free from its tether. "Agent Williams, I read you five by five. It's always a joyous occasion to spend time with those dedicated servants of democracy as yourselves."

We all left the building manager's office. They went about their business, and I went about mine.

The next day was Tuesday. I decided to go to my off-campus office, check for mail there and pick up a few books I had bought to read during the summer months. I also wanted to make a phone call.

There was nothing of importance in the mail. I reached for the phone and dialed the desired number.

A few seconds later I heard: "Hello?"

"Ken," I said, "it's David Phelps. How are you and your Justice Department doing these days?"

"Dave, it's nice to hear from you. I was beginning to think you had fallen off the face of the earth.

"I'm doing fine," he answered in response to my query, "but I'm not convinced the Justice Department is in such good shape. A lot of strange things are going on these days."

"That sounds intriguing," I offered. "It's just the sort of juicy tidbit an old lion like me longs to sink his feeble fangs into in order to jump start his life."

"Naw," said Ken, "this stuff is too fast for an old geezer like you. You'd have a heart attack the first time you chased it around the block."

I chuckled and broached the main purpose of my call. "Ken, I'm hoping you might be able to help me with something."

"What, are you under federal indictment again?" he teased. "I thought you had left your draft-dodging days behind you long ago."

"Well," I remarked, "strange things happen in more places than Washington. However, to answer your question: No, I am not under federal indictment." I paused for a few seconds and, finally, mumbled: "Not yet anyway."

Ken said: "Oh, oh! This is beginning to sound serious and complicated. What's up, Dave?"

"It's a long story that I would rather not get into at the present time. I might be talking to you about it soon enough. I was thinking of visiting you in a few days ... that is, if you were going to be available."

"Come on down. Pam and the kids would love to see you again. It's been too long. I might even be willing to talk with you."

"Is this coming weekend okay?" I inquired

"I don't think there will be a problem, but I'll check with Pam. If you don't hear from me by tonight, it means the coast is clear."

"Ah ... Ken, there's one more thing," I indicated. Have you ever heard of an organization known as the Bettinger Foundation?"

Ken was silent for a brief period. "The name rings a distant bell, Dave, but it's all kind of hazy. Why?"

"Do me a favor and see what you can find out about them," I requested. "They have offered me a very lucrative external consulting position, but, for some reason, I have a funny feeling about the whole thing. Maybe you can help me allay my anxieties or put a concrete face on them so that I know with what I might be dealing."

"Done," Ken said. "And, Dave, if we are on for this weekend, give me a call before you come so we can make arrangements to pick you up at the airport."

"I will," I assured him. "I hope to see you all in a few days. Bye, for now, Ken."

"Roger that," he responded and hung up.

I put the phone down on its cradle and sat back in my chair. I closed my eyes and began thinking about my relationship with Ken.

We had known each other for more than thirty years. We had met while going to college.

We were both rebels, and this had been the bond that drew us together initially. But, we were very different kinds of rebel.

Ken was a Vietnam veteran, yet, he was the one who had counseled me to go to Canada. He referred to us as Mr. Inside and Mr. Outside.

We each wanted to change things. He used to joke about how Mr. Inside and Mr. Outside would catch the system in a pincer movement and roll on to victory over injustice and stupidity.

I was pulled back to the here and now by a knock on the door. "Come in, please," I said as I cleared the last remnants of reminiscence from my consciousness.

The door opened and in walked Beth Idaho. She looked different somehow, but in a way I couldn't identify.

I jumped up. "Beth, where have you been?" I cried, partly in relief, partly with happiness, and partly out of curiosity."

She gave me a mournful and frightened look. Finally, she said: "I don't know ... I don't know where I've been."



Chapter 8: The Masked Marvel

I came around from behind the desk and helped guide Beth to a chair in front of the desk. When she sat down, I kneeled down and clasped both of her hands in mine. She was in obvious distress.

"Take your time, Beth," I said, "but, if you can, tell me what you remember of the things that happened since we last met. Did you get my messages"?

She nodded her head. "Today," she whispered.

"Did you just get back from your vacation?" I asked.

"Vacation?" she said quizzically.

"Yeah," I affirmed. "When I came back from seeing Brian, I phoned your work number at the library. They said you had gone on vacation."

Beth withdrew her hands from mine and lowered her head, resting her forehead on the palms of her hand, while her elbows rested on her knees. She was shaking her head in her hands.

Finally, she said softly, with head still bowed: "I don't remember going on vacation or even asking to go on vacation."

"What's the last thing you remember?" I inquired.

Beth raised her head and looked at me. The look in her eyes was vacant for a few seconds, but, soon, I saw signs in them of an attempt to struggle to remember.

"Ahhh ...," she began, "I remember phoning the prison and leaving a message for Brian about your coming." She thought a bit more and said: "After the call, I remember wanting to take a walk in the ravine behind where I live."

Her eyes had the appearance of someone retracing past actions. In quick succession, she switched her focus from the ceiling, to the floor, to the wall on her right. Eventually, she looked at me.

"I remember walking along the ravine. My head was down. My feet were kind of on automatic pilot. I was preoccupied thinking about our session in your office, about Brian and about your up-coming visit with him."

Beth fought hard to concentrate at this point. She closed her eyes.

She placed the fingers of her hands on her temples. She was silent for about a minute, and, finally, she shook her head.

"I have a vague sense of some sort of presence near me. I don't know whether this was a person, animal or what."

"I remember starting to look up, and, then, I recall feeling dizzy and having difficulty in breathing, but ... ," and her voice trailed off. She shook her head and said: "Nothing after that."

I raised myself from my kneeling position and perched myself on the edge of the desk near her. "Beth," I cautioned, "I'm going to ask you a series of quick questions. The questions might sound silly to you, but humor me and just give me the information that I ask for, okay?"

She nodded her head in assent. As she waited for my questions, she sat back in the chair.

I proceeded to ask her about some biographical details of her life. Beth had given these details to me during our first session together.

After the questions about her life, I made a few inquiries concerning general knowledge issues. Finally, I explored certain aspects of her procedural memory.

My brief examination was far from rigorous or exhaustive. However, I was satisfied that Beth didn't appear to be suffering from any of several possible kinds of amnesia.

I returned to her account of events. "Beth, you said you got my messages about Brian. Do you remember how you got back to your home or when you returned?"

She seemed somewhat embarrassed. She shrugged and said: "I awoke in my bed. I have no memory of either coming back to my place or going to bed."

Mentally, I began running through, and considering, in relation to what I knew of Beth, various possibilities from amongst the categories of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. More extensive testing would, of course, be necessary, but I thought about various kinds of psychotic episodes and anxiety disorders and rejected them.

A more likely candidate was a dissociative or fugue state of some sort. There were many cases in the literature of people going on a sort of "mental holiday or hiatus" for anywhere from a few hours to days, weeks and even months at a time. There could be many stressful life circumstances that could result in those dissociative or fugue states.

In trying to narrow down some of the possibilities that might account for her lapse of memory, I sought more information. "Forgive me for asking this, Beth," I apologized in an attempt to prepare her, "but it's important for me to know certain things. I wouldn't ask otherwise."

"Obviously," I added, "you don't have to answer my questions if you don't want to. They involve sensitive and very personal issues. However, please believe me when I say that you should not feel there is any judgment on my part if your answer to any of the questions I need to ask should be 'yes'."

She looked at me with an air of both curiosity and anxiety, presumably wondering what the nature of the questions might be that would require her to be prepared in this fashion. She nodded slightly giving me what I hoped was a sign to proceed.

I began: "Do you drink much alcohol, or do you take any non-medical drugs?"

She answered in a matter of fact way: "No." She didn't seem to be offended by the question, and the 'no' didn't appear to be anything other than a straightforward response to my query.

I followed up with a potentially more difficult question, both for her and for me. "Were you ever sexually abused by a family member or someone else whom you trusted and respected?"

Beth lowered her head and shook it. "No," she said very softly. She was blushing a little.

She could have been lying. Nonetheless, I felt she probably was just feeling embarrassment for both of us because those questions had to be asked.

She raised her head again and looked me in the eye. "No," she re-confirmed.

Another possibility occurred to me that was not among the diagnostic categories of any DSM checklist. Yet, because the possibility I had in mind was consistent with her memory lapse, I decided to seek possible corroborating data, despite its rather far-fetched nature.

"Have you ever had an experience of missing time like this before, Beth?" I queried. I quickly added: "Maybe, those episodes of missing time might not have been as long as your present experience. Maybe, they might only have lasted a few hours."

She shook her head in the negative. "I don't think so, David."

I reflected on the situation for a few minutes. The far -fetched possibility that I had been entertaining concerned the "alien abduction phenomenon" that was getting an increasing amount of attention from a number of reputable psychiatrists, therapists and serious researchers.

In a period of just ten years, the abduction phenomenon had jumped from the supermarket tabloids to the waiting rooms of professional people. According to the journal articles I had read, nobody among the professionals had reached any firm conclusions about what was going on with the 'abductees', as they were referred to. On the other hand, most of the authors did agree that something of psychological significance was going on, whatever it might finally turn out to be.

I hadn't given up on the possibility that Beth's extended memory lapse might be due to some stress-related dissociative process. Moreover, there were a number of potential organic or biological causes that ought to be checked out by a neurologist or psychiatrist.

Finally, I said: "Beth, would you be willing to be hypnotized? We might be able to find out some important information through those a procedure."

She considered my words. Her facial expressions seemed to indicate she was of mixed feelings about the prospect of hypnosis.

Beth pushed air back and forth in her mouth, from cheek to cheek. First, one cheek would puff up, be deflated, and, then, the other cheek would be inflated, before the air, again, was withdrawn and shifted to the other side of her face.

She returned from her journey of preoccupation by saying: "I'm not crazy about the idea of being hypnotized. On the other hand, I am not exactly thrilled about having lost eight or nine days out of my life either."

She sighed and asked me: "Do you think there is some chance this loss of memory could happen again?"

"I really don't know, Beth," I responded honestly. "Hypnosis might help to either eliminate some of the possible causal candidates I have in mind or help confirm them as the source of your problem. In either event, we'll be further ahead than we are now."

She vacillated a bit longer. I took the opportunity afforded by the delay to inform her of an additional aspect that should be factored into her decision.

"I don't know if this is going to make any difference in the nature of your decision, Beth, but I wouldn't be the one who is doing the hypnosis. There is a woman psychologist with whom I'm acquainted who is quite proficient as a hypnotherapist. I'm thinking of asking her to help us out with this.

"If you decided to go ahead with the hypnosis, and if this woman agrees to work with us, I'm sure there would be no objections on her part for me to be present during the session if that would make you feel more comfortable." I paused slightly and added: "I suppose I'm being somewhat presumptuous. Maybe, you would rather not have me be present at those a session."

Beth smiled. "Yes, you are being presumptuous, David, but I think I would like to have you there in any case."

"Is that a 'yes'?" I asked.

"Why not," she replied.

I got up from the edge of the desk on which I had been perched while talking with Beth. I went around to my chair and sat down.

I opened the drawer of the desk and pulled out a brown -covered book listing addresses and phone numbers. After thumbing through the pages for a moment, I found the desired name and number.

Grabbing the phone, I proceeded to hit the necessary keys. I leaned back in my chair and waited to see if there would be an answer.

Someone responded at the other end of the phone connection. "Hello, can I help you?"

"Is this Dr. Jennifer Ormsby?" I queried. "Yes," she said. Her reply was part confirmation and part question. The question was an unspoken: 'Who wants to know'? ... or, 'What is this about'?

"My name is David Phelps. We work in the same building, and we've met at a few conferences."

"Oh, yes, I remember. What can I do for you?"

Side-stepping her question for the time being, I asked: "Did I catch you at a bad time? Can you talk for a short while?"

"No, go ahead," she assured me. "I'm not busy at the moment."

Having received the green light, I returned to her earlier question about how she might be able to help me. "I have a client who is with me now, and she has a presenting symptom of an eight or nine day memory lapse. I've considered, checked for, and rejected a number of obvious possibilities."

"There are a number of other causal candidates that, conceivably, could be eliminated through one or more sessions of hypnosis. One of these possibilities involves a phenomenon in which you are interested. I read your recently published article on it."

I only alluded to the phenomenon in which Dr. Ormsby was interested because I didn't want to put any ideas in Beth's head. Furthermore, I raised the possibility of the abduction phenomenon because I thought it would intrigue the good doctor and entice her to help us out.

"And, Dr. Ormsby," I stipulated, "perhaps I should tell you up front. I'm helping this client on a pro bono basis. Consequently, if you're inclined to assist us, I'm kind of hoping you might be willing to offer your services on that same basis, or, at the very least, a substantially reduced rate to be negotiated by all concerned parties."

She listened patiently to what I said. When I finished, she quite wisely asked: "Are there any other conditions about which I should know?"

"Nothing major," I offered. "But, if you could see your way to doing this yesterday, you would have my eternal gratitude."

"Eternity, Dr. Phelps, is a very long time. If I were you, I wouldn't go promising something I might not be able to deliver on."

I countered with: "Would you accept eternity less a day?" "Not without checking your credibility history," she shot back. "In that case," I remarked, "I really would have no choice but to throw myself and my client upon the mercy of your court." "Sounds rather abusive," she commented.

"Which?" I asked, "the throwing or the seeking of your mercy?" "The former," she asserted.

"May I interpret your response to mean we can count on not being abused by the quality of your mercy?" I said in the most imploring tone of voice I could manage.

"Your client probably can count on my mercy", she stated. "I'm not sure I would be willing to extend the same courtesy to you."

Not willing to call it a day on the verbal repartee, I said: "You are aware, I sincerely hope, Doctor, the tremendously damaging ramifications that those rejectionist statements can have in the development of various pathological conditions in an individual." As I said this, I smiled and winked at Beth just to assure her, in case she hadn't been able to tell by my manner that this portion of the conversation was all in jest.

"Dr. Phelps," said Jennifer Ormsby, "I'm quite certain the adverse ramifications of anything I might say to you would be small potatoes compared to the magnitude of your already considerable pathological condition."

I decided to surrender unconditionally. "Well, if you are willing to extend mercy only to my client, I can live with that. What do you say, Dr. Ormsby, a deal?"

"When and where," she inquired?

"How about your office?" I offered generously. "I'll let you pick the day and time."

"There's no time like the present," she sighed. "Give me about twenty minutes to finish off something and come over. Is that all right?"

"Perfection," I admitted, "but, with one minor difficulty. I don't know whether to come down, up, or across in order to get to your office."

"I'm in 317 West," she informed me. "Please knock before entering."

"Thank you, very much, Dr. Ormsby," I acknowledged. "Having taken your counseling to heart, I might not be able to manage an eternity of gratitude, or even an eternity minus a day of gratitude, but I am, sincerely, in your debt."

"Don't worry," she said, "I'll find some means through which you might work your way out of indebtedness. See you both shortly," and she hung up.

While waiting to go to Dr. Ormsby's office, I talked a little bit with Beth about the general nature of hypnosis. I didn't want to say anything that would leave her with false expectations or distorted impressions of the process.

However, I did want to help her feel positive toward, and open to, the general idea of hypnosis. The intention was not only to help her alleviate some of the anxiety she undoubtedly was feeling about the soon-to-arrive unknown, but help her, as well, to be in a relaxed frame of mind going into the procedure.

Some twenty minutes later, we began to make our way down and over to 317 West. When we reached the office, I, per instructions, knocked.

Dr. Ormsby opened the door, smiled and introduced herself to Beth. She said hello to me and showed us both into another office behind the first room.

She waited for us to come through the entrance to the inner office and closed the door behind her as she came into the room. She pointed to several seats by a coach, and after we sat down, she sat on the couch across from us.

Once we were all settled, I said: "Dr. Ormsby, unless you have some objections, Beth has indicated to me that she would like me to be present during the session. Do you foresee any problem with that arrangement?"

"None at all. It's probably a good idea for you to be present."

"Naturally, you should restrict your participation to that of an observer. Once the session is over, we collectively can decide how to proceed."

Dr. Ormsby turned to Beth. "Where do you feel you would be most comfortable?" she inquired. "On the couch where you're sitting, or maybe in the chair where Dr. Phelps is sitting?"

Beth briefly considered the options. "I'll stay where I am," she indicated.

"Before this gets underway," I intervened, "did you want any background information, Dr. Ormsby, concerning either Beth or the situation leading up to the memory lapse?"

"Not really. I often prefer to go into the initial session with as few preconceived notions as possible. Although one can never have a situation entirely free of those preconceptions, I find that keeping them to a minimum is, in the long run, advantageous.

"Consequently, as much as is feasible, I try to let the person relate her or his experiences unencumbered by any biases of mine. Whatever comes from the first session helps lay the foundation on which subsequent explorations are constructed."

Jennifer Ormsby was quiet for a moment. Finally, she looked at Beth and said: "Make yourself as comfortable as you can in your chair, and when you have done that, nod your head."

From the time Beth nodded her head, Dr. Ormsby took less than a minute to induce Beth into an hypnotic state. Jennifer took another few moments to deepen the condition of hypnosis before proceeding.

"Beth," Jennifer asked, "do you remember being in the office of David Phelps today?"

"Yes," Beth said.

"Why did you go to his office, Beth?" "I ... I was upset ... upset and afraid." "Why were you upset and afraid?"

"Something ... happened," Beth responded. "What happened?" Jennifer probed. "Ahhh ... I don't know."

"Beth, just before something happened, what were you doing?" "Walking."

"Where are you walking to?" Jennifer inquired.

"... nowhere ... just walking."

"In what place are you walking, Beth?"

"The ravine."

"Where is this ravine?"

"Near ... behind my house," Beth replied.

"Why did you go to the ravine?"

"... Like it ... trees ... water ... birds ... helps me think."

"Were you thinking about something in particular during this walk, Beth?" Jennifer asked.

"Yes," she answered.

"What were you thinking about?"

"... Brian ... David's visit," Beth said.

"Beth, who is Brian?"

"Brother," came the one word response.

"What visit of David's were you thinking about?" Jennifer queried. "... to see Brian ... in prison."

"What are you feeling during your walk, Beth?"

"... happy ... hopeful," she affirmed.

"What are you seeing in the ravine?"

"... Grass ... feet ... path ...," Beth informed her.

"Whose feet do you see?" Jennifer wanted to know.

"Mine."

"Beth, what do you hear while walking in the ravine?"

"Train whistle ... far away ... water ... brook ... birds ... ahh ... something else ... to my right ... I don't ... know ... coming closer," Beth related.

"What do you do when you hear something to your right in the ravine that is coming closer?" Jennifer asked.

"... begin to look ... want to find out what's coming ... ," Beth indicated.

Beth starts to gasp and tries to catch her breath. She seemed to sway a little in the chair.

"Beth, why are you having difficulty breathing?"

"... don't know ... can't get enough air ... throat ... something's wrong."

"What else are you feeling, Beth?"

"... dizzy ... very dizzy ... everything's swirling," Beth managed, between labored gulps for air.

"Beth, what happens next?" Jennifer requested.

Beth was silent. She was squirming slightly in her seat. She shook her head, stopped, and shook her head some more.

Finally, she said in a somewhat more intense tone of voice than previously had been the case: "No ... no ... don't ... please." She fidgeted in her seat some more and, then, became silent and still again.

"What do you see, Beth?"

Beth licked her lips. "... ahh ... ahh ... bright lights ... they're hurting my eyes."

"How does your body feel, Beth?"

"It's ... ahh ... it's ... ahh ... I don't know ... some kind of vibration ... ahh ... something's humming."

Beth was silent for a few seconds. Eventually, she said: "I'm floating through the air ... must be dreaming ... can't move ... feel ... feel paralyzed."

"Do you see anyone near you, Beth?" Jennifer inquired.

Beth made some struggling motions with her head. She rolled her eyes first to the left, and, then, to the right. "... lots of little children or men or something ... ahh ... they look very strange."

"Can you describe them, Beth?"

Again, Beth looked both left and right. "... short ... skin looks grayish ... heads are quite big ... ahh ... sort of pear shaped ... can't see any ears ... huge eyes ... very black ... don't like looking in them ... frightening."

Next, Jennifer asked: "Are they saying anything to you, Beth?" Beth shook her head. "No ... no words ... their thoughts ... thoughts are in my mind ... mouths don't seem to move."

"What are their thoughts saying to you, Beth?"

"Telling me not to worry ... won't hurt me ... ahhh ... everything will be all right."

"Are they taking you anywhere, Beth?"

Beth's head moved around a little. The eyes beneath her lids seemed to be searching here and there.

"They are taking me to a ship of some kind," Beth said finally. "Can you see the ship, Beth?"

She nodded her head.

"What does the ship look like?" Jennifer inquired.

Beth was silent for ten seconds or so. "... very big ... looks like a thick dish or saucer ... silvery."

"How do you get to the ship, Beth?"

"Ahh ... bluish light is all around ... seems to be carrying me upward."

"Beth, tell me what takes place in the ship," Jennifer directed.

"... taking me to a large room ... ahh ... like ... like doctor's examining room ... putting me on table ... room is cold ... light is bright ... but can't see where its coming from ..."

Beth begins to move around in her chair. She is grimacing. "What is happening on the table, Beth?"

Beth continued to squirm and struggle in her seat throughout her description of what was happening to her during this aspect of her account. Sucking in her breath, Beth said: "... hurting me ... ahh ... using instruments ... going into me ... ooh ... painful ...," and, then, expelling her breath, she indicated: "taking ... ooph ... samples ..."

Jennifer told Beth to relax and breath easily. She also told her to go forward to the time when the procedures on the ship have been completed.

"What took place immediately following the examination on the ship, Beth?"

"... images ... thoughts ... ahh ... being sent ... too much." "What are the images and thoughts about?"

"... future ... disasters ... dying planet ... ahhh ... want me to ... to teach others ... telling me ... I'll remember later," Beth said.

"All right," Jennifer announced, "I want you to return to the present time, Beth. You are back in my office with David and myself.

"I'm going to count to three. When I reach three, Beth, you will awake relaxed and refreshed, feeling safe and secure. Do you understand what will occur when I count to three?"

"Yes," Beth replied.

"Good," Jennifer indicated. "One ... two ... three, awake Beth." On the count of three, Beth opened her eyes, blinked them a few times, looked at Jennifer, then me, and smiled. She stretched a little. "How are you feeling?" Jennifer asked of Beth.

Beth seemed to run a quick overview of how she felt. "Fine," she responded.

"There are a few questions that I would like to ask you Beth, if you don't mind," Jennifer requested.

Beth glanced over at me and back to Jennifer. She shrugged her shoulders and said: "Sure, go ahead."

Jennifer began with: "Beth, do you suffer from any sinus pain or sinus headaches on a regular or semi-regular basis?"

Beth shook her head. "I have the occasional headache like anyone else, but nothing like you are asking."

Jennifer followed with: "Do you have any persistent gastrointestinal difficulties those as irritation, pain, cramping, or bowel problems?"

Once again, Beth shook her head. "No," she said.

"Have you ever had any sudden and unexplained bleeding from your ears, nose or rectum?"

Beth thought for a few seconds and said: "No."

Jennifer continued on. "Beth, have you, either recently or in the past, had any sort of gynecological problems or complaints?"

Beth blushed a little, looked down briefly, and shook her head. When she raised her head, she said: "No."

"Do you have nightmares with recurrent themes on a more or less regular basis?" Jennifer inquired.

"No," indicated Beth simply.

"Last, but not least," Jennifer said, "have you, or anyone else in your immediate family, ever experienced problems of lapsed memory on more than one occasion?"

Beth hesitated briefly. Finally, she replied: "I can't really speak for anyone else in my family, but as far as I know, the answer to your question is no."

Jennifer smiled. "Well, that pretty much does it." As a sort of afterthought, she said: "Oops, almost forgot. I need a few samples of your hair."

She saw the puzzled look on Beth's face. There was puzzlement present in me, as well, but it was hidden.

By way of explanation, Jennifer stated: "Believe it or not, there are quite a few things that your body metabolizes that actually end up in your hair. Examining your hair might help us to identify certain metabolites that could be related to your memory lapse."

When Beth gave her permission, Jennifer set about finding some scissors. Once she had located them, she came to Beth and snipped a few hairs right at the roots.

After completing the task, Jennifer went to her desk and opened the middle drawer. She rummaged around and pulled out a small plastic bag into which she deposited the hair samples.

I motioned Jennifer to come back and sit with Beth and myself. When she had settled onto the couch, I confessed: "I'm afraid there are several small details that I have kept from both of you until now."

"I wanted to keep these facts concealed so that the hypnosis process would not be delayed or rendered more problematic, as may well have been the case if I informed both of you about these facts before the session had taken place."

"This ... this deception, if you will, was undertaken for what I hope is Beth's best interest. Now, I believe Beth's best interests will be served by

both of you coming to know what I know and, perhaps, together, we can explore various options that we might have."

Beth and Jennifer exchanged glances wondering what this was all about. Beth appeared anxious. Jennifer had a wary look in her eyes.

I turned to Beth. "Brian is missing from the prison."

"Did you know?" I inquired. "Has anyone left a message for you on your phone service?"

Beth was stunned. After getting over her initial shock, Beth shook her head in delayed response to my questions, although her response was redundant in view of her reaction.

"When ... when did it happen?" Beth wanted to know.

"I was told that it happened a few days after my visit with him," I informed her.

"Now," I said, "prepare yourselves for small detail number two. The FBI wants to question you, Beth. I know this because they paid me a visit. At the end of our tête-à-tête, they strongly suggested I tell you about their desire to speak with you if I should see you before they did.

"Apparently, they were, or are, considering me as a possible accomplice in your brother's escape. Their suspicions are based solely on my having visited with your brother a few days prior to the escape.

"I'm certain there is no other evidence that could tie me to any escape plan. If there were, I probably would be in custody right now.

"As I see it, your recent memory lapse is going to present a huge problem of credibility in the eyes of the FBI. To them, the fact you cannot account for your whereabouts during the period your brother went missing will seem to be a little too convenient and far too contrived-sounding.

"I'm worried about their jailing you, Beth. You are in a very vulnerable situation.

"Even if Dr. Ormsby were to go to them and inform them of what she had discovered during the hypnosis session, they are not likely to accept that as credible evidence. Such an account is probably even worse than no account at all."

I turned to Dr. Ormsby and said: "I hope you will not judge me too harshly for playing a little fast and loose with the truth. I'm telling you now so that, if

you want, you can disengage yourself from the situation without having to face the prospect of, possibly, unpleasant repercussions.

"As far as I know, neither Beth nor I have warrants of any sort issued against us. Beth is, at this point, merely being sought for questioning.

"You had no knowledge about any of this mess until after the fact of your induced participation under conditions of less than full disclosure. You were acting in good faith, and you have done nothing illegal.

"Consequently, you are free to: (a) show us the door; or, (b) phone the FBI and provide them with as much information as you feel is necessary concerning the manner in which you were lured into the whole affair by me.

"I'll back your story and so, I'm sure, will Beth. After all, that is exactly what happened. It's the truth of the matter."

I looked over at Beth as I was making "our" commitment. Her nod of assent cemented the offer.

"However," I continued, "I'm hoping you might be willing to help Beth and me figure out what is best for her under the present circumstances. The easiest solution might be to take Beth to see the FBI, but I'm rather pessimistic about how all that might turn out.

"A lot would depend on the questions they ask. As long as they didn't ask her where she has been for the last eight or nine days, she might be okay. Unfortunately, I'm not sure Beth can count on that kind of cooperation from the FBI."

Jennifer waited to see if I had said everything I wanted to say. When nothing but silence was forthcoming, she asked: "Why do you have so little confidence in the ability of the FBI to treat Beth fairly and justly?"

"There are a lot of reasons for my negative biases toward the FBI. Some of these are personal and could be discussed at another time. Much more relevant is the fact I believe Brian Idaho was framed by the FBI for a murder he didn't commit."

Out of the corner of my eye I could see that Beth was pleased with the statement concerning my belief in Brian's innocence. It probably was the first piece of positive news she had heard today, or, maybe, even for a few days.

Developing my train of thought, I said: "The people who framed Brian are going to be very interested in what happens with the resolution of

the prison escape. Beth's memory lapse could present them with a golden opportunity to find some sort of contrived way to nail yet another member of the Idaho family.

"The FBI, along with other branches of our government, has a wonderful history of being less than either fair or just when it comes to Native peoples. What reason do you have, Dr. Ormsby, for assuming they will change that policy for someone like Beth?"

"If you will forgive me for saying so, Dr. Phelps, this all sounds like some far-fetched, conspiratorial fantasy of a somewhat paranoid individual. Don't you think you're over-reacting a little?"

"Maybe. Sometimes, however, Dr. Ormsby, the belief that somebody is out to get one is perfectly justified when people actually are conspiring to do one in. I would say that, both historically and currently, Native peoples are more than a little justified in believing that some people in official circles, including the FBI, have it in for them.

"Those thinking might, indeed, be somewhat paranoid and conspiratorial in nature. Nonetheless, it has adaptive value in the present climate of hostility concerning Native peoples.

"My concerns are for Beth, not me. I'm hoping we can make that concern the focus of our discussion.

"If I make an error in this situation, I would prefer that my error would work in Beth's favor, and not against her best interests. If conspiratorial and paranoid thinking is an error in this case, so be it, as long as Beth derives benefit from the error."

Jennifer was silent for a moment. She had her hand near her mouth and was hitting her forefinger lightly against her mouth in a repetitive fashion, as if she were considering possibilities.

Finally, she spoke. "Even if what you say about Beth not getting a fair shake from the authorities were true, have you considered the possibility that any significant delay is going to make things look that much worse for Beth, like she was trying to avoid them because she had something to hide? Wouldn't you be playing right into the hands of the sort of people about whom you are worried?"

I had to admit that Jennifer had a good point. No matter which way we turned, there seemed to be problems.

Turning to Beth, I said: "Since you seem to be the object of this exercise, what do you think? Do you want to take your chances with the FBI and hope they don't ask any questions about where you've been for the last nine days?"

Beth wondered: "What do you think would happen if they asked that question and either I or you or Dr. Ormsby were to tell them what came out during hypnosis? Would I necessarily become an accomplice to Brian's escape just because of a story that they found to be ludicrous?"

"I don't think any of us knows the answer to that question, Beth," I offered. After quickly reviewing the situation, I indicated: "I guess it's the uncertainty surrounding precisely this issue that is making me hesitate.

"If the FBI thinks you are lying and trying to hide behind what is, for them, a fabrication of incredible proportions, who knows what they might do. At the very least, even if they didn't hold you in custody for some legal reason, they might make your life miserable."

Beth countered with: "Wouldn't the testimony of you and Dr. Ormsby count for anything?"

I shrugged my shoulders. "Maybe yes ... maybe no. They might just bring in their own psychological experts and turn things around to serve their own purposes.

"Besides," I added, "if all of this goes as far as a court trial, are you prepared to spend time locked up while your case slowly works its way onto the calendar of some Federal district court? I have a strong suspicion you wouldn't get bail on any charge related to allegedly helping a convicted murderer of an FBI agent escape prison.

"Perhaps we need to think about getting you some qualified legal counseling on these matters. Unfortunately, the judicial system in America, everywhere really, is those a swamp, no one, not even lawyers, can ever be certain whether or not one is standing on solid legal ground, or whether what had been solid is about to be transformed into quicksand."

Jennifer had been quiet for some time. She placed a hand on Beth's knee and asked her: "Would you mind, Beth, if I were to take Dr. Phelps into the outer office and speak with him in private for a moment?"

Beth said: "Sure, I guess it's all right." Nonetheless, a look of concern crossed her face, undoubtedly because she was wondering why such a private conversation would be deemed to be necessary.

I also was concerned. I hoped this turn of events didn't signify yet another bump in an already rocky road.

After we entered the outer office, Jennifer closed the door to the inner office. She motioned for me to take a seat, and, then, she sat down in an adjacent chair.

"I believe," she started out, "that we might have a problem beyond the ones we have been discussing. There were several things about the hypnotic session with Beth that have been bothering me.

"First and foremost, Dr. Phelps, I'm not convinced Beth had an abduction experience, and this is not, as you must know if you really have read my article, because I reject the possibility or reality of those experiences.

"One reason for my doubts about the authenticity of her alien abduction experience concerns the absence of any physical complaints or problems. The list of questions that I asked Beth following the hypnosis session were designed to check for the kinds of difficulties that frequently are reported by 'abductees'.

"Beth answered in the negative with respect to all of the questions I asked following the session. Of course, her negative replies, in and of themselves, are inconclusive because not each and every 'abductee' reports such symptoms or difficulties.

"A far more important reason for my doubts has to do with the character of the affect or emotion that Beth displayed during the session. It was all wrong. It didn't fit the signature profile of the kind of emotion usually exhibited by 'abductees'."

Jennifer launched into a brief explanation of what she meant by the signature profile idea. "The emotive aspects of abductees as they relive their abduction experiences is more intense than anything else I've seen in my clinical experience. They show incredible bouts of crying, screaming, sadness, grief, rage, terror and writhing about. They often perspire profusely.

"Beth reflected many of the descriptive features of an abductee's experience quite accurately. This would include aspects those as: how the experience begins; the nature of bodily sensations during the experience; how one is transported to the ship; what the ship looks like; what happens during the examination; the physical appearance of the beings; how they communicate, and what sorts of images and thoughts are projected during instances of communication.

"Nevertheless, the affective dimension of her reliving the alleged abduction experience was not even remotely similar to what I've seen in most, if not all, of the abductee cases with which I've been involved. Yes, there was a certain amount of emotion and movement associated with her retelling of her supposed experience, but it was far too ... sedate, almost matter of fact, maybe even staged."

"Dr. Ormsby, are you saying Beth was faking it? ... because if you are, then this would be saying something about her that I would find difficult to accept. If you like, such fabrication doesn't match with my signature profile of her as a person."

"Well, Dr. Phelps, this brings me to a further reservation of mine concerning the authenticity of Beth's abduction account. I believe Beth sincerely believes she was describing actual events while under hypnosis.

"If my hunch is correct, however, Beth's abduction memories were not invented by Beth but by someone else. Why someone would go to the trouble of doing this is beyond me."

Jennifer began to outline her hunch. "Early in Beth's account, she talked about having difficulty in breathing and feeling dizzy. These sensations are somewhat atypical of abductees -- or, at least, these sensations are atypical of the abductees with whom I have worked.

"On the other hand, these sensations of dizziness and difficulty in breathing are classic symptoms of someone who has ingested or inhaled certain kinds of drugs that, among other things, have anesthetic properties. Ketamine, for example, is one possibility, but there are others.

"Ketamine is an extremely powerful abreactive agent. It begins to act on an individual immediately when it is inhaled through the nose.

"This drug breaks down a person's will to resist the suggestions of those who are administering the drug. Moreover, sufficiently high doses of Ketamine also can leave a person with amnesia for the period during which the drug is active in that individual's system.

"Beth said something was coming toward her from the right. She looked up and began to have difficulty breathing and felt dizzy.

"Ketamine has been one of the drugs of choice for those wishing to abduct people who, otherwise, normally might be expected to resist the idea of being taken hostage or kidnapped by a person or persons unknown. Oftentimes, what happens is that the perpetrator uses a dispersal method

that will allow the drug to be released into the nasal passages of the intended victim, where it begins to take effect immediately.

"Another possible candidate might be flunitrazepam, somewhat better known under the trade name of Rohypnol. This drug is tasteless, odorless and colorless.

"More importantly, when ingested in the right amount, people who have been under the influence of Rohypnol not only have been known to experience hallucinations, but they also often develop complete amnesia in relation to how they received the drug or what transpired after ingesting it.

"Unfortunately, Rohypnol has become one of the tools used by certain animals, sometimes euphemistically referred to as men, in order to be able to sexually assault unsuspecting women with minimal, if any, legal complications. Ketamine has been used for the same purposes."

Jennifer seemed to be considering other possibilities. After a pause of some 10-15 seconds, she said: "I suppose tetrodotoxin might fit into this scenario as well. The floating sensation that Beth described has featured prominently in the reports of quite a few people who have been under the influence of this substance.

"In addition, people exposed to tetrodotoxin frequently mention suffering both acute respiratory difficulties and considerable dizziness, similar to what Beth indicated while under hypnosis. Moreover, Beth indicated experiencing a tingling or vibrational sensation of some sort just prior to the actual abduction memories, followed by a sense of paralysis. These kinds of effects and sensations are quite consistent with the symptoms associated with the influence of tetrodotoxin.

"One or more of these kinds of drugs could have been given to Beth when she was in the ravine. The intensive use of these drugs, plus various kinds of hypnotic conditioning, over a period of eight or nine days, might provide an alternative, plausible account for many of the things that Beth believes she has experienced in the context of a supposed alien abduction incident.

"Maybe, Beth did have an abduction experience, but one that is quite different from what her memories under hypnosis would suggest. Maybe her abduction memories were implanted by someone for some, as of yet, unknown purpose.

"This is why I asked for the hair samples. What I told Beth was true, just not the whole truth.

"I know someone at the University who could test for the presence of certain metabolites associated with Ketamine and a few other drug possibilities. The results could be ready in 24-48 hours."

In an attempt to strengthen her proposal, Jennifer asked: "Furthermore, don't you feel the nearly simultaneous occurrence of Brian's escape and Beth's memory-lapse incident is much too peculiar to be purely coincidental?"

"I don't believe in these kinds of coincidences," Jennifer proclaimed. "I am of the opinion there's always something significant going on beneath the surface that brings those events together."

My initial reaction was to shake my head and say: 'Dr. Ormsby, you sound as conspiratorial and paranoid as you believe me to be. Maybe more so.' My second reaction, that went unspoken, was to acknowledge to myself that there might be something to her conjectures.

Jennifer seemed amused about the change in direction of finger pointer. "I might not share your paranoid biases concerning the FBI, Dr. Phelps, but this doesn't mean I naively assume we live in a world free from evildoers. Furthermore, unlike your theory concerning the FBI, my hypothesis concerning foul play is much more amenable to being tested."

"So, what about Beth?" I persisted. "My ideas about the FBI might not be as testable as your thesis is, but I believe a very powerful historical case can be constructed in support of that perspective, especially in conjunction with people like Beth."

Sighing, I said: "If we can avoid doing so, I would prefer that we keep Beth away from the FBI for a few days. I might be clutching for a will-o-the-wisp, but, Beth's position might be more tenable in a few days than it appears to be right now. I would like to give her that chance."

"Besides," I added, "if your twisted abduction hypothesis turns out to be true, we might be able to use that evidence to help defend Beth. Certainly, the FBI would be more prepared to accept your kind of abduction scenario than what came out during Beth's hypnosis session."

Jennifer suddenly interjected: "Why doesn't Beth come and stay with me for a few days? If, as you say, there is no outstanding warrant concerning her, then I don't think I'll be running too big a risk in having her as a house guest for a day or two."

"In any event, even if the FBI were following you around, hoping you might lead them to Brian or Beth, there is no established connection between you and me. Our getting together today was entirely fortuitous and unplanned, so they really have no reason to come looking for me in conjunction with Beth, you or Brian."

Apparently checking for possible holes in her logic, she inquired: "Did you meet anyone, or were you seen by anyone, on your way over here?"

I reflected briefly and shook my head. "No, to the best of my knowledge, everything was pretty deserted, even in the elevators."

Warming to the idea of having Beth as a house guest, Jennifer thought of another possibility. "You know, I don't have much on tap for the next little while. I could spend some time with Beth, and if there are no professional objections, maybe I could work with her on some of the traumatic aspects surrounding her recent memory-lapse ordeal, whatever it turns out to be.

"Unless something of a significant nature changes in all this, we could maintain the arrangement I'm suggesting until, at least, the tests at the University have been completed. At that time, we'll all get together again and decide what to do. How does it sound?"

"Let's go see what Beth says," I suggested.

We joined Beth once more in the inner office. Without mentioning the abduction theory, we outlined Jennifer's offer. We also explained, to a degree, how the results of the tests on Beth's hair samples might be a big help in improving Beth's situation in relation to the FBI. Finally, we introduced the idea of Jennifer being able to work with Beth on the memory-lapse issue while we awaited the test results.

Beth seemed greatly relieved after hearing what we had to say. She probably spent quite a few anxiety-filled moments during our absence from the room wondering how our talk might affect her future.

After Beth accepted the proposal, Jennifer said: "You realize, of course, Beth, we can't go back to your place and pick up any of your things. That would sort of defeat the whole purpose of my brilliantly constructed strategy," she proclaimed in self-mockery.

"But, don't worry, we'll manage somehow," Jennifer affirmed, trying to ease whatever discomfort Beth might be feeling. "If we need to," Jennifer added, "we can buy a few things to tide you over."

A thought suddenly occurred to me. "Beth, when are you due back to work from your vacation?"

Beth appeared to be somewhat flustered and embarrassed with the question. She said: "Since I don't remember asking for vacation time, I don't really know.

"Vacation time, however, usually runs for a two week period," she stipulated. Beth appeared to be making a few quick mental calculations, and indicated: "If the normal procedures are in effect in my case, there are still a few more days of vacation left before I have to report back."

I nodded my head in acknowledgment. I smiled in a rather mischievous way and asked: "So, Beth, what are you going to tell your co-workers when they ask you about what you did on your summer vacation?"

Beth was very casual in her response. "Right now, I don't have a clue, David, what I'll say to them. But, I've got a couple days to think something up, don't I?" she said in a rhetorical fashion.

The time had come for me to go. I tried to provide Beth with some additional support before leaving.

I made arrangements with respect to keeping in touch over the next several days. I also thanked Jennifer for all her help and kindness, especially in view of the difficult nature of the circumstances with which I, to some extent, had entangled her.

I opened the door that led to the outer office and was about half-way to the exit from the offices when Jennifer stopped me: "Dr. Phelps, wait! Let me make sure no one is outside the office door."

She proceeded to open the door enough to allow her to stick her head out and check about for anyone who might be in the vicinity. She gave me the all-clear sign.

She opened the door for me, and as I walked by her, I whispered: "Now that we are both paranoid co-conspirators, do you think we could be on a first name basis?"

"Sure," she whispered back, with a grin.

I gave them both a last wave good-bye. Jennifer nodded and closed the door behind me.

On Wednesday night, I called Jennifer and Beth in accordance with our pre-arranged plan. The news was good.

Traces of the drug, Ketamine, along with a few other neuropharmacological agents, had been found in the samples of Beth's hair. Therefore, the test results were consistent with, although not necessarily proof of, Jennifer's version of Beth's abduction experience.

Moreover, even if Jennifer's abduction thesis were proven to be true, there still were a lot of unanswered questions and issues floating about. We agreed to meet in Jennifer's office at 10 a.m. on the following day.

On Thursday morning, I made my way to the off-campus building where Jennifer and I had offices. Once in the building, I went on a rather circuitous journey en route to Jennifer's office to make sure no one would know -- assuming anyone cared -- where I was going within the building.

I knocked on the door, waited a couple of seconds, and soon the door was opened by Jennifer. We exchanged greetings and joined Beth in the inner office.

After we were all settled, Jennifer was the first to speak: "Beth and I have been talking about the situation, David, and Beth feels she is ready to go and talk with the FBI. She believes, as I do, that, if necessary, the test-results plus our supporting testimonies should be enough to keep the FBI at bay.

"In addition," Jennifer said, "without mentioning names or specifics, I've taken the liberty of running some of the general features of our situation past a lawyer friend of mine. She seems fairly confident there should not be major legal problems for somebody in Beth's situation, providing, naturally, that there is no hard evidence tying Beth to the escape.

"Furthermore, my friend has agreed to go with Beth to the FBI for the interview in order to ensure that Beth's legal rights are being honored. And, David, you will be happy to know that my friend has agreed to do all of this on a pro bono basis."

I looked at Beth. "Is this what you want?"

"I think it is best, David," she confirmed. "I feel good about the support I have from you, Jennifer, her lawyer friend, and the test results."

She shook her head slightly. "I can't avoid the FBI forever. My prospects, now, David, are about as good as they are going to be under the circumstances. I have faith everything will be sorted out in a positive fashion."

"If you're satisfied, I'm satisfied," I intimated, "and," I requested: "please keep me posted on any and all developments."

I smiled and said: "You know, Beth, we haven't even had a chance to sit down and discuss my visit with Brian. He and I had an interesting discussion, but, the long and short of it all is, I'm afraid that the visit was of more help to me than it was to him."

Beth chided me: "David, did you ever stop to think that your visit might have provided motivational inspiration for my brother?" She paused and, then, completed her thought. "Brian might have been so concerned with your paying him another visit that he decided to escape from prison."

We all laughed.

Something from the visit with Brian popped into my awareness. "Beth, have you ever heard of a group called the Botclofots?" I inquired. "Brian mentioned them," I elaborated. "He said that if I were able to make contact with them, they might be able to show me how I could help him."

"Brian was very mysterious about the whole thing. He said he was leaving the whole issue of contacting the Botclofots as an exercise or task for me."

"Sounds like Brian," Beth said. She shook her head in a sort of apologetic manner, saying: "I don't recall hearing him speak about those a group, and I don't believe I've heard it used in any other context either."

I turned to Jennifer. Before I could say anything, she gave me a look that said: 'Sorry, no help here'.

Jennifer checked her watch. "Beth, Ellen Hudson will be waiting for you at the address I gave you. You both can go to the FBI office from there."

Beth and Jennifer rose from their seats. Not wanting to be the odd man out, I stood up as well.

Jennifer opened her purse, took out some money and handed it to Beth. "You'll need this for taxi fare."

When Beth protested, Jennifer said: "We can settle accounts later. You'll undoubtedly be gratified to know that I've hired an accountant just to keep track of your debt to me."

Beth relented and accepted the money. Beth thanked her, not just for the money but for everything that Jennifer had done during the last several days.

Giving me a hug, Beth thanked me too. She smiled at both of us and went out the door of the outer office in search of her lawyer, Ellen Hudson.

Chapter 9: Alien Mysteries

When Beth had left, I turned to Jennifer. "Do you have time for some lunch? We could go across the street to one of the restaurants or sandwich shops over there."

Jennifer pursed her lips in consideration of the suggestion. Quickly, she replied: "I could use something to eat."

She grabbed her purse from the desk top, pushed one of the buttons on the door edge near the handle, and motioned for me to vacate the premises. She shut the door behind her on the way out of the office.

As we approached the elevator, I asked her where she would like to eat. She indicated her choice, and we headed off in the direction of her preference.

I was happy with her selection. The service was slow, and the atmosphere was casual and laid back. It was a great place to have a conversation.

With the exception of a few pleasantries here and there, we both had been fairly non-talkative on the way over to the restaurant. The relative lack of talk continued until we were seated at a table in the restaurant.

The waiter came with menus and water. We both passed on the menus but accepted the water.

Each of us knew what we wanted to eat. We ordered accordingly.

I decided to break the silence: "I really did read your article you know. Of course, I'm not sure I could pass an examination on its finer points."

Jennifer looked at me in a way that seemed to say: 'What's all this about?' She appeared to be waiting for some sort of an elaboration from me.

In an attempt to clarify things, I reminded her of what she had said several days earlier during our private discussion following the hypnosis session with Beth. "During the course of that discussion, you seemed to be calling into question the credibility of my claim, made to you when I first called you on the phone, that I had read your article."

Jennifer gave a dismissive gesture with her mouth and head. "Must have been something I said in the heat of the moment. I wouldn't worry about it."

"I'm not exactly worried about it," I remarked, "... just trying to shore up my credibility history. You know, in case you decided to have me investigated."

A puzzled expression appeared on Jennifer's face. "Why would I want to do that?" she asked.

"Don't you remember?" I responded. "When I called you up on the phone, seeking your assistance with respect to Beth, you said you wouldn't be prepared to accept my offer of an eternity -minus-a-day's worth of gratitude without checking up on my credibility history."

An expression of recall flashed across her face. "Oh, yeah," she confirmed with a smile.

"Consequently," I said, "in order to put to rest any doubts you might have had concerning the genuineness of my claim of having perused your article on the abduction phenomenon, I'm taking this opportunity to set the record straight. I hope shoring up the rest of my credibility history is not going to require as much effort as this aspect has taken."

Jennifer countered with: "Well, David, if you start a program of aerobics right away, I'm confident you'll be able to keep up with whatever exertions will be required of you in that department." She punctuated her barb with a radiant smile that made one forget all about the barb.

I was beginning to feel I might be out of my depth in a variety of ways. I enjoyed her sense of humor, but there also was something very appealing about the person through whom the humor was being given expression, as if the humor were but a small sample of something much more valuable that was hidden behind the visible.

Jennifer looked to be in her early to mid-thirties. She was not beautiful or cute or striking, but I found her to be very attractive in a sort of plain way.

The attraction was not so much her physical presence, although that was not unappealing to me. The source of attraction seemed to be her inner being.

She exuded a kind of radiant integrity that was felt more than seen. Being near her was like being caught in the invisible lines of force of an incredibly powerful magnet.

I returned to the topic of her article. "I actually came across your paper quite by chance," I admitted. "I was looking for something else in the journal in which your piece appeared.

"When I opened the journal, your article was staring me in the face. I remembered having met you at several conferences, so I thought I would see what you were up to.

"I also wanted to find out something about the 'abduction phenomenon'. Your article afforded me a chance to accomplish both goals simultaneously."

"David, in light of your previous statement about not being able to pass an examination about the finer points of the article, I'll only inquire after your general impressions of the material."

While I reflected on how to respond to her query, I took a drink of water. I began by saying: "One of the things that struck me about your article is that you spent quite a bit of time trying to say what the abduction phenomenon was not.

"You argued that 'abductees' were not delusional or suffering from any kind of psychiatric disturbance, either organic or functional. You further indicated the experiences of 'abductees' were not motivated by a desire for attention, notoriety or fame. In fact, almost all of the abductees emphatically stated, at one time or another, that they wished the abduction experiences had never taken place.

"You also said 'abductees' were not caught up in some sort of runaway fantasy. Moreover, there was no evidence to suggest the 'abductees' were undergoing a dream state."

I thought a bit more and added: "If memory serves me on this, you ruled out multiple personality disorder as being related to the abduction phenomenon. In addition, you rejected satanic ritual abuse syndrome as having any connection with, or role to play in, the abduction phenomenon.

"Your article stipulated that the abduction phenomenon was not a psychological device for masking some underlying history of sexual or physical abuse. In fact, you argued in just the opposite fashion. Your article pointed out that although there had been a number of cases in which instances of sexual abuse had been used to mask an underlying experience of abduction, the reverse had never been found to be true."

Somewhat surprised about the amount of material I was retrieving from memory, I continued to regurgitate to my teacher, Jennifer, what I had learned from her article on the abduction phenomenon. "Another point of importance covered by your paper revolved around the issue of whether or not the experiences of the abductees were merely a set of beliefs that were derived from the subtle suggestions and expectations of the hypnotist.

"I think your article did a good job of arguing against the notion of any sort of fabricated contamination being introduced into the situation, provided the hypnotist observed appropriate guidelines while conducting the sessions. Perhaps, more to the point, as far as I'm concerned, I had a first-hand demonstration of the truth of your article's argument on this issue during your session with Beth."

I dug a bit deeper into my memory banks. "The article explored, and rejected, the possibility that the incredible consistency of the stories of different abductees was the result of their having been in communication with one another or because they had read literature on the phenomenon.

"Your article also argued against the idea that any sort of memory confabulation process or false memory syndrome was at work in the reporting of abduction experiences. You pointed out in this respect that just because, under some circumstances, memories can be shown to have been altered or restructured, it does not follow that, therefore, all memories are suspect.

"In fact, you cited research to support your argument. According to the research, the more intense an experience is, the more likely it is that the essential features of those an experience will be recalled accurately, even if peripheral aspects of the experience are forgotten or distorted.

"Finally," I said, "your article discussed how the abductees do not exhibit any identifiable profile of: personality, race, gender, socio-economic or educational characteristics. In other words, the abductees seem to constitute a fully cross-sectional reflection of the general population."

I took another drink of water. "On the basis of the foregoing points, you drew a number of conclusions.

"First, you maintained there is no credible, conventional psychological theory that is capable of accounting for the abduction

phenomenon. Secondly, you entreated the psychological community to refrain from trying to force-fit the abduction phenomenon into inappropriate diagnostic categories. Thirdly, you suggested the abduction phenomenon is not indicative of a pathological condition or disease process of any kind. And, fourthly, you called for a commitment of time, money and talent to investigate what might be one of the most significant and interesting phenomena of the modern era."

Jennifer said: "I'm very impressed. In fact, I'm nonplused that not only have I found someone who has read the dumb article, but the person in question actually was prepared to sacrifice his poor memory cells in conjunction with those a dubious enterprise."

I held up my hands in a cautioning fashion. "Please, lady and non-gentlemen, hold the applause ... which I don't mind pointing out is very much deserved. There is a question from the floor for our esteemed authoress. Speak directly into the microphone, sir."

Making the transition from my role of MC to that of audience, I proceeded to raise my question from the floor. "Dr. Ormsby, given that your article addresses itself to what the abduction phenomenon is not, would you care to direct your current efforts to explaining to the kind man in the audience just what the abduction phenomenon is?"

Jennifer was about to speak, when the waiter came with our food. "Saved by the lunch bell," she murmured.

"Au contraire!" I protested. "You're going to have to find a way to juggle eating and talking. Inquiring minds want to know."

She considered the challenges before her: me, the food and the explanation. She raised her eyebrows, as if to ask herself: 'Am I up to this?', and, then, launched into a wonderfully choreographed set of movements that treated all of her challenges in a harmonious fashion, never ignoring, for too long a period of time, the food, me, or the explanation.

"The short answer to the question from the floor," Jennifer began, "is that no one really knows what is going on. They only know that something...something significant appears to be happening.

"Contrary to popular opinion, neither the ships nor the aliens involved in the abduction experiences are necessarily from outer space. They might be from another non-physical dimension of reality or consciousness.

"Whatever the alien beings are, they seem to be consummate shape-shifters. In other words, they appear to be able to manifest themselves in many different forms, often assuming the shape of a variety of different animals.

"Quite a few 'abductees' develop an intense, intimate relationship with the 'spirit' of these animals. It is almost like they have a totem relationship with them."

Jennifer saw the look of mystification on my face. She took a minute to explain what she meant.

"These totem relationships," she said, "that are established by the 'abductees' are similar, in some respects, to the ones that different Native clans develop with the spirits of particular animal species. In both cases, there seems to be some sort of guidance or assistance that comes through the relationship. The animal species through which the various kinds of help come is the totem around which a great deal of individual or clan activity revolves."

Returning to the original theme concerning the apparent capacity of the aliens to shape-shift, she continued on. "In any event, there is no consensus of opinion among clinicians or researchers about whether the various elements of the abduction experiences involving, what appear to be, shape-shifting phenomena are even primarily physical in nature.

"Many of the features of those experiences might be the result of some kind of psychic projection on the part of the aliens. Alternatively, some form of hypnotic induction or altered state of consciousness might be involved in the abduction phenomenon.

"You're probably aware of the fact, David, that through hypnosis, one can produce all manner of physical effects, those as making blisters appear, or making warts disappear, or manipulating the perception of pain, and so on. We know these things can happen, but we don't have a clue about how they are possible.

"The ability of many yogis to exercise tremendous control over their autonomic, supposedly involuntary, nervous systems has been rigorously demonstrated under laboratory conditions. Where our bodies leave off and our consciousness begins is a complete mystery to all of our scientists and medical researchers. How body and mind interact with, or affect, one another is also unknown.

"Consequently, the existence of a variety of physical symptoms and effects associated with the abduction experience, does not, in and of itself, prove that those symptoms or effects were caused by purely physical processes. For example, the abductees' reports of undergoing biological examinations, or their accounts of the alien genetic experiments that try to produce part human and part alien hybrid off-spring might involve more than just physical/material phenomena.

"All Christians accept that Jesus came into created existence when the spirit of God entered into the body of Mary to produce a being that was part man and part spirit of God. Maybe, there are other mixtures of spirit, energy, soul, or consciousness that, under the right circumstances, are capable of being combined with the human form to produce new, hybrid species of being.

"Is the abduction phenomenon a physical process? Is it a psychological process? Is it an invasion from outer space or inner space? Is it a spiritual process? Is it an altered state of consciousness? Is it a form of possession? Is it the result of the penetration of our four-dimensional world by another dimension of a non-physical nature? Is it a combination of all of these things? Does it involve an encounter with some realm of reality that, heretofore, has been veiled from us?

"We simply do not know. In fact, not only do we not know the nature of the kind of reality with which we are dealing in the abduction phenomenon, we also don't know what the meaning or purpose or significance of these experiences is."

Jennifer managed a couple of bites of her meal and a few sips of her fruit drink. Before proceeding with her attempt to answer my question, she took her napkin to track down and erase an errant morsel of food from the corner of her mouth.

Starting in again on the explanation, Jennifer said: "There seem to be a number of themes that emerge among 'abductees' concerning the meaning and significance of their experiences. One recurrent theme is the already-mentioned alien/human hybrid genetic experiments that have been described by many, if not most, of the 'abductees'.

"Quite a few 'abductees' talk about the genetic experiments in the context of a possible, forthcoming series of ecological and cataclysmic natural disasters on Earth. Apparently, the hybrid off-spring are intended to

provide a new species of beings who will populate, if not serve as guardians of, the post-apocalyptic world.

"Why there should be a need for those hybrids is not known, at least not in any fashion that is capable of being articulated, at the present time, by any of the 'abductees'. The 'abductees' say they have been told by the aliens that not all human beings will perish in the apocalypse that is supposedly forthcoming.

"However, according to the accounts of many of the abductees, the aliens allude to the hybrids in ways that suggest that the hybrids will be better adapted than human beings to the post-disaster conditions that it is said will prevail in the world. Yet, there seem to be precious few details on just how, or why, the hybrids will be more adaptable than human beings.

"The alien/human hybrids are described by the aliens as representing a chance to provide humanity with a new start. Whether the post-apocalyptic remnants of humanity will enjoy this new chance as a result of the guidance or assistance provided by the hybrids, or whether the hybrids themselves are considered to be the new face, and, therefore, new start of humanity is not clear.

"In conjunction with this idea of a new chance for humanity... however one might conceive it ... is a rather disturbing report of some of the 'abductees'. They claim the aliens have communicated to them that the Earth is now, and has been for some time, at the center of a cosmic debate concerning what the fate of the Earth, and, therefore, humanity should be.

"Apparently, not everyone in the cosmos is in favor of letting humanity continue its existence on Earth. Yet, as far as I know, none of the 'abductees' seem to know who has the deciding vote in these matters.

"Those concerns notwithstanding, many of the 'abductees' indicate they have been informed that the aliens wish to help human beings avoid the scientific and ecological mistakes that led to the destruction of the home world of the aliens. Be this as it might, nobody seems to have asked the aliens whether or not they actually have correctly figured out what went wrong on their home world.

"If the aliens really know what they are doing, they might have something to offer to humanity. If they are still tinkering about with, and stumbling around in, the unknown, then maybe they should do their galactic or dimensional kibitzing elsewhere.

"The fact the aliens seem to be far more technologically and scientifically advanced than human beings does not necessarily mean the aliens have the solution to human problems. Their technical superiority might only mean they have the ability to make advanced and sophisticated mistakes far more quickly than we are capable of. Their own, self-acknowledged, questionable track record in this regard does not exactly induce one to have a whole lot of confidence in what they are attempting to accomplish.

"As human beings have found out during the last, several hundred years ... only too painfully ... technical and scientific proficiency cannot protect us from our own moral corruption and spiritual diseases. Human beings have a history of undermining their technical cleverness with emotional stupidity. Maybe the aliens are the same.

"Another little detail that sort of has been left dangling in all of this involves the alien projections or prophecies concerning the character of the disasters that are to come. A lot of attention has been paid to the ecological message of the aliens and the manner in which the 'abductees' are helping to spread this message among humankind. Considerably less attention has been directed to the reports about the incredible natural disasters that are said to be coming.

"Without wishing to diminish the importance of raising our sense of ecological consciousness and responsibility, environmental awareness is not going to do any of us a whole lot of good in relationship to preventing, or dealing with, cataclysmic natural events. On the other hand, there is some indication from the 'abductees' ... and I've also heard similar reports from Native peoples ... that the natural disasters actually will be expressions of the Earth's cleansing response to the ignorance and heedlessness of human beings concerning their responsibilities to the Earth and its non-human inhabitants.

"In any case, things are not very clear with respect to whether or not the natural disaster side of the alien forecasts is something that is inextricably linked with the ecological issue or is independent of those problems. Furthermore, although there are indications that the predicted ecological disasters might be avoidable, if we act now, there are not comparable indications about our prospects for being able to avoid the natural disasters that are said to be forthcoming.

"Interestingly enough, these alien forecasts or predictions or prophecies are really nothing new. Native peoples, from very different spiritual traditions and from widely separated geographical regions, have been speaking of those a future disaster scenario for quite some time. In addition, of course, there are the prophecies concerning these kinds of events in both the Old Testament and New Testament of the Bible, as well as in the Islamic religious tradition."

Having finished the main part of the meal, Jennifer began to turn her attention to a few of the contents of the bread basket. While adding some butter and jam to one of the selected slices of bread, she elaborated further on the abduction issue.

"Entertaining reservations concerning the purpose or significance of the abduction phenomenon need not be restricted to raising questions about the quality of alien insights into the reasons and causes underlying the demise of their home world. There are a number of moral questions, as well, that emerge in connection with alien activity."

Jennifer began munching on the appropriately prepared slices of bread. After swallowing, she washed the bread down further with some of her fruit juice.

"The aliens are using force on the 'abductees'. To the best of my knowledge, no human being has ever been asked whether or not he or she wants to go on to the alien ship.

"The aliens merely take whom they want, when they want, for whatever reason they want. Apparently, human wishes or human rights do not enter into the issue of abduction.

"What is the moral or spiritual authority for conducting those abductions? What, if anything, could legitimize those activity?"

"The vast majority of the 'abductees' are terrorized by their experiences. Many, if not most, of the different kinds of experience associated with abduction tend to be humiliating, painful and traumatic.

"There is a long list of adverse emotional, psychological and social consequences that ensue from abduction experiences. For instance, as a result of their experiences, 'abductees' tend to develop a deep sense of being alienated from, and/or rejected by, their immediate families and communities. Furthermore, due to the sexual, physical and

psychological violations of their beings during abduction experiences, 'abductees' have considerable problems with issues of trust, as well as with persistent feelings of extreme vulnerability.

"On the other hand, there have been a number of 'abductees' who reported that various serious illnesses have disappeared in conjunction with their abduction experiences. In addition, some 'abductees' claim to have acquired certain kinds of healing capability as a result of their association with the aliens.

"Still other 'abductees' report having felt tremendous joy surrounding what might be intense spiritual experiences during certain phases of the abduction process. These people talk in terms of cosmic consciousness and feelings of becoming one with everything.

"They describe being bathed in an incredibly powerful light of unity, bliss and knowledge from which they do not wish to be removed. Indeed, there seems to be tremendous sadness and a sense of grief or loss associated with departure from the condition that many of the 'abductees' refer to as their 'real' Home ... a home that is said to be beyond time and space and that allows one access to infinite realms and dimensions of being."

Consuming the last of her bread, she looked around for our waiter, caught his eye and mouthed the word: "coffee". Then, she held up her hand in a way that signaled for the waiter to hold on for a few seconds.

She looked over at me, I nodded, and she showed two fingers to the waiter. The waiter acknowledged receipt of the message.

She was quiet for a few seconds, apparently trying to recall where she had left off in the discussion. Presumably, she found the proper place, for she mumbled, more to her herself than to me: "Right", and was, once more, off to the races.

"A number of 'abductees' speak about a process of transition that takes place across a series of abduction experiences. They start out being terrified about what is going on, but, gradually, over a period of months or years, they begin to view the abduction experiences as playing a central role in both their personal growth and spiritual transformation.

"Quite a few of the 'abductees', at least those able to negotiate the rough currents and eddies of the transitional process, indicate there is a deep bond of love that develops between themselves and whichever alien becomes

something of a guardian or guide for a given 'abductee'. The 'abductees' claim they feel or sense this deep love is reciprocated by their mentors.

"These 'abductees', many of whom experienced their first abduction as children, describe how their early interaction with their 'mentor' tends to be gentle and playful. When the 'abductees' become older, however, the nature of the teacher/student relationship becomes more rigorous and demanding, although the dimension of deep, reciprocal love is said to be still present and crucial.

"As a result of the dynamics of the teacher/student relationship, many 'abductees' feel that, over time, they become more committed to showing compassion toward, and feeling responsible for, all of creation. They also indicate that their attitudes toward the, if you will, sacredness of the Earth, along with their relationships with other people, undergo radically positive and constructive changes as a result of the experiences of the abduction mentorship or apprenticeship program.

"Similarly, many 'abductees' describe themselves as becoming gentler, less aggressive, and more tolerant of others through the influence of their abduction experiences. They feel they are much more willing to openly express their love for people than was true prior to those experiences.

"Although the 'abductees' might use different language to describe the transitional process of personal growth and spiritual transformation, they seem to agree that the key to the transitional process is the need to lose one's sense of ego as an entity that is separate, and apart from, the rest of the universe. These people, also on the basis of their experiences during the abduction process, contend consciousness and/or soul cannot be reduced to the confines of the physical body.

"In short, these people believe they are being taught a new way of life through means of their contact with the aliens. They also feel the aliens are calling on them to teach this new way of life to others.

"Apparently, this call to teaching is part of a general strategy of the aliens for seeding the Earth with individuals who are either in the process of becoming transformed, or who have, perhaps, already completed such a process. Conceivably, the alien/human hybrid experiments might fit into this aspect of seeding, or vice versa.

"In any event, this seeding project is taking place in something of an ambiguous context. More specifically, some of the 'abductees' say that

images of forthcoming ecological and natural disasters have been projected into their consciousness by the aliens. Other 'abductees' say they have been shown those 'events' on computer-like monitors. Yet, there is considerable uncertainty about whether these images of disaster, irrespective of how they are encountered, represent the actual, fixed future or a projected future, based on data extrapolation, or a possible or conditional future that is destined to occur if human beings don't start making proper ecological, political and social choices.

"The 'abductees' describe the seeding project as a method employed by the aliens in order to try to help human beings avoid the sort of choices that will lead to disastrous consequences in the future. This tends to suggest the images being shown to the 'abductees' are of a possible, or extrapolated future, rather than a fixed future.

"This assumes, of course, the aliens know what they are talking about. The sense of impending ecological disaster has been with us at least since Rachel Carson wrote Silent Spring. Native peoples have been warning us about those possibilities for a much longer period of time.

"Are the alien predictions about ecological disaster just part of the Zeitgeist of the modern era? Did they come across Rachel Carson's book and decide to exploit it for their own purposes?

"Was Rachel Carson, unbeknown to both her and us, an abductee even before Barney and Betty Hill's experiences in September 1961? Were the aliens, or their predecessors, the ones who taught Native peoples about ecology as some Hopi legends might suggest?

"What is the basis of the claims of the alleged aliens concerning the future? Do they have spiritual insight into these matters? Are they merely concerned scientists who can see the trends that are being generated by their data collection techniques? Do they have their own version of our psychic hot-lines, and, as a result, have they received a personal consultation with a gifted and certified psychic?"

From the time Jennifer had mentioned the possibility that Rachel Carson might have been an early 'abductee', I had been increasingly entertained by her various stream-of-consciousness-like ruminations. When she began talking about aliens and psychic hot-lines, I couldn't help myself, I began chuckling.

"Sorry," I offered. "The psychic angle kind of got me going." Jennifer smiled. "I suppose I was going over the top on the matter," she acknowledged.

She appeared to be debating, for a moment, whether to say something. Finally, making a decision, she said: "In a way, the psychic aspect is, I agree with you, somewhat ludicrous. There is, however, another side to the matter."

Jennifer looked at me somewhat strangely and, it appeared to me, defensively. Starting off slowly, as if walking through a minefield, she said: "I don't know where you stand on those matters, David, and I hope you won't misunderstand what I'm about to say."

Having come this far, she sighed and took the plunge. "I'm not a fan, or advocate, of the whole psychic sideshow spectacle that seems to be spreading everywhere like an out of control viral infection. At the same time, I have seen some very impressive demonstrations under controlled conditions that strongly suggest there are some people who have an authentic psychic ability.

"Nonetheless, there are several things that bother me about the psychic phenomenon that has ensconced itself in a lot more places than supermarket tabloids. Aside from the fact there are many phony psychics who don't have the psychic ability of even a rock, I don't like the fact that even many legitimate psychics are charging people money in exchange for 'insider' information.

"Those authentic psychics who charge money don't appear to have asked themselves several important questions. First, do they have the spiritual right to disclose those privileged information?

"Providing people with inside information about stocks is against the laws of the Security and Exchange Commission. Why shouldn't this principle of restricting the activity of people with insider information be considered with even more circumspection when matters of future events are concerned?

"Secondly, even if, under certain circumstances, the release of privileged, psychic information were permissible, why should there be a charge levied for the release of those information?

"Why isn't the information freely given? Why should only those with money be able to have access to, and be benefited by, such information?

Doesn't the taking of money in exchange for these psychic tips show disrespect for the sacred source of that information? Why do psychics seem to assume that those intuitions are a commodity that can be mined and commercialized like any other commodity?

"For reasons best known only to Divinity, God permits human beings to perform many acts that display an absence of respect for, and commitment to, that which is sacred. Consequently, we often use the gifts God gives to us for non-sacred purposes.

"Having an ability to do something does not automatically mean we should do what we have the ability to do. We have the ability to kill, rape, maim, destroy and spread misery, but this ability does not mean we, therefore, have the right to exercise such an ability.

"Similarly, some people have a psychic ability. Nevertheless, once again, having this kind of ability does not necessarily mean the ability should be exercised.

"Sometimes God gives these gifts and abilities as a trial and test. There are spiritual issues at stake in any decision to use these abilities."

Jennifer, then, brought the focus of the discussion back to the abduction phenomenon. "Conceivably, as a result of psychic abilities, aliens might have picked up certain information about future cataclysmic events on Earth. Even if one gives the aliens a benefit of doubt concerning their reasons for sharing this information about the future with certain 'abductees', maybe the aliens still are meddling in areas for which they lack any spiritual authority.

"Even leaving aside the psychic issue, perhaps, the capacity of aliens to abduct people is itself an example of an ability that ought not to be exercised. Maybe the whole abduction phenomenon constitutes a huge test and trial for the aliens.

"The aliens might have convinced themselves they are engaged in a moral and spiritual mission of mercy in relation to Earthlings. Yet, they might be quite mistaken about the legitimacy of their various abduction-related activities."

The waiter arrived with the coffee, placed everything on the table and left. While we both went about preparing our coffee, Jennifer continued talking.

"What I find really fascinating, David, in all of this abduction phenomenon material ... the reason why I started investigating this phenomenon in the first place ... is the way the abduction phenomenon both parallels and departs from mystical traditions.

"Let's just focus on some of the similarities between the abduction phenomenon and mysticism. Both involve a student/guide relationship; an emphasis on the central role of a love of reciprocity between teacher and the one being taught; the ability of a spiritual guide to project thoughts directly to the student; altered states of consciousness; a path of transition that entails struggle, difficulty and pain; the need to lose one's sense of being separate and apart from the rest of the universe; an emphasis on the importance of moral transformation; an enhanced sense of the sacredness of the Earth and all creation; realization of one's personal responsibility to help care for creation; a sense of 'calling' to the life of spirituality; the joy, bliss and knowledge to be found in the intense light of certain aspects of spirituality; the idea of a 'home' that is beyond space and time; the potential for acquiring certain kinds of healing capabilities, as well as a potential for being cured of a variety of maladies."

Jennifer took a taste of her coffee, apparently liked it, and had a longer drink. She held the cup for a few seconds in front of her face while her elbow rested on the table. Then, she took another sip and put the cup down.

"The differences," she said, "between the abduction phenomenon and most of the Earth-variety of mystical traditions are also very instructive. In fact, these differences might be far more important than whatever similarities might exist between the two kinds of experience.

"One obvious difference concerns the form through which these experiences are given expression. In the case of the usual sort of mystical traditions with which we are familiar, the spiritual guides have, for the most part, always been human beings. To be sure, guidance can come through many different mediums, but the main teaching relationship comes in the context of our relationship with other human beings.

"In the abduction phenomenon, human beings are no longer the guides. Is this good, bad, or neither here nor there?

"This is a difficult question to answer because of the relative absence of reliable, verifiable information. For example, we don't know who or what

these aliens are. We don't know whether their actual, as opposed to their stated, intentions are different from one another. We don't know what their level of moral or spiritual attainment is. We really don't know if they know what they are doing in their hybrid experiments and seeding projects. We don't know if they know anything about the future or are just winging it. We don't know if they have learned anything from their own past disasters. We don't know what the source of their authority is for their abductions, hybrid experiments and seeding projects. We don't know what the legitimacy is, if any, of the 'authority' that they might cite in order to try to sanction their activities.

"Comparatively speaking, we know a great deal about the quality of life of people those as: Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, Krishna, Buddha, Lao Tzu, Ramana Maharshi, Milarepa, Farid ud-din Attar, Black Elk, Meister Eckhart, Marpa, Moses de Leon, Shankaracarya, St. John of the Cross, Rabbi Akiba, Huang Po, Crazy Horse, Ramakrishna, Jalalu'l-din Rumi, Naropa, St. Theresa of Avila, Chuang Tzu, St. Francis of Assisi and Mu'in-uddin Hasan Chishti. This list could be extended with hundreds of thousands of names from the registry of shining lights of spirituality in human history.

"We know about the quality of their character, integrity, compassion, love, honesty, patience, tolerance, justice, commitment, wisdom, generosity and so on. On the other hand, we know little or nothing about the presence or absence of these qualities in relation to the aliens.

"The aliens might possess these character traits and moral strengths. Then, again, they might not be so blessed.

"Are the aliens offering human beings another mystical choice, to be placed next to the mystical dimensions of Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Taoism, Hinduism, Native spirituality, and so on? Do the aliens feel they can offer something that is not already being offered by presently existing mystical traditions?

"This brings us to a second critical difference between the abduction phenomenon and the traditional mysticisms of Earth. Traditional mysticisms do not go around abducting anyone.

"There might be certain religious cults that make a habit of kidnapping, brainwashing and/or indoctrinating people. However, these cults are nothing but gross distortions of, and deviations from, whatever mystical teachings they purport to be representing.

"When it comes to the issues of using force to abduct people against their will to participate in something, the abduction phenomenon is more akin to a cult than it is to an authentic mystical tradition. Similarly, the conducting of hybrid genetic research resonates ... uncomfortably so ... with the orientation of Nazi scientists and medical practitioners, and not at all with the intentions, purposes and activities of the great mystics."

While both Jennifer and I were consuming the last of our respective cups of coffee, the waiter came and asked us if we wanted anything else. When we said: "No", the waiter finalized our bill, put it on the table and went away.

Working her way toward the end of an extended answer to my original question, Jennifer said: "There is a third possible difference between the abduction phenomenon and traditional mysticisms. This difference revolves around the degree of efficacy that these respective teaching methodologies have for both recognizing and realizing all levels of human potential.

"The aliens are busy conducting genetic research in an attempt to produce 'improved' alien/human hybrid strains. They seem to be emphatically proclaiming that human beings are defective and need to be supplied with some missing ingredient or quality that, presumably, the aliens have.

"The mystics all have maintained that human beings have the potential for spiritual transformation. These mystics also have said that the problem with human beings is that most of us are not at all interested in realizing the spiritual potential that is present in us.

"In other words, according to traditional mystics, human beings are not lacking anything in principle or in essence that is necessary for the realization of human spiritual potential. Our lack is one of acting on, and, therefore, helping to bring to fruition, the capacity that is already with us.

"The great mystical traditions have given expression to many luminous examples of the efficacy of their methodologies. Where are their hybrid counterparts? In what way are these hybrids giving expression to something that is absent from the great mystics?

"Abductees' have reported that the aliens are both fascinated with, as well as mystified by, human emotions. Apparently, the aliens also find human emotions frightening and a cause for concern.

"The aliens might find comfort in the fact that we human beings are quite fascinated with, and mystified by, our own emotions. Humans, like aliens, also are frightened by the capacity for destructiveness that can be unleashed

through our unbridled emotions. We, too, consider our emotions to be a cause of concern.

"The mystics, however, considered an individual's free-will struggle with the emotions to be at the very heart of the process of spiritual growth. The goal of mystics is not to get rid of the emotions but to have them become spiritually redeemed through the transformative character of the mystical path.

"We cannot be sure what the purpose of the alien hybrid experiments are. Furthermore, we don't know for which characteristics the aliens are attempting to selectively breed.

"However, if the aliens are tinkering around with, among other things, human emotions in an effort to make us less aggressive, hostile and destructive, they are fooling around with something that is a two-edged sword. Our emotions have the potential to be a force for incredible good as well as incredible evil. According to the mystical guides of the past and present, by removing our potential for evil, one also removes a fundamental ingredient that is necessary for the process of spiritual transformation through that great goodness can come.

"According to the reports of the 'abductees' there is a substantial potential for personal growth and spiritual transformation associated with the abduction experience. Their self-reports say they have experienced constructive improvement in qualities such as love, tolerance, gentleness, harmonious relationships with others, respect for the Earth, and so on.

"Let's not question the degree of accuracy in these self-reports. Let's, for purposes of argument, accept them.

"There are a lot of methodologies that make similar claims. These include: sensitivity training, EST, primal therapy, sensory deprivation tanks, holotropic breath work, transcendental meditation, ingestion of LSD, and so on.

"There are many differences of opinion concerning whether any of these methodologies actually deliver on their claims. Some people swear by them, while others feel quite dissatisfied with their encounters with these methodologies.

"Similarly, as I indicated earlier, not every 'abductee' reports having mystical-like experiences. Many of them have only terror, trauma, and pain to show for their experiences, and they are not enthralled with what the abduction phenomenon has to offer them.

"Even amongst those 'abductees' who report having mystical-like experiences, the issue might not be straightforward. For instance, there is a tendency among many people to suppose that because the language that different people often use to describe their spiritual experiences is somewhat similar, this means everyone is talking about precisely the same thing.

"Thus, many people believe that all forms of cosmic consciousness or all instances of becoming one with the universe are completely coextensive with one another. Or, many people believe that the joy and knowledge that comes to different people bathed in the intense light of Divinity must all be the same.

"Where is the proof of this assumption? Absolutely every other dimension of human affairs points in a very different direction.

"We all have different kinds, degrees and combinations of: wealth, health, talent, intelligence, creative abilities, friends, education, families, troubles, athleticism, beauty, success, fame, failure, status, power, children and length of life. Why should we suppose that spirituality is any different?

"We have the reports of some of the 'abductees' concerning cosmic consciousness and spiritual illumination and a joyous 'Home'. But, in reality, we don't know what any of this means or how, or if, it compares with similar descriptive reports of the mystics with whom we are somewhat familiar.

"Moreover, we don't know if any of the abductees' experiences of cosmic consciousness or spiritual illumination are indications of permanent, or only transitory, spiritual transformations. We don't know if, say, through alien psychic projections, 'abductees' might have been given a taste of certain spiritual states, but that these states and conditions disappeared when the psychic projections of the aliens were withdrawn.

"Those transitory experiences could, indeed, have a profound effect on any individual undergoing them. Nonetheless, those transitory conditions are, at best, only small steps on the way to the sort of full, permanent spiritual realization alluded to by many mystics."

Jennifer suggested that we pay for the meal and she could finish up on the way back to the office building. We sorted out who owed what, gathered together the requisite amounts, left a tip and went off to find the cashier.

As we exited the restaurant, Jennifer picked up, more or less, where she had left off. "Among the experiences reported by the 'abductees', there are a few that suggest some sort of reincarnation motif.

"Essentially, some of the 'abductees' indicate having gone through a number of reincarnation-like cycles. These cycles consist of their spirit or soul or consciousness first becoming embodied, then disembodied, and, then, once again, embodied.

"The disembodied portion of these cycles tends to be described as one of returning to the 'Home' of unity, bliss, knowledge and light. After an appropriate, pregnant host is found one's consciousness is removed from this realm and, so to speak, brought back to Earth."

We waited for traffic to ease up a bit and dodged our way through the remaining vehicles. When we reached the sidewalk on the other side of the street, Jennifer continued her interrupted train of thought.

"The point I would like to make, David, is this. People have an experience of some kind, and they interpret that experience. The interpretation might, or might not, accurately reflect the actual nature, character, purpose, meaning or significance of the experience in question.

"Altered states of consciousness are very tricky things. A person in those a state is encountering something that is not part of her or his normal routine.

"Individuals undergoing these states or conditions often tend to be disoriented and/or overawed. There might be a variety of emotions, biases, character flaws and pieces of one's life history that color and shape one's perception of those experiences.

"Generally speaking, one is not familiar with the rules, principles, values or etiquette that might govern what is transpiring. In addition, one might not understand the symbolic character of the forms and/or processes that are being given expression through one's altered state of consciousness.

"When one undergoes certain kinds of unitive states or conditions of being one with the universe, one is being affected by the character of those states and conditions. One sees, feels, senses, intuit, hears and is aware of something that overwhelms one's conceptual abilities.

"When one is removed from the altered state, one begins to take things out of context. Based on one's experience of those states, one starts to

abstract ideas that are really distortions of the reality of the original experience.

"One also might begin to impose foreign, theoretical elements into the original experience that have little, or nothing, to do with the actual nature of that experience. Or, one might confuse and conflate different aspects of the experience in one's understanding."

We had reached the entrance to the office building. We stood by the entrance while she finished her explanation.

"During some of these altered conditions of consciousness, one comes into contact with the spirits of different people. Some of these people have passed away from the biological realm of existence.

"One's being can become entangled, in a sense, in their being. If one gets lost or disoriented or confused during these entanglements, one can come away from these encounters with something of a biographical imprint with respect to certain aspects of the other person's life history and personality superimposed on one's own life.

"Under those circumstances, there might be a tendency for some individuals to mistake the other person's life history, personality and character for one's own. Indeed, not only might one mistake the other person's life for one's own, but the 'imprint' that occurred while their beings were entangled might begin to manifest itself and influence one even after one has become disengaged from the altered state.

"These manifestations and influences might even show up in various physical ways involving posture, mannerisms, gait, speech patterns, feelings, and body markings. Furthermore, the person who bears those an imprint could have knowledge about the life of the other person or the times in which that person lived as a result of the imprinting process.

"Despite the presence of those features, they are not necessarily indications of reincarnation but, rather, of a metaphysical confusion. This confusion is rooted in the way an imprinting process, that occurred while in an altered state of consciousness, has come to dominate, influence, shape, color and orient certain aspects of a person's life.

"Consequently, when some of the 'abductees' talk about having an experience in which they claim to have seen themselves, or had an awareness of themselves, becoming embodied in the form of a fetus, after having had previous lives, several possibilities arise. One such possibility is

that the individual is misinterpreting the experience and confusing someone else's life with his or her own life as a result of the previously described imprinting process that took place during an altered state of consciousness.

"Another possibility is that a non-human form of consciousness has hijacked a human body or fetus during pregnancy. This possibility would be consistent with reports of some of the 'abductees' who say they feel they have both an alien and a human dimension to them that must be integrated."

Jennifer waved and said hello to someone going into the office building. She made a gesture with her hand, like holding a phone up to her ear, indicating that someone should call someone.

"This brings me to my final point, David. If some form of non-human consciousness has been hijacking human bodies on a regular basis down through history, then, ultimately, the abduction phenomenon, at least in one sense, might not turn out to be about human beings.

"Instead, this phenomenon might, to varying degrees, be about alien forms of being or consciousness that, through various means, have taken up residence in human bodies. If this were the case, the process of abduction would appear to constitute something like a procedure for taking these embodied beings back to the 'shop' for various checks, tests and experiments.

"The tremendous psychological trauma experienced by the 'abductees' could come from several factors. First, the process of embodiment, and the realm of intense emotions that comes with it, might have overwhelmed the consciousness of the being so embodied to those an extent that the being has forgotten all about his or her origins and actual identity. As those, the traumatized reaction is an issue of problematic adaptation to the host or human body.

"The other possibility concerns those 'abductees' who are aware of feeling both alien and human. They don't know how to reconcile the two, and they are having difficulty not only with the problem of integrating these very different dimensions of their being, but also with understanding what significance and meaning their experiences have in the cosmic or metaphysical scheme of things.

"Naturally, the truth of the abduction phenomenon could be an expression of any number of combinations of the many possibilities that I have placed before you. Then, again, maybe none, or only a few, of the things

I've said is true. The reality might be even more incredible than we have been able to imagine up until now."

Jennifer looked at me and laughed. "You've been pretty quiet for quite a long time, David. I suppose I really haven't let you get a word in edgewise."

She studied me a bit more and said in a somewhat amused tone of voice: "Has the inquiring mind found out perhaps more than it ever wanted to know back when it so naively asked its question from the floor of the restaurant?"

I shook my head, as if coming out of a trance. "I think," I said, "I must have fallen victim to your skills as a hypnotist."

"Your discussion of the abduction phenomenon has absolutely mesmerized me. I mean this in the best sense of the word. I've thoroughly enjoyed your account."

Jennifer seemed to be both pleased and somewhat surprised by my words. Surprised, perhaps, because there actually was someone interested in what she was doing and thinking. Pleased, perhaps, because the object of her surprise had been available to listen to her.

We entered the lobby of the office building and waited for a ride upstairs. When the elevator arrived, we got in, pressed the buttons for our respective floors, and rode in silence to our respective destinations.

While riding on the elevator, I had been mulling over a possibility in my mind. After reaching my office, I decided to try to bring the possibility to realization.

Sitting down at the desk, I picked up the phone and pushed the appropriate sequence of numbers. Within a few seconds, my intended party answered.

"Hi! Jennifer, it's David. Sorry, for bothering you, but ..."

She cut me off with: "Don't be silly, David. I'm not feeling bothered at all."

"Well, after you hear what I have to say, maybe your feelings will change," I cautioned her.

She responded with an: "Oh!?" It seemed to be both exclamation and a question.

"I'm pretty terrible at this kind of thing," I confessed, "so I hope you'll forgive my lack of social graces."

"I'll do my best," she promised.

"Would you be interested in going out ... you know ... on a ... ahh ... a date?" My brain felt like it was turning to jelly.

"That didn't strike me as lacking in social graces, David, but we might have to work on your enunciation and delivery."

"You're not going to make this easy for me ... are you?" I said with semi-mock disconsolateness.

"Struggle is the anvil on which character is forged," she replied.

"What, do you have a book of quotable quotes in front of you, just waiting to terrorize poor unfortunates like myself with the casually discarded bon mot?" I challenged.

"David, how can you possibly feel you are lacking in social graces when you slip in French expressions with those savoir -faire?" she countered.

"If sprinkling my conversation with clever French witticisms is the key to my admission into the world of social graces, I'm afraid I'm destined to be standing on the barbarian side of the entrance for quite some time," I confessed.

"In fact," I added, "I'm pretty certain my French language disability probably played a significant role in Quebec's desire to separate from Canada. My lack of linguistic skills proved to be those an embarrassment to both English-speaking and French-speaking Canadians I became persona non grata ... pardon my Latin ... and was asked by the Federal government to leave Canada for the sake of national unity.

"Unfortunately, the Québécois separatists considered this gesture on the part of the Federal government to be too little, too late. Being responsible, at least potentially, for the break-up of a country is a very tough burden to try to bear sometimes."

"Although," Jennifer said, "I suspect you are suffering from a serious case of memory confabulation. Having you slip into depression simply won't do. I guess I'll be forced to accept your invitation. This course of treatment probably will be easier than trying to drag you in from some office ledge."

"Since you put it like that," I said, with what I hoped was the right amount and touch of pathos, "maybe I should run with your obvious empathy for the situation and ask about your availability for tomorrow night."

"Here at the Distress Center, we try to be as accessible as possible for those in need," she informed me. "What did you have in mind?"

I was sort of unprepared for having to come up with an actual plan of action. I hemmed and hawed a little, and, then, kind of blurted out: "Why not take a walk along the Charles and sort of play it by ear?"

"Apparently, we have graduated from office ledges to the murky waters of the Charles," she observed. "This outing appears to be fraught with peril."

"If you keep your distance from me," I suggested, "I believe you'll be all right. I'll try to slip below the surface in a splash-less fashion."

"What time does the show get under way?" she inquired.

"If possible," I stipulated, "I usually like to jump before 8:00 p.m.. The currents are more favorable at that time. Consequently, if I were to pick you up around 7:30, I think I could still make my window of opportunity."

"Sounds exciting," she exclaimed. "I'm looking forward to it."

"I find considerable satisfaction in knowing that my impending demise is eliciting those anticipation," I announced. "Are you sure you can control yourself between now and then?"

"I could say," Jennifer remonstrated, "that: 'Struggle is the anvil on which character is forged', but, somehow it seems so clichéd. Instead, I'll just run through a few anxiety reduction exercises and hope I make it."

"Ahh ... Jennifer," I said hesitantly, "there is one other thing." "Yes?" she said, in a tone of voice that suggested she might be about to hear the other shoe drop.

"Where do you live?" I asked.

Chapter 10: On Obedient Souls and the Spirit of Obedience

In view of the intensity of my feelings of anticipation about being, once again, in Jennifer's presence, I had convinced myself that my psychological state was going to inflate my perception of the passage of time. Happily, despite my condition, Friday evening arrived more quickly than I would have thought possible.

On my way to pick up Jennifer, I navigated my way through the lingering remnants of what is laughingly referred to as 'rush-hour' traffic. Thirty or forty years ago, if then, the rush from work might have taken only an hour, but, now, the rush started around two -thirty or three in the afternoon and began tapering off toward seven or seven-thirty in the evening.

I began to speculate that, perhaps, the inflationary virus that affects the value of money from time to time might have mutated, as has been the case with the causal agents of so many other treatment-resistant social diseases. The result of those a mutation might be manifesting itself as a continental grid-lock that was lasting for a length of time many times longer than the original rush -hour.

Continuing on with my traffic-induced flight of imagination, the thought occurred to me that just as we deal with adjusted dollars, we also deal with adjusted rush-hours. The unit of measurement, whether stated in terms of a dollar or an hour, might stay the same, but the meaning and significance of that unit has changed significantly over time.

Having arrived at this conclusion, it was a mere dive, paddle, and float down my stream of consciousness to the realization of how the same altered relationship between units of measurement and their meaning or significance had permeated so much of our lives. Everybody spoke about truth, sanity, justice, rights, freedom, democracy, spirituality, health, soul, purpose, knowledge, family and community as if they were commonly understood units of measurement through which to assess the quality of life. Yet, the meaning and significance of these units had each become a mini tower of Babel.

A red light brought me back to the modern version of a rush-hour.

Following Jennifer's directions, plus a few traffic related mid -course corrections, I, eventually, made my way to her house.

I parked the car in her driveway. By the time I had exited the car and approached the walkway, Jennifer already was outside on the porch, checking the front door to make sure it was securely locked.

As I watched her turn around and walk down the stairs of the porch, I felt both a deep emptiness coming from within me as well as a sense of presence emanating out of Jennifer. The presence seeped into my being and began pushing my emptiness aside.

I swallowed and said, rather self-consciously: "Seeing you is like receiving manna from heaven."

Jennifer smiled and said in a wonderful southern drawl: "My, my, David Phelps, you do say the most outlandish things." Then, apparently noticing I was blushing, Jennifer added in a normal voice, but with considerable warmth: "Saying that was very sweet of you, David. On an average day, one doesn't get likened to a Divine food. So, I do believe your words make today something special."

I walked to the passenger side of the car and opened the door. I did this not so much out of social convention or any kind of preconceptions concerning the roles of men and women, as I did out of a desire to be of service to the mystery that seemed to be entering my life in the form of Jennifer.

She accepted the gesture without comment. After she was fully in, I closed the door behind her.

I ambled around to the driver's side of the car, got in, shut the door and strapped myself in. Once the car started up, I backed down the driveway, put the gear-shift in drive and headed for the river Charles.

As we drove along, Jennifer began talking about what had happened with Beth's venture into the domain of the FBI. First, Jennifer said: "Ellen Hudson called and indicated that everything went reasonably well with Beth's interview."

Expanding somewhat, Jennifer said: "Ellen did say there were a few rough patches that had to be weathered when the FBI asked Beth where she had been for the last several weeks. In the end, however, and especially in the absence of any countervailing evidence, they let Beth go but told her to be available in case additional questions needed to be asked."

Not waiting to see if Jennifer was going to add anything further, I asked: "Did Ellen say whether or not the FBI was going to look into Beth's

abduction? Or do Native peoples only count when they are the designated target of apprehension?" I inquired, with a sprinkling of indignation.

Jennifer appeared to ignore my mini-fit of pique concerning the FBI. She responded with: "Ellen told me she had recommended to the agents conducting the interview that they might be well-advised to pursue the abduction angle.

"Apparently, the FBI intimated that as far as Beth's situation was concerned there was no clear-cut evidence demonstrating any federal laws had been violated. They promised, nonetheless, to keep Ellen's recommendation in mind during their investigation."

Jennifer dropped the subject of the FBI, at least for the moment, and returned to Beth. "Beth called to thank me again for putting her up for a few days and for getting Ellen Hudson to help out. Beth also said she had talked with people at the library where she works and that everything is okay there."

"Wonderful," I exclaimed with relief. "I was worried about how it would all turn out."

Adding to the information already passed on to me, Jennifer said: "Beth asked me to say 'Hello' to you for her. She indicated she would try to call you this weekend."

While processing the latest data on Beth, I remembered something. "I probably won't be here this weekend. There's someone I have to see in Washington, DC ... an old friend who works for the Department of Justice."

With a casual sort of curiosity, Jennifer inquired: "Feel free to tell me to keep my nose out of restricted areas, but does this have anything to do with Beth or Brian?"

With my left hand firmly on the wheel and my eyes shifting back and forth quickly between Jennifer and the road, I reached out with my right hand and made a shooing motion near her nose with the back of my hand. While Jennifer was laughing, I indicated: "Actually, there's nothing really private involved in the trip."

I briefly switched my attention to waiting for traffic to clear before making a left-hand turn and, then, resumed with what I was intending to say to Jennifer.

"I haven't seen my friend, Ken Pratt, and his family for some time. I thought I would combine a friendly visit with my desire to take advantage of Ken's intelligence sources and, perhaps, find out something about an organization that is trying to throw a lot of money at me for some part-time consulting work.

"Originally, the Brian and Beth affair wasn't a primary consideration in taking the trip to see Ken. Quite a few things, however, have happened since the idea of the trip became more than a possibility. Therefore, I'm sure Beth and Brian will be getting some air-play during the visit."

We were both silent for awhile. Each of us was following the path laid down in consciousness by our respective thoughts and feelings.

After a time, Jennifer looked over at me. I could see she was sort of studying me or gauging me in some manner.

Jennifer made sure her door was locked and shifted in her seat a little so she could lean against the door and look at me with a little more ease. When all the adjustments had been made, she vented forth with what was on her mind.

"What's really behind this emotional vendetta you are unilaterally carrying on with the FBI?" she wanted to know. "When you and Beth were in my office for the first time, after the hypnosis session, you indicated you might be willing, at a later time, to go into your personal reasons for not trusting the FBI.

"Well ... the time is later," Jennifer indicated and, in the process, gave somewhat exaggerated emphasis to the word "is". "So, what do you have to say for yourself, Dr. Phelps? Are you going to come clean, or do we have to take you downtown and take the gloves off?"

"We are downtown already," I observed. I slowed and stopped for a red light.

"In that case, we'll just have to skip the kid-glove treatment routine and go straight to the rough stuff," Jennifer said in a way that sounded like a copper who meant business.

While waiting for the light to change to green, I defiantly stated: "I ain't saying 'nuthin' until Ellen Hudson gets here."

The light changed. I drove through the intersection and took the next right.

I looked quickly over at Jennifer and returned my gaze to the road stretching out before the car. As the car rolled down the street, I proceeded to the topic in which Jennifer had expressed an interest.

"After going to Canada during the Vietnam war," I began, "my father became quite ill with a variety of medical problems. This occurred about four or five years after my leaving the United States.

"In the years between coming to Canada and my father's illness, I had been tried, in absentia, in Federal District Court, for draft evasion. Following my conviction, a federal warrant was issued for my arrest.

"Once the federal warrant was in effect, the FBI began to call my parents on a semi-regular basis to ask them questions such as: Did they know where I was? Has your son been in contact with you or vice versa? Did your son have any plans to return to the United States? Did they know if I had entered the United States at any time? And so on."

I suspended the talk while making another left-hand turn. Once the turn had been negotiated, I resumed speaking.

"My father's illness was very difficult and traumatic for both my father and mother. The calls of the FBI made the situation even more stressful.

"The FBI didn't just call once and let it go at that. They called up every three months or so, and they kept this up for a number of years.

"When my father passed away, FBI agents attended the funeral. They wanted to see if I would show up for the occasion. I've been told, I forget by whom, that quite a few federal fugitives are caught while visiting ill parents or trying to say good-bye at the funerals of family members."

I suddenly applied the brakes. A couple of young jay-walkers were running across the street. Fortunately, the early evening light was still good. At twilight time, I might not have seen them so easily.

I looked over at Jennifer, wondering if the braking had been too abrupt. Apparently, she had seen the incident coming and had managed to brace herself by extending one arm against the dashboard.

"Are you all right?" I asked.

"Fine," she replied. However, she added, in a rather cryptic fashion: "Our near miss in the external world paralleled a near miss in my internal world."

"I'm afraid I don't follow," I remarked.

"I was going to utter some harsh words concerning the recklessness of those kids, when a bit of my own history of jay-walking came back to me. Consequently, tolerance and patience seemed to be better roads for me to travel down."

Thinking about the close-call and Jennifer's comment, I forgot what I had been saying to Jennifer before hitting the brakes. Gradually, I remembered my place in the discussion.

"My parents had nothing to do with my decision to come to Canada. They did not help me to leave the United States, nor did they offer me any financial assistance while I was in Canada.

"My parents were not in favor of my evading the draft, but they didn't hate me for doing it either. There was some psychological and philosophical distance between us for a time. Eventually, however, we worked our way through the differences."

I started to slow down for another red light, but the light changed before I had to come to a full stop. I accelerated back up to a moderate cruising speed.

"The FBI bothered my parents for a number of years. Presumably, they were hoping either my Mom's and Dad's patriotism would overcome their parental affection for me or that my parents, inadvertently, would divulge some piece of information that might assist the authorities to arrest me.

"In effect, the FBI knowingly kept a deathbed watch over my father to see if their prey would step into the trap that they had set, with my father and mother as bait. In addition, like vultures, they hovered over my father's grave to peck at the grief that lingered there."

I slowed down and turned right at the intersection. I began looking for a parking spot.

While looking for a legally viable space, I finished trying to answer Jennifer's question. "I accept the fact that people like the FBI have a job to do. I'm even prepared to accept that their job can be, on occasion, a very difficult way to earn a living.

"What I don't accept is the frequency with which they seem to end up punishing, harassing and/or persecuting innocent people while they go about fulfilling their duties. Furthermore, they sometimes tend to go about their duties with a great deal of self-righteousness, arrogance and insensitivity."

Reflecting, for a short period of time, on what I had said, I shrugged my shoulders. "I suppose my real bone of contention with the FBI is its whole mind-set. How they treated my parents is but one manifestation of their psychological orientation.

"On far too many occasions, the mind-set of the FBI lends itself to all sorts of dubious enterprises. For example, the FBI was at the beck and call of the forces of McCarthyism. The lives of a lot of innocent people were ruined as a result of the activities of the FBI during that period."

"This organization also, frequently, has been in the service of big business while the latter attempted to limit the effectiveness and influence of unions. Long before organized crime ever showed up on the scene, the FBI was busy doing its best to undermine and contain union activity.

"Many people in the FBI viewed unions as just one more of the hydra-like heads through which the Red menace was believed to be manifesting itself. Concepts like poverty, hunger, exploitation, unsafe working conditions and abuse of human rights seemed to be beyond their ability to comprehend as legitimate reasons for trying to organize labor."

The engine of a parked car, up ahead on the right, was running. I slowed down, hoping the driver was about to vacate the space.

My hopes were dashed when the exhaust fumes disappeared and the driver got out of the car. I continued my search for a parking space.

"In any event, the FBI repeatedly has allowed itself to be used as an instrument of terror and oppression in relation to, for instance, Native peoples. In addition, the FBI was quite rabid in its pursuit of anyone who opposed the U.S.'s attempts to keep a corrupt, oppressive government in power in South Vietnam.

"On more than one occasion, the FBI has compiled an enemies list based not on criminal activity, but on the personal whims and prejudices of its so-called leaders. Moreover, this organization has a very disturbing tendency to bend, if not break, the law in order to satisfy whatever the current agenda demands ... an agenda, I might add, that is not always in the service of either the law or the people of the United States."

I was on my second trip around the block, and no parking spaces were in sight. I decided to try my luck with a street coming up on the left.

Just after making the turn, I spied the rarest of treasures: a parking space on the street. I quickly pulled into the empty spot and switched the engine off.

Turning to Jennifer, I said: "I'm sure you remember the experiments on compliance or obedience conducted by Stanley Milgram at Yale University back in the early '60s."

She nodded, yet with a trace of hesitation. Jennifer said: "I remember the broad outlines of the experiment," she confirmed, "but a number of the details have faded from memory."

"Hopefully, Jennifer, you'll be as patient with me as you were with our young jay-walkers, because I might repeat facts with which you are already familiar. In any event, I believe the Milgram experiment has relevance for the FBI issue."

Jennifer smiled, saying: "You're asking a great deal, David, but I'm prepared to grit my teeth and ride out the trial. Please, go on!" she urged in a reassuring manner.

"If you'll remember, Jennifer, the essence of the Milgram experiments was that roughly two-thirds of the experimental subjects showed themselves fully capable of inflicting, or so they were led to believe, great pain, if not life-threatening conditions, on other human beings. They were ready to do this for no other reason than that someone in a scientist's frock told them the experiment was important and needed to be completed.

"No one held a gun to their head. No one threatened them with punishment if they failed to comply with the request of the experimenter to continue with the experiment.

"Even when the subjects heard what they had been led by the experimenters to incorrectly believe were the screams of pain and anguish of people in another room, two-thirds of the subjects kept flipping the toggle switches. The subjects did this despite the fact they had been led to believe by the experimenters that their actions would send further shocks of electricity to the screaming person in the adjoining room.

"When the person, whom the subjects believed ... incorrectly ... was the recipient of the shocks, was heard over a speaker begging the subjects to stop, two-thirds, or more, of the subjects continued to throw the switches. These subjects might protest, or cry, or be on the verge of a nervous breakdown, but, in the end, two-thirds of the subjects would always throw the

next switch. All that was required was for them to be reminded by the experimenter that the experiment was important and that the subject had, of his or her own free will, agreed to participate in the experiment.

"Furthermore, when the level of shock to be given was indicated to be potentially life-threatening to the person in the next room, two-thirds, or more, of the subjects went through the complete sequence of graduated shock levels required by the experiment. They did so because of, among other things, their desire to be obedient to, or comply with, the expectations of the experimenter.

"The people in these experiments were not emotionally disturbed people or psychopaths. They were average people, drawn from a cross-section of the general population."

Having completed my synopsis of the Milgram experiment, the time had come to try to link it up with Jennifer's question. I started out by saying: "The FBI has an extensive battery of psychological tests and evaluations that all prospective candidates are required to complete.

Presumably, only those 'stable' individuals who satisfactorily pass these tests and evaluations will be permitted to proceed further in the training programs.

"Yet, those testing for psychological stability notwithstanding, the FBI continues to require, in addition, traits of compliance and obedience from its agents that, among other things, its program of mental evaluation is designed to identify in prospective candidates. Mavericks, rebels, independent thinkers and people who might be willing to resist the peer pressure of the 'team', are not suitable FBI material.

"The personality profile that the FBI finds useful can lend itself, and, in fact, has led, to all manner of excesses, abuses, and infractions. In turn, these abuses can lead, and have led, to the suffering, persecution, terrorizing and death of innocent people.

"Like the subjects in Milgram's experiments, these agents are led to believe their actions are necessary for the good of the experiment being run, in this case an experiment involving the nature of democracy. Sometimes the actions of the FBI do serve the interests and good of the experiment of democracy.

"Sometimes, however, the actions of the FBI do not serve the greater good. Indeed, as I briefly indicated earlier, history has produced many

substantial instances of a pathology that, from time to time, erupts within the FBI.

"Like the subjects in Milgram's experiment, far too many FBI agents will, when requested to do so, flip whatever toggle switches are indicated by their superiors. These agents might have reservations about what they are doing, or they might protest against what they are being called on to do, or they might even lose sleep over their actions, but they will continue to flip the toggle switches upon demand.

"If agents don't do this, they will follow the route of approximately one-third of Milgram's subjects who refused to comply with the experimenter's request to continue with the experiment. In other words, at some point during the course of one, or another, institutional experiment, a certain number of FBI agents will find themselves unable to comply with some of the requests being made by the people who are running the experiment. Among other things, this means that, on average, the people who remain in the FBI tend to represent a self-selecting group of highly compliant and obedient personality types."

I looked at the street scene through the front windshield. The shadows of a declining day were spreading everywhere. People of twilight were going about their business and pleasure.

Sensing that I was not yet finished, Jennifer waited patiently. She didn't appear to be gritting her teeth, but, maybe, she was good at hiding her impatience ... or boredom.

Finally, I said: "I don't like what the far-from-isolated cases of aberrant behavior of the FBI have done to my sense of trust concerning law-enforcement officials. I don't like the fact, for example, that on all too many occasions, and even with a game program, I often can't tell the difference between the so-called 'good-guys' and the alleged 'bad-guys' due to the manner in which the FBI has a tendency to blur the lines between moral and immoral activity ... not to mention issues of legality ... in order to suit its purposes and the vested interests it often serves.

"I don't appreciate the manner in which the FBI, sometimes with considerable enthusiasm, has contributed more than its fair share to the creation of an amorphous, ambiguous atmosphere of moral credibility. For example, when the FBI says someone is a 'bad-guy', I don't know any more if what they are saying is the truth or merely a public relations campaign that is being

conducted to camouflage a campaign of harassment, persecution and/or oppression of innocent people as required by some hidden agenda.

"If the FBI claims certain Native peoples are terrorists, is this the truth? Or are those claims part of a carefully-orchestrated plan to eliminate all sources of opposition to 'progressive' governmental and corporate programs aimed at completing the destruction of Native spirituality and ways of life ... a program begun several hundred years ago by other like-minded government and corporate agents?"

"Generalizing the issue before us, one might ask the following. If any given protest or activist group is labeled as a terrorist organization by the FBI, is this the truth? Or is this act of labeling just one step in a series of steps intended to demonize a group that doesn't fit into the FBI's current mind-set of what America is supposedly all about?"

While speaking to Jennifer, some part of my mind had been playing devil's advocate with certain aspects of my position. I decided to give voice to this unseen critic.

"A person might argue that the FBI is merely trying to enforce the law. However, there are at least three problems with this argument."

"First of all, the FBI doesn't always enforce the law. Sometimes, the FBI breaks and/or twists the law for its own purposes.

"Secondly, sometimes the FBI is very selective in deciding for whom, and against whom, it will enforce the law. For instance, for a variety of reasons, the federal authorities often prefer to go after street criminals rather than corporate criminals. Yet, and a lot of people don't know this, many more deaths are due to, and far, far more money is illegally obtained by, corporate activity than by street crime.

"Alternatively, the FBI often tends to prefer to arrest and prosecute protesters of government misconduct rather than arrest and prosecute the perpetrators of government misconduct. Or, the FBI is much more eager to apprehend small-time terrorists than it is willing to take a look in the mirror and see how it sometimes terrorizes, big-time, groups those as Native peoples.

"Lastly, to say the FBI merely enforced the law is to avoid the real issue. The Gestapo, the KGB, and the secret police of any number of countries enforced the law. However, none of this addresses the question of whether any of the laws in question ought to be enforced.

"Furthermore, one cannot merely say those issues are up to the courts or the legislature. One of the lessons of the Nuremberg Trials is that no one has the right to hide behind the excuse that one was merely following orders or acting in accordance with the requirements of the law.

"In addition, having the courts or the legislature respond to bad laws after-the-fact might be helpful for people in the future. Nevertheless, this doesn't do a whole lot for the people whose lives are destroyed by the enforcement of those laws before changes take place."

I wondered how Jennifer was feeling or thinking about what I had been saying. She seemed to be listening quite intently, but this didn't necessarily mean she felt any kind of resonance with my words or perspective.

Her opinions about me were beginning to be matters of concern to me. I hoped, perhaps even more than I was presently admitting to myself, that we would prove to be kindred spirits of the mind and heart.

My hopes, however, would not alter what I said to her. I would rather be rejected by someone for honest reasons than be accepted on the basis of superficial ties of compatibility that might come back to haunt us later in the relationship.

Returning to the final installment of my response to her original question, I said: "All of us seem to be caught in a catch-22 or double-bind. We were told, following Nuremberg, that we have a moral responsibility to resist all manner of evil, injustice and abuse. Yet, when we do this, we run the risk of getting punished, especially in the context of a social, political or legal atmosphere that is not yet prepared to acknowledge that what is being resisted is, in fact, evil, unjust or abusive.

"We are liable to punishment if we do act. We are liable to punishment if we don't act.

"I seem to recall Pavlov's dogs broke down under conditions in which they were required to make finer and finer discriminations in some given task. Increasingly, we might be pushing ourselves into a similar dilemma.

"We are being required to make finer and finer discriminations concerning judgments about when to actively resist, and when not to resist, injustice and evil. And, no matter what we do, we run the risk of punishment of one sort or another.

"One is left with a very uncomfortable feeling. If one acts, will one be next on the FBI's, quite frequently, arbitrary hit parade? On any given

occasion, one simply can't be sure if the FBI will be acting out of propriety or pathology.

"On the other hand, if, out of fear, one does not act, will one be subject to later prosecution by some other form of judgment? This other form of judgment could range from our conscience, to a Nuremberg-like process, to future generations, to Divinity."

I sighed. "The propriety-or-pathology malady that afflicts the FBI is present in a lot, if not most, of our institutions. In fact, it is present in most human beings, including myself.

"I have flipped more than a few toggle switches in my life. One might even say that my going to Canada must have felt like the throwing of a toggle switch, or three, to quite a few people I knew, especially my family. Whether I could have, or should have, avoided throwing those switches is another matter.

"Sometimes, however, I wonder about the FBI agents who bothered, and intruded upon, my parents. I wonder if they ever asked themselves whether they could have, or should have, avoided flipping the switches of pain in relation to my parents.

"In my better, more charitable moments, I give the agents the benefit of the doubt. In my more cynical moments, I tend to believe those issues never crossed their minds.

"Unfortunately, as far as the FBI is concerned, I tend to be given to more moments of cynicism than of charity. Consequently, those agents, whoever they are, along with their colleagues, don't enjoy many benefits of the doubt from me."

During the last few minutes of my answer, I had been seeing, without watching, some of the activity on the street. As this activity made the transition in my awareness from background to foreground, I turned back to Jennifer, waiting to see what she might say.

Apparently, she believed I might say something else, for she remained silent. Or she might have been considering how to respond to what had been said but hadn't yet arrived at any sort of reply with which she felt comfortable. Or, she might be thinking about how to ask me to take her back to her house without embarrassing either me or herself.

The silence went on a bit longer. Consequently, in order to break whatever tension might be present, probably mostly in me, I made a rather

pathetic attempt at a Porky Pig imitation: "Gg ... bb ... gg.. bb ... gg ... bbb ... that's all folks."

Jennifer laughed. "Do you do John Wayne, too?"

"I'm sure you have noticed," I admitted, "that I don't even really do Porky Pig."

"Yes, those an observation did drop by for a chat," she agreed, "but I didn't want to have to be the one who broke the news to you."

Jennifer looked at her watch, and I thought to myself: 'oh, no! she's going to suggest it's late, and she needs to get up early tomorrow.' I braced myself.

Having checked her watch, she looked over at me and said: "I'm afraid, David, we've missed your window of opportunity for jumping in the Charles.

"However, if you can live with the disappointment, are you still willing to take a walk by the river?"

Feeling relieved, I replied: "I accept your kind invitation." Then, with dramatic tones, I proclaimed: "My moment of destiny with the inviting depths of the Charles can wait until tomorrow."

"Not likely," countered Jennifer, as she got out of the car. "And why not?" I huffed in mock annoyance.

When I had got out of the car, Jennifer pointed out: "Destiny awaits you in Washington. If you jumped into the Charles tomorrow night, the river would have no choice but to toss you back, like an undersized fish."

"There's always the Potomac," I offered.

"Well, why don't you wait and see how things work out with your friend Ken and his family before making a final decision?" Jennifer counseled.

We began walking toward the river. The air had a very pleasant combination of warmth and coolness.

A trace of the smell of lilac wafted about. It would float by, then disappear, only to manifest itself again further on.

Snaking along the horizon was a last remnant of the sunset. Here and there, one could catch a glimpse of the fading colors of the sunset reflected from the surface of the river.

The sounds of the river were, as usual, soothing. I didn't understand the language, but the river seemed to have something to say to whomever might bother to listen.

Thoughts about my comments on the FBI drifted into and out of focus. The sounds, smells, sights and peace of the approaching night were providing stiff competition.

I hadn't taken a walk along the river in years. I was feeling a mixture of both happiness and sadness.

The happiness came from the pure enjoyment of being with Jennifer on a night like this. The sadness came from the regret of realizing all of the missed opportunities that, probably, had slipped past me, in years gone by ... opportunities for walking along the river with someone I liked.

My mind had begun to explore the pros and cons of choices made and not made, when Jennifer spoke. The sounds of her voice, irrespective of their semantic content, were like a counterpoint to the melody of the night.

"David, at this point in time, I don't have much feed -back to give to you about what you said to me in the car. It's not exactly the sort of discussion that one can call enjoyable, but this is really a reflection of the seriousness of the issues being raised and not a comment on your ideas, beliefs or values.

"I don't consider myself to be a very politically astute person. There are a lot of things about the history of political affairs, both domestic as well as international, that remain a mystery to me. You might even say that, in many respects, I'm sort of a politically-challenged human being.

"Consequently, I have few points of reference by which to gauge the degree of correctness or quality of your thoughts concerning the FBI. At the same time, your words have made me realize there are a number of things that I take for granted about the way the world works that might not necessarily be true.

"I don't know where, if anywhere, my realization is going to take me. Nonetheless, I want to express my gratitude to you for taking the time to answer my question in the way you did. If nothing else, there are some questions dancing around in my mind that were not there an hour ago.

"I consider those questions to be a kind of sacred gift or trust. I believe they come into our lives for a reason. I feel our responsibility is to try to determine their significance in relation to the reality of things.

"I've always believed in the importance of what I call the 'interrogative imperative'. I guess one might say this refers to the deep need within us to seek out the truth through, among other things, the posing of questions.

"Questions disturb our sleep. They upset us. They anger us. They embarrass us. They frustrate and perplex us. Yet, the right questions also can help us find out about who we are and what purposes, meanings and values might be entailed by that identity.

"Some of the questions that have arisen in me as a result of your answer are, I admit, potentially quite disturbing and upsetting. In time, I might come to agree with your assessment of things, and, then again, maybe I won't.

"In either case, my intention is not to shy away from the challenge that these questions are beginning to generate as they set down roots in my life. I'll let them continue to annoy me and irritate me until the personal and spiritual growth comes for which the questions serve as seeds."

Quite a few people were taking advantage of the weather as well as the magnetic-like properties of the river that were drawing people to the adjacent strips of land running along both of the banks of the river. Couples and small groups of people went past us in each direction. From time to time, the occasional singleton also strolled by.

Muffled, indecipherable sounds from a variety of conversations approached like on-coming tides and then ebbed away. Laughter sprinkled the night in seemingly random fashion.

There were some questions I had concerning Jennifer's life, both present and past. I doubted these questions were the kind that she would consider to be of the sacred variety, but they were of interest to me.

I cleared my throat and asked: "Aside from your clinical work, Jennifer, what else are you doing in a professional capacity? Are you teaching?"

"I'm on sabbatical," came the reply. "The leave started in January and runs through to the end of December. I'll begin teaching again next January."

"I'm consumed with jealousy," I pronounced. "My academic furlough is not due for another four years or so."

"What are you doing with your time away from official duties?" I inquired.

Jennifer said: "In theory, I'm writing a book. In practice, I actually haven't started writing.

"I spent the first five to six months of the sabbatical completing my research. Right now, I'm trying to get sufficiently organized to create breathtakingly beautiful and insightful prose in the last six months of my leave.

"I haven't made much progress. For the last couple of weeks, I've just been practicing various, hopefully aesthetically pleasing, poses with my hands over an imaginary computer keyboard ... trying to catch glimpses of myself in the mirror to determine how things might look to posterity."

"What's the book about?" I queried.

"Believe it or not you've already previewed the book," she remarked.

I thought for a moment and made an interrogative declaration: "The abduction phenomenon?!"

"The very same," she confirmed.

"I don't know how other people will respond to your presentation," I said, "but if their reaction is anything like mine, I believe your work will be quite well received."

"That's kind of you to say, David, but I have my doubts, especially with respect to many clinical circles as well as much of academia. More than one person has suggested to me that those a book might not be a good career move. They seem to feel the whole issue smacks of the tabloids and is not an appropriate topic for serious research and study."

I shook my head with a feeling of both sympathy toward, and empathy for, Jennifer's situation. Her experience with her book project was all too reminiscent of what goes on in many universities and colleges.

Partly out of the frustrations generated by my own encounters with the intellectual timidity of many academics, and partly as a general observation, I said: "Academia is supposed to be a marketplace for the free exchange of ideas. Regrettably, more often than not, this alleged bastion of intellectual freedom is an exercise in oppression and group think."

I began thinking about some of the many kinds of biases, pettiness, prejudice, narrowness and other unhealthy manifestations of ego that permeate so much of the life of a university or college campus. In conjunction with these thoughts, I said: "The amazing thing about those an environment is that anything new, interesting, and/or valuable ever gets introduced into academia, let alone survives."

The moon was still on the waxing side of its cycle, but it was approaching fullness. Light from the moon and the city had become wedded to the river's surface.

I returned to my biographical probing of Jennifer's life. "What subjects do you teach?" I asked.

"I help team teach an introduction to psychology, plus I offer several courses on personality theory and abnormal psychology," Jennifer answered. "This coming spring, the Department's going to let me run a trial course on transpersonal psychology.

"The Departmental chairman probably will be monitoring the course fairly closely. I'm hoping, nonetheless, that I will be permitted to try and get the students thinking about some of the mystical dimensions of transpersonal psychology.

"I'm not interested in foisting any particular view of spirituality onto the students. However, among other things, I would like the students to come away from the course with a positive orientation toward some of the spiritual possibilities inherent in transpersonal psychology.

"I hope the students will come to see that altered states of consciousness are not necessarily a sub-category of abnormal psychology. I also would like them to understand that altered states of consciousness might have something very fundamental to say about human potential.

"Issues of identity, meaning, interpretation, purpose, valuation, and methodology, all become important themes when one begins to explore transpersonal psychology. These are issues in which students ought to take an interest since these topics carry important implications for the personal lives of all of us."

I stopped and acted as if I were searching for something on or about Jennifer. She was both entertained and puzzled by my actions. "Where is it?" I inquired. "It's got to be here somewhere."

"What, might I ask is it that must be here?" she demanded with an accommodating bemusement.

"Why, the spring course catalog, of course," I said. "You were reading from it just now, were you not?"

Jennifer laughed. "I suppose I did sound like that didn't I?" she admitted.

"Just kidding," I said. "Actually, the course sounds quite interesting."

We resumed walking. I briefly turned my attention to the pleasant way the multi-media atmosphere of the night was pressing against my senses.

A short while later I returned my attention to Jennifer. I asked: "Do you follow some sort of religious or spiritual path? There are a number of things that you have said tonight, and on other occasions, that lead me to believe you do."

Jennifer began by saying: "A lot of people, including myself, might not refer to the path I follow as a religious one, but, yes I am committed to a spiritual way of life."

"What's the difference between religion and spirituality?" I asked. "I always sort of thought they were one and the same thing."

"One enters contentious territory," Jennifer warned, "when one embarks on an exploration of the possible differences between religion and spirituality. Many people would take exception, some less politely than others, with my ideas on the subject.

"First of all, David, religion tends to be heavily preoccupied with the world of concepts. These concepts ... whether in the form of theology, dogma, philosophy, or personal interpretation ... play fundamental roles in mediating and coloring an individual's understanding of Reality or Divinity.

"Spirituality, on the other hand, is preoccupied with the different levels and dimensions of the experience of Reality or Divinity. In other words, spirituality is advocating that one's spiritual experience, at some point, should not be mediated by concepts, theories or interpretations.

"Concepts might be acceptable up to a certain point, but the general consensus of the perspective of spirituality is that, ultimately, concepts lead one away from the truth, not toward it. This raises the problem of how one is to go about differentiating between, on the one hand, imagination or fantasy, and, on the other hand, truth or reality, but this is another matter.

"Secondly, religion often gives emphasis to issues of salvation. As those, one of the key motivations underlying many religious acts involves doing something because, theoretically, that action will help one gain heaven or acquire positive karma, while simultaneously helping one to avoid negative ramifications that might arise from sins of commission or omission.

"Spirituality doesn't deny the metaphysical realities or issues of salvation that are said to be associated with the positive or negative consequences of our actions. The motivational orientation, however, is entirely different.

"In spirituality, one's motivation should be to do things because of the intimate nature of our essential relationship with Reality or Divinity, and not because of what we might receive as reward or avoid in the way of negative consequences. The emphasis should be on doing things out of love and gratitude, rather than as a means to some further end.

"In short, religion is about what human beings seek from God. Spirituality is about what God seeks from human beings.

"Thirdly, generally speaking, religion operates on the basis of trying to change people from the outside in. Spirituality concentrates on helping people to change from the inside out.

"More specifically, religion is concerned with imposing a doctrinal framework onto the individual. This framework must be internalized in order for the individual to be considered a properly functioning member of the religious collective.

"Spirituality is concerned with the realization of one's true identity and essential capacity. Proper intention, thinking, understanding, awareness and activity all flow from a realized inner nature, not internalized external doctrines.

Jennifer turned her head away from me and lowered it slightly. She put one hand up toward her face and let the hand hover there.

Suddenly, she sneezed. This was quickly followed by another, lesser sneeze.

She rummaged around in her purse for some Kleenex. She wiped her nose and apologized for the interruption.

She threw the used Kleenex in a nearby garbage can. Closing her purse, she turned back to me and picked up where she had left off.

"Fourthly, religion tends to place great emphasis on the exoteric. One is required to perform rituals, irrespective of whether one understands the nature and purpose of those rituals. The important feature is to comply with the ritual and, therefore, conform to the letter of the law.

"In spirituality, the emphasis is much more on the esoteric dimension of whatever forms of practice one might pursue. One should try

to be receptive to the spirit of a practice. One should seek to understand the nature and purpose of those practices, not just conceptually, but experientially.

"Fifthly, in religion, faith is, all too frequently, a matter of a blind, static, rigid, narrow acceptance of some belief, value or practice. In spirituality, on the other hand, faith is intended to be a dynamic, living, flexible, continuous growth of one's understanding concerning the nature of one's relationship with Reality and Divinity.

"Religion often equates faith with an emotional or conceptual commitment to a belief system. Spirituality treats faith as a species of knowledge rooted in realizations drawn from personal experience.

"Sixthly, religion often becomes entangled in politics. This is so both within a religious collective as well as in the manner in which a given religion relates to the surrounding world.

"Spirituality, by and large, seeks to avoid the political sphere, preferring to contribute to society directly, and, where possible, anonymously. These contributions come through the beneficial effects of moral qualities those as compassion, patience, charitableness, tolerance, kindness, honesty, integrity, forgiveness and so on.

"Seventhly, religion tends to gravitate toward a authoritarian modus operandi in which submission is demanded of individuals. Spirituality, on the other hand, is centered around the command and respect that a person's recognition of the authoritative nature of truth brings. Submission is freely given.

"Eighthly, generally speaking, religion is governed by rules, whereas, spirituality is governed by principles. In religion, one needs to know what the rules are before one can act, and in the absence of specific rules, one tends to become disoriented. In spirituality, once one understands the principles, one is able to deal appropriately with any situation even when none of the available rules seems to be relevant to the present situation.

"Finally, in religion, the participation of the individual often revolves primarily around interaction with an institution those as a church, temple, mosque, or synagogue. Personal interaction with the leader of that institution tends to be of a secondary nature, if it takes place at all.

"In spirituality, participation primarily revolves around one's personal relationship with a teacher or guide. Participation in some kind of institutional activity is of secondary importance, if it occurs at all."

Jennifer followed up her nine-point distinction between religion and spirituality by saying: "Some people would argue that religion encompasses all the interests, emphases and tendencies of spirituality. However, if this argument were correct, the history of the world would be very different.

"Religion is what human beings bring to history. Spirituality is what Divinity or Reality brings to history. Spiritual history is very, very different from religious history.

"We are inspired and find hope, encouragement and love through spiritual history. We are embarrassed and discover despair, disappointment and enmity through religious history.

"People are inherently drawn to spirituality because it is in our essential nature to find resonance with the teachings and practices of spirituality. People become confused, however, when someone attempts to convince them that religion and spirituality are synonymous.

"People are induced to believe religion can satisfy and realize the longings of spirituality. This can never happen, because religion is preoccupied with the concerns of religion, not those of spirituality.

"Religion is at its best when it is informed, colored, shaped and oriented by spirituality. Spirituality is at its worst when it is informed, colored, shaped and oriented by religion."

When I was certain that Jennifer had finished, I remarked: "While I've been listening to you, Jennifer, I've realized that almost all of my interactions with religion have been very painful and frustrating. I often felt like a 'stranger in a strange land' and didn't understand why I felt that way.

"I'm quite certain I helped create many of my own problems, and I certainly don't mean to imply that all my spiritual difficulties are due to the influences of religious activity, beliefs or values. Yet, what you say makes a lot of sense with respect to why I frequently might have felt out of phase with many facets of a religious orientation and atmosphere.

"Until now, I've been very confused about what exactly was wrong. In fact, the whole situation has been so unpleasant and problem-laden that I've just let these issues slide from view.

"I wasn't an agnostic or an atheist. I hadn't devised any kind of philosophical or theoretical position concerning religious or spiritual issues. I just tried not to think about these things too much because I didn't seem to have any viable place to go with them.

"Earlier, Jennifer, you referred to yourself as being politically-challenged. Well, I suppose I've been a spiritually-challenged individual for quite some time.

"Perhaps, however, an important part of my problem is that I've been expecting religion to address my longing for spirituality when, if you are right, religion is largely incapable of doing so. In effect, if I might be so bold as to alter a song title slightly I think I've been looking for spiritual truths concerning my true identity and essential capacity in all the wrong places."

"David, at the risk of breaking the seemingly wonderful momentum we've got going here," Jennifer cautioned, "truth requires me to inform you that the song title in question has been altered more ... much more ... than slightly. So, I would have to say your boldness borders on, if not topples into, the realm of the reckless."

I responded with: "I'm on the verge of discovering the keys to the universe, and you're worried about technicalities. How can I soar with the eagles, when you want to tether me to a duckbilled platypus?"



Chapter 11: As Above, So Below

Up ahead, I spotted a bench facing the river. There was a lovely, large maple tree rising behind the bench that seemed to lend a sense of protected seclusion to the area. In addition, there was a light standard near one end of the bench that bathed the spot with a soft light that had a very appealing quality to it.

Apparently, Jennifer was drawn to the site as well. She said: "I imagine you are probably exhausted from all the spiritual excitement that's been going on. Would you like to rest your weary soul, or whatever, on yonder bench for a little while?"

"I am not worthy of your kind solicitations," I offered.

"You're right," she agreed, "you aren't worthy, but why don't we sit down in any case. Furthermore, I wasn't soliciting. I was suggesting."

We walked the short distance to the bench in silence and sat down. A slight, intermittent breeze was coming off the water and rustled lightly through the leaves of the maple behind us.

Although the number of people walking along the river had thinned out a little, there still were a few who, from time to time, passed near our bench area ... singly, in pairs, and, occasionally, in groups of three or four. In between the time of the passers-by, one could hear the water making contact with various rocks and other obstacles near the bank of the river.

After some minutes had passed in silence, while we each were absorbing the atmosphere that surrounded us, I said: "In some of my more idle moments, I have devised what I call the protein theory of relationships. Would you like to hear about it?" I inquired.

"Does it have a happy ending?" Jennifer asked.

"Well," I said, "the theory is kind of post-structuralist in its ambience, so I'm not sure there is any ending to it ... just a series of perspectives."

Jennifer repeated the name: 'protein theory of relationships', several times. "Hmmm," she murmured. "This sounds very reductionistic to me, David." "Not at all," I countered. "It's intended to be metaphorical." Jennifer sighed: "I hope I'm not going to regret giving you the go-ahead on this."

"You probably will regret it," I conceded, "but just try not to choke too much on the bitter pill that fate is forcing you to swallow ... the choking sound will disturb my concentration."

Jennifer made an exaggerated rolling, circular motion with her hand. With, what I hoped was, feigned impatience and irritation, she was imploring me to get going and try to speed things along.

"Very well," I said, "since the consensus of those in attendance seems to be overwhelmingly in favor of proceeding on, here follows the tale, in several acts, of the protein theory of relationships. Quiet please, and, kids, do not attempt this at home."

"Some might say it should not even be attempted here," Jennifer heckled.

Attempting to ignore her comment, I began my account with an imperious air. "As any little studious girl or boy knows, proteins are made up of a sequence of some twenty-plus amino acids."

"Moreover, every amino acid involves three aspects. There is a carboxyl group, that consists of a carbon atom, two oxygen atoms and an atom of hydrogen. In addition, there is an alpha-amino group, consisting of two hydrogen atoms bonded with an atom of nitrogen. Both the carboxyl and the alpha-amino groups are always the same from one amino acid to the next.

"There is also a third part of an amino acid that differs from amino acid to amino acid. This third part is what gives any given amino acid its special or particular characteristics.

"The simplest example of this third component is glycine that has a single hydrogen atom, in addition to the carboxyl and alpha-amino groups that glycine holds in common with other amino acids. The third component of each of the other twenty-odd amino acids differs not only from glycine's hydrogen atom, but from one another as well.

"Chains of amino acids are held together through covalent bonding in that various electrons are shared among some of the atoms of neighboring amino acids. These chains are known as polypeptides.

"The specific sequence of the different amino acids that form the polypeptide backbone are known as the primary structure of a protein. Each protein has a unique sequence of amino acids and, therefore, a unique primary structure.

"These polypeptide chains tend to have twisted, multi-dimensional personalities. In other words, they prefer not to remain straight and unidimensional. They like to fold up into three-dimensional structures. This three-dimensional form is known as the tertiary structure of a protein.

"The pattern of folding depends on the way positively and negatively charged molecular groups are distributed along the polypeptide chain. Some parts of this chain of amino acids are attracted to other portions of the same chain, and some parts of this chain are repelled by other sections of that chain."

Jennifer held up a hand, indicating her desire for a temporary halt to my account. "What happened to the secondary structure part of this story?" she asked. "We seemed to have shifted from primary to tertiary, with nary a word about what comes in between."

Responding to her with the impatient manner with which a side-show carnival barker might deal with someone who was trying to poke holes in the spiel, I said: "If the young lady would be patient, all will be revealed in its proper time.

"Now," I mumbled, "where was I before being so rudely interrupted." I made an eureka sort of face, as if discovering something, and started in again on unpacking the intricacies of the protein theory of relationships.

"When everyone gets done folding around, the polypeptide chain of a given protein has a unique three-dimensional shape. No two kinds of protein have precisely the same shape, although, sometimes, two different kinds of proteins might have similar three-dimensional folding patterns, either as a whole, or, more importantly, in part.

"Now, the primary and tertiary structures of a given protein have a lot to do with what kinds of processes those a protein can participate in or with what sorts of function the protein can have. For example, because of these primary and tertiary structural features, some proteins serve as enzymes which help various biochemical reactions take place. Enzymes are catalysts.

"Other proteins, because of different primary and tertiary structural features, serve as building blocks for the various parts of a cell. These building blocks are referred to as structural proteins.

"Enzyme proteins and structural proteins depend on one another in various ways. Neither one is worth much on its own. Moreover, these two

kinds of molecule, together with a few others types of molecules those as DNA, RNA, lipids, and carbohydrates, help give expression to the complex forms and processes that characterize a living organism.

"Both enzyme proteins and structural proteins depend on their primary structures and their tertiary structures to accomplish their respective tasks. If an enzyme, for example, has the 'wrong' kind of shape for a given situation, biochemical processes cannot take place quickly enough, if at all, to be able to help sustain life. On the other hand, if a structural protein has the 'wrong' structural properties for a given situation, then the form of an organelle, cell, tissue, organ or organism will be defective in some fashion.

"This issue of correct shape becomes especially important when one is considering certain kinds of intracellular and intercellular forms of communication. As I am quite confident our very intelligent audience knows, there are different kinds of protein receptors embedded in the surface of the membranes of cells. Only biological agents, those as other proteins, with the right shape or pattern of folding, will be able to activate these membrane receptors.

"When do we get to the metaphorical part?" Jennifer inquired. "Your wish is my command." I responded.

"I wish we could move onto something else," she indicated with an amused expression.

"Wrong wish," I told her. "Besides, you feet shufflers in the audience will be happy to know that, yes, indeed, we have arrived at the magical moment of transition to the realm of metaphor."

I mentally reviewed the brief overview of proteins that I had given. Next, I quickly considered the steps that were remaining to establish the metaphor I had in mind.

When I was ready, I said: "There are a number of themes that affect the relationship between a man and a woman. Consider a list of thematic possibilities consisting of trust, creativity, communication, intimacy, power, companionship, openness, spirituality, growth, love, compromise, stability, family, career, sensitivity, passion, growth, commitment, security, respect, independence and sexuality.

"Not everyone thinks about, or values, these themes in the same way. Men differ from one another in the priorities they assign to these themes.

Women also differ from one another with respect to how they would hierarchically rank these themes. And, of course, men and women often differ from one another in terms of the relative importance they would give to various themes from the foregoing list.

"Thus, one person might place intimacy, trust, family, respect, compromise, sensitivity, commitment and communication toward the top of her or his preference-ranking. The same individual might put creativity, passion, independence, career, and sexuality near the bottom of his or her preference-ranking. Finally, this person might arrange themes those as stability, growth, power, security, companionship, openness, and spirituality somewhere in the middle of the preference-ranking hierarchy.

"Many people might put love at the top of their preference hierarchy. At the same time, many of us realize we might have to settle for a preference sequence that is devoid of love, even while companionship, intimacy, passion and sexuality might be present in varying degrees and combinations.

"Another individual might want to give primary emphasis to themes that, for the other person, were of only middling significance. Furthermore, themes that were toward the bottom of the first person's preference hierarchy might be moved toward the middle of the preference-ranking hierarchy by the second individual. Consequently, the themes that had been of primary importance to the first person get pushed to the bottom of the preference hierarchy by the second person.

"Obviously, the possible combinations are quite extensive. Even if two people included roughly the same kinds of themes in the top, middle and bottom portions of their preference hierarchy, the way in which these themes were organized and ranked within the three sections could be very different.

"Let us treat each of these themes ... that is, openness, trust, passion, and so on, as if they were amino acids. There is, however, at least one major difference between those themes and amino acids.

"In the case of amino acids, two of the three components that make up the amino acid ... namely the carboxyl and alpha -amino groups ... are always the same across amino acids. Even the third component of the amino acid, the portion that distinguishes one amino acid from another,

will stay the same in every instance of a particular kind or type of amino acid.

"In human beings, on the other hand, the meaning of any given theme ... those as intimacy, independence, commitment, communication, respect, and so on ... will often vary from individual to individual. This is not only true across individuals it might also be true within one and the same person over time.

"However, just as any given amino acid has three components, so, too, all of the previously mentioned twenty-plus themes also could be said to have three components. More specifically, there are social/cultural, biological and hermeneutic or interpretive dimensions that interact to form the structural character of each of the twenty-plus themes that are being treated like amino acids.

"Naturally, there are certain commonalities of understanding that link, say, your understanding of themes such as commitment or independence and my understanding of these themes. These commonalities come from similarities in our biological, social and interpretive experiences. Nevertheless, because there also are differences, of varying degrees, in our biological, social and interpretive experiences, we might not understand the aforementioned twenty-plus themes in precisely the same way.

"For instance, there are some who would argue that, among other differences between men and women, the way men and women understand, and rank, the various themes that tie a relationship together differs quite significantly from one sex to the other. Whether these differences of ranking and understanding are due to inherent differences between men and women, or are due to processes of socialization, or some combination of the two, involves issues of considerable contentiousness."

Jennifer interjected with: "Is this protein theory of relationships a guy-thing?"

"Of course, it is a guy thing," I said. "After all, the inventor of this illustrious theory just happens to be a guy.

"Presumably, however," I added, "you are really probing to determine if the protein theory of relationships is typically and characteristically, if not stereo-typically, the way all men or most men think. Is

my presumption correct ... ?" I was about to say "miss", but changed it to the more politically correct: "Ms." in the nick of time.

"Well, yes, I guess so," she replied.

With words of dulcet reassurance and overtones of mock hallowedness, I indicated to her: "One can only hope the truth of things is gender-neutral. On the other hand, I am open, within certain limits, to the possibility that just as, say, chains of polypeptides might come, at least in theory, in left-handed and right-handed properties of optical activity, so, too, there might be sex-based versions of reacting to, or transmitting, the unitary light of truth."

An expression of realization came over Jennifer's face. She said: "You know the famous Zen koan that asks: 'What is the sound of one hand clapping?'"

I nodded affirmatively.

"I wonder," she mused, "if anybody ever asked whether the master was talking left hand or right hand?"

Laughing, I said: "Perhaps, we should leave that issue as an exercise for the audience to work on in its spare time. Now, if you will kindly permit me to return to the far more important issues ... excuse the pun ... at hand."

"By all means," Jennifer murmured.

"Thank you," I said in a perfunctory sort of way. Beginning, once again, to try to finish off the effort of many idle hours, I said: "If our listening audience will remember, we left our hero back at the laboratories of the protein theory of relationships.

"When one arranges the aforementioned twenty-plus themes in a ranked order of preference, one has something that is similar to a sequence of amino acids or a polypeptide chain. We will refer to this as the primary structure of the hierarchical ranking or sequencing of one's preferences concerning themes those as security, creativity, family, career, independence, intimacy, commitment, love, etc..

"As is true in the case of polypeptide chains, the themes of a given person's preference ranking establish shared bonding arrangements with neighboring themes in the hierarchy. These bonding arrangements help give stability, as well as an over-all order, to an individual's preference rankings.

"For instance, let us suppose that the first five items in someone's preference hierarchy sequence were the following: trust, commitment, companionship, intimacy and family. Obviously, the issue of trust will share certain bonds of commonality with commitment, and the theme of commitment will, in turn, share links of various kinds with both of its neighbors: trust and companionship. This sort of shared bonds or links will continue all the way down the preference hierarchy sequence.

"In addition to the shared bonding arrangements among neighboring themes within a preference hierarchy ranking or sequencing, there, also, are various dynamic arrangements among the themes in different portions of a preference sequencing. This kind of interaction might be likened to the dynamics that goes on within a polypeptide chain.

"More specifically, depending on the character of a given preference sequencing, different parts of the primary structure of an individual's ranking of preferences will enter into dynamic relationships, of one kind or another, with each other, as a result of an individual's personal history, personality traits, interests and so on. Thus, themes from the top portion of one's preference hierarchy will be drawn toward, and/or repelled by, other themes in the middle and bottom portions of one's preference sequence, and vice versa.

"For example, one individual's preference hierarchy sequence might show certain links of attraction and/or repulsion among, say, themes of security, compromise, stability and respect that are distributed, in some fashion, across that person's preference sequence. The fact a given theme appears in the middle or bottom portion of a preference hierarchy doesn't necessarily mean this theme will be antagonistic to, or opposite from, those themes that appear higher up, or lower down, in the hierarchy.

"Sometimes, the themes that are most important to one, are incompatible with, or conflict with, one another. Sometimes, one will consider one theme as being more important than another theme, and, as a result, the second theme will get pushed toward the bottom of the hierarchy, but not necessarily because of inherent conflicts between the two.

"The second theme just might not be that important to one's happiness or peace of mind or whatever. Nonetheless, there still might be various kinds of resonances and secondary or tertiary links, both positive and negative, between themes in different parts of the preference hierarchy. Depending on the character of an individual's preference

hierarchy, different patterns of attraction and repulsion throughout the preference hierarchy sequence are possible.

"These patterns would be the basis of what one could envision as a set of dynamic folding arrangements that are observed in any given preference hierarchy sequencing. However, unlike the three-dimensional folding patterns of proteins, the folding patterns of a preference hierarchy sequence would be far more complex and could not be restricted to just three spatial dimensions. Nevertheless, as far as the protein-theory of relationships is concerned, this multi-dimensional pattern would still constitute the tertiary structure of a person's preference hierarchy sequence."

"For the record," Jennifer interrupted, "I would deign to point out that we still have not heard from that elusive secondary structure. May we in the audience look forward to the happy occasion when our concerns in this matter might be allayed in a suitable manner by the speaker?"

"At this time, all that can be said is this: the issue of secondary structure is a matter of family values. Please, I can say no more."

"Please," she confirmed, "say no more."

Like a performer who doesn't know when to get off stage, I plunged on, hoping to resurrect my act from its condition of code blue. "The folding aspect of a preference sequence should, perhaps, be construed more in a metaphorical sense than a literal manner. The idea of folding is intended to provide a concrete image for thinking about the way in which different aspects of one's preference hierarchy are drawn toward, or pushed away from, other aspects of that hierarchy.

"As is the case with proteins, the primary and tertiary structure of a given person's preference hierarchy sequence has a lot to do with the functional character of those a sequence. A person who most values trust, commitment, compromise, stability, and security, probably will operate or function in a very different way from a person who primarily values independence, passion, creativity, growth, and career.

"Unlike the case with amino acids and proteins, the different themes that make up the preference sequences of two people can serve as both catalysts as well as structural building blocks for a relationship. Whether, in any given set of relational circumstances, a theme serves primarily as a catalyst or a structural building-block would depend on the specific character of those circumstances.

"Sometimes, for instance, trust or passion or independence could serve as catalysts for enhancing a relationship. At other times, these same themes might serve as building blocks that lay down a foundation for, as well as help give shape to, the development of other aspects of the interactive dynamics of the preference hierarchy sequences of, say, a woman and a man.

"In addition, as with proteins, if the primary and tertiary structures of one person's preference hierarchy sequence is not compatible with the primary and tertiary structure of another person's preference hierarchy sequence, the relationship might be dysfunctional. In other words, under those circumstances, sooner or later, the building-blocks and catalytic processes that are necessary for the continued, effective life of the relationship will either breakdown or lead to numerous kinds of stresses, strains and distortions in the relationship.

"Although both polypeptide chains and preference sequences might enter into complex folding arrangements, often times only certain portions of these folded structures serve as the primary site of activity. However, the overall pattern of folding has been necessary in order to create the sites that have just the right kinds of properties to become the focus of effective or functional interaction with, say, other proteins.

"Consequently, for one individual, the attractive and repulsive characteristics of her or his preference hierarchy sequence might create a pattern of folding that brings together, from different parts of that person's preference sequence, themes of sexuality, career, family, trust, respect and stability. For the individual in question, this complex of themes, along with the dynamics that link the elements of this complex together, constitute the primary site of activity through which this individual relates to his or her partner.

"There might be other secondary, tertiary or quaternary sites of relational activity. These additional sites have been created in the same way as the primary site of activity.

"In other words, they are created through the manner in which the attractive and repulsive dynamics of a person's preference hierarchy cause themes from various sections of the sequence to come together to form complexes with different kinds of properties and functions. The thematic composition of these sites would vary from person to person, and even vary within one and the same person over time.

"In view of the foregoing possibilities, one might conjecture something along the following lines. A person would tend to interact with different people through means of those kinds of activity site in her or his folded preference sequence that had a form or shape that was most likely to establish a workable fit with some activity site, or sites, with the other person's complex, multi-dimensional folding arrangement of her or his own preference sequence.

"As is the case with polypeptide chains, so, too, preference hierarchy sequences are affected by environmental conditions. Those conditions might either help the viability of those chains and sequences, or undermine their viability.

"In biochemistry, when a protein loses its functional integrity as a result of environmental conditions, those as heat, pH values, and so on, the protein is said to be denatured. The same sort of thing happens in relation to preference hierarchy sequences.

"However, in these latter cases, the environmental forces that help lead to the denaturing of a person's preference hierarchy have more to do with social, political, spiritual, philosophical, and economic conditions than purely physical forces those as heat, pH values and the like."

"What about illness and death?" Jennifer inquired. "These conditions involve physical processes.

"Some of us in the audience might be willing to hazard a guess that these physical conditions could have a fairly sizable denaturing impact on an individual's preference hierarchy. Certainly, rumors abound in this regard with respect to death.

"I, myself, of course, have not, yet, had an encounter of the inevitable kind with a denaturing process that involves, shall we say, extreme prejudice to my bodily wherewithal. I've been told, nonetheless, that I'm on an intercept slope with those an event."

"Young lady," I remarked, "your point is well taken, and when my article comes out, I'll be sure to refer to this contribution of yours in an appropriately obscure footnote. Having said this, however, I hope you will permit me to suggest to you that I fear you might not have entered into the proper spirit of things with such intrusive commentary."

"I can't do anything about the hoping part of your request," Jennifer countered, "but I'm afraid I'll have to say no to the permission-seeking part of your offer."

"But," I objected, "since I already have made the suggestion that you are refusing me the permission to make, what do you propose that I do?"

"Oh! that is those a leading question, sir, but I'd settle for having the whole matter stricken from the cosmic recording of this event."

"So noted," I said, "but those possibility seems beyond the capabilities of this humble person.

"May I continue anyway?" I asked.

"If you must," Jennifer replied.

"During courtship," I observed, "two individuals should be taking a look at the degree of conformational compatibility of the entire range of their respective packages of primary and tertiary structures involving their preference hierarchies.

Usually, however, many people get caught up with just a few points of attraction, those as, say, sexuality and family, while overlooking much of the rest of the dynamics of the way two preference hierarchy sequences operate, not only within themselves, but in relation to the other person's primary and tertiary structures, as well.

"Even if we were to limit attention to just the small set of themes that form the primary sites of relational activity of two people's folded preference sequences, most people don't look at the dynamics of the situation very closely. I'll give an example of what I mean here.

"Let's assume that person 'A' has a primary activity site consisting of themes those as family, security, sexuality, commitment and spirituality. Let's further assume that person 'B' has a primary activity site consisting of independence, sexuality, commitment, security and family.

"On the surface, there would seem to be quite a bit of compatibility between these two people. Four out of five of the indicated themes match ... namely, family, security, sexuality and commitment."

"In reality, however, there might be very different kinds of dynamics and interpretive processes going on within each person in relation to the themes that form their respective active relational sites. To begin with, we don't

know the precise sequence of the preference hierarchy rankings for either of these people.

"In addition, we don't know how the attractive and repulsive tendencies in their different preference orderings cause the respective sequences to fold in order to form the active sites in question. Moreover, we don't even know what each of the people means by the themes that are thought to be held in common.

"Each of the two, for example, has the themes of sexuality and family as part of their active site. But, do they necessarily value them or think about them in the same way?

"For one person, sexuality might be a means to having a family. For the other person, family might be considered to be an incidental outcome of sexuality.

"One individual might look at family purely in terms of the notion of a nuclear family and considers the notion of an extended family to be both intrusive as well as problem-laden. The other person might believe that an extended family enriches and supports the nuclear family and is, therefore, something that is very fundamental and necessary.

"One person might look for security through relationships. The other individual might feel security is rooted in money and property.

"Person 'A' believes commitment is something the other person needs to provide. Person 'B' feels the same way.

"The independence of person 'B' and the spirituality of person 'A' might or might not find a way to coexist. A lot depends on the kind of independence and spirituality one is talking about, and a lot depends on how independence and spirituality fit into their respective preference sequences.

"Presumably, of course there would be very few, if any, instances in which the primary and tertiary structures of both individuals would be perfectly compatible. Consequently, the problem is one of trying to assess the relative degrees of compatibility and incompatibility that are present.

"To complicate matters, the preference hierarchy sequences of many people often do not remain the same over the course of a lifetime. Sometimes these alterations are relatively minor, and sometimes the transformations in the hierarchy are considerable.

"When one looks at the incredible complexity of the problems involved in matching up the primary and tertiary structures of two people, one is struck by a number of considerations. Firstly, one should not be surprised by the high incidence of divorce, separation and general unhappiness in most marriages. Secondly, one should be surprised by the existence of relationships that are characterized by any degree of long-term stability, happiness and fulfillment.

"Thirdly, in light of all the domestic and social problems that arise out of couples with non-matching preference hierarchies, one can't help but be surprised that so few, if any, of our primary and secondary schools devote time to helping students learn about the ways in which the ranking, interpreting and dynamics of the twenty -plus themes mentioned earlier has both short-term and long-term consequences for the health and success of one's relationships with other people."

Jennifer said: "At the risk of inviting the wrath of the powers that be, I'm still waiting for some kind of clarification on the significance of secondary structure in both proteins as well as preference hierarchies. If you delay much more in providing an explanation for what you claim is a matter of family values, I'm going to begin to suspect you're really a politician running for office who's trying to dodge the tough issues."

"Those are potentially slanderous sentiments, young lady, especially the politician angle," I charged. "I find them most offensive and foul.

"However," I offered, in a more conciliatory tone, "since you have, once again, persisted in raising this matter, I feel the time has come for me speak on this matter of secondary structure. I'm sure, after hearing my explanation, you will see I have been neither hiding nor dodging anything. Hopefully, these vicious innuendoes concerning my integrity will be laid to rest once and for all."

Sniffing away the last of my pseudo-indignation, I said: "Although there are exceptions to the rule, nonetheless, the conformational shapes of the vast majority of proteins fall into two broad categories of classification. One category of proteins is known as fibrous, and the other conformational type is referred to as globular.

"Globular proteins are relatively tightly coiled structures, assuming, as their name indicates, a globular or spherical form. Most of the,

roughly, two thousand enzymes about which biologists know are examples of globular proteins. In addition, there are a number of proteins with transport or hormonal functions that also are globular in nature. Furthermore, all of the antibodies fall under the globular category of proteins.

"Much, but not all, of the protein theory of relationships is built around the properties and qualities of globular proteins. Nonetheless, there still is room in the theory to accommodate some of the characteristics of fibrous proteins as well.

"Generally speaking, fibrous proteins are made up of chains of polypeptides that run in parallel with one another along a given axis. This category of protein constitutes the essential material that forms, among other things, connective tissue in more complex animals. Those fibrous proteins are found in bones, tendons and elastic connective tissue.

"The, now infamous, secondary structure of proteins refers to the repetitive arrangement of polypeptides that extends longitudinally along one dimension. The backbone of these kinds of polypeptide chain often are either helically coiled or run in a zigzag fashion down the length of the chain.

"Sometimes, a number of individual helical coils wind themselves around one another in the same manner in which strands of hemp are intertwined to form a length of rope. This is referred to as supercoiling.

"If we substitute, once again, the notion of a preference hierarchy sequence for a polypeptide chain, one has little difficulty in applying the idea of secondary structure to human relations. For example, the recurring arrangement of polypeptide chains that is characteristic of secondary structure can be likened to the members of a family.

"Taken collectively, relationships among the members of the family constitute the connective tissue that binds the family together. This is especially clear in the case of supercoiled helical structures whose individual strands or 'lives' become intertwined over time.

"Just as the functional effectiveness of a given kind of connective tissue will depend on both the quality of its individual polypeptide chains as well as on the way these chains of polypeptides interact with one another, so, too, is this the case with respect to the character and dynamics of the preference hierarchy sequences of the members of a family. In both polypeptide chains and preference sequences, defective features in either of the foregoing two

aspects of the secondary structure of connective tissue could lead to problematic functioning in those tissues.

"Dysfunctional families arise out of the way the preference hierarchies of the individual members of the family play off against, and affect, one another. Any one, or combination, of the twenty-plus themes

I mentioned earlier could be the source of difficulties in a family. Differences among family members in ranking hierarchies, or differences of interpretation concerning the meaning and significance of many themes, or pathological dynamics involving the interaction of the preference hierarchies of family members, can all contribute to the manner in which a family is dysfunctional."

At this point, Jennifer inquired: "How would the issue of identity fit into your protein theory of relations? For instance, is identity something that pre-dates, so to speak, the individual's preference hierarchy and helps shape, color and orient the character of that hierarchy? Or, is identity something that arises, in a sense, after the fact ... that is after a given preference sequence has become established?

"Stated slightly differently, does one invent or create identity as a function of the process of trying to work out a preference hierarchy in the context of day-to-day living? Or, does one generate a preference hierarchy as a function of one's existing identity ... an identity that one comes to recognize through the process of establishing a preference hierarchy?"

After a brief pause, while I had been busy trying to think of how to respond to Jennifer's initial set of questions, she asked a further question and followed it with a comment. "Does, or would, your theory allow for the co-existence of two kinds of identity ... one identity that was invented and another identity that was indigenous to the individual? Maybe the themes that become part of the preference hierarchy are the playing fields through which invented and indigenous identities vie with one another for control over how preferences interact in relation to one another, as well as how they are ranked and interpreted by the individual."

As I struggled to find an intelligible way of responding to that which had grown to three questions and one comment, she added an observation. "Of course, I might only be giving expression to my own inclinations, but of the twenty-plus themes that you listed as potential candidates for any given preference hierarchy, the only theme that seems capable of effectively and

harmoniously organizing the primary, secondary and tertiary structures of an individual's preference hierarchy is spirituality."

I replied: "Well, what about philosophy or science or mythology? These are not among the themes I listed, but one could learn about them and use their framework to rank, interpret and dynamically link the various themes of a preference hierarchy. One's sense of purpose, meaning, valuation and identity might all arise in this fashion."

"Yes, one could," Jennifer admitted, "but, like religion, to me, they seem to be imposed from the outside rather than arising from within as I believe is the case with spirituality. I guess this brings us back to my three questions concerning whether identity is invented, indigenous, or involves a struggle between the two."

"Couldn't one argue," I countered, "that reason and understanding arise from within? One adopts a philosophical, scientific or mythological position on the basis of one's rational reflection on the available empirical evidence."

"One possible problem with your suggestion," offered Jennifer, "is that what is called 'rational reflection' is shaped by assumptions, biases and processes of evaluation that come from external institutions and social practices. Not only are these assumptions, and so on, quite arbitrary, on many occasions, but they cannot always be justified in any rational manner."

"Besides, for the sake of argument, let's forget about the issues of arbitrariness and justifiableness in relation to some of the underpinnings of rational reflection. Even under these circumstances, I'm not convinced rationality, alone, could effectively and harmoniously organize the primary, secondary and tertiary structures of a single person's preference hierarchy, let alone the dynamics of the set of preference hierarchies in a family, neighborhood or society."

"Doesn't spirituality have its own share of subjectivity problems?" I inquired. "Surely, one cannot suppose that everything which arises from within an individual is the unadorned truth just because one slaps the label of 'spirituality' on it."

"Masters of spirituality or mystics would agree with you completely," Jennifer pointed out. "They would acknowledge the issue of subjectivity as a major source of problems on the spiritual path. At the same time, they indicate these problems are resolvable ones. In fact, one of the

purposes of the spiritual or mystical path is to provide the individual with a methodological means of coming to realize the correct resolution to, among other things, problems of subjectivity."

Jennifer was quiet for a moment. She appeared to be preoccupied with some aspect of either her previous comments concerning my theory or some dimension of that theory on which she had not yet commented.

Finally, she said: "The only other thing that occurs to me in relation to your theory, David, is the somewhat arbitrary number of the twenty-plus themes that you cited earlier. I understand you are trying to maintain certain parallels with the structure and dynamics of protein formation and function. Furthermore, I also found the themes you did mention to be quite interesting selections for the exploration of relationships between, say, women and men.

"Nevertheless, from a mystical point of view, there are, at a minimum, at least ninety-nine qualities of Divinity that are capable of being given manifestation, to varying degrees, through human beings. The manner in which these themes of Divinity are, let us say, woven together to give expression to any particular individual could, I think, still fit in with the overall structure of your theoretical framework, but they would add quite a lot of depth, breadth and richness to your basic idea."

Although Jennifer had been ribbing me in a good-natured way throughout my presentation, she had raised some interesting issues. Despite the fact the protein theory of relationships had been just a spare-time sort of intellectual diversion for me, nonetheless, I often found myself tinkering around with the various components of the theory in a semi-serious manner.

Yet, after working, on and off, with this idea for a period of time, I was still uncertain whether or not the theory had something constructive and, potentially, useful to offer. Perhaps, the whole idea was just another example of how academia, quite frequently, complicates a matter unnecessarily.

Conceivably, the theory didn't really have much to offer except, possibly, as a way of visualizing various aspects of the structure, interpretation and dynamics of relationships. Sometimes, however, just being able to express a problem in concrete terms helped one to better understand different dimensions of an issue.

From time to time, I had toyed with the possibility of using the protein theory of relationships as the starting point for developing some kind of interpersonal relations or moral education course that might be used in the public school system. Part of the reason for considering those an application for my part-time theory was because I wasn't all that impressed with the theoretical and empirical support for a variety of staged-based and values oriented programs that were being used by some public school teachers.

Consequently, I had been trying to come up with a different way of engaging the underlying moral and psychological issues associated with those programs. The twenty-plus themes of the protein theory of relationships, although, admittedly, somewhat arbitrary, might be part of the kind of alternative approach for which I had been looking.

When one considered the interactive dynamics of the twenty-plus themes of the protein theory of relationships, together with the issues associated with ranking and interpreting these themes, one seemed to have the basic materials for some interesting discussions and lessons involving morality, values, methodology, interpretation, and interpersonal relations. Even more importantly, such an educational context would not have to be tied to a single set of theoretical preconceptions about human nature or developmental stages.

In other words, the twenty-plus themes of the preference hierarchies entail common yet important conceptual and emotional issues in our day-to-day lives. As those, they constitute a natural staging area for looking at a variety of approaches to purpose, meaning, relationships and organizing our lives.

Moreover, I had a feeling that, to a degree, one might be able to explore these issues independently of the dogmas of preconceived political, theological or economic positions, and without necessarily being forced into an empty relativism in the process. Love, trust, creativity, intimacy, commitment, growth, respect, passion, stability, openness, communication, compromise, and so on, tended to assume a considerable degree of shared importance in people's lives irrespective of our philosophies.

Whatever the ultimate purpose of life might be and irrespective of what the best form of government or economics might be, and aside from whatever individual views we held in relation to those matters, we all tended to be preoccupied with the problems and issues given expression through the twenty-odd themes with which the protein theory of personal

relationship was concerned. In fact, we often are inclined to evaluate the quality of a given political, economic, theological or philosophical system in terms of the aesthetics of how these frameworks address, interpret, rank and arrange those themes.

I didn't know what to make of Jennifer's suggestion about expanding the number of themes from twenty-plus to ninety-nine or more themes. In principle, I had no objection to the possibility of adding more themes to the theoretical mix, but, somehow, twenty -plus themes seemed to be a lot more manageable, at least conceptually, than did ninety-nine-plus themes.

Perhaps I would need to get time on someone's Cray computer in an attempt to handle the additional themes. However, I had serious doubts about whether this would help me very much since physicists were still having problems dealing with three-and four-body problems.

Trying to get even the world's most advanced computer to solve problems involving twenty-plus, not to mention ninety-nine-plus, dimensions, would probably cause a cascade of failures all along the power grid system for much of the east coast. The up-side of my dilemma was that I could blame any those blackouts on the alien UFOs which, according to some individuals, always are hanging out around certain parts of these grids.

In any event, Jennifer's questions about whether identity was created, indigenous or a struggle between the two added some potentially valuable features to the educational mix. Furthermore, the whole problem of whether one's manner of ranking and interpreting the themes of the preference hierarchy is being imposed from without, or realized from within, introduced another, interesting wrinkle to matters.

Finally, she had raised the question of whether there was any best way of organizing, ranking, interpreting and linking the twenty -plus themes of an individual's preference hierarchy. Jennifer was inclined toward spirituality as the means to accomplish this in an effective and harmonious fashion.

However, philosophy, science or mythology were other possible candidates for injecting purpose, meaning or orientation into preference hierarchies, as well as into the dynamic manner in which these hierarchies linked one to other people. Once again, exploring the ways in which various kinds of meaning and purpose could alter the way one

understood and organized one's preference hierarchy, seemed to have interesting educational implications.

I had started talking about the protein theory of relationships for several reasons. On the one hand, I wanted to see what observations and comments Jennifer would make concerning the theory. The whole idea was still something of a hobby with me, but it was a hobby in which I had some interest.

On the other hand, I needed something to help take away some of the anxiety I had been feeling about being with Jennifer. Explaining the protein theory of development had helped me feel a bit more at ease with her. This was sort of dumb, I suppose, but I wasn't about to argue with success, especially when she had been so kind and patient while indulging me throughout the discussion.

We had been silent for several moments when Jennifer broke the silence. "If you don't think it's too personal or forward of me, David, I've been wondering if you have ever been married."

"There's nothing personal or forward about the wondering," I replied. "The voicing of the wondering might be another matter."

I kept a straight face for a few more seconds, but couldn't manage to stop myself from laughing when I saw a trace of concern creep into her face, presumably over whether a faux pas of some sort had been committed. She laughed too with a mixture of relief and, perhaps, a touch of annoyance with my way of teasing her.

Finally, I said: "I don't think you are wondering about my, possibly, lurid marital history is either too personal or forward. In fact, I think it's rather courageous, in a forward, personal sort of way."

She smiled, and a very nice, warm smile it was. The smile in her eyes was even more radiant than the one on her lips.

I smiled too, as nicely as I could. I hoped my smile was half as nice as hers.

Looking out over the water, I shook my head. "No, Jennifer, I have never been married."

I expanded a bit on my answer. "There was one time, quite a few years ago, when I thought the moment might have arrived."

A few tattered memories ran an express route through my consciousness and disappeared over the horizon. I sighed. "However, the planets must not have been in the right alignment or my apartment was hanging on the wrong cusp or something."

"Maybe something else, something that was better for you, was intended," she indicated. "Sometimes, the things that don't work out are really blessings, even though we might not think so at the time they fall apart."

"You could be right," I admitted. "But, if the better thing that is being intended for me is delayed much longer, then that better thing will have to visit me in an old-folks home or at my grave ... whichever comes first."

"Would it be too personal and forward of me," I inquired, "to ask why you were wondering about all of this?"

Jennifer looked at me. It was a strange sort of look.

I felt warmth in her gaze, but the gaze also seemed to be seeking out something within me. I felt an involuntary shudder ripple through my being, like I had been hit by the aftershock of some distant earthquake.

Jennifer replied softly yet very directly. "I have fairly good intuitions about people, David."

In a teasing manner she said: "You do have many, quite obvious rough edges." She was silent for a few seconds, and then she continued on in a more serious manner: "Nevertheless, I've had a good feeling about you since you called me up on the phone seeking help for Beth.

"Among other things, you have a warped sense of humor that I appreciate. And, I don't know which is worse: your having it, or my appreciating it."

Jennifer paused briefly, as if weighing something in her mind. Then, she said: "To be perfectly honest, my feeling about you predates the phone call. I experienced some sort of connection or resonance with you when we met, on occasion, at a few of the psychology conferences.

"I know you have a good feeling about me, as well, David. I can tell from the way you interact with me and from the way you look at me.

"I also know you like me. We wouldn't be sitting here on this bench, if this were not so.

"The awkwardness with which you asked me out tends to suggest you probably don't go out much. Strangely enough, your awkwardness had a sincere charm all of its own that appealed to me.

"You didn't try to hand me a line or snow me. This is something I liked very much.

"I enjoy being with you, David. This is not so much a matter of what you say or do, as much as it has to do with something that is in you ... something that is hidden and, yet, manifesting itself in a way that resonates with something in me ... something that transcends hormones, urges and drives.

"I feel comfortable with you. I believe I can be myself around you and that I'll be accepted for me.

"I'm a fairly direct person, David. I do try to be sensitive to peoples' needs, and I'm not into confrontation. Nevertheless, I believe a lot of problems would be avoided if people would simply communicate honestly and genuinely with one another.

"No matter what the nature of a relationship might be ... family, friendship, professional ... I prefer to let people know where they stand with me. I appreciate when these sentiments are reciprocated.

"I realize I'm not all that attractive. My spiritual commitments make me even less attractive to many people.

"I'm certainly not flooded with offers to go out on dates. More often than not, the situation is like a desert river bed that is waiting for some rain.

"Your invitation was very nice to get. However, I'm neither desperate nor easy, if you catch my meaning.

"I know what interests me and what is important to me. I'm not willing to settle for less than that. I would rather have the trials and peace of solitude than the occasional pleasure and relatively constant discord of an ill-advised relationship.

"I don't have any romantic expectations concerning the two of us, either of a positive or negative nature. In fact, I have no idea how this relationship might turn out, or what kind of relationship it will be.

"Nonetheless, there are a number of positive indications between us that have possibilities. Consequently, I wanted to do some exploratory

reconnaissance. I wanted to know a bit more about your background ... whether or not, for instance, you had ever been married.

"I could have asked you if there were any axe-murders in your past that I should know about. Somehow, however, the marriage angle seemed less personal and forward."

Jennifer's words had given expression to incredible courage. I had never met someone who was so willing to allow herself, himself, or their self to be placed in such a vulnerable position, with no expectation of return for the risks being run.

On the one hand, I felt quite honored and special. I did not believe that what she had said to me was an everyday event.

To a certain extent, she was putting an important part of her being in my hands. She was prepared to trust me with her vulnerabilities as a human being.

Yet, there was a tremendous responsibility that accompanied the trust being extended to me. Here was someone saying: treat me with sincerity; be genuine with me; show respect for me; be fair in your dealings with me; be sensitive to my needs as a human being.

Sincerity, genuineness, respect, fairness and sensitivity were among the things that human beings least liked to give to one another. Far too many human beings were more likely to hand over a thousand dollars to a stranger than they were likely to treat one another with any degree of integrity and dignity.

I viewed the lighted buildings on the far side of the river. I wanted to look at Jennifer as I talked, but I felt disoriented by the uncertainty of the territory into which I seemed to be venturing. The sight of the buildings provided a sense of stability and familiarity.

"The other day," I began, "when I asked if you would go out with me, you teased me a bit. At the time I indicated to you that, apparently, you were not going to make the process of asking an easy one for me.

"Ultimately, however, not only did you take away the stress associated with those situations, but, now, your candor has made things very easy for me once again. However, even though you have made the present situation as friendly as possible, I don't easily find my way to saying what I would like to say to you.

"The heart has its own language. One's habits, fears, and anxieties don't always permit the intentions of the heart to be translated accurately. More often than not, at least with me, in situations like this, what I most deeply feel gets garbled.

"Anyway, here goes. I'll do the best I can to try and reciprocate the candor and genuineness you have shown me.

"I don't know anything about your personal history, and, consequently, I only can guess at the kind of arbitrary criteria for attractiveness that people might have tried to impose on you. However, I have my own standards of, and methods for, gauging what I consider to be beautiful.

"I know that when I see you, I feel happy. I know that I find looking at you to be an enjoyable experience. I know that when I am with you, your being seems to radiate in a way that I only can describe as, at least for me, quite beautiful and very appealing.

"When I picked you up earlier this evening, the vision of you really did strike me as being like manna from heaven. I was feeling empty, and seeing you not only made the feeling of emptiness disappear, your being somehow began to permeate me in a very satisfying way. You were like food for my soul.

"Like you, I must confess that, ever since meeting you at the first conference in Chicago, I felt a bond of some sort with you. I never had experienced anything remotely like it before in my life. Nonetheless, I also was fairly mystified by it, and, perhaps, more than a little frightened of it.

"I also must confess to you that as unfortunate and difficult as the circumstances surrounding Beth's abduction have been for her, these circumstances also provided me with a legitimate reason to contact you ... something I might not have done otherwise. At the same time, if the truth of the matter be known, I'm feeling a little odd about possibly benefiting from someone else's misfortune."

While talking with Jennifer, I had been aware, in an absent-minded way, of how the lights in the buildings across the river had been blinking off and on. Thoughts and feelings within me also had been blinking off and on while I was talking with Jennifer. Neither off/on process seemed to have any discernible pattern.

I needed to finish off what I originally had intended to say to Jennifer. "You might not be able to imagine how nice I felt when I heard you say you have good feelings about me. Moreover, when you intimated there are some positive indications running through our relationship that might deserve further exploration and consideration, I was, and am, a pretty happy guy.

"Although I, too, do not have any expectations concerning where things between us might go, I do have hopes. Your words have lent some degree of credence to these hopes."

As I finished, I felt a little more confident about looking at her than had been the case ten minutes ago. When I turned to face her, I found her looking at me in a way that, for many years, I had believed to be more the stuff of dreams than reality.

The look had a blend of warmth, tenderness, affection and openness. In addition, there was a depth and intensity to it that induced in me a state that probably was somewhat akin to how a storm tossed sailor might feel when he catches a glimpse of the lights of a port after having been lost in the desperation of a seemingly endless night of impending doom. There was refuge and safety and a readiness to help me find a way of weathering the squalls of life.

I was overwhelmed by her gaze. I was having difficulty adjusting to it, as if the situation were too good to be true and something within me was afraid to completely trust what my heart and senses were telling me.

However, I was quite prepared to work on perfecting such an adjustment. I felt, in time, I might be able to get very used to, if not need, what she was offering at that moment.

In reality, I always had needed what was coming through her gaze. I just had to become accustomed to its being present.

Briefly, I looked away, and then, gathering resolve, I turned to her again. For a time, we became like mirrors, each reflecting the look of the other. For a time, there were just the flip sides of the same gaze.

Eventually the gaze dissolved in the mists of worldliness. Sounds, smells, and thoughts intruded into our awareness.

We sat together in our respective solitudes, but, now, there was a difference. A bond had been established that was like an umbilical cord

between us, linking us in our separateness, sustaining us even though we were apart.

Jennifer had become part of my conceptual and emotional horizon. Like all horizons, her presence shaped, colored, and oriented my focus.



Chapter 12: Voices in the Night

Sitting on the bench with Jennifer by the Charles, in relative silence on a beautiful, nearly summer night, was very peaceful and enjoyable. Much of me was quite content to merely let the atmosphere of the evening continue to flow undisturbed, through and around me.

Another part of me, however, wanted to ask some further questions concerning how Jennifer felt or thought about various issues. As much as I wanted things to work out between us, I didn't relish waking up some morning, six months to a year down the line, only to discover there were some irreconcilable differences that might threaten our relationship.

I suppose one can never learn everything one would like before becoming involved with someone. In fact, generally speaking, one finds oneself emotionally involved first and, then, intentionally or otherwise, one begins to explore the uncharted territory of the other person's life, personality, temperament and so on.

Already, some very strong feelings of regard for, and attraction toward, Jennifer had permeated deeply into my heart, soul and mind. Perhaps, before we got too ensconced in one another's life, we had a duty of care to each other, as well as ourselves, to try to get as many issues as possible out in the open so we each might have a better opportunity to assess the situation and figure out what kind of a relationship might serve us best.

Even if the romantic possibilities didn't bloom, I liked Jennifer a lot. She was an intelligent person with integrity and heart.

I benefited from being around her. I wouldn't want to lose close contact with her just because, for whatever reasons, romantic love didn't materialize.

Romance comes and goes. Real friendship, on the other hand, is a relatively rare commodity, both within, as well as outside of, romantic relationships.

In the best of all possible worlds, I would choose to have both romance and friendship. However, if forced to choose between having romance or friendship, romance, despite all its appealing qualities, would cross the line a distant second.

To me, romance seemed to have a tendency to be more unpredictable than reliable. In a storm-tossed relationship, romance was

just as likely to slam the door of refuge in one's face as it was to invite one in.

With friendship not only was the door of refuge much more likely to be opened to one on a stormy night, but it seemed more likely than romance to organize search parties to go and try to find a lost soul under difficult circumstances. Friendship seemed less likely to disappear beneath the shifting cross-currents of emotion than appeared to be the case with romance.

Maybe, romance was too steeped in the kind of unrealistic, idealized expectations of other people that wilted when exposed to the inevitable heat of friction that arose in relationships. Friendship seemed to be both more understanding of human limitations and differences, as well as more willing to accord the degrees of freedom necessary to heal the stress fractures that sometimes occur in friendships.

In any event, not knowing quite where my relationship with Jennifer might end up, I wanted to try to come to know her in a way that went beyond mere pieces of biographical data. Although some of these insights would only come indirectly, with time and across circumstances, some of what I was seeking might come more directly, merely by asking questions.

Among other things, I was interested in knowing how she interpreted the nature of womanhood and manhood. What did she believe was entailed by being a woman or man? Furthermore, what ramifications, if any, did her perspective have for the ways in which men and women interacted with one another, both in the context of a specific relationship, as well as in the context of society in general?

Considered from any number of perspectives, we lived in very confusing, unstable times. Nowhere, perhaps, was this more true than in the changing character of the manner in which women perceived both themselves as well as the relationship between women and men.

Individually and collectively, we have been undergoing transition in these matters for quite some time. Yet, no one appeared to know exactly where we stood amidst these changes or where it all was headed.

There were a lot of theories about the issue. However, theories are, at best, representations of some aspect of the truth, and not all representations accurately reflect the character of that to which the representation is attempting to make reference.

Although turbulence had been bubbling all about me for some thirty-plus years, nevertheless, because of the way my life had unfolded, in a lot of ways, I had been out of the loop, so to speak, for much of that time. Dealing with the relationships between men and women on a theoretical, intellectual basis, is much different from having to consider the same issues when they are up close and personal.

I swallowed, mustered my courage and said: "Would irreparable damage be done to our relationship, if I were to raise the specter of the f-word?"

"That would depend on which f-word you had in mind," Jennifer indicated. "Let's see, there is: 'faith', 'fairness', 'fanaticism', 'fate', 'fear', 'feudalism', 'fission', 'fluoride', 'forbidden', 'frustration', 'freedom', and 'future'. Am I getting warm with any of these?"

"Well, actually, you are," I replied. "The f-word that I had in mind, at least based on my experience, is sort of a combination of certain elements of all the things that you mentioned."

Jennifer appeared to be thinking about the items in the list of possibilities that she had mentioned. A smile appeared on her lips.

"Ahh!" she exclaimed, "I think you are referring to feminism. Is that right?"

"I'm afraid so," I admitted.

"Your fear is justified," she acknowledged. "Fathers have been known to snatch their children from off the streets and hurriedly usher them into the shelter of the home whenever the shadow of feminism has passed by."

"Since I'm not a father," I responded, "this sort of anxiety has not been a part of my experience. My concerns lie elsewhere."

"What's the matter," Jennifer inquired, "don't you do windows?" "As infrequently as possible," I confessed. "When the panes of glass get too dirty, I figure it's easier just to replace them."

"Besides," I added, "I've been told ... I forget by whom ... that fixing things is more compatible with male sensibilities than cleaning things is. I believe it has something to do with the way in which men are supposed to go about bonding with the universe or vice versa."

"I hear tools ... masculine tools, of course ... calling out to me all the time. 'David ... David. I am for you; you are for me' Sometimes, this can be quite embarrassing."

I shrugged in my best world-weary fashion: "What can I say? It's part of the price one has to pay for being a man."

"So" Jennifer queried, "what is it about the f-word that you've always wanted to know but were afraid to ask? Don't be shy, good sir."

"Madam Jennifer sees all and hears all. She will endeavor to answer your most sensitive questions with a wise equanimity."

"If you can see that much," I pointed out, "you must be able to see what I would like to ask."

"Of course, I can," she responded, "but etiquette requires me to permit you to speak of those matters in your own voice. In fact, this issue of voice touches on a theme of much importance to some, and considerable debate to others, in the context of the f-word in which you are interested."

"Oh! Madam Jennifer," I remarked, "your prescience is truly remarkable. In speaking of voice, you have raised an issue of considerable interest to me. Please, say more."

"Sir, you have placed me in a most awkward position. You have requested me to say more about voice, but consistency requires me to restrict myself to my voice only."

"I cannot speak with the voice of feminism in general," Jennifer said, "but only with the voice of feminism in particular. Do you feel you can be satisfied with the voice of but one woman?"

"Because the voice is yours," I replied, "I would be most content."

Jennifer fluttered her eyes and murmured: "Your words, sir, give clear proof that chivalry has not yet passed from our midst. I find your comportment most gallant."

I lowered my head and kicked my foot in an 'aw, shucks, twern't nuthin' manner. With my gesture, the curtain closed on a mixed period piece of female/male interaction.

Roughly twenty or thirty seconds passed before Jennifer spoke again. Finally, she said: "Any discussion of feminism is complicated by the fact that this one word has a multiplicity of referents."

"For instance, among other possibilities, there are: Marxist, lesbian, psychoanalytic, liberal, post-modernist, radical, socialist, existential, and post-structural feminists. Furthermore, even within each of these broad

categories of approach, there are considerable differences of hermeneutical perspective as one goes from woman to woman.

"Naturally," Jennifer pointed out, "the existence of those differences does not necessarily indicate an absence of common ground among feminists. In fact, I believe all feminists probably would point to their concrete, personal experiences as being the touchstone that gives expression to the common themes of injustice, abuse, exploitation and oppression that some of them contend has been perpetrated against women across virtually all cultures and periods of history.

"As is true, however, of most systems of critical thought, feminists differ among themselves concerning their various manners of characterizing, investigating, interpreting, evaluating and responding to the common themes that run through their individual experiences. Different feminists identify different causes of, and strategies for dealing with, injustices to women.

"For example, there are many feminists who believe patriarchy, or the systemic oppression of women by men, is the primary source of miseries, problems and difficulties in the lives of women. There are many other feminists who focus on the fundamental role that they believe gender and gendering play in enslaving both women and men to a false ideology concerning human nature and possibility.

"Some women believe feminism is about helping women to become more like men as far as issues of autonomy, equality, freedom, rights, entitlements, and educational, as well as economic, opportunities are concerned. Other women consider feminism to be about coming to acknowledge, understand and protect the ways in which women are different from men, biologically, epistemologically, existentially and socially.

"Among feminists, one finds some women who give primary emphasis to the absolute priority of the rights of individuals over the collective, in a variety of matters, including, but not restricted to, issues those as abortion and reproductive freedom. There are other feminists who give primary emphasis to the absolute priority of the rights of women as a general category over the rights of individuals, especially men, in various matters those as affirmative action.

"There are some women who rally around the values of nurturing, bonding, reciprocity, community and non-authoritarian egalitarianism that they believe

is inherent in the idea of sisterhood. On the other hand, there are other women who are critical of the notion of sisterhood because they feel it contains no strategy for redressing current injustices against women.

"Some women consider feminism to provide a wonderful opportunity for analyzing the many different kinds of disadvantageous power relationships existing between women and men, both within as well as without the family. Those analysis is intended to demonstrate how men use these relationships to control, manipulate, silence, exploit, oppress and abuse women.

"Other women are interested in feminism's potential for generating, and exploring, alternative epistemologies. By examining alternative ways of engaging the problem of how human beings come to know about themselves and the world, these feminists are attempting to challenge the assumptions, methods and biases of various male approaches to epistemology that have dominated most societies throughout history.

"There are quite a few feminists who are opposed to pornography. Nonetheless, there also are some feminists who, on various grounds, defend pornography.

"Some feminists insist motherhood is a sign of the biological inequality between women and men and constitutes one of the primary ways through which men control and oppress women. Other feminists argue that all of the current interest in reproductive technology is an attempt by men not only to remove women entirely from the equation, but to divest women of one of the few sources of potential empowerment that they have over men.

"There are some feminists who believe that any woman who is willing to enter into a heterosexual relationship cannot be considered a fully committed feminist. There also are some feminists who maintain that biological, as opposed to ex utero, motherhood is a betrayal of the cause of women.

"Some of those who espouse this view argue that pregnancy is an expression of the male colonization of a woman's body. I guess," Jennifer conjectured, "those women consider these kinds of activities to be instances of sororitizing with an imperialist or colonialist enemy."

Sensing Jennifer had come to the end of her remarks, at least for the moment, I indicated: "Sounds like someone we both know and, I hope, like,

should withdraw to a mountain retreat and begin to consider various forms of ritualized suicide. Something like hara-kiri seems to be the only decent and honorable thing a man could do under the circumstances."

"There is no need for you to entertain those thoughts in lonely isolation," Jennifer replied. "I'm sure there might be any number of my sisters who would be prepared to assist you in your deliberations."

"Thanks," I said. "I can't tell you how much solace and encouragement I find in your words."

"I am constantly at your service in all matters," she commented.

Returning, once again, to what I believed was the serious side of our discussion, I inquired, "Jennifer, do you think conflict between women and men is inevitable? In other words, do you feel the respective natures of men and women are innately and, perhaps, irresolvably antagonistic to one another?"

"Yes and no," Jennifer stated without hesitating. "Everything really depends on what realm one is considering."

Before she expanded on what had been said, Jennifer reminded me: "Keep in mind, David, I'm speaking through the voice of just one woman. Moreover, I'm engaging your question from a particular orientation ... a spiritual one.

"Consequently, whatever I say is a blend of both my experience as a human being, as well as my understanding of the currents of spirituality that run through, color and shape my being. Quite a few, perhaps most, feminists might dismiss what I'm about to say to you, but they cannot ignore the voice through which it is said without bringing into question the legitimacy of their efforts to give expression to their own voice in those matters.

"This is so because if, as I believe is the case, the touchstone that forms the starting point of all analysis and interpretation is personal experience, then everyone's experience has a certain potential contribution to make to the discussion. The value of any given contribution will depend on its degree of accuracy, truth, insight, wisdom, fairness and so on, and not on the identity of the locus of manifestation through which the contribution comes.

"In short, one cannot automatically assume that voice, whether of a woman or man, gives expression, in and of itself, to truth. One should be seeking neither the masculine voice nor the feminine voice, but the voice of

truth, to whatever extent we are capable of listening to this modality of voice and understanding its manner of addressing us.

"Voice does give expression to personal experience. Nonetheless, experience cannot act as a non-circular guarantor of the truth of voice except to the extent that what is voiced about experience accurately reflects something of the truth of the ontological or existential conditions in which experience is rooted and to which experience gives, at least, partial expression."

Having concluded her prefatory remarks, Jennifer offered her answer to my original question: "Let us consider any given interaction between a woman and a man that is rooted in a purely worldly context. And, for argument's sake, let's define a 'purely worldly context' as goals and purposes that are pursued for non-spiritual intentions and motivations.

"Under those circumstances, I believe there are inevitable conflicts that will arise between women and men. In fact, irrespective of the sexual identities of those who are participating in the activities occurring in a 'purely worldly context', antagonism is inherent and unavoidable in this kind of situation.

"On the other hand, let us consider any given interaction of a woman and a man that arises in a spiritual context. Again, for the sake of argument, let's define a spiritual context as consisting of goals and purposes that are pursued for spiritual intentions and motivations along the lines I outlined previously.

Jennifer had given added emphasis to the word "spiritual", and, then, as if explaining her emphasis, she said: "If you will remember, David, earlier in the evening I made a distinction between the spiritual and the religious that is applicable here. A person who operates out of a religious framework does not necessarily pursue goals and purposes with spiritual intentions and/or motivations. So, in what follows, I'm talking about spiritual, not religious, contexts.

"More specifically, in a spiritual context, I feel the relationship between a man and a woman has the potential to become complementary. I also believe those relationships are naturally given to establishing reciprocity and harmony between the two.

"In fact, irrespective of the sexual identities of the participants, any two, or more, people who come together in a spiritual context will be inclined to

interact with harmony, reciprocity and in a complementary fashion. In short, just as much as worldly contexts are divisive and conflict-laden, so, too, spiritual contexts tend to be unitive and directed toward resolving conflicts.

"On the level of the world, taken as an end in itself, both men and women are largely dominated and driven by our egos or false selves. On that level, many of our actions are governed by ambition, envy, desire, greed, arrogance, selfishness, anger, pride, hostility, jealousy, stubbornness, lust, insincerity, gossip and pettiness.

"According to the mystics, the nature of the ego or false self is precisely the same in everyone. However, individual ability, personal history, socialization, education, and various processes of reflection, interpretation, and evaluation combine together in a complex dialectic to generate the beliefs, values, commitments and actions that either prune, or are pruned by, our egos in one direction rather than another."

Jennifer was about to continue when I interrupted: "Why do you refer to the ego as the false self? Irrespective of its properties or qualities, isn't the ego our primary way of interacting with the world? We might not like some, or even many, of its tendencies, but its presence, activities and effects, problematic though they might be, seem real enough."

Nodding while she listened to me, Jennifer responded with: "What you say, David, is quite true. Yet, from the perspective of spirituality or mysticism, our true self or real identity involves something more essential and fundamental than can be given expression or understood through the inclinations and qualities of the ego.

"The true self is the locus of manifestation for Divinity in human affairs. The ego attempts to obfuscate our awareness concerning the possibilities of the true self that are within us.

"The mystics contend that, among other things, the true self possesses qualities those as patience, humility, compassion, kindness, charitableness, love, integrity, fairness, gratitude, servitude, gentleness, tranquility, selflessness, and generosity. These are qualities that are entirely foreign to the ego.

"To refer to the ego as the false self is to allude to the manner in which the ego is masquerading in a role of authority that is inappropriate to it. The ego is attempting to control how we characterize, interpret, evaluate and act on our experiences, but the ego does so with all the wrong

intentions, motivations, attitudes, purposes, goals, values and understandings.

"For example, on the level of the ego's engagement of the world, much of our treatment of other people is permeated with prejudice, suspicion, lying, manipulation, dogma, abuse, bias, exploitation, cheating, fear, thoughtlessness and cruelty. This is as true for women as it is for men.

"Moreover, the properties of the individual ego also are writ large on the level of the collective. In other words, on average, and in general, there is a very strong tendency in virtually every political, national, ethnic, religious, economic, social, cultural, creative and professional group to differentially perceive, and treat, 'insiders' and 'outsiders'.

"In addition, from the perspective of the 'insiders' of these groups, an enemy is defined as anyone who is considered, rightly or wrongly, to constitute a threat to the group's status, prestige, power, vested interests, convenience, pleasure, theoretical world view and/or collective false identity. Therefore, as is true in relation to most individuals, so, too, in the case of collectives, perceived threats are subject to being attacked by the considerable, and quite destructive, allied arsenals of the individual egos making up the collective.

"The activities of the ego can be constrained and curbed, to some degree, by external forces those as socialization, education and various kinds of peer pressure. Nonetheless, as far as the mystics are concerned, the only stable, long-term, viable way of dealing with the ego's tendency to make trouble for oneself and others is to transform the character of the ego's intentions and purposes by bringing it under the influence and guidance of the qualities and properties of the true self.

"Let's try to transfer some of the foregoing principles and points to certain aspects of the feminist discussion. For instance, let us consider the relationship between men and women while keeping in mind the nature and activities of the ego.

"Given an understanding of the properties and characteristics of the ego, one has no problem in accepting at least part of the argument of feminists who claim there is a substantial amount of evidence demonstrating the existence of a systematic attempt on the part of some, perhaps, even many, men to oppress women in a variety of ways.

"After all, inherent in the nature of the ego are tendencies to oppress, exploit, manipulate, abuse and treat others unfairly. Consequently, those men who are oppressed by their own egos will be inclined to allow their egos to oppress others, especially when these men derive benefit from those oppression.

"I also agree, up to a point, with those feminists who are trying to show how the socialization process of gendering often entails an indoctrinatory program that adversely affects both women and men. This program attempts to inculcate in all of us an unquestioning acceptance of the idea that many of the qualities associated with gender are inherent in our natures, when, in reality, quite frequently, those qualities are merely reflections of the way power has become arbitrarily distributed within society and the family.

"Once again, from the perspective of spirituality, one has little difficulty in being receptive to quite a few feminist insights on some of the issues surrounding gender. This is especially true with respect to the manner in which the gendering process helps underwrite, support and maintain a variety of qualities and characteristics that coalesce in the form of a false self.

"Some feminists speak of this false gender identity as the 'other' ... which women and men are required, if not forced, to internalize. Each of us must assume the identity of the 'other' in a way that is considered 'appropriate' to the roles that we, as women and men, are expected to play in society."

"Sounds," I offered, "as if the gendering process is like a real -life version of one of those nightmarish, science fiction movies in which the heroine and/or hero is threatened by the desire of some alien presence to assume control of human lives."

"That's a stark but rather apt likeness," Jennifer agreed. "The ... the gendering script, for want of a better phrase, calls for us to become one with the alien other. As a result, all our thoughts, values, attitudes, feelings, intentions and actions are to be shaped, colored and oriented by the properties of the gendering gizmo into which we are being strapped.

"According to some feminists, internalization of the alien other prevents us from seeking out, and trying to realize, our true identities and callings. Feminists disagree, however, about what the precise character of these true identities and callings are, or should be.

"In any event, when, for whatever reason, the internalization process is short-circuited, either at its inception or after-the-fact, external

pressures are brought to bear in order to ensure, at least, outward compliance with the directives of the alien other. Sometimes these externally applied pressures are subtle and indirect, and sometimes those pressures are blatant and direct.

"Naturally, if the oppressive qualities of patriarchy or the formation of identity by gendering were completely successful, no woman would ever have been able to break free of the orbit to which mission control had tried to assign her. However, as a result of personal qualities and life circumstances, there have been some women who were able to gain certain insights into some of what is false about the nature of patriarchy and gendering.

"Therefore, these women have been opened up to, and they have tried to apprise others of, the possibility of transcending the alien other that walks amongst us amidst the internal and external shadows of our lives. Yet, although an increasing number of women are seeing the possibility of an 'I' that is independent of the gendering process, a major challenge stands before feminist theorists.

"More specifically, establishing the possibility of an identity beyond gender does not specify what the character of the identity is that lies beyond the gender horizon. One's still faced with the question: What kind of non-gendered 'I' should one seek?

"I disagree both with those women who are preoccupied with patriarchy, as well as with those who are preoccupied with gender, when they attempt to claim that most of the problems of women and society can be laid at the feet of either patriarchy or gender. In point of fact, both patriarchy and gender are but symptomatic expressions of an underlying disease: the ego or false self.

"Whatever pathologies various men might suffer from, one cannot automatically assume that the problems of women are only derivative from the condition of, say, patriarchy or gendering. Women, as do men, have their own indigenous demons of hatred, anger, pride, envy, jealousy, manipulateness, dishonesty, cowardice, ambition, pettiness, oppression, prejudice, biases, worldly desires, exploitiveness, preoccupations with power, and so on. These demons are fully capable of generating problems for women, quite independently of the kinds of difficulty that men, due to the activities of their own demons, impose on women.

"These demons are not the product of patriarchy or gendering, although these processes might color, modulate and orient those internal demons in certain ways. These demons are inherent in the human condition, for both men and women.

"Furthermore, aside from our demons, and aside from the different kinds of hardship that some men inflict on some women, women, like men, are faced with the problems that arise in conjunction with the search for essential purposes, meanings, directions, values and understandings in our lives. Between these sorts of problem and our own personal demons, women still would be in a world of difficulty even if men did not exist and had never existed.

"As those, contrary to what some feminists have argued, women were not the first group to be oppressed, nor can the oppression of women be taken as the prototype for all other forms of oppression. From the perspective of mystics, one cannot oppress others until one, first, has oppressed oneself through permitting one's false self or ego to gain ascendancy in the control of one's thoughts, values, attitudes, emotions, intentions and actions.

"The first group to be oppressed were those ... whether men or women ... who became inclined to oppress others. Consequently, the activities of the ego or false self constitute the prototype for understanding all other forms of oppression.

"In any event, many women still find themselves in a position of having to try to break free of the gravitational pull of what has been referred to as the ideology of confinement and separate spheres. Many feminists believe that patriarchy and gendering both give expression to this ideology as a means of isolating, containing, denigrating, excluding and subjugating women.

"Those feminists have argued that men marginalize women by means of the ideology of confinement and separate spheres in order to establish and preserve the kind of domestic and political/social stability that men believe to be necessary to the 'well-being' of their own egos or false selves. In point of fact, however, every form of oppression uses the same tactical ideology of confinement and separate spheres.

"This is so because those an ideology reflects the strategy that the ego originally used to confine the oppressor's own awareness, thereby relegating understanding to a separate sphere devoid of any meaning except what the

ego permits that sphere to have. The oppression of others, whether in relation to sexual identity, class, religion, race or whatever, is but another manifestation of the activities of the ego or false self written on a larger scale.

"The ego oppressed the individual's own being in order to establish a stable space within which to pursue its intentions and purposes free from, say, spiritual interference. This program of pacification occurs in every oppressor and oppressed relationship.

"When the process takes place between men and women, this is but a particularized example of a generalized ideology of confinement and separate spheres in action. The use of this ideology, in whatever circumstances, whether in relationship to oneself or others, is the telltale signature of the presence of the imperialistic ego or false self."

As Jennifer was finishing her last sentence, I heard the ringing of the bell from what I believed was a vendor heading our way. Like one of Pavlov's dogs, my mouth began to water in anticipation of a possible refreshment of some sort.

I leaned forward on the bench slightly and looked in the direction of the ringing in order to see if my initial supposition had been correct. It looked like the vehicle of an ice-cream vendor.

Turning to Jennifer, I asked: "Would you like an ice-cream?"

"I wondered," she replied, "when you were going to break down and part with some of those big, professorial bucks that you've hoodwinked your college into giving you. I must admit, however, I had something in mind that was a little more up-scale than an ice-cream."

"Is that a yes or a no?" I responded.

"It's a yes under a flag of protest," she countered.

Looking for a flag above her, I said: "Your protest is duly noted. You might file the appropriate affidavits with The World Court at your earliest convenience.

"In the meantime," I indicated, "if you can manage to rise above your state of vexation, we need a decision on a flavor. I await your pleasure with much anticipation."

"Too bad," she said, "you are not as free with your money as you are with your hyperbole. I'll have strawberry."

I motioned the vendor to stop. "I would like to have your most deluxe strawberry ice cream and a simple, working man's vanilla cone," I requested.

The vendor looked at me and, then, Jennifer, smiled and said: "I'm a Henry Ford type of person. You can have anything you want as long as it's what I sell."

As the vendor rummaged around in the cooler, he said: "I don't know how deluxe or simple they are, but I do believe I have a strawberry and vanilla cone somewhere in here."

The vendor found what he was looking for. Handing the cones to me, he received the required amount of money in exchange.

He peddled off. I returned to the bench and gave Jennifer the strawberry cone.

We spent a minute, or so, unwrapping the cones. I began to eat, and Jennifer began to speak again.

"Since the issue of power is a common theme running through patriarchy, gendering and the ideology of confinement, many feminists believe that: understanding power, acquiring power, and wielding power, have become the keys to unlocking the door to democracy's promises concerning freedom, equality and justice. For instance, through the acquisition and exercise of power, some women have gained enhanced access to the public sphere; equal treatment before the law; educational and economic opportunity; a re-calibration of duties and responsibilities within the domestic realm; control over their sexual and reproductive lives; medical treatment that reflects their biological differences from men; and roles of leadership in education, science, medicine, law, politics, economics and religion.

"All of these have made differences in the lives of the false self of many women. None of these changes, however, has necessarily brought women any closer to realizing their true spiritual identity or essential capacity.

"In fact, in my opinion, almost all of the benefits that feminists have fought for and won, have, in many cases, pushed women further away from their true identities and essential capacities, just as it has done in the case of men. Many women, like many of their male counterparts, have merely become further entangled in a purely worldly context and have, as a result, become intoxicated with the possibilities and choices surrounding the ego.

"None of what I have said should be construed to mean that injustices concerning the treatment, rights, and freedoms of women should not be remedied. However, when those remedies are obtained at the price of denying the realm of spirit, then, one needs to question the value and nature of what has been won at the cost of the loss of something that is more precious and essential ... namely, the spiritual health of the soul."

Jennifer took a few, tentative licks of her ice-cream and noted: "For some women, the horizons of the false self have expanded tremendously. Yet, at the same time, the horizons of the true self have narrowed proportionately for these same women.

"In fact, mystics have indicated that the relationship between the false and the true self is governed by a spiritual law or principle. Whatever permits one realm of self to expand, necessarily closes-off possibilities for the other realm of self to expand.

"In the terminology of quantum physics, the false self and the true self have a conjugate relationship with one another. Focusing on one kind of self prevents the individual from knowing about the other kind of self.

"Now, by the grace of power, women are 'free' to make, and are making, many of the same mistakes that men have made concerning the way one engages, and participates in, the world. The only difference is that women do so with a feminine twist and through the modality of their own 'voice'.

"One of the mistakes many women are now making is to have learned so precious little from the mistakes that men have made. For instance, many women, as has long been true of many men, have failed to understand the difference between a calling and ambition.

"A calling is not synonymous with ambition. A calling is the voice of true identity and essential capacity making entreaties for our attention and co-operation. Ambition is merely a manifestation of the ego or false self.

Becoming a little more aggressive with her cone, she took a few bites. "In the view of some feminist theorists," she indicated, "one of the historical sources of inequality between men and women can be traced to the fact that the roles of men proliferated, but the roles of women did not keep pace. For instance, when society began to undergo one transformation after another, as a result of industrial and technological changes, although the social, economic, and political role opportunities available to men expanded tremendously,

the role opportunities available to women did not proliferate in the same way or at the same rate.

"Some feminists maintain that the differential between men and women with respect to the issue of role proliferation caused many women to seriously question what being a women meant and entailed. On the one hand, women didn't identify with the narrowly defined roles into which patriarchy and gendering had stuffed them. On the other hand, women had been excluded from the process of making progress through the opportunities afforded by the proliferation of roles.

"Consequently, women seemed to be suffering from an interstitial disease. This kept them in a no-person land between something with which they didn't wish to identify and something with which they were not permitted to identify."

A noisy group of adolescents, enjoying the beginning of the weekend, ambled by. Jennifer waited for things to quiet down before speaking. While she waited, she took the opportunity to busy herself with her ice-cream cone.

When the noise had subsided, Jennifer said: "Some feminists have pointed out that, historically, there have been a disproportionate number of women intellectuals who have ended their lives in suicide, or in silence, or in illness, or in convents. These maladies are all considered by feminists to be symptomatic of the underlying interstitial disease that has arrested the healthy development of identity formation.

"In short, women were being denied the same chance that men had: to discover or invent their true selves by means of exploring and engaging the world of role proliferation. The effects of this denial and confinement showed up, in one way or another, as a life of suffering and misery.

"Without wishing to condone any of the people, forces and pressures that led women to suicide, silence, illness or seclusion, the fact of the matter is this. Women intellectuals have made, and are making, the same mistake as male intellectuals when we assume the life of the intellect will be our salvation. Intellect alone has not been able to save men from entanglements with their false selves, nor will intellect, by itself, be able to save women from our false selves.

"The frustration and despair that comes from having the ambitions of the intellect thwarted is an affair of the ego or false self. A calling which

seeks to enlist the assistance of the intellect in the realization of one's true self and essential capacity is quite independent of any considerations of ambition."

After taking a few more mouthfuls of her ice-cream and pausing long enough to swallow, Jennifer continued on: "The process of coming to realize the true self also often results in a life of silence, seclusion, illness and death. However, the meaning of these conditions to the seeker after true self-realization is quite different from their significance to one who is caught-up in the thwarted ambitions of the false self's use of intellect.

"To the former individual, silence and seclusion become matters of choice rather than something into which one is forced. One is silent because the intellect cannot comprehend what the heart and spirit know and, as a result, verbalization often only leads to distortion of the truth.

"Moreover, the one who desires to realize the true self often seeks out seclusion. Seclusion permits one to withdraw from the cacophony created by the way false selves, including one's own, have become entangled in desire for a world from which the sacred has been actively removed by the activities of these same false selves.

"In addition, although we all suffer from the illnesses that are contracted by our false selves, in the struggle for deliverance from these illnesses, there's potential for healing. When the 'death' of the ego or false self occurs, the recovery of spiritual health will have been achieved, and the true self will be in ascendancy."

Nibbling on her cone from time to time, she added: "Being accorded equal access to educational, economic, legal, social and/or political services and opportunities, is one thing. The ideology of progress through access to role proliferation is quite another matter.

"Having access to role proliferation has done nothing but confuse men about who, in essence, they are. Whatever 'progress' some men might have made politically, socially, and economically has been paralleled by a progressive devolution in their spiritual lives.

"Men have not found themselves through the proliferation of roles. They have lost themselves.

"With the proliferation of roles, men have become increasingly vulnerable to the temptation of being seduced away from their true selves.

In the process, many men have become entangled in the false selves of one, or more, of the proliferated roles to which they have access.

"Those feminists who look to the proliferation of role opportunities as the yellow brick road to true identity are making the same mistake as many men have made. Those people suppose the real self is to be found among the proliferation of roles.

"The true self is not about roles, proliferated or otherwise. The call to self-realization cannot be achieved through the trying-on of roles that come from the outside. Self-realization only can come by answering the call of the heart and spirit.

"Many feminist perspectives seem to approach the issue of identity in terms of emphasizing the idea of creating identity instead of discovering its already-made presence. They appear to believe that everything must be invented anew in the feminine voice in order to flush out all of the patriarchal and gendering poisons with which women have been afflicted."

Having finished my simple, working man's cone, I inquired: "Would you agree that, in some ways, various strains of feminism have become just so many additional external ideologies that must be internalized by the individual? In a sense, at least in the case of some kinds of feminism, the individual, seemingly, is being told that someone else's personal experience and voice must be ingested and digested before one might consider oneself to have become a real woman, with one's own identity.

"Although this process of internalization is said to be a process of consciousness-raising," I continued, "consciousness has not necessarily been raised, as much as one's angle of engagement of experience has been changed. However, the new and different are often mistaken for, or assumed to be, the higher and better."

"In certain respects," Jennifer acknowledged, "there are some feminist theorists who, like theorists in other conceptual systems, promote their view of things as the revealed truth, as opposed to just a possibility that is to be accepted or rejected on its merits. To the extent this occurs, then, I agree with you, David that women are being invited to internalize someone else's invented identity as if it were their own. Those imported frameworks are antithetical to a woman being able to discover her own true identity and essential capacity.

"Tragically, so many women have made those tremendous efforts to break free of the influence of the male ego, only to succumb to another ego, either their own or that of other women. Like many men before them, an increasing number of women have permitted their own ego or the egos of other women to sweet-talk them into becoming addicted to the blind ambition of the kind of individualism that renders the voice of calling inaudible.

"From a mystical perspective, many women, despite all of our worldly gains, have not become free in any essential sense. Instead, we merely have redecorated the interior and exterior nature of the place where we will reside during our enslavement. Instead of being subjugated to the whims of a male ego or false self, we have become subjugated to the whims of a female ego or false self."

Eating the last of her cone, Jennifer concluded: "Since one ego or false self is, more or less, identical with any other false self or ego, whether male or female, this kind of an exchange would appear to be something of a Pyrrhic victory. We have gained the world at the potential cost of our own soul."

Chapter 13: In the Garden of Gethsemane

Checking my watch, I noted the time was getting late. Since I had to get up fairly early to catch my flight to Washington, by the time I drove Jennifer back to her house, returned to my apartment and looked after a few pre-journey tasks, the time was going to be later still.

Earlier in the evening, I had been beset by worries that Jennifer was going to pull the plug on the evening. Now, ironically, I was going to have be the one to do the pulling, although I would be doing so most reluctantly.

Turning to Jennifer, I said: "As much as I hate doing this, I think, perhaps, we should head back to the car. I figure that if I average 140 miles per hour between getting you home and me home, I'll have the luxury of an hour's sleep before I go to the airport."

Jennifer checked her watch and exclaimed: "Oh, my goodness, David, where has the time gone? Here, I've been droning on so thoughtlessly ..."

"Not at all," I interrupted. "I have been enjoying myself thoroughly. Moreover, pretty much everything you have said has been both interesting and quite illuminating."

"Only 'pretty much everything'?" Jennifer said with feigned chagrin. "I guess I better start listening to my prosperity and personal power tapes more often."

"Don't do that," I pleaded. "If you get any more illuminating and brighter than you already are, I'll have to start wearing sun glasses in your presence."

We both got up from the bench and began to walk slowly back toward the spot where the car had been parked. We were amongst the last of the stragglers walking along the Charles, all of us trying to squeeze the last, delicious drops from a pre-summer night's dream.

As we walked along, Jennifer slipped her arm through the space near the crook of my elbow. The touch of her arm felt quite nice, and we both made adjustments for the sake of comfort.

After a few moments of strolling in silence, I inquired: "Had you finished everything you wanted to say before I kind of preempted you?"

"I fear," she said, "that if I say anything more, the one hour of sleep you might get this morning will be filled with nightmares of one sort or another."

"Not really," I responded. "Usually, I need more than an hour to get into the REM stage of sleep.

"Consequently, I believe I'll be all right today. Of course, I can't guarantee my sleep will remain unaffected tomorrow night as a result of your ... what was the phrase? ... oh! yes, 'droning on'.

"However, if I should suffer a sleep disturbance episode of some kind due to your current dissertation on feminism, I might require your clinical expertise. You might have to hold my hand, in a long distance sort of way, and talk me through the whole ordeal.

"If you are prepared," I cautioned, "to observe your duties of care and follow up on these possibilities in a responsible fashion, I believe I am prepared to run whatever risks might be entailed by listening to the rest of what you have to say. Does that strike you as being a fair arrangement?" I concluded.

"Yes ... yes," Jennifer admitted, "this strikes me as fair. It also strikes me as being rather long-winded."

"Wonderful," I replied. "I've always thought that women and men who, respectively, drone on and are long-winded make those charming couples. Don't you agree?"

"I'm afraid I'll have to invoke the Fifth Amendment on that one, David," she remarked with a laugh. "However, if you will permit me to proceed against the advice of legal counsel, there are a few other things that I had wanted to say in order to finish off the previous discussion."

I nodded my head in assent. Then, by way of verbal confirmation of the gesture, I said: "You have both my permission and my full attention."

Jennifer was quiet for a short time and, then, began with: "Among the most fundamental issues at the heart of the feminist critiques of the processes of patriarchy and gendering involve, on the one hand, the extensive nature of the destructive impact that systematic oppression has on the lives of both victim and victimizer and, on the other hand, the adverse ramifications that follow, for both men and women, from the imposition of an identity that is alien to, and other than, one's real nature and identity. Although feminists have succeeded in exposing some of the ways in which these social processes have prevented women, and men, from realizing different aspects of human potential, most feminists have failed to see that the real source of oppression,

alienation, manipulation, deception and exploitation, namely, the false self or ego, has been left almost completely undisturbed in their analysis.

"In my opinion, many feminist theorists have seen deeply, but not deeply enough. They have identified some of the disguises that the false self assumes in order to keep us busy chasing various manifestations of injustice, but they have failed to give a clear description of the one who is organizing the whole charade.

"Ironically, one probably would have as difficult a time trying to convince feminists about this lacuna in their analysis as feminists have had trying to convince men and women about the insidious presence of patriarchy and gendering in our lives. Indeed, many feminists would be as much in denial about the way in which they are systematically oppressed by their own false selves as many men are in denial about the roles they play in oppressing and exploiting women.

"The longings of many feminists for freedom, identity, and the realization of individual potential are, as they are for men, a double-edged sword. They mean very, very different things to the two edges of this sword: the false self and the true self.

"For the false self, freedom is about maximizing choice, irrespective of the price that might have to be paid by the true self or by other individuals. Alternatively, for the true self, freedom is a matter of giving expression to our spiritual nature and, thereby, among other things, attempting to help transform, in a constructive fashion, the character of the false self.

"For the false self, identity is a matter of inventing ourselves, from moment-to-moment, or day-to-day, as an arbitrary function of the way the internal dynamic of the false self becomes entangled in the world through the desires, ambitions, purposes and motivations of the ego. On the other hand, for the true self, identity is a function of trying to discover, and bring to fruition, the character of our being rooted in Divinity.

"Finally, for the false self, the realization of potential involves the impossible task of seeking to satisfy the endless thirst of the ego for stimulation, gratification, power, status, and possessions. However, for the true self, realization of one's potential is a matter of actualizing one's capacity for knowing, loving and serving Divinity under all circumstances.

"In view of the differences between the false self and the true self, then, as far as issues of freedom, identity and realizing potential are concerned, a

feminism that is embedded in the false self will be quite different from a feminism that is oriented by the true self. And, this will be the case regardless of whatever agreements might be reached on the nature of the impact of patriarchy and gendering upon the lives of women and men."

Evidently, Jennifer had completed her train of thought because she became quiet. While listening to her, I had been catching glimpses of a few possibilities that seemed quite consonant with certain aspects of her perspective. Although these ideas ran in a somewhat different direction, I decided to see what she thought about these possibilities.

I began by saying: "If I understand your position, Jennifer, one might argue that, in many ways, capitalism works because it is rooted in the ambitions, desires, purposes and motivations of the ego or false self. Whether one is talking supply-side or demand-side economics, the fuels that run the capitalist engine are so many crude, refined and blended grades of ego.

"Unfortunately, a variety of pollutants are inherent in these fuels. Toxic elements those as greed, oppression, exploitation, selfishness, corruption, heartlessness, and mindless consumption, all have a very marked tendency to lead to the abuse, enslavement and destruction of individuals, families, societies, resources and the Earth.

"Undoubtedly, capitalism does provide a means of helping to feed, house and clothe human beings. Nonetheless, it often does so in a way that is reminiscent of various treatments for cancer. These treatments engage doctors in a race to try to stop the cancer from killing the patient before the treatment does.

"However, unlike medical practitioners who know enough to discontinue, for example, chemotherapy or radiation therapy when the cancer has been checked, most practitioners of capitalism have none of these sensibilities. Long after our basic requirements for life have been met, we continue to pump the toxic dimensions of our egos into our lives and the lives of others. As a result, the very course of economic treatment that has been used to save our physical lives is now killing us, both physically as well as spiritually.

"Oddly enough, the reason why communism, in many ways, does not work is because it is rooted in an inherently unstable dynamic that is the inverse of capitalism. Capitalism requires the activities of the ego in order for

it to work, whereas communism needs to curtail the activities of the ego if communism is to work.

"Communism is based on certain philosophical ideals that delineate what are considered, by some, to be a just distribution and use of resources for both individuals and society. Nonetheless, the false self has absolutely no interest, except, perhaps, on occasion, self-interest, to pursue the ideals of communism. These ideals are in opposition to the nature of the ego.

"In fact, the practice of communism, along with the practice of capitalism, has been replete with similar kinds of corruption, exploitation, oppression, and abuse of human rights. All of this is a reflection of the dominant role that the false self plays in those systems.

"From your perspective, Jennifer, the only force capable of curbing the appetites of the ego is a spiritual one. Communism, however, is inherently opposed to, and denies the value of, the spiritual principles, practices and disciplines that are necessary to overcome the narrow self-interests of the ego and, thereby, bring to realization the ideals of justice that are at the heart of such an economic system.

"With considerable pride and vehemence, capitalists are fond of pointing out that the ideals of communism are entirely absent from our way of conducting business. In the gospel of capitalism, whatever distribution of goods and services is established through the, supposedly, blind forces of the market will generate the most efficient distribution of resources.

"Furthermore, according to the capitalist mentality, whatever is efficient is believed to play a fundamental role in maximizing the utility function of society as a whole. Consequently, an efficient economic system becomes an integral part of any theory of justice.

"Once again, Jennifer, from your perspective, the only thing that is capable of countervailing a capitalist's obsession with efficient self-interest is spirituality. However, although any given capitalist might, like his or her communist counterpart, rebel against accepting the remedy that spirituality offers, many capitalists tend to do so in a much more duplicitous fashion than would an advocate of communism.

"In general, a capitalist will do one of two things with respect to the issue of spirituality in the marketplace. On the one hand, she or he might try to claim that spirituality is an unwarranted intrusion into, and disturbance of, the harmonious, efficient workings of market forces.

"If this should be the case, then this kind of capitalist will want to place spirituality under the authority of an ideology of confinement and separate spheres. In other words, the ego does not want considerations of God, morality, truth, or justice interfering with business, but believes, nonetheless, that going to the mosque, synagogue or church on, respectively Friday, Saturday or Sunday, is a good hedge against an uncertain market in spiritual futures.

"Another way in which a capitalist might respond to spirituality is to try to enlist its assistance and support. For instance, such an individual might attempt to use spirituality to justify the ego's agenda. As a result, greed, ambition, desire, selfishness and material preoccupations all become transformed into "spiritual" values.

"On the other hand, the false self might use spirituality to legitimize whatever injustices, inequities, and so on that arise due to the play of market forces. The famous invisible hand of the market becomes the Hand of God.

"Consequently, from the perspective of those a 'theology', people who are successful and wealthy are those who are acting in accordance with the wishes of Divinity, whereas those who are not successful or wealthy are acting in opposition to the laws of God. Everyone gets their just desserts, and issues of oppression, human rights abuses, exploitation, unfairness and corruption merely become woven into the 'natural', if not Divine, order of the invisible forces that set the economic table on which these just desserts are to be served.

"Very few capitalists ever seem to question why we should permit the market to determine the value of things. The market is, after all, not the unbiased, neutral arbitrator that capitalist theorists often try to claim is the case.

"Although the market does provide a mechanism for helping us to satisfy basic material needs, in point of fact, if the satisfaction of those needs is all that is at issue, capitalism is a terribly wasteful and inefficient way of acquiring the necessities of life. In reality, of course, capitalism is about satisfying the hunger of the ego for different varieties of wealth.

"These various forms of wealth have very little to do with just acquiring the basic amenities of life. Economic growth is, for the most part, just a reflection of the expanding horizons of desire and whim being given expression through the activities of a collective of false selves.

"Under these circumstances, the efficiency of the market is almost always a complex function of what is of value to a variety of competing false selves. To the extent this is true, the market operates in accordance with, and reflects, qualities of the false self rather than the qualities of spirituality or any other approach to valuation.

"The notion of efficiency is allowed to dictate what goes on in markets, but whether the things that are being done in the name of efficiency ought to be done at all is an entirely separate matter. Efficiency does have a moral dimension to it, since wastage can never be defended, but the issue of efficiency arises only after a decision has been made to go ahead with some project or other. Efficiency cannot answer the question of whether those a project should be undertaken in the first place.

"Moreover, not doing something can be even more efficient than doing something efficiently. Not doing certain things can save time, energy and resources, as well as help prevent a further degradation of the environment.

"Indeed, in a very fundamental way, the most morally defensible form of efficiency might involve a combination of things that are done, along with things that are left undone. The problem becomes one of deciding what belongs in these respective categories of activity and non-activity.

"There is an additional dimension to the efficiency issue. More specifically, establishing the proper relationship between cost-effectiveness and the quality of what is offered as a product or service is not a matter that is straightforward and without ambiguity.

"There are a large number of degrees of freedom that enter into the costing process for a given product or service. Nevertheless, not all levels of expenditure will be capable of providing the minimal amount of quality that are necessary to fulfill all the duties of care that one has with respect to providing services and products.

"When trying to determine what efficiency means in any given context, one has to take a number of things into consideration. Factors those as durability, workmanship, safety, environmental ramifications, the potential adverse impact of a product or service on individuals or society, functional effectiveness, considerations of resource depletion, as well as fairness to both clients and employees ... all of these factors have a bearing on decisions concerning efficiency."

We had reached the car. I unlocked Jennifer's door and went around to the driver's side. Since Jennifer already had released the catch, I opened the door and got in.

After fastening our seat-belts, I started the car, checked for traffic and pulled out into the street. Once underway, I completed the thought that had been suspended while getting into the car.

"Efficiency is not just a matter of finding the cheapest way of doing something, end of story. Efficiency is the cheapest way of doing something while still fulfilling one's duties of care: to oneself; to one's employees; to customers; to the community and to the environment.

"For example, although the cost, in terms of dollars and cents, entailed by producing a given product or service through procedure 'x' might be the most efficient, nevertheless, procedure 'x' might not be the most efficient in terms of over-all social costs. If the use of procedure 'x' depends on the oppression and exploitation of people, here or elsewhere, that leads to war, revolution, social violence and/or the dissolution of individuals and society, the true costs of procedure 'x' only can be assessed by factoring in the not-so-collateral damage that is being introduced as a result of the use of procedure 'x'.

"As much as corporate planners and bean counters might like to deny the fact, issues of compassion, justice, charitableness and morality have integral roles to play in any consideration of questions of efficiency. Indeed, as a general rule, any notion of efficiency that excludes these values will, sooner or later, end up costing both individuals and society a great deal in order to clean up the mess that ensues from the problems generated by those narrowly and ill-conceived notions of efficiency. Indeed, corporate planners and politicians are dealing in false-economies to the extent their policies do not take into consideration the more complex, interrelated and subtle dimensions of efficiency.

"Feminists want a capitalistic democracy that will live up to its promises of freedom, justice and equality for all of its participants. But, the question is: Can those a system, any more than communism, have its potential and promise realized without the guiding presence of a real spirituality that is capable of curtailing the activities of the false self in which both capitalism and communism traditionally have, in actual practice, been rooted ... openly in the case of capitalism and clandestinely in the case of communism?"

Having finished what I believed was an application of, or addendum to, the sort of perspective that Jennifer seemed to have been espousing, I asked: "Is there anything in what I've said that you feel is inconsistent with, or distorts, the position that you have been developing in relation to feminism?"

Jennifer shook her head and replied: "For the most part, I've never thought along the lines that you are suggesting, David, but I don't have any problems with what you are saying. In fact, it provides some interesting ideas that invite further exploration and reflection."

Her words gave me the confidence to push the envelope of our discussion a bit further. Threads from the fabric of my life seemed to rapidly unravel before my awareness as I started to raise the next issue.

"Is God a She or a He?" I inquired.

"Neither," Jennifer responded "Nor is Divinity an It," she added.

"What Divinity makes manifest on different levels of Being, however, can have either masculine or feminine properties and characteristics ... or some sort of combination of the two. The feminine and the masculine are not so much things as they are relational principles through which God weaves together various levels of Divine manifestations.

"In general, the feminine gives expression to the tendency or capacity of a Divine manifestation to be receptive and sensitive to, or resonate with the way in which some other dimension of Divinity is being manifested. In addition, the feminine principle is a medium through which certain kinds of Divine attributes involving creativity, nurturance and birth, broadly construed, are manifested.

"The masculine principle, on the other hand, gives expression, in general, to the tendency or capacity of a Divine manifestation to activate, act on, influence and engage various other dimensions of Divine manifestation. The masculine principle also serves as a medium through which certain kinds of Divine attributes of creativity and nurturance are manifested. These latter qualities are different from, but complementary to, their feminine counterparts.

"Every manifestation of Divinity will give expression to both feminine and masculine principles. In some manifestations, however, feminine tendencies might predominate, while in other cases, masculine properties or characteristics might have ascendancy.

"According to the mystical perspective, every aspect of Being is a locus through which Divinity is manifested. Every locus transmits or reflects Divine manifestation in accordance with its capacity to do so.

"Every capacity is unique. Consequently, every capacity has a unique way of transmitting or reflecting Divine manifestations. Moreover, every capacity has a unique way of giving expression to both the feminine and masculine principles that are inherent in Divine manifestations.

"On different occasions, one and the same capacity might give reflected expression to various combinations of masculine and feminine properties. In other words, on some occasions, a given capacity might reflect or manifest a certain ratio of feminine to masculine properties, while on other occasions the same capacity might reflect a different ratio of feminine to masculine properties.

"The biological form associated with a given capacity does not exhaust the spectrum of possibilities that are inherent in those a capacity. Biology is only one facet of capacity.

"Therefore, even when a biological form is sex-typed as being, say, male, the underlying, extra-biological capacity with which the biological form is associated still can serve as a locus for giving reflected expression to Divine manifestations that, on a given occasion, might have a predominantly feminine character. For example, a male biological form could give expression to those feminine properties as being receptive and sensitive to, or resonant with, some aspect of reality.

"Similarly, the fact that a biological form might be sex-typed as female does not necessarily determine what package of feminine and masculine properties might be manifested through those a biological form. The underlying, extra-biological capacity with which the biological form is associated still is able to serve, under the right circumstances, as a locus for giving reflected expression to Divine manifestations that, on a given occasion, might have predominantly masculine properties. For instance, on a given occasion, when the masculine principle is in ascendancy in a female biological form, the individual might exhibit various dimensions of that principle those as engaging, activating or acting on some other aspect of reality.

"A great deal of confusion exists because people want to think about feminine and masculine properties or characteristics only in terms of biological sex-types. In reality, sex type is only one example, and a very limited one, of masculine and feminine principles in action.

"These principles also manifest themselves through concepts, emotions, values, intentions, beliefs, attitudes and actions. Furthermore, the feminine or masculine character of these concepts, emotions, etc., will not necessarily be a function of the sex-type of the individual through whom these concepts and so on are being given expression.

"In fact, as far as the mystics are concerned, far more important than an individual's biological sex-type is the issue of false self and true self. These two kinds of selfhood will give expression to feminine and masculine principles in very different ways.

"As a general rule, irrespective of whether the principle being given expression, on any given occasion, is predominantly feminine or masculine, if the locus through which it is being manifested is the false self, the principle will tend to be colored, shaped and oriented by the character of the false self. When this occurs, the result is invariably problematic, either for the individual or for others or for both.

"On the other hand, if the locus through which a predominantly masculine or feminine principle is being manifested is the true self, the character and qualities of this self will be shaping, coloring and orienting the way in which the principle is being given expression. When this is the case, the result is invariably constructive, either for the individual or for others or for both.

"The masculine and feminine dimensions of Divine manifestation are neither 'good' nor 'bad' in any conventional sense. They are what they are, and they are capable of being given expression in an infinite array of settings and circumstances, as well as in an infinite set of possible combinations of relating to, and modulating, one another in those settings and circumstances.

"Considered from a mystical point of view, gendering and patriarchy constitute but one kind of attempt by the false self to skew and delimit the way in which masculine and feminine principles can be given expression in our lives. More specifically, gendering and patriarchy give expression to the false self's attempt to use sex -typed biological forms as an

arbitrary basis for determining how roles, power, responsibilities, resources, opportunities, duties and identities are to be distributed within families and society in a manner that is advantageous to some false selves but not to others, and that is disadvantageous to all true selves."

"Presumably, however," I interjected, "a sex-typed biological form is only one of the arbitrary standards that the false self uses as a basis for organizing the interactions of people in ways that are advantageous to itself and disadvantageous to others. For example, race, class, religion, language, nationality, values, ethnicity, political views, physical appearance, beliefs, intellectual abilities and talents, or lack thereof, could all be used as standards, individually or in various combinations, for skewing and delimiting the way in which masculine and feminine principles will be given expression in our lives."

Nodding her head in agreement, Jennifer said: "Before feminism came along, there were many, many people, both women and men, who, because of one prejudice or another, were subject to all manner of exploitation, abuse, injustice, cruelty, persecution and oppression. After feminism came along, there were, and continue to be, many, many people, both men and women, who, as a result of various kinds of prejudice, still are being treated with gross inhumanity.

"This does not mean, of course, that feminism has been ineffective. After all, there have been some women who have enjoyed substantial benefits as a result of the activities of the feminist movement. In addition, many other women have seen moderate kinds of improvement come into their lives as a result of feminist achievements.

"Nonetheless, in various ways, the problems facing humanity transcend much of feminist theory and activity. For one thing, we live in a very finite world.

"A number of realities follow from finiteness. Moreover, these realities constitute a severe challenge not only to feminism, but to any number of systems of understanding and interpretation.

"For example, there simply are not enough resources to go around to ensure that everyone will be able to have a life of even moderate affluence. There is not enough money. There are not enough long-term jobs at livable wages and with even minimum benefits. There is too little food getting to too many people. There are not enough doctors, hospitals, lawyers, teachers

and schools to allow everyone to be treated with equality and justice, even if those who have, were inclined to share, that, for the most part, they are not.

"Furthermore, not everyone can be a boss or a chairman of the board or an elected official or a teacher or an entrepreneur. The character of the world in which we live is such that only a small group of people ... an elite ... can occupy the limited positions of authority, power, control, leadership and the 'good' life.

"So, what do we do about the rest of the people? What do we do about the roughly 90-95% of humanity who are not, nor will they ever have the opportunity to be, part of the privileged elite? Should they be treated as equals, but in a lesser way?"

"There are," I observed, "some middle-class and upper-class people who argue that some form of propertied individualism is the necessary foundation for freedom and equality. These people believe both freedom and equality presuppose having the right to own, control, and dispose of property, especially land.

"One could enter into an endless debate about the nature and validity of the necessity that supposedly links freedom and equality to individual ownership of property. One also could enter into an extended discussion about just what kind of freedom and equality are tied to propertied individualism and about whether or not there might be other kinds of freedom and equality that are more viable and more valuable than the kind that allegedly issues forth from propertied individualism.

"However, even if one were able to arrive at a position concerning these issues that satisfied most people's concerns and questions, one still needs to show how to ensure that everyone will have the opportunity to own, control and dispose of property to the same extent as everyone else. Moreover, even if one could discover a way of ensuring that everyone will have an equal opportunity to realize the condition of propertied individualism, the whole exercise becomes academic since, as you have pointed out, Jennifer, there simply are not enough resources or property to go around.

"People," I suggested, "who are preoccupied with careers as some sort of power broker, executive, professional, or entrepreneur have very little insight into, or empathy with, the lives of those people, whether women or men, who merely are trying to avoid poverty, hunger, homelessness, or unhealthy and unsafe living conditions. This is especially the case when

the former group of 'haves' play a largely zero-sum game with the latter group of 'have-nots' in which someone gains ... almost invariably the 'haves' ... only if someone else loses, almost invariably the 'have-nots'."

Picking up where I left off, Jennifer said: "Women, like men, consume scarce resources. Some women, like some men, consume more of these scarce resources than do other women and men.

"Some women, like some men, have more power than do other men and women, not only with respect to their own lives but also in relation to the lives of others. This is especially true when the empowered, including women, continually force the disempowered, also including women, into zero-sum games in which the disempowered have virtually no chance of winning.

"Some women, like some men, have access to better quality legal services, health care, and educational opportunities than do other women and men. Some women, like some men, have access to better quality housing, food and leisure activity than do other men and women.

"Some women, like some men, benefit from the oppression of others, both women and men. Some women, like some men, engage in the political, financial and economic exploitation of others, both women and men.

"Feminism has given voice to a universal message that is intended for all women. Yet, in practice, many of the advances to which feminism has given birth only have eased the passage of some privileged, middle-class women into positions of power, economic success and public visibility. More often than not, these 'advances' have merely sharpened class lines by forcing economically and politically underprivileged women and men further down the socio-economic scale.

"In effect, even though there are those individuals who have been able to take advantage of the enhanced opportunities that feminism has helped to open up for some women, this advantage has been gained to the detriment of other women. In this respect, women have shown themselves to be just as opportunistic as their male counterparts whose gains often come at the expense of other men and women.

"If one would like to argue that statistically, and in general, women have been more disadvantaged than men, both currently as well as historically, so be it. However, one cannot use this claim to turn around and marginalize the suffering of the men and women who have been, and are continuing to be, disadvantaged. This is especially so when this disadvantage comes, in part, at

the hands of advantaged women who have a vested interest, along with their male counterparts, in keeping some people, both men and women, in a position of disadvantage."

Going with the flow of the conversation, I added: "There are many people in North America and Europe whose quality of life is enhanced because they can derive economic advantage from labor and resource situations that are rooted in oppressive, exploitive, and abusive practices taking place in various countries elsewhere in the world. Both men and women benefit from this situation, and both men and women suffer because of this situation.

"The continuation of these kinds of economic advantages depends on ensuring that those oppressive, abusive and exploitive practices continue. It is not for nothing that the United States and a number of European countries have armed and trained the armies of quite a few resource-rich, but democracy-poor, countries around the world.

"Many people in North America enjoy advantages today that are based on our use of lands and resources that have been acquired through the criminal and immoral manner in which our predecessors have dealt with Native peoples. Many of us, both women and men, enjoy advantages that have been bought and paid for by the oppression and exploitation of other women and men."

Shifting the focus of the discussion slightly, but continuing on with the general tenor of what had been said up to this juncture, Jennifer noted: "Virtually every woman, like virtually every man, engages in pollution of one sort or another and, as a result, helps degrade and destroy the environment. Some women, like some men, contribute more pollution than do other men and women.

"Some women, like some men, have become dogmatically committed to their nation, religion, class, race, ethnic group, and/or political philosophy. As a result, these women, along with their men, are quite prepared to discriminate against, or treat unjustly, if not inhumanely, anyone who falls outside the umbrella of protection of their particular brand of fanaticism.

"Consequently, some women, like some men, believe they have an obligation to teach their children to carry on the parental tradition of prejudice, bigotry and dogmatism with respect to a variety of other women and men. Not only do those women and men seek to oppress those who are different

from themselves, they also oppress their own children, both girls and boys, through their acts of indoctrination.

"Some women, like some men, engage life almost exclusively from purely worldly intentions, purposes and motivations. Some women, like some men, encourage their children to become preoccupied with the false self rather than the true self.

"Men and women have both helped to make the world the way it is. If women would like to put forth the rather contentious argument that men are responsible for, say, some arbitrarily large part of the world's problems, both past and present, we also should explain how we are going to take care of our own arbitrarily small contribution to the mess that we have helped to create and for which we are fully responsible."

There was a further question that I wanted to ask Jennifer. The issue was as emotion laden, if not more so, as any problem confronting women, in particular, and society in general.

I was pushing my luck, perhaps, because, up until now, although our conversation had been intense and even, at times, passionate, nevertheless our lines of communication had never been threatened. In the case of the question that I had in mind, however, past experience had taught me that one was venturing into an area where even angels fear to tread.

Some of my concerns were allayed by my confidence in, and respect for, Jennifer's even-handed way of dealing with tough issues that others, including many men I knew, would not have been able to accomplish. Still, my question was voiced with a certain degree of uncertainty, if not trepidation.

"Where do you stand on the issue of abortion, Jennifer?" I inquired.

"As far away as possible," she said, with either a smile or a grimace. I couldn't quite tell in the available light.

There was a brief silence following her reply, and, then, she continued on. "Abortion," she began, "is an extremely complex issue simply because it cuts across so many contentious themes ... themes that are contentious -- in and of themselves -- independently of abortion.

"Freedom, equality, individual rights, collective rights, moral philosophy, economics, religious values, mental health, the political process, medical ethics, personhood, duties of care, poverty, constitutional interpretation, education, dysfunctional families, welfare, crime ... the

problematic currents that run through abortion, and swirl about it, are very extensive. We aren't even clear about how to think about, or deal with, all of these other problems, so most of us come to the issue of abortion in a very confused state.

"The true believers at either end of the spectrum of perspectives concerning abortion have a dogmatism, fanaticism and air of moral certainty about them that, quite frequently, renders any attempt at cooperative efforts, let alone dialogue, an exercise in futility. On the other hand, out of frustration, confusion, and indifference, a lot of people in between the two extremes merely abdicate their responsibilities as moral agents and turn the channel.

"Some of the extremist pro-lifers are quite prepared to take life in order to impose their pro-life point of view on others. Similarly, some of the extremist pro-choice advocates are quite prepared to oppressively impose their will on others in order to serve their vision of justice. Neither group of people seems to be aware of, or understand, the nature of the ironic, but fatal, inconsistencies in their respective positions.

"Even amongst those who share, to some degree, a general perspective on this issue, one finds tremendous differences and divisions. For example, there are any number of philosophical and religious arguments that carry various implications for the problem of determining exactly when a fetus achieves the status of personhood.

"This line of demarcation concerning personhood is crucial because, at least for some individuals, such a line identifies the limits of permissibility concerning what might or might not be done with respect to either the embryo or the fetus. On one side of the line, no person exists and, therefore, abortion might be, depending on circumstances, justifiable. On the other side of this line, a person is said to exist and, therefore, abortion might not be justifiable, although, even here, some people might permit exceptions to this general principle.

"There are those who wish to set the limit of permissibility at the moment of conception. Others establish the line of demarcation at forty days. Still other individuals say that the minimal conditions of personhood do not arise until around the third month, and there are some people, including many doctors, who would be increasingly reluctant to perform an abortion the closer one comes to the end of the second trimester.

"Some individuals wish to avoid the whole personhood debate and merely use the law to arbitrarily set the line of demarcation. However, some of these people go about this in a very peculiar, if not inconsistent, fashion.

"For instance, in both the United States and Canada, women were not accorded the legal status of personhood until well into the present century. Many feminists have argued that this legal denial of personhood to women is but one more example of the oppressive nature of patriarchy and the gendering process. Yet, many of these same feminists wish to legally deny the status of personhood to the fetus, that, in many ways and in many cases, is but a younger version of themselves.

"No one likes to be oppressed, even a little. Unfortunately, however, we don't always necessarily mind oppressing others, even more than a little.

"When a man considers a woman to be his personal chattel, to be treated and disposed of as he likes, this is deemed, and quite rightly, to be wrong. When a woman considers a fetus to be her personal chattel, to be treated and disposed of as she likes, this is deemed, at least by some, to be okay.

"The criteria by which some are to be accorded the legal status of a person, while others are to be denied this same legal status, are extremely problematic. Furthermore, the standards by which some are judged as chattel, while others are entitled to be free of those judgments, needs considerable clarification.

"Feminists say the law earlier in this century was wrong to deny women legal standing as persons. They have used, among other things, extra-legal arguments involving patriarchy and gendering to expose the error in law.

"Nevertheless, many of these same feminists who wish to deny the fetus legal standing as a person now claim that the law, as it stands, is correct and no extra-legal arguments are permitted. Apparently, what is good for one goose is not good for another goose, not to mention a few ganders."

Jennifer and I became pre-occupied with our own thoughts for a bit. On the one hand, I was attending to the process of driving. On the other hand, I was reflecting on some of the things which she had said this evening. These actions were interspersed with various considerations concerning my forthcoming trip to Washington.

After awhile, Jennifer began speaking again. Her comments seemed to be a follow-up to her earlier remarks on the legal/extra-legal distinction surrounding the issues of personhood and abortion.

"Of course," Jennifer said, "some people object to the use of extra-legal arguments that, from their point of view, are tainted by spiritual considerations. They claim our founding fathers ... I guess there were no women in the colonies ... anyway, those people claim the framers of the constitution intended for there to be a strict separation between church and state.

"Given the history of religious persecution that caused many people to flee to the Americas from their European homelands, and given, oddly enough, the religious persecution that arose in many places in the colonies amongst those who, themselves, had been victims of those persecution, the importance of ensuring that no one religion should be able to dictate state or national political policy is an extremely fundamental principle. There is a corollary, however, to this principle that few people seem to understand.

"As much as there needs to be legal protection against permitting any one religious point of view to influence democratic processes, there also needs to be legal protection against permitting any one philosophical point of view from having untoward influence on the democratic process. Consequently, the various species of secular humanism have no more right to dominate democratic institutions than do the various species of religion.

"The principle that underlies the clause in the Bill of Rights dealing with the separation of church and state is neither religious per se, nor is it, in essence, secular in character. This principle is one of fairness and justice ... a principle whose wisdom can be understood and appreciated by people of both religious and secular orientations.

"The principle at issue stipulates that one cannot arbitrarily give a competitive edge to any one religious or philosophical perspective because to do so would permit, at least potentially, the kinds of persecution and oppression that the principle is designed to help us avoid. Instead, there must be a series of checks and balances that allow a variety of perspectives to be given intellectual and behavioral expression.

"A constitution is not predicated on the truth of things. Those a document is preoccupied with procedural justice or fairness.

"Irrespective of the ultimate truth of a given religious or secular position, democracies should be committed to establishing a social environment that permits different interpretations, theories, models and systems of truth to be treated with procedural fairness. To reject, out of hand, extra-legal

arguments concerning the possible spiritual nature of an embryo or fetus is to abandon the principles of procedural fairness in which our democracy is constitutionally rooted.

"Moreover, even if, on some specified grounds of procedural fairness, one were to permit the rejection of extra-legal arguments of a spiritual nature in the issue of personhood, this does not automatically permit one to accept extra-legal arguments of a secular kind concerning the nature of personhood. In fact, whatever the specified grounds of procedural fairness are that are being cited as justification for rejecting extra-legal, spiritually-oriented arguments concerning personhood, these same sort of grounds also could be cited in relationship to the rejection of extra-legal, secularly oriented arguments in relation to the problem of personhood.

"Unfortunately, the whole process of adjudication, especially at the level of the Supreme Court, is being, and, for some time, has been, sucked into a quagmire of unresolved issues. These involve the difficulties inherent in not only defining what is to be meant by, but determining what is to be the relationship between, legal and extra-legal considerations.

"More specifically, a legion of important terms has been left undefined in both The Declaration of Independence as well as The Constitution of the United States. Thus, among other things, even though certain, crucial words are used in these documents, one finds no clear stipulations of meaning concerning the nature of, for instance: truth, equality, laws of nature, God, rights, the logic of necessity and self-evident propositions, men, life, liberty, pursuit of happiness, justice, consent, despotism, duty, public good, domestic tranquility, general welfare, judicial power, good behavior, free exercise of religion, freedom of speech, to keep and bear arms, unreasonable search and seizure, probable cause, due process, just compensation, impartial jury, cruel and unusual punishment, common law, excessive bail/fines, and equal protection.

"The meaning, value, and significance of all these themes are interpreted by members of the judiciary. Consequently, one is confronted by a delicate situation. Although the procedures for becoming a member of the judiciary might be fairly well-regulated in a legal sense, the processes of interpretation employed by the judiciary are nowhere clearly specified in, or regulated by, law.

"Thus, the questions that need to be answered are several. To begin with, are the philosophical and/or religious assumptions, theories, beliefs,

biases, values, concerns, understandings, commitments, interests, and priorities of a judge legal or extra-legal? In either case, how does one reconcile these substantive factors with the clear emphasis given in the Constitution to purely procedural issues?

"Given that only eight of the thirty-nine people who were signatories of the Constitution also were among the fifty-six individuals who signed the Declaration of Independence, is the relationship between the two documents legal or extra-legal? Furthermore, in either case, what is the nature of that relationship and what, if any, role do the intentions of either group of people have concerning the nature of the Constitution?

"In addition, under what authority did any of these people have the right to represent, and make decisions on behalf of, all of the people in the thirteen original colonies? Was this authority and 'right' legal or extra-legal?

"Are the intentions of the framers of either document legal or extra-legal? In either case how does one reconcile underlying differences of intention amongst the framers, and is those a process of reconciliation legal or extra-legal?

"Finally, what is the precise character of the obligation that ties later generations to either the intentions of the framers or the practices and interpretations of previous members of the judiciary? Is the nature of this obligation legal or extra-legal? And, under what circumstances, is one people, in line with the spirit of the Declaration of Independence, entitled to dissolve 'the political bands that have connected them with another' people?

"All of the foregoing questions bear on the abortion dispute. Neither those who are pro-choice nor those who are pro-life should suppose any of these issues are simple and straightforward.

"Differences in the way various people answer those fundamental issues of democracy present more than a problem of epistemology. In other words, the difficulty is not just a matter of needing to know that, if any, of the positions are correct.

"The more pressing problem is to try to figure out how to proceed in conditions of uncertainty when there are a multiplicity of competing perspectives. The attitudes, intentions, motivations, integrity and humility with which we engage problems under these circumstances is as important as are the methods and substantive solutions to which we become committed during those a process of engagement.

"Sometimes, the problems that arise out of differences are even greater than the original problem out of which the differences initially arose. Abortion is one issue. The hatred, misery, cruelty, death, divisions, alienation, conflict, terrorism and social dissolution that are generated by the differences over this issue are quite another matter.

"Irrespective of who might be correct in the original debate, no one has the inalienable right to be intemperate in his or her treatment of those with whom one differs. Irrespective of whatever evil might, or might not, be done in any given abortion, evil is being done on each and every occasion we permit our differences to pump toxic emotional, psychological and behavioral wastes into our communities.

"If an individual, whether pro-life or pro-choice, feels compelled to do evil to prevent evil, one needs to rethink one's motivations and strategy. If we introduce evil into the world for every evil that we try to remove, what really has been accomplished?

"Of course, if one likes, one can become a metaphysical bean-counter and assess the comparative negative utilities of different kinds of evil, but all kinds of evil corrode the fabric of both individual as well as collective life. What difference is there if one's existential and moral fabric are destroyed through, on the one hand, a few instances of massive corrosion or, on the other hand, by means of an armada of minor corrosions?"

"Jennifer," I interjected, "your comments on personhood and the abortion issue have triggered a few thoughts of my own. I had never considered these ideas relevant to the debate on abortion, but, maybe they are.

"In any event, I find it both interesting, as well as disturbing, that while the fetus is not accorded the legal status of a person, corporations are accorded those a status. As a result, a variety of legal entitlements and rights are extended to a corporation in its capacity as a 'person' that are not extended to a fetus.

"In fact, corporations enjoy rights that no living, biological person enjoys. For example, corporations are never put in prison for the deaths, both human and non-human, that its activities, products or services might cause in relation to its employees, to the general public or through the degradation of the environment.

"Moreover, multi-national corporations have even been accorded a status above the law, despite the popular myth propagated by

officialdom in many democracies that, supposedly, no person is above the law. Many corporations use their extra-legal status to manipulate, corrupt, undermine, oppress, terrorize and exploit quite a few countries and peoples, and they do so, pretty much, with complete impunity.

"On occasion, a corporation might be found in violation of the provisions of some regulatory agency or other. Nevertheless, the penalties for those violations amount to little more than some tongue clucking, finger pointing, media posturing and, possibly, a ludicrously inadequate fine.

"An everyday, garden-variety type of living, biological person rarely, if ever, would get treated with such leniency. This is but one more example, among many others, that underlines the inequality existing between the corporate 'person' and a living, biological person.

"One cannot claim that the people who work for a corporation are the corporation since, for many different reasons, people come and go, but the corporation remains. Furthermore, more often than not, a corporation does not have to accede to the wishes of its employees. However, the reverse is not true, unless the employee is prepared to quit or be fired.

"On the other hand, one cannot claim that stockholders are synonymous with the corporation. In fact, corporations have a fiduciary responsibility to the stockholders that the stockholders do not have with respect to the corporation.

"In addition, although there are a few indications that some things might change in the future, nonetheless, for the most part, neither employees nor stockholders can be held liable, in civil or criminal court, for any legal transgressions that might occur in the name of the corporation. Consequently, once again, the distinction between a corporation and both employees and stockholders is quite clear.

"The corporation as 'person' has many rights that both equal and, in many cases, exceed the rights of a living, biological person. Yet, corporations are, with all due respect to the plant kingdom, complete vegetables as far as their qualities of personhood are concerned.

"Unless a corporation is given intensive care, 24 hours a day, a corporation cannot think, feel, speak, make decisions, or act for itself. All of these things must be done for the corporation by hired nurses and caretakers.

"A corporation does not have a personal sense of identity. Moreover, it does not have any awareness of what goes on within it or around it.

"A corporation has no intelligence, nor does it have the ability to distinguish between right and wrong. A corporation has no capacity for remorse concerning the wrongs that are done, without resistance, through it.

"Corporations are a legal fiction that arbitrarily has been given the ontological status in law of a living person. Corporations have been given this status despite a profound and pervasive inability to satisfy any of the conditions that often are associated with the requirements of personhood.

"Even independently of considerations relating to what role the soul plays in establishing personhood, both the embryo and fetus, as biological entities, have much more of a valid claim to being accorded a status of personhood than does a corporation. Although, to be sure, an embryo or fetus is extremely dependent, in many different ways, on the mother, nevertheless, from day one, even the embryo is capable, with the nutrients provided by the mother, of accomplishing a variety of organized, biological tasks involving, for example, mitosis, as well as the use and/or production of fundamental biochemical components those as proteins, lipids, carbohydrates, energy and so on. A corporation, on its own, can do nothing at all.

"In addition, there is considerable evidence for the existence of different kinds of awareness in both the embryo and the fetus. This awareness might be rudimentary or instinctual in character, but it is a veritable treasure house compared to the emptiness and darkness of a corporation's 'awareness' considered in and of itself."

Just as I finished, we turned onto Jennifer's street. In a few minutes we were at her house.

While parked in the driveway, a mood of awkwardness descended upon me. I really wasn't sure how to bring things to a conclusion. Jennifer helped me out by saying: "I've had a very nice time David. I hope we can do something together, again, very soon."

"Is Tuesday night too soon?" I asked.

"I would have felt rejected," she indicated, "if you hadn't suggested it.

She unfastened her seat-belt, opened the door, and paused before getting out. She turned to me and gave me a brief, but heart-melting smile that was shared by her eyes.

"See you on Tuesday night," she confirmed.



Chapter 14: The Sorrow and the Pity

Although Ken Pratt had asked me to call before coming to Washington so that he could make arrangements to pick me up at the airport, I decided just to go unannounced. This would save him the trouble of disrupting his schedule even more than already would be the case once I showed up... I wanted to spare him the trouble of driving to, and from, the airport; trying to find a parking space at a busy facility; being held hostage by the fees of the airport parking authority; waiting around through the delays often associated with air travel, and so on.

They knew I was coming. Therefore, my arrival at their front doorstep would not be like I was dropping in without advanced notice.

Ken might be slightly annoyed, but he would soon forget it. On the other hand, he knew me well enough to be able to anticipate this kind of possibility.

On the way to the airport, I stopped off at a local flower shop. I selected a floral arrangement that I hoped would be to Jennifer's liking.

Before giving instructions for delivery, I decided to write something to accompany the flowers. On one side of the store, a small counter had been provided for those a contingency.

I emptied my mind and waited for my creative muse to appear. Hopefully, he, she or it was not having breakfast, on vacation, or otherwise unavailable.

In a few minutes, some ideas and feelings began to bubble to the surface of consciousness. Slowly, at first, they began to blend themselves into a set of organized possibilities.

As a direction for proceeding became clearer, I started to write, editing my thoughts, somewhat, as I went along. From time to time, I would stop in order to await further subsidies of inspiration.

When I had finished, I went back over my, and the muse's, collaborative efforts. If it turned out well, I would accept the accolades with calculated humility. If it turned out poorly, I would blame the muse for being away without leave. In either event, I had run out of the time that I had allotted to 'Project Romance' before setting out for the airport.

Upon completing my critical review, I decided the Pulitzer committee would unlikely be calling on me anytime soon, unless,

perhaps, it did so with a writ ordering me to cease and desist in those activities. Possibly, Jennifer would be a more sympathetic audience.

The poem, for want of a better word, read as follows:

I miss you like waves without an ocean;
I miss you like eyes without light;
I miss you like mosques without devotion;
I miss you like bats without night.
I miss you like needles without thread;
I miss you like lips without a kiss;
I miss you like hermits without bread;
I miss you like gnosis without bliss.
I miss you like a race without a start;
I miss you like bodies without a soul;
I miss you like lovers without a heart;
I miss you like beggars without a bowl.
I miss you like letters without a stamp;
I miss you like bees without pollen;
I miss you like a mold without the damp;
I miss you like a dike without Holland.
I miss you like a bird without the sky;
I miss you like babies without milk;
I miss you like addicts without a high;
I miss you like China without silk.
I miss you like seeds without earth;
I miss you like leaves without a breeze;
I miss you like life without birth;
I miss you like pain without ease.
I miss you like thirst without water;
I miss you like patients without care;
I miss you like cows without fodder;

I miss you like a lung without air.
I miss you like flowers without the rain;
I miss you like laughter without ears;
I miss you like mirrors without a tain;
I miss you like prayers without tears.
I miss you like ships without the sea;
I miss you like planets without the sun;
I miss you like locks without a key;
I miss you ... when all is said and done.'

David

I folded the "literary" effort and asked the clerk if I could have an envelope. Upon receipt of the requested material, I placed the folded paper inside and sealed the envelope. On the front side, I wrote: 'For Jennifer'.

After handing the envelope to the clerk, I wrote out Jennifer's name and address on the required order form. Taking out a little more than the indicated amount from my wallet, I paid the clerk, received some change, and departed from the store.

The trip to the airport and the flight to Washington were both uneventful. When I had disembarked from the plane and found my way to the surface transport area, I corralled a taxi and its driver.

Traveling to Ken's and Pam's house, took less time than I had imagined. I was quite pleased I didn't have to sell any stocks and bonds to cover the cost of the taxi ride.

I paid the cabby, grabbed my bag and walked up the driveway. As I approached the porch area, the front door opened.

Ken's lanky form appeared in the doorway. His physique was trim and athletic, as if he were still in the military, and his chiseled, angular facial features, together with his black, short-cropped hair, looked like they had made no concessions to the weathering processes of time.

His face had a scowl on it, and his finger was moving in a reproofing manner.

"Just like a draft-dodger," he charged, "not to keep his word. You promised to call us."

"Actually," I corrected, "as I recall the situation, no promise had been made, only a customary, verbal response of politeness to an offer of questionable sincerity. Furthermore, since there were neither services rendered, nor any financial consideration exchanged, I believe none of the requirements for a valid contract existed at the time of our conversation."

"Who's the lawyer here," Ken admonished, "you or me? Besides, smart-guy, I'm going to go after you under the laws of tort, not the laws of contract."

I dropped my bag in surrender and took Ken's proffered hand, pulling him toward me so that I might embrace him. "It's great to see you again, Kenny," I whispered.

While still engaged in our clinch of reunited friendship, I saw Pam's smiling countenance near the door. Disentangling myself from Ken, I said: "Don't get offended, old buddy, but I see someone a lot prettier than you."

I went to Pam, kissed her on the cheek and gave her a hug. As I briefly gazed at her trim, five foot-ten inch frame, auburn hair, and dimpled cheeks, I said: "Pam, you're like a vintage wine. You just keep getting better and better with age."

"How nice to be properly appreciated," she beamed. "Some people around here, whose identity I cannot divulge for reasons of national security, are inclined to liken me only to sour grapes."

"Some people? ... some people?" Ken repeated, with growing interest. "So, Pam, are you going to tell me who the others are around here that share my insights, or do I have to place an unofficial request with my friends at the National Security Agency to devise an algorithm capable of breaking your encrypted secrets?"

"Knowing the caliber of your friends over there," she replied, "I feel my secrets are quite safe."

Turning to me, she said: "You are welcome to come in, David, but tell the other guy he'll have to go."

"Do you mind," I asked, "if this fellow brings my bag into the house? He seems to be a decent sort of person."

"I suppose so," said Pam, "but don't tip him. His kind only gets encouraged to hang around if you show them any consideration."

Picking up my bag, Ken confided to me: "Just remember, Dave, here, but for the Grace of God, go you."

"Ken Pratt, I heard that" Pam announced.

"With ears like that," Ken countered, "you ought to be working for the National Security Agency rather than my friends. You probably could replace one or two of the NSA's most sensitive, international listening posts."

"Where are the kids?" I inquired.

"They are spending the weekend with some of their friends," Pam informed me. "We told them you were coming," she added, "but I'm afraid you lost out to a rather Machiavellian conspiracy that had been carefully engineered over several weeks by them and their friends."

"I should have videotaped the whole affair," Ken said with a tone of chagrin. "It would have had considerable potential as a training tape for Washington bureaucrats."

Ken motioned for me to follow him. He, my bag and I went off in the direction of, what I presumed would be, the guest room, or, at least, the room in which this guest and his bag were going to stay.

After washing up, I rejoined Pam and Ken. Across a late lunch, cleaning up the dishes, and most of the afternoon, I filled them in on what had transpired over the last several weeks ... from Beth's first appearance, to the visit with Brian at the Federal prison, to lunch with the Bettinger Foundation's Timothy Jameson, to the speaker Rachel Donaldson, to the visit from the FBI's Hardy boys, to the hypnosis session with Beth, to the discussion with Jennifer concerning the abduction phenomenon, to last night's date with Jennifer.

Although both Ken and Pam were suitably intrigued by, and responsive to, all of the recent happenings in my life, they became especially animated when I mentioned "date". Each of them began peppering me with inquiries.

I felt like I had wandered into the latest Washington scandal. Maybe, in their spare time, they were either stringers for the Post or researchers working on a sub-committee investigation desperate for the minutiae of some poor wretch's life ... in this case, mine.

By the time my interview or interrogation had finished, we were faced with the decision of what to do about dinner. After some discussion, we opted for eating out and reminiscing about the old days.

Subsequently, we enjoyed a long, leisurely meal at one of the Pratt's favorite dining places. There was much laughter, and there also were some difficult moments as we remembered friends who were no longer with us ... some of whom had succumbed to the illness of Vietnam; some of whom had passed away due to other kinds of tragedy.

When we finally arrived back at the Pratt residence, the clock was registering into the early hours of the morning. While our spirits were willing to carry on with our version of 'This is Your Life', our collective flesh was weak, and we decided, reluctantly, to take some rest.

Following a good night's sleep, I showered, shaved and dressed. Ken and Pam, no doubt well conditioned by their children, already were up by the time I ventured downstairs.

We had an early lunch, or a late breakfast, and tied up a few loose ends of the discussion that had been left over from the previous evening. By the time we had finished eating, talking and cleaning up, early afternoon had arrived.

Pam excused herself, indicating she had a number of errands to run and a few people to see. Perhaps by design, this left Ken and myself alone to pursue the second reason for my trip to Washington.

Ken was the first to speak. "How did the Bettinger Foundation people approach you?" he asked.

"They, or, at least, their Timothy Jameson, sent me an invitation to lunch," I answered.

Ken followed up with: "When did you get the invitation?"

"The day I got back from visiting Brian at the prison," I replied. "How much time was there between the time you met Beth and your meeting with Brian?" Ken inquired.

"About a week or so," I said.

"Did you tell Beth you would see Brian when she visited you at your office?" Ken asked.

"No," I responded. "I wanted to think the situation over for a little while. I phoned her a few days later."

"Did Brian know you were coming?" Ken probed.

"Yeah," I indicated. "Beth had phoned the prison and left a message for him."

"What were the conditions of the external consulting offer that Bettinger made to you?" Ken queried.

I thought back to my conversation with Dr. Jameson. As terms of the offer popped into consciousness, I listed them: "\$55,000 per year; 15-20 hours per month; extremely flexible work schedule; write my own ticket with respect to responsibilities, and a year trial period with options for either renewal of existing arrangements or, maybe, even a full-time job."

"Did this Jameson guy say how you came to be chosen to be the recipient of the Foundation's beneficence?" Ken wanted to know.

"He said," I reported, "that he had heard me speak at the Network Support Conference for the Survivors of Terrorist Attacks and had been impressed with my talk. Furthermore, apparently, he knew something about my background, both as a psychologist as well as a draft-dodger.

"Dr. Jameson informed me that the Bettinger Foundation considered all three facets of my life to be potentially valuable resources. He said the Foundation would like to be able to draw upon my experience, insights and expertise as the need arose."

Ken terminated his series of questions, at least for the moment. He seemed to be mulling over various possibilities.

"What's with all these questions?" I wondered aloud.

"As you requested," Ken replied, "I've made some inquiries with respect to the Bettinger Foundation. The more I find out about them, the less I like what I'm discovering.

"First of all," Ken began, "the Bettinger Foundation is only one of a number of corporate entities that is under the control of a parent, holding company called Futures Unlimited. This latter organization does its banking through the Cayman Islands."

"I don't know, David, whether or not you are aware of the fact, but in the Cayman Islands, to even ask questions about any of the client companies of the chartered banks there is an illegal act. Although some companies might have legitimate reasons for wanting to shroud their financial activities in super secrecy, more often than not, people and companies that take this route have something illegal or immoral or problematic that they wish to keep from becoming public knowledge. Consequently, as far as I am concerned, the Cayman Island connection leaves the shadow of a very large question mark

concerning the integrity of the motives and activities of the people who, ultimately, are behind Bettinger.

"None of the corporations falling under the umbrella of the Futures Unlimited holding company is listed with any stock exchange. Moreover, although I've managed to dig up a few pieces of information, there is very little financial or corporate information available on these companies in any of the standard business reference works or from any of my friends in the business community who generally know quite a lot about those matters.

"The virtual absence of information concerning these companies, including Bettinger, also is potentially disquieting. To me, it suggests someone, for some reason, is very concerned about covering the tracks of corporate structure, interests, goals and activities.

"Under some circumstances, this aura of mystery might be nothing more than a minor blip on the screen of life. However, the people who are behind the Bettinger Foundation are very well connected with certain aspects of our own government as well as quite a few foreign governments.

"In addition, they have links with various branches of the military, along with different facets of the intelligence community, both domestic and international. They also seem to have a fair amount of interaction with key players in the defense industry, as well as a number of multi-national corporations.

"Moreover, because Bettinger is not considered to be a lobbyist as defined by law, it doesn't have to satisfy any of the conditions, those as disclosure, through which the activities of registered lobbies are, to a degree, regulated. Yet, on the basis of what little I have discovered, I have no doubt that Bettinger is actively involved in trying to shape government policy on a lot of different levels.

"Secrecy and mystery in this context are no longer minor issues. They set off a lot of warning bells in me."

"Actually, Ken," I interrupted, "Dr. Jameson more or less told me about these governmental, military and intelligence links. He said he wanted to be up-front with me about these connections in view of my draft-dodging background and so that we would have the opportunity to discuss any problems that these kinds of liaison might pose for me.

"Moreover," I continued, "Dr. Jameson indicated the Bettinger Foundation maintained close contact with these sorts of people and

organizations in order to acquire as much accurate information as possible. He suggested this information was essential to its activities of combating terrorism and carrying out various tasks those as competent risk analysis assessments."

"Perhaps," Ken replied, "things are just as Dr. Jameson has stipulated. On the other hand, what he told you might be just a plausible cover story that puts a positive spin on intentions and purposes that are other than what they are made to appear to be.

"When did your talk at the Network Support Conference take place last year?" Ken asked. "Wasn't it June?"

"The last few days of June and the first couple of days of July," I specified.

"So," Ken said, "Dr. Jameson waits nearly a year and ..."

Before he could continue, I interjected: "Dr. Jameson told me he had wanted to let some time pass before contacting me. He said he didn't want to intrude into my life at that time out of consideration for my situation and feelings."

"Taken on its own," Ken countered, "one might be inclined to accept that explanation at face value. Nonetheless, when one juxtaposes this sort of explanation next to the facts of a missing federal prisoner and a kidnapped sister, I begin to wonder about things."

"I don't understand what Brian and Beth have to do with the Bettinger Foundation," I remarked.

"I don't understand it either," Ken acknowledged, "but don't you find the whole situation excessively coincidental? The invitation to lunch is sandwiched between, on the one hand, your visit by Beth, together with your trip to see Brian, and, on the other hand, Brian's and Beth's disappearances?"

"There would have been enough time between, on the one hand, the point at which you informed Beth about your trip to see Brian, or the point at which Beth notified Brian of your forthcoming visit, and, on the other hand, Bettinger finding out, in one way or another, about these plans and setting in motion their own response through the lunch invitation. Jameson might have intended to contact you at some future date just as he told you, but circumstances unfolded in those a way that the time of contact was advanced to accommodate, in a, seemingly, very natural manner, those circumstances.

"The intriguing aspects of these events are only enhanced," Ken intimated, "when one throws into the mix the rather secretive and mysterious nature of Futures Unlimited that, through Bettinger and, possibly, in other ways as well, also happens to have very close links to a variety of powerful government, military, intelligence and business organizations. Don't you feel your spider sense tingling, Peter Parker?"

"I'm afraid my spider suit is at the cleaners," I responded. "Furthermore, I'm all out of webbing. Consequently, I'm having a little bit of difficulty swinging from premise to premise."

"Let us suppose," Ken conjectured, "that you have stumbled into something with Beth and Brian that is far more complicated than it appears on the surface."

After all," Ken added, "even without bringing the Bettinger Foundation into the picture, you have Beth's vision involving you, together with her temporary disappearance and Brian's on -going disappearance. Wouldn't you agree that all of this indicates something already is going on which is rather convoluted in nature?"

I reflected on Ken's words. "Yes," I confirmed.

"Good," he stated. "Now, let us bring the Bettinger Foundation before our viewing audience ... enter, stage right."

"Unfortunately," Ken continued, "due to the innocence, if not naivety, of our unsuspecting hero, he does not see that Beth, Brian, the invitation to lunch, and the disappearances might all be part of the same chain of events. Instead, the hero treats the events as interesting but unrelated incidents."

"What if, however, Beth and Brian constitute some sort of threat or obstacle to certain vested interests that the Bettinger Foundation or its parent company, Futures Unlimited, has? Moreover, what if some kind of action had been planned by either one, or both, of these corporations with respect to Brian and Beth in order to resolve the problems generated by this brother and sister?"

"Yet, inexplicably, a fly by the name of David Phelps lands in the specially prepared corporate ointment before it can be applied to the area of irritation. As a result, a contingency plan is devised to remove the fly from the ointment."

"In these particular circumstances, the method of choice for removing the fly is a very lucrative and attractive job offer. Most flies would jump at the chance."

"If this inducement doesn't work, other contingency plans can be drawn up. Those organizations have a large number of options available to them.

"They are experts at arranging situations. They have many ways to influence, pressure, co-opt, neutralize, discredit, intimidate and, if necessary, eliminate people who are causing difficulties.

"Perhaps, David, I've spent too much time in Washington, but I see these kinds of thing happen on a daily basis. The scenario I've constructed might appear to you to be very fanciful and improbable, but, I assure you, the underlying principles on which the scenario rests form the woof and warp from which much of the historical fabric of our country, and virtually every other country on Earth is woven."

"Ken," I said, "I don't have any problem accepting the underlying principles on which the scenario rests. I just have a problem with the scenario. For example, what possible threat could Brian and Beth be to either Futures Unlimited or the Bettinger Foundation?" I challenged.

In rapid succession, more interrogative missiles were launched in the general direction of Ken's musings. "Why kidnap Beth but let her go? Why go to the trouble of implanting false memories concerning an alien abduction?

"Wasn't Brian already neutralized in prison? Why remove him from there? Or, alternatively, why not suppose that Brian escaped for his own reasons and through his own means?

"How could my arrival on the scene constitute a problem sufficiently severe to warrant a job offer? And, how would those an offer disengage me from the Beth and Brian situation? Moreover, didn't the disappearances, if they were the intended actions of Futures Unlimited or of Bettinger, take place in spite of my having stumbled onto the scene? So how was I a fly in the ointment?"

Ken raised both of his hands, palms toward me, to about chest level and moved his hands and arms in a way that indicated: 'Enough' Lowering his hands, he admitted: "All of your questions are quite legitimate, and I really don't have a fully satisfactory response for most of them, although, I suppose, I could suggest a few possibilities.

"For instance, Beth could have been kidnapped to find out what she had told you. Or, alternatively, perhaps she was kidnapped in order to bring pressure of some kind on Brian.

"She could have been released relatively quickly in order either not to draw undue attention to her absence or because Brian agreed to cooperate in exchange for her release or some combination of the two. Furthermore, the alien abduction cover story might have been implanted both to confuse whomever might try to help Beth, as well as to help discredit any legitimate information that Beth happened to divulge to her would-be helpers.

"As far as Brian is concerned, if what he has is information or knowledge that could either hurt or help Futures Unlimited, his being in prison really does not resolve their problem. My guess is that if these people arranged for Brian's removal from prison, Brian has information that they need. If it were otherwise, if they were afraid Brian would reveal something that was injurious to them, they easily could have taken out a contract on him in prison.

"Your place in this whole scenario might not be that hard to figure out either. Because you had met both Beth and Brian, the Futures Unlimited people would want to find a way to keep tabs on you without arousing your suspicion.

"Brian had talked to you for a long time at the prison. They might have been quite concerned about what he had said to you and what, if any, fallout would be precipitated as a result of that conversation.

"For example, they might have had some knowledge of this Botclofots organization or group that Brian mentioned to you. Since Brian seemed to suggest the Botclofots might be able to help out, then, conceivably, either Futures Unlimited or the Bettinger Foundation wanted to use you in some way with respect to that group. Who knows, maybe they even thought you might be able to lead them to that organization.

"In any event, what better method of engagement would there be in your case than for the Bettinger Foundation to approach you through an issue that has affected your life in a profound manner? This would give them a natural entryway into your day-to-day life that would permit them to monitor your activities at close range.

"In addition, if you took the job, they would be in a position to subtly shape your schedule to suit their agenda. For example, if at some critical point,

for whatever reason, they needed to get you out of the picture temporarily, they could have you go on a speaking tour or participate in a terrorism conference in another country.

"Currently, you might not be interfering with any of their plans. However, you might constitute a potential threat, and, consequently, they might have decided to take steps now in order to be in a position to neutralize you at some later time.

"The bottom line, David, is that something strange is going on here. I have a gut feeling there are too many 'coincidences' in too short a period of time that are taking place in your life.

"My conjectures, in part or as a whole, might not be the correct explanation for whatever is transpiring. Nonetheless, I wouldn't be too quick to dismiss those possibilities out of hand.

"In any case," Ken informed me, "my scenario only was intended as an intellectual appetizer. The main course is about to be served.

"More specifically, organizations like the Bettinger Foundation claim to be in the business of fighting world-wide terrorism. In my opinion, however, they are, to a large degree, in the business of hypocrisy, misdirection and disinformation with respect to the issue of terrorism.

"These kinds of organization are engaged in a mammoth effort to convince the American public there is something like an international terrorist conspiracy, just as there was alleged to be an international communist conspiracy, that is intent on destroying America and democracy. They are using this program of 'educating' Americans in order to direct attention away from, and to cover up, some very dirty policies and activities.

"The effectiveness of this program of 'education' is truly remarkable. All one has to do in order to demonstrate this fact is to ask almost any person in the streets of America who she or he believes is responsible for the terrorist acts taking place in the world, and the name of the United States will never, or almost never, come up as a perpetrator of terrorism.

"The very sad truth of the matter is, however, that many aspects of government, the military and the corporate world in America are now, and have been for quite some time, major players in helping to establish and perpetuate the atmosphere and environment of terrorism in which we live with fear and trembling. Organizations like the Bettinger Foundation play a very important role in not only helping to keep these truths from the

American public, but also in helping to obfuscate matters and to control the damage that might occur when those truths do happen to break through into the public consciousness.

"Institutions like Bettinger exist because some elements of government, the military, academia, business and the media do not trust the American people. These elements believe that if the American people were ever given clear, steady and unimpeded access to the truth of what is being done to people and countries around the world in the name of American democracy, then, the reign of power, riches, exploitation and oppression that have been enjoyed and used to those self-serving advantage by these malignant elements might become seriously threatened.

"Consequently, not only does much of the rest of the world get forced into de facto slavery as a result of the activities of these morally-challenged individuals, but the vast majority of Americans have become unwitting accessories, both before and after the fact, through the veils of ignorance that are constantly being cast over our collective consciousness by groups those as the Bettinger Foundation. Lies, manipulation, disinformation, censorship, misdirection, propaganda, indoctrination, and duplicity are standard tools of the trade for these people.

"Much of what is seen, heard, read, and learned by the majority of Americans has come to them through a whole series of carefully constructed informational and interpretive filters. Everything is made to appear objective, balanced, scholarly, rigorous, judicious and authoritative, when, in point of fact, quite frequently, none of this is the case.

"Let me give you a variety of examples that help demonstrate the truth of these claims. Although one could go on almost indefinitely with those exercises, I'll try to provide you with enough detail to permit you to understand the gist of my take on things.

"For instance, virtually everybody knows about and condemns the massacre in Munich of the eleven Israeli Olympic athletes by a group of Palestinian terrorists that took place in the summer of 1976. Almost nobody knows about the Cuban airliner that was blown up in October of 1976, killing seventy-three people, including the entire gold medal-winning Cuban fencing team.

"The bombing of the plane was organized and conducted by a leading international terrorist. However, this individual had been trained by the

CIA and had very close ties with that organization, carrying out many terrorist operations throughout Latin America on its behalf.

"Many Americans also might be surprised to discover that the first hijacking and the first hostage incident in the Middle East were not committed by the PLO or any similar group or organization. In point of fact, in December of 1954, a commercial, civilian jet liner from Syria was forced down at Lydda airport by Israeli jet fighters.

"The purpose of this event was to provide the Israeli military with hostages who, subsequently, might be exchanged for certain Israelis being held prisoner in Damascus. Apparently, there were a number of Israeli soldiers who had been on a spying mission in Syria and had the misfortune of being caught. Consequently, the Israeli military had decided to use Syrian, civilian hostages to negotiate the release of the spies.

"Let's move forward thirty-one years to 1985. In this year, an Air India jumbo jet crashed, near Ireland, killing three hundred and twenty-nine people. The cause of the crash was a bomb explosion.

"The primary suspect in this tragedy had been trained at a camp for mercenaries being run out of Alabama. The people who operated this camp were virulently anti-communist.

"While they were primarily interested in training mercenaries to serve as surrogates for US foreign policy throughout Latin America, they also trained a variety of Sikh extremists. One of the people they trained was heavily implicated in the Air India crash.

"In the same year, 1985, in March I believe, there was a car-bombing that occurred in Beirut. This caused the death of some eighty people and wounded, with varying degrees of severity, a further two hundred individuals.

"The operation was conducted by a unit consisting of Lebanese who had been trained, financed and provided with logistical support by the CIA. The unit had been organized in order to assassinate a Shi'ite leader who was merely suspected of being connected, in some way, with attacks on various US installations in Lebanon ... so much for due process and innocent until proven guilty.

"Sticking with Lebanon for a moment, Americans were horrified when two hundred forty-one Marines were killed in that country during October, 1983. These deaths were the result of a suicide bombing operation.

"Many, if not most, Americans were led to believe that the incident was one more example of the completely irrational, uncivilized terrorist presence that was considered to be responsible for many of the problems in the Middle East. The Marines were portrayed as just the latest victims of the senseless, wanton disease of terrorism that was stalking Americans around the world.

"Few Americans were ever informed that, among other provocations, the US battleship, New Jersey, had been regularly bombing the hills of Lebanon in order to lend support to the Christian-dominated government. Apparently, bombing defenseless civilians in violation of international law, as well as in violation of the charter of the United Nations, is rational and proper, while trying to fight against those who are illegally occupying one's homeland is an act of terrorism.

"Once again organizations like the Bettinger Foundation play a fundamental role in convincing Americans that white is black and black is white. They have helped us to invert, and, in so doing, pervert, all of the values and principles for which we believe America stands."

Before continuing, Ken asked: "Would you like any coffee or tea or something cold to drink? This main course of our discussion might take a little time, so, you might need a libation with which to wash it down?"

I considered the offer briefly and replied: "My years in Canada must have had more of an influence than I thought. I wouldn't mind having a spot of tea."

"Well," Ken responded, "I can give you a napkin, and we probably could pour a drop or two on it, but in America, we generally have found that cups work nicely. Maybe, this invention hasn't spread that far north yet."

"You should know," I informed Ken, "that I had to go south from my home in northern Maine in order to reach Toronto."

"I guess," said Ken, "your years in the uncivilized wilds of Maine account for why you don't know about cups. I'll have to dash off an apology to the Canadian embassy."

Ken disappeared into the kitchen. After making a variety of kitchen-like preparatory noises, he re-emerged and resumed the discussion.

"From approximately the early 1980s until about 1986," he began, "the Libyan leader, whom nearly everyone likes to write off as a crazy, vicious supporter of international terrorism, had, according to Amnesty International,

been responsible for the deaths of fourteen individuals, most of whom were Libyan dissidents. Yet, in the same period of time ... 1980 to 1986 ... and, again, according to Amnesty International, the government of El Salvador murdered nearly fifty thousand of its people, while the authorities in nearby Guatemala exterminated about seventy thousand of its citizens.

"The difference between, on the one hand, Libya and, on the other hand, Guatemala and El Salvador is simple. Guatemala and El Salvador are now, and have been for many years, client states of the United States, while Libya is the naughty, delinquent, petulant child that not only refuses to take direction from, and serve, US interests in Africa and the Middle East, but often actively seeks to undermine, or oppose, US strategic efforts in the region.

"The armies and police forces in Guatemala and El Salvador are trained, equipped and supported by both the US military and intelligence communities. Libya is not.

"Consequently, the US is prepared to look the other way while one hundred and twenty thousand Latin Americans are massacred. However, the same United States becomes morally outraged with the slaying of fourteen people by the Libyan government, referring to it as exhibit number one with respect to states that are sponsors of world-wide terrorism.

"All murder is repugnant, whether one is talking about one person, fourteen people or one hundred and twenty thousand people. Nonetheless, these acts do not give expression to the same degree of evil.

"The United States and its client states have far, far more blood on their hands than Libya does. Yet, Libya is considered to be one of the world's worst terrorist states, and the United States is all innocence and goodness, at least as far as Americans are concerned, because of the manipulation of public opinion that is being effected by organizations like the Bettinger Foundation.

"In the mid-1980s, Israeli bombers were sent to Tunis to bomb PLO headquarters there. More than fifty Palestinians and some twenty Tunisians died as a result of the attack.

"Interestingly, the United States had requested the Tunisian government, that supposedly was one of our allies, to allow the PLO to set up its headquarters in Tunis after that organization had been expelled from Lebanon by the Israeli invasion. Even more interestingly, the United States did not warn Tunisia about the impending Israeli attack despite the fact that the US Sixth Fleet, that was in the Mediterranean Sea at the time, had

been tracking the movements of the Israeli bombers during the latter's flight to Tunis, including the refueling of those planes.

"The strike was said to be in retaliation for the murder of three Israelis in Larnaca, Cyprus. However, the Israelis knew, and later admitted, that the evidence surrounding the Cyprus killings pointed in the direction of Syria, not Tunis.

"In April of 1986, US planes bombed the cities of Tripoli and Benghazi in Libya, killing about one hundred people. The raid was said to be in retaliation for the December 1985 attacks at airports in both Vienna and Rome, as well as for the bombing of the La Belle discotheque in West Berlin on April 5th, 1986, in which several US soldiers were killed.

"The only problem with this is that Libya had nothing to do with either the airport attacks or the nightclub bombing. The evidence all suggested a Syrian connection.

"The US military and intelligence community knew this. Unfortunately, for the one hundred Libyans who died, the United States had another agenda for which the truth was an inconvenience.

"The attack on Libya, like the Israeli bombing of Tunis, was a terrorist attack in violation of all international law. Yet, in America, most people were of the opinion that not only was the United States acting responsibly, prudently and in defense of democratic freedoms, but that Libya got what it so richly deserved.

"Many Americans have these opinions because organizations like the Bettinger Foundation are incessant in their efforts to make sure the American public is fed a steady diet of those misinformation and disinformation. Once we have become accustomed to this diet, we tend to discover that if the occasional tidbit of truth finds its way onto our plates, we consider the experience to be quite distasteful and often are inclined to spit out those a morsel of truth immediately."

A whistling sound from the kitchen indicated the water for the tea was ready. Ken responded to the signal and went into the kitchen.

A few moments later he entered the living room with a tray filled with a pot, two cups, several spoons, some napkins, containers of sugar and milk, as well as a plate containing an assortment of cookies. Ken placed the tray on the 'coffee' table between our chairs.

As we each went about fixing our respective cups of tea, Ken said: "Let's consider another example. For instance, take the case of the second Gulf war involving Iraq and Kuwait.

"Many, perhaps most, Americans cheered the alleged role of the US in defending Kuwait against a belligerent, invading aggressor. This role conforms to the myth that organizations those as the Bettinger Foundation have created, in which the United States stands like a lonely beacon of freedom against the invasive forces of darkness.

"In reality, Desert Storm is merely a continuation of a self-serving policy that is often dressed up, for purposes of propaganda, in the guise of a courageous defender of freedom and democracy. In truth, whether the United States will permit an invasion, or will act against it, depends entirely on circumstances and the implications that those circumstances have for its various political, military and business interests.

"Issues of democracy, rights, freedoms and so on are purely for public consumption. The real motivations are always about power, control, possession, exploitation, money, resources and influence.

"The United States did not interfere when Iraq invaded Iran in the first Gulf war. This is so because certain people of prominence feared that the spread of an Iranian version of Islamic fundamentalism might undermine their control of the area and its resources.

"Similarly, the United States has permitted Turkey to deal brutally with the Kurdish people. This is permitted because Turkey serves US interests in a variety of ways and because the nationalist aspirations of some twenty million Kurds in Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria constitute a potential threat to US aspirations in the area.

"America not only permitted Israel to invade Lebanon, but gave logistical support to the latter because Israel was serving the United States' need for a countervailing presence in the Middle East with respect to left-leaning Arab nationalism, Palestinian unrest, and, Islamic fundamentalism. Furthermore, Syria's invasion of Lebanon was allowed to go unchecked by America as long as the attack was directed against Palestinians who were considered to be a destabilizing element as far as US interests in the Middle East were concerned.

"The United States did not object to Indonesia's invasion of East Timor and the slaughter of some two hundred thousand civilians in order to

permit Indonesia, among other things, to gain access to the latter's substantial oil deposits. America backed Morocco's invasion of the resource-rich Western Sahara for similar reasons, although with far less loss of life to the inhabitants of that region.

"In each of these cases, US interests were being served. Indonesia and Morocco were both being armed and supported by America because those countries would permit the United States a share in, and some degree of control over, the resources, once the latter had been secured.

"America looked the other way during the '70s and '80s when apartheid-oriented South Africa, directly or through surrogate forces those as the terrorist groups UNITA in Angola and RENAMO in Mozambique, attacked a variety of neighboring states that held political views to which the United States was opposed. At the same time, and much less passively, America financed, armed and gave logistical support to the Contras as they conducted numerous operations against various civilian targets in Nicaragua, ranging from peasant farmers to religious workers to health care professionals to students to union organizers and community workers."

Ken popped a few small cookies into his mouth, chomped on them a bit and, took a few sips of tea. When he had finished eating and swallowing, he started to speak again.

"Since approximately 1952, when the Psychological Warfare Center was inaugurated at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, a program came into being that, eventually, would evolve into a so-called anti-terrorist program. This whole process was set in motion when, within a month, or so, after the Center opened, the Special Forces branch of the United States Army was established and became attached to the Center in order to help give active expression to the principles and perspective that were the original motivating force behind the founding of the Psychological Warfare Center.

"More specifically, among other things, this Center had been designed to promote the use of unconventional warfare to secure various objectives in foreign territory. This kind of warfare encompasses a wide spectrum of possible strategies and operations that either fall at, or beyond, the borderline of what is allowable under existing international law concerning the rules of warfare.

"Initially, the Special Forces Mobile Training Teams, the so-called 'A team', that usually consisted of up to ten enlisted men and several officers,

would be sent into designated areas in order to teach indigenous guerrillas how to conduct successful operations of unconventional warfare. Naturally, these guerrillas were fighting for goals that were compatible with US objectives.

"Gradually, the focus of the Center changed, and, as a result, so did some of the activities of the Special Forces. One major transformation concerned the switch from showing guerrillas how to carry out unconventional warfare, to showing oppressive, corrupt, exploitive and undemocratic governments how to defeat the guerrillas who were seeking to generate an insurgency against those governments.

"In other words, the primary purpose of the Center was no longer to help people to learn how to fight wars of national liberation through unconventional warfare. The purpose of the Center had become, for the most part, one of helping various authoritarian governments to learn how to use unconventional methods to suppress wars of national liberation.

"Every struggle for national liberation involving a people oppressed by a client of the United States required a response of US-supported programs of counterinsurgency against these cadres of the alleged, world-wide communist conspiracy. When the threat of communism began to crumble ... along with the Berlin Wall and the former Soviet Union ... the policy of counterinsurgency was transformed into a policy of counter-terrorism in order to contain the world-wide conspiracy of terrorists and their sponsoring states.

"Counterinsurgency became counter-terrorism in order to take advantage of changing circumstances in the world. Because of events during the last eight or nine years, the 'label' communism no longer evokes the same kind of blind fear it once did during the era of the Red scare, so a new term had to be employed that would re-ignite the same sort of blind fear that could be used to manipulate the American public.

"Thus, the issue of terrorism was seized on. Where, once, the United States used policies of counterinsurgency to defend the free world against the hordes of communists, now, the United States, through policies of counter-terrorism, could defend the free world against the hordes of pathological malcontents known as terrorists.

"Consequently, anyone who objected to the exploitive, oppressive, and undemocratic policies of either the United States or its client states now

were more likely to be labeled as terrorists rather than communists, although, on occasion, the insurgents might be called both. In either case, in order to maintain the status quo of American influence and control, those rebels had to be controlled or eliminated through the use of unconventional measures of warfare.

"Sometimes, Special Forces Mobile Training Teams would be sent into the field to serve as advisors to, as well as instructors for, the military and police forces of foreign governments who were serving American interests. Sometimes, members of the military and police from these countries would be sent to the Psychological Warfare Center, or to the Pentagon's School of the Americas in Panama ... which has since re-located to Georgia as well as undergone a name change ...or they were sent to Fort Benning's program on counter-terrorism, for training.

"In any event, one of the central precepts taught by many of these instructors of counter-terrorism and counterinsurgency was the importance of creating local paramilitary groups. These groups would serve as counter-organizations to local guerrillas.

"Furthermore, considerable stress was laid on recruiting certain kinds of people to these paramilitary organizations. More specifically, the recruits should be those individuals who, for 'reasons' of class, religion, ethnicity, tribe or race, harbored considerable hatred for the people who would become their targets.

"The slaughter, by Christian Phalangists, of two to three thousand Palestinian refugees in the Sabra-Shatila camps, including many women and children, is a thoroughly repulsive example of this policy in action. Most regrettably, this same policy has been implemented in many other parts of the world by the US and its client states.

"The focus of this policy was always on 'soft' targets of opportunity. In other words, instead of going head to head with armed guerrilla groups, these paramilitary counter-terrorist organizations were taught to attack defenseless civilians, especially those who were struggling to implement programs of social justice and human rights that would benefit the poor people of a given region.

"Those attacks were not just because there were civilians who were working toward goals considered to be antithetical to various American interests.

The brutalization of these civilians would become the object lesson in terror for the edification of other civilians.

"In other words, to defeat an enemy, one doesn't have to engage in direct, high-intensity, high-risk conflict with the military forces of that enemy, whether these forces be in the form of guerrilla groups or a standing national army. All one has to do is to attack the civilians of a region through low-intensity, low-risk terrorist operations.

"When, as a result of their fear of those terrorist operations, civilians become submissive and pliant, imposing one's will on the region becomes much, much easier. Without the support and assistance of many aspects of the civilian population, guerrilla organizations have considerable difficulty in maintaining themselves and conducting viable campaigns of insurgency against the existing government.

"This approach has been employed by the U. S. and its client states with great success, at least for the short run, in many parts of the world, including Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, Asia and the Far East. In fact, this terrorist model of foreign policy is really nothing more than an updated, technologically refined, exported version of a domestic product that had been developed in America during the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries with respect to the Native peoples of North America."

Ken nibbled on another cookie and drank some more tea. His quiet, gentle actions were in stark contrast to the violence of the topics that were sandwiched around his ingestion of cookies and tea.

Picking up a napkin, Ken dabbed at his mouth and the general vicinity surrounding his mouth. As he folded up the napkin and placed it on the tray, he stated: "The use of torture, disappearances, and death-squads to generate an atmosphere of terror and fear in the civilian population became a staple of many of the client states that were trained and supported by America. In fact, these techniques are much more characteristic of US-trained, foreign, military and police forces than they are of anyone else.

"Organizations like the Betteger Foundation point fingers of condemnation toward the terrorist activities of Carlos the Jackal or Abu Nidal or the German Red Army Faction or the Italian Red Brigade or the PLO or the Shining Path of Peru or the IRA or the two Libyans who were tried in the Lockerbie, Scotland Pan Am bombing. And, indeed, all terrorist activity deserves to be condemned.

"However, the terrorists whom institutions those as the Bettinger Foundation like to keep reminding us about are rank amateurs compared to the United States and the client states around the world that America trains, arms, supports and encourages in their acts of terrorism.

"From 1968 to the present, all of the minor league terrorists have been responsible for approximately nine to ten thousand deaths. Without any doubt, all of these murders of innocent people are repugnant, immoral and, ultimately, counter-productive.

"Nevertheless, during the same period of time, the major league terrorists, those as the United States and its clients, have been responsible for well over a million and a half deaths in their world-wide campaign of terror. Surely, we ought to find the murder of innocent civilians in El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Argentina, Mexico, Chile, Lebanon, Indonesia, East Timor, Mozambique, Angola, South Africa, Iran, Vietnam, the Philippines, Cambodia, and Iraq, that have taken place by our hand, or by those we have trained and armed, or by those who serve our purposes, to be far more morally repugnant, immoral and, ultimately, counter-productive than anything the minor league terrorists have perpetrated.

"Of course, the retaliatory terror of the minor leaguers is not justified simply because it comes in response to the campaign of terror inflicted on them by the United States and others. Nonetheless, one ought to keep in mind that the United States, its allies and their clients have been among the primary architects of, and contributors to, the problem of terrorism.

"In similar fashion, one needs to understand that the minor league terrorists were not the first to practice terrorism. Indeed, they learned their lessons at the feet of the major league terrorists like the United States, Britain, France, and Germany.

"To mention just one quick example, consider the case of Iraq's use of chemical weapons against certain factions of its Kurdish inhabitants. Many of us seem to derive considerable gratification from our sense of moral superiority on this issue, yet, quite conveniently, we are oblivious to the fact that Iraq's leaders learned this technique from the illustrious example of none other than that great spokesperson for democracy, Winston Churchill.

"As Secretary of State at the War Office, he gave the RAF permission in 1919 to use chemical weapons, as an 'experiment', against the 'uncivilized' Arab tribes of Mesopotamia, one of modern-day Iraq's historical predecessors.

In addition, with the approval of the War Office, the RAF continued to carry out a terrorist campaign of bombings against those tribal villagers who were unwilling to accept the puppet government that Britain had installed in order to serve, among other things, the latter's oil interests in the region.

"We condemn, and quite correctly, the Iraqi use of chemical weapons against its Kurdish citizens. Yet, we often do not condemn our own use of chemical weapons, those as when we employed Agent Orange against the Vietnamese and, ironically, our own soldiers, or when our allies use chemical weapons, those as the previously mentioned case in Mesopotamia.

"If the minor league terrorists are monsters, America and the other major league terrorists should be prepared to accept the fact that we have created the former in our own image. Just as the children of abusers often grow up to be abusive toward their own children, so too, we should not be surprised to learn that the children of terror that we have spawned are growing up to be just like their terrorist mentors."

Ken was silent for a moment. On several occasions, he looked over at me and, then, away, as if he were debating whether or not to say something.

Finally, he said: "You know, David, in quite a few places, if a death occurs during the commission of a crime, anyone who participates in carrying out the crime, even if only in a marginal manner, is liable to a charge of murder. This remains true in cases where the death is due to, say, a heart attack that occurs during the course of the criminal act.

"You might not agree with what I'm about to say, David, but in my opinion, the individuals or group that planted the bomb that killed your mother, sister and quite a few others, are not the only ones with blood on their hands and souls. America and its client states have had a considerable hand in helping to create the atmosphere and perpetrators that make those tragedies possible.

"By our own standards of justice, the United States, along with many of its client countries, should be considered to be culpable in many of these acts of minor league terrorism. This is so because we have had a substantial role in aiding and abetting these criminals through our own sins of commission and omission.

"In my opinion, by working for an institution like Bettinger, you will be helping to perpetuate and cover-up America's role in the kind of acts that led to the deaths of many hundreds of thousands of innocent people,

including your mother and sister. Consequently, I would recommend against becoming involved with the Foundation in any fashion."

Ken paused for a few seconds and added: "Of course, one of the problems that might be facing you is that the Bettinger Foundation, or, more precisely, the people behind this organization, might not be prepared to accept your 'with regrets' concerning their RSVP. If one or more of the scenarios outlined by me earlier is operative, the people who are extending the 'invitation' to you might not be the sort of individuals to whom one can just say 'no'... at least, not without suffering the consequences of those a rejection."

By the time we had finished discussing the Bettinger Foundation situation, late afternoon had arrived, and Pam had returned from her sojourn. Ken and I cleaned up the remnants of our refreshments while Pam attended to a few other domestic chores.

A few hours later, Ken pulled up in front of the Departure's access door for the airline handling my return domestic flight. Pam and Ken both got out of the car to give me a hug good-by.

Ken picked up my bag and walked with me toward the entrance. He put his free hand and arm around my shoulder as we walked along.

When we reached the door, he removed his hand and arm from my shoulder and put the bag down. Turning toward me, he said: "I might have a little more information for you about the Bettinger Foundation in a couple of days. Apparently, they have a research facility somewhere near your old stomping grounds in northern Maine.

"Where this facility is exactly or what kind of research is conducted there, I don't know. However, I have a few friends looking into the matter for me.

"There's one other thing," Ken intimated. "Some of the information I've been able to obtain suggests that religion might have an important role to play with respect to the people behind the Bettinger Foundation. The available evidence, interestingly enough, appears to indicate that a number of different religions, rather than one particular tradition, might be involved.

"In addition, there have been a number of rumors echoing about the halls of the Justice Department for several months concerning various kinds of anomalous activity in a number of religious communities. Up until now, I haven't paid too much attention to the whole issue, but I'm

going to examine the matter a little more closely and see if there are any links with either Futures Unlimited or the Bettinger Foundation.

"I'll pass on to you whatever I find out. This might or might not prove to be of interest to you, but it's about as far as I can take things at the present time."

I picked up my bag and thanked Ken for all his help. I told him that I was intending to take his advice with respect to the Bettinger Foundation's invitation.

We shook hands and said good-bye once again. I waved to Pam and went through the door toward my journey back to Boston.

Chapter 15: Some Enchanted Evening

On Monday afternoon I placed a call to Tim Jameson at the Bettinger Foundation. I was quite relieved when he picked up the phone since I wanted to disengage myself from the whole matter as quickly as possible.

"Timothy Jameson speaking," he announced.

"Dr. Jameson," I began, "this is Dr. Phelps. How are you?" I asked with a friendly sociability that did not reflect my feelings.

"I'm very well, thank you," he replied. "What can I do for you?"

"Nothing, actually, Dr. Jameson," I answered. "I've called in order to let you know my decision about the external consulting offer."

"Oh?!" he said, with what seemed to be a mixture of concern, uncertainty, and curiosity. "This sounds ominous," he added.

"I suppose that would depend on one's point of view," I responded. "In any event, as you appear to have intuited, I've decided to pass on your proposal."

"I'm sorry to hear this, Dr. Phelps," he said. "If you don't mind my asking, was there a problem with our offer or the arrangements of the job? Maybe, we still might have some room to negotiate or fix whatever the difficulty might be.

"Dr. Jameson, there was absolutely nothing wrong with the terms and conditions of your proposal," I indicated. "In fact, I found the offer to be extremely generous, flexible and, quite frankly, very tempting."

"Does your decision have anything to do with the talk you attended last week at the Foundation?" he inquired. "You did seem to be in somewhat of a rush to absent yourself from our program. Perhaps, Professor Donaldson's comments were more upsetting to you than you wished to admit at the time."

"The answer to your question," I asserted, "is, once again, no, Dr. Jameson. If anything, I was very much impressed by Rachel Donaldson's comments concerning both terrorism and the Gulf War."

"Ahh," he exclaimed, with what appeared to be hybrid tones of revelation and puzzlement. "This leaves me with something of a paradox, Dr. Phelps," he added.

"Why is that?" I asked.

"Well, on the one hand, you state that everything about the terms, conditions, offer and lecture were very good. Yet, on the other hand, you are declining our offer. The two don't seem to go together."

"Yes," I admitted, "when you put things that way, I can appreciate your perplexity. However, believe it or not, Dr. Jameson, there really is more to me than job offers and lectures."

"Dr. Phelps, I didn't mean to suggest ..."

Before he could finish his sentence, I interrupted. "Rest easy, Dr. Jameson, I'm not suggesting you were suggesting anything. I'm merely trying to resolve your sense of paradox."

In an effort to elaborate, I said: "I've given your offer a lot of thought. Furthermore, I've explored the issue in considerable detail with someone whose opinion I value a great deal."

"This process of deliberation and exploration led me to certain conclusions. Consequently, for a variety of historical, professional, political, philosophical and personal reasons, I've decided your job offer and my present life circumstances are incompatible.

"My answer," I acknowledged, "still remains rather vague. However, I'm not really prepared to go into more precise detail at this time. I hope you will let things stand as they are."

"Of course, Dr. Phelps, of course," he confirmed. "Naturally, and I'm sure you can appreciate this, we try to find out as much as we can about why things did not have ... shall we say, a happier ending."

"Perhaps," I offered, "this is a happy ending. It just might not be the one either of us might have been led to expect by our original anticipations."

"Nicely phrased," he noted. "Nonetheless, your decision saddens me more than you can know. I wish there were some way in which I could persuade you to reconsider."

"I'm sorry, Dr. Jameson, the decision is final. Yet, I do wish to thank you for your offer.

"Among other things," I indicated, "I've found the whole deliberation process to be quite instructive. A lot of things have become much clearer as a result of the opportunity for reflection that your proposal has afforded me."

"Well," he responded, "I'm glad we could be of assistance to you in this respect. Moreover, I believe you did get a tasty, free lunch as promised."

"Affirmative," I replied. "Thanks again, Dr. Jameson, good-by."

After replacing the phone in its cradle, I lifted the receiver once more and entered another number. The phone at the other end of the connection began to ring.

While I was waiting for someone to answer, a thought crossed my mind. Timothy Jameson was not entirely correct when he had told me at our luncheon engagement that the barbarians were at the gates.

In point of fact, as Ken's overview had demonstrated, some of those who were manning the gates were, themselves, barbarians. In a clever variation on the Trojan horse ploy, an unknown number of barbarians had managed to disguise themselves as guardians of civilization, and, as a result, they had been appointed to defend the compound.

Once assigned, they, at their leisure, could set about dismantling whatever democratic defenses they wished to target while monitored by the forgiving and heedless eye of patriotic fervor. The supreme irony in all of this was that these people could scream and foam at the mouth in frenzied outrage over the acts of the external barbarians in order to divert attention away from their own, far greater acts of barbarity.

After three or four rings, someone at the other end of the connection picked up the phone. "Hello," came the reply.

"Hello, yourself," I said.

"Is this the poet laureate?" Jennifer asked. "Are you the one who has just come back in triumphant return from walking in the corridors of power of our nation's capital as well as hobnobbing with the rich and famous?"

"If you must know, the people with whom I visited are neither rich nor famous. Furthermore, their front hallway could not easily be mistaken for a corridor of power.

"As far as your first question is concerned, I am uncertain whether I am the correct referent of your inquiry. While, from time to time, I have tried to be inspired to write in a sort of up-scale doggerel style, there have not been, at least heretofore, any laurels that have come my way in acknowledgment of those poetic efforts."

"In that case," Jennifer advised, "I wouldn't resign from your day job just yet. However, as, hopefully, a leading candidate for the coveted position of inaugural groupie in your fan club for up-scale doggerel style, let me be the first, unofficially though it might be, to confer honors upon your latest literary rendering."

"When one translates your words from high -English to low-English, would one be safe in assuming that you liked the flowers and poem?" I asked.

"The risks entailed by those an assumption would be minimal," Jennifer confirmed. "At the same time," she cautioned, "I have not quite made up my mind about playing the roles of the damp to your mold, or fodder to your cows, even though I appreciate ... I think ... the sentiment behind these words."

"I am gratified and encouraged by the graciousness with which my modest efforts have been received," I said with unctuous humility. "Perhaps, you would be willing to entertain further efforts in this vein at some future time."

"As long as those efforts were sufficiently far enough in the future, I believe I probably could handle it," she replied. "Although, as one gets older, one is less able to deal with the stress surrounding the responsibilities and demands of etiquette that are entailed by entertaining things of that ilk."

"I think," I indicated, "I'll quit while I'm only moderately behind. The luster of my status as poet laureate seems to be attracting considerable tarnish with each passing moment."

Attempting to change topics before my would-be international reputation was further sullied, I asked: "Are we still on for tomorrow evening?"

"I wouldn't exchange it for all the poems in Boston," she replied. "When all is said and done, David, I've missed you very much."

"That's very nice to hear, Jennifer. I'm really looking forward to being with you again."

"Is 7:30 okay?" I asked.

"Sounds good," she said.

"Is there anything in particular you want to do?" I inquired. "Just come over," she indicated. "We'll figure something out." "See you tomorrow, Jennifer," I concluded. After she had said her good-bye in reciprocation, I depressed the buttons on the receiver and terminated the connection.

Without replacing the phone, I released the buttons and entered another number. The line intermittently came alive with the sounds of electronic signals being transmitted from location to location.

"Hello, Beth Idaho speaking. How can I help you?"

"Beth, it's David Phelps. I hope you don't mind my calling you at work."

"Not at all, David. How are you doing?" she inquired.

"Quite well, actually," I answered. "How about yourself?" "All things considered, I'm doing all right," she replied.

"Any further developments with either your brother or the FBI?" I asked.

"All is quiet on the eastern front," she responded.

"Are you suffering any after-effects of the abduction ordeal?" I probed.

"Not as far as I can tell, David," she indicated. "I'm sleeping, eating, and working well. I'm not feeling particularly depressed about anything, although, I am concerned, naturally, about Brian's situation."

"Sounds like you are in pretty good shape under the circumstances," I concurred. "I just wanted to touch base with you and to let you know that I'm available if you want someone to talk to or be with."

"I appreciate your thoughtfulness, David," she said.

"I'm afraid," I confided, "I'm pretty much of a bust as far as being able to help your brother is concerned."

"Don't count yourself out yet, David," she countered. "The path of life consists of many twists and turns. Just because one can't see beyond the bend in the road doesn't mean there aren't interesting things waiting for one around the next corner."

"Why do I keep getting the feeling, Beth, that you should be the clinician, and I should be the one seeking your help?" I mused.

She laughed. "Offering advice is like babysitting," she suggested. "As long as one doesn't have to take responsibility for looking after a child on a full-time basis, one often appears to be a better person than one is."

"I like your simile," I said, "but I'm not sure it applies in your case."

"That's nice of you to say, David, even if I don't happen to agree with you," Beth responded.

"Well, I don't want to keep you from your work," I indicated. "If there is anything I can do for you, Beth, please don't hesitate to call me."

"I will, David," she promised.

"In turn, I'll try to keep you informed about what I find around the next curve," I offered.

"It's a deal," she noted. "Be careful, David," she added. "Sure," I affirmed, despite feeling a sense of disquiet from her request of caution. "You take care too, Beth."

"Bye, David," she said. The next sound I heard was 'click'. "For some reason, her "bye" bothered me. It had an unsettling quality to it, as if it possessed a sense of finality about it.

I soon became busy with one of the books I had set aside to read during the summer and forgot about my feelings of unease with both Beth's cautionary note and her last words. I planned to immerse myself, for a number of hours, in *Commitment and Identity* by Robert Wickersham, do a load of laundry that was approaching the size of the national debt and, possibly, go out for a movie later that night.

The movie theater that I went to featured second-run and classic films. This week they were focusing on a variety of science fiction movies - popular, obscure and experimental, from different periods of the fifties, sixties and seventies.

The show finished around 11:30 p.m.. I decided to stop in at a local donut shop and pick-up a few snacks for the home front. After purchasing a dozen, or so, donuts, I headed off in the direction of my parked car, on a side street about four blocks away.

The price of tickets at the review cinema I had just attended was on the low end of the entertainment spectrum. The prices also reflected the section of the city in which the theater was situated.

This part of town was somewhere between full-scale urban decay and up-scale, uptown glitz and glamour. There was considerable political discussion

concerning the precise nature of the direction in which the area was considered to be headed.

Along the way to the car, I saw a number of individuals whom, I presumed, were among the increasing numbers of homeless people who seemed to be generated by the ramifications of political decisions, irrespective of the character of the direction in which the economy of a given area went. One of them, who was sitting on the front steps of an apartment building, extended a hat, turned upside down, in my direction, seeking an offering of some sort.

I took the change from my pocket that had been left from the transaction at the store, added a dollar to it and put both in the waiting hat. For reasons that were not entirely clear to me, I had a sense of awkwardness and embarrassment about the whole process.

I felt badly for the man who had to ask me for a hand -out. I felt badly about the social conditions that led to those a necessity.

I wondered about the propriety of giving more than I had. I wondered about the metaphysics of why him rather than me.

The man said: "God bless you, sir."

I smiled or grimaced, or did both, in a mute acknowledgment of his gratitude. Soon, I moved along with my life while the man was left sitting with his circumstances.

Following the interchange, I was preoccupied with thoughts of politics, economics and social policy. There still were several more blocks to the street on which my car was parked.

A few moments later I vaguely became aware of someone rapidly approaching me from behind. Suddenly, something hard was jammed into the small of my back, and I heard the words: "Just keep moving and don't turn around if you want to stay among the living."

At first, I thought the man on the stairs, or one of his colleagues, had decided that I had more to offer than I had given. Another thought that flashed through my mind was that I was about to receive a lesson, at yet to be determined tuition fees, in what so many academics and politicians like to talk about, but, concerning that, few of us have any direct knowledge.

However, the next words I heard forced me to revise my initial appraisals of the situation. "Stay cool, Professor. Don't go dumb or heroic on me. Just keep moving until I tell you otherwise."

Either my assailant was using "professor" as a form of general address, like some Maritimers use "captain" and certain Britishers use "governor", or the guy knew who I was. I wasn't sure that I preferred: an old-fashioned mugging by a stranger or an attack of, perhaps, more sinister proportions by someone who, in some way, knew me or knew of me.

While walking along and waiting for the curtain to rise on the main part of this drama, I busied myself with trying to sort through various possibilities, and I did so on the assumption that the person behind me was caught up in my life in some fashion, prior to tonight. I suppose I was in a state of shock because I seemed to be dealing with a rather bizarre and, potentially, dangerous situation in a rather detached kind of way.

First, I considered my financial situation and whether or not there might be some irate creditor that I consistently had been overlooking. I quickly eliminated those a possibility since I was pretty much up to date with everything except the paper boy, and I didn't think that thirteen year old Bobby Vlasco would carry things quite this far just because I was a week behind in paying him.

Next, I wondered about the college. Maybe, one, or more, of my students felt I had given too low a grade in the finals or on a term paper.

I was just about ready to start assessing the personalities of my students, when I heard: "Turn down the next street on the right," from my newly acquired companion.

As I reached the corner, I complied with the directive that had been given to me. I took three or four steps down the street and was told to stop.

Things were quiet for a few seconds, and, then, I heard: "When I tell you to turn around to face me, do so, but do it slowly, keep your eyes closed and turn to your left." This was followed by about ten or fifteen seconds of silence, although the person behind me seemed to making motions of some kind, as if in preparation for my turning around.

The command finally came: "Turn now and slowly ... to your left." I began to turn around. When I reached a certain position, I was told: "All right, you can stop now, but keep your eyes closed."

As soon as I stopped, something was blown into my nose. I started to feel dizzy almost immediately and was experiencing difficulty in breathing.

I collapsed to one knee and reached out gropingly for the ground with my hand in order to try to steady myself. I missed the ground with my first attempt and lost whatever tenuous balance I had. As I flailed away in a desperate attempt to regain some degree of stability, I toppled over completely with my doughnuts spilling into the street.

My eyes were open now, but everything was spinning despite lying in a stationary position on the ground. Events were registering but in slow motion and as if experienced through a dense fog.

My perceptions were quite distorted. I felt like I was looking at things through the wrong end of a telescope.

A car pulled up. Voices ... Shouts ... Someone running. More shouts ... Cars doors slamming ... Screeching of tires ... Silence ... Someone kneeling beside me, speaking to me, helping me to my feet, consoling me, leading me into a house or apartment.

Sometime later ... how much later I don't know ... the fog began to lift. There still was a slight dullness that seemed to have taken up residence in my consciousness, but my perceptual capabilities had returned to their normal levels of distortion.

I found myself lying on a couch. As I turned my head, I saw a man sitting at a table looking at me.

The man appeared to be in, maybe, his mid to late thirties or early forties. He might even have been older. I couldn't really tell.

He had a well groomed but relatively short beard. There were a few flecks of gray sprinkled about the beard as well as in the hair near his ears.

Although I could not be certain, given my reclining position and because the man was sitting down, he appeared to be a tall man, somewhere on the far side of six feet. He also seemed to be physically fit.

There was something familiar about him. I closed my eyes trying to remember where I had seen him before.

I was about to open my eyes from a failed effort to recall why he seemed familiar to me, when an image invaded my awareness. The image was of the black man on the steps to whom I had given some money.

I remembered his clothes as being more ragged than they now appeared. Moreover, he seemed to have a scruffier look to him on the street than now was the case.

Both of these impressions might have been due to the lighting conditions prevailing around the area in which we had our brief encounter. Or, perhaps, I had been looking at him through my own preconceptions and biases without really seeing what he actually looked like. I wasn't sure what processes might have been operating at that time.

I opened my eyes again. I swallowed and found my mouth and throat to be quite dry. I licked my lips, trying to find any extra liquid that might be hanging around.

"Would you like something to drink or eat?" the man asked.

I nodded my head and raised myself to a sitting position. I felt a twinge of wooziness that quickly evaporated.

"Something cold," I croaked.

The man made a gesture to someone in the next room. He returned his attention to me.

"How are you feeling?" he said with a tone of genuine solicitude. "Like Alice in Wonderland," I answered. I added, "What's going on exactly?"

The man smiled. "That's a very good question," he asserted. "Apparently, someone tried to kidnap you."

The man elaborated a little. "I had been watching the scene develop from the stairs where I had been sitting.

"You looked like you needed some help, so I made a lot of shouting noises and loud stomping sounds as I ran toward you, hoping to scare your would-be captors away in the process. Fortunately, my bluster worked.

"I don't know what I would have done if those guys still had been near the corner when I arrived," he indicated. "The situation could have proved quite embarrassing to me and not of much assistance to you.

"If those guys hadn't moved on, I would have had little more than spit with which to defend us. And, between you and me, I've never been able to spit with much authority."

A woman came into the room with a tray on which, among other things, was a container of fruit drink and a glass filled with ice. She took some cloth material from the tray, unfolded it, and spread it over the top of a side table

by the couch. On top of the material, she placed the fruit drink container and the glass from the tray, then she left the room.

I opened the container and poured some of its contents into the glass. I took a long drink that drained most of the liquid from the glass and proceeded to pour the remainder of the contents of the fruit drink container into the glass.

After refreshing my parched throat, I leaned back and rested my head against the top of the couch. I closed my eyes momentarily.

Opening my eyes, I looked at the man. "I'm sorry," I apologized, "I forgot to thank you for your help.

"I don't know what would have happened to me if you hadn't intervened on my behalf, but I don't believe my future with the people you ran off would have been a pleasant experience."

I got up, a little unsteadily, and reached out my hand to the man in order to shake his hand in thanks and also to introduce myself. "I'm David Phelps," I informed him."

The man took my extended hand and said: "People around here call me Rip. There's no last name, just Rip."

As I returned to the couch and sat down again, he said: "I was never sure if the name was given to me in honor of Rip Van Winkle because of my legendary sleeping habits, or in memory of Ripley's Believe It Or Not because of some of my excursions into, shall we say, the realm of the extraordinary. On the other hand, the name might have something to do with my tendency to rush headlong into things and let'em rip, so to speak, or, perhaps, the name is a shortened form of riptide since I'm sometimes accused of giving vent to contradictory actions and moods."

Rip was silent for a moment. "Or," he said, "if we move into the darker realm of things, perhaps, for whatever reason, I reminded someone of Jack the Ripper."

He shrugged his shoulders. "Take your pick, David."

Smiling, I observed: "With the exception of the Rip Van Winkle angle, those characters who attacked me tonight seemed to be on the receiving end of most of the possibilities that you've listed, including, at least from their vantage point, JtR. However, personally, I like 'just Rip', he of no last name."

Taking another drink from the glass on the side table, I began, for the first time, to take a look at my surroundings. The place didn't have the appearance of an apartment, but it didn't quite seem like a normal house residence either.

I wasn't quite sure what made me feel this way. I decided to try to find out in a roundabout manner.

"Where am I anyway?" I inquired.

"I guess," Rip said, "one might refer to this as a sort of community center. We attempt to tend to the needs of the needy here. If you like, a little later on, I'll give you the grand tour."

"I'd like that," I replied. "Does this center have any official name?" I probed.

"Like my name," he responded, "the name of the center has a variety of possible etymologies. Unlike my name, these different possibilities go by various designations."

"Some people refer to us as the Bearers. Some individuals know us as People of the Cloth. Others call us the Bearers of the Cloth. And, still other people refer to us by other names, not all of which are complimentary."

"When you say 'cloth'," I asked, "are you using this in the same sense in which, say, some Protestants and Catholics refer to their clergy as people of the cloth? Are you a religious organization?"

"Not really," Rip indicated. "Nonetheless, I would say we do share quite a few of the values and interests to which some of the clergy are committed."

"I guess I don't understand," I admitted. "What is the significance of the reference to People or Bearers of the Cloth?"

"Generally speaking," Rip began, "when someone makes reference to members of the clergy as people of the cloth, that individual is referring to the garments that members of the clergy wear indicating, among other things, their membership in some given religious order or denomination. Oftentimes, as well, the nature of the garment will give some indication of the kind of role that the individual fulfils, or the status that the person has, within the order or denomination to which the individual belongs.

"In the case of the Bearers," he continued, "the significance of our relationship to cloth entirely has to do with the kinds of things that can be

done, and the functions that can be performed, with such material. For example, when one needs to bind wounds, a cloth can be of assistance. If one wishes to tend to the fever of a sick person, then, among other things, a damp cloth might be applied.

"Cloth can be used to make garments for those who are poor and cannot afford to buy clothes. Or," and he pointed toward the side table on which my drink was resting, "when hospitality manifests itself in the form of serving food or drink to a guest, a cloth of some kind might be spread.

"If someone's tears need to be dried, a cloth can be offered. Should there be a need to conceal something, those as a person's nakedness, vulnerability or faults, various, special kinds of cloth might be utilized.

"When a mirror like the heart is to be polished a cloth designed for that purpose is available. If feats of, let us say, spiritual mystery ... some might say 'magic' ... are indicated, a cloth or veil often conceals the nature of the secret from probing eyes.

"Certain kinds of cloth might be involved in the fashioning of a shelter or tent that protects one from the sun and wind. Furthermore, a person in need of sleep might require a piece of cloth on which to lie or with which to cover himself or herself, or both. Or, when a person seeks to remove the grime and dirt of the world from one's countenance, she or he might require a face cloth.

"In days gone by, gifts were sometimes wrapped in cloth. The newly born, blessed child of Bethlehem was placed in swaddling cloth.

"Human beings often need different kinds of cloth to mark important stages of development in their lives ... from birth, to confirmation, to graduation, to marriage, to maternity. When a person dies, the individual might be given a burial cloth.

"The nature of our journey through life depends, in different ways, on the kind of cloth we use to make the sails that we hope will move our ship, with the assistance of the wind, toward whatever our destination might be. In reality, from the cradle to the grave, cloth plays a variety of fundamental roles in our lives."

Rip grasped the pointed part of the right collar of his sport jacket and drew my attention to a small white piece of ragged cloth with, what appeared to be, a black-threaded needle running through it that attached the little piece of cloth to the collar of the coat. In an evident attempt to explain the

significance of the ragged cloth, needle and thread, he said: "The People of the Cloth are those who are dedicated to helping individuals, families and collectives stitch and sew back together again the torn fabric of tattered souls that have been rent asunder by the battering of the storms and developmental seasons of life.

"So, you see, David, in our sense, 'people of the cloth' refers more to meeting the needs of people by means of the different functions that cloth can serve than it does to identifying the order, denomination, metaphysical orientation or status of the person wearing some kind of cloth. In fairness, however, to some people of the cloth in the clerical sense you spoke of earlier, David, I am sure they would agree with us, or we with them, about where the emphasis should be given in the matter of the significance of the term: 'people of the cloth'. In other words, service to creation and humanity should be the priority.

"Nonetheless, there is a difference in orientation between the two uses of this term. In one case, the emphasis tends to be on the identity of the one who wears the cloth, and only secondarily, and by implication, on what the cloth being worn signifies. In the other case, the primary emphasis is on the duties and responsibilities entailed by the uses to which the cloth is put, and only secondarily, if at all, on the identity or status of the people who provide the cloth to be used in these different manners.

"Unfortunately, there sometimes is a tendency for a person to start out with the intention of being among the people of the cloth in the sense of service to others and, yet, end up acquiring the robes of personal identification, community status, career enhancement, monetary gain, and hierarchical power. At just what moment an individual slides away from being among the people of the cloth in the former sense and starts becoming among the people of the cloth in the second sense, is not always easy for a person to discern."

Rip got up from his chair. "David," he said, "why don't I show you around our center, or, at least, the parts that are accessible at the present time."

I rose from my place on the couch. I picked up my glass, finished the last remnants of fruit juice, returned the glass to the table top and followed Rip through the door.

Although everything was done on a very modest scale, the center was surprisingly diverse and complete in what it had to offer. There was an

infirmary; a small library; a common room in which games could be played or television watched; several places for taking showers; an administration area; a room capable of holding meetings for up to ten or, maybe, fifteen people; a suite of two or three rooms that had been set aside for counseling and therapy sessions, as well as a partitioned dormitory section in which four women and four men could sleep.

In the basement were some laundry facilities, several storage areas and a relatively large combined kitchen and communal dining room. Despite the time of night or morning, there were, perhaps, seven or eight people scattered about the dining area engaged in various stages of consuming a meal. They all had the physical appearance of being card-carrying members of the homeless.

Rip motioned for me to take a seat at one of the tables. He went into the kitchen area, spoke with the person working there, and, a short while later, came back with a couple of bowls of soup and some coffee.

We were silent for a few moments while we each helped our spoons shuttle soup to our mouths. Finally, Rip said: "The people who come to this center are mostly homeless, but while they share this condition, the routes by which they have come to it might be quite different.

"Some of them have been betrayed, one or more times, by people they trusted, and they have not, yet, been able to recover from the trauma. Some of them might never get over their deep sense of betrayal.

"For instance, some of people who find their way to us might have been sexually abused by parents, relatives, a teacher or a person from the clergy. Others might have come from seriously dysfunctional family or social environments of a non-sexual nature.

"A surprisingly large number of the people who make use of our facilities are Vietnam veterans. Some of them felt betrayed by their government while in Vietnam. Some of them have felt betrayed and rejected by the manner in which the American government, businesses and many of their fellow Americans treated them after they returned from the war.

"Some of these veterans had their sense of identity as human beings shattered in fundamental ways by what they were forced to see and do while on their tours of duty. Some of them are still suffering from various forms of post-traumatic stress syndrome.

"For all of these veterans, their self-image as individuals, or as Americans, or as human beings has been affected in deep-rooted ways. They feel completely alienated and estranged from everything with which they identified before going to Vietnam.

"They don't know how to reintegrate themselves into the activities, rhythms, purposes and meanings of so-called 'civilized' society. They are still at war, except now it is an emotional, psychological and ideological conflict with themselves, their families, their country and/or their God.

"Some of our ... clients ... are casualties from the collective impact of corporate down-sizing and/or changing technology and/or free trade and/or governmental deficit hysteria and/or economic sluggishness and/or urban renewal. Some of the people who need to use our facilities are the product of a lifetime of racist treatment by schools, various institutions, government officials and employers.

"There are a number of our clients for whom the center represents a way station on the alcoholic or addiction express. Many of them will descend further down the line. A few of them might transfer to the rehabilitation express that departs from here on occasion.

"We also try to help people who are just a break or two away from being able to fend for themselves. For example, a few of the individuals who make use of our facilities and services are ex-cons who are trying to go straight in a society that is dubious about the degree of their rehabilitation and, therefore, not keen on giving these people a second chance.

"Others who come to us are beneficiaries of relatively recent changes in programs of community mental health. Instead of being kept in protected and therapeutic environments, they have been medicated and dumped on the streets.

"There is another category of people who, from time to time, use our facilities. These individuals, some of whom are men and some of whom are women, appear to be mentally disturbed, if not psychotic.

"In reality, however, they are spiritually intoxicated. Furthermore, notwithstanding the seeming craziness of many of their behaviors or utterances, some of these individuals have roles to play in the spiritual administration of a given geographical region."

Noting the mixed expression of puzzlement, curiosity and skepticism on my face, Rip laughed. He took a few more mouthfuls of soup, pushed the dish aside and wiped his face with a napkin.

He looked again at the expression on my face that seemed to have become somewhat frozen into a permanent mask of confusion. He smiled, shook his head and turned his attention to his coffee that he began to sip.

Eventually, he spoke again. "Which possibility bothers you the most, David?" he asked.

"I don't follow you," I replied. "I'm not sure to which possibilities you are referring."

Rip took another sip of coffee and proceeded to clarify his question. "Do you have difficulty accepting the idea there are people who you think are crazy but who are not mentally disturbed and, in fact, are more sane than most of us? Or, do you have trouble adjusting to the possibility there might be such a thing as a spiritual administration of a given geographical area? Or, are you disturbed by the thought that an apparently crazy person has hands-on authority and responsibility for some of what might be permitted to happen or not happen in a given area?"

I began to reflect on the possibilities that Rip had laid out before me. I finished my soup as I continued to think about his questions.

Smiling, I indicated: "I don't have any problem accepting the last possibility you've mentioned. After all, if one were to suppose mentally disturbed people were responsible for overseeing the administration of the world, then, in a crazy sort of way, a great many things about government, society, economics, religion, education, institutional behavior, and international politics would make an enormous amount of sense."

Rip acknowledged my point with a smile. In response, he asserted: "Your statement, David, is accurate as long as one understands that the people who are really responsible for craziness in the affairs of the world are those whom many of us consider to be sane and that the apparently crazy people to whom I am referring are among the few loci of manifestation through whom elements of sanity are being introduced into the world, although there are few people who understand this."

I had a queasy feeling that the lines of demarcation by which I organized and framed my sense of reality were beginning to shift. I was feeling

the debilitating and disorienting effects of a kind of conceptual vertigo or agoraphobia.

Part of my condition was due to the issues that were being raised, and alluded to, by Rip. Part of my growing sense of unreality was, no doubt, a result of the traumatic aftermath of the abduction attempt. A further set of contributing factors probably was rooted in my intense experiences of the past several weeks, beginning with Beth's visit to my office.

I didn't really know how to reply to Rip's queries concerning what bothered or puzzled me most about the idea of people who appeared to be mentally disturbed but who, in reality ... or so Rip was maintaining ... were spiritually intoxicated and, yet, were performing spiritual tasks that had a dimension of sanity to them that belied the crazy packaging wrapped around them. All of this was way beyond the point to which I had been prepared to push, at least until now, the theoretical and personal character of the psychological envelope through which I engaged life.

As a sort of delaying strategy that would help me to avoid grappling, at least temporarily, with the problems that surrounded my potential need to redefine some of my conceptual boundaries, I decided to ask a two-part question. "What exactly do you mean by spiritual intoxication, and how does this condition fit in with the notion of a spiritual government?" I inquired.

"I'll try to answer you, David, but in doing so, I might take what appears to be a slightly circuitous route. This just means that although you will receive a response to your queries, I want to lay down a few other ideas in order to provide a bit of context against which to consider your questions."

I motioned for Rip to proceed. As he began, I finished my coffee.

"People receive Grace from God in many different forms. Intelligence, athletic ability, creativity, career success, health, courage, friends, integrity, social standing, family stability, education, love, artistic or musical talent, monetary wealth, as well as handsomeness and beauty, are just a few of the ways in which God has conferred Grace upon different people.

"Some people, for reasons best known to God, have been given these gifts in more abundance than have other people. However, the receiving of gifts can be a two-edged sword.

"The people who are recipients of these various forms of Grace have not done anything to deserve these gifts. They are not necessarily better

human beings than everyone else and, in fact, because most of us are a thankless lot, many of the ones on whom Grace has been bestowed begin to entertain very arrogant and inflated ideas about their place in the scheme of things.

"From the point of the view of the Bearers of the Cloth, everything that is given to us by God is both a test as well as an opportunity. Like the parable of the talents in the New Testament, God has arranged things in order to see what we will do with what we have been given, irrespective of whether this amount is much or little.

"Consequently, from the perspective of the Bearers, life is a proving ground. The Bearers believe that human beings will be held accountable for, among other things, what we do with the gifts that God has entrusted to us.

"This process of accountability concerns our decisions with respect to the aspects of our potential that we choose to develop, as well as the intentions with which we undertake these decisions. Accountability also involves the extent to which, and manner in which, we share our gifts with, and make these gifts available to, the rest of humanity and creation.

"Spirituality and spiritual experiences are a gift of God in the same way that, for instance, talent, health and intelligence are gifts of God. Once again, as with other bestowals of Grace, spirituality and spiritual experiences are not evenly distributed among people.

"Spiritual intoxication refers to the overflowing, incredibly intense, more or less continuous, spiritual experience of love, universal connectedness, knowledge, light, and joy one receives through an enhanced, conceptually-unmediated awareness of the presence and nearness of Divinity in one's life and being. For those who have undergone this experience, all of the other gifts of God that I have mentioned earlier are viewed as, comparatively speaking, worthless trinkets. In fact, as far as those who have experienced such spiritual intoxication are concerned, if they were given a choice between: having all of the other gifts or being spiritually intoxicated, they would choose the latter.

"Oddly enough, however, the Bearers claim we all, according to our individual capacities, were once in this condition of spiritual intoxication prior to being brought into earthly existence. Yet, most of us have managed to forget the experience.

"In other words, for many of us, earthly life might be likened to a massive, long lasting hang-over that follows our experience of spiritual intoxication during our stay in what is referred to by the Bearers as 'pre-eternity', or the realm of our existence prior to coming into the world of physical/material experience. We don't remember what went on the 'night' before and, now, we have to deal with the problems and pain of the morning after.

"As we go about our lives and try to make sense of its events through the fog of our hung-over condition, we all have a tendency to become caught up in pursuing the sensory, emotional, aesthetic, creative and mental pleasures that can be derived from the other kinds of gifts that God has bestowed upon our lives. In a way, these entanglements and pursuits serve as a sort of phenomenological or experiential form of methadone that we use as a substitute for the spiritual intoxication for which we always are searching, but often cannot find except in very diluted and transitory forms during what psychologists sometimes refer to as 'peak' experiences.

"Like methadone, while our worldly pursuits and pleasures help to dull and quiet our craving for the 'real stuff' of pre -eternity, these worldly pursuits and pleasures are actually addictive. Moreover, and again somewhat like the case of methadone, the worldly substitutes for which we settle do not, even remotely, compare to the original experience of pre-eternity, but these substitutes have aspects that remind us, in a very distorted way, of the ecstasy that is inherent in the original experience of spiritual intoxication in pre -eternity.

"Some of these trace features of worldly pleasures have a certain, extremely distant resonance with the condition of spiritual intoxication. This facet of faint resonance between various trace features of worldly pleasures and the original condition of spiritual intoxication often tends to confuse us.

"In other words, we sometimes mistake the resonating quality in certain trace features of worldly pleasures as expressions of the original state of spiritual intoxication. This confusion is one of the factors that seduces us into becoming addicted to, and settling for, the world rather than continuing to seek for the real source of spiritual intoxication.

"Those who are spiritually intoxicated in this world are the ones who, by God's Grace, have been reminded, in a very intimate and intense manner, of their original spiritual condition. Furthermore, depending on capacity, circumstances, and the extent of spiritual realization, different

people will experience various degrees, depths and kinds of spiritual intoxication.

"Some of these spiritually intoxicated individuals are given various tasks and responsibilities to carry out on behalf of a spiritual government that is believed by the Bearers to operate on different levels of reality, including the physical/material realm. In fact, the condition of spiritual intoxication serves as an integral part of the ability of those individuals to receive, understand and act upon, whatever spiritual ordinances and directives might come to them.

"The purpose of the spiritual government is not to assure that the world is a safe, peaceful, happy, trouble-free place in which to live. In many ways, the world and its people must be allowed to flow along their indicated paths, even if this means, on occasion, the result will be chaos, suffering, oppression, conflict and injustice.

"If the world ... as the Bearers contend is the case ... is a proving ground for human beings in order to see whom will be best in conduct and to determine whom will and will not realize the purposes for which life has been given in the first place, then, a true, fair test means everyone must endure trials of various sorts. Enjoyment and difficulty both can serve, simultaneously, as manifestations of trial as well as blessing.

"Moreover, these two qualities of enjoyment and difficulty can be brought together in very complex, subtle, variable and dimensionally-layered combinations. Indeed, everything that happens in the world gives expression to both of these elements, and all of these events give expression, in turn, to the trials and tests that are, so to speak, the bread and butter of the purpose of the physical/material world.

"Notwithstanding the forgoing considerations, the Bearers do not maintain that everything is fixed by an unalterable destiny. There is a certain degree of fluidity to the events of the world. Free will does have a role to play, although not everything that goes on in the world might be capable of being changed, or even affected, through the exercise of free will.

"Among other things, the spiritual government works, God willing, to assist or encourage some events to occur, or to modulate the manner in which these events take place, or to prevent those events from occurring. Which events are to be supported, resisted or modulated by the spiritual government will be in accordance with God's plan and not in accordance

with the likes and dislikes of either the average person in the street or the preferences and agendas of various power brokers in government, business and so on.

"Naturally, however, there will be many events of this earthly existence in which the spiritual government, as well as both so-called 'average' people and the worldly power brokers will have a common interest, albeit for quite different reasons and with very different purposes, understandings, and intentions. Sometimes, for their own reasons, the members of the spiritual government will work in concert with the worldly activities of people, and, sometimes, the members of the spiritual government will work in opposition to those activities.

"The conditions under which they will work in concert with, or in opposition to, the worldly activities of people is not straightforward and cannot be reduced down to any simplistic formula or, even, a set of algorithms. Their mandate comes from God, not the world.

"Moreover, religion and religious hierarchies might have little, or nothing, to do with the spiritual government to which I am referring. In fact, all too frequently, organized religion and religious individuals can be a source of as many problems for the spiritual government as are those who do not believe in spiritual realities at all.

"In any event, in a given, large metropolitan area there might be one or more of the aforementioned spiritually intoxicated people who serve this spiritual government in various capacities. Some of these individuals might be found among the homeless, street people of that locality.

"Therefore, when you walk down the street, David, and you see someone who seems to be exhibiting evidence of mental disturbance or a psychotic break with reality, at least as we understand it, then, if the Bearers are right in what they are maintaining, you can't be quite certain of what you are witnessing. On the one hand, the person actually might be crazy in the generally accepted sense of operating under diminished capacity due to organic or mental malfunctions of one sort or another. On the other hand, the individual might be acting on behalf of the spiritual government, and the bizarre behavior might be a manifestation of spiritual intoxication that, despite appearances, is neither a matter of diminished capacity nor of malfunctioning.

"In previous times, some of the spiritually intoxicated people who were in the service of the spiritual government actually sought refuge in the wards of mental hospitals in order to hide themselves from the people of the world. Most, if not all, of the staff of those hospitals were inclined to interpret the words and actions of these people as merely symptomatic of an underlying mental pathology, and, therefore, the latter individuals become relatively free to be themselves and go about their spiritual business, oftentimes in plain view of other people.

"Consequently, until recently, using a mental hospital as a cover for their activities was a very good form of camouflage for some of the spiritually intoxicated who were involved in matters of spiritual government. However, the use of lobotomies, electro-convulsive therapy and neuroleptics, all of which have potentially horrific side-effects, has complicated matters considerably for those people.

"On the other hand, given that, in the present atmosphere of cost-cutting, more and more patients are being turned loose from various care facilities, this issue of the dark side of modern forms of psychological treatment of mentally disturbed people has become, to a degree, somewhat academic. In many large metropolitan areas, the spiritually intoxicated are simply doing on the streets what they used to seek out mental hospitals to do. For the most part, people perceive these individuals as crazy, homeless, street people and, with the exception of the police, tend to leave them alone."

Although I had been paying close attention to what Rip had been saying, I also had been thinking, from time to time, of a field experiment in psychology that had been conducted around 1973. A psychology professor had sent some of his graduate students to various clinicians who worked in and around the city near where the professor's university was located.

The students were instructed by the professor to do two things. First, at some point during the clinical interview, the students were all to report they had been hearing voices. Secondly, in all other phases of the interview session, the students had been told to answer questions truthfully.

After taking part in the clinical interview, a number of these graduate students were diagnosed to be suffering from some form of schizophrenia. As a result, the students diagnosed in this manner were committed to various mental hospitals.

Once these students had been admitted to these institutions, some of them had a difficult time getting released from the facilities. Apparently, their explanations to hospital authorities about the reality of what was taking place were treated as part of a delusional system.

Eventually, the clinicians, who unwittingly had been participating in the psychology experiment, were made aware of what the professor had been doing. Many of them were extremely upset and accused the professor of, among other things, unethical conduct.

One might also add that most of these 'participating' clinicians were terribly embarrassed about having been duped in this fashion and, as a result, having been induced to commit those a diagnostic blunder. Undoubtedly, this underlying embarrassment helped fuel their sense of outrage about the professor's alleged unethical conduct.

One consideration that neither the professor, his students, nor the clinicians seemed to have entertained was the possibility that maybe those students who were diagnosed as mentally disturbed actually were, in reality, mentally disturbed, despite the false stories about having heard voices. Having been a psychology student myself and having taught those students, I'm sure a very good case might be constructed for establishing the existence of a fairly sizable component of mental pathology, of one sort or another, in the lives of quite a few students of psychology, myself included.

My thoughts returned from this brief digression concerning the possible pathology of psychology students and focused, once again, on the field study I had been considering. The experiment had more than one part.

After the hurt feelings and embarrassment surrounding the experiment had dissipated somewhat, the professor decided to give the clinicians an opportunity to redeem themselves and restore some luster to their tarnished professional pride and reputations. He informed them that somewhere within a certain time-frame, of so many days duration, he would be sending more 'pseudo-patients' as his students came to be known, to the clinicians.

The mission of the clinicians, should they decide to accept it, was to identify that of the people coming to them in the indicated period of time were these pseudo-patients. Most, if not all, of the clinicians who were 'participants' in the first part of the experiment opted to be a part of the follow-up stage to the experiment.

In the designated time interval of this second aspect of the experiment, approximately twenty-five percent of the people who were admitted to mental hospitals by the participating clinicians were identified as being 'pseudo-patient'. This might have been fine except the professor, tricky fellow that he was, hadn't sent anyone, pseudo or otherwise, to the clinicians, and, consequently, the clinicians were, once again, exposed with diagnostic egg on their faces.

I suppose this experiment came to mind because of its potential implications for Rip's present discussion. The spiritually intoxicated individuals about which he was talking were, in some ways, like the 'pseudo-patient' in the field study, except more so, since the presenting symptoms of the allegedly spiritually intoxicated individuals were not just mentioned, as in the case of the psychology experiment, but were being acted out in all their bizarre splendor.

Clinicians would diagnose these people as mentally disturbed or psychotic because their presenting symptoms fit into, or reflected some list of criteria in DSM-IV, the latest edition of a widely used manual that helped clinicians to assess an individual's psychological condition. However, such a diagnosis would entail no understanding of the realities behind the symptoms. These clinicians merely would assume that the underlying etiology was pathological in character because this was all their diagnostic methodology would allow them to recognize.

One didn't have to accept the ideas of spiritual intoxication or spiritual government in order to recognize that psychological diagnosis, like its medical counterpart, is not an exact science. Mistakes are made.

Conceivably, an individual who is quite sane could be labeled as mentally disturbed simply because there was a clash between the way this individual went about engaging reality and the way a given diagnostic tool, which is rooted in many arbitrary assumptions and cultural biases, went about evaluating the rationality or sanity of those a mode of engagement. Not all departures from the norm necessarily are a matter of pathology or abnormality in some irrational or diseased sense.

As I came to the end of my thoughts concerning the 1973 experiment, I remembered a question I had intended to ask of Rip earlier during his explanation but which I had not voiced in order not to interrupt his account. "Rip," I started, "your methadone simile suggests that spiritual

intoxication is an addiction of sorts, just as heroin is. Was this intentional on your part, or is this the point where the simile begins to break down?"

"Actually, David," he said, "under certain conditions and circumstances, spiritual intoxication can have an addictive dimension to it. People who give emphasis to this experience and, as a result, de-emphasize the Source or Reality underlying that experience might get caught in a trap and, consequently, become addicted to the experience and forget about what the real purpose and destination of the spiritual journey is.

"Individual spiritual realization might be delayed by getting stuck at a particular stage of the journey because an individual has become addicted to the quality of the experience that arises at the stage in question. These people are said to have stopped traveling on the path since they have interrupted their journey before reaching their destination of, on the one hand, having the identity of their true selves unveiled, as well as, on the other hand, realizing the fullness of their essential capacity to love, know, cherish and serve Divinity.

"This possibility of getting stuck is just one of many reasons why there is a need for a process of purification. As those, purification doesn't cause spiritual progress as much as it constitutes one of the factors that sets the stage of readiness for receiving whatever form or degree of grace Divinity wishes to bestow on an individual.

"In other words, purification helps one, God willing, to deal with the rigors and difficulties of different stages of the spiritual journey. As those, purification is preparatory for receiving spiritual grace rather than an antecedent condition that necessitates the bestowal of grace.

"By undertaking a process of constantly purifying the sincerity of one's intention, one is, God willing, less likely to become stuck at a particular stage of the journey. In the case at hand, purification leads away from preoccupation with the experience of spiritual intoxication and towards giving emphasis to the ultimate purposes and goal of the spiritual journey.

"Some people have, by the grace of God, been purified or prepared to those an extent that although inwardly they might be experiencing spiritual intoxication, none, or little, of it necessarily spills over into the visible realm of activity unless they permit it to do so and, even then, only in the desired way and to the extent needed. In the case of other individuals, the nature of their preparation is those that they cannot help letting the spiritual intoxication

manifest itself in the realm of visible activity. As with anything, however, there always are exceptions that tend to prove the rule or principle.

"The bottom line, David, as far as your question about spiritual addiction is concerned is this. If one gives primary emphasis to the experience of intoxication and only secondary emphasis to realizing the fullness of one's relationship with Divinity, then, one is potentially vulnerable to the possibility of becoming addicted to the experience in question.

"If, on the other hand, the individual gives primary emphasis to realizing one's spiritual potential and purpose completely, and does not become entangled in pursuing spiritual experiences qua experiences, then, spiritual intoxication is not addictive and becomes an integral dimension of one's being. In this context, spiritual intoxication is placed in a proper perspective and, therefore, is understood, enjoyed and utilized by the individual in accordance with Divine wishes."



Chapter 16: The Subtle Side of Madness

While Rip and I had been talking, there was sporadic activity going on around us. Some of the people who had been in the dining area when we first came were now gone. From time to time, other individuals had arrived to take their places in a figurative, and sometimes literal, sense.

The people came in alone and left alone. For the most part, they sat alone and ate in silence.

What these people thought or felt or hoped or feared was a mystery. They were like phantoms who suddenly materialized and vanished, and, yet, one knew they did not really disappear except from our minds and hearts.

Their life stories were their own, and perhaps this story was the only possession that many of them had. For a variety of reasons, many of which undoubtedly were rooted in their hidden histories, they kept their distance from most other human beings.

Like all of us, they were trying to find a way to survive the twenty-four hours of each day. However, one of the differences between them and the rest of us was they somehow managed to accomplish the feat of survival with no home, no job, virtually no resources, no family support and few, if any, friends.

I wondered about whether or not I could duplicate their accomplishment if required to do so. I had my doubts about the successful outcome, if one could call it that, of those a challenge.

Dostoevsky had once said words to the effect that the quality of treatment extended to the inmates of a country's prisons is an indication of the degree of civilization inherent in those a society. Surely, the quality of treatment extended to the homeless, who have committed no crime, is an even more fundamental index of the degree of civility present in a given country.

If one were to apply those an index to America and many other countries in the so-called developed world, then, as a civilization we were all failing at an increasingly accelerated rate. If, in addition to homelessness, one added issues those as hunger, poverty, racism, medical care, community mental health, substance abuse, criminal justice, and the environment, to the 'civility index', one might be hard pressed to figure out on what grounds we considered ourselves to be civilized.

In conjunction with my musings about the 'civility index', a particular work of another writer drifted into awareness. I began to think about Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

The story was about a young man of some social standing whose portrait was painted by a friend. Prior to the painting of the portrait, the individual seemed to be a decent, likeable, thoughtful person.

Due to a variety of, mostly unspecified, forces operating in the life of the young man, after the portrait has been completed, the young man begins to lead an increasingly morally corrupt life. This slide downward on the scale of humanity involves various acts of cruelty, selfishness and insensitivity in relation to different people in his life.

With each new act of inhumanity and with each new descent into the depths of moral turpitude, the young man notices that the portrait is changing in parallel with his increasingly corrupt state. The portrait has become a mirror for his soul.

Outwardly, the young man remains urbane, charming, handsome, and attractive. Yet, inwardly, this person's soul has become ugly, festering, odious and repulsive. The horror of his inner moral condition is being given visible expression in the changing character of his portrait's appearance.

Realizing what is going on, the young man hides the portrait away in an upper room of his house in order to keep the truth from others. However, from time to time, out of a morbid compulsion, he visits the room where the portrait is being kept in order to view the changing record of his continuing departure away from the life of a civilized, decent, moral human being.

Eventually, the young man becomes so repelled and offended by what he sees in the portrait's changing record of his internal degradation that he slashes the portrait again and again in order to destroy the portrait's reflection of his condition and its constant manner of reminding him about what he has become.

Upon the shredding of the portrait, the young man dies. Moreover, in death, his countenance comes to give expression to the reality of what the portrait had been disclosing throughout his downward journey into the depths of giving active expression to the human potential for evil.

As I thought about Oscar Wilde's story, I wondered in whose attic the portrait of America was being kept. I wondered what grotesque form those a portrait had now assumed.

On the surface, like the focal character in the story, we Americans like to present our country to others, if not to ourselves, as a charming, charismatic, urbane, witty, intelligent, democratic, religious and morally decent nation. Yet, this public image is totally at odds with the realities of what our country has done to native peoples, blacks, women, the tired, the poor, the hungry, the sick and the homeless. The public myth of America is totally contradicted by what America has done, or permitted to be done, in Latin America, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, Africa, Indonesia, the Philippines and elsewhere.

I wondered if the time was coming when we might follow the example of the character in Oscar Wilde's story. I wondered if the time was coming when we would reach our limit for being able to live with the repellant and offensive image that the hidden portrait of America was reflecting back to our compulsive gaze of horror.

I wondered if the time was coming when we no longer would be able to tolerate the manner in which the soul of America was becoming increasingly disfigured and degraded by America's domestic and international actions. I wondered if the time was coming when we would seek to destroy the portrait, only to discover that in the process of destroying it, we, like the character in Oscar Wilde's story, must die and that, in death, the realities of our nation's sins would become visible upon our collective, prostrate bodies.

Rip's voice drew my attention away from the memories, associations, and reflections with which my mind had been filled. "What do you do for a livelihood, David?" he asked.

"I teach psychology," I responded. "In addition, there is a certain amount of private clinical work that I do independently of my job at the college."

"What courses do you offer at your school?" he inquired.

"The topics tend to vary from year to year," I replied. "Our Department likes its faculty members to keep current in a number of areas and believes the demands of teaching different courses will help encourage us to keep up with new developments, theories and research.

In addition, none of the faculty members in our Department wants to get bored and stale with what we are teaching, so there is a tendency, within certain limits, to change the nature of our educational responsibilities from time to time."

"I know," Rip said, "there are a lot of different areas of psychology to be taught. Do you have much to do with abnormal psychology?" he queried.

When Rip asked this question, I had a very peculiar, though fleeting intuition that he already knew the answer. Maybe the fact I had mentioned doing clinical work had led him to the reasonable assumption that I probably would have some degree of acquaintance with various aspects of abnormal psychology.

"I've taught a number of courses on abnormal psychology," I informed him. "I've also worked in a couple of private mental hospitals on several occasions during summer holidays when I was an undergraduate."

"What do you know about schizophrenia?" he inquired.

Although I didn't believe he was pursuing this line of questioning for the sake of idle curiosity, I really wasn't sure where he wanted to go with things. I shrugged my shoulders and said: "I know enough to understand that nobody really knows what's going on."

Rip didn't respond to my statement. He seemed to be waiting to see if I would say anything else.

I hesitated briefly and proceeded to expand a little on my initial reply. "There have been a number of studies involving twin offspring, both identical and fraternal, of schizophrenic mothers. These studies would suggest there is a strong genetic component to the condition but that genetics alone is not sufficient to account for schizophrenia.

"More specifically, depending on the study, the concordance rate of identical twins, or the extent to which the condition shows up in both of the children of, say, a schizophrenic mother, can vary anywhere from 0 to roughly 85%. Furthermore, studies involving fraternal twins show concordance rates that have values ranging somewhere between two and about thirty-five percent.

"Consequently, genetics does not seem to be the whole answer to the puzzle. If it were, one might anticipate, for example, a concordance rate in identical twins that approaches 100%, but this is not what has been established so far.

"A lot of theories have been advanced about what other conditions are necessary complements to genetic factors. These theories point fingers at different kinds of causal scenarios, ranging from: certain species of dysfunctional families; to various psychoanalytical accounts of ego melt-

down; to double-bind or lose-lose scenarios of interaction from which one cannot withdraw; to a creative process of trying to adapt to an insane world; to nutritional deficiencies; to LSD-like metabolites roaming around in the brain; to environmental allergens; to auto-immune diseases of one sort or another.

"For the last thirty-five years, or so, there has been a lot of interest in the biochemistry of a number of neurotransmitters ... those as dopamine and serotonin ... that seem to be implicated, to a degree, in certain cases of schizophrenia. However, no one has been able to work out a fully satisfactory etiological account of the cause or causes underlying breakdowns in the normal process of neurotransmitter activity or how the complex symptomology of schizophrenia can be generated by problems in the malfunctioning of just a few neurotransmitters.

"No one really knows why schizophrenia has an early onset in some individuals, or a later onset in other individuals. No one knows why the prognosis is, in general, relatively poor in the former cases, and, within limits, more promising in the latter cases.

"Furthermore, no one understands why there should be spontaneous remission in a certain number of cases of schizophrenia. No one understands how to fit this phenomenon in with either the data on neurotransmitters or our current knowledge of genetics.

"Considered from, yet, another direction, the problem of trying to determine the cause or causes of the onset of schizophrenia has not been helped by the fact that the diagnostic profile, that supposedly helps to identify those who suffer from this condition, has gone through a number of transitional stages over the years. In addition, there have been significant differences between how, for example, Europeans and Americans have diagnosed schizophrenia.

"The Swiss clinician, Eugen Bleuler, coined the term 'schizophrenia' around 1908. From that time to the relatively recently released version-IV of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, the way in which this term has been used and applied has exhibited considerable variance."

"Is there, currently, any set of criteria or symptoms that have been established as the agreed-upon standard for diagnosing schizophrenia?" asked Rip.

"DSM-IV is probably about as close as you'll get to a generally agreed-upon standard at the present time," I replied. "However," I added, "these guidelines have a variety of biases that shape and orient them.

"For instance, DSM-IV is solidly rooted in a medical/biological model of human nature and behavior. Moreover, this diagnostic tool also is, to a considerable degree, colored by a Western cultural perspective in general and American clinical experience in particular."

"As far as this standard ... ahh, DSM -IV ... is concerned, what are some of the symptoms that are generally believed to be associated with schizophrenia?" Rip inquired.

I reflected for a few seconds and said: "One important factor would be the length of time for which certain kinds of symptom have been persisting. Generally speaking, even when the 'right' sorts of symptoms are present, if these symptoms have not been in evidence for at least six months, the mental condition might not be diagnosed as schizophrenia.

"Instead, if the symptoms have lasted for two weeks or less, then the condition might be considered to be some sort of brief reactive psychosis that might have been precipitated by intense stress of some kind. Or, if the symptoms have been present for more than two weeks, but less than six months, then the condition might be treated as some form of what is known as a 'schizophreniform disorder'.

"If the symptoms have persisted for the requisite six-month period, there are about six, or so, diagnostic categories that are compared to the symptoms being exhibited by the individual. These categories encompass themes of thought, perception, attention, motor behavior, emotion or affect, and life functioning.

"For instance, there might be different kinds of disturbance in thinking that could be evidence of the presence of schizophrenia. These disturbances might be either in the character of the structure or forms that those thoughts assume, or these anomalies might concern the content of those thoughts.

"In the case of problems with the form of thought, the individual's ideas tend not to be connected to one another, or the individual will have great difficulty sticking to any one topic. Form -of-thought problems also could include those things as the individual's inclination to use neologisms ... that is, to make up words that might have meaning for the speaker, but which, in

all likelihood, have little, or no, meaning for the listener. The individual might also make use of, what are known as, 'clang associations' in which lots of rhyming words appear in the individual's day-to-day discourse.

"Disorders in thought content could include a profound lack of appreciation for, or awareness of, the existence of a serious problem of mental disturbance in oneself. The schizophrenic often does not see anything wrong with the way he or she is behaving or performing.

"Another kind of disorder in thought content concerns delusions of one sort or another. The character of these delusions can vary considerably.

"Perhaps, the classic form of schizophrenic delusion, at least in the popular literature, is the one that is paranoid in nature. However, there are many other kinds of possible delusion.

"The individual, for instance, might believe that someone is stealing his or her thoughts. Alternatively, the person might believe that an external agency is broadcasting or inserting thoughts, feelings and impulses into one's consciousness.

"Another category of symptoms involves various kinds of perceptual disorders. The most striking symptom in this category are hallucinations in which the individual has a sensory experience of some kind in the absence of any environmental stimulus.

"In three-fourths of the cases, this kind of perceptual distortion comes in the form of auditory hallucinations. For example, the individual will report hearing different voices arguing or commenting about various issues.

"There are other kinds of perceptual distortions as well, besides these more common auditory ones. Some people do have visual hallucinations. Others might experience sensations of burning, electric tingling, or numbness. Still other individuals might feel insects or snakes are crawling around beneath their skins or in their abdomens.

"Another category of mental disturbance that is used to try to diagnose the presence of schizophrenia involves the phenomenological quality of an individual's awareness or attention. Schizophrenics frequently report that the world seems unreal, colorless, or flat.

"In addition, their awareness of the world might have a substantially alien quality to it, in the sense that everything is experienced as being strange and unfamiliar. Or, the individual might experience his or her engagement of the world in a depersonalized fashion, those that the body seems to go about its

business in the world in a mechanical fashion that is devoid of any sense of personhood or identity as an individual.

"A fourth category of symptoms revolves around motor activity. The schizophrenic individual sometimes manifests, for extended periods of time, strange facial contortions, or they might exhibit a complex, peculiar series of movements involving hands, fingers, arms and legs.

"Probably, the most well-known examples of motor disturbance in schizophrenics are catatonic immobility and catatonic agitation. In the former case, the individual tends to be, as the term suggests, immobile and might assume various kinds of unusual and awkward postures that are held for long periods of time.

"In the case of catatonic agitation, the individual tends to be constantly on the go and in a very excited state. In this condition, the individual expends tremendous amounts of energy with little, or no, regard being given to whether an activity is important or unimportant.

"A fifth category of symptoms that plays a role in helping to diagnose the schizophrenic condition involves the character of an individual's affective or emotional engagement of experience. In general, there are two distinguishing features to this affective component in the lives of schizophrenics.

"Various studies, those as the World Health Organization's International Pilot Study of Schizophrenia, have shown that approximately two-thirds of all schizophrenics report or exhibit a total absence or flatness of affect in their daily lives. This flatness might manifest itself as a deep-seated apathy concerning oneself and one's surroundings, or it might show up as an inability or unwillingness to respond to any kind of emotional stimulus from the human beings forming one's environment.

"Individuals showing this kind of affective flatness will often be seen staring vacantly for long periods of time. The muscles of their faces tend to be flaccid or loose and lacking definition, and their eyes are lifeless. If they speak at all, their voices sound toneless, mechanical and devoid of any emotion.

"The other kind of affective disturbance that is prevalent in schizophrenics has to do with the display of affect or emotion that is inappropriate to a given context or situation. The individual might laugh

uproariously when sadness or tears would be appropriate, or the person might cry when happiness would be the usual or expected response.

"Much more rarely, one might encounter individuals who display a constant, rapid shifting between, or among, various emotional states. When this does occur, such a symptom often carries a lot of weight with some people in reaching a diagnostic determination of schizophrenia.

"The final category of symptoms to be considered in diagnosing schizophrenics concerns disturbances in the way the individual goes about attending to their various needs of life. These life-functioning skills would include things those as: personal hygiene and grooming; the presence of an inclination to make friends and to socialize with other individuals; as well as a capacity to retain a job or to deal with responsibilities in school.

"In my opinion, this last category is somewhat more nebulous, subjective, and less helpful than some of the other categories of symptoms that I have mentioned. There are a lot of different kinds of mental disturbance that would entail life-functioning problems very similar to the ones that I have summarized and, therefore, don't necessarily provide a good way to diagnostically identify the nature of the condition with which one is confronted.

"In fact, if one were to rely solely on this last category, quite a few teenagers might stand an excellent chance of being diagnosed as schizophrenic. On the other hand, when one combines this category with the other five categories of symptoms then considerations of the quality of life-functioning sometimes helps to round out the general clinical picture of schizophrenia."

When I had completed my overview of diagnosis and schizophrenia, I smiled rather sheepishly. "You'll have to forgive me, Rip," I requested. "Quite frequently, when one asks a professor a question, one ends up having to enroll, even if only informally, in the impromptu classes that we professor types tend to launch into at the drop of even the most innocent and simple of questions."

Rip chuckled. "No apologies are necessary," he assured me.

"I was genuinely interested in what you had to say," Rip informed me, "and you provided me with the kind of information that I had been seeking."

"Was there any particular reason for your interest in schizophrenia?" I probed.

Rip looked at me. In fact, he appeared to look deep into me or right through me. I couldn't be sure which, if either, was the case.

He didn't reply to my question right away. He seemed to be lost in thought.

While waiting for what I believed would be an eventual response to my query, I began to consider various possibilities for his interest. At the top of my list was an empirical finding that had been known for quite some time.

The highest incidence of schizophrenia is found in the inner-city areas of a metropolitan region. This finding has been confirmed in a number of cross-cultural studies carried out in Norway, the United States, England and Denmark.

In fact, studies have shown that schizophrenia showed up in the lowest socio-economic class at a rate roughly twice that of the incidence of schizophrenia in the next lowest socio-economic class. Moreover, in general, there was a very sharp discontinuity between the rate of schizophrenia in the lowest socio-economic classes and many of the higher socio-economic classes.

There have been several explanatory approaches to this statistic linking schizophrenia and socio-economic class. One approach is known as the social-drift theory, while the other major account is referred to as the sociogenic hypothesis.

According to social-drift theorists, an individual suffering from schizophrenia might start out in a middling or upper socio-economic class. Nevertheless, the traumatic, pervasive and debilitating impact of the condition is those that during the course of the person's lifetime, they gradually, or rapidly, will drift down through the various levels of socio-economic class until they hit rock bottom as homeless, street people in the poorest part of the inner-city.

Those people, on the other hand, who are advocates of the sociogenic hypothesis contend that the numerous impoverished dimensions of life among the lower socio-economic classes are the primary causes of schizophrenia. In other words, various combinations of poor education, dysfunctional families, poverty, lack of social support services,

negative self-image, inadequate nutrition, constant exposure to environmental stressors and pollutants, as well as a relative absence of different kinds of economic, social and educational opportunity, will either cause people to have schizophrenic breaks with so-called normal reality or will grease the skids for those a break in those people who might be genetically predisposed to succumb to those an onslaught of forces.

The available evidence seemed to suggest that both the social -drift theory and the sociogenic hypothesis have a certain degree of validity. Several studies indicated that while the fathers of schizophrenics were more likely to be from the lower socio-economic classes, nonetheless, the schizophrenic children of these fathers tended to end up further down the socio-economic class line.

Thus, on the one hand, empirical data gathered in relation to the socio-economic class of the fathers of schizophrenic children lent support to the sociogenic hypothesis. In other words, this data implicated the impoverished life of lower socio-economic classes as being a major precipitating factor in the emergence of schizophrenic children.

On the other hand, data from these same studies also showed that the schizophrenic children of lower socio-economic class fathers tended to end up worse off than their fathers as far as socio-economic class status was concerned. This finding lent a certain amount of support to the social-drift theories that held that the debilitating nature of this condition of mental disturbance would prevent one from holding jobs or getting an education and, consequently, would result in a drift downward in socio-economic class.

Perhaps, the reason Rip was asking questions about schizophrenia is because the inner-city work of his center, in accordance with both the sociogenic hypothesis as well as the social-drift theory, necessarily involved contact with a number of schizophrenic individuals. In fact, since many municipal and regional governments, in order to cut costs, merely were removing schizophrenics from therapeutic environments and placing them back into the communities with little more than prescriptions for different kinds of symptom-masking neuroleptic medications, Rip and the center were likely encountering quite a few more schizophrenics than might have been the case previously.

I became aware that Rip was looking at me. He seemed to be waiting for me to return from my flight of thought.

"I have been reflecting," he began, "on what you were telling me about the various issues surrounding the diagnosis of schizophrenia. I have been intrigued by the parallels between what you have been saying and what is occurring in a quite different context.

"Psychologists, psychiatrists, doctors and other mental health clinicians are very busy these days applying their diagnostic instruments to various individuals who might be suffering from conditions those as schizophrenia. What these professionals might not understand is that they, along with the rest of us, are being examined and observed in accordance with another set of diagnostic instruments by, among others, some of the spiritually intoxicated people about whom I was talking previously."

I started to feel a tightness or tension in my stomach. I had an uneasy feeling I was at the mental/emotional equivalent of the first summit of a roller coaster ride that is poised to plummet down to the bottom of a very steep incline.

Quickly, I adjusted some of the emotional and conceptual safety-cushions that buffered my sense of psychological equilibrium. I wished I had something to grab hold of with my hands. I would have felt a bit more stability, if not comfort, if, in the best tradition of these kinds of experiences, I had been able to latch onto 'whatever' in white-knuckle fashion.

Rip continued on with: "From the perspective of some of those who are spiritually intoxicated, if one were to use diagnostic criteria similar to the ones that you have described, David, many, if not most of us, probably would be diagnosed, at least in spiritual terms, as being quite insane. Let's consider some of the possibilities.

"For instance, in one of your categories of symptomology, you spoke about catatonic immobility and catatonic agitation. Many of us 'normal' types, like our catatonic counterparts, also are locked into patterns of habitual behavior that completely immobilize us as far as pursuing spiritual activity is concerned. Furthermore, like the schizophrenic who is exhibiting catatonic immobility, many of our so-called 'normal' habitual patterns are bizarre, peculiar, and maintained for long periods of time, and we seem to be frozen into various postures of idiosyncratic or personal significance.

"On the other hand, many of us are caught up in a frenzied sequence of activities in which an enormous amount of energy is expended with little consideration given to the difference between what is, spiritually speaking, important and unimportant. We rush about our lives, going from school, to jobs, to meals, to career, to marriage, to family, to houses, to possessions, to entertainment, to hobbies, to vacations and back again with, quite frequently, only the most fleeting energy, if any at all, being expended on spiritual needs.

"From the vantage point of the spiritually intoxicated, many of us have lives filled with complex, peculiar, strange sequences of movements involving our fingers, hands, and limbs that really serve no spiritual purpose whatsoever. I'm sure our motor activity must look as strange to the spiritually intoxicated as the motor activity of schizophrenics looks to us.

"Another category of symptoms that you described concerned affect or emotion. If I remember correctly, you indicated that flat affect and inappropriate affect were the two major emotional indicators for diagnosing the potential presence of schizophrenia."

I nodded my head in confirmation of his recollection. I wondered if any of the people coming and leaving had just begun, or just completed, respectively, their clinical assessment of my spiritual condition.

Rip said, "Compared to the joy, ecstasy and sense of connection with the entire realm of Being that a spiritually intoxicated person experiences, most of the rest of us go about our lives as if we were schizophrenics. Like them, we spend inordinate amounts of time staring vacantly into space. Like schizophrenics, our eyes often have a gaunt, lifeless quality to them.

"Along with our schizophrenic brothers and sisters, we tend to exhibit a profound apathy toward a vast spectrum of stimuli. The stimuli to which schizophrenics are non-responsive are only sensory in character. However, the rest of us are non-responsive to the spiritual stimuli that Divinity is conferring on us every second of our lives.

"In addition, we often laugh uproariously amidst the horror, suffering, oppression and injustice that exist in the world. On the other hand, we cry grievously and throw kicking-and screaming-tantrums when someone ... like a Prophet or spiritual guide ... comes along and tries to help us stop doing all the things that are generating the horror, suffering, oppression and injustice that we seem to find so amusing.

"Like schizophrenics, our emotional or affective priorities seem to be inverted. We laugh when we ought to cry, and we cry when we have reason to be happy.

"David, you also mentioned a category of symptoms that revolved about the character of the phenomenological quality of a schizophrenic's experience of, or way of attending to, the world. For example, you spoke about themes concerning the unreal, depersonalized, colorless and alien nature of that experience.

"From the perspective of a spiritually intoxicated individual, the experience of a non-spiritually intoxicated person cannot help but be seen as being unreal, depersonalized, colorless and alien in nature. When an individual is alienated from his or her essential nature, when a person is estranged from a fundamental sense of connectedness with all of creation, when one is absent from one's true spiritual identity and, therefore, exists in a condition of depersonalization, when we have permitted our awareness to be veiled and reduced to a colorless reflection of the true, vibrant reality of things, then, under those circumstances, do we not share a great deal in common with the various kinds of deficit present in the phenomenological quality of a schizophrenic's manner of engaging experience?"

Apparently, my state -- was it a symptom of spiritual schizophrenic stupor? - did not permit me to respond. I agreed with him, but I gave no visible acknowledgment of my internal, affirmative response to what was, given the situation, pretty much of a rhetorical question.

"Disorders of perception," Rip continued, "were another category of symptoms to which you made reference, David. Among other things, these impairments of perception were said to involve hallucinations of both an auditory and visual nature.

"From the perspective of those who are spiritually intoxicated, most of us suffer from a disorder that is sort of the inverse of the perceptual problem experienced by schizophrenics. More specifically, schizophrenics tend to see or hear things for which there is no corresponding external stimulus. In our condition of spiritual psychosis, however, we tend to not see and hear realities that are present.

"The people of spiritual intoxication are responding to spiritual stimuli that are within, and around, us all the time. Yet, because we suffer from a

condition of spiritual schizophrenia, we have become blind and deaf to the presence of these realities.

"We call the spiritually intoxicated crazy because we do not see or hear what they do. We, however, are the ones with the perceptual disorder."

"Another category of symptoms mentioned by you, David concerned disturbances in both the content of thinking, as well as in the structure or form of a person's thinking. There were," he indicated, "two types of problems with thought content that you said might be interpreted as providing evidence for diagnosing the presence of schizophrenia in an individual.

"One of these difficulties involved the lack of insight exhibited by schizophrenics with respect to the pathological nature of their condition. The other type of problem revolved around the delusional character of the content of schizophrenic thought processes.

"As far as the schizophrenic symptom of a profound lack of insight is concerned, those who understand reality from the perspective of spiritual intoxication could easily maintain that those a deep lack of insight is precisely the character of the disturbance that exists in most of our thinking concerning the nature of our own spiritual condition. No matter how extensive and pervasive evidence to the contrary might be, most of us seem to persist in believing there is nothing wrong with us or our spiritual behavior, and we have little, or no, appreciation of the seriousness of the spiritual pathology that besets our being.

"Many of us also suffer from various kinds of disturbances or disorders in the content of our thought processes. In fact, for those who live the experience of spiritual intoxication, much of the religious and spiritual pronouncements, theories, beliefs and philosophies of those who have never had such an experience are, by and large, delusional in character.

"People try to impose their systems of thought onto reality even though there might be all kinds of data or facts indicating that the former is not consonant with the latter. Yet, isn't this what schizophrenics try to do? Isn't this the essence of delusional thinking?

"Furthermore," Rip added, without waiting for an answer, "a great deal of our delusional thinking is quite paranoid in nature. We always seem to be suspicious of other people, or we seem to like to busy ourselves with thinking the worst of the intentions and motivations of other people. As a

result, we often end up accusing them of entering into all kinds of plots and conspiracies against us.

"These disturbances in thought content are prevalent in the way we think about people from other races and religions, or about individuals of ethnicity and nationality that are different from our own. Even more unbelievably, however, those disordered thinking is reflected in the paranoid way we, all too frequently, treat members of our own families.

"Many of us also harbor these dark suspicions in relation to God. We often feel quite justified in hurling all manner of absurd paranoid, accusatory delusions in God's direction.

"The other kind of thought disturbance you mentioned encompassed issues of form or structure. If I have understood what you said, David, this sort of problem or disturbance has to do with the incoherent, unconnected, scattered flights of thinking sometimes exhibited by schizophrenics.

"Just as schizophrenics do not seem to be able to focus or concentrate and, therefore, tend to drift or jump from one topic to another, so too, many of us are incapable of maintaining spiritual focus. In fact, most of us are so challenged in this regard, a Zen master once likened the quality of our thinking processes to what one might expect from a barrel full of drunken monkeys.

"Furthermore, many of us engage in something very similar to the neologisms that are invented by schizophrenics. However, instead of inventing new words, like the schizophrenic, that have meaning for her or him but for no one else, most of the rest of us invest many of the words of everyday conversation with ideas that make sense to us but often do not make sense to those with whom we are speaking.

"We might use a common vocabulary, but many of us tend to give quite different interpretive connotations and denotations to the words we speak and hear. This is especially true in the realms of religion and spirituality."

As Rip was talking about neologisms, schizophrenics and the rest of us, I thought briefly about the world of academia and its penchant for neologisms. Perhaps, our inclination to introduce new words, or to give old words new meanings, was symptomatic of an underlying pathology rather than an expression of a creative component of communication.

On the one hand, I felt the idea might form the seed for a journal article. On the other hand, wanting to write a paper about the academic pathology in which I was immersed made me feel like a man who is in the process of being hanged and decides to busy himself in his last minutes of life with helping the hangman ... in this case, Rip ... to tighten and adjust the rope.

"Finally, David, we come to the category of symptoms dealing with impairments in the life-functioning of an individual. Just as schizophrenics are said to have few social skills, friends or intimates, so too, from the perspective of the spiritually intoxicated, many of the rest of us have few, if any, real spiritual skills, friends or intimates.

"Like schizophrenics, but in accordance with our own manner of psychosis, we tend to lead spiritually isolated and secluded lives. Many of us actively avoid the company of spiritual people due to a variety of irrational fears.

"Like schizophrenics, we tend to give only cursory attention to personal hygiene and grooming. The only real difference is that in the case of schizophrenics, this problem concerns their inattentiveness to their physical appearance, whereas for many of the rest of us, the issue is a matter of our lack of attentiveness to our spiritual appearance and the underlying need for a concern about processes of internal cleansing and spiritual orderliness.

"Moreover, like schizophrenics, many of us encounter spiritual counterparts to impairments in life-functioning abilities those as keeping a job or concentrating in school. In the realm of spirituality, the form that this impairment might assume could involve difficulty in committing ourselves to the work that is entailed by observing a regular, day-by-day set of spiritual practices. In addition, many of us might experience trouble concentrating on, and learning about, a given spiritual curriculum.

"Last, but not least, is the time factor that you mentioned in passing, David, at the beginning of your outline on some of the factors involved in diagnosing schizophrenia. You indicated, I believe, that symptoms had to persist for at least six months before one could begin to consider schizophrenia as a possible diagnosis in any given case."

"That is correct," I confirmed. I wasn't sure if, from the perspective of the spiritually intoxicated, my voice sounded flat, toneless and mechanical.

"For most of us," Rip pointed out, "the symptoms of our spiritual schizophrenia have persisted throughout our entire lives. And, in view of what you said, David, about the poor prognosis for those who experience an early onset of the symptoms of schizophrenia, if the same holds true for the spiritual counterpart I have been discussing, then, a lot of us have a tough row to hoe."

"We could," I observed, "always hope for spontaneous remission of our condition."

Rip's face brightened with a smile. "Yes," he said, "Divine intervention is like that."

Apparently, Rip had come to the end of his reflections. He had become silent and, seemingly, introspective.

I filled up the silence with the noise of my own thoughts. I started to speculate about how one might work various sociogenic theories as well as the social-drift hypothesis into the context of a discussion about spiritual schizophrenia.

Just as I was beginning to get settled again, amidst the comforts of my intellectualizing, and to relax from the tensions of the emotional and conceptual roller coaster ride on which Rip had sent me, something was said that plunged me careening down another incline. The ride wasn't finished.

Rip inquired: "Have you heard any news of Brian?"

My mind, heart and stomach all went numb. "Brian who?" I asked in desperation.

Rip smiled and replied: "How many 'Brians' do you know?" The fact of the matter was that I knew only one Brian. I knew Brian Idaho.

My mind was spinning. I tried to recall if I had mentioned Brian's name at any time during our conversation, and I found no solace in what I remembered of my interaction with Rip.

A possibility flashed through my mind. Maybe Brian's name was written down in my wallet, and Rip or someone had found the name while going through my wallet when I was still recovering from the attack on the street.

This line of thinking was disavowed with Rip's next question. "Didn't Brian tell you about us?" Rip asked in what seemed to be a rather teasingly mischievous manner.

Something within me knew what Rip was alluding to. My rational mind was resisting the intuition however because what seemed to be going on was at odds with the way I believed the real world worked ... a delusional symptom, no doubt.

"Wh ... what do you mean?" I stammered.

Gently, Rip painted me further into my rapidly disappearing corner of reality. "Haven't you been asking people about us?" he challenged mildly.

'How did he know these things?' kept reverberating in my mind. Every hypothesis I came up with in an attempt to account for such knowledge seemed more and more implausible.

Eventually, I decided that I wasn't going to be able to figure it out ... at least, not right now. For the time being, I would enter into a state of suspended disbelief and go with the flow of the moment.

"You're the Botclofots?!" I said, half-asking and half-stating my conclusion.

"I'm one of them," Rip corrected.

"Where does the word come from?" I asked.

"English," Rip answered. "The word is really sort of an acronym."

My thoughts journeyed back to a portion of the conversation in the room upstairs. I began to work out some of the words that might correspond to the letters.

"Bearers ... of ... the ... cloth ...," I said, starting off with relative ease. I drew a blank on the rest of it and looked to him for assistance. "For ... tattered ... souls," Rip added.

He glanced at some of the people in the room and returned to me. "Are you still interested in helping Brian?" Rip wanted to know.

"Yes," I affirmed, "but I really don't see how I could be of much help to him. I don't even know where he is or what he is planning on doing."

"He's getting ready for something," Rip intimated. "That's about as much as I can say on the matter."

"At the present time, you'll be safer and Brian will be safer if you don't know anything else," he asserted. "In any event," Rip added, "if you are open to something that I am going to propose, then, in the not-too-distant future,

everything that can be revealed will be disclosed to you if that should be your wish."

Rip's comments about my being safer if I didn't know certain things seemed to echo the words of Brian just before our conversation at the prison had ended. "What is the nature of the proposal?" I inquired.

"I ... that is, we ... the Botclopots, would like you to attend a symposium in Chicago."

"What's the symposium about?" I asked.

"It's entitled: 'Spiritual Communities in a Secular World ... Challenges and Prospects'," he replied. "People from a large number of different faith groups and spiritual perspectives are convening at the Balmer House from Wednesday through Sunday of this week. In a way, the symposium is part of a follow-up project to the Parliament of World Religions assembly that took place in Chicago a few years ago."

"What am I supposed to do there?" I queried.

"Just attend," Rip informed me. "Participate in any way you like; go to whatever sessions might be of interest to you."

"As far as the main reasons for your being at the symposium are concerned, let's just say that events will overtake you at the appropriate time. I can tell you, however, you will develop a liaison with someone there who not only will be of considerable help to you at the symposium, but who also will be able to help you to be of assistance to Brian a little further down the road."

"I'm sorry," Rip apologized, "for being so cloak and dagger about this. Unfortunately, the situation is a sensitive one and requires both a certain amount of secrecy and discretion at this particular juncture."

Evidently, a mixture of wariness, indecision and uncertainty were fairly palpable on my face. In an apparent attempt to reassure me, Rip said: "There is nothing illegal or immoral in any of what I am asking you to do, David ... at least not as far as your part, or our involvement, in this matter is concerned."

My feeling about Rip was similar to my feeling about Brian. For whatever reason, I trusted each of them even though I really didn't know either one of them.

They both seemed to radiate, each in his own way, a basic sense of sincerity, integrity and decency. The vibrations, for want of a better word,

that I felt from them seemed to induce me to be willing to step a little further into the unknown on the basis of only a minimum of supporting evidence.

Intuitively, I sensed I was about to swim into uncharted waters that could be filled with all manner of denizens of the deep. Nonetheless, the same source of intuition seemed to promise that whatever lay in wait for me had, in some way, a central role to play in my becoming whatever I had the potential to become.

"All right," I responded, finally, "I'll go."

"You understand," Rip cautioned me, "that you'll have to pay for the trip yourself. I'm afraid we are not in a position, like some organizations you might have dealt with, to reimburse any of your expenses."

Given everything else that Rip seemed to know about my activities, the possibility that his words might be alluding to the recent overtures of the Bettinger Foundation fluttered about in my awareness like a butterfly seeking something of substance on which to perch. As this thought flitted from consciousness, I nodded my head in acknowledgment and acceptance of the conditions.

"Should I get in contact with you after the symposium?" I asked.

"No, there is no need for that," he informed me, "but don't worry, we'll be getting together again quite soon. You'll be hearing from me." "What about the contact I'm to make in Chicago?" I inquired.

"How will I recognize the person? What should I say or do?"

"The individual in question will make contact with you. I'm fairly certain you will have no problem in recognizing the person.

"As far as your other questions are concerned, play it by ear," Rip advised me. "Oftentimes, these sorts of situations have their own rhythms and personalities without the need for a great deal of input on our part.

"Mostly, it's just a matter of showing up and figuring out whether to exit stage right or stage left. You'll do fine, I'm sure."

Rip rose from the table. I sensed our time together had come to an end.

As I got up, I suddenly felt very tired. I looked at my watch and was surprised to see 7:13 a.m. registered on my watch.

Rip accompanied me to the front door of the center. As I turned around to shake Rip's hand and thank him for his rescue as well as his hospitality, I noted the street number on the building.

Rip took my hand and placed his free hand on my right shoulder. "Good luck, David. I'll see you soon."

I began to descend the stairs. I was on the next to last step, about to reach the sidewalk, when Rip called to me.

"David," he said, "I'm genuinely sorry about your friends."

Before I could ask him what he meant or to whom he was referring, Rip had disappeared behind the closed door of the center. I could have knocked on the door in an attempt to raise the issue with him, but I strongly suspected that if he had wanted to tell me, he would have done so already.

Why he had bothered to say anything at all was something I could puzzle over on the way home. I began to orient myself in terms of my location via the street signs on the corner and headed off in search of my car.

Chapter 17: Ebb Tide

By the time I had crawled home through Tuesday morning rush hour traffic, the time was approaching 9:00 a.m.. Before responding to the call of sleep, that had been becoming increasingly persistent in the way it was irritating my body in a variety of annoying ways, I made several phone calls.

The first call was to book a seat for a noon flight to Chicago on Wednesday. The second call was to make a reservation at the Balmer House where the symposium was being held.

Having completed the arrangements, I staggered off to bed, perchance to dream. However, I felt my dreams were going to have a hard time keeping up with the weirdness that seemed to have entered my waking life during the last several weeks.

On Tuesday evening I met with Jennifer. With each new opportunity for being together, I realized the love in my heart for her was growing, seemingly exponentially.

I don't know why this experience had taken nearly fifty years to find its way into my life, but I was very thankful that it had bothered to knock on my door at all. There were many people who lived their whole lives in quarantine from love, and, I suppose, in many ways, until I had met Jennifer, I was one of them.

I had loved my parents and my sister, and I knew they loved me. Yet, as is true for most of us, I constantly was scanning the horizons hoping a special someone would walk out of the shadows of possibility and fill the void in my heart that first seemed to make its presence felt in my teens.

At times, this void had manifested itself as a dull ache. On other occasions, its pain had been given more intense and acute expression.

Emptiness, restlessness, dullness and incompleteness were all symptoms of this void. They were at the opposite end of the spectrum from the sort of void about which the Buddhists speak.

Now, like a Florence Nightingale of the heart, Jennifer had emerged from the darkness. The light of her being brought: healing and peace to a soul that was scarred by and weary from the battle of life.

I brought Jennifer up to date on all of the latest events. Talking about my trip to Washington, the aborted kidnapping, the rescue, my discussion

with Rip, the identity of the Botclofots, and the mysterious mission to Chicago, occupied us until well after midnight.

We both agreed there appeared to be a striking similarity between Beth's memories of dizziness and difficulty in breathing prior to her abduction experience and what had happened to me last night. We felt there was some sort of connection between the two events, as well as, in all likelihood, Brian's disappearance, but we had no plausible hypothesis that would account for all the data.

The possibility of some further attempt to abduct me seemed quite real. Nonetheless, since we had no idea of what was really going on, there were few concrete precautions that could be taken.

As had been true with Beth, the nature of the evidence was so flimsy, going to the authorities probably would be an exercise in futility. I could, of course, tell them about Rip and his having witnessed the incident, but, if possible, I would prefer not to involve him in the matter.

In any event, even if Rip did tell the authorities what he saw, I was far from convinced this would bring the situation much closer to any kind of satisfactory resolution. Furthermore, in fairness to the police and the FBI, short of giving me protection ... which, due to, among other things, limitations of staff and budgets ... was extremely unlikely, there appeared to be little they had to go on and little that they could do under the circumstances.

Reluctantly, I left Jennifer around two in the morning. I would have liked to be with her longer, but I had a number of things to do in order to get ready for my trip to Chicago, including latching on to a few hours more sleep than had been possible the previous day.

After driving home and attending to the preparations for my journey, I managed to slip beneath the covers of my bed around 4:30 a.m. I had set the alarm for 9:40, a little over five hours away.

I was uprooted from my slumber by a heavy knocking on the apartment door. Looking over at the clock through the blurred vision of awakening, the time appeared to be 8:53 a.m..

The knocking continued and seemed to become more insistent with each passing second. I grabbed a robe and made my way to the living room.

Upon opening the door, I found myself staring into the faces of Special Agents Williams and Bradley. Perhaps due to a lack of sleep, I found myself

saying: "If you guys are serious about continuing to court me, I'm going to insist that you inform my parents about whether, or not, your intentions are honorable concerning our future together."

Agent Williams started to enter the room. I stepped in his path and said: "I'm pretty sleepy, but I don't recall inviting you in. Unless there is a legal document entitling you to enter my humble abode, you should have the courtesy to either ask to come in, or you should wait to be asked."

Somewhat flustered, Agent Williams flashed a look that suggested equal parts annoyance and contempt. Agent Bradley was his usual, silent, enigmatic, unflappable self.

With exaggerated politeness, Agent Williams inquired: "May we come in, Dr. Phelps?" There was an edge of some sort to the way he intoned: "doctor."

"Please do," I replied. "The furniture undoubtedly will feel blessed by your presence."

The two agents followed me into the living room area, and I motioned them to several chairs that were by the couch. As they sat down, I said: "I would be remiss in my responsibilities as host if I didn't offer you some coffee or tea."

Both of the men shook their heads in a negative fashion. "No thank you," they said, more or less at the same time.

"Do you mind if I get my coffee machine started?" I inquired. "It will only take a minute."

Agent Williams nodded his consent. Agent Bradley was doing a quick inventory of the front room and, then, checked out the kitchen.

I followed Agent Brady into the kitchen and set things in motion for brewing the coffee. While there, I turned on the cold water tap and splashed some of it on my face and vigorously rubbed a little on the back of my neck.

Feeling more fully awake, I turned off the tap and picked up a dish towel. I wiped my face and neck and went back to the living room to see what was cooking there.

Almost as soon as I sat down, Agent Williams started in. "Where were you on Monday night?"

The issue of how much to say loomed before me. I opted to start out with giving a minimum amount of information and wait to see if I could figure out why they were here.

"I went to the 'Frames of Mind Cinema' over on Gardner," I answered.

"What time was that?" he inquired.

Shrugging my shoulders, I said: "I suppose it was from, approximately, 7:30 p.m. to about 11:00 p.m. ."

"Was anyone with you?" he countered.

"No ... no, there wasn't," I responded. "Perhaps, if you will tell me what this is all about, I might be of more help to you."

"Just answer the questions," Agent Williams indicated. "That is all the help we want or need from you."

Shortly thereafter, he followed up with: "Can anyone verify your whereabouts on Monday night, or do you have a ticket stub from the movie or a parking receipt?"

I thought about his questions for a moment. Finally, I said: "I threw the movie ticket away as I left the theater, and I parked on a side street, so there is no parking receipt.

"As far as your first question is concerned, I'm not sure anyone could place me at the theater. I did talk with the guy at the concession stand for a few minutes while he was filling my order, but I don't know if he would remember me. I'm sure he probably talks with a lot of people in the course of an evening."

Reflecting on the matter a bit more, I added: "After the movie, I stopped at a doughnut shop a couple of blocks from the theater. Strangely, there were no police there. I had always heard the two were something of an item."

"I did exchange some pleasantries with the proprietor of the shop. Once again, however, I'm not sure if the person would remember our little interlude.

"To the best of my recollection, no one saw me either leaving the apartment building on my way to the theater or returning here following the movie. Therefore, there is no one here who can corroborate my going or coming."

Without pausing, Agent Williams pushed on: "What time did you arrive back at your apartment?"

A cross-road of sorts had been reached. If I told the truth, I would have to bring Rip into the discussion that I didn't feel like doing at the moment.

On the other hand, if I lied or was evasive ... yet, if, for whatever reasons, I later needed to tell about the abduction attempt or spending the night at the Center ... then, issues concerning my credibility would arise. They would want to know why this question hadn't been answered with full disclosure the first time around.

I really had nothing to hide, but I didn't care to have them poking around in my life or asking questions that I didn't feel like answering. I decided to stall.

"Look, gentlemen, despite the immense enjoyment I am having in passing the time of day with you, unless you tell me what this is all about, I'm not going to answer any more of your questions."

Agent Williams looked over at Agent Bradley. The latter moved his head in those a way as if to indicate that the decision was up to Agent Williams.

Turning his gaze back to me, Agent Williams said: "Do you know Ken and Pamela Pratt of Washington, D.C.?"

"Of course," I responded. "I visited them last weekend."

"Yes, we know," Agent Williams indicated. "Our Washington office has informed us you were observed having a meal with the Pratts in a restaurant on Saturday evening."

"I didn't know that was a federal crime," I retorted. "Have I been placed under surveillance?" I asked.

"No, Dr. Phelps, at this point you are not under surveillance, at least not by the FBI," he said. "The information concerning your whereabouts on Saturday evening came about during an investigation that is being conducted in the Washington area by, among others, Bureau officials."

Agent Williams paused, looked at me in a strange sort of way and, then, proceeded to say: "You are quite correct, Dr. Phelps, eating in a restaurant is not a federal crime, but the murder of a federal employee does meet the requirements."

"What are you talking about?" I snapped in exasperation.

Both agents were watching me very intently. Agent Williams said: "On Tuesday morning, the bodies of Ken and Pamela Pratt were discovered in their homes by a neighbor."

He was saying something else, but I couldn't hear what. I felt like there was a two-ton rock in the pit of my stomach.

I wanted to cry, but I bit my lip and fought back the tears. I couldn't believe what I had heard.

The words: "... bodies ... were discovered ..." kept ricocheting about in my mind. 'My friends ... 'my friends' reverberated its painful echo from everywhere deep within me.

Suddenly, I thought about Ken's and Pam's boys. "What about the kids, Greg and Billy?" I asked.

"They are all right," Agent Williams informed me. "They had been staying with another family for four or five days, so they were not home at the time of the murders."

Lowering my head, I closed my eyes. I felt relief that the children were safe, but I struggled for some semblance of control concerning the rest of the situation.

I was vaguely aware that Agent Williams had been droning on about something. Gaining some degree of composure, I said: "I'm sorry, Agent Williams, I haven't heard what you've been saying. This news is deeply disturbing to me and has kind of left me numb."

"Let me repeat myself, then, Dr. Phelps," he replied. "And, try to pay attention, because we would like to know what your role in this is."

He was about to continue when I stopped him. "What do you mean 'my role'?"

"I don't have any role in this. They are ... they were ... no, they are my friends.

"Just what are you implying?" I demanded to know.

"We are not implying anything," he answered. "As I was saying before, you are presenting us with a major problem.

"Several days after you visited Brian Idaho, he disappeared from a federal prison. Now, just after you return from visiting with Ken Pratt, who works for the Justice Department, he and his wife are found dead.

"We believe there might be some link between the two events, but we are not sure what that link might be. You are the only common denominator for both incidents with which we have to work.

"Your role might be purely coincidental to, or your role might be integral to, the commission of these crimes. We intend to discover which is the case."

"How," I inquired, "could you possibly think I had anything to do with the deaths of Ken and Pam? They have been friends of mine for years."

"Perhaps," commented Agent Williams. "In doing a background check on you, Dr. Phelps, following our initial meeting, we learned that a number of years ago you were found guilty, in absentia, of draft evasion in Federal District Court. Ken Pratt, on the other hand, served his country with distinction during the Vietnam War."

"You're right on both counts," I confirmed. "So what?"

"So, maybe, it was a point of irritation between the two of you that simmered beneath the surface for many years. Maybe, you went to him to get some kind of help from the Justice Department in relation to Brian Idaho and he refused to become involved.

"Maybe, words were exchanged because of his refusal, and one thing led to another. Maybe, your differences on the Vietnam War came out during the argument. Maybe, he questioned, and rightly so in my opinion, your patriotism, manhood and sense of morality, and you took exception to what he had to say.

"Maybe, as a result, you began to plan his murder. Maybe, during your commission of the crime, his wife was in the wrong place at the wrong time."

My tiredness, together with residual stresses from the abduction ordeal, as well as my current state of shock, might have been largely responsible for what happened next. First, almost uncontrollably, for a few minutes, I half-laughed and half-cried.

The laughter was an expression of my feelings concerning the absurdity of Special Agent Williams' theory about the deaths of my two friends. The laughter, that might not have been forthcoming under other circumstances, also was directed at the agent's incredible arrogance and self-righteousness in relation to his opinions about Vietnam.

The tears had been with me since learning of the deaths of Ken and Pam. What started out as laughter soon became the sluice-gate that released the flood of grief for my friends.

I found myself caught between two attractors of tears and laughter. At certain points, I underwent a phase transition that took me out of the sphere of influence of one attractor, only to find myself under the influence of the other attractor.

When the laughter and tears had subsided, I said: "You know, Agent Williams, people like you got America mixed up with the Vietnam mess in the first place. People like Ken Pratt and myself, each in our own way, tried to extricate our country from that quagmire."

"I suppose," he said, "you have never heard of the saying: 'My country, right or wrong.' At least, even if Ken Pratt didn't agree with the policies of America at that time, he had the decency to honor his obligations to his country."

Out of the corner of my eye, I noticed that Agent Bradley had been trying, as unobtrusively as possible, to get the attention of his partner. Unfortunately, the actions had been unobtrusive to the wrong individual.

"Your supposition would be incorrect, Agent Williams," I responded. "I have heard of the saying: 'My country, right or wrong.' In fact, the last time I heard it, war crime trials were held in Nuremberg and Japan for those who offered it as an excuse for their unconscionable actions.

"People like you, Agent Williams, have the poor taste to question my patriotism, manhood and sense of morality, and, yet, members of the FBI have been the ones who have had complicity in the death of innocent kids at places like Ruby Ridge, Idaho and Waco, Texas.

"During these tragedies, people, whom you apparently would honor, break the FBI's own Rules of Engagement. In the process, they violate the Constitution of the United States in order to impose their own self-serving sense of morality on everyone else.

"The people, Agent Williams, to whom you, seemingly, would wish to give your respect, have a habit of becoming listening-toms and peeping-toms in the private lives of, among others, civil rights leaders. They do so in order to try to find ways of controlling, or exerting pressure on, those whose ideas are feared by certain vested interests ... vested interests that you and your cohorts are seeking to serve.

"Some of the people to whom you seem to be committed, Special Agent Williams, hunt down those who would violate federal law and, then, quite hypocritically, they become co-conspirators in third-rate burglaries, dirty tricks and cover-ups, all in the name of that which is 'true', 'good', and 'right'. Those people undermine the very heart of democracy and the rule of law that you claim to honor.

"The people whom you appear to admire, Agent Williams, have played a fundamental role in the erosion of respect for law enforcement among many segments of the general public. Those people you admire have helped to create an atmosphere of lawlessness and permissibility in America that induces different segments of the general public to be more willing to violate the laws and principles of democracy because they have been taught to do so by the manner in which far too many federal authorities have conducted themselves.

"Why should organized crime, drug dealers, bikers, or street gangs act any differently than they do when various members of the CIA, FBI, police and government officials often do precisely the same thing? All too frequently, the only difference is that one is labeled 'legal' and the other is labeled 'illegal'."

"Tell me, Agent Williams, are you a Christian?."

"Quite frankly, Doctor" he said, "I don't see how that is either relevant to the matter at hand or any of your business."

"Look," I shot back, "you're the one who introduced the topic of Vietnam, and I am curious ... if you are Christian or, for that matter, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Native American, or whatever ... how you go about reconciling the slaughter of millions of Vietnamese, not to mention hundreds of thousands of Cambodians, with the essential tenets of any of those spiritual traditions?"

Agent Williams returned serve with: "Fortunately, Dr. Phelps, we live in a democracy where there is a separation of church and state, and I'm not required by the state to reconcile those issues. I'm only required to abide by its laws ... something that you did not do when you ran away to Canada. Besides," he added, "if you want to invoke principles of religion, what about the morality of protecting innocent people from being invaded by a God-less bunch of Commies?"

I smiled, and decided to put several balls into play at once. "To begin with, Agent Williams, I doubt you would understand the difference between a war of national liberation, with socialist leanings, and a Communist plot to overthrow the world. Moreover, I doubt you would understand why it is that if someone becomes sufficiently isolated and desperate ... especially when the West has played those a leading role in generating those isolation and desperation among those who were not willing to bow down to the Western Leviathan ... that those people might be prepared to accept military and economic aid from those whom they are well aware probably don't have their best interests at heart. Surely, you have heard of the saying: 'The enemy of my enemy is my friend.'"

Without giving Agent Williams an opportunity to respond to the statement, I hit a few more balls onto his side of the conceptual court. "Moreover, it might interest you to know that before political powers of the West began redrawing the world's geography according to their latest economic whim ... sometimes referred to as 'national interest' ... Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and a host of other countries did not exist. These countries were created by the West when, for example, Siam and other countries were divided up for profit-sharing by Western absentee landlords. So, what we in the West like to think of as an invasion of South Vietnam by North Vietnam was really an attempt ... whether well conceived is another matter ... by a people to reclaim its soul and sense of self-determination from the self-serving shopping mall known as South Vietnam that had been bankrolled by the English, French and, most recently, the United States.

"As far as your 'God-less' comment is concerned, Agent Williams, I have no idea what the faith of any single individual soldier of the Viet Cong or the North Vietnamese army might have been ... and neither, in all likelihood, do you ... but for someone, who just a few moments ago was running separation of church and state up the pole and saluting, then, what right do you have to now invoke your Anglo-centric rendition of God and use that to try to justify the imposition of Western values and vested interests on another culture and people? In fact, if you, and those who share your jingoistic mentality had even a smidgen of the Buddhist compassion about which you seem to be so contemptuous, there might be millions of people still alive today ... including fifty thousand, or so, Americans. Instead, what did they all die for? Well, apparently, so that some twenty years later a few Western

business men would, once again, be able to think about opening up Vietnam for business. Now, that's progress."

Agent Williams had the kind of smile on his face that Goliath might have had when he saw his opponent was just a kid. He looked over at agent Bradley and said: "You see, Paul, you give a fool enough rope, and he hangs himself every time."

Returning his gaze to me, he narrowed his eyelids somewhat. His facial features became much more serious than just a few seconds previously, and he said: "You do realize don't you, Dr. Phelps, you just have been making our case for us? Your recent rant would strongly suggest, as I indicated earlier, that your motive for killing your so-called friend did, indeed, revolve around differences you had over the Vietnam War."

Tired, frustrated, upset, distraught, annoyed, and impatient, I blurted out: "If you had half a brain you'd be embarrassed for yourself, and since you don't seem to be embarrassed, one might conclude that the first part of the hypothetical is false."

At this point, Special Agent Bradley intervened. "Dr. Phelps, we can appreciate you are very upset at having lost those close friends as Mr. and Mrs. Pratt. However, I hope you will understand we are coming into this situation blindly.

"We don't really know you, and we don't know much about your relationship with the Pratts. If we explore possibilities that, to you, seem preposterous, just remember, you have knowledge and information that we don't have.

"When we conduct investigations, we are trying to both eliminate some possibilities as well as to develop a plausible, tenable case with respect to various other theories that we might be considering. We are trying to make sense of the data and information that we encounter or uncover.

"I believe you share our desire to see that whoever murdered the Pratts is brought to justice. You might have information or knowledge that could help us to figure out what is going on, and we are hoping you will share that material with us.

"As Special Agent Williams indicated earlier, we believe there might be a connection between the deaths of the Pratts and the disappearance of Brian Idaho. One of the reasons we believe this to be so is because you are a common factor in both cases.

"This doesn't mean we consider you to be behind these crimes, although, to be quite frank with you, we cannot, at least at this time, rule out those a possibility. On the other hand, if you are not responsible for these criminal acts, then, another hypothesis we are entertaining centers on things that might be going on in your life that might reveal other kinds of connection between the disappearance of Brian Idaho and the deaths of the Pratts.

"Why did you go to see the Pratts, Dr. Phelps? Did it have anything to do with Brian Idaho?"

"Not really," I indicated.

"I did discuss the situation with him, including Beth Idaho's abduction that took place around the same time as her brother's disappearance from prison. However, this was all done purely for the purposes of informing him about what had been happening in my life in the last several weeks.

"Aside from taking the opportunity of visiting with Ken and Pam for the first time in about a year and a half, I went to Washington in order to talk with Ken about a job offer that had come my way. I had asked Ken to find out what he could about the organization that was making the offer."

"What was the name of this organization, Dr. Phelps, and what kind of job proposal were they making?" Agent Bradley asked.

"They are registered as The Bettinger Foundation, but it is only one of a number of organizations that are owned and operated by a holding company known as Futures Unlimited. I'm not really sure about what the other organizations do that fall under the Futures Unlimited umbrella. The Bettinger Foundation seems to focus largely on trying to combat world terrorism.

"Dr. Timothy Jameson, who is an executive officer of some sort with Bettinger, invited me to lunch and made me a very attractive offer to serve as an external consultant for the organization. I wanted to discuss the situation with Ken Pratt before I made a decision about the job."

"I suppose," Agent Williams interjected, "you have objections to fighting against world terrorism, just like you had objections about fighting against the Communists in Vietnam."

Looking at Agent Williams, I found myself feeling sorry for him. He really couldn't help himself.

He had been conditioned and brainwashed to those an extent that he had lost the capacity for any kind of balanced, critical reflection in certain parts of his life. He had been wearing his made -in-America glasses since early childhood and saw the world through its colored lenses, uncorrected for political, economic and philosophical astigmatism.

"Agent Williams," I began, "if the background check you did on me has any depth to it, you would know that my mother and sister were killed in a terrorist attack a number of years ago. I am most assuredly against world terrorism, but the issue of identifying who are the worst perpetrators of terrorism in the world is not the straightforward matter that is often delineated through our newspapers, magazines, books, televisions or law enforcement agencies.

"There were some questions in my mind about where The Bettinger Foundation stood on these issues. I value Ken Pratt's opinion, so I asked him to look into it for me.

"Even before members of my family died at the hands of terrorists, I was opposed to terrorism. This was at the heart of my opposition to Vietnam, for that war was merely a different face of terrorism.

"In fact, the Vietnam War was a turning point of sorts. For the very first time, through that war, the attention of the American people was being directed to processes of state-sponsored terrorism that had been taking place for decades on other fronts in South America, Central America, Africa, the Middle East and with our own Native Peoples and black communities."

Agent Williams waved his hand dismissively at my comments and stared out the window. He remained quiet and let Agent Bradley conduct the remainder of the interview.

"Dr. Phelps," Agent Bradley said, "you indicated earlier you had some questions about where the Bettinger Foundation stood on various issues of terrorism. Would you care to elaborate?"

"Let's just say," I remarked, "that I was uneasy about some of their connections with the defense industry, the military and the intelligence community. I was hoping Ken Pratt either would allay my concerns in this regard or provide me with a clearer picture of the situation so I could make an informed choice with respect to the job offer."

"Have you arrived at a decision concerning the job?" Agent Bradley asked.

"Yes," I replied. "I declined the offer. I informed Dr. Jameson this past Monday, the day after returning from Washington."

"How did Dr. Jameson react to your refusal?" Agent Bradley inquired.

"He was disappointed. Dr. Jameson said my decision saddened him more than I could know. I guess he had plans for me."

"Previously, Dr. Phelps, you alluded to a request that had been made of Ken Pratt. You mentioned, I believe, asking him to see what he could find out about The Bettinger Foundation.

"I'm wondering," Agent Bradley said, "if he had any success in his investigation into the matter. Moreover, I also am interested in knowing to what extent his findings, if any, played a formative part in your deliberations about the job offer."

"Ken wasn't able to find out a great deal," I asserted. "And, strangely enough, this fact, in and of itself, bothered him.

"The parent company, Futures Unlimited, banks through the Cayman Islands and seems to like to operate in the shadows and in anonymity. Yet, the corporation appears to have a great many contacts with all levels and branches of government, both on the domestic scene as well as internationally.

"Ken didn't like the combination of secrecy mixed with potential influence of government processes and policies. I must say, I don't care much for it myself.

"Practically the last thing Ken said to me before I left Washington was that there seemed to be some kind of religious angle to either Futures Unlimited or The Bettinger Foundation or both. He didn't elaborate on what the angle might involve.

"Ken said he would let me know what he discovered in that regard. I don't know if he had the chance to pursue the issue any further.

"As far as the other part of your question is concerned, Agent Bradley, I would say Ken's discussion with me on the various themes surrounding the job offer played a fundamental role in shaping my final decision. I might very well have accepted the position if not for what transpired during my exploration of the matter with Ken."

Agent Bradley paused briefly before continuing. "I'm sorry for having to raise the following question," he apologized, "but we need to know if there

was anyone you encountered or spoke with after your visit to the doughnut shop on your way home from the movies.

"Our forensic experts place the time of death for both of the Pratts at somewhere between 3:00 a.m. and 4:00 a.m. . Although, admittedly, the time line is rather congested, you still could have gone to the airport, caught a plane for Washington, traveled to the Pratt residence and committed the crime in the interval between roughly a little after 11:00 p.m. and the indicated time of death.

"If we are to completely eliminate you as a suspect in this case, Dr. Phelps, your situation would be helped considerably if somebody, anybody, could place you in the general vicinity of the greater Boston area between, say, 12:00 a.m. and 4:00 a.m.. Is there anything more that you can remember in this respect which you haven't touched upon already in your account?"

I had hoped to avoid getting into the whole attempted abduction issue and the events that followed it. In addition, given the circumstances, the affair now had an aura of contrivance and convenience about it.

On the other hand, I didn't know what choice I had. I knew I hadn't killed my friends, but the FBI was looking for hard evidence to this effect.

As implausible as the truth sounded, I decided to 'let 'er rip, so to speak, with several exceptions. First, I wasn't going to mention the Botclofots, and, secondly, I wouldn't say anything about the fact that Rip seemed to know about the deaths of Ken and Pamela Pratt even before the FBI.

Although all kinds of macabre conspiracy scenarios were possible as a way of accounting for Rip's apparent preternatural knowledge, I was certain in my heart that Rip had nothing to do with what happened to my friends. In fact, if he had anything to do with their deaths, divulging that link to me seemed to make very little sense.

In retrospect, as strange as it sounded, I believed Rip intimated what he did about Ken and Pam to help build trust between himself and myself as a kind of preparation for whatever might be hidden beyond the curve in the road of my life's present path. Furthermore, for whatever reason, he must have felt the forging of that bond was important, or else I think nothing would have been said.

Having come to these conclusions, I hesitated for a moment, took a deep breath and stepped off the high board. I hoped soft water and a nice clean entry would be waiting for me at the bottom of the plunge.

"After leaving the doughnut shop," I said, "the same thing nearly happened to me that took place with Beth Idaho several weeks ago," I stated. "Someone, I don't have any idea who, tried to abduct me.

"The person was a man who spoke with a Boston accent, but I never saw him. He approached me from behind, stuck something in my back that felt like a gun, and told me to keep moving. He remained behind me throughout almost the entire incident.

"At one point he did give me instructions to turn around slowly, but before I could get a look at my assailant, he blew something into my face. I immediately became dizzy and was having difficulty breathing.

"Shortly after that, I lost my balance and fell down. I heard a car pull up; shouting; someone running, and I heard a car lay rubber as it sped away.

"Someone knelt down next to me. This person helped me get up and assisted me into a building on the street.

"Some time later, I'm not exactly sure how long it was, I awoke in a room. A man by the name of Rip was sitting in the room, apparently waiting for me to revive.

"This man, Rip, arranged a glass of fruit juice, as well as some soup and coffee, for me. In addition, he talked with me for several hours and when I was fully recovered, he bid me adieu somewhere around 7:30 a.m. ."

"Do you have an address for this man, Dr. Phelps?" Agent Bradley inquired.

"Assuming my brain and eyes were functioning properly at the time of my departure, the address is 99 St. Jude," I stated. "I hope, once you speak with him, my name will be deleted from all of your lists except the one for Christmas cards."

Agent Bradley smiled and said: "I'm surprised you would even want a Christmas card from us. You must not get much mail.

"In any event, we will check out your story and see where we stand after that phase of our investigation. Are you planning any trips in the next few days?"

"As a matter of fact," I remarked, "I'm booked on a one o'clock plane to Chicago. I'm attending a symposium for three or four days. I should be returning to the Boston area on Saturday or Sunday."

"Do you know where you will be staying?" Agent Bradley asked. "The Balmer House," I replied. "The symposium is taking place there."

Agent Bradley rose in preparation for leaving. He looked over at Agent Williams: "Do you have any further questions you would like to ask Ed?"

As he got up from his chair, Agent Williams shook his head in a negative fashion. He headed for the door.

"Thank you very much, Dr. Phelps, for your cooperation," Agent Bradley offered. He followed Agent Williams down the hallway.

As Agent Bradley was walking out the door, a thought occurred to me. "I don't know if it matters at all, but the person who tried to abduct me appeared to know me.

"The second or third time he spoke, he referred to me as 'Professor'. It could have been a general form of address, the way 'governor' or 'captain' is used in some locations, but I don't think so.

"On the other hand, there was nothing familiar about the voice. I suspect the person, somehow, might know me, but I don't believe I know the person."

"Thank you," responded Agent Bradley. "We might want to follow up on that with you if we come up empty on some of our other leads."

Agent Bradley nodded his head in a final good-by and walked down the hall toward Agent Williams and the elevator. I closed the door to the apartment.

Going to the kitchen, I checked both the time and the coffee. I heard the alarm go off in the bedroom, roughly confirming the 9:42 on the kitchen clock.

I turned the coffee machine off, poured myself a cup, added some sugar and headed for the bathroom. I hadn't left myself a whole lot of time to shave, shower, dress and arrive at the airport in time for my flight.

Fortunately, I had the good sense to pack before going to bed earlier in the morning. Barring unforeseen contingencies, I should be able to get to the airport with ten or fifteen minutes to spare.

Thinking of Ken and Pam, I briefly entertained the possibility of not going to Chicago. However, this idea was quickly rejected.

My experience with the deaths of both of my parents and my sister had taught me two things. First, only the passage of time would help heal the pain I felt and allow me the opportunity to deal with the grief in my own way. Secondly, keeping busy was a coping mechanism that seemed to assist me to

deal with the situation in manageable doses by forcing me to concentrate, at least for a time, on something beside thoughts of my friends.

Burial arrangements probably were underway somewhere in Washington, but I tended to shy away from those things. I suppose God would get even with me by forcing me to attend my own funeral.

I didn't think that Ken and Pam would hold my not going against me. I would love them in death, as I loved them in life, but my love wouldn't manifest itself by showing up when they were lowered into the ground.

In time, I would visit their grave sites and say good -by in person. In time, I would look in on their children and say hello ... but not now.

Upon arrival in Chicago, I took one of the shuttle buses that made the rounds of different hotels, including the Balmer House, to and from the airport. After getting off the bus at my destination, I confirmed my reservation, picked up my key card and proceeded to the assigned room on the twenty-first floor.

I spent about ten or fifteen minutes in the room unpacking. Before going back downstairs in search of the symposium registration desk, I used some of the hotel stationery to write a short note.

Dear Jennifer,

Enclosed is a poem that I wrote a number of years ago. It resulted from a challenge by a couple of black friends of mine in Toronto who claimed that not only couldn't white men jump, they couldn't rap either.

Battered, tattered and alone, I stood in the harsh beam of the spotlight. Weak and uncertain, I placed my hands firmly on the two turntables before me and surveyed the crowd that had gathered in anticipation ... i.e., my two friends.

I began to make noises with my voice and mouth that became a sequentially blended combination of wind and percussion instruments. I added a layered set of sounds with deft, rapid, rhythmic motions of my wrists that ran the surface of the records on the turntables against the needle creating unique, exquisite electronic skidding sounds (I first tried to do this with a portable CD player, but couldn't figure out how to make the necessary sounds).

Finally, when the acoustic ambience of the moment was just right, I began my: 'One Hundred Second Rap on Civilization'. Before actually presenting

this creative effort in its entirety, unedited and uninterrupted, there are a few liner notes that accompany the presentation.

You should know, since most Americans know almost nothing about their northern neighbor, that York was the name of both the fort and the town that eventually became the present city of Toronto. Furthermore, the name of York is still heard today in Canada through those things as the county of York, the cities of York and East York, as well as York University.

As is frequently said in promotional literature, the batteries necessary to set this whole thing in motion are sold separately. Therefore, you will have to supply your own energy source in order to produce the appropriate electronic skidding sounds, along with the requisite wind and percussion accompaniment of voice and mouth.

Now, here, on our stage today, without further delay, we bring you, entirely unsolicited, a white man who is too old to jump, doing his version of a rap song (eat your heart out Marshall Mathers, I got there first).

There may not be
A history
You'll hear or see
Like one from me,
So listen up
What's coming down
About a town
That has a sound
Still heard today:
Y-O-R-K!
Way back when old
Worlds descend on
Distant shores of
New horizons,
There was a fort
At the bay's end
That did defend

Some of the men
Who would contend
For goods and land.
Around it grew
A town of new
Aspirations,
And soon there were:
Proclamations,
Incorporations,
Innovations,
Generations
Of changing hues.
Buildings, people
Came and went;
Money, careers
Were earned and spent.
Town turned city
More's the pity:
T - O - R - O N - T - O - T
O - R - O - N T - O - T - O
Words that repeat
The name of the
Government seat
Where people meet.
This common place
Helped set the pace
Which shaped the face
Of things to come.
Fakes and rakes mixed
With true and blue ---

Doctors, paupers
Wanting to heal;
Lawyers, tycoons
Waiting to deal;
Traders, merchants
Needing a start;
Artists, writers
Making their mark;
Soldiers, sisters,
Church and nation,
Pagans, seers,
Lords of station,
Trappers, hunters,
Those who were wild,
Loggers, miners,
People self-styled,
Railroads, farmers,
On their way west,
Seekers searching
To be their best;
Mothers, teachers
Prepared their quests
To take the land
Where all are guests.
Hail Toronto,
What's in a name?
History and
Mystery and
Plenty of fame,
Tears, fears, smiles too,

Courage, worries
All wax and wane.
Strange how things change
But stay the same:
T - O - R - O - N - T - O - T
O - R - O - N - T - O - T - O!
Love,
David ... see you soon, I hope.

I folded the note and the poem and placed them in one of the complimentary envelopes I found in a drawer of the table by the bed. I sealed the letter, affixed a stamp that I had been keeping in my wallet, and quickly wrote Jennifer's address on the front of the envelope.

Taking the addressed envelope with me, I left the room in order to find both a place to mail the letter as well as the location for registering at the symposium. Soon, both missions were accomplished.

I began to study the listing of talks and gatherings for the afternoon session that had come with the registration material. The only event that struck my fancy was a moot court session on evolutionary theory to be held on the fourth floor, beginning at 3:00 p.m., about twenty minutes from now. I decided to go and see what it was like.

I fully expected the worst. At the same time, I held out a certain amount of hope that there might be some degree of entertaining diversion to be derived from the trial.

The whole thing would be very trying, indeed, if the participants took themselves too seriously and lacked a sense of humor. Equally daunting was the prospect that few, if any, of the individuals taking part in the moot court might actually know anything about modern evolutionary theory.

Images of Spencer Tracy and Frederick March came to mind from 'Inherit the Wind'. There had been a remake of the movie in which Jason Robards played a Clarence Darrow-like character to Kirk Douglas's version of William Jennings Bryan.

I had enjoyed both movies but always felt the cards had been stacked rather unfairly in the debate. The crux of the drama had not really centered on evolutionary theory per se, but on a clever lawyer's dismantling of a

simplistic presentation of a narrowly conceived religious position held by a somewhat flawed personality. Hopefully, the moot court session was not going to repeat the same mistake, except in reverse- that is, to use a clever lawyer's debating tactics to defeat a simplistic presentation of evolutionary theory.

If done properly, the trial setting could provide a valuable opportunity for a good educational experience. I preferred not to think about what the result would be if things were done improperly.

I eventually found my way to the indicated room. When I walked through the doors, two things surprised me.

For some reason, I was expecting a relatively small venue, perhaps from having seen too much of the stage settings for the old, pre -revival, Perry Mason television series. The room selected for the trial was quite large and had been set up like an actual court, complete with a jury box, witness stand, lawyers' tables, a raised desk-like affair for the presiding magistrate, and a large area at the back of the courtroom for the audience.

The other feature that I found interesting was the size of the crowd. Nearly every seat was taken. I was lucky to find a vacant chair.

The members of the jury already were assembled in their seats. Those who were acting as lawyers were at their respective tables.

A door to the left and behind the judge's bench opened, and a diminutive, attractive, forty-something, black-robed, brown-haired woman entered the hall. As she did, a court officer stood up and said: "Hear ye! Hear ye! Hear ye! All rise."

"Moot Court is now in session, the Honorable Justice Karen Arnsberger presiding, in the matter of the people versus Wayne Robert Corrigan, in the City of Chicago, in, and for, the County of Cook, on June 26, in the year of our Lord, 2000. Draw nigh, and ye shall be heard."

The bailiff waited for the Judge to be settled in her chair. When he was satisfied, he announced: "Please be seated."

As the Judge waited for the noise of the audience's seating process to subside, she shuffled and re-arranged some of the papers before her. When relative quiet had returned to the room, she scanned the court and, then, said: "In accordance with agreements reached in chambers between the prosecution and defense concerning pre-trial motions filed on various aspects of the procedural format to be observed during the course of this trial, the following principles will be in effect:

"Due to considerations of time, the prosecution and defense each will be entitled, if so desired, to call a maximum of two witnesses; with the exception of certain provisions - provisions that have been agreed to by all parties concerned, standard rules of evidence will be in effect throughout these proceedings; prospective jurors have been polled by both the defense and prosecution prior to the start of this moot court session, and jurors have been selected and impaneled on the basis of their perceived capacity to judge the matter before the court in a fair and impartial manner. During the selection process, both sides were given the right to challenge seven of the candidates without the need to show cause for dismissal; again, out of consideration for the time constraints under which we are operating, neither the defense nor the prosecution will be permitted the opportunity for redirect examination; the decision of the jury shall be read in open session on the last day of the symposium."

Putting the paper down from which she had been reading, she addressed each of the lawyers: "Are these the conditions to which you have agreed?"

Both responded, almost simultaneously, but slightly out of synchronization:

"So stipulated, your honor."

"Very well," she replied.

She shuffled through a few more papers and stopped when she found the desired document. "Mr. Corrigan, will you please stand."

After the defendant ... a curly-haired, freckled youngster who looked to be in his mid-twenties ... had arisen, Judge Arnsberger said: "Wayne Robert Corrigan, you are being accused of teaching students material that is in direct conflict with the facts of evolution as well as with the principles and methods of science. How do you plead?"

"Not guilty, your honor," came the response.

"All right, Mr. Corrigan, you may sit down," she indicated. Turning to the lawyer for the prosecution, she asked: "Are the people ready to proceed, Mr. Mayfield?"

"The people are prepared, your honor," he informed her. Looking in the direction of the table for the defense, she inquired: "Is the defense ready to proceed, Mr. Tappin?"

"We are, your honor," he stated.

"Good," she asserted, "let us proceed with opening statements. Mr. Mayfield, you are up first, and, gentlemen, please remember the meter is ticking."

Pushing his chair back as he arose, the lawyer for the prosecution ... who looked, sounded and acted like he came from a family of moneyed-gentry, walked to a point in front of the jury box about midway between the two ends. He placed his hands momentarily on the railing atop the three-foot partition that enclosed the jury area and briefly made eye contact with various jurors as he looked first to his right and then to his left, as he surveyed the members of the jury.

Removing his hands from the railing, he began to address the jury as he slowly walked back and forth along the front length of the boxed area. Every so often, he would stop and face the jurors in front of him and speak as if he were talking just to them.

"Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, some seventy-four years ago, a man by the name of John Scopes was placed on trial for teaching evolution to his students. He was accused of promulgating theories and ideas that ran contrary to established religious doctrines concerning the origins of human beings.

"Today, you are being asked to pass judgment on a case that, in many ways, is quite similar to the Scopes case, but with a major difference. The defendant, Mr. Corrigan, has been accused of teaching material that is contrary to the facts of evolution and in opposition to established principles, practices and methods of science.

"I, personally, find it very disheartening that some hundred and thirty-nine years after the publication of Charles Darwin's classic study: *The Origin of Species by Natural Selection*, we find ourselves unable, apparently, to put this matter behind us. I consider this situation to be unsatisfactory because for nearly one hundred and forty years, there has been an exponential growth of data from many different fields of scientific endeavor, all of which points in one direction -- namely, that evolutionary theory has been proven to be a valid, consistent, empirically grounded, rigorously examined and scientifically satisfying account of the origins, not only of species, but of life itself.

"To be sure, as is true in any area of scientific research, there are differences of opinion concerning the value and use of different kinds of

methods, techniques, and interpretations in evolutionary theory. However, none of these differences has anything to do with bringing into fundamental question, nor are they capable of undermining or refuting, the shared understanding, and agreement, of scientists concerning the essential character of evolution.

"At the heart of evolutionary theory is one simple truth. The origin-of-life, the origin of species, the transition from one species to another are all completely explicable in terms of known, natural principles and processes.

"In other words, the processes of physics, chemistry, cosmology, geology, meteorology, and climatology, when combined with a few simple principles those as natural selection and sexual selection, provide a definitive, exacting and sufficient framework through that to understand the origins of life along with the biological phenomena that those origins set in motion. In short, the dynamic interaction that results from the interfacing of the forces operating through these various principles and processes is all that is necessary to be able to provide an adequate account of why certain phenomena and forms, rather than other phenomena and forms, were selected to play crucial roles in the emergence and perpetuation of different life forms.

"To employ principles and forces beyond the natural realm is to violate what is known as Ockham's razor. This long venerated tenet of scientific methodology advises us not to multiply assumptions or concepts beyond what is needed to adequately account for any given phenomenon.

"Translated into more modern language, Ockham's razor is really the law of parsimony.

"Keep things simple. Do not complicate matters unnecessarily.

"Evolutionary theory operates entirely within the purview of this law of parsimony. Indeed, as far as the issues surrounding the origins of life are concerned, evolutionary theory is the only account that operates in accordance with this fundamental principle of rigorous methodology.

"The Scopes trial was caught up in emotion, dogma, and cultural biases. These influences settled like a dense fog around the minds and hearts of the jury and made reaching a fair and impartial verdict on the issues of that case very difficult.

"As a result, John Scopes lost the case. He lost the case despite the fact that the overwhelming character of the trial evidence ... revealed through testimony and cross-examination ... exposed the charges against the defendant to be entirely without merit.

"You, the members of the jury, have been selected because of your stated willingness to rise above issues of emotion, dogma and cultural bias. You have been selected because of your commitment to render a free and impartial judgment in the matter before us based solely on considerations of facts, logic and reasonableness of deliberations.

"The prosecution intends to demonstrate, within the limits that are being imposed on this trial, that evolutionary theory has been established beyond any reasonable doubt. Consequently, anyone who, in this day and age, would teach material that stands in opposition to a theoretical framework that has been established and agreed upon during the last one hundred and thirty-nine years can only do so by denying the facts of the matter and by refusing to observe sound scientific practice and principles.

"This is precisely the violation of which Mr. Corrigan is being accused. If the prosecution is successful in the presentation of our case, as I believe we will be, then you, the women and men of this jury, will, beyond any reasonable doubt, find Mr. Corrigan guilty as charged."

Once again, the prosecutor briefly ran his eyes down the two rows of impaneled jurors, stopping here and there to engage the eyes of this or that juror. When he had finished, he said: "Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, I want to thank you for the careful attention that you have given to my opening remarks. I am confident you will give the same considered attention to the evidence that governs the case before you."

Mr. Mayfield turned and went back to his table. As he sat down, one of his assistants whispered something in his ear.

Judge Arnsberger turned to the lawyer for the defense. "Surf's up, Mr. Tappin," she informed him.

Before getting up, he picked up one of the sheets from the tabletop, looked at it for a few seconds, and put the paper back down. He continued to sit for another five or ten seconds, as if in thought, and, then, rose, quickly making his way to the jury area.

In speech and manner, Mr. Tappin appeared to be the opposite of Mr. Mayfield. With the exception of his thinking processes, everything about the defense lawyer was casual, informal, and laid back.

Like the lawyer for the prosecution, Mr. Tappin appeared to be in his early thirties. Like Mr. Mayfield, the defense lawyer was moderately handsome, but in a rough and ready manner, that, therefore, appeared to be somewhat at odds with the prosecution lawyer's aura of urbane sophistication.

"Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen of the jury," the defense lawyer began.

"Good afternoon," came a collective, somewhat mumbled response from the jurors.

"I would like to thank my learned adversary for the wisdom of his comments," Mr. Tappin stated. "With his well-known, and respected, capacity for conciseness, Mr. Mayfield's introductory statement has focused on the most important elements of this case.

"The legal matter before you is not about ... or at least, it should not be about ... emotion, dogma and cultural biases. On the other hand, this case is about facts, logic and reasonable deliberations.

"These proceedings will not be about evolutionary science versus what some adversaries of evolution refer to as 'creation science'. This is so because my client is not an advocate of creation science, nor is this what he teaches in his classroom.

"My client, Mr. Corrigan, does not find any philosophical, or even religious, inconsistency between the vast majority of the tenets of evolutionary biology and a belief in a Divine Being Who creates the material and physical world. Mr. Corrigan is willing to admit the plausibility, if not tenability, of a position that says that evolution is merely the manifest form of the means through which God creates physical/material reality.

"The nature of Mr. Corrigan's faith is not so feeble that it depends on presupposing a particular conception of creation that precludes the possibility of evolution. He doesn't have a vested interest or axe to grind in this respect.

"Mr. Corrigan's concerns lay elsewhere. He is worried about issues those as truth, proof, logical argument, understanding, explanation, interpretation, and the integrity of the exploratory process.

"The case of the defense will not be about whether the second law of thermodynamics is inconsistent with the theory of evolution. We are quite prepared to live with the entirety of thermodynamic theory, including the relatively recent work on the phenomenon of dissipative structures that, sometimes, arise under conditions in which a system is far from equilibrium.

"The defense will not involve any arguments about whether the fossil record does or does not create problems for evolutionary theory. In addition, we will not try to exploit the controversies surrounding punctuated equilibrium theories as a means of undermining the framework of evolutionary biology.

"The position of the defense does not depend on the raising of questions about the reliability of dating methods based on radioisotopes. Furthermore, we have no intention of trying to use, to our advantage, differences of opinion concerning the role that, say, lunar samples play in pinning down the time of events on Earth, or the way in which high temperatures can affect the significance and interpretation of Carbon¹² and Carbon¹³ ratios as an indirect procedure for helping to establish the possible presence of life at a given period of time in the early history of the Earth.

"There will be no attempt by the defense to take quotes of noted evolutionary scientists out of context and try to use these quotes as evidence against evolutionary theory. We are only interested in taking a look at what the best science of our day has to say in support of the case for evolutionary theory.

"Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, so far, I have told you what the case for the defense will not be. I have not, yet, indicated what our case will be, so let me take this opportunity to rectify that omission.

"The contention of the defense is as follows. When closely examined, evolutionary theories concerning the origins of life consist of little more than a rather argumentative mixture of: questionable assumptions, speculative conjectures, problematic inferences, arbitrary interpolations or extrapolations, ambiguous evidence, and a wonderfully serendipitous confluence of events quite beyond the ability of science to demonstrate with any degree of plausibility except, perhaps, to the true believers among evolutionary theorists who are more in need of faith to prop up their theories concerning the origins of life than are many followers of religious traditions.

"The defense will be asking you, the members of the jury, not to be dazzled by the technical virtuosity of modern science. We will be asking you not to be intimidated by the use of technical terms.

"However, the defense will be asking you to keep in mind the importance of those basic, fundamental questions as: how? Where? When? What? and Why? In addition, the defense will be asking you not to shunt aside or marginalize the number of questions that go unanswered within the evolutionary perspective.

"The defense believes that if members of the jury are prepared to persist in asking simple questions along the lines we have indicated, and if you are willing to keep a running total of the questions that, after all is said and done, lack a satisfactory answer, you will arrive at one conclusion, beyond any reasonable doubt. This conclusion is that my client, Wayne Corrigan, is not guilty of teaching material in conflict with either the facts of the matter at hand or with the methodological tenets and principles of scientific investigation.

"Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, I would like to thank you for your kind attention to my opening statement. I also would like to leave you with one suggestion.

"Pause for a few seconds, sit back, relax and take a few deep breaths. For, in approximately ten to twenty seconds, you will not get the opportunity to do so again until these proceedings have concluded.

"Thank you, again," Mr. Tappin stated, and returned to his seat. A few jurors seemed to be following his suggestion.

Approximately fifteen seconds later, Judge Arnsberger announced: "The prosecution may call its first witness."

[A full account of this mock trial can be found in the book *Evolution and the Origin of Life* that is a fully transcribed account of the entire proceedings of the above-noted trial. For a variety of reasons, I did not feel that including the rest of the aforementioned proceedings would be appropriate with respect to the purposes underlying the presently transcribed portion of my taped account of certain events - D.P.]

Chapter 18: Encounters with the Unknown

Although the court case on evolution had been interesting, there was a lot of technical information on biochemistry, cell biology, and so on being given within a fairly short time frame, and I found keeping up with it somewhat difficult. It was like being given a crash course in numerous branches of modern biology.

In addition, my mind and emotions kept flashing back to Ken and Pamela. Consequently, I found my concentration swerving in and out of the proceedings of the trial, like some drunken driver who is pretending, unsuccessfully, that he or she is in control of the vehicle that is careening through traffic. Naturally, this made following the thread of the discussion even more problematic than did the technical nature of the proceedings of the mock trial.

I had known Ken for about thirty years, and, yet, in many ways I never really knew him. I always had known him to be a very private person, keeping lots of thoughts and feelings to himself.

At the same time, he was an extremely generous individual who gave of his time, energy, talents, and money to whomever was lucky enough to come into contact with him. He was a wonderful friend who accepted people for whom and what they were, without trying to change them ... yet, he was always ready to help them to be better human beings.

He knew me more insightfully than I knew myself. He understood Vietnam would destroy me psychologically and spiritually if I were to have gone, as it would destroy so many young people who did go ... some physically and some emotionally.

He had been the one who argued with me in order to get me to leave the country. Yet, he had decided to stay and go to Vietnam.

He never talked about what he experienced or witnessed while engaged in his tour of duty. One didn't know what pain might have been locked up deep inside of him.

He was too sensitive a person for it not to have affected him in some way. However, whatever the costs had been, they went in silence with him to his grave.

I never really understood why he went to Vietnam. He was deeply opposed to the war from the beginning.

He was far more politically aware than I had been, and, to a large extent, still am. He had been following events in Indochina since high school, and he had seen the quagmire coming from a long way off.

He had known the Gulf of Tonkin incident was a fabrication, just as the tale about the incubator-baby killings had been a fabrication in the second Gulf war. He knew that lying came second nature to all too many government officials.

Ken realized the government in South Vietnam was as corrupt as they come. He had known that, from a very early period, US advisors to South Vietnam were engaged in a program to help the duly constituted forces of government in South Vietnam to oppress and terrorize large segments of the Vietnamese population in order to protect a variety of vested Western interests.

How he came by a lot of his information, I never found out. Yet, long before the media picked up on it, he had been telling me about the program of chemical warfare that was being implemented by the US in Vietnam on scales that would make the Iraqi gassing of the Kurds seem like child's play.

Somehow, he had learned from a friend in the know that the CIA was running drug smuggling operations throughout Southeast Asia. He also knew that many young Americans, while observing their tours of duty in Vietnam, had been turned into drug addicts with the assistance of a knowing, but uncaring, indifference by some of the people in authority, including the euphemistically -labeled 'intelligence community'.

In fact, during this period of time, Ken had informed me that the CIA had been involved in a series of drug experiments that took place in a variety of places, including Montreal, Canada. The foreign nationals of another country, a supposed ally, had unknowingly been given massive doses of LSD in order to see its effects on mental stability. The lives of many of the unwitting participants of these experiments were destroyed, physically, socially, and psychologically, as a result of those studies. Only grudgingly, and after subjecting the families of the victims to a further twenty to thirty years of additional suffering, did the United States, if only in a limited fashion, admit complicity in the matter and express a reluctant willingness to grant some, small amount of financial compensation to the families.

Similarly, under a variety of code names, the Defense Department had arranged, during this same, general period of time to give LSD to a

substantial number of graduate students on different campuses across America as part of a related series of studies. This time the students knew... sort of ... what they were getting, and when the idea of ingesting LSD began to spread like wild fire among the youth of America, the authorities were very public in expressing ... quite hypocritically, since they were the ones pushing the drugs ... their horror and outrage at the lack of moral fiber of the future leaders of our great nation.

While enlisted, Ken had come to know about the illegal bombings in Cambodia. He had known that thousands of innocent Cambodians were being killed by this policy.

He was aware of massacres at places like My Lai. People lower down the chain of command were the ones being held accountable, but people higher up the chain of command were really responsible, but never held accountable, for creating the mentality and conditions out of which those tragedies arose.

Ken had ridiculed the domino theory from the time it had left the lips of self-serving advocates who were trying to rationalize policies that spread death, destruction and political chaos whenever and wherever they were deployed. He had known the difference between a fight for national liberation by left-leaning insurgents and some insidious plot dreamed up in Washington that attempted to claim that all of Southeast Asia would fall to communism if America did not stand shoulder-to-shoulder with its South Vietnamese allies.

Today, the US is busy seeking to establish all manner of trade links with the very people who were once said to be part of the great domino scare of the period extending from the 1950s through the 1970s. And, the people who had helped arrange the deaths of some fifty thousand Americans and millions of people in Southeast Asia are too busy trying to make a profit to feel much regret for what they had set in motion so many years before.

Despite knowing all of these things, Ken had enlisted, fought, and remained in the armed services for a number of tours of duty in Vietnam. I guess he felt the only way of being able to stop those events from occurring again was to try to earn his accreditation as a patriot and to trade on those a process of certification later on by becoming an agent of change within government and the body politic ... an agent of change that might be accepted because of having served his country and put his life on the line for America.

He had loved his country deeply, passionately. Yet, because America has a very short memory about whom does what for it, Ken's plan had never quite worked out the way in which he had hoped.

Now, he was dead. Unfortunately, his country could care less about the sacrifices he had made.

The country no longer needed Ken. It had millions of others who could be cajoled, misled and indoctrinated into killing the designated enemy of the hour whose terrible evil must be stopped in order to protect the vested interests of the few.

Cuba, Vietnam, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Lebanon, Grenada, Panama, Libya, Iraq ... who would become the next beneficiary of US foreign aid? People are very sadly mistaken if they think the killing has stopped. Times of peace are merely the world's way of preparing for the next round of genocide.

While engaged in a sort of walkabout in search of a place to eat, I had begun to think more about some of what Ken had been discussing with me during my trip to Washington. Among other things, he felt there were too many coincidences, for his liking, that had been going on in my life recently.

First, Beth shows up on my doorstep with a story out of the Twilight Zone. I go to visit her brother in prison. A few days later, he disappears.

The FBI drops by for a little tête-à-tête because I seem to be at the top of their list of possible co-conspirators in Brian's apparent prison escape. Beth is unavailable for comment.

I get an invitation from the Bettinger Foundation for a lucrative position as an external consultant in matters of terrorism. I go and listen to Rachel Donaldson respond to some questions about the Gulf War as well as terrorism, and I begin to have a few questions of my own about the job offer.

I call Ken to see if he is open to the idea of my coming down. Shortly, thereafter, Beth shows up in a dazed and confused state.

Enter Jennifer. Jennifer uncovers one kind of abduction that, maybe, isn't only to reveal another kind of abduction that, maybe, is.

I go to Washington and speak with Ken about the whole situation. I come back and turn down the job offer from the Bettinger Foundation.

Several days later, Ken and Pam are dead. In addition, the FBI is back on my case because, now, I'm the only common link connecting two, seemingly disparate events.

In the meantime, I've had a close encounter of the worst kind with my own would-be abductors. If not for Rip's timely intervention, who knows what would have happened.

Presently, I'm in Chicago attending a symposium waiting to make contact with person, or persons, unknown who will be of assistance somewhere down the line. I really have no idea what is going on, but whatever it is, I seem to be in the middle of it.

Just before I had left Ken, he had mentioned two leads that he was going to pursue and let me know what, if anything, he might have uncovered. One lead concerned a religious angle of some sort with respect to the Futures Unlimited group or organization that stood behind the Bettinger Foundation.

The other lead involved some sort of research facility in northern Maine. The kind of research going on at this facility was unknown, at least to me, but something about it seemed to pique Ken's curiosity and interest.

I was rapidly coming around to Ken's way of thinking about my situation. There were far too many coincidences to be coincidental.

At the same time, there were too many pieces missing from the puzzle. Furthermore, my resources and ability to discover the missing ingredients were extremely limited.

However, one possibility did occur to me. When my mother and sister had been killed in a terrorist incident, I had come into contact with a journalist, Mary Streeter, who was covering the story for the Boston Planet.

Subsequently, we had become friends. From time to time, we would meet, talk, have dinner or lunch, and, occasionally, take in a movie together.

I didn't know what her time commitments or schedule was like at the present time, but she might be prepared to devote a little effort to helping me out. I felt pretty confident her sources and contacts were likely to be a lot better suited to investigating the problems confronting me than anything I might be able to contribute to the situation.

Maybe, if I promised her an exclusive on whatever juicy scandal or conspiracy into which I might have blundered, then, this might entice her to

become involved. I couldn't imagine a newspaper person walking away from the intriguing possibilities that seemed to be swirling about the current chain of events in my life. I decided to call Mary, either later in the day, or sometime tomorrow, and ask for her assistance.

On several occasions following various recesses in the moot court proceedings, I had tried to get in touch with my journalist friend, Mary Streeter. The only contact I was able to make was with her voice mail.

The first time the recording came on I decided not to leave a message, hoping instead, to be able to speak with her directly later in the evening. When I was unsuccessful the second time as well, I left a message indicating I was calling from Chicago and that I would try to make contact with her on Thursday morning, before she left for work.

After a night of what seemed like dreamless sleep, I awoke around 7:00 a.m. . I became busy with the morning rituals of preparing for another day and was ready to call Mary around 8:00 a.m. .

Hoping that I would neither be waking her nor catching her in the middle of a shower, I placed the call and waited to see if she would answer. A few seconds later, she had picked up her phone.

"Hi, Mary, it's David Phelps," I said.

"Good morning," she responded. "I got your message last night. I'm sorry I missed your call.

"For the last several weeks, I've been engaged in doing some extended research and interviews for an upcoming series of articles on a variety of ecological issues. Consequently, lately, I've haven't been spending much time around the house."

"Not to worry," I assured her. "I hope I didn't wake you or that I'm not calling at an inopportune time."

"Your timing is impeccable," Mary informed me. "I was just about ready to get busy on my day's itinerary and would have left in another five minutes or so.

"In fact, I was looking at the phone just now wondering if you would call" she indicated. "Therefore, I'm completely yours for all of three or four minutes.

"By the way, what are you doing in Chicago?" she inquired. "Are you attending a conference or something?"

"Or something," I replied. "It's kind of a complicated story.

"If possible," I added, "I would like to be able to get together with you on ... maybe Sunday night or Monday sometime ... and tell you more about what has been transpiring. This might be premature on my part, but there could be a story in all of this for you.

"However, whether or not there is a story, I think I need some help from you. Unfortunately, by the sounds of your hectic schedule these days, my timing might not be so impeccable after all."

"As a matter of fact, David, you are on a bit of a roll," Mary corrected me. "Around one o'clock, or so, on Monday afternoon, I could manage at least an hour. Do you think that will be enough time?"

"I'm sure it will be," I replied.

"Okay" she confirmed, "why don't you pick me up at the office. I'll let you splurge all of seven or eight dollars on me in a sandwich shop somewhere."

"You ink-stained wretches of the newspaper business are always looking for someone else to pick up the tab," I complained.

"You are going to have update your insults David," Mary advised me. "We work with computers these days."

"Don't you need pens to take down notes?" I countered.

"Sorry, David," she said without sympathy, "we use miniature electronics to look after those mundane tasks. I hope your courses at the university are more current than your information about the world of journalism."

"I'm beginning to wonder about that, actually ... however, that's another story" I responded. "Look, Mary, I know you have to make a getaway, but before you go, there are a few names that I want to leave with you, and anything that you can find out might be of value to me."

"Go ahead," she said.

"Is your tape recorder on?" I asked.

"No," she answered, "I'm on a manual back-up system, sometimes referred to as a pencil."

I proceeded to list the names. "There are two organizations in which I'm interested ... namely, The Bettinger Foundation and Futures Unlimited. The latter organization might have some kind of research center in northern Maine, and it might, or might not, have some kind of religious affiliation.

"In addition, see if you can come up with anything on a group known as the Botclofots. They might be associated with a community center, of some kind, located on St. Jude in Boston. I have a funny feeling you might come up empty on this group, but give it a try anyway.

"Finally, several years ago, I'm not exactly sure when, but, probably, within the last six or seven years, a guy by the name of Brian Idaho was convicted of murdering an FBI agent on an Indian reservation somewhere out West. Recently, he has turned up missing at the federal facility where he was being housed. I don't know what you can find out about the case or him, but, again, I would be interested in whatever you might come across.

"Don't devote a lot of time on any of this, Mary. You probably don't have it to commit in any case.

"What I'm really hoping for, I suppose, is for you to make a few discreet inquiries with some of your journalist friends around the country concerning the names I've given to you. If I'm lucky, perhaps something interesting and useful might fall out if someone shakes the right tree.

"A word of caution though Mary, on all of this. Be careful about whom you contact or how and where you make your inquiries.

"Quite possibly, there already are two people who are dead as a result of something that is going on in connection with the situation in which, quite inadvertently, I have become entangled. In addition, there have been several abductions, or at least one abduction and one attempted abduction in connection with this thing.

"I wouldn't want anything untoward to happen to you. In fact, if you want to back away from this, I would understand."

"Are you kidding?" Mary asked incredulously. "You've been ringing all the right bells that, like Pavlov's dogs, make any journalist worth her or his salt begin to salivate in anticipation.

"Sorry, David, but I have to get going. I'll see you on Monday around one. Bye for now."

I hung up the phone and looked at my watch. If I hurried, I could squeeze in breakfast and get to the courtroom in time to grab a seat for the morning session.

The court proceedings for the morning session ended a little after twelve noon. I was feeling quite hungry and decided to visit the restaurant right next to the hotel that, among other things, served some delicious fish dishes.

After consuming my meal, I returned to the hotel and wondered what to do next since I felt that I had reached my saturation point with the technical discussions of the trial. During lunch, I had checked over the schedule of programs for the afternoon and had decided there was nothing that struck my fancy.

I was beginning to wonder just when and how ... or if ... I was ever going to meet the person about whom Rip had told me during the last part of our conversation at the community house on St Jude. He had indicated that events would overtake me, but I was becoming impatient to be overtaken by these elusive events so I could get on with things and, maybe, find out about what the significance was of all the mysterious events that had been taking place in my life recently.

I went up to one of the lounge areas adjacent to some of the rooms in which symposium meetings, of one sort or another, were taking place. Perhaps, some great inspiration would come to me while I relaxed, and, as a result, I would be pointed in the direction of a constructive course of action.

The lounge area was moderately large. In fact, the area was big enough for me not to feel like I was intruding on, or being crowded by, what appeared to be a group discussion involving six or seven people that was taking place in the corner of the lounge area diagonally across from where I decided to rest my muddled mind and associated body.

The combination of size, carpeting, drapes and ceiling materials seemed to absorb much of the sound in the area so that very little of the discussion was able to carry over to my area. Whatever sounds that did reach me from the group were very muffled and indecipherable.

For awhile, I watched the group from afar, attending, to some extent, to the frequency with which different people seemed to participate in

the on-going discussion. I wondered, in a rather disinterested fashion, what was being discussed and tried to use various clues of body language as a gauge that might indicate whether the matters being addressed were important or incidental issues.

Eventually, my attention wandered inwardly. I found my thoughts running in cycles that went from Jennifer, to Ken and Pam, to Rip, to Beth and Brian, then back to Jennifer again, ready for another cycle to begin.

Warren Idaho was thrown into the mix every so often. I didn't know what to make of his 'missing in action' status.

Was the inability of Warren's friends to contact him in some way connected to Brian's disappearance from prison or Beth's abduction? Or, was Warren simply in transit and would, at some point surface ... wondering what all the fuss was about?

As I was reflecting on these matters, I suddenly realized someone had approached me and was standing in front of me. The individual was a short, bearded man who looked to be in his early to mid-thirties.

He smiled and gestured vaguely over his shoulder with his left hand in the general direction of the group behind him. "We saw you from across the way and decided to ask if you would like to join us," he informed me.

My initial reaction was to decline the invitation. I didn't know if I was up to a discussion, especially if it concerned issues in which I might have little, or no, interest.

However, remembering that just a day ago I had been wondering how to go about getting myself into circulation and, thereby, be in a position to make contact with more people, I resisted my inclination to stay removed from the group. Assenting to the invitation with a nod, a smile and the verbal confirmation: "Sure, why not," I arose from the couch and accompanied the man to the lounge area in the corner across from my former place of repose.

Having exchanged introductions on the way over to the group, the man who had extended the invitation, and whose name was Vince Ardello, said to the others who had been waiting for our arrival: "Everyone, this is David Phelps from Boston." Vince proceeded to quickly go around the circle and mention the names of each of the members of the group.

I remembered a few names and was able to match them with the right face. Three or four of the names, however, had failed to register in anything beyond short-term memory ... my usual eidetic memory was being

undermined through the presence of countervailing forces those as, perhaps, the first stages of senility.

Fortunately, with the exception of one of the participants, the people were wearing name tags. Unfortunately, the person without the name tag was also one of the individuals whose name had escaped me. Hopefully, someone would mention her name during the course of the discussion. If this didn't happen, then, if required to do so, I would have to figure out some way to address her without embarrassing either of us.

Once Vince and I were settled, the woman without the name tag said to me: "David, we've been having a fairly free -form discussion about a variety of issues concerning spirituality and secularism. Just before you came we had begun to explore Joseph Campbell's approach to myths and mythology and what, if anything, he has to say about the nature of spirituality."

"Well," I said, "I know a little about Jung's treatment or understanding of myth, but I know very little about Joseph Campbell except the bits and pieces I happened to catch on one or two of the shows in Bill Moyers' PBS series. I'm afraid I didn't learn enough from my limited exposure to really figure out what Professor Campbell was all about."

"You're in good company," she replied. "There is considerable debate about whether he was a mystic, a romantic, a philosopher, a psychologist or something else.

"Certainly, more than a few people have categorized him as some sort of Jungian. Maybe, you would care to share with us something of your understanding of Jung's conception of myth."

"I've only been sitting for sixty seconds," I observed, somewhat nervous about the prospect of having to sound intelligent, "and, already, my seat seems rather hot."

"I'm sorry," she said, "I didn't mean to put you on the spot.

"You didn't," I responded, "I'm just trying to figure out how to jump into the conversational waters when my normal style is to let the waves of the discussion wash over my feet for a while before I wade in further. Furthermore, you probably all know much more about this than I do."

"Maybe, but I doubt it," she suggested. "We all have our strengths, I'm sure, but we are, by and large, just interested amateurs in most of the things we have been discussing up to this point."

"If you promise not to quote me," I stated, "I suppose there are a few things about myth and Jungian psychology that I could say that, if nothing else, might be slightly better than dead air-space. Although I hope you won't throw this claim back in my face if it turns out that after I'm done, you would have preferred dead air -space."

"David," Vince assured me, "you should treat us as people who have just come out of a long session in a sensory deprivation tank and are starved for stimulation. We are thirsty for whatever you might have to offer us."

Taking a few seconds to chart a general course before plunging in, I started somewhat hesitatingly. I hadn't thought about this particular aspect of Jungian theory for some time.

"Maybe, the place to begin is with Jung's belief that, broadly speaking, in order for an individual's personality to develop properly one must deal with certain kinds of psychological challenges during the course of one's life. Moreover, according to Jung, the challenges with which the individual is confronted during the first part of life ... say, up until about young adulthood ... are quite different from the sort of challenges faced by a person during the second half of life.

"In many ways, Jung agreed with Freud that the task of the first half of life was to establish the sort of strong sense of ego identity and self-sufficiency that would permit an individual to operate independently and that would equip that person to find a productive place in society. In order to accomplish this, a person had to break free of, and make peace with, the instinctually charged character of the relationships that arise in conjunction with one's parents and that shape many, if not most, of the events of the first half of life.

"For Jung, however, and unlike Freud, an individual's psychological work did not end with a successful, neurosis -free navigation of the troubled waters of early development. To be a fully functioning person, one also had to revisit the unconscious during the second half of life in order to bring into balance and integrate certain aspects of personality that had been, for whatever reasons, not properly attended to or separated off from conscious functioning while dealing with the earlier psychological crises of life.

"On the basis of his own harrowing encounters with the tremendous forces of the unconscious ... encounters that almost overwhelmed and destroyed him, Jung believed that, at a minimum, two conditions were necessary to undertake the psychologically perilous journey of the second half of life. The first requirement, outlined earlier, was for the individual to have achieved healthy ego functioning unencumbered by lingering residues of the problems characteristic of the first half of life.

"The second condition was that an individual should not undertake the process of revisiting the unconscious without help ... and, preferably, according to Jung, this assistance should come in the form of a therapist who was familiar with the territory. Although therapy sessions could be used to help individuals to negotiate unresolved issues left over from the first half of life, Jungian therapy really tends to come into its own with respect to assisting people to meet the psychological challenges associated with the journey back to the unconscious that characterizes the second half of life.

"One needed a strong ego in order to resist the temptation to surrender to, become lost in, and be overwhelmed by, the forces of the unconscious. Similarly, one needed an enlightened guide or therapist to help one learn how to enter into dialogue with, as well as interpret the symbols of, the unconscious so that the situation, if properly handled, would allow the individual to take advantage of the benefits that the unconscious had to offer in the way of an expanded, more balanced, more integrated sense of self than could be accomplished by the establishment of a strong, healthy ego as a result of successfully meeting the psychological challenges of the early stages of development.

"Jung looked at the unconscious in a very different manner than did Freud. The latter conceived of the unconscious as the well-spring of instinctual, primary processes, as well as the repository of repressed material that was produced while trying to contain instinctual energies from being expressed directly. Jung, on the other hand, considered the unconscious to be a door-way of sorts that linked human beings to a realm far beyond instincts and primary processes.

For Jung, the unconscious was a treasure-house of psychological wisdom that, among other things could help one resolve many of the problems that arose during the process of psychological development. Jung claimed this store-house of knowledge and wisdom had been accumulating since the times of primitive man ... maybe even earlier.

"According to Freud, the unconscious was in many, but not in all, ways an entity created by the individual through repression of experiential components drawn from everyday life. At the same time, Freud believed the ego, that was the home of the reality principle and secondary processes of rationality, must become the master regulator of the ways, and to what extent, various irrational processes and contents of the unconscious were to be given expression in any given set of social circumstances. Thus, his famous dictum: 'Where id is, there shall ego be'.

"For Jung, however, everyday experiences were merely the stimuli for eliciting various dimensions of an inherited, not created, unconscious that contains much more than repressed material. Furthermore, although Jung believed the unconscious could never be mastered or even tamed, he maintained that an individual could derive psychological benefit through limited, controlled excursions into the super-rational realm of the unconscious.

"Nonetheless, because the unconscious had the capacity to mislead the individual, as well as destroy the individual, the process of bringing certain facets of the unconscious to some degree of conscious realization was a tricky business. The task had to be undertaken in measured, carefully analyzed, and properly interpreted steps, or the individual risked having his or her sense of self become fused with, and dissolved by, the forces of the unconscious.

"By venturing into the realm of the unconscious through a series of limited excursions, the individual comes to realize that the everyday world is not the only reality. Rather, the objects of the everyday world are understood as 'a' reality instead of 'the' reality.

"In fact, the objects of the everyday world were able to assume symbolic significance by pointing in the direction of unconscious processes, as well as to serve as loci of projection for these same unconscious forces. This is where myths enter the picture."

Shortly after I had sat down and been asked to talk about Jung, one of the members of the group, whose name tag read 'Art Carmichael', had excused himself and disappeared somewhere. Presumably, he needed to attend to personal business of one sort or another.

Now, he had returned, bearing a tray filled with an assortment of soft drinks and juices for the members of the group. While he quietly busied himself with distributing the drinks, I continued to speak.

"Returning, once again, to Freud, for purposes of comparison, he construed myth to be an externalized symptom of the repressed contents of various kinds of libidinous striving, especially those associated with the incest wishes of children concerning their opposite sexed parent. Indeed, all of civilization was a sublimated containment response to the attempt of the forbidden inclinations of the id to seek public expression, and, considered from this perspective, myths constituted just one aspect of this process of sublimation.

"Jung, on the other hand, didn't consider myths to be public signs of an underlying pathological trade-off with the unconscious. He maintained that myths ... along with dreams, art, and the active imagination ... were clues or tools that could be used to unlock different secrets of the unconscious during the constructive, life-affirming process of individuation through which an individual sought to become whole, integrated, and balanced.

"Myths, dreams, the active imagination, and art formed part of the running dialogue with the unconscious that Jung believed was essential to the process of working toward a healthy resolution of the psychological challenges of the second half of life. Simply stated, myths were concrete, symbolic encapsulations of the unconscious wisdom and powers that were beckoning us to return to the hidden dimensions of the inner life in order to have a shot at winning the ultimate prize: a deeper, richer, more harmonious and integrated sense of the meaning of the self as a distinct individual identity and personality formed against the backdrop of both society and the history of the species.

"According to Jung, running through the myths of different societies were a set of commonalities that he considered to be a reflection of the underlying archetypes that formed the collective unconscious. The collective unconscious was the inherited repository of psychological forms, dynamics, themes, and meanings that constituted a deep reservoir of wisdom, although largely unconscious, from which we could draw to complete the process of self individuation.

"As far as Freud was concerned, the similarities among the myths of different societies were a reflection of the libidinous drives that were part

of our common biological inheritance that differentially manifested themselves through a set of biological and psychological stages of development. Yet, each person underwent this encounter and struggle with the species-wide biological inheritance of libidinous drives in a fashion that uniquely reflected the individual's interaction with his or her family and the surrounding community.

"Jung believed myths came into being when a given society created a symbol-laden story that was anchored in, and animated by, different archetypal motifs of the collective unconscious. The symbols of the myth were intended to elicit the active participation of those who heard or read the myth by helping to remind people of the forceful shaping presence of archetypes in our lives and, through this means, entice individuals to follow the symbolic clues of the myth back to their source through the process of therapy.

"The thematic contents, or archetypal forms, of myths came with the psychological inheritance that accompanied but, unlike Freud, were not reducible to our biological inheritance. As those, the thematic contents of myths rather than their particular symbols were psychological givens in the lives of all individuals.

"The particularized details of any given myth were drawn, according to Jung, from the social, cultural and historical character of the lived experience of a people. Therefore, the way in which these particularized details symbolize, and give expression to, the underlying archetypal themes is peculiar to the circumstances of the people out of which a certain myth arises, and, for this reason, Jung disapproved of the tendency of some people in the West to adopt the myths of various Eastern cultures and try to incorporate the symbols of those myths into a Western context.

"For Freud, the purpose of myth is to serve as a sublimated, disguised medium for emotional release that is intended to serve as a form of compensation -- albeit inadequate for the direct expression of libidinous energies and drives. The individual inherits a set of biologically-rooted, libidinous drives instead of experiential themes.

"For Jung, the purpose of myth is to provide the individual with an opportunity, through a return to the unconscious, to seek a deeper understanding of the nature of self, personality, meaning and identity. The individual inherits a common set of psychological themes that are a crystallization of certain aspects of the experiences of one's ancestors carrying ramifications for the process of self-fulfillment and self-realization.

"The Freudian approach to myth is to consider the myth as a symbol of something which is hidden and, in reality, different from the character of the myth. If the myth were not substantially different from that which remains hidden, it would not have been permitted to be given public expression.

"With Jung, the myth is not something different from the underlying archetype. The symbols of the myth are intended to lead toward, or elicit, the reality of the archetypes giving expression to different facets of the collective unconscious.

"However, once the archetype or archetypes that are present in a myth have been properly identified, one must undergo a further process of interpretation by means of therapeutic guidance. According to Jung, one cannot understand the meaning of a myth in the context of one's life until one has insight into how the archetypes being symbolized through that myth fit into the concrete and particularized character of one's life circumstances and developmental history.

"Jung distinguishes between mythology and myth by pointing out that, unlike a complete mythology those as a religious tradition, no one myth can contain all of the archetypal themes that exist in the collective unconscious of human beings. Therefore, no one myth ... again, unlike any given mythology ... provides all of the material that is necessary for working toward either a proper balancing of one's personality or a realization of the deep riches that are inherent, at least potentially, in the nature of the self.

"Individual myths call one to particular aspects of identity, meaning, self and personality through the specific archetypes to which our attention is being drawn by the symbols of the myth. A mythology, on the other hand, calls one to the full spectrum of psychological possibilities that are inherent in the archetypes of the collective unconscious to which one's attention is being directed through the complex symbolism of those a mythology.

"When individuals concentrated on only certain myths ... rather than the dynamic intricacies of a fully elaborated mythology ... Jung believed those people cannot help but leave substantial dimensions of their selves unexplored, undeveloped, unbalanced and unintegrated. Consequently, at best, the process of individuation will be woefully incomplete, and, at worst, those people risk becoming overly-identified with the archetypal underpinnings of particular myths. When this occurred, according to

Jung, those people rendered themselves vulnerable to a mental breakdown through loss of identity and sense of self as individuals with a potential that carries beyond any given archetype."

I sort of shrugged my shoulders and raised my hands in a way that indicated this was all I had to say. I had held center court for long enough and now was the time, I hoped, for me to slip into my preferred place amongst the peripheral shadows of a discussion.

There was no immediate response to what had been said. Thankfully, no one had drifted off to sleep ... at the same time, no one seemed to have been transported into a state of ecstatic reverie by my words either.

Finally, Vince said: "Lest you have any concerns in this regard, David, I think one can safely say that your précis on Jung's approach to myth was, by quite a few orders of magnitude, better than dead air - space."

"Speak for yourself, Vince," said the woman with no name tag but wearing a mischievous smile. Although her gray hair and wrinkles testified to her apparent age, her manner and comportment gave expression to a youthful energy and an enchanting, yet, hard-to-pin-down, spiritual quality that was very appealing.

"On occasion," she intimated, "I like dead air-space. Consequently, I feel duty bound in these times of endless searches for constant sources of sensory stimulation to come to the defense of a beleaguered companion of those who might be inclined to meditation and contemplative reflection. However, if you wished to express the same sentiments in some way that did not denigrate that which remains silent in its own defense, then, I believe I would support the general tenor of your position."

She seemed to reflect for a few seconds on what she had said and, then, added: "For someone who professes to appreciate silence, I don't seem to have much trouble destroying it, do I?"

The two comments were followed by a further brief silence. After a few moments had passed in this fashion, one of the people whose name I remembered, Ben Blake, remarked: "For some reason, I've always had a problem with treating the unconscious as an actual thing. Or, maybe, the right way for me to try to convey what I mean is to stipulate that for some kinds of processes and issues I'm quite prepared to accept the existence of a realm referred to as the 'unconscious' that is, in some way, attached to, or a

part of, one's being, but there are many other aspects of life that often are relegated to the unconscious, or forces of the unconscious, but about which I have my doubts as to whether or not this is a correct characterization of the situation."

"I'm not sure I understand what you are getting at," said a woman whose name tag read 'Melanie Teasdale'.

My initial impression of her ... perhaps aided and abetted by her Bride-of-Frankenstein-like hair, as well as the reading glasses that hung about her neck, seemingly ready to examine whatever curiosity she might happen upon ... was that Melanie was an individual who had spent many of the hours of her life pre-occupied with exploring quite a few of the uncharted nooks and crannies of life.

"Could you give some examples, Ben, of what you have in mind?" she requested.

I found myself mentally referring to him as 'Uncle Ben' ... due, no doubt, to his friendly, familiar, and, generally, avuncular style of relating to the people in the circle. The unlit pipe with which he gestured and, from time to time, that he placed, unlit, in his mouth, seemed to enhance this effect.

"Well," Ben began, "although I find myself conceptually going back and forth on these issues, I guess the obvious examples involving instances where the existence of an unconscious dimension to human affairs seems apparent would concern various aspects of personal memory and motivation. For instance, there is the name or fact or piece of information that one knows but, for some reason, one can't produce or retrieve it on a given occasion.

"Presumably, this data that remains out of the reach of our consciousness could be said to be residing in the unconscious. Of course, there might be some individuals who would wish to say those material is not really in something called the unconscious as much as it merely remains inaccessible to conscious recall.

"In other words, being out of consciousness is not necessarily the same thing as being in a realm of the unconscious. For example, what is going on in some country on the other side of the Earth might be out of our current state of consciousness, but this doesn't, as a result, automatically qualify this unknown data to be a part of someone's unconscious regions, nor does

it necessarily create, in and of itself, an unconscious realm in which those data can be said to exist.

"Moreover, there are many facets of a computer's data base or memory banks that might not be in use at any given time. However, I'm not sure one would want to claim, therefore, that a computer can be said to possess an unconscious realm.

"Alternatively, someone might wish to reverse the argument. If one does not wish to attribute an unconscious realm to computers when their current programming state or operating mode does not permit them to have access to certain aspects of stored data, then, perhaps, the same is true of human beings as well.

"Another, possibly better, example that might indicate the existence of an entity called the 'unconscious' involves various non-conscious emotional or motivational patterns that are operating within us on an ongoing basis. More specifically, these motivational and emotional patterns or processes might be the real forces shaping our behaviors, yet we are not aware of them because they are hidden beneath, say, psychological defenses that permit us to attribute more acceptable or flattering reasons to the behaviors that are rooted in this veiled network of emotion and motivation.

"Although the idea of the unconscious existed before Freud came along, he was able to place it, to some extent, in a more scientifically acceptable light. For, in addition to dreams, hysteria and so on, Freud also took phenomena that he referred to as the psycho -pathology of everyday life, like slips of the tongue, as commonplace sorts of example that served as empirical evidence for the existence of the unconscious.

"Hidden emotions and motivations, along with instinctual drives, played a very important part in disclosing the presence of the unconscious realm as far as Freud and a variety of other psychological investigators were concerned. This data does not prove the existence of a region, state, realm, place or entity known as the unconscious, but, at least, those data lend a certain plausibility to the idea.

"Nevertheless, there are other cases, and Jung's notion of the collective unconscious is, at least for me, one candidate for what I have in mind, in which we might use the term 'unconscious' as a way of talking about forces, processes and phenomena that we don't really understand and that, in point of fact, might have nothing necessarily to do with a psychological or

biological realm of the unconscious. Instead, these processes and phenomena might be impinging on us from some other realm, through a dynamic we are not aware of, and we merely attribute our experiences to the unconscious because, for a variety of cultural and historical reasons, we are more prepared to accept this kind of ontological or metaphysical interpretation for those events than if someone were to try to argue for an other-worldly or spiritual account of these sorts of phenomenon or process."

An individual whose name I remembered was 'Andrea Myers'... a recollection that was confirmed when I checked the name written on the tag pinned to her blouse ... spoke up at this point. She looked and talked like a business executive who had stopped into the 'club' for a lunchtime chat about what the non-business world was up to.

"If I correctly understand the last part of what you are saying, Ben," Andrea indicated by way of preface, "your idea might have something to do with the changing character of the philosophical and cultural conceptions of the nature of the individual with respect to one's relation with reality.

"At certain points in history," she continued, "people were prepared to accept, as true, ideas those as visitations by a creative muse, or demonic possession, or satanic influences, or dreams as messages from some other world. Now, however, as a result of various kinds of scientific, psychological, and philosophical influence, many people accept as true, ideas those as, for example, that dreams are due to certain kinds of brain activity during REM sleep, or these people contend that creativity is the result of a free play of concepts that is generated through various modalities of brain chemistry, together with K-complex electrical rhythms, or those people argue that demonic possession is really a residual, delusional effect of some kind of breakdown in the metabolic pathways of, say, serotonin and/or dopamine.

"Yet, in point of fact, we are not necessarily any closer to understanding what is going on now than when people were attributing these phenomena and processes to other-worldly agents. Currently, terms those as neurotransmitters, brain chemistry and electrical activity are used to give descriptive expression to the realm of the unconscious, but all we really have with respect to those terms are certain patterns of correlation rather than a solid case of causation ... although we 'moderns' like to feel somewhat smugly superior, relative to the so-called primitive myths of yesteryear,

simply because we are able to couch our ignorance in very impressive-sounding technical language."

Colby Shaw, another of the individuals whose name I remembered from Vince's round of introductions, joined in the discussion at this juncture. He reminded me of what I envisioned a twenty-something Tom Sawyer might have looked like although I do not know exactly on what this sense of the young man actually was based.

Somehow, Colby's tanned and freckled face, his general demeanor, together with his laconic way of expressing himself, seemed like they might have been the product of having experienced adventures, of one sort or another, near the banks of a river in the South. Yet, this down-home boy impression was in counterpoint to the kinds of thought being voiced by him.

"Seemingly," suggested Colby, "Carl Jung represents an interesting sort of transitional figure in all of this. In certain respects he is an important part of the conceptual revolution that has been taking place during the last ninety years, or so, in which psychological accounts have gained ascendancy, at least in some quarters, over spiritual or religious accounts, as the repository of 'true', down-to-earth explanations for the events of our lives. Yet, at the same time, his notion of the collective unconscious seems to be part of a metaphysical framework that transcends, and, therefore, cannot be reduced to, the brain functioning of any given individual."

The gray-haired woman with no name tag said: "I've often found Jung very confusing in this respect. Frequently, one finds him speaking about the soul, spirituality, the importance of religious symbols, and so on, but he appears to make spirituality a function of purely psychological processes.

"For him, spirituality or religion appears to be little more than one of the forms generated by processes of a mythological nature. As is true with psychology, these mythologies are significant in as much as they contain the symbols that are able to help the individual make contact with the archetypes of the collective unconscious. Consequently spiritual themes provide a person with psychological material through which she or he can work toward resolution of the problems and challenges of identity, the self, and personality that Jung believes are necessary for a successful completion of the developmental processes that characterize the second half of life.

"I find Jung interesting in as much as he is willing to allow for dimensions of reality, meaning, the self, identity and personality that extend beyond the overly simplistic world of the libidinous energies and instinctual drives of Freud and biology. Nevertheless, even if one agreed with Jung concerning the need to reclaim, balance, and integrate aspects of personality and self by revisiting the unconscious, I don't feel a purely psychological approach is capable of doing justice to that which spirituality is, in essence, attempting to direct our attention.

"In a sense, just as Jung's theories add very important dimensions to, as well as complement, the work of people like Freud, something needs to be added to Jung's framework in order to reflect the richness and depth of being that transcends the realm of the psychological. In many respects, I find Jung to be just as reductionistic, in his own way, as he seemed to find Freud to be, even though Jung certainly is offering a far more complex picture of the nature of the human being than did Freud."

"But, Tammy," said Art Carmichael, the recent bearer of liquid gifts, "on more than one occasion I believe Jung spoke in quite approving terms of those things as religious discipline. At least he wasn't saying, like Marx, that religion was the opiate of the masses or, like Freud that religion was merely an illusory projection of an overly moralistic superego trying to cope with the many problems presented by a very resourceful and devious set of instinctual urgings."

For some reason that I could not identify, and that was more of a feeling than it was a reasoned analysis of any kind, Art seemed somewhat lost in the group. While there was nothing odd in what he said, his psychological and emotional rhythms seemed to be out of phase with what appeared to be the ambience of the rest of the members of our impromptu gathering. Perhaps, like me, he had been drafted into a situation with which he was attempting to deal as best he could.

"I'm not so sure, I agree with you, Art," said the previously unnamed woman, Tammy, whose last name I later learned was Winthrop. "I tend to get the impression Jung was, to some extent, favorably disposed toward religion for several reasons that had nothing to do with Divinity or our relationship with Divinity.

"On the one hand, as I suggested previously, for Jung, religion was a fully adequate mythological medium that provided the individual with a means of making contact with the archetypes of the collective

unconscious. The collective unconscious represents the collected wisdom of human experience concerning the completion of personality and development rather than a repository of Divine wisdom.

"Consequently, one's contact with the archetypes of the collective unconscious is not necessarily a process of reaching out to, or for, Divinity, nor does one enter into dialogue with the archetypes for the purposes of coming to know, love, worship or serve God. Instead, one makes contact with the archetypes of the collective unconscious with the intention of coming to know, enrich, balance and integrate one's sense of self, identity and personality in order to complete a process of psychological, not spiritual, development ... although Jungians, including the master, himself, sometimes seem inclined to use a spiritual-like vocabulary as a way of speaking about those a psychological project.

"One might argue, I suppose, that part of the wisdom we psychologically inherited through the archetypes of the collective unconscious might involve the thoughts and emotions of previous peoples concerning the properties that they believed a relationship with some transcendental, Divine Being should have if an individual were successfully to bring to completion the psychological project of creating a balanced and integrated personality and identity. However, these kinds of beliefs are not at all the same sort of thing as saying that those a Divine Being exists and that our attention and efforts should be directed toward making some kind of realized contact with this Being rather than the archetypes of the collective unconscious.

"Another reason behind Jung's praising of religion and its framework of discipline might have been connected with his very healthy respect for, and wariness concerning, the tremendous powers he believed to be inherent in the realm of the collective unconscious. As David pointed out earlier, Jung had witnessed the overwhelming character of those forces and had experienced, first hand, this dimension's capacity to confuse, if not mislead, individuals who, either intentionally or accidentally, wandered into it.

"Conceivably, for Jung, the rituals, practices, discipline and regimen of religion served as so many psychological buffers between the individual and the forces of the collective unconscious. By exerting control over the individual's interior life, religions were, in effect, helping to protect

individuals from potentially disastrous and destructive encounters with the collective unconscious.

"If religious adherents were not prepared to undertake a serious journey into the realm of the unconscious, then better for them to be surrounded with a set of religious constraints and restraints that were likely to keep them out of harm's way. In other words, the practices, beliefs, rituals, art, and so on, of their religious tradition would provide the less venturesome of these people with a limited, gradual, somewhat superficial method for making contact with at least some of the archetypes of the collective unconscious through the symbols inherent in their tradition.

"On the other hand, these same symbols of a given religious tradition would serve as hints for the faithful with respect to the psychological wisdom that could be found by anyone bold enough to journey inwardly in a rigorous, sincere fashion. Moreover, until those time as an individual was ready for, from Jung's perspective, a serious, inward journey, the symbols, myths and other aspects of the religious mythology still could offer its adherents some of the materials necessary for working toward completion of some facets of the psychological tasks involving the self, identity, personality, and so on.

"As far as the developmental challenges of the second half of life are concerned, Jungian therapy is intended to take the individual on a guided encounter with the forces and wisdom of the collective unconscious in a way that is both different from, as well as similar to, the modalities used in the mythological processes of religion. As those, not only did Jungian therapy provide an avenue for helping non-religious people to address the unfinished psychological business of developing the self, identity and personality in a complete and proper fashion, but his modality of therapy also could be held out to religious believers who didn't seem to be able to obtain, within their religious tradition, the help they needed for tackling the problems surrounding the completion of the tasks entailed by psychological development.

"Sometimes, when reading Jung, I even get the distinct impression he might have felt his brand of therapy was a much more efficacious way of gaining access to, and deriving benefit from, the archetypes of the collective unconscious than was religion. In any event, Jung, within certain limits, might have been tolerant of, and somewhat positively disposed toward, religion simply because he felt it was trying, in its own way, to help

individuals accomplish some of the same kinds of goal concerning meaning, self, identity, personality, harmony, balance, integration and enrichment of the psychological soul, as he himself was attempting to do through his own therapeutic methodology."

Melanie Teasdale jumped in at this point with an observation for our consideration. "What I'm about to say might sound strange, but I've found myself wondering, from time to time, whether what we call normal, waking consciousness, is, in reality, the unconscious realm.

"Many of us, including myself, seem to want to take the modality of consciousness we use in everyday life or the modalities of consciousness that we tend to associate with abilities ... those as creativity, language, insight, and reasoning ... that we believe set human beings aside from the rest of animal and plant life, and we place these forms of consciousness at the very apex of a chart of evolutionary or cosmic accomplishment. Yet, I think few, if any of us, really understand how creativity, or insight, or reasoning, or language actually operates.

"Consciousness ... the everyday-waking-variety kind of consciousness, does not so much appear to generate these kinds of ability as much as it seems to be a recipient or beneficiary of talents and abilities that are transpiring in some other realm or dimension. In reality, our work-a-day consciousness is the last to know what is going on within us, and whatever it is that our everyday consciousness comes to an awareness of, those awareness really only seems to have a very partial, fragmented, shallow and indirect sort of relationship with the centers of awareness that actually have the responsibility for regulating and governing a whole variety of complex operations and processes involving so-called 'higher' human functions and functioning.

"The productions of language, or creativity, or insight, or reasoning are so fantastically complex, intricate, and innovative that I have difficulty with the idea they are a function of unconscious processes. In fact, I find far more believable the possibility that the everyday consciousness in which we like to take so much pride is actually, relatively speaking, quite dumb and unconscious with respect to most of what is going on in reality.

"Only the human ego's inclination to appropriate these capacities and abilities as its own prevents us from realizing the absurdities inherent in our attempting to lay claim to those processes and functions that, for the most part, take place beyond the horizons of our everyday, waking

consciousness. We seem to be zombies who operate from within a firmly entrenched delusional system that portrays our normal modalities of awareness as being the cat's meow of consciousness.

"I wouldn't be surprised to find out someday that our everyday consciousness is really just a residual, trickledown effect of far more advanced activities going on beyond the horizons of our so-called normal, waking consciousness. In other words, our work-a-day form of consciousness is not so much an instance of emergent properties as it is an expression of divergent properties of some sort that have become separated off, like a dissociative mental condition or fugue state, from its original source or context.

"In some ways, the relationship of our everyday modes of awareness to the real consciousness that seems to be going on in some other realm or dimension of being is sort of reminiscent of certain science fiction movies or novels. You know, the ones where Earth gets visited by beings who are so far more advanced than humans are that the aliens either have great compassion for our pathetic condition and keep sending us anonymous gifts of consolation so we won't get too depressed about the rather abysmal condition of our waking consciousness, or, they adopt us as dumb but, on occasion, lovable pets and give us trinkets every so often with which we can amuse ourselves like so many kittens with a ball of string, or, they consider us to be only slightly different than the insect life on this planet, but their moral values will not permit them to exterminate us and put us out of our misery."

"Thank you, Melanie, for gracing us with these thoughts," Vince Ardello said with mock gratitude. "I'm sure everyone else found them as uplifting and inspiring as I did ... especially the part alluding to the aliens.

"All kidding aside," Vince added, "what you say strikes some sort of sympathetic chord within me. I have often felt we humans have got this consciousness and unconsciousness distinction all inverted and twisted around.

"If one considers how impoverished our waking consciousness has become with all of our routines, habits, biases, prejudices, psychological defenses, emotional blindness, preoccupations with our fantasy life and so on, I really am surprised any of us can do much more than walk and chew gum simultaneously. Given the wretched condition of the waking

consciousness in which we spend so much of our time, the miserable state of the world is not all that hard to understand."

"I would like to get back to Jung, for just a moment," indicated Colby Shaw. "Maybe, some of you can answer a few questions I've been carrying around with me for awhile.

"Ever since college days, I've been trying to figure out the logistics of certain aspects of Jungian theory. For instance, I've always wondered where the collective unconscious was located.

"If one says it is located in psychological space, whatever that is, then, the question just resurfaces in slightly different forms. Where is psychological space, and where can one find the collective unconscious in those space?

"I guess this gets back to the sorts of thing that Ben and Andrea were talking about earlier. We have a hard enough time trying to speak of the nature and location of just the plain old unconscious without complicating matters and bringing the collective unconscious into the discussion.

"Even if one were to argue, for example, that the regular unconscious is a function of certain kinds of brain activity, this option seems not to be available to Jung, at least as far as the collective unconscious is concerned, since he seemed to want to distinguish between the mechanisms of biological and psychological inheritance. So, one returns to questions those as: where is the collective unconscious, and how did it originate, and why, apparently, did only certain kinds of archetypal forms, rather than others, get deposited there, and what was the mechanism of the formation process of archetypes in which the particularized experiences of individuals got transformed into a generalized categorical form, and why should one suppose the potential of the self is limited to the possibilities inherent in the archetypes, and why is there so much power and force associated with archetypes, and what precisely is the character and nature of those power or force, and how do we know that Jung's interpretations of the significance, meaning and function of the archetypes is what he claims to be the case?"

"Whoa, Colby," responded Vince, "slow down. You've asked enough questions to keep scholars busy for the next several centuries."

Colby displayed a sheepish smile. "I told you these concerns have been with me for awhile."

Vince and Colby both looked in my direction, as if I were the resident expert on Jung. Shaking my head, I rebuffed whatever expectations they might have had with: "Don't look at me, fellows, I'm just trying to be sociable and hold up my end of the conversation when you asked me to talk about Jung's approach to myths.

"I don't know how Jungians would answer any of your questions Colby," I added, "although I'm sure they have thought about those matters. Quite frankly, more than a few of the questions mentioned by you have been ricocheting about in my mind for quite some time as well."

Tammy Winthrop sort of came to my rescue by diverting attention elsewhere when she said: "There are some spiritual traditions that speak of a realm or world of symbols and similitudes that, on the one hand, addresses human beings through the language of dreams, and, on the other hand, constitutes a dimension apart from the physical/material world that functions as a way station, of sorts, with a potential for offering the individual exposure to many different kinds of spiritual or mystical experience.

"These traditions suggest one can commune with the spirits of prophets and saints in this world of symbols and similitudes and, as a result, be in a position to acquire, at least potentially, a great deal of spiritual wisdom and understanding through those encounters. However, these same spiritual traditions also indicate that individuals can meet up with other kinds of very powerful entities in this world or realm of symbols and similitudes ... entities that are capable of leading one into spiritual confusion and error.

"When I compare some of what Jung says about the collective unconscious ... especially in the context of his own harrowing experiences ... with what various spiritual traditions relate concerning the nature of the world of symbols and similitudes, I can't help but wonder if Jung might have tried to impose the structure of his own psychological theory onto a dimension of reality that has nothing to do with the collective unconscious or archetypes or completion of the personality and self, at least in Jung's sense of these ideas. In a very fundamental way, Jung might have found himself in the middle of something he really didn't understand and, like most of us, simply tried to make coherent sense of his experiences and those of his patients in a way that was consistent with his philosophical predilections."

"Couldn't one," asked Art Carmichael, "raise all of the same kind of questions concerning this world of symbols and similitudes to which Tammy is referring that Colby raised in relation to Jung's theory? For instance, where is this world of symbols and similitudes if it is not physical or material in nature? Or, how did it come into being? Or, how does one gain access to it and under what circumstances? Or, why should one feel compelled to accept a spiritual interpretation of those a realm, any more than one should feel compelled to accept Jung's psychological interpretation of his encounter with what he claimed was the realm of the collective unconscious?"

"What I'm about to say might not satisfy Art," suggested Ben Blake, "but a partial, albeit general, way of responding to your questions might be along the following lines. Just as Jung's psychological theories, when compared to those of Freud, provided a much richer, more complex and nuanced way of looking at the nature of the relationship between human experience and the character of the reality or realities that helped make those experiences possible, so too, the realm of spirituality might offer, relative to Jung's perspective, a much richer, more complex and nuanced way of looking at the relationship between the spectrum of human experiences and the nature of the reality out of which these experiences arise.

"Whether we are psychologists or philosophers or mystics or scientists, we all are involved, more or less, in the same kind of quest. We all are trying to find out what the relationship is between our experiences and the structural character of the dynamics, processes, events and so on of the dimensions of reality that help make our experiences possible and help lend to those experiences certain kinds of differential character under various circumstances.

"Deep down, I believe few, if any, of us wants to read something into experience or reality that doesn't belong there. On the other hand, I also feel few people have a desire to exclude anything from, or read something out of, the book of reality when those things do belong there.

"All of our methodologies, techniques, instruments, procedures, tests, questions and critical analyses are intended to try to discover whether our theories, hypotheses, conjectures, speculations, ideas, and so on, give accurate expression to, or are reflective of, our experiences, both individual and collectively. Moreover, whether we are professional investigators or amateur sleuths, we tend to critically reflect on the ways in which other

people describe and explain their experiences as measured against our own experiences and understanding of those experiences.

"When discrepancies arise in this process of comparison, we tend to be confronted with a variety of possibilities and options. The other person's description or explanation might be problematic in some way, or our own description and/or explanation might be flawed, or both of our approaches suffer from certain kinds of difficulties that might be either of a peripheral or essential nature, or each of our accounts is right in its own way but we are viewing different aspects of the same phenomenon.

"Jung agreed with Freud on some issues especially in relation to the nature of the problems, challenges and tasks of the first half of the developmental process. However, there were many aspects of Freudian theory that did not match up well with Jung's own experiences or the experiences of many of the people Jung was seeing in therapy.

"As a result, Jung went in search of a set of descriptions and explanations that, hopefully, would prove to be more satisfying to him, both conceptually and experientially, than either a purely Freudian and/or biological account of psychological processes, dynamics and human possibilities. The collected works of Jung are his response to the questions and issues that bubbled about inside of him while he struggled to come to grips with what he believed to be the relationship between the character of human experience and the nature of the reality in which those experience is rooted and out of which it develops.

"Others have come along since Jung, and they have undergone a journey of inquiry with respect to Jung that was similar, in some respects, to the kind of exploration that Jung had undergone in relation to Freud and other theoreticians or clinicians of Jung's day. Some of these new kids on the block have operated, to some extent, within a broadly Jungian framework, but they have seen fit to adjust, modify, alter, eliminate, and de-emphasize various facets of the original ideas or theories of Jung in order to try to establish a better fit between their own experiences and the descriptive and explanatory system of understanding that they use to interpret the possible relationship between one's experiences and the nature of reality through which those experiences are given expression.

"Some of us, on the other hand, feel that Jung does not really speak to various dimensions of our experience and/or understanding of reality. As Tammy suggested, we might be intrigued with this or that aspect of

Jung's framework, and, as a result, we might experience a certain amount of resonance with many of the things that he has to say about the implications and ramifications that the search for meaning carries for issues of identity, the self, human fulfillment, completion of personality, and individual development.

"Nonetheless, we also might feel the full potential of human meaning cannot be discovered either through purely psychological processes, in general, or a Jungian approach to things in particular. Consequently, we go in search of something that might constitute a better fit between, on the one hand, our experiences, and, on the other hand, the kind of reality that could have made those experiences possible.

"Like David pointed out earlier, Jung was quite opposed to the desires of some people who wished to borrow the symbols of another culture or mythology and try to import those symbols into a different mythological tradition or set of social/historical conditions. According to Jung, this act of transposing symbols constituted a potential source for considerable distortion, error, and confusion.

"Somewhat ironically, however, Jung himself might have been guilty of those a process of transposition by taking spiritual issues out of context and placing them in a purely psychological framework. In doing this, he might have opened the gates for a great deal of error, distortion and confusion concerning the nature of the reality or realities to which his psychological theory of archetypes attempted to make descriptive and explanatory reference.

"Although an individual starts out on her or his spiritual journey in the world of forms, ultimately, spirituality or mysticism points in a direction that transcends the realm of forms. Therefore, even if one were to grant the existence of Jung's archetypes, they might be a purely formal manifestation of some further dimension of reality and, as those, they might not adequately address that which lies beyond the mode of communication and understanding that is capable of being given expression through one's entering into dialogue with these archetypes.

"As has been said, 'the Tao that can be described is not the Tao'. The principle holds, I believe, for all mystical journeys.

"The only real answer, Art, to the extent your questions can be answered in any formal sense, is to say that one must undertake the

spiritual journey and follow it to its logical and ultimate conclusion. There is no way one can sit back in a rocking chair and think one's way to an understanding of how, and under what circumstances, one can encounter a world that is neither of a physical nor material nature, and there is no way one can reason one's way through what is meant by a realm that transcends forms since reason and logic, as is true also of concepts and language, are themselves forms that are tied to the parameters of possibility served by the structural character and properties of those forms.

"Jung advised individuals who wanted to encounter the realm of archetypes that they must do so under the guidance of someone who knew: the landscape, potential problems, and ways of moving about in the regions of the collective unconscious without becoming: lost, confused or overwhelmed. The language used by mystics seems to say something very similar, except they are speaking about dimensions of reality that are quite different from the psychological realms for which Jung's theoretical framework is attempting to provide a map.

"One cannot replicate an experiment from the sidelines. If one wishes to seek to verify whether, or which parts of, Jung's understanding of things is correct, true, accurate, or tenable, one must follow, to some extent, in his footsteps. Furthermore, if one wishes to test the veracity of a mystic's understanding of the relationship between experience and reality, one must follow in the footsteps of a mystic.

"Unfortunately, there are not enough time, energy, and resources to go about trying to replicate everyone's understanding of their experiences. So, we are faced with choices about which paths of replication and testing we will pursue.

"Our conception of self, identity, meaning, purpose, fulfillment, harmony, human potential, truth, and reality become a complex function of the choices that we make concerning what we attempt to replicate or test or validate. Trying to figure out whether we have chosen wisely or correctly in this regard is what keeps many of us up at night."

A silence came over the group at this point, as if we were all meditating on what had been said. Finally, Art suggested that, perhaps, we should take a short break to make phone calls, run brief errands, get a snack, and/or go to the washroom in whatever order seemed indicated. We could meet back in the lounge area in, say, twenty or thirty minutes.

The suggestion was well received by everyone. As a result, we all went off in various directions.

Chapter 19: Return of the Hero

During the break, I wandered about the several floors on which the different facets of the symposium were being held. For whatever reasons, the prospect of getting a snack didn't seem all that appealing, and although I had no errands to run, phone calls to make, or calls of nature to answer, I was feeling restless.

In somewhat of a preoccupied manner, I had been looking over a variety of symposium-related exhibits, displays and introductory reading materials that were in an area that had been set aside for those purposes. I suppose part of the reason for my preoccupation and restlessness was connected with Rip's mysterious references to my meeting up with someone at the symposium who might be a help at some point in the future.

I didn't believe that I had come to Chicago to attend a mock trial involving origin-of-life issues ... at least, I didn't think this was the reason I was here? Nor did I believe that the point of the Chicago exercise was to become involved in a discussion on Jung, Freud and the nature of the unconscious.

Should I be moving about more, and circulating in different venues of the symposium in an attempt to maximize my exposure to people, circumstances and events. Perhaps, but there was no guarantee any of the other sessions I might choose would advance my purpose any better than staying where I was might be able to accomplish.

As I thought back, trying to recall what Rip actually had said to me, the mists veiling the swamp of my mind began to dissipate a little. He had told me I could do whatever, or go wherever, I pleased.

Events would overtake me. Moreover, the import of his words, as best I could recall, was that the person whom I would meet would be of help to me, not only in relation to the events that would overtake me, but also in some other way or ways later on, possibly in relation to Brian Idaho's situation.

This raised some other problems. How could Rip possibly know events would overtake me in Chicago and that someone would be involved with those events who would be of assistance to me in a variety of ways, including, perhaps, Brian Idaho?

Was Rip part of some vast conspiracy into which I had stumbled and with respect to which I was now but a pawn to be moved about and, if

necessary, sacrificed? Brian knew of the Botclofots. The Botclofots knew of Brian. Yet, I didn't know how anyone knew whom or what they knew.

Had the Botclofots arranged Brian's escape? Was Brian a Botclofot?

Who were the Botclofots, exactly? Why didn't Beth, Brian's own sister, or Jennifer or Ken or Pam, all very intelligent and knowledgeable people, have even a passing acquaintance with the name?

Given what Rip had explained to me with respect to all of the meanings associated with being a member of the Bearers of the Cloth, and given all the charitable work that seemed to be going on at the Center, one wondered why the Botclofots were not a household name. Yet, they seemed to exist in obscurity, or, at the very least, along the very margins of society.

On the first occasion I saw Rip, he sought a handout from me on the streets as I was on the way to my car following the movie. Later, he seemed to have an important role to play at the community center on St. Jude.

Among other things, he talked to me about people who are spiritually intoxicated and who are homeless. These are people whose impoverished condition requires them constantly to live beyond their means just to stay alive from day to day.

Next, he turned my world view upside down by suggesting that, to the spiritually intoxicated, most, if not all, of us, so-called, 'normal' people live lives, not of quiet desperation, but of insipid insanity. Maybe, part of what Rip was trying to convey to me was, in its own way, alluding to a rendering of the Biblical text that ... perhaps, in connection with both worldly well-to-do, as well as worldly-poor but spiritually intoxicated, individuals ... maintained that, respectively, the first shall be last, and the last shall be first.

Conceivably, Rip was suggesting that people who go after this world will be the poor and destitute of the world to come. Yet, those who seek the world to come often end up being among the poor and destitute of this world.

Another question left its signature trail in my mental cloud chamber. How did Rip seem to know about what had happened to Ken and Pam even before the authorities did?

Rip was the one who had broken up the abduction attempt. I was with him for most of the night, and he never left me alone, except when he talked with the person down in the kitchen at the center.

Somehow, I doubted he had taken that opportunity to order a hit on my friends. Moreover, intimating knowledge of the event really made no sense if he was involved in the matter.

Possibly, I was reading something into his words that didn't belong. His words were very general and could have meant almost anything.

Phony psychics, and other would-be portenders of the future, often used this technique of vagueness to induce their clients to fill in the ambiguities with the client's own life events. Furthermore, whenever something subsequently seemed to fit in with what the psychic was foretelling ... usually after conveniently forgetting about any inconsistencies ... the amazing ability of the psychic would have been 'confirmed' yet once again.

However, Rip didn't strike me as someone who was running some kind of a scam. Furthermore, I didn't believe he was part of a conspiracy involving the deaths of Pam and Ken.

Nonetheless, in my gut, I felt Rip somehow knew about Ken and Pam. If his further prognostications concerning Chicago turned out to be true, I would be confronted with some very disturbing questions about what could be known and how it could be known.

At this point in time, the only thing I knew is that for some inexplicable reason I trusted Rip. At the same time, I was uncomfortable with the idea that I could feel so confident and at peace with a piece of 'knowledge' that was so wrapped in uncertainty, ambiguity, confusion and mystery.

Oddly enough, I had the same kind of experience with Brian Idaho when I visited him at the prison. I was hoping these guys were not Ted Bundy clones ... people who are charming, convincing, friendly and very, very deadly.

Maybe part of the training of Botclofots is to learn the art of instant hypnosis. If so, large portions of my present feelings about, attitudes toward, and perceptions of Rip and Brian might be little more than post-hypnotic suggestions being manifested in the form of a positive regard for them, as well as in the form of a willingness to help them out.

Memories of the Star Wars trilogy came briefly to life. I remembered the capacity of Jedi warriors, including those who had been captured by the dark side of 'the Force', to fog and control the minds of those who opposed them.

That was fiction. This was ... I didn't know. Maybe Rasputin or Jim Jones was closer to the mark.

Here I was in Chicago, feeling restless about meeting a person whom I had come to meet at the suggestion of someone I really didn't know at all. The fact of the matter was that I was either in over my head, or I was in over my head. Whichever one it turned out to be, I definitely was swallowing water while trying to tread water in the deep end of the pool.

I checked my watch and decided to head back to the lounge area. Somehow, the questions and problems surrounding the unconscious or mythology, however difficult they might be in some respects, seemed a lot more tractable than some of the problems and questions upon which I just had been reflecting.

When all the members of the group had reconvened and settled down, we began the session in the same way we had ended with the last session. There was silence for a short period of time.

Finally, Vince Ardello broke the quietude with: "I might be premature on this, but I believe we have reached a closure, of sorts, in the facet of our discussion concerning Jung. If my perceptions in this regard are correct, I'm wondering if we might get back to the topic of Joseph Campbell's approach to myths that, if you all will remember, we were beginning to explore before David barged in and distracted us with all this Jungian nonsense."

"Don't listen to him, David," advised Tammy Winthrop, "Vince is known far and wide for the rapidly deteriorating condition of his character due to the ravages of the acute, early-onset, manners-deficit disorder with which he is afflicted from time to time."

Vince managed a rather convincing expression of wounded innocence in response to Tammy's words. His eyes seemed to beg for a sympathetic understanding of his troubled world.

Continuing on, Tammy suggested: "However, we all know that if we do not cater to Vince's wishes, there is bound to be all manner of unpleasantness that will create considerable embarrassment for

everyone except him. I think we better indulge Vince on this, so, Andrea, as our ranking, amateur expert on Campbell, perhaps, you could get the ball rolling a little with your usual, insightful eloquence."

"I fear Tammy is promising far more than I can deliver," Andrea fretted, "but with an introduction like that I feel duty-bound to, at least, say something." She was about to speak when she checked herself, and turning to Vince, she inquired with feigned solicitousness: "Would this meet with your approval?"

Beaming with the contentedness of someone who is getting his way, Vince gave an imperious gesture of magnanimity with his hand. The royal assent had been bestowed.

"Given our previous discussion of Jung," Andrea indicated, "perhaps the best place to start taking a look at some of what Campbell believed is by addressing some of the ways in which he might have differed from Jung. I say: 'might have differed', because there are some people, as Tammy pointed out prior to asking David to speak about Jung, who consider Campbell to be sort of a neo -Jungian.

"I agree there seem to be a certain number of commonalities shared by the theoretical frameworks of both Campbell and Jung. Nevertheless ... and you will have to decide for yourselves whether this is for the better or worse ... I believe Campbell had introduced his own, unique set of twists to the idea of myths that suggest his position was not merely a derivative of Jungian theory.

"Campbell himself indicated that although he held Jung in great esteem, nonetheless, Campbell did not consider himself to be a Jungian.

He respected Jung without feeling compelled to defer to the latter's theoretical judgments.

"There are other considerations beside Campbell's disavowals, however, that tend to substantiate his claims. One of the factors that lends support to his contention in this regard is the manner in which Campbell, unlike Jung, maintained that myths had a metaphysical reality and significance, not merely a psychological reality and significance.

"For Campbell, myths spoke to the actual nature of reality. They were not just a function of therapeutic ventures into, or interpretations of, some aspect of psychological space.

"In fact, Campbell seemed to feel therapy, at least of the Jungian variety ... and, maybe, other kinds as well ... was sought out only by those who possessed no myth of their own. In a sense, I guess, one might even contend Campbell might have believed the absence of myth in a person's life had a causal role to play in the development of various kinds of emotional or psychological problems that created a need for therapeutic assistance of some sort.

"There is little doubt Campbell considered myth to be absolutely essential in the life of an individual. For him, myth was the key to understanding oneself and the nature of reality.

"By contrast, Jung believed that what was essential in one's contact with the realm of the unconscious was therapy rather than myth. Myth was just one means, along with dreams, art and the active imagination, that could be used as a therapeutic vehicle for helping to transport one toward a healthy engagement with the realm of archetypes.

"In brief, consequently, the role of myths for Jung was an option or possibility that could be pursued if desirable, but was not essential, or even necessary, to the process of therapy. For Campbell, therapy was not only unnecessary but clear evidence pointing to the absence of myth in an individual's life, whereas myth was the sine qua non of the human journey toward fulfillment of the self.

"Moreover, unlike Jung, Campbell was quite hostile to organized religion. Among other things, he felt that giving emphasis to the authority of the institution over the freedom of the individual placed entirely unnecessary obstacles in the way of those who were seeking to realize the purpose and function of myth in their lives.

"According to Campbell, the church, temple, synagogue or mosque did not lead to realization of the self. Myth alone made such self-fulfillment possible since in myth one found the only wisdom that really mattered to issues of self-realization and self-fulfillment.

"Furthermore, Campbell did not appear to believe any kind of mystical or spiritual practices ... those as chanting, meditation, fasting, or the like ... were required to be used in conjunction with myth in order for an individual to be able to pursue, or benefit from, the treasury of wisdom that allegedly was hidden beneath the surface of myth. If a myth was presented, or introduced, by the right kind of sage who helped one correctly

interpret the meaning, significance, value and purpose of a given myth, the individual seeker had everything he or she needed in order to gain access to, and unlock the nature of, the unconscious realms to which myth was calling one.

"As David informed us earlier, Jung tried to discourage people from getting too entangled with individual myths because of, in Jung's opinion, the inability of myths, when considered in isolation from a proper mythology, to help an individual bring to fruition a complete, balanced personality. Campbell, on the other hand, encouraged individuals to give themselves ... mind, heart and soul ... over to, and completely identify with, a myth, because only myth had the capacity to open one to the unconscious self.

"In some ways, Campbell seemed to feel humans were, to a degree, hard-wired with the potential for responding to the way myths called us to the realm of the unconscious. In fact, he borrowed from the work of Konrad Lorenz and Niko Tinbergen in order to suggest how this might be possible.

"Both of these latter researchers spoke about the notion of 'innate releasing mechanisms'. These hypothetical systems were considered to be capable of generating species-specific behaviors when animals in which this mechanism were operative were presented with a particular stimulus capable of triggering the firing of those an innate releasing mechanism.

"Sometimes the stimulus that served as the triggering device for the activation of the behavior controlled by an innate releasing mechanism was also innate. For instance, baby chickens will display a stereotypical flight/panic response whenever an object that casts a shadow shaped like a hawk is flown above or over baby chickens, even if the object in question is not actually a hawk but only hawk-like in shape. Yet, if the shape of some other kind of non-predator, those as a pigeon or duck, is flown over the baby chickens, the same kind of flight/panic response is not elicited.

"Apparently, in this particular case, there is nothing being learned through experience that shapes either the triggering stimulus or the character of the behavior being manifested through the firing of the innate releasing mechanism that regulates those behavior. The whole stimulus-release/response package is part of the biological equipment inherited by baby chickens.

"There are other cases, however, in which a special kind of learning process, known as imprinting, occurs. Apparently, this kind of learning can take place

only within a critical period of development that seems to vary with the species being considered.

"Yet, if one works within the constraints imposed by this critical period for imprinting, one discovers that one can establish different kinds of stimulus triggering relationships with some of the innate releasing mechanism operating in a given species. For instance, under normal conditions, certain relatively young birds exhibit what might be called a 'following response' when presented with the stimulus of the mother's presence those that wherever the mother goes, the offspring will follow.

"Nonetheless, if one substitutes a human being for the normal, species-appropriate mother during the critical period in which the imprinting of the following response takes place for that species, the young birds will follow only that human being. The stimulus of those a human image has been substituted for the stimulus of the species-appropriate mother, and, as a result, it is the human image rather than the normal mother's image that has been linked up with the neural, innate, releasing mechanism responsible for the following-response during the critical period for imprinting those stimulus information.

"According to Campbell, human beings also have, at least some, innate releasing mechanisms within them. Moreover, humans can undergo an imprinting process in which a certain kind of stimulus can be hooked up with a particular innate releasing mechanism.

"More specifically, the symbols inherent in a given myth are the stimuli that trigger the firing of the innate releasing mechanism within us. These innate releasing mechanisms are the archetypes, and the behaviors that these archetypes regulate concern all of the emotions and actions that are appropriate to the journey inward to the unconscious and realization of the self.

"Campbell believes the people who create myth understand the nature of the relationship between the symbols that are implanted in a myth and the character of the underlying archetypes. Therefore, when people encounter the symbols inherent in a myth that has been constructed by people with knowledge of the self and the unconscious, the archetypes within us will automatically release the appropriate sorts of emotions and behavior that are conducive to working toward realizing the unconscious wisdom with which the archetypes are associated and to which they give expression.

"The archetypes ... those as birth, old age, the masculine and feminine, suffering, light and dark, as well as a variety of other themes of development and life ... are innate. On the other hand, the symbols in myths that trigger an archetype's capacity to release appropriate kinds of emotion and action can be variable and introduced through experience.

"Presumably, different stages of development constitute so many critical periods in our lives. As those, we become open to the imprinting of certain forms of experience during different stages in which we are sensitized to the problems, challenges and possibilities of these way stations of development.

"The symbols of myths are specifically designed, according to Campbell, to tie in with the learning that takes place during those critical periods involving themes related to archetypal patterns. Thus, when we encounter a myth, the symbols of the myth resonate both with our lived experience as well as the underlying archetypes that are relevant to those experience.

"Part of the problem with Campbell's theoretical framework at this point is that some of his discussion of archetypes is couched in ambiguity. One is never quite sure whether archetypes are inherited or acquired since, from time to time, he appears to speak in terms that allow for both possibilities.

"Yet, if archetypes are acquired anew by each generation, as he sometimes seems to suggest is the case, one has difficulty understanding how these archetypes are connected to the great wisdom of the unconscious to which archetypes are supposed to give expression and to which they are intended to call us back. If archetypes are acquired anew by each generation, one wonders why we should feel compelled, as Campbell insists we must, to consider archetype -driven myths as worthy of completely giving ourselves over to and identifying with mind, heart and soul.

"If archetypes are acquired anew with each passing generation, a certain amount of confusion is generated. This is because one is unclear as to why one should suppose that myths are completely sufficient unto themselves as the only means of helping a person to obtain self-realization and self-fulfillment.

"In my opinion, Campbell's theoretical framework becomes much more consistent when archetypes remain as givens or constants, and symbols are what can be acquired anew with each passing generation. The task of the creators of myth for any given generation, then, would become one of ensuring that the symbolic seeds planted in these myths are capable of triggering the archetypal innate releasing mechanisms that supposedly govern the emotions and actions crucial to an individual's inward journey toward the unconscious."

"Andrea," interjected Ben Blake, "I wonder if I might interrupt you at this point and raise some concerns I have with Campbell's approach to the issue of self-realization. I hope you'll forgive me if I am about to preempt anything that you were intending to discuss."

"By all means, Ben, go ahead," Andrea assured him.

"Well, I've often wondered about the following problem. If things are as automatic as Campbell seems to suppose is the case by his discussion of innate releasing mechanisms, why aren't more people self-realized and self-fulfilled?"

"In other words, presumably, when we encounter the symbols that have been planted in myths that have been designed specifically by various sages to serve as triggers for the firing of the archetypal innate releasing mechanisms, this symbolic encounter should set in motion a series of steps ending with the release of the emotions and actions that are necessary for undertaking the journey inward. Yet, despite the presence of these myths and their wide dissemination through various kinds of mass media, many, perhaps most, of the people who come into contact with those symbols don't seem to get swept along by a tide of emotions and actions that culminates in a successful completion of a journey of self-realization and self-fulfillment.

"All of this seems to suggest several things. First, maybe human beings aren't as hardwired as Campbell would have us believe through his use of Tinbergen's and Lorenz' notion of innate releasing mechanism in conjunction with archetypes.

Secondly, perhaps the journey inward is not as automatic as Campbell sometimes appears to maintain is the case. Moreover, there might be many factors of experience, personality and life -circumstances that can interfere with the way, and the extent to which, someone might respond to the symbols inherent in a myth.

"In addition, and following from the foregoing considerations, I feel Campbell is on somewhat shaky and contentious grounds when he attempts to contend that learning how to properly interpret the symbols of myth through contact with people who are capable of imparting those understanding is sufficient for the process of self-realization and self-fulfillment to occur. After all, Campbell likely considers himself to be a person who understands the proper interpretation of myth, and, yet, despite his guidance to students, to readers of his books, and to viewers of the multi-part PBS television series that delineated his perspective in some detail, many of the individuals who have been exposed to his guidance over a significant period of time haven't necessarily become self-realized and self-fulfilled.

"None of what I'm saying is intended to denigrate Joseph Campbell as a teacher or scholar. He appears to have been quite gifted in both areas.

Nevertheless, one is left wondering about whether, or not, innate releasing mechanisms actually are involved in any of this; and, whether, or not, the journey inward is as automatic as Campbell sometimes seems to suppose; and, whether, or not, having a correct interpretation, along with rational reflection are sufficient tools for permitting an individual to successfully complete the inward journey?"

"You've raised some interesting points," acknowledged Andrea, "some of which I was intending to cover and some that are new to me. I don't know if you will think the following relevant to your musings, Ben, and I certainly have no desire to serve as an apologist for Campbell, but he did go on record saying he considered those things as institutionalized religion to be obstacles that encroached on people's ability to be free to pursue and respond to the teachings of myth.

"Furthermore, he advised people to surrender to, and completely identify with, the dynamic of a myth and its potential for leading one to the unconscious and realization of the self. Conceivably, an individual's failure to heed this advice prevented those a person from benefiting by that which myth, and Campbell's interpretation of myth, had to offer."

"Andrea, I realize you're an interested student in, rather than a proponent of, Campbell's work," stated Ben, "so what I have to say is really being thrown out for general consideration, but what, exactly, does completely surrendering to, and identifying with, a myth involve? Is this just a matter of believing in, and accepting as true, what someone's

interpretation claims is the truth concerning those a myth? Or, is something necessary beyond mere belief in, or acceptance of, the interpretation of a myth?

"Should one become obsessed with a myth in order to properly identify with it? Should one become fanatical about the myth in order to surrender oneself to it completely?

"I suspect Joseph Campbell would say no to both of these suggestions. Yet, one is not at all clear about what one should be doing that has some sort of practical or reasonable demeanor to it rather than possessing an obsessive or fanatical quality.

"When Campbell speaks about the emotions that are released through the process in which a myth's symbol elicits human response, is this merely a matter of having emotions of a certain level of intensity? And, if so, what level of intensity is this, and why is such a level of intensity considered to be appropriate?

"Should the emotional intensity be just high enough to help motivate or inspire an individual to carry through in the realm of action? And, if one does not have this level of emotional intensity, then to what is one to attribute the problem?

"Is the reason for those an inadequate emotional response due to an improper construction of the myth or an error in the nature of the symbols that were implanted there? Or, does the fault lie wholly with the individual who is encountering the myth? Or, should we consider the possibility that Campbell's description of the nature, potential and power of myth is not what he claims is the case?

"Should the actions in which an individual engages be limited to the sorts of thing that Campbell did, such as reading about, interpreting and reflecting on myths? Or, was Campbell mistaken in all of this and, in point of fact, other kinds of action are required, and, if so, what are these actions?

"Moreover, I'm sure there were millions of people among Campbell's students, readers and viewers who felt about organized religion in the same way that Campbell did. Why haven't all these people become self-realized and self-fulfilled... as I presume is not the case or else we would be living, I think, in a much different, hopefully much improved, society than the one we find around us?"

"Ben, I share some of your concerns in relation to Campbell's work," asserted Vince, "but I have a feeling Andrea had a few more things to say that might have some bearing on our questions. Why don't we let her finish and see how these issues fare at that time?"

Nodding in agreement with Vince's words, Ben apologized to Andrea. "I'm sorry for interrupting. I think your discussion must have triggered some sort of innate releasing mechanism in me," he said with a smile.

"No apologies are necessary, Ben," she replied. "I do have a few more things to say, but I'm not certain any of it will address your concerns in a way that will satisfy either you or Vince.

"On the other hand, the new material might provide a bit fuller outline of Campbell's general perspective than presently is the case. If you bear with me, I should be able to finish things off in fairly short order, and, then, in line with Vince's suggestion, we can see how things stand."

Ben gave a sign requesting her to resume. Upon seeing Ben's gesture, Andrea said: "There is another important difference between Campbell and Jung that I forgot to mention earlier, and this has to do with how they viewed the unconscious.

"For Jung, the unconscious was always unconscious and remained so even after one's encounters with it. As David had pointed out earlier, one of the differences between Freud and Jung is that the former believed much of the contents of the unconscious were filled with repressed materials, whereas Jung considered the unconscious to contain archetypes that had never been conscious and really were not capable of being made conscious, although the archetypes certainly could shape, direct and modulate the structural character of consciousness.

"If we leave aside, for the moment, the question of whether or not the psychological material of primitive humans ... out of which archetypes, somehow, supposedly were constructed ... gave expression to conscious or unconscious forces, then, one can say Jung believed the archetypes did not consist of formerly conscious material that had been deposited in the unconscious. Campbell, on the other hand, maintained the unconscious consisted of materials that once had been conscious but, for reasons he never made very clear, were, now, removed from, or lost from, or separated off from our normal modalities of consciousness.

"Indeed, Campbell's book: *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, that he is reported to have considered his most important work, has, as one of its central motifs, an exploration of the hero's quest in relation to this lost dimension of being fully human. According to Campbell, the task of the hero is to reclaim, repossess, or rediscover that which human beings once consciously knew and understood.

"In fact, the sages who are responsible for constructing myths are examples of the hero who have regained the lost wisdom. After having completed the first part of the mission, these heroes have set about consciously planting various metaphysical seeds, in the form of symbols within a given myth, with the intention of inducing others to take the inward journey to the unconscious and also make conscious what is now hidden.

"The basic story line in all hero myths is, for Campbell, essentially the same. As one moves from one culture to the next, whatever differences occur in various hero myths are considered by Campbell to be unimportant to the basic teaching, purpose and function of these myths, and, as those, these differences are part and parcel of Campbell's claim there is only one hero who is manifested in the form of a thousand different faces, both literally and symbolically.

"The once and future hero ... who is always a male figure ... is, through one means or another, induced to leave behind the so-called normal world of everyday life and journey to another kind of realm, world, or dimension of being. In this new world, the hero encounters, and is exposed to, all manner of incredible, non-ordinary forces, powers and wonders.

"The hero is challenged, in some fashion, by one, or more, facets of this wondrous, mysterious realm. Yet, following a struggle and, eventually, a triumph over that by which this individual is being challenged, the hero returns to the world of everyday, normal life as an enlightened being with gifts to bestow on those who had been left behind at the beginning of the journey.

"The wisdom that the hero brings back from the journey is of two broad kinds. First of all, the hero comes to understand there is much more to both the world and himself than he previously believed or understood to be possible. Secondly, the individual gains insight into the fundamental or essential nature of the world and being human.

"Each dimension of essential reality, whether concerning the world or the individual, is, in a sense, a flip side of the same metaphysical coin. Within

each of us, as well as within the world, a Divine principle is operative that is responsible for the identity and nature of, respectively, human beings and the physical/material world.

"The hero returns from his journey with the knowledge that one does not have to travel to some other mysterious realm or world in order to be able to encounter the ultimate animating principle of Divinity. For the enlightened individual, Divine, or ultimate, reality can be experienced in the midst of the material, physical world.

"Consequently, the material/physical world is not, at least as far as gaining access to essential or ultimate reality is concerned, the barrier we often tend to suppose it to be. When properly understood, this material world is one of the modalities through which ultimate reality reveals itself.

"Be this as it might, nonetheless, Campbell indicates one only comes to this realization after journeying to, and gaining insight into, the contents of the unconscious. One doesn't start with the external world, and through that encounter, one brings enlightenment to the internal world. Rather, one starts with the internal world, and through that encounter, one gains insight into the real and essential nature of the external world.

"To be sure, one first comes into contact with the echoes of the ultimate nature of things when one hears of, or reads about, the myths in the physical/material world since these myths contain the symbols that are capable of summoning one to the inward journey. However, these symbolic seeds only point to those a possibility, and must be properly interpreted before, according to Campbell, one can realize their meaning, value and significance.

"During the hero's journey inward to the unconscious realms of the mind, the individual must face, and triumph over, the personal ego of the everyday, normal world. When this transformation has taken place, then the individual surfaces again with a new sense of self that is described as being egoless."

"Campbell considers the personal ego to be the source of all delusions, distortions, desires and problems to which human beings are vulnerable. Only by becoming removed, or detached, from one's sense of a personal ego did Campbell believe the individual could obtain ultimate enlightenment and, consequently, gain insight into the true nature of the self and the world.

"By arguing in this fashion, Campbell aligns himself with the essential perspective of certain aspects of Eastern religious traditions those as Buddhism and Hinduism. He tended to express, at least up to a certain transitional point in his thinking, a great deal of admiration for this dimension of the teaching of these traditions.

"There was no individual as those. All that existed was the one essential, ultimate principle of Divinity that was clothed in the guise of a thousand different outer faces of the hero.

"This brings us to, yet, another essential difference between the orientations of Campbell and Jung, if not, as well, almost all of modern psychotherapy. One of the primary functions of psychotherapeutic intervention is to restore the individual to a state of healthy, ego functioning and consciousness.

"For Campbell, this goal was an oxymoron. Since the ego was the source of all our problems, by restoring the individual to those consciousness, one could not possibly produce a healthy person.

"True health lay in the direction of the egoless self of the enlightened individual. Therapy, of whatever sort, could not accomplish this.

"This task could be achieved only through myth. This is the reason why he considered myth was indispensable to the life of the individual, since without myth, Campbell believed the individual had no access to ultimate nature, identity, the self, or fulfillment.

"This also is related to Campbell's firm belief that modern civilization really can make no contribution that is capable of adding to, or improving upon, the insights of ancient wisdom. Since the fundamental insight of this wisdom concerns understanding why the condition of egolessness is to be preferred to a personal ego, all modern peoples can do is agree with this wisdom and set about realizing those a condition.

"The hero of myth and real life is considered a hero for several reasons. On the one hand, the hero is prepared to venture forth on a hazardous, difficult journey or quest that most others in normal society are not prepared to undertake.

"In addition, the motivations underlying the hero's quest are selfless ones. The hero wishes to share the wisdom with all of humanity.

"According to Campbell, the hero is tempted to remain in the new world of enlightenment. Apparently, there exists within the hero an inclination to

completely surrender to this essential reality and, in the process, avoid having to be confronted by the duties and obligations that populate the world of individuality.

"Consequently, the final stage of the hero's journey is to disengage the self from the new world to which one has traveled. This is not easy since the hero has begun to feel he has finally arrived at his real home in the universe."

Andrea picked up her soft drink can and finished off its contents. Settling a little more deeply into her chair, she signaled that her Campbell retrospective had finished as well.

"Personally," stated Melanie Teasdale, "there are quite a few aspects of Campbell's excursion into the realm of the hero myth that I find problematic. First of all, I think a lot of the analysis involves 20-20 hindsight.

"For example, I don't really understand how the hero should know before-the-fact of the journey that it is going to be hazardous or difficult. For all we know, the guy has wanderlust or is bored and, therefore, is looking for some kind of excitement or stimulation.

"In many, if not most, ways, the hero has no real conception of what he is going to encounter or find. As a result, at this point in the story, I have difficulty in understanding how to construe this as being the stuff of heroism.

"Secondly, since the so-called hero doesn't know what lies in store for him, he hardly can be said to be undertaking the journey for the benefit of the rest of humanity. If anything, the quality of heroism only arises after the individual is confronted by the desire to stay in the new world, and, consequently, he has to struggle to overcome this inclination in order to return to the normal world and share his wisdom with the rest of his fellow human beings.

"Moreover, once the individual returns to the everyday, normal world, he, supposedly, realizes the principle of Divinity is active in the normal world. Therefore, in reality, the individual has lost nothing by returning to the normal world since he brings the new world with him in the form of his enlightened condition.

"This raises several other problems for me. If the individual truly had become enlightened in the new world to which he had journeyed, why didn't

he understand that nothing would be lost by returning to the normal, everyday world from which he originally had set out?

"Just as importantly, one wonders what 'desire', in the form of wanting to stay in the new world, is doing in a supposedly egoless individual. If the individual is detached from everything, would this not include desire in all its hydra-headed modes of being?

"Similarly, why would a, now, egoless individual, who allegedly had set out originally with the heroic intention of benefiting humanity, wish to avoid the responsibilities and obligations inherent in the normal world? If anything, one might suppose the egoless individual is in a better position to carry out those duties without having to try to do so through the problematic qualities of selfishness, egotism, greed, and other debilitating manifestations of a personal ego.

"Furthermore, until one reaches the fourth volume of his *The Masks of God* series ... namely, *Creative Mythology* ... Campbell is consistently a critic of western individualism and an advocate of the egoless communalism he believes is being proposed by eastern traditions. Yet, when considered from Campbell's perspective, the qualities of a true individual have carried the day.

"Someone who already is enlightened does not go on a journey seeking some missing aspect of oneself. This is so because this kind of individual realizes, as part of the wisdom of the condition of enlightenment, that there really is no other truth or missing element to discover since the enlightened state is described as being complete unto itself.

"Moreover, one might suppose that someone who is egoless might not have to struggle with human weakness, ignorance, fear and desire. One assumes this battle already would have been won during the journey to an egoless condition and constitutes one of many benefits that ensues from enlightenment.

"Presumably, the egoless being has no sense of sacrificing anything since what is most precious is carried within this individual. This would be true, even if, in contrast to Campbell's hero, the normal world to which such a being returned was devoid of the principle of Divinity.

"Ignorance, desire, and delusions are all qualities of the individual prior to enlightenment. However, so are the qualities of courage, struggle, and

self-sacrifice that are necessary equipment for the difficult journey to egolessness.

"A person might start out with little or no understanding of the meaning, significance, value or possibilities inherent in the journey inward, and, as a result, one cannot really call this kind of journey heroic. The nobility and integrity of heroism only begin to surface when the individual starts to encounter danger and difficulty on the journey and does not turn back, and when, in spite of those danger and difficulty, the individual sees, however dimly, the potential ... but, by no means, assured ... benefit for oneself and all of humanity that is possible if one is prepared to struggle on and sacrifice oneself during a journey of hardships and hazards.

"Furthermore, I believe the enlightened person knows that people, in general, probably will not be inclined to undertake the journey to realized selfhood after the hero has returned from successful completion of the quest, any more than they might have undertaken those a quest prior to his journey. The enlightened individual also realizes, I feel, that each individual has to decide, for himself, herself, or themselves whether to respond to the symbols of the myth or the entreaties of the returned hero and step into the unknown in order to undertake the trip.

"If anything, one might assume that since the hero knows the normal condition of human beings, he returns to the everyday world in order to serve as, among other things, a beacon of compassion, justice, love, and service ... not only for all of humanity but for all of being, whether animate or not. If people will not, or cannot, undertake the journey to self-realization, the enlightened individual owes a duty of care to them as a result of, among other things, the hero's recognition of the gratitude he feels for having had enlightenment bestowed on his being.

"Nevertheless, while attending to the needs of humanity and creation, the enlightened person still could search for those individuals who might be induced to undertake the journey of discovery. If, and when, those individuals are located, the enlightened individual would attempt to encourage, assist and support that undertaking in whatever way is possible.

"Campbell maintains the meaning of the hero myth is about the process of reclaiming or rediscovering the realm of the unconscious. Yet, in line with our previous discussion of Jung, I'm disinclined to believe that a recovery of the unconscious is the actual goal of the hero's project of rediscovery.

"The individual might find enlightenment, the self, identity and the true nature of the world after completing the journey of realization, but these are not found in something called the unconscious. The journey can be nowhere but from Divinity to Divinity ... the only difference being that at the end of the journey one understands this, whereas at the beginning of the journey one did not possess this insight.

"I feel people those as Campbell and Jung use the term: 'the unconscious', as a conceptual place holder for purposes of having something to which they can make reference when talking about the journey to selfhood ... in whatever way this journey might be conceived. In reality, however, I don't feel they knew what they were referring to by this term since it actually gave expression to everything about which they were ignorant and toward which their efforts all were expended in trying to probe the inner nature of this mystery."

Picking up where Melanie had left off, Colby Shaw began to speak. "When Campbell visited India in 1954, he was completely revolted by, and disgusted with, what he observed there. In addition to the oppressiveness of the omnipresent poverty and caste system in India, Campbell was horrified by what he considered to be that society's lack of respect for the individual.

"Apparently, Campbell had been so ensconced in the rarefied and idealized world of books, he didn't seem to have much awareness of what was going on around him in the everyday world. Why he should have been shocked by what he found in India is itself somewhat startling given that the history of the world almost everywhere, and pretty much most of the time, is replete with deep-rooted poverty, oppression, of one sort or another, and, as well, a rampant disregard for the individual.

"This was so even in the America of the mid-1950s. Campbell, seemingly, hadn't bothered to take a look at what was going on around him in those days in relation to Native peoples, blacks, women and other groups of impoverished and/or disenfranchised people living in America.

"Whatever Campbell might have written in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, as far as I am concerned, his response to the plight of people in India hardly seemed to be that of an enlightened person who understood the Divine principle was present in the material/physical world and operating in accordance with its own essential reality, not the expectations of Joseph Campbell. Presumably, the enlightened person might have understood that

poverty, oppression and disregard for the individual are the inevitable result of the activities and understanding of people who were still very much attached to their personal egos.

"Rather than permit those conditions to revolt and disgust him, he should have seen them as evidence in support of everything to which he was making reference in his books concerning the difference between realized and unrealized human beings and why there was a desperate need for the hero's quest. Rather than running away horrified and disgusted, he should have exercised some compassion and tried to bring about changes, however small, in those conditions.

"Unlike Jung, who was prepared to risk himself by venturing forth emotionally and psychologically into what were, for him, uncharted territories, Campbell never actually took the journey into the unknown to meet, face to face, the tremendous forces that are present in the unknown. He was a brilliant scholar, but I have my doubts as to whether he ever bothered, except in a broad conceptual manner, to follow in the footsteps of the hero about whom he spoke in those glowing and admiring terms in many of his books.

"Jung's works have the ring of an authentic explorer who, on the basis of personal experience, is trying to map out the new frontier. The fact he might have misunderstood some of what he saw, or encountered, doesn't detract from the boldness, courageousness, and even, at times, the remarkable insight of his efforts.

"Campbell's works, on the other hand, seem more like so many travel-logs in which the author is writing about places that are the subject of stories spun by other people who might have visited those locations but to which the author has never really traveled. The descriptions in these travel-logs might or might not be correct, depending on the accuracy of the original accounts on which they are based, but they are purely second hand and not rooted in direct experience.

"Reflecting on those stories, exotic places and travelers, can never be used as a substitute for the actual experiences that are derived from an authentic journey. Yet, in essence, Campbell seems to be trying to argue that thinking about doing these things is the same as having done them.

"I think many people are attracted to Campbell's teachings because he appears to be offering something that we all desire. We want a way to become

enlightened and realized that is purely conceptual and that can be accomplished without much struggle or any real sacrifice on our parts.

"We want to be transformed, but we also are afraid of changing. We become intimidated by, and are afraid of, anything that promises real, essential change in our lives.

"We claim to long for egolessness. Yet, at the same time, we desperately are hoping we can bring along our ego and that we won't be asked to check it at the threshold to enlightenment."

Ben Blake contributed to the running commentary, at this point, by remarking: "Irrespective of whatever other reservations I might have concerning Jung's perspective, one of the differences between him and Campbell that I've always appreciated was the healthy respect that

Jung had for the complexity of forces at work in the unknown realms in which he was interested. I find far less of this kind of respect in Campbell, although there can be little doubt Campbell had great respect for the wisdom that he believed could be obtained by venturing into the unknown worlds beneath the surface of myth.

"Jung never believed the forces inherent in the world of archetypes could be tamed. There were dimensions transcendent even to the world of archetypes ... a world that he believed was itself beyond human abilities to master or comprehend.

"Campbell, on the other hand, often seems to give the impression that the hero is one who conquers and tames the forces encountered during the inward journey. While this might be true as far as one's struggle with one's own personal ego is concerned, the same cannot be said of the principle of Divinity that is realized during the egoless state.

"This principle of Divinity is not something that one masters or tames. In fact, one would be more accurate if one were to contend this principle of Divinity has helped one to master and tame the unruliness and rebellious ignorance of the personal ego.

"The hero's victory has been won while venturing forth in an unknown world. Yet, the victory is really over the enemy ... in other words, the personal ego ... that the hero has brought with him from the everyday world into the regions of the new world.

"Nothing of the new world has been tamed or conquered. The hero is a hero for facing himself and choosing Divinity over his own ego, even though,

when all of this is looked at from the egoless side of things, I'm sure this decision process is seen as a no-brainer.

"Campbell calls on us to surrender completely to the forces of the new world. Jung, however, advises caution.

"To be sure, Jung is warning us in this fashion because he feels the ego must be protected from identifying too deeply with the realm of archetypes and, as a result, running the risk of the dissolution of identity and healthy ego functioning. Nevertheless, Jung also is warning us in this fashion because he knows, based on personal experience, one is capable of being misled, confused and destroyed by some of the forces associated with the world of archetypes.

"In a sense, Jung is counseling us to look before we leap, and if we do leap, we should take care not to leap too far. Campbell, on the other hand, seems to be advising us that in the context of responding to the symbols of myth, he who hesitates is lost, and, moreover, there is no those thing as leaping too far.

"As Colby has indicated, however, Jung's counsel is rooted in actual experience. Campbell's advice is based on little more than armchair musings on these issues.

"Consequently, Jung's cautionary note is nuanced in a way that only comes from the benefit of lived experience, while Campbell's theoretical encouragement lacks the tempering quality that is derived from having seen, in a direct fashion, that there are aspects of the journey, or facets of the forces encountered on this quest, that are quite independent of the ego, yet, nonetheless, are capable of leading one away from the condition of enlightenment. In other words, there might be good reasons why one ought not give oneself, in an indiscriminate fashion, over to, or surrender to, certain forces and dimensions encountered during the inward journey.

"Not only does one's relationship with the external world have a potential for generating illusion and delusion, one's relationship with the internal world has this potential as well. As a result, one would be well advised to exercise some degree of discretion before surrendering to the forces, powers and wonders that one runs into during one's journey.

"These considerations lead to another issue with respect to Campbell. This involves what appears to me to be an inconsistency in his view of the status of the world.

"Sometimes, one finds Campbell talking about the worthless nature of the normal, everyday world. At other times, Campbell characterizes this world as, ultimately, not being essentially different from the reality the enlightened hero discovers in the new world to which the hero has journeyed during his quest.

"Surely, in all of this, the real nature of the world remains constant. What varies is the person's relationship to, and understanding of, that world's nature.

"The everyday world is not what is worthless. What is worthless is our attitudes toward, and our ways of interacting with, that world.

"Our ignorance and condition of being unenlightened are what create the illusion of a worthless world. Therefore, part of the wisdom that the returning hero has to share with humanity concerns the fact of our having devalued the true nature of the world through the faulty understandings that we are imposing on that world.

"Campbell was right, I feel, to criticize, among others, Jung when these people sought to get their clients to hold on to ego-consciousness and to strengthen the role of the ego in everyday functioning. Yet, Jung might have been right ... although, perhaps, for the wrong reasons ... to treat the everyday world as real rather than illusory and worthless as Campbell sometimes is inclined to do, at least prior to the fourth volume of *The Masks of God*.

"On the other hand, Campbell was right, I believe, to argue that the principle of Divinity is actively present in the everyday world. The nearest that Jung comes to any of this, which is not really near at all, is to allow for the possibility that the individual might project archetypal elements from the realm of the collective unconscious onto different facets of the external world.

"Nonetheless, in my opinion, and I agree with Colby on this, one of Campbell's shortcomings was that Campbell didn't necessarily understand what he was saying. As Colby has suggested, perhaps the reason for this is that his theory might have been uninformed by actual mystical or spiritual experiences.

"In any event, one finds, I think, some signs of the inconsistent status of the world within Campbell's framework when one reflects, somewhat, on his reaction to his experiences in India. If Campbell really understood what he

was saying about the true nature of the world, he would have put his trip to India in proper perspective.

"When people devalue the true nature of the world, they automatically are prepared to devalue the people who live in that world. Alternatively, when people devalue their own true nature and, instead, become entangled in the machinations of their personal egos, those individuals also will devalue the true nature of both the world as well as the true nature of other human beings.

"Furthermore, professing to believe in the teachings of a religious or spiritual tradition is not the same thing as sincerely living in accordance with those teachings. Campbell, however, often seems to feel the former realm of mere belief will somehow guarantee the realization and implementation of what is being professed."

"I've been listening quite intently," intervened Tammy Winthrop, "to what Andrea, Colby and Ben have been saying. Suddenly, an idea came to me. This idea might or might not be correct, but it makes a lot of sense, at least to me, when one considers it in the context of what appears to be a major shift in Campbell's thinking that, to the best of my knowledge, he never explained ... or, at least, never explained to my satisfaction.

"In any case, the idea is this. When Campbell went to India and saw that true, sincere action did not necessarily follow from belief, maybe he was shaken concerning his own understanding of things. After all, if everything worked the way his theory said it did, he should have wondered how these sort of oppressive, impoverished and individual-devaluing conditions could be possible in a land that, supposedly, was the origin for the notion of egoless enlightenment that played those an important role in his book: *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*.

"These experiences would have carried, I believe, a very problematic implication for his own teachings. If he wished to continue to maintain that all one needed in order to gain access to enlightenment was to obtain, with the help of a sage, a true interpretation of the symbols inherent in a myth, then, how does he explain the social conditions he discovered in India where there was a wealth of symbol-laden mythic material, as well as, presumably, the sages necessary to provide correct interpretations of, and guidance concerning, the significance, meaning and value of those material?"

"His time in India proved to him that a basic operating principle of his theoretical approach to myth was contra-indicated by actual experience. Ironically, rather than understand the symbolic significance of his experiences in India, Campbell seemed to hold the East's teachings at fault rather than the individuals with personal egos who were the ones with the responsibility for taking up the quest of the hero and, then, after successfully completing the inward journey, living in accordance with the unitive understanding brought forth through the condition of enlightenment.

"Supposedly, for Campbell, the ultimate significance and message of the hero myth was the oneness of reality. On the one hand, enlightenment joined the visible and invisible worlds together and showed them to be different aspects of one and the same active principle of Divinity. Moreover, self-realization provided the insight that fused the world of consciousness with the unconscious realms and demonstrated them to be so many expressions of the same underlying reality.

"Yet, ostensibly, Campbell was not able to reconcile the facts he learned on his trip to India with the principle of unity that he alleged to be at the heart of the meaning of the hero myth. This left him with a huge theoretical problem, since if the hero myths were not about the unity of being ... as his trip to India seemed to lead him to believe might be the case ... what did the hero myth mean?

"Andrea earlier indicated there is a dimension in the teachings of Campbell that is not necessarily in Jung's theoretical framework. More specifically, for Campbell, symbols do not have just a psychological meaning, as is, by and large, the case for Jung ... symbols also have a metaphysical meaning for Campbell.

"Campbell is not interested in just putting forth a correct theory of the nature of myth. Campbell believes his theory of myth correctly reflects the structural character of the reality or ontology of the universe and human beings.

"Therefore, symbols are rooted in something more than the realm of psychology. Symbols are rooted in ontology as well.

"In this respect, and as I suggested previously, one of the major problems for Campbell is how to demonstrate that his experiences in India are consistent with a theory of myth that, seemingly, Campbell believes does not, cannot, or should not, allow for the sort of social conditions that he had

witnessed during his trip. If Campbell were not thinking along these lines, one could hypothesize that he might not have responded in as negative a fashion as he did following his trip there.

"As far as psychological symbolism is concerned, Campbell can continue to construe the meaning of the hero myth, along with other varieties of myth, as being one of unity. However, he seemed to have difficulty continuing to do this ... at least, perhaps, in the privacy of his own thoughts ... with respect to the meaning of the metaphysical or ontological symbolism inherent in myth.

"Following his trip to India, Campbell, at least in his conversations, had begun to extol the virtues of individuality, whereas prior to his trip he heaped scorn upon both individuality and the Western way of life that encouraged it. Yet, this transition in his feelings and attitudes was not reflected in his writings since, for example, in the first three volumes of *The Masks of God* ... which were published about a decade, or more, after his trip ... he not only continued to champion the Eastern model in which the individual seeks to realize her or his essential unity with the cosmos and the Divine principle that animates the cosmos, Campbell also continued to castigate the West for its childish preoccupations with the self-centered world of individuality.

"Up until the fourth volume of his *The Masks of God* series, Campbell was able to give the public impression of theoretical consistency throughout his perspective by pushing the psychological interpretation concerning the significance of all myths, in general, and the hero myth, in particular. In other words, Campbell still believed the psychological meaning of myths was, and is, the underlying unity of all of reality, but ontologically, the role of individuality, as the heart and soul of the human condition, had begun, since 1954, to assume more importance in his thinking than that of egolessness.

"Campbell's writings in the *Creative Mythology* volume of *The Masks of God* introduced a major shift, that he never explained, in the ontological side of his theory. In this final volume of the series, the character of the hero changed in certain fundamental respects and departed significantly from the Eastern model of the hero that Campbell had been psychologically, but not ontologically, championing since his return from his trip to India.

"In point of fact, this volume of the series provided Campbell with an opportunity to heal an ontological wound that had been festering for the thirteen or fourteen years that had passed between his trip to India and

the publication of the fourth volume of *The Masks of God*. One might even speculate the four-volume series was conceived, and undertaken, by Campbell with the implicit intention of providing a progressive, if not evolutionary, conception of the transition from, on the one hand, primitive, oriental and occidental traditions of myth, to, on the other hand, the modern world in which creative individuals, rather than mystic sages, were responsible for generating new myths capable of calling people to discover the wisdom of the unconscious.

"In doing so, the nature of modern wisdom, the modern meaning of unity, and the character of the modern hero would have changed considerably from that of the other three kinds of myth-driven cultures that had been explored in the first three volumes of *The Masks of God*. Nevertheless, at the same time, an ontological dimension would have been re-introduced into the theoretical framework that could have permitted Campbell to not only forget, if he wished, about his experiences in India, but actually would have validated those experiences as necessarily pointing in the direction of the importance of the individual over that of an oppressive, marginalizing and impoverished communalism of the ancient worlds, whether primitive, oriental or occidental.

"In the context of the modern myth, wisdom is no longer a matter of the Divine enlightenment and concomitant self-realization that becomes possible through an egoless individual. Wisdom has become the province of those individuals who can create the kind of symbols and myths that are capable of engaging the emotions, understandings and actions of modern humans and, thereby, induce us to explore and realize all of the life-potentialities that are within us but which, up to this point in our lives, have not been reclaimed from the unconscious.

"The ontological unity proposed by the modern creator of myths is that of becoming reintegrated with our psychological and biological nature and, among other things, the inherent capacity of this nature for loving others. The love being referred to by Campbell is neither the libidinous desire of Eros, nor the brotherly/sisterly love of agape, but the courtly form of love, amour, that he considers to be a dynamic combination of both Eros and agape and, yet, also involves something more.

"For Campbell, amour is to be considered an end in itself. In addition, Campbell believes, amour ennobles, if not redeems, individual character

through its qualities of courage, temperance, courtesy, loyalty, aesthetic sensitivities, conscience, as well as conscientiousness.

"In the mythic worlds of primitives, Orientals and occidentals, the journey toward the death of the ego and, therefore, the death of that which drives the individual excesses through which the world's problems are brought into being, is the path to enlightenment. In the modern world of creative mythology, one's willingness to risk physical death ... which is the price one often must pay for realizing, and acting on, amour ... becomes the path to enlightenment.

"According to Campbell, amour brings a balance to life that combines properties of other-worldliness and this-worldliness. As those, amour is said to allow one to realize the immanence of the Divine in the physical/material world because those who have surrendered to this dimension of their life-potential come to understand the true nature of both themselves and the world, not as a function of what some institution, like the Church, assumes one should be, but as a function of what we are in reality.

"Consequently, Campbell believes, and/or affirms, the value and reality of the physical world in a way that is absent from, if not denied by, the other kinds of mythic world that are explored in the first three volumes of *The Masks of God*. Accordingly, in the realm of creative mythology, one finds enlightenment and self-fulfillment by undertaking one's journey in the material world rather than by traveling to some other non-material realm.

"The hero of the modern myth is no longer the one who goes to a wondrous, mysterious world and gains Divine enlightenment that permits the hero to become absorbed into the whole and, in the process, reveals the everyday world to be worthless and illusory. The hero of the modern myth is the artist, the creator and the innovator who strives for individual attainment and is willing to believe in the authenticity and legitimacy of her or his own, unique experiences and understandings, rather than in the arguments of authority issued from religious, political, or cultural institutions.

"The individuality and originality of the modern hero are contrasted with the inflexibility and conformity of the three other mythic worlds. The modern hero is a liberator who is seeking to place faith in oneself and one's own creative understanding of personal experience, in order to fill the vacuum left by, according to Campbell, the failing and

oppressive orthodoxies of the primitive, oriental and occidental worlds to which individuals were subordinated previously.

"By the end of *Creative Mythology*, Campbell believes he has returned to, and restored to prominence, all of the most important themes of *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, those as universality, the mystical, selfless sacrifice, and a hazardous or dangerous journey inward. In reality, however, I feel Campbell has succeeded only in resurrecting and entrenching the very same personal ego that the latter book was dedicated to counseling us to eliminate from our lives.

"Campbell has universalized the false self at the expense of the true self. Moreover, the selflessness that Campbell believes he has introduced into the realm of creative mythology is nothing but the delusions of the false self trying to rationalize what are the largely self-serving, selfish and self-centered activities of the ego.

"Amour is the ego manifesting itself through a new mask. Amour is the ego with a thousand faces.

"Moreover, by drawing attention to the realm of magical enchantment that is an important theme in his notion of creative mythology, Campbell feels he has revitalized myth with the mystical dimension that was present in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Unfortunately, he apparently fails to understand there is such a huge difference between the mystical and the magical that the two realms really have nothing to do with one another.

"The magical covers a spectrum of possibilities. At one end of this spectrum are all of the strange, weird, mysterious, phantasmal creations of poets, novelists, artists and musicians that invite the audience to explore all manner of possibilities that can be constructed through the magical nature of conceptual, experiential and emotional combinatorics.

"At the other end of the spectrum of the magical is magic, broadly construed. This not only encompasses the tricks and illusions of those who today are passed off as magicians, but also involves those who actually have the capacity to draw upon a realm of reality in which there are certain, limited powers capable of generating non-ordinary physical phenomena.

"Mysticism has nothing to do with the magical in any of the foregoing senses. Mysticism is, now, and always has been, concerned with

helping the individual to know one's essential relatedness to Divinity, as well as to realize one's unique capacity to give expression to that essential relatedness.

"Mysticism is not about the phantasmal or conceptual exploration of that which is phenomenologically alluring, inexplicable or mysterious. Mysticism is not about magical powers or the creation of illusions or the learning of tricks.

"Mysticism beckons us to our essential nature and identity. Mysticism offers the possibility, for those willing to undertake the journey and stay with it until the end of the line, of coming into as close a contact and understanding of ultimate reality as human beings are capable of accomplishing.

"Campbell tries to contend the hero of creative mythology is someone who, like the main focus of *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, undertakes a journey of self-discovery and self-realization involving various kinds of hazard. For instance, by resisting the authority of religious and political institutions, the modern hero opens himself or herself up to the possibility of encountering different kinds of danger ... physical, emotional, financial, and social ... created by the forces to which the creative individual stands in opposition.

"Apparently, Campbell has forgotten that in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, the individual who undertook the inward journey encountered no greater danger than his own ignorance, selfishness and oppressiveness. Indeed, the dictatorship of the ego or false self is far more elusive, tricky, ruthless and difficult to overcome than is any external dictatorship.

"Furthermore, defiance, in and of itself, does not guarantee that either truth or justice is being served through those resistance. Defiance becomes a heroic act only when truth and justice are being served in the context of: furthering the essential interests of the individual, family, community, and all of creation.

"All too frequently, defiance is an act of the ego or false self. More often than not, rebellion is merely a sign of the ego looking after its limited, non-essential, vested interests, and such rebellion is directed against those who are doing likewise but who have the advantage of being in power.

"Among other things, one of the characteristics of the false self is to attribute to itself what, in reality, does not belong to it. In the mythic world of the modern hero, the artist considers herself or himself to be the creator,

and, yet, the artist has absolutely no idea of where the creations come from or how they come into being or what they really mean.

"All the false self knows is that it was present, in some fashion, when the creative or innovative impulse came. Like a country that flies its flag over unknown, but desirable, territory, or like a squatter who lays claim to property simply because the individual is too lazy to make the effort necessary to discover whether there is another person who owns the property being claimed, the false self grabs hold of the products of creativity as if they were its very own possessions.

"In *Creative Mythology* Campbell has come up with a framework in which he meets all the criteria for what he considers to be characteristics of a modern hero. Explicitly, he admires Thomas Mann, James Joyce, Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival* and Gottfried von Strasburg's *Tristan*.

"Implicitly, Campbell, I feel, admires himself, because, like these other modern heroes, he has succeeded in creating, and giving expression to, the myth of the modern hero as the consummate individualist. The modern hero is someone who thinks for ones elf on the basis of one's own evaluation and authentication of one's experience and is, as a result, willing to stand up to, and defy, the authority of the institutions that seeks to prevent the free exercise of that individuality.

"The modern hero is one who is prepared to explore the depths of amor against all opposition to those a project, and this modern hero is, if necessary, even ready to risk physical death in order to live in accordance with amor. In reality, the modern hero ... in an inversion of the direction of transformation undergone by the hero of a thousand faces ... is willing to exchange the infinite domain of Divine wisdom for the limited domain of purely human experience, and, then, the modern hero feels duty-bound to proselytize this inversion through the creation of myths that attempt to justify the exchange as a good bargain.

"As a result, the whole character of metaphysics and ontology changes from what had been the case in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. In modern metaphysics, the Divine principle ... which, for the hero-of-old, animated and unified the individual and the cosmos ... has been supplanted by, if not sacrificed to, the anthropomorphic principle in which everything becomes a function of, and reduced to, the modern hero's interpretive

ignorance and arrogance concerning Divinity, the nature of the universe and the essential character of the human being.

"Everything created by the modern hero might carry the signature of individual uniqueness. Yet, there is no guarantee that any of this creative uniqueness reflects aspects of reality or truth beyond the individual's own description and interpretation of his or her experience.

"In the modern myth, truth becomes a tautology in which conclusions concerning reality merely reflect the assumptions of the creator of a given myth. Ontology becomes a function of the biases and prejudices that color our creative understanding ... biases and prejudices that give expression to the limited, but endlessly changing, horizons of conceptual and emotional moods.

"This creative process might lead to a correct or accurate rendering of individual perceptions. However, there is nothing which necessitates that those perceptions constitute an accurate or correct reflection of what the ultimate or essential nature of the cosmos or the human being entails.

"Instead of aspiring to the infinite heights to which an egoless enlightenment and absorption in Divinity invites us, the modern hero insists not only on individualistic separation from Divinity, but wishes to limit the Divine to what we create in our own image within very finite psychological, emotional, sensory and material realms. Whereas the hero of a thousand faces found Self-sufficiency through being unified with the Divine principle, the ego of a thousand faces finds self-sufficiency in its own creative musings.

"In Creative Mythology, Campbell does retain many of the general themes of The Hero with a Thousand Faces, but he does so at a great cost. He has jettisoned the substantive heart, soul and spirit of the latter work merely to save the appearances of an outer, superficial, and theoretical consistency in thought concerning the psychological and ontological meaning of myth and its symbols."

When Tammy Winthrop finished speaking, we all seemed to become lost in our individual reflections on, and feelings about, not only what she had been discussing, but also the contributions of Melanie, Ben, Andrea and Colby. I had found the explorations of both Jung and Campbell to be quite informative and interesting, but I also sort of felt a bit like a kind of social or group parasite for not having contributed more to the conversation.

Before having been invited by Vince to join the discussion, I had spent a little bit of time speculating about their group's dynamics. I wondered now, if I had been a part of the group then, how I would have described my relationship to, or role in, the group that I had been observing from across the lounge.

Sometimes, perhaps a lot of the time, there is a whole spectrum of dynamics going on beneath the surface of behavioral appearances that tie one to a group but that would be difficult to identify merely through observation of who does or doesn't speak. I liked being with these people and enjoyed listening to them, but one might never know this if one were to make judgments based on my level of observable interaction.

Vince broke the silence. "I've got some errands to run, so I'm going to have to leave, but I was wondering if everybody would like to meet for another session this evening ... after dinner some time?"

Externally, everyone sort of looked around at one another trying to get some sense of how others felt about the prospect of getting together again. Internally, I'm sure, people were mentally checking their appointment calendars for possible schedule conflicts.

Very little time transpired before we all seemed to agree that we would like to get together again. Although the people in the circle might have agreed to a later meeting because they were conforming to some sort of social expectation about those things, I had a good feeling about what I perceived to be the genuine and sincere desire of all the participants to enjoy one another's company for, at least, a little longer.

Although Vince tried to convince us that the discussion should not come to end just because he was leaving, we all decided that perhaps this portion of the discussion had reached a natural point of termination. After arranging a time for meeting back at this lounge area, we all went off to our respective short-term destinies.

Chapter 20: Ma and Pa T. Riarchy Lose Their Mind

After a leisurely dinner at the restaurant next door to the hotel, I returned to my room. There were several calls that I wanted to make, and my body was longing for a refreshing, leisurely shower.

With the time difference between Chicago and Boston, I thought there might be a good chance of contacting either Beth Idaho or Jennifer or, maybe, even both. If my timing was right, I might be able to catch them just after they had eaten supper but before they, possibly, were going out for the evening.

I tried Beth's number first. After about four rings, she picked up the phone and said: "Hello!"

"Beth, its David Phelps calling from windy, downtown Chicago," I responded. "How are you?"

"I'm fine, David," she indicated. "What are you doing in Chicago?"

"Well, if you will recall our last conversation," I replied, "you might remember me promising to tell you what I found around the next curve. In reality there have been a number of curves that I've gone careening about in the last few days, so I thought I would bring you up to date before my vehicle goes completely out of control."

"Oh! Oh", she intoned. "I don't know if I like the sound of this."

"There is an upside to all of this, Beth," I suggested. "After all, if I had departed from the land of the living, I probably wouldn't be permitted to make this phone call.

"In fact, two friends of mine did make those a departure very recently. Consequently, I would have to say that, in the light of everything that has happened, I'm quite fortunate to be able to talk with you."

"I'm terribly sorry to hear about your friends, David," Beth sympathized. "What happened?"

"No one is really sure," I answered. "They were murdered several days ago, but by whom or why is not known."

I didn't want to go into details about the situation with Beth. I suspected she might feel responsible in some way for the deaths of Ken and Pam if I were to share with her some of the possibilities linking the various deaths, abductions, and so on, that had begun to pile up since Beth first walked into my office.

She had nothing to do with what happened. Moreover, I didn't believe Brian had anything to do with the death of my friends. Nevertheless, we all seemed to have become entangled in the same net of fate that had been cast into our collective lives by an unknown fisher person who was trolling for who knows what.

Technically, there was a correlation between Beth's appearance on my doorstep and a number of subsequent events. However, in terms of causality or culpability, she was not responsible for any of what had happened.

I didn't want to run the risk of Beth conflating the two separate issues. This would be just one more problem for her to deal with on top of her missing brother and the abduction ordeal.

Beth needed to be warned, I felt, but I wanted to do this in a roundabout manner. Therefore, I decided to let her know about how I almost had become a card-carrying member of her club.

"You might not believe this, Beth," I began, "but I'm fairly certain the people who abducted you also tried to do the same with me." "What?" she gasped in shock. "When? Where?"

"On Monday evening," I informed her, "not too long after I had come from a movie. If not for the intervention of a street person, I was done for.

"If I compare the symptoms I experienced with the ones that you described to Jennifer, they are pretty much identical. In both of our cases, I feel fairly certain some kind of drug was used.

"I won't bore you with the blow by blow account, but, actually, one of the reasons I'm in Chicago is to follow up on a possible means of helping Brian. I'll fill you in on the details later.

"I wouldn't recommend getting too excited about any of this quite yet," I advised her. "The lead I'm looking into is connected with the Botclofot group Brian had mentioned to me toward the end of my visit with him.

"The whole thing might go nowhere since, on the surface, it would seem to be, at best, a long shot. Nevertheless, I thought you might like to hear that I haven't given up on trying to help your vision to become realized."

"As I told you before, David," Beth reminded me, "I never had any doubts about the man in my vision either finding a way, or being found by a way, to help Brian, but I'm also worried for your welfare."

There she was, again, with her certainty about things spiritual. I found it a little annoying, but I also felt that a good portion of my annoyance probably was out of envy for someone who was sincere in her faith and who seemed to know about those things from the inside out, while I was stuck looking at the same things from the outside in, through an extremely besmirched window of observation.

I decided to pass over her statement without comment. Instead, I said: "I suspect I know what the answer is, Beth, but you haven't heard anything further about, or from, Brian, have you?" I inquired.

"No," she stated, "I haven't. In fact a new element might have been added to the cosmic stew that is being heated up.

"My other brother, Warren, has disappeared. Some friends have been trying to get in touch with him for nearly a month now, but he has dropped completely out of sight without leaving any clues or indications as to where he is or has gone.

"Apparently, Warren's friends have been able to determine he has left South America. Nothing else, however, is really known."

"You might feel this is silly, Beth," I proposed, "but I think you and Jennifer ought to stay together for a week or ten days until, hopefully, the situation becomes more stable and resolved. At the present time, however, the rate of strange and dangerous happenings seems to be picking up acceleration.

"I'm sure Jennifer wouldn't mind. I would feel a lot better if I knew you both were readily available for one another, if necessary. You could guard one another's back, so to speak.

"I was about to call Jennifer anyway, and I could ask her about the idea. You would be doing me a big favor, Beth, if you were to say yes."

"I'll tell you what, David," she offered, "why don't you have Jennifer call me and the two of us can discuss the situation directly? Will that satisfy you?"

"No, it won't," I answered, "but it beats just being flatly rejected.

"I'm going to say good-bye for now, Beth. When I hang up, I'll try to get in touch with Jennifer.

"If she's not home, I'll leave a message explaining the situation and ask her to call you. In one way or another she will get in touch, either through your home or your work number.

"Take care, Beth. I'll keep you posted on the latest breaking developments."

"You be careful as well, David," Beth cautioned. "Thank you for calling."

After hanging up, I tried Jennifer's home. She picked up the phone on the second ring.

She said: "Whoever this is, it better be good, because you are interrupting the flow of creative energy that is busy painting beautiful word pictures on the screen of my computer's monitor."

"More endearing words have never been spoken," I replied. "I bet you say this to all of your suitors."

"Love is nice, but creativity is the spice of life," she shot back. "Do you really want to go down in history as the one who's silly obsession with a truly radiant and beautiful woman has, quite tragically, interfered with and prevented her great thoughts from being communicated to a needy world?"

"Yes, I suppose the idea of this call was rather selfish and shallow of me," I said, somewhat chastened. "If you wish, I could call back at another time."

"And, what, drive away the guardians of inspiration once again?" she criticized. "The damage already has been done. I might as well speak with you."

"It's nice to hear your voice too," I offered. "Incidentally," I added, "please give Beth a call and see if you can persuade her that you both might be a lot safer if she were to stay with you for a few weeks, or so, until, hopefully, the situation resolves itself somehow and becomes more stable and people friendly."

Jennifer responded with: "I'll see what I can do." Quickly changing the subject somewhat, she asked: "Have you made any progress with your Chicago mission and the mysterious Botclocots?"

"The only progress I've made is to undergo an evolution in my thinking concerning origin-of-life issues," I stated.

"Has someone, finally, managed to inform you about the birds and the bees?" queried Jennifer.

"Not quite," I indicated. "The information is more along the lines of the secret and salacious lives of all manner of hydrocarbons, including their bonding habits.

"In addition, we even have had an opportunity to gain some insight into the rather controversial cross-bonding inclinations of some of the more daring hydrocarbons. I'm beginning to feel somewhat like a voyeur."

"Well, although from your perspective, all of this might appear to be quite risqué, nevertheless, you seem to have a long way to go before you reach the part about the birds and the bees," observed Jennifer.

"Not at all," I countered. "I've already encountered detailed accounts of the mating habits of all manner of autotrophs, heterotrophs and eukaryotic life forms. I very strongly feel that I might be on the verge of some major breakthroughs."

"Let's hope you are up to speed by the time you get back," she remarked. "I would hate to think I was considering marrying someone whose understanding of the way of the world was stuck in the existential angst of Pre-Cambrian days."

"If you promise to marry me," I posited, "then, I will apply myself diligently to learning all I can in these matters."

"Don't get too rambunctious," Jennifer advised. "I find your innocent naivety very attractive."

"Your every wish is my command," I acquiesced.

"I wish you would hang up," she commanded, "so I could set about trying to re-ignite the fires of creativity that you have so thoughtlessly extinguished with your mindless prattle about evolution."

"I miss you deeply, as well," I pined. "By the way, I've sent you another poem that you might receive, depending on the mood of the US postal service, tomorrow or Saturday, or, possibly, on Monday.

"If you will recall, Jennifer," I added, "you did say that as long as a sufficiently long period of time had passed, you would be receptive to receiving another poem from me. Somewhat arbitrarily, I have decided the true, official technical meaning of 'sufficiently long' is about seven days."

"I was envisioning something more along the lines of the length of the Jurassic era," she responded. "Isn't it strange how some people see things in those narrow, constricted terms, while others of us look to the big picture?"

"In any case, David, despite the extensive nature of your growing list of faults and foibles, I love you and miss you," she confessed.

"Your charitable expression of sentiments concerning my person," I noted, "emboldens this humble one to ask if you would deign to spend time in my unworthy presence, perchance, on the Tuesday night next?"

"If you promise to take English As A Second Language between now and then, it's a date," she confirmed.

"I'll see you on Tuesday night, David, maybe around 8:00 p.m. ." "I love you," came from my lips as I hung up the phone.

Upon finishing the conversation, I busily set about making preparations for a nice, long shower, including the laying out of some fresh clothes to complement and celebrate my body's soon to be acquired new lease on life

When I had finished washing up and dressing, I checked my watch and noted that the time to rejoin the group for the evening session had nearly arrived.

As I was running through my usual pre-departure checklist to make sure I had everything I needed, I discovered that, somehow, I had mislaid my key-card for the room. I knew the card must be somewhere in the room since I would not have been able to enter my suite without it.

Yet, after searching the desk, beneath the bed, in the folds of the chairs, and the bathroom, I had come up empty. I knew of washing machines and dryers that seemed to hunger for, and consume, items of clothing, but I had never encountered a hotel room with a sweet tooth for key-cards.

Since I was too far north for the Bermuda Triangle to be a factor ... unless, of course, it had signed on to the Free Trade Agreement and was exporting its alleged weirdness to other localities ... I decided enough time had been wasted on looking for the card. Most likely the card would turn up at some point ... maybe when the cleaning staff arrived in the morning.

In the meantime I would try to obtain a back-up card from the registration desk. I was fairly certain that for a slight extra charge added onto my bill the hotel would be quite accommodating with respect to my request.

Upon arriving in the lounge area with a new key-card for my room, I found Vince Ardello, Melanie Teasdale and Tammy Winthrop already seated in the area that the group had occupied in the afternoon. Aside from the four of us, the lounge was empty.

No sooner had I greeted everyone and sat down, Ben Blake and Colby Shaw entered the area and slowly made their way over to us while engaged in conversation with one another. Approximately five minutes later, Andrea Myers arrived.

As we waited for Art Carmichael to show up, we began exchanging general sorts of biographical data with each other. Following roughly ten to fifteen minutes of this sort of interaction, Art still had not made an appearance.

The topic of conversation changed to wondering where Art was and whether any of us knew of any reason for the delay. When the response to these inquiries provided no useful information, we decided to nominate Vince as our designated investigator into Art's absence.

Conceivably, Art might have been less interested in continuing the discussion than his earlier, expressed willingness to meet with us in the evening would have suggested. Possibly, not wishing to be embarrassed by being the lone dissenter, he had given his verbal assent to the idea without really being committed to the proposed program in his heart and mind.

On the other hand, something more important or more urgent might have arisen that required his attention, and he simply was not able to let us know what was happening. If this were the case, there was no way of telling whether Art would be a no-show or merely delayed in his arrival.

Vince went off to fulfill his duties. Some ten minutes later, Vince returned with nothing new to report other than that he had been able to find out Art's room number from one of the symposium's organizers and, therefore, had asked one of the people at the hotel's registration desk to phone up to see if Art was at home ... which he wasn't ... or if he were, then, for whatever reason, he wasn't responding to the phone.

After discussing the situation for a few moments, we decided to proceed without Art. Hopefully, somewhere along the line, he would join us.

Melanie Teasdale started things off by wanting to return, if only briefly, to the subject of Joseph Campbell's approach to mythology in order to address what she felt was some unfinished business in our earlier

conversation. The issue concerned certain aspects of Campbell's treatment of the roles of matriarchy and patriarchy in mythology.

"One of the things that always bothered me about *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*," observed Melanie, "is its preoccupation with the quest of the hero at the expense of any discussion about the journey of the heroine. Moreover, this marginalization of the heroine seems rather inexplicable given that Campbell supposedly is operating out of, and giving expression to, an Eastern perspective in his book which, unlike *Occidental Mythology*, has a strong matriarchal orientation.

"If one takes a look at Bachofen's work in the 19th century, a historical account, of sorts, is given with respect to the origins and influence of matriarchal and patriarchal traditions. Bachofen believed the observance of matriarchy or the honoring of the right of the mother was predominant in Greece, Africa, the Near East, and Asia prior to the ascendancy of patriarchy or the right of the father in Israel and classical Greece, especially Athens.

"According to Bachofen, following the emergence of patriarchy in classical Greece and Israel, this tradition really took root during Rome's rule. Patriarchy marched and spread with the armies of the Roman emperors.

"As far as Campbell is concerned, what! find interesting in all this is that, unlike Bachofen, Campbell seemed to want to restrict his interest to the psychological significance of matriarchy and patriarchy and leave their political implications aside. One of the reasons I find this interesting is because, as was noted in our previous discussion, Campbell seemed to indicate elsewhere in his writing that mythology was not just about psychology but about ontology as well, so his desire to pursue an exclusively psychological approach to the matriarchy/patriarchy issue seems somewhat inconsistent to me."

"Perhaps," Vince Ardello replied, "Campbell felt the political aspect or implications of myths would take him too far a-field from his primary interest of delineating their symbolic meaning and significance. Furthermore, didn't he devote a fair amount of time in the first two volumes of *The Masks of God* praising, and showing a preference for, the values of matriarchy relative to those of patriarchy?"

"Besides," Vince added, "aren't most of the qualities of the hero ... those as selflessness, sacrifice, sharing and egalitarianism ... aren't these qualities really more reflective of what are considered, traditionally, to be expressions of a matriarchal approach to things rather than properties normally associated with patriarchy? Moreover, isn't the idea of union with the Divine also in keeping with the perspective of matriarchy, and in opposition to the supposed tendency of patriarchy to insist on a hierarchical separation between Divinity and the human realm?"

"If what you say is true, Vince," responded Melanie, "why not give symbolic expression to this by talking about a heroine rather than a hero? If the model being extolled in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* is an Eastern one and if, as Campbell states explicitly in many places in his writings, that Oriental mythology reflects a matriarchal orientation, I'm puzzled why the exploits of the hero are being explored to the exclusion of the exploits of the heroine.

"I'm not sure if the problem lies with Campbell or with a possible alteration of some of the myths about heroism that occurred down through the ages in order to be consistent with the burgeoning influence of patriarchy or with something else. Nevertheless, whatever the explanation, I find the trend troublesome."

"What I find troublesome in Campbell," said Andre a Myers, "is what appears, at least to me, to be the forced character of the logic that Campbell sometimes employed in developing his position. I'll try to outline what I mean by this.

"In volume one of *The Masks of God*, which deals with primitive mythology, Campbell goes through what are, in my opinion, some rather intricate conceptual contortions. More specifically, on the one hand, hunter and planter societies are very much distinguished, respectively, by their patriarchal and matriarchal orientations, and, yet, on the other hand, these societies also are considered by him to be masked expressions of one another since they both, purportedly, are rooted, each in its own way, in beliefs of mystical union, immortality and self-sacrifice.

"However, what mystical union, immortality and self-sacrifice mean in these two societies might not be the same sort of thing at all. So what is, ultimately, a superficial similarity really disguises a fundamentally different approach to themes of existence that is a reflection of the divergent values of matriarchal and patriarchal societies.

"One of the central motifs throughout the four volumes of *The Masks of God* is that despite the differences of the story lines in primitive, oriental, occidental and creative mythology, underlying them all is a belief in, or an acceptance of, the mystical oneness of all things. Although there might be a general sense in which Campbell could be quite correct in this contention, the argument also is quite misleading because one is talking about very different ideas concerning theories on, and conceptions of, just what the nature of the mystical is, or what sacrifice involves, or what immortality entails.

"Freud, Jung and Campbell all talked about the unconscious, so one can say, correctly, that underlying all of their theories is a belief in the unconscious. Yet, all three of these individuals are engaged in very, very different kinds of hermeneutical activities with respect to the uses to which they put the notion of the unconscious.

"Consequently, just as one is not necessarily saying anything very interesting or important when one suggests these three individuals are bound together by their common interest in the unconscious, so, too, one might not be saying very much that is useful when one argues all forms of mythology are, at heart, or in essence, about the mystical oneness of all manner of being. If anything, one is obscuring the fact that these various modalities of mythology actually are giving expression to competing theories of symbolism, metaphysics and ontology.

"Matriarchy and patriarchy are not disguised versions of one another unless one can demonstrate that matriarchy and patriarchy, ultimately, are describing, explaining and engaging reality in, more or less, the same way. I don't think Campbell accomplishes those a demonstration in a very plausible fashion.

"These are competing mythologies that are not so many masks that give differing expression to the same underlying Divine reality. They are conceptual glass slippers in search of some ontological foot capable of snuggling nicely into the structural parameters of the proffered wearing apparel.

"Furthermore, which if any of the slippers constitutes a proper fit with respect to the Reality on which human beings are trying to hang them is a separate issue. Not only are we unsure whether, or not, the respective mythologies are being offered to the ontological counterpart to the fair Cinderella, rather than her ugly stepsisters, we are not even sure if the

slipper might be, after all, merely a figment of our imagination with no ontological referent to which it actually applies.

"Interestingly enough, in the volume on Oriental mythology, Campbell, at least in certain places, gets away from the idea of trying to treat matriarchy and patriarchy as disguised or masked versions of one another. Instead, he suggests there is a fundamental dichotomy between, on the one hand, those peoples, those as in the East, who advocate the unity of the human and the Divine, and, on the other hand, those peoples, those as in the West, who tend to insist on a separation between the human and the Divine.

"Campbell argues that this essential psychological and metaphysical orientation concerning the issue of accepting or rejecting distinctions between the human and the Divine is a fundamental shaping factor in the structural character of the mythology that arises out of any given people. He believes all other distinctions and differences, including those between matriarchy and patriarchy, are secondary to, and derivative from this inclination to make, or reject, distinctions involving the human and the Divine.

"What is not clear to me is why there seems to be a tendency in cultures influenced by patriarchy to accept those distinctions, whereas amongst peoples under the sway of matriarchy, there often appears to be a tendency to reject those distinctions. One possibility is that, somehow, the original decision concerning the acceptance or rejection of distinctions between the Divine and the human is, perhaps, biologically driven, but this doesn't necessarily explain why men would be willing to accept a matriarchal orientation or why women would be willing to accept a patriarchal orientation.

"Another possibility is that the original decision to accept or reject those distinctions was purely a matter of metaphysical preference concerning what various people believed to be the true character of ontology or reality. However, the further choice of patriarchy or matriarchy could have been a function of considering that of the two underlying metaphysical possibilities was most conducive to supporting a certain kind of psychological and social life-style ... i.e., patriarchy or matriarchy.

"If the latter possibility is the case, each kind of psychological/social orientation would have gravitated toward the metaphysical system that best reflected its way of looking at, or responding to, the themes of existence.

Yet, once again, there is still the problem of why some men would be inclined to matriarchy or why some women would be inclined to patriarchy.

"One could, I suppose, make everything just a matter of the socialization process that occurs in the kind of society into which one happens to be born. However, I'm not sure this really would account for how either matriarchy or patriarchy came into being either.

"If, as many believe is the case, planter societies tend to exhibit qualities of matriarchy, whereas hunter societies tend to be characterized by properties of patriarchy, then, the values of matriarchy and patriarchy don't necessarily reflect biology so much as they might reflect the social arrangements that, to some extent, are forced upon a people by the contingencies associated with survival. On the other hand, I'm not really certain there is anything inherently contradictory about having a patriarchal planting society or a matriarchal hunter society, so, once again, we face the problem of origins in relation to matriarchy and patriarchy and why different people become influenced by these orientations."

"I don't know, Andrea, if what I'm about to say fits in with the issues you are raising," Ben stated, "but maybe the whole discussion about the qualitative differences between matriarchy and patriarchy is really a false dichotomy. Maybe, neither of these orientations is good or bad in and of themselves, but, instead, perhaps we need to take a look at whether an individual or society is approaching patriarchy and matriarchy through the essential, spiritual self, or the false, worldly self.

"For example, traditionally ... possibly stemming from Bachofen's work ... there are various stereotypic qualities associated with matriarchy and patriarchy. More specifically, among other things, the values of matriarchy are said to involve egalitarianism; selfless immersion in a greater whole ... both cosmically and socially; sharing; peacefulness; a sense of changelessness or timelessness; as well as an awareness of and cooperation with the cycles of nature, while the values of patriarchy are said to consist of hierarchical religion, family and social arrangements; ambition; self-centeredness; a lack of respect for, and a tendency to disrupt, the cycles of nature; a sense of temporality, along with a concomitant notion of progress, and, finally, a proclivity for activity and fighting.

"Spiritually speaking, what these values actually mean will depend on whether they are being interpreted through the eye of our true selves or our

false selves. As those, these qualities have the potential for being either assets to, and expressions of, realization of the true self, or these same values could be antithetical to this sort of realization and, therefore, an ally of the pursuits and interests of the false self.

"Consider, for example, the matriarchal quality or value of a sense of changelessness. Viewed from the perspective of the true self, this quality reflects the constancy of eternal spiritual verities concerning who we are in essence and what our relationship with the rest of being is. Yet, considered from the perspective of the false self, changelessness becomes a function of dogma, inertia, self-satisfaction, rigidity, and resistance to necessary changes in our lives.

"On the other hand, if we take a similar look at the value or quality in patriarchy that might be considered to be the corresponding counterpart to matriarchal changelessness ... namely, activity or, perhaps, change ... we get something along the following lines. More specifically, from the vantage point of the true self, change becomes the medium of transformation through which we overcome our tendencies to remain entangled in the world and, by this means, move toward the realization of our spiritual potential. Alternatively, through the eyes of the false self, change becomes the means of serving the desires, whims and interests of our worldly inclinations.

"Let's run another set of corresponding matriarchal and patriarchal values or qualities through the manner of understanding things that is being suggested. Maybe, a good test case for this might involve taking a look at the egalitarianism/hierarchy pairing.

"Viewed from the perspective of the true self, the matriarchal value of egalitarianism reflects a belief in the essential equality and oneness of all people, if not of all being, as so many manifestations of the Universal Soul. Considered in this way, everything has a sacred dimension to it and must be accorded an appropriate modality of etiquette that is in concert with any given thing's reflection of, and role in, the cosmic scheme of universal being.

"When, however, one looks at the idea of equality from the orientation of the false self, this value assumes an aura of relativism in which all ideas, values, beliefs, goals, purposes, desires and agendas are, more or less, the same. If things are considered from those a view, one has no right or basis to make any distinctions about the superiority of some

points of view over that of others ... indeed, the perspective of the false self is judged to be as legitimate as the perspective of the true self.

"Another possibility in this regard is that when the notion of egalitarianism is engaged through the false self, all individuality must be extinguished or denied as contrary to the alleged priority of the collective spirit over that of the individual. This is one of the things Campbell had been horrified by, and sought to rebel against, following his journey to India.

"Hierarchy, as viewed by the true self, is, on the one hand, a recognition and acceptance of the fact that, among other things, there is a difference between illusion and reality, and there is also a difference between truth and falsehood. On the other hand, there is an understanding that we did not create ourselves nor our abilities, but, rather, these were gifts bestowed upon us through a Ground of Being that has priority over us.

"Engaged from this perspective, life entails the opportunity to participate in, and coming to realize our rootedness in, that Ground through the largesse of that Ground and not through any virtue of our own independent of those a Ground. There is a logical and ontological priority possessed by that Ground that we do not have and, as those, whatever hierarchy that exists derives from this metaphysical fact.

"Humans are the ones who are caught up in illusion, not the Ground. The Ground has merely made illusion a possibility, like a spider spinning a web in preparation for the possibility of the hapless victim who makes a bad life-choice.

"Human beings are the ones who have to struggle to make the journey inward in order to realize our essential oneness with Reality or Divinity. Divinity already knows what we have not yet come to understand.

"The foregoing several points attest to nothing except the following. On a certain level, and from a certain perspective, we need to acknowledge that legitimate, hierarchical distinctions can be drawn between the One who makes our origin possible and we who are the originated and who must struggle to dispel the illusions generated through the agency of the false self.

"Nevertheless, to appreciate the nature and significance of metaphysical hierarchical relationships does not, in and of itself, automatically preclude the possibility of speaking about our essential identity with, and rootedness in, Divine reality. The issue need not be

restricted to an either/or choice but can involve a much more complex arrangement than the logic of the sort of choices outlined earlier permits us to consider.

"Viewed from the perspective of the false self, hierarchy tends to be colored by that self's presumed, but unverifiable and unjustifiable, right to dictate to others concerning the nature of metaphysical, social, political, cultural, family and personal relationships. In those a case, the false self arrogates to itself the role of Divinity and, consequently, inverts the true metaphysical order of things.

"If one explores the allegedly contrary pairings of matriarchy's supposed tendency to cooperate with the cycles of nature versus patriarchy's so-called inclination to ignore, if not disrupt, the cycles of nature, then, one also can treat this pairing in a way that is consistent with the foregoing analysis. In other words, once again, the difference is not in matriarchy or patriarchy, per se, but in the nature of the self ... i.e., whether in the form of the 'true' or 'false' self ... through which one engages these pairings.

"Thus, when the notion of cooperation with the cycles of nature is approached through the understanding of the true self, the individual recognizes one has a duty of care to live in harmony with the manner by which the Truth or Reality underlying nature is being manifested through, or reflected in, the principles and laws and etiquette inherent in the structural character of nature. To neglect or deny these duties of care is done at one's own peril.

"At the same time, one cannot suppose the cycles of nature are restricted merely to the physical, material and biological world. There are an array of psychological, emotional and spiritual cycles of nature to which one owes continuous duties of care as well.

"On the other hand, although the false self also recognizes the idea of a duty of care to the cycles of nature, these cycles are all a manifestation of the desires, whims, interests, goals, purposes and fantasies of the nature of the false self. As far as the false self is concerned, all other cycles of nature have value only as a function of the manner in which they can be made subservient to its own cycles.

"Alternatively, the false self is quite prepared to acknowledge the existence of, and live in harmony with, the cycles of nature, but this

appreciation is restricted to the realms of the biological, material and/or intellectual. This sort of cooperation is a function of the false self's desire for a healthy, sustainable existence and the continued high quality of life that sound ecological surroundings make possible.

"The notion of a disruption of the cycles of nature, which is said to be stereotypically characteristic of the patriarchal orientation to things, also can be viewed in terms of its potential for either constructive or destructive ramifications. As before, the difference is a matter of which self is in control of the situation.

"When the aspect of nature being considered is the false self, then, spiritually speaking, the individual has an obligation to disrupt the cycles of nature operating through that false self. One does not have a duty of care to live in harmony with the false self, but, rather, one has a duty of care to oppose and resist the inherent tendencies of the false self to wreck havoc on, and exploit, all other cycles of nature.

"Nonetheless, the rest of nature does not have priority over us, any more than we have priority over it except, maybe, to the extent we have been given the spiritual capacity, and concomitant duty of care, to minister to the needs of the cycles of nature and, therefore, establish harmonious relationships with and through created being. Just as creation serves us, so, too, we must serve creation and help to keep things as balanced as possible across all cycles of nature.

"In one sense there always will be a certain tendency of various aspects of nature to encroach upon the lives of human beings, just as there is a reciprocal tendency of human beings to encroach upon the different facets of nature. Our job ... and this is a duty of care that nature is not obligated to observe except through Divine permission ... is to do justice in maintaining a proper ... that is, spiritual balance ... between these two modalities of encroachment.

"One also can consider disruption of the cycles of nature from the perspective of the false self. This self does not think twice about its absolute, automatic, and completely presumed right to interfere with, and disrupt, nature in any way it chooses and for whatever reasons it desires.

"The false self recognizes no duties of care with respect to the cycles of nature. Instead, nature must be subdued and made to serve the goals, purposes and projects of the false self.

"Finally, let's take a look at the pairing of the values of selflessness and self-centeredness that is said to reflect, respectively, qualities of matriarchy and patriarchy. As before, the issue is not straightforward.

"Engaged through the understanding of the true self, selflessness gives expression to the desire for, and realization of, a disappearance of the pettiness, greed, anger, lust, jealousy, hostility, pride, envy, desires, and insensitivity of the false self. As if obeying some spiritual version of a Pauli-like exclusion principle, the false self and the true self cannot simultaneously occupy the same realm of consciousness, and, consequently, one dimension of the true self is to work toward the dissolution of the false self's reign over the affairs of the individual.

"With the ascendancy of the true self comes the understanding that only the real Self, or Divinity, has the right to say 'I'. The condition of selflessness is an acknowledgment of this Reality.

"Yet, in the hands of the false self, selflessness becomes a denial of both the Divine Self as well as the capacity of one's own true, essential, spiritual identity to reflect and, in a sense, be aware of and know the nature of that Divine Self. Moreover, since the false self has no essential reality, its endlessly changing states, moods, desires, whims, goals, purposes, interpretations, beliefs, values, motivations and interests all give expression to a selflessness that is the exact opposite of the sort of selflessness that is sought after spiritually.

"If one considers the quality of self-centeredness, which is thought to be a feature of patriarchy, from the perspective of the true self, this merely points to a basic truth concerning our metaphysical nature. If we are to function properly and harmoniously in relationship to the cosmos, the ecology, our communities, families and ourselves, everything must be centered on the Self of Divinity that is reflected in our own true selves.

"The foregoing sort of Self-centeredness, is, of course, very different from the self-centeredness that is characteristic of the false self. The latter is deserving of our condemnation and needs to be opposed.

"So, if the foregoing outline is correct, one is, in a sense, barking up the wrong tree when one tries to use the matriarchy/patriarchy axis as one's framework for analyzing metaphysical, social, political, cultural or educational issues. The deeper framework concerns the dichotomy between the false self and the true self.

"Both matriarchy and patriarchy have multiple dimensions for accommodating either the false self or the true self. To label some perspective as patriarchal or matriarchal is not enough to understand what is going on. One must see that dimension ... the true self or the false self ... is operative. When one has done this, the qualities or values associated with matriarchy and patriarchy begin, I think, to make more sense as far as being able to identify the character of the dynamics being given expression through those values or qualities is concerned.

"Furthermore, I believe the foregoing analytical framework allows one, if one wishes, to dispense with the idea that part of our spiritual task is to try to balance masculine and feminine components within us. Rather, the true self of both women and men entails a variety of capacities, dimensions, and facets that are able to be active relative to certain levels of reality while, simultaneously, being receptive relative to other levels of reality.

"The issue no longer would be a matter of: when, or under what circumstances, we should exercise our masculine sides or feminine sides, nor would one necessarily even have to struggle with trying to understand what is meant, metaphysically, by masculinity or femininity. The task, for both women and men, becomes a matter of knowing when, and in what way, to be in a properly spiritual active mode, and when, as well as how, to be in an a spiritually appropriate receptive condition."

"Ben, the general tenor of the thinking that you have just outlined," indicated Tammy Winthrop, "and in which you make the meaning or significance of the qualities of matriarchy and patriarchy a function of the activities of the false and true selves, reminds me of an aspect in Campbell's theoretical framework with which I disagreed. The point I have in mind is related to something that Campbell said in the *Occidental Mythology* volume of *The Masks of God*, and I think the issue it raises might be complementary to some of what you have been saying.

"During one section of *Occidental Mythology*, he makes reference to the Biblical passage concerning God's creation of males and females in the image of Divinity. Campbell deduces from these verses that God is both male and female.

"Campbell, consequently, considers Divinity to be androgynous in nature. Subsequently ... and this might be another instance of Campbell's tendency, sometimes, to rely on the kind of forced logic that Andre a mentioned earlier,

Campbell maintains androgyny is actually an alternative form of matriarchy.

"One of the difficulties that I have with Campbell's interpretation of things at this point is that he never seems to consider the possibility there might be a difference between Divinity and the image of Divinity. For example, just as one would not consider the image in a mirror to be the same as the reality that is being reflected, so, too, one cannot suppose Divinity and the image of Divinity are necessarily the same, although, obviously, in each case there is a relationship between image, or reflection, and reality.

"Some mystical traditions distinguish between Divine Essence and Divine manifestations those that although the former makes the latter possible, one cannot use the structural character of the manifestations as a basis for drawing conclusions about the nature of Essence, except in a very limited sense. According to this perspective, manifestations don't say anything about Essence, per se, except that the latter has the capacity to bring these sorts of manifestation forth.

"Therefore, for example, from the fact there are male and female forms in the realm of manifestation, one might not conclude, automatically, that the nature of Divine Essence also is male and female in character. All one really can say is Divine Essence has the capacity to generate those forms.

"The precise nature of the relationship between manifestation and Essence remains a mystery even though, quite clearly, the two are related since manifestation would not be if not for Essence. Nevertheless, Essence could continue to be Essence even if manifestation never saw the light of day.

"We know about Divinity only by means of what is revealed through relationships of manifestation. In other words, we attribute certain qualities to Divinity on the basis of the kinds of relationship that seem to be given expression through manifestation.

"We say, for instance, Divinity is compassionate, loving, aware, forgiving, kind, merciful, patient, just, wrathful, generous, independent, imminent, transcendent, knowing, rich, and so on, because we believe we have experienced these relationships ourselves, or we are told about them through the experiences of others. If we speak collectively, these attributions constitute a conceptual image we have of Divinity.

"On the other hand, through various books of sacred scriptures or revelation, God also is said to speak about a spectrum of attributive qualities of Divinity that describe different dimensions of the relationship between, on the one hand, creation in general, and human beings in particular, and, on the other hand, Divinity. This time, however, the perspective concerning the nature of the Divine image is that of Divinity not humanity.

"If one accepts these books as Divinely given, then, Divinity is describing Divinity for the purposes of disclosing to human beings certain dimensions of the relationship between manifestation and Divinity. Among other things, Divinity is pointing to the nature of the Source as That which is responsible for, among other things, the creating, originating, and generating of the manifestations that assume variable forms or modalities of expression in the realm of phenomenal Being.

"As those, the connection between Divine Essence and creation is described in terms of the context of the Divine attributes that establish the parameters of human existence and that have been made possible by Essence. In other words, Divinity is not describing Essence per se, so much as Divinity is describing what Essence can do, and has done, in the realm of created manifestations.

"In Divinely revealed scriptures, when God is said to speak of creating human beings in the image of Divinity, this means human beings came forth as a function of the attributes or capacities that God has exercised in order to relate Essence and manifestation. Just as the conceptual image that human beings have of Divinity is based on their interpretation of the character of the complex network of attributive relationships that they believe links Divinity and humanity, in a similar fashion, one might say some of the images of possibility contained in Essence are given expression through what God discloses about Divinity by means of books of revelation, prophetic missions, the teachings of saints, veridical dreams, together with certain kinds of mystical or spiritual experience, which concern the spectrum of qualitative attributes through which Essence links creation to Divinity.

"Consequently, there actually is, at a minimum, a double sense to the notion of human beings having been created in the image of Divinity. On the one hand, our created origins arise out of, by means of, and through the expression of, those Divine attributes or capacities.

"Here the emphasis is being given to 'in'. Our origins are in the Divine image formed by the dynamic of the attributes that God uses to bring forth the cosmic manifestation.

"On the other hand, and in conjunction with the nature of our created origins, we have within us all the Divine attributes that Essence uses to link manifestation to Essence. Here, the emphasis is being given to the structural character of human nature as an image that reflects the Divine attributes being used to give expression to the manifested nature of a human being.

"Furthermore, when the image that human beings have of Divine attributes matches or reflects the actual character of the image of 'attributive-Divinity' that the Divine Essence has disclosed through revelation, prophets, saints, dreams and spiritual experiences, then, the two images reflect one another. Mystics have said that when one understands the reality of these reflective images, one comes to realize the nature of the human being.

"Maleness and femaleness are qualities rooted in the attributive relationships God uses to link Essence and human beings. As those, these qualities reflect properties of the realm of Divine attributes or capacities rather than properties of Essence.

"There are males and females because Essence has the capacity of establishing these qualities within the context of the Divine exercise of attributive capacities through which manifestation makes its appearance. Therefore, in point of fact, on the basis of manifested qualities, one can say nothing about the actual nature of Essence except that Essence gives evidence in the realm of created being of having the capacity to bring forth manifestation with the variable qualitative forms, properties, attributes and so on which are characteristic, in the present case, of females and males."

"Tammy, if you are saying what I think you are saying, I tend to agree pretty much with everything you have said," stated Melanie Teasdale, "but there is one concern that I have with the perspective you are delineating ... although, perhaps, you did not wish to create this impression. More specifically, when you first began to talk about the notion of image, you seemed to suggest that as far as human beings are concerned the Divine image is limited to a conceptual realm.

"Later, you spoke about the manner in which the image of Divinity within the human being might come to reflect the Divine image that Essence is, in a sense, projecting through the total set of attributive relationships linking manifested creation to Essence. Moreover, you seemed to indicate that if, or when, this occurs, the individual will come to understand the real nature of the human being by realizing the character of the Divine attributes that form who, why and what we are.

"My concern is this. There are a lot of people today who wish to reduce mysticism to being some sort of emergent property of brain or mental functioning.

"In other words, techniques involving chanting, meditation, breathing, contemplation, fasting, focusing, various methods of mind control, self-hypnosis, use of imagery, different kinds of body-energy systems, sensory deprivation, and so on, are often recommended, or undertaken, for the purposes of altering brain chemistry; and/or, brain electrical activity; and/or, alleged right brain/left brain lateralization capabilities; and/or the flow of certain kinds of energy through the brain. Unfortunately, in the process, some, if not many, of these people ... both among the ones who recommended, as well as the ones who do the undertaking of those practices ... confuse the notions of correlation and causation.

"They tend to assume that whatever changes might come about on various levels of brain activity means those changes are necessarily the primary target of the techniques that are being used. Furthermore, those people tend to assume that any altered states of consciousness that arise in conjunction with these techniques serve as evidence that altered states of consciousness are a function of altered brain activity.

"Apparently, many people never stop to consider the following possibility. Whatever changes in brain activity that occur ...subsequent to implementation of one, or more, of the foregoing kinds of technique ... those changes not only might be just a residual, peripheral, or secondary effect of those techniques, but that, as well, those changes in brain activity do not necessarily cause those altered states but, at best, might only be correlated with those changes.

"A further problem here is due to a failure, on the part of some people, to differentiate between techniques whose effects might be limited to the realm of the brain or the mind and techniques that entail dimensions of the individual extending beyond, or transcending the spheres of influence

of either the body, the brain, or the mind. Unfortunately, as we discussed this afternoon in conjunction with Jung, just as many people want to attribute everything to the unconscious without any appreciation of the nature of either the unconscious or the reality of that which is being attributed to the realm of the unconscious, so, too, many people want to restrict mysticism to the realm of the brain or the mind, despite the absence of any real understanding of what either the mind or mysticism are actually about.

"In my opinion, this tendency to psychologize mysticism has led to a great deal of misunderstanding and confusion concerning the nature not only of the mystical path but of the nature of the human being as well. Although the discipline of trans-personal psychology might have broadened the horizons of the traditional approaches to psychology, at the same time, this discipline is trying to appropriate or incorporate a reality ... namely, mysticism ... which, at least, according to my understanding of the teachings of the mystics, has very little to do with psychology, brain, or mind ... however these might be construed ... except to the extent there might be a trickle-down effect ensuing from mystical practices and realization that help orient various aspects of brain or mind functioning.

"I suppose one of the reasons for conflating the mystical and the psychological concerns modern ideas about the source and character of consciousness or awareness. For example, many people want to make consciousness a function of, or expression of, the activities of the brain or mind and, therefore, these individuals tend to believe any change in awareness is necessarily tied to brain or mental activity.

"Apparently, these people have not considered the possibility that awareness or consciousness is something quite apart from mental or brain activity or that the latter kinds of activity might participate in consciousness only according to the nature of their capacity or modality for doing so. Altered states of consciousness or consciousness-raising are not so much a matter of a change in consciousness as they are transformations in the manner through which we engage consciousness.

"When we come under the sphere of influence of different modalities for accessing various dimensions of the quality or attribute of consciousness, the nature of our phenomenology changes. Consciousness, nevertheless, remains what it always was and is.

"Considered from the foregoing perspective, the idea of mindfulness is really a misnomer. The appropriate term would be 'aware-

fullness', and focusing the capacities of the mind provides only one modality of aware-fullness.

"The mystical path really consists, among other things, of a journey to, and through, various realms of aware -fullness. Each kind of aware-fullness gives expression to a qualitatively different kind of engagement of, and understanding of, the nature of the relationship between Divinity and the human being.

"In this regard, one of the places where I do agree with Campbell is when he said, at least in his earlier works, that modern people have nothing to teach the ancient sages with respect to having knowledge of, or understanding, the mystical nature of existence, in general, and the human being, in particular. I don't consider mysticism or spirituality to be something that evolves over time and that we are only now on the verge of truly coming to understand for the first time of history due to either a Divinely 'intended', or fortuitous, but chance, acceleration in the rate of evolution in our mental capacities, brains, consciousness or so-called spiritual technologies.

"Consequently, I worry about people getting the idea into their heads that mysticism is merely a function of brain or conceptual activity. So, I guess, the question that I'm asking, Tammy, is whether you are saying that the nature of the image that needs to be understood, if human beings are to realize the nature of their own spiritual identity and essential capacity, is purely a matter of the brain or the mind or concepts?"

"You have raised some very important issues, Melanie," acknowledged Tammy Winthrop. In retrospect, I think, maybe, I was a little sloppy in my way of introducing and developing the image topic.

"You're quite right, however, in pointing out that the image of Divinity should not be restricted to, or made a function only, of mental or brain or conceptual activity. In fact -- and, perhaps, Melanie you have been alluding to this -- mystical ideas of Divinity are a complex function of different modalities of ... to use your term ... aware-fullness, each of which engages the infinite nature of Divinity in an entirely different, but complementary, manner.

"The mind, the heart, the spirit, together with other kinds of interior modalities of aware-fullness, all must be realized in an appropriate fashion in order to have an image of Divinity that is able to reflect, accurately,

the image of Divinity being given expression through all the Divine attributes or capacities, collectively considered, that create, generate, shape, modulate, control, color and orient different realms and levels of manifestation. In addition, eventually, these modalities of aware-fullness occur in a context of ... to use Ben's terms, namely, one's true self or true self-identity ... those that when the individual becomes Self-realized, that person comes to understand there is only one real Self Who is engaging the multiplicity of attributes being given expression through the image of manifested Divinity in accordance with the unique, reflections of as many different modalities of, and capacities for, aware-fullness as there are human beings, irrespective of whether these individuals are realized or not.

"From the Divine Essence side of things, so to speak, whether or not human beings become self-realized makes no difference to the purpose for which manifestations were brought into being and given expression. All conditions of aware-fullness through which Essence and manifestations are related are unique in the manner in which they engage and reflect the image of Divinity, and there is nothing that human beings can do that would undermine the spectrum or array of modalities and capacities of aware-fullness being exhibited.

"From the human side of things, nonetheless, the issue of self-realization makes all the difference in the universe. We can spend our existence stuck in some limiting, incomplete, and, therefore, distorted and illusory modality of aware-fullness ... those as a purely material or sensory or biological or conceptual condition ... or we can spend our existence in struggling toward, and God willing, realizing the full extent of the human potential for uniquely reflecting the image of Divinity, made manifest through Essence, by seeking to have all our spiritual modalities for aware-fullness brought on line.

"Divinity provides the metaphysical opportunity and sets the ontological stage through which the human drama is to unfold. We make our choices concerning the kinds of aware-fullness and extent of our spiritual capacities that are to be realized.

"The goal is not so much a matter of raising consciousness, but to change the character of the kind of internal modalities of awareness concerning the Self to which we have access, and, therefore, both to alter, as well as to complete, the ways in which the Self is engaged, experienced, known and so

on. Becoming aware of awareness ... that is, becoming mindful ... is not enough because the Self is much, much more ... indeed, is infinitely more ... than either awareness of awareness or the mind, although, naturally, those awareness and the mind are partial expressions of what is made possible through the reality of the Self."

"I'm way out of my depth in relation to many aspects of this discussion on mysticism," I confessed, "but there is something that occurred to me a little bit earlier that might fit in with some of what you are saying. In any case, I find the matter raises a lot of interesting questions for me.

"A number of years ago, a medical clinician by the name of John Lorber was doing some work in England with hydrocephalics. For those of you who might not be familiar with this condition, it is created when, for whatever reason, the flow of cerebral-spinal fluid is blocked in those a way that the fluid begins to become trapped in one or more of the ventricles or cavities within the brain.

"Generally speaking, if the cerebral-spinal fluid accumulates in the brain, it begins to exert pressure from the interior of the brain, where the cavities or ventricles exist, in an outward direction toward the skull. Eventually, if allowed to continue, the brain literally gets squeezed almost out of existence and, as a result, becomes compressed to just a few millimeters, or so, in size, around the inside of the skull.

"Usually, the end result of this process is a severe form of irreversible retardation known as hydrocephaly. Lorber, however, stumbled onto some exceptions to this general rule.

"After doing some brain scans of some of his patients, he found these people's brains had been compressed, as one would expect, to an extremely thin layer along certain interior portions of the skull. Yet, amazingly, these patients were not severely retarded but were fully functioning, intelligent human beings ... and at least one of whom was an honors graduate in mathematics from Cambridge.

"This meant one of two things. Either having a brain gets in the way of doing mathematics, that might be why so many of us have difficulty with mathematics, or one might not need a brain to exhibit intelligence.

"Why some people who exist more or less without a brain are severely retarded, while others who appear to be in the same condition are

not similarly retarded, no one knows. Some people have speculated the difference might be a matter of how quickly or slowly the damage is done, with the latter process allowing time, perhaps, for some sort of transfer of functioning that is not possible with a relatively quick compression of the brain.

"Whatever the explanation turns out to be, one has difficulty looking at the significance of brain functioning in the same way after learning about Lorber's findings. The relationship between, on the one hand, intelligence and consciousness, and, on the other hand, neurotransmitter chemistry, neuronal functioning, and brain electrical activity, might not be quite as neat as some psychologists and neurophysiologists would have us suppose is the case.

"In addition, in the light of Lorber's findings, one has trouble, I think, trying to maintain that consciousness is merely an emergent property of the activity of billions of neurons and/or their synaptic connections. When most of these synaptic pathways have been destroyed and when neuronal functioning has been severely disrupted, if not entirely compromised, and, yet, consciousness or awareness remains intact, at least in the fully-functioning hydrocephalics, then, the idea of treating consciousness as an emergent property of a certain level of complexity in brain activity seems to lose much of its appeal, if not, logical force."

Although no one said anything in response to my comments, I could tell from their facial expressions and body language that they were quite intrigued by the information being presented to them. I guess just as I had been very enveloped by what the others had been saying about mysticism, aware-fullness, and so on, without having said anything, until now, in response, the absence of verbal participation from, or feedback by, an individual didn't necessarily signify the person was not interested in what was taking place.

In any event, I no longer felt so much like a useless cog in the visible aspects of our group dynamics. If necessary, I could be silent for the remainder of the discussion and still feel I had been holding up, in some minimal fashion, my end of things within the group.

Colby Shaw's voice interrupted my internal musings. "Earlier, Melanie had voiced her concern about the tendency of a variety of people to reduce the spiritual or mystical realms to being a function of purely mental or psychological or brain activity.

"I have a related concern. There is a very strong parallel trend to isolate or remove various practices from their original, spiritual environments.

"Quite frequently, individuals seem to have no sense of the ecological character of spirituality or mysticism. They seem to suppose they can venture into a variety of different mystical ecologies and extract different practices from those ecologies and transfer them as techniques back to a completely artificial and rationally fabricated ecology of modern mysticism.

"Many years ago Jacques Ellul had warned us, although not necessarily in the context of mysticism, about the tendency of modern, technological societies to try to make a technique of everything, or reduce everything to technique. In the process, individuals who are exposed to, and become entangled with, this world of techniques, and its concomitant thinking, become impoverished in a variety of ways because the humanity of these individuals becomes limited to, and a function of, the logic of machines.

"When we come under the sphere of influence of technique, our political, economic, educational and social forms of organization all are affected adversely by this. This same sort of thinking seems to be becoming increasingly evident in a great deal of modern literature and movements dealing with altered states of consciousness, mysticism, spirituality, trans-personal psychology, and the so-called expansion of consciousness.

"Inherent in the logic of machines is the idea one can substitute, in an endless fashion, machine parts without adversely affecting the functioning of the machine in which the substitutions are made. Also inherent in the logic of machines is the idea that one can cannibalize machines as required and take from those machines whatever one likes and use the parts in another context and for other purposes than was the case with the machine or machines from which the parts were cannibalized.

"The logic of machines involves the belief one can move machines anywhere, and they will operate in the same fashion as they did in the original setting with, at most, only minor adjustments having to be made. The logic of machines has little regard for the subtleties, richness and complexities of ecology.

"Today, we find all manner of so-called psycho-technologies that purport to have the ability to deliver us to self-realization, wholeness, ultimate reality

and so on. Many people report having derived benefit, insights and intense kinds of experience through the techniques that are employed by the psycho-technologies.

"What these people might not understand is that deriving benefits, gaining insights, or having experiences is not necessarily the same thing as realizing the true nature of our identity or activating all of the potential of our essential capacities for the different spiritual modalities of awareness that Melanie and Tammy were discussing. If one does not know who or what or why one is, and if one has not realized the full spiritual potential of the human being, how can one assign a meaning to the significance of the benefits, insights or experiences that have accrued to one through following some set of techniques?

"When one has had a powerful insight or experience, all one can say is that it was unlike anything one has had previously. Where those insights or experiences actually weigh-in when measured by the exacting standards of the grand scale of Reality or Divinity is a question that ought to be asked but often is not.

"Instead, people tend to treat these powerful, never-before-encountered experiences or insights as if they are all that Reality had to offer. These people often seem to assume that, surely, there couldn't possibly be any more than what has been experienced or understood, or thought to be experienced or understood, following the use of the techniques associated with a given psycho-technology.

"For years now, the field of biological ecology has steadily been revealing the damage we do to the environment by applying all manner of techniques to our physical/living surroundings without having any understanding of what we are doing or the nature of the destructive effects that will be entailed by what we do. Truly, we are those who need to be forgiven, for we know not what we do to, among other realities, the ecologies of the Earth and the residents of these ecologies, including ourselves.

"What many individuals do not appreciate is that in the realm of spiritual ecology, things are even more complex, subtle, rich, and interconnected than they are on the level of material/biological manifestations and phenomena. Yet, people are so preoccupied with technique and psycho-technologies, they fail to understand the damage they are doing to themselves and their surroundings.

"In legal circles there is a well-known saying to the effect that the non-lawyer who tries to serve as his or her own counsel in matters of law has a fool for a client. Similarly, in the realm of mysticism, anyone who tries to serve as her or his own spiritual guide has a seriously deluded idiot for a disciple.

"In fact, one of the most important ecological principles of the spiritual realm is to get a guide who is an accomplished and realized veteran of the territory into which one wishes to venture and who will be able to help one avoid harming oneself or doing damage to other aspects of that ecology. This is considerably easier to say than to do since there are a lot of counterfeit guides who are running about in the countryside.

"The ecological character of the guide herself or himself is underlined by the following point. Techniques by themselves have an extremely limited efficacy, and can have detrimental ramifications, unless done in the context of a sincere and loving relationship of reciprocity between guide and the spiritual seeker.

"Among other things, the guide is sort of a catalytic agent with respect to the kind of impact that various practices have upon the individual. As is the case in biochemistry or chemistry in which reactions either would not take place at all, or would do so extremely slowly and probably not to completion, in the absence of catalytic assistance, so, too, in the spiritual realm, in the absence of the catalytic influence of an authentic guide, a person is not likely to get very far on the mystical path, irrespective of the amount of time those an individual might invest in the performance of different mystical practices.

"Spiritual techniques, in and of themselves, have very little to offer. Techniques only become proper mystical practices when embedded in an appropriate spiritual ecology.

"People who employ mystical practices that have been extracted from a proper spiritual ecology, including the presence of a true guide, might undergo various states of non-ordinary experience and, subsequently, conclude the technique has retained its efficacy. What these people might not understand is there is a difference between, on the one hand, having experiences and, on the other hand, becoming transformed in a permanent fashion those that one comes to realize the nature of one's true identity and so that all one's modalities for aware-fullness, in relation to one's relationship with Divinity, become active.

"Divorced from an appropriate spiritual ecology, techniques become so many toys in the hands of those who play around with them. Like children, these people can incorporate the use of spiritual toys into a world of imagination that entails various kinds of fantasies about the sort of activity in which they are engaged, but in the end, the whole thing is still a matter of make-believe."

"Since we seem to be engaged, to some extent, in a session of venting our worries about the way some people are using or abusing spirituality and mysticism," remarked Andrea Myers, "I might as well mention one of my concerns. Just as lots of people have a tendency to reduce the mystical path to being a function of either unconscious, or mind/brain, activity, or some combination of the two, there also are any number of individuals who try to limit the mystical realm to an array of processes that involve the generation, transmission, accumulation, focusing and control of energy of one kind or another.

"Although we might have difficulty understanding how there could be realms of Being that are entirely independent of considerations of energy of whatever kind, nonetheless, I believe if one listens carefully to what the mystics are saying about the nature of the Self or different modalities of knowing, experiencing and engaging the Self, one begins to appreciate the fact that one cannot suppose all references to subtle realities or essences are necessarily alternative ways of speaking about different forms of energies.

"In any number of ways, I believe the realized masters have indicated there are tremendous, qualitative differences between the levels in which energies, of one kind or another, are operative, and the levels of spirituality that are closest to our true Selves and essential capacities. This is not intended to deny the reality of various species of subtle forms of energy beyond the physical realm, but is intended, instead, to give emphasis to a major principle of the mystical path which stipulates that even in conjunction with the most subtle forms of energy, there are distinct metaphysical boundaries within which those energies are operative and beyond which other modalities of Being come into play that are not a function of energies of whatever description.

"Whether one is talking about: the carriers of force, or bosons, of quantum physics; dissipative structures in the context of the brain's electrical fields; the boiling energy or Num of the !Kung in the Kalahari; ch'i; prana; psi; the property of nefish described in the tradition

of the Kabbalah; the serpent fire of kundalini yoga; or auras of whatever variety, these manifestations of energy ... however related to, or separate from, one another, they might be, and however powerful they might be in their own spheres of relevance ... they are functions of realms of Being that cannot be reduced to, or be made functions of, this spectrum of energies. The masters of the mystical path have been very clear, I feel, in warning us not to use the lesser to explain the greater, and, in point of fact, all manner of energies are very much limited manifestations that are made possible by a Reality that is both imminent within, as well as that which totally transcends, and, therefore, is completely unlike, those phenomena.

"Thus, when the realized masters of the mystical path speak of the 'glance' of spiritual Grace that transforms the spiritual condition of the disciple, they are not referring to a form of energy, whether of a gross or subtle nature. Moreover, the Self or one's essential identity is not the most subtle energy field in a series of ethereal fields, with the physical, biological body being the most dense, visible modality in those a series.

"Similarly, spiritual light is not a manifestation of certain kinds of subtle energy. Although spiritual light, like the physical light that is generated through electromagnetic phenomena, has the capacity to illuminate, and, in the process, make certain facets of reality visible to the appropriate modality or instrument of spirituality that is sensitive or receptive to the nature of its illuminating qualities, nevertheless, the capacity of spiritual light to illuminate is not based upon the field properties of some kind of mystical counterpart to the exchange of photons that is said to take place in processes of quantum electrodynamics.

"As Colby intimated earlier, people who pursue the mystical path with the idea of learning techniques that permit them to exercise control over, or exploit the potential of, various kinds of energy, are really engaged in something other than mysticism or spirituality, even though they might use these terms to describe or refer to what they are doing. The goal and purpose of the mystical path lie far beyond these sorts of superficial and limited consideration."

After a certain amount of silence following Andrea's remarks and observations, the conversation became somewhat scattered, dealing with various experiences, some humorous and some that were thought-provoking, that different members of the group had undergone during

the symposium. Gradually, we all came to the conclusion that, perhaps, the time had come to bring the gathering to an end.

Since pretty much everyone in the group -- with the exception of me -- seemed to have a busy Saturday in store, there probably would not be any opportunity to get together again before the symposium ended on Sunday morning. As a result, we all exchanged phone numbers and addresses for possible contact on some occasion in the future ... despite the fact that few, if any, of us were likely to act on, or follow up on, this information, since once we returned to our homes, most of us would become caught up, yet again, in the inertial properties of our normal life routines, and, consequently, we would have difficulty extricating ourselves long enough from the hold that those patterns of behavior had upon our actions to pursue or establish some sort of relationship-at-a-distance even with people we had come to like.

Before breaking up, we briefly discussed whether any of us should probe further into Art Carmichael's failure to show up for the evening session of our group in case, for example, he was sick. Although we all hoped he was all right, we felt there was a potential for his being embarrassed by those efforts, and, therefore, we decided to let the matter drop.

I returned to my room and prepared for sleep. Before drifting off, I took a look at the symposium's program for Saturday and selected a couple of possibilities that I would ponder on further over breakfast.

Just before sleep overcame me, I remembered thinking that Rip's promise, with respect to my being overtaken by events, was running out of time. Oh, well! Even if nothing much transpired between now and Sunday noon, the trip had not been wasted since had been given quite a few things on which to reflect ... both through the mock trial, as well as a result of the several discussions in which I had participated with the impromptu group that I had been invited to join.

I thought about Jennifer and realized how much I loved her, and I looked forward to seeing her on Tuesday when I returned to Boston. I thought about Ken and Pam and realized that never again, at least in this life time, would I be able to see these two people whom I loved.

Sleep enveloped me in the midst of these ruminations. My dreams consisted of a weird juxtaposition of elements related to the last three or four weeks of my life.

There was only one consistent theme throughout the several dreams, or across the various stages of one, long dream. Some dumb, persistent raven kept tap, tap tapping at my door.

Chapter 21: As the Worm Turns

The tap, tap, tapping became an annoying bang, bang, banging. Eventually, the idea penetrated my groggy semi-consciousness that someone was trying to get my attention from the other side of the door to my hotel room.

I stumbled about trying to find my robe. I yelled out: "I'm coming already ... hold your horses."

While putting on the robe and heading toward the door, I snatched a glimpse of the digital clock-radio by the bed. The clock registered twenty-seven past eight in the morning.

Opening the door, I was confronted by a familiar, yet, not altogether welcome sight. Special Agent Williams was standing before me wearing a conservative FBI style of suit along with his own, personal haberdashery accessory ... a dour countenance of imperious impatience.

I greeted him with: "Agent Williams, I'm flattered you couldn't wait for me to return to Boston. I must warn you, however, I'm already spoken for by a very nice woman back home."

"Dr. Phelps," responded Agent Williams, "may we come in. There are a few questions that we need to ask you."

I ushered Agent Williams and a woman into the interior of the room. Pointing to a couple of chairs, I motioned for them to sit down and proceeded to choose the edge of the unmade bed for my seat.

Nodding his head toward the woman who was accompanying him, Agent Williams said: "This is Special Agent Davenport from the local Chicago office. The woman looked at me rather impassively but with a hint of how a scientist might look at a specimen about to be dissected.

"Where's Agent Bradley?" I inquired. "Did he win or lose the coin toss?"

"Special Agent Bradley is taking a few days holiday," replied Agent Williams, " ... not that it's your business. In any event, the time for chitchat is over.

"The first order of business, Dr. Phelps," began Agent Williams, "is the fact that your alibi for last Tuesday morning does not check out. Although you were placed at both the Frames of Mind Cinema and the doughnut shop, there is no those place as 99 St. Jude. Or, perhaps more accurately where 99 St. Jude should be, one finds an empty lot.

"In addition, we interviewed people around the neighborhood. Not a single soul living on that street ever heard of any one called Rip.

"Are you sure you got the address right?" he asked me. "You allege you had been attacked and that some unknown foreign substance was blown into your face, whereupon you claimed to have felt dizzy and fell to the ground.

"Maybe the aftereffects of this supposed incident scrambled your memory or perceptions somewhat. Is this possible, Dr. Phelps?"

"Possibly," I offered, "but I don't think so. By the time I left Rip, I feel fairly certain my faculties were pretty much intact.

"I remember looking at the house number, and it read 99. I also recall looking at the street sign at the end of the street that read: 'St Jude'."

"Do you know Art Carmichael?" asked Agent Williams. "I've met him," I answered. "I can't really say I know him.

"He was part of a discussion group in which I participated yesterday afternoon and again last night. Art didn't show up for last night's get together even though he indicated in the afternoon he would join us."

"Did you ever visit with Mr. Carmichael in his hotel room?" Agent Williams queried.

I shook my head negatively. I added: "I don't even know his room number."

Agents Williams and Davenport briefly exchanged glances. Proceeding on, Agent Williams indicated: "In that event, Dr. Phelps, we have a real puzzle on our hands that I hope you'll be able to resolve for us.

"Could you explain," inquired Agent Williams, "how the key card for your hotel room turned up under the bed of Mr. Carmichael? We happened to find the card on the floor of his room along with something else ... Mr. Carmichael's dead body."

I was completely nonplused. What was going on?

Stammering, I managed to say: "I ... I ... When I was getting ready to leave my room and attend the ... ah ... meeting last night, I noticed my card was missing. I looked for it but couldn't locate it.

"I went down to the registration desk and requested an additional card that the hotel people gave me. I assumed my card would show up at some point but not like this."

"Yes, I can appreciate your sentiments, Dr. Phelps," acknowledged Agent Williams. "Now, I hope you will have some appreciation for our situation.

"Art Carmichael was an undercover agent for the FBI. He was investigating links between terrorism and various religious and spiritual cults.

"Of course, we get upset when any citizen of the United States is murdered. But, we become very upset when a member of the FBI is killed, especially when that agent is performing his or her duty on behalf of the people of this country.

"Where were you, Dr. Phelps, between the hours of 6 and 8 p.m. last evening?" asked Agent Williams.

"I had a long dinner at the restaurant next door to the Balmer House. I came back to my room, took a shower, got dressed, looked for my missing card, went to the hotel's registration desk to seek a new key card, and, then, attended the meeting that had been scheduled for the rest of the evening by the group with which I had been spending time in the afternoon."

"Can anyone verify your whereabouts throughout this period of time?" Agent Williams inquired.

"With the possible exception of, maybe, my waiter at the restaurant, I don't think so," I stated.

Agents Williams and Davenport arose from their respective chairs. "Stand up, Dr. Phelps," ordered Agent Williams. "We're going to have to take you in on suspicion of murder, not only of Agent Carmichael, but also of Ken Pratt, another federal employee. Furthermore, we feel you are implicated in either conspiring to assist a federal prisoner ... one, Brian Idaho ... to escape custody or helping to harbor this same fugitive from justice or both.

"Face the wall next to you, Dr. Phelps," directed Agent Williams, "place your hands on the wall above you, and move your feet back from the baseboard about three feet."

Even though I was in a state of mental shock about what was happening, I complied with the order. As he began frisking me for weapons, there was a knock at the door.

With his hand placed firmly between my shoulder blades, he exerted pressure to let me know I should not make any movements. "Ann," he requested, "see who it is."

Agent Davenport went to the door and opened it. From around the corner, I heard: "Agent Bradley to see Agent Williams."

A few seconds later, Paul Bradley walked into the room. He took in the scene and said to Agent Williams: "What's going on, Ed?"

"What are you doing here?" Agent Williams asked. "I thought you were taking a few days off."

"I was," Agent Bradley informed his colleague, "but I decided to spend my time following the good Dr. Phelps around. Are you arresting him?"

"You bet," answered Agent Williams with a little too much enthusiasm for my liking.

"What for?" inquired Agent Bradley.

"Suspicion of murdering Agent Carmichael, together with suspicion of murdering Ken and Pamela Pratt, as well as suspicion of conspiring to help a federal prisoner escape custody," itemized Agent Williams. As he finished the list of charges, Agent Williams pulled out a pair of handcuffs and told me: "Lower your right hand, Dr. Phelps, and place it behind your back."

"Do you mind if I get dressed first?" I wondered.

Before Agent Williams could answer my question, Agent Bradley said: "Ed, I've talked with our forensic people. They gave me their preliminary estimate on the time of death."

"During the critical time in question, Dr. Phelps never left his room after returning from the restaurant next door to the hotel. I had him under surveillance the whole time. He couldn't have killed Agent Carmichael."

"So, how did the professor's key card end up at the scene of the murder?" Agent Williams queried.

"I don't know," replied Agent Bradley. Turning toward me, he asked: "Why did a hotel employee come to your room after you returned from the restaurant? Did you make some kind of request for room service?"

I looked at him in a quizzical fashion. "Nobody came to my room-- at least -- not that I'm aware of," I indicated.

"I was in the shower for ten or fifteen minutes. Someone might have come in during that time, but, if so, I didn't hear anything."

Agent Bradley looked over at Agent Williams and gave the latter a look which suggested that, perhaps, Agent Williams ought to reconsider the possibilities. In addition, Agent Bradley said: "As far as the other charges that you mentioned are concerned, Ed, even though part of Dr. Phelps' alibi for last Tuesday doesn't check out, the preponderance of evidence pointing to him is both fairly marginal and circumstantial.

"We both know the time line required for him to go from Boston to Washington, commit the murders, and, then, return to Boston is extremely tight. Furthermore, when we showed a composite drawing of him to the ticket and airline personnel, both in Boston and Washington, no one remembers him as having been there on the night in question.

"Motive, opportunity and means are, up to this point in time, entirely absent from any case we might have against Dr. Phelps in relation to the Pratt murders. We have even less evidence capable of tying him to the Brian Idaho prison escape."

Apparently, Agent Williams was mulling over what had been said to him by Agent Bradley. He hadn't taken his hand from my back, but the force being exerted had diminished considerably.

Finally, almost reluctantly, Agent Williams withdrew his hand from my back. For the moment, I seemed to have been tossed back into the waters of freedom as not quite a legal catch.

I felt badly for Agent Williams. There was no love lost between us, but I'm sure the soaring anticipation with which he flew to Chicago to rendezvous with me had just plummeted in a severe down draft supplied by Agent Bradley's words.

His return trip to Boston was likely to be a downer as well. Nonetheless, despite my empathy for his condition, I also had a strong sense of 'better him than me', and I was sure that being the kind of guy he was, Agent Williams would be able to deal with his pain and disappointment in a suitably manly fashion.

Agent Williams backed away from me and moved toward the hall leading to the door. Just before turning the corner, he turned around and faced me.

Pointing his finger at me, he said: "Don't think this means you are home free, Dr. Phelps. I don't buy the idea your connection with three murders and a prison break is a matter of coincidence.

"I don't know how you fit into all of this, yet, but you better believe I'm going to stay with this case and find out." He glared at me for a few seconds longer, looked over at Agent Bradley with an expression that was hard to read, and turned around to leave the room.

Agent Davenport followed him through the doorway. Agent Bradley lingered behind.

When the other two had left, he asked: "When are you planning to leave for Boston?"

I thought for a moment. I concluded that Rip's prognostication concerning my being overtaken by events had just transpired, and if this was not the case, I wasn't anxious to wait around and discover what followed this existential appetizer.

"If I can book a seat, probably either sometime this morning or this afternoon," I replied. "Why?"

"Can you meet me on Sunday at a time yet to be determined?" inquired Agent Bradley. "More likely than not, the time will be earlier in the day rather than later."

"Yes, I guess so," I responded. "What's the purpose of the meeting?"

"I'll tell you when we get together," he intimated. "Stick by your home phone, and I'll let you know the time and place."

Agent Bradley turned to go. I said: "By the way, thanks for bailing me out."

Still going away from me, he stated: "I was helping Agent Williams as much as I was helping you. Moreover, Dr. Phelps, in certain ways Agent Williams is quite right."

At the door, he turned around and faced me. "Your involvement in all of this is no coincidence," he stated matter-of-factly.

"My theory of the situation may be different from that of Agent Williams," he added. "Nonetheless, you should know that neither he nor I will stop until we get to the bottom of what is going on in these events of the last month or so."

"Does this mean I'm going to be under continuous surveillance?" I inquired.

Agent Bradley smiled. "Now, Dr. Phelps, you wouldn't want me to spoil all the fun you'll have in trying to guess whether or not you are being watched, would you?"

"Believe it or not, Agent Bradley," I said, "being watched, is not my primary concern at the moment. I am becoming more concerned about how many parties are watching me and why, because, seemingly, there is a growing amount of evidence, at least in my own mind, that the FBI is not the only party who is treating me as a spectator sport."

The smile disappeared from Agent Bradley's face. He fixed my gaze for a second or two and said: "I'll contact you on Sunday, Dr. Phelps," and, then, he walked down the hotel corridor in the direction of the elevators.

After closing the door to my room, I lay down on the bed and began to reflect on the news that had come pouring forth from the lips of Agent Williams, like an unwanted leak in the dikes of my sanity. 99 St. Jude did not exist or was a vacant lot ... take your pick.

How could this be? I had spent some six or seven hours in that house.

Rip had given me the grand tour through its varied rooms and facilities. I had eaten food in the center's soup kitchen.

Suddenly, a thought surfaced. Beth's abductors had planted memories in her mind about aliens in order to obscure the reality of what had transpired.

Was 99 St. Jude a similar implant? Were Rip, the center, and my experiences there a clever, fabricated mental construct designed to hide another reality altogether?

In Beth's case the memory of one kind of abduction had been used to conceal the fact of another kind of actual abduction. In my case, perhaps the memory of an attempted abduction was being used to mask an actual abduction as well.

Beth had experienced some missing time, and where she actually had been was blocked out by an implanted memory of an alien abduction. I also might have experienced some missing time, and where I had been in actuality might have been screened behind an implanted memory of a Botclot community center.

On the one hand, everything about that morning with Rip seemed so vivid in my memory. On the other hand, people who undergo false memory

syndrome also are quite certain that certain things happened that, in point of fact, have not taken place.

Elizabeth Loftus, a psychologist, had done quite a bit of experimental exploration into the ways in which memory could be distorted and falsified, after the fact, through a variety of different forces those as our vulnerability to suggestion and social pressure. The notion of confabulation referred to the mind's capacity to invent or reconstruct memories in an effort to make sense of, or generate a consistent story line with respect to, whatever memory fragments we do have.

I also thought about a syndrome known as autoscopy. In this condition, an individual has a hallucination in which one's body image is projected into visual space and experienced as an external, real object.

Maybe, Rip and the center were some sort of weird variation on autoscopy. Rather than just projecting my own body image into space, I had constructed a whole set, together with a cast of actors, and projected them into visual space as well.

If I had experienced a transient episode of an autoscopic-like condition, I might have had some natural or synthetic chemical assistance. A number of hallucinogenic candidates flitted through my mind.

The Tukano Indians of the Amazon used a hallucinogen known as yaje. The Huichol Native peoples of Mexico ingested peyote that contained mescaline as an active hallucinogenic ingredient. Ayahuasca, or the vision vine, was popular among some of the native groups in the high- and mid-Amazon jungles of Peru. LSD or some new designer drug was also on the short list of chemical suspects.

Many of these hallucinogens were described as being able to generate incredibly vivid and life-like hallucinations of considerable detail and intricacy. If the substance that I believed had been blown into my face at the time of the attempted abduction was one, or more, of these hallucinogens, maybe Rip and the center were nothing more than an elaborate hallucination.

Depending on how much of those substances might have been blown into my face, the length of my 'trip' would have varied. However, six to seven hours would not have been an implausible drug -aided journey into inner-space.

So, here I was sitting in a hotel room in Chicago, possibly at the behest of a figment of my imagination. Visions of doing some down-time in a private psychiatric facility began to dance through my head.

In the light of these considerations, Rip's -- or my alter ego's -- deconstructive treatment of schizophrenia was not necessarily the delineation of an interesting and insightful paradigm shift involving the perspective of spiritually intoxicated mystics vis-à-vis so-called 'normal', sane individuals. Instead, these musings might have been the unconscious projections of an over-the-hill psychology professor who, thanks to a drug-induced altered state of consciousness, was being forced to swallow some of his own conceptual medicine in an attempt to heal an alienated and scarred psyche whose hold on reality was not as firm as he sometimes deluded himself was the case.

At this point, the trajectory of another thought lit up the darkness of my ignorance. How did my alter ego know about the existence of: the symposium; its correct title; the dates for the event; the city; and the building where it would be held?

To be sure, lots of notices landed on my desk during the course of a school year, informing me about many different meetings, gatherings, lectures and the like. Perhaps, for some reason, I had absorbed the data and, subsequently, proceeded to forget where I had read or heard about the symposium.

This was a possibility I was inclined to discount. But, I couldn't necessarily rule it out completely.

The information concerning the symposium could have been a memory implant. Yet, how did those an implant know, ahead of time, that events would overtake me in Chicago as my friendly chimera, Rip, correctly had predicted?

How could an implanted memory know I would develop a liaison with someone present at the symposium that would be of assistance to me, as seemed to be the case with Special Agent Paul Bradley? Was this all a matter of coincidence, or synchronicity, or a carefully worked out plan of some sort?

Were the whole set of events involving the symposium, Art Carmichael, along with Agents Williams, Davenport and Bradley, all part of some elaborate conspiracy in which I had become entangled? How could some elusive group of co-conspirators possibly have taken into account,

ahead of time, those a seemingly 'chance' future event that I would sit down in a lounge in a Chicago hotel where a group ... of which Art Carmichael was a part ... would invite me to participate?

Perhaps this mysterious 'they' didn't know I would be sitting in that lounge at that time. Maybe they were just opportunists whose previous preparations allowed them to exploit the opportunities that chance was providing.

I also began to wonder about whether or not I had gone to the lounge of my own free will and volition? Or, was the lounge idea part of a post-hypnotic suggestion given during the time of my abduction that, at the appropriate instant or with the right stimulus-trigger, would bob to the surface of my consciousness as if it were my own thought?

For "persons unknown" to conspire in those an elaborate fashion with respect to me seemed, to say the least, rather egocentric and narcissistic. There just seemed to be no reasonable explanation for why anyone would feel the need to construct those a highly complex set of arrangements in order to involve or manipulate me.

Then, again, if the pawns in a game of chess had some small degree of self-awareness and rationality, maybe, they, too, would be wondering why anyone would bother to take the time and make the effort to get them mixed-up in all manner of struggles, strategies and deceptions. An individual didn't necessarily have to understand she or he was a participant in a game in order to get moved about by the mover of the first part whose motives were opaque to the 'movee' of the second part.

I was getting nowhere fast with all these flights of fantasy. I decided to do something down-to-earth and try to get a flight back to Boston.

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As a result of the upcoming Fourth of July holiday and the normal, enhanced level of summer air traffic, I wasn't able to obtain a departure time before 10:00 p.m.. Once time zone, flight time, road travel time back to the apartment, and getting-ready-for-sleep-time were factored in, I was able to climb into my own bed around three in the morning.

Paul Bradley must have been watching all of this. Apparently, keeping me guessing about surveillance was not enough for him, and he decided to have some further fun at my expense by providing a wake-up call at seven a.m. .

He might have been amused. I wasn't.

"Dr. Phelps, this is Agent Bradley. Could you meet me in about an hour outside your apartment building?"

"Are you calling at this time to annoy me or because it is really necessary?" I inquired.

"To annoy you, of course," he replied. "However, if you take a nice hot shower, I believe you'll find that all your annoyance will wash off, along with the remaining residues of your late-night trip back from Chicago."

"Should I dress in formal attire for my audience with you?" I asked.

"Something between tennis and a tuxedo should be sufficient," he answered. "I'm a pretty humble kind of guy."

"Maybe," I responded, "but you lack compassion for those who are sleepless in Boston."

"Sorry," he apologized insincerely, "but my job description as an FBI agent quite clearly specifies I must be devoid of both compassion and humor whenever possible. You wouldn't want me to be suspended for conduct unbecoming an agent, would you?"

"I'm warming up to the idea," I indicated.

"We're wasting time, Dr. Phelps," he urged. "If you hurry, I'm sure a man of your integrity and intelligence should be able to get to the lobby in about fifty minutes, complete with matching socks."

"What happened to the hour you were dangling before me earlier?" I asked.

"What happened to it is something you might do well to keep in mind, Dr. Phelps," stated Agent Bradley rather ominously. "At the FBI our offers don't stay on the table very long."

"Do I need a trench coat or, perhaps, a cloak and a dagger?" I queried.

"Just bring a Captain Cosmic deluxe, de-coder ring," he advised and hung up.

Approximately forty-five minutes later, I was downstairs in body, although not quite in spirit. The latter appeared to have hit the snooze button for some extra sack time and was still in some far off exotic place of which dreams are made.

At least I seemed to have remembered to put on some pants and a shirt ... although given recent events, I couldn't be really sure if this was true. I

decided not to check and see whether I had met the matching-socks standard entailed by Agent Bradley's test for integrity and intelligence.

Agent Bradley was waiting for me in front of the apartment building. He motioned me to get in his car.

When we both were buckled up for safety, I asked: "Where are we going?"

"That information is classified, Dr. Phelps," he informed me. "I'll de-classify it when we arrive at our destination."

The remainder of the trip was traversed in silence. Whether this was due to his nature, the situation, a need to maintain the secretive, taciturn image of the FBI or a combination of these factors, was uncertain.

Some forty minutes later we were parked in front of the Frames of Mind Cinema. Agent Bradley got out of the car and indicated for me to do the same.

After leaving the car, he said: "Dr. Phelps, I would like you to retrace your steps of last Monday night and Tuesday morning. As we go along, describe to me whatever took place at that time as best you can remember."

"Is this an official request?" I wondered.

"Semi-official," he stated. "Your assistance could help out in an on-going investigation, but I'm also doing this on my own time and for my own reasons.

"If you want to make it official, Dr. Phelps, we can meet again on Monday morning with Agent Williams. The choice is yours."

"You have quite a way with the English language, Agent Bradley," I remarked. "Your semantic nuances are so subtlety and delicately phrased."

"It's the training," he offered. With his hand extended in front of him, his body English and the expression on his face voiced the question: 'Shall we proceed?'

By way of response, I began to narrate the sequence of events of nearly a week ago as we walked along the same route followed at that time. Some fifteen minutes, or so, later, we had arrived at St. Jude Street.

We ambled slowly down the street to where I believed, and recalled, 99 St. Jude to have been. Agent Williams' words reverberated in my mind as my eyes bounced about the empty lot.

I began walking into the vacated area, not really paying any attention to where I was going. I was preoccupied, once again, with all the possibilities I had considered while lying on the hotel bed in Chicago.

Somewhere toward the middle of the lot I stopped and turned around. I shrugged my shoulders and shook my head, as if to express to no one in particular: 'I don't know what is going on. This is not how I remember things'.

I looked over at Agent Bradley, who was observing me from about forty feet away, and, then, I casually scanned the ground around me. A piece of paper was fluttering in the slight breeze that had arisen.

The paper was held down by a small piece of asphalt that covered about a quarter of the sheet. Out of idle curiosity, I leaned over and tugged at the corner of the paper.

Upon pulling the sheet closer to me, I could see there was writing on it. It read:

"Dear David,

Sorry for the disappearing act. I hope to see you soon. Say 'hello' to Agent Bradley for me, Rip"

By the time I had finished reading the note several times in order to overcome my incomprehension about, and awed fascination with, what was in my hands, Agent Bradley was by my side. I handed the note to him and said: "If neither you nor Agent Williams wrote this note, there is a lot bigger mystery here than any of us suspects?"

Agent Bradley stared at the paper for quite some time. On several occasions he looked over at me with a very puzzled expression on his face.

I suspected he, mentally and emotionally, was running through his version of what I had gone through, lying on the bed in Chicago. For my part, I felt exhilarated, amused, relieved and confused all at the same time.

Rather mischievously, I inquired: "Do you suppose the people down at forensics can do anything with this? If you like, I can loan you my deluxe, Captain Cosmic de-coder ring."

He was silent for a while longer. Finally, he asked: "Do you mind if I keep this?"

Initially, I wasn't happy about relinquishing the only piece of concrete evidence I had that helped to substantiate my whereabouts last Tuesday morning. On further reflection, I realized the piece of paper, in and of itself, probably didn't prove a whole lot.

In fact, the most important feature associated with this piece of evidence might have been the manner in which Agent Bradley was serving as a witness to its discovery. Unless, of course, he suspected me of either planting it, or having it planted by one of my co-conspirators those as the ever-dangerous Beth Idaho or the criminal genius, Jennifer Ormsby.

I answered Agent Bradley's request with: "I suspect you could confiscate the paper as material evidence irrespective of what I say, but I appreciate your having sought my permission."

We walked back toward the Frames of Mind Cinema in silence. I waited for him to unlock the car and proceeded to get in and buckle up.

On the way back to my apartment, I inquired: "Agent Bradley, do you mind if I ask about what the personal reasons are to which you alluded earlier for taking me on this little jaunt this morning?"

"No," he indicated. "I don't mind you asking, as long as you don't expect an answer ... at least, not at the present time ... perhaps, never."

To either change the subject or to offer some sort of compensation to me for his abruptness concerning the issue being raised, he said: "You might be interested to know we have determined that the guy who came to your hotel room while you were taking a shower was not an employee of the Balmer House. Whether he is the perpetrator of anything beyond impersonating a hotel employee, illegal entry and, apparently, being responsible for the lifting of your key card is not known at this time?"

"Of course," he added, "we can't rule out the possibility this person might have been known to you, and you are covering for him. If it's a comfort to you, while Agent Williams is favorably disposed toward this idea, I've disinclined to entertain it seriously."

"Does this mean you don't consider me to be a prime suspect any longer?" I asked.

"Let's just say," he remarked, "that you seem to have more potential as someone who, for whatever reason, is caught up in the turbulence of some interesting, albeit illegal, activity."

"That sort of sounds like you are considering me to be a form of bait," I observed.

"You should be happy to have the chance to serve the community," he countered.

"Both the worm and the one who fishes serve the community," I indicated, "but, unlike the bait, the fisherman gets to receive the deep appreciation of the community in quaint little ceremonies."

"Not to worry, Dr. Phelps," he consoled me. "If necessary, I'll make sure they spell your name right on whatever memorial might be erected on your behalf.

"Besides," he added, "if you've read Melville, Hemingway, Kipling or Benchley, you should know that the ones who do the fishing don't always come back alive. Fate, sometimes, is very egalitarian in the way in which it treats the life at both ends of the fishing pole."

"That might be true," I acknowledged, "but at least the one who does the fishing has some idea why he or she is out on the water. Meanwhile, the poor, dumb worm is drowning and wondering why all these sharp teeth are whizzing by."

Agent Bradley pulled up in front of my apartment building. Looking over at me, he said: "Thanks for coming, Dr. Phelps. I'll be in touch."

"I'm sure those must be the sentiments with which the worm is left just after being skewered," I replied. Unbuckling my belt, I debated whether to tell Agent Bradley about what Rip had said concerning the nature of my, at least partially, intertwined destiny with the one who would be of assistance to me in Chicago.

I decided to let the matter go for now. Agent Bradley probably only would interpret those a tale as the rambling of a waterlogged worm.

After a good night's sleep, I got up early on Monday morning. Before fulfilling the conditions of my pre-arranged meeting with Mary Streeter, there were a few domestic chores and financial loose -ends to look after.

I had finished all my errands in plenty of time to make my way over to the newspaper offices where Mary worked and walk through the front doors at about five to one in the afternoon. I told the receptionist who I was and whom I had come to see, and she placed a call to Mary.

Three or four minutes later, Mary appeared from around a corner. Smiling, she walked toward me and, upon reaching me, gave me a hug, that I returned.

Mary was blond-haired and with a color of greenish-blue eyes that were mesmerizing. One easily could become lost in the alluring depth of those eyes as well as by the way light seemed to dance about them when she looked at you.

She was as intelligent as she was beautiful, and her beauty was considerable. I felt lucky to have become friends with her over the years.

We left the building exchanging pleasantries. Once outside, she took the lead and guided me to a restaurant several blocks away.

Since Mary had made reservations, we were ushered to a table in fairly quick order. Although the restaurant was moderately busy, our seats, at least for the moment, were somewhat removed from most of the other patrons.

In a few more minutes we each had ordered and were sipping water from the glasses provided by our waiter. While waiting for the food to arrive and during the first part of the meal, I filled Mary in on everything that had taken place ... from the time that Beth Idaho had first walked into my office, until the time when Agent Bradley had dropped me off in front of my apartment yesterday morning.

When I had finished my account, she said: "I've already made quite a few inquiries about the individuals, organizations and leads that you gave me while you were in Chicago. Nothing has come back yet, but I'm expecting some results in the next day or two. I hope you'll appreciate the fact, David that I've called in a lot of I.O.U.s on this one."

"You've also created a new I.O.U.," I offered, "if that is any consolation."

"Not much," she sniffed. "An I.O.U. from you is like a lot of junk bonds ... full of promise, volatile, and often of more value to the one who is supplying them than to the one who is receiving them."

"Remind me not to ask you to speak at any testimonial dinner that might be given in my behalf," I noted.

"Although the latter is unlikely to happen," Mary countered, "nonetheless, I feel deeply honored that you have entrusted me with those a sensitive responsibility."

"My, my," I remarked, "we're feisty for a Monday, aren't we? Your research on ecology must not be going all that well, so you've decided to add the names of your few remaining friends to the red list of endangered species."

Smiling, Mary remarked: "You psychologist types are so clever, but, as usual, only by half. In reality, the research is going extremely well, but, unfortunately, it is too much of a bad thing.

"The whole thing started out," she informed me, "with the idea of doing an interim report on what had happened following the Earth Summit that occurred in Rio in 1992, together with an overview of some of the issues that had been discussed during the environmental summit held in Kyoto, Japan. Originally, I thought I would just do an updated version of the three R's ... reduce, reuse and re-cycle ... but I soon began to see that the problems are beyond the capacity of the three R's to solve.

"Indeed, the three R's are woefully inadequate to take on the killer P's: profits, politics, power, poverty, population, propaganda, procrastination, progress, paradigms, pathology, production, pleasure, pesticides, pharmaceuticals, plastics, as well as other kinds of polymers and pollution. In the context of the killer P's, the three R's seem to be someone's cute, marketing strategy to help keep us in ignorance and denial concerning the real magnitude, and potentially terminal nature, of the problems with which humankind is presently faced.

"Moreover, these issues are not just a matter of how human beings are adversely affecting different eco-systems that are sharing this planet with our species and that play very important roles in our continued physical existence. The problems give expression to ecological concerns construed in the broadest possible terms ... spiritual, social, political, legal, medical, educational and economic.

"Because human ecology has become diseased on all levels, a metastasis-like process has been spreading human malignancies throughout the different layers of the Earth's physical environment... from the atmosphere, to the oceans, to the lands, and to the organisms that inhabit various niches of these layers of the environment. The reason this metastasis-like process has been going on, unchecked, for those a long time is because our ecological ignorance begins, first and foremost, with our failure to understand the complexity, intricacy and nature of the human being, both internally, as well as in conjunction with our relationships with

one another and our relationships with different eco-systems within our environment.

"If, for the moment, we ignore the human side of the ecological equation and just look at the physical aspects or symptoms, if you will, of what humanity brings to that equation, the situation is very depressing, if not daunting. Just keep in mind, however, as horrific as the purely outward character of the problem is, the issue doesn't get really scary and nightmarish until we look at the human pathologies being given expression through these symptoms.

"If the problems with which we are confronted were purely technical in character, we might stand some chance of turning things around through scientific and engineering ingenuity. But, what needs fixing is the human being, and neither science, technology nor engineering have anything to offer for solving the human part of the equation.

"As far as the outward facets of the issue are concerned, one could start almost anywhere. For instance, during the last hundred and fifty years, and especially since World War II, billions of kilograms of man-made, synthetic chemicals have been pumped into different parts of the environment.

"These chemicals come in the form of over one hundred thousand species of compounds. In addition, there are more than a thousand new synthetic polymers being introduced into nature with each passing year.

"Only a tiny fraction of these compounds have been studied with sufficient diligence to even begin to understand what sorts of problematic impact these chemicals might be having on various ecological cycles. Moreover, whatever detailed studies have been conducted strongly suggest that many industrial chemicals ... both in the form of commercial products as well in those that are used in production processes ... have properties capable of adversely affecting almost every dimension of the environment, including, most importantly, the numerous species inhabiting an array of interlocking eco-systems within the environment.

"None of this, of course, even begins to take into consideration the many unknowns associated with the introduction of biotechnology into the discussion. We are just beginning to realize that even in the case of synthetic

chemicals there are intricacies of ecological dynamics that, as little as twenty or thirty years ago, we neither comprehended nor even imagined.

"Now, we have arrogance and ignorance running about in sullied lab coats, with visions of dollar signs and accolades dancing in their brains, assuring us they are omniscient and we have nothing to worry about despite the fact that what they, and the rest of us, actually know about ecology, both short-term and long-term, is embarrassingly little. I would feel a lot safer if some of these scientists and researchers had a little more humility and common sense and a little less ambition and technical acumen.

"In any event, if we just limit our conversation to synthetic chemical compounds and reluctantly shelve, for the moment, the additional problems raised by genetic engineering, there is something that every human being on Earth needs to come to understand with their souls, hearts, minds and bodies. In one way or another, eventually, a very large number of the synthetic chemicals being pumped into the environment become part of a toxic cycle that disrupts, undermines, compromises, alters, and/or lethally affects virtually every ecological cycle on earth.

"During production, or while being used, or when being disposed of, these chemicals ... either directly or through the by-products of their decomposition ... are dispersed into air, water and land. Furthermore, through processes of evaporation, weather patterns and so on, these chemicals become part of the rain and snow that fall to Earth and, as a result become distributed throughout, and accumulate in, every link in the food chain.

"Unfortunately, there simply are not enough dollars or scientists being directed ... by independent agencies, institutions, and organizations ... to the kind of detailed research that needs to be done to determine the potential toxicity of the tens of thousands of chemicals that have not been subjected to anything but a limited, and cursory, sort of examination by the very people who stand to profit by the commercial sale or use of the chemicals that they are studying. Furthermore, very few of the studies being commissioned, whether by the chemical companies or by independent funding, are studying the possible synergistic effects that the interaction of different synthetic chemicals might be having once these substances are released into the environment.

The waiter arrived to take our orders for dessert and/or a beverage of some sort. Another person came and removed the used plates and glasses.

When the brief flurry of activity had subsided, Mary continued by saying: "Just to give you a relatively simple example of the complexity of these kinds of interaction, consider the issue of acid rain. Despite the fact that during the last thirty years regulatory steps have been taken to help bring about a fairly dramatic reduction in the amount of sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxides being emitted into the atmosphere, nonetheless, acid rain, rather unexpectedly, continues to persist as a problem.

"One would expect the level of acid rain to go down when some of its primary, formative ingredients ... in other words, sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxides ... are removed from the environment. Because this has not always been the case, especially in environments those as forests, where a few scientists have taken a closer look at the issue.

"They have discovered that the problem of acid rain is a lot more complicated than originally was believed to be the case. Among other things, these researchers have found that the buffering role of certain chemicals, known as bases, have not been properly appreciated in connection with helping to counteract and neutralize the effects of acid rain.

"More specifically, David, as I'm sure you know, bases have a pH of more than 7, whereas acids have a pH of less than 7. In the atmosphere there are tiny amounts of minerals, like magnesium carbonate and calcium carbonate, found in atmospheric dust particles, and these minerals can serve as bases when the particulates, of which they are a part, are dissolved in water.

"If these base particulates either act directly with acidic gases those as nitrogen oxides or sulfur dioxide, or if the particulates become dissolved in atmospheric water droplets containing any of the acidic gases, the basic and acidic materials tend to cancel each other out, resulting in a neutralization of the acid properties of the gases or water droplets.

"In addition to natural sources for airborne dust particles with basic characteristics, there are also a number of human-assisted sources of particulate production. Construction sites, mining operations, farms, cement production plants, automobile traffic on unpaved dirt or gravel roads, as well as metal processing, can all release considerable amounts of mineral-containing particulates into the air that have the potential for forming basic solutions when dissolved in water.

"When the regulations for decreases in the emissions of nitrogen oxides and sulfur dioxide came into effect, there were also other kinds of regulations seeking to reduce the levels of different particulates generated by various kinds of commercial activity. When particulate emissions began to decrease, along with them went their neutralizing capabilities with respect to acid rain emissions.

"This is not the end of the story, however. The relationship between bases and acids extends beyond what goes on in the atmosphere. Their dynamics carry over into, and have ramifications for, chemical processes going on in the soil.

"Base cations, or ions, are positively-charged. In the soil there are small particles of decayed organic matter and various kinds of clay that are negatively charged, and, as a result, these anions, or negatively-charged ions, are available for reacting with positively-charged ions, like basic particulates, that, previously, had been airborne but, now, have become deposited in the soil.

"In addition, many of the elements ... those as sodium, calcium, potassium, and magnesium ... contained in these former dust particles of the air serve as a potential source of nutrients for plant life. Thus, when dust particles containing these kinds of element descend on the soil in which plants are rooted, they act as a source of minerals for proper plant functioning and development.

"When acid rain falls and leeches downward through the soil, positively-charged hydrogen ions contained in the acidic water are capable of binding more tightly with negatively-charged ions of clay and organic matter in the soil than are positively-charged ions those as magnesium, sodium, calcium and potassium. Consequently, the cations, or positively-charged ions, in acid rain tend to replace base cations that, up to then, had been bound to the negatively-charged ions in the soil.

"These chemical replacement-reactions have a number of consequences. First of all, once the base cations have been shunted aside, they become vulnerable to being washed out of the soil and ending up in streams, rivers and lakes. This not only depletes the soil of minerals necessary for healthy plant life, but, as well, it makes the soil acidic, and this has its own deleterious effects on plant life.

"Secondly, when acid rain soaks into the ground, sometimes it brings about the formation of aluminum ions by reacting with naturally occurring, or synthetically generated, aluminum that is in the soil. Aluminum ions are positively-charged and also tend to replace base cations, just as the positively-charged hydrogen ions of acid rain tend to replace base cations.

"Aluminum ions have toxic properties. Therefore, not only does acid rain force out useful mineral nutrients from the soil, as well as acidifies the soil, acid rain also provides a way for a toxic substance to accumulate in the soil by helping to convert aluminum molecules to an ionic form capable of entering into chemical reactions with the negatively-charged ions in the soil.

"When base cations, relative to acid rain cations, predominate in the soil, the former serve as a buffering system against the effects of the latter by helping to neutralize acidity. This neutralizing action protects the flora of forest eco-systems, as well as the fauna that depend on a healthy flora for biological success.

"When the amount of acid rain begins to overwhelm the buffering capacity of base cations, a useful form of cation exchange is replaced by a problematic form of cation exchange. At some point during this transition from the former kind of cation exchange to the latter modality, both the flora and the fauna of the forest eco-system begin to be affected adversely.

"For a long time, the standard model of cation exchange maintained that base cations in the soil were continuously replenished by means of a sort of chemical weathering process. In other words, various useful minerals, contained within the rocks in the soil, were released into an eco-system, slowly over time, through the dissolution of the rocks as a result of the effects of various naturally occurring chemical reactions involving these rocks.

"Relatively recently, however, researchers have discovered that in certain eco-systems, airborne base cations seem to serve as a more important source of some nutrient minerals than does the chemical weathering process going on in the soil. Consequently, in these kinds of eco-system, pollution regulations designed to reduce the levels of particulate emissions actually render the system more vulnerable to the effects of acid rain because a source of buffering ...namely, the base cations that will arise when the minerals in the particulates go into solution ... is being withdrawn from the environment due to the regulations.

"One of the morals of this story does not involve the suggestion to permit higher levels of particulate emissions to be released into the environment in order to better counteract the effects of acid rain since various kinds of particulate create their own form of health and environmental problems. Rather, scientists recommend that the levels of sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxides currently being pumped into the atmosphere should be reduced even further than required by present regulatory guidelines.

"If the chemical emissions that help lead to the formation of acid rain were reduced even more, then, even though particulate emissions were also being reduced, nonetheless, airborne base cations still would be available in sufficient quantities to neutralize the effects of acid rain in those ecosystems which, for whatever reason, relied more on airborne dust particles to supply necessary minerals than chemical weathering in the soil. The issue becomes a matter of ensuring that the base cation exchange process in a given eco -system never becomes so fragile that its buffering capacity is overwhelmed by the cation exchange system being introduced into the eco -system by acid rain.

"Another moral of this research concerning the complex dynamics of base cations, acid rain, soil anions, with respect to the viability of an ecosystem ... and the point I originally wanted to make ... is the following one. Even in relatively simple cases like acid rain, the environmental interaction of synthetic and naturally occurring chemicals can have unpredictable ramifications and properties.

"When one throws over a hundred thousand synthetic chemicals into this ecological stew, only the most asinine of people can say they know, without the benefit of extensive testing, that none, or few, of these synthetic chemicals could enter into deleterious synergistic relationships with one another and, consequently, potentially become capable of having a negative impact on various species of flora and fauna. Unfortunately, all too many individuals in the chemical industry seem to believe synthetic chemicals should enjoy the same sort of constitutional protection as human beings do and, consequently, these people appear to want to maintain that all chemicals are innocent until proven guilty.

"I would prefer the Napoleonic code of law be applied to chemicals. I believe the burden of proof should be placed on the chemicals that are suspected of wrong-doing and the task of their advocates is to prove the

innocence of these substances, rather than having the burden of proof placed on the rest of society to prove the culpability of synthetic chemicals.

"Furthermore, in conjunction with the Napoleonic emphasis concerning the one on whom the burden of proof rests, I would want the more rigorous standards of criminal procedures to be applied to any investigation into the potential toxicity of chemicals, rather than the far less demanding standards of civil procedures. In other words, chemical companies should be able to prove, beyond a reasonable doubt, that chemicals ... whether individually or in synergistic conjunction with other chemicals being released into the environment... have no deleterious consequences for the environment or human beings, rather than merely having to demonstrate, as presently is often the case, that there might be some degree of evidence in favor of the 'innocence' of those chemicals, as opposed to the evidence of 'guilt' concerning these chemicals, and, therefore, everything is okay when those might not be the case."

Our waiter arrived with the after-meal orders that Mary and I had made. There was a lull in the conversation while we busied ourselves with adding our personal touches to the recently arrived food and beverages.

In between the bites and the sips, Mary continued on with giving an account of her research. "To further complicate matters," she added, "various chemical companies ... both through legal lobbying efforts, as well as through other kinds of more questionable, hidden activities ... have been able to bring about a narrowing of the definition of what constitutes innocence and guilt in those matters. At the present time, in many jurisdictions, commercial enterprises are required only to conduct experimental trials on three unrelated species, for three generations, to determine if a substance exhibits any carcinogenic properties or causes birth defects.

"Among other things, those testing does not address the fact that many synthetic chemicals have the capacity to mimic the activity of hormones. As a result, these synthetic chemicals have a significant potential for severely undermining and compromising an organism's endocrine or hormone-producing system.

"Biological systems involving embryological development, homeostatic feed-back processes, behavioral capabilities, neurological functioning, bodily rhythms, as well as immune activity, can all be affected adversely by an endocrine system that is being disrupted by synthetic chemicals that are mimicking the effects of naturally occurring

hormones. These problems need not show up either in the form of easily detectable birth defects or in the form of some kind of cancer in order to be able to affect those things as: the capacity to concentrate, learn, and think; or, emotional stability; or, susceptibility to various kinds of non-cancerous diseases; or, the lowering of stress thresholds; or, sociability; or long-term reproductive fertility and potency of a species; or motivational patterns; or the ability to realize a high-quality of life or one's full potential.

"Moreover, these kinds of problems might not manifest themselves within three generations. Certain critical levels of toxic exposure or accumulation, across more than three generations, might be necessary before the presence of these debilitating defects surface.

"Perhaps, like the case of acid rain and base cations, there are buffering systems that are active within the environment or a species that are capable, within certain limits, of counteracting or neutralizing the effects of various synthetic chemicals. Yet, when some critical level is reached, after many generations of exposure to, or accumulation of, hormone-mimicking synthetic chemicals, these systems become overwhelmed and are no longer able to offer a protective buffer.

"Many people in the chemical and pharmaceutical industries demand a strict causal proof, approaching one hundred percent certainty that their substances are having a toxic impact on human beings or many other species of life. Aside from the fact that chemical companies and commercial enterprises are the ones that should be supplying the evidence exonerating their chemical 'clients' beyond all reasonable doubt, one of the problems with those a demand is one cannot find adequate control groups anywhere on Earth that are completely free of these substances so that we have an uncontaminated baseline against which to compare a contaminated system.

"Once these substances work their way in the eco -system, they get distributed by air, earth, wind, water, and the food chain to every nook and cranny of the world. Radioactivity fallout from Chernobyl lands on North America; garbage from Denmark washes up on the beaches of Alabama; PCBs and CFCs produced in the Western hemisphere find their way into bodies of water that evaporate to form, along with thousands of other chemicals, a toxic rain that washes over Asia and Africa, and all the nations of the Earth are busy polluting the oceans and seas of the world that distributes these wastes to all corners of the globe through currents, tides, marine life and weather systems.

"When chemical companies were prevented from selling some of their pesticides in North America, these clever business people sold, and are continuing to sell ... especially in Africa ... those pesticides overseas in massive quantities. Apparently, both the companies and the government have ignored or forgotten, rather conveniently, that those pesticides eventually will find their way back to North America via the toxic cycles that have become intrusively entangled with all of the naturally occurring cycles occurring in various eco -systems.

"Many industries are fond of pointing out that the complexity and intricacy of chemical reactions in various eco -systems is so extensive one cannot do any more than establish correlations that are open to interpretation concerning their causal significance with respect to the issue of the degradation of either the environment or any given species. In taking this position they wish to put a positive spin on their activities, and, yet, in reality, they entirely fail to miss the logical conclusion of their own argument.

"If the chemical reactions are as complex and intricate as they claim ... and they are, and, then, some ... extra caution ought to be observed, not less, in making decisions about the release of chemicals into the environment. We need to understand, on many different levels, the full implications of a course of action before we commit ourselves, possibly quite irrevocably, to the consequences of that course of action.

"Of course, chemical companies, pharmaceutical firms, and a variety of other industries all argue they are the saviors of humanity. If not for their products, their argument goes, humanity would be threatened with all manner of unpleasant and inconvenient, if not lethal, ramifications.

"What these idiot savants seem to have forgotten is humanity managed to survive quite well for thousands of years without benefit of synthetic chemicals, pharmaceuticals and a plethora of pollution-entailing commercial products. Indeed, one might even be tempted to argue that ancient human beings were, in many ways, far superior to modern human beings since the former were able to accomplish so much with so little, and under very demanding, physical circumstances, whereas, in so many ways, we moderns have accomplished so little, with so much, and under relatively easy physical circumstances.

"Many moderns love to crow about the benefits of growth economics. Presumably, they choose not to recognize that much of the modern world lives in impoverished, oppressed conditions due, in no small way, to

the extensive exploitation of the resources and peoples upon which, both historically and currently, those growth economics, together with the concomitant geo-politics that guard and enforce it, are predicated.

"Apparently, many modern-thinking people tend to overlook the intimate connection between the disease, hunger, death, and unhappiness of times past and times present. Throughout history, oppression, and not economic and technological backwardness per se, has been one of the biggest determining factors in the incidence of disease, hunger, death and unhappiness existing in the world at any given time.

"Technology and capitalism are just as likely ... and, in, certain respects, perhaps more so ... to lead to the oppression of people as is any other kind of non-technological and non-capitalistic system. Technology and capitalism are just able to accomplish those oppressiveness with greater speed and efficiency than any other kind of system.

"Every period of humanity, including our own, has had problems with hunger, disease, wars, death and social problems. However, two of the major differences between modern civilization and ancient civilizations are the following.

"On the one hand, modern civilization, unlike ancient civilizations, has brought all of life, including humanity, to the brink of a total ecological collapse. On the other hand, the disparity between the haves and have-nots in modern civilization has managed to subject people to hunger, disease, wars, death and social instability on a scale far, far greater than ever before in human history."

"There were a number of things, Mary, that crossed my mind," I said, "while listening to you. First of all, if the Aum Shinri Kyo, the Japanese cult that released the nerve gas, sarin, in the Tokyo subway system, or if Iraq were releasing these chemical toxins into the environment, we would be labeling them, and justifiably so I believe, terrorist monsters and ready to declare war on them.

"Apparently, however, everything is all right if one is motivated by certain kinds of establishment economics and, in the process serve as a shining example of capitalism in action. Under these circumstances, politicians, government regulatory agencies, the educational system, and much of the media ... present company excepted, of course ... largely ignore, deny or

cover up the true extent of the damage being done to eco-systems, communities, families or individuals.

"I remember reading somewhere that approximately ninety percent of the products we use, although not necessarily need, involve, in one way or another, the kind of chemicals to which you are alluding. Furthermore, these products, together with the industrial processes generating them, constitute almost half of the gross output of the Earth's collective economies.

"In addition, I've seen some of the financial estimates that outline what would have to be spent if the human race is to deal adequately, responsibly and quickly with the presence of toxic chemicals in the environment. The costs are absolutely staggering and would place governments and the economy under an incredible, and, perhaps, completely debilitating, set of stresses.

"Most businesses don't want to do anything because their precious profits would be affected. Most governments, irrespective of level, don't want to do anything because they could lose votes, tax revenues, economic spin-off from these industries, as well as lose power or nice, secure positions.

"Most individuals don't want to do anything because their pay checks, patterns of consumption, pleasures, and conveniences would be affected. Most educators don't want to do anything because they would lose their jobs when businesses, governments, consumers and career-minded students object vociferously to the former's pessimistic, profane heresies concerning economics, progress, growth, politics, the environment, human survival, and the nature of our modern civilization.

"Most branches of the media remain relatively silent since to take these issues seriously would be to commit commercial suicide. The advertising revenue, together with the various kinds of government and/or public support, that underwrite the media's existence would disappear quite quickly if the latter were to make a sincere, concerted, protracted effort to help resolve the problems facing us.

"The occasional editorial, article, program, series or documentary is fine. Business and government can live with this because they know, from their own experience, how these sort of isolated forays into the public's consciousness are unlikely to take root and bring about any kind of an

effective response on the part of individuals and various community groups.

"In this fashion, business, government, education and the media can all extol the virtues inherent in free speech. Simultaneously, and behind the scenes, they can take the steps that are necessary to ensure that very little of what is spoken about in those occasional ways ever has the opportunity of spilling over into the sphere of action.

"Heaven help the media, however, if they should violate the principles ... both legal and unspoken ... that favor corporations, money and power, and by which much of humanity is held hostage. Sacrilege in modern civilization is anything that would cause substantive, long-term difficulty for, or interference with, an array of deeply entrenched, vested political, economic and cultural interests that are busy keeping things running in accordance with their master plan for themselves, and by way of ramifications, for the rest of humanity and creation as well.

"Just take a look at the impact that one kind of chemical compound ... alcohol ... has on human society. Every year, tens of thousands more people die or are killed through the effects of alcohol than die or are killed in conjunction with all the terrorist activities of the world combined.

"The ramifications of alcohol consumption are costing billions and billions of dollars in lost productivity, medical and hospital resources, property damage, and legal/court expenses. Moreover, a great deal of the increasing instability within the community and the family ... due to the many forms of rape and domestic violence, together with the rampant physical and sexual abuse of children ... is shaped in significant ways by the presence of alcohol.

"The highways of the nation have become proving grounds for the alcohol-saturated terrorists in our midst. The same neighbors who smile at us and pat our children on the head are quite willing to put our lives and the lives of our children at risk so they can indulge their whims and pleasures.

"Yet, as with all of the other chemicals that are pouring into the environment, we all have complicity in the problems entailed by the presence of alcohol. Advertising firms, publications needing ads to survive, bars, corner stores, restaurants, resort areas, hotels, many aspects of the entertainment industry, sporting events, governments, the legal system, and

every single individual who consumes alcohol and, therefore, helps subsidize an industry that earns huge profits at tremendous costs to society, all of us have complicity in the creating of the problems entailed by the presence and consumption of alcohol.

"Many of us have vested interests ... whether as a function of personal pleasure or economic benefit or tax revenues ... in keeping the alcohol industry going. As a result, many of us are in deep denial about our role in the toxic cycle of alcohol production, commercialization, consumption, death, destruction, violence and disease.

"Alcoholics, arguably, have an excuse, of sorts, for why they are locked into patterns of behavior that have destructive consequences for themselves and others. However, I can't help but wonder about the rest of us.

"What is our excuse for becoming locked into a set of behaviors that are so obviously destructive, counter-productive and costly? Instead of being ashamed of ourselves and the ways in which we derive benefits from keeping the status quo, vis-à-vis alcohol, going, we would rather point fingers at the alcoholic and say: 'There wouldn't be a problem if not for him or her'.

"In reality, we have a co-dependency with the alcoholic and the alcohol industry. We are prepared to allow all manner of evil into our midst so that we can continue to live in accordance with our own selfish and short-sighted hierarchy of desires and priorities.

"We use the vocabulary of individual rights and freedoms to mask what actually is going on. We are addicted to a certain kind of life -style, and we can't bring ourselves to admit this or deal with the implications of those an admission.

"We need to dress up our addictions in the lofty language of a discussion involving jurisprudence and political philosophy. Yet, this is merely part of the process of denial and rationalization that goes on within us in order to direct our moral sensibilities away from the essential issues that are at stake.

"The problems associated with the specific chemical, alcohol, is a reflection, in miniature, of the problems associated with the presence of chemicals, in general. I could just have easily used the tobacco industry, or any number of other industries, as a paradigmatic example of the principles at issue.

"Despite rising levels of pollution, pathology, death, medical expense, environmental degradation, insurance premiums, and so on, that are associated with the continuing, if not escalating, release of chemicals into our bodies and the environment, few of us ... whether in government, business, education, the media, or as private citizens ... are prepared to come to grips with the multiple cross-addictions that give expression to this thing called modern civilization. We are addicted to money, to comforts, to pleasures, to conveniences, to consumption, and to our unceasing desire for the technological and economic envelope to be pushed back in all of these areas with more and more products and services.

"Naturally, like any good pusher, commercial enterprises are only too eager to supply our habits. After all, businesses are as much addicted to consumers as the latter are addicted to the former.

"We are not just painting ourselves into an impossible corner. Like some bizarre, surreal cross-fertilization of Poe's 'The Cask of Amontillado' and 'The Premature Burial', we are walling ourselves up in a variety of designer sarcophagi within an economic crypt, loaded with technological extras ... all, I might add, at a very reasonable price ... where we are waiting, with varying degrees of horrified awareness, for the end of human existence.

"Together, the demand and supply sides of economics come together to form an ultimately self-destructive co-dependency. The end toward which our economic system is leading us, like so many lemmings, is misery and death, not wealth ... except, perhaps, for the very, very few who require the death and misery of the former to subsidize their style of life.

"Furthermore, our economic system is not allocating resources in the best fashion for the common good. Rather, our economic system is allocating resources for all the wrong reasons and in the worst way in order to serve the very limited, exploitive agenda of a small segment of humanity.

"Just as there are ecological principles regulating the dynamics of different eco-systems within nature, so, too, there are ecological principles governing the dynamics of various eco-systems within human beings, both individually and collectively. The fact that in the case of human beings the principles that currently are dominating these dynamics are largely pathological in nature doesn't make them any less ecological in character.

"Indeed, the ecology of pathology that now has dominion in the sphere of human activity helps explain why so many of our problems seem to be

largely intractable. The links among different aspects of this ecology are so numerous, subtle, and complex, there are a variety of feed-back and synergistic mechanisms that tend to preserve a number of the inertial characteristics of any given individual or social eco-system.

"Even if one comes up with a way of dealing with one those feed-back or synergistic dynamic, any number of other, alternative routes of interaction are quite capable of filling the vacuum. The ecology of pathology has its buffers just as does the ecology of natural systems.

Supposedly, western intelligence agencies have discovered a chemical weapons plant being constructed at Iarhunah, near Tripoli, in Libya. Authorities here are worried about the fact the facility is being built in those a way ... deep beneath rocky outcroppings ... so as to be virtually impregnable to all bombing attacks except, possibly, a direct, nuclear hit.

"While I share the worry of western authorities concerning both the construction of this kind of facility, as well as the uses to which it might be put, western authorities do not exhibit anywhere near the same kind of concern or anxiety with respect to the chemical war being waged by industry against humanity and the eco -systems of the Earth. I wonder if these authorities have considered bombing attacks, or a nuclear strike, against those facilities.

"Probably not. Business people are devilishly clever in the manner in which they build their plants close to civilian populations and use that population as sort of s human shield to protect the industry from any steps being taken against them."

"Actually, David, you might be closer to the truth than you think," Mary stated. "The whole idea of the maquiladora industry in Mexico is a case in point.

"Some 2,500 foreign owned assembly plants, employing more than 600,000 workers, have set up shop in Mexico. These plants operate virtually tax free.

"In addition, there are a number of other inducements offered in order to attract entrepreneurs. The wages of the workers are extremely low even though a great deal of high-tech work is often involved.

"Furthermore, the unions that exist are known as 'white unions' and actually are controlled and run by the companies. As a result, there are no

benefits for the workers, and the working conditions are generally poor, with very little regard for the health or safety of the workers.

"Environmental regulations governing the emissions and effluents of these plants are almost non-existent. The few ordinances that do exist are, for the most part, not enforced, and whatever penalties might be assigned to companies do not have an effective dimension of deterrence. "The strip of land running along the Rio Grande where many of the maquiladora industries operate is one, big, toxic wasteland. Numerous places even glow in the dark from the materials dumped by these plants, and, yet, many of the workers construct ramshackle huts in those dumps because that is all they can afford with the wages they are being paid.

"Originally, when NAFTA was being negotiated, assurances were given that these maquiladora industries would disappear as a result of the benefits that supposedly would accrue to all concerned parties by virtue of the provisions of the trade agreement. In point of fact, since the signing of the NAFTA pact, the maquiladora model has spread to many other parts of Mexico.

"The people of Mexico are held hostage by these maquiladora industries since the latter understand quite well that no government action will be taken against the plants due to the various financial considerations that, through one means or another, end up in the pockets of government officials who help the foreign owned plants continue their operations free of disturbance and interference. If anyone objects to: the low level of wages; or, the absence of benefits; or, the lack of concern about the health and safety of workers; or, the failure of the 'unions' to protect workers, those people will be eliminated through different means ... some more violent than others ... and replaced by someone else from amongst the millions of other Mexicans who are desperate for an opportunity to be exploited by the maquiladora industries since those abuse offers a marginally better existence than they otherwise 'enjoy'.

"Furthermore, even if the different levels of government were suddenly to develop a conscience and actually act for the good of the people they purport to serve, by repealing all of the perks of the maquiladora industries and forcing the foreign businesses to become good corporate neighbors, this would accomplish very little. The companies in question simply would fold up their tents and silently steal away in the night to set

up shop in some other land where the governments are prepared to live in accordance with the maquiladora model.

"When American consumers purchase the goods produced by these companies, we are accomplishing a number of things simultaneously. First of all, we are subsidizing not only the exploitive abuse of human beings in other countries, but we also are taking jobs and money away from American workers.

"Secondly, we are aiding and abetting the degradation of the environment, both in Mexico, and, eventually, due to the ramifications of the toxic cycle, in America as well. Moreover, in order to compete with these maquiladora industries, American firms are trying to cut costs by lobbying for a deregulation of environmental controls in relation to the emissions and effluents being generated by American businesses, and, this also is leading to the dissolution and degradation of our communities and the environment.

"Thirdly, and again under the banner of economic competitiveness, there is a constant pressure in American industry and businesses to erode wage levels, benefit packages, job security, health and safety precautions in the work place, as well as union activity. In other words, the exploitation of human beings in other countries becomes the center piece in an argument attempting to rationalize the exploitation of workers in North America.

"As far as I'm concerned, David, all of this talk about an optimum and efficient allocation of resources, or, the generation of a wealth in which all can participate with relative equitability, or, an enhancement of the common good, that, allegedly, is brought about by a properly run market system, is a lot of hogwash. These theories are based on assumptions that are either: false, highly contentious, not provable, or dependent on a number of false-economies.

"For example, the doctrine of laissez-faire capitalism maintains that the common good is best served by the uninhibited pursuit of self-interest, both on the part of businesses as well as individuals. The only problem with this is that not only are the meanings of 'the common good' and 'self-interest' both open to debate, one needs to demonstrably prove how uninhibited activity of any kind can best serve either the common good or self-interest.

"Economists inclined to the capitalist, free market system tend to set up a number of arbitrary, self-serving criteria and standards for evaluating what constitutes self-interest or the common good. Socialist- and communist-oriented economists do the same, so although what I'm about to say is developed in the context of a discussion of free market economics, in point of fact, the underlying principles are transferable, with slight modifications, to both socialist and communist approaches to economics.

"Economists qua economists, for the most part, are not interested in matters of spirituality, morality, truth, duties of care, human obligations to the rest of creation, the nature of justice, or the purpose of life. Resources those as kindness, spiritual wisdom, integrity, sincerity, tolerance, forgiveness, love, generosity, peace, and compassion are irrelevant to their models unless one can demonstrate how to convert the value of those resources into quantifiable functions of currencies, wages, costs, or material goods.

"Economists, as usual, have got everything backward. Currencies, wages, costs and material goods are not appropriate measures of spirituality, morality, justice, wisdom, identity, duty, and so on. Rather, one must come to an understanding of the meaning and significance of the latter issues in order to properly address questions and problems concerning the role, value or function of currencies, wages, costs and material goods as one attempts to ascertain the true nature of the common good and self-interest.

"Economists can, if they wish, try to argue that when one introduces matters those as spirituality, justice, or truth into the market, this has a distorting effect on the activity of those markets. Non-economists can counter, just as easily, and far more profoundly, that any system of economics that defines self-interest and the common good purely in material/quantitative terms has a distorting effect on the activities of spirituality and that, ultimately, anything that disturbs the latter kinds of activity will end up disturbing market considerations of a purely material and quantitative character ... moreover, they will do so in extremely destructive ways.

"On the other hand, economists might wish to argue that ultimate questions about spirituality, truth, morality, justice, duty, meaning and identity are irresolvable. If they do, then, all of their pronouncements about self-interest, the common good, equitability, and the optimum allocation of

resources are totally arbitrary and relative to the whims and desires of those who wish to set the agenda for what constitutes the latter's version of the common good, enlightened self-interest and so on.

"If economists should wish to argue that economics is only about how to allocate goods and services efficiently ... once certain, fundamental political or policy decisions have been established concerning the nature of the common good ... then, economics is really irrelevant to, or, at best, derivative from, the most important questions of life. As those, economic considerations, of some sort, might have a role to play after hammering out working agreements on the more basic issues, but we should not be allowing the caboose to drive the train as is the fashion these days.

"Furthermore, economists are presuming that cost-efficiency is the only criteria for determining how goods and services are to be distributed. In many situations, the costs to the quality of human spirituality, compassion, morality, identity, and integrity, far outweigh any considerations of cost-efficiencies that are calculated in terms of dollars and cents. Any system of economics that is predicated on the latter kind of bottom line, while at the same time ignoring the former, is rooted in a false-economy of substantial proportions.

"Many of our educational, environmental, political, legal and social problems have their origins in, and are significantly shaped by, those false-economies. This is not only a matter of being penny wise and pound foolish, but it reflects a complete ignorance about how to go about calculating the true costs ... socially, environmentally and individually ... of any given economic proposal.

"Most economists don't have a clue about human nature or how people make decisions. Many of them seem to want to assume that human beings are rational agents who make decisions independently of one another concerning their respective self-interests.

"The brains of these economists must have been exposed, for an excessive period of time, to the toxic chemicals required to produce their beloved widgets. As a result, their neurological functioning seems to have become impaired in rather significant ways.

"Even if agreement could be reached on what being a rational agent entails, these rationally-challenged economists seem to have missed the

obvious. Marketing and advertising strategies are not about appealing to the rational mind.

"Sex, desire, envy, greed, pride, self-image, fear, acquisitiveness, illusion, jealousy, competitiveness, loneliness, narcissism, vulnerability, insecurity, boredom, and conformity underwrite the market, not rational decisions. Reasons are what we use, either before or after the fact, to rationalize the irrationalities in which many of our economic decisions are rooted, but none of this ... including the rationalization process ... is very rational.

"Moreover, we do not make our decisions independently of other people based on our own deliberations concerning what constitutes our self-interest. Many of us are deeply influenced by the people around us.

"In fact, marketing and advertising people count on this truth in several ways. These kinds of commercial activity are dedicated to influencing our decision-making process, those as it is, through entraining, shaping, conditioning, exploiting, and manipulating our emotional and motivational programming.

"Marketing and advertising people get paid the big bucks to undermine, and interfere with, our independence, together with whatever rationality we might possess. Through non-rational channel ways, they attempt to persuade us that wants and needs are 'rational' to have.

"By working on our herding instinct as well as our inclination toward conformity, marketing and advertising people induce us to seek what everyone else has. By operating on our capacity for self-deception and pride, these same people convince us that the purchasing of their product is an expression of our unique individuality.

"This is a marriage made in commercial heaven. Now, we can consume what everyone else does and, at the same time, sincerely believe we are exercising our inner-most sense of individual identity in doing so.

"Only in a very limited way does free market economics begin with a consumer demand that is not manipulated that, in turn, leads to efforts by the supply side of the equation to allocate the resources entailed by those demands in the most efficient manner possible on the basis of feed-back information provided by exchanges in the marketplace. Most of today's market place is driven by the supply side's setting of an agenda, by means of various stratagems employed in sales, marketing and advertising, that

create and perpetuate an array of desires, fears and delusions that stoke the fires of consumer demand completely independent of actual need.

"Although free market forces might establish the equilibrium point for bringing together supply and demand in the most efficient way as far as suppliers are concerned, this equilibrium point does not necessarily reflect the best allocation of resources as far as either the common good or the true self-interest of the individual are concerned. Suppliers, or capitalists, often have the arrogant and self-serving belief that what they wish to supply also represents the best use of the resources that are available to humanity.

"The theory of free market economics also is often based on the assumption of perfect knowledge. The theory assumes that either the consumer and/or the producer and/or the famous and mysterious invisible hand of the market know, both in principle and detail, with perfect certainty: what is in an individual's best self-interest; or, how people will respond to various kinds of dynamics within the marketplace; or, what constitutes the common good; or, which allocation of resources best serves both individual self-interests and the common good; or, how efficiency is, necessarily, the only criterion for measuring the health of an economic system or the society it purportedly serves; or, what the spiritual, moral, environmental, political, legal, medical, educational, social and international costs are going to be prior to the making of any decision concerning demand or supply.

"The simple truth of the matter is that none of us, including the infamous invisible hand, has anything remotely approaching perfect knowledge of the economy or how economic decisions today are going to affect us a few months or years down the road. In fact, the invisible hand is to capitalism what historical materialism is to early-Marx: fictions told to naive, impressionable minds in order ... like some modern-day relative of Voltaire's Dr. Pangloss ... to convince us that we will live in the best of all possible worlds when the presumed inevitability of the laws inherent in the free market or history are permitted to manifest themselves.

"Instead of petitioning Divinity for help, we are taught to place our troubles at the altar of the invisible hand or to bring them to the sanctum sanctorum of historical materialism. Anyone who actually believes this theoretical drivel provides more evidence for the teachings of Barnum than the teachings of either Adam Smith or Karl Marx.

"Economists while away their time, deep within their ivory towers, spinning out reams of equations rooted in impeccable mathematical logic and a lot of dumb assumptions that have virtually nothing to do with the real world. In lieu of any real understanding into the nature of either human beings or the true character of the common good, economists have created an artificial, synthetic world and fully expect that all of us should accommodate ourselves to the requirements of the theory or model, rather than that the models and theories of the economists should start accommodating themselves to real people with real problems that extend far beyond the extremely limited horizons of economic thinking.

"Economics isn't the dismal, if not dreary, science because of its subject matter. It is not even a dismal science due to the unnecessary misery it brings into the lives of human beings through its arrogant, ignorant, and arbitrary presumptions concerning issues and problems involving the common good, human self-interest, rationality, the best allocation of resources, equability, and the appropriate criteria for evaluating the health of a community or society.

"Economics is the dismal science because it does science dimly. Only the members of the Nobel selection committee, and those who covet those a selection, could possibly consider economics as a science that has anything to do with laying bare the character of those aspects of reality that lie beyond the tautologically scarred, artificial, and barren landscape in which economists would have humanity take up residence."

"Mary," I said, "I'm no fan of economics or economists. For instance, among other things, I don't understand how economists can keep a straight face when they wax eloquent about the moral improprieties surrounding the forgiving of the debt of third world countries, when much of the developed world's wealth is built upon the far more serious moral improprieties surrounding colonialism, imperialism and the associated economic exploitations that, historically, have accompanied each of these forms of oppression.

"Consequently, given my general perspective on these matters, I sort of feel strange saying anything to defend either economic s or economists. Nevertheless, don't you think you are being a little harsh in some of your assessments?"

She waved her hand in a sort of 'give -me-a-break' manner. Her nose wrinkled in a way that suggested there was a bad smell that had just wafted across our table.

"If I say harsh things about economists, all that might happen is the feelings of a few professionals might get hurt. When economists say something, thousands of people might lose jobs, money, homes, health, and, sometimes, even life itself.

"Economists do not even have the decency to come to our doors and say they understand how those pronouncements are negatively affecting our lives in fundamental ways despite the fact we economists don't necessarily know what we are talking about. Like the pilots who drop bombs on people whom the former never have to see, care for, or bury, economists release their destruction from afar in the pristine, technologically advanced surroundings of boardrooms, government offices and academia.

"Many economists claim free markets provide an efficient feedback mechanism for assessing the value of one's decisions involving either supply or demand. Supposedly, this cybernetic dimension of the market offers an opportunity to correct whatever aspects of our decisions might have been mistaken.

"Yet, the whole idea of free markets is warped by a wealth of underlying philosophical, psychological, religious, sociological and political assumptions about the nature, purpose, meaning, and significance of human existence, in particular, and universal existence, in general. Unfortunately, many economists are reluctant to examine, in any detailed or rigorous fashion, the nature of these assumptions or how they adversely affect our lives in so many different ways.

"Many economists don't seem to understand that one is not even in a position to talk about efficiency or the value of one's decisions until one has a reliable ontological baseline against which to measure one's efforts. And, since economics cannot provide those a baseline in any non-arbitrary and unbiased fashion, one is really beginning at no reliable beginning and working toward no reliable end when one resorts to economics as one's tool-kit for evaluating the efficiency or value of various dimensions of human interaction and decision-making.

"Economists want to say: Given those and those an assumption, certain things follow. There might be validity to this way of thinking, but there need

not be any truth involved, either before, or after, the stating of those assumptions.

"Globalizing free trade will accomplish certain things, none of them very desirable. For one thing, the maquiladora model will become a major growth industry, with the same pattern being exported to all corners of the world ... low, or no, corporate taxes; lower and lower wages for the vast majority of people; few, or no, benefits provided to most workers; an increasing disregard for the health and safety of personnel; a continued tendency to deregulate, water-down, and not enforce environmental standards; a clamp-down on, as well as an undermining and marginalization of union activity; and, finally, the firing, elimination, or oppression of anyone who resists submitting to the maquiladora paradigm.

"A second ramification of the globalization of free trade, especially in the context of growth economics, is the depletion of the world's resources ... sooner rather than later. Even if the world's population were to achieve zero growth right this very moment, an increasing number of organizations, think tanks, academics, scientists, and researchers have indicated that everything from wood, to drinkable water, to metals, to minerals, to oil, to coal to natural gas and other kinds of non-renewable resources will begin to become endangered species toward the middle of the twenty-second century ... if not before.

"Unfortunately, the world's population has not stabilized and continues to increase. If one projects a continuously growing economy onto the entire world, and if one projects a continuous growth in consumption of resources ... on both the demand and supply side ... in order to fuel a world-wide growing economy due to the globalization of free trade practices, the resources of the Earth will become endangered, if not extinct, long before the middle of the next century.

"A third ramification of globalizing free trade in the context of growth economics is likely to be the complete ecological collapse of all the ecosystems of Earth. We already are losing the pollution battles in the air, on the seas, and across the lands with our current population and economic growth.

"When one adds the increased pollution of the projected 2 - 5 billion new producers/consumers who will be born in the next sixty years or so, to the activities of the present 5 billion human pollution factories already in existence, the biosphere likely will be pushed into cardiac arrest. Anyone

who doubts this or wishes to argue against those a scenario doesn't have, or doesn't use, the intelligence that God gave a gnat.

"For instance, consider the following. From 1950 to the present time, the number of automobiles in the world has grown from approximately 50 million to about a half a billion. Although, to a large extent, the market for automobiles might have been saturated in North America, Japan and western Europe, there are billions of potential customers in Asia, China, Latin America, Africa and many parts of the former Soviet Union.

"Manufactures have come up with the so-called 'Asia car' that is a stripped down version of models sold in more affluent parts of the world. Plants are being set up in Thailand, Indonesia, Brazil and other third world countries in order to meet, and stoke, the growing demand for automobiles in the non-saturated markets of the world.

"For the last seventy years, or so, automobiles have been the single most desirable consumer item in the developed world. This trend is now being exported to the billions of people living in the undeveloped world.

"In India, the production of cars has more than doubled over the last ten years. By the year 2020, China is projected to become the third largest car market in the world with demand estimated to be between 5.5 and 6.5 million cars per year. In Brazil, the four largest car makers ... GM, Ford, Fiat and Volkswagen ... have redoubled their investments in this market, and, as one might expect, there also are many other manufacturers trying to get a toehold in what is projected to be an extremely lucrative and thriving market.

"The Environmental and Forecasting Institute in Heidelberg Germany has conducted an investigation into the projected impact on the environment that the production and operation of a medium-size car ... equipped with a catalytic converter and using unleaded fuels ... will have over a ten year period. They estimate that during those a time frame, this car will be involved in the generation of 2.04 million cubic meters of air pollution and some 59.7 tons of carbon dioxide. In addition, on average, each of these cars, through one means or another, will leave behind about 26.5 tons of waste materials that will have to be disposed of in some manner.

"Moreover, while the precise figures vary from country to country, for every one thousand cars that are built, there will be an associated fringe benefit of, at a minimum, slightly over 2 deaths, 125 critical injuries, and

about 10 forms of disability, of varying severity. All of this will place a further burden on a variety of medical, health-care, legal, economic and social institutions.

"None of this ... either the pollution data or the casualty statistics ... takes into account how these figures will spiral upwards as a result of poor car maintenance. Furthermore, as far as I can determine, the study doesn't take into consideration those things as the following. Every year, during so-called normal operating procedures involving the loading and unloading of oil, tankers spill or leak four times as much, or more, of this chemical into the ocean as the 37 million liters of crude oil that were dumped into Alaska's Prince William Sound by the Exxon Valdez.

"In any case, if one multiplies the foregoing data and statistics by another, projected, several billion consumers, one begins to understand that just from this one single product, we are being confronted by pollution problems of incredible proportions. Especially relevant is the fact that carbon dioxide, that is being pumped into the atmosphere by each of these cars, is one of the primary greenhouse gases.

"On the one hand, an impressive body of growing, scientific evidence is showing how these greenhouse gases are helping to push up the average global temperature. One of the implications of this is that if present trends continue, or are elevated, then, within some fifty to seventy years, or less ... both through the thermally caused expansion of ocean waters, as well as due to the melting of glacial, arctic and, possibly even, Antarctic ice ... many of the coastal areas of the world, where some 60-70 percent, or more, of humanity presently resides, could be inundated by varying amounts of water.

"Whether one talks about building some sort of levy system to protect these areas, or one talks about moving people, businesses and so on from these areas, one is talking about a huge set of financial and social problems. Irrespective of whatever might be decided upon as a course of action, we have very little time to decide, plan and implement those a strategy.

"Greenhouse gases also are implicated, rather significantly, in the increasing severity and chaotic character of many large-scale weather patterns that appear to be taking place. This presents its own variety of economic, social, legal and political problems.

"Increases in the rate and severity of coastal flooding, insect infestation, droughts, heat-related deaths, species extinction, the spreading of tropical diseases, melting permafrost, forest fires, crop failure, storm damage to property, and last, but not least, skyrocketing insurance costs across the board, are being bequeathed to us as greenhouse gases wing their way into the atmosphere. The mentality that is behind the drive toward globalization and its concomitant feeding-frenzy of growth economics is full of false-economies that are leading to ecological, social, political, legal, spiritual and human costs for which no one bargained and for which few, if any of us, are prepared to deal.

"Currently, each and every year, 13,000 square kilometers of Amazon rain forests are being cleared. This represents a 34 percent increase since 1990 when there began to be a growing public awareness, however dim, of the importance of the rain forests as a mainstay of many kinds of ecological dynamic.

"If the destruction of the tropical forests continues at current rates, most of these forests will have been destroyed by the year 2040. If this rate of deforestation accelerates, the rain forests will be gone even more quickly.

"One can trace the movement of 'civilization' around the planet by following the path of deforestation that has occurred wherever civilization has taken root. The rain forests and the Pacific Northwest are the only remaining, extensive areas of old growth trees on the face of the Earth, and both of these areas are under heavy assault.

"Ironically, in the rain forests, the preferred method of deforestation is to burn the trees. This produces carbon dioxide that adds to the greenhouse problem, and, although on the one hand, the clearing of forests is a metaphor for humanity's desire for economic growth, nonetheless, at the same time, it is a metaphor for the signing of humanity's death warrant ... those is the nature of progress.

"Unfortunately, little of the world's growing concern about the rain forests has much to do with what is happening to the Yanomami or Guarani native peoples who live in these forests. Moreover, few, if any, of our anxieties are directed toward the urban and rural poverty surrounding these forests.

"Instead, our concern is about the way in which the quality of our lives might be threatened by what is going on in, and being done to, the rain forests. Now that many of us have secured our own brand of economic

security and have exploited, polluted, and destroyed many of the world's ecosystems in the process, we are concerned for ourselves that others are interested in doing what we, much to our discredit, already have done, and that worst of all, we might have to suffer as a series of ecological and social tsunamis, resulting from economic growth elsewhere in the world, spreads its destructive consequences across the shores of our existence.

"Whales are washing up on our beaches so saturated with toxic chemicals those as DDT and various kinds of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons that their bodies constitute hazardous waste material. There are dead zones in the oceans, off our coasts, some as large as 8 thousand square kilometers, that are testimonials to our dumping activities with respect to a variety of contaminants as well as the process of eutrophication, or removal of oxygen from water, that frequently ensues from the presence of these contaminants.

"Each year, more than 4.5 billion kilograms of industrial chemicals are being dumped into the waters of America, including more than 1000 varieties of chemical compounds ... at least 250 of which are considered to be toxic ... found in the Great Lakes that constitutes one-fifth of all the fresh water on Earth, and from which more than forty million people drink each and every day. Even modern sewage treatment facilities are not capable of eliminating or neutralizing most of these chemicals, and in many places existing sewage treatment plants either are inadequate, breaking down, or both. Furthermore, after a storm, as much as ten percent of all sewage passes right through these facilities without any kind of treatment whatsoever.

"Well, Mary, given that you have been so generous in sharing all of these wonderful, upbeat statistics and ideas with me," I said, "what is the solution? Since you seem to have ruled out capitalism, socialism and communism, what are we left with?

"We are left with subsistence economics, David, and two choices. We can either intelligently work our way into this kind of framework as quickly as possible, or we will be forced into it by an escalating cascade of ecological, economic, social and political cataclysms. As far as I can see, there is no third alternative."

"What about some form of steady-state or sustainable economics," I inquired?

Shrugging her shoulders, Mary replied: "In my opinion, there is no those thing as sustainable economics. These sorts of theory generate the same spectrum of problems involving consumption, resource depletion and pollution that growth economics does. It just accomplishes this only slightly more slowly than does economic growth of between, say, 1 and 3 or 4 % per year."

"When one factors in a doubling of the world's population, along with increases in the length of life and possible declines in rates of infant mortality that are likely to be associated, up to a point, with even a limited distribution of the enhanced standards of living that so-called sustainable economics might be able to bring about in the short run, one still will encounter substantial increases in the levels of resource depletion and concomitant pollution. Under the present circumstances, all sustainable economics offers is a choice in the kind of poison one wants to swallow to commit suicide ... it offers a slow acting one rather than a fast acting one."

"Wouldn't switching to things like natural gas, nuclear power, or, fusion energy ... if and when a viable means of commercial production is discovered ... alter the picture you are painting in a rather dramatic manner?" I asked.

"Not necessarily," Mary responded. "The construction of facilities and support systems for any of these forms of energy production are, themselves, energy intensive and would generate a lot of pollution, as well, which would be a by-product of that construction process.

"The transportation of natural gas is also energy intensive. Furthermore, there are on-going, unresolved problems surrounding the disposal of radioactive wastes, not to mention a constant worry about containment problems should there be more incidents like Chernobyl or Three Mile Island ... and you can be sure there will be, especially if we began to build more of these facilities under the rushed conditions of political, social, ecological and economic crisis.

"In addition, even if a viable commercial means of harnessing fusion energy came sometime in the next five or ten years, and fusion scientists are pessimistic about this at the present time, it takes anywhere from 10 to 20 years for a new technology to be integrated into the economic, legal, political, and educational fabric of society. Fifteen to thirty years is too long a period to have to wait to resolve the problems with which we are currently being confronted.

"Besides, neither natural gas, nuclear reactors nor fusion energy is going to have much impact on all of the other kinds of energy consumption, resource depletion and toxic pollution that is taking place at current and projected rates. North America could become a perfect, ecologically aware society by the first light of dawn tomorrow morning, but what would this mean, or accomplish, in the context of a world where we presently constitute only one -fifteenth of the world's population, and, by the middle of the next century, we will represent just one-thirtieth of that population?"

"As I previously indicated, the toxic cycle carries pollutants by air, ocean, land and biological life to every corner of the Earth. How do you propose we escape the depletion of resources and pollution of our small world that is coming our way from the rest of humanity, irrespective of what we do in our own backyard?"

"All of this is academic, however. We will not become perfect, ecologically aware, and dutiful citizens of the planet Earth by tomorrow morning."

"In fact, precisely the opposite is true. Despite forming only one-fifteenth of the world's population, we are contributing in a highly disproportionate way to the rates at which the resources of this planet are being depleted and the eco-systems of Earth are being undermined, compromised, and destroyed through the pollutants that we are pumping into the environment in ever-increasing amounts, varieties and toxicities.

"No, David, we really have done it to ourselves this time. The wheels of Divine justice might grind slowly sometimes, but irrespective of the rate at which they move, they grind exceedingly fine, as, I believe, we are about to find out in the blink of an eye on the cosmic scale of things."

"Isn't it possible," I replied, "that various kinds of technological or scientific breakthrough could save the day?"

Mary's head shook in a negative fashion. "I have no doubt, David that new, exiting technological breakthroughs and developments will continue to take place in a variety of areas. You are forgetting, however, about Streeter's Law ... namely, for every advance in science and technology that is applied to the human condition, at least 4.78 additional social, political and/or environmental problems will be created in the process.

"As a result, we cannot keep pace with the problematic series of bifurcations being generated by our technological and scientific cleverness. We are creating difficulties at a rate that is faster than our capacity to resolve them.

"Furthermore, in our frenzied rush to solve these problems, we are making decisions about our future while operating under conditions of constant stress and conflict, as well as while working with a woeful lack of information, understanding and wisdom concerning the significance and ramifications of our decisions. The result of all of this is that an array of new more complex problems is inherent in the solutions being forced on us with increasing rapidity in those an atmosphere of crisis."

Mary looked at her wrist watch. "Time to go," she said. "Us working people don't have the luxury of several months off during the summer like you academic types.

"Oh, yes, I almost forgot. I am working on the names and leads you gave me when you phoned me from Chicago. I'll need just a little more time to run down a few more possibilities, and, when I'm done with this, I'll compile it in a way that even a professor could understand and forward my findings to you. I hope this is okay."

I replied: "I will be thankful for whatever you can come up with, but I would work extra hard on putting it in a format that factually challenged unfortunates like myself will be able to fathom."

Mary responded with an expression that seemed to convey the idea that a woman's work was never done and waved good-by.

As originally requested by Mary, when I phoned her from Chicago, her price for meeting with me was that I pay for the lunch. However, after listening to her, and as I handed over money to the cashier, I felt like a condemned man who has had to spring for his own last meal ... no doubt, part of the fine mesh gauge of the wheels that were grinding my way and toward the rest of humanity with relentless determination.

Chapter 22: Manifest Destiny

On Tuesday, as had been pre-arranged by phone the previous week when I had been attending the symposium, Jennifer and I got together. The time apart had been only about a week, but I felt as if years had passed since I last had been in her presence.

As mesmerizing as the eyes of Mary Streeter were and Mary's great beauty notwithstanding, I did not feel as entranced or as intoxicated whenever I was with her as I did when I was with Jennifer. Whatever existed between Jennifer and myself ... emotionally, psychologically, spiritually and/or physically ... went very deep and was more than just a matter of pheromones.

I was enchanted by Jennifer and would have been willing to do anything to please her. Yet, all she seemed to want from me was my presence.

What she might be getting from our relationship on any given level was hard for me to understand. In fact, as far as I was concerned, through the generosity of her being and spirit, and for reasons that only could have been fathomed by Divinity, a love for me had arisen within her that was not caused by anything that I did or was.

I might not understand the how and the why of the matter. Nevertheless, her love for me was undeniably palpable in the way she looked at me, spoke with me, and interacted with me.

She was doing me an honor every time she permitted me to be near her. When I was with her, I felt like I was engaged in a sacred process through which a form of manna-like sustenance for my continued existence was being transmitted to me.

I had never experienced this condition in my life, and prior to now, I never could have imagined it as anything but a possibility of fiction. Having now tasted something of its reality, I could not conceive how anyone could forget or ignore the intense character of the thoughts, feelings, and states that were given expression through those a condition.

When I had arrived at Jennifer's, Beth, who had moved in with Jennifer for a little while, was just coming out the door. Beth said she was on her way to a friend's house and might not be back until sometime after work the next day.

Jennifer and I decided to go out for a leisurely dinner and, maybe, take another walk along the Charles. The weather was balmy and conducive to the aimless wanderings of those who were in love.

Throughout the evening, time seemed to be suspended. Each moment seemed as if a delicious eternity were merely waiting, patiently, to be replaced by the next those 'moment'.

Einstein was wrong. Time is not what a clock measures.

These measurements are merely some of the degrees of freedom that time assigns to clocks in order for clocks to act in accordance with their inherent nature. The measurements say more about the manner in which clocks ... whether natural, mechanical, atomic or psychological ... engage time, than those measurements reveal anything about the essence of time.

I was thankful to God for the opportunity to be with Jennifer and, as a result engage time in a way that allowed me to have experiences whose duration could never be measured by conventional and scientific instruments. The movement of shadows across the face of a sundial, or the flow of grains of sand, or the rotation of wheels, or the vibration of atoms, all have their characteristic properties, but love dances to various rhythms that fall beyond the horizons of these modalities of measurement, even while these clocks tick their tocks and attempt to correlate physical time with the experiences of non -physical temporality.

After completing dinner and going for a walk, we decided to take a drive. Not too long into this segment of our evening together, the brakes failed while going down a long hill, and I lost control of the car.

I must have hit my head at some point because I lost consciousness. I awoke into a very different world.

When my eyes finally opened, I was in a bed. A woman was seated next to the bed looking at me with concern.

She asked: "David, how are you feeling? You've had us worried. You were unconscious for nearly two days."

I looked at her for a moment and two questions popped into mind.

Who was she, and who was David?

Apparently, as the woman later explained to me, I was suffering from psychogenic amnesia. I could remember pretty much everything about the world in general and virtually nothing about my world in particular.

The woman said her name was Jennifer Ormsby and that we were very close to one another. For some reason, a chill swept through me when she told me this because I knew, after a brief period of introspection, that I didn't feel anything for her, and, for whatever reason, this frightened me.

She was trying to be solicitous, supportive and encouraging toward me. However, her attentions were making me feel uncomfortable.

I didn't have any sense of how to respond to her. The two poles of the dynamic ... her and me ... were blanks, and what to do about that was difficult to figure out since I really didn't have any points of reference that would help guide me except some general principles of etiquette and politeness that, somehow, managed to bubble to the surface at appropriate times.

Over the next several days, Jennifer fed me both food and information. The latter was far more difficult to digest than the former.

She said that when the accident took place, she, too, had lost consciousness for a brief period of time. When she awoke, a tall, athletic, middle-aged, bearded, black man was leaning over her trying to unfasten her seat belt.

The man had introduced himself as Rip. He helped Jennifer to deal with the aftermath of the accident.

Somewhere in his life, Rip seemed to have picked up a considerable amount of paramedical training. Following a preliminary examination, Rip indicated he believed I was suffering from a concussion of some sort and that everything else appeared to be all right.

For reasons which, currently, I didn't understand, the two of them had decided that perhaps the safest place to take me was not to a hospital but to Jennifer's spiritual teacher who lived on a farm -like setting about an hour's drive from Boston. Both Rip and Jennifer seemed to believe the accident was not all that accidental.

Since the front end of my car was pretty mangled from its rather forced and rude introduction to a tree that had been trying to mind its own business, Rip and Jennifer had to remove me, unconsciousness and all, from my car and put me in Rip's car. Once the transfer had been made, Jennifer gave directions about how to get to the residence of her spiritual teacher, and we all proceeded on our way, some of us more aware of what was going on than others.

After Rip had completed his mission of mercy, he disappeared into the night. Jennifer said he departed as mysteriously as he had arrived since she was witness to neither his coming nor going ... these events just seemed to happen.

While at the house of her spiritual teacher, and while I still was unconscious, a medical doctor, who was a friend of the teacher, had been asked to take a look at me. The doctor confirmed Rip's initial diagnosis.

In addition to the sequence of events on the night of the 'accident', Jennifer filled me in on the events of the last month and a half. The names of: Beth, Brian and Warren Idaho; Timothy Jameson; Ken and Pamela Pratt; Rip; Paul Bradley and Ed Williams, or Mary Streeter, meant no more to me than did Jennifer's name or that of David Phelps.

I knew nothing of my parents or my family. I had no recollection of having lived in Canada.

I was a psychology teacher who, among other things, taught about personality, development and identity. Yet, at the moment, I lacked direct insight into all three areas.

Jennifer suggested I might benefit by talking with her spiritual guide. Since I already seemed to have lost everything else, I didn't feel there was anything else to lose by pursuing her counsel.

Jennifer took me to her teacher and introduced us. After that, Jennifer left the room.

Her guide's name was Jaamee. She was a woman in her sixties whose hair showed only a few traces of gray and whose face seemed to be adorned with light, like mist hovers about a mountain top.

She was very loving and compassionate. I was drawn to her, and, almost immediately, I felt more comfortable in the presence of her unfamiliarity than I did in the presence of my own current estrangement from myself.

Jaamee ushered me to a sofa chair across from her. There was a pot of tea hiding beneath a cozy on the table between us, and beside the pot were two cups, as if waiting for my arrival.

When I settled into the indicated seat, she asked: "Would you like some tea, David?"

Out of politeness, I replied: "Yes ... sure, but I have no idea how I like it."

She looked at me in an appraising manner and smiled. She said nothing but went about preparing a cup of tea for me.

When she had finished, she lifted the cup and saucer, placing it on the table in front of me. She said: "Why don't you try that, David? I think you'll like it."

I did, and she was right. The taste was quite agreeable.

Leaning back into the softness of the sofa chair, I placed the cup and saucer on my lap. Being at a complete loss as to what to say, I remained silent and alternated between studying the floral design on the teacup and checking out the room in which I was sitting.

Finally, Jaamee broke the silence. "I don't know if you understand how lucky you are, David."

Perplexed by her words, I responded with: "I'm not sure I know what you mean. Are you referring to my having survived the accident?"

"Not entirely," she indicated, "although, obviously, there is much to give thanks for in that respect as well. No," she went on, "what I mean is you are in a very advantageous condition.

"Through circumstances, you have lost, at least for the time being, what most of us need to lose in order to be opened up to certain aspects of reality. In losing your personal identity, you now have an opportunity to consider events free from the personal biases, prejudices and habits that normally control how most of us think, feel and interact with the occurrences of our lives.

"Most of us, David, assume we know who we are. We confuse personal history with essential identity.

"We believe our familial and social experiences tell us what we need to understand about ourselves. However, the nature of true identity has nothing to do with roles, career, social status, ethnicity, race, gender, family background, religion or class.

"Unfortunately, most of us have a tendency to become entangled in the network of relationships that constitutes the purely peripheral and superficial dimensions of our lives. Since our initiation into this network occupies a fundamental part of the first fifteen or twenty years of our lives, there are few of us who are able to survive this socialization process with any clear sense that there might be more to whom we are than what our

families, communities, education, governments, and jobs are trying to convince us is the case.

"If one asks most people if they know who they are, they will say yes, and they will be wrong. If one asks you if you know who you are, you will say no, and you will be right.

"You know you don't know who you are, and you are seeking to change that. Most people don't know that they don't know who they are, and, therefore, they have no desire or motivation to change the way things are.

"Consequently, you are in a much better position than most people. Because you don't know who you are, and you are painfully aware of this, you are starting from a basic truth, while most other people are operating out of a basic falsehood since they are assuming they know who they are when they do not.

"Very few people either have, or take, the opportunity to look at things from a completely fresh perspective. Having been stripped of your personal history and biases, you have been given those an opportunity, and I hope, God willing, you embrace this chance in the spirit with which it has been given to you.

"Don't seek to become who you were, David. Seek to realize who you are."

Reflecting on her words, one portion seemed to jump out at me. I was puzzled by it.

"Just a moment ago," I noted, "you were expressing your hope that I 'embrace this chance in the spirit with which it has been given to' me. I'm not sure I understand what the nature of the spirit is to which you are alluding, nor do I understand who is doing this giving.

"As far as I know ... according to what Jennifer has said ... I was in an accident, and, apparently, I either hit my head, or something hit my head, resulting in a concussion that has caused temporary amnesia. I don't see that anything was given to me by someone."

"There are no accidents, David. Everything that takes place is part of a chain of events ... a chain of events that has meaning, significance and value according to the nature of the interpretation one places on those a chain.

"However, not every interpretation of a chain of events is an accurate reflection of the actual character of the themes that bind those events together any more than all interpretations of a dream constitute correct renderings of the meaning and significance of those a dream. In fact, just as the symbols and similitudes within the language of dreams have to be decoded, so too do the symbols, signs, and indications of the events of life have to be decoded.

"Indeed, what we generally refer to as waking consciousness is, for the vast majority of people, nothing but a dream. Most of us sleepwalk through life, and we call this condition the waking state since, relative to other kinds of experiences of consciousness that we have had, we believe we are more aware than usual when walking about the corridors of our so-called normal lives.

"We use systems those as science, philosophy, mythology, religion, psychology, and literature to provide us with a framework for engaging and interpreting the chains of events that define our lives. We develop vocabularies with words those as: accident, causation, purpose, goal, utility, and so on in order to assign meaning to the events in those chains.

"Yet, this is precisely where many of our problems begin. Instead of opening our bodies, minds, hearts, souls and spirits to what life is trying to communicate to us ... instead of merging horizons with Being's reality, we insist on imposing and assigning our own meanings, values, significance, and so on, to the events of our lives."

"How," I asked, "can one distinguish between when one is imposing one's own interpretation onto life and when one is genuinely being open to the actual message or messages that the events in our life are trying to relate to us?"

"One cannot do this on one's own," Jaamee replied. "The individual needs help."

"Help from whom?" I inquired.

"From someone authorized to undertake those work," she responded.

"And just who or what authorizes those work?" I wondered.

"The same One," she pointed out, "Who arranged your 'accident' and provided you with an opportunity to begin to ask questions about the nature of your true identity free from the distortions of personal history."

"How does one know when one is dealing with someone who has been duly authorized or sanctioned?" I asked.

"Through sincerity," remarked Jaamee. "Your sincerity and the sincerity of the teacher or guide. When sincerity meets sincerity, wonderful things are possible."

"Isn't it possible," I countered, "that people on both the teaching and the seeking sides of things believe they are being sincere when they are not?"

"Yes, this is very possible," Jaamee answered. "This is why one should exercise discrimination, not only with respect to what one is becoming involved in spiritually, but especially in relation to one's own sincerity."

"One must examine the motivations and intentions underlying one's actions very carefully. If one seeks a spiritual teacher out of a desire for fame, influence, wealth, status, rewards, mystical secrets, magical powers, or non-ordinary experiences, then, one's sincerity is being compromised, if not corrupted, by these kinds of desire."

"True sincerity is rooted in love and nothing else. That which seeks anything but love is a sign of insincerity."

"Supposing," I hypothesized, "someone were sincere in the fashion you have suggested. What should this person do?"

"This individual should trust in God," she indicated. "One needs to understand that the quality of Divine mercy is those that God will never allow true sincerity to wander alone in the wilderness, and, in fact, this sort of understanding is at the very heart of trust."

"On the other hand, wandering alone in the wilderness also has an important role to play," Jaamee added. "If we didn't wander in the wilderness for awhile, we might not understand the value of guidance and truth."

"All of life is a journey ... a journey of different kinds of experience. The parameters of this journey are characterized by a pairing of opposites."

"For example, through the experience of darkness, we come to appreciate and seek out light. Through the experience of restlessness, we come to value, and long for, the condition of peacefulness."

"By being exposed to falsehood, we come to see the importance of truth. If we are touched by injustice, we know the significance of justice and fairness.

"If you like, I could go on," she assured me. "But, I'm certain you grasp the general nature of the point being made."

"So," I said, "if one is traveling sincerely about in the wilderness, learning from one's journey through the peaks and valleys of these various opposites, and trusting in God to deliver one from all of this, how long does this all go on?"

"Patience is a nice companion to have whenever one goes on a journey," Jaamee observed.

"Yet," I responded, "someone could have patience, sincerity and trust, and, nevertheless, becoming stuck in the wilderness still could prove to be a very trying set of experiences. How does one survive?"

"With courage," she intimated. "Have the courage of your convictions that your patience, sincerity and trust are correctly placed."

"If one has courage, patience, sincerity and trust, why does one need a teacher?" I queried.

"This is where humility is of value," she stated. "One needs to understand that one doesn't acquire courage, patience, sincerity, and trust on one's own.

"Even when one is traveling 'alone' in the wilderness, one is being provided with spiritual sustenance. Unfortunately, most of us have a tendency to attribute those qualities to our efforts and character, rather than understanding, as humility enables us to do, that all of these qualities are gifts from the One Who is watching over us while we travel about in the wilderness ... these are gifts from the One Who is providing us with opportunities to learn about those things via the chain of events that are introduced through our lives."

"Doesn't this merely raise the same question as before, but from a slightly different direction?" I asked. "In other words, if God is teaching us in the wilderness, why do we need a guide to help us?"

"Divinity is teaching us all the time," Jaamee agreed. "However, we aren't learning all the time ... or, at least, we aren't learning what we need to as

far as realizing our true identity and essential spiritual capacity are concerned.

"The nature of the human being is those that, initially at least, and up to a certain point of realization, we learn best about spiritual matters, to the extent we learn about them at all, when Divinity teaches us through our relationship with a guide that has a form, whether human or of some other kind, to which we can relate, and with which we can identify in various ways. Divinity always is the One Who is teaching, whether through a guide, or through our inner selves or through nature, but time and experience are necessary for us to come to understand just what this means and, to some extent, how it works.

"Out of mercy, compassion and love, Divinity brings us into contact with a spiritual teacher. The task and responsibility of this individual ... the fiduciary duty which Divinity has bestowed on this person ... is to help guide us, in accordance with the wisdom that God provides, during the time we must spend journeying in the wilderness. In this manner we are shown how to find our way to the sacred oasis of our true identity and essential spiritual capacity through which we can know, serve, love, cherish and worship Divinity.

"This is how we work toward fulfilling our spiritual destinies. God willing, if we are prepared to struggle in a sincere fashion, a guide helps us to accomplish what we cannot accomplish on our own due to our waking condition of spiritual sleep.

"While we are in a state of spiritual sleep, we are dreaming we are awake. When spiritual realization comes, we come to know the difference between the dreaming of our 'normal' waking life and the awareness of one who has woken from those a sleep."

"If," I postulated, "someone does not choose to work or struggle in this manner, what becomes of those a person?"

"Then, this individual realizes a spiritual destiny of a different sort," Jaamee indicated. "What happens is up to the individual because God responds to us in accordance with our attitude toward, or opinion of, or feelings about, Divinity."

"This all seems to be somewhat circular," I suggested. "We appear to have arrived back where we began."

"The path we have traversed is more helical than circular," Jaamee corrected. "You have been exposed to insights and understandings which permits you, if you take advantage of the opportunity being offered, to engage the issues being discussed from a slightly better vantage point than was the case before we began our discussion.

"Generally speaking, one either follows the spiritual helix upward toward awakening or one slides down the helix toward a deeper state of sleep. The inherent nature of the helix does not permit one to remain stationary for very long, and, therefore, one must make an effort to understand in which direction the elevator is moving into which one is entering and entrusting one's life."

After the exchange of words, a silence passed between us. The silence was not empty, even though no words were spoken and even though I cannot say I really understood what was transpiring.

Nonetheless, there was a stirring in my heart. I could feel deep, intense currents of feeling and intuition moving about within me, like a maelstrom whose vortex had an origin of unfathomable depth.

Sometime later, Jaamee said: "Your relationship with Jennifer, David, is, under the circumstances, like your present relationship with God. Previously, you had professed your love for Jennifer, but, now, you have forgotten what you said to her, or how you felt about her, earlier.

"Before the accident, you were intoxicated by Jennifer's nearness. In addition, you felt the deep pangs of separation whenever you were away from her.

"You found her love for you to be inexplicable and considered that love to be an act of pure grace on her part for which you were thankful from the bottom of your heart. You treated your relationship with Jennifer in a sacred manner in which, if requested, you were prepared to sacrifice your own likes and dislikes in order to honor the duties of care that you felt to be inherent in the love binding you to her and her to you.

"Following the accident, all those feelings, commitments and understandings concerning Jennifer have disappeared. There is virtually no trace of her to be found within your being except the residues that come from your present interaction with her here at the farm.

"Similarly, David, you have forgotten your previous relationship with God. Just as the accident has caused you to forget Jennifer, the process of

birth into the physical world has caused you to forget the nature of your love for God that had existed before you assumed, or took on, the form of biological life.

"Prior to your existence in this world, you were intoxicated by your nearness to Divinity. You recognized the sacred character of your relationship with Divinity.

"Prior to this life, you understood God's love for you was an act of pure Grace by Divinity since you had done nothing to deserve or earn that love. Prior to this physical existence, you claimed you were prepared to honor the duties of care entailed by that act of Grace.

"Now, however, just as you would disclaim all knowledge of your feelings for, and relationship with, Jennifer, you also would disclaim all knowledge of, or involvement with, God. In the former case you have the excuse of a concussion.

"In the latter case there is no comparable excuse. Rather, what has happened is that, like most of the rest of us, you have become caught up in the multiplicity of addictions brought about through biological existence and the socialization process that shapes, colors and orients that existence.

"In relation to Jennifer, you suffer from a lesser amnesia. In relation to God, you suffer from a greater ... a much greater amnesia.

"In both cases, you must struggle to remember what you have promised and what you felt. Your happiness and well-being depends on this, David."

There was a knock on the door. Jaamee called out for the person to come in.

Jennifer entered the room with a man. She introduced the man as Paul Bradley, an agent for the FBI.

The man approached me and placed a few envelopes in my hand. He explained: "I picked up some of your mail before I came."

"Isn't tampering with the mail a federal offense?" Jennifer inquired.

"Yes, it is," the man acknowledged, "and if I were you, I would report it to the nearest federal agent. If you do not wish to file your complaint with me, then, in the not too distant future, there might be a whole bunch of federal agents who will be clever enough to find their way to this farm just as I have done and, if you like, you can register your concerns with them.

"Beth Idaho did not show up for work and, apparently, has disappeared once again. The wrecked car that you abandoned has been found, traced and a determination has been made that a person, or persons, unknown performed unsolicited, and quite lethal sorts of adjustment to your car's braking system.

"You both are wanted for questioning by the FBI in conjunction with the possible kidnapping of Beth Idaho. Furthermore, there are several other developments that I can't go into, strongly indicating you are in considerable danger."

"Have you come to bring us in?" Jennifer asked.

"No," he replied. "I've come to get you out of here. I have reason to believe that if you were to be detained officially at this time, you could be killed, possibly by elements from within the intelligence community ... maybe even from within the FBI.

"I don't know what you have done to stir things up, but the temperature in this whole situation is rising very quickly, and the heat that is bringing this about is coming from a variety of directions.

"Whatever we decide to do, we don't have much time. If we are lucky, we might have six to ten hours head start before authorities, of one sort or another, find their way here.

"Up to this point, there is no all-points-bulletin on the two of you. Whoever, ultimately, is attempting to locate you both is applying a considerable amount of pressure, but this is being done in a way that they hope won't attract a lot of unwanted attention.

"Officially, I'm on holidays. Consequently, I have a few days to help us all try to sort out this mess."

"Dr. Phelps, your friend, Dr. Ormsby, has informed me you have amnesia as a result of the accident. Is this correct?"

I nodded my head in affirmation.

"Do you know who I am?" he inquired.

I shook my head in negation. "I remember pretty much everything except for the personal events of my life, including anyone I might have met prior to the accident.

"If I have met you before, I don't recall it. I don't even remember my relationship with Dr. Ormsby which I have been told has been very close."

I looked at the mail that had been given to me. I felt strange getting personal mail when I didn't feel much like a person and, very likely, when the contents of the envelopes would be meaningless to me.

One of the envelopes had a return address on it with Dr. Ormsby's name. I decided to open it first.

Inside was a poem. There was no accompanying letter, but at the top of the poem was a brief note that read:

'Dearest David,

I love you, and since you have been courageous enough to share with me some of your literary efforts, I thought I would return the favor in kind.'

The title of the poem was: 'Life: A Work-in-Progress'. It read as follows:

Echoes of death lap the shores of my being ...
Harbingers of a tide that is yet to come,
When negation rolls in and life ebbs away.
Time stalks me, haunts me, taunts briefly, then is gone
An undertow which lures and sweeps me along
According to a purpose that's, yet, unknown.
Transformations mark stages of becoming
Along chaotic paths that disappear in mists
Of incompleteness, leaving no trace to find.
Deep within, a mystery I am feeling ...
Not clearly, but in colored shadows which move
Like an owl in the night, asking: who, who are you?
My spirit yearns to see what is calling to
Me from behind the veil of life's mystery ...
To know why I am, rather than not at all.
Caught between forces of give in and go on,
While waiting for the first light of dawn, my heart
Fights back tears laced with the salt of earthly fears.

Beauty weaves a melody which mingles
With my soul ... harmony flowing from God's Grace
Against counterpoints of discord from me.
Alien places, inviting and vaguely
Familiar, reach out through framed symbols
Of estrangement, trapped beneath life's surface hues.
Winds of loneliness swirl about me nightly,
Bringing the chill of freedom to mortal bones ...
Around me, I wrap my cloak of friendship tightly.
Doubt kindles a smoldering uncertainty;
Questions boil in a cauldron of possibility;
Answers whisper their secrets with subtlety.
On the edge of a truth, much is left to see.
Love Jennifer

The other envelope was much larger than the first. There was no return address on it, nor was there any postal mark.

While I went about opening the envelope and perusing its contents, a conversation went on around me concerning what to do. As I became engrossed in the contents of the envelope, I lost track of what was going on elsewhere in the room.

There was a covering letter, together with a map of Maine that had a red circle drawn around the northernmost end of what seemed to be an elongated and fair sized body of water known as Eagle Lake. In addition, the envelope contained photocopies of a number of articles from different newspapers in various parts of the US.

I went back to the covering letter. The signature at the bottom was just Mary, but it meant nothing to me.

Dear David,

Given what happened to your friends Ken and Pam, and in the light of the events in Chicago, as well as the abduction attempt about which you

told me, I have decided to take a few precautions. One of these precautions involves a plan for ensuring you get a copy of the results of my inquiries, meager though these might be.

If you receive this package, David, it probably means I am dead. I left instructions with a friend to release certain materials to you in the event of my demise, irrespective of whatever the apparent causes of my death might be.

The map of Maine with the circled area identifies the general location of the research facility that is connected to the Bettinger Foundation and the parent company, Futures Unlimited. I have been informed the buildings are set back into the woods about a hundred yards from the shore somewhere along the northern end of the lake, near to where there is a river or stream that links Eagle Lake with Long Lake.

I don't know if the photocopied articles are of any value to you since there is no obvious linkage with the Bettinger Foundation or Futures Unlimited in any of them. However, they are the only ones that could be found on short notice that, per your request, had an out of the ordinary sort of religious flavor to them.

I'm sorry there isn't more to offer you. I had been waiting for a few more things to come in but decided to make sure you got at least this much in case something happened in the meantime.

Obviously, I ran out of time. Don't feel badly about what has happened, David.

I'm a big girl ... or, I was ... and knew the risks. I died doing what I love, and there aren't a lot of people who can say as much.

I've always had a lot of admiration for you, David. I wish you the best of luck in fouting up whatever these maniacs are trying to accomplish.

Mary

I turned next to the photocopied articles. Several of them were about a number of religious leaders, each from a different tradition, who had disappeared for a time ... anywhere from a week to ten days ... but had returned, seemingly none the worse for wear, with various kinds of plausible accounts of where they had been and why they hadn't informed anybody about their absences.

There were a second series of articles about altercations, of one sort or another, within a variety of different religious communities. In each case, the problem seemed to center around the efforts of a single individual trying to persuade her or his community of a different, possibly better, way of engaging the faith.

One article was about someone in the Christian community who seemed to be stirring up a storm of controversy with comments concerning certain words attributed to Jesus ... namely, "I am the truth and the way and the life."

The person at the center of the issue, Carrie Thomas, claimed the "I" being referred to in the statement is the same 'I' that spoke through Krishna, Buddha, Muhammad, Moses, and so many others, both known and unknown.

According to Thomas, this 'I' was always the same Divine I. The locus through which this Divine I was given expression varied according to time and circumstance.

Apparently, a lot of Christians had taken exception with this interpretation. There had been a variety of violent clashes at some of the public functions at which Thomas had appeared.

Another article gave an account of similar sorts of disturbance within the Jewish community. In this case, however, a young Rabbi, Isaac Goldhar, had been critical of the way many Jews were interpreting the meaning and significance of ideas those as 'God's Chosen People' and the 'Promised Land'.

Goldhar claimed the Jews were not the Chosen People of God. Instead, he argued God's Chosen People were those individuals ... whether Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Native, and so on ... who bowed in submission to God's command and attempted to live their lives in accordance with the wishes of Divinity.

In addition, Goldhar maintained that anyone who tried to interpret the meaning of the Promised Land in a literalist, material sense was making a fundamental mistake. According to him, the Promised Land was of a spiritual nature. People who killed and terrorized one another over the issue of whom should own or control mere physical land were engaged in a conflict with no spiritual value or purpose.

A third article was about a Buddhist monk, Qwan Tzu, who was upsetting a lot of people in that religious community with commentaries built around a

sort of Zen koan. The statement at the heart of the commotion was this: Buddhism is wrong because it is right.

As best as I was able to gather, the issue had something to do with the nature of ultimate reality and the issue of Divinity. In any event, quite a few influential Buddhists, as well as some of those from among the rank and file, had taken rather strong exception to both the statement and the monk's commentaries on the matter.

The next article was about a Muslim activist, A'isha Ahmed, who was giving talks in which a prominent theme was how many Muslims around the world had become a community of idol worshipers. More and more Muslims everywhere, Ahmed claimed, were worshipping, and bowing down to, money, fame, power, alcohol, sex, material comforts, and their own theological interpretations, while forgetting their spiritual obligations, responsibilities, and the purpose of their existence. She further argued that the proof of the truth of her assertion was the increasing disarray, ruin, dissolution, death and misery in which Muslims around the world were becoming inextricably entangled. Citing a spiritual authority, Ahmed said words to the effect that when God wishes to destroy a city, God causes its people to live at ease, and they commit sin therein and, thus, is God's word proved true against them, and, then, God destroys them utterly.

A fifth article was about a Hindu woman, Sita Prashad, who was endeavoring to convince others in her religious community that there was only one Divinity. She was alleging that the multiplicity of gods on which different people called upon in certain aspects of Hinduism were, in reality, Divine attributes that, through a mistaken understanding arising a thousand, or more, years ago, had been conceptually separated off from Divinity and, as a result, were being accorded an undeserved ontological status as individual, self-contained, independent deities.

As had been the case with the individuals discussed in the articles concerning the other religious traditions, this Hindu woman had been threatened, or confronted by, violent protests of one sort or another. As also had been true in relation to the other stories about spiritual dissidents, the central figure of the story ... in this case, Ms. Prashad ... had disappeared a second time, but to date none of these individuals had reappeared as they did previously after a period of a week to ten days.

Although foul play of some sort was suspected in each case, there was no tangible evidence to verify any of these suspicions. All attempts to pursue

the available clues concerning their possible whereabouts ... whether alive or dead ... had come up empty-handed.

The articles came from newspapers in widely separated parts of the country. The incidents covered a period of time beginning, approximately, in early May of this year and ending in mid-June.

While going through these articles, I had put the map of Maine, with the circled portion, on the table in front of me. Unknown to me, Jaamee had picked it up and was looking at it.

She said: "I believe the person you are looking for is at Eagle Lake."

"Do you mean Beth Idaho?" asked Paul Bradley.

"No," Jaamee indicated. "Beth has been brought to a safe place by friends, and she is getting ready for something that is to happen in the near future, but her brother is at Eagle Lake."

Jaamee was silent for a moment, and, then, she added: "There is a childhood friend of David's, by the name of Kevin Albert, who lives near a place called Mattawamkeag, somewhere in the general vicinity of Eagle Lake. This man flies planes as part of his job, and he will be able to help you get to Eagle Lake.

Paul Bradley was somewhat skeptical about what he was hearing. Jennifer Ormsby was prepared to act on the information. I had no opinion on the matter.

Paul also voiced his concern that, at some point, authorities were likely to show up in Mattawamkeag once they learned David had spent part of his childhood there. If he were conducting the search, he told us, this is what he would do in an attempt to check out all the leads or possibilities.

Jennifer filled Paul in, according to her understanding of things, about Mary Streeter and the significance of the contents of the envelope that he had brought to me. She was providing this information on the basis of the briefing I supposedly had given to Jennifer during some portion of the evening prior to the car accident.

Paul expressed less confidence in Jaamee's words than he did in Jennifer's point that, if nothing else, the journey to Eagle Lake would have the advantage of taking us some place that was not likely to be discovered by whomever might be looking for us. After further discussion on the matter, we decided to go to Eagle Lake.

I didn't know what to believe in all of this. The only thing I seemed sure of, although for reasons that were not at all clear to me, is that on the basis of my interaction with Jaamee, I trusted her, and she appeared to feel that going to Eagle Lake was necessary.

We began to make preparations to leave. As we did, Paul asked Jaamee if she had a typewriter.

After he was shown the machine's location, he went out to the trunk of his car, took something out of an attaché case, and returned to the typewriter. For a few minutes, he became busy typing something.

When Paul had completed his task, he took a pen out of his inside jacket pocket, paused for a few seconds, and, finally, wrote something on the paper that he had removed from the typewriter. Subsequently, he folded the papers and placed them and the pen in the pocket from which the pen had been taken originally.

Jaamee had prepared some food for us to take. We thanked her for her help and kindnesses, said our farewells, and headed for northern Maine.

As we drove away, I thought I saw some tears in Jaamee's eyes. I couldn't be sure.

On the way through the town near to Jaamee's farm, Paul withdrew a sizable amount of money from a bank machine. Jennifer had wanted to do the same, but Paul discouraged her.

He indicated the people searching for them were likely to have flagged her accounts and charge cards, as well as those associated with me. The authorities would be able to trace our movements in this fashion.

Some six, or so, hours later, we had arrived in Mattawamkeag. After a few inquiries, Paul found out where Kevin Albert lived.

By the time we pulled up in front of Kevin's house, it was about five-thirty in the afternoon. Fortunately, Kevin was at home.

Paul explained the situation to Kevin, including the part about my amnesia. Kevin agreed to fly us to Eagle Lake.

As all of this unfolded in accordance with Jaamee's statements earlier in the day, Paul developed a great deal more respect for Jennifer's spiritual teacher. So did I.

About an hour later, all the arrangements for the flight had been made, and we were climbing into a plane that was tethered to a long dock extending out into a lake area.

Although Jennifer and I had nothing to bring except the clothes we were wearing, Paul had stuffed a variety of things into a medium -sized duffel bag, all of which had been taken from the trunk of his car. In addition, he had changed into clothes and shoes, again taken from the trunk of his car, that were likely to be more suited to the conditions toward which we were traveling.

Somewhere around an hour later, while the sun was beginning to set, we were over Eagle Lake, approaching from the south, and working our way northward. Kevin, who was a fishing and hunting guide by profession, was familiar with much of the region.

He put us down in an area that was not too far away from where we believed the facility to be and, yet, at the same time, would not likely have been noticed by someone at the facility unless they had sophisticated monitoring equipment, which we were hoping was not the case. However, as a partial cover for our presence at the Lake, when Kevin registered his flight plan, he indicated he was taking a fishing party into the area for a day or so.

There was a docking float out on the lake near where we landed. A canoe was attached to the structure.

Paul suggested that Kevin stay with the plane. He further indicated Jennifer should stay with Kevin while Paul and I went in search of the facility.

Jennifer would have nothing to do with this. She insisted on going.

Paul relented only on the condition that she would do exactly what he told her to do. She consented to this arrangement, and we proceeded toward shore.

Before leaving, Paul gave Kevin a compact, walkie-talkie-like, communications device. Paul instructed him not to use it, except in the case of a dire emergency, and merely wait to be contacted by us.

When we arrived at shore, Paul tied the boat. Out of his duffel bag, he took a couple of blue parkers, with the letters FBI in bright yellow printed on the back of the jackets, and handed them to Jennifer and myself.

He next removed a small knapsack from the bag and put a few things into it, including a device like the one he had given Kevin. Next, he put the knapsack on his back.

Out of a pouch of the duffle bag, he took a bottle of insect repellent and told us to apply it liberally. When we were done, he did the same and, when he had finished, asked me to put it in one of the pouches on the side of the knapsack on his back.

Finally, he took out three pairs of night-vision goggles from the bag. He distributed the goggles and helped us to adjust them.

About two hours later, we had made our way along the edges of the shore to a point that seemed to be not far away from the end of the lake, although this was hard to determine with any certainty. About five hundred yards away, we caught glimpses of light shining through some of the cover of the forest.

In another hour, we stumbled onto a clearing that was about sixty yards wide. On the far side of the clearing, set back a little into the forest, were a group of buildings.

The time was around midnight or a little after. Paul whispered we should wait for another two hours before going across the clearing to the buildings.

Jennifer would wait at the edge of the clearing. If anything went wrong, she was to make her way back to Kevin and wait there with him.

Paul had removed his knapsack. He opened it up and took out another communications device from it and gave it to Jennifer.

He provided her with a few instructions concerning its operation. As he had done with Kevin, he told her to refrain from using it unless absolutely necessary.

Paul was of the opinion there probably was only a limited security staff on hand. He seemed to feel the physical isolation of the location was intended to serve as the primary form of protective security for the facility.

He believed that if we went in around two or three in the morning, most everyone would be asleep. Whatever security might be present was likely to be unprepared to handle those an early morning visit with any kind of efficiency. Besides, while at Jaamee's farm, Paul had typed some official-sounding phrases, regulations and legal codes on a blank federal warrant and signed the name of a fictitious federal district court judge to it.

There were unlikely to be any lawyers present at the facility. Consequently, he felt the document had a good chance of convincing anyone else who might be on hand that Paul and I had a legal right to be at the facility to search the premises for one: Brian Idaho, a federal fugitive.

Paul would have the FBI badge and his gun to lend authority to things. I would complement Paul with the official FBI jacket with which he had supplied me, as well as by acting as bearer of the fake warrant.

He instructed me to work on conveying a sort of taciturn, impassive surliness when we interacted with the people at the facility. If I did this, I would have mastered half of all that was necessary in order to be a first-rate FBI agent. The other half ... how to wear sunglasses ... could be taught later on.

In the beginning, the operation went very smoothly. In the end, it went terribly wrong.

We were able to enter the compound, take control of the situation and locate Brian Idaho with considerable efficiency and very little noise. We only had to deal with one security guard at the front gate.

On the way out, we had come across a high-tech room filled with all kinds of communications equipment. Within a very short period of time, Paul had proceeded to disable pretty much all of the electronic gear.

At the front gate, we tied up the guard and gagged him. Someone would find him in the morning, embarrassed perhaps, but quite safe.

Things fell apart as we were making our way across the clearing near the compound, back toward Jennifer. About half way to the cover of the forest, we saw Jennifer rushing toward us.

The wind had picked up so we couldn't really make out what she was saying. She seemed to be pointing behind us.

As we turned to look back over our shoulders, she hit, like an NFL safety, between Paul and myself, full force, with her shoulder. I was surprised someone her size could hit that hard.

The force of the impact knocked me off balance. I fell at an awkward angle, hitting my head on the ground as I landed.

While going down, I heard what sounded like several shots. I saw Jennifer crumple to the ground about the same time my head hit hard against the grass.

Three things stunned me: my harsh introduction to Mother Earth; the realization that my memory had come flooding back as a result of this introduction, and my worries about Jennifer. For a brief time, I felt paralyzed.

Recovering, I crawled over to where Jennifer was lying. She was face down, and I turned her over.

I was no doctor, but I could see she was in deep trouble from her wounds. She looked at my face, smiled slightly at me despite, or, perhaps, because of, the goggles covering my eyes, lifted her hand and brushed my lips with her fingers, then, she was gone.

A sinking emptiness swept through me. I heard several more shots ... from where or from whom, I did not know.

The next thing I knew, Paul had knelt down beside me and was quickly examining Jennifer. He said: "She's dead. We've got to get out of here."

Several more shots rang out from somewhere near the buildings. The sounds suggested more than one person was shooting at something, and since Paul was beside me, I figured it must be the other guys who were doing the shooting.

Paul picked me up by the scruff of the neck and snatched Jennifer's goggles from the ground at the same time. With the help of Brian, they, more or less, carried me to the part of the forest where Jennifer had been waiting.

I was in shock and not reacting very well. Paul slapped me across the face several times in order to get me to attend to the business at hand.

Over the next hour and a half to two hours, we made our way back to where Kevin was waiting for us. The urgency of the struggle to get away helped take my mind off what had happened.

The situation would have been tragic enough to have had to deal with even if I still were suffering from amnesia. The fact my memory had returned colored the world in eerie, alien hues that went beyond the green tinge with which the night-vision goggles were imbuing everything.

By the time we reached the canoe on the shore, the dawn was in an advanced stage. We had been able to traverse the last part of the journey without need of the goggles.

When we reached the boat, Paul had contacted Kevin with the communications device and told him to start up the engines. By the time we reached the docking area, the plane was ready to go.

Kevin could tell by the looks on our faces that things had gone wrong. He didn't bother to ask about Jennifer. He seemed to know.

We took off in silence, like monks in a monastery observing a vow. We flew back in the same fashion.

I sat next to Brian during the return trip. From time to time, I looked over at him, and, from time to time, he returned my gaze.

There was something about him that was different from what I had remembered based on my meeting with him at the prison. I attributed the differences to what we both had been through since we last met.

Finally, we landed and disembarked. While Kevin was busy securing the plane, Brian turned to Paul and me.

He said: "I have a message for you from Rip. He said you should meet him in Toronto at an address where all three of you have been."

A strange feeling came over me, only part of which was in reaction to the cryptic nature of the message that was being communicated to Paul and myself. With a certainty that seemed entirely misplaced, I stated, in a rather rhetorical fashion: "You're not Brian, are you? You're Warren."

He smiled and replied: "Guilty." Then, he said: "When Brian was taken from prison by the people who run the facility at Eagle Lake, we had come to know of their plan ahead of time and had made our own contingency arrangements.

"They are not the only ones who understand the workings of psychopharmacology. Native peoples know a thing or three about those matters as well, and my travels in South America were very helpful in this regard.

"In any case, we intercepted Brian's kidnappers and put them to sleep while we made a switch. For reasons that I'm not at liberty to go into, I took Brian's place, and Brian went about his business elsewhere.

"The guys at Eagle Lake have been trying to extract information from the wrong person for several weeks now. Moreover, whatever information they have acquired will not help them to achieve the purposes for which they kidnapped Brian from prison."

"You were a decoy?!" indicated Paul, both stating something and asking a question at the same time.

"Essentially, yes," answered Warren. "I have further duties in that regard that is why I must take my leave of you gentlemen at this time.

"I'm very sorry about what happened to the young woman," he offered. "I owe her and you all a great deal, and the only way I know of which will permit me to fulfill the obligations entailed by that debt is to continue in my assigned duties."

Paul and I both started to inquire about the nature of his task when he replied: "My understanding is that whatever answers can be provided concerning all of this will be given by Rip when you meet him in Toronto. The time left to us all is relatively short, so, I suggest we get moving in our respective directions."

Paul and I shook hands with Warren. We watched him walk away and disappear around a bend in the road.

We thanked Kevin for his help. Paul tried to offer him some money to cover his expenses. Kevin wasn't interested in getting anything for his efforts.

Paul warned Kevin that, at some point, authorities of various descriptions very likely would be prowling about town. Paul suggested Kevin would be well advised to run everything through the fishing charter angle and try to keep to the facts as much as possible without deviating from that story: We came; we flew; we fished; we flew some more; we left.

We got into the car. While Paul was starting up the engine, he told me we ought to head for Saint John, New Brunswick and fly to Toronto from there.

He felt we wouldn't have to produce any kind of identification at the Canadian border. Furthermore, once in Canada, passports would not be required to take a domestic flight from one Canadian city to another.

We could place the car in long-term parking at the airport. In this way, the car wouldn't attract unwanted attention, and he would worry about making arrangements to pick up the car at some later time.

I agreed with his ideas. He put the car in gear, and we headed north.

Exhausted, both emotionally and physically, I slept all the way to the Canadian border. Once through the immigration/customs check-point, I went back to sleep until we reached Saint John.

Before going back to sleep, I informed Paul that my memory had returned. I kind of wished I still had amnesia since, among other things, I would not be feeling as much pain about Jennifer as was presently the case.

The void of sleep helped anesthetize me. How little do we tend to be thankful for the many mercies that come to us through this disengagement from waking life.

Storing the car, purchasing tickets, and the flight to Toronto all took place without incident. During the flight, Paul and I discussed the message that had come to us from Rip via Warren.

We both came to the same conclusion. The only address that made any sense was 99 St. Jude.

Three or four hours later we were walking through Pearson Airport in Toronto. Paul said we should take a bus into the city rather than take an airport limousine, since our movements would be more difficult to trace if we did this.

Before purchasing our tickets for the bus, Paul bought a street guide of Toronto. Within a short period of time, we had located St. Jude.

The bus ride into the city took about thirty minutes or so. When we got off the bus, we took a subway to the stop nearest St. Jude.

After a fifteen minute walk, we were in front of 99 St. Jude. We climbed the stairs and rang the bell somewhere around five-thirty in the afternoon.

A minute or so later, Rip opened the door. His greeting was very warm, and he invited us into the interior of the house.

We sat down in the indicated chairs, and Rip asked us what we would like to drink. We gave our requests, and he disappeared briefly before coming back with the refreshments.

I asked Rip: "So, is this another vacant lot we are sitting in, just like in Boston?"

He grinned and answered: "David, compared to Divinity, everything is a vacant lot. The difference between people is that some people are aware of this, and some of us are not."

I provided Rip with an account of everything that had occurred since we last had been together. That time seemed like years ago, and, yet, only about ten days had passed.

Somehow, I felt Rip already knew most, if not all, of what I was relating to him. He listened to it, however, as if he were learning about it for the first time.

He expressed his condolences concerning Jennifer. He spoke about her for a few moments, as if he knew her quite well, and described, quite accurately, many of her marvelous qualities, both spiritual and interpersonal.

We were all silent for a few moments. Finally, Paul said: "Before departing from one another, Warren indicated to David and myself that you might provide us with whatever explanation could be given about what is going on. Is this possible now?"

Nodding his head, Rip answered: "I would say you both have earned an explanation. Nevertheless, I should warn you ahead of time that what I have to say might not answer all your questions."

Paul shrugged and responded: "Whatever we get from you is more than what either David or I have at the present time."

Rip paused slightly and began to speak. "There is a ceremony that is to be observed in the very near future. This ceremony is to mark the occasion of the beginning of the end of the last stage of human existence on Earth.

"The time, place, and participants in this ceremony have been established since human beings first walked on the surface of this planet. Relatively recently, people associated with Futures Unlimited, employing the help of some individuals with psychic abilities, have become aware of some, but not all, of the details of this ceremony.

"For several months, the people at Futures Unlimited desperately have been trying to obtain the missing pieces to their puzzle. Unfortunately for them, but fortunately for us, their psychics are not capable of seeing deeply enough into the matter to supply the people at Futures Unlimited with all the information that the latter individuals would like to have.

"Unknown to the people at Futures Unlimited, the existing Rules of Engagement covering these issues prevents their psychics from seeing any more deeply than they do. In any event, those people have been resorting to other means in order to supplement the information they have.

"Your attempted abduction, David, together with the ones involving Beth and Brian were part of those supplemental activities. In addition, there have been a number of other abductions that have taken place

over the last several months involving individuals from different religious communities.

"The people at Futures Unlimited know that Brian Idaho has some sort of key role to play in all of this. When Beth Idaho walked into your office, you got drawn into the whole affair.

"Beth was taken in order to find out what she knew and who you were. Brian was removed from prison because those people knew they were running out of time with respect to the ceremony that they wanted to stop from happening, and they were beginning to panic.

"You were becoming something of an unpredictable irritant in the whole affair, David, so, when you couldn't be distracted by the offer from the Bettinger Foundation, they tried to abduct you. When that plan failed, they, for a variety of reasons, took steps with your friends Ken and Pam, but mostly they did what they did because Ken was making progress with his inquiries on your behalf, and he was getting too close to a few things that had the potential to expose some of their activities for what they were and are.

"When you continued to be a player by undertaking the trip to Chicago, and especially when your call to Mary Streeter set in motion a further round of unwanted inquiries, they decided to frame you for murder and, hopefully, put an end to the manner in which your stumbling about was proving to be increasingly embarrassing to them. Your friend, Paul, here, fouled up that plan when he provided you with an alibi at the time the undercover agent was murdered.

"Their next course of action was simply to terminate you and Mary Streeter. They succeeded in the latter case, but not in the former case.

"In fact, they were not entirely successful in their attempts to stop Mary either since she already had made arrangements to provide David with critical information concerning the facility at Eagle Lake. This led to the rescue and release of Warren Idaho who is busy, as we speak, playing out the rest of his role in the matter at hand."

Paul interrupted at this point and asked: "What is there about this ceremony to which you alluded earlier that is so important to the people at Futures Unlimited that they would be willing to kill and abduct people in order to find out about those an event and that they would be willing to try to prevent various individuals, like Ken Pratt or Mary Streeter, from finding

out about what they were doing either with respect to the ceremony or in relation to other kinds of activities?"

"The people at Futures Unlimited believe they are the guardians of civilization. They believe they have the duty of preserving, as well as continuing to add to, the scientific, artistic, medical, literary, religious, philosophical and technological achievements of human beings.

"Their psychic advisors have informed them, quite correctly, that if the ceremony in question takes place, a series of events will ensue that will end, at some point in time, in the termination of the human race. The people at Futures Unlimited feel they are under an obligation to stop this from happening.

"They believe they are the agents of destiny who have been entrusted by God with the responsibility of protecting human achievements ... past, present and future. They see the ceremony as the work of evil incarnate in which an eternal darkness will enter into the universe through the door represented by the ceremony.

"What the people at Futures Unlimited do not understand is that the existence of the Universe has never been about humanity. It always has been about Divinity.

"Those people want to preserve human accomplishments as if those works have inherent value. Those works do not have any inherent value, and they never did.

"Those sorts of activity merely represent the seductions of the world. People become preoccupied with pursuing these kinds of activity and, as a result, have no time for the real purposes underlying human existence.

"The desire to pursue accomplishments, achievements, awards, rewards, and so on, in and of themselves, is an expression of the activities of the ego. The people who become entangled in these activities don't even understand that whatever creations, inventions, discoveries, or insights come into being through them are not really their productions.

"Moreover, what comes, comes both as a gift and as a trial. We are given things by Divinity to see what we will do with them and how we will respond and react to them.

"The opportunities for spiritual realization that are entailed by human existence on Earth are going to be shut down by the very One who has made

them possible in the first place. The people at Futures Unlimited take exception with those a decision because they are convinced it denies, as well as interferes with, everything they believe to be important about the potential of human beings in the scheme of things.

"They do not understand that things will not come to an end as a result of the ceremony. The ceremony is nothing more than a sacred observance that has been commanded by Divinity.

"The people involved in the ceremony are not revolutionaries who, subsequent to that event, will go about trying to destroy civilization or humanity. In fact, these people only will attempt to help whomever they can to make the best spiritual use of whatever time remains to us.

"How much time ... whether hours, days, weeks, years, decades, or centuries ... remains before the end comes, following the observance of the ceremony, is not known ... at least not by human beings. Our duty is merely to perform the tasks that have been assigned to us and leave the rest to Divinity.

"The people at Futures Unlimited believe they can alter the course of destiny. They are convinced that free will is all-encompassing when, in reality, it is very limited in character ... although, to be sure, in the margin of these limited degrees of freedom, the fate of the individual rests, and, in this respect, we become the masters of our own spiritual destinies.

"There is just one further piece of information to add to what I have said previously. Each of you, if you so wish, can be witness-participants in this ceremony.

"If the answer is yes, I will tell you where and when, as well as make arrangements for your reception at the ceremony. If the answer is no, you are free to leave and go about your lives.

"Whatever your answer might be, I'm afraid I must have it now, before you leave. Moreover, you need to understand that if either, or both, of your answers should be in the affirmative, there is a possibility you might not come through the ceremony unscathed since the event is surrounded by considerable danger due to the continued efforts of the Futures Unlimited people to disrupt, if not cancel altogether, the gathering in question."

For me, the answer was easy. In many ways, I had come too far down the road on which I had been traveling since early June to stop at this juncture. I felt I owed it to Jennifer, Ken, Pam, Mary and myself.

"I'm in," I replied.

Paul seemed to be lost in thought. I had no idea about what was going on inside him or what factors were being considered.

Finally, he nodded his head. "I, as well, would like to participate at the ceremony ... in whichever way is deemed to be appropriate."

Rip rose, and we followed his example. He embraced each of us in turn.

He told us our destination was in New Mexico, and we had to be there by midnight tomorrow. He gave us the name and address of a person to contact in a nearby village upon our arrival.

Chaco Canyon had been the heart of the Anasazi culture that had thrived approximately a thousand years ago. Its architectural and construction technologies were quite advanced.

Where the Anasazi people came from, or what happened to them, no one really seems to know for certain. The civilization appears to have sprung into existence mysteriously and, then, disappeared in the same fashion.

Among the few remaining remnants of the culture are the walls of the Great Houses, some as long as five hundred feet, with a maze of interior rooms ... numbering about six hundred ... of different sizes and shapes. In some places, the buildings rise to as much as four or five stories in height.

Thousands of tons of sandstone, along with nearly twenty -five thousand trees ... many weighing hundreds of pounds ... were used in the construction of, respectively, the walls and roofs of the Great Houses. These materials had to be transported from as far away as fifty miles without the assistance of anything except manual labor and whatever technological innovations the Anasazi could devise to achieve their purposes.

After the construction materials had been delivered to the building sites, the former had been carved, shaped and assembled with intricate precision. The fact the walls have stood, without benefit of any kind of mortar, for more than a thousand years is a testimony to the skill of the Anasazi builders.

At various distances from the main center at Bonito, there are another eight Great Houses, although not quite on the scale of the central structure. In addition, there are a number of other settlements, some of them hundreds of miles away that are connected, to the main center by a series of straight roads, some thirty feet across.

These roads do not follow the easier, natural contours of the land but follow, instead, a man-made line. This required, from time to time, a series of steps to be carved into the face of cliffs in order to keep to the straight lines of the over-all organizational plan.

The roads were discovered from the air in the 1970s, when the emergence of remote sensing technology was able to detect their presence and nature. In light of the fact the Anasazi used neither wheeled transport nor horses, the need for, or purpose of, those an elaborate set of roadways is not known.

Like the great dynasties of the early Egyptians and Chinese peoples, or like the Babylonian, Phoenician, Greek, Roman, Maya, Inca, Aztec, and so many other civilizations, the Anasazi are gone. So, too, will the civilizations of the modern world disappear, and those people of today who can stare into the relentless evidence of history and still believe, that, somehow, they will be able to escape the fate that has befallen, without exception, all civilizations before now, are deluding themselves.

In view of the purpose of the ceremony for which we were gathered, the venue for this ceremony seemed to have been a well considered choice. The only difference between now and then is that this time around, whenever it actually took place, the disappearance of humanity would, in all likelihood, be final.

There were about thirty people gathered for the ceremony. Although I did not know most of the people, some were familiar to me.

Rip and Brian Idaho were both present. Furthermore, the spiritual 'dissidents' who had been mentioned in the photocopied material that Mary had sent to me also were in attendance.

A representative of each of the spiritual paths invited to the occasion had a role to perform in the ceremony. Sacred recitations in a number of different languages took place.

The ceremony was simple and straightforward. It probably took a little over an hour to complete.

Upon completion of the main requirements of the gathering, some food was distributed among the participants. As we were eating the food, armed men came in through several entrances to the room within the Great House where the ceremony was being held.

They opened fire and continued to do so for some time and, then, just as suddenly as they had appeared, they merged into the darkness of the night. Almost all of the participants at the ceremony, including Rip and Brian, were killed instantly.

Once again ... this time in relation to an organization known as Futures Unlimited ... a group of people had decided to delegate to themselves the responsibility for trying to forcefully shape what course history should take. As is usually the case in those instances, all that actually had been accomplished was the murdering of a lot of people, while destiny continued to unfold beyond the reach of mortal limitations.

Both Paul and I were seriously wounded during the attack, but we had been taken away and hidden by some Native people who arrived a short while after the intruders had departed. Agent Bradley ... the very special, Special Agent Paul Bradley ... died just after sunrise this morning.

I heard later that Warren Idaho also lost his life at some point during that night. He had been part of a decoy group that was intended to provide our circle with enough time to be able to finish the ceremony.

Beth Idaho is due to come by shortly to pick up the tapes that I have been recording. I'm feeling very tired.

Yesterday, when she came by, she had a few pieces of information to share with me. One of these was in the way of a confession of sorts.

She informed me that my precise facial features actually might not have been in the vision that she told me about when we first met in my office in early June. Evidently, she was having some second and third thoughts about that conversation and had begun to wonder if she had misled me and, as a result, involved me in something in which I might not have become entangled otherwise.

I indicated there was no reason for her to feel the way she did about the manner in which fate had become manifest in my life. As far as I was concerned, I was the person in her vision, and all the events that led to my lying wounded before her were proof of this.

Indeed, as she had assured me on several occasions, much to my annoyance at the time as I recall, the vision would find a way for the person in it to help her brother, and this is what had happened. Listening to the call of the owl was merely the price of admission one had to pay in order to be a part of those a powerful and extraordinary vision.

Beth also told me that the massacre was being described in the media as a raid on a terrorist organization that had been plotting to destroy America. The group was said to have been responsible for, among other things, fomenting discord within a variety of religious communities, as well as for a recent terrorist attack on an educational research facility in northern Maine, near Eagle Lake.

In conjunction with the latter incident, my heart was relieved tremendously when Beth told me that members of Jennifer's family had been able to secure release of her body and lay her to rest in a cemetery near Jaamee's farm. Until hearing this news, I had been feeling quite restless about having left her in the clearing, but I don't know if we could have got away if we had tried to take her body with us on the way back to the plane.

I pray she has forgiven me for leaving her behind. I suppose I'll find out if she has done so soon enough.

The final bit of information that Beth conveyed to me concerned a report based on data that came from the orbiting Hubble telescope. Apparently, although the precise nature of the trajectory had not been established, there were a few asteroids, of uncertain origin, headed in the general direction of Earth.

According to the information Beth gave me, the asteroids were estimated to be some four hundred miles in diameter. When I heard this, two things came to mind.

The first thought that occurred to me was related to the moot court trial on the origin-of-life issue in Chicago. I believe some evolutionary biologists have stated that if an asteroid the size indicated by Beth struck our planet, it would be capable of evaporating the oceans of the world and, in the process, destroy all life on Earth.

The second thought that occurred to me was the belief held by many Christians that next time God had promised to destroy humankind with a fire, not a flood. Maybe that time had come.

For me, the issue is rather academic, since I don't believe I'm going to last much longer. Nonetheless, for several reasons, I have made friends with my physical condition.

First of all, before dying, I have been able to love someone, and to be loved back by that person in a way I never thought would have been possible a few months ago. I am thankful to God that Jennifer and I had been given an

opportunity, however brief it might have been, to find one another and experience a love for which many people long but that few of us are able to encounter, even for a few weeks.

Secondly, I have come to understand, deep within my soul, that I have been brought into intimate contact with truth in a variety of essential ways through my association with Beth, Brian, Rachel Donaldson, Paul Bradley, Jennifer, Ken, Pam, Rip, the discussion group in Chicago, Mary, Jaamee, Warren, and the people at the ceremony. I might not complete my journey of self-realization before I pass on, but, at least, I feel it has begun and, maybe, now, my name can be removed, God willing, from the list of those who are without spiritual faith.

The time has come to close down my form of bearing witness. The only thing that comes to my mind and heart as an appropriate way of finishing my present task is to offer a saying from high school Latin:

Magna est veritas, et praevalet

-- Truth is great, and it shall prevail.