



The Newsletter of the Mythic Imagination Institute, a Non-profit Arts and Education Corporation, Copyright ©2004
Fall 2004

Welcome

It is hard to believe that it has been over four months since Mythic Journeys. The conference was incredible in every way. It was a unique chemistry of attendees, speakers, performers, vendors, and volunteers from all walks of life. The sessions and performances were amazing, and the brilliance and eloquence that the presenters and performers displayed was inspiring and informative. The really great accomplishment of the conference, however, was the sense of community that bubbled out of the stew of individuals that was simmered together at the conference. The fragrance filled the air and was evident throughout the entire space. Upon checking out, one of the front desk clerks asked one of our speakers what our conference was about. The speaker asked the clerk why she wanted to know. She replied, "Because in the eight years that I have worked here, I have never encountered a group of people who are so nice and so happy." I think that says it all!

For those who could not attend the conference, and for those who did attend and want to relive the memories, almost every session is available on cassette, CD, video, and/or DVD. Please go to <http://www.conferencerecording.com/newevents/myj24.htm> to order them.

We have been very busy since Mythic Journeys, and we have many new projects to announce in this issue of *Mythic Passages*. First, we have decided to make Mythic Journeys a biennial event. The size and scale of the event is such that it requires significant planning and a huge volunteer base to produce. Also, while Mythic Journeys is large, urban, and about being in the world, we want to have time and resources to produce conferences that focus more on nature and the individual. As such, we will be planning smaller, Mythic Journeys In-Depth conferences in the other years. So, we have signed contracts with the Hyatt Regency in Atlanta for June 7 -11, 2006, June 11 - 15, 2008, and June 16 – 20, 2010 for Mythic Journeys, so mark your calendars now and save the dates!

We have also begun planning our first stand-alone In-Depth conference called Into the Woods. This conference will be held in the North Georgia Mountains from June 16 – 19, 2005. This conference will be limited to 200 attendees, and will still feature our signature diverse range of speakers and performers. There will be approximately 10 presenters, and I am pleased to announce that Michael Meade has agreed to join us again as a key presenter at this conference. You can read more about Mythic Journeys In-Depth: Into the Woods in this newsletter. Registration for this conference will be available on-line by the end of November. We will send out a notice when it goes up. Save the date.

I am also very happy to announce that Public Radio International will be broadcasting a two-hour radio special entitled *Mythic Journeys* over the Thanksgiving holiday weekend. The show captures highlights from the conference and celebrates Joseph Campbell's Centenary. You can also read more about this show in this newsletter. This program will reach approximately 500,000 listeners and will be the single biggest tool we have in reaching as broad an audience as possible with the message of the Mythic Imagination Institute, namely that Myth Matters!

And last, we have constituted an Education Committee that is working to define the goals of the Mythic Imagination Institute within the educational arena. This may include curriculum

development, teacher training, education tracks at Mythic Journeys, stand-alone conferences, publications, and more. If you are interested in getting involved in this committee, please contact the Chairs, Ty and Jeanna Collins, at education@mythicjourneys.org.

As you can see, we have many programs underway. The outpouring of volunteers since the conference has been wonderful. All of our efforts require many people. The work is rewarding and fun. If you are interested in volunteering, please send an e-mail to volunteers@mythicjourneys.org.

We also need financial support. While we can cover a lot of our costs by charging tuition for conferences, this by no means can cover the total expenses of the organization. We are creating a membership program and will be announcing that soon. Please consider becoming a member of the Mythic Imagination Institute. We are a 501(c)(3) charitable organization, so any contributions you make are completely tax deductible. If you believe in our mission, please support us. We cannot do it without you. If you would like to make a contribution, please go to http://www.mysticjourneys.org/memb_levels.php.

Our editor, Mary Davis, has put together a great issue of *Mythic Passages* for you, including articles by Ulla Suokko, Dr. Stephen Aizenstat, Derek Beres and others. I hope you enjoy it.

Sincerely,

Michael Karlin
President

Mythic Passages Fall 2004
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Mythic Journeys: The Radio Special

If you missed **Mythic Journeys** or simply want to relive all of the memories, we have good news for you! Over the Thanksgiving weekend Public Radio International, PRI, will distribute a two-hour public radio special about **Mythic Journeys 2004**. The program, entitled **Mythic Journeys**, will be a continued celebration of Joseph Campbell's Centenary. The performances that will be featured include stirring poetry readings by Pulitzer Prize-winner **Galway Kinnell**, **Robert Bly** and **Coleman Barks**; storytelling by **Michael Meade** and **Sobonfu Some**; and messages from theologian Matthew Fox, folk singer **Janis Ian** and psychologist **James Hillman**, among many others. Each performance was first presented during Mythic Journeys, and will feature in-depth interviews with each guest.

The radio special highlights the best programming from the four-day festival held last June in Atlanta. In celebration of Campbell's Centenary, his colleagues, friends, followers and former students came together to pay tribute to his teachings, which reverberate as strongly today as ever. The radio program is being produced by Mary Beth Kirchner and the Mythic Imagination Institute. Mary Beth Kirchner is an independent radio producer and national programming consultant in Los Angeles. With an extensive record of accomplishment in public broadcasting, she has received over fifty national and international awards. During more than two decades in public radio she has worked with National Public Radio, Public Radio International, Carnegie Hall, the Wolf Trap Foundation for the Performing Arts, the BBC, the Western Folklife Center, the Dana Alliance for Brain Initiatives, the Asia Society, NHK (Japan's public broadcaster) and ABC News "Nightline," among many others. We are very proud to be affiliated with Mary Beth.

Please contact your local PRI affiliate station for broadcast times and dates. We anticipate that up to 150 stations will carry the broadcast, but there are no assurances that it will air in your market. Please contact your local station and encourage them to carry the program.

Mythic Journeys In-Depth: Into the Woods

The **Mythic Imagination Institute** is pleased to announce “**Into the Woods**,” the first event in our **Mythic Journeys In-Depth series**. Nature-based myths lead us into something larger than ourselves, helping us navigate the darkness and confusion in our lives to find our center. In search of these myths in our modern age, we’ll gather together in a secluded, wooded retreat center and learn old wisdom anew with a group of prominent presenters, performers and a total of 200 participants.

We are very pleased to announce that Storyteller and Mythologist **Michael Meade** will be joining us. Those who attended the first Mythic Journeys conference in 2004 will remember Mr. Meade’s amazing stories and presentation style. He will be joined by a number of other presenters whom we hope to announce soon. You can read more about the event below.

Into the Woods will take place **June 16-19, 2005**. Please be aware that since attendance is limited it is important to register early. When we are ready to accept registrants, we will send e-mails to all who attended the 2004 conference and our entire e-mail list. You can also watch the <http://www.mythicjourneys.org> website for announcements about registration. Bill Bridges and Sheri Kling are co – chairs of Into the Woods.

*Midway on our life’s journey, I found myself
In dark woods, the right road lost.
— Dante, The Inferno*

James Hillman speaks of the Anima Mundi, the world ensouled. If the world is imbued with soul, what does it mean when we cut ourselves off from its wild places? Nature as we know it is almost wholly subsumed within the sphere of human influence. It is now possible to live one’s entire life without encountering wilderness. Is this good for us?

Sometimes, we need to go into the woods. This is not necessarily a physical journey. Going into the woods is a metaphor for leaving behind the conventional strictures on our own thoughts and possibilities, to touch the primordial ground of myth. Going into the woods can be an entry point to the underworld, as in Dante, or it can be the womb of our remaking, as in the tale of the Handless Maiden. We can go in dream or ritual, but our ancestors teach us that it’s best done outside, away from our constructed spaces. Back to nature, back into the woods from whence we came.

Myth provides the pathway for our discoveries, showing us the steps taken by those who went before us. We can learn forgotten truths on this path, ancient ways that can grow new shoots from modern soil. We can learn personal secrets, whispers from our chthonic soul or daimon, the deep-rooted seed growing the oaken branches of our lives.

Into the Woods is a collaboration between the Mythic Imagination Institute and a group of featured guests, including Storyteller and Mythologist Michael Meade and more guests to be announced soon. Spend three days and nights in a retreat center nestled amidst the north Georgia Mountains, learning mythic life ways through dialogues and workshops, telling stories, and listening to music and song inspired by the winding, wooded path. Artistic performances immerse us in stories and help us to silence the urban chatter of our minds and let nature speak clearly. Renowned teachers lead us through activities to foster renewal, transformation and wisdom, leaving us tools we can take back with us into modern life.

Like the Mythic Journeys conference, Into the Woods brings voices of myth, philosophy, poetry and song together to share ideas and experiences. Into the Woods provides an intimate, intensive space for encounter with and contemplation of nature myths, and is limited to 200 participants.

Editor's Notes:

The major focus of this issue of *Mythic Passages* is the experience many of us shared at our first Mythic Journeys conference in Atlanta this summer. Here we present several individual accounts of this deeply meaningful, joyful, and hopeful gathering!

For reflections on our individual journeys through time, our youngest Mythic Journeys presenter, Derek Beres, writes *Shapeshifting Through The Times*, and we also present *Aging As Metamorphosis*, a Mythic Journeys discussion about becoming elders. This discussion occurs among Coleman Barks, Betty Sue Flowers, James Hillman, Huston Smith, and Jane Yolen! Read *Watering the Jasmines* by Ulla Suokko, who began the conference with her beautiful flute music and the *Kalevala* creation story, Stephen Aizenstat on his work with dreams, *Parabola's* Susan Ellen Mesinai on *Cinema of the Spirit*, and more!

Please enjoy this issue! We invite your comments and participation. Please contact me at mary@mythicjourneys.org.

Watering the Jasmines

by Ulla Suokko ©2004

*“...our time surrenders us to an obligation
to water the jasmines
or bleed to death in a dark street...” –Pablo Neruda*



The purpose of artists, musicians and storytellers is not only to inspire, excite and uplift, but also to unsettle and to provoke, to arouse and to awaken, so that the veils of comfort are lifted and the deeper truths revealed. It is through art, poetry and music that we water the jasmines of our souls and ignite our heart's fire to cultivate beauty, bliss, passion and compassion in our lives. Artists shape-shift into messengers of timeless times, leading us into the known and the unknown, into darkness and light, soothing our souls and stimulating our minds. They educate and entertain, heal and hold, connecting us with our own hearts and visions, bridging peoples and cultures, reaching for the ultimate vision of oneness with each other and with the universe. Joseph Campbell was an avid advocate of the artist's function as the communicator of the divine mysteries of life and as the interpreter of the things seen and unseen. In today's world, it is the artists who are the magicians, the shamans and the bards, who stir the cauldron of our dreams and guard the wisdom of the ages. But as Campbell said, he or she “has to be an artist who understands mythology and humanity and isn't simply a sociologist with a program for you.”

In June, we had an extraordinary opportunity to delve into mythology and humanity from various intriguing perspectives at the Mythic Journeys conference in Atlanta, celebrating the work, ideas and 100th birthday of Joseph Campbell. It was an honor to be part of this festival with such luminaries as James Hillman, Robert Bly, Michael Meade, James Flannery, Mickey Lemle, Coleman Barks, and so many others! It was brilliance and beauty in action on many levels, where the essence of ancient myths and timeless tales offered their timely gifts through the voices of daring and caring, and through the poetry of intellect and intuition, eloquence and imagination.

My presentation of the first Big Story in Atlanta was the creation story from the Kalevala, the national epic of my native Finland, in which Ilmatar, the Daughter of Air, creates the world. The very breath of the beginning of time, the Air Goddess rides the winds and the waves of the primordial ocean, and finally, gives birth to the first man, the witty, steadfast, old Väinämöinen. He is the supreme hero, a consummate singer-musician-healer-shaman-bard, who, when challenged, would use the beguiling gifts of music's magical might, instead of mere brute force. Truly a forefather to all of us cosmopolitan bards, as we hold space for each listener to journey into the sacredness, magic and medicine of their own hearts, and into the heart of their own story.

As a flutist and performing artist, one of my most important allies is, naturally, breath. Breath is my brush and air my canvas as the stories arise through my flute or voice. I surrender to be an instrument, listening to the hidden meaning of sound, observing how a shift in the quality, character, color, mood, or intent behind the sound changes the vibration in the room, the player and the listener. In Jungian terms, I allow *intuition*, *sensation* and *feeling* to ride the dragon, and to determine the expression of my breath, *thinking* coming to aid only when language is needed.

Many of the creation myths of the world are testimonies to the power of breath and sound to create and to transform. *The Old Testament* says, "And the Lord said 'Let there be light!' And there was light." *The Gospel of John*, "In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The Koran says, "When God said 'Be,' it became." In the Ancient Egypt, Thot was said to have created the world by his Word, and the sound of Thot's song was thought to have created four frog gods and snake goddesses who continued Thot's song, helping the sun journey across the sky. The Hopi Indians have the Spider Woman, the Earth Goddess, who sings the Song of Creation. In the *Popul Vuh*, the Mayan tradition, only the giver of breath, the Maker, is present in the primordial hum under the empty sky, and the world is created by word alone. In *The Vedas* of the Hindu we have "*Nada Brahma*," the God-Sound through which everything is made, "In the beginning was Brahman with whom was the Word. And the Word is Brahman." Or, the mighty Indian sage Markandeya, who is deeply transformed by the song of the life-breath of a manifestation of Vishnu, the immortal wild gander, "the sound of whose breathing is the magic of the creation and dissolution of the world."

These powerful tools of creation are available to all of us right here, right now. Through the awareness of our breath, we may enter the threshold of silence within, thus tuning into the possibilities and potentialities of the conditions of the primordial hum in the microcosm of our own being, merging into the music of the universe, into the sound of the Absolute, *nada*. (I find it interesting that in Sanskrit *nada* means "sound" and in Spanish "nothing," perhaps, in the ephemeral infinity of listening to the universe through your own breath, these two become one and the same thing.) By consciously changing the pattern and expression of our breath, we can change our lives at any given moment, at any given breath. Working with the sound of our own voice, uniting ourselves with the sacred sounds of creation, we can access the subtle vibrations beyond the physical form and enter into the realm of manifestation and miracles. The great mystics and schools of knowledge have always studied the power and science of conscious breath and sound as carriers of divine codes, and as potent portals into higher awareness, profound healing and deeper awakening.

The Mythic Journeys festival will always remain in my heart as one of the important and inspiring milestones in my life, a confirmation of my purpose as an artist and human being and an affirmation of courage and continuous curiosity. Mythic Journeys was a discovery of a beautiful community of seekers and finders, of explorers of the inner and outer worlds of humanity on personal and global levels. It offered a new vocabulary for the hidden mysteries of age-old myths and the deep waters of the human mind, a truly enriching expansion of ideas and insights into my own mythic journey.

Since the conference in Atlanta I have paid yet again much closer attention to the deep messages of my dreams and to the subtle signs that connect me with my true path. Every moment is a call to live our lives to the fullest, to expand our awareness, and to water the jasmines. While staying aware of the realities of the world around us, we must have courage to keep our hearts open to goodness, kindness and love, and to keep moving towards our dreams and visions. One breath at a time, one note at a time, one heart at a time for hope and healing, and for the fulfillment of each of our life stories. We can, and we must make a difference. Every action counts. Every thought counts. Every breath counts. In Pablo Picasso's words, "It is my wish at this time to remind you that I have always believed, and still believe, that artists who live and work with spiritual values cannot and should not remain indifferent to a conflict in which the highest values of humanity and civilization are at stake."

The breeze at dawn has secrets to tell you.

Don't go back to sleep.

You must ask for what you really want.

Don't go back to sleep.

-Rumi

Ulla Suokko is a New York City-based, internationally acclaimed concert flutist, performing artist and workshop leader. She holds a Doctor of Musical Arts degree from The Juilliard School and is a member of the Sound Healers Association.

Shapeshifting Through the Times

By Derek Beres



Gregor Samsa's transformation may have been slightly unusual, but his alchemy forced him to confront an entire existence, all in the course of a morning. Franz Kafka created a world of questions in a man finding himself turned into a many-legged bug one auspicious dawn. As the sunlight crept into the familiar room, not much else was so; the traveling salesman had new trails to blaze.

Kafka's strength in *The Metamorphosis* was capturing the universal in the particular, extracting sympathetic qualities we all share and somehow appropriating them into the personal lives of his readers. While few of us know the strains of becoming a sudden insect, we all relate to the yearning of becoming something "other," of fusing our emotional and intellectual worlds with the physical surrounding us.

When I arrived at Rutgers University in 1993 to study business, I had no idea the transformation awaiting me. Becoming disenchanted with that discipline, I was handed copies of the *Bhagavad Gita* and *Dhammapada*, Hindu and Buddhist scriptures. Being I had never even read the Bible, my world unfolded into many. Living in a culture governed by a certain rhythm, new ways of dancing emerged. I took to the floor and left four years later with a degree in comparative religion.

Knowing the difficulties of sustaining economically from such a degree, I turned to journalism. Writing was the language my mind spoke best, and the fact I could make a living (somewhat) from seeing words hit page appealed to me. I became the Religion Writer at *The Daily Targum*, covering a rather unconventional field during my time – most stories reflected politics, activism and sports. While Eastern faiths and practices like yoga were growing, there was still not a heavy demand, so I bided my time.

Fast-forward to 2001 and random jobs in Manhattan, editing crossword puzzles and logging commercials for the Discovery Channel. In July I was offered a position as Managing Editor of *Global Rhythm* (then *Rhythm*) magazine, the country's largest world music publication. I had been cutting my teeth writing freelance articles covering rock and hip-hop. I was somewhat familiar with international musicians via my best friend Jimi, who was working publicity for Putumayo, the world's largest international record label. During my 2 1/2 years, I would learn over and over again this path was the one for me.

The disparity between making a living and living in the making is a tough question for many people of my generation. At 29, I sit at the meeting point between two worlds: the established professionals who have laid a certain foundation, and youngsters dreaming of changing it. It's an auspicious age where dreams can manifest but not without tasting the bitter fruit of reality a few dozen times. Having a degree in religion – a word latent with negative connotations by many my age – and writing about international music, a "genre" looked at as, at best, exotic by the general media, does not equate to a cushy foundation. Existing at a time when my peers are well into their 401K packages, I have been living for some time without health benefits or a regular paycheck.

Then there was that line I will never forget, delivered by a former colleague: "Soon you'll come to realize that for most people in the world music is religion." While at Rutgers there was something ritualistic about live performances and club life, something truly "other" the classroom wasn't offering. The intellectual pursuit of spiritual academia is great fodder, yet lacking in complete nourishment. The experience of religion is another story. Throughout time this has taken place in the context of the arts, dancing, painting, and, at root of the ceremony, music.

In December 2003 I happened upon the Mythic Journeys website via Phil Cousineau's homepage. I had just finished reading *Once and Future Myths* and was looking into the man whose resume includes numerous editing projects of Joseph Campbell's work, as well as a film on the life of the great mythologist. Campbell had long been meaningful to my work, especially in regards to the book I have been working on for nearly 3 years, *Global Beat Fusion*. When I found out about this epic conference in Atlanta a few months later, the wheels began turning: how could I get there? My finances were, have been, scattered, yet I knew that, in any way I could, I'd need to be present.

Some of my personal heroes, the very thinkers who have been formulating the work I'm doing with their own mythological tales, were on the schedule. Besides writing I had been DJing for over two years, holding a few regular gigs in the city and touring internationally with my DJ collective, GlobeSonic. The fusion of writing and DJing would be my pitch: the day I found out about Mythic Journeys, I devised the idea of Mythika Electronika, a lecture-friendly version of the book. The basis is the creation of a new world mythology by international electronic music. Rituals are governed by the folk instruments performers use. In Pakistan, *qawwali* is led by the harmonium and tablas as the vocalists, such as the great Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, sing; in Morocco, the all-night Gnawa ceremony, the *lila*, is led by the bass-like *sintir* and *karakebs*, metal clappers; in Jamaica, Rastafarians fall into trance with *nyabingi* drums, and so on. Today's modern ritual plays out in clubs with electronic music. The computer is the first instrument that everyone is using to create modern music. By taking the traditional and sacred instrumentation of their ancestors, producers and DJs are making the first true "world folk" music with laptops.

I submitted my idea and five months later found myself in the midst of this forward-thinking conference. Being the only speaker under the age of 30, I quickly realized my role went beyond the application of world music and digital technology. Mythology, while important to me, is not discussed much among those of my generation. When it is – in movies, television and video games, mostly – the screen provides a separation making mythological concepts seem like a nice idea, but not applicable to everyday reality.

I don't want to imply the idea of a "golden age." If we understand the fall of man not as female tempting male with ridiculous fruit, but the onset of understanding the dualities of existence ("the knowledge of good and evil"), we find paradise an unreliable, unattainable situation. Consciousness is antithetical to our idealizations. If we then turn to India and the concepts of *samsara* and *moksha* – the continual wheels of life and freedom from them – we see the problems we deal with today have been plaguing the human psyche since we first sprang from earth.

Seeing that no golden age ever existed, save in the minds and hearts of poets and romantics (which is where they rightfully should), mythology isn't some Nuevo-hipster lingo suddenly relevant; it's always been with us. If the problems of yesteryear are today's bane, then we turn to our surroundings to extract the story behind the stories. In America today we sit at an unfortunate and fortunate junction: the former because we have no creation mythology acquainted with our land (save incredible native folklore more often seen as exotic than applicable), and the latter as we now have the opportunity to create our own. With a world of them at the tips of our fingers, all we have to do is decide.

Choices do not always lead to resolution. Sometimes too much freedom is a constriction. My generation is a fickle breed, honing in on one fad before jumping to the next. You see it in our fashions, music, literature, the very slang we employ to move from moment to moment. Living in New York City does not make choices easier; the city is a dream wrapped within illusions all vying for energy. As one of my yoga teachers, Dharma Mittra, said, this city is the most spiritual place to be – if you can quiet the mind here, you can do so anywhere.

While Mythic Journeys allowed me to meet many of the faces and handshakes behind the words, it also introduced me to one now sacred on my bookshelf. Michael Meade's work in the realm of

initiation has given me, as so many before, a modern grounding to what our experiences mean and can become. His work is embedded in the everyday and through his workshop lets participants fly. In his book *Men and the Water of Life: The Initiation and Tempering of Men*, he says “In the psyche, refusing to commit means refusing to let something die.” Often we believe the opposite, that committing is dying to other possibilities. Without the discipline to engage in something fully, to exhaust one’s self in an interest, career, person, object, we remain ungrounded, unfounded, forever spiraling. This is where lacking a creation mythology uproots us and laughs in the wind.

What Michael Meade succinctly pointed out during the seminar on the “Warrior and the Wound” is that we liberate ourselves within our injuries, be they physical, mental, spiritual. Having attained numerous broken bones during youth, one half of my body was completely shortened while the other lengthened. The imbalance led to 10 years of physical therapy and chiropractic care. It wasn’t until I started the daily practice of yoga 2 1/2 years ago that I began to understand this concept. Because of my ills I have aligned not only my body, but thoughts and heart. Then comes the understanding that the three are one– we don’t see with our eyes any more than we think with our brains. They are all one process: body, idea and spirit. Yoga means, as does the word religion, to “bind.” This is the creation myth we need to come to terms with, a more complete education than the mind/body dualism that is our original fall.

During the conference I ran into Phil and thanked him for the indirect reason for my attendance. As we were discussing upcoming projects, he mentioned the importance of writing for the times, of touching the minds of our generation. The language of our elders, who brought mythology into context, was superb, though often overtly intellectual. This does not discredit academia. Our time needs something a little more widespread, breaking the structure of esoteric mind fodder and touching the hearts as well. Over the last three decades I’ve noticed writing on spirituality to swing the pendulum too far in the other direction. Instead of confining itself within a tightly knit puzzle that cannot see past itself, it opens its heart without yielding a sharp sword. Modern literature is so concerned with the moment it cannot see beyond it, never attempting to touch the timeless. The balance of engaging the eternal within the present has always been humanity’s great challenge. As we liberate ourselves from the restrictions of both, we transform an age of anxiety into continual moments of clarity. This is a passage outside time, passed down through generations by words, understanding and a sly, knowing smile from elders to wide-eyed initiates.

***Derek Beres** is the youngest invited presenter at the Mythic Journeys Conference. He is one of the leading sources of international music in America through his many journalistic endeavors which include writing for Trace, The Village Voice, Rattapallax, Global Rhythm, Global Beat Fusion, and more. His Mythica Electronika project traces the mythological roots of various world musics. Beres is also a playwright, yoga teacher, DJ, clothing designer, and co- founder of EarthRise Arts.*

Words: www.globalbeatfusion.com

Sounds: www.globesonic.com

Arts: www.earthrisearts.com

On Friday afternoon of the Mythic Journeys conference, a poet, a psychologist, a theologian and an author sat down in conversation to be interviewed by a teacher on their experiences of the changes we humans face in aging. The room was packed with people of all ages; young folks sitting on the edges of their chairs, scholars taking notes, elders nodding in common acknowledgment of point after point. For such serious topics... aging, physical and mental deterioration, death, depression... there was an overabundance of joviality. Laughter rang out time and again from both the audience and the guest speakers. In transcribing the recording of this session, I felt it was very important to preserve the sense of lively high spirits and conviviality, and so I've noted not only the instances of laughter, but also the intensity and tone as well. If you were fortunate enough to have sat in the audience on that Friday afternoon, you already know what a valuable experience it was to hear these fine elders speak. If you weren't able to be there, then please enjoy the next best thing...

Brenda Sutton

Aging as Metamorphosis

Participants: Coleman Barks, James Hillman, Huston Smith, and Jane Yolen

Moderator: Betty Sue Flowers



Flowers: This is a topic that applies to everyone, and I think that's one reason why people are having a hard time finding chairs, but bring them in from the back. This is Huston Smith I'm talking to right here. *(laughter)* We are going to start by introducing ourselves, but what we want is to have this not be a panel but a conversation, and to then open it up to you (the audience). So I'll start by saying I'm Betty Sue Flowers, and I'm aging rapidly. *(laughter)*

Barks: Tell them you taught poetry. *(laughter)*

Flowers: *(to Smith who is losing his hearing)* He says to tell them I taught poetry."

Barks: What else did you teach?

Flowers: Mythology.

Barks: Mythology.

Flowers: Poetry.

Barks: Where?

Flowers: University of Texas at Austin.

Barks: Okay.

Flowers: I always played his (Barks') tape after Bill Moyers interviewed him; I'd play that Rumi tape that's so wonderful because you're such a delight on it. You really are. You so love what you're talking about. It just comes across on the screen. Whenever I'd turn on the lights after showing that (video), people would be smiling.

Barks: Hm. Hm. *(laughter)* I'm Coleman Barks, and I taught American Poetry and Creative Writing at various universities for 34 years. And then seven years ago I retired and I still go around and do poetry readings. I don't have to stand up and be smart much anymore. I can sit down and be dumb *(laughter)* which I plan to do today. *(laughter)*

Hillman: I'm James Hillman. I was a psychologist for many, many years with individual people, and that passed on. Now I'm just a psychologist without the individual people. *(laughter)*

Yolen: And I'm intimidated here. I'm Jane Yolen and I'm a poet, a novelist, a children's book writer, a young adult writer, and a storyteller. I taught Children's Literature at Smith College for seven years. Now that I'm an official crone (at least I have been called so by the U.S. government; when you turn 65 and they say, "You are a crone."), I was eager to be on this panel to find out what to do next. *(laughter)*

Hillman: We're supposed to be informative about aging. That's the topic. And having aged (I no longer use the "ing"), it stopped, it arrived here. You're thrown up on the beach in a certain condition.

The whole idea of metamorphosis is for kids. I mean, it's for Ovid and for children. The rest of us, when we get to a certain point, that's all over with. Metamorphosis is a fantasy, the American fantasy of continual change: off with the old, on with the new. The great curse of the United States of America was that they called it the New World and we haven't gotten over it yet. We still think everything has to be new. It isn't. There's something marvelous about "old" and I'll let Coleman tell us that. *(laughter)*

Yolen: This was supposed to be a friendly panel. *(more laughter)* Here's the friendly part. *(even more laughter)*

Barks: William Butler Yeats asked the question, "*Who could have foretold that the heart grows old?*" I want to try to address that or just ask it. Does the heart grow old? And what does it mean that it grows old? Does it grow tired of loving? Does it grow exhausted?

Denise Levertov's grandmother in her nineties once said, "I am tired of being thankful for the gift of life." *(laughter)* Now, I didn't know the woman, but I love the flavor of truthfulness in that. Don't you? And, I think you love truthfulness more as you get older.

But what about this growing old in the heart? You said, "No, no, it doesn't happen. No." I think it does. Something happens, and the way you love changes. I think you get keener and less here, maybe more in the spirit.

Yolen: Do you treasure quiet more? I treasure it now.

Barks: Oh, God! I love silence! I adore it. And what kind of music do you like? Do you like any music?

Yolen: Not when I'm writing, none at all.

Barks: Me either.

Yolen: But when I'm not writing, yes, plenty of music.

Barks: What kind?

Yolen: I used to absolutely adore classical music, and now I'm into folk rock. *(laughter)* Go figure. I

suppose that next it will be hip-hop. *(more laughter)* No, I don't think so. I find, and maybe it's because I'm getting deaf, that classical music and its very particular nuances are beyond me; and that the louder, more pounding, getting-your-heart-moving kind of music is working for me. Maybe that's the metamorphosis.

Hillman: Hm. Or deafness.

Yolen: Or deafness. *(laughter)*

Hillman: I find hearing music different. I hear music differently than I used to. I hear what's going on *inside* the music, which I never did before. I used to hear the music. Classical music I'm talking about.

Barks: Tell me about that.

Hillman: Somehow I'm picking up the structure of the music, which I never did (before). I followed it or was moved along with it. But now I'm hearing, and I'm not listening more intently or that I put it on my machine. (I can't even work my machine. I've got a new DVD and I haven't even yet used it, and that's two years ago...) *(laughter)*

Yolen: You need to find a sixteen-year-old boy.

Hillman: That's true. I live with people who have mostly metamorphosed. *(laughter)* The point is though, that something goes on *in* the music that is enormously complicated and interesting, and I get so that I'm able to recognize things, like a pattern let's say, or the thought of it let's say. The thought. And I find that I also like less bombastic music like symphonic music. Some of Beethoven gets tiresome, the symphonic part, because it's so "bipolar," as we say in our work. *(laughter)*

Flowers: I don't know if it has to do with aging or experience, but don't you think that one of the things you can do as you get older are little experiments with time. You can slow down the middle of the music. You can do little things to anticipate the time, and what you can see differently is that time isn't such a feature. It turns into something else... it's very mysterious.

Hillman: Hm.

Yolen: I wonder though if this is just personality difference, not just old age or aging, because you seem to be going towards the more complex and I seem to be simplifying. And that's interesting.

Hillman: Hm.

Yolen: And maybe my personality is heading towards, I don't want to say the simplistic but certainly, the simpler. You're looking and seeing more and more complex things, whereas I'm just tired of nuance. *(light laughter)* You know, "Say it plain, damn it!" And I don't know why that is.

Hillman: I understand that. "Tired of nuance." Politically we have to use that word with great care though.

Barks: "Tired?" *(laughter)*

Hillman: No, "nuance." *(more laughter)*

Yolen: Politically, I'm just looking for someone smarter than me to be in charge. *(and more laughter)*

Barks: I thought I had asked a good question about the heart.

Flowers: Yeah, you did.

Yolen: And we're ignoring you. *(laughter)*

Hillman: He raised the music point though.

Yolen: That he did, he did.

Barks: I raised the music, too. That's right. Yeah.

Yolen: Well, it's your own damned fault. *(more laughter)*

Flowers: He says, "But does the heart grow old?" And I want to ask do you think the heart *has* to grow old? Is that a necessity?

Barks: It grows tired, doesn't it? I mean it really does grow exhausted.

Flowers: What's that Yeats line about old age? It *"is but a paltry thing... unless soul clap its hands and sing... for every tatter in its mortal dress."*

Barks: Yes.

Flowers: You don't believe that?

Barks: *"Nor is there singing school..."* Yeah, I do believe that. I'm thinking that love gets less specific, more general, friendly. Or is that vague? What I'm asking is what do we want, and how badly do we want it? And how does that change?

Yolen: To go back to what you said, doesn't time have something to do with it? As you get older, you know that you have less time, so you start deciding what it is that's going to be important to love or that you want to spend your time loving. I'll give you a 'for instance.'

I just went through two years with my husband who had cancer, a huge cancer in his skull. There was no knowing whether he had any more time or not. In fact, he's doing fine now, but for that four months of 43 days of radiation, for those months after where you didn't know if he was going to come through or not, most of my heart was set on him. I have three children, and now I have six grand children, and I adore them all but my heart, for that time, was set on him because that might have been all the time I had with him. So I think the timing has a lot to do with what you love or how you use your love.

Hillman: Coleman, when you say, "The love becomes more friendly and maybe more warm and maybe less specific," the curious thing is that love is struck by particular instances rather than a movement out starting with my heart. It doesn't start with my heart. It is a response of the heart to particular moments of the world, meaning someone, some thing, some sight, some sound, some moment that comes and then is gone.

It's not attached to desire, which tends to something I believe or feel that comes out of me toward reaching. This is not a reaching. Not even "Bleibe doch, du bist so schön," you know Goethe... the Faust thing about, "stay Helen or whoever it is... Gretchen..." one of them. "Stay a moment; you're so beautiful."

It isn't even asking it to "stay" in Keats' sense either, but just the appreciation. So it seems. It makes me think that's all we're here for, really... to appreciate the world. We don't have to do a fucking thing with it; we should just appreciate it, which means an awakening of the senses, awakening of aesthesis, of the esthetic connection.

Barks: That's different than being young.

Hillman: Yes, that's different than being young.

Barks: Isn't it?

Flowers: But youth want to change the world.

Hillman: Uh huh. But I don't have time for it when I'm younger.

Yolen: Where does cranky come into that? *(laughter)*

Hillman: Regularly cranky.

Yolen: I find cranky is a big part of it.

(Huston Smith wore a microphone that placed the sound from the shared microphone into his earpiece.)

Smith: Keep those two together. I thought you were going to put (the microphone) on the table.

Hillman: Oh.

Smith: Yeah. I didn't know you were going to pass it.

Hillman: This becomes a ...

Yolen: A talking stick.

Hillman: Yes, exactly. It's a talking stick. Oh, it's fine.

Yolen: I find that the older I get, the more instances of crankiness I have. And where does that fit in the loving, open, more generous, non-specific heart?

Barks: I have a different experience. I don't get cranky. *(laughter)*

Yolen: Oh. Could you move in with me? *(more laughter)*

Barks: No, I can't live with anybody. *(even more laughter)*

Yolen: That explains it.

Barks: Couldn't possibly. Couldn't possibly. *(great laughter)* I go whole days without talking to anybody, but I'm not cranky. *(and even greater laughter)*

Yolen: You don't turn on the TV either, do you?

Barks: I do some of that.

Hillman: It rests the mind. TV rests the mind. *(light laughter)*

Barks: You're saying all these things that we don't agree with. *(laughter)*

Hillman: Agreement's not part of it.

Yolen: This is Loki. (*indicates Hillman*) I want to introduce you to Coyote here. (*indicates Barks*)

Flowers: I think you're looking at me because I was supposed to moderate this panel.

Comment from the audience: There's no way.

Flowers: There's no way!

Yolen: There's nothing moderate about this panel. (*laughter*)

Flowers: But, Coleman, you did ask a question, and I think you thought it didn't get answered. Is it answered, do you think?

Barks: I like what you were saying about desire. Obviously desire diminishes.

Hillman: No.

Barks: Everybody agrees with that?

Yolen and several voices from the audience: No!

Hillman: It depends.

Barks: Sexual desire.

Voice from the audience: It's because you're living alone. (*great laughter*)

Flowers: (*speaking to Smith*) He says, "That's because you're living alone."

Barks: I didn't agree to tell the whole truth. (*laughter*)

Yolen: Oh, gosh.

Hillman: Desires change. When he was very old, my grandfather said, "I only have so many more meals to eat and I want every one of them to be good." Now, he was a finicky eater. I get pissed... I get cranky over crappy food. I mean, there are desires, but desire as such... what the French would call something big... you know they'd give a big name to it... *that* diminishes. The grasp of it, and the intensity of it, the avariciousness of it, I think that does decline. Cranky is just a basic condition. I don't think it's more or less.

Yolen: But for me it's a new condition.

Hillman: Ah.

Yolen: Up until the last few years I've been the nicest person anyone would have met. (*light laughter*) I might have been a little sharp tongued, but I was not cranky. And I have found, over the last two or three years, a condition of crankiness that outweighs the niceness.

Hillman: There are a lot of them; they're a whole group. They're like Seven Dwarfs. There's Whiney, there's Cranky, there's Petulant... (*laughter*)

Barks: Bitchy? (*laughter*)

Hillman: There's Bitchy.

Barks: I think you could carry that a bit further there.

Flowers: I don't think there are any good myths about aging. You know, this whole thing about crones.... there's not enough in that myth.

Yolen: Oh, now wait a minute. Excuse me.

Flowers: Good.

Yolen: I did a whole book called *Gray Heroes*.

Flowers: Yes?

Yolen: And it is elder tales from around the world. So there are lots of stories out there.

Flowers: Yeah, tell one, because it seems to me most of the tales about older people are about wisdom.

Yolen: There are trickster tales. There are love tales. There are adventure tales. And there are a lot of wisdom tales.

Flowers: Tell a love tale. This (takes us) back to the heart.

Yolen: I'd have to read it because it's been so long since I wrote this book, I don't remember the stories, but, um...

Voice from the audience: Is it too long to read?

Yolen: Can I still read? (*laughter*) No, because they wired me up strangely here. (*Someone in the audience produces the actual book.*)

Flowers: I remember the couple (who) get turned into trees by the door, but I'm just trying to think about love tales.

Yolen: This one is from Syria. An old widow had an only son, and when he grew to be a man she found him a bride. But she was jealous of her daughter-in-law, and began to complain of imaginary sicknesses. Every day she would nag her son saying, "Bring me the doctor, boy. Let the doctor come." The son did nothing for a while, but eventually he gave in and he went to fetch the doctor. While he was out, the widow washed herself and lined her eyes with kohl. She put on her best gown and wound a sash of silk about her waist. She donned a velvet vest and her daughter-in-law's wedding headdress, and placed an embroidered kerchief over it. Then she sat and waited.

When the doctor arrived and asked for his patient, the son showed him in and said, "There she is. It's my mother. Since the moment that I married, she's been grumbling (cranky) like a hen, and not one day has brought her joy or pleasure."

"This lady needs a husband," said the doctor.

"But she is my mother!"

"Yes," said the doctor, "and she needs a groom."

"She's over ninety years old! Surely she can't be thinking of marriage again!"

"You are wrong, my son," said the doctor. "As often as her skirts are lifted by the wind, the thought

of a bridegroom enters her mind.” *(much laughter)*

“Sir,” said the son, “if she wanted a husband, she could have married long ago. Why don’t you examine her and see what is the matter with her?”

“I have already told you what is wrong.”

At this, the old woman sprang up from the corner and said to her son, “My boy, may you find favor in the sight of God. Do you fancy yourself a greater expert than the wise doctor?” So. *(applause)*

Hillman: Nice story, nice story.

Barks: I’ve been translating with John Moyne (who knows the Persian) a notebook of Rumi’s father, Bahauddin, who is an elder and kind of cranky and eccentric. And here’s what he says about falling apart, as we all do. He says...

“As I sit comfortably somewhere, my stomach begins to hurt. Then there’s the unmistakable twinge of tooth trouble. Dark blotches appear on my face. I have constant diarrhea, and sharp knee pains afflict me when I walk. So age descends upon this form. These complaints will increase until I go through the Death Gate, and if I continue like this, to moan my maladies, I’ll have no time for anything else. I refuse to be a preliminary mourner in the procession toward my own demise. From now on I’ll give this rapid disintegration no notice. I’ll pretend to have hit rock bottom, alone, abandoned to die in some wilderness of disgrace. However, even here I take delight in being alive, and I still have a few desires I can follow. This old corpus lives, and then it dies.”

(applause)

To me he has a kind of wonderful, high good humor and sanity about his attitude toward losing faculties.

Hillman: Yeah.

Barks: And I like that, the realism of it. His son Rumi said that it was “very important to live in the ruins.” That is the diminished way of nothingness. No more ego, no structure. You live there. And then you begin to find something in the ruins. Maybe you don’t find anything. But you dig in ruins, and maybe there will be two jewels, the eye points staring back at you. But not everybody finds the jewels in the ruins. Some just diminish the ego, and then have nothing, a cleared space. That word “emptiness” is very important, don’t you think? When you get to a point... I’m 67. *(to Hillman)* You’re...?

Hillman: 78.

Barks: 78? *(to Yolen and Flowers)*

Yolen: 65.

Flowers: 57.

Barks: Just a kid. *(laughter)* The word “emptiness” and empty vistas are more beautiful to me. The high plains or high desert is beautiful to me now.

Man in the audience: What’s that Jason poem you’ve got? “Golden Fleece?” How does that end? Jason and the Golden Fleece took two roads, and you find out that there’s no Golden Fleece, no crew, no Jason.

Barks: Right. That's Emily Dickinson.

(Finding Is The First Act by Emily Dickinson)

*Finding is the first Act
The second, loss,
Third, Expedition for
The "Golden Fleece"*

*Fourth, no Discovery --
Fifth, no Crew --
Finally, no Golden Fleece --
Jason -- sham -- too.*

Yolen: This morning when I was listening to the story telling... telling the story that's in one of my books which I find fascinating... I started writing this. (It) is the end part of something. It's very raw:

"What can we do? Stand up. Choose to be born. Choose to pick up the quills. Choose to open the Third Eye. See through the dark. Touch the hem of heaven, and sew yourself a robe, not a shroud. What can we do? Age gracefully. Take your medicine. Pick up your skirts. Bend your aching knee and dance."

(applause) And I feel that way, but there's not that much time. I'm going to choose to dance, now that I have a new knee. *(laughter)*

Hillman: Hm

Man in the audience: This session started out informally discussing love as a topic, and then it sort of evolved into the inevitability of the physical demise.

Hillman: There's a funny mistake made about this though, because everyone in the room, no matter what age, could die...

Flowers: Tonight.

Yolen: Three minutes from now.

Hillman: This peculiar linking of "old" only with "dying" and "ending" is a pathological way of thinking, that "old" is a condition. An old shoe. An old whiskey glass. I mean, I wrote a book on this. I can't remember any of it so... *(laughter)* but it's called *"The Force of Character."* It's the wrong title. I wanted a different title, but...

Flowers: What title did you want?

Hillman: I wanted something about what the book's called... *"Lasting, Leaving, Left"* ... which is what the book is. I wanted to add the word "old" somewhere in the title, but the publishers thought no one in the world in America would buy a book with the word "old" in the title unless it was "Old China." *(laughter)* You know what I mean. "Old Porcelain." Whatever. Anyway...

Yolen: Or a book that says, "Don't feel old."

Hillman: That's it, that's it. The idea is that, if you think about it, an old wall, an old shoe, old whiskey, Old Masters... the word "old" has a huge qualitative value to it, and does not necessarily

mean “degenerating” or “decomposing.” Those things are going on, but if we only think of the idea of “old” that way, we miss what it offers as a qualitative value to something.

Yolen: Uh huh.

Flowers: What does it offer?

Hillman: Well, it offers background, and it offers partly what Coleman said. It offers ruin. Ruin allows enormous imagination. Why do they put ruins in all of the paintings of that Gothic period in British painting? They always put a ruin in there. Why? The ruin was not just to give you some antique recollection. It was also, the ruin... you rebuild what wasn't there with the imagination. Ruins are fantastic places to visit, the crumbling. And so we do that. I do that in my own imagination because I don't remember what I'm supposed to be doing right now. *(light laughter)* And I've lost the list that I had it all on to begin with, you know. *(light laughter)* A lot of time is spent in the ruins of the past.

Yolen: Well, that's the other thing it gives you, of course. It gives you perspective looking forward, but it gives you history, which ends in the word “story.” You have stories to tell and things still to look forward to. It gives you a perspective of that forward motion that is really informed by the stories from your past in a way that young people, who are so headlong and who think that they don't have to think about the past because it's all about the future, don't see. We're cantilevered.

Hillman: Hm.

Flowers: You know, the adults are always trying to educate the young by saying, “If I knew what I know now when I was young, I would live *this* way.” Is there anything that the elderly would say to the near middle-aged, or to the rapidly aging, or to adults that would say, “While you have it now, do this” or, “Don't do that.” Or the best way to prepare for (aging), if people were looking for advice...

Yolen: They wouldn't listen anyway.

Several people from the audience: Yes, we will! *(laughter)*

Hillman: To which group are we giving this advice?

Flowers: If you look at someone and say, “Are you pleased to be living where you are now in the age that you are now and, if so, how could we be that way when we're your age?” People look for advice.

Hillman: I see.

Flowers: One of the things I would say about older age is that quite often people who are wise quit giving advice, so I'm going against what I know to be the case, which is the greater part of wisdom not to give advice. What I'm asking goes against the grain, if there's such a thing that people who are mere adults and not older should know now that would be helpful when they get older.

Hillman: One thing seems to me very important and I tried to make one of the main points of this book was: In the middle of life you have no idea what old is. Your ideas of old are filled with fear and anxiety and decay and negative thoughts and so forth. Except you get things, you'll be wise, which is of course nonsense. But the actual late life is a life of its own that is beyond the imagination, I think, when you are in your forties and fifties. And I mean late life. I think it's different. All kinds of things occur that you might not have imagined could occur.

Smith: True! *(laughter)*

Smith: I'm going to kick in.

Hillman: Do, please.

Smith: You three, excluding the moderator who is obviously in the prime of life, (*laughter*) you did very well for spring chickens. (*loud laughter*) I resonate very much to several things you said. Long ago, I gave up the "I'm growing old," you know. I'm old. That's right. But let me just advise you... you dwell on music. I'm musically minded. My spouse is visually minded. There's always, almost like clocks, there's always some music going on in my head. But I can't hear it. I used to always have lunch when I was at home, put on a number from the symphony or something like that, and just glory in it. Now it sounds all tinny! But I have the memories of that, and so that's compensating matter.

Outwardly, you have use of all your limbs, able-bodied. You may feel otherwise, but it looks that way. Wait until you get a fractured back. And your compensation? You will get whisked through the airport security in a wheel chair. (*laughter*) There are compensations at every point.

I spent last week in Athens, so I'm reminded of Socrates' "philosophy is the practice of dying." Oh, we have a good course to practice on. You get more practice every day. I want also to mention a compensation... loss of short-term memory cells. It is real. And you know I can't remember people's names, but it's compensated for by more vivid memories of the past.

Hillman: (*chuckling*) Exactly!

Smith: Long-term memory. More and more, the child is father of the man, and that's true. In a way, you're living in the past, but in an enriching past. I grew up in traditional China. It's all different today. Age was venerated, so when people ask me, "How old are you?" I'll say I'm 85 years venerable. (*loud laughter*) Because it was really true. Part of the wisdom was that when your body capacity declined, they built in a social structure that was an escalator so that every passing year, you can expect that somebody else is going to jump up and fill the teapot. You don't. But, more important, you will be listened to with greater respect.

Now, that's very different from our culture where, as the saying goes, "When you're forty, you're over the hill." And we all know that when you're over the hill you pick up speed. (*laughter*) I think of the wisdom of the civilization that built in that capacity.

There's another thing. I'm ahead of you in being physically unable and I'm also deaf. Alas, I face hereditary macular degeneration and it's advancing. Fortunately, because of the computer screen, I can increase the size of the fonts so I can still write comfortably. My brother is ahead of me on that. His vision is almost gone... I don't know what I'm going to do when I get to that phase.

And then (there's) physical pain. I'm blessed. I'm in discomfort a lot of time, but almost never in real pain. When I'm cold, no discomfort, and I can just sleep free. Was it Oscar Wilde who said, "*God, you take care of the physical pain. I will take care of the rest.*"? (My sister-in-law's) car was slammed into by somebody who ran a red light, and she's never out of physical pain. I don't know how I'm going to cope when I come to that.

Now I feel less depressed than I ever have in my life, but I know that that can turn around. If I'm in dark depression, I don't know what I'm going to do then. Then, of course, there's Alzheimer's... I think I still have my wits about me (*laughter*) but they say that's a sure sign. (*more laughter*) I certainly find the world never more interesting, and my investment in ideas never greater than now, but if Alzheimer's were to come in, I don't know how I would cope.

Barks: Well, one thing you can take from Huston's advice is to try not to feel shame about the losing

of your faculties. I tend to be shamed over this short-term memory thing. When I retired from teaching, somehow all the names went with it. I can't remember people's names. And some people just say, "I don't do names anymore." *(laughter)*

Yolen: I call it Namesheimer Disease. *(laughter)*

Barks: I still remember those people who are related to me, but I will eventually forget them. *(laughter)*

Hillman: Yeah, you will. *(laughter)*

Barks: Yeah. I love the way Huston just seems to have no shame about the diminishment of faculties and energy. He just announced at the end of the last session that he had to go and get prone, take a nap. Sometimes we feel ashamed of doing that and of forgetting things.

Flowers: When I taught Creative Writing, the first couple of weeks it seemed like every other poem was about pity for old people.

Hillman: Ha! Who were you teaching this?

Yolen: Not old people...

Flowers: Kids.

Hillman: Kids?

Flowers: Kids, yeah. Eighteen-year olds and nineteen-year olds. Getting back to your point about death, it seemed that by distancing themselves from old people and feeling superior, they were asserting their own immortality somehow. I found a way to stop all these poems that were about pity for old people.

(Hillman chuckling)

Flowers: I had an exercise in which I had everyone sit around and put down the date of their death. Month, day, year. And of course they don't know; it's just something to be made up. But somehow when that went around, it makes it real, instead of put off on old people that you will never be because you can't imagine that. I do think that disconnection between Death and Age is really important but almost impossible, very difficult for young people to make.

Barks: We have wonderful artists, too, who are old people; Stanley Kunitz, Wallace Stevens.

Hillman: Yeah.

Barks: How about Bernard Berenson? Gorgeous poem, *An Old Philosopher in Rome*. Stevens recognizes in this poem that you love, James, *The Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour*, "*how love lights the first light of evening*." There's kind of a grandeur, a majesty in aging. And you see it in these people. We need to recognize that as a possibility. It may be that you can be William Blake or King Lear. "*Come, let's away to prison. We two alone will sing like birds in the cage*." Beautiful.

Woman in the audience: When we're talking about old age being linked with death, I think one of the reasons we do that is that most of us want to die of old age. We don't want to walk out into the street and be hit by a truck, or have a building fall on us, or get pneumonia and die in four days. We want to live until we die, and we want to make that a long time so we do link old age with death because that's how we want to die.

Yolen: I want to go back to the question that was asked about advice, and it really goes right along with what James says, which is that my advice would be “Do not be afraid.” You don’t know what’s going to happen. You don’t know what’s in the future, so go boldly into that future. I had a 106-year old friend. When she was 105 she said, “Bah, I cannot believe I have an 80-year old son.”
(laughter)

Barks: La!

Yolen: Well, she spelled it. And it was just this recognition that people around her were aging, but she was not. She was still going forward, and she did that until the moment she died at 106. So I take that as my guidepost.

Barks: Right.

Yolen: I want to live to see my sons eighty years old.

Hillman: Oi! (laughter)

Barks: (to Hillman) You don’t happen to agree?

Hillman: No, (more laughter) it’s an extraordinary fantasy.

Smith: I want to add a couple of one-liners. One is “*Inspiration from others*” and my example here is Ram Dass. You know what he has gone through, but I’ve known him ever since he was Richard Alpert at Harvard. The courage in that guy to face up to his inspiration.

A second is “*Fall is beautiful.*” Well, I bit my tongue! Even though I’m not a good example in a lot of extroverts, but never the less as an intention, that is true. Another thing one realizes is how thoughtful people are... They’re kind to the disabled. Somebody brought me water! How many of you get water brought to you? (laughter)

And there’s one last thing on learning. Don’t wait too long to express your love for family and friends because you don’t have very long. You don’t know. Today may be your last chance, so I’ve become more expressive to other people.

Flowers: Wouldn’t it have made more sense to have a panel on youth?

Hillman: Yes.

Barks: Yeah.

Yolen: No! (laughter)

Flowers: Why?

Hillman: Because they don’t know where the hell they are. They need panels all the time. (great laughter)

Maggie Macary in the audience: I just want to ask a question about this idea of the heart, and get more generalized. When you asked that question, my first response was, “I think you also must get more specific because things are more and more accessed. Jim, when you were talking about the idea of rooms of memory, people who are gone, that the memories and imagination are more specific because you’re imagining it more? This is (a question) I’m just throwing out to you all. Isn’t there more of a power over the access of life as you get older?

Hillman: Yes, I think so. Certainly there are specific remembrances and, with them, their specific agonies and remorse and amusements and various things. They're encapsulated in the memoria, and they are for themselves. There's nothing "to do about" any of it. There's nothing to repair or to... nothing! There it is.

It's like new material filling up the shelves where the recent material, the short-term memory, is gone, leaving space for the long-term memory. And a lot of other things, though, that are... as I say, I can't remember them, but there are a lot of other things that... I'm like Huston who's got them.

There's also a shift between day and night, and sleeping, and things like that. The shift. I think the idea that you have to have so many hours of sleep within a certain amount of time span... oh, that's all... you sleep when you're sleepy. *(light laughter)* I think that's something useful to remember. *(light laughter)*

Yolen: But that goes back to childhood, when you're a teenager. In some ways, some of the things you're talking about, we're getting in some ways more like teenagers if you sleep when you feel like it, you eat when you feel like it.

Hillman: Teenagers will sleep right straight through until 2:00 in the afternoon. That doesn't happen too often any longer. But also waking at night is also part of the way it works. I mean, the way the bladder works. *(laughter)*

Barks: I can go right back to sleep, though.

Hillman: Yeah, exactly. It's not a disturbance. Besides, it's not just waking in the night, you will wake to the night in a culture that doesn't pay much attention to the night except to light it up.

Barks: Beautiful, beautiful. I'd like to say one thing. Indifference as a state of mind becomes totally inappropriate, I think, and immature... a sign of deep immaturity. As you grow older, everything (about) the human is worth caring about.

Hillman: That's interesting.

Barks: And I don't ever get bored.

Hillman: That's very nice.

Flowers: But that suggests the answer to your question about love, and you just said it. You love more. When you say "generally," I think you love more.

Barks: But her (Macary) talking about specificity seemed right, too. Just the tenderness as opposed to passionate.

Hillman: Yeah.

Barks: The passionate doesn't... You know, Dylan Thomas telling his father to "rage, rage against the dying of the light" seems dumb. *(laughter)*

Hillman: He was dead. He never even got to forty.

Barks: Right, right. But I don't want to rage against the dying of the light.

Hillman: Well, some days.

Barks: Maybe, yeah.

Flowers: Don't you think that specific love, the difference is not so much between specific and universal or less passion, but between the search for the Beloved which you had as a young person? And the capacity to love what it is that you have, as you grow older, so that the search, that passionate desiring search, doesn't have to be.

Barks: Instead of looking for a Beloved, you're sort of walking around inside of it.

Flowers (and audience): Yeah, exactly.

Barks: It's a weather and you walk inside it.

Flowers: *(applause from audience)* Exactly. So, it's not less passionate. It may feel less passionate because it has less of a vector quality. It's not going out there looking for the Beloved. It's more the "Wow! You're so lovely! And you just are!" The capacity immediately to fall in love and not have to do anything about it, and forget the person's name the next hour.

(laughter)

Yolen: But for everyone who is like that, who has that acceptance or that ability to bring things together... we all know people who've gone past cranky. Older people, my father was like that, who became more and more egotistical, and more and more "It's all about me." He lived with us the last four years of his life when my children were teenagers so I was in that sandwiched generation. I remember him saying to me, "Your children are so appalling. They don't want to come in here and talk to me about my life." I said, "Well, have you talked to them about their lives?" He said, "Their lives are worth talking about?" And I'm thinking, "You slimy old bastard. *(laughter)* If you want them to come in and talk to you about you, you have to also be interested in talking to them about them." And so I think that it's nice to feel we are marching, not sinking, into this interesting, loving, open, only-slightly-cranky old age, but there are a lot of people out there who are just... cranky.

Hillman: Another part of that, what goes on today, is the medicalization of late life...

Yolen: Yep, yep.

Hillman: ...which starts earlier and earlier. If we're going to give advice, one of the advice is "Don't waste your last years thinking medically about your years. *(applause)* Don't get into the medicalization of your life." You're more likely to die in the bathtub slipping anyway. You know that's the most dangerous place. The most dangerous place is your own bathroom, and the most dangerous people are your own family. There are more murders committed by family members *(laughter)* than homicide and so on. Anyway, so stay out of the bathroom with relatives. *(great laughter)*

Yolen: I'll go home and tell my daughter that.

Hillman: But, getting back, the main point is not to get medicalized. The amount of attention paid to our insane health insurance systems and drug cards... all of this has absorbed the older mind of our society. It has sucked up the mind of our society, the older mind.

Barks: Have you taken your pills today? *(laughter)*

Hillman: Well, I'm on... let me think... *(laughter)*

Yolen: My father used to give us what we called *The Daily Bowel Report*.

Hillman: Bowel?

Yolen: *The Daily Bowel Report.* I swore I would never do it, but I'm afraid I find myself doing it, so don't talk to me in the morning. *(laughter) (to someone in the audience)* You want to tell us something?

Man in the audience: You are all experts on this, so I'm interested in your reaction. Seems to me like we're talking about what is your own personal mythology. When I was very young, five years old, my father had a little picture of an Indian guru who was 99 years old and weighed 99 pounds. He had this vision that he was in touch with something beyond himself, and he was happy. Somehow I know that I will be 99 years old and 99 pounds, no possessions, no body left, but I look forward to this with great anticipation. At the end I'll have contact with a higher reality that I would not be able to have in this life. This is part of my faith, my own personal vision, which is something contrary to what our society tells me. Now, my question is, "What is our personal mythology?"

Yolen: *(repeating for Smith)* The question is "What is our personal mythology?"

Hillman: What does that have to do with our topic?

Yolen: Well, first of all, I haven't been 99 pounds since I was in sixth grade *(laughter)* so I don't expect to get back to that. My personal mythology is very family-oriented. I would eventually like to be just surrounded by children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren. I'm very much family-centered, so as far as anything else? I don't know if there's another life beyond this one. I don't know if there's another world beyond this one, but I do know that I want to be surrounded by family.

Barks: Mine may be more Taoist. I feel closer, as I get older, to whatever that means. That big flowing through. I felt it as a child before I went to school, and then school sort of distanced me from the Tao. Now I feel back in the Tao, but the Tao that can be said is not the Tao. God, I love rivers and being near them. Just that flow of spirit through everything is my... I don't know... is that a mythology? I don't know if it is or not.

The old Taoists went off at the end. I've got a cabin, and I like to be separate from people for most of my days, and just feel that. Just wait for whatever is going to be said. I'm always waiting for inspiration. That's just what I live for, and for me it's words. So I'm always waiting for words and images. I don't guess that's a mythology.

Hillman: Another question...

Yolen: *(to Hillman)* Are you going to answer that?

Hillman: No, I don't have an answer to this.

Man in the audience: How about the specificity thing? I was visiting the hospital where my mom was being kept, and I railed angrily at first. And then, as I'd walk out (of the hospital), I'd see all the other mothers sitting in wheel chairs, and I'd have love for them, as if they were my mom also. The love for my mom gave way to an acceptance and a love for all moms.

One other contribution... my neighbor (Huston Smith) talks about (the courage of) Ram Dass... and my neighbor walked into my shop and said, "Look, Richard, I can raise my arm. I had an auto accident, and I was hurt. So I swam everyday and I couldn't raise my arm this high. And now look at me!" I marveled that, here I was, angry a lot, and (yet) in Huston there wasn't an ounce of self-pity about who hit him or what had befallen him. (Instead he developed) just his daily courage to retrain his arm and proclaim a victory in his mid-eighties. You weren't aware of that... *(laughter)*

Barks: What about sentimentality?

Hillman: I hate it. (*laughter*) I'm not so sure that it increases or decreases... I don't know what to say about that because you are touched by it (sentimentality.) On the one hand, I object to hating it. I object to that statement, but I hate crapo, I hate kitsch, I hate that stuff! I hate this crapo art that's presented as art. I get wild over that. What do you do with that? I think mine is a legitimate crankiness, but I'm not even sure that it's cranky. I think that it's good taste. (*laughter*)

Yolen: But, you know, that's your taste...

Hillman: No, I don't go for that. No, no, I don't go... Taste is not just personal. There are deep, deep roots in taste.

Yolen: (*skeptical*) Mmmmm.

Hillman: No, I would discuss that with you when you get a chance. (*laughter*)

Man in the audience: I took care of an aunt for about six years. She died last year. I learned integrity in this experience of being with her. Facing the medical community for any assistance she ever needed, I made sure that she was addressed respectfully and with integrity, that she was not drugged to absolute stupor. Going against the medical community and everything that happened, (it was always important) that she be handled appropriately and carefully because she was kind, she was loving and she was important. She was very valuable, and she blessed everything she touched all the time.

We have a divine right to integrity. It doesn't matter if we're twenty, thirty, fifty or eighty (years old.) That sense of something inside that has quality, that needs to be honored, needs to be helped. I feel that, as we get older, part of that comes out into the world. We see it in other things. Yeats said, "Everything I look upon is blessed." That sense at the end of his poem, *A Dialog of Self and Soul*, that he was able to give himself and bless the world.

Yolen: I'd like to go back to the thing you said about your aunt, because there's something we haven't touched on which I saw, for a number of reasons, fairly recently. That's the infantilization of the aged. You had to step forward to talk to the medical people who should be there anyway.

Man in audience: Only when she couldn't do it herself, when she was incapable. I wasn't actively sure. Part of it was about them, but part of it was about her *with* them.

Yolen: That's what I mean. I remember my great Chaucer professor who became a friend after I graduated. (She was) a wonderful woman, one of those grand old women teachers at Smith College. I never knew her by her first name; (she) was always Miss Williams to me. Her name was Edna Williams.

When she was in her eighties, she fell and broke her hip, and they put her in a nursing home where all these hardly educated young helpers were calling her Edna. "Edna, dear, do you want to do this?" And I still, at age forty or fifty, would not call her Edna. She was Miss Williams. It was that kind of infantilization that I was furious with. I would go there and I would say to them, "This is Miss Williams. This is who she is." But that, to me, was one of the things that I hated; that there was no honor due to her at the end of her life. Even though her head was not as a child, she was made a child in their eyes.

Flowers: There's a question in the back.

Man in audience: Cancer has been a real hard teacher in my life; early in '95, my wife, and then in '99, my daughter (contracted this disease.) I experienced in just a profound way helplessness and powerlessness. One of the things I learned from my daughter was that there are worse things than

death. I would gladly die for my daughter. This whole notion is one thing when you take it from an ego perspective, and an entirely different thing when it's from the heart. I agree with what Steven Levine said, "In the heart lies the detriment." I think that's what took me through that whole thing.

Flowers: You know, Coleman, back to something you said. You asked a question about sentimentality. You have a habit of asking questions that I'd like to know what your answer is, because that's a very strong thing, what you were saying. It's brought me back to this opposite of sentimentality. You said you had a whole book of grandmother poems.

Barks: Grandfather poems, yeah.

Flowers: Grandfather poems.

Barks: What he was talking about... the whole thing is to open the heart, isn't it? That's where we want to grow old, not grow selfish and mean-spirited. We want to have a growing old that is also an opening up, I guess. Does that seem right to you?

Yolen: Yes.

Hillman: Uh huh.

Flowers: But sentimentality, to me, seems like a false opening of the heart.

Barks: Well, the word has a pejorative tone. Sentimentality is something that is asking us for more emotion than we can give it, when something's sentimental like that. I get less concerned about sentimentality, but that's just maybe a personal thing.

Hillman: Mostly, I'm thinking of one thing we may not have touched which Michael Meade or someone mentioned already about justice; the sensitivity to injustice, and the almost intolerance about injustice. Intolerance about injustice. I cannot abide "can't," and injustice, and corruption of the language. The daily news infuriates me because of these things... injustice, corruption of the language, fake emotion, sentimentality. I think that fact that it does, it must belong to part of being an elder in a society that one has to bring one's reactions into the world. That is the kind of myth that I am now engaged in.

Yolen: Would you have twenty years ago, given the same set of circumstances?

Hillman: No, no, I don't think so.

Yolen: What would you have done?

Hillman: Twenty years ago, I was more cynical. (*light laughter*) "No, that's the way it is. That's the way they are."

Yolen: But now you've got to have cynicism into anger.

Hillman: Oh, anger has never left me. (*laughter*) It's just shifted its focus. It's the feeling I have that the old people in our culture ought to get off the golf course. In fact, they ought to be speaking up and doing what has to be done. (*applause*)

Yolen: And not just involved in their medications.

Hillman: Well, the medication is part of the plot. There's a deep... what did Hillary call it? A deep right-wing agenda plot to medicalize us.

Yolen: A conspiracy.

Hillman: A conspiracy. Our pills are part of the conspiracy. What I mean is that the Chinese elder that you spoke of... we are those elders now. We are the Chinese elders, and we have to, not simply expect reverence, we need to maintain the structure of our society. We are part of the institution, and if we don't defend the institution, we cannot expect veneration.

Man in the audience: I am aging at two or three different rates. My body is aging at a very different rate than I am. And I have come to the philosophy that we are not our bodies. I'm getting an old body, and inside me I'm not aging at that same rate. I feel more powerful than I ever had in my life. I have a lot of personal power, a lot of strength, but I have an inability to walk well, so I'm relating to what you're talking about, and to a lot of medical stuff. They've really got me in a medical world.

I find it a very strange time of life. I can't reconcile the two things. *(to Hillman)* I read part of your book, the erotic chapter. *(laughter)* You wrote that for me. That was wonderful, and it should be called "Sexual Desire." That's such a big thing in my life, and has been all my life, (but) my life is changing. My sex life is changing. It's all stuff that I don't quite know how to live with. The question in here is just, "What do I do with all of this?" Thank you. *(applause)*

Hillman: Thank you.

Flowers: Do you have any comments about that differential in aging? What to do with that?

Yolen: Well, I certainly think that that's what my 106-year old friend meant. There was her son aging in front of her eyes, but she didn't feel certainly old enough. My daughter is about to turn 38, and I find that astonishing because one part of me feels old enough to be her grandmother, and the other part of me feels not old enough to be her mother. I really understand that sense of time doing two or three things. My writing head is better than it has ever been. My emotional life is a bit rocky with everybody I know getting sick and dropping dead, but physically I'm falling apart in a lot of different ways. I see that as three very different things, and I understand that.

Man in audience: I wonder what you have to say about something very specific, namely euthanasia? What do you have to say about that? A society that preserves life that is no longer life. What about death with dignity at the end of a life?

Yolen: Do you remember what happened to Bran (in Celtic mythology)? When he died he said, "Cut off my head and take it with you, and I'll prophesize for eighty years." So, it isn't just us. We're not the only ones who want to prolong or not prolong. I'm of the opinion that, when I'm not there, pull the plug, but that's personal. And I'm not sure I can give permission to someone else to do it to someone else.

Hillman: I have no worked out thought on euthanasia.

Barks: I'm for it. If we have birth control, we can also have death control. *(light laughter)* I'm for it. I'm for that right, to have that right.

Yolen: I think we have time for a couple more (questions).

Woman in the audience: Jane, you spoke of going forward in life without fear. One of the fears or concerns of middle age is not stepping into the cold destiny, and not accomplishing or experiencing what my soul came here to do. And I'd like to know if anyone on the panel has any regrets about things you thought you might get to do in life, and how you deal with that?

Yolen: I wanted to meet Viggo (Mortensen). *(laughter)*

Hillman: You do?

Yolen: My daughter wanted me to meet Viggo. So sorry. It's getting late on a panel.

The problem with being afraid to step forward into your destiny is that you're more afraid of stepping into horseshit. We're so afraid of stepping into something disastrous that we sometimes don't take that larger step. I don't regret a lot that I've done. I do have some things that as I look back I would have rather done. One of them was putting my kid into a private school...which I didn't do... because he needed it, but those are little things. So nothing big for me, but maybe I've gotten so old that I don't remember what those things are.

Hillman: I like that song, "Je ne regrette rien..."

Yolen: Yes, yes. *(laughter)*

Woman in the audience: I don't know what that means.

Yolen: That means, "I don't regret anything."

Hillman: I don't regret anything. I regret nothing. In other words, that's your life... live it. Drink it. There's something in there about who's to judge what's to be regretted? Who's to decide that was a mistake?

Yolen: There's some comedian who says, "Don't shit on yourself." Don't *should* on yourself....

Woman in the audience: I would love to know your experience of beauty and age. Not passing beauty, not mild-mannered beauty, but ravishing, extreme beauty. In your youth, (that beauty) would have come through eyes untouched by eyes' natural degeneration; or, as in Huston's case, follicles that (no longer hear) the high beautiful tones. The beauty in the world saved my life in youth and middle age, and I want to know does beauty still touch you at any age? Does Goddess reach in? Is She present throughout and beyond and between? Can She find a way through all those diminished faculties to make the heart want to beat at least one more time? I want to know that.

Yolen: I'm not that old yet. *(laughter)*

Barks: There's a Zen master...who was it? Rinzai, maybe... who died. What he did when he died was think. He heard squirrels running across the roof, and he said, "Beautiful!" He said, "Shhh. Listen."

Yolen: That's nice.

Barks: I think that, as you get older, the beauty gets less pronominal... no pronouns for it.

Hillman: Right. Yes!

Barks: Is that a word, pronominal?

Hillman: Pronominal.

Flowers: It is now.

Barks: First time I ever said it.

Hillman: If you used it, it's a word.

Barks: It meant something.

Flowers: Well, I think I hear the squirrels of time running across the roof here.

Hillman: Yes.

Flowers: We're supposed to stop at 3:30, and it's after I think. Thanks all of you.

(applause)

Parabola: “Cinema of the Spirit” and Mythic Journeys

by Susan Ellen Mesinai

Hats off to Michael Karlin, Scott Livengood and George Johnson, and the staff and volunteers from Mythic Imagination, for their generosity of spirit in bringing together the host of presenters and guests at the MYTHIC JOURNEYS Conference!!! As a major co-sponsor, Parabola came away greatly enheartened by the spirit and depth of the conference. On stage and off, treasures were shared in a way unique to this galaxy of souls and talents. While there is much to be said for smaller, more focused events in the near future – the enthusiasm and magic, in the true sense of both words, made the June 2 – 6, 2004 gathering quite memorable.

Thanks also to Parabola’s Native American friends, Chief Jake Swamp and storyteller/author Gayle Ross, who gave the inspiring Thanksgiving invocation and closing, respectively. Not only were their offerings deeply moving, but as Native Americans, whose myths are part of the fabric of a living sacred tradition, their contributions and presence reinforced James Hillman’s opening phrase: “Myths are real.”

Parabola’s main contribution was its *Cinema of the Spirit*, a program especially designed for Mythic Journeys -- often introduced and later discussed by the filmmakers themselves. The “journey” generated by these films in sequence was extraordinary. Africa: the painted visages of young Wodaabe men, with their magical facial movements to charm the women of this nomadic tribe in Niger -- to the vast plains between earth and sky of *Cosmic Africa*, as astrophysicist Thebe Medupe travels to ancient sites to find the roots of astronomy in African culture. Siberia: Blind blues singer Paul Pena’s exotic journey from San Francisco to remote Tuva to take part in a throat-singing competition in *Genghis Blues*. India: Michael Tobias’ *Ahimsa* and Mickey Lemle’s *Compassion in Exile*, giving us unique access to the Jain faith today and to His Holiness the Dalai Lama as the leader of Tibetan Buddhists -- both voices for non-violence. USA: Kevin Peer’s *Navajo Sandpainting* and Phil Cousineau/Gary Rhine’s *A Seat at the Table* with Huston Smith on the Native American struggle to observe and preserve their sacred ceremonies; and two modern, impromptus – Karen Koski/Sherece Lamke’s *Burning Man Through Irish Eyes* and Eric Saperston’s *The Journey*.

Two strong memories from the remaining films to share with those who weren’t there: A discussion between Michael Tobias, producer of *Mad Cowboy* which documents the violence done to animal life through industrialization with Gayle Ross, who described the traditional rules for the hunter to maintain the sacred relationship between animal and man. And the absolute hush in the Learning Center as Ram Dass described his moment of “being stroked” in *Fierce Grace*, the tears that followed and the bonding -- until the sense of love in the audience was matched by the love of Ram Dass pouring off the screen. Something must be said for the wonderful camaraderie that existed between the filmmakers themselves – from Sherece Lamke creating a trailer on everyone’s behalf to draw attention to their showings, to the support and respect they gave each other’s work. Last but not least, Michael Tobias and his extensive body of work as a documentary filmmaker were recognized with the presentation of Parabola’s Focus Award of \$5000.

Parabola’s other contribution was its “Cinema as a Sacred Art” panel discussion, moderated by publisher, Joe Kulin – Producer of *Cinema of the Spirit* – and including Michael Tobias (*Mad Cowboy*) and Mickey Lemle (*Fierce Grace*) as well as Institute of Sacred Cinema director, Kevin Peer. Each of the three gifted documentary filmmakers had a unique perspective that made for a lively exchange. We emerged from the panel energized by the intensity of the discussion and with the audience urging us to “do this more often.” We recently transcribed this discussion and, going back through the detail of the text itself, realized how vital, profound and

humorous the discussion had been, with valuable ramifications for the future of our *Cinema of the Spirit* festivals. Excerpts of the panel discussion will be posted on the website: www.cinemaofthespirit.org.

Parabola's staff also had the pleasure of meeting and spending time with the many people who stopped at our booth in the Marketplace to purchase magazines, books and tapes. It was truly a renewal for us to be face to face with our unseen subscribers – and to make friends with our fellow vendors as well.

While Mythic Journeys was to some degree a treasure hunt, it was also a cauldron where important new visions were seeded, or projects launched. When asked about the Conference, my short form response is: "One thing was for sure. Everyone who came was profoundly touched or transformed in some way."

But now, in the aftermath, it's important to give the invisible forces at work in our own mythic journeys time to heal and transform us, to let us grow. Still, when I'm reminded of the event -- I can see the place (Atlanta Hyatt Regency Hotel), the seed pod elevators going up and down. Then, suddenly I am consumed by rainbow fire, the rapid flow of inspiration, intellect and hard - core empowerments. And I'm there again in that life - enhancing timelessness where, even in the midst of frantic movement, everything has its place.

Susan Ellen Mesinai is the Associate Producer of Parabola Magazine's "Cinema of the Spirit." She is also Parabola's Manager of Special Projects. Mesinai's own "mythic journey" has led her to Russia 25 times to search for the Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg, who disappeared at the hands of the Soviets in January, 1945. While she has not yet conclusively found Wallenberg's paper trail, she has found others missing in the Gulag for decades. Parabola is a corporate sponsor of Mythic Journeys.

We are grateful for the many articles written about Mythic Journeys. Rob Wiersema of Victoria, British Columbia, Canada, writes here about Joseph Campbell's life and work. Wiersema also writes about his experiences during the Mythic Journeys conference and about Mythic Journeys' exploration, in fact, celebration of myth as it relates to modern life. This article appears with the permission of the author.

Into the Mythic for Inspiration

REPORT I Writers, philosophers and others gather to celebrate the life and work of Joseph Campbell

Robert J. Wiersema
Special to the Sun

July 10, 2004

ATLANTA, Ga. - 'Myth is all about us, on every street corner,' James Hillman, an American psychologist, said in a packed hotel ballroom here, the audience hanging on his every word. "And we need to expose the myth we are currently living. This could be the story of Armageddon, a story of revenge and righteousness and dripping blood. Awareness of that story might keep us from falling victim to the blindness and the grand delusion that have claimed us before. Whether in Texas or in Thebes, the story is the same."

Hillman was delivering the opening address at Mythic Journeys, a four-day conference celebrating the life and work of the mythologist Joseph Campbell. He was born in 1904, so this is his centennial year -- an occasion that hasn't received quite as much attention as the 60th anniversary of D-Day or the centenary of James Joyce's *Bloomsday*.

Mythic Journeys featured more than 100 speakers and performers, including Hillman, Robert Bly and Jane Yolen and Canadians Guy Gavriel Kay and Charles de Lint. They came both to celebrate Campbell and to extend his ideas into a new millennium.

Joseph Campbell was born March 26, 1904 into a staunch Catholic family in upstate New York. His interest in mythology and comparative religion can be traced to a Wild West show he attended as a child, where he was impressed not so much by the cowboys as by "a naked American Indian with his ear to the ground, a bow and arrow in his hand, and a look of special knowledge in his eyes."

The young Campbell quickly devoured all of the children's books he could find on American Indian culture and gained special access to the adult collection at his local library to continue his research. The dynamic between his family's Catholic faith and the primal mythos around him was to carry through his life and work.

After high school, he attended Columbia University in New York City, where he specialized in medieval literature while also becoming known as a track star and a jazz saxophone player.

After earning his master's degree in Arthurian studies, he went to Europe, where he was exposed to modernism in art, literature and psychology.

The voracious inclusiveness and scope of the work and ideas of Picasso, Jung, Joyce and others shaped Campbell's theory that artists are the mythmakers of their culture, and that all mythology is a product of the human psyche seeking its place in the larger world.

After returning from Europe, Campbell spent several years in relative isolation, reading voraciously and writing maniacally in his journals. He drifted to northern California, where he spent a year with John Steinbeck and the marine biologist Ed (Doc) Ricketts -- a period well examined in Vancouver writer Eric Enno Tamm's forthcoming book, *Beyond the Outer Shores*.

After another year of solitary reading and writing -- this time in Woodstock, N.Y. -- Campbell accepted a position in the literature department at New York's Sarah Lawrence College, a job he would hold for 38 years.

As a writer and editor, he was prolific and dedicated. His most important work, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, appeared in 1949. It not only outlines the stages of the hero's journey, drawing elements from seemingly disparate mythic tales to reveal an underlying monomyth, it also extends the metaphor to the rise and fall of cultures.

Hero was followed quickly by *The Masks of God*, Campbell's four-volume magnum opus, which examines mythology from around the world, through history to the present.

Despite his prolific output and his reputation as both a writer and a teacher, Campbell's work didn't receive wide public attention until after his sudden death, from cancer, in 1987.

At the time of his death, work was under way on *The Power of Myth*, a six-hour series of interviews with Bill Moyers. Seen as a risk at the time, it has become the top-rated public-television series in history, an omnipresent repeat during pledge runs. It also spun off a book -- published largely through the intercession of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, who brought the work to Doubleday -- that became a publishing sensation.

The Power of Myth introduced most of the world to Campbell's work, especially to his exhortation to "follow your bliss." He wrote that "if you follow your bliss, you put yourself on a kind of track that has been there all the while, waiting for you, and the life that you ought to be living is the one you are living. Wherever you are -- if you are following your bliss, you are enjoying that refreshment, that life within you, all the time."

Toronto's Guy Gavriel Kay, whose early high-fantasy novels owe a debt to Campbell's mythic approach, said to me privately: "The trouble with 'follow your bliss' is that it becomes so debased. It becomes a slogan on a T-shirt and takes attention away from Campbell's real work."

Kay, a longtime Tolkien scholar who worked with Christopher Tolkien on assembling *The Silmarillion*, continued: "It's what happened to Tolkien in the 1960s, with 'Go-go Gandalf' and 'Frodo lives.'"

I went through my follow-your-bliss phase as a university student and thought I had put it behind me. I take a certain amount of pride in my cynicism, my critical distance.

Yet as Mythic Journeys proceeded, that hardness dissolved and I found myself caught up in a rapidly forming community, enraptured by a cross-pollination of ideas that was virtually impossible to resist.

If you had told me, before the conference, that I would be chanting a West African healing song or carefully planning the design of a leafy Green Man mask, I would have scoffed. Yet I took part in both activities and parked my cynicism at the door.

The Mythic Journeys conference turned out to be an exploration of mythology -- and of mythology applied to modern life, where one might least expect to find it.

It drew an eclectic audience from around the world. At the opening banquet, my tablemates were a marketing executive from Brazil, a former writer for the Star Trek franchise, a housewife from North Carolina and a photographer from Locus magazine. Later, I shared an elevator with comparative-religions eminence grise Houston Smith, poet and Rumi translator Coleman Barks, and Hillman, who has been called the father of archetypal psychology. (They were talking about where to have dinner.)

I took more than 100 pages of notes during Mythic Journeys, but a few things stand out as especially memorable.

One was Scott Livengood, CEO of Krispy Kreme Doughnut Corp. Through its charitable foundation, Krispy Kreme was one of the conference's sponsors. Livengood spoke about how he had incorporated Campbell's principles of the hero's journey not only to his life but also to his company's corporate culture, creating a "mythodology" for success.

The concert by Toronto singer/songwriter Heather Dale, who is building a successful independent career with music and motifs drawn from the Arthurian myths, was a highlight. Her music is powerful stuff, reminiscent of Loreena McKennit and Sarah McLachlan but with a depth and resonance rooted in its mythic sources.

Another highlight (scoff if you will -- I would have) was the group meditation Wendy and Brian Froud led before their mask-making workshop. They took participants through the seasons, and had them think about the spirits of the seasons, and the gifts they offer, to inspire their artistic creation.

The Frouds' lives as artists (Wendy is a sculptor and puppet-maker who created Yoda in *The Empire Strikes Back*, while Brian is a visual artist best known for *Lady Cottington's Pressed Faerie Book*) are rooted not only in the fantastic but in a deep mythic awareness of the landscape around their home in Devon, England.

Equally inspiring, though in a different way, were the thoughts of Robert Hillman, a psychologist and the author of *The Soul's Code*. In a keynote address, he drew the story of Oedipus and the curse of Thebes together with contemporary events to create a compelling mythic revisioning of American foreign policy.

I wouldn't have thought myself an admirer of the poet Michael Meade, who was one of the leaders of the men's movement in the early 1990s. But his command of traditional stories was impressive. Particularly touching was his description of his work with Vietnam veterans in sunrise ceremonies on California beaches.

"You don't leave someone suffering alone," he said to the rhythm of his drum. "You wrap them in song. And in doing so, you heal something in yourself. The afflicted are sacred in this way."

Of particular interest to me was the Endicott Studio circle, a loose affiliation of writers and artists working in the interstices between myth, fairy tale and genre, as I do in my fiction. Led by Terri Windling (author of *The Wood Wife* and the editor of a series of fairy-tale retellings for adults), the Endicott panels were freewheeling explorations of the role of myth and fairy tale in contemporary writing, the depths of truth in traditional motifs (I'll never look at Snow White the same way again) and the role of artists in the ongoing creation, and recreation, of cultural mythology.

It would be impossible to come away from a gathering like Mythic Journeys uninspired. The key, as with all inspiration, is carrying that enthusiasm forward.

Robert Bly was a shamanic presence, whether reading from his own poetry or from his translations of Kabir and Antonio Machado, or exploring the fairy tale of *The White Bear King*. And, of all the speakers, he was the most explicit about how Campbell's work, and the spirit of Mythic Journeys, might be carried out into the community.

"Stories are not meant to exist on the page. They're meant to be told in the human voice, with all of its problems," Bly said.

"Campbell broke through the spell of the 20th century -- that was his gift. And that's what you need to do when you leave here. You need to find a story from your own tradition.

"Find a story that speaks to you, and learn it. Learn to tell it. Then go out into the world and tell your story to anyone who will listen. That's Campbell's legacy."

Robert J. Wiersema is a Victoria writer.

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Notes and News:

Additional information about Joseph Campbell's life and works can be found at the Joseph Campbell Foundation's website: <http://www.jcf.org/>. The Joseph Campbell Foundation is one of Mythic Journeys' Event Partners.

Our readers may also be interested in several additional excellent online articles which feature Mythic Journeys presenters and the Mythic Journeys conference.

Bradford R. Pilcher in articles June 21, July 6, and July 19 in *Jewsweek*, writes about the conference, the art exhibit, the artists, plus he interviews Janis Ian, Ari Berk, Jane Yolen, and Ellen Kushner. Titles of the articles are "Mythic Journal," "Mything Persons," and "Myth, Inc. in Action." These articles are at <http://www.jewsweek.com>. Search "archives" via the author's name, then the titles of the articles appear.

Rob Kall interviews Huston Smith in an article titled: "Politics and Religion: An Interview with Huston Smith, an interview with the world's leading author on world religions discussing Jihad, the rapture, the Left Behind Series, and the use of religion to influence politics." Both Huston Smith and Rob Kall were presenters at Mythic Journeys, and the interview took place at the conference. The article appeared this summer in www.OpEdNews.com and has been available in archived articles.

Coming soon: Author and Mythic Journeys presenter Charles de Lint features Mythic Journeys in the December issue of "Fantasy and Science Fiction."

Coming soon: Author, theologian, and Mythic Journeys presenter Matthew Fox is interviewed in new magazine, "Worthwhile," by Anita Sharpe in an article titled, "Joy and Work Are Meant to Go Together," due in November.

Coming soon in Atlanta: Brian Froud, artist and author of Lady Cottingham's Pressed Fairy Book, signs his new book, **Brian Froud's Goblins!**, Wednesday, October 27 at 7 p.m. at Chapter 11 Bookstore at Ansley Mall. Froud and scholar Ari Berk, who works with him on *Goblins!* are Mythic Journeys presenters.

Coming in December in Atlanta: James Flannery, Emory University Professor, W. B. Yeats scholar, singer, producer, and Mythic Journeys presenter, produces the annual Atlanta Celtic Christmas Concert, now in its twelfth season, on Saturday and Sunday, December 11th and 12th at Emory University's Schwartz Center for the Performing Arts. Professor Flannery's book/recording *Dear Harp of My Country: The Irish Melodies of Thomas Moore* was recently featured on Public Radio's nationally syndicated "The Thistle and Shamrock."

An Interview with Cosy Sheridan



*Cosy Sheridan is an award winning songwriter and singer, who also has a degree in transpersonal psychology and who uses myth in her creative process. Sheridan and her works have been featured everywhere from Carnegie Hall to National Public Radio, and this summer at Mythic Journeys in Atlanta. At Mythic Journeys, she presented her one woman show (available on CD), *The Pomegranate Seed – An Exploration of Appetite, Body - Image and Myth in Modern Culture*. Her song *Too**

Much Time is included in the critically acclaimed *Putumayo* CD, *Shelter*. Sheridan's website at <http://www.cosysheridan.com> includes information about her performance schedule. She is interviewed here by Mary Davis.

Q: What did you find most interesting and most meaningful at the Mythic Journeys Conference/Performance Festival?

COSY ANSWER: I loved all of it! It was one of the most significant events I have been part of in the past 10 years. I think what was most interesting for me were the discussions in the workshops - listening to all those wonderful minds and souls, with all their years of experience. In fact, one of the things I most enjoyed was the wisdom of years of most of the speakers. Our country is so focused on what people under 25 think - it was a joy to hear the wisdom of people who've been thinking about myth and archetypal journeys for all of their lives.

Q: Cosy, I love your use of the myth of Persephone and Demeter in your work, *The Pomegranate Seed*, the way you translate this myth to our time and culture. I'm recalling your image of Hades on his Harley as he roars away with Persephone! Can you describe your creative process when you worked with this myth? Why did this myth speak to you...and to our time?

COSY ANSWER: I think it was either Christine Downing or Kim Chernin who wrote: you don't choose a myth, it chooses you. I was also looking at the myth of Psyche and Eros at the same time, and it was Persephone's abduction to the underworld that kept drawing my attention; I kept seeing my own life in the myth.

I remember when I first read the myth as a young girl - maybe 12 years old – and what really affected me was Persephone's forced separation from her mother. I had a visceral reaction; it was like a foreshadowing of how my life would come to mirror parts of that myth. And I was also really bothered, even at 12, by how Persephone appeared to have no control over her own destiny – she was “acted upon” by forces, instead of acting. So, when I was creating *The Pomegranate Seed* I really wanted to hear about it from Persephone's view. In the traditional myth, she doesn't really have a voice. The only words we hear are her scream when she is abducted.

I remember feeling like I really had a handle on how to bring the myth into modern day when I envisioned Hades riding up to Persephone on a black motorcycle. My own mystical/spiritual experiences are often visual.

Q: Certainly, *The Pomegranate Seed* speaks to the issue of the re – emerging feminine in our culture, and I know that is an interest of yours. At Mythic Journeys, we included formal recognition of both the feminine (yin) and the masculine (yang) in our programming.

(A) Do you have any comments and suggestions for the future as we try to strengthen the feminine in our future programming?

(B) Do you have comments and suggestions on how our culture can welcome and nurture this re-emerging feminine?

COSY ANSWER: At some level, the feminine is re-emerging whether or not She is welcomed or nurtured: look at our changing climate conditions. We're hearing the response to our neglect of our environment. On a more personal or individualized level, I think the recent interest in the person of Mary Magdalene is a sign of welcoming the re-emerging feminine. Another aspect is perhaps the greater diversity of possible roles for women – how women are more comfortable with displaying many sides of their feminine.

Q: You have mentioned Marion Woodman's *Leaving My Father's House* and Christine Downing's *Goddess* as books which have inspired you. Can you tell us the ways you were inspired by these works? Do you have other favorites you would recommend to our readers?

COSY ANSWER: I first found Marion Woodman's *Addiction to Perfection* and *The Owl Was A Baker's Daughter* in the late 80's. They both address eating disorders, which was an issue for me. I have re-read *Addiction to Perfection* a number of times now. Marion Woodman has an amazing understanding and compassion for women with eating disorders. I first read Christine Downing's *Goddess* for a psychology course in college. Her way of approaching and interacting with goddess archetypes really inspired me in creating *The Pomegranate Seed*.

Q: One of the recurring themes in your work and a theme in most of our lives as women is our relationship to our physical bodies. You speak of our disconnection from our physical selves; our preoccupation in this culture with changing our physical selves. We often think we are too fat, too thin, too this, too that. There is an increasing use of Botox and plastic surgery to change our faces, our bodies. Often, we appear to punish our bodies. Do you think this "not being (or appearing) good enough" is media driven and/or that this tendency comes from a deeper place in women's psyches? Do you think it relates to myth? What do you think is going on here?

COSY ANSWER: Wow – this is such a big subject, and I feel like a newcomer to it in many ways. I would direct people to Marion Woodman's work for deeper, wiser answers to these questions. My own understanding and view is that women's body-image issues ARE media driven, but are also, on some subtler level, coming from a deeper place in the national psyche. There is a lot of fear about women exercising their power – the more "powerful" they become in our business/political world, the smaller/thinner they appear in the media.

Q: Thank you so much for this interview. What are you working on currently? When can we expect the next CD? And will you continue to explore myth in your work?

COSY ANSWER: I have some ideas for my next work, but nothing I could articulate yet. I find that I am still working with *The Pomegranate Seed* – refining it, re-writing parts of it. It's still very much in process for me. I think I will always explore myth in some way in my work – whether or not it will be as clearly delineated as it is in *The Pomegranate Seed*, I don't know.

Dr. Stephen Aizenstat is the founding President of Pacifica Graduate Institute. Aizenstat is also a clinical psychologist who has conducted dreamwork seminars for more than twenty five years throughout the United States, Europe, and Asia. At Mythic Journeys, he participated on several panels, "Shadow, Now" and "Healing," and he also presented two seminars: "The Intolerable Image: The Myth Active in Today's World," and "DreamTending." His published articles include: "Dreams Are Alive," and "Nature Dreaming: Jungian Psychology and the World Unconscious." He shares his approach to dreamwork with us in the following article.



DreamTending: A Radical New Approach to Dreamwork

by Stephen Aizenstat

June, 2004

Dreams have fascinated humanity since the beginning of time. From the shamanic priests, to the Bible, to Freud and Jung, everyone agrees that dreams can give us insight into the deepest part of our minds -- perhaps even our souls. There is no cultural or historical period in which dreams have not been looked to as a source of wisdom and understanding. Even now, in a world overflowing with crises, seemingly on the verge of catastrophe, people intuitively understand that it is our dreams that hold the key to our survival and flourishing.

♦ Assumptions of Western Dreamwork Systems

Yet it is interesting that in the last century, when so many things around us have changed in revolutionary ways, our basic concept of how to work with dreams hasn't evolved since the time of Freud and Jung. Both of these masters, whose contributions are absolutely essential to any serious work with dreams, saw dreams in an essentially egotistical way -- that is, they saw dreams as being all about the dreamer. This is most obvious in Freud's system, where dreams are thought to be essentially the outpouring of the personal unconscious, filled with material from our day to day lives. And although Jung adds the much larger realm of the collective unconscious to the dream world, the content of dreams is still almost always understood as relating to the life of the dreamer and nothing else. This is what I mean by an "egotistical" way of viewing dreams -- a view that is centered on the dreamer. You could also call it "egocentric" or even "person-centered."

Another assumption of Western dreamwork, is that the best way to work with our dreams is essentially a verbal, logical, rational approach. We are taught to interpret our dreams like a code or a puzzle, using an analytical approach to derive a meaning from the dream.

A third assumption in much of dreamwork is that the images in our dreams are static, perhaps even predictable entities. The scores of books outlining rigid systems of dream interpretation ("a dream about a train means..." etc.) epitomize this essentially pre-packaged approach to dream.

But dreams are not just a code we decipher or look up in a book in order to understand our daily lives, or something we analyze or interpret to fix ourselves. Our dreams are not even always about us. They are a living reality that reflects the dreaming of the entire world.

♦ A Radical New Approach

In the course of the past 30 years, I have developed a fundamentally new paradigm for working with dreams. This system, which I call DreamTending, is revolutionary because it moves beyond the person-centered view of dreamwork, into what I call the "psyche-centered" view. This seemingly simple move outward from the person, to embrace the consciousness of the entire world, gives birth to a completely radical way of understanding dreams, how they affect our life, and how they change our relationship with the all the creatures and even objects in our environment.

DreamTending considers dream images as “living images.” It makes the particularity and presence of these images available to the dreamer. The wisdom of ancestral callings, the instinctual knowledge of animal visitations, the musings of the soul are attended to from a psyche-centered, rather than person-centered, perspective. The “intelligence” of the dream is listened to from the inside out. To “tend” a dream is not just to interpret or analyze it. The figures and landscapes of dreams are experienced as alive and moving about with a certain degree of autonomy. In a very practical and accessible way, the craft of DreamTending offers the possibility of listening deeply to the voices of the dream images themselves as they come forward to offer their insights and perspectives. DreamTending appreciates that dreams carry an inner knowing, an innate sensibility, and an element of potency that affords each of us the capacity to open to the depths of our own experience. When we tend a dream, images come “awake,” imagination is animated, and we participate in life more fully rooted in the way of the dream. Furthermore, the DreamTending system orients around four essential ideas -- the compass points of DreamTending, as it were.

These principles are:

- ◆ The psyche is multi-dimensional
- ◆ Dreams are alive
- ◆ Everything is dreaming, and
- ◆ Dreams are now.

A brief look into each of these four ideas will give us a clear understanding of the DreamTending viewpoint.

◆ **The Multi-dimensional Psyche**

The notion of a multidimensional psyche in relation to dreams is not a new one.

DreamTending views the images of dreams as the symbolic and metaphoric language of a multidimensional psyche. In Western psychology, we understand the nature of the dreaming psyche as existing primarily in three “dimensions” of experience: 1) Awake Circumstances, or the Awake Consciousness; 2) Personal Development, or the Personal Unconscious; and 3) a trans-cultural sensibility, or the Collective Unconscious.

Reaching back to indigenous traditions, we can add a fourth dimension: an ecological consciousness, or the World Unconscious. The first dimension, Awake Consciousness, refers to everyday waking experience. Dream images are tended in relation to the experiences and circumstances of daily life.

At the second level, the Personal Unconscious, dream images are viewed as representing stored memories that present themselves when something current re-stimulates a historical association. Dream images are tended in relation to our personal past.

At the third level, the Collective Unconscious, dream images are tended in relation to their wider cultural implications. Rather than memories, the Collective Unconscious contains archetypal images that have core meanings relevant to all of humankind—regardless of culture, ethnic identity, or historical age. For example, “home” has a universal sensibility. Everywhere in the world, people have a sense of home, just as they share a collective sense of “journey” or “flight.” These trans-cultural themes often display themselves as archetypal images in dreams.

The fourth dimension, the World Unconscious, goes beyond human experience to appreciate that the psyche lives not only inside of the human, but that the human lives inside of the psyche. In DreamTending, all the phenomena of the world (humans, creatures, buildings) are experienced as having psychic interiority. Dream images are not representations of our personal natures only, but are also informed by the subjective inner natures of the things and creatures out there in the world. When viewed from the perspective of the World Unconscious, the image originates in and of the world.

♦ Dreams Are Alive

The second orienting idea of DreamTending is the notion that dreams are alive. This principle is the heartbeat of DreamTending. When we write dreams down in dream journals, they become static entities. Often, the dreamer brings these narratives to the therapist's office for interpretation or analysis. The actuality of the dream itself, of course, is not static. Images interact; images are alive; they are moving about in the dreamscape, coming into relationship with each other, changing one another. The images and figures of the dream come with body, breath, and pulse. They are living entities in the actuality of the dream time.

In the practice of DreamTending, we operate from the point of view that neither the dreamer nor the dream tender necessarily knows all that the dream means. The dream itself participates in the unfolding and understanding of its message. Experiencing dream images as alive, with body, allows the intelligence that is inherent to the living image to become known.

♦ Everything Dreams

The third orienting idea of DreamTending is the notion that everything is dreaming. People are dreaming, rocks are dreaming, mountains are dreaming. It is the idea that the world itself is always dreaming—that all things, phenomena and creatures have a subjective interiority and appear as images in dream. From this perspective we are inside the dream, as opposed to the dream being imagined as only inside of us. That's why it's peculiar to wake in the morning and say, "Last night I had a dream." Upon closer inspection, we see that the "I" we're talking about is often pictured in the dream. We have to wonder, "If I'm in that dream, who is actually having the dream?"

DreamTending is very interested in the question of "who is having the dream." That "who" may be part of our personal experience. It might be a reflection of the Collective Unconscious, drawn from the mythological themes that have been present throughout human history. And, at times, the "who" that visits in a dream may originate in the creatures and things of the world. DreamTending offers the skills and tools needed to hear the voices of the others who inhabit this planet and have influence on our lives. Ocean may be dreaming now, wolf dreaming, mountain appearing as image with voice. In an animated world, everything is dreaming.

♦ Dreams Are Now

The fourth orienting idea of DreamTending is the notion that dreams happen now. That is to say that dreams exist in the immediacy of our experience. Dream images are like a poem or a painting that ask us to hear or see differently. The images themselves are present as live figures, and they ask us to meet them in an open and receptive mode in the present time. Dreams happen now. When DreamTending, we move into the "real time" of the dream itself. Bringing a "witnessing presence" to dreams in the immediacy of our experience opens a deeper sense of Being. Images that are experienced in the immediacy of the dream are deeply felt and anchored in a sense of mindfulness, a sense of being immediately present in the here and now.

♦ Putting It All Together

Of course, these concepts must be put into practice before they can bear fruit. The most basic practices in DreamTending are very easy to do. Begin with the normal methods of dreamwork, such as writing down your dreams, interpreting them according to your personal life, and so on. Next, however, try to look at the images in your dream as something that has its own life; something that has its own dream and has come into your dream of its own accord, with its own purposes. Attempt to understand the image as a real being with real desires, and see if you can talk to it about its perspective. Remember that it may not be there to tell you anything about your life at all. The juice here is in the interaction, as DreamTending is basically a relational mode of working with dreams.

Poems from *Like A Woman Falling* by Stephanie Pope

One of the newest members of our Mythic Imagination Education Committee is Stephanie Pope. Pope has a Master's Degree in Mythological Studies with an emphasis in Depth Psychology from Pacifica Graduate Institute. She has given us permission to quote from her recently published first book of poems, *Like a Woman Falling*. Read more of Pope's work at www.mythopoetry.com. She also belongs to the artists' consortium at www.mythicartist.org.

Moon Pausing

You know I am a Lunar Lover
That silver sliver slips
A solar whisper rising
In the breath
I have been kissed by
Dreams you know
And, far below
A rolling thunder rides

You know how I compose
In tides
A life with Death
The coldest flame that
Cools the air that shapes
The burning thing
Falls from the sky you know
And far below
Faithful Coyote howls

From **Ghost Flowers**, Section IV.

IV.

Elusive, an unborn flower ghosts
the bark of a pond apple. Its sole stalk
broods over water a secret life; made from
one that persists both with and without
green appearances, and one perennial
beyond all absences, and one whose
secrecy winds round and round and round
a watersong rooted in chaos.

Stu Jenks is an artist whose works and installation were an integral part of the Mythic Journeys art exhibition, Ancient Spirit, Modern Voice, and whose photograph, Catalina State Park, Arizona, is the cover art for the Mythic Journeys brochure and program book. Jenks was recently named a second place winner in the Tucson Weekly's category, "Best Local Visual Artist." Here, Jenks shares several of his writings which also describe the context and the landscape in which he works.



Ghost Horses, Arizona (c) 2002

The moon is late. Well, that's a bit pretentious, I think to myself. How about this. You're early.

A glow like dawn is to the east. The full moon is just below the horizon. My tripod has been set for an hour. An image has been composed inside of the viewfinder of my Rollei. Focus is set on an unlit hula hoop sitting on top of a sandstone hoodoo on the edge of Coalmine Canyon. I know where the hoop will take off and where it will land. The rest is a mystery.

I've been here since a little after noon. Odd day, but most days at Coalmine have a slant to them. On the drive in on the steep, two track, I passed an old Navajo woman riding a mustang. Two small Rezi dogs, one white, one black, ran beside the horse and her. I give her a head nod and she nods back. Not that unusual to see sheep dogs and herders on the Rez. Just a bit eerie to see her and her dogs so far away from home. The nearest house is miles away.

Except for her, the horse and the dogs, I saw no one all afternoon. I walked along the edge of Coalmine. A mile to the north, a mile back to the south. Stopping, standing, sitting, standing, walking. Lot of memories of many times on this, the east side of Coalmine. But my introduction to Coalmine was 16 years ago on the west side.

I'm looking for a windmill. I've been here once before but that was months ago, and it was summer then. Today is a fully overcast October day and it looks like it rained recently. Mike warned me that I can get stuck in the soft sandy soil if I'm not careful. It was dry in June. Not today. My Nissan King Cab sucks in the mud. No weight in the back.

There it is. The windmill. I turn off the pavement, onto a dirt two-track. A huge puddle lies just ahead. Shit. But I see that others have gone around and up, off the road, to get by it. I can do that. I ease by, keeping up my speed. My heart is racing. I take the right fork that leads toward the windmill. Past a concrete cow tank. Then past the windmill. The two-track bares left and there just beyond a barbed wire fence is Coalmine Canyon.

It drops down from the flatness of the mesa I've been driving on since Tuba City and out to the north for miles and miles. The strata is like nothing I've ever seen, starting from the grass of the mesa top, with a cross section of gray, then dark black, to white, to red orange, to white, to red, to white, to red again. That black line is a vein of coal, Mike told me. The sheer walls drop a good 700 feet to the valley floor, with towering hoodoos and large red-orange and white fins of sandstone jutting out into the canyon like giant tail fins off a '59 Cadillac.

I get out of the truck and feel a strong damp wind hit my face. Man, it's colder than I thought. I put on my hooded jacket and get out my backpack. My poncho is near the top and I take it out just in case, securing it to the outside of my pack. I'm going in for the night. It's a little after one. I got about four hours to get to the Ghost.

The Ghost is a 500 foot high pillar of sandstone deep in the canyon. Mike said, that's a great place to go but it's about 5 miles in. He also said that on full moon night, they say that you can see ghosts

dancing along the walls of the canyon. Both Navajos and Hopis don't come here for they believe it is haunted. When I was here in June, I just stood here. I didn't hike in.

To get down into the canyon, Mike said, look for the talus slope of coal just near the picnic tables. I sort of remember that from before. Two concrete picnic tables in the middle of nowhere. I look a little west and there they are, just a few hundred feet on the other side of the fence. And there's the black coal slope. I open the top part of the cattle gate in the fence and walk to the other side and beyond to the southern edge of the canyon. That slope is steep. 45 degrees. Easy to get down, a pain to get back up, I think. But just at the bottom of the talus slope I can see the beginning of a trail that winds its way down and in and to the north. That's the place.

I go back to the truck, grab my pack and place it in the truck bed. I check the water bottles. Good. Full and tight. I shoulder the pack and adjust the straps. Good. I place it back in the bed and lock up the truck. Mike says that all I have to worry about are the drunk kids from Tuba who like to come out here to drink and the occasional pack of wild feral dogs. The wild dogs are very dangerous, Mike said. Best to bring along a pistol just in case. (I borrowed a .357 from a friend before leaving Tucson. It's in my pack.) He says I don't need to shoot the dogs, just let go a round or two and they'll run off. I don't see any dogs now. Hope I don't see any at all.

I say a prayer over the locked Nissan, to protect it from harm, and I shoulder my pack and head for the talus slope. I get to it and look down. This is going to just be a long slide, I think. God, I hope I can get back out of the canyon. I step over and slip down the slope, like snow skiing except it's in coal. I reach the bottom, a little coal dusty but in good shape. And there's the trail.

I begin to hike north. Past red and white canyon walls, first close in, then spreading out. Past hoodoos like sentinels along the walls. Past small volcanic marbles, black and rough, like they were blown out of the cone yesterday. Past crystals, brittle and barely formed. Past huge slabs of sandstone that have fallen from up above on the canyon rim and slid down near the valley floor. Past beautiful deposits of red and white sand. On and on. Down and down until after an hour, I'm on the relatively flat canyon floor. Not as flat as the mesa top but much easier than walking on the edges of soft sandstone fins. The grasses are in clumps and the ground is wet and muddy, but its sand mud. Still sticks to the soles of my boots, giving me an inch of height after a while, but easier to scrape off than clay mud. I move down the canyon, the walls now a half mile apart. I can't see the Ghost, but I've been told its there, further south. I just keep walking in the mud. Not thinking much. Just moving.

Another 1/2 hour goes by (I guess) and I see The Ghost. Christ, it's huge. I see a trail, leave the valley floor and wind up the silt and sand to a smaller version of The Ghost, maybe 30 feet tall on the south of a fin ridge, and The Ghost, towering at the north end. I hike up the trail to the small Ghost and drop my pack on some level ground, between the two hoodoos. I'm tired. I scrape some of the mud off my boots, sit on a rock and light up a smoke. I'm on a small island ridge, canyon walls close and some far away, open yet feeling sheltered. And the Ghost, its 500 feet of sandstone is to the north. We'll camp here.

I set up the tent and arrange the Svea cook stove, the water, the freeze dried food. I load the .357 and place it in the tent. I drink some water and eat some gorp. Sun's going down. Getting a bit colder. I light the stove to boil some water and make some freeze dried stroganoff and instant coffee. I make dinner, make some coffee, and eat and drink like a starving man. Noodles still a bit undercooked but I don't care. All food on the trail tastes like ambrosia. I finish dinner, wipe out the plates with a wet paper towel, stow the trash and the food, but keep the water on a low boil for some more coffee. Instant coffee is like fine wine here. I have a third cup.

Right at sundown I go to the ridge line between the two Ghosts, just above my campsite and meditate. Meditating for me is simply, closing my eyes, breathing, and feeling what I feel and seeing

what I see. That simple. I close my eyes and breathe deep. Breathe again. Losing the light. Not dark but getting there. Breathe some more. After a minute or so, the oddest thing happened.

It was like I could feel the powers of good and bad energy around me. Like there were other ghosts here beside the sandstone ones. Eyes closed, I would swear it's like the echoes of a fight to the death by two men, just to my right. One trying to kill the other, The other succumbing and dying. I have never felt that before (or since). I open my eyes almost expecting to see an Indian and an Anglo fighting on the ridge I'm sitting on. Nothing. I close my eyes again, and I feel the energy once more. I should be afraid but I'm not. I breathe into it and I begin to cry. Not sure why. Don't need to know why. I just cry. The energy of Good and Evil begins to fade away, but my tears increase.

It has been a hard year or so. I pushed my wife away with my drinking and drug use and my abstinence didn't bring her back. The world is new and exciting, but more confusing. I have no hold. I pray to God for help and receive it, but have no true clarity, even though I try and fake it around my friends. I'm doing meaningful work, but hardly any of the patients get well. I feel surrounded by new friends and colleagues, but frankly I have never felt so alone. I know that the divorce from Denise was the right thing for both of us, but I still miss her. I wonder from time to time if I'm lovable at all. So much guilt and shame from so many years of avoiding doing the right thing, avoiding the quiet still voice within, avoiding just about everything. Who am I really without the dope pipe in one hand and the scotch glass in the other? I feel like a fraud half the time now. Luckily a quarter of the time, I feel like I'm sitting in the lap of God. The last quarter of time I don't have a clue. But I've recently learned that the three words 'I don't know' have a lot of healing power in them.

I cry some more. I finish my coffee. I light another smoke. I feel a little better.

More clouds are coming in. A soft overcast is spreading. No Moon. It might rain tonight.

The Full Moon pops over the treeless horizon like the headlight of a one eyed car, cresting a hill. The sky is completely cloudless. My Pathfinder sits on a hill just a couple hundred feet to the east. Maybe a little more. I look toward the Ghost to the northwest, a good five miles away and think of the old days, of my first visits. My emotional nakedness in the late 80's. The hope for a better Stu. I chuckle to myself. I don't know if I'm any better. I am a bit clearer I guess and I tend to lie less to myself, tend to treat people a little better, tend to be a bit less of a son of a bitch I hope. [I can still cut people off at the knees with just a couple of words.] I'm not hip to get married again, but I still need the touch of a loving tender woman. I think I have a good woman waiting for me at home right now. She knows to send out the hounds if she doesn't hear from me in a few days. She knows where I am. I have my doubts about us, due to my, our scars, but she does have a sweet mojo. And I need the mojo.

The far western side of Coalmine is now lit by the headlight Full Moon. Lots of definition. Lots of lights. I don't need to light my flashlight as I walk back up to the truck to have a smoke. Soon. Start the hoop dance soon but not quite yet. A bit more Moon.

The next morning I wake up and it has rained. Not hard but hard enough to make everything wet. I try and light the Svea but with no luck. I pour a little white gas right on the stove and toss a lit match toward it. Whoosh. That gets the stove lit. I start some water boiling. I roll up my sleeping bag, pack up some of my things and strike the tent while the water heats up. Finally, I make coffee and oatmeal and go back to the ridge where I felt Good and Evil yesterday. I sit on the same rock. Don't feel it now. Just a calm over everything. Heavy overcast. No sun. No wind. The smell of wet Sage is all around. My boots are muddy but warm. I inhale the oatmeal. I drink the coffee a little slower. Time to hike out of Coalmine, I think. I'm tired but good. No tears this morning.

Off to the south, on the valley floor in the direction of the trail head, I can see some cows. They must have come in last night. Hmm. Cows. No dogs.

Time to shoot. Moon's been up for an hour, hour and a half. High contrast on the mesa edge. Lots of details.

Lots of light. I take a deep breath, say a quiet prayer for God to guide my hands and feet and gingerly I walk to the hula hoop that is lying on the edge of the canyon. Careful, Stu. It's a long way down and you are close. I get to the hoop, and swing the four switches that light the battery powered lights, to their 'on' position. Even in the full moonlight, these 100 Christmas lights are bright. I do a couple of trial runs, lifting the hoop, dancing a bit, place the hoop back on the ground. Up, dance, rest. Good. I put the lit hoop in the first position, and head back to the camera, careful not to fall over the edge. I open the shutter, and let the hoop burn for a minute. I then walk to the hoop, raise it and slow dance with it and place it back on the ground. I walk out of the frame and back to be near my Rollei, keeping the shutter. After a minute, I go and switch the hoop lights off. I hope this arch of light I'm trying to make works. I sure hope it works.

Time to go. Boy, I'm tired and it's barely past dawn. Burned a mess of kilocalories yesterday. I shoulder my backpack and head toward the smaller Ghost and the trail down to the valley floor and eventually out of Coalmine. I slide down the track some. My footing isn't good. Mud is caking up rapidly on my boots. I stop often to scrape off the mud, but it takes a lot of energy. Screw it. Just walk with it. After a while my boots reach a saturation point of an inch and a half of mud and stop there. Problem is I have little traction. Oh well. Just the way it's going to be, I guess.

When I reach the valley floor, I look north toward the trailhead. It's a hell of a long way away. Miles. Don't think about it. Just walk, I think. I crest a gentle low rise and off to the west are about 20 head of cattle. They all raise their heads, almost in unison and look at me. I stop and look at them. They continue to look at me, motionless, like cow statues. Huh. We stare at each other for a minute and then I continue my trudge. After about 15 minutes I look back over to the area of the cows and they still haven't moved. Still staring at me. Only thing that's moved are their heads, following me. I walk and keep my eye on them, from time to time. Finally after I guess 20 minutes they go back to eating. Faces in the grass. I'm probably the only white guy they've ever seen, I think. Hell, I'm probably the only walking man they've ever seen, period. Every other man or woman they have seen has been on a horse. I smile to myself.

Each exposure of each dance is about 20 to 30 minutes. I don't want a thin negative 8 hours from home. I've done about two exposures, two dances. With the shutter open after the third arching hoop dance, I leave the canyon side and walk up to my Pathfinder to have a smoke. I have my flashlight with me but I'm not using it.

Suddenly in the darkness ahead, I see something move low on the ground. My heart races as I turn on the flash. It's two dogs between me and my truck. Fuck. Rezi Dogs. I begin to run, flanking the dogs to the left, but still heading toward the general direction of my truck. A low involuntary sound comes out of me. A low steady drone. I begin to run faster, trying at the same time to keep my flashlight on the dogs. Where are the dogs? Where are they? Just as I'm getting closer to the truck, my light hits the dogs and I slow down. They are the same two dogs I saw earlier in the day, playfully walking along side the old woman on her horse. All I can see now is one white dog, one black dog, running hell bent for leather away from me. These aren't the feral dogs of the Rez of yesteryear. These are bright eyed sheep dogs. I just scared the shit out of them. This is their very large front yard, after all. They were probably just out and about for an evening run, when suddenly a man is running toward them, making a low humming sound. Poor things. I enter my truck and light a Camel Filter. After I finish my smoke though, I do cautiously leave my truck. My adrenal glands have emptied, flooding my blood stream. Even though I know danger is not about, my body doesn't know that yet. That'll take a little while.

The canyon narrows and I see the trail leading out, up ahead. I've been hiking through mud and grass and more mud for a few hours now. I'm running out of water. If I thought I was tired when I

left the Ghosts, I'm dead tired now. I begin the slow ascent out. I'm really feeling the forty pounds on my back. I gaze forward. It's still at least a mile up before I get to the mesa top. One foot, another foot, left, right, left. I'm rising up the strata slowly.

Just off the trail I see a vein of pure white sand. I promised Mike to get some of this sand if I could. He sand paints in his work. I shed the pack and it clumps to the ground. In a top flap, I pull out a good sized plastic zip lock bag. I scoop up handfuls of the wet white sand. I fill the bag and begin closing it when I hear this voice, within me.

"If you take this sand, you will not make it out."

Pardon me?

"If you take this sand, you will not make it out." the small but insistent voice repeats.

I freeze. I won't make it out? Why? Is it bad luck? Will it be too much weight? What?

"If you take this sand, you will not make it out."

I stop asking questions. I dump out the sand. I fold up the bag and stow it in my pack. I take a drink of water. Maybe a half quart of water left. That scares me a little, but I'm too tired to get too scared. I shoulder my pack, lean forward and walk, not looking up. Just looking down at the trail and taking it, one step then another.

I'm done. Pretty much. I think I have the shot I hope for, on the first Delta 400 roll, but I take a few more hoop dance shots from other angles just for fun. One, far away. Another, close up. But I'm still looking over my shoulder now and then, wondering if the dogs will return. They're friendly, right? I hope.

Time to go but one last thing. I leave the Christmas-lit hula hoop on top of a hoodoo near the edge of Coalmine. I walk down the canyon rim a ways. The moon is high. Bright as day. No flashlight needed, plus I know this part of the rim pretty well. After a hundred yards, I turn around and see the glowing hoop on the hoodoo. Too far away for a photograph, but wondrous none the same. Some images just have to be experienced I guess. Tom, the drummer in Wobbly Gumbo, my art rock band in college, used to say 'The best stuff never gets on tape'. I'm OK with that, with this long distance hoop image. I don't think I'll be so OK with it, if the close up image that I've been working on for 4 hours ends up being trash.

I'm hurting. I'm in shape but I'm hurting. Left, right, step, step, step. I'm getting close to the talus slope. I think. I'm not sure. I'm not thinking too good right now.

The canyon is closing in. All of Coalmine becomes a collection of side canyons, but if I'm still on the trail, I'm still good, I think. Step, Step, Step.

Then the trail stops and nothing looks familiar. I look up. Where am I? A brief bit of panic hits me. I'm close. I have to be close.

"Turn around and walk back."

Really?

"Turn around and walk back."

I don't argue nor question the little voice. I turn around. After only thirty feet or so, I see the black coal talus slope above to my left and a faint trail leading to it. Thank God.

I climb the trail and now I'm at the base of the slope. The backpack feels like it's a hundred pounds. I start to climb on two legs but it's not working. I lean into the slope and climb with my legs and my hands. As I step up I slide down to where I started. Damn it. I start again with a faster turnover of my limbs. I'm climbing and sliding at the same time, but I'm going up inches at a time. I push and push and push some more.

"God, get me up this. Please"

"You'll make it out. You'll make it out."

Pushing. Sliding. Faster. Scrambling like a crab up the slope. Digging my fingers deep into the coal. Pushing. I don't know. I stop. I don't slide. Still have another forty feet or so to go. I don't know. I don't know.

"You'll make it out."

The voice sounds old, like a man. It doesn't sound like a voice inside. It sounds like a voice next to me.

"You'll make it out."

The last push. Sliding. Pushing. I look up. The rim is close. Push. Push. And now my hands are not grabbing coal. There is no more coal. I step up and I'm on the rim. I'm here. I made it out. "YES. YES." I pump both fists in the air.

I look over and there is my yellow Nissan King Cab truck. Intact. Waiting for me. Sodas are in the cooler.

I pack up the Pathfinder and get ready to leave. No dogs. Hope they are OK. It's past midnight.

I turn on the lights and ease onto the two track leading out. Slow and easy. No Hurry. I turn on Neil Finn's new CD that has been in the player for the drive up. His New Zealand twang about Love and God and Death is good right now. Slowly I go, in four wheel drive. No worries.

The headlights then hit something other than grass and sand. It's the mustang from earlier today, and the two dogs. The hackamore is hanging loosely from his head. No old woman. As I approach in my Pathfinder, the dogs, wagging their tails, scamper off. The horse just slowly steps off the two track. I ease on by the horse and then stop and pull up the emergency brake. I get out and stand by the truck. The horse stops. The black and white dogs sheepishly come back. The four of us just look at each other. Where is the woman? Is she hurt or did the mustang just get loose and wander away and the dogs followed him? I look around this vast mesa top and realize that even in the Full Moon light, if she was hurt, I'll never find the old woman. I turn off the engine and listen. Horse and dogs stay put. No sound except the sound of my own blood pumping by my ears. Nothing to be done, really. I hope she's at home by the fire.

Before I get into the truck, I turn to the dogs and the mustang and say aloud "Take care of each other, now. I hope Grandma's OK? Take care of each other."

The two dogs fidget around the horse's legs. The mustang just looks at me and I at him.

Take care, old boy, I think.

I get back in the truck and slowly drive away, knowing that I'll never know if anything happened to the old woman from this afternoon.

I press play, on the tape boombox sitting on my passenger seat, as soon as I hit the blacktop. Kevin Braheny's "The Way Home" begins to play. I'm sipping on a lukewarm Tab soda. It tastes so good. No traffic on the road as I drive to the west toward Tuba City. My wet boots are changing colors as they warm up from the car heater at my feet. My thoughts are on the Cameron Trading Post and its bathroom with hot and cold running water. I long to splash water on my face and then have a bowl of chili at their restaurant.

The ambient music from my tape player swells. My eyes mist up. I'm not sure but I think I'm experiencing Joy.

"Are there any petroglyphs in the area, with spiral forms on them, that I can hike to?" I say.
"Sure," the park ranger says, "Over there, there is a rock with a bunch of petroglyphs on it."

He points out to the west into a vast valley of the Painted Desert. "Over there" doesn't really seem quite specific enough.

"How far over there?" I said.

"Oh, not too far, really. You just go down the trail that starts over there."

There's that "Over There" again. But he seems to be pointing a lot closer this time.

"...and hike down to the valley floor and head toward those hills over there and it's a large boulder at the base of one of those hills."

"Is there a trail that goes there?" I ask.

"No, but it's easy. Just head toward those hills once you get to the desert floor."

"Those Hills" look to be about three to five miles away. It's around 8:00 a.m in October. Cold but it'll warm up. Clean blue sky.

"So I can just bushwhack over there? No problem with that?"

The ranger smiles. He's in his early 30's, trim, with a beard, wearing the standard Government Issue cotton polyester uniform of the U.S Park Service. No hat.

"No, it's no problem. Have a good time." His smile is genuine it seems.

"Thanks. I appreciate it. Spirals, right?"

"Yep. Them and a lot of other symbols on that rock."

Cool, I think.

"Well, I think I'll hike out there with my camera and see. Thanks again."

"You bet." He's still smiling. Seems like a nice guy.

I go to the truck and load up. Not too much. Tripod, Rollei, water. And I head off to the trailhead. Well worn and well maintained. You got to give it to the Park Service, to keep things ship shape. The walk down is easy. Still just above freezing but warming up. The sun is bright and good. I look off toward the boulder the ranger talked about. I think I see the hills he was pointing to. Has to be them. No other hills in the direction of "Over There." The air is crisp and easy on the lungs. No winds. No people. Just the trail and me.

I get to the level valley floor and begin navigating around the base of a few small hills that rim this flat expanse of the Painted Desert. The red, white, yellow and blue strata of the hills are beginning to become more noticeable as the sun rises. Easy to see how this area got its name. To the west, I think I see the hills the ranger mentioned. Maybe just a couple of miles. It's warming up. I take off my winter jacket and sling it through my camera case strap.

After an hour of walking, I can see a large boulder toward the north end of the "Over There" hill. As I approach, I can't see anything of note, but then I begin to see things. Yes. There. Petroglyphs of many types and sizes: spirals, circles, zig zags, lizard shapes, hand prints, human stick figures, all carved into this boulder. There is much speculation of what these prehistoric carvings signify. Some speculate that they are messages back and forth between people, like a bulletin board. Others think they are designation of boundary lines. Ancient gang taggings. Perhaps though, they were made

because the Ancient Indians of these parts, just want to. M. Scott Peck, in his book on his travels to Scotland and his exploration of the stone megaliths there, came up with a revolutionary proposition on why Pre-Celtic people made Stonehenge, and Avebury and The Standing Stones of Callanish. It wasn't to do primitive astronomy or to make places of worship. Maybe, he speculates, they dragged the stones and built the cairns in the pursuit of Making Art.

Perhaps these Ancients here too, carved the petroglyphs for similar creative reasons. They found a good rock, easy to find, easy to carve, and had at it. I saw a big rattler recently, he thinks. I think I'll put it on the rock. I love the sun, she thinks. I think I'll carve it on the rock. I realize that I am here, he says. Maybe a hand on the rock will let others know. I see God all around me, she says. A circle seems to say God best.

Red filter. Long exposure. F22. Maximum depth of field. I pop a few exposures, then I leave the camera on the tripod and climb another nearby boulder and have some water. I look over at the rock covered in symbols and marvel at its diversity of images.

Whether they were messages or tags or memoirs on a rock or Fine Art of the Ancients, they are bits of wonder to me today. And wonder is what I search for in Art, in God.

Stu Jenks

www.stujenks.com

PO Box 161, Tucson, AZ 85702

Thanks for the Memories by Dr. Ric Chambers

I had to write to tell you about my experiences during and after the conference. It was without a doubt, the best and most professionally produced conference I have ever attended. I can't imagine how much work it took to make everything so nice for your guests. I couldn't believe it was the first conference you have done.

I thought I would check out the poetry the first night but I was really just looking forward to the more "meaty" workshops the next day. I had never heard poetry like that and never with music in the background. From the first poem about war, tears came to my eyes. (My son has turned 19 and 20 in Baghdad and has been there since April of last year). In fact, whenever the lights were out or I was alone, I had tears in my eyes and a knot in my throat. Since I have not cried since the fourth or fifth grade, I could not understand this and thought, "I must be weeping for the world or this must be what it is like to weep," but it just did not fit the feeling.

It was the next Tuesday before the meaning of the feelings became clear. The feeling I had the entire weekend is what baseball players feel when they hear *the Star Spangled Banner* before the World Series, it was what the soldier felt in *Braveheart* as the drums play and he rides back and forth yelling "freedom," it was what the lover feels when he sees the beloved. The heart burns, the eye tears, the throat tightens, but the jaw clinches, the backbone stiffens and your blood gets up. Long hours of discipline and preparation, strength and character combine with inspiration to produce **resolve** and **commitment**. You can see it in the jaw and eyes. The ballplayers and soldiers have a moment of resolve and commitment before the contest, battle, or trials. This is a moment to realize what is at stake, to let lesser concerns fall away, and to **dedicate** themselves to doing their part. You can feel it in your chest and in the knot in the throat as the lover cannot speak but falls to a knee in pledge to withstand all temptations and circumstances in faithfulness to the beloved. It is the moment when the hero hears the call, enters the field and moves toward his destiny. There is no turning back, the decision is made, the hero is transformed and revealed. No longer the fool or the child, he knows who he is, why he is here, and what is worth questing for. This moment cannot be manufactured, willed, or faked.

Thank you for making possible not just a moment like this but an entire weekend. Your conference was the singing of the anthem. The quest is set: To find the Elixir to save the wasteland and bring the sleeping people back to life. The anthem has been sung, the stakes couldn't be higher, the contest is about to begin. Let's get started!

This is the first part of an email message sent to Michael Karlin following the conference, and reprinted here with Dr. Chambers' permission. Chambers continues and offers his assistance to the Mythic Imagination Institute. He quotes from Carl Jung's Collected Works about the "blight of ideologies" and discusses Mythic Journeys as a "large scale container for people who have moved into a consciousness where ideologies are no longer dangerous." He discusses the importance of the work of Mythic Journeys as similar to that of the UN, and continues, "What you have done bypasses political processes, and goes straight for the transformation of consciousness...Again, thank you very much for a life changing experience." Dr. Chambers is involved with A Better Way Soul Work, the Joyful Being Community, and Wisdom Café. Further information can be found at www.joyfulbeing.org.

Waiting for a Train

by Louis S. Hlad

I'm not a writer. I'm an engineer. Actually, I'm an ex-engineer. I guess I wasn't even very good at that. But writer or not, engineer or not, it's important to tell our stories. And this story I just have to tell.

"What book are you reading?"

That question was the start of it all. Well, maybe it started earlier...it's so difficult to tell when true stories begin and end. Maybe it started last night at the conference, when I was moved to tears – lots of tears- by the music and lyrics of Janis Ian. Or maybe it was the hours - long conversation I had afterwards with a pagan about the tenets of Christianity. I suppose a good place to start would be the moment that I looked down at my watch and realized that I had a train to catch. Yes, let me begin there. That sounds like an appropriate line to open up a story.

I had a train to catch. Being a native and current Atlantan, I haven't had the necessity (or the luxury) of staying at the hotel with the other guests this weekend. Instead I have had to cut my late night reveries short so that I could travel to my home in Dunwoody, just a twenty minute train ride away. While it's always comforting to sleep in my own bed, I do miss the ability to keep pace with the night owls, to forget about time and engage in those real after-midnight-meaning-of-life-and-baseball conversations. But the midnight train to Georgia always leaves promptly at twelve, and I had to catch it.

Entering the station just in the nick of time, as the security guard had already closed the electronic gate to a twelve inch gap and I had to squeeze through to gain entry, I thought how fortunate I was that I had successfully fought the temptation to allow our engrossing conversation to last just one more minute. I rode the escalator down to the northbound line to await the final train of the night.

There were only a few other expectant passengers at the station this late: a baseball capped teenager talking on his cell phone, a dazed looking old man with a plastic bag full of bananas, and three drop-dead gorgeous young women who were obviously returning home after a concert or party downtown. As if I hadn't been paying attention to Betty Sue Flowers' workshop on weaving empowering myths of our future, I immediately decided to avoid the subway divas to save myself from the embarrassment of being ignored, disdained, or unnoticed by them. I sat with the banana man. I opened up my copy of "Once and Future Myths" so that I might have something new and possibly insightful to say to Phil Cousineau the next day and proceeded, as I always do, to get lost in the power of the myths.

"What book are you reading?"

I looked up to find a 5'8", long - haired, long - legged blonde standing over me, with her two equally striking friends in tow. So much for predicting my near future. "It's a uhhh...a book about myth," I managed to get out. "Oh," she replied. Then awkward silence.

Since she didn't walk away, I felt compelled to say something else. "I'm attending a conference on myth this weekend." She looked down and shuffled her feet, obviously on the verge of getting bored with me. "Myth?" she repeated after an unconcerned sigh. "What's that?"

Given the opening to talk about a topic so dear to me, I did my best to explain the concept, uses, variety, spirit, language, and transformative power of myth in one sentence or less. I took another half – sentence to describe the conference structure and activities, mentioning the workshops, concerts, marketplace, art exhibits, drum circles, and tribal stories in a hurried rush of breath, and in a last ditch effort to not sound boring. The glint in her eye told me that something had resonated

with her. She slowly sat down on the bench that supported me, a now - sleeping old man, and his stash of bananas. Her friends wandered away, barely noticing that a conversation had begun or that I even existed. Looking back, two out of three isn't such a bad prediction after all.

"You're not **even** serious," my new friend accused me with a doubting but insatiably curious look directed at me. Not knowing what I had said to merit this attention (and the whole time desperately trying to figure it out so I could write it down later), I started to unravel the whole story for her. She listened more and more attentively as I related to her the tale of the modern mythic movement, the origins of Mythic Journeys, and the fraternity bond of art, music, and storytelling. Her eyes got wide. "I'm an artist," she blurted out excitedly, "And I write music!" The connection had been made and, no matter where it began, this new story about waiting for a train was up and running.

As she and I sat there, I discovered that she is a painter and a pianist and a student at Auburn University. She had driven up to Atlanta for a Parliament concert and, if this kind of synchronicity can be believed, she admitted to listening to "The Odyssey" during her entire two hour trip. "I listen to it all the time," she confessed. "My friends have been ragging on me all night about it."

As we sat and talked and waited for the alleged last train, her jaw kept dropping at every new revelation. Although she wasn't familiar with the terminology, she was a student of the great stories, a lover of myth. I imagine she was experiencing the same feeling that I did when I first realized that there are other people out there in the universe who actually talk about this kind of stuff. She was hooked. Even so many years after his death, Joseph Campbell claimed another soul. Hesitating for just a moment, and lowering her voice considerably, she ventured a question. "Are there ummm, any *Christians* that attend this conference?" I laughed under my breath. I had spent the entire day in enthralling conversations about my Christian values, upbringing, and beliefs with what seemed to be a "sampler pack" of world religion disciples. "Yeah, sweetheart," I assured her, "It takes all kinds."

We spent the next ten minutes in side - splitting laughter as I recalled anecdotes from the Big Conversation between Dr. Huston Smith and Dr. James Hillman speaking on religion and myth. She nearly fell over when I quoted in my best Huston Smith voice, "Religion is a cow. It kicks, but it gives milk." As the train rolled up to the sound of our laughter, she looked as if the train she had been waiting for her whole life had finally come in.

Her stop seemed to come too quickly for both of us. Along the ride she had acquired from me a copy of Parabola magazine and the website address of fellow pianist Michaela Foster Marsh, written conveniently on the back of one of my business cards that listed my phone number and email address. I will have to thank Michaela for that one. As she was leaving the train with a newfound excitement for the myth of her life, she said, "I don't know how to thank you." As she and her friends walked away, I thought:

Don't thank me. Thank Joseph Campbell. Thank Bob Walter. Thank Michael Karlin.

Heck, thank me.

J. Darrel Sprayberry attended the Mythic Journeys Conference, and he is also a friend of Mythic Journeys' Coordinator Brenda Sutton. She describes Sprayberry as a Southern gentleman whom she fondly considers, "an urban hermit." Following is Sprayberry's detailed account of his experiences at the Mythic Journeys Conference, as well as much, much more! Read and enjoy!

The Mythic Journeys Conference, June 2004

We're all kinspeople here. With you I can be honest. You know where I come from, you'll know if I tell a lie, and you won't let me get away with it.

Okay, I should have known better in 1984.

I have to admit it was on a day ominously like the one before, twenty years ago, when I clearly heard the long-expected, magical, door-opening words, the ones we all wait for, the ones that *could have* changed everything. I still remember the syllables precisely, so for not stepping over the threshold, for missing the chance unforgivably and for what happened after, I have to blame myself and nobody else.

I was much younger then and still in school but that's no excuse, damn it. I should have been ready. I should have expected something gripping and life changing to throttle me that day because *that's what happens* to people on insidiously off-guard days. Only in ordinary moments does lightning strike and precipitate super powers, only on up-market suburban streets does a sphinx appear asking ridiculous questions that can't, like the phone bill, be postponed or ignored. Only ever on repetitious Tuesdays when one is sitting on the edge of a bed with a coffee cup steaming on the night-table nearby does the falling-apart of a Gordian knot in a shoelace unfetter Enlightenment itself, blindingly, unexpectedly, damned inconveniently on the day of the Benson-acquisition proposal, resulting in a levitating, career-killing, seven hour meditation on God's true intention of the archetype, *shoelace*. Ghosts with their warnings of danger don't really observe anniversaries, no matter what the romantics say. They waft in when they want to, some time after supper, maybe in August, maybe later on, not sure, don't wait up, we'll call you.

When it's time, we'll call you.

So if you people who resonate toward and rightly believe in myth know what's good for you, especially you younger ones, you'll have changes of clothes and a travel toothbrush stuffed in a good-quality bag you carry everywhere, sheddings of skin, a mystical name, some foreign language tapes, maybe a ritual implement or two like a skein of thread or a golden helmet or a few magic beans. You should long since have fire-drilled yourselves into readiness for the 7:44 a.m. primordial *reveille* to rare back and change completely. That is, if you know what's good for you.

Here's one definition of regret:

In a university classroom in Atlanta on an ordinary morning of 1984, a tweedy, dignified, independently wealthy, Oxford-educated, southern-aristocratically-accented, perfectly postured and casually elegant authority on the history of the English language in general, the canon of Geoffrey Chaucer in particular, said to a half-listening class of forty-five or so unprepared nobodies the words, "Some of you should consider going into *mythology*: the field is wide open."

Gong.

You know what I mean. There are times when the words spoken by the powerful and wise cause the striking of a large bronze object against the inside of your head. You taste metal on the back of your

tongue. A tremor grips your feet so violently that your classmates assume you're suffering a *petit mal* and look away discreetly, to avoid involvement so close to lunchtime. Your ears pulse. Your eyes unfocus. You don't remember anything else that happens for a while. At some point you absently eat something cold and waxy from the upright cooler in the Student Center Grille, inadvisable and unlikely on days of full consciousness.

It was the clarion voice of the Almighty of Many Names that charged me that day with the deliverance unto my future, the declaration of my destiny, God's grace, loaves and fishes, winged sandals, my very own door key, lotus, and golden goose. Whom does the Grail serve? For one day in 1984 the correct answer was *Me*.

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood, and I, I blew it.

Of course it was Raymond Carter Sutherland the younger, PhD., speaking that morning: Episcopal priest and World War II veteran, from a family so established that their original New World land grant -- that portion of the colony of Virginia between the Mattaponi and the Pamunkey Rivers -- had been the gift of Queen Ann to a son of the *Duke of Sutherland*. Displayed in the descendant Dr. Sutherland's office was a portrait in oils of the generous Queen Ann. In addition to royal likenesses, he collected what could be called *tastefully expensive objets d'art*, porcelain *japonaise*, Waterford crystal; he shared his well-appointed Atkins Park home with a mannerly English sheepdog named Heather; and among other scholarly duties he advised brilliant graduate students concerning their master's theses and doctoral dissertations.

On that ordinary morning twenty years ago the discourse was of Chaucer's yeoman in *The Canterbury Tales*. To a point Dr. Sutherland's manner was customarily measured, but touching on the significance of the yeoman's horn and the color of his livery ("*Greeeeen*," he said with much drama, "*the no-no color of the middle ages...*"), a different light glowed in his eyes. His subject matter took a turn into the dark woods, and for the next forty-five minutes or so, almost entranced, he spoke about *other beings* at large in the world, appearing, disappearing, pointing the way to pilgrims, darting in the shape of a white hart, crying for changelings in the night.

I don't know whether my classmates fell under the spell or not. I had my own hackles to deal with. The edges of the room were blurring. Something was about to be spoken. Something deliciously arcane in the voice of our Episcopalian storyteller had me by the ear with otherworldly fingers.

Then he said those words, "...The field is wide open." *Gong*.

That was the day that could have changed everything. I could have chosen to pursue the scholarship and the publishing, to wrap myself professionally in the fabric of myth and art and literature and to walk around in it. I knew it was for me. I still had time to meet Joseph Campbell if I pulled my socks up and got busy. The door I'd been hammering on with books my whole life fell off its hinges right in front of me.

I didn't step through.

At that age I had California in my sights, at least my idea of California, and not graduate school. It was all arranged. Life in Napa would be lush and various and mysteriously affordable somehow, a stylish, organic quality of life. I was a grown man now, time to put away scholarship and art and to go after what was really important, things like shiitake mushrooms and aerobic running and EST and pricey sunglasses. Time to get out there where they make television.

I passed by the beckoning door, and that has made all the lamentable difference.

Neither did I ever make it to California. What have I been *doing* with my time?

Friday Night: Nice and *Rumi*

I got to the Hyatt just after six, later than I planned.

I'm always a little suspicious when I'm in *terra incognita* like the Hyatt Peachtree. Some people live for spontaneity, but I'm of an age now that I weigh the impulses of new locales and new experiences against the trouble it takes to get there. I should force myself, but I've gotten timid and I'm much safer passing my days in places I've been to before. People recognize me in those places. I'm a big tipper, for one thing, and they remember that about me.

The lobby of the Hyatt on Peachtree Street has sweeping lines and glittering glass and draping banners that draw the vision up toward dizziness and an undiscoverable altitude. It's lyrical and geometrical and impressive even to me, a callused, sometime business traveler for whom the luxury of hotels is standard procedure and entirely deserved on my part.

Registration for the conference was down a level, and once I picked up my name badge and little Mythic Journeys knapsack full of goodies (programs, catalogue, complimentary *Parabola* magazine, various interesting fliers) there was nothing much else to do down there. I was a stranger and had no idea where the evening's presentation would be, so I decided to go up to the lobby again and look through the literature. Maybe I would spot a celebrity.

I did. At the top of the narrow escalator stood my friend Brenda Sutton in a Mythic Journeys t-shirt, wearing a radio headset in one ear and holding a cell phone to the other. It was her husband Bill on the line so I had a chance to say hello to him while giving Brenda a smack on the cheek. She looked tired but it was the stoic, very presentable kind of upright-tired you might respect in a chief justice or Beverly Sills or Toni Morrison.

The conference had really been going on since Tuesday for the lucky people who signed on for the full transformative week. I can't imagine the kind of administration required to bring off a function like this one. Brenda and the others on the Mythic Imagination Institute staff must have worked miracles over long nights to coordinate the travel, scheduling, amenities, public relations and other supports and resources for a gathering of such size and speakers of such renown. Now that the planning was done and the Thing Itself manifested, they were in a *dream-time* of sleeping little or not at all for a solid seven days. As I have come to learn, Brenda *will* be present in as many places at once as she can manage, and not only as an observer. She's a much-admired and skilled performer and a perennial student herself. This particular event aside, and in addition to numberless duties as mother and grandmother and mentor and teacher and writer, she belongs to various societies and committees and a three-multi-tasking-woman band called *Three Weird Sisters*, who play both traditional and delightfully original folk music with guitar/bodhrán, harp, and upright bass. To me her life seems full beyond the capacity of a day to hold it. She must count sleeping the least of her activities, so no wonder she would be tired. Tired but *stately*.

I never belonged to a band or wrote songs. The oldest traditional instrument I know how to play is *la turntable*. Neither am I called on to change diapers or be the treasurer of anything or even get in much of a hurry, usually. I certainly haven't neglected my sleep. I'm from country stock and we know the value of it.

Brenda was on her way to grab something to eat before the 7:00 Robert Bly and Colman Barks reading, the *de facto* commencement of the main conference weekend. I tagged along with her. I felt more confident with a little magical guidance pointing the way. Everything was happening the way I hoped it would.

In the lobby of the Hyatt there's an open-air restaurant away from the elevators and separate from the thoroughfare of traffic but not at all closed-in. We presented ourselves to the hostess and there,

just behind her at a little bistro table, eating like folks, were Robert Bly and Huston Smith having dinner together. Holy cow.

Brenda said softly, "Do you know who that gentleman is, with Robert Bly there?" We were close enough to them that, had she spoken at a normal conversational volume, they would have heard her and maybe scowled at a couple of gawkers. She didn't want to be rude but she did want to make sure I knew in whose precincts we'd be dining.

Of course I knew that was Huston Smith. And that was Robert Bly with him, sitting right there, eating. Look at that. I wanted to present myself and talk to them, but what does one say? You can't imagine my dragging a chair up backwards, throwing a leg over, propping my elbows on the table and saying to Huston Smith, "How's that salad bar treatin' ya?" But you can very easily imagine Robert Bly breaking switches off a potted schefflera and thrashing me like a whelp as an example to others.

We joined another couple at a table not far away, insiders and friends of Brenda's, a pretty young woman with great jewelry and a tall, bearded, pony-tailed and kilted young fellow who told me stories about the Oscar party in Hollywood. This was Clyde Gilbert of the traditional band *Emerald Rose* who were also performing at the conference. I had heard the organizers of this conference also participated in a gala at the Academy Awards in partnership with the major U.S. *Lord of the Rings* society, and here around the dinner table I heard the stories. Peter Jackson had trouble shaking hands because he clutched his Oscars all night. I would have, too. John Rhys Davies was generous and charming and erudite, just like you'd think. The hobbits had a *particularly* good time. That's what I was told anyway, by people who were there.

"And oh by the way", Clyde told Brenda, "there's a plan to kidnap Alan Lee tomorrow at 9:30 and take him over to the art gallery" -- on DeFoor Avenue, where some of his paintings were on exhibit in conjunction with the main conference event. Brenda pointed out sternly that Alan Lee had a workshop to host the next day in the conference proper, and needed very much to avoid counter-schedule sub-grouping and off-site bodily transport. Clyde unhurriedly said, "Well somebody better tell Karen. It's all arranged."

It was disarming to me how very familiar they were with the dignitaries. I couldn't let on, socially, but for heaven's sake this was *Alan Lee* we were talking about, artistic designer for the *Lord of the Rings* films, not a brother-in-law who needs a lift to the airport in the morning by way of the doughnut shop down the street.

I was star-struck and I can say so out loud. I was twenty feet from Robert Bly and Huston Smith, tsk-ing my tongue at the scampy behavior of over-served hobbits in Hollywood, nodding dramatically at the potential *snafu* if a certain globally-renowned painter didn't appear the next day for a pre-arranged meet-and-greet. It was a little surreal, this hashing out of the comings and goings of people I've only read about.

But of course they were all chummy, the organizers and the organized. They had already spent all week together. They probably made Iroquois s'mores every night in Chief Jake Swamp's room and surprised each other with Viking panty-raids and played truth-or-dare in Latin and Sanskrit. (Gadzooks, truth-or-dare in that crowd must take on a whole new meaning.)

We conference weekenders were destined for ample amazements to be sure, but our experiences would probably be only postcards of the weeklong magic as a whole. Who knows what went on before we got there? It was obvious the all-weekers were vibrating at a much higher frequency than we were. Best to speak little and listen much.

Exhausted but still capable of projecting her consciousness forward in time to tomorrow's Alan Lee

workshop, which would doubtlessly benefit from the presence of Alan Lee, Brenda reached responsibly for the radio headset she had unhooked from her ear when the dinner came. Then she put it back down on the table. "I'll do it later," she said. By this time on Friday night she had organized her heart out, and though the heart grew in the laboring, she needed a good few minutes off the air.

Because she had hinted it, I knew she would be up all night again, strumming and drumming and merry-making with the other twilight people whose power is so much greater than mine (I bow my head when I say it). At cockcrow the next day another round of poets and writers and scholars and groups would take up with their unfoldments, dozens of venerable voices well known in the village and under the sunshine, but other kinds of pedagogues would teach at night with guitar and drum music and charms and epic poems and really despicable dirty jokes exchanged and committed to memory. If history is made at night, then some of it is a very secret history indeed.

But for now, almost showtime, no rest for the weary. Once more into the breach, dear friends. Time passes differently for us folk, seven days into one very long sleepless span, so drink thou the coffee and bear thy eyelids up; the scratchiness of the throat and the buzzing of the ears are both fine, fine things on nights like this will be.

I left Brenda in the restaurant at 6:56. She had taken up her connection to the airwaves again, and I didn't want to get crowded into too distant a seat for the poetry reading. I got a good one, plenty close enough it seemed to me, but anyway there were large projection screens on either side of the stage for closer views.

Bly, with his snow-white hair, colonial accent and trademark scarlet-paisley waistcoat, performed with Coleman Barks, the retired Poet and Professor Emeritus from the University of Georgia who made the definitive translation of the poems of the mystic Jelaluddin Rumi. Each of them read from their own work and then from Rumi, to the accompaniment of two onstage musicians: Eugene Friesen who played cello, and Arto Tunçboyacıyan on various drums, flutes and some stringed instruments I had never seen before.

We loved every minute of it. The recitations hit particular heights, including some severely political war-time ones, that produced shouts of testifying from all quarters of the crowd, barks of vocal support and scattershot solo applause. The spoken meter inflamed the mob. The people were on the verge of uprising.

Sitting next to me was a gorgeous lady to whom I had chatted a little before the reading started, a schoolteacher who had flown in just in time to make it to the hotel. Once the twangly music started in, she gave over to it with that high humming you hear from southern ladies in church when the spirit gets hold of them. Lordy. What if she starts prophesying or talking in tongues, drawing everybody's attention in this direction? Am I expected to keen also? Will I offend the two poets if I don't?

Makes me wonder what the earlier parts of the week were like.

When the ecstatic poetry and music extended a bit beyond the scheduled time, as well it should have, Barks mentioned the time quietly in an aside to Bly, who defiantly whispered, "We're allowed." *Oh yes*, I thought, *say on, say on*.

There were later concerts scheduled in that hall and in other rooms, but I decided to head home early for a healthy start of the next day's activities.

That was a mistake. I missed cautionary tales and words that changed the weather and musical phenomena that will not come again, and for what? For the sake of pragmatism, a little more

isolation and a little more shut-eye. I deserved to miss it. Anyway, there would be Saturday night for glazed wildness, and I would know so much more by then after a full day of mythic journeys. I would better remember everything I used to know about courage and explosive nature and the zeal for discovery and the energies that move over from the spirits and bodies of the truly alive. When did I get so sleepy, and when did I bumble off so far from the ones who started out with me?

In the milling crowd outside the hall I saw mostly teachers and students, their regular street clothes masking the quantum realignment going on in us all, but there was a delegation also of the lightly eccentric: one druid figure in robes, a dreadlock on a white guy here and there, a phalanx of women dressed in half medieval, half-gypsy couture. Street clothes can be different for different people, and on Friday nights everywhere a good deal depends on the kind of street you're traveling. I think I'm fine with that.

Saturday: To Infinity, and Be *Yang*

On Saturday morning I felt pretty confident the traffic would be negligible on the way to the hotel. Even though there were hundreds of cars already rolling through Riverdale at that hour, I still got through and made my way downtown to Freedom Parkway in about twenty-five minutes. From there it's just a curlicue around to International Boulevard and then right on Peachtree. The Hyatt is two blocks away.

But sitting there in the middle of International, right in front of me, towering twice the height of the buildings, was a terrifying crane swinging in an arc across the sky what looked like a two-ton air-conditioning unit, at what looked like a hundred miles an hour. It was a monster blocking the way. It was a giant with a mace. That's okay, I thought. This conference is about myth, and in myth there's always a monster blocking the way: the dragon, the hungry ogre at the bridge, the industrial crane on International. It's all the same story. Luckily this metal behemoth couldn't move as fast as the sporty Ford Focus, so I just went around, turning down Piedmont instead. Easy.

Then I got stupefyingly lost. There are a lot of one-way streets downtown if you didn't know, and you can't always just do a box step to get back where you meant to be. In some places you have to go three down, then one over, two back, but then you come to that swervy place that throws off the whole grid so you lose count. Lost in the middle way of life, with ten minutes to go before the opening ceremony of the conference. I was in the labyrinth.

And I was getting worried. I didn't want to be late or miss anything. Right up ahead I was sure, two more blocks away, should be the place where I turn left and get back on track. Waiting for the light to change, I happened to look to the left and saw I was about to pass the hotel again. I was much closer than I thought. So I did what you would do: I turned left scorchingly from the far-right lane. That's okay, I thought. This conference is about myth, and in myth there's always an unbreakable rule to break. That's the only way to tear into a new energy of life: eating the forbidden fruit, opening Pandora's box, flooring it in front of some very surprised Saturday morning trippers on Peachtree. I made it.

I leaped out at the valet stand, handed over a few bucks to the young guy there and asked him not to notice the bird poop on the hood. The Senegalese teenager probably had no idea what I was saying, but it passed for small talk while I gathered up my knapsack of catalogues and notes and my little airplane pillow. (I felt good about remembering to bring it. The night before I had discovered the hotel chairs were not exactly lumbar-friendly to an aging spine. With a clutch-pillow in place, I could last a good nine hours without contorting myself into the laps of my neighbors, without having to say, *Sorry, I seem to be having a spasm of self-actualization, and I think I'll be all right if I can just stretch out here across your legs for a minute.*)

Then it recurred to me why I hate valet parking. When I valet-park my keys are gone. I use my keys

as a touchstone, to reassure me everything is all right so long as I hear that little jangle or I spin them around on my finger, see them on the table or feel them in my pocket. With my keys I can always get home, and when I get there I can go in. Yikes, I'll be reaching for them all day, panicking for three or four seconds, berating myself a hundred times for falling for it again and again. That's okay, I thought. This conference is about myth, and in myth there's always something to lose at the outset of the adventure. Gems and raiment have to be discarded at the gate of the Underworld, weapons have to be left outside the place of testing, and the keys to the sporty Ford Focus have to be surrendered to a young African man with epaulettes on his shoulders. I was unarmed, crutchless, yet heroically I sallied forward naked and alone into the flashing vortex of the Hyatt's revolving door, right into the belly of the whale.

(*Metaphorically* naked, you understand. This conference is about myth.)

Where the hell are my keys? Oh yeah, the valet took them. Everything's cool.

The doors of the Hyatt's Centennial ballroom were already open and participants were filing in to find seats as I descended the escalator from the lobby into deeper understanding. Was it coincidence that the walls of the escalator-well were silvery and immaculately polished like mirrors? We could all see ourselves, our real selves and our future selves, like the young initiate in that preserved Pompeii fresco who sees an old man in his own reflection. Was I only twenty-one when I came into this hotel just now? No, that was more than twenty years ago. Now I look just like my grandmother in that chrome. I'm big and I'm carrying a pocketbook. No wait, that's my knapsack with my papers and my little pillow. Everything's cool.

Everything's cool except the fact I need a little pillow to help support my sagging, nagging backbone through the exhausting regimen of quiet *sitting* I need to do for two days. Everything's cool except that I've already been twenty-one a couple of times over and I'm on my third lap.

The night before, I had chosen my seat too modestly, more than halfway back when there were plenty of closer ones. For this session I intended to risk getting closer to the action, even if that meant getting trapped in some claustrophobic position between people I didn't know. It shouldn't have bothered me, being enclosed by these people. These were my own people. Our histories and our views may have been different, but that sort of diversity was one of the themes of the whole weekend, to be celebrated -- not grudgingly tolerated, as is the fashion. If we were to be fellows at this particular event, I should open my heart to their fumbling encroachment of my personal space with their limbs and their awkward belongings. I should give them the hospitality granted to strangers by the ancient races who welcomed all beings as deities, even if they want to crowd too close to me and slip out of their 100% non-animal-product shoes to funk up my area with feet that smell like they used to *run* ancient races. Of course I had no reason to anticipate any extraordinary behavior, but I looked pretty old in that mirror out there. It's just good planning to suffer from bad situations before they actually happen. *Where are my keys?* Oh yeah.

I entered the meeting chamber with a resolution: for this weekend at least I would not give in to the destructive habits I've picked up in the last twenty years. I wouldn't shrink from new acquaintances, -- who, my habits like to tell me, would take up more of my time than I want to give. For these two days I wouldn't assume the worst about somebody, wouldn't zip through a ready punch list of differences to find some flaw I could count on to free me from the obligation of interaction. No matter who my neighbors turn out to be when I take my seat, I'm going to make contact, introduce myself, ask something interesting about them. Then I'll be email pen-pals for the rest of my days with a sculptor on one side and a zany college psychology professor on the other, one of whom used to steal cantaloupes with Georgia O'Keefe, one of whom received the Newbery Medal for her children's book, a mythic retelling of Mother Goose in the secret language of medieval alchemy. These would be the people I would meet, and I would charm them, I would invite them to dinner and they would accept. "Where is it you're taking us?" they would ask. "It's

called *Manuel's Tavern*," I would say. "You'll really like it." I felt younger stepping into the auditorium, through the looking glass. I'm really going to do this, I thought.

No, forget that. I spotted my friends Catharine Tipton and her husband Ken Sosebee. I'm sitting with them. (That was close.)

The houselights darkened and the twitter of the audience softened. Then some powerfully thumping, energetic music started. In a kind of strobing flash, the backdrop behind the stage lit up with rapid-fire pictures of historical and modern cultures from around the world, temples and skyscrapers, sacred and secular, oriental, occidental, cave paintings and billboards, China, Peru, Tibet, teepees and pyramids, images striking like lightning with the urgency of the music. The room went black as the roar of the music stopped short, and there was a crash of applause from all of us. *That* was the way to start this conference. It got our attention. We knew we were together in something we had always pursued alone before, or in twos and threes. Now we belonged to something previously unknown, all of us together, whoever we were. It was perfect.

Michael Karlin, president of the newly-formed non-profit organization called the Mythic Imagination Institute, to whom we owed the idea, the planning, and the production of this conference, took the stage and welcomed us to this creature that had never been, this first-of-its-kind, interdisciplinary symposium of artists, scholars, scientists, and performers, brought together to explore and strengthen the idea of mythic story as basic to the human experience, essential to the human spirit. The weekend, he told us, would be divided into two themed days of sessions and panel discussions: Saturday for Yang, with expressions of the male, active, heroic, and forceful, and Sunday for Yin, embodiment of the female, silent, receptive, and hidden.

He promised us great wonders to come in the two ensuing days and in the future as the conference grew in stature and the connections already made between colleagues that week took stronger hold. Guests and lecturers who had admired each other's work all their lives, he said, were meeting for the first time finally, and great things, magical things, would come to pass, he was sure. We believed him. We clapped *a lot*.

Following Michael, whose tender age and casual dress in t-shirt and jeans embolden me to dispense with referring to him as Mr. Karlin despite my respect, we had a few stern words from James Hillman, the venerable psychologist and author whose credentials (Harvard, Yale, Princeton, the Jung Institute, and dozens more) are too many to list here. He's also the honorary chairman of the Mythic Imagination Institute and was one of three editors of a famous collection of poems, *The Rag and Bone Shop of the Heart*, along with Michael Meade and Robert Bly.

Hillman said in his tribute to the late great Joseph Campbell, in honor of whose centennial this conference had convened, that we were a gathering of *the peculiarly original*. We applauded some more, in token of how right he was. In large part Campbell's work dealt with the relevance of the hero, he said; Hillman's suggestion was that the myth *is* the hero, with the liberating power to slay dragons and reveal truths to us. We were in the right place. This is what we came for.

Finally in that opening session there was a performance by a group of theater students from Kennesaw State College, who with their advisor had synchronistically written and produced, independently from any connection with the conference, a play in about twelve acts of monologue dramatizing the lives of mythic heroes such as Gilgamesh, Merlin, Anansi, Siddhartha, Taliesin, Inana, Raven and others. They were very good and a few of them were extraordinary. Partially masked as in the old Greek dramas, they spoke in language that was rich and high, just right. There were also some surprising comedic elements thrown in and that was even better. We stood up in ovation for them, and though people always stand up at the end of performances now, these kids really deserved the extra attention. The piece had been written for a room to hold fifty people, and they never dreamed they would play to a thousand.

Michael returned to give us a final send-off into the day and we applauded the whole thing all over again. I didn't need the keys anymore. I wasn't leaving.

There was a half-hour break scheduled after the opening rites and before the first of the many workshops. Though the play had run about ten minutes long, Michael declared we would still take the full half hour and asked the presenters to commence accordingly. We would shave the minutes off at lunchtime, he ruled, and get back on track for the afternoon. So let it be written.

My friends Catharine and Ken are both teachers at the private Paideia School in Atlanta. Along with some other teachers, Catharine was herself a presenter in one of the next meetings, called *Myth in Education*. Sam Keen, a luminary from the worlds of philosophy, psychology, and religion, who wrote *Fire in the Belly* and had his own PBS special with Bill Moyers called *Your Mythic Journey*, was part of the same panel on education, along with eight more bright lights I wouldn't have minded hearing. I wanted to support her, naturally, but sadly her hour coincided with one I was most looking forward to. So, with apologies to her, I made my way to John Matthews.

Now I could have chosen to sit in on a reading by Joyce Carol Oates or one by Galway Kinnell, but I don't really know them as I should. I could have opted for *The Heroine's Journey: Woman's Quest for Wholeness*, but I would not have been happy. I don't mind women being whole or going on heroic trips, mind you, and in fact I urge them to do both if they want to, but for myself I didn't think I would get much out of it.

The Labyrinth Workshop, no, I had done something similar in the car already that morning. *Mythika Electronika* was not a good idea for me personally. I didn't know what it meant, but it sounded vaguely and musically mathematical, and I'm no good at that. I would have been doubly intimidated by those people able to accomplish both harmonies and long division.

There were several sessions having to do with the works and legacy of Joseph Campbell, frustratingly presented at the same time, including one called *Joseph Campbell and the Twentieth-Century Approach to Myth* that was on my shortlist of top three choices. Another runner-up for me was "*The Cuchulain Cycle*" by W.B. Yeats: *A Hero's Journey in Five Episodes*, presented by James Flannery, head of the Yeats Foundation, and Michael Meade. I've heard of James Flannery for years and I've known Michael Meade's work for even longer, and though it would be a fine thing to meet them, there would be other chances, certainly. This was only the first round of workshops and there were many more to come in the schedule.

The hands-down winner for me in the upcoming timeslot was the reading of a paper called *Merlin as Shaman* by John Matthews.

Ahead, before the next session, were thirty long minutes of resonating from the ritual drama in which we had just participated, so I decided to drop in to see what they called the Marketplace, the stalls of vendors and associations who had signed up for space during the conference.

That was another level down so I took the escalator again, keeping my eyes fixed on the bald spot of the man in front of me so I wouldn't be tempted to look at the glare of the accusing mirrors on either side. I might not have suffered the same accusations as before, and I might not have turned to a pillar of salt or lost my love like Orpheus, but why take a chance? If I looked even older descending to the next ring of the Underworld, I didn't want to know about it. There was something a little bit *Dorian Gray* about those mirrors, and if they were going to hang there revealing my inner decrepitude all weekend, I just wouldn't pay them any attention.

There were maybe fifty different booths in the Marketplace including the obvious and welcome ones installed by Borders Books and by the Campbell Foundation. There were many stalls offering artwork of all kinds, a few with racks of colorful batik and tie-dye for ladies to glide and flow around

in, shelves filled with crystals and candles and oils that reminded us of the mystery business we were really about.

Past the peddlers' zone there were tables and chairs for the weary or hungry, a selection of bagels and Danishes with ice buckets of canned drinks, --- and off to one side a mammoth statue of Athena, ten feet high, flanked by lesser powers blowing into conch shells and by *hippocampi*. I didn't linger there overlong. Goddesses don't like staring, as anyone in the Hyatt that day, experts in the care and feeding of gods and goddesses, would have confirmed.

It was time to leave the Marketplace. I certainly didn't need to purchase a silly bust of Nefertiti. What would I do with another one? One for home and one for office, but a hood ornament for the sporty Ford Focus would be out of the question.

I became aware of the works of John and Caitlin Matthews years ago, long before they had written quite so many. Between them they're up to seventy-odd titles now I think, of which I presently own less than I once did. I had many in the past but, in the way of books, they spent summers and holidays with friends and, rather than hurry home, they became unintentional expatriates. The one I especially enjoyed and learned from was *The Western Way*, a hefty treatment of the history and practices of the mystery traditions of the West. I don't think it's even in print here any more and that's too bad. I felt compelled to lend it before I finished reading it myself. Now I won't know whether Christianity ever amounted to anything in the farther reaches of the Roman Empire.

Other Matthews books deal authoritatively with the Arthurian cycle, shamanism, the literature, lore, images and meanings of god and goddess traditions, the rituals of the hunting and harvesting cultures of ancient Europe.

Although in my case it almost never comes up in conversation, certainly not at work, rarely at Thanksgiving or at Manuel's Tavern, but art and ritual and lore really are mother's milk to me. It's a craving I was born with, something I know a little bit about it, but I don't get much call to go into it in any detail. First of all, it's not easy to bring up in a casual setting:

"Would you care to hear about our specials today, sir?"

"Sure. Would you like to take a look at the ancient fertility symbol I've got hidden here in my pocket? I don't show it to just everybody. Get ready for a *mano fica* you just *won't believe*."

You see. It doesn't work. At least, it gets you looked-at sideways by a waitress named Tonya at the pancake house in Union City.

So for the most part I attend to my studies quietly and by myself. But no such problem this weekend, at this convocation of the *peculiarly original*. I could talk about anything I wanted to, to just about anybody, and the odds were good they would know what I meant and offer views back to me. *I even talked about Merlin with John Matthews*, and that was a good moment for me.

This session carried the Druidic seal of approval, if the presence of that chap from last night who wore the robes was anything to go by. He sat directly in front of me, black haired and black-bearded, not this time in robes but wrapped in a splendid coat of overlapping and laced green leather patches, expertly put together with cording and ornaments and buttons in the shape of ivy leaves. He could have been *Bercilak de Hautdesert*, Gawain's famous Green Knight. Whatever you do, do it with style.

It was a pleasure to hear John Matthews read his paper, a kind of synopsis of his next book that will be available soon. With obvious pride and some mischievous hints, he spoke at length about what he repeatedly referred to as "the *film* I've been working on, coming out next month." This was the

new *King Arthur*, for which Matthews served as an advisor to the writers and director. Portraying Guinevere as a warrior-queen instead of a simpering *ingénue*, was his own idea, he told us. When someone asked whether the movie would be entirely true to sixth-century history, Matthews pronounced it at about seventy per cent. There was some embarrassment in his voice on that point, but he explained that a Hollywood movie comes with some constraints, having to do with money, of course, and the projected audience-palatability of the genuine Dark Ages on film. The completely real thing would be a gruesome two hours indeed.

I listened studiously and scribbled rapidly, but my note-taking was cryptic and arrogant -- as though I would later read in my notebook the phrase "2 M's plus Taliesin" and easily write out the four pages it abbreviated. Luckily recordings of everything would be available following the conference, better than any aptitude of note-taking.

When John Matthews finished reading, there was still time left in the hour, so he unclipped his microphone and left the podium to sit in a plush chair and answer questions. No one moved or spoke, so I did. I asked whether he had ever come across a reference in his researches to "a student of Merlin's, named Melchior." I found this line in a book about the Holy Grail some fifteen years ago, and then the book went away in the way of books. I've looked for the name in other sources but have never seen it again in that context.

"No," Matthews said, and sat still.

So much for that. What else was there to say?

But I wanted to keep the connection going. "Well, I guess if *you* haven't seen it, I'll have to let it go and decide I dreamed it."

He smiled and said, "Well, you *may have*. But Melchior is not a Celtic name at all...."

"I know, and that's why it was puzzling to me ..."

"What book was it in?"

Dejectedly, I had to admit I no longer possessed the book and couldn't even remember the name of it. At that point I knew I was finished. I might as well have cited lines from a Little Lulu comic book as come to the table with ephemeral, unsupported references to lay before John Matthews.

The hour was over and it was time for lunch.

If I had been alone I probably would have picked up some pasty meal-replacement bar in the hotel gift shop, but as it happened, luck granted me a delightful lunch partner.

Once I stood, I saw that an acquaintance of mine, Gwen Knighton, had come in after I did. We exchanged our hellos, and then she went up to visit with John Matthews. They knew each other. When did that happen? *Does everybody I know enjoy these friendships with the internationally prestigious?*

They chatted away together, she saying that her flight to London was the following Monday and wondering whether she would find the Matthews's at home over the summer. He explained he would be touring the U.S. with the imminent release of the film. "I'm the 'scholar-in-residence' for it, you see, and Caitlin and I will be in Los Angeles for the opening, then all around the country for five weeks or so."

I didn't feel I had anything to offer their conversation so I just listened and marveled. I couldn't

compete. They were on about their trips to London and their major film releases, and even though my grandmother *had* told a funny story about a vulture in her birdbath earlier in the week, I didn't think the time was right to bring that up.

Ten minutes later, Gwen and I were sitting down to lunch together in the hotel restaurant.

Suddenly she grabbed and squeezed my forearm where it rested on the lunch menus. Her back stiffened and her eyes widened as though she were in shock.

"What is it?" I asked.

"I'm about to have a *fan-girl moment*," she said. "That's Guy Gavriel Kay."

"Where?"

"At that table," she said, "*right there*."

"Which one?"

"The slender one in the yellow shirt, talking to that other guy. He's sitting *right there*."

"Oh. I see him. Who is he?"

She snapped out of her catatonia and looked at me in disbelief. "*Guy Gav-ri-el Kay*." She over-pronounced it for me, the way people do when you've missed the boat completely. "He's the one who helped Christopher Tolkien with *The Silmarillion*."

Great Gehenna. *The Silmarillion*. That was a name she didn't have to say twice. When that book hit stores in 1977 I forced my poor mom to drive me on a school night to the nearest bookstore far north of our country town so I could buy it on the very first day. This of course was J.R.R. Tolkien's prequel history of the ancient days of his Middle-earth, including the creation and the emergence of the various races that would eventually feature in the matter of *The Lord of the Rings*. I bought it in hardback, which seemed very extravagant. It's one book I never let get away. I've bought copies since to give as presents, but my first edition *Silmarillion* stays with me.

The first time I met Gwen was at a party at Catharine's in 1998. Some friends of ours were visiting from Ohio, and the Three Weird Sisters provided some entertainment for us all after dinner.

The Three Weird Sisters are Brenda, the event coordinator for the conference, Gwen, award-winning Celtic harpist and apparent chummy buddy of John and Caitlin Matthews, and Teresa, the dark-haired and sweet-voiced lady who surprisingly plays the 3/4 upright bass -- an surprising instrument for a semi-traditional all-girl folk band, maybe, but not at all out of place.

My path crossed with Gwen's again at the *Lord of the Rings* class taught by my friend Dr. Jim Cook at Catharine's in 2002. Brenda was there too, and though I only knew them noddingly, I had the vague sense then that Gwen, Teresa and I would be fast friends also if given the chance. First of all, like Catharine and Brenda, they laugh at my jokes. I've always honored an unbreakable blood-tie with anyone who laughs at my jokes. *Semper, semper fidelis*.

Gwen later played her harp at Catharine and Ken's Christmas Eve wedding and her music was sparkly and magical. Melodies flew from her fingers like handfuls of diamonds flung into the room. After the reception, I offered to help her lug the harp back to her car and she accepted casually. Carrying a harp: a new experience. I leaned in with all the confidence of my inherited upper-body strength to tame the mighty thing and to bear it out, struggling beneath the prodigious weight of

centuries of western history.

I almost threw the thing over my head.

You would have thought that a full-sized, floor-standing object carved in such a poetic swoop from solid wood must have some significant weight to it. Just listen to the radiance of the notes that fire from it like arrows. The frame holding those heartstrings should have the solidity of ancient forests that covered the world before man came, but I could lift it with one hand. My friendly offer of help involved no more sacrifice than carrying her books after school.

Then a Saturday in June, I found out Gwen knows the John and Caitlin Matthews well enough to invite herself over to their place in Oxford during the summer, and I was there for her fan-girl moment in the glow of Guy Gavriel Kay.

About the next panel discussion I had chosen for Saturday after lunch, the *Mythic Journeys* conference program said,

Breaking the Round Table: Heather Dale, John Matthews, Chris Snyder, Greg Stafford. All good things must come to an end. What does this particular story have to say about the origins and the future of a broken brotherhood? What is the purpose of broken things?

Although in my youth I was as big a devotee of the Arthurian stories as anybody, I do have to confess I spent more time in Sherwood Forest than in Camelot. Why wouldn't you? For all his high ideals and shiny, clunky outfits, compared to Robin Hood, Arthur was as dull as dishwater.

Arthur did everything memorable in his life when he was a kid. That's when he knew interesting people like Merlin and Morgan le Fay, and accomplished all his noteworthy deeds, like pulling that sword from the stone. After that his duties became more and more ceremonial. He was in the military for a while, he married for political convenience, then he settled down and let all the other guys strap on that damned freezing armor and go tearing around the countryside killing things and rescuing women and representing the highest examples of whatever it was. Arthur stayed home, dressed himself in woolens and fuzzy dragon slippers and waved from the window, saying things like, "Good luck with that 'quest' thing, fellows. Let me hear from you once in a while. I'll be here. *Damn, it's cold out there. Where's my lap-blankie?*"

But Robin Hood, there was a character with some mettle. He lived outdoors, in England, in winter. Men don't get any butcher than that.

As a wedding present from her husband, Guinevere received the silver and gold Barbie Dream Castle to live in, yet she whined all the time and wound up running away with Lancelot, Arthur's Frenchie frat-brother.

But "Maid" Marianne left her comfy digs and moved out to the woods herself rather than spend a single day without her saucy, green-britches outlaw-man. Robin had it going on.

In times of peace, Arthur lounged around the fireplace sipping cocoa and remembering the good old days before bursitis, when there were Saxons to clobber on the playground and heraldic beasts to skewer with sharp sticks.

But whenever Robin had a day off, he got all the boys together to drink beer and cook up new ways to stick it to the Sheriff.

Arthur got better press, but Robin was the go-to guy if you were looking for a kegger.

When I was very young I learned about the Round Table, and Merlin, the plague, blue whales, deciduous trees, electricity, and vulcanized rubber in the blessed World Book Encyclopedia.

Ours was the 1966 edition that Mother had paid for in installments, bought from a man who wore a necktie and had papers to fill out, a man the sisters of Sacred Heart School recommended when I started kinder-garten. Sister Damian-Marie said a set of encyclopedias was essential to any household with school-age children, as if we were some television family or as if ours were the kind of home you might read about. I had been nervous when she said it, afraid of what she would think if she knew the truth about country folks. She was not from the country. She was a town nun if ever there was one, you could tell it in the way she spoke, and it “weren't no Georgia town, neither.” She was from the imaginary land of Wisconsin, talked funny, and had been in person to Rome, Italy.

Just like the insurance man, this salesman came all the way out to our house, eight miles from town, drove right up our endless dirt driveway, carried his squared-off suitcases full of books and forms and free-for-the-taking ball-point pens right up on our porch. The two bird dogs yowled at him until they choked, delirious like that time they scratched up a nest of ground bees, and he pleaded with them loudly and cheerfully, forcing laughter the way people do to pacify dogs when their owners might be able to hear. Mother apologized in her mannerly office voice as she pushed open the screen door, which made the dogs seem even more uncouth. As soon as he was out of sight, the dogs forgot him, as idiot dogs always do.

Not many strangers ever came to our house, and not even our insurance collector wore a necktie. This man who brought the World Book looked all wrong in our living room, like somebody in costume, putting-on, sitting forward uncomfortably so only the very edge of the sofa cushion kept him from falling on the floor, with his lap full of brochures and sales blanks and volumes *G* and *Q-R*. My brother and I peeked at him from behind the big chair.

I was five, Keith was seven, and we lived in the country. The prospect of something expensive and new coming into that house, a place already so thoroughly examined and known, was enthralling to us. That it should be books, so many new, new-smelling books, covered in green and bone leatherette and stamped with gold, was a religious miracle brought about by town-born northern nuns in a mysterious convent hidden behind incense smoke and locked doors in a Spalding County Catholic private school. Our old house was no place for books stamped with gold. Ours was a house for the *Penny's* catalog, the *Market Bulletin*, Mother's magazines with the TV women and presidents' wives on the covers, and that untouched, odd grey object we knew was the Catholic Bible.

Mother gave the World Book man iced tea in a good glass from the china cabinet, not from the kitchen. In her office voice she was polite and efficient, pronouncing her i-n-g's, which our daddy wouldn't have done if the Pope had shown up one Friday night at our fish-fry.

By the time I was eleven, the World Books still looked mostly new except for two scandalous torn pages I knew of and kept secret. The gold was still bright and, though our favorite volumes suffered some dullness from much handling by unwashed hands, the set was undamaged otherwise. Under *Animals* there were twenty-two pages of pictures we especially loved to look at, and at *Human* there were four transparent overlays with the bones and guts printed on them so you could lift the layers right off the man's silhouette and look at them separately. Yet not all my research was satisfied; even when all the pages lay in place, *Human* wasn't all there. I imagined the World Book editors of 1966 saying, *Everybody knows what goes where on the outside. We have no intention of putting anything nasty in plain view, even for scientific purposes. Anybody who wants to see that must be sinful and sick.* I just wanted to make sure everything of mine was what and where it was supposed to be, and for that I needed some reference material. If necessary, in some unimaginable future circumstance in which comparisons were made, I wanted to have something rehearsed and quippy to say in case I was either deformed or especially superior. The readiness is all.

From somewhere our dad once brought home a truckload of glass bricks, each about ten inches square and half as thick, heavy, brilliant as ice, the kind used in restaurant walls and such places. He unloaded them down by the barn, then carried them around by two's and stacked them out of sight in the back pasture beyond the barbed wire fence. Why he went to so much trouble to get them out of sight, I never found out.

He was always doing that, bringing home treasures that drove us wild with curiosity, dangerous things, even poisonous things. Once he appeared with a box of deadly steel surgical instruments that he said was only the least little part of a mountain of goods thrown out from the supplies of the government installation where he worked as an on-base civilian. "If only I had been there five minutes earlier," he said. Hypnotized, we were left to wonder what else he might have rescued, if only. In our minds, uniformed men in masks incinerated with flamethrowers great piles of perfectly good stuff still in boxes, never used, destroyed all of it for reasons we would never understand. They seemed to throw away an awful lot.

In the back pasture, I stacked up the brilliant glass blocks under the sweetgums and chinaberry trees to build a shady Camelot, took my place on an unbreakable throne of solid diamond, and ruled that scrubby, briared slope as regally as Arthur ever could, in peace and fairness, encouraging the supernatural and upholding justice as I was meant by God to do. At the foot of the hill below me was the almost tropical line of foliage and creek, dry for half the year but oily with shoe-sucking clay and crawdads the rest of the time, spiky with reeds and cattails, roiling with black and green snakes. It wasn't much of an English countryside. But my glass castle wasn't altogether badly located. There were some willows along the water down there that worked out all right on days when the game was Hamlet, and the woods beyond were crisped and sere enough for Edgar Allan Poe. There was nothing Sherwood about it though. I knew very well that just past those dark woods there was a rattling brown autumn cornfield planted and harvested by the land-baron Hamills. I had trodden there often enough, haunted in those ghostly, crowded rows by the whispering stalks so like bones in the October chill, that I couldn't visualize anything English about the aspect of that landscape. It was sinister, intensely American. Puritans and pumpkins and hangings and disappearing villagers, witches, rabbit tobacco, and somewhere, just out of sight, the Headless Horseman waiting on the other side of the bridge for trespassers with their pretense and their book learning.

In Britain you can wander off into elf land wearing summer clothes in the bright afternoon and never be seen again, and there's a tradition of believing the lost are somewhere cutting capers and tasting lemon curd and having a lovely time. Here in the colonies, when you're taken it's by other kinds of powers, far less civilized, that don't want you for silly dancing.

Part of the blueprint of life can be found in the 1966 World Book Encyclopedia. That's where I learned about magnetism, irony and allegory, where I first saw that traumatizing photograph of Rasputin, worried over the fate of the two princes in the Tower of London, imagined the sound of the silver trumpet from the tomb of Tutankhamen. Some of it stayed with me and some of it didn't. If suddenly stranded on a desert island, maybe I won't be able to produce electricity from a coconut and a Canadian dime, but I'll know what the major agricultural export of Sierra Leone was in 1966, and I'll be able to quote the dying words of Alexander the Great, in Greek --- if such as that should come up in a rescue plan.

For *The Breaking of the Round Table*, Catharine, Gwen and I sat bang up front.

The session opened with a song to set the mood by Heather Dale, whose Celtic music recordings feature stories of the Arthurian cycle. The moderator was Christopher Snyder of Marymount University and occasionally of The Learning Channel. The panel included Greg Stafford, editor of *Shaman's Drum Magazine*, and of course John Matthews.

The studious language in the program directed the experts to consider the repercussions of the

failure of the Round Table and its ideals. Though Dr. Snyder valiantly tried to steer the conversation in that direction, a query from one audience member got at a deep substrate of discussion that consumed much of the time allotted to the segment. Assembling this group of authorities can't have been easy, and the opportunity to eavesdrop on their debated answers was a valuable one, so I for one was grateful the question came forward. There were matters of conflicting texts and psychological symbolism and cultural import to get to, but our time was short and this penetrating question crumbled barriers and shot squarely at the heart: "What's your favorite *King Arthur* movie?" With a flash we were all back in college together.

Candidates for the best cinematic production were put forward along with supporting evidence. Allowances were made for films that got some but not all things right, others that got almost none but a couple of things right. Scholarly stuffiness had been defeated, deflated, run through with a lance, and we enjoyed a fine hearth-and-fireside Camelot confab. In fact, we could have done with afternoon ale in flagons but none was forthcoming. Perhaps a suggestion for next year's conference. I'm sure we all own sets of flagons, but when do we get to use them?

During the session I noticed some people coming in rather late. Others left part-way through. The nerve. Having made my choice for the hour's tutelage, I would never have had the cheek to look for greener grasses somewhere else, so, judging those dilettantes very harshly, I couldn't wait to talk about them during the break. Then it came to me in my bumpkin thinking that moving around from room to room was the only way to sample as many delights as possible. It was probably an anticipated practice, even respected by the speakers. I was the rube, not those people who tasted all thirty-one flavors and more with their little spoons.

Well, I thought, fine for them, but I had a different raising. Folks have you to their home and you don't just get up and go, even if they want you to. You're beholden to stay put till just after they fall asleep, then you take another good hour to say *I appreciate it* and *Bye*. You've only been grateful enough if you get the impression you won't be asked back for a while. That's civilized behavior.

In that Round Table session, the image that struck me deepest had nothing to do with medieval manuscripts or disputed history, but everything to do with the mythic imagination and our defense of it. Greg Stafford, in his comments on the film *Excalibur*, observed that the attraction to Arthurian stories is strong in young people

even today, and described the sword-in-the-stone game played by his (may I say ingenious) toddler, involving the inspired trick of situating the toy sword between stone-like sofa cushions, and enacting the defining British moment over and over again. "Say the words, Dad!" "LET THE BOY TRY!"

Prodigy. What a brilliant idea, the sofa cushions. What a wonderfully childlike and brilliant idea. I'm sure I wasn't the only one thinking, *Well done. I wish I'd thought of that all those years ago. For me it's too late, but just the same, Long Live the King*. Sofa cushions, for heaven's sake. In the mental picture so concretely evoked by this story, I can't help noticing that when little Arthur draws the sword from the sofa with a great fanfare of imagined brass instruments and choruses of angels singing, when he bravely accepts, time after time, all the powers and responsibilities of the mightiest sovereignty on Earth, his *back* is to the television set. I have a good feeling about that.

I had a do-not-miss family birthday party to go to that Saturday night, but I knew I would hurry back to the Hyatt for the merrymaking they told us would go on till morning. I wanted to slip into a little tie-dyed number myself and be there when the chanting-women struck up the dark strains and flew around the room like Valkyries. I wanted to join when the drumming-men took off up the sides of the hotel like the Wild Hunt, chasing conventioners and frightening the housekeeping staff. I wanted to hear songs that pulled me along with them, watch dances that hypnotized with gestures like a snake charmer's, maybe witness a few miracles. Turn lead into gold, that sort of

thing. These were the people who could do it.

Alas, I didn't make it back that night after all. I can allow, however, that it was a *very* good birthday party. We had plenty of music, spun yarns about ourselves, frightened a couple of neighbors with our hooting. It was the perfect rounding-off of a perfect mythic day, a celebration of my own people and my own place with them. The conference dealt with theory, but this was the practice. Though nobody at the party turned anything into gold, my cousin turned smoked salmon into dip, and I turned a little Irish whiskey into a good reason to stick around. Sufficient unto the party are the miracles thereof.

Sunday: In With the *Yin* Crowd

I was looking forward to seeing Caitlin Matthews in the plenary session Sunday morning. We all had more tough choices to make from the list of concurrent sessions that day, and I wasn't sure I would have another opportunity to learn from this respected scholar, author and teacher. We received a most memorable lesson from her that morning.

I arrived in plenty of time, well rested and happily free from post-party depression of the empty-bottle kind. I wasn't moving into *Yin* as fast as some people, probably, but I was secure enough in my *Yang* to take some time about it. Transformations of personal energy, like term papers and tax filings, can be done more creatively at the last minute.

Again I risked the escalator descent past those damned mirrors. For a second I was a *deus ex machina*, feeling pretty regal and confident in that shiny place at the commencement of another day of astonishments. Then the reflection mugged at me again, tried everything to get my attention.

"Stayed out a little late last night, did we? Aren't you too old for that sort of thing? Hope you remembered your little lumbar pillow and tummy-tablets this morning. And what's with that shirt? Did somebody shoot the kitchen curtains?"

So sad. I was embarrassed for him, carrying on in public like that. He was the one out of shape. I could have answered his challenge, but this was no time for a squabble between the light and dark twins, so I discreetly displayed a secret sign with my hand and ignored his acting-out. Oh, he knew what I meant. I'd deal with him later, not among these decent people who maybe saw my downcast eyes and assumed I was praying for him. Starting Monday I would force him back onto low-fat rations and see how he liked that. Next year, here at the Hyatt, it's *the stairs* for you, buddy.

There was some delay of the opening presentation. The doors leading to the hall were closed to us, but the warders promised it wouldn't be long. As the crowd grew and pressed a little in the cheery morning light spilling through the terrace doors, I removed myself more and more to the periphery -- not to escape, I told myself, but to guard the brood from any predatory attacks from outside. *Yin* energy was taking me over. I felt nurturing and motherly.

Truth be told, I just emanate more tranquilly when I'm not trapped in a crush of people, even those of such high caliber. Call it a learned response I've picked up over the intervening years of seclusion, but the embarrassing fact is that, somewhere along the line, I posted the land around me with signs that say *Private. Occupied. I'd Turn Back If I Were You.*

Hadn't I learned anything from this weekend? Life is about living: I wanted the experience of this conference to shake me out of the early retirement I had taken, to reawaken me to the value of collaboration and corroboration. The night before at the birthday party, I had made a right gregarious showing of myself. Why not here? After all, several of my old friends were in this crowd, new ones doubtless waiting, and what if they really needed me? Shouldn't I *want* to be jostled?

Pressed against the railing by the escalator, I edged into John Matthews himself, who with a few spoken words, wizard-like, disarmed my self-scolding and made me feel much better about everything.

After hellos I asked whether he had rested well, and he said, "Yes, thank you. It's nice to have a room right here -- where everything's happening -- good to disappear up there for a few minutes during the day when things get going." We both took a second to scan the crowd again, maybe to measure the distance to the nearest exit. "You see, with my work I go for weeks at a time without seeing anyone except close family, so all this can be a little... overwhelming."

Thank you. That was exactly the way my spirit wanted to put it.

"Well," he said, "I'd better be off to see what Caitlin is up to." He plunged into the crowd and willed himself right up to the doors of the hall, which the warders pulled open for him without a word and he disappeared.

Someone must have asked the threshold guardians why the way was still closed to the rest of the faithful, because the lieutenant spokesbeing with her fanny pack made an announcement: "There will be a few more minutes before we can let you in. There are some last-minute changes the presenters wanted to make, having to do with music and so forth, so please be patient. I promise you, it will be worth it."

Lay it on us, we all thought. You're welcome to all the time you need to prepare, and we'll stay here all day if we have to, camping out for tickets to Eleusis. We're getting the hang of this now. We know what's possible. We want to be *concussed* with wonders, ravaged, transmogrified, poked in the Third Eye, but in a good way. We want to be shaken awake like the rag dolls some of us have become, imprinted with the memory of this day so profoundly that we can take it back into the world of illusions with us and bless others.

So take another ten or twelve minutes if you need it. No problem.

Alan Lee. Right next to me at the long table there, picking leisurely through the stacks of fliers and references and business cards promoting mythic goods and services, was Alan Lee with his distinguished, silvery beard and bright eyes, wearing a shirt of purple so royal that the shade hasn't been seen since Phoenicia ruled the waves.

I had to talk to him. Think of something, think of something. *Did they kidnap you yesterday?* No good, he'd think I was off my nut. *So what's it like to have such vision and imagination and technical mastery?* Not even I could ask a question like that. *How about a pint at Manuel's Tavern later? Ten minutes from here, great onion rings, -- and speaking of Rings....*

As I turned and opened my mouth to speak, somebody else in the throng recognized him, and the two of them launched into an enthusiastic exchange. The young chap leaned in with his questions, and Mr. Lee's eyes flashed as he illuminated the answers. I couldn't hear a word they were saying. I thought I might wait to wedge my own comments into the mix and thus be able to say quite honestly I had spoken with Alan Lee, but the doors of the hall were finally open and the herd was driving forward.

[Later in the afternoon, after the closing ceremonies, I passed him in a group of admirers as they headed toward the door and no doubt toward dinner. "Thank you for coming, Mr. Lee," I said as they swept past me. He turned and smiled and his eyes flashed, and he said, "Oh, thank *you*," and they were gone. So there, I spoke to Alan Lee. He would have loved Manuel's Tavern, and I'll suggest it next year.]

Once assembled in the meeting room we heard, first in English and then in his native language, a moving invocation and blessing pronounced by Chief Jake Swamp, whose esteemed voice has spoken for both Native American and environmental issues for decades.

Unfamiliar language has the quality about it of conveying more than the mere noises; there's a certainty that the sounds carry meaning with them. It's a miraculous thing, considering the nuances of expression and infinite vocabulary. Apart from a few tongue-clicks in some languages that are impossible to reproduce in others, the sounds people make with their voices are fairly common, but what scope they have. It's irresistible to wonder what one's own language must sound like to those who don't speak it. *How can they not know what I'm talking about? They can obviously see these pictures in my head.*

The whammy of Sunday morning was the rite led by Caitlin Matthews called *The Blessing Seed*. Herself at a podium on the left and performer William Todd-Jones at one on the right, they told a lofty-poetic creation story, with musical improvisation provided by a line of performers between them. We were there to witness the burgeoning of reality for the very first time, again, as it was in the beginning, before our very eyes. The auditorium became hallowed ground. The stage became an altar.

In the orchestra were Brenda and Gwen of The Three Weird Sisters, all the members of Emerald Rose, others I didn't know, and among them they conveyed emotionally in music the meaning of the words spoken by the celebrants. When there was fear it sounded like fear. When there was discord it sounded like discord. When there was joy, well, that's what joy and love and relief and gratitude sound like. It was exhilarating, fiery, affecting.

It had the intended effect on the audience, too. I would say a good seventy percent went out of control completely. They were *bacchantes*, wild, spilling with their dancing out into the aisles and tearing around the room to the drum beats and strings and chanting. If a retired English teacher from a Sacramento middle school, an anthropology doctoral student from Raleigh by way of Howard University, and a snappy-dressing druid from the outer realms unknown, came to the Mythic Journeys conference to have a liberating, milestone experience on a Sunday morning in June, then by god they got one.

The music and the honey-rich voices of the swelling story redoubled, more and more seats emptied, clouds of batik blew past, men stamped their feet and women flapped wings made of gauzy sleeves. That hall went into orbit for a while, and the faster the dancers pedaled the faster we shot between the worlds. Something genuine had hold of the room with both hands and shook it like a snow globe.

Yes, Mrs. Matthews, that was it. Thank you all for taking the extra time to get it ready. By Tuesday we'll all be back in metaphorical Sacramento, remembering, eating a piece of dry toast on our way to work; but part of us, a good seventy percent of each of us, will still be here transcending space and time. That's our real job.

Following that cathartic session, I chose *Images of Return, Resurrection and Renewal*. It sounded like a prescription I could use, and maybe I could pick up some pointers for my reclamation of twenty sidetracked years.

This panel included Peter S. Beagle, some of whose work I knew but, until that morning, had no idea how charming a speaker I had so far missed; the painter Meinrad Craighead (whose pronouncement during that hour, "Every image has a point of entry," remains stuck in my head like the memorized answer to a question I'm waiting for...); Pittman McGehee of quite rarified Jungian credentials; Ellen Hemphill of the Duke Theater Studies Department and; continuing with my theme for the weekend, John Matthews.

The topic, *Renewal*, was no doubt intentionally broad to begin with, and there was little way of knowing whither we would wander, but I was content that the discussion turned to the creative process in general, to inspiration and the conception of ideas. How satisfying to sit comfortably with accomplished creators, hear how and in what media they are moved to create, listen and believe them when they confess how mystified they are, even they, about the source of art and the impulse to symbolism and the self-awareness taken on by seemingly inanimate materials when the fit is on them.

As synchronicity would have it (and there was endemic synchronicity arcing in the Hyatt that weekend), I ran into Brenda, who, beyond belief, actually had time for a meal at that moment. There were no gang-wars going on between the Romans and invading hordes on the third floor, no unplanned disappearances of featured speakers in mid-sentence, no witnesses claiming to have seen creatures from Greek mythology picking up chicks in the hotel bar and galloping off, leaving hoofmarks and tabs unpaid.

We took a table and I settled into a quietly sweet oasis with my friend, -- who along with others had legendary feats of organization and performance yet to accomplish in the afternoon. Yikes. The last day of the Great Work, still miles to go before she slept. *Eat, darling, eat, it's good for you. What, you want to shrink to skin and bones? Get something whole, a nice chicken leg, something grainy, something leafy, a piece of cake, a tangerine. Do you need a sweater, in Georgia, in June?* My mothering *Yin* energy was having hot flashes.

At the front of the Marketplace hall was a stage where intermittent musical performances were scheduled, and I spent my afternoon there enjoying a concert by Three Weird Sisters (though because of the inclusion of the Two Weird Husbands, I think the technical name of the combined performing band was A Year and A Day). I hadn't seen much of Catharine that day, but for this concert she appeared, nestled herself into an overstuffed chair and relaxed, cat-like, to enjoy the fun of the show. I squinched awkwardly into the chair next to hers. (I look better and do better when sitting next to her.) Although at higher climes of the hotel, workshops and breakthroughs were transpiring, there was nowhere I would rather have been than in that intimate group, enjoying talented friends of mine stirring the passions and surprising the ambivalent, after-lunch shoppers at the stalls behind us, dragging them over by harp strings and harmonies and *sweet airs that give delight and hurt not*.

We, the tired but humming masses, re-assembled in the main hall late in the day for our final instructions, marching orders, another dose of ritual drama, and a superb story about the transformation of grief.

This was the benediction we needed to return to our workaday worlds, to existences that seemed so far, connotatively and geographically, from the abundantly validated, if slightly paranormal, lives we had cultivated for the weekend. How can we keep the inspiration going once that revolving door spits us back out onto Peachtree Street, thence to hundreds of separate addresses and thousands of monotonous dullnesses that attend the demands of commerce and caretaking? Here, we were dynamic, insightful, risk-taking, and inventive. Back out there, will we sink back into bad habits, listen to mistaken reflections of ourselves who don't really know us for the magical beings we are? How can we hold on to this resonance?

Well, first off get some batik. Get some tie-dye if you'd rather. Get yourself a druid's robe, symbolic or, if you dare, actual. Paint a picture, plant a garden, write an article, join a band. Create something every day, read as much as you can, and take some time off. Stay in touch with others like you and with everybody you love. Life is about living. That's what the myths of the world give us to understand. Learn from the great characters of history and art, but only so you can be a character yourself. And if you know what's good for you, especially you younger ones, have that travel bag right where you can get to it. You don't know when the door will open.

What have I learned, myself, from the Mythic Journeys experience?

1. Don't lose contact with the radiant, dazzling, and talented people you call your friends. You were drawn together for a reason, and if you spend too much time away, you may forget how to be with them, why it's so good to be there, and that you're actually one of them yourself. These are the people who know the way to that door. Plus, these are fun people. Merlin had his madness and hid himself in the forest for a long time, and I'll bet he never heard a single great joke there.

2. In the words of Nelson Mandela:

**We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant,
gorgeous, talented, and fabulous?
Actually, who are you not to be?
You are a child of God.
Your playing small doesn't serve the world.
There is nothing enlightened about shrinking
so that other people won't feel insecure around you.**

We are born to make manifest the Glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us, it's in everyone, and as we let our own light shine, we consciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.

3. (That sword-in-the-sofa-cushions thing *works great*.)

J. Darrel Sprayberry

The Mythic Imagination Institute

Who we are and what we're about

Myth is the symbolic language of the human experience, of story and ritual, of dreams and tradition, of poetry and art. Myth links us together, providing crucial context and illumination for understanding the mysteries of existence. Myths are the eternal truths hidden within the heart of the stories we hear, read, and see. Their wisdom guides us to meaning, mental health, and even conflict resolution. But today, people seem to be cut off from their traditional sources of meaning.

We believe that there is such a thing as a deeper meaning in life, and that it can be reached through delving into myths, archetypes, stories, and our cultural history. Scholars, teachers, artists, and psychologists are showing the relevance of myth in the modern world. Through this work, audiences find new contexts for appreciating the deepest truths of their own mythic traditions. They gain "permission to believe" again. At the risk of sounding maudlin, we believe that the world would be a better place if more people were aware of this work and could integrate it into their lives.

To that end, this is our Vision:

The Mythic Imagination Institute seeks to help to create a better world by increasing the mythic literacy of people everywhere.

You'll find more about our Vision and Mission on our new web site. If you'd like to read our Vision and Mission Statement, which includes our tactical plan for the next five years, send a note to info@mythicjourneys.org or call (404) 832-4127.

We're depending on support from people like you. If you'd like to learn more about the Mythic Imagination Institute, or to contribute time, expertise, money, or materials, please write to: info@mythicjourneys.org or call (404) 832-4127.

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We are asking our partners, such as Miriam's Well, for example, to either share their mailing list with us or to send something on our behalf. In return, we may occasionally agree to send something along to you. We feel that this is an important part of our resource linking and community-building efforts. However, this will be rare (we don't like wading through too much mail and Spam, either) and will usually be included in our newsletter or regular publications. We will make every effort to ensure that everything we pass along is consistent with our mission and is likely to be of interest to our audiences.

Tell us what you think

We'd like to hear what you think. If you have any comments about this newsletter or its contents, please write to us at mary@mythicjourneys.org or call us at (404) 832-4127.

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President: [Michael Karlin](#)

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Editor: [Mary Davis](#)

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