



STILL SINGING, SOMEHOW

An Odyssey of One Soul's Karma



Rob Rideout

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Prologue

This book was inspired in prison. I wanted my son, long estranged due to divorce, to know the entire story; the why and the how that brought me to this place. In the process of writing, I discovered that I was really writing it for myself-to purge and forgive myself for the life I created. Sadly, my own compulsions sabotaged much of my life, allowing me to wallow in self-absorption and self-pity. Through years of laboring in rewrites, I have reviewed my life many times- maybe too many. The result has been a tremendous healing. My story is one of fall and redemption, of heaven and hell. It's about the pain of loss and the cop-out path I pursued for so long. If you're looking for something better than what you've seen on TV or already read, you might or might not find it here. But remember, the truth is *always* stranger than fiction. I couldn't have thought this story up in my wildest imagination. Hopefully, anybody suffering from alcoholism or an overactive ego may find a ray of hope here. However, this book is without a hook; an inspirational memoir whose title alone will have to suffice. My lifelong dream has always been to pursue a lifestyle of truth, simplicity and love. The road to that goal hasn't been easy, and I realize that I paved it all myself. I had to lose everything to gain a freedom I never dreamed possible, but it was worth it, every step of the way. Many names in this journey have been changed to protect the innocent.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, Divine Mother, Friend, Lord, Beloved God-Jesus Christ, Bhagavan Krishna, Mahavatar Babaji, Paramahansa Yogananda and sacred Peyote; I humbly bow to you all. May Thy love and light shine forever, on this, the sanctuary of my devotion, and May I be able to awaken Thy love within my own and within all hearts and bring them to Thee. Amen

Life Path

You were born on the last day of the last sign of the zodiac wheel and as a result have tremendous potential for an all-or-nothing existence. It is not an easy ride, in many ways, as you will be forced to confront who you really are and what you really want. There will come a time when you will be called upon to make a drastic change, and at this point it is essential that you follow your heart. Born on March 20, you are kind, unusual and liberated. You are naturally good at changing your life. You will make a very wise sage in your latter years.

STILL SINGING, SOMEHOW

“Before signing your plea bargain, is there anything you would like to say?” asked the balding Superior Court judge.

“Yes, Your Honor,” I replied. I was the only one being convicted who even responded to the judge’s rhetorical question. Since it was my life on the line, I decided that I may as well tell him what was running through my head. God, this is all *so* heavy! My palms were sweaty, I was shaking and I sensed that the judge knew I drank last night. I hoped that I would learn the length of my prison sentence after speaking with the judge. My court appointed public defender hadn’t been able to shed any light on this subject over the past two anxiety-ridden months. He dryly stated that I could serve anywhere from four months to four years for this aggravated DUI felony that had gotten me to the present karmic moment of my pitiful life.

“Whatever sentence you impose, Your Honor, I see it as the will of God. I am a very sick man who only wants to get well. I accept my punishment wholeheartedly.”

The judge replied, “Thank you, Mr. Rideout. I’ll soon be sentencing you to prison in the Arizona Department of Corrections. I have seen a few men really change for the better in prison. Good luck in county jail until your sentencing.”

Good God, how had all of this happened to me? How had I let alcohol take me this low? I had five years of college under my belt, traveled to nineteen countries, been blessed by holy men in India, had two marriages plus a child and, quite literally, withstood the trials of Job. Ironically, I was *not* scared out of my wits. I was *way* past that and ready to accept my sentence with open arm- praying that I could *really* change inwardly. I wanted to process and correct the many mistakes and wrong choices that had resulted in this incarceration. I saw that I must use this appointed time creatively, to look within and reflect upon what had put me here:

abandonment issues and alcoholism, dysfunctional upbringing and rebellion, heartbreaks and my misleading hasty ego. After decades of spiritual searching and study, maybe prison was *just* what I needed to awaken from the illusion I falsely created and called “my life.” Maybe I would somehow find the inner peace necessary to be able to forgive myself for all of the pain that I had inflicted upon my son, ex-wives, and loved ones.

After signing my plea bargain (which was *some* variation of guilty as charged) I was immediately handcuffed and seated, still wearing the new Christmas shirt given to me by my dear friend Lyn. I sat uncomfortably in the jury box, alone and bewildered, and watched while others’ lives went to hell. After a few hours, my wrists aching, I was escorted out the back door of the courtroom and taken over to the county jail.

“Am I being booked again?” I asked the guard.

“Yeah... and here is your new orange outfit, complete with Yavapai County jail stenciled on the back. Plus, you’ll get a new identity bracelet for your left wrist, with your own number and picture on it.”

“My face will change over time, but this number will *never* change,” I replied. “I am now a convicted felon, like it or not! How long do you think I’ll serve?”

“I don’t know, Buddy, I just don’t know.”

This mad house

I’m now doing my time in Golf Pod. All of the pods here have such classy names, with approximately forty-five inmates per pod. This is where I’ll stay, until I’m finally shipped off to prison. This mad house is packed! We have about sixty inmates over crowded in here, with fifteen more on floor mats. I soon found my space under the stairs and scored a very beat up paperback to begin reading immediately. This would be the first of many more books to come. Now I can begin to

mentally relax and “rest in God.” I know this sounds strange, but *finally* the long awaited process of incarceration has begun for me, up and running. This is it... well, the beginning anyway. All the fear and anxiety of the past few neurotic months is behind me now. It feels like it’s sunk or swim in this present jail environment. Talk about being pushed into the unknown! Just walking into this room, with all these new weird faces checking me out, makes one a bit nervous. I’m learning to adapt quickly, however, as when I traveled in foreign countries. I’m basically staying to myself, until I can figure out all the new rules and politics here. And there are heavy politics here, believe me! Every day is a learning experience in one way or another. I know I won’t be sentenced to prison, Arizona Department of Corrections (ADC), for another month and that alone keeps me guessing. How long *will* I do hard time? Why can’t they just tell me now? Legal wheels move *soo* slow! Everybody here has advice and opinions. Everybody! And some of it *really* scares me. Thankfully, there are always many jailhouse lawyers to help figure things out. And everybody here has many things to figure out. Oh yeah.

After a few days, I finally moved out from under the stairs into a room with two other inmates upstairs. However, I’m still on the floor while they’re on bunks. “Oh, this is priceless,” I thought. Thank God I haven’t lost my sense of humor. It’s one step up this institutional ladder at a time.

Every day, after breakfast is passed through a slot in our door, along with a disposable razor to be returned, we’re let out of our rooms to shower and congregate- only to find another ten or more new cons asleep on the dayroom floor. They booked in while we slept. Many will bond out quickly, paying any amount of money to do so today. Many will return later for longer stays. We recently had a DOC SWAT team dressed out in black combat gear conduct a practice on us for prison uprisings; complete with loaded paint guns, face shields and kneepads. They looked like they were out of the TV evening news or possibly the Mideast crisis.

“Everybody get on the floor right now! Hey you, longhair, get down!” We were forced at gunpoint to lie on our faces against the cold dirty cement floor, and later marched outside to be lined up against a wall, execution style, for an hour. Some inmates laughed or made rude comments.

“I’m calling my lawyer,” threatened one inmate. He was quickly handcuffed and sent to the hole, not to be seen again.

A book cart comes by bi-weekly, and I scramble for any reading material.

“Have you read *Lonesome Dove*? Here it is. Grab it quickly!” shouted another inmate to me.

“Thanks. I’ve always wanted to read it.” Luckily, I have found some great thick books so far, perfect for prison reading. Down time is basically a time warp. As I adjust, I see that time now seems to go faster inside, than on the outs. Cool. Most of my time is spent on my bunk, flat out, trying to relax on all levels. The lights are always on here and the green, cracked plastic mattress is very thin and hard. There is no pillow. Everybody who knows claims that prison is *way* better than any county jail. I’ll be finding out the validity of this claim in due time. But for now, it’s time to lie back down and remember how it all began for me, with that “damn beat” of the Beatles.

That “damn beat” just....

Music has always been my first love, long before I ever had a girlfriend. My mom loved music intensely too, especially the Beatles. To quote Mom, “that damn beat just drives me crazy!” But that “damn beat” that my mother spoke of, would ultimately lead me into a lifestyle of bars and drunks, pot and parties, heartaches and heartbreaks; all laced with travel and relationships. Playing music professionally would put me in enabling environments for the creation of a very self-indulgent lifestyle.

This lifestyle and mindset would persist for many decades to come and take me further into to the illusion of the ego.

For me, it all began on February 7, 1964 when the Beatles arrived, attacking our American TVs on Ed Sullivan's Sunday night variety show. This had to be one of the spiritual high noon's of the 20th century. No crime was committed in New York City during that one hour. When I saw a picture of Ringo's drum set, taken from behind in *Life* magazine, I knew I'd finally found my destiny: to play music and follow that "damn beat" wherever it would take me. This was my parents' worst fear. My mom would repeatedly say, "Oh God, Rob." That would actually become her mantra. And like it or not, I would hear that mantra many times in my life.

My drumming career began on an upside-down tin garbage can, using paint brushes for sticks. Soon, I had an old wooden snare drum and a cheap Japanese cymbal that got beat beyond recognition. When I scored my first real job in the *Malibu's*, I'd progressed to a full set of oyster blue *Ludwig* drums. I seemed to know how to play instinctively. I knew where the beat was and how to get there. I must have been born with rhythm. Mom paid for drum lessons but only one sufficed, as I could play everything already. Cool! So now I was actually making money on weekends, playing for dances after football games. And the times, they were a changing, as cheerleaders were quickly starting to notice musicians over the jocks. Yes!

In 1964, most bands mainly played instrumentals. With the advent of the British musical invasion, vocals were becoming very popular, as were costumes. Being raised in Bellingham, we were exposed to such bands as *Paul Revere and the Raiders* and Seattle's *The Fabulous Wailers*, *Don and the Good Times*, *The Viceroy's* and *The Sonics*, to name a few. We wanted to be like them! I studied each drummer intensely, learning to imitate something from their style, as these bands played weekly in our county. So, with love and fascination for the Civil War, *The Rebels* was created. Our five mothers hemmed us gray woolen uniforms right out of the Confederacy. With our knee-high vinyl boots and Rebel forage caps from a Seattle costume shop, we were equipped for musical warfare and armed with plenty of new cover tunes.

However, these woolen band outfits proved to be incredibly hot! We were drenched in sweat by the end of our first set. At this time too, razor cuts were considered advanced hair styling. I'd actually drive to Seattle, ninety miles away, to have my hair cut. My stylist, gay of course, cut all the famous Seattle bands' hair at that time. Mod haircuts were the thing for musicians. You have to look good on stage and you sure couldn't trust '60s barbers for that! The jocks went to them.

In a local battle of the bands, *The Rebels* won big time. Our band, of fourteen to sixteen year olds, sounded great. The other members had been taking music lessons and practicing on their instruments much longer than me. We sounded *much* older than we were and everybody got a kick out of our costumes. Our young raw energy was pretty much irresistible, with three part harmony and cover tunes that sounded dead-letter perfect. With a college student as our manager, we played weekly for 1500 students at Western Washington State College, for months. Our fame was pictured and printed in the *Bellingham Herald*. I was now making over \$100 per weekend- way more money than most my age and having extreme fun at the same time. I love this music business! I literally lived and breathed drums in my head at school, especially on Fridays. I couldn't *wait* to be on stage each weekend. The chemistry that I was experiencing between the band and audience would become addicting over time, as would a variety of other things.

We even played a few fraternity keggers in Seattle. Our microphone cords would often short out from all the spilt beer on the floor. And once, while packing up equipment, we found fresh blood on the floor of our rented U-Haul trailer.

"What's that?" we all asked. It obviously wasn't a murder but something was out of whack here.

"Another college virgin has been deflowered," said a frat boy, while we virgins played on.

After playing these gigs, we often frequented the counter-culture coffee houses in the University district. Here I encountered my first "fringes"- beatniks playing bongos and reading poetry. These folk, historically the first symbols of those to drop out, were paving

the way for the upcoming hippies. I was all eyes, as I entered these coffee shops of mystery. I also hung out a lot around our own counter-culture college scene at WWSC in Bellingham. Many of the older college freaks, who were already experimenting with drugs, told me not to mess with them.

“You don’t need them with your energy. You are already there!” The same truth *A Course in Miracles* would hammer home to me decades later. If *only* I had heeded their advice then!

My summer of love....

As the psychedelic movement was blossoming during '67, I had Red Dog, my mom’s red VW bug and high school graduation gift, painted much like John Lennon’s Rolls Royce. It was groovy flower power done artistically, by two art-student friends. I now owned the first freak vehicle in Bellingham’s history. I proudly made my maiden voyage through Bunk’s Drive-In, to show off and revel in my newfound hip glory. “You do your thing and I’ll do mine,” was the popular saying of these times. How I longed to be noticed as unique. Why? My ego had already chosen the social archetypical role of the “nonconformist” artist or performer, unbeknownst to me. I wore my wide, black leather belt, holding up my bell-bottom jeans. My Beatle boots and polka dot balloon sleeve semi-pirate shirt made me hip as shit! Most of my classmates probably thought I was totally crazy. Who cares? I sure didn’t. I was the only musician in my class and everybody seemed to know that. I was different, no doubt about it.

Just prior to graduating from high school, the *Jefferson Airplane* came to town, complete with the *Merry Pranksters*, the *San Francisco Mime Troupe* and their psychedelic bus, *Further*. Beat poet Alan Ginsberg, freak author Ken Kesey and speed freak legend Neil Cassidy, along with a lot of very silent actors, assaulted Bellingham for a week- a week I would *never* forget. This whole troop was all living legends. The Beatles’ Sergeant Peppers album had just been released and I was one of the first to

own it, of course. Well, the Airplane somehow got wind of this news and asked if they could borrow my newly acquired treasure- to drop acid to after their concert. They couldn't wait to experience this classic masterpiece and I was instrumental in making their dream come true. At the concert, I was seated on the floor with my legs under the sixteen inch high riser. Grace Slick was belting out *White Rabbit* right in front of me. I was almost in her personal space. The following morning I drove over to their crash pad to retrieve my new Beatle record. There was the Airplane passed out on the floor. I quietly put my record back in its jacket and backed out the door. Were they asleep or was the Airplane still flying somewhere out in the cosmos? Boy, they sure sounded good last night and I hadn't even experienced drugs yet! What *is* acid? Now the time was coming for this young free spirit to go on pilgrimage to the happening Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco, California. My "Summer of Love" was about to begin.

Mike, the Rebel's bass player and also called "Toad," from Kenneth Graham's *The Wind in the Willows*, joined me on the twenty-four hour Greyhound bus ride to the pilgrimage site. We ran into Kathi, our old girl singer, who took us up to Hippie Hill in Golden Gate Park.

"Have you ever smoked marijuana?" she asked.

"No, I haven't yet. But I'd like to."

Well, Kathi stoned me for my very first time up on Hippie Hill. For the record, the word "hippie" comes from "hipster." "Hip" is slang for "aware." This was the beginning of the end, one could say, even though I didn't really get off on that first toke.

Toad and I also had another bizarre experience together during this Summer of Love. We attended a Baptist revival meeting at a circus tent in the Happy Valley district of Fairhaven, Bellingham. Toad had been drinking beer and, being an atheist, didn't cotton to believers. I didn't know what to think, not having been exposed to religion yet. The crazed preacher was expounding brimstone and hellfire inside those canvas walls.

“My God... is this what religion is all about?” I thought. After mocking them, we quietly slipped out under the tent canvas. “Who needs a God like that, Toad?” I just don’t understand this thing called religion- yet!

This summer also introduced me to LSD and Timothy Leary’s mantra, “Turn on, tune in, drop out.” Faithfully and sadly, I took both to heart. Now, I *knew* what acid was. In total, I dropped good LSD about a dozen times, way less than most of my peers. My first trip took me from being an agnostic, who doesn’t know if there is a God, to the realm of a true believer. My mystic path had just begun; it was a real turning point. Acid let me see things clearly, I felt, just as they are, peeling away the onionskins of preconceived ideas and perceptions of judgment in my mind. It’s very difficult to write about acid trips, practically impossible actually, as most of it is *so* far beyond words. Trying to explain seeing things at a sub-atomic level, where everything is in a state of constant motion, isn’t real easy to describe, much less relate to for most people. I was fortunate enough to have experienced guides, harmonious settings and so, basically wonderful trips. Acid made me aware of other levels of reality, whatever that is, and let me feel a structured and loving, divine order to all of life. I’d only tripped twice in ’67, but it really opened my mind, as they say. It was the first crack in my ego shell, which allowed me to get a glimpse of pure Spirit.

My own experiments were always special, sacred and spiritual. To me, acid was a sacrament, *not* a toy. It could show you heaven or take you to hell in the wink of an eye! Respect it and keep it holy. I realized early on that it was *just* a door to show me the Way. Not to be considered or mistaken *as* the Way. However, that’s the trap that many got caught up in. I’m lucky to have survived, I guess.

As my parents weren’t churchgoers, I was raised agnostic. We didn’t talk about God in our house. When I was a youngster, my mom took me to Sunday school briefly, but then was appalled by all the hypocrisy. She promptly yanked me out. In the war, she had held a dying soldier in the ocean, with both arms and legs blown-off. After this, poor Mom couldn’t believe in God anymore. Mom

was Scots-Irish with flaming red hair, a temper to match, coal black eyes and nice long legs. She'd been a babe in WW2, as a scrub surgery nurse under General Douglas Mac Arthur in Australia and New Guinea. Mom was one of fourteen nurses surrounded by two thousand lonely soldiers. Here, she learned to smoke, drink, dance and cuss. Her bad habits would ultimately corrupt my poor dad. During her last year of life, at age sixty-four, her faith would finally turn around. Mom always told me that we create our own heaven or hell right here on earth. It has taken me over fifty some odd years to fully realize the complete truth of her statement. I did drop out, as they say. I guess I was destined to all along- always the Rebel on *so* many levels. But what was I *really* rebelling against? Myself sadly, and not just authority, but I wouldn't realize this for a very long time. Also, I descended from Quakers, historically the first semi-hippies in anti-establishment Europe. I became the black sheep in my parents' eyes, for dropping out in more ways than one, and would later in society's eyes. But, all things considered, I'm still glad I got to experience all I did back in the '60's. It was a real trip!

Jesus, Mayhem, and Red and....

For about two weeks now, I've been coughing heavily as nicotine toxins exit my system. I know my cough upsets the Mexicans, but I've just *got* to get this phlegm out. I really felt no come down from alcohol, except the occasional nervous body snap when fully relaxing before sleep. Sleep, everyone does a lot here. It kills time. I did a lot of deep breathing and quick walking of laps around the dayroom, joining an orange line of others in the exercise program. The high starch diet is a major change from my usual fare of fresh veggies and brown rice. I've gotten horribly constipated and had to queue up in the nightly med line for laxatives. I'm drinking water copiously now, to aid this common incarceration problem. It does feel great, finally, to escape the bondage of demon alcohol and its ensuing entrapment into my lower nature. I've sadly

been under the spell of the false self, the ego, whose very nature is harmful, for *far* too many years! My awareness of my true nature, the Higher Self or Christ within me, grows daily, as I now confront my forced sobriety and shame over a wasted life. Finally surrendering more, I'm letting God have His perfect way here. I long for the awaited healing of my heart and soul. I just feel grateful to be alive right now, even here in county jail.

"Look at that dude. Jesus Christ's clone has appeared!" a fellow inmate shouted. This inmate from Seattle, as I learned, looked exactly like actor Robert Powell from *Jesus of Nazareth*. I wonder what the guards thought as they processed this carbon copy of the Lord. God definitely has a great sense of humor, even in jail.

"Have you gotten any mail yet?" I was asked.

"Yea, I have and surprisingly from my first ex-wife."

"How many ex-wives do you have?"

"Only two that I know of," I responded.

Jolene put fifty dollars on my books but, and as the county takes one dollar per day for rent if you have money, that doesn't leave much for commissary candy. She let her folks know of my new address, and soon her faithful mother wrote me too. Her letter was heavy- hard love. Many sentences were underlined, admonishing me to *never* drink again and reminding me of all I had lost, just to feel good temporarily and numb out life.

After reading the letter, I said to another inmate, "In a strange way, I'm grateful that my parents aren't alive any longer."

"Why would you say that?"

"I'm sure my mom would have killed me verbally and most definitely disowned me."

My dad had already done that, years ago. I'm sure they are both rolling over in their graves, but then again, they don't have any, as I put their cremated ashes to rest in the ocean.

"Yeah, my mom is really having a hard time dealing with my incarceration. My dad hates me now," answered back the fellow inmate.

The White Supremacy Arian Brotherhood is powerful in this jail. Names like Chaos and Mayhem are popular, along with swastika and lightening bolt tattoos. And, of course, the shaved head. They keep the majority of Mexican nationals or Pisa's in line through intimidation and fear. I learned that in the Convict Code, racial pod fathers negotiate problems between the races. Father knows best. You *never* eat with other races, *only* your own. Sean, the unspoken king of the Aryans, silently ruled our pod. He had the German Nazi eagle tattooed on his neck and even drew it out as an extensive letterhead on letters he wrote. And he wrote continuously. When Sean got shipped over to Prescott for court, a real asshole named Red took over. Red was a meth-head and had been up speeding non-stop for nearly two weeks. He was pronounced clinically dead in the E.R., after ingesting mass amounts of speed in a police chase. However, he miraculously survived, to torment us all here. Red had a very loud idiotic machine gun-type laugh, which cackled constantly throughout our waking hours. He combined this audio torture with saying, "You know what I'm talkin' about?" and "You know what I mean?" every few seconds in his babbling dialogue of his egotistical drug orgies. This sick dude looked like an angry Vincent Van Gogh, combined with the Energizer bunny.

He even shouted at me, "Hey old man", a first that *really* hit my ego. Red was a classic bully who reigned through intimidation of weaker, less institutionalized inmates. He was a real super control-freak and doing his best to exert his power. Some people seem to come into their prime in here. The lowest can become the highest. In all of my life, I've never really felt such hate for an individual, until I encountered this Red. I really don't like to use the word hate, but he was the

living embodiment of all I detested- a real human antichrist in my opinion. Yet, what was he reflecting in me, to make me *so* upset? Are my own imperfections so intolerable that I project them onto poor Red? Maybe someday I'll be able to offer compassion, instead of judgment. Four of us inexperienced jailbirds even wrote a kite, the proper prison paperwork, to the guards to have Red removed from our pod. But this, as we later learned, was a form of snitching or ratting off in the Convict Code. Learned inmates would have just smashed Red. However, it takes time to learn all these unspoken rules. We all, unfortunately, had plenty of that still coming our way. In time too, I would have my confrontation with Red.

Oh, those innocent days of youth....

On the first day of spring and the last day of Pisces-March 20, 1949 I was born in Seattle, WA to Dr. Eugene Melvin Rideout and mother Jane. On my first day back here on earth, I was treated for spastic bowel with opium. *What* a way to start my life and how symbolic of my karma to come.

Dad was a general surgeon in Bellingham, Washington where I grew up. Mom became a frustrated mother who probably should have kept her day job as a nurse. Our last name, Rideout, comes from Normandy, France and supposedly relates to the first warriors to *ride out* into battle when being attacked. Mom's Celtic lineage is an ancient line of nomads who were difficult to govern and viewed as rebels prone to violence. But I inherited many good qualities from these two bloodlines: a sense for travel and spirituality rather than religion and a resilient self-confidence coupled with a self-cleansing psyche that loves life. Two years after I was born, my sister Joyce showed up on the scene. She was born on Friday the 13th, the same as Dad, but different months. I was blessed to have Joyce as my sister, for now anyway. Together, we tried to understand just how to survive in a classic dysfunctional family. Poor Mom had lost her three best friends to polio after I was born and became very depressed. She strived endlessly to be a Super

Mom of the '50s, wanting only the best from and for her children. Needless to say, her dream failed to materialize. Sadly, Mom seemed to thrive more on melodrama and the adrenaline rush of worry, fear and negativity, than on life itself. She would never find any kind of inner peace, until she was nearly at death's door. Her ego was fast, always in fifth gear. It rubbed off on me, as I had to be prepared to respond instantly around her. My hasty spirit was already being formed. And Dad, being a doctor, seemed to have a shell around his heart and feelings. Maybe this was his way of dealing with other's health problems and death, but he was emotionally not there much, for me or my sister. There wasn't any hugging or "I love you" in our family. The phone was constantly ringing, always interrupting any kind of semblance of family life. To this day, I *still* react adversely to ringing telephones. Many nights my mom would take my bed, in her desperation to get sleep, forcing me to lie next to my snoring dad and that telephone next to the bed that would surely bring a 2 a.m. call from some hypochondriac patient. Being this doctor's son was *no* fun.

In Lowell grade school, I had a lunch box of Davey Crockett killing a bear and a decal of a newspaper with a headline asking, "What's the Latest Dope?" This was a common saying in the '50's, meaning, "What's up?" Ironically, this would have various levels of interpretation in my later life. I was a Cub Scout too; Pack Seven, Den Five. Once, at a large assemblage of scouts, I was nominated to lead the flag salute, the sacred Pledge of Allegiance. This was my first experience of performing in front of a crowd and I froze up big time. I was *so* nervous that I couldn't even remember the first word: "I." Finally kids began whispering, "I" to me, so we could get this hellish ordeal over with. Who, at this point, would have ever thought I'd spend most of my life in front of audiences? I was off to a rough start.

Mom became a den mother and was highly regarded by my peers. When I asked them why, they replied, "She is cool." Little did they know how crazy she really was? They were only seeing one side of her Gemini personality. She was progressive and very different from their mothers, with her Lucy persona and war experience, and they enjoyed the change. Why was my mom such

a wild card? Would I end up like her? Being more of a female, right-brained person myself, I told my friends, “I feel very comfortable with *your* mothers, who are calmer and more of the June Cleaver/Harriet Nelson mold than my Lucille Ball mom.”

“Well, we like your mom better!” they answered back.

You’ll never know, until you’ve been there yourself....

On my fifty-fourth birthday, my son Sri Ram sent me greetings and a decent guard even wished me “Happy Birthday”. Then, on March 24, 2003, I was sentenced to prison in Superior Court by that same balding judge. This was the day I’d been anticipating. What would my sentence be?

“How long did you get?” asked my cellie when he saw me return to our pod.

“Two and a half years, with no fines or probation- only community supervision upon release,” I answered back. “That is the politically correct terminology for parole now.” The reality of this hadn’t sunk in yet at all.

After this sentencing, I was officially upgraded to property of the State of Arizona, instead of Yavapai County, even though it would be another month before I’d be transferred to my new ADC yard. Returning to my pod, I was in shock, to say the least! I’d met earlier with a local probation lady, who supposedly influences the judge’s decision.

“I know you won’t qualify for any minimum sentence, due to your priors,” she told me.

“Well, I kind of figured that.”

“I want to see you in a halfway house upon release, with five years of probation!” she sternly warned me. “Your destructive behavior and irresponsible drinking could have easily killed you, others or *even* Sri Ram.”

Guilt, shame, fear and deep remorse set in strongly. I was trembling, I was so scared. I don't think I've ever felt *so* scared. Oh God, what have I done? I feel *so* pitiful! I've created some *very* heavy karma and the scales *must* be balanced now. Remember, I told the judge that whatever he sentenced me to, I saw it as the will of God. I still respect his decision, as heavy as it was. The way I see it, I deserve it! It's all good, as it's all God and it's all karma too. With good time, I'll hopefully be out in twenty-three months instead of thirty; maybe. That still seems like a long time to me, right now, as the reality of all this settles in. It really seems like a long time! I've got to stay positive: Positive, Positive, Positive. Now, I just wonder when exactly, I'll be transported out of this nut-house jail.

One inmate told me a jailhouse truth. He said, "Dude, this is probably the only time in your life when you can't *wait* to get to prison." How appropriate! Then he said, "You'll be sent to a DUI yard - much better than 'real' yards, where violence, politics and fear are the norm. And in some of those yards, you can actually make some money, working outside, as you're considered a minimal risk."

"Wow, prison does sound a lot better than jail," I replied, thankful for this ray of hope.

"Oh, it is. You'll see. And after the way you stood up against Red, verbally, when he tried to bust your balls, I think you'll do just fine in prison. He could have smashed you, you know, but you nailed him with the truth."

"Yea, I sure hope you're right, as it's been a bit stressful mentally so far," I responded, but more to myself than to him. This place is aging me already, I thought. Red and I did get into it; Red yelling obscenities, while I slashed him to the bone verbally. There was a huge crowd all around us. It got very heated and I was a bit worried. After all, I'm dealing with a crazy person here.

"Just so you know, Rideout, if Red would have hit you, we would have been all over him."

“Thanks, that’s reassuring even after the fact.”

During my second month of waiting, my dear old friends, the Harmon’s, finally wrote. Barb suggested that I move back with them and build a cabin for myself on their wooded acreage. This promising news was like a shot of divine adrenaline. It gave me hope with a capital “H”; just what I needed after my sentencing. I would definitely be writing Tony and Barb Harmon more, when I arrive at my new ADC home.

That change occurred early on Friday, April 18, 2003. The guards shouted those infamous words, “Roll up!” and I knew I was now off to Alhambra- the Arizona Department of Corrections’ equivalent of Ellis Island in New York; a convict processing plant, for those newly entering the system. I’d already been fully warned about this place.

Three other convicts were chained and shackled with me on our ride to Phoenix, in a heavily barred transport van. There were seven other inmates already in this van, from jails over in Prescott and up in Flagstaff. I hadn’t seen I-17 or the Verde Valley in two months, so even this ride was a simple treat for me. I joyously watched the scenery pass by from the rear view screened mesh window, on this one and a half hour road trip. Then, we stepped out of the van into another world.

“God, even the hot Phoenix sun feels good,” I commented aloud, after being inside concrete buildings for so long. We were only allowed outside maybe once a week, for about twenty minutes, back at county jail. Then I noticed that the guards here all carried rifles with scopes, looking down from the rooftops of this classic institution. This was a maximum security yard, as many criminals here carry far worse records than a mere DUI. DUI’s are considered a minimal risk, but we receive far harsher sentences than car thieves, child molesters, rapists and burglars. Our crime is technically a traffic violation but we get a felony, a cross we’ll have to carry with us for the rest of our lives. Even though we did it to ourselves, it just doesn’t seem fair somehow, sometimes, but karma is karma and God knows, I’m trying to deal with mine.

Everything has a beginning....

Herded inside like cattle at Alhambra, we were all instantly assaulted by a large team of staff who were moving about every which way and then finger printing us yet again. It was as crowded in here as *Costco* on Saturday afternoon, with new arrivals wondering which way to turn. Next, photos were taken of our clean-shaven faces for our personalized “license plate.” This ID card, with your notorious ADC number, will always stay the same. The new identification badge is to be worn at *all* times, in plain view, on our new orange jumpsuits. All tattoos were photographed and documented and this took some time, as many cons had “sleeves” on their arms or near-total torso coverage. I was questioned by a huge black NFL-looking intake officer about the Om sign, which looks like a squiggly three, on my wrist.

“Is that tribal?”

“Yeah,” I replied, yet laughing inside at my answer. “Tribal,” I thought. “That’s a good one!” To me, only a person of African descent would say something like that. He would probably never understand the Sanskrit symbol anyway.

Little did I know at this point, just how political and tribal tattoos are in prison. Like Anglos had better not have feather tattoos, as only warrior chiefs were allowed that privilege. Sadly, I hardly met any “chiefs” I’d consider warriors. Alcohol had taken down their once-spiritual civilization in the 19th century but they still have plans to drink and party when they get out. I sometimes wonder if today’s Indians aren’t the very souls who persecuted the Redman, only to reincarnate this time around on the other end of the karmic scale.

Next, we were all herded off for pee tests and eye exams. With hundreds a day being processed, these hurdles were done quickly. Anybody going to prison in Arizona must pass through Alhambra first. It was a rude awakening to see *so*

many others in trouble too. What do the personnel working here think, seeing daily, year in and year out, so many wounded souls passing under these gates of hell? Everybody is now just reduced to a number. If a name is used, it's always your surname.

"Hey Rideout, come over here right now!" shouted the C.O.

"Yes Officer, I'm coming." I've personally always preferred first names; much more intimate. I usually get some kind of a comment or snicker when people hear my last name, yet I'm always proud of it, since there are so few Rideouts in the whole world. One day, I *will* ride out of this place. But for now, the game is to accept "authority", which I've always had a problem with, and slowly become institutionalized, without even knowing it. It happens.

Finally, we were all assigned to rooms in a hallway called Dog Run- small yellow rooms with eight inmates in old tinny bunks and six more on the remaining floor space. One such room housed the criminally insane. These poor souls looked *so* lost, as they stared out the single barred window. I wonder if they even knew where they were, let alone where they'd be going or what they had done. An institutional stainless steel toilet sat in each room's center, so everybody could watch you relieve yourself. This made peeing very hard for many nervous ones, me included. And you'd better damn well flush repeatedly when shitting, for the smell. I was blown away by how much toilet paper those guys used- like ten feet for each wipe. That is such a waste! But it's just one of their ways of getting back at a system that they feel put them here. I know something that most of them don't know yet. I know *I* put myself here, without a doubt.

This prison is very old, built in the early 1900's but looks like it weathered the Civil War. There are no books and don't even consider TV. This was the adult experience of "nothingness." There really wasn't much to do but talk to each other and compare our horrible tales of woe.

“Did your parents do weird shit when you were a kid?” asked a bored inmate.

“Oh yeah, they sure did,” I responded. Whose parents didn’t do weird shit? “We took a family trip together, when I was about fourteen, to see my Grandparents in San Diego. I remember my dad sneaking out behind his parents’ backs to smoke a cigarette. Dad’s homely mother Grace was a dead ringer for the witch in the *Wizard of Oz*. His father Harry resembled a Native American chief. He had no idea that his serious doctor son smoked. That’s messed up, don’t you think? Well, my Grandma Grace was pumping pecan pie down me big time, as my dad was sneaking around outside. Give me a break! I learned *then* how to do my own thing, by not letting my parents catch on. If my dad did it, it was O.K., right?”

“You got that right, Jack! My old man was the same way. They were teaching us to lie, unbeknownst to them.”

“One of the scariest memories was when Mom left us, in her orange VW ragtop, to commit suicide. I think she might have been drinking as she was raving frantically as she drove away. She planned to drive off Chuckanut Drive into the ocean. And she let us know it loud and clear, by punching a hole in the back door before she left. Obviously, this was a call for help, love and healing. My sister Joyce and I cried and screamed, while our dad did nothing. He just waited silently. Mom returned later that night, after we’d cried ourselves to sleep. Thank God. Nothing was ever said about this later. That’s the way it is, in an alcoholic household.”

“Yeah, I know all about alcoholic home fronts. I think most of us here do.”

Once every three days we got to shower. There were about five working showers, in a small room with forty-five inmates waiting in line. When the prison towels became scarce, they passed out orange tee shirts to dry ourselves.

One heavy biker dude asked me, “Did I ride with you up in Jerome?”

“No, I don’t think so.” At least he thought I looked biker enough. Lunch, in-room always, was a plastic sack filled with two bad sandwiches, cookies, stale chips and a packet of lemonade. Then, we either napped or told our tales again until dinner.

“Are you a Christian?” asked the small black dude next to me. He couldn’t wait to get to prison where he could have his Bible.

“Wow, now that’s a loaded question,” I answered back hesitantly. “Yes, I am. But not in the way that you think.”

I’ve pretty much been from A to Z with what I call, “Churchianity.” The Campus Crusade for Christ, my first girlfriend Jeanne and Art History at college, all influenced my conversion to Jesus. As our family *never* read the Bible, when I converted to Christianity, I became fanatic. I’ve always been an extremist and seem to take things to their limit. But I drove my poor parents up the wall, in desperation to save their souls. Didn’t they want to accept Jesus as their personal Savior and go to heaven with me? I studied Bible scripture *so* intensely, that I had visions of becoming a monk. Then my dad caught hepatitis from a patient and spent a month in bed, all jaundiced and yellowish. But I was there, at his bedside with the word of God and the teachings of Billy Graham! This did not improve our father-son relationship one iota.

At the same time, I was playing music in a house-band, named *David*, at the most happening bar in Bellingham, the Iron Bull. This popular bar was a major college hangout, due to ten cent beer specials. During breaks, I’d hand out religious tracts to drunken students or stoners in the alley. Then I’d pray for them all, by myself, in our band room. Being a new Christian was a lot of work! Many resented me for my fanatic actions but danced away when I got back behind my drums. But now, I was being persecuted for being a Jesus promo man. I even appeared in an article about “New Christians” in a college newspaper. My friends started calling me the “scatter-brained prophet” and made jokes about throwing us Jesus freaks into the lions’ den- probably meaning the taverns where I played music.

“Jesus man, you really did embrace the Lord,” commented the black inmate.

“Well, there’s more to it,” I replied.

When it was finally time to fly from the family nest, at twenty years old, I moved into a Christian male commune called “The Superior Cleaner.” This was a Christian teashop with us five monks residing upstairs. Previously, the building had been a vacuum repair shop, hence the name. Jesus was obviously the Superior Cleaner. Daily, I was quizzed on how many new Bible verses I had memorized, so I could use these new weapons of mass salvation on the unbelievers of Bellingham’s streets.

“How many new Bible verses did you get down today, Rob?” I was asked yet again.

“Jesus, I don’t know! All of this is causing a deep confusion and neurosis in me,” I answered back angrily. It was, and on some gut level I knew there was more to the story than I was experiencing with this Christian dogma.

I also attended spirit-filled services in Seattle, at all black Pentecostal and Baptist churches, hearing people speak in tongues and roll on the floor for Jesus. The opposite of this was the Quaker service of “sitting” in silence with my girlfriend Jeanne, for one hour on Bellingham Sundays.

Then one night after Bible study, a Christian psychic couple visited us budding monks. They placed their hands on me as I knelt and proclaimed, “You are very special, you will travel much and touch many souls in your life. If you *really* want to know God, He will take everything from you.”

It seems that this prediction has pretty much come true for me, now that I’m here in prison. But I’ve had a whole lot of other losses, many, long before I ever came here.

“Did the travel prediction come true? Did you end up traveling to foreign countries or did you just travel in the USA?” asked my new black friend.

“Both. Let’s eat first, and then I’ll tell you some of it.”

I had already been briefed about the chow here, considered great by prison standards but you were only given five minutes, if that, to cram it down. We were guard-led, of course, out of our yellow room on Dog Run across the yard of green grass to the chow hall. Then you swallowed as fast as you could, until you heard a guard yell, "Row 1, and pick up!" This hurried eating sure can't be good for proper digestion? It's not. Evidence was all the farting and constant constipation. The one delightful element here was the grossly overweight neutered Siamese cat, who obviously took *his* sweet time eating. We were also let out every other day for one hour of walking around the yard, with the cat. Here, I saw a few others I'd done time with up in county jail. These souls, sadly, would be going to *real* yards, not a DUI camp. Walking together and looking up, I noticed those same armed guards again, on the roof above the razor wire looking down at us with loaded rifles.

"If my friends back home could only see me now!" I thought. But where is my home now? It must be in my heart and mind, as that's all I seem to have left presently. And this whole experience, so far, was really making me face *now*, as there was no other place to escape *to*. And ironically, a part of me on high was watching and cherishing this experience, knowing that I would *never* pass this way again.

"This place, Alhambra, never quits," commented one inmate. "They just keep coming and coming."

How true. It, daily, processes new inmates as fast as it can. Most inmates spend on average a week here, before being transferred finally to one of Arizona's thirteen other prisons. Some, luckily, spend only a few days, while others might be in boredom for well over a month. And some are actually doing their time here. Yuk! I luckily only spent six boring days. I was given paper, a child-size pencil and indigent status envelopes, so I could write Sri and my friends. They all got a blow-by-blow description of my journey through this part of my incarceration. We also had dental x-rays taken, DNA mouth swabs, blood tests for HIV/AIDS, prostate cancer exams and finally scholastic tests to measure abilities in math, English, IQ, and reading levels. The numerous Mexicans took this two-

hour exam beneath Spanish-speaking headphones. Most of them had little schooling, so they would be required to take literacy classes and possibly GED classes in their new yards. Why? Many would be deported back to Mexico by INS after serving their time in Arizona anyway. I don't even want to get started on this subject. There are always more Mexicans in prisons and jails than Indians, blacks and whites. Something really seems wrong with our system. That subject could be a book too, especially concerning sentencing.

Anyway, I passed these scholastic tests with flying colors. Then, counselors evaluated each person's rap sheet and job skills, to determine which yard they'd be classified to—minimum, medium or maximum. I was assigned to a minimum DUI yard. I still wouldn't know which one of the four in Arizona, until I was rolled up again for the infamous DOC bus ride. A black weight lifter inmate, named Vincent, was my cellie, and had come down from the Verde Valley with me on the transport van. He had robbed Circle K in Village of Oak Creek, and a pizza place in Rimrock. No gun; he just walked off with the cash register beneath his two massive black arms. Obviously, he was going to a real yard, not an adult day care center for alcoholics.

However, he was serving only one year, while I'd be doing two and a half. See what I mean? Where is the justice in this ambiguous system?

I got notice that on April 23, 2003, I was to be transported out of infamous Alhambra. Thank God! I could hardly sleep the night before, I was so excited. So at 4 a.m. on Friday, I was given only cold cereal and little to drink. We could be on this bus for up to sixteen hours, so full bladders were discouraged. Once again, we were all strip-searched one last time. Serious looking guards inspected our assholes, scalps and mouths. What a job they have. In two naked lines facing each other, shackled in leg irons, I saw every form of penis imaginable. You will lose all self-consciousness in humbling situations like this. Now, I know how the Jews probably felt, all lined up naked in Nazi concentration camps. And my karma with

alcohol had provided me with this life changing experience. After being shackled and handcuffed together, we took short baby steps into the barred prison bus. Every driver passing us would see that this is the bus you do *not* want to be on – the one going to prison.

So here I sat, happy as a clam at high tide. This was definitely a big day. I was *finally* going home- well, to my new temporary home anyway. That's the only way I could see it. Prison has to become my home, as bizarre as that sounds, as I'll be here awhile. We were told not to sit in the first two rows of seats. But as soon as I sat about midway in the bus, my last name was called loudly.

“Rideout... you sit up front.” I knew then that I would be the first to reach my new yard and Phoenix West Prison was only about ten minutes away.

“Good deal, right where I wanted to be!” I mumbled to myself. Others had told me about this yard in county jail. I felt very lucky, as this yard had serious outside jobs where one could possibly make and save some money. I really needed that, after alcohol's drain on my financial status. I was the only DUI on this bus- a true minority amongst other crimes. There were a lot of car thieves and hackers on board. I learned that the Revlon nail file is a universal lock pick and that magnets from fifteen-inch speakers would suck the power from auto security systems when placed on car hoods. The lessons here never cease to amaze me.

Finally, the bus was fired up and running. Off we went amongst the rumblings of inmates seated behind me. There were some scary dudes on this bus and egos were already starting to flare. It was quite embarrassing, as I made eye contact with people out the window; they stared at my nameless face with pity. Only those who wear chains know the joy of freedom, I thought to myself.

Finally, I was taken to....

When we pulled into the parking lot of Phoenix West, I was told by many to submit a kite for transfer.

“Look at that small fucking yard! This place sucks. You gotta get out of here man!” shouted one chained inmate behind me. Yea, buddy, you do your time and I’ll do mine.

When the bus guards unlocked my chains, they accidentally spilled my entire beloved psyllium seed laxative all over the asphalt. A nurse at Alhambra had just given me this gift the night before. Some lame guard hadn’t screwed the lid on properly after checking it for contraband. And, I really needed this shit to shit! Oh well, maybe some real instant coffee would finally get my clogged bowels back to normal. What they called coffee at Alhambra was really chicory root. Waiting alone at intake to receive my new orange clothes, bedding and dorm room, I was suddenly brushed into medical for explanations on how H & R procedures worked here. I would have to pay three dollars for any medical business. But I could get a second pair of institutional eyeglasses for this price too. As I sat waiting, a white dude noticed I was a new fish, all decked out in my Alhambra transport jumpsuit. He gave me half a pouch of Top tobacco instantly. I was told that the “white wood” would take care of me. They did.

“Oh boy, here we go again,” I thought. After two months of freedom from tobacco, I now faced *every* smoker’s dilemma: to smoke or not to smoke? I made the wrong choice and went for it, when a C.O. offered to light my fire outside. I mentally promised myself that I’d quit sometime during my lengthy stay here. But prison isn’t the easiest of places to quit, as I’d soon learn.

Finally, I was taken to my new micro world of Dorm 4. I had a splitting headache and was freely given aspirin and Keefe instant java by other dormies. Everybody seems to honor a new face, as I was helped to feel at home on my first day here. My new “house” was the single temporary medical bunk against the wall, with no shelf or electricity. This suited me

fine, as I had no present money or a desire for a TV. To my delight, I had nobody above me on this single rack. I was just *so* grateful, finally to be in this better environment, where the lights were dramatically dimmed at night and I could lay my head down on a green plastic pillow inside a cotton case. I even had two white sheets! I remember Mom, back in the '50's, sun drying our bed sheets. I could smell summer sunshine when I went to bed. Wool blankets from South America were the finishing touch to this new luxury bed here. Later, I learned about stuffing newspapers under the low mattress dents, and even thought about smuggling in sand from the horseshoe pit, to help fill in these low spots. Soldier Jessica Lynch had used sand in her bed in Iraq. Maybe I should submit a kite to ADC about this pregnant idea. I doubt it would fly.

One evening, a new miniseries was airing on TV. It was about Hitler and I really wanted to watch this on our English day room television. Most cellies here owned their own clear plastic color TV's. In fact, our dorms kind of looked like a furniture store, which had nearly fifty TV's on display. Big black Charles, who resembled Seattle's BoBo the gorilla, got very upset about Nazis on the TV. He released his anger on me- verbally.

"Hey, turn that shit off!" Ironically, most TV's in the dorm had this show on. As I learned quickly, Nazis and blacks don't mix well, especially in prison. Charles's house was right across from mine. Now I had to walk on eggshells, as I was a marked "whitey" in his book of reality. I nearly got smashed, too, by three gang banger Chicano types and a Mexican, for farting in my bunk on my first night. The coffee was definitely doing its thing. I had crippling fear coursing through me, as I tried to hold the rotten smell under the wool blanket. Boy, I hate being here right now! Paranoia *does* strike deep.

"Use the bathroom next time, asshole," I was scolded. I so wish this Convict Code was published and available in the library! You just learn as you go along. Pod Fathers, of the various races in each dorm, explain the finer points of institutional living and help settle disputes between the races.

But the gas, that all inmates have, can be a *real* problem any time of day and a headache for not only the Pod Fathers.

I soon made friends with David H., an old California hippie who was a short timer and soon to be released. He was a gentle soul, much like me, and had a similar warped twisted sense of humor. But he was indigent, meaning no money, and had recently broken both ankles. He looked like a gaunt version of actor Peter O'Toole. He also loved his coffee, and had unique ways of hustling it off of me. There are no secrets in prison. And it's always a good policy to share here. You never know when you might need help, on whatever level.

"I heard you talking about Europe. Have you been there?" asked David one afternoon.

"Yeah, I drove through thirteen countries in ninety days, in a Volkswagen van with my classmate friend Randy in 1968. We'd both just finished our first year of college. You name it and we pretty much saw it."

This Grand Tour was....

My parents gave me this Grand Tour as an initiation into life. The Volkswagen bus, which cost \$1900 new, was a gift which would later be sent home and travel the United States with me and the lady who'd become my first wife. We started our trip in Holland, where we saw Ann Frank's upstairs hidden apartment, the famous "red light" district, numerous canals and tulips and learned all about how Edam cheese was made. Most of our trip, we survived on Edam cheese. Ann's place and the girls of the night made quite an impression on us. In the museums of northern Europe, we viewed the art of Van Gogh, Rembrandt, Raphael, Da Vinci, Michelangelo, etc., to Cézanne, Picasso, Fra Angelico, etc. - yada, yada, yada. Before leaving Germany, we visited a huge beautiful stone castle from 853 A.D., Burg Hohenzollern, complete with three drawbridges and a moat. This place fit every image I ever had of a castle. The

doors were ten inches thick! But a day that I'll *never* forget was visiting Dachau concentration camp. It's now a fully restored museum, but you get the idea of what it once was: full on Hell and way worse than any prison.

"Wow! That must have been heavy, just feeling the vibrations there," remarked David.

"It was."

After seeing the gas chamber valves at floor level, a beautiful butterfly crossed my path in front of the massive crematoriums. This was like seeing Beauty and the Beast at the same time. Walking through the yard, billboard-sized black and white photos captured images of emaciated Jewish prisoners piled, dead and rotting. How can men commit such atrocities? Is there any hope for mankind? Is there really a God, and, if so, how could He let this happen? These were some thoughts I had upon leaving Germany. I was only nineteen years old and seeing *so* much.

"Where did you go next?" he asked, knowing well that I'd tell him. This is a good way to kill some more time.

"After trying spaghetti in northern Italy, which was nothing like Mom's, we ferried over to Greece, reaching the ruins and Oracle of Delphi as our first stop in this ancient land. Over a bottle of yellow wine that resembled piss, an ancient Greek mariner prophesized to me. He had traveled the world and said that I looked like I came from Chile."

"Yea, you do kind of have that Indian look."

"Well, maybe. I've always been told that I look part Indian or maybe Jewish. You know, they used Jews to play Indians in many of the early Westerns."

After scaling the Acropolis, where the 5th Century B.C. Parthenon sits overlooking the city of Athens, we drove up the western side of Italy, stopping at Rome, Pisa and Florence. The coliseum in Rome seemed to house most of the city's feral cats, as we visited it in pre-dawn early light. At the Pope's house, the

Vatican, we saw the Sistine chapel frescoes where Michelangelo had painted the ceiling from scaffolding lying on his fricking back! Again, we did yet more museums that left us exhausted. These museums are huge all day affairs. We were getting callous and burned out to the Masters of Western art. The underground Christian catacombs, however, were haunting and fun to explore. This labyrinth of tunnels, eight miles long, contained tombs and secret meeting chambers. A spooky feeling unfolded for me there. These early Christian sure could dig! There were 174,000 Christians buried around the Apian Way and Saint Sebastian, Peter and Paul were all buried here too. Now that's far out!

“It definitely is. Being a Christian, I would love to see all that stuff. Did you happen to see Pompeii? I saw photos of that place in *National Geographic* in our library,” enquired David.

“Yeah, we did. After visiting the leaning Tower of Pisa, Venice with its black canal water and Michelangelo's *David* and *Pieta* in Florence, we spent a long day at the Pompeii ruins outside of Naples. Volcanic Mount Vesuvius still looms in the background. Vesuvius erupted on August 24, 79 A.D. burying Pompeii in ash. Remember?”

“I remember, but not the exact date. I'm sure it was in the magazine article but *so* what. Who'd remember that? Jesus, Rideout!”

“Well, this archeological city was huge, dude! We saw frozen bodies of humans and dogs, screaming, as the volcanic ash turned them to stone forever. Pompeii affected us much like Dachau concentration camp had- memories that leave a lasting impression with some even frozen in stone!”

“Man, you guys saw a lot of neat historic stuff,” exclaimed my friend. “You saw the real deal.”

“Well yeah, we did.”

“Is it hard to remember now, this many years later?”

“What do you think?”

After driving through the Italian Riviera, we sampled Monaco and the French Riviera, before heading on to Barcelona, Spain. Here, replicas of Columbus's ships, the Pinta, Nina and Santa Maria, were docked for display. We were amazed at how very small Queen Isabella's ships really were. And we heard flamenco music here, too. The guitars and flashing rapedo boot heels really stirred our Anglo blood. I've always loved Spanish music and in both Italy and Spain, we heard Tom Jones's *Dear Delia* sung by everyone and recorded in numerous languages.

"That's an old corny song!"

"It may be, but in 1968 it was *very* popular! Don't you get off on romantic songs like the Mexicans listen to? I do and I especially love Julio Iglesias's voice."

"You can have it as I'll stick with good old rock n' roll. It's more my style."

In Barcelona too, we saw the famous ballet team of Rudolf Nureyev and Joan Fontaine perform at night, in a bullfighting arena. He held the record for high jumping, long distance style ballet and in '68 they were both world famous superstars receiving a lot of media attention. We were very blessed and fortunate to have seen them. Also in the same bull arena, we saw six bulls killed in the matador's death dance before 34,000 people. This was sad to watch but the crowd greatly enjoyed it. At least this gruesome sport had a happy ending; the orphans ate freshly killed beef that night.

"That's certainly something we don't get here!" exclaimed David. "All the meat in this prison is made out of turkey. You know- turkey ham and turkey hot dogs."

"Well, it is probably healthier for us. I didn't wanna tell you but I've been a vegetarian for thirty years. This is the first time I've eaten meat in three decades."

"Really, you're not kidding?"

"I felt it would cause too many problems with the other inmates to declare my vegetarianism. Also, it's probably good for me

mentally and spiritually to break my old mold and be able to eat meat now. When I finally get out, in about two years, I'll be able to eat meat if I choose. But, knowing me, I'll probably go back to being a vegetarian."

"Okay... whatever. I still love my meat," David commented.

In France, anti-American sentiment was strong. The Vietnam War was the cause. Graffiti of "Yankee Go Home!" was everywhere. This was strange when I saw the French wearing what appeared to be American Civil War caps. Poor Randy, my traveling companion, stood out like a sore thumb. He had that blondish brillo crew cut and apple pie look. I was usually mistaken for French, English, Jewish or Canadian. We had a Canadian flag on the van's rear view window, German tourist license plates and a Netherlands decal near the exhaust pipe, so nobody knew quite how to take us. After four years of French classes, where I was called Robere Rideaux, I tried out my new tongue. The results were insane. They understood me perfectly, but their sexy-sounding replies to my standard questions were *so* fast that I shut down. Let's stick with English, damn it! It's the universal language and most Europeans speak it anyway, along with four or five other languages. I should be so lucky.

"Yeah, I hear you. I hate it when the Mexicans speak Spanish and the Indians their language and I don't know what they're saying. I wish everybody spoke English in prison."

"Now you know where I'm coming from, David."

The Eiffel Tower, the Citadel of Love, was fairly impressive from a distance. Up close it was very rusty and in need of a paint job. The Louvre Museum was one of the biggest and best yet. Of course, we saw a lot more Flemish masters, Madonna and Child paintings, Da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* and a ton of French impressionism. All the best the world of art had to offer! How very fortunate we were. I was having so much fun. Despite their lack of affection, my folks had indeed given me a *very* great gift. When I finally got mail, I realized that I missed my family immensely. This was my first real time away from home for so

long, and being only 19 years old, I couldn't wait to see them again- especially my sister, Joyce.

"I know what you mean. I can't wait to see my friends and family again, when I finally get out. And I'm just a short timer. I don't have that long to go. You are going to be here for awhile, Rob. You'll make some new friends. It always happens."

"You don't have to remind me. I know. We also took in the Follies Bergere and Moulin Rouge- the prototype original seminude stage shows that would greatly influence Las Vegas. Are you going there when you get out? That seems like an inmate dream you'd pursue."

"Who knows? I'll write you a postcard if I do," replied David.

"Yeah, I'll bet. I do hope you get there, though. Well anyway, this was nudity with class, at its best and oh *so* French."

There was an authentic forty-foot tall waterfall on stage with beautiful topless ladies descending down on ropes from above, all in feathery costumes. This was a royal night out for us. We even wore ties, a first for me, as they enforced a strict dress code. After Paris, we ferried over to the iconic white cliffs of Dover, England. That August night we saw those infamous white cliffs gleaming under the moonlight. Now we couldn't wait to finally try British fish and chips. We luckily found a vendor still open late at night. What a disappointment! Our greasy meal was wrapped in newspaper and the added vinegar made the ink come off all over our fingers, lips and food.

In London, we came down with the Asian flu which was very popular that summer of '68 but a real pain in the neck, literally. Our eyes felt like we had knives stuck in them. We'd tie our black dress socks around them to keep out the piercing light. We both had very high fevers and probably should have seen a doctor. But we just sweat it out in the van, taking aspirin and hotter Kool-Aid and tea. As a result of this flu, we didn't see much of London. We didn't see much of anything for awhile with those socks wrapped around our eyes. I remember wandering around Carnaby Street, all spaced out after our illness. Here we saw the Beatles' Apple store,

which had been previously painted in beautiful psychedelic colors. Now, it was all whitewashed over and had the word *Jude* scrawled across the windows. Was this anti-Semitic graffiti? It certainly looked that way, especially after the concentration camp tour and Ann Frank's house still mentally on my mind. No, it was soon to be one of the Beatles most beloved songs, *Hey Jude*.

"Did you go to Ireland or Scotland, after getting sick?" asked my intrigued friend.

"No, we didn't get to see where my mom's bloodline came from."

We returned back to Holland, where we picked up Randy's Texas friend Paul for the remainder of our European experience. He was a Mobile oil kid too. Now, we headed north through Germany again to Copenhagen, Denmark. Here we saw the famous Little Mermaid statue seated on a rock in the bay. She was donated as an art gift by Carlsburg Brewery, and later some fool decapitated her bronze head off. Is nothing sacred anymore? Carlsburg was very wealthy and a patron of the arts. His brewery had life-sized elephant statues supporting the entrance and gold plated handrails on the guided, gilded tour. We got roaring drunk in the tasting room and smuggled beer out in our jeans.

"Wow that sounds like something I'd do too, being an alcoholic and all," confided David.

At that time, I didn't even *know* the word *alcoholic* yet. We were just beginning our youthful experiments with alcohol on this trip. Randy was dry-heaving in a five-gallon bucket, as I somehow drove us to our campground. We were very lucky not to get a DUI in Scandinavia. Even in '68, one could get imprisonment and loss of driver's license for life! Here, drinking people took cabs; responsible drinking. I sure didn't know then that drunken driving would be the demise of my golden years.

We drank heavily again at Touborg brewery. But this time, we knew well how beer was made and could have cared less about the damn tour. We only came for that one free hour of all we could drink. To double our fun, we then did both brewery tours again,

back to back. More vomiting resulted, but this time Randy wasn't alone, as Paul and I retched right along beside him.

"Wow that sounds messed up man! You did two tours in a row of your own personal Vietnam. But I probably would have done the same exact thing," confessed David. "You guys were like kids loose in a candy store. Guys have gone wild."

"We were more like sick puppies."

After passing through Sweden quickly at night, we went on to Oslo, Norway and the Norwegian fiords. The people had that Viking look and the natural topography reminded me of my area of Washington State. In Vigeland Park, we saw many naked statues by the artist of the same name. There was a monolith about three stories high composed of piled up, naked sculptured bodies. Another couple of aging crones were on their knees, breasts sagging, looking up at the sky. These strange stone people reminded me in some ways of the real stone bodies we'd seen in Pompeii. Also in Oslo, we saw Thor Heyerdahl's Kon Tiki raft in the local museum. Downstairs, we could view the small raft from underneath, in an aquatic mural setting complete with mounted fish. This raft actually fell apart at the end of Thor's voyage between Peru to Tahiti. Here it was authentically reassembled for display. It's amazing such a small raft actually crossed that large body of water. Thor's diary was there too, from which he penned his acclaimed book, *Kon Tiki! Across the Pacific by Raft*. Real Viking ships were on display too, but not quite looking as glorious as the Hollywood versions.

After ninety days abroad, I arrived back home a seasoned traveler, with a taste in my soul for more foreign travel. I found out that traveling is the greatest education, as you see for yourself how things actually are, instead of someone else's interpretation in a book.

"Yeah, you could say the same thing about prison."

"I guess you could, but in 1968 our world was still rather innocent and safe for travel. Today's world for an American traveler is *far* different. Even by '69, things had begun to change

worldwide, especially due to drugs. I was lucky to see Europe in that window of opportunity I had, Dude. I will always be thankful to my parents, forever, for the Grand Tour of Western Europe. It certainly opened my eyes.”

“Thanks for sharing your memories, Rob.”

“Thanks you for being here for me, David. Birds of a feather *do* flock together and you are one of the only birds around here like me.”

“Yeah, I know. I’m glad you’re here too, as ironic as that sounds.”

When the student is ready....

After completing the required Stage I and II substance abuse classes, I was assigned my first job as dorm porter. This classy job paid ten cents an hour, to clean the bathroom sinks, toilets and showers, but I only received two cents per hour, after 80% for “kick out fee” and MADD Mothers was deducted. In two weeks, I might be able to afford a pouch of Top tobacco. David H. and I shared some cosmic humor, doing this shitty job together. He is one of the few I’ve ever met who understood or appreciated my bizarre sense of humor. It was fun to share my European memories with him too. It felt sad to see him leave, as a friend in prison, or anywhere for that matter, is a great gift. Friendships formed in difficult circumstances *do* seem extra special. David wrote me for awhile after release, and even put twenty bucks on my books as payback for all of his coffee hustles. Later, I saw in a Holbrook newspaper that he was back in court for failure to pay fines. I wrote him again but never heard back. He’s probably back in the prison system for violating his probation, as most here are. Or maybe he did make it to Las Vegas. I’ll certainly never know, unless I receive that postcard he promised.

When Nazi hating Charles was released, I moved into his house. A new friendship was to begin with my Bunkie, Randy Larkins, who lived above me on Memory Lane. He too hailed from Washington, near the Mount Rainier area, having worked in the logging business in his early years. Randy was ten years my junior, and had had his own construction company doing underground utility installations in the Phoenix metro area. He had lost all of this from alcoholism. He also loved cats as much as me, so I gave him many of Jolene's cat cards from my mail call.

Poor Larkins' head and neck always hung low. He was very depressed and had mucho shame and guilt still to process. He also had a very deep fear of relapse, upon release. His alcohol track record was very heavy from an early age on. I was continually amazed at how many inmates here really had no real friends in their lives; only alcohol, who is no real friend at all. They had placed the bottle *way* above any effort to create and maintain real lasting friendships. How very sad. Now that the bottle was gone, they had nothing and seemed to be realizing that. Most of the mail they received was legal mail, an indication of potentially more trouble. I was *so* thankful for all the letters my real friends wrote me- letters of love. I could feel how jealous others were of me. I am truly a rich man, even here in prison.

Bunkie Larkins was struggling a lot with his Catholic roots, recent Christian conversion and, as always, the Devil. He feared hell and damnation on a daily basis, and basically kept his TV tuned to Channel 4, the Christian station, for help. I personally feel it only made his matters worse. Fear, on many levels, is the teachings of these "Christians" who propagate from their interpretation of the Bible. What an illusion they preach! Larkins was like a small child, just beginning kindergarten lessons in religion. Spirituality was *way* beyond him. He thought I was *totally* crazy when I reminded him that heaven is here now. Jesus even says so! Sadly, not many here understand Now, the holy instant- the only reality and all that there is. Nor do they understand how to creatively use this

prison experience to get well, now, while serving time inside these “walls of freedom.” Most only think about getting out, *not* getting well. Larkins had a revelation one day.

“I was placed as your Bunkie, Rideout, to bring you back to Jesus, so you can be saved.” How cosmic! How comic? Then after getting to know me a bit better, he lays another one on me.

“Like how did you get so weird, man? Not too many people in here think like you...you’ve got to realize that, right?”

“I had a true life-changing experience Randy. It’s something that you probably would *not* understand.”

“Try me,” he fired back.

“Okay. But please don’t judge me on what I’m about to tell you.”

“I’ll try not to, Rideout. I promise.”

It all began when I met my first wife, Jolene. For my twenty-first birthday present, my folks gave me a ticket to Iowa City, to scout out the University of Iowa as a possible grad school for art history. Jeanne, my first girlfriend, and I were slowly drifting apart, mostly because I always envisioned myself with a Sophia Loren type of a woman. Already my ego was leading me astray. Sophia was to be the archetype goddess of most of the women in my life. Ironically, Jeanne’s father was my airline pilot on that flight to Iowa. I even got to stay overnight with him and a few other pilots in Kansas City. Neither he nor I had any idea then, that I would soon be breaking his lovely daughter’s heart. And forty years later, I’d still be regretting it and wondering where Jeanne’s at today. God truly does work in some *very* strange ways. After my birthday party, where I’d stayed up all night drinking hard liquor and smoking strong hash, I threw away my bag of pot in the airplane head. I now had such a hangover that I *never* wanted to use again – a pattern that would be repeated often in decades to come. You know what I mean. After landing in Iowa and renting a room at the Rebel motel, of all names, I helped a blind man to his room, where he sure didn’t need to find the light switch. Then I was on the campus prowl to score again. Back then, an ounce of joy went for ten

bucks. I entered the commons building cafeteria to find many longhaired junkies strung out on heroin, listening to John Lennon scream his brains out on *Cold Turkey*. That was mind blowing, as I really didn't expect to see long hair here and I knew very little about heroin. I had on my black leather motorcycle jacket, aviator glasses and haircut like Peter Fonda from *Easy Rider* – always in hip style. Unfortunately, the weed I scored was laced with heroin. Unknowingly, I smoked and experienced this demonic high.

“Jesus, man! You smoked heroin?” interjected Larkins.

“I only did it this one time in my entire life, asshole!”

“Okay, don't get pissed off about it. You don't have to be all defensive.”

Anyway, I lay flat out feeling sick in the grass and wanting to puke, as a warm current swam through me. Those bastards! I was not enjoying this *at all*. When I finally stumbled back in for coffee, to hopefully come down, a new song was playing on the jukebox. It sure sounded like my musical mentors, *The Beatles*. I scanned the room and saw a beautiful Italian student singing along, who appeared to be single. She obviously knew this song and looked a lot like Sophia Loren! Wow. I stumbled over nervously, asking if this were *The Beatles* we were hearing? She simply smiled and said, “Let it be.” I immediately fell in love. As soon as we looked into each other's eyes, we both knew that we'd always known each other and had finally found each other again. Her name I soon found out was Jolene, a Catholic from Webster City, Iowa. She was born on April fool's Day of 1949- exactly twelve days after me. Her father was a jazz sax player and presently taught band at high school level. Her grandfather had been found as a homeless baby against the wall of a convent in Italy, and raised by nuns. Later, he stole away with his bride on a ship bound for New York, where he too was a jazz musician. So Jolene was descended from musicians and I spent my next three days following her to classes.

“Was she a babe?”

“What do you think? I just said that she looked like Sophia Loren. Of course she was!”

I told Jolene that I would write her weekly when I returned home, but she felt we'd never see each other again. Well, we did. It all took time, of course and a breakup with Jeanne, but Destiny and Karma had plans for Jolene and me. So, between Bible study and my college curriculum, I'd begun writing her weekly. We got to know each other a lot better through our correspondence. She also sent photos so I could visually remember her. During this same time frame, I was baptized a "Christian" in the YMCA's shower, by a black charismatic soul singer named Walter. I first met Walter when he sat in with our band, singing "My God" to the tune of *My Girl*, with a voice like Smokey Robinson. I invited him to dinner at my parents' house.

"Guess who's coming to dinner, Mom and Dad?"

"That must have been something!" exclaimed Larkins loudly then clapping his hands. I could tell he wanted to hear more.

"Oh, it was."

Walter's being black and semi John the Baptist/ Billy Graham, blew my folks out of the water, to say the least. They were receiving an *adult* dose of Jesus around the dinner table tonight! Even Walter's heavy trench coat had hundreds of small crosses embroidered in the design. He often fasted for days on end and prayed continuously, writing people's names on his conga drum head so he could remember them in prayer while keeping the beat. After our breakup, he contacted Jeanne, asking her to be one of his many wives, at his New World utopia that the Lord had shown him in Hawaii. Jeanne declined- smart move, girl. I often wonder if Walter is still in the jungle or possibly a mental institution. Despite his extremism, he was truly one of the most charismatic and beautiful souls I've ever met. Religious fanaticism drives many crazy. Or maybe the crazies just become fanatic.

"Yeah, you might be onto something there. Look at the 450 alcoholic fanatics we're locked up with here. Most of us became fundamentalist drinkers. So what happened after that classic dinner party?"

During my novitiate training at the Superior Cleaner, the federal government notified me of my draft status for the Vietnam War: 1 A- ready to be drafted. Even my student deferment status wouldn't help me now. Please, sweet Jesus, save me! I applied for conscientious objector status and could receive it, if I'd work in a hospital. I wrote back to the Feds that I had no national pride but only Washington State pride and refused their offer. Many of my friends and I had thoughts of draft dodging to Canada. Some did. While some played crazy or injured themselves to get out of this insane war. Luckily and karmic for me, my birthday was an exempt high number when displayed on the TV lottery that we all watched nervously from our living rooms. Thank you, Jesus! Maybe I've had many incarnations as a soldier before, which I often played out as a child, and now I don't need to repeat the lessons of war. I feel I was always destined to become a spiritual warrior instead.

"Do you really believe that reincarnation crap?"

"I most definitely do. Just compare the water cycle as an analogy."

"Well I don't know...I'll have to think on that awhile."

While briefly touching on reincarnation, I sometimes wonder if I'm *not* my great grandfather Marion Guthridge. He survived the battle of Gettysburg, as a private at age 15, in the Confederacy. I owned his small red leather-covered bible that was carried through that tragic battle. More soldiers died there in three days than in seventeen years of Vietnam. Marion lived until the ripe old age of eighty-nine- nearly twice the life expectancy for that time! I used to hold that antique Bible as a teen ager and wonder if the four-leaf clover inside came from the fields of Gettysburg. I'll *never* know. The clover is the Shamrock, sacred to the Irish and may have protected him. As with this Bible, I was fascinated with all things Civil War, even meditating on battle pictures and soldiers' uniforms. Had I been there before? Somehow, I feel I was. I was probably a Rebel, as that seems to be my in nature and the name of one of my first bands.

“Well, you are an inmate *now*, Mr. Rebel and a damn crazy one at that. So, tell me, did anything happen between you and Jolene?”

Two other events transpired before we were reunited. I dropped out of college in 1970, at the beginning of my fourth year. This move *really* blew my folks away. Oh God, Rob! They were thinking, “See what drugs have done to our son!” It wasn’t drugs but music. Then I drove to the Grand Canyon with a friend and actually set up my full drum set at Hopi Point on the south rim. I played for three hours. It sounded like thunder reverberating through the canyon. Many people came and watched me, but I never made the TV news or *Life* magazine. As far as I know, I’m the only person to ever do that. Today, it would be virtually impossible.

“God man, you are a trip!”

“You don’t know the half of it, Randy.”

The year 1970 marked a cosmic Christmas and life-changing event for me. After many long months of separation and letters, I sent Jolene a plane ticket to visit me. We both needed answers concerning our love and long-distance relationship. They were definitely coming. This was just the beginning of the most magical days of my life- the cosmic times. Synchronicity was in the air and not just for me alone. The Children of Love were starting to wake up, all over our planet.

“I guess you were too young to remember that, right Larkins?”

“It was different for me. Remember, I’m ten years younger than you. I do remember seeing a lot more long hair back then.”

Well, George Harrison had gone solo after the Beatle’s breakup and had just released his masterpiece three-record set, *All Things Must Pass*. The song, *My Sweet Lord* from this recording, was and still is my all-time favorite song. For Christmas dinner, my folks served us crabmeat appetizers and the following day Jolene and I dropped psilocybin at my friend Peter’s house. He’d recently returned from India. Peter’s bedroom wall was plastered with Hindu calendar art of gods and goddesses, all very psychedelic, and looking like they came from some astral realm with those rain

cloud eyes. Soon, Jolene and I had to crawl on our knees, as we were too stoned to walk upright anymore. Onto Peter's bed we fell, into an out-of-body, near-death experience. In a peaceful dark void, we experienced telepathy between each other. I would think her name and then hear her call back to me. Next, we ascended through a tunnel of whirling colors, where memories of our whole lives flashed before us in the wink of an eye. Again, this was the "near death" or "little death" experience we would read about later, in our search to make sense out of what had happened to us on this holy day. Upward we shot, into a bright white light that was a million times more dazzling than our earth's sun, but surprisingly didn't hurt our eyes. The peace, joy and calm were indescribable. Then, in this light appeared the bust figure of a Holy One, who closely resembled Jolene or Mona Lisa. I later thought that it might have been Jesus, but with no beard and looking very feminine. After all, I'd been praying to him for answers. What gender *was* this vision? The Holy One had me crying from the depths of my soul, as I felt unworthy and impure to be in this Presence. Everything was communicated from the eyes telepathically and, to this day, I cannot remember what message may have transpired. I just knew that I knew this Holy One, with deep love, respect and honor. This vision occurred exactly when *My Sweet Lord* was playing on Peter's phonograph. The words being sung were killing us. It wasn't the voice of George Harrison any longer but the voice of our own souls. Talk about synchronicity. After returning to our physical bodies, Crosby, Stills and Nash were singing the words, *It's been a long time coming, it's gonna be a long time gone*. I knew then that we had been truly blessed and that this wouldn't happen again, to this degree, anytime soon, if ever. We immediately opened Peter's Bible at random and just happened to blindly point to the verse that reads, "The pure in heart shall see God." Everything fit together like a complex jigsaw puzzle, with no accidents and no mistakes, just perfect synchronicity. What an appropriate affirmation to our vision of the Lord. We had just taken our first step onto the mystic path.

“But *who* did you see? Were you insane or seduced by Satan’s drug visions?” questioned Larkins. “The Bible warns about stuff like this.”

“No, we were not insane or seduced. And just stuff your Bible beliefs for awhile, will you?”

We tried to explain to Peter and others what had transpired for us, the Holy Instant, but soon found that we were casting pearls before swine. They tried to enter our dimension but couldn’t. We were too high. It wasn’t until a year or more that we’d get our answers as to whom we’d seen. Soon things got much heavier at my parents’ house. Poor Jolene nearly died the Big Death. She was allergic to the Christmas crabmeat we’d eaten the night before and bloated up nearly twice her size, with her heart failing fast. Thank God, my dad was a doctor! He shot her up with adrenaline right in her heart to keep her alive. Talk about heavy! We were all scared shitless and worried out of our minds. How could God take my beloved from me after all we’d just gone through? This was scaring the hell out of me. She miraculously survived, after much prayer and doctoring, to return to Iowa and complete her University graduation. We’d gotten the answers we needed to any questions about our relationship. We were destined to be together again, without a doubt. We now felt spiritually married.

To back up about a year prior, I had another spiritual experience on LSD- a true ground breaking kind. I was at Betty’s house tripping. She would later be Jolene’s bridesmaid. On Betty’s floor, I had the kundalini spiritual force rise up my spine through all seven charkas. It felt like I was having an orgasm in every cell of my being. The waves of bliss were *so* intense and strong that I thought I would die or blow apart with the next surge. It took what seemed like forever to utter to Betty, “Who is this?” I was referring to the heavenly music on her phonograph. When she softly said the band’s name, *It’s a Beautiful Day*, the cosmic juice shot up my spine to my sixth chakra, or third eye, where brilliant golden letters appeared – GOD – pounding in my forehead, as the wavelets of bliss continued to surge. Then I saw myself naked, alone on a stage, looking up. It reminded me of Shakespeare’s words about the world being a stage, where we are all just actors.

“You’ve definitely had some incredible trips, Rob,” commented Larkins. “I never had the guts to do acid. I guess that maybe I’m afraid of my own mind and what I might see. So I just stuck with alcohol. The shit seems much more predictable than acid, even if it did put us here. So, who did you see in that vision?”

“You sure don’t forget, do you, Larkins. I’ll tell you in time. We’ve both got plenty of that still left to do. The point is that all of the brain washing and confusion of Christianity fell away. Jesus had answered my prayers, as you would say.”

These experiences gave me an awakening into the spiritual realms of self-realization. All fear of death was gone now and I was no longer an agnostic, but a true believer. What is mind blowing, however, is that I ended up here, in prison. Of course, a lot of substance abuse and many unspiritual experiences contributed to that. Even though I believed in God, Jesus and the Great Ones, I was still misled by my own self-centered, hasty ego for many decades, ultimately ending up in this present incarceration.

“Even if you don’t believe in reincarnation Larkins, you can’t deny incarceration!”

“You’ve got me there, Rideout. However, you’re still a loser - just like me,” he retorted.

“I don’t believe I *am* a loser, like you. I’m willing to accept the mistakes I’ve made and forgive myself. It’s the only way to move on. That’s the difference between you and me, Larkins.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“Well, until you forgive yourself, the healing can’t begin. Ultimately, I know that’s why I’m here. What about you?”

Did I get any mail today....

Mail call is very important in prison. You can get mail that either makes or breaks your day. My young Nebraska cellie in

county jail, Daffer, wrote that meth-bully Red had been smashed well by six cons over in Prescott, for trying to dominate with his ugly intimidating aura. He was taken to the hospital in bad shape. Dark souls like Red have *no* idea about the cosmic law of karma. He'll have a lot of hard prison time, hopefully to learn his lessons and confront his anger and fear. Inmates will teach him that. Sadly, I never heard from Daffer again. He may have been sentenced to four years in prison, for his twenty pounds of pot conviction, or he may have been released with ten years of probation. I'll never know. Inmates cannot write other inmates in prisons. The only way to do that is to piggyback a letter through a third person on the outside. And I don't know any of Daffer's friends.

Soon, I had very supportive mail arriving from my beloved son Sri and female friend Lyn to brighten my days. I'd been seeing Lyn prior to my incarceration. Both expressed missing me and the intention to come visit soon. And both were praying for me daily. A guy can't get too many prayers, especially in here. Then the depressing mail arrived. Larry wrote that David Lee Bond died of heroin on June 15, 2003. I wasn't really surprised by his death. I knew it was coming. I'd let Dave live with me for the last ten months before prison. Now I would never be repaid the five thousand dollars he'd promised me, or be made into a "fucking prince," another promise. Goodbye dear Brother- you had a good con going, as much as I *did* love you. I attempted to find out about his "living will," but got no results. Dave's lawyer never even responded to the letters I wrote him, concerning Dave's death. I even began to wonder if Dave hadn't staged his death in order *not* to repay his debts. At this point, I wouldn't put it past him. Writing letters was my only means of communication and it often became *very* frustrating when I didn't get replies for weeks, and then, often, many unanswered questions. To top off the depressing mail, Michael finally wrote saying that he put my dog Shanti down and that he had lost my place! He never gave landlord Ken any forewarning of his departure, thus legally breaking the lease agreement. He assured me that all of my possessions were safe in a mini storage and the rent was

being paid; but for how long? His letter blew me away. Every day I worried and tried desperately to process my fears. I was now smoking more. I wrote Michael back but got no response. Lyn was also lax on responding to my urgent questions, regarding what was left of my earthly possessions. In desperation, I wrote Roderick, Sri's step dad, to call Lyn. Finally, she wrote that everything was fine and not to worry. I still had my doubts. I thought I was somehow beyond all this and wouldn't be bothered. Wrong! I'd become attached to my vintage clothes, stereo, tapes, books, guitars, photos, P.A. system, religious trinkets and family heirlooms I'd been saving for Sri. Please, God, don't let me lose *these* things! Of course, all of these "things" I called "mine" just mirrored how very stuck I still was, in attachment. Those words from my youth reverberated in my head, "If you want to know God, He'll take everything from you."

Next to come was an intimidating letter from landlord Ken. He was very upset about Michael leaving and the ruined state of his rental unit. He also let me know loud and clear, in his parental way, how much pain my drinking had caused him. He would surely use my situation as a tax write-off, as he's no fool business-wise. I'm sure his only pain was the Midas complex: worrying about his beloved dollar. Isn't it easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven? Landlord Ken sent an exaggerated itemized list of repairs, cleaning and other sundry costs totaling about \$750.00- to be paid and he'd be out for my life. This letter *really* stressed me out, as he had repairs listed that needed attention long before I ever moved in. Dewayne, an older retired real estate agent inmate, helped me compose a politically correct response to the landlord's unfair demands. How could Ken expect to get blood from a turnip? Especially an orange turnip who earned ten cents an hour cleaning shitters in Dorm 4? I never heard from him again, just as Dewayne had predicted.

Christian wrote too. She married Joya, my second wife, and I at her island home and later baptized our son, Sri Ram-

asking God and the Great Ones to bless his young life. Christian shared that she'd had eight eye surgeries and other medical tests conducted. My heart goes out to all of my friends' woes, as I contemplate my life here in prison. Life can be *so* heavy. Anything can happen to anybody. Jolene has come through with flying colors in supporting me here. She sent me the money for my color TV, as my birthday and Christmas presents for the next two years. She writes regularly and sends great internet jokes and hip humor. I send these jokes to others, using the backside for writing stationary. No waste here. It's kind of ironic, but after thirty years, Jolene is proving to be one of my *very* best friends. Larkins and I *so* love those cat cards that she sends. Looking back, it's a shame that she and I never got counseling together. Who knows, our marriage may have survived and this alcoholism might have been nipped in the bud early. But, of course, that wasn't the way my story was to play out.

A description of Phoenix West needs mention. This present DUI yard was formally a Bashas grocery store warehouse. It was converted into a prison around 1996. Some guys have been here since then- long sentences. There are eight dorms with about fifty-five inmates in each. Rows of bunk beds house shelves and electricity for the expensive clear TV sets- only clear, so nothing can be hidden inside. Inmates classified as medical, or over fifty, usually get the cherished lower bunks. Other inmates often wait over a year, in a seniority pecking order, to receive a lower bunk. And even *that* move is at the discretion of the movement officer. It's *all* politics here. There are three showers, three toilets, four sinks and two urinals per bathroom. Our outside yard is very small, with a Native American sweat lodge, horseshoe pit, tables, exercise bars and a sand volleyball court. It takes twelve laps of walking around the perimeter to equal one mile. We all shop once a week at commissary on our appointed dorm day. This is one of the highlights of the week, if you have money on your books, as everybody wants coffee, writing tablets, stamps, candy, bagels, etc. We all eat with a Spork- a plastic spoon with small lower front teeth and, colored orange, of course. Do

not lose this tool, as you'll not be granted another. Our toothbrushes are about two and a half inches long. Keefe coffee rules and, luckily, all food prices, including tobacco, are much cheaper than on the outside. There is no tax here. Books can be sent into property, *if* they come directly from a publisher or bookstore but not friends. We arise at 5 a.m. and lights are out at 10 p.m., except for weekends and holiday late nights, when midnight shuts down all activity. There is a lot of activity on weekends. Weekends are still weekends and that means visitations for some. As for any kind of partying, and not having alcohol involved now, most turn to food. Inmates will pool food items like beans, chips, beef tips and tortillas to party down. The cooking is done in bathroom sinks, with the help of plastic bags under hot water and stingers- submersible electronic heating devices. Obnoxiously loud voices continually inform us of announcements on the intercom system- "Inmate so & so, number...report to your C.O." This piece of information was called daily, "Attention, attention in the dorm...Attention in the unit and attention in the yard. Smoking area will close in fifteen minutes. All inmates should be returning now to their dorms, as dorm doors will be secured for formal count." The one that always cracked me up was, "Attention, attention - ice run has been completed!" Who in the hell cares, unless maybe you are the dorm porter who forgot to go fetch the ice? And that could be heavy, as these guys take ice very seriously here- it cools the sodas they buy, trade and barter while being locked down. This definitely is an ecosystem like no other.

AA is here, along with jobs...

During my first month of prison, I saw the cosmic humor and insanity of this new home clearly. I got creative and decided to write a parody on life here, which I entitled, *Now in an Orange Grove*. It is supplemental reading for a more comic view of prison life at Phoenix West. I had to be cool about whom I

could share this with, as it touches on some race issues and could raise unneeded controversy. I also wrote a satirical spoof on AA's preamble called *Conanon*. It mocks the infamous twelve step program by designing it for cons and their P.O.'s, Probation or Parole Officers- as if the P.O. is your Higher Self. All of this creative writing is in fun and helps keep me mentally healthy. It also proves to be therapeutic in some weird way. I think I'll continue. Due to these writings, I became inspired to write this book. What a beautiful way to use my time. Bunkie Larkins suggested that the title should be *Loser*, of course, as he felt that is essentially what we all are for ending up here. The cover could be solid black with large orange lettering- how strikingly appropriate. Or maybe a good title would be, *Autobiography of a Hippie*. Another priceless bi-polar inmate, Joe, suggested his title idea - *Just another Autobiography by a Righteous Dude*. Joe's favorite repeated words were "sweet" and "smooth action". You do meet some real characters here.

For awhile, I attended AA regularly in the library. I was the star reader by far, as many were too shy to expose their reading inability. All of the repeated war stories got old very fast. One Mexican, Alfonso, continually talked of his crack pipe and little baby for twenty minute stretches at every meeting. This was too much.

"Keep it short, so others have a chance to share," another inmate stated. "And focus on alcohol, not drugs, Brother."

"But I kept hitting that pipe and the little baby was crying, man. You know what I mean?"

Out of the 450 alcohol abusers here, only about ten or less attended AA. Again, who wants to get well, when the only thought is about getting out? The next time, many told themselves, they would drink without driving. Oh yeah, that's a good one-the Mother of all Lies for alcoholics. Keep those self deceptions going and you *will* be back here, especially in Arizona. Many, I found out, are on their second or third tour of duty as a result of that *very* illusion; I can drink and not drive!

Get real, dudes, and face your Problem- alcoholism. I finally felt like these meetings were a waste of time; none of us were obviously drinking in prison and the drug tales were getting redundant. I *do* believe in the power and good of AA, but for me, not often in prison. I plan to attend meetings on the outside, as I know you can't beat this affliction alone. I've tried that and failed. As the program says, "It works if you work it." Another good one is, "Meeting makers make it."

After an AA meeting one evening, Larkins confronted me back at our bunks. "Who *did* you and Jolene see in that near-death vision? I still want to know, Rideout. It's really been bugging me."

After playing rock music on the road in Montana, we were married in Seattle upon returning. Jolene's Catholic parents wanted to see their daughter married- not roaming the country in a VW van, living in sin. It was a quick court house wedding with two friends, Betty and Harrison, standing up for us. It took about ten minutes. We already felt we were married, eternally on some level, so it was rather a legality to sooth her worried parents. Betty gave us her cottage overlooking the ocean for our honeymoon. Then Jolene and I got a phone call and moved south to Phoenix, Arizona in 1971. The van blew up upon arriving. We spent six months in Tempe in a futile attempt to play music. Our band, *Rainbow* played at Pizza Huts, schools, a car dealership and a popular water park that had a wave machine for surfing. Things just didn't pan out as expected. However, our answer came as to whom we'd seen in our near-death experience. He was Paramahansa Yogananda, a perfected yogi and divine incarnation of Love, an avatar sent from India in the 1920's to American shores to share his teachings of Self-Realization and the unity of all religions. He lived and breathed God and became our God-ordained Guru.

"So now you're into gurus?"

"When the student is ready, the teacher appears. A true guru is a direct transformer to know God. This is heavy shit, Larkins, which goes on forever."

Even if the disciple strays from the Path, the guru does not. His help and love are unconditional. God, guru and self are one. We read Yogananda's classic book, *Autobiography of a Yogi*, under orange trees at our rental house in Tempe. I will always remember the fragrant smell of orange blossoms falling on the open pages. This book was magical and hard to put down. It would change our lives, as it has for millions of others.

"I think we have that book in our prison library," commented Larkins.

"Yeah, we do, but not too many here have attempted to read it. I was so blown away by it that I bought and gave away over twenty copies to friends and libraries. It is a true *must read*. One chapter talks about Mahavatar Babaji, the yogi Christ of modern India. Little did I know then, just how very much this Babaji would play out in my life."

"Now what are you talking about? Who is Babaji?"

"Larkins, He defies description and is beyond human comprehension. If I told you now, you'd *really* think I am crazy. You're having a hard enough time just handling Jesus and the word, guru. Try reading Yogananda's book first, if you think you can handle it. It's pretty deep stuff but well explained. Then I'll tell you more about Babaji and my connection with Him, here and in India."

"Sounds good, Rob. We'd better get back to Dorm 4, as formal count is about to begin."

"Boy, they sure count us a lot here, don't they?"

"About four times a day, at least!"

Everybody needs a hustle....

This prison is classified as a "work yard." After completing the first month of substance abuse classes, many are assigned jobs. These range from dorm porters, like me, to maintenance and kitchen staff, computer lab, yard porters or the library. For

those fortunate enough to be classified as NB-3 or outside clearance, the jobs ranged from landscaping at the Capitol, flood control in drainage canals, possibly carpentry and masonry at the National Guard. The big buck job was at sacred Greater Phoenix Auto Auction. This job entails the detailing of endless cars, fifty acres, for ten to fourteen hours a day. However, the gross pay is minimum wage, the highest paid job for any prisoner in Arizona. Many such workers left prison with well over \$10 thousand! That just doesn't seem fair, when I'm cleaning toilets for 10¢/hour. But what is fair in prison or in life for that matter? Inmates that left with that much money had obviously been down quite awhile.

Anybody with a prior history of domestic violence was not allowed to work outside. And I had such a charge on my rap sheet; from sitting on Joya ten years ago. So I hustled my way into the coveted position of librarian. I scored this job by working under the counter on weekends for head Chicano Mondo and the "angry dog" Navajo chief, Mitchell- he'd been married twelve times. I guess he beat Liz Taylor's record anyway. I received two pouches of Top tobacco and one ramen soup for eighteen hours of babysitting books. This was way more than 10¢/hour! Also, I was breaking new ground with the Chicanos and the Indians. My commitment and enthusiasm won out. Mondo swung it so I could become the librarian legally and he could cut hair in the barber shop, another coveted position. Of course, he charged me a pouch for his efforts, even though he still owed me for last weekend's under-the-counter trade. But that's the way things work in prison. If somebody helps you out, there's always a price tag. I didn't care, as I was just happy to be making 32¢/hour, instead of 10¢ on my WHIP pay.

Many here have a hustle, in one way or another. I reproduced a cartoon drawing of Peanut's Snoopy, in a prison suit with ball and chain. He is holding his heart, thinking, "It's all right here, you know." Soon I transferred this "art" to envelopes using my lighted TV screen to make copies more easily. I gave my first sample to Tony Pebbles, a recent arrival

with the oldest ADC number on the yard- 25,100. He'd been in and out of prison since the '70's. He claimed now to be serving a twenty-four-year sentence and boasted of 140 DUI's! Good God, they need to sell bullshit repellent on commissary. But this incessant talker got me into the envelope art hustle and became a major repeat customer, often ordering ten to twenty of certain envelope designs. And he always paid me well, up front, with Folgers Coffee, coco, chips and tobacco. If I let him determine the price, which I did, he always overpaid me I felt. I didn't mind our business relationship but I couldn't stand old Pebbles socially, with his non-stop mouth of tall tales. "Tell me again, Tony."

Soon I expanded my creations with colored pencils and came up with designs of birds, tipi, pueblos, cacti, Monument Valley, Sedona, Harry Potter and E.T. behind bars, Popeye, Olive, Charlie Brown and Lucy, the Lion King, Huey Duck and the Indian head off the wooden nickel.

Bunkie Larkins commented, "The Indian head looks like your face, Rideout."

So I drew it on a meditating body, dressed in orange, floating on an *asana* ringed in barbed wire. Many cartoons had captions with metaphysical truths. My friends now have something to cut out for their refrigerators- a little something to remember me by. I always wondered what the post office thought, when they encounter prison art envelopes. Some are priceless. Maybe someday there will be a book on prison postage art; who knows? Maybe there already is.

Those barn days would always be remembered as....

After another institutional lunch, Randy Larkins approached me back at our bunks. "So what happened with you and Jolene? Why didn't it work out between you two, if she was your soul mate?"

"That's one hell of a loaded question, Randy."

Being young and married put us through a lot of changes during the '70s. After we returned from Arizona, we scored the find of a lifetime outside of Bellingham. It was a livery stable/barn for fifty dollars a month rent, on 160 acres of gorgeous property, complete with a pond, waterfalls, orchard and two other living units. Our new band, *Omsly*, all lived on this magical land with us. We literally made music in the woods. And Jolene and I began our days as aspiring yogis, after reading Yogananda's book. We signed up for his mail-order lessons and upon reading them we began meditating, like two hours a day! In 1971, we became fanatic vegetarians, did enemas along with our energization exercises, fasted and daily stood on our heads. And I grew a beard and my hair out; very long. We even did enemas with our headstand, to let the warm cleansing water *really* penetrate deeply up inside our intestines. Then we sat reading *Mother Earth News* on our portable toilet for a very long time. What goes up must come down. And perfect health seems to be the balance of what goes in and what comes out. We were real yogis, no half measures for us. Later, readings on fruitarians, by South African author Morris Krok, and Arnold Ehret (*Mucusless Diet Healing System*) would be instrumental in our move away from this paradise; something that *never* should have happened, but did.

We also smoked a lot of black Afghani hash during these barn days. You never see that around anymore. Hash, to us, was a divine sacrament. To me, it still is and always will be. It let the music play us, instead of us playing the music. Or so it seemed. Oh, the stories I could tell! Like these friends who had just returned from a long stay in Morocco. This couple looked eternally stoned. They had smuggled back two hot water bottles full of liquid hash oil, strapped to the old lady as if she were pregnant. The stoned dude, who didn't do drugs anymore, gave me a tablespoon and said, "This is the only time in your life you'll ever have this opportunity. Help yourself to as much as you'd like." I swallowed a whole spoon of the amber oil from the recently drained red rubber bags. I didn't come down for three days, continually seeing geometric patterns in the air. I was scared that I would *never* come down. A musician I played with was

given the empty containers. After slicing them open, we had enough hash oil for the next year of altered states.

“Did you drink back then too?”

“No, thank God. I loved my pot and hash that I felt raised my consciousness. I knew alcohol always took me down, lowering my consciousness. Plus, just playing in bars gave me a bad impression of alcohol.”

I don’t view “drugs” quite the same as other folk. Jolene and I got to meet Baba Ram Das, after reading his classic book, *Be Here Now*. After hearing Ram Das chant mantras and speak, we privately took him aside and told him about our vision of Yogananda. He confirmed that we weren’t crazy, the guru’s darshan was *very* real and Yogananda had actually appeared to many young yogis, via altered states of consciousness. Ram Das called psychedelics “tools of transformation.” Such tools were necessary for some- to break the stuck mental, emotional and spiritual barriers to true “seeing.” But this dangerous path could become a trap, if one gets attached to believing these sacraments *are* the Way. The object is to *be* high, not just get high. Ram Das also autographed our copy of his best seller, writing, “Here we are in Love – Ram Das.” Sadly, it was destroyed by fire years later, along with quite a few other sentimental things.

“Did you have a house fire too?” asked Larkins.

“That happened years later, during my second marriage to Joya, Sri Ram’s mother. I’ll tell you all about that in time.”

Back at the barn, I was given a calendar picture of Lord Shiva, from a friend who’d recently returned from India. Shiva is the dreadlocked Hindu god of change, destruction of the illusion, yoga, drugs, and the original drummer. This picture looked alive! Shiva is beautiful. I’ve never seen a more profound piece of art that moved me like this one. Remember, I was majoring in art history and I’ve seen the best Europe had to offer. I cherished it dearly, until its passing in the fire. With this portrait, I fell in love with Shiva as my ideal form of God. I still am to this day. Shiva means self- the Higher or Christ Self within. It is believed by many that

Mahavatar Babaji is Shiva in human form. Anyway, this incredible poster art launched me into an upcoming lifestyle and belief system paralleling that of Beatle George Harrison. Aren't we all really Hindus anyway, as the soul never dies?

"That's easy for you to believe in, but not for me. You know I'm pretty skeptical of this stuff. So, did you just play music to get by or did you do other work?"

Jolene worked at the shoe department of Sears and Roebuck, and I finally got accepted into the carpenters' union apprenticeship program- a four-year course. I cut off my breast length hair for a hard hat and worked in Fairhaven, building a new sewage treatment plant across the rail tracks from Bellingham Bay. The stress of being run ragged as an apprentice and working two jobs, if you count music, caused a psychosomatic bowel disorder known as spastic colitis. I would battle this malady for years to come.

"Isn't that when you shit all the time?" questioned Larkins.

"You got that right, Bunkie. It's miserable."

My doctor advised me to quit one of my jobs. I chose to follow music, which seemed to flow from my heart. Many times in my later life, I wondered if I made the wrong decision that day. This was a major turning point in my life that I wasn't truly aware of at the time. The life of a professional musician has many unseen pitfalls and occupational hazards, as I would soon find out. But I made my decision and now I would just have to live with it. These hash days were like none other in my life. Synchronicity continually abounded everywhere- all the pieces of the puzzle seemed to fit perfectly. Creative visualizations seemed to manifest almost immediately. Many times we'd get sweaty palms and tingling hair, knowing that the Holy Spirit would be felt again tonight. We were literally glowing. It's so sad to see where the world went, when drugs got really abused and out of control, becoming big money and big crime. Only a few old hippies can probably relate to what I'm trying to say. And the rest, like my Bunkie, probably think I'm crazy anyway. That's not new to me. Please remember, this attitude was normal in the early 1970's. And magic is *not* always easy to put into words. How can you

ever forget being touched by God? As the sadhu in India say, hash is Shiva's essence. Sadly, only a few of us still feel this way today.

"I've never even smoked hash and didn't like marijuana anyway. Alcohol was always my thing. When did you start having problems with alcohol?"

"Not until years later. We were on a spiritual path strongly at this point."

Before cutting my hair, I was wearing it tied up on top of my head like Hindu yogis. Jolene and I had just acquired our first mala, which is 108 beads, of rudraksha, the holy tear seeds of Lord Shiva. I would be wearing rudraksha malas for the next thirty years.

"I don't see them on you now!"

"They were on me until I was incarcerated, and will be the first thing back on me when I'm released. You can count on that!"

I actually acquired books that read like sci-fi on the benefits of these sacred seeds. They lower high blood pressure, for instance. I've always registered low. Also, he who wears them cannot be killed by man or demon. I would later encounter this truth twice in near tragic accidents. To even gaze upon rudraksha, brings a spiritual blessing. They look like your brain. Any prayers or mantras done on rudraksha, increases their potency a hundred fold. Rudraksha are 125,000 years old and the seeds contain secrets of the entire evolution of the cosmos within them. All of this is very Hindu, I realize, but at this point of my spiritual quest, I too was of "Hindu mind," like George Harrison, my wife, and quite a few others we knew. Somehow I felt that I *must* have lived in India before. Oh, how I longed to go there!

"You did go there, right?"

"You know I did and we'll get to that eventually. Have some patience, Larkins. India happened *way* later in my life. I wasn't destined for it yet, or maybe even ready for it, as much as I wanted to go."

On December 12, 1974 a major event happened in my life; a true tragedy. Jolene and I took our first magic mushrooms. And we

took a lot- over twenty of the tiny, harmless-looking, dried-out shrooms. While shaving at a friend's apartment in Bellingham, I received a distressing phone call from Jolene. She sounded very serious on the phone and told me to drive over to my parents' house NOW! I heard hysterical screaming and crying in the background. It was my mom, screaming, "There is no God!"

When I asked Jolene why, she said, "Joyce has died." I felt my heart break beyond belief. Oh God no! Not my sister Joyce! Then a primal energy erupted like a dormant volcano from deep within me, as I screamed out loudly my pain and anguish.

"Oh man, that's *too* heavy. You must have been blown away!" exclaimed Larkins.

"Oh, I was, beyond belief but at the same time, the mushrooms were coming on heavily."

Somehow, I managed to keep it together enough to drive across town to my parents' place. It was hard to see beyond the raindrops on the windshield and the tears in my eyes. A part of me had just died too. My childhood home was filled with loving, caring neighbors, who sat silently with my grieved-out parents.

Everyone was in heavy shock. The loss of a child has got to be the greatest pain a soul can endure. I felt *so* sad and sorry for my poor mom and dad. This was putting everything they believed in on the line. Dad looked like a stoic cigar store Indian, unable to express any emotion except shock, remorse and probably disbelief that this was actually happening. In my altered state of heightened awareness, I felt a very deep calm descend upon me, as if Joyce's spirit was right next to me. And I'm absolutely sure she was. I've read that the deceased spirit hangs around for usually three days, before departing to God-only-knows where. Joyce let me know loud and clear that it was her time to go on and told me to watch over Mom and Dad. I now clearly understood why "the good die young." They don't have that much karma to deal with this time around. My dear sister was like an angel. I never heard her speak ill of anybody, ever and was seemingly loved by all people she touched. Physically, she'd matured into a semi-super model, a French Brook Shields crossed with Audrey Hepburn. My mom

always said Joyce looked like Egyptian Queen Nefertiti. As her protecting brother, I had to verbally beat away my musician friends who wanted to date her. Joyce played music too. She'd been playing piano since her early teens, and practiced every day, early. I had classical music pounded into my head at 6 a.m., on a black Baldwin baby grand piano that sat against my bedroom wall. Every time I hear *Moon River* now, I cry. That was Joyce's favorite song.

"So what killed her, Rob?"

"That's a real mystery, Larkins."

Joyce received a federal grant to study cancer research, at the University of Arizona in Tucson. There, she got engaged to an older doctor, Scott, who'd returned from a tour of Vietnam. They were both very much in love and he asked her to take the birth control pill, so they could safely make love. Joyce did. Then, as she injected a laboratory rat with cancer cells, the needle slipped, pricking her. She called my dad immediately and told him of the accident, but being such a small amount, nobody considered any possible consequences. Next, poor Joyce ended up in the hospital with a mild case of Valley Fever. It took a two-week autopsy investigation to determine the cause of her death. The cancer, combined with the pill and Valley Fever, it seems, had stopped her heart. Joyce died in her apartment without the strength to even open a recent letter I'd sent her. My parents were told previously not to have a second child. They nearly lost Joyce to scarlet fever as an infant. She was just born with a very weak immune system and the deck stacked against her from the get go. My dad could have sued her Arizona doctor for keeping her on the pill when hospitalized with Valley Fever, but it would never bring Joyce back. Dad knew that beyond doubt.

"Looking back now, I'm grateful to have experienced her passing exactly the way it happened. I really believe there are no accidents or mistakes in God's plan. Even us being here in prison together is perfect."

"Jesus, how can you say that? Some of the stuff that comes out of your mouth is unbelievable, Rideout."

“I just try to see the perfection in each moment. We both created this experience for our next lessons in awakening, Larkins. We are exactly where we should be each moment, like it or not.”

My poor parents would never be the same again, as their deep depressions set in. They closed the window shades, locked their doors and actually turned off the TV to chain smoke and repeat over and over everything they could ever remember about Joyce- for years! Their alcohol consumption greatly increased to numb their aching hearts. My parents always claimed to be *controlled* alcoholics, only drinking after five o’clock. Now I was beginning to wonder. Being the black sheep of the family, I ceased to exist in their world. That is how it felt to me. They never understood me most of the time anyway. In their minds, they had lost their *only* child. Joyce was alive, even after death, and now I felt like the living dead. My heart was hurting too. Grief can be *so* heavy.

Left with a hole in my heart, life went on again back at the barn. My parents went off alone to bury Joyce’s ashes- up under a tree where she’d caught her first butterfly, at Twin Lakes near Mount Baker. How symbolic that is. But to this day, I have no idea of the exact location, as Mom and Dad never disclosed it.

At our barn, we had a weekend music festival and invited a Seattle band, called *Bad Manners*, to join us. These guys were as close to the *Rolling Stones* as our band *Omsly* was to the Los Angeles band, *Arthur Lee & Love*. The manager of *The Doors* attended our gig. Jim Morrison had just joined my sister. He asked me if I’d consider moving to L.A., where he could set me up with some great studio musicians, and I could possibly move up the musical rungs to fame. Again, this was one of those opportunities in life that you wonder about later. It was another turning point decision which I cordially declined. How could I? I didn’t like big cities after Phoenix and loved my yogic lifestyle, psychedelic rock band and barn. Looking back now, I’d probably have died at any early age from drugs and alcohol, in such a musical waste land as L.A. in the early ‘70’s. I *was*, however, honored to have been noticed for my God-given talent, by one so respected in the music industry- *The Doors* manager, good God!

Then, thanks to Yogananda, friends from past incarnations started arriving. And the power of the written word would cast us all into a fiasco of craziness. Word soon spread in Bellingham's underground community about Jolene and me and our idyllic home front. Carolyn was the first to come into our life. She would soon transform into Christian, with a couple of different last names. Yogananda was Carolyn's guru too and soon we were all chanting the names of the Lord and meditating together regularly. We sang many of Yogananda's Americanized chants, but gravitated quickly to the older Sanskrit mantras from Mother India. In time, we were certified through Self-Realization Fellowship, to conduct weekly meditation services for the Bellingham community. Then one day, we picked up a beautiful young hippie girl hitch-hiking towards Lake Whatcom. She had striking blue hypnotic eyes and was called Krilla.

"Where are you headed, Krilla?" I asked her.

"I'm trying to find a Rob and Jolene who live in a barn somewhere in this area."

Voila! Here came another past friend from a previous incarnation, as Yogananda's teachings clearly pointed out. Next in line was Wally. He was a student from Washington D.C., attending Western now and looking for property to erect his tipi to practice yoga. Well, we had lots of land and invited Wally in. He chose a peaceful spot next to our meandering stream that fed the pond. Wally was a Hatha Yoga teacher and became my first real spiritual brother. We all began listening more intently to Bhagavan Das chant on his dotara. I'd been turned onto him back in '72 when his double album *Ah* came out. The dotara he plays is a simple two-stringed drone instrument. Later, I too would be chanting on my own dotara, thanks to the influence of this Bhagavan Das.

"Wow," exclaimed Larkins. "I can't imagine you chanting. I can see you singing rock songs but chanting?"

"I've been doing it a very long time Larkins. I just love to sing."

Then, our small band of hippie yogis found out that we had a living treasure in our own backyard. Existing on Western's campus was Sri Das, eighty-odd years old, from India, who'd been Yogananda's chauffeur in their 1924 drive across the country in an open-topped Maxwell. He said our Master was just like everyday life, a regular sort of man, despite his spiritual greatness. Sri Das made us all our first taste of Indian curry, a taste that I would fall in love with forever. We all ate cross legged in the grass in our five-acre field, watching the ground fog ascend at dusk into our apple orchard, as the deer reared up on thin hind legs to pick their favorite fruit. God, these were special times. The memories still bring tears to my eyes.

The valley has been....

Now the power of the written word would change our young lives in ways we couldn't possibly foresee, and have some pretty dramatic karmic consequences. We all read a small book, entitled *Secret of the Andes*, by Brother Phillip. This book spoke of a secret remote "valley of the blue moon" situated between Peru and Bolivia in the high Andes mountains. Here, supposedly, the Monastery of the Seven Rays stores esoteric teachings dating back to the ancient civilization of Lemuria. It is the cosmic college for the spiritually advanced and ready. As none of us had found any answers to life at college, this book pulled at our hearts' strings. It seemed like the next step for us. There were no clear-cut directions to this place, but guides would find you; when you were ready, remembering to bring *only* your soul. In our young spiritual naiveté, we took the bait- hook, line and sinker. And, amazingly, we met South American travelers who knew of this valley and encouraged us to go. Krilla and Carolyn left nearly a year before Wally, Jolene and me. The girls traveled overland through Mexico and Latin America, writing us postcards along their way. Our plan was to fly down to Ecuador, then bus to Machu Picchu, Lost City of the Incas, outside of Cuzco, Peru. Here we'd all rendezvous on New Year's Eve of 1974. Preparations began for our pilgrimage.

We sold my beloved VW van, which had traveled Europe and much of America, to a good kid who reminded me of myself at that age.

My sister's yellow VW bug, Jolene's first car, was next to go. Our beloved barn went to a mountain climber friend, who would also house-sit our bob-tailed Manx cat, Jessica, for us. Then we were hit with the shocking news that the Valley had been "aborted due to disobedience and unpreparedness." This came from a newsletter by old Sister Thedra of Mount Shasta, California who'd lived in the Valley for five years. We called this Thedra long distance, and she told us *not* to go. Her words hurt my ears. People had died trying to locate this Valley. Even if we did find it, Sister Thedra said we would find nothing. Our bubble had been burst! We wanted to cry, as all of our bridges had been burned; our home, animals, vehicles and parents, who thought we were totally crazy, were now gone. All we had now were loaded backpacks, a broken dream and plane passage to Quito, Ecuador. What had we done *so* wrong to deserve this lesson in our quest for God? Were we so misled by our egos or was this all a part of the master plan? There was no way to write the sisters ahead of us about this depressing turn of events. Just prior to this news, we discovered that the magic mushrooms grew at our very doorstep. Wow! You've got to be kidding me. After ingesting them for days on end, our own valley, here, began to look like the Valley we were searching for. In reality, it was, but now it was too late. We had just lost one paradise forever in this life. It would haunt Jolene for decades to come.

As we went to bed that night, after Thedra's depressing reality check, our barn began to shake heavily. A very bright blue light ringed in white, was flooding through all of our windows. Every barn board seemed to be trembling in anticipation. Jolene and I were at that very fine line on the threshold of sleep, and felt a deep primal fear. She whispered for me to go look. I was *too* scared to get up and go outside and she felt exactly the same way. Wally snored away through all of this. Imagine that. To this day, I believe that a UFO was there to possibly take us to the real Valley, as our devotion was so intense and heartfelt. Are you really ready Rob

and Jolene? Step outside and get beamed up. Who knows? I really can't explain this one. And we weren't on drugs either, just for the record. At least, this was quite the cosmic send off for our now very uncertain future. It's certainly something Jolene and I will never forget- never.

"If anybody should have a close encounter, it should be you guys."

"Thanks, Larkins. Now you're getting to know me."

So, off we flew to Los Angeles first, where we received Kriya Yoga initiation at the Mother Center of Self-Realization Fellowship, atop Mount Washington. When the SRF monks saw Jolene, they all did double takes, exclaiming, "You look just like our Master, Yogananda!" I've always had the same impression. Back in our cheap motel room in seedy Hollywood, we practiced our Kriya Yoga. But our meditations were constantly interrupted by the moaning sexual sounds of some hooker and her John getting it on in the room next to us. Hollywood sure isn't conducive to deep meditation.

Arriving at Quito airport, ten thousand feet high, and not being able to speak Spanish, reality hit us like a brick wall. Where in the hell were we? From postcards we'd received before leaving America, we learned that Carolyn was now Christian, having been spiritually reborn in South America. She wrote that she and Krilla had been separated in a Bolivian train station, and unable to find each other. She had no idea where sister Krilla was. Now our dreams of Machu Picchu were fading fast! And with the language barrier, Sister Thedra's warning and having to piss something awful, we entered customs at Quito airport.

"Now you'll never find your friends, Christian and Krilla," Larkins pointed out.

On our flight to Ecuador, the airline magazine featured a cover story on the Viejo's- the old ones of Vilacabamba who were documented to live well past one hundred years of age. In our health bible, *Survival into the 21st Century* (Victorus Kalvinkus) we had read about a fruitarian guru, named Johnny Lovewisdom,

who'd been residing in Vilacabamba for years. Evidently old Johnny did a forty-day fast in a volcano crater, and people thought he was crazy. So they shot his pure, cleaned-out body full of Thorazine to bring him down from his high level of super-consciousness. Jolene stayed with our nurse friend in Cuenca, while Wally and I took an all-night cattle truck ride to visit the controversial fruitarian. Visually, Vilacabamba jungle foliage glowed and shimmered under the high altitude sunlight. It reminded us of a vision on mushrooms. This place was magical in its beauty. In the small village, everybody knew Johnny, of course. He wasn't hard to locate. When we met him, he was lying bedridden, inside a rooftop pyramid, with a broken leg; like maybe pyramid power was healing for broken bones too. Johnny resembled an ageing Howard Hughes, about ninety-five pounds, with graying waist length hair. His disciples appeared to be starving and finally agreed to ingest steamed cauliflower greens to supplement their lacking paradisiacal diet. We told Johnny about our quest for the Valley of the Blue Moon. He laughed loudly and stated that he'd seen hundreds of kids like us in search of the mystical place. He claimed to know Brother Phillip, a pseudo name for the real author, and that the Valley never *did* exist. Well, where in the hell did Sister Thedra reside then, for those five years? When he asked us where we were from, we said, "North of Seattle."

"Seattle, huh?" he replied slowly. "There was a girl here from Seattle a while ago. She was named Krilla." We about fell over.

"Is she still here?"

"Follow that trail over there, up in the jungle about two hours and you might find her." He also told us how authors control the world- through the power of the written word. I'm listening.

"If you read *Playboy*," Johnny said, "the Bible, newspapers or whatever and believe it, you've let that force into your mind. How do you really know the truth unless you've personally experienced it firsthand for yourself?" That's a good point, Johnny. That is Self-Realization.

This whole trip was teaching us what St. Francis of Assisi had once said: “What you are looking for is what is looking.” Or, as the Zen say, “If you can’t find it where you are standing, where do you expect to wander in search of it?” It finally dawned on us that we didn’t need to go anywhere in search of God or higher teachings. Just “Be still and know I AM GOD.” But, sadly, that’s not as easy as it sounds, and it would take many more years to have that truth hammer home and resurface with much more impact in *A Course in Miracles*.

So, up the trail Wally and I hiked in search of Krilla. Suddenly, she appeared out of the jungle, wearing a white sheet with those blazing blue eyes not even recognizing us. When it finally dawned on her who we were, she screamed in shock.

“What are the odds of you guys finding your little lost sister between Peru, Bolivia and Ecuador?” asked Larkins.

“I know. It seems unreal.”

Krilla told us her story back in Cuenca, with Jolene present. It seems that after losing Christian in Bolivia, she headed for the Andes outside of Lake Titicaca. Way up alone in the mountains, she remembered the words “bring *only* your soul,” and immediately threw her backpack into a ravine. Dressed barefoot in her white sheet, a heavy storm was quickly approaching. She lay down with bleeding feet, screaming to God for directions to the Valley. As the storm got heavier, a voice boomed from the sky, “Move!” Krilla found a cave, where she performed the hypothermia “breath of fire” to stay alive. She finally passed out and awoke to find mountain villagers staring at her. Dressed as she was, with only her soul and those magnetic eyes, the locals thought she was a wounded angel. She was taken by the hill folk to Peace Corp workers, who nursed her back to health. Then Krilla finally found Vilacabamba, Lovewisdom, and ultimately us. Again, God *does* work in mysterious ways. Later, jaded by Eastern mysticism, Krilla wrote me that Jesus was the *only* way. I guess she meant the only way for her, because He was still revealing more of God to me, in many different ways. And Jesus would return to me unexpectedly as the Voice in *ACIM*.

Now, we were off to Quito to purchase our souvenirs, before finally leaving this banana republic of smashed spiritual dreams. We'd pretty much covered western Ecuador by bus, seeing Los Banos and its geothermal water, quaint Cuenca, and sea-side Esmeralda. I was tired of bugs in my ears at night, and itching from fleas in these third-world hotels. Plus, I'd gotten very ill in Los Banos and felt I was nearly at death's door. While I was shitting and puking at the same time, the Virgin of Banos was having her yearly celebration, complete with a large doll-like image of her carried through the streets on a stretcher, while a poorly dressed semi-Salvation Army band cranked out off-key, bugle drum corps Virgin music. It was definitely time to go home! While breathing the dirty diesel bus fumes once again, standing outside a raunchy hotel, I noticed that Wally was acting very distant and withdrawn. He seemed totally blown away by our experiences here. I think he felt deceived by us somehow, because none of us ever heard from him again. I felt such love for him as my spiritual brother. When he dropped me, it really hurt. Is human conduct *ever* reliable? Can anybody ever really *be* trusted? I would ask myself these same questions many times in my life. This was the first time. Well, like they say, there are three kinds of people from the '60's- the burnouts, the sellouts and the holdouts. I'm definitely the third kind and maybe, I'm also a fourth- the Rideouts.

Oh, how attached we become to our material things....

Visitations are very special here and often pretty emotional too. These occur on weekends and any visiting friend or relative has to be thoroughly checked out, before approval is granted by DOC. Then they are given a physical pat-down, before entering our world through the sally port. Sri and Roderick were first to arrive. They both looked a bit shocked by the prison environment, Roderick more so than Sri. This would change. We all had a very heartfelt connection, which was a great blessing for me and now the ice had been broken for future visits. I knew they all went through a big ordeal to

have Sri spend a little needed time with me- a long drive with high gas prices, Joya and young Falcon (Sri's brother) killing time outside and all the emotions that surface during such an encounter here. My heart goes out in loving thankfulness for their efforts to make this possible for me.

Lyn also came and I was nervous. Remember, I was seeing a lot of her prior to my incarceration. She too had to make many arrangements for her visit. But as soon as we were seated together outside at a picnic table, it was as if we had been together yesterday. She looked *so* beautiful and was very excited to see me. We talked of Mr. Blanco. She had informed me in a letter that my favorite white Siamese cat had split from her place, after five days of hiding under the microwave stand. I was very upset by this news, but understood how hard it is for cats to adjust to change, especially when I wasn't there for the shocking transition. I figure Blanco still has about six lives left anyway and, knowing him, he probably adopted a better living situation further down the road.

Lyn also assured me that she'd check into my stored belongings. Obviously, this was *really* important to me, after Michael's unpredictability and his moving out. My gut instincts about him proved true. Some weeks later, Lyn wrote that he'd moved to Flagstaff, but his ex-girlfriend said the storage was being paid but for how long and by whom? More stress! I now needed Lyn to get everything legally transferred over to her name, so I could do easy time here, instead of hard. I'd lost *so* much, on so many levels since incarceration that I needed to know my earthly possessions would be safe, with the storage rent paid each month. I really relied on Lyn to help me on such business matters. To quote *The Beatles*, "Don't Let Me Down".

More changes....

One hot sunny Phoenix morning, sitting outside in the smoking cage, Larkins asked me, “So what happened after South America? Did you pick up the pieces of your life and start over again?”

“Yeah, you could say that. It sure put us through a lot of changes coming home after only a month gone. We thought we’d be gone forever. We never should have left our barn and home front. We screwed up, and would now have to start over again. Sadly, this would happen again many times in my life.”

We lived with our friends, Jan and Mitch. I got a job at Washington State Nursery, bent over pulling juvenile trees out of the ground all day for reforestation. I also began playing country western music with a guitar player named Mack. After years of rock, this was a real first for me and I dug it. I fell in love with country music big-time. It seems to come from the heart much more than the genitals. Jolene worked briefly for two preventive dentists. Through them, fate led us to the Okanogan area of eastern Washington, where we nearly inherited an organic orchard from an elderly Italian fruitarian, through the most bizarre of circumstances. He took a shine to us and his property sat in a beautiful secluded valley thick with apricots and McIntosh apples. Still tripped out from South America, we wondered if maybe this was *the* valley we’d been seeking. On some weird level, we were creating this whole strange situation. However, I tore my knee cartilage from doing the full lotus advanced yogic posture too long and too soon in my career. I needed surgery, but the Italian fruitarian insisted that God would heal me. *If* I had surgery, he insisted we would *never, never* inherit his house and property. Wow, now that put a lot of pressure on me. In extreme physical pain and emotional turmoil, I consulted Bellingham’s most renowned psychic, Dolly. Without telling her anything about myself, she read me like an open book.

“I see a frayed rope in your knee,” she said, “and it’s important that you realize God also works through the hands of surgeons. You are a western man trying to be an eastern man, and that has contributed to this accident. And yes, you have previously incarnated in India-as a monk with a shaved head.”

“Wow, maybe that’s why I have a lot of hair in this present life, as I didn’t have any before. And that helps shed some light on my longing for India. Thanks Dolly, that’s quite a reading.”

Since I had my medical parents pressuring me for surgery, along with the psychic’s answer and medical insurance, we chose to say goodbye to the fruitarian and our dream valley. My knee operation was my first experience with major surgery and being put under and learning to use crutches, but not to be my last. What would the future bring now?

“Well, what did it bring?” asked Larkins. “You seem to change more than the weather, my friend.”

In 1976, that “damn beat” resurfaced again, when I got an off-the-wall call from musician friend Mack to play country western music in Dallas, Texas. He had moved down there as he felt Texas was definitely the place to play country music. I flew down on a two week scouting mission to check out the scene. This time we wouldn’t just jump, but look before we jumped. Mack arranged for me to use some Mexican’s raunchy drum set. But this Mexican ironically turned out to be the original drummer for *Sam the Sham and the Pharaohs*, and I was playing the German made Trixson drum set that had recorded the famous song, *Woollie Bullie*. Things looked promising enough in Texas for Jolene and me to make the move; probably another mistake, but what the hell. The reality of just playing music, with more travel, was very appealing to my wandering minstrel soul. However, because of the advent of disco music, we had a hard time finding steady gigs in Dallas. Nobody was interested in live music now. And unbeknownst to me, things were happening behind my back that I wouldn’t find out about for a few years to come. So after six months of struggling in the Big D, mainly playing in private clubs where alcohol could be served, we’d had enough of Texas. It was time to return home. Texas, to me, is a state of mind anyway.

“What do you call home? Bellingham?”

“Yeah, I guess so. Jolene and I really needed to settle down and create a new home front again. So we chose to go back there. It was our hood, Bro.”

We needed some kind of stability in our lives. Things had just gotten too crazy since we had left our barn. Fortunately, I scored a job as a groundskeeper/caretaker at an historic building complex just a few blocks from my family home. It had been a convent, when I was a child, and now we'd be living in Mother Superior's penthouse apartment. Jolene ended up working next door at a private business as a secretary. We'd eat lunch together in our apartment, then back to work right where we lived. This was definitely a unique living-working situation. As active vegetarians, we now grew sunflower greens and wheatgrass under our skylight, as well as sprouting lentils, mung and alfalfa in large glass jars. We bought the popular Champion juicer and a special manual juicer specifically for wheatgrass. In our good health, we now wanted to purchase our own piece of land, to live the simple life once again in nature. *Mother Earth News* was our main source of inspirational reading towards this goal. We came across seven wooded acres south of Bellingham for \$7,000. This was a good investment for our money. We soon purchased logs to build a log cabin. We even took a weekend log cabin building class in Redmond, Washington. At the class, Jolene and I had a heavy quarrel, about equal to one we'd had in Dallas. What was happening to us? We definitely weren't getting along anymore. I was not providing the stability and security that Jolene needed. We were basically poor but happy. Now she was not happy and wanted more than I could give. We talked about children but never seriously. Maybe we should have. But I knew I wasn't ready. There were *so* many good times together in our marriage that didn't get any kind of mention. All of those times when we were one. And how can I ever describe the taste of her good food and all of the love that went into preparing it? And the everyday joy for life we both shared together for so long. Now we had serious problems to deal with. Nobody ever said marriage was going to be easy; especially for those marrying so young back in the early '70s.

"Were you guys drinking at this time?"

"No. We'd both gone through a beer stage coupled with that country western music I was playing in Texas. During this time period, I got into Colombian marijuana. Jolene no longer joined me

in smoking. What's up with *that*? In time, she grew to hate it. This was a real change, as we had always shared this together."

"That could lead to problems," exclaimed Larkins.

"Oh, it did from her point of view but there were more problems happening than my pot smoking."

When trust is broken, it can *never* be regained. I came home from playing music one night to find my wife and a former very drunk employer together. I felt sick, hurt and angry. What's happening? What's *really* going on? At lunch one day, Jolene dropped the Big One on me:

"I am divorcing you, Rob. You are like a bird that needs to be set free." This was heartbreak Number Two, Joyce's death being Number One. It felt like my soul mate was yanked from my heart.

"Did she ever really tell you why she left?"

"Yeah, over twenty years later, she told me her reason. Seems I had placed music and getting high, as priorities above her, she felt. But, of course, there are always two sides to every story. She refused the marriage counseling that my parents offered and had already set her decision in stone. A few days later, all of her stuff was gone, leaving me feeling like half a man with a broken heart and oncoming depression."

"Well, so much for soul mates and marriages made in heaven," snickered Larkins.

"Yeah, that is exactly about how I felt at this point too. Later, my view on soul mates would change. I really feel that we incarnate to work stuff out, that we'll *never* understand- probably from past lives and unfinished karma. Certain soul mates may last *forever* but others may only last a certain length of time. Who really knows, Larkins?"

"What did you do after she left you?"

"I started picking up the pieces of my broken heart."

I continued to live in our apartment, where I really heard the heart and depth of Willie Nelson's soul. He sang hurting songs that

portrayed my very feelings as I was doing the dishes alone. It was as if I were hearing myself sing. I got on my knees in front of my stereo in rapt awe. Who is this guy who sings from the heart so deeply, like he'll be forever lonely? I'd been listening to Willie awhile and playing his songs in Texas, but now I was really *hearing* him and self-realizing the depth of his divine talent. He tells it like it is! No fluff. Then I went to a Jimmy Buffet concert at the Bellingham Ice Arena. At this concert, I finally saw Hiranman. I had heard about him before, as he too was a vegetarian and into sprouts, wheatgrass and God- just like me. Having returned from India with a shaven head and eyes turned upward, Hiranman looked heavy- very heavy. Friends who knew him said he had lived with *the* Babaji of Yogananda's autobiography. I couldn't believe this! Nobody sees Babaji. Yogananda had only seen Babaji twice in his holy life. I should add to, that by this point of my life, I had fallen away from Yogananda's path of meditation. This caused a lot of guilt feelings at first, feeling that I was leaving my guru, but my path was changing. I met a monk from Self-Realization Fellowship who'd given up his vows. I can't imagine his guilt. People change and paths change and the next step always presents itself. I will always respect Yogananda's teachings and organization, but found it was not for me any longer. I was much more attracted to Babaji in his autobiography anyway. So, who is this Hiranman? Can he teach me anything about Babaji? I must meet him and learn more.

"Did you," questioned Larkins, "get the chance to finally meet him?"

"That would come to pass after more foreign travel."

"You are a lucky dog, Rideout!"

"Well, I don't know about luck, Larkins. You don't *know* the price I've paid to be a free spirit. Everything has a price tag."

"Where did you go this time? Gosh, you seem to get around more than anybody I've ever met."

"I'll get to that," I replied. "Right now, have you got any Jolly Ranchers in your drawer? They were out of them on commissary last week."

“Yeah, I’ll give you one. Have you got any Sweet ‘n Low? Kevin hasn’t been able to smuggle any out of kitchen duty in his socks for awhile.”

A bonus to my spiritual seeking at this time came in hearing Dick Gregory speak at Western’s campus. Gregory was a noted black comedian turned political and diet activist. His long fasts for peace made national headline news. He was *heavy*. He kept re-emphasizing, “When are y’all gonna wake up? Y’all just smoke that reefer and listen to that vinyl. You have a lot of work to do! When you gonna wake up?” I took my French friend Fabian, who has the same birthday as me, to see him. After hearing Gregory speaks, Fabian did a forty-day fast to help her wake up. Dick Gregory was like John the Baptist- one *powerful* voice for truth crying in the wilderness of materialistic wasteland. What a blessing it was to see him and hear his powerful words. Sadly, I wouldn’t wake up for a long time. Alcohol was coming back into my life again. The snowball, that would become a snowman, was just beginning to form. I now drummed for a country-rock band named *Super Natural*, in the border town of Blaine. Again, this was yet another very talented band. We had a great tight groove and everybody sang well too. They introduced me to peach brandy during our fifteen minute band breaks off stage. Soon, my upcoming divorce and loneliness didn’t seem so bad. On the very day of my divorce becoming finalized, I went from divorce court and final goodbyes to Jolene on the courthouse steps, to a recording studio and whiskey shortly after. What the hell- I was free now, or so I thought.

“I know the exact feeling. Alcohol almost always makes me feel free,” said Larkins.

“Yeah, it does in the beginning but not later. It becomes a trap, on more levels than one.”

Playing weekends in Blaine, we met Emma and Henry Morell, who’d migrated to Canada from Fiji Islands. They loved our band and invited us to their home in Surrey, B.C. for Fijian food, stories, dancing and grog- *kava kava*. Kava, technically yongona root, is a mild liquid intoxicant and a large element in Fijian and most South

Seas culture. And it's legal. We all became very close with the Morells and visited them many times. They were so loving, mellow and kind and raising a very functional family in first world Canada. They were absolutely beautiful. Finally, they suggested that *Super Natural* ought to consider playing in Fiji, and offered to assist us in our endeavor. It would take much planning and time to bring this tropical dream to fruition, but their seed did sprout and bloom into a beautiful flower of a once in a lifetime experience.

“So, you're on the rebound from a divorce, starting to drink again and going to Fiji islands to play music? I wish I could have been in your boots. That sounds exciting to me. Fiji!”

“Yeah, it sounds crazy, doesn't it? However, the divorce would still haunt me far away in paradise.”

Those ports of Paradise

I was definitely at a major turning point, in my young life of thirty years. In early October of 1979, Bruce, Wayne, Teri and I flew fourteen hours to Nandi, Fiji. We had gotten an incredible introductory airfare on Continental airlines for five hundred dollars round trip, with Hawaii included, and good for up to one year. During '79, Brooke Shields was busy filming *The Blue Lagoon* in Fiji. She would soon be our neighbor, island-wise. In Nandi airport, the first thing you hear is *Bula*, Fijian for hello. We'd just stepped off the plane into another world. The warm tropical night air felt *so* good after the freezing cold of the Pacific Northwest. With Fiji being fifty percent Hindu, it's not ironic that this town is named after Lord Shiva's bull, Nandi. Even the capital city of Suva sounds a lot like Shiva to me. But these are just observations of a Hindu mind. Fiji might actually blow my mind, who knows.

That first night we stayed at an inexpensive haven for travelers, where we could cook our own food to save money or order from their simple menu. Arriving very late at night, I took my flashlight outside to see the flora of this new world. The flowery scents of frangipani flowers and roses were evident, even in the dark. After a short nap, I was the only one up early enough to see the sunrise. The same old sun, but it sure looked spectacular this morning. There were lots of beautiful Hindi children in blue uniforms, walking off to school and mangoes were scattered everywhere, with the mynah birds picking and cackling about. I was rushing with joy on my first morning in paradise! The beauty and magic here was already killing me. I felt so incredibly free and blessed and it was warm too.

"I wish we were there now man, instead of here in prison," exclaimed Larkins.

"I know what you mean. Just pretend you're with me, Randy."

The snorkeling in Fiji's coral reefs ranks next to the Great Barrier Reef in northern Australia. There is ninety-foot visibility in the near, 70° water. On our first dip, we all emerged screaming with joy. This was another unbelievable dimension to experience; an aqua paradise. The coral and numerous varieties of fish reminded us of pages out of *National Geographic* or TV specials

by Jacques Cousteau. We'd snorkel *so* long, that when falling asleep at night, we'd experience the aquatic feeling of floating in water again. After leaving Nandi, we traveled south on King's Road to Suva, Fiji's capital city and a famous hub in the South Pacific. The air pollution in Suva smells like a coconut macaroon cookie, from the copra processing plants. How sweet. This was much better than the diesel fumes of Quito! Our combo played for a week at the Hotel Esa Lei, overlooking Suva Bay. This classic hotel was famous in Suva's history and built in the shape of a turtle, Fiji's symbol. The *Fiji Sun* ran a front page picture and story on us- *Super Natural – Super Country*. The article said we were famous in America, and on holidays here in Fiji. At least part of that is true. When we arrived to play, it was like being famous for a little while, as small black faces stared into our taxi windows, while being repeatedly asked for our autographs. I wonder today how many of those kids, who would now be adults, even remember who we were. We also played at Fiji's four-star resort, The Fijian. That place was really something else. Talk about beauty! After spending two weeks on the main island of Vanua Levu, our trip was possibly coming to an end, or modification, anyway.

“What do you mean, Rideout?”

“Well legally, we could only perform for two weeks, as we were competition to local Fijian bands. We could never get a clear answer to this question before we came down here. So Wayne and Teri decided to fly home and commercial fish in Alaska. They loved what little of Fiji they saw, but had children to raise and responsibilities far beyond guitar player Bruce and me. We decided to go for the long haul and spend six months, as we'd only touched the tip of this tropical iceberg. We both had enough funds for the venture and the chance to experience this paradise so fully, might never be presented again. My life was *so* good at this point, but we seldom seem to realize that when it is actually happening.”

“Oh, I know what you mean. We always seem to take life for granted.”

“That is so true, Larkins and prison always seems to hammer home that truth.”

After saying goodbye to Wayne and Teri, Bruce and I moved into the government fisheries compound north of Suva, where the Canadian Morells’ cousins resided and worked. Their names were Harry and Olive Morell, and their blond five-year-old daughter was little Emma. Fisheries would be our home base of operations for the next half-year. We drank Fiji bitter beer and/or Yongona root – kava or grog – with the fishermen pretty much each night. I’d brought pictures and postcards from home, to share around the *tanoa* or grog bowl. They would pass these treasures around like they came from another planet. When we saw *The Deer Hunter* in Suva and Mount Baker came on the screen, everybody fell into a silent shock at the sight of my sacred snow-clad mountain. I wanted to stand up and shout, “That’s where I come from!” Why is the grass always greener somewhere else? Leaving your own country always lets you see it from a new perspective.

“I’ve never even left the United States, but prison is sure giving me a new perspective on it.”

“I hear you loud and clear Larkins. It’s like the other side of the coin from leaving the country. David said the same thing. Being incarcerated does give one a whole new perspective on his country. You never really know what it is like, until you are there.”

The Fijians really took to our nightly music around the grog bowl- like every night! This almost took on the similarity of a job, but it did cover our room and board. We did not want to be a burden to these kind people, so this was the least we could do- play music. Music is undoubtedly the greatest common denominator anywhere on earth; the true universal language. So we sang for our fish dinner, and believe me, we ate fish nearly every night, plus white rice, dalo and cassava root.

However, I was plagued by dreams of my ex- wife Jolene and those divorce flashbacks. I also discovered my first gray hairs sprouting from my crown. I still felt that I was processing deep inner questions about her and our relationship. Could we *ever* be together again in the future? I doubt it. I know I’m

looking for an anchor but will I find it here in Fiji? I also know that God is the *only* anchor, but I still miss having a mate. All the goodness of Jolene comes through to me at times alone, still haunting me. I remember how heavy she could be, on so many levels both good and weird, and yet possess a beauty that most women don't have. Women! Why do I lose myself over them and give away my power? I see too that I am the one who must change and mellow out a bit more, before I'll ever attract another mate. I feel so fragmented and I need to be whole. On top of all these dreams and flashbacks, I still wonder what I'll do for work when I do return home- a major worry. So, I wrote a letter to country musician Mack back in the Bellingham area, to possibly see if he might have any work when I return. It sure doesn't hurt to do some ground work from here, down under. It just may pay off.

"You were trying to cover your ass for the future, Rideout."

"Yeah, you could say that, Larkins."

One day in Suva's marketplace, Bruce and I luckily ran into a very friendly outer island native, named Joe. He offered to take us to his village of Gunu, on the island of Naviti in the Yasawa group. At first, we didn't believe him. We needed to receive government passes to visit. We were also required, by the government, to take grog, rice, flour, sugar and salt, carrots, bread, jam and peanut butter. That way we wouldn't be putting pressure on their low-income subsistence village economy. Finally, we were off for a five hour voyage on a twenty-four foot long crowded copra or dried coconut boat, heading towards Joe's island of Naviti. The total cost was \$5.50 each. Cold waves splashed us all day, we were soaking wet and we both got wind and sunburned, with no visible sun in the sky. On this thirty-six mile trip, my fingers actually got numb. This was the first time I'd been cold since leaving the Pacific Northwest. As the waves were splashing me and I was shaking all over, all I could think about was the possibility of a Hindu wife. In the back of my head I could hear my mom saying her mantra, "Oh God, Rob." Many native friends here had already posed this idea to me. Bruce had a similar idea too- of possibly marrying a Rotuman wife. Rotuma is an island 300 miles north of

Fiji and is supposedly noted for the prettiest women and the sweetest fruit in the south Pacific. Now that's a good one. We had previously met a few Rotumans here. One, named Julian, had become our friend, planting this idea and also suggesting that we should definitely see his beautiful island on our trip. It seemed like a good idea at the time, the marriage thing I mean, as I was already of Hindu mind. I reckoned a nice young East Indian lady would probably make a hip guy like me a great mate. Now I was flipping out over the idea. Then maybe, I could possibly live in Fiji full or part time. This was actually where my head was at, on the rebound from my divorce. And seeing the Rotuman women didn't sound like a bad idea either.

"You were fricking crazy, Rideout!"

"Divorce does that to some folk. You know that, Larkins. Just think about some of the stories we've heard in here from other inmates. A lot of these guys have been married right and left, many times."

Finally, we saw Naviti looming in the distance. The water here was *so* blue, splashing up against our waists as we waded ashore. This was a vision Hollywood dreams were made of. No wonder they're filming *The Blue Lagoon* here! Where's the music? This gorgeous tropical scene was blowing me away. I totally forgot how cold I was a few moments ago. Most tourists in Fiji will never see this side of native life, unless they're invited into it like we were. But there is a price to pay for it too, like the physical aspect. After catching our breath on the beach, we began hiking up five miles of jungle trails, seeing incredible vista views of the other islands in the Yasawa group and numerous white sand beaches scattered in every direction with no tourists- the *real* Fiji. Soon it got dark on the trail and following Joe was not an easy task. After slipping and sliding in the dark, we met another native who had the most incredible bananas I've ever tasted. After his sweet snack, we took a bath in a black saltwater lagoon with lightning flashing overhead. Good God! Where are the dinosaurs? Coconuts were falling in the dark and bananas were scattered everywhere, with a warm wind blowing to beat the band. This bath felt refreshing but I wish it could have been clear water instead of saltwater. By the time we

had reached Joe's village, the moon had risen, casting a luminescence across the most beautiful bay I'd seen yet in Fiji. Already, Bruce and I felt like we were being permitted a view of heaven on earth or at least a totally different culture from our own. Here was a true paradise.

The next day we took our grog or yongona root to Chief Johnny. He performed serious prayers to the gods Mana and Dina or luck and truth, followed by muffled handclaps that ordained us permission to be a part of their village. Then, Johnny thanked us. You must always bring yongona when staying in a Fijian village, to be accepted. In the days that followed, we tasted green coconut milk, wore our first *Sulu* or wraparound skirt and learned how to weave palm frond baskets with much difficulty. Soon our fishing lessons began in the blue lagoon. The spear guns were basically an inner tube strip combined with a coat hanger. You can imagine how hard it must be to shoot a fish this way!

"Wow that sounds like real fun to me," commented Larkins.

"It's much harder than you think. You have to calculate the refractive nature of water too.

Joe has had doctors, scientists, engineers, hippies and God only knows who else stay here in his village of Gunu. Joe is a holy man to me and, physically, he reminds me of Mahavatar Babaji in his former incarnation. Back in 1974, when my wife Jolene and I had taken the pilgrimage to Ecuador, we carried a small book with us titled, *Hariakhan Baba –Known, Unknown* by Baba Hari Dass. Joe strongly resembled the cover photo of Babaji. Who was this guy, really, to give us such an incredible experience?

"Maybe he was Babaji, unbeknownst to you."

"I don't actually think so, but in my mind I felt such deep respect for Joe that he might just as well have been Babaji. He was always teaching me so much in so many subtle ways. He told me once that I was *fit* and a chief. Maybe you *are* right, Larkins."

As we watched the goats, pigs big and small, chickens, puppies, cats and kittens play alongside aqua blue graves, Gunu's villagers and fishermen told us tales. They spoke of seeing large colored lights ascending from the ocean depths into the night sky and beyond. They asked if we thought they were possibly devils. I don't think so, as the Fiji Sun and Times newspapers both had feature articles about UFO sighting in the Yasawas. Old radio shows like Art Linkletter's *Kids Say the Darnedest Things* and *The Shadow* are still popular here at night, as TV does not exist. Who needs TV when you've got ET?

"Why no TV?" asked Larkins.

"The government wouldn't allow it. Back in '79, they were trying to protect their culture against the inevitable."

Kava, or yongona root, of which I've already spoken, is a variety of pepper tree that takes five to seven years to reach harvest. When the stems and roots are dried and then manually beaten, or mechanically ground into a flour, cold water is added to create a mud puddle that tastes like a freshly ground cedar pencil. This is the liquid drug or beverage of Melanesia and Polynesia. With my addictive personality, I had a love/hate relationship with this grog, as it is commonly called. It is consumed daily in Fiji as a ritualistic ceremony, a "grog break" at a city bank or socially in the villages and towns. Both native Fijians and domestic East Indian Hindus partake of the narcotic beverage, which is basically a man's drink. I out drank the chief of another village one night and became a living legend-something they would talk about for a long time. When asked if I was stoned yet, I replied, "You don't even *know* the meaning of the word." You are dealing with one of the original hippies here. To me, the high was like one beer combined with a mediocre joint. But when drinking mass quantities, I developed what Fijians call *coni coni* or second skin. This is an intense nerve itch that can't be scratched- like a snake shedding its skin. I swore I'd never drink grog again. However, when tomorrow arrived, there was nothing else to do but to drink it again. My thinking was that it made me feel more at

one with the natives, myself and this hot environment, despite the consequences. This rational and pattern would be repeated with alcohol later; that damn addictive personality at work. At night in the villages, you often hear what sounds like drums pounding away. However, these are not drums but the beating of kava into powder. The beat goes on, even in Fiji.

“Yeah Rob, I’ve got that addictive personality problem too. I think most alcoholics do.”

“That goes without saying, Larkins.”

Things were about to get much more interesting for us under the palm trees. On Christmas day, Bruce and I attended a Methodist church service to enjoy the incredible a capela singing. I wore a white muslin shirt from Thailand and meditated with my eyes closed. I now wore a beard with my long wild hair. Unexpectedly, I heard children’s voices saying, “It’s him,” all around me. They thought I was Jesus, for Christ’s sake! Bruce affirmed their observations, as this island sure didn’t see too many hippies here looking like the Son of God.

“That’s unreal!”

“Well, one kid whispered I was *not* him.”

“Still, that is something you’ll never forget, Rideout.”

“I suppose you’re right, Larkins.”

After that experience in the church, we were invited to celebrate the holy day with whiskey and grog under a corrugated tin roof. Everybody there had a head start on us. The gray-haired, respected chief of the village sat in front of us. Both the bottle and the *bilo* were passed around for us to catch up. A very great honor was about to be bestowed upon us. I guess they were just getting us ready. The chief had two *tobuas* to present us. This is the highest spiritual honor in Fiji, seldom given to whites, except maybe important dignitaries or Prince Charles. A *tobua* is a sperm whale’s tooth, usually passed at death or marriage within Fijian culture. We were blown away, to say the least! We only accepted one for the two of us and later passed it on to the Morells for their daughter little Emma. There are only *so* many in circulations here. Had we taken it out of Fiji, it would have been confiscated at U.S.

Customs in Hawaii, never to be returned to Fiji. The sperm whale is an endangered species so this could be illegal outside Fiji. I carried a picture of me holding our sacred treasure, which could open any door in Fiji like a key. Now, we were spiritually adopted in Fiji; in like Flynn. This token is similarly equal to receiving a golden eagle feather from a Native American.

“Wow, that’s cool and another affirmation that you *are* special, Rideout. God was blessing you and Bruce. ”

“Yeah, well maybe, but we are *all* special in our own unique ways. Even you are special, Larkins. And I know you usually don’t feel that way about yourself.”

“Yeah, I know,” he mumbled under his breath.

“Please try to hold your head and neck a little higher. You look too depressed sometimes.”

“Hell, I am!”

One thing made me very unique for years to come. To fulfill a longtime desire, I had a local Hindu craftsman build me a *dotara* for chanting. This simple musical instrument is a large hollow pumpkin gourd with a bamboo neck and two strings tuned the same. I soon began chanting Sanskrit mantras under the palm trees near the ocean, ala Bhagavan Das.

“You are *so* bizarre, Rideout! Come to think of it, a lot of musicians I know are weird. But you are unique in your own way. Was it hard to play that *dotara*?”

“No, it came to me real easy and fast. It was just like I always knew how.”

Singing to God has always been my most cherished form of devotion. The human voice is really all you need to express your love for the divine. You just need to find and perfect that voice within your own heart and let it come forth. I began doing just that on the beaches of Fiji in 1979. Bruce, in his quiet way, didn’t have much to say about it. He was busy photographing flowers and shells close up.

“Wow, you’ve been singing a long time. I don’t hear you singing in here... prison I mean.”

“No, not here, but when I hear the chiefs singing out in their sweat lodge on Saturdays, it brings joy to my heart. They know what I’m talking about. And there is a Mexican here who sings to Jesus all day long. You know the guy I’m talking about... the one who plays guitar in the chapel. That dude is one righteous soul, really trying to keep his mind on God here in prison through devotional songs. I take my hat off to him. However Larkins, I’ll sing like a lark when I do get out.”

“Yeah, we *all* will. So, did anything ever happen with you marrying a Hindu girl in Fiji? That just sounds *so* crazy to me.”

“Yes and no.”

After placing an advertisement in the newspaper and having girls lined up and down the sidewalk, I chose nineteen year old Indra to be my bride. Her mother was a seamstress and her father farmed sugar cane. I was totally out of my mind. Calling my mother collect, I asked her to send me my much needed, recent divorce papers.

“I don’t know what I’ll have to say to you, Rob, when I pick you up at the airport,” she shouted, before slamming the phone down.

This was a real bummer, as I still had another month to go and a lot of time to think about what I’d done and/or nearly done. There would be no marriage without my US divorce papers. Oh well, *c’est la vie*. During this time, I met Tim Welch from Iowa, who’d been schooling in New Zealand and was on his way home via Fiji. We became fast friends and partied hard with the Morells. Our lives would cross again. Finally on my way home, I stopped off in Hawaii to visit old friends. Why not, it came on the same ticket and I may never have the chance to see Hawaii again. There, I reunited with Hiranman once more, the Bellingham disciple of Mahavatar Babaji. He was presently building a Shiva temple in the jungle, as instructed by Babaji. As I helped Hiranman mix cement, we talked for hours about his personal experiences with Babaji in

India. There was *no* doubt in Hiranman's mind that the present young Babaji in India was the same old Babaji of Yogananda. Left alone in my friend's house, while they went out shopping, I noticed a black and white photo of a man that seemed to stare through me. I studied the photo closely. He looked like the actor Sabu from *The Jungle Book* movie. This was Babaji, both young and old at the same time, back in his body and alive in India! I couldn't stop *staring* at this photo. Even today, after seeing many pictures, this photo still holds that power over me. I returned to Bellingham a changed man, holding my first photo of God.

"You mean Babaji."

"Same."

"Was your mom pissed off at you when she picked you up at the airport?" questioned Larkins.

"No, not really; she'd cooled down quite a bit and actually felt a lot of compassion for me. My mom knew that I wanted a woman in my life, but not somebody from another world and culture, so far away."

"Moms have a way of knowing what's going on."

We were all having too much....

Soon, a letter arrived from Indra, stating that her family did not want her to marry a non-Hindu, white dude. I understood and now it wasn't a problem- just pipe dreams down the drain. I'd just gotten a job offer to go on the road again, playing music for a year with Mack. Remember, I'd written him about possible work and he came through. Our three piece country-rock band spent six months in Winner, South Dakota playing some serious music and experiencing alcohol on a pretty much daily basis. During this time I made friends with some Sioux Indians. Rosebud Indian reservation is very close to Winner. On the weekends here, it was real cowboys and Indians as the

drunken barroom fights broke out. Later, the Indians presented me with a golden eagle feather and told me to consider myself Sioux.

“Wow, like getting the *tobua* in Fiji,” interjected Larkins.
“That’s pretty cool.”

“Again, I felt very blessed and blown away.”

Working cowboys took us horseback riding here too and we even played for a rodeo dance. Tim Welch, whom I’d met in Fiji, drove over from Iowa to spend a few days and hear us play. What a friend! As the summer got hotter, we all got into bowling, demolition derbies and the community swimming pool. A few affairs with cowgirls came with the territory too. We all grew to really love South Dakota, in more ways than one. Seeing Mount Rushmore was definitely a rush and Rapid City on our day off was a musicians dream comes true. I actually saw a drummer there set his Zildjian cymbals on fire with lighter fluid, while performing the drum solo on *Wipeout*. On my tape deck, I was still listening to Fijian music constantly and dreaming about how I could *ever* get back there someday. These dreams were heartfelt and intense, especially under the influence of alcohol.

After our stint in the mid-west, we traveled on for six more months to Texas, New Mexico and later, British Columbia playing our songs. This is when my drinking career *really* began and accelerated quickly. What happened in Winner didn’t stay in Winner. It followed us, especially me. I was definitely a party boy. Little did I know then that I was an alcoholic? I did become a much practiced drinker during this time, as we often partied after hours till dawn. We were all having *way* too much fun; extreme alcoholic fun and craziness. At this time, musicians usually got free drinks, not to mention the ones that the fans sent up on stage. While playing in Silver City, New Mexico in December of 1980, John Lennon was shot and killed just before we were about to go on stage at a Holiday Inn. Everybody left. We reluctantly played our tunes to empty tables and bar stools, on the day the music died. I

deeply mourned Brother John, as Yoko had requested, three days after his passing. I did this in the Gila wilderness of New Mexico, never envisioning then that I might live there someday. After completing our tour of duty in British Columbia, playing small hick towns in the middle of nowhere to some of the quaintest people on earth, our band settled into a house-band job for five years in the American/ Canadian border town of Sumas, Washington. This new gig would ultimately lead me to my own piece of property and cabin.

“So, you *only* played music during this time?” questioned Larkins.

“Well, yeah. That’s what musicians do. I made enough to live on and that was good enough for me. It left me time to enjoy my life a bit more. I also finally learned to play the guitar. That was a total dream come true for me. Drums came easy but I always longed in my heart to play that damn guitar. I never thought I could do it but it happened, after practicing an hour a day for a month. In fact, my guitar became a *very* dear friend, enabling me to learn any song I wanted to sing, including my own. And that is a pretty high form of therapy in my book.”

“You musicians live the life of Reilly, don’t you?”

“Not really, but it can seem like that at times to an outsider. It’s just a thankless job with some strange fringe benefits and a whole lot of occupational hazards.”

Our band, *Dakota* was like a big fish in a small pond. I played four days a week and made as much money as I did working forty hours a week, in only nineteen and a half hours. I also had *way* more of my share of good times than most people could ever believe or deserve. The party that had begun on the road seemed to continue into this house-band job. As far as women went, we could take our pick of the litter from onstage. This was all still before HIV and AIDS became a big scare. In short, these *were* the good old days.

“Alcohol must have been starting to cause problems in your life by now,” remarked Larkins.

“Yeah it was, but I was in total denial of course. A fellow musician told me I was starting to have blackouts. I had no idea what he was talking about. What’s a blackout?”

“Your troubles were just beginning my friend,” commented Larkins. “A blackout is when you can’t remember anything that happened.”

Willie Nelson and Emmylou Harris were performing in Seattle, so I attended this concert with my friend Will Callow. Callow grew up in my neighborhood and had worked on tugboats for years- two weeks out, two weeks home. He looked like a bobcat, wide eyed and bushy tailed. He was very well off financially and also grew the herb. He met me at a rest area south of Bellingham and we carpooled to Seattle in his tub of a station wagon. For having money, he didn’t have much of a car. On empty stomachs, after an afternoon in the University district window shopping, we began chugging down whiskey before the gig. Then Callow ate raw oysters while I had greasy fries. After yet more whiskey, we smoked his special green California bud to be in prime shape for the gig. Our concert seats were seven rows from the front and not cheap. When Callow went to pee, I went into the twirlers, puking all over the floor. People got *very* angry, as it stunk something awful. Hell, who can blame them? I didn’t get thrown out, but I did get placed at the back floor space of the King Dome.

“How embarrassing that must have been for you!” exclaimed Larkins?

“Yeah, it really was. I was one sick hombre.”

When Callow returned, he was *very* upset, as nobody in row seven knew where they’d taken me. He spent the whole concert walking every row, balcony and floor, looking for me! I distantly heard Willie and Emmylou, who I could barely see now, as I dealt with immense guilt and shame. I’d puked at my musical mentors’ gig. Shame on you! Look what fucking alcohol did to you this time, asshole!

“Boy, you got that right, Rideout,” commented Larkins.

Callow finally found me during the last song. He was *not* in a good mood. I wonder why? In fact, he was fuming mad. Now things quickly progressed to what seemed like a Cheech and Chong movie. We left immediately to beat the traffic jam. Wouldn't you know it- Callow's tub had engine trouble, belching and spitting as we were leaving the parking lot. He started freaking out on me, rummaging around madly behind his back seat. How is this going to fix the engine? He had a pound of his California pot that he was frantically trying to hide, as the red and blue lights of the cops appeared behind us. *Now* there was heavy fear in the station wagon! I got out immediately and told them we needed a jump. All I could taste was peuck and whiskey in my mouth. They quickly said, "Call a cab now, as this place is gonna be crazy with traffic when that concert gets out," and sped away. Whew!! A Good Samaritan jumped us within seconds. Then Callow needed a drink for his nerves. I was through with alcohol *forever* at this point, or so I thought. He got a few shots of whiskey down his belt before we were finally backed on I-5, heading north toward home. But not talking. Then, all of a sudden, we ended up at the Mukilteo ferry landing. Somehow Callow got in a wrong lane and took an exit north of Everett. Would this night never end?

"Well, how did it end?" asked Larkins.

"Callow finally dropped me off at my Datsun pickup and I slept off my headache and shame in the back. I returned to my home the next morning like a dog with his tail between his legs. I didn't see Callow again for many years. Ironically, Kenneth Bianchi, the famous Hillside strangler, killed his last two college girls in Callow's parents' house, working as a security guard while the family was away on vacation. The girls' bodies were found in a car in a cul-de-sac two blocks from my parent's house- heavy karma."

"I saw a special on TV all about that sick dude."

"I did too, Larkins. They even showed Callow's parents' house, which totally blew me away. What are the odds of me seeing a piece of my old hood, on TV, in prison?"

“You certainly have some strange stories, Rob. Have you ever thought about writing a book?”

“Funny you should say that. My mom said the same thing.”

There are still so many unanswered questions here....

At Phoenix West, Channel 4 is the Christian station. What a joke! It oscillates between science fiction and Comedy Central. Emotional fans of Jesus cry and extend their arms up in the air, praying to feel God's presence. If they'd quit crying and close their eyes just once, maybe they'd finally realize that the kingdom of heaven is within them, as their holy Bible clearly states. Tammy Faye Baker seems to have a clone, with heavy eye make up and a bouffant wig. This lady can cry on call! Then there is an East Indian preacher who continually knocks down sick people or pushes them over onto their backs. I am sure he goes over like a lead balloon in India. The young traveling, hip looking ministers are *really* a good laugh. They frequent Tibet, India and Nepal, which is nice to see on TV, telling people, who already have a profound spiritual path, how to get to God through Jesus. How insane is that? These kids are barely old enough to travel or obtain a passport, let alone know the way to God. I have yet to see a self-realized being on channel four, only parrots of Churchianity.

The sisters or homosexual cons seem to have a gay ol' time here. They have that certain look in their eyes that makes them stand out. They are different. They excel at back massage and hemming pants and really come alive after 10 p.m. lights out, usually hanging in the bathroom. What goes down in there is anybody's guess. Some love to stare, never blinking. What are they on? Staring is fricking rude in anybody's book. Here it indicates lack of respect, according to the Convict Code.

The warden removed the public day room English and Spanish TVs last week. Now it is very quiet, *finally*, but all those brown Latino eyes are focused on *my* TV set, as it faces

the day room. Some rude dudes actually stand next to my “house,” with their nuts in my space, trying to catch a glimpse of what I am watching. It makes me paranoid to even change channels, as they are now *so* into my TV. On weekends, I hang my wet towel from Larkin’s rack above, to give me some semblance of privacy. You are never alone here! I often get up early – like 3:30 a.m. – just to find some quiet time. Then I hear farting, coughing, snoring and sleep-talking all around me. At least it’s a little peace, before the 5 a.m. bright lights awaken the racial rascals once again.

Before bed, I often enjoy some nacho chips and fireball candy while watching TV. If I can afford it, the killer is raisin bagels and peanut butter. This is as good as it gets. Inevitably, somebody walks by asking for a handout, so I often feel guilty partaking of my one simple pleasure. It’s much easier to eat treats during count, when the other prying eyes are stationed at their own bunks, not knowing what I’m doing. Oh, the joys of prison life!

The blacks are fairly low key, but loud- very loud, just like the Fijians. Due to noise levels, their domino and card games have practically been banned from all dorms here. They’re commonly seen playing on the yard picnic tables now. The Indians or Native Americans are called chiefs in prison. There are a lot of chiefs, mainly Navajo, a couple of Hopis and an occasional Apache. I seem to get along fairly well with them on a one-to-one. But sometimes I get the feeling that, being white, they feel I caused all of their problems. Maybe this is the karma of being white. Many of the chiefs receive government money and purchase mucho commissary. There is one semi-chief who claims to be Indian, but I noticed that the other chiefs have nothing really to do with him. We call him “Shitting Dog”. He has tattoos of feathers on both arms and calves, as he probably doesn’t even own a feather- poor guy. He also is never seen in the sweat lodge. He tries to lose weight on his special diet, but buys so much junk food at commissary that he fills the cart and our largest mesh laundry bag with his mouth watering treats. Food addictions seem to replace

alcohol here. And being cynical about others seems to come with the territory too.

My intellectual atheist friend just got released this morning. The red haired female Sergeant announced in her calm soothing voice those familiar words, “It’s time to go home.” How we all await that special time! This young con had a very old number, indicating that his criminal record began early on. He was smart but not smart enough to stay out of trouble. God bless him, even if he doesn’t believe in God.

This once drunken dad often feels like a semi-forgotten father, in my prison sobriety. Then my son comes through, with a letter of love that reminds me I *am* his dad and he loves me unconditionally. He truly is the best outcome of my marriage to his mother. I pray the best is yet to come for Sri and me. And I hope and pray that he will somehow be able to accept me, as I am, despite the mess I have made of my life—not to mention the pain I’ve caused him and his family. It really hurts me to hear him call Roderick “Dad.” I’ve got to get over that, or at least get used to it. He’s blessed, truly, as he has two dads. I hardly had one.

There are still *so* many unanswered questions here and all about my future, of course. What kind of a job can I look forward to back in Colville, if I’m allowed to go there? I hope that Tony can employ me somehow at his new cabinet shop, but God only knows. After all I’ve been through and all I’ve done for employment, faith is what I am left with now. I have many fears but trust God will provide, as always. Everything depends on faith. I don’t even know where I will be living for sure when I leave here—Prescott, Cottonwood or Washington? Will Lyn and I ever be more than a couple? What to do with my truck, since I can’t drive? How will I pay child support? My sobriety will pave the way for the answers, somehow—and in *that* I place my faith.

Back in my cabin....

“So tell me more, Rideout, of your days playing that house-band gig on the Canadian border.”

“Well Larkins, I had some of the most incredible times of my musical career in that bar, playing again with a bunch of very talented, good guy musicians. As I now had steady work, my goal was to manifest two acres and a cabin.”

After writing daily affirmations hundreds of times - *I, Rob am now finding my two acres and a cabin* - and praying to Babaji, I found exactly two acres and a cabin on Sumas Mountain, not far from the border town where I was playing music. The total price was \$15,000- a true miracle. I had Babaji’s disciple, Hiranman perform a Vedic fire ceremony on my new property, to bless it properly. Then one night, on stage, time seemed to stop; when I gazed into the eyes of a beautiful French Canadian lady dancing in front of me. I mouthed, “I love you” spontaneously. She read my lips standing very still, staring at me. She had that Babaji look in many ways. As I tried to reach her table during our fifteen-minute break, she walked out the door with her apparent date. I went home that night and wrote in my diary the whole experience, reverently praying to Babaji again to bring this goddess back into my life.

“Well did she come back?”

“Be careful of what you pray for, Larkins, as it may come true.”

I wrote Babaji a letter, thanking him for blessing my prayers and land affirmations. I felt He was directly responsible for scoring my new home, via my new friends and neighbors Tony and Barb Harmon. It was a difficult letter to write, as I felt I was *literally* writing to God incarnate. He would know everything already anyway, right? So I chose my words *very* carefully. Also, the mystery dream lady I’d seen on stage a year ago, returned to my bar world again. Thank you, Babaji. She wore cowboy boots and an Alpaca poncho from Bolivia. She was as cute as could be, but smoked cigarettes! I had *never* been with a smoker before, but I let this pass. My parents had both smoked around Joyce and me

growing up. Mom smoked in our VW bug with the windows closed taking us skiing at Mount Baker. She'd be out in the freezing cold, cigarette in hand, giving me lessons on how to put the damn chains on the car. I'd be under the back wheel trying to hook the freezing metal chain latch in numb bare hands smelling Mom's cig. I needed to know more about this chick. It didn't take long. I saw her intelligence, magnetism and budding spiritual beauty from the get-go. Her name, I found out, was Jody and she was yet another Catholic girl. How do I attract these Catholics into my life? We walked over toward the pool tables to talk, and she asked me, "How do you feel about kids?" Hell, I didn't know, as I really hadn't given it much thought and felt I was still too much of a child myself. I wasn't ready yet and Jody seemed to feel the same way too, or so I thought. But little did I know back then just *how* prophetic her words would be. We arranged a date where she'd pick me up with my drums and drive us to the Ski to Sea Festival in Bellingham. Our band *Dakota* would be playing outside there.

Earlier that same morning at about 4 a.m., my deceased sister Joyce appeared to me beside my bed in living color. This was no dream or hallucination. I was totally straight. She'd left us seven years ago, but looked very beautiful in her youthful astral form. Nothing was said that I remember. Then she dematerialized back into the spirit world. Thank you, Joyce.

"Has she ever reappeared to you again?"

"No. It only happened once. But later, as I looked at pictures of Joyce, I noticed that in nearly every one she has bright light shining from her forehead. Is that heavy or what?"

"Being your sister, I can totally believe it. She must have really been something, Rob."

"She definitely was, Larkins. You would have loved her. Everybody did."

Jody and I visited my parents before the gig. My mom planned to come see me play drums and I wanted Jody to hang out with her; to keep her company and get to know her better. Upon arriving,

my dad took me aside in the driveway and announced, in his doctor's bedside manner, that my mom was dying of terminal cancer of the esophagus. She had maybe a year to live. This was devastating news, now that she and I were *finally* very close in our mother-son relationship. When I entered the house, Mom asked me if I knew what was up. "Yes," I said, holding back tears of pain. "Dad told me." How was I supposed to enjoy playing music after this shocker?

Mom expressed that she wanted Joyce to be there for her when she crossed over. I calmly told her of Joyce's appearance that morning and reassured her that she'd be there for her. Jody photographed my mom at this gig, the last time she'd ever see her drummer boy perform. Mom really approved of Jody. She loved her. Jody and I continued dating, but after awhile I broke it off.

"Why would you do that?"

"She was a great lady, no doubt, but I wasn't ready yet. I had just been burned severely in a cosmic flash-in-the-pan relationship prior to Jody. I don't even want to tell you about that one."

"Oh, come on. Please do tell, Rideout."

"It takes too long to tell and it's too heart wrenching for me to relive it."

"Okay, I get the point. Sorry."

I had given my heart away too fast and it had been broken severely, again. At this point, I wasn't certain if I truly had *any* love left in me, to give to a serious relationship.

I continued to putter away on my land and cabin and bang away on my guitar, learning every song I ever wanted to try singing. And of course, I was chanting away on my *dotara*. I gave my custom Fijian dotara to Hiramana for his Hawaiian Shiva temple and purchased a larger one from India that sounds incredible. This was one of the greatest joys of my entire life—having my very *own* property to grow with, cultivate and improve. And I was singing to God doing it. In my small garden I grew the vegetables I dearly loved and watched them

flourish. My young tabby cat Angela was now learning about a whole new environment- the wildwood. I took long walks in the woods, finding a raven's nest on a craggy cliff and sitting in a small cave, next to babbling mountain stream that ran down the little ravine across the road. Daily, my new relationship with neighbors Tony and Barb grew deeper. We depended upon each other for help many times. I felt *so* blessed at this point of my life. I owned my own piece of heaven outright and loved it. As I began studying *A Course in Miracles*, I felt like I was being shown a divine secret to finally understand myself and life. This was a whole new way of looking at things. There must be a better way. I practiced the daily lessons for one year. Sadly, I was not prepared at all to tackle the heavy text of this triple volume, life changing manuscript. However, a seed was planted then that would sprout much later in my life, in the most unlikely of environments- right when I'd need it most.

Also, at about this time, I began to have deep fears and doubts concerning my future as a drummer. Drum machines were on the rise, putting many percussionists out to pasture. Thank God I learned to play guitar. I knew I would live, as I've always been a survivor and will find work regardless, but fear gripped my guts deeply one night as I lay reading alone near my woodstove. Most other musicians I knew treated music as a weekend hobby, not a career! I'd put all of my eggs in one basket, and became very depressed about any future in music. Parental voices scolded me in my head for *not* pursuing my college education or carpentry apprenticeship program. Why can't I just play music? That's all I've ever wanted to do. Maybe I should have taken that offer from *The Doors* manager years ago? I guess I'm just like Peter Pan. I didn't want to grow up.

"Hell man, you are an alcoholic! That goes with the territory. That's why we drink. To try to stay young or at least in our minds anyway," retorted Larkins, scratching his ass against the side of his bunk.

"You're words are *so* comforting, Randy."

“Well, you know I’m right, right?”

On the way to work one evening, I stopped off for my mail. I had received an aerogramme back from Babaji! Lord Shiva had replied to my thank-you letter. My hands were trembling as I opened it. What am I going to read? His secretary had typed His reply. He sent me His blessings- now that’s cool- and said I may visit Him, after first sending \$1,500! This blew my mind. I spoke with Hiranman immediately. He had never heard of Babaji asking for money. He stated that there was a lesson here, somehow.

“This sounds like bullshit to me,” interjected Larkins quickly.

“There was a lesson here.”

There always is with Babaji. He had stated that if you doubted Him, He’d really give you something to doubt about. I had *continually* battled the same doubt many had, as to whether this new young Haidakhan Babaji in present rock star form, was really the same old Babaji from Yogananda’s autobiography. Was this His lesson? Did I doubt Him? Would the real Babaji ask for money? Would the real Babaji *please* stand up?!

“Did you ever figure it out?” asked Larkins.

“I mulled it over for a very long time, just watching all the thoughts that came to the surface. I would get my final answer later, in India. However, I did not send any money to Babaji. He left His body before I could.”

As the shock of Babaji’s letter was wearing off, Barb Harmon told me about an old psychic gypsy at the Lynden Fair. I decided to have a reading in her small carnival trailer. She looked the part with a scarf wrapped around her head and predicted that I’d meet a beautiful lady where I worked, who’d love my voice. In my mind, it had to be Jody. She loved my voice and I met her where I worked. How could I have *been* so blind? Yet at the same time, I was helping to create everything that was about to transpire- all based on the words of a gypsy! And tragically, this would mark the beginning of all of my woes to come...with nobody to blame but myself. But I didn’t know that back then. It would take many

years for me to understand the misleading of my hasty ego and the karma involved here.

“You’ve definitely made some wild decisions, Rob. Have you ever thought about being on *The Bachelor*? So what happened after the gypsy’s prediction?”

I called Jody up and we began dating again. My mom was elated. However, Jody was presently signing real estate papers to purchase a large home in Canada. I remember thinking, “Don’t do it, as I’ll be marrying you.” She began reading Yogananda’s book and then called me from Ontario, where she was visiting her parents. This book really impressed her, and she was fascinated with me because of the path I’d pursued.

“If she only knew you’d end up in prison,” said Larkins, with a snicker on his lips.

“That’s not very funny! My incarceration has deeply affected her.”

We shared the Christmas of ’84 together, driving to Seattle’s Virginia Mason Hospital to visit my dying mother. Poor, shrunken Mom looked like an extraterrestrial with huge black, knowing eyes. That was the last time I would see her, as she passed over to join Joyce on December 28, 1984. When Dad called me that day, I was knee deep in snow hauling drinking water up from the well. There were three tall hemlock trees near my cabin that I always felt represented Mom, Dad and me. On the day of my mom’s death, her hemlock fell over and was lying in the snow.

“Wow, that is kind of symbolic,” remarked Larkins. “Did you have a funeral with your dad?”

“I guess you could call it that.”

Jody, Dad and I took Mom’s box of cremation ashes to Clark’s Point, where I’d played Tom Sawyer as a kid. I said prayers and recited mantras, just trying to do my best, as I watched my beloved mom disperse into the Pacific Ocean. The waves washed her away, leaving the colorful starfish displayed on barnacle-covered rocks. Jody and Dad watched on from the cliffs above. She wouldn’t be

the only loved one I'd lay to rest here, either. I remembered her words about the curse on the Irish- drink or the temper. Sadly, I had them both.

"You don't seem like an angry person at all to me, Rideout. You seem to have more inner peace than anybody here, in some ways," commented Larkins.

"I was a much different person back then," I countered back. "Time and what you are about to hear, all had an effect on me, eventually mellowing me out some. Jody had heard me talk about Fiji and my desire to return someday. My God, that is *all* I ever talked about back then."

"I'll bet."

"Anyway, she heard an advertisement on Canadian radio selling cheap airfare to Fiji."

I really wanted to go, but needed to find a lead singing drummer to substitute for me, to cover my ass, so to speak. I luckily found a Cree Indian drummer who fit the bill perfectly. I even had him up to my cabin for a walk in the woods. This guy sang fantastic and played more instruments than just drums. I invited Jody to go with me, if she could pay her own way. With her recent house purchase, I thought my offer was highly improbable. Not so. She had a gold credit card and used that to finance her trip. So now we were off to heaven, so to speak, before our descent into hell.

"What do you mean by *that* statement? That sounds kind of heavy, Bunkie."

"Just keep listening and you'll see what I mean, and why I drank, Larkins."

"Okay, go ahead and continue. I think I know why you drank already, but we've got time to kill before formal count, so talk away. You do talk a lot, you know," remarked my friend.

"I know. I've been told that a lot." It is one of my major character defects and something I need to keep under control. It still hurts to have somebody point it out.

With the money I'd sent....

After the Willie Nelson embarrassment and waking up in a ditch hung over from a friend's wedding where I couldn't find my truck, I quit drinking for a year. I broke that year of sobriety on our flight to Fiji. Now, flying over the Pacific above no countries, anything we wanted to drink was absolutely free. And drink we did. We were both *so* excited, that we seemed to burn up any and all adverse alcohol effects immediately. When Julian and Sarda Croker met us at Nandi Airport, we'd already consumed three bottles of red wine on the fourteen-hour flight. Whew! And here was Julian, all fat now and with a case of Fiji Bitter beer and kava to wash it down with afterward.

"You have got to be kidding me! You drank that much?"

"I don't remember if we finished it all or not. We were all too high."

I passed out on the lawn at sunrise and awoke mid-morning with intense sunburn and one hell of a headache. Jody and I stumbled into a café with painted pictures of pigs, goats and fish on the wooden walls. You guessed it, this was our menu, all curried of course. As we ate, I designed a tattoo for my left wrist. It was the Sanskrit symbol of Om. The Nepalese tattoo artist would accept no money but I made him take a dollar, at least. Then I took Jody for a day at the small touristy Beachcomber Island, before making preparations to visit Joe Lewabela's family in Gunu, Naviti. Again, I packed plenty of white rice, flour, sugar and kava, along with my trusty acoustic guitar. After hiking that same six mile jungle trail uphill over the island, but this time in daylight with our young guide singing *Islands in the Stream*, we arrived in Gunu to find a very big surprise and devastating cultural change. The tourist industry had discovered my sacred hideaway of five years ago. Now, a huge cruise vessel sat anchored in the bay! Foreign tourists danced to the *Bee Gees* on deck, before coming ashore to see Joe and his village friends perform the *meke* dance in traditional Fijian attire. We swam out to the cruise ship to touch the hull and look up four stories. What a sellout, I thought. This

was just too much! However, the villagers were very happy to finally be making a greater weekly income than harvesting copra. They were literally dancing with joy. Who can blame them? I guess forever changes.

The village really took to Jody and she really took to Fiji. With her dark good looks and palm frond headband, many thought she was from New Caledonia. She smoked rope tobacco, rolled in newsprint, around the grog bowl with the men. They'd rarely seen a woman do this. We had lots of fun in the sun on Naviti too. We waded in mangrove swamps, made love by the sea and discovered bushes with small red Chile peppers – rockete – really hot! There was always lots of music too, as I serenaded Jody and the Fijians borrowed my guitar to play their traditional island songs. And again, the underwater world of snorkeling never let us down. It was *so* nice this time, having a woman to share it all with. Words really can't describe it.

"I remember that you felt kind of lonely in paradise before, coming off the rebound of divorce and wanting a woman in your life again. What an adventure it must have been, to return to paradise with somebody you're falling in love with."

"You've got that right, Larkins. It was *way* better this time around and a totally different experience."

We briefly visited Harry and Olive Morell at the Suva fisheries division. Little Emma was now *not* so little anymore, and quite striking with her blonde Afro contrasting her dark skin. I even gave a talk about Babaji to the Hindus at the Suva Shiva temple. Then we found out that we could fly to Rotuma in less than an hour, thanks to the completed airport. Now we would not have to forgo that three-day grueling puking sea voyage that I took with Bruce years ago. Ian and Flora Croker, Julian's parents, were overjoyed at my return, especially because they weren't required by tribal law now to butcher many pigs, as we were both vegetarians. The fish net I had sent, from my commercial fishermen friends, had revolutionized life here in Juju. No longer were they required to spend long hours at night fishing from punts or canoes with their crude spear guns. Now, they staked yards of

net on the shoreline and let the incoming tide deposit many fish into their trap.

“That must have been rewarding to see. You really helped out those people, Rideout.”

“It was the *least* I could do. All they’d given me was priceless.”

With the money I’d sent, Ian had built a bamboo video theater. Via the coconut telegraph, it was packed with children almost instantly. We saw *An Officer and a Gentleman* one balmy night, drinking that green grog again. They don’t dry it first so it is much stronger green. I was treated as a returning king, with my lovely queen, after my five-year absence. I definitely had a holy relationship with these island folk.

As island royalty, we fell deeper in love daily. How could life ever *be* so good? I so wished Jody could have been here with me five years ago too. She was *so* fun to be with! Having a woman in love here made this whole trip *way* better. God, we were in heaven. How could either of us ever know then, what was to come?

Back in Nandi with Julian and Sarda, we shared our last farewell drunks together. It was fun telling them about our time with Julian’s folks in Rotuma. Julian’s dad Ian is as hip as his son. Sarda’s mother was in the kitchen cooking up curry delight in her sari. She was a stunning woman who watched us all make sentimental fools of ourselves while drinking. Alcohol can seem very bonding on some levels. This was especially true now, in this foreign land with faraway friends. Their little daughter Cassandra really took to Jody. And talk about cute! They dressed Cassandra up in her blue sari and she looked like a petite Hindu goddess, with her small brown hand rising in blessing. We’d need the blessing, for now it was time for Jody’s trip to end, a month earlier than mine. When she arrived home, she wrote immediately that she might be pregnant. Oh boy, this gave me much to consider during my month alone here. Could I ever be a father the way I am?

“Was she pregnant after all?” asked Larkins.

“No and sadly this relationship which seemingly started off on such a high rung of the ladder, was slowly changing. It was descending into a living hell for both Jody and me.”

Many factors contributed to our final demise, and everybody has their own demons. Alcohol, obviously, was my demon. After returning home from Fiji, my band of five years, *Dakota*, was put out to pasture. The new bar owner brought in big-name Canadian country bands. Our local drinking hole was now like a concert hall. Everything had changed drastically. To top it all off, everybody’s favorite perennial house band couldn’t even find work! We played our last gig for injured loggers. En route home, after a lot of Jack Daniels and employment fears, I rounded a rural corner to find ten peddle bicyclists abreast in the county road at 2 a.m. To avoid killing them, I flipped my truck over three times- totally destroying my vehicle and leaving my drums scattered across a pasture. It’s a miracle I didn’t die.

“You dumb shit, Rideout! What did you do?”

“Well, a fellow musician and witness to my accident drove me home, once I could remember where I lived. I was in extreme shock. Luckily, he had talked the cyclists out of calling the police. I’ll never forget hearing the voices of the bicyclists asking if I was alive, as their flashlights shone into my truck cab and I sat trembling in shock.”

“You would have been in big trouble, you know if they’d called the cops.”

“Yeah, I do know. And this *should* have been the wake-up call of all calls; but sadly it wasn’t. Not even close, Larkins.”

“You’ve *got* to be kidding me.”

The next day, I could barely move my neck, as I lay in bed slowly remembering the nightmare of last night. I was in a lot of trouble! I had extreme fear, guilt and shame inside of me, as I met with a cop to complete the accident report. I lied to him that a deer was the cause. He didn’t believe me at all, but let it pass. Then as I began driving my still functioning wreck out of the field to the insurance company for a write-off, I saw a large six-point stag

through the broken windshield- *exactly* where my skid marks lay on the asphalt! This blew me away, as I've never seen a deer there in my life. Everything speaks to me.

"You do have a unique perspective on life, Rideout," countered Larkins. "However, those are pretty extreme odds of seeing a deer there, like you said."

"Maybe someday you'll see things the way I do, although I rather doubt it. Anyway, once again, I was back on the wagon after this near fatal accident."

At a time when I needed him most....

Christian married Jody and me in early October of '86. It was a small wedding at her island home, facing the Pacific Ocean with Bellingham and Mount Baker in the background. My dad, Tony and Barb and a few others were there. Jody had a beautiful sand cast gold wedding ring made for me; an OM sign with an Afghani lapis lazuli dot, right where it belongs. It truly is a beautiful ring. How perfect! Once again, here comes the mystery ride of marriage. I drank sparkling cider to celebrate. How long could I do this? Fortunately I found work, with a green card, playing music daily up in Vancouver, B C- with a superb three piece country western combo. She sang her guts out sounding like Emmylou Harris and looking like Cat Woman, which she was, while he fiddled his brains out, something he'd done his whole life as one of Canada's top fiddle players. They'd both preformed on TV for a decade and knew how to put on a quality show. They made me a way better drummer as they taught me a lot about dynamics- taking the volume up and down. Too many bands play everything at the same volume, a sign of musical immaturity. However, I spent much of my time crossing the U.S. Canadian border and driving ungodly distances to work, as I sure didn't want to relocate to live in Canada. After my twenty year class reunion,

which landed on the Harmonic Convergence of '87 and is a whole story unto itself, we had our minds blown.

“What happened now; a fight with your wife? Did you see an old sweetheart at the class reunion?”

“No, it was nothing like that; nothing even close.”

In October of 1987, we had a drought situation in our neck of the woods with no rain for about ninety days. The forest was off limits and barricaded at our driveway due to extreme fire danger. We had been using Watco Danish tongue oil on our new bedroom addition. Now that I was re-married, we needed more room. Tony was helping us with this project. The oil-stained rags were thrown in an open Rubbermaid garbage can on the porch. At about 6 a.m. the following morning, we awoke abruptly to the sound of shattering glass. Was somebody breaking in? Who would be doing that when we live so far up in the woods? Running out of the bedroom, I saw what looked like the sunrise on our porch. We were on fire, *big time*!

“Oh my God, Rideout, that *is* heavy. What did you do?”

“I tried to stay clear and focused in the moment. It was all happening *so* fast.”

Jody ran to Harmon's to alert them, while I dialed 9-1-1 for help. As I stood in total shock, with scorching flames just feet away, I suddenly remembered all of the harvested pot I'd thrown under our bed. Ironically, as we were building this addition, a police helicopter hovered over my dozen Afghani pot plants one afternoon. Friend Peter had given me these sacred plants to grow here, but now I was forced to uproot them or possibly lose my land. Holding my mother's gold watch, I threw it down and opted for the huge sack of bud instead. Then I promptly jumped off our new porch that Tony had built. I hid the sack in the woods, away from any firemen's eyes. I felt bad about Mom's watch, but I sure didn't care what time it was now. In fact, after this fire I didn't wear a watch again for thirteen years. My Om tattoo, where the watch would go, always reminded me that the correct time is now. Six fire trucks made it up our incredibly steep hill and managed to

prevent a major forest fire. The black mushroom cloud that resembled Hiroshima was seen all over Whatcom County. Tony and Barb stood by in their bathrobes holding a five gallon bucket of water. The cabin was a total loss. Everybody knew that. I saw my red mantra prayer flag, suspended from a long bamboo pole ignite into flames and all of my fond memories of this beloved cabin go up in smoke. It was killing me to lose my beloved funky cabin. It was such a charming little abode with much character. This was a Maha Yagna- a great purification by fire, much greater than the Vedic fire ceremony performed here previously by Hiranman. Poor Shanti, our blue healer mix dog, was tied to the porch and got singed by the flames. She was taken to the vet's, as the shit was literally scared out of her from convulsing in fear. The wind chimes on our porch rang loudly from the heat-created wind of the fire. Shanti avoided the sound of chimes for a long time to come.

"Where did you guys stay after losing everything?" asked Larkins.

"We stayed with Dad after the fire."

Luckily, our Datsun pickup truck had survived the fire, along with my wallet and checkbook that I'd grabbed before jumping out. When we shopped at K-mart for toothpaste, etc., dressed in rubber milking boots and sweat pants, store detectives followed us around as we looked so suspicious. That night Dad got very drunk over our loss and then turned angry, blaming me for the tragedy. At a time when I really needed my dad's sympathy and understanding, it was not there. He really knew how to hit below the belt, I felt. I sure didn't need the blame game right now. I felt horrible already.

The next day, our insurance adjusters drove up from Seattle and, along with the fire chief, met us at the burn site. And what a sad sight it was to see the black, still smoking ruins of where I once lived, dreamed and prayed. I had only paid about one hundred dollars for a yearly premium, once, but would now receive \$56,000 for loss of house and personal property. As we owned everything outright, with only a propane and generator gas bill, MSF&G would pay our rental bill and all utilities, minus about twenty dollars per month, for the next year of rebuilding. We luckily

found a small house in Sumas to begin our new displaced life and escaped Dad's negative judgmental environment.

While searching through the ashes, we found a few items that did not burn up. The cover photo of old Babaji, from the book I'd taken to South America in '74, survived the flames – along with cymbals that Babaji gave Hiranman, a brass Shiva lingam and the words to a song I wrote. All of the other songs I'd learned to play on guitar were gone; like maybe I should be writing and singing my own songs! Quite a few of our photo albums and long play records managed to survive the fire too, as the firemen threw them out the windows straight away. But the biggest loss to me, in many ways, was my cherished red leather Bible that my great grandfather Marion Guthridge had carried through the battle of Gettysburg, during the Civil War. Those singed photo albums that the firemen threw out, would bring tears to my eyes, many months later, as I looked at our cherished pictures. I would finally get the needed emotional release from the trauma that this fire had created in our lives. I should have cried my pain out long ago, but chose to numb out instead with alcohol, side stepping my feelings.

“Boy, you are an alcoholic! But I'll bet those photos brought closure on many levels, as it was *so* needed.”

“You are right Larkins, they did. I finally broke down.”

After much thought and planning and purchasing two more acres of land with insurance money, we worked daily along with three constructive dear friends to create a double story, log-sided dream octagon. As anybody who has ever built a house knows, there is a lot of work, stress and decisions involved. And we built this house using a gas generator, as there was no power up here. The prior cedar cabin had run on a 12 volt system and this new octagon would too, with quite a few upgrade modifications. However, the stress of rebuilding and the unreal shock of the fire had me and Jody drinking malt liquor daily after work, in our temporary rental house; but promising to quit when we moved into our new dream home. Right now, we felt that we *needed* it, on a medicinal level

anyway. Drinking felt like home, mentally somehow, after losing our real home. We just existed, temporarily, in this living space; all stressed out from decisions and non-stop work.

“That sounds like another game alcoholic’s play.”

“We were both working our day jobs, as well as helping build a house on our off hours. Go, go, and go! You’d drink too.”

Things were about to change that would take my mind off alcohol. In a twist of fate, my dad fell in love with his office nurse, Pam, who was twenty years younger. I was closer to her age than Dad was. He’d only experienced one woman in his entire life, my mom. He was a virgin when they’d married. Now, he seemed way happier with Pam, so he got our blessing when they married later. Pam actually got my dad out of his daily suit and tie. He’d worn one his entire life, even on weekends. Little did I know then what a gold digger and bitch she’d really turn out to be? Poor Dad was *so* naïve. Mom had warned me that Dad was like a little kid, who may surprise me. He did that to say the least!

Then another surprise, when Jody called me one afternoon from work at the Best Western motel up in Canada. She exclaimed, “Happy Anniversary!” Her voice sounded a wee bit nervous. I informed her that it wasn’t October yet, so she was a bit off on her date. Then she said, “Ungh, ungh...I’m pregnant.” I about dropped the phone. Neither of us had talked about children, especially after the house fire shock and present rebuilding stress. And Jody had been on the birth control pill- well, so much for modern chemistry. Suddenly, I remembered that she had asked me how I felt about kids, on the day we finally met. How ironic. As we had only one year to rebuild, to receive full insurance benefits, this news of a baby coming added a whole new dimension to getting our act together, on a lot of levels now. I settled into a hot bathtub with a bottle of beer and a *National Geographic* issue that showed color photos of a developing fetus. I was in shock again without fire. What just happened?

Miracles occur in the strangest of places....

Then one day I stumbled across a hidden treasure in our prison library. I found part three of *A Course in Miracles*! I hid it away in my drawer immediately. I felt like I had the key to escape prison now and didn't want any snoopy inmates to find it. There was really very little to worry about, as most here wouldn't understand this book anyway. I began reading the Manual for Teachers at 3 a.m., when everyone else was still fast asleep and snoring away. On reading these words again, I instantly felt a very real hit from God; like my time had come full circle to *really* understand this course- finally! As I proceeded to read, I felt like a light were shining *over* my head or a backup light had been turned on *in* my head. I was feeling the presence of the Holy Spirit, as it guided my reading, always taking me to deeper levels of understanding myself more thoroughly. I realized that now I was in an optimal environment to have the needed time and space to study and apply these unique teachings. I had been introduced to them back in my Sumas mountain cabin in 1983. Each time I read with full concentration, I was free – in my heart and mind anyway. Soon, I found a source that sends prisoners a free paperback edition of *A Course in Miracles*. Great! Now I've really got something to read and sink my teeth into. I couldn't put the *Course* down for hours. This book is heavy just to hold- I could feel that my life here was about to change. I now had a goal: to read and study the text and begin again the one year of daily lessons. What an environment I had to apply these lessons in! I felt like this *Course* was the missing shard that would put the broken crystal of my life back together again. It proved to be just that, and much more. After searching and studying metaphysics since the early '70s, and going through years of Self- Realization Fellowship lessons, meditation, chanting mantras and feeling Babaji's guidance in my life, Jesus had now *just* returned; as the Voice in *A Course in Miracles*. He always was my first guru and top of the line in my SRF lineage. I took vows upon initiation into Kriya yoga

that made Jesus, Babaji and Yogananda my lineage of spiritual masters- the guru disciple relationship that never ends. It is an eternal relationship. So, here comes Jesus again, saying *exactly* what I really need to hear, to wake up from this delusive melodrama that I'd created. The truth of *when the student is ready, the teacher appears* was happening again. I soon began to realize that I cannot blame anything on anybody, but me. And that's not the greatest of news in prison, where it's real easy to blame the system, judges, laws, other cons and ex-wives for the way things are here, just like everybody else does. How could this be me? But it is, as I was beginning to see.

"Nobody likes to hear that truth, Rideout... especially in prison," complained Larkins.

"I'm not trying to bum you out but wake you up, Randy."

This *Course* showed me how I'd created *special* relationships in my life- ego-based controlling relationships that became possessive. I now understood better that my need to cling tightly to Jolene, ex-girlfriends and Joya really stemmed from my fear of abandonment- feeling God left me, but He never did. All the actions my loved ones took that weren't directed by me, made me fearful and my desire to hold onto them became an attack. *Holy* relationships, on the other hand, only require giving up judgments for love. These would be the kind of relationships I'd seek now. Why do I always judge others *so* critically? This massive character defect is really having a heyday here in prison. It is so easy to think I'm better and smarter than most here! Just look around. See what I mean? This has got to stop! Who am I to judge anybody or anything, when the *Course* is teaching me that it is all in my mind and I am judging myself only, projected outward in this dream movie. Each of these inmates here is just another part of me, showing me where I am stuck.

I feel stuck! I'm feeling that spiritual pride is one of my greatest character defects. I clearly see how I've mistakenly placed myself above others, in my own estimation, because of all the special blessings that God has granted me or I created

myself somehow. I think this pattern began when I became a Jesus freak in the late '60s. I felt superior to lost sinners, as I'd accepted Jesus as my personal Lord and Savior. Then, seeing Yogananda in my third eye put me in a class of believers that experienced the spirit world and visions. Having a lifetime love affair with Babaji put me in a class of *very* few – the chosen ones, I egotistically felt.

So now that I realized all of this, I pray to God to humble me here in prison even more, slow me down, quiet my inner dialogue, destroy my hasty sarcastic spirit and stop my *judging* mind for the remainder of my sentence here and beyond. I would like to leave prison a *really* changed man- like a butterfly emerging from a cocoon. Is that too much to ask for?

Look again, it's a....

“So after losing everything in the house fire and then spending every waking moment working, now you've got a baby coming. That alone sounds majorly stressful, to me,” stated Larkins one day in the smoking cage. His mom had put money on his books, so he was enjoying a tailor made cigarette instead of rollies.

“Actually, it wasn't that bad, once the shock of it all wore off. The fire seemed to have given us the strength to face almost anything; including becoming parents.”

We began taking Lamaze birthing classes up in Chilliwack, B.C. which wasn't that far of a drive from our home. Jody learned breathing exercises to facilitate the birthing process and I learned what to expect, as she went through the labor stages. Our teacher was a beautiful loving mother of four, named Kathy. She'd seen it all. She ended up our labor coach and will be honored forever, as she witnessed and helped birth our baby. Before birth, we were certain our kid would be a girl. We'd done all the old wives tales and everyone agreed, it would be a girl. We had the name, Indra Mela, picked out. Indra is just a beautiful name and had nothing to do with my aborted marriage attempt in Fiji. Mela means festival.

On the day of April 29, 1989, a Saturday afternoon, the chain saws began clear-cutting the property across the road from us. What's going on? We were witnessing our neighborhood being slashed down before our very eyes. This shocking incident sent Jody into labor. It was now time to head for the hospital up in Mission, B.C. With Jody's Canadian citizenship and medical insurance, the financial burden of birth was *way* less in Canada. Plus, Mission was much closer than Bellingham. Oh God, here we go- becoming a father.

"I have no idea what that feels like, not being a father myself," commented Larkins.

"Very special, my friend...it feels *very* special; especially if you're there to witness the birth."

Because of the lack of love from my own father and his great emotional distance from me growing up, my goal was to be just a good loving, supportive dad. However, my dream would be shattered in ways that I couldn't imagine that night in the hospital. I would be thrown into a self-created hell that I would be in denial of for many years to come.

On Sunday morning April 30, 1989, our son Sri Ram was born. Jody did very well giving birth. Ironically, our doctor was a musician too. At 4 a.m. we basically had the hospital to ourselves. As the head emerged, I exclaimed "It's a girl," but the doctor said, "Look again. It's a boy, Rob!" The umbilical cord had hidden his genitals. I was shocked and dumbfounded. We had never seriously considered a boy. Ironically, this is also the birthday of my musical mentor, Willie Nelson. I guess that's God's little joke on me. The sunrise was spectacular this Sunday morning, as Mount Baker shown divinely in all its glory. It was a spring morning like no other. This incredible beauty symbolically mirrored to me, the beautiful boy who had just entered his first day on earth again and our lives. God, I was a happy and proud father! I drove home with beer, waking up Tony and Barb and reveled in my new found happiness. Now my life would truly, *never* be the same again.

“You’ve got that right, Rideout. I’ve been told that babies are the acid test that will make or break your marriage.”

“You were told correctly, Larkins. Babies are the acid test... for sure.”

At first, parenting was exciting and bonding, but as time marched on, I was slowly losing my wife to a mother. We were both under a lot of stress from being new parents. I’m sure all new parents experience that. However, I was now working two jobs to make ends meet- playing music on weekends and working manual labor in Bellingham forty hours a week. However, the house fire and rebuilding process had taken its toll on us. My hair was salt and pepper now, from all I’d been through, and more grays were sprouting every day. I did finally meet old Willie later, in a Vancouver concert. There, he signed Sri Ram’s photo for me, commenting on his name. Then my Iowa/Fiji friend, Tim Welch came to visit us, taking in our new home and young son. I was deeply touched by how Tim cared for me and how he always managed to stay in touch over great time and distances. As our marital stress slowly increased, we both sought counseling, separately and together. I also did hypnotherapy to quit smoking pot, which Jody’s mother paid for. What a total waste of money that was. Since Sri’s birth, I very seldom drank anymore. I was too busy working or too tired. I did, however, stay focused on Babaji totally, by reading every book about Him that I could find. Soon, our new home was decorated with pictures of Him on the fireplace mantle. Sri Ram even had a black and white photo of Baba in his crib. Babies first see in black and white. I now began chanting the mantra that Babaji stressed, *Om Namaha Shivaya*- a Sanskrit phrase meaning “I surrender to/ bow to/ take refuge in God.” In time, this holy mantra would become programmed into my subconscious hard drive beyond my wildest dreams. That takes years of repetition. I would chant to Sri in our upper octagon meditation room on my new dotara, which I purchased after the fire. I had to have another one. I also replaced my burned up Yamaha guitar with a Hondo guitar copy of a Martin D-28, a collector’s item. Sri heard me singing

mantras and ballads from an early age on. Sri Ram's name is an ancient Indian mantra, meaning *Holy God*. Anytime his full name is repeated, the universe reverberates with that divine affirmation. *Sri Ram* was also the first chant I learned to sing back in 1971, off *The Sufi Choir* album.

The winter of 1991 was minus 40° on our mountain. That is damn cold! The hill was solid glare ice like a glacier, which required corks with nail soles to walk the risky one mile uphill home. Carrying groceries, gas and Sri on my back was a challenge. We felt like pioneers from a hundred years ago. This cold winter, the house fire and becoming a dad, gave me tremendous strength, as a survivor. I'm sure Jody felt the same way. When the chips are down, you'll know how strong you *really* are. I felt like I could face almost anything after this winter. However, forty below was nothing, compared to what was coming.

"I take it things got worse, right?" asked Larkins.

"Oh yeah, they did."

After the numbing winter, our life began its slow descent into darkness. Things increasingly got very crazy, both physically and verbally. Threats, curses and accusations were made, that *never* should have been mouthed. I felt *so* sad that our love had deteriorated to this pathetic point. How did it *ever* get this crazy? A dark side in both of us had surely surfaced. No alcohol was involved. We separated, and I lived alone for a year in a friend's cabin, where a lot of alcohol was consumed. Jody had kicked me out. I would no longer be trimming my young son's paper thin finger nails.

"Jesus that must have been a hard move, especially after building your new dream home together," exclaimed Larkins.

"It sucked big time! I had a lot of anger over it."

While living at that small cabin, two-year-old Sri came for a visitation. Inside, my heart was crying in pain over not being at home with my son and changing wife. Sri spoke his first full sentence to me here, saying, "Daddy, be happy." With his long hair

and innocent beauty, Sri looked exactly like a child Babaji. One of Babaji's commandments is *Be Happy*. Oh God, I wish I knew how.

During this time, I remodeled our shop on the weekends into a sauna and bedroom. When I *could* finally return home, then I would have a separate place to sleep at night, after playing music- so the smoky bar odor wouldn't bother Jody and Sri.

After a depressing year of separation, with a lot of anger and excessive drinking alone, I was finally allowed to return home. Jody had made up her mind, thank God. As my marriage now was on *very* shaky ground, I made a major decision. After twenty-eight years of being a professional musician, I chose to permanently leave the business. This was my last ditch effort to hopefully make this marriage work. You've got to do, what you've got to do. I've noticed that many women are attracted to musicians, like both wives were, until they're actually married to one. Then reality sets in as a musician's lifestyle is just *too* much for most women later. Everybody knows the image musicians portray. Historically, we were right down there with prostitutes, even though we provide a greater moral service to humanity. Most people love music, so why degrade the ones who make it? We're just doing our job even if an often destructive lifestyle comes with it like after-hour parties and getting high, to sing even more songs 'till the sun comes up. It was quite the moment on stage, with official handshakes from band members, when I said my final goodbye to the *only* work I've ever loved *so* much. The real work wasn't singing songs but all the endless hours of packing heavy band equipment, my drums included, practicing with musicians who take forever to learn a song and driving numerous miles, always at night, and sometimes under the influence. However, such sacrifices are needed, I felt, when dealing with serious subjects like marriage, love and parenthood. Would this move actually work? Could it? Or had irreversible changes already occurred that were far too late to change? I should add too, that at this point of my fragile marriage, I was *very* stressed out. I was playing music Thursday through Sunday, as well as working my construction day job, parenting, and driving across

Whatcom County relentlessly. I was *so* stressed that I took it out on my poor dad. All my built up years of anger came flowing out in waves that blew him away. I would pay dearly for this later. It may seem like I'm trying to defend my lack of love situation but I'm really just trying to make some sense out of it. After my anger got vented, I felt exhausted. I needed a break- but not the kind that was coming.

“What do you mean by that?” probed Larkins.

Four days later, on May 05, 1992, I fell twenty feet off a roof causing twelve breaks in my body; eight in my left femur and four in my left shoulder ball joint. I could have died in this accident but landing on an oak ladder broke my fall, instead of my neck. This was the worst physical pain I've ever felt in my entire life. It *really* hurt! It took the paramedics over twenty minutes to arrive from only two miles away. Hurry up guys. Sadly, this accident put further stress on Jody and our already fragile marriage, or what was left of it. Now, she felt forced to take care of me, as I definitely needed a nurse for awhile. I went through daily physiotherapy, learned to use a wheelchair well for three months, and progressed on to crutches later. Finally, there was the cane. I had to learn to walk all over again. The pain was constant even on pain pills but not always physical. Jody went on an inner search, which resulted in a legal name change to Joya and a new self-identity. Sri Ram was too young to know what was *really* going on, thank God.

“It's amazing you're alive, Rideout. The accident is bad enough but then losing your wife to a total personality make-over. That must have blown your mind!” proclaimed Larkins.

“It did blow my mind. I felt like a real loser, in more ways than one. I'd lost my wife now to a mother with a new name.”

“I've always told you that you're a loser, Bunkie.”

“Don't go there now, Larkins. I feel weird enough just telling you my story.”

We pretty much ended our marriage at a yoga retreat with Baba Hari Das, on Salt Spring Island, off the B.C. coast. Hari Das had

written the small book on Babaji that had accompanied me to Ecuador, and whose cover had survived the house fire. He is a muni yogi- not talking. His vow of silence was well over twenty years now. He questioned me on his portable chalkboard, if I wanted to know my spiritual name. Yes, I'd been curious for years.

“You’ve got to be kidding me! What is a spiritual name?” exclaimed Larkins.

“Well, after giving Hari Das my birth date and year, he referred to a red leather covered book from India. Then, I received a scrap of paper stating that I was Hari Om, name of the most Supreme Being. My name is a combination of Vishnu (Hari) and Shiva (Om). It felt very fitting and right to me. In fact, I love Hari Om. Perfect!”

“I wonder what my spiritual name is.”

“It doesn’t matter, Larkins. Another spiritual teacher could have given me a totally different name. However, mine did ring true for me and I felt very blessed.”

I didn’t start calling myself Hari Om. In fact, I never thought I’d ever even hear it spoken after this karmic ending to our sad marriage. Upon getting the new name, we had a very bad argument in our tent. What was really freaking me out was Jody, or now Joya, living her hippie day’s decades after me. I guess she needed a new identity after all the hell we’d been through. Jody’s given spiritual name, according to Hari Das, was Mungula, which she did *not* take to at all. She obviously felt better off with Joya.

Then, after another horrible fight at the dinner table, where I did something unmentionable, but not involving alcohol, the end finally came; the Fat Lady had sung. What a relief and what a shock! I caused it all, the guilt in my mind was saying. I watched Joya drive away in the red Tercel with my young son and knew, this time, that it was *really* over. Now I couldn’t stop crying. I was soon escorted by the police to leave our dream home, under a court restraining order. The tribe has spoken. It’s time for you to go. Joya would have the house now. Because of my accident, I would soon be off to college again, to be retrained under State Industrial

Insurance. I qualified for a new program being taught at Skagit Valley College in Mount Vernon, Washington. I would study the water cycle and flora and fauna that determine the health of aquatic systems. I would come out with a two-year degree as an Environmental Tech 2. I briefly moved in with my friend Peter, before going to school. We enjoyed listening to Julio Iglesias sing in Spanish and French, as we got stoned in his hot tub looking at Mount Baker in the sunset. After a month of wallowing in hot water, sorrow, alcohol and sentimental music, I moved down to Sedro Woolley and rented a room from an odd estranged carpenter dad. He too was separated from his child. And here, I would attend SVC from '92 to '94. The study workload was *very* difficult and intense. My mind was not used to the new school schedule, study régime and required discipline. And my body was still hurting physically, but not as much as my heart. I would see Joya, with her new boyfriend Johnny, as she dropped off young Sri for visitations at my house on certain weekends. She looked *so* happy and content while I was pathetically crying inside still. How does one find another lover so fast? She would continue to live in our octagon until we could figure out what to do with it. Sri needs a home. How is all of this affecting him? My heart couldn't get over being away from my young son and beautiful property. After owning a \$100,000 paid-for octagon in the woods, it just plain sucked to be living here in this crappy little room, in a shabby house in Sedro Woolley! It often felt like I was in a prison of sorts with lots of scholastic homework, depression and unanswered questions. On some level, I still believed our divorce *wasn't* over, even though I'd heard the Fat Lady sing. I still loved Joya and wanted to see our family back together again. Is that abnormal or wrong? I just couldn't accept this divorce as final, yet. With a child involved, this divorce was *much* heavier emotionally on me than my first one. It made it much harder to let Joya go. Despite the pain, I just didn't want it to end. Why? At school, I despised many of my classes and the constant heavy workload, but still found time to drink daily after completing homework. I'd sit on my bed watching anything on TV and wondering when this would all be over. Surprisingly, I came out with a 3.95 grade average. I chose to self-medicate, to numb out my feelings and pain. I had one session with a

psychiatrist, who wanted to put me on Zoloft psych meds. He said I was dealing with the largest major depressors life had to offer – all at the same time. I threw the psych meds down the toilette after one try. I'd rather self-medicate my pain with malt liquor and pot. I know how they react in my body and brain. Pharmaceuticals have never been my bag. But sadly, after a Christmas party with college classmates, I got my first DUI and served twenty-four hours in jail. My troubles with alcohol were escalating.

“Boy, I can relate to what you’re talking about now. I’ve had many DUI’s and you never forget your first one. It just plain sucks that you end up here in prison, years later, after all the heavies you’ve been through.”

“Well, maybe it was all a part of my preparation for prison, Larkins.”

During my college break in the summer of ‘93, I took the Amtrak train to Nebraska, where one of Babaji’s US ashrams still flourished. I was finally off the cane and able to walk, without much of a limp showing. There, I spent a week learning the art of mantra music from Babaji’s Italian devotee, Turkantom. I’d already been listening to his tapes for years, so it was a real treat to hang out with this talented musician. I’ll always remember him winking at me as we sang devotional songs at 5 a.m. He told me many stories of Babaji, having lived with Him, and all about His ashram in India. Oh, how I longed to go there! How could I? I didn’t even have a job or the means to get there. Turkantom preformed a concert in Omaha and asked me to join him onstage during his last three songs. What a treat and dream comes true that was! I got to play guitar with my hero, as we intensely chanted the mantra along with the audience. During my stay here too, a chiropractor introduced me to the nature of urine therapy. I wasn’t ready yet to imbibe my own “water of life” but a seed had been planted about the healing nature of urine.

“That’s gross, Rideout! You’d better not let anybody here know that you drank your own piss. You could get smashed, Bunkie.”

“Chill out Larkins. I’ll tell you more about that later, in private.”

I was expected to....

Joya and I finally decided that we needed to sell our home and property. Neither of us could afford to buy the other one out, as she was on welfare and I was on disability insurance. And the dream was over anyway, wasn’t it? Now, all we had was a ghost house of troubled memories. It was time to sell it! Joya hosted a peyote meeting, complete with tipi, to hopefully solve our problem. Sri and I drove up after the ceremony. I learned that Joya’s new friends were part of the Native American Church, which used peyote as a sacrament for deeper prayer. I noticed that our dog Shanti was being severely neglected, with her long hair beginning to matt and nobody giving her any love. Even animals suffer from divorce. So I took Shanti with me, even though I couldn’t have a dog at my rental. Luckily, a fellow classmate offered to let Shanti live on his property, where I could visit her more often. My poor dog’s life was similar to my own... a dog’s life. My tabby cat Angela would stay with Joya at the house until it sold. Hopefully by that time, I’ll have a more stable home front for my pets. Joya was sponsoring a birthday meeting for Sri’s life soon. Of course, I was expected to participate. I nearly backed out at the last minute, due to another argument with her. I didn’t begin to understand what I was getting myself into. However, I was persuaded to be there, as this was *my son’s life* we were dealing with. An Anglo roadman or peyote chief named Hawk conducted the ceremony. My first introduction to NAC and peyote is basically beyond words, of course. This was also my first experience of praying with tobacco, which I didn’t inhale. I cried all night over the pain in my heart and the forgiveness needed to heal it. God’s presence was *very* strong here. Joya leaned over at one point and told me that she would *always* love me, but we couldn’t live together anymore. It was tearing

us apart. Peyote did, however, help to bring us together in a new way. This powerful church was the most real service I've ever attended. People don't preach and talk about God here. Everybody prays deeply for twelve hours, which seems like eternity, and experiences the Holy Spirit within them. The peyote songs with the beating drum and rattling gourd took me to new levels of prayer and awareness. Everybody here was focused on my son's young life. He would surely get a great blessing for all the prayers said on his behalf. How could he not? As the tipi door opened, I could literally wring out my wet handkerchief, as it was soaked with cleansing tears. Now, I had a new respect for Joya, this Native American Church and all that peyote had shown me. I returned to college a much more aware man, wanting to *sit up* again.

I got my chance the following weekend on Mother's Day. I felt my mom's presence very strongly as the Christ light literally pushed my face to the dirt floor in humbling respect. Then I remembered her words before dying: "You won't even think of me when I'm gone." As the years go by, I see what she meant. How sad. But every time we do remember our deceased loved ones, they come alive again in our hearts and minds, especially with the help of this medicine. I learned more in one night in the tipi, than I had in years of schooling. There are no atheists in the tipi.

I want to be clear here. I do not want to offend or disrespect the Native American Church or any of its members by relating my stories of *sitting up* on peyote. With the advent of the internet, it is all out there anyway. I am not disclosing any secrets, only my respect for the medicine and this way of worship.

"Your life continues to fascinate me, man. Now you're getting into peyote, with all your alcohol and personal problems coming along," Larkins dryly stated.

"This was just my introduction to what was to come later. First, a life long dream would finally come to fruition that would open my heart beyond my wildest expectations."

“Tell me my friend, did the house sell? I really do like all this. You know that, right?”

Everybody faces racism and time here....

Let's talk about racism here. Prisons are *the* acid test like babies are to a marriage. I had no idea that I'd feel strong resentment towards those of other color, race, or religion after being exposed to so many foreign countries. Prison too is like a foreign country, but without a *Lonely Planet* guidebook or map. With an in-house population of close to 70% Mexican, I had to face the truth of my feelings and perceptions. The Mexican and Chicano ways are *so* different and I could easily harp on all the negatives. It takes a lot of strength *not* to be racist here and to try harder to see the Christ in each individual. Just walking down the hall can be a real challenge and patience tester. Being born an American, the whole illegal immigration issue is a very volatile subject. I predict that in my lifetime, we may see a new flag with green, red and white stripes for the United States of Mexico. It might have only forty-nine stars, as Alaska may prove too cold for our border brothers. We'll probably see underground coyotes too, smuggling Arians into the Great White North. I hope Sri learns Spanish, as he might need it for employment. Enough said about this. I see what they mean about the pen being mightier than the sword.

The tongue is way up there too and, God knows, this has been my biggest lesson daily in prison. I'm trying *always* to think before I speak. For a talker like me, that's hard to do. Even a simple "hi" can be interpreted by some institutional long timer as, "What do you mean by that?!" As part of the code here, it's safer not to talk about anything that doesn't directly concern you. And while we're still on the subject of racism, our resident atheist Jew needs mention. He is a very intelligent pathetic creature, who has the knack of putting his foot in his mouth or doing the wrong thing at exactly the wrong time. The poor bastard even salivates at the mouth when he

gets excited talking. Library wise, as I am currently the librarian, he ruins book bindings, is supercritical and opinionated about nearly everything and can never seem to put the newspapers away correctly- all little stuff, of course. This David hails from eastside New York City. His father escaped from a concentration camp in Nazi Germany and went on to help develop the atomic bomb in Chicago. David claims to have been beat poet Allen Ginsberg's lawyer. But now, he's debarred and down for five years, practicing as a jailhouse lawyer. The Arians can't stand David helping the Mexicans with their legal problems. Last night, he was caught removing papers from the library reference DOC Bible, to defend a chief's case; wrong race again David! He believes that life is just random chaos and thinks I believe in mumbo jumbo, hippie religious shit. This David is not spiritual one iota, but more of a radical political activist. Sadly, the poor guy was beaten up by a whole pod of skinheads in county jail, when a guard moved him into this lion's den. I am certain David has an opinion on racism.

The blacks here don't seem to notice racism much, as they've experienced it all before. And the chiefs really don't give a shit, as they've seen racism and illegal immigration ever since Manifest Destiny took over their land. I personally feel that the whites here react to racism to the greatest degree. Guys like me. We had a meeting in the bathroom late one night, to discuss pod racial issues. We were told by our white pod father, sitting on a shitter like it was his throne, to be sure to clean any hair out of the sink after shaving. Other races could leave hair, he explained, as somebody always was, but not us whites! Don't forget what race you are- the best one! See what I mean? If you'd don't think you are racist, come to prison. The experience will put you to the test.

Having failed to put God first in every moment of my life, I've been misled by illusions that ultimately put me here for my next lessons in awakening. My challenge here is to turn loss into gain; where a loser shall become a winner, *if he wants to*. And God knows how I want to! As they teach us in classes

here, it often takes a tragedy to *really* change. I'm embarrassed to think of how often I've thought that I've had that life-changing tragedy. All of those wake-up calls now cause me a lot of shame. Where is one's real rock bottom? I pray that this prison time is the needed last tragedy that I must endure to wake up- finally, once and for all.

Someday, I'll get out of these bars. But the exact date is still uncertain. I have a time comp which gives January 27, 2005 as my earliest release date. Rumors talk about even earlier releases, if changes occur in Arizona's state legislature. But this is just yard talk and rumors change daily here about early release. For guys serving long sentences, like six to ten years, these rumors keep their hopes up. I cannot imagine where their heads are at, and the depression *they* must face. Prison is one huge rumor mill with some new story surfacing daily. It's easy to get caught up here in the unknown future and forget the lessons of the eternal holy instant, Now.

I had hoped to move up with Tony and Barb upon my earliest release date, only to discover that Arizona won't let me perform my community supervision or parole in Washington with friends - friends that are my family. It can *only* be possible if I live with blood relatives, which I do not have anymore. After much letter writing, phone calls, and research, I also discovered that there are no ADC approved halfway houses north of Phoenix for parolees re-entering the free world. The thought of living in Phoenix in a half-way house without a driver's license is very unappealing to me. I can't stand Phoenix *with* transportation! So I signed the legal papers to deny my early release, unless something changes, and just live more of my time institutionalized. I'm still killing my number, but in a setting I've grown used to, slowly. To pay for my mini storage rent, Lyn helped sell my Toyota truck to a released inmate. I only got seven hundred dollars, but that sum was what I needed to protect my belongings. The truck was in sad shape anyway and now I won't be tempted to drive. I've never really been without wheels my whole life and I truly have no idea at this point when or if I'll *ever* be able to legally drive

again- Carma with a C. Legal driving is a privilege, not a right; one that could possibly be taken away from me forever.

I prayed to Babaji....

As the house wasn't selling after Joya's peyote ceremony, I prayed to Babaji for help in selling our home. I promised to come directly to India, in thanks, if the house sold. My prayers were answered almost overnight and the house did sell, enabling me with the means to *finally* go to the ancient motherland of my dreams. Joya and Sri would be moving south to New Mexico, in her recently purchased blue school bus. There, she would be studying herbal healing. The summer before I finished school, I erected a twenty-four foot diameter canvas yurt on Wayne and Teri's ten acres of property, overlooking Bellingham. Carpenter friend Kirk, who works as slow as a turtle, helped me construct the stage for my new home. It took all summer for something that should have taken a week at most to create.

"Weren't those the people who went to Fiji with you and Bruce?" asked Larkins.

"Yeah, they came through with flying colors by giving me a place to live in the woods again. They were up in Alaska fishing while I lived in their twenty-four foot travel trailer, trying to get Kirk to work a little faster. God, he is slow!"

I even built a separate bedroom for Sri, so he would have his own space when he slept over with me. However, before I left for India, Joya called from New Mexico with some distressing news. She stated that she now *loved* the Southwest and had *no* intentions of ever returning to the Pacific Northwest to live. Well now, that just blew a hole in my yurt! Should I be moving to the Southwest too, after India, to be near my son and divorced wife?

My dad passed away from esophagus cancer in May of '94. I had tried my best the day before his death to get it right with him, one last time. Crying at his bedside, I told him how much I loved him and asked for his forgiveness. After marrying his nurse Pam, he conveniently left everything to her. Sri and I got absolutely nothing! Not surprisingly, I had hurt my dad verbally, when I was having my emotional breakdown from the stress of divorce, the accident and my miserable life. All of my anger came out, directed at him as a father. I said things to my poor dad that *never* should have been said- the same heartless behavior I'd used on Joya. I cut him to the bone and now he would never forgive me. However, I felt my dad had never been there for me growing up. He failed to understand my lifestyle as a musician and spiritual seeker. Having grown up a doctor's son, I *never* wanted to be a doctor. The phone was always ringing in our house, forever taking my father further away from me. And a certain stigmata came along with being a doctor's son- one that I despised. In short, by this time, neither of us really knew or understood each other. And it was too late in the game to even try. All I could do was watch my dad die. Why do children seem to go the opposite way of their parents?

"Wow that *is* sad. Maybe you're here to confront those feelings about your dad, Rideout. Your anger over him seems to be a core issue in your life. Don't you agree?"

"You're right but to top it all off, my dad seemed to have *no* interest in his grandson's future, which *really* upset me all the more."

"Yeah, that does kind of suck. But now, you can address those issues."

All I *ever* wanted to be for my son Sri was a good father. Now that reality was being taken away from me too. I was feeling like a real failure at relationships and wondering if maybe I wasn't just better off living alone? Maybe this trip to India will provide some answers and guidance. God knows I could sure use some at this turning point!

“Did you get your answers, Rideout? What happened in India?” asked my anxious Bunkie.

“Wouldn’t you like to know?”

When I wrote my Iowa farmer/ Fiji friend Tim Welch about my pilgrimage to India, he insisted that I spend time with him in Bangkok, where he was now living and married to a Thai wife, named Aoy. Thailand came on the same expensive ticket, so I made arrangements to spend a month there after India. Spiritual brother Dan, who built our dream octagon and let me live in his cabin during our separation, drove me early to Sea-Tac airport. He somehow got us lost in downtown Seattle at 4 a.m. by getting in the wrong lane on I-5. Get me to the airport Brother. We said our goodbyes over a hurried cup of Starbuck’s airport coffee, before I flew south to Albuquerque to spend a couple of days with Sri before India. Joya, boyfriend Johnny and Sri had the school bus parked on Joya’s Native American teacher’s desert property. The smell of pine trees and sage was intoxicating. Johnny proved to be a good fatherly friend for young Sri, as I saw them playing together. Joya let me borrow her car, so Sri and I got to explore Santa Fe, where we found him a black felt cowboy hat. Sri had to shape it like Pecos Bill’s immediately. He’d just seen *Tall Tales*. Then we all soaked in Jemez hot springs under a snow cover. Seeing Joya and young Johnny nude together, and obviously happy, really hit a nerve in me. How can people change mates so easily? I slept in Johnny’s Aloha travel trailer that night, filled with Joya’s drying herbs. Wow! What a smell! However, as I stepped out to relieve myself, I heard them making love. Again, this was just another hole for my heart. I had so many now that I had lost count.

“Boy, you did go through a bunch of heavies in a row! You must have been pumped for this trip.”

“I was *very* excited, but also scared of the unknown. India! Just the word is heavy.”

When Joya and Sri took me to the airport, I could feel the pain and confusion in Sri’s young heart, as he watched me fly

away from his life for awhile. I would return, in time, but that's hard for a five-year-old to understand. His whole world had been turned upside down too, by this ugly reality called Divorce.

I was going Om

In Los Angeles International Airport, I ran into the Hare Krishna's. They seem to love airports. They tried to lay their books and rap on me. It was hilarious. Here I am, off to India, the birth place of their god Krishna, in fifteen minutes, while they're stuck in smoggy L.A., chanting the mantra and trying to find new converts in an airport of all places. Finally, I was seated in my 747 for the long flight to Mother India. I was going Om, spiritually speaking.

"That sounds like something you'd say. Give me a break."

"Well, like I told you Larkins, I've wanted to see India since I was a child."

Seeing actor Sabu star as Mogli in the classic movie of Kipling's *Jungle Book* stirred ancient memories in me. How was I to know that Sabu looked exactly like young Babaji in His present 1970 incarnation? That movie turned me on to exotic India and Babaji, unconsciously. On the long flight up the coast of Alaska, then crossing over to Southeast Asia, I witnessed a sunrise from 30,000 feet. The colors with the earth's curve below were like an IMAX sci-fi movie. I'd *never* seen a sunrise like this! At sunset of the same day on this 20 hour flight, I saw the full moon shining over the Ganges River above Calcutta. India, from on high, hardly has any bright city street lights. They all looked like 12-volt systems, compared to our first world electrical extravaganzas.

On my flight, I noticed a black lady with large matted dreadlocks and that spiritual look in her eyes. Obviously, another devotee of some guru, I thought. When I arrived into

Delhi's Palam International Airport at around 3 a.m., my rucksack didn't arrive. I was left with just my carryon, wondering what's next. My pack had somehow gotten off in Thailand, during refueling. Welcome to India!

"You've got to be kidding me! That would *really* piss me off!"

"That is just how things go in India. Anybody who has been here will tell you that. Anything that can happen has happened here already and will happen again."

I ended up getting a cab to the YMCA with the California dreadlock. I found out that she was off to see holy man Sai Baba again. She was also meeting her dreadlocked daughter at the Y. I felt very comfortable around this lady. Birds of a feather *do* flock together.

My small room at the Y, with a bathroom down the hall for the whole floor, cost ten dollars a day. At the time, this seemed reasonable to me. The Y felt safe. It has a reputation, after all. I walked out into the pre-dawn streets of Delhi to see it come to life. India! My good God, I am finally here! What a sensation and realization.

"Wow, that must have been like a dream come true for you."

"Yeah, it was. I couldn't wait for the sun to come up so I could see more and explore Delhi!"

Work crews silently sat around fires as I walked, while others slept in doorways looking like corpses ready for burial. Nothing much was happening yet, so I went back into the Y for an early breakfast. There, I met Ian Coppel. He was a British schoolteacher at a private International Girls' School in Mussoorie, U.P., up above Rishikesh in the sacred Himalayan foothills. He was presently on holiday leave in Delhi. Ian had grown up in Liverpool and his father was a noted fretless jazz bass player, who personally knew the Beatles quite well. He shared many unheard Beatle stories with me.

"Do you remember any today?" questioned Larkins.

“No, I really don’t. You know how the mind works. You remember what you remember. It’s amazing that I can even remember all that I’ve been telling you for months. Don’t interrupt any more and just let me talk.”

“Okay.”

Ian proudly introduced me to my first day in Delhi, beginning with Connaught Circle, a huge complex hub of shops and cafes. I was totally blown away, all day. My senses were continually assaulted by noises, chanting, and the odor of burning cow dung, diesel exhaust, incense and curry. These are the smells of Delhi, combined with pathetic beggars vying for attention and aggressive shop owners all shouting “Hallo!” Many people were taking morning showers squatting on their haunches at water hydrants, totally oblivious to me. One woman beggar was cut off at the waist and so horribly ugly and deformed, that I had to look away. Her karma was obviously *way* heavier than the skateboard amputee I’d seen in ’68 Madrid. Somebody had to have helped her get to where she lays all day. After curry lunch, standing up with scores of others in the cheap cafe, I went off on my own to explore for awhile. I was immediately hit with a case of Delhi belly. I looked into one of Delhi’s public latrines and about puked. There was shit everywhere! I had to run back to the Y to relieve myself. I felt no tiredness from my flight and presently felt very cleaned out. I rushed on my own adrenaline and the intense energy of New Delhi. In no time at all, I was approached by a shoeshine boy. I told him that you can’t polish tennis shoes. What a moron, but maybe not? He asked, under his breath, if I wanted to buy any *charas*, Hindi for hash. Yes, yes, yes! I found out soon that I’d just paid nearly seven times the true price, but that seemed cheap to me. Again, this was my first day in India and I didn’t even begin to know the ropes yet.

“What did you pay, Rideout?”

“I paid the equivalent of twenty dollars for ten grams of hash. The true price was three bucks.”

After calling Thai Airlines, I was assured that my lost backpack would arrive tomorrow. That was comforting news. Next, I found a Tibetan import shop that sold me a smoking pipe. Now, off I went to my Y room to partake of the holy sacrament. This was yet another dream come true for me; to smoke hash in India. I think a lot of old hippies have that dream. However, this *charas* which tasted great wasn't as strong as the '70's hash I'd experienced and come to adore. So, Ian and I decided to go have some Indian beer. Being the only two customers in a gaudy red cocktail lounge, I found *Kingfisher* to be incredibly tasty, much like microbrewery beers back home. After getting a mild buzz, I experienced my first ride in a small black and yellow kerosene-operated "putt-putt." What a rush! I wanted to scream continually, as everybody here drives in a total crazy free-for-all frenzy. Anybody who has been to India knows what I mean. This place is much wilder than Rome. At one point, an elephant walked about two feet in front of us. Begging children would approach at stoplights, calling me God and asking for a quarter of one cent. This was Poor India, full blown. I saw the huge full moon, rising red in the east from pollution of exhaust fumes, as I stood on my YMCA balcony. The blazing red sun was setting in the west, on my *still* first day in India. The noise of Delhi, wafting up at me, almost sounded like music at times. There were parrots, vultures and hawks flying everywhere. Here was some exotic beauty. India has more birds than any other country on earth.

Joining up with Ian again as the sun was setting; he insisted that we pay a visit to the girls of the night in Old Delhi. Oh boy, how will this compare with Amsterdam? Ian disclosed that he had done this before alone and had nearly gotten robbed and/or stabbed. Great, so that's why he's taking me along – for protection. We climbed up worn, slimy steps, under a single green light bulb, to enter a room packed with short girls, aged about twelve to seventeen years old. This is nothing like Amsterdam. Their bright red lipstick was smeared on past their young lips, almost giving the appearance of a clown.

“That sounds gross!”

They rubbed my arms, saying, “I’ll be your Lolita, Baby... fucky, fucky darling?”

“Let’s get out of here now, Ian!” I exclaimed.

Well, the next room looked exactly like the last, as if maybe there was a connecting door we hadn’t noticed. Enough of this, I thought, let’s gets out of here now, even if their asking price was about two dollars. Later that same night, we walked to a Chinese café for a late dinner. There was luckily a place still open. Some people actually had beds in the streets. I was telling Ian all about my accident, Babaji and recent divorce, when we noticed that we were walking with a nomadic family surrounding us. They looked like *real* India. Dad was turbaned and heavily bearded, wearing a wraparound blanket, and right out of the *Jungle Book*. This elder and his exotic young looking wife had about ten kids in their tribe. They smiled at me with an unworldly look. They had *so* much love in their eyes! For a moment I felt as if I were a part of their family. I ended up crying in an emotional release, thinking of where my life had put me. I was surrounded by a love supreme in this ancient land of the soul. By the time I tried to put all of this down on my new cassette recorder, I couldn’t fall asleep. I really hadn’t closed my eyes in almost three days, I think. After literally buzzing on my bed, I finally did fall asleep, totally exhausted of course. I’m really in another world now; one I’ve dreamt about for *so* long.

“What did the next day bring?”

“Day number two brought the phone call saying my lost pack was now at the airport- my first miracle in India.”

I hired a driver and his yellow jacket putt-putt to take me there. I told him to wait, as I’d be back in about twenty minutes. Or so I thought.

“You don’t know India,” he calmly stated. How right he was- I finally returned nearly four hours later.

“I am still here for you, sahib. You are liking India?” asked my smiling cabbie.

“Yes and no.” I answered. “Take me back to the Y.”

I just had to pay baksheesh to an old man, who escorted me to where my pack was, in an airplane-hanger-sized building of lost luggage. Everybody has their hand out here. Why pay money to somebody who didn’t even do anything? India was definitely going to teach me the greatest of all virtues- Patience, with a capital P.

“Prison is teaching us that too, Rideout.”

“Maybe that’s why I have an easier time here than you! India prepared me.”

Most everything in India is super cheap- lives, food and souvenirs. I bought a rudraksha seed carved into a cobra with Shiva lingam, from an orange-clad sadhu lady and her lovely little daughter. To this day, I’ve never seen a prettier girl. Her eyes glowed with *so* much inner light that they were silver, like tin foil. India is one of the poorest countries on earth, but very high on the love level. I never felt threatened or afraid in India. Those dark Hindu eyes seem to have an inner spiritual depth that few in the West possess. They know something we don’t. They are good at accepting life just the way it is, amongst all the insanity, chaos and poverty that surrounds them. The West could learn a lot from India and vice versa. Hell, everybody knows that.

I found an eighteen-inch-high brass Shiva statue for \$95.00, which actually retails for about \$450.00 in the West. Lord, is it ever beautiful! I had the shop owner store it for me until I would be leaving India. Can I trust him? I think so. This magnetic statue emits a power and serenity that is awesome – my brass *murti* or image of Babaji. It was hard *not* to buy everything I saw these first few days, as the bargains and products were so overwhelming. It’s easy to see how and why so many travelers get into the import/export business of foreign delights. I would have to hold off on the souvenirs until later,

as I still had over three more months to go and couldn't be burdened with such mementos now. I'd already brought way too much with me, as I discovered quickly. Maybe I'll give some away to lighten my load. At night, I would try again to put verbal accounts of my day onto the Radio Shack tape recorder. So many things were happening to me that one single day in Delhi, felt like a week back home. Talk about a time warp! I did meet a cool hip sadhu, named Hardwari Baba, at Delhi's local Shiva temple. He read my palms free, for over an hour; even prophesying over the small lines on each part of each finger. He hit the nail on the head quite accurately. I bought him a cup of coffee. I was also permitted to visit Babaji's bedroom at this Shiva temple. He occasionally stayed overnight there, it seems. The walls were lined with pictures of Him I'd never seen before, including one with many signs in his inked footprints. As an incarnation of Shiva, Babaji has astrological signs, a cobra, trident, a wheel and more, all in His feet; like we have fingerprints. As Yogananda stated, Babaji is beyond human comprehension. When the Lord appears in human form, only one out of a million will even know. Of course, everybody just thinks this is plain crazy. But is it? What if? I *totally* believe it. Babaji has appeared throughout ancient and modern history in various forms and in many cultures and yet humanity still doubts. Why we haven't heard of Him, people ask. He only lets Himself be known to very few. If only we had the eyes to see and the faith to believe. I personally feel that Babaji and Yogananda backed *The Beatles*, from behind the scenes, unbeknownst to them.

"Now that's far out," reflected Larkins.

Their pictures are even on the cover of the *Sergeant Pepper* album. *The Beatles* were a perfect channel for a love divine to touch our planet. But what do I know?

"Well, you know a whole lot more about this stuff than me. I'm just hanging in here, letting you ramble," commented my only friend here.

On day number three, still at the Y, I arose early Sunday morning to catch the eighteen-hour tour bus for the Taj Mahal—one of the Seven Wonders of the World. This should be good! The dreadlocked mother, whose name I learned was Satya, and her hairy daughter Gopika were on the same tour to Agra. Cool. They looked much pumped up for what we were going to see. On the drive there, I sat near an American ornithologist and his daughter. They had come to India to film and document birds. I came to give thanks to God and worship. She took notes, while dad busily researched his bird books for all the various classifications of winged creatures they were videotaping. It was fun to see somebody else enjoying India, but in a whole different context than me. We truly do see what we want to see. Projection is perception, as they say.

The small dirty town of Agra totally caters to Taj tourists, who are pouring in by the bus loads every day. Souvenirs abound everywhere. Upon seeing the Taj Mahal, it was everything I'd ever imaged it to be. I think everybody feels this way their first few moments. It takes your breath away. I felt as if I were momentarily suspended in a dream world. Time seemed to stand still, as well as my chattering inner dialogue. The perfection and beauty of this creation is truly something out of *this* world. The story of its creation is too. Taking twenty years to build, back in 1632 A.D., with thousands of workers, the name Taj Mahal means *crown of the palace*. This is in reference to the empress Arjumand, for whom it was built. However, the love story behind its creation is very sad. When Arjumand died in childbirth, her husband Emperor Sahah Jehan turned white haired overnight in grief. He built this mausoleum for his deceased wife but was forced to view it until his death from across the Yamuna River, where his wicked power-seeking son, Aurangzeb had incarcerated him. Ironically, empress Arjumand had died giving birth to this evil son. Dysfunctional families seem to have a long history in our world.

“Yeah, I came from a dysfunctional family too” blurted out Larkins. “That’s probably why I became an alcoholic.”

“You may be onto something there, Larkins. It all starts with our family, in one way or another. At least we were fortunate to have a family. Many don’t.”

Upon entering the Taj, we heard the song of the muezzin; the call for Muslim prayer. The acoustics are perfect within these jewel-lined marble walls. When flutist Paul Horn recorded here in the early ‘70’s, a mosquito could be heard in his recording. Our tour guide, Mr. Lal, upon finding out that I was an American, asked if I knew Baba Ram Das. Far out! I said that I had met him and loved his book, *Be Here Now*. This Mr. Lal had shown Ram Das the Taj years ago. He probably did acid with him too, as he seemed pretty hip for a tour guide. I soon saw my first of many sadhus here. I found these holy men to be very beautiful, both physically and spiritually. This skinny old man had dreads piled eighteen inches high on his ash-smeared head.

“I’m a holy man... holy man,” he quietly said, in a very high meek voice.

One can feel their inner calm and lack of anxiety from far away. On many levels, I felt like I’d returned home in India. So many hidden emotions and new feelings were coursing through me. Surely, I had lived here before! It seemed as if the love I *so* lacked and longed for in my family and country, made a daily appearance here. God must surely love India, to have blessed it in *so* many unique ways. I purchased a small white marble Shiva statue, which is supposedly made by the direct descendants of the Taj craftsmen. I’ll bet! I also bought a mala of 108 sandalwood prayer beads and a blue woolen blanket. Upon observation, blankets seem to be one of the most common pieces of clothing in India, right up there with saris. En route back to Delhi, our tour bus stopped for puja or temple services at the birthplace of Lord Krishna in Mathura. The temple gongs, in alternating crashes, metallicly shouted “Krishna.” I stood on the supposed exact birth spot of Krishna and purchased a framed picture of the love god for my altar. A man, with a very keen ear, helped me pick a nice melodic set of small chanting cymbals, to help me sing my way through Hind;

from the heart, of course. On this same day, I tape recorded and photographed cobra snake charmers and smelled the stench of chained tamed black bears, along with camels and monkeys. The monkey man got off on my peacock yell and cougar scream. Comically on the bus ride home, we had to put up with the ravings of an obnoxious drunken Russian tourist and his heavy set homely wife, dressed out in traditional Ukraine garb. Finally, a turbaned Sikh put him back in his seat. India just doesn't quit, even on a bus.

"Do they drink coffee in India?" questioned Larkins.

"You can get it, but it's usually Nescafe instant," I answered back.

"That's equivalent to what we drink here. What's up with that?"

"It seems that the British got India into tea-big time."

Chai seems to be the national drink in India- *very* sweet black tea, with plenty of spices. Around the train stations, one continually hears the shouted mantra, "Chai ya, Chai ya," by the Chai *wallahs*. It's very inexpensive, like less than 5¢ a cup. Commonly, the small ocher sun dried river mud teacups are smashed on the railroad tracks, after one imbibes the saccharine beverage. I always wondered who made the millions of cups, as the Indian population was well over 900 million reincarnated souls in '94. These delicate pottery cups would make a nice souvenir ashtray, if you could get it home in one piece.

On day number four, I took a long walk around Delhi alone. I saw the famous Hanuman monkey temple, dedicated to Sri Ram's simian friend. There were so many large aggressive monkeys there that armed guards are on duty to beat back the monkeys and protect devotees. While I was leisurely enjoying my walk unperturbed, a young rickshaw driver, by the name of Ashoka Shiri Om, insisted that I take a free ride from him. He also claimed to be a med-student. I desisted, as I really just wanted to walk and be alone. Driving slowly along beside me,

he continually stated that he just wanted to be my friend. What to do? The classic Indian hustle was at work! He took me to the monstrous-sized Bilar Vishnu temple and then out to eat; where he paid for my curry meal *and* whiskey. Alcohol, in India, is hard to find, even in a city the size of Delhi. Most Hindus just don't drink and certainly can't afford it too often if they do. I even found a beer named *Guru*, with an ocher-colored bottle cap. Now that irony made me laugh! The word guru means, dispeller of darkness. What a misnomer. The same night, I was scheduled to take a bus ride northeast to the town of Haldwani. This is the get-off point to Babaji's ashram in Herakhan. When I finally got seated on the bus, this hustler Ashoka pleaded desperately for twenty dollars; to buy his medical textbooks. He promised to pay me back in full, when I returned to Delhi, even giving me his mother's home phone number. At this time, twenty dollars was about equal to a month's wages in India. I never saw this con man Ashoka again, but I would, ironically, hear about him once more.

"So now you're finally on your way, to where this Babaji of yours lived?" asked Larkins. "You must have been anxious!"

"Oh yeah, I really was. All of my expectations were coming to a head."

Now my nervous excitement was....

I can still remember hearing the excitement in my voice, as I listened to this recorded sojourn later. The all-night bus ride was *very* cold. We were headed up in elevation to the foothills of the Himalayas. I used my Value Village down vest and new blue Agra blanket to attempt staying warm-burr! This area of the Kumon is the abode of the gods, a very sacred pilgrimage destination for sadhu and Western babas alike. Now, I was super-excited, something I hadn't felt in a very long time. I felt as if divine guidance was protecting every step of my way. One hill person on the bus looked a lot like Babaji, circa '82. I

arrived at 4 a.m. to a dark quiet Haldwani town. I already knew that the Kailash Hotel was *the* place to stay, for Baba devotees anyway. I was given Leonard Orr's room. He is the author of *Physical Immortality*, and the self-proclaimed father of my expensive rebirthing sessions. I briefly experimented with this connected breathing rhythm back in my Sumas days, as well as hanging upside down suspended from ropes off my porch beams. There was a great calendar photo of Babaji on the wall, life size, which I was allowed to take home. It has followed me ever since. Then, surprise! In the hotel lobby were the two original photos of Babaji in 1917, which I had in the book I'd taken to South America. The hotel owner was busy lighting incense and then waving it around the photos three times, in a clock wise fashion. One picture was taken, but two photos miraculously developed. Babaji was dressed in one, but naked in the other. Go figure that one out! Next to the framed pictures was the handwritten explanatory story by Baba Hari Das, the author of my book.

"Isn't that the same dude who gave you your spiritual name-the silent one with the chalk board?" remembered Larkins.

"Yeah, it's same guy, the one who doesn't talk. He too had stayed here. Remember, he's the one who gave me the name, Hari Om, prior to my divorce from Joya."

And now, that was the name I went by. Goodbye Rob, for a while at least. I learned too that very few are *ever* given this name Hari Om, even in India. Like many others, it is the supreme name of God.

After a short sleep, I found the grain shop of Babaji's main man, Muniraj. His facial features strongly resemble those of Chief Sitting Bull. You must get permission from him, to even be allowed into Herakhan. After sitting with this "king of silence," as Babaji had labeled him, I was granted my passage. He asked me about Hiranman. And he actually remembered meeting me in the Seattle area a decade before, when he and revered Shastraji, another Babaji saint, toured the U.S. ashrams and centers. Another shorter bus ride ensued, but this time

there were many shaven-headed disciples on board, with yellow horizontal stripes on their foreheads. I had made a sacred promise to Sri Ram that I would *not* shave my head. Sri had been through enough changes, due to our divorce, and wanted to see me return home looking like his memories- not like some cholo rapper or survivor of Dachau. As the *mundun* or head shave was required after two weeks of ashram life, I would cross this bridge later. Now, my nervous excitement was increasing. I saw the original Mount Kailash through the pine trees. It has also been called Mount Meru, the ground axis of the earth, king of mountains, and the golden mountain. It is supposedly the center of our world, holy beyond words. The other Kailash in Tibet gets all the recognition, but this Kumaon Kailash, Babaji claims, is the original. Other claims say that Jesus supposedly spent time here too, during his “missing years.” I wouldn’t doubt it. Psychics state that this whole area is bathed in a violet flame. Stories abound here that sound like science fiction to skeptics. However, I was now about to enter into the camp of the believers- those like myself who love Babaji with all of their heart. I had found my tribe. Babaji Himself said that one can only come here, if his karma is in correct order. I guess my karma at this point of my life’s journey was in order, as confusing as it all seems, as here came the magic moment.

“Well, what did the place look like?”

“Beautiful!”

Walking down the hill of huge pine and oak trees, I was reminded of Colorado. Suddenly, I had my first glimpse of Herakhan Vishwa Madham, the center of the universe. Well, Babaji’s universe, anyway. Nine peach-colored banana-shaped temples sat against the base of Mount Kailash, across the holy Gautama Ganga River. This river flows underground temporarily from its source at the Tibetan Kailash to resurface here. The warm river was teeming with fish. Babaji’s cave, where He has incarnated many times, sits next to the nine temples. On the south side of the multi-channeled river is the main ashram complex. The dormitory rooms are all peach-

colored here too, as well as the highly sacred, octagonal Shiva temple old Babaji erected in 1840. Where He got the marble to erect this *mandir*, up in this remote mountain valley, is still an unsolved mystery. Next to this old temple is the Mahasamadhi shrine where Babaji's 1984 body is buried in lotus position under an eight-sided marble cross, bearing the mantra *Om Namah Shivaya* on top. My good God, all this was too much! I had new potential friends, from six different countries, all bunking in my dorm. Luckily for me, everybody spoke English with their appropriate accents. And everybody had stories and tales of their encounters with Babaji. Many had spent time with Him in the flesh, prior to His passing in 1984. Their stories were often amazing, again testing one's limits on believing.

"Most of your stories test my beliefs, Rideout."

"I'm sure they do, Larkins. Maybe you need to have your mind opened up a bit more, my friend. It wouldn't hurt."

There are two Chai shops at the ashram, where I drank instant coffee at 4 a.m. each morning. I needed coffee, not chai. Everybody gets up at that ungodly hour for the descent down the 108 steps to the river, for ritual bathing. The water was often warmer than the outside air. Next, we lined up at Babaji's room to have *chundun* applied to our damp foreheads. *Chundun* is yellow sandalwood paste, applied in three horizontal lines across the forehead, with the red tilik dot and rice grains anointing our newly opened third eye. Now, everyone resembles a god or goddess, Hindu of course. If you weren't wearing this sacred marking, you were asked to leave, as it was proof you'd slept in and weren't serious about working the program here. There were such unfortunates. Standing outside of Babaji's room at this early hour of the oncoming day was something that I'll *never* forget. The stars looked closer than I'd ever seen them and the smell emanating from Babaji's small room was intoxicating. How could I *ever* be *so* blessed as to be here right now? After all the recent hell I'd been through, I now felt like I was approaching the upper rungs of the spiritual ladder. Life at this ashram brought one in

touch with the divine- both within and without. That is what ashram life is all about- non-stop devotion and ceremony. Here, it seemed to come naturally.

After *chundun*, we meditated next to the sacred fire *dhuni*, where the flame has burned non-stop since Babaji's reappearance in 1970. Certain devotees hold the honor of keeping this fire burning for months on end, as part of their spiritual discipline. Much could be said about the power of a *dhuni*. A series of little footbridges take one across the river to the cave and nine temples on the other side. A small antechamber has been built in front of the actual cave, where you crawl on knees with a flashlight into a two-man hole in Mount Kailash. A small stone Shiva lingam, with incense and candles, graces Babaji's famous face photo inside the cave. Upon entering, I felt like I was in the warm womb of Divine Mother. How many cosmic forces had aligned for me to end up here in Babaji's sacred cave? How many? I took a small piece of wall rock for my medicine bag. It was often difficult to find alone time here, as everyone desired to meditate in this holy of holies. I soon met one of the local hill boys, Triloka Singh, from across the river. He rented packhorses and dealt *charas*. Now, I got the right price- three dollars for ten grams; not twenty dollars! Smoking, technically, was not allowed at the ashram, but the Italians got away with it daily. I got busted by the ruling ashram queen for smoking *charas* with two wandering sadhu. We all got a verbal lashing and reprimand. Hash has always been my drug of choice and here in India, it is believed to be the very essence of Lord Shiva himself. I couldn't agree more. When young Babaji reappeared here in 1970, he seldom spoke but did smoke charas, occasionally. He sat for forty-five days atop Mount Kailash, like a statue- never moving, eating or toileting. Nobody every saw His eyes blink either. Most people claimed that His open eyes burned right into their souls. Many others said that He could be scary to be around, as He knows all thoughts- all the time.

"It sounds like this Babaji is a master magician."

“Well, not really, as He dissolves illusions. He doesn’t create them, as a magician would.”

As I arrived here, just prior to Christmas, rehearsals for the Christmas play were well underway. Babaji respected all religions and had told Westerners years ago to “do the Christmas thing.” I was immediately asked to take part in the Nativity play and assigned the role of one of the three visiting wise men. When Christmas arrived, I was very excited. This proved to be a Christmas I would *never* forget. At dress rehearsal the day before, I was told to come to the ashram office for part of my costume. There, an Italian devotee named Ganga lent me Babaji’s silver silk waistcoat to wear. I was floored when she stated that this particular vest had been His favorite. Wow, I get to wear it! All of my dorm mates had to smell and feel it, for a contact high. On Christmas morning, I took a walk alone down river to pray for my distant son, Sri Ram and his mother Joya. Oh, how I missed them! I noticed the floating hair locks shaven from devotees’ *mundun* heads. Upon closer inspection, right in front of me in the water sat my rock *lingam* from Herakhan. This rock fit perfectly to every part of my palm and had a white stripe around the face that resembled the elephant god Ganesh, son of Shiva. When I returned up the 108 steps, old Prem Baba took hold of my geological Christmas present and spoke in Hindi for ten minutes about my lucky find. I sensed I had found something *very* special this day. Babaji had said that the rocks of Herakhan are the hearts of great souls. Now that’s far out! Maybe this whole experience was symbolic of how very special I was in God’s eyes, still. But aren’t we all? However, I guess I needed some divine reassurance on this Christmas, after all the hell and turning points I’d just gone through.

“I feel that God did bless you, Rideout. You’ve got your son, regardless. You needed symbolic reassurance at that particular moment and you got it,” commented Larkins.

“Thanks Randy, that’s a sweet observation. I didn’t know you had it in you.”

Our play went off very well, in front of hundreds of hill folk with children. Almost everybody was wrapped up in those, now familiar, blankets. This ashram gig was very special for them, with free food and lots of festivities. Many had walked a very long way to be here. There was much chanting of songs in praise of God and, of course, a lot of *Om Namah Shivaya*. Later, when I returned the special vest, Ganga mumbled something I couldn't clearly hear. When I asked her kindly to repeat, she said, "the vest is now yours to keep; Merry Christmas, Hari Om." Wow! I've got Babaji's vest. What a day. Thank you Ganga...I'll never forget you! It didn't even seem to be a big deal to her but it sure was to me. Some of these women here who have lived with Babaji are very intriguing. I sometimes wonder where their heads are at, as they've lived here on and off for a very long time- living the same program of devotion, work and ceremony... day in-day out, year in-year out. Also on Christmas Day, Muniraj and many high-profile Indian political devotees arrived for the big *yagna* or fire ceremony. Babaji had said, "If you want to worship God, worship the fire." Both East and West Indians have sacred fire ceremonies. Sadly, only the upper echelon got to participate here, while everyone else looked on enviously.

"That sounds messed up! Did you just stand around the outside and watch?" an irritated Larkins asked.

"Well, not quite. Something else happened unexpectedly."

As the *yagna* fire was crackling away, a small wondering sadhu, who distinctly resembled Babaji and seemed to have appeared out of nowhere, called me to join him in his cave. This cave was for sadhu only and located next to Babaji's sacred cave. After he smoked me up, he let his hair down- literally, as his *long* dreadlocks hung like serpents cascading to the earthen floor. He was, and still is, the most profoundly beautiful man I've *ever* seen. I felt like I was seated beside Babaji, on Christ's birthday. I involuntarily knelt and kissed his feet. Was this Babaji seated in front of me, looking exactly like Lord Shiva? I had secretly always longed for darshan such as this. Be careful for what you pray. As I was meditating now,

automatically in front of him, I opened my eyes to see him point at me and exclaim, “Babaji!” Now who is Babaji? What a blessing this day had been. This sadhu was named Mukunda Baba Bramachari. He lived solely on curd (yogurt) and fruit and had never experienced a woman. His purity was awe-inspiring. He spoke little English, but gave me a picture negative of him that I developed later. To really see the divine in human form, so beautifully manifested, is beyond words. Ironically, he mysteriously moved on before I could give him my blanket. This small Shiva sadhu was headed to the source of the Ganges to see a fabled ice *lingum* of Shiva in a cave. I’m sure he probably made it.

“Jesus, don’t ever tell anybody here that you kissed some dude’s feet! You could get smashed, Rideout.”

“I know. You just keep your mouth shut about all this too.”

“Mum is the word. You can trust me Bunkie.”

Later that same day, I got to stand guard duty. We had so many poor villagers here, that our multi-national devotees were paranoid of possible theft in the dorm rooms. Even at a sacred place, on a sacred day, the soldiers of God had to pay attention to human frailties. The day after Christmas, I ascended Mount Kailash on a three-hour grueling climb with about twenty others. I arrived at the summit first, and got to sit alone where Babaji had sat for the forty-five days in 1970. Again, I prayed deeply for my young son Sri and his mother. What were they doing today in New Mexico, while I sat on top of the world looking down at the ashram below? The Ganges River was far off on the distant plains of India, with Tibet and Nepal above me. When the others arrived, mainly Swedes and a few Italians, we sang the devotional *Aarati* song. I taped it. Golden eagles and hawks soared over us on this sunny blue-sky day. On our steep, slippery descent down, one female European fell off the steep trail but miraculously was not hurt. Maybe the mantra had saved her. Soon, I walked through a picturesque hill village. The beauty of this part of India I will never forget. The rhododendron trees here were huge! Stopping briefly, I

smoked with the locals and my young seedy horse friend. After leaving them, I entered the enchanted forest, walking past an ancient well that looked like it belonged in a Bible story. Suddenly, I heard a faint voice calling softly to me. Turning around, I saw a knock dead, beautiful hill girl, decked out in bangles, motioning me to come back to her in the broken sunlight.

“Boy that is temptation. What did you do?” asked Larkins.

I walked back to her, where she asked in poor English if I liked her and wanted to head for the bushes. Was this a Hindu goddess from some astral realm, or the devil in a sari disguise? I calmly said, “*Om Namah Shivaya*,” which was the only thing on my mind and kept walking at a quick pace back to my dorm room. Upon entering, I told my fellow dormies what had transpired on the holy mountain and down below. Holland quickly said, “Go back there you stupid fucker or you’ll regret this rest of your life!” Belgium and Italy felt that this was Babaji’s spiritual test, after my experience on top of His sacred mountain. I learned later that the goddess was a village whore, whom the *charis* kid had sent to me as a gift. Sex, it seems, was allowed on that side of the river, but not at the ashram proper. I guess I passed my final exam. Maybe I too was meant to be Bramachari- no sex- like it or not.

“Well, you are now... like it or not,” commented Larkins. “What else happened there?”

It is Lord Shiva’s....

Most every day, to me, seemed paradisiacal in Herakhan; hard to believe but true. It’s the vibration of the place. After the morning river ritual, sacred makeup and meditating by the fire *dhuni*, the *Aarati* ceremony with chanting began. I’ll always deeply remember the sounds of Herakhan’s large temple bells clanging loudly, driving away all evil spirits. *Aarati* is a series of beautiful chants that tell who Babaji Is. It

was written by the man responsible for Babaji taking a body again in 1970. This man spent his entire life, praying every moment, for Babaji to return. He literally walked around most of India, restoring numerous Shiva temples in preparation for His return. The power of his prayers and intense devotion brought Babaji back. Every time I sing *Aarati*, I experience a very high clear energy that can only be Babaji. The well-fed ashram dogs bark along with the bells and are of the highest dog karma to even be here. However, even they had their furry paws outstretched when *Prasad* (blessed sweets) was passed out. After our early musical session in front of Babaji's sandals, crystal ball and dais seat with pictures of Him, we practiced karma yoga – work dedicated to God – until noon. I helped construct a rock-walled garden, which the river would later destroy during the yearly monsoon flooding. Work is worship here, and always with *Om Namah Shivaya* in your mind and on your lips. People don't say "hello" or "good morning" here, only the mantra. There really wasn't much need for talk here, as we are here to learn how to listen. This mantra would become programmed into the hard drive part of my brain so deeply, that it would repeat for years to come and still is! It is Lord Shiva's toll free 1-800 number. Babaji said so Himself. He also said that karma yoga, combined with God's name or mantra was the highest yoga for our present age. Few devotees can truly meditate deeply, as the material world's energy is accelerating too fast. That is why Babaji didn't stress Kriya yoga this time around, but work instead. Work is the new Kriya yoga. So work, my friend, and do it without ego thoughts of the result. Just do your *very* best, for the God within you.

"It's hard for me to do that here in prison, dude. I really don't give a rat's ass when I work here. Do you know what I mean?"

"Yeah, I *do* know what you mean. But don't use prison as an excuse to *not* do the work God gave you. The real prison is your mind, Larkins."

Lunch was usually curried lentil *dahl*, rice and vegetables, with *chapattis* or *rotis*, similar to tortillas, served sitting on a cold concrete floor. Then, we had a few hours of free time to read, hike, and write letters or whatever, before another ritual bath in the river and more ceremony and chanting again. A late dinner of leftovers, eaten with the hands of course, occurred at around 9 p.m. As toilet paper isn't used in India, but water instead, the left hand is for toilet and the right for eating. One just hopes that the cooks are right-handed.

“Man, that is gross!” blurted out Larkins.

“Well, that’s how it is in India. In time, I actually preferred their method of toiletry. But it does take a little getting used to.”

“No thanks.”

After lunch one day, I explored the small ashram library. There, I found a small out-of-print book about Babaji. As this priceless book would be near impossible to find later, I read it entirely onto my tape recorder, sitting next to the Gautama River. I can still hear the rushing water and chirping birds, when I listen now to my audio book. I would advise any would-be traveler to invest in a tape deck. Sound, or the science of the spoken word, can *really* do wonders for your memory later. I also found out the truth about my book, *Harikhan Babaji – Known, Unknown*, which I’d taken to Ecuador. It seems that author Baba Hari Das, the silent one who’d given me my spiritual name, did *not* write the book. He ripped it off from Saint Shastraji’s brother, who was a judge and devotee of old Harikhan Baba. So, this small book, which was *so* special to me and whose cover had survived my house fire, was *not* allowed here. Wow! That could be heavy karma for Hari Das, maybe, but at least the “stolen” book, published in the West, reached numerous others and me, turning us onto Babaji. Many books published in India seldom leave that subcontinent, and the printing quality generally sucks.

“That still blows me away that Babaji’s picture did not burn up in your house fire.”

“Well, it sure made more of a believer out of me, to say the least. However, the mystery of Babaji gets more interesting, my institutionalized friend. Are you still with me?”

“Do I have any choice?”

Standing high above the ashram proper was a lovely, lonely isolated temple. When I asked about it, I was told that it was built back in 1986, when many believed Babaji had reappeared again here, as Balak Baba or Baby Shiva. Ironically, Balak was driven away, when somebody died smoking datura root with him. Datura is also known as jimson or locoweed and can transport one to the ghost realms for many days and sometimes permanently. Many devotees were divided on Balak Baba’s true identity. Om Shanti, the resident interpreter at Herakhan for many years and her crew believed, without doubt, that Balak was Babaji back again in His divine *Lila* or play. She worshipped and lived up here alone, up high at this nearly forgotten temple. And I would encounter Om Shanti again, in the not-too-distant future.

Winter was definitely coming on and with no heat source here, besides the sacred *duni*, I was wearing everything I’d brought to stay warm. Brr, it was cold! Mark, my Belgium dormie, and I had become good friends. Our mutual German girlfriend Kalavati, and her young bitchy daughter, were leaving soon for Rajathasthan to visit Shastraji. She asked if we’d like to join them. Yes!! Shastraji is way up there on the *must meet* list. We had all talked about attending the huge Kumbha Mela festival that was about to begin. What a perfect chance to see Shastraji en route. Kalavati had formal acceptance somehow and assured Mark and me that we’d be welcomed too. I sure hope so. Why do I even doubt? But I’ve never hung out with a saint before. Before leaving Herakhan, I found Kalavati a thin rock *lingam* in the riverbed. I’m sure she probably still cherishes it today. After saying goodbyes to our yogic friends, we left by the river trail, instead of the easy bus route. It was much prettier by far, but also sad, as we saw our magical abode slowly fade back into the dream landscape, where it eternally exists. All I could think was, “thank you God,

for showing me heaven on earth and showering me with your blessings.” I felt like my heart was *very* open- almost too open. This trip has been one miracle and blessing after another. I *so* needed this experience in my life; a real dream come true. I will treasure the memory of Herakhan forever and ever!

When the trail left the river for the woods, we encountered a tribe of about twenty large monkeys. They easily could have overtaken us. This was truly scary to face such intelligent primates on their own turf. We all began chanting the mantra, of course. Babaji had stated that it has more power than a thousand atomic bombs; all things can be accomplished through it. The monkeys totally left us alone, thank God! From Haldwani, we took a crammed packed train back to Delhi and rented rooms in the traveler’s area of town. Now, I learned that the YMCA had been a major rip off! Here, I was getting a nice room with warm running water, plus my own shower and toilet, for \$3.50 per night, instead of \$10.00! This hotel was *way* better and had a tri-level outdoor café on the roof, which overlooked Delhi’s sprawling city life below. There is no personal space down below, but there was in my room and occasionally at the roof top café.

“Personal space is *so* needed. There sure isn’t much here in prison,” commented Larkins.

“Yeah, I know. Both India and prison are a lot alike in that way. Everybody sees everything.”

So what’s it all about...

After some rest, we pooled our rupees for a cab ride to Rajgarh, the city of kings. Our ancient Ambassador cab threw a left rear wheel, right where I was seated. We luckily avoided a fatal accident. The sheered-off wheel shot off like a rocket into a small village, scattering people out of its rapid path. We switched cabs at this point, to continue our pilgrimage to Shastraji. This one made it there safely. Rajgarh is an ancient

walled-in city, dating back 600 hundred years to a time when Moguls ruled India. Many buildings were washed in blue and the colorful Rajasthan women wore numerous bangles and mirrored fabric. In this desert province of India, camels were a common sight too. However, American hippies like me apparently were not. When I walked up the hill to examine the ancient wall, kids continually followed me, asking me my name and where I came from. The kids here reminded me of the flies in Fiji; always on you!

Babaji had stated that Shastraji was the wisest man on earth and a saint. Now that's a heavy one! So, what's it all about, Shastraji? You lived with Babaji His whole time back on earth. I was asked if I'd like a reading from Babaji, which he could tap into on a silver bracelet that Babaji had given him. Sure, why not. Could I tape-record it? Yes. I was told that I had had a tragic accident and should have died. Babaji had saved me. I had never said a word to Shastraji about my twenty-foot fall from grace. Babaji had appeared to me twice in this life, he stated, but I had failed to recognize Him.

“What a pity,” Kalavati said into my tape recorder.

However, Babaji was coming again soon, Shastraji predicted. Maybe next time I'd hopefully recognize Him. I *do* remember a mind-blowing incident that occurred at Tony's coffee shop in Fairhaven, Bellingham. There was a young boy, called Mescalero, who'd arrived from the Southwest. He appeared to be totally crazy, and nobody dared sit at his table. Nobody would sit there, that is, but me. I noticed that this boy was extremely beautiful and was wearing a leather fringe coat that looked like it belonged in a museum. He also appeared to be having a discourse with deceased U.S. presidents Lincoln and Washington on the astral realms. After I studied his piercing eyes, he jumped up, spun around quickly, and from out of nowhere materialized a large photo of Babaji. Then he asked me if I knew Herakhan Babaji? Here He was, in the guise of a crazy kid! I said “yes” and pulled out the same exact picture from my wallet. Then, I said the mantra- *Om Namaha Shivaya* and Mescalero/Babaji repeated it back with strong emphasis on

the word, *Na-ma-ha*. Shastraji disclosed that I'd been Baba's woodcutter incarnations ago. He then stated that I've been spiritual since birth, my concentration is like stone and I care nothing for material wealth. My mind and heart are working together. They are one. Wow. I then displayed three photos of Sri Ram. He studied each photo and asked if they were of the same boy? Yes. Could he give me a reading on Sri from the photos? Yes, again. Shastraji stated Sri had been a king in ancient India, Chandra Gupta, and it was my great fortune that he had chosen me for his father. Ironically, this king was very devoted to the Hindu god, Ram and ushered in the golden age of India's history. Kalavati showed Shastraji the thin *lingam* I'd recently given her. He saw old Babaji's face in the rock and pressed Kalavati's third eye until she was crying. I guess she finally saw the image too. It can be a bit weird being around such a respected "saint," as it's easy to give your own personal power and self integrity away.

Shastraji had a semi-motel, for lack of better words, for visiting devotees. As he was expanding for more visitors, a lot of construction was going on. In my room, I discovered a drawer filled with hundreds of Babaji photos he'd collected over his fourteen years of service. I sat enraptured for hours. I was permitted to take one picture home, to be copied and then sent back. I adore this picture of a young Shastraji sitting at Babaji's feet. Babaji stated that His pictures are sacred and to be respected, as He visits where His pictures are placed.

"Maybe if you had a photo here, he'd come. Is that right?" questioned Larkins.

"Don't get hung up on the physical. Babaji is all about the heart, where He resides. On other levels, I am sure He has been here... probably a lot!"

Shastraji also told me one night, "You are a yogi. You know all of this already." I've always known that I knew, but somehow life in the material world makes one doubt nearly everything. Here were answers to questions I'd always wondered about. I'd come to India to give thanks and then find

out, that I already knew what I needed to know. Far out! Just trust that inner guidance, Hari Om, which speaks to you always- all ways.

Rajgarh had pillars and mausoleums all over the place. Some areas had the feel of ancient Greek ruins, with those tall columns. Kalavati and I took a walk outside the city walls one afternoon, to visit an old abandoned Hindu temple. It was sad to see sacred Hindu temple art defaced by Muslims so long ago. Much world art is religious in nature, but even *it* suffers from man's narrow mental attitudes and prejudices. As I sat on the temple floor, I felt how special it was to be here with Kalavati. We both come from such different worlds, Germany and America, and end up here. Later, Kalavati gave me an aura cleansing, in a technique known as *jara*. I was swept with a bundle of peacock feathers, while she repeated specific mantras. Shastraji had taught her this ancient mode of healing. Before leaving for Banares, and then onto the Kumbha Mela gig, he told us all that we would see many, many Babas. Then he put his open palm on my medulla oblongata and repeated, "Be happy" three times, before I bent over to get in the cab. Is this what it's all about, Shastraji? Sounds easy, but after two failed marriages and so many heavies, can I *ever* find happiness alone?

"Can you? Even though we are surrounded by so many inmates 24/7, I still feel alone here," complained Larkins.

"I think all alcoholics feel that way. We seem to think that nobody can identify with us, but many can. I know I'm still learning to be alone with myself. I hope it doesn't take a whole lifetime to master it!"

We took another dusty cab ride back to Agra, this time seeing the Taj Mahal under moonlight- spectacular! I drank three beers, but they only brought me down. Alcohol and India just don't mix. The next day we all trained south on the N E Flier to Banares or Shiva City, known now, again, by its former name of Varanasi. Way back, originally, it was known as Kashi. This time we traveled first class, enjoying a five course Indian meal for forty-five cents. The rest of the train resembled a

packed cattle car. However, Kalavati's young daughter Alexandra was sugared out and crying a lot, getting on my nerves. Her mother gave her no attention. Why would you bring a young child to India?

"Why? Hell no! That is just crazy to even consider," answered Bunkie.

Anyway, Varanasi is death row for believers. Hindus believe that to die and/or be cremated here, frees one from the endless cycles of death and rebirth. As Shiva city, there are about 800 temples here and over 500 of those are dedicated to Lord Shiva. Right now, this was a short one-day stopover en route to Allahabad, where opening day of the Kumbha Mela was happening. Kalavati had been here before and hated Varanasi for some reason unbeknownst to me. I fell in love with this city immediately. I couldn't *wait* to return! I bought a gray wool coat here for warmth and much beautiful batik of the gods for souvenirs. We were escorted to shops by a fine teenager named Raju. He didn't hustle us. We then, fortunately, got a seat on the overcrowded buses, headed for the largest assemblage of humanity on the planet.

"Like how many people were there?"

"More than you could ever believe, Larkins."

This was the adult dose of....

This Mela was the *ardh* or six-year festival, with only ten million sadhu, holy men and spiritual seekers, compared to the twelve-year cycle Maha Kumbha Mela that often reaches even greater numbers, like up to seventy million souls. It is believed that this Kumbha Mela has been going on as far back as nearly 3500 BC. To even *be* here, is the equivalent of a thousand other pilgrimages! As I couldn't smoke on the sardine-style packed bus, I ate charis like candy on the way there. When we approached the confluence of the Ganges, Saraswati and

Yamuna Rivers, my heart nearly jumped out of my chest. My good God! Mahadeva! This gig made a Rainbow gathering look like a small cocktail party. This was the adult dose of Ripley's *Believe It or Not*.

"You've got to be kidding me. There were actually ten million there?" exclaimed Larkins.

"No, I'm not kidding, at all. It's so big that it can actually be seen, from satellites in outer space. It's like two miles wide and seven miles long!"

We each got our own bicycle rickshaw, as we were packing a lot of luggage along. Mark lent me his *chimtah* – a huge tweezers-looking tambourine instrument. I used it for jamming with the holy songs blaring from the bell speakers atop telephone poles. The energy of this opening night was as intense as it gets and loud- very loud. I've never felt anything even close to this and I've been to many concerts, including seeing *The Beatles* three times! We had copies of a shrunk-down map covering 200,000 acres with street names. We were trying to locate Babaji's camp, in this monstrous, moon- lit city of canvas tents and intense noise. It would take our poor, frustrated rickshaw *wallahs* over two hours to locate the *Om Namah Shivaya* tents – ironically just down the road from Yogananda's Yogoda Satsanga Society camp. We were located at Moarie Road and Sangum Crossing on this Friday the 13th, February full moon, opening night, 1995. The rush doesn't quit here. There is just *too* much happening all the time.

"I can't even imagine such a scene. I'd never want to be there!"

"Well Larkins, to each his own. I don't think I'd enjoy Las Vegas much, but I loved most every minute of this gig, for quite awhile."

When my poor driver finally paused in total confusion, exhaustion and desperation, the large crowd around me suddenly opened up, like Moses parting the Red Sea. A male figure was approaching me and the closer he got, the faster the

changes occurred inside of me. I felt like I was in the Twilight Zone again. My mind slowed way down and the only internal sensing I remember, knew that this man here, now in front of me, knew everything about me- good and bad and about those ten grams of hash I'd eaten on the bus ride here. This was Babaji, in person and this time, I *finally* recognized Him! He could have cared less about the charis I'd eaten.

“Did he say anything?”

“Yeah, He did.”

With unblinking, piercing black eyes, He looked deeply into me and then asked in perfect English, “Are you having fun?” I couldn't find my voice to reply. He wore a wool sweater and *topi* cap, which He was noted for in His previous incarnation as old Herakhan Baba. Then He melted into the crowd, quickly disappearing. It has been said that Babaji always attends every Kumbha Mela, in some form or another.

“This is just too much, Rideout,” exclaimed Larkins. “Do you actually expect me to believe all this?”

Suddenly, the sights and sounds of the Mela hit me full force again, like waking up from a dream or pressing *play* after a DVD has been on *pause*. Mark and Kalavati were behind me, oblivious to what had just transpired. They were still upset as to how we would *ever* find our Herakhan camp amongst ten million busy souls.

Before we finally did locate our haven of refuge, the crowd began prostrating themselves flat out on the ground. *Now* what was happening? As we watched in bewilderment, here came six of the largest decorated elephants I'd ever seen. On top of each sat ancient-looking kings or maharajas, looking like they'd just ridden across India in some time warp to even be here. I wanted to scream my guts out! Yes! Here was the Eternal India of my childhood dreams. At the Herakhan camp, we were welcomed with open arms and loaded *chillums*. We were among the very first to arrive into this sanctuary of peace- to finally be separated physically from the tumultuous masses

of the Mela and have some semblance of personal space. Mark and I had our own large army tent, perfect for soldiers of God. We decorated our space with the newly purchased batiks. A thick straw ground covering was our mattress. It actually seemed like a modern day miracle that we ever even found this small camp, amongst the hundred of thousands of other such tent compounds. A beautiful Italian Madonna named Titti was our acting *pujari* for camp worship services. There was a separate tent here, serving as the temple compound. I lent Titti Sri Ram's bronze Ganesh statue I'd bought in Varanasi. She'd bathe the small elephant daily at 4 a.m., and then apply fresh *chundun* and the sacred silk thread to it. This was a great blessing that I wanted for my young, faraway son. I prayed that maybe *someday* he would come to understand the significance of my journey here, and come to know that he is *always* with me- even though we may be far apart.

"Boy, I can tell you love your son."

"More than you'll ever know, Larkins. More than you'll ever know."

Squatting Indian style, outside our compound in the fog, was a white dreadlocked devotee, smoking charis. I met him the next morning and we became fast friends. His name was Bert, from East Berlin, and when the wall came down, he'd left to explore a world so long denied to him. He introduced me to his older girlfriend Petra, and fellow German friends, Effie and his step-son Robert. How I loved my new crazy, dogmatic German family. And boy could these guys smoke, both charis and tobacco to the extreme! I would awaken at 3:30 a.m. to their coughs, as they fired up the clay *chillum* pipe, loaded with tobacco and mucho hash. I'd never smoked tobacco in my forty-six years, except once in prayer at Sri's peyote meeting and then again at the Mothers Day meeting. This time, I got very sick. I felt like I'd turned green and literally couldn't move, as the buzz was *so* strong. I asked if we could possibly skip the tobacco. Absolutely not, as this was the way it is always prepared in chillum etiquette. It says so in the Vedas! After about three days of such smoking, I slowly adapted to the

strongest addictive herb on earth, tobacco. The Native Americans say that tobacco is to be used *only* for prayers to the Creator. If it is abused, sickness will result. What a simple truth. Look at how many millions of people tobacco is smoking! Sadly, now I was one of them.

“Jesus Rideout, I started smoking when I was fifteen, not forty-six.”

“It shows Larkins, as your heavy cough keeps many of us here, especially the Mexicans, wondering if you don’t have lung cancer. I know I’ve got to quit at some point myself, but here in prison, smoking is one of my only joys. In fact, I only have the chance to meet certain inmates in the smoking cage. But I so wish now that I’d *never* started smoking this shit. Hash was my gateway drug to tobacco, it seems. How odd is that?”

“What seems odd to me is that a health nut like you would *ever* smoke. It seems sort of out of character, if you know what I mean,” commented Larkins.

“It totally is, and something I need to overcome in this lifetime. I now *know* what it is like to *be* a smoker; you’re trapped in a prison of a different sort.”

Effie was older than me and had been coming to India yearly, for over two decades. He imports goods back to Berlin for the massive weekend flea market. He also had huge dread locks that rivaled many of the sadhus here. In India, Effie was much respected -just because of his mighty mane. He wore a special turquoise ring from Tibet, said to promote hair growth. If Effie was proof of the ring’s power, think of the marketing sales over Rogaine or transplants in the West. One night, Effie pulled out his stack of photos from the previous Kumbha Mela six years ago. As I eagerly looked at his various pictures, one caught my eye. The pictured sadhu looked like Babaji, only with dreads. This was the same entity I’d seen pictured on the wall at the New Delhi Shiva temple. Effie said this sadhu was Balak Baba, the one whom the temple on the steep hill at Herakhan had been erected for.

“Do you think Balak is here, Effie?”

“Oh yeah, he’s here for sure, but good luck finding him in this crowd.”

I started my search at the center of the gig, where many red pendant sadhu prayer flags were flying. Little did I know that this was the camp area of the most extreme followers of Shiva. These were the real heavies, often considered as warriors. Many were “sky clad,” or totally nude, and had left their remote caves to walk god-only-knows how many miles just to be here. I only talked to one other American during my two-week stay here. He was a thirteen-year resident Krishna devotee, who’d obviously done his share of chanting. He’d also been to a few of these Melas. How could he and I be the only Yanks here? I wondered if my home country still existed, as these odds were stupendous. There must be other Americans here. Having an American at one’s camp brought prestige, I was told. So wherever I walked, I was always called over to smoke and hang out for awhile- like maybe I had red, white and blue *chundun* on my forehead.

Some of the roads here were wider and much cleaner than the paved city streets of Delhi. Garbage was meticulously picked up, as we were all treading on holy ground. If only the rest of India could learn from this micro environment. Sadly, DDT was sprayed liberally to keep infection down. And fleas seemed to be breeding in our tent straw, biting my face and arms nightly. The numerous chai shops here were as large as taverns back home, while circus-sized domed tents held live plays, with children dressed as Hindu gods and acting out their scriptural stories. The International Rainbow Family actually had a camp here, but I didn’t find any more Americans there. Barnum and Bailey, plus Buffalo Bill Cody, couldn’t hold a candle to this show! Sometimes I saw sadhus who appeared to be right out of the bar scene in *Star Wars* or maybe *The Night of the Living Dead*. In the privacy of my tent each night, I tried again, in vain, to record all I’d seen and experienced that day. And *oh*, how I missed my son, wondering what he was doing, while I’m here at the world’s largest freak show. The continual

sound of a screaming voice, reading a roster of all the attending holy men and lost children, blared away eighteen hours a day. One set of constantly repeated syllables became an inside joke between me and the Germans.

“That would drive me nuts,” interrupted Larkins.

“Yeah, it does get on your nerves. But it is *so* typical of India. It just doesn’t quit.”

One night, I was approached by a poor elderly female devotee dressed in orange. She asked me to buy her some prayer beads. I chose a nice sandalwood mala and when I handed them to her, we both burst out crying. It was truly a divine moment; a holy encounter, as I gave my gift to God and saw how overjoyed Divine Mother was to receive it. The gift truly is in giving, not receiving, as they say. This experience was very humbling for me and opened my heart much more. This poor lady could probably never hope to purchase a mala, so we both had a dream come true. Again, India is not for everybody. She will blow your heart wide open at times. The lessons here don’t come easily, but they last a lifetime. I love India!

“I think I’d hate it,” remarked Larkins.

“You probably would have a hard time, being as anal and judgmental as you are.”

Mark and Kalavati did not participate or approve of the *charis* ritual. Both were in recovery, whatever that means. Hence, India and this Mela were much harder for them to accept, without judgment. I literally cruised through situations that left them angry and/or frustrated. India was taking its toll on them. I really pitied Kalavati’s young daughter. This was no place for a Western child at age six. She was only receiving much pain, on many levels, and her mother was constantly realizing the mistake she’d made by bringing her. Slowly, more devotees of Baba’s tribe filtered into our camp daily. However, during my stay, there were only twelve disciples-total. Is this symbolic or what? Ironically, the Yogananda

disciples down the street seemed to ignore us. Wasn't it Babaji who had sent Yogananda to the West in 1920? Sadly, most Indians here had no idea that Babaji had taken form again in 1970, in a cave at the base of Mount Kailash. There are *so* many Babas, meaning *father* in India, that even they get confused. When I'd show elderly sadhu my photo of young Babaji, they usually replied, *Mahadeva*, meaning great God, Lord Shiva. They knew and they knew, I knew.

One morning, another Herakhandi Austrian schoolteacher named Silvia and I walked through the extreme sadhu compound. There, she recognized Balak Baba! We ran back to our camp and returned with doubting Titti, to be misled in a crazy wild goose chase searching for Balak. When Titti, our unbeliever, gave up frustrated and walked back towards our compound, Silvia and I were permitted into Balak's presence. Surprisingly, Om Shanti from Herakhan was there too, and remembered our time together back at the temple on the hill. In her perfect English, she again claimed that Balak Baba was indeed *thee* Babaji; resurfaced, and we were led here, now, specifically to receive darshan- the vision of a saint. Oriental looking Balak was busy filling the *chillum* for his guru, who strongly resembled Sri Yukteshwar, Yogananda's guru. India can drive a man crazy! Soon, we were given *Prasad*. This was to be considered a sign of acceptance, according to Om Shanti. Well, at least I'd found the needle in the haystack from Brother Effie's photo. Now, would the real Babaji *please* stand up?!

"I see what you mean about the mystery and controversy of Babaji. This is all too much for me. I'll just stick with Jesus and trust the Bible."

"That too, my friend is full of controversy and mystery. The Bible can be interpreted on many levels. It is a good beginner's book for people like you, however."

One observation I made here, about myself and my nationality is that we seem to corner the market on a good sense of humor. The Germans seem pretty rigid, dogmatic and commanding - you'll never win an argument - and everybody

knows what the arrogant French are like. While I was heading back to lunch late one morning, a balding sadhu seated full lotus on a real tiger skin called out to me.

“Come, now!”

“No Baba, I’ve already smoked enough.”

“Come!”

He said he had mentally called to me for days, as I often walked by his camp. He asked which country I came from, and after I told him, he began speaking in perfect English slang. This dude was hip as shit! He told me to follow the ways of our Red Man, as they were the holy ones for America. Was this the lesson and path I’d been looking for in years of spiritual reading, practice, worshipping and searching? I flashed on the peyote church back home and God’s presence in that tipi ceremony. I felt a deep longing to return to the tipi again. I *hadn’t* come to India *seeking* God, after the lessons learned in the ‘75 Ecuador fiasco with my first wife. I had *solely* come to experience Herakhan and give thanks there to the Divine, as I’d promised Babaji when the house sold *so* miraculously.

So now, after two weeks of seeing thousands of sadhu and holy men, dressed in that ocher orange with dreads touching the ground, I began to feel disillusioned. This wasn’t my world, as trippy as it was to see. Who did I think I was, playing yogi? We all play *many* roles in our lives. I played many just in my childhood, acting out army, civil war, cowboys and Indians and Vikings. I’d already ruined my knee from advanced yoga postures in ’74, and after years of meditation and chanting, I wasn’t certain now if I felt any closer to God than a non-believer. Maybe this was the “dark night of the soul” that St. John of the Cross wrote about. Even after profound spiritual experiences, if aided by “drugs,” every day God just seems *so* ordinary. It’s often easy to not see or remember Him. Mark and Kalavati had already left our camp, leaving me feeling very lonely. Now, it was time for me to move on. Bert offered me a tab of acid, but I refused. I couldn’t even imagine

tripping here. I'd never find my way home in this cluster fuck of spiritual soup. I'd finally seen enough sadhus for the rest of my life. I knew too that I would always be a Western Baba, as they had called me here- a sadhu forever, in my own unique way. A French friend even took a picture of me, as I came out of the Ganga on sacred bathing day when certain planets align auspiciously. I must say he truly captured Hari Om, on film, in a glorious magic moment of eternity.

"I've got to hand it to you Rideout, you are different. Hell, who wouldn't be after all you've been through, and you've still got more to experience here. I just wonder where your head and beliefs will be at *after* prison. This place changes one just like India; you'll never be the same. So, what happened after you decided to leave the Mela?"

When a holy cow with....

Back in ancient Varanasi, I was told to stay at Asi ghat, the furthest bank upriver from the crazy downtown area. There was more Shanti or peace there. Even *The Beatles* had experienced Asi ghat. As I planned on being here for about a month, Asi ghat sounded good to me. Ghats are the concrete steps or banks that lead down to the Ganges River, goddess Ganga. The whole two mile-long walk to town was traversing these myriad horizontal steps. There are also many long exotic names and historic events associated with different Ghats here. Ten horses were sacrificed centuries ago on Dasashwamedh ghat. Varanasi is possibly one of the oldest cities on earth, dating back 3,500 years. Many of the Ghats had animal and human excrement spread amongst the drying laundry and colorful saris. One sign proclaimed "No Spitting," and below it, sat piles of human shit. Maybe the sign was misspelled. The filthy, highly polluted river had flower petals from ceremonies floating by, mixed in with laundry detergent, toothpaste and human ashes and body parts from the cremation grounds. I walked by both cremation grounds daily for a

month, seeing 150 bodies a day consumed by Shiva's flames. This was *really* something to see and smell at night, as I floated in a rented boat down India's holiest river. At times, it reminded me of scenes out of *Apocalypse Now*. Back in town, stretchers with the newly deceased were carried through the narrow alleys and labyrinth mazes, to the chanting of Shree Ram mantras. I even saw a procession carrying chandlers, extension cords and a portable generator on wheels to light their nocturnal way. This was a marriage party. Only in India! Again, Varanasi is truly the place to die, for a Hindu anyway. Sadly, many Westerners have nearly died here too, from the contaminated water. And I could have died of rabies from the pariah dogs, which hang around cremation grounds feeding on unburned body parts. They nearly did me in one evening, as I walked home at sunset. When the sun sets here, it gets very dark, very fast. Then the feral dogs from hell come out to prowl. I had no stick with which to defend myself and made the mistake of telling these evil mongrels to F off. They understood that universal insult and were nearly upon me. Instantly, I began chanting the mantra, just like with the monkeys, and felt protected as if by an invisible shield. From now on, I told myself, I'd walk home before sunset and not have to put the mantra and myself through such ordeals! Another Varanasi observation I made, is that only one or two banks will cash American Express traveler's checks. I had to stand in line a long time to receive my huge, thick stack of rupees, stapled together with large metal staples. Then I noticed a sign behind the teller that read, *Work is worship*. Karma yoga is very popular in India, from ashrams to banks.

"That saying sounds like something your Babaji would say."

"I couldn't agree more, Larkins. Karma yoga is work. And work should be thought of as karma yoga."

In Asi ghat, Bert and Petra rented a room in a hotel next to mine. I was elated they were here. Their room faced an ancient temple loaded with carved relief of the Hindu gods. Mine was painted yellow, faced the river and was run by a local yogi of some repute. Many of the temples here are *so* old, that they're

literally slipping into the river and lean at angles that resemble the famous tower in Pisa, Italy. Many say the temples lean because they are praying to the river goddess, Ganga. In a country like India, that makes sense. Next to our hotels was a new outdoor café, just opening and catering to the culinary tastes of burned-out Western travelers wanting a taste of home. Great! Except their attempt at pizza was like nothing I'd ever seen or tasted. Jesus, what is this? When they served spaghetti, it came with a spoon. We were their very first customers, so we gave them a lot of flack and feedback. You know, just trying to help. It was good to taste brown rice and bread again. Next to this café sat a small wooden cupboard, which was home to a local sadhu named Hari Hara. With his recently shaven head and ash-smeared body, our new friend resembled a ghost. He displayed earlier photos of himself, when he had dreads and a beard to his waist. He'd spent many years in a cave, living naked at the Himalayan source of the Ganga. I gave this friendly sadhu my new wool coat and many Shiva stickers to decorate his small shack. We had our pictures taken together, which would be relevant later. Hari Hara was my buddy. I also made a bunch of new friends in Varanasi's Old City- a rabbit warren maze of blind alleys, stairs and corridors. They lived in an ancient Muslim domed tower, which overlooked the river in three directions and was considered very auspicious. Here too, I met Vanessa Ramos, a Canadian photographer who'd practiced intense Buddhist meditation at Bodhgaya. I told her all about the Kumbha Mela, as we spent two days together- I played guitar and Vanessa took pictures. [Ironically, six years later Vanessa helped film the Maha Kumbha Mela in the DVD documentary, *Shortcut to Nirvana*. Tragically, she was killed a year later. Little did I know that she was only nineteen years old when I met her? I can at least still see this beautiful soul on my copy of the film. And Vanessa is included on my prayer list of all the departed friends in my life. Sadly, the list just keeps on growing.]

The narrow weaving alleyways in Varanasi can get a person lost. In one small nook, I bought some incredible sandalwood oil from a very old vendor. This guy looked ancient. When a

holy cow with large horns negotiated these narrow corridors, I nearly got stabbed by his swinging head. One word-of-mouth shop was noted for its *banglasi*- a yogurt hash milkshake for eighty cents. I'd drink two and then jump back into the ocean current of slowly moving humanity. Most people can hardly handle one. Often, the power goes out in town, so the smell of gasoline and sounds of loud generators adds spice and noise levels to the street scene. I found stores selling sitars and tablas cheaply, that musicians in the West would beg for. Yet again, I found more incredible batiks, rudraksha malas and finally, a Narmada lingam. These special geological phallic eggs are perfect in their symmetry, like an egg, and have distinct ocher Shiva markings. They are said to be tumbled by the Narmada River and/or created by a meteor that hit India long ago. These lingams were difficult to find, even here in India. However, years later I'd see them in mass at new age shops in Spokane and Sedona, Arizona- exported spiritual paraphernalia.

"I was literally escorted by the hand of an elderly shopkeeper, Larkins, at night, to meet Varanasi's greatest astrologer. I didn't even want a reading or this psychic hustle, but got a short one anyway."

"Did he tell you anything that you don't already know?"

I was told many facts I already knew but also learned the stars prediction of my being a teacher at age sixty-two and a sadhu in my seventies. I would live to be very old, like my Rebel great grandfather, and my time with women was over, as all I needed now was God. What he didn't tell me was just how much I'd *really* need God! While walking towards the main burning ghat, Manikarnika Ghat, I took a photo from faraway of the rising cremation smoke. No cameras are allowed near the flaming dead. A strange man threatened to call the police, over my camera, if I didn't give him three hundred rupees. Luckily, a Good Samaritan, who knew this heroin addict's hustle on unsuspecting travelers, rescued me. Samaritan was a wealthy businessman, owning Varanasi's largest silk factory. I chose to visit his warehouse for chai and walked away with yet more batiks and a silk patchwork quilt, valued at about four

hundred dollars. I paid eighty bucks. This would hopefully be Sri's heirloom someday. It totally looks like India- exotic, large and multicolored. Next, the silk Samaritan accompanied me to the post office, to send my prize home. Here, baksheesh was paid to the postal clerk to insure I'd actually receive *my* trophy three months later. The quilt was wrapped into a light canvas, sewn shut and then hot wax was dripped on the seams. This would prevent theft or possible replacement by a lesser quality product. You *always* need to do the post office dance here, or you may not receive what you actually purchased.

"What a hassle! Or I guess I could say what a hustle," remarked Larkins.

"Yeah, it can be but it's also well worth it."

While walking home along the downtown Ghats, with their numerous sun shade umbrellas, I noticed an elderly balding river boatman who had grey ear hair about three inches long, with eyebrows to match. Then I encountered a Hatha yogi who looked to be well over 100 years old. Where *do* they grow these people? On his blanket next to the river, he performed complicated advanced yoga contortions. His legs were wrapped behind his neck and his arms were extended towards the sun in prayer- a human rocking prayer with gray dreads over seven feet long. People threw coins on his blanket, which his upturned eyes failed to notice. He was not of this world any longer. These amazing sadhus, who own practically nothing, allow the faithful to fulfill their dietary needs. To the superstitious Hindu, helping a holy man brings a blessing, as these fakirs, it is believed, can easily put a curse on the uncaring. Something needs to be said here too, in defense of India's sacred cows. Most Western minds have no idea of the holy cows' role in the circle of life. He is usually ridiculed and the brunt of many jokes but here he serves a distinct purpose. Cows are the garbage men and clean-up crews, and their crap gets flattened into what looks like hamburger patties, to be burned as fuel for cooking and heat. Cow dung burns clean and rates high by scientists. As wood is very hard to come by here, the cow is invaluable in his service to humanity. The

roaming bands of pigs serve under the cow in garbage clean up. They're small enough to get into ditches and tight places that the larger bovine can't.

"That certainly sheds a whole new light on holy cow. Thanks for sharing."

"No problem. It seems to be my role in life."

One afternoon, Effie's stepson Robert and I took a rickshaw to Deer Park in Saranath, outside of Varanasi. This is where Buddha gave his first sermon on the mount, after becoming enlightened in Bodhgaya under the Bhodi tree. An actual grafting from this famous tree grows here, with concrete painted statues of Buddha and his boys sitting around it. Also, a huge brick stupa dominates the park, with devout Buddhists circumnavigating it in a clockwise rotation. Some take the time to lie down and actually roll around the stupa. Robert and I quickly purchased food from dispensers to feed the deer. I loved this young Robert and pictured him as Sri Ram at twenty-one. He disclosed that opinionated Effie, his stepfather, really liked me, and that was to be considered a great compliment, as Effie trusted very few. I must say that this German tribe touched my heart deeply. They were surely friends from a past incarnation, probably in India. My love and respect for them was profound, like maybe bonding with foreign friends in a foreign land makes it extra special, as we all know it will never happen again. Robert and I had lunch together at a Tibetan tent, for my first taste of yak milk. Yuk! However, these Tibetans were a very kind and humble people. They all wore their hair in long black braids and looked rugged but still exotic. Robert said they'd often just give things away, never asking for money or trying to do the Hindu hustle. I noticed that their culture and physical look have many similarities with the Navajo, who would soon be entering my life big- time.

"You've got that one right. Look at how many Navajos we've got in prison!"

"I didn't mean it that way, asshole. You'll see what I mean, all in due time."

From reading Yogananda's autobiography, I wanted to find the ancient home of Lahiri Mahasaya, old Babaji's Kriya yoga disciple of reputed fame, who'd spent his life as a house-holder in Varanasi. He was also the guru of Yogananda's guru, Sri Yukteswar. I finally located the house and met Lahiri's great, great grandson, Vindu. There were life-sized marble statues of his famous ancestral lineage, but I saw no picture of Babaji. When I asked why, he showed me the SRF generic drawing of Babaji tucked away in an obscure corner of his shrine room. That wasn't good enough for me. From my wallet, I produced a current photo of Herakhan Baba for Vindu's inspection. This is what He really looks like! He stood speechless, studying it for a long moment of silence. Then, I told him of my finding a rare book at the University of Washington's library, written by disciples of Lahiri, all claiming that Babaji's 1970 incarnation was one and the same. Here I was, an American, telling a renowned Indian yogi of unquestionable lineage about Babaji's reappearance in his own land recently. Maybe the West does have a lot to offer the East, even in spiritual matters.

"You'd think a person of his spiritual stature would have been aware of Babaji, back in a body in his own country," stated Larkins dryly.

"Well, it's like Shastraji said. There are many, many Babas in India. Babaji probably chooses who He wants to know Him anyhow."

Finally I decided to give Varanasi a break and take a twenty-three hour train and bus ride to Mussoorie. I planned to visit my British friend Ian at his International Girls' School. On these train rides you must always chain your pack to your bunk, or it will be gone. Of course, those dark Indian eyes stare continually, as if they'd never seen a white person before. What century am I living in? Again, this is India. Upon arriving in Rishikesh, I tried calling Ian. Thank God the phones actually work here. However, we must have gotten our wires crossed during my first few days in Delhi, as Ian was presently on leave back in England. Well, we *were* drinking a lot, as we made our plans. So, I never got to see Ian's beautiful

girl students or the snows of the Himalayas. To have been *so* close to the abode of extreme sadhu and mountain climbers, and not get to see it, was very disappointing. Darn it!

“Did you ever see Ian again?” asked Larkins.

“No. What a shame. I really did want to play guitar for all those girls too. That would have been quite an experience, you know.”

“Well, it looks like alcohol sabotaged that dream, my friend.”

“You’re right, Larkins. It did.”

Rishikesh was spiritual marketing at its best. Many spiritual tourists come here for the ashram experience. I wanted to puke, as Herakhan was *way* superior to this highly visited supermarket... in my mind anyway. The Ganga or Ganges up here resembled my sacred Nooksack River, back in Bellingham. Most of the holy men that usually reside here were still at the Kumbha Mela, but I did find the abode of famous deceased yogi Shivananda. Again, as I sat outside the ashram gate, I said my prayers for Sri, Joya and all my faraway friends. I’ve always felt that prayers are more potent in such sacred places. Are they? Who knows? Maybe we just give our power over to God more in such places. I do know that I give meaning to everything I see. Near Rishikesh wooden bridge, I purchased a rudraksha mala of very small, pure seeds; hard to find. Also, one particular devotional tape was being played everywhere I walked, so I purchased that too. Later, this music would always remind me of Rishikesh. Music has a way of doing that. We all know. When I was browsing at a bookshop near the wooden bridge, a book entitled *Amoroli* fell off an above shelf, nearly hitting my head. This book covered the science of urine therapy. How ironic, especially after my introduction by the chiropractor at Babaji’s Nebraska ashram. Needless to say, I purchased the book. This must be a sign that I should try my own liquid. But for now, I would hold off. I needed to study this manual to get up the courage up for that first drink of the immortal nectar.

“Did you finally try it?”

‘We’ll get to that later, Larkins. I wasn’t ready yet.’”

Here was Divine Mother again....

After one cold miserable night at a commercial ashram in Rishikesh, I bussed south to Haridwar, called the gateway to heaven. This city too hosts the Kumbha Mela on certain yearly cycles. It also marks where the rushing Ganga slows down in its advance onto the plains of India. This is symbolized in pictures of Lord Shiva. At the top of his piled up dreads is the face of goddess Ganga spitting water. Shiva caught her in his hair to slow the rushing water- hence, Haridwar. Vertical iron poles are even stuck into the riverbank, so that faithful bathers don’t get swept away. Here, I finally got to see a rudraksha tree, which resembled a eucalyptus. I also scored some fresh seeds, as they were scraped from a shell with bluish pulp inside. I see now why they are *so* rare. To obtain 108 seeds of the same size and quality is amazing. I purchased an orange silk altar cloth with the Shiva mantra written in Sanskrit. This would look beautiful back home, wrapped around my dotara’s neck, above the tuning pegs. I also saw the most beautiful carved black statue of goddess Ganga I’d ever imagined, at a temple next to the famous river of her name. Boy, these Indians take the gods and goddesses seriously.

Upon leaving my hotel for the long train ride back to Varanasi, I had an accidental fall off the steps, severely spraining my ankle and smashing my head into the wheel of a rickshaw. I might as well have broken the ankle. When taken to a turbaned doctor, by the distraught rickshaw *walla*, I was only given pain pills and told that a break would have been better. Great! I was in horrible pain again, reminding me of my major accident. Next, I was wheeled in an antique wheelchair to the train station. How was I ever going to get onto this train? Luckily, a female German angel, seeing my situation, helped me out with my cumbersome backpack. Angels seem to work

twenty-four hours a day, even in India. It almost takes divine aid to even find which train car is assigned to you here. But somehow, she did find my name typed on a posted paper with hundreds of others. India, amazingly, does have an order to its chaos. I got on the train in eternal gratefulness, to this loving soul who appeared out of nowhere to help me... thank you, girl.

Once in my berth, I swallowed the doctor's pain and swelling pills. Then I ate some bhang, a semi-hashish candy that Effie gave me. I slept over twelve hours. When I finally arrived back at Asi ghat, I could barely walk to Bert and Petra's flat. My ankle was killing me. This really sucked. Haven't I suffered enough? I knocked on their door and yelled "mm hengh," our inside joke on the non-stop blaring voice from the Kumbha Mela speakers. They were shocked to see me back so soon, and insisted that I live with them. It was great to reunite with my German friends again. One nice thing about traveling alone – it gives one the opportunity to meet some incredible fellow travelers, without attachments.

"You could say that about prison too. Think of all the characters you've met here."

"Sadly, most here have never even left Arizona or had many life experiences, besides drugs and alcohol. They are all suffering the pain of their karma. It's a whole different ball game, Larkins, when you're out of your own country, free as a lark with only a backpack, passport and travelers checks."

During this stage of Varanasi and still nursing my swollen ankle, I got seriously ill. The one nice side effect of illness or injury in India is that people *finally* leave you alone. They don't try to constantly hustle you, when you are obviously hurting. I had eaten a salad, if you can call it that, which had probably been washed with Ganges water. This is *not* good news. More experienced fellow travelers finally told me to seek professional help, as they saw my health declining rapidly. I had an Indian chap take me to the home of Varanasi's chief Aryuvedic doctor. He taught at the University here. Yoga came from Aryuveda, the science of life. I personally feel that

this complete system holds one of the best handles on health truth. I was given packets of powdered herbs, in folded newsprint, to be taken daily with honey. I recovered my strength very quickly and was not ill again on my continuing journey. Author and speaker, Dr. Deepak Chopra helped heal dying Naomi Judd, as reported in national news, through Aryurvedic medicine. Sadly, pharmaceutical companies, along with insurance conglomerates, still seem to rule our ailing world.

“Right along with prisons,” commented Larkins.

“You think that now, because we’re here. But we deserve this incarceration. You know that, Larkins. We screwed up.”

Petra, Bert and I rented a small boat one afternoon, and paddled across the Ganga to the other shore. There, we saw over one hundred large vultures congregating on the beach area. Bert slowly advanced, stooped over wearing a loin cloth, until he was permitted to squat among their feathered clan. As babies aren’t cremated in India, they are thrown into the sacred river. This clean-up crew waits to begin their karmic job, kind of like the cows. All of this is, of course, a part of Shiva’s life cycle of creation, preservation and destruction. Bert and Petra were leaving soon, and I would be by myself again, to attend the Shivarati festival back at Herakhan ashram. Alone now, I went to hang out with Hari Hara, seated on the lip of his wooden closet shack. I would be taking off within the hour, and wanted to say goodbye to my most favorite sadhu. I loved this guy. Suddenly, I saw an ex-girlfriend’s double walk by me, headed for the new outdoor café. I told Hari Hara that I was hungry. He laughed, knowing well my true intentions. I had to meet this goddess. As we were the only two seated there, it wasn’t hard. Her name was Simona, from Rome, and she’d been to India three times now. Our brief encounter was like two ships passing in the night; a quick cosmic romantic fantasy. We hit it off instantly, of course, with an attraction and energy level that was *very* intense. I felt like I was seated next to my ex-girlfriend! Talk about a look alike!

“Which girlfriend is this?” asked Larkins.

“She’s the one that I didn’t disclose much about; the one that broke my heart, just prior to my relationship with Jody.”

“I remember now.”

Simona and I walked over to the ancient temple, outside Bert and Petra’s room. There, I asked her to come to Herakhan with me. How could I not, with all the cosmic juice flowing through me. She couldn’t and then disclosed a deep secret. She had been scared or abused somehow by her father and had never been able to fall in love. How sad. After she briefly heard of my love losses, she quoted, “Better to have loved and lost, than to never have loved at all.” Maybe Simona’s right with that age old truth. I probably should have gotten her address and a kiss, but I didn’t- something I still regret to this day. Here was Divine Mother again, just teasing me. When she asked my name, I said, “Do you want the English or spiritual name?” She wanted the spiritual one. God bless you, Simona, wherever you are today. Hari Om loves you eternally.

The holiest night of the Hindu year....

So here I went again, on that now familiar train ride back to Delhi, then quickly on towards Herakhan. I knew the way. In rustic Haldwani, I spent another day back at the Kailash Hotel. The owner was glad to see me again and said that another American lady would be traveling with me to Shivarati. I went to meet her. When she opened the door, I about fell over! Here was crazy Kate, whom I’d encountered back at the Nebraska ashram, singing mantras with Turkantom on guitar, during the summer of ‘93. She left a spooky memory in my mind. On our shared cab ride to Herakhan, no bus this time, she told me of her multiple personalities and the psychic testing she’d undergone as a child. This lady was a *real* trip. Her face could change 100% into another being, sometimes not even looking human. She’d been expelled from the ashram many

times before and wondered how long she'd last this time around. So did I. She also disclosed that she'd gotten pregnant by Turkantom's Italian drummer, back in Nebraska's cornfields. The baby aborted, she felt, due to a spell that the ashram owners had cursed her with. Whatever, Kate, I'm just thankful you're *not* to be a mother. One of your personalities at a time is enough for our crazy world. Ironically, Turkantom's drummer was present again at the ashram this time. I wonder how he felt about Kate's arrival.

"He probably felt like he was being stalked by her."

"I wouldn't doubt it, Larkins. Karma is karma. And Kate was Kate. I didn't see her around very long, so I think she got the boot again."

Returning to Herakhan, I was asked to help prepare *rotis* in the smoky kitchen. Usually upon arriving, you're exempt from work, due to travel fatigue. But the cooks remembered me well and insisted I join them in the kitchen. After all, I'd been here before, so you can skip all that first day bullshit. This "kitchen" wasn't much different from the smoky *bure* used for cooking in Fiji Islands. The ceiling was black from years of wood fires. It smelled like it. We cooks all chanted the mantra continuously, preparing food for over one hundred devotees. This was the joy of Karma Yoga, work done for God. Preparations were underway big time now, for the holiest night of the Hindu year-Shivarati, or the night of Shiva. As Herakhan and Mount Kailash are considered Shiva's sacred abode since antiquity, I was honored to be a part of this celebration in *such* a sacred place. I am literally in Lord Shiva's garden. Again, here comes another unforgettable experience that only India can offer. Everyone would soon be chanting the names of God, non-stop for twenty-four hours, and then taking ritual baths in the river, before sleep sometime tomorrow. Many were climbing with blazing torches in the dark up Mount Kailash, to have ceremony on the summit. Not only was this happening here, but all over India, as this is a major big night. Mahadeva is celebrated tonight! During our intense singing, lightening struck the Shiva trident, or *trishula*, atop the old 1865 temple.

This was taken as an auspicious sign, for sure. Then, right before midnight, the Austrian schoolteacher Silvia asked me to play guitar. As soon as I hit my first G chord, it began to pour rain.

“Hari Om has made it rain!” she yelled.

“Mother Mother Ocean,” I sang, as the first words to the Jimmy Buffet song rang from my lips in the pouring rain.

Would the miracles never cease? Moti Ma, a long time German devotee hung out with me as the others were chanting away. I always loved hearing her sing the *Aarati* with her buddy Ganga, the Italian lady who gave me Babaji’s vest. She suggested, as she passed a just-lit chillum to me, that I use my house sale money to live here in Herakhan. She’d obviously spent much time here and for a moment I considered the reality of it. *What* a place to live and work on yourself. Good God. But in my heart I knew that my path was to be near my son, somehow. The following day, I was asked to be a father, to give away a Scottish groom in a traditional Hindu wedding. Wow, I’m a father even here in India. He was marrying his Celtic bride, whose Welsh accent was *so* thick that I could hardly recognize her words as English. The groom had the look of a leprechaun or elf, with large ears riding at 90° angles from his shaved head. The bride could have passed for Barb Harmon’s double. This couple had actually bicycled around India, something I couldn’t even *begin* to fathom. Motor vehicles of any kind were like death traps out on the poor Indian roads. Even bus drivers perform mini puja services in front of their buses, to ask the gods for protection and safety of their passengers. And Ganesh, Shiva’s son and the “remover of obstacles,” is commonly seen on dashboards of busses. A bicycle was sure suicide in my book, but these two young souls had miraculously survived long enough to tie the knot. And they had chosen the most special place on earth to do it. Their wedding was very beautiful and exotic, complete with the *yagna* fire ceremony and offerings of rice, fruit and mantras. I was honored to stand up for this couple and sit around this sacred fire pit once again. Nothing can warm your soul like a

Vedic fire ceremony. I also met a dreadlocked Oregon hippie named Jeremiah. He was from Brittenbush, where young Sri, Joya and I had attended a goddess retreat of herbalists before our divorce. Jeremiah too, ironically, was a dear friend of Dan, who'd built our octagon and driven me to the airport! It is still a small world, even in Eternal India.

My poor ankle was slowly killing me and very swollen in its purplish color. An Italian lady, who was extremely devoted, gave me a huge baggie of sacred ash impregnated with mantras, from the still-burning *dhuni*. She strongly suggested that I find a masseur in Delhi to alleviate the swelling and apply the ash in the meantime. Before leaving, I fixed an eleven *muki* [faced] rudraksha seed to the long dreads of a ninety-year-old sadhu. He had been a boy with old Herakhan Babaji, who frequently visited his village. This particular seed, which I'd found at the Kumbha Mela, is only to be worn in *jatu* or dreadlocks. I'll never forget how he looked once his mighty mane was piled back atop his head. One lone rope of hair, tied with the rudraksha seed, hung over his face, like a bell hanging off a court jester's hat. I'd just made another special friend and I'm sure he probably still has that seed in his hair today. It is just too sad that he didn't speak English, so I could have heard his stories of old Babaji. I would have liked that a lot. I also bottled up some Gautama Ganga river water, as a gift for Hiranman back home. Holy water for sure. I know he will appreciate it, as he bathed Babaji Himself in this very water years ago. Oh God, how I'll miss this sacred place! Words can't describe Herakhan- ever. It just has to be experienced.

"I wish I could see your pictures. Maybe when you get released, we could hook up," interjected Larkins.

"Maybe we will and maybe not, Larkins. Time will tell. You know how it is with inmates. They say they'll stay in touch but most never do."

Upon departure, I rode a very bony, white horse down the riverbed, to save my aching ankle. I bid my farewells to the Center of the Universe once again. This time it felt final, like I

would never be here again. It's extremely hard to say goodbye to a place like this. Thank you, Babaji, for the guidance, protection and blessings and for the dreams come true. I had walked where few go, let alone even hear about or believe. I had finally found the Valley I'd been searching for in South America, here in the Kumon region of northern India. Oh, God, how great thou art! Thanks for the fine memories too, as they are some of my *very* best. I'll try to hold on to them for as long as I can. You never know when you might need them.

"Those are great memories, Rideout. Thanks for sharing them with me. You certainly don't seem to have any fear about opening up, my friend. You wear your heart on your sleeve."

"I've always been an open book, Larkins. Whatever you try to hide will eventually show."

So, returning to Delhi for my last time, I was surprised to find Bert, Petra, Robert and Effie packing up at a large hotel off of Caughnot Circle. They were headed back to Berlin soon and very glad to run into me one last time. I swear you meet kindred souls out there on the traveler's road. We all knew that we would *never* pass this way again. All of the Babaji devotees that I've met, known as Herakhandi, are crazy devotional birds of the same feather. Now, these German Herakhandi friends were busy stuffing *charis* up their butts in latex condoms, for transport home. As they had lots left over, I too now had way more than I even needed or wanted. After tear-filled goodbyes and promises to write, I met a young British couple back at my funky hotel. They'd just arrived in India. He looked like a member of the British rock band *Super Tramp*. She was a duplicate of stunning British actress Olivia Hussey, much too frail and pretty for India. We talked on the rooftop café that overlooked Delhi's mad scene and hanging laundry below. These naïve British kids were in severe cultural shock. Olivia couldn't imagine setting foot out the hotel's front door, into a street scene that resembled a moving packed can of sardines. Why they had even come here, I wondered. Good luck, my Limey friends, you'll definitely need it. Most women I asked hated India. The Indian men, it

seems, continually sexually harass them in subtle ways – especially blondes. The few brunettes, who could tie a sari and wave a hankie properly, seemed to be able to fit incognito with their disguise. India is definitely *not* for the weak in spirit or for those in a hurry. I had learned a lot more about patience here; something I’ve always needed to learn. India also gave me a much greater respect for life in every precious moment. So I now returned to the shop, where I’d purchased my large Shiva statue three months prior. It was safely stored upstairs-remarkable. I set it up in my hotel room and exulted in my *murti* souvenir of God. After four days back in the city, I noticed that the British couple still had not found the courage to approach that front door yet. I knocked on their door and gave Super Tramp and Olivia a large amount of black charis, as an inspiration to get moving. Later, they told me that they *had* finally taken a short walk down the street. Their journey was at least now beginning, slowly, with baby steps.

“I don’t think I could handle India, with the lack of personal space and all. I’m just not that adventurous. I’d be nervous as hell!”

“Well, like I’ve repeatedly told you Larkins, India is not for everybody; probably damn few actually.”

On my whole trip, I had kept my eyes open for a copy of the calendar art of Lord Shiva that had burned up in my house fire-the hypnotic picture that looked like it was going to come alive any moment. For one last shot, I ventured into the Paharganj District of Old Delhi and located a factory that produces many of India’s divinity calendars. I spent quality time digesting gaudy artwork, but failed to find that 1970 piece. It may have come from Nepal. I did purchase many posters cheaply here, as gifts for friends. I also managed to find a masseur in a city park who moved powerful healing energy into my still hurting, swollen ankle. He carried a diary with International testimonies of his healing skills. He sounded good alright. In fact, he sounded great. And he was. After his treatment, I could walk 75% better. My ears were cleaned free of wax with a long, thin metal spoon, as my tennis shoes were being patched

up too; by two thin Hindu boys in polyester slacks. This all happened during the same Sunday afternoon ankle healing session. The gods were *definitely* smiling on me, as I took care of my last needed business.

Then, ironically, on my last day in India, a very karmic encounter occurred. What goes around comes around. As I was walking near the Thai Air offices in New Delhi, I heard somebody saying the usual *hallo* behind me. I just ignored it as usual, until a hand tapped me softly. Turning around, I was face to face with my beloved rickshaw driver from the airport backpack retrieval of my second day. He asked me why I hadn't called him, as promised, for his chauffer service when I'd returned to Delhi. I had him now! I calmly educated him to the fact that now I *did* know India. At least I knew it a whole lot better than that first day. He had been charging me four dollars and fifty cents for a ride that should have cost forty-five cents! Mother India, you have deeply touched my heart and soul. All I can say is *Om Namah Shivaya*.

Before leaving India, one final comment needs mention. In Herakhan, I often sat up late with another German devotee, talking about Babaji and our lives. I told him of my writing Babaji in thanks for my cabin, and His reply of asking for fifteen hundred dollars. This astute devotee's insight was that Babaji was asking for His 10% real estate commission; for helping me score my cabin and property- for only fifteen thousand dollars. After all, I had written Him, thanking Him for His help in finding my land. Who knows the mysteries of this strange universe; the why and how things happen the way they do. And who knows what Babaji means sometimes?

"I think the German hit the nail on the head, as crazy as that sounds. Everything has a price. Babaji was just pressing your buttons and teaching you a lesson, Rideout," exclaimed Larkins, after hearing this testimony. "So after India, you were headed to see your friend Tim in Thailand, right? That's the guy you met in Fiji who always stayed in touch."

“Yeah, you remembered. Sometimes even you surprise me, Larkins.”

I looked forward to....

Tim Welch was there to pick me up when I arrived at Bangkok’s Donmuang Airport at 7 a.m. He and his Thai wife Aoy live in a beautiful high-rise apartment complex, with polished wooden floors and Siamese cat’s stalking in the hallways. After all, Siam was Thailand’s former name. My mind, however, was still in India. And my heart was aching from leaving. I was now adjusting to this new culture, while downing cold Singhai beer and talking my head off to Tim. It had been years since we’d seen each other. We had a lot of catching up to do. Jumping from India to Bangkok was quite a shock. Bangkok is first-world modern, compared to third world India. They took me out to dinner my first night at a huge outdoor restaurant, where we shared a dozen exotic taste delights. Thais enjoy sharing humongous dinners together. Their tasty food is my most favorite of culinary delights. I looked forward to eating my way through Siam. My weight had dropped nearly twenty-five pounds from India, so no money or *bhats* was wasted on food or beer.

“It sounds like you relapsed, Rideout.”

“I did relapse, Larkins.”

After three months of 98% abstinence from alcohol, I began drinking daily here. As a true alcoholic, I picked up the bad habit again, exactly where I’d left off, before India. However, my drinking now was setting the stage for worse things to come, eventually. Soon, drinking wouldn’t just be for fun anymore. The tables were turning and I would soon be drinking to totally escape my abandonment issues. I’d be seriously drinking to forget.

“You were entering the later stages of progressive alcoholism, my friend. I’ve been there myself. I know what negative drinking is all about.”

“I guess most of us here have been there or we wouldn’t be here. Well, back to my story, Larkins.”

To me, Thailand did not have the spiritual vibe I’d felt in India, although the country is riddled with Buddhist temples. Everything was much higher priced here, than in poor bargain basement India. The most infernal traffic jams on earth seem to belong to Bangkok too. I wasn’t much impressed with this country, so far. In fact, I was pretty bummed out that I’d come here.

On my second day, I walked for hours in the humid heat, window-shopping and looking for another cheap travel alarm clock. My rucksack had been robbed by Delhi’s airport staff, who took *only* my alarm clock. Who cares what time it is, in such a timeless country as India? Talk about insane. I finally found a clock and the price was five dollars; the same as at home! I thought they made the damn things here? Maybe it was China or Taiwan. The fare for a tuk-tuk ride, the fast Thai rickshaws, was four to six U.S. dollars, in comparison to India’s forty-five cents. Now, I’d have to watch my dwindling money for sure. After returning to Tim’s apartment, sweating profusely and with blisters on my toes, I checked out a city map to see how much ground I’d covered- only about one square inch in an eighteen square inch area.

“Bangkok sounds like its fuckin’ huge!” ejaculated Larkins.

“It is, and there is *no* easy way to get around,” I truthfully answered.

What to do? In desperation over taking the slow crowded city buses, I tried a motor scooter cabbie. I was told later that many tourists die annually, as these guys zip between the rear view mirrors of cars stuck in traffic jams, with often disastrous results.

“Did you see any sex shows? I hear Bangkok is hot for that!”

“What do you think, you sex starved inmate? You don’t have to ask. Yeah, I did see one show.”

Tim took me to Patpong District, the sex show area of Bangkok. What an appropriate name for this capital city! As I’d find out soon, most of Thailand’s topography is pretty phallic. We went to *Super Girls*, which had a stained glass *S* front door window resembling Superman’s jersey. *Rolling Stone* magazine rated this sex club as the very best in town. Tim knew best also, as he’d seen them all. It was mind-blowing to witness what these sex slaves could perform. I saw darts blown out from between legs to pop blown-up condom balloons. A squatting nymph drew a piece of artwork with a felt pen in her you-know-where. Then, a bottle of soda was opened by those vaginal lips, spraying a customer in the face. Afterwards, these ladies would sit on patron’s laps, to see if they desired further proof of their acquired skills. Looking like a Western baba and mentally chanting the mantra, I was totally ignored. The mantra must have made me invisible! I’d never been invisible before. I also was not even horny; sex seems to have left me. Outside, I found a vendor who sold me her last beautiful, dark green 100% silk safari jacket for twenty-five dollars. This coat is probably worth at least two hundred dollars. So, there still are some bargains here in Siam, besides sex shows.

I visited the King’s Palace and many of the tall Buddhist temples in the downtown complex on my own, as Tim and Aoy still had a business to run. Thailand is ultra Buddhist and Siam has often been called “the land of smiles.” They always smile here, especially when they’re cheating you. I noticed that Thais seem to understand English well, but are often very shy to speak it. All signs are written in Thai, with weird backward-looking letters, similar to Greek. This makes getting around either difficult or damn confusing. At least in India, the English language was the common denominator, left from the British legacy. That was a true blessing, for me. Communication there was *so* much easier. Oh, how I wished I were back there. I had that same feeling after I returned home

from Fiji. Both Fiji and India had stolen my heart in ways unimaginable. Then Bangkok blows me away, on a good note, with many Buddhist temples that were totally awe-inspiring. They were *so* tall that I couldn't photograph a whole temple in one picture. The steps climbed *so* steep that rope wound the handrails, for a good grip, to ascend to their summits. There were hundreds of painted Buddha's on walls and each had a different face! How many years and devotees had it taken to erect these holy structures? This part of Thailand reminded me of India, as there are temples of faith everywhere! Faith and devotion can truly perform wonders and sometimes even miracles.

"We Christians have built some pretty impressive structures too!" interjected Larkins.

"I know, Bunkie. You have a point there. I saw many of them in Europe."

However, after four sweaty days in congested Bangkok, I was burning out. Why had I left India, where God seemed much more prevalent to me? I just want to go back there. I *really* want to go back there. Tim suggested I take the train to southern Thailand and enjoy the beach resorts. He and Aoy hadn't been there themselves, but had heard nothing but good about the south. Their business of growing sunflowers, for commercial cooking oil, took them mainly to northern Thai provinces. Okay, I'll go. Off I departed on a night train, south to the Krabi area. I met a Canadian tourist from Vancouver, BC on board and we stayed up late, talking and drinking Mekong Whiskey. It was fun to meet somebody from my own neck of the woods; somebody who could finally speak English. For sleep, I had my own bed with sheets and a snap-on canvas wall for total privacy. There is much more personal space here than in India, that is for sure. Outside this protective shell, all kinds of alcohol were wheeled through the aisles. I'd even heard that amphetamines were added to this whiskey, to reduce hangovers. However, I sure had a killer one the next morning, when I bussed from Surat Thani to Krabi town. Nursing a headache, I found a travel agent who booked me at a cheap

resort on the Andaman Sea. After bouncing down sandy rutted roads, which nearly had me heaving over the side, I arrived in the back of an open rusted Toyota pickup truck to yet another version of paradise.

“You’ve definitely seen a few versions of paradise, Rideout, from all of the stories you’ve told me.”

“I’ve also seen a few versions of hell too; my own self created hell, made by my ego. For every high I’ve *ever* had, the low has been equal. It’s the karmic price tag. You’ll hear more about this subject.”

Now in paradise, my little grass shack, complete with a roofed porch, table, chair and mosquito-netted bed, only cost me three dollars a day. I drank daily, about three to four times this amount. Money doesn’t seem to matter much to alcoholics. And this alcoholic was on the tail end of a fantastic trip, slowly heading home to an uncertain future. So why not drink, right? My small hut had barking gecko wall lizards, noted as a sign of good luck. They eat mosquitoes. Sometimes they feel like little rubber feet, when they zoom across your sleeping face. I’d encountered these little buggers before in Fiji. The food here, especially the fresh fish, was fantastic and very reasonable. I managed to score some red haired bud, as Thai stick was never heard of here. This *ganja* was way heavier than India’s *charas*. I was ignorant of the fact that, had I been caught with drugs in Thailand, I would probably never have seen the good ol’ USA again. Sometimes ignorance is bliss and this ganja definitely was. My head was still thinking like I was in India, where pot isn’t *that* big of a deal, especially if you’re white and spending money. My first afternoon, I wandered up the blinding white sand beach and ran into Grant, an Aussie who’d been on the bus with me. He asked if I felt any better. I’m sure I looked pretty rugged. He introduced me to a German resort owner who’d lived here for a decade and to another nice Australian couple. We all drank, of course, and smoked heavily, as the German told us his tales of Thailand. It was fun to hear a German accent again. On my seaside walk home, I began to notice topless sunbathing ladies, increasing in number. I was

soon to learn that all of the tourist beaches here were topless. I would be encountering every titty in the anatomy book.

“I sure don’t need to hear that here in prison!” shouted Larkins. “Beer and titties are what make *my* world go around. Remember the rush of just trying to get that damn bra strap unhooked?”

“Settle down, while I finish my long story. We’ve still got time, as you well know. By the way, did that turkey ham we had for lunch give you gas?”

“What do you think? You’ve been here long enough. Oh yeah, did you see the Undertaker smash that dude on *WWE Smackdown* wrestling last night?”

“That’s the best shit on Friday night TV. Of course I did.”

Southern Thailand’s limestone karsts topography attracts many rock climbers and I daily watched stoned youths ascend vertical limestone walls. You’ve got to be kidding me! There are many caves here too, with thick, moist vegetation and huge prehistoric-looking teak trees that resemble Jurassic Park. I tried snorkeling but found the coral reefs to be much inferior, in comparison to Fiji’s. Long-tailed boats, with extending propellers run by car engines, were the aqua cabs for getting around islands and other beach resorts. Down the coast from my cheap traveler’s abode were the more expensive tourist resorts. Here was Sunset beach facing west, Sunrise beach facing east and Pranagh beach perpendicular to the two. All were topless, of course, and dominated by German tourists. A huge limestone cave was dedicated to the sea goddess Pranagh. Incense burned around many carved, red-painted penises. Now this reminded me of the Shiva lingams in India... far out. This meant that fishermen’s wives had been praying for babies. At Sunrise beach, I met a gay British couple named Nick and Mike. I was *so* straight that it didn’t even dawn on me that they might be gay.

“You didn’t even know?” questioned Larkins.

“They said exactly the same thing! No, I didn’t for sure until I asked them straight out.”

They both laughed and became very dear friends during my month-long stay here. They also ate Vegit on bread, just like in Fiji. We would all become pen pals for many years to come. I gave both Nick and Mike copper mantra bracelets from India, and helped these two sensitive souls patch up a lover’s quarrel that threatened to destroy their out-of-the-closet relationship. When I showed them my photos of India, they recognized the med-student hustler Ashoka from Delhi, who’d taken me for twenty dollars. He’d hustled them too, but for over a hundred dollars. Small world! Ashoka seemed to hit on long haired freaks. What a niche to hustle.

We all hiked upward, sweating profusely, and then rappelled down ropes into the center of a crater, where the daily ocean tide created a beautiful inner lagoon. I celebrated my forty-seventh birthday with Mike and Nick, and a British redheaded female half my age, but with the same birthday. Drinking was the daily norm in this paradise, for almost all nationalities.

“Sounds like my kind of place- way better than India, Rideout.”

“You would say something like that, Larkins. Thailand caters much more to tourists than India, which seems to attract the more spiritually minded travelers. There is a big difference between tourists and travelers.”

We were on holidays to have fun, so we tried our best. I hung out with many nationalities and heard lots of travel talk, as we drunkenly yarned each night. Again, I felt a sense of pride at my U.S. sense of humor and overall freedom, mentally and spiritually. This has to be my proud American ego talking. Tie-dye is very popular in Thailand and I acquired quite a few new shirts. The Brits did too, but stated that they could *never* wear such loud clothing back home. Suits and ties were the proper apparel, not these dripping acid colors that proclaimed psychedelic freedom when they were, “the Brits abroad.” I let them know loud and clear that this was a large part of my

wardrobe back home, in the land of the free. I've never owned a suit and tie in my life. I hope I never do. Again, I was the only American around. I guess I must need these kinds of experiences, on some level. A Norwegian friend and I toured a Buddhist cave complex that was designed to overcome the fear of death. Here, we saw many skeletons and photos of decomposed bodies. One could rent a personal cave, with a locking door, for secluded meditations on death. No thanks. The Norwegian proudly proclaimed that Russian and Icelandic women were the most beautiful, and sought after, of all the mail-order brides. These women badly wanted out of their cultures, as their men folk abused them regularly. I'd had enough of those pipe dreams, after the Indra fiasco in Fiji. The woman in me is who I'm really looking for and I came to know her a lot better after India.

Back in Bangkok, my wallet was pick-pocketed on Khan San Road, where I sat nursing a beer. Just as my anger was peaking over this outrage, I saw gay Nick and Mike again, stepping out of a cab. Wouldn't you know it? This area is full of fellow world travelers and cons. We quickly talked of my outrage, over a beer, and then said our goodbyes again. I bought some bootlegged Levi and Calvin Klein jeans cheaply and cassette tapes of *The Beatles* BBC sessions for only a dollar and a half per tape. In a pre-dawn torrential downpour, I said my goodbyes to a soaked Tim and Aoy. At the airport, Shiva's brass eighteen inch long trident was confiscated from my beloved *murti* statue. It was considered a lethal weapon and would supposedly follow me to LAX airport, with Bowie knives and other pointed articles of destruction. It never even boarded my flight, as some Thai sticky fingers took it home for an alter piece. Boy, how I despise thieves.

"That's just wrong!" shouted Larkins.

"You're right, I feel the same way. Thieves are worse than drunks, in my opinion."

After much letter writing to Thai Air, I was compensated the full price of ninety-five dollars on the stolen article. Today,

my Shiva still has no trident, his symbol of sovereignty over dark forces. I'll find one someday. Or I'll have one made. It really doesn't matter. It's just another lesson in attachment to material things. Divorce and the house fire taught me that one already.

Stopping briefly in Seoul, Korea to gas up en route home, I met a top-hatter lady returning from Katmandu. She eyed me, saying, "You look like you're from Bellingham." You hit the nail on the head, lady. She was from Seattle. I guess her trip to Nepal had opened her third eye. Ironically, we ran into each other at Seattle's International Drum Festival a month later. It's a small world, once again. But sadly, in 1995, I had no idea of the upcoming decade of self-created hell I would be descending into. None of India's holy men gave me any warning. It was all of my own making.

"This is a good time to go have a smoke, before count. I'll see you out in the smoking cage, Rideout. Tell me what it was like coming back home, later. Will you?"

"Yeah, I'll tell you. I really didn't have a home *to* come home too. Go smoke, Larkins."

Leave no branch unturned....

So, after four months of traveling the Far East, I returned to New Mexico to be with my beloved Sri Ram again. I was excited! At first sight in the airport, I noticed he had now lost his front baby teeth. It happens to all kids. They look like somebody punched them out. I looked much different myself, with very long wild hair on the verge of dreading, on a skinny body framed with numerous prayer beads. I definitely looked like I'd just come back from India, full blown. It was *so* good

to be reunited with my son! It felt incredible to hear him call me “daddy” again. Joya took us out for East Indian food in Albuquerque- how sweet, curry once more. My story began to unfold to them over dinner but my mind was still overseas, somewhere. Switching cultures is a shock! It takes time to adjust. I just switched India for Thailand and now it’s America. Joya and Sri were presently living at friend Carol’s property. Her bus was parked there, for my temporary living space. She and Sri now resided in an upstairs bedroom. Carol was instrumental in getting the Native American Church legal in New Mexico and had been doing the medicine a very long time. She had married a Native roadman who had physically abused her, and now she was sadly dying of terminal cancer. Poor Carol, she was such a good, caring person. Joya had adopted her as her mother, in the NAC tradition. Joya’s own mother, Pauline, couldn’t quite understand this spiritual relationship. However, she too would come around in time, with the help of the medicine. Carol loved Sri very much, continually telling me how special he is. Boy, don’t I know that. I was extremely happy for their new living arrangement. I just want to see my kid happy too, even if I’m not around him. Doesn’t every parent want just that? Joya and Johnny had parted ways. I learned later from him that it had been very painful, resembling my own sad story. Joya’s new path of self-discovery was leaving a few confused hearts in its wake.

“Women, why are they like that!”

“God only knows, Larkins. We men seem to bring out the best and worst in them. They just think different than us.”

I gave Sri his blessed Ganesh statue and a kurta outfit of pants and shirt, complete with a decorative Kashmiri vest from Rishikesh. He looked like a little prince, which he is to me, but outgrew the costume quickly. In fact, I don’t think he hardly ever wore it. Later, Ganesh was given back to me to keep for Sri, for when he’s older. The East Indian thing was *my* trip, as Joya had now gone Native American whole heartedly, even discovering later that she does have some distant Indian blood in her. I’d bought a special crystal mala at the Kumbha Mela,

to give as a gift. When I purchased this one-of-a-kind rosary, I'd mentally promised to give it to someone I love. My heart still loved Joya and I saw us together again. Even though the Fat Lady had sung, I refused to hear her. Wasn't there any hope that we could *somehow* work out our differences and be a loving happy family once again, here in the Southwest, away from the toxic memories of Washington?

"Was there any chance in hell?"

"No, but she accepted my gift and promised to return it, if I ever found somebody later I really wanted to give it to."

It had belonged to a sadhu who'd spent many years in meditation. I never got it back.

There was soon to be a peyote meeting on Carol's property. That means I would soon be sitting up again. Good deal! Johnny taught me the correct way to prepare the sacred firewood and stack it properly. It was good to work with this brother out in the sunshine and hear his views on meetings and peyote. Johnny was definitely a peyote boy. I'll always remember him asking the roadman for more medicine, after vomiting up what he'd just ingested five minutes ago. Perfection in such preparations as sacred firewood is essential to the success of the prayer service. Leave no branch unturned. Everything counts here. If *only* we could live every day with that same intention of consciousness- just like my ashram experiences. I was slowly learning more about this awareness, each time I sat up. This particular meeting was laced with many highly respected Indian elders from the NAC heritage. One elder had broken his back when the tipi poles "accidentally" fell on him. Of course, there are no accidents or mistakes in the universe, or tipi for that matter, so this meeting would hopefully ease some of this karma. It was a "hard meeting," according to seasoned Joya, and very crowded. The peyote brought up many hash toxins in me and I was *so* skinny that my ass was literally killing me. I basically could not move from one *uncomfortable* position, crammed in between others, for twelve grueling hours. Joya was right. This was hard!

What people don't do to realize the Divine presence! These elders let me know loud and clear that one didn't need to travel to India in search of Creator. He was right here in this spineless cactus. How true that statement is.

"Follow the ways of the Red Man for America," the guru had said.

Every time I've ingested peyote, God's eternal presence has become obviously clear again, in the here and now. To the Huichol Indians of Mexico, peyote is the spirit of a deer. To me, it is pure Love and I feel like a child in total awe of the universe. Peyote was becoming my friend- a very gentle friend. When many of Babaji's devotees experienced sitting up in Switzerland, they said peyote is Babaji. Why not? He can assume any form. Peyote has also been labeled *God in vegetable form* or *the flesh of God*. After this powerful meeting, Joya and I ate more medicine the next day and had lunch together. Now, we talked of my future plans. We had to, and I still wanted her feedback on my life choices. I just had to be near Sri, and she understood that. All the guidance I got in India told me to be with your son. So I decided to sell my expensive yurt and move down to New Mexico. This time driving to the airport wasn't so sad for my young Sri. I would be returning, as soon as I finished up my business back in Bellingham. My new path in America was unfolding - the journeys of following my ex-wife to be near my estranged son. This probably was *not* going to be an easy path, not at all.

"You're mom said you'd have a hard time in life."

"Boy, she wasn't kidding, Larkins. However, I think she was referring to my over-sensitive empathic nature. You know, feeling things too deeply."

I was praying the hardest....

Wayne and Teri picked me up at Sea-Tac International airport, in the pouring rain. Some things never change. I began pounding forty ounces of Old English 800 malt liquor en route home, much to their disgust. Being a Pisces, I've always enjoyed altered states, feeling more comfortable out of my body than in it. This must be an astrological minus, a definite setback. It's also one hell of a rationalization to drink. I actually drank to come down and be on the same lower level where most people vibrate at, or so I thought in my mind. Crazy. Back at Yurtsville, Shanti, my blue healer mix dog, and Angela, my old tabby cat, gave me a longing look, as if to say, "Why did you leave us for *so* long?" What was I doing to my animals? Wayne built us a fire in my woodstove, as I passed out the souvenir gifts of rudraksha malas, deity posters and batiks. Their new thirty-foot diameter yurt was fabulous compared to mine, and now Wayne's wooded acreage semi resembled Mongolia. Except there is no sound insulation in a tent, so Wayne and Teri heard me chanting clear as a bell each morning, much to their delight. I put the word out about my real estate sale and, fortunately for me, Wayne decided to buy me out but later. What a blessing that the yurt and foundation stage would not have to be moved. God knows it took long enough to build. What a shame that I invested so much time, labor and a lot of money into this short lived dream, that was now gone with the wind. The month that I spent back in my yurt was mentally confusing for me, as I hadn't really come down from my Indian state of mind. Even after all the drinking in Thailand, India and the American Indians were still having an effect on my psyche. That same time warp happening again, with all the foreign flashbacks. Facing taxes, insurance, driving, etc., was a real reality check, after my simple, carefree backpack lifestyle. I cannot stress enough my love for the freedom that traveling brings. It's fun to have your life so darned simple, reduced to a passport, traveler's checks and a backpack; an escapist's dream comes true. I've always cherished simplicity - sitting around a fire, singing songs, growing a garden, yarning with friends - nothing complex, just being there. That ol' hippie dream, in this fast insane

technological world, is *still* my goal. I realized after this Far East trip that, sadly, my traveling days were over. I'd seen enough now of other cultures and the world is getting scarier for travel, with all the terrorist threats. Besides, I have a kid now. There is still plenty of America to see, and, hopefully, with my son. So, back in my canvas yurt, it was time to hang up my rucksack. Welcome home, Rob. You are no longer, Hari Om. That beloved spiritual name would stay reserved for Babaji's circle of friends, the Herakhandi and India only. Others would never understand. Even having a guru today, was becoming weird and passé to most people. Then again, most people don't even *begin* to understand the true guru-disciple relationship anyway. Are they just too lazy to learn?

"I feel I have that with Jesus, being a born-again Christian and all. Am I right?"

"Yes, you're right if you feel that way in your heart, and continue to keep your mind on Christ, Larkins. Jesus will reveal more to you when you're ready."

Bill, a college amigo who had housed Shanti for me after our divorce, came for a visit. Bill was always a great guy to hang with and we enjoyed talking about reality, as we drank together. After being around me for a few hours, he left with the mantra *Om Namaha Shivaya* on his lips. My lips tasted Schlitz's Bull Ice daily now. My addictive nature was in full bloom again, after that alcohol binge in Thailand. For two dollars, I could get a good buzz on. Then I'd listen to the music I'd brought home from India. Here we go! I felt I needed to numb out to face the stress of Western civilization again. Was this *really* the land of the free or the land of entrapment? I was free to drink, I felt, after all I'd been through, and drinking was fun again as I packed up. My first DUI was somehow long forgotten. How quickly we humans forget- especially me! I finally was ready with my belongings and Shanti for the 1700 mile return trip to the Southwest, my new home. I'll now live in the sun, instead of rain. Thank God!

Shanti was always good company on road trips. She loved going in the truck and adapted well to motel rooms, with a late night walk in some foreign neighborhood of America's many states. She was happy anywhere, as long as she was with me. After all, she *is* a dog and what a dog. We stopped off in Crestone, Colorado, to finally experience Babaji's Baca Ashram. Joya and I had donated much money over the years for the construction of the Divine Mother temple here. I felt that this was my way of paying Babaji back His real estate commission, for helping me score my cabin and land that I now had lost through fire and divorce. I met a fellow Pisces devotee from Iran or Persia, who'd lived many years in Herikhan. His name was Donesh. He'd married an American lady named Narayani, and later murdered her with a knife before killing himself. This blew away the Babaji community, to say the least. I'd spent nearly a week with these people and was shocked by the tragic news. The high altitude property and *earth ship* underground ashram was amazing here. I helped plant vegetables on a sunny afternoon and awoke to snow the same night. That's Colorado weather. If you don't like it, wait twenty minutes. The Sangre de Christo Mountains were spectacular. This Baca area was definitely sacred. No blood has ever been shed between Indians and Whites here. I guess the tragic killing at the Ashram was probably the worst incident to hit this special area. Here too, I got to meet the president of the American Haidakhandi Samaj. She too had experienced peyote in the tipi way. She and I had a lot in common, wishing everybody could experience sitting up. As a side note, I have been spelling Babaji's ashram as *Herikhan*. It is also commonly spelled *Haidakhan*. The true pronunciation is a cross between the two, with a rolling *r-d* sound.

"As if I care about such details, Rideout," remarked Larkins. "You always remember so many weird little facts."

"That's just the way my mind works, Larkins."

Upon returning to Carols' property outside of Albuquerque, preparations were underway for Sri Ram's next birthday meeting. It is believed, by those who know, that four

consecutive peyote meetings for a child will set their life up towards a good future. It's definitely true, in my opinion, when I view where Sri is at today.

"Didn't he come for visitation last week with Roderick, his step-dad?"

"Yeah, he did and it was emotional as always. I love him so much and can't even imagine what goes through his young mind, after seeing me here, dressed in orange. In some ways, I feel that I've scarred him for life."

"It is embarrassing," commented Larkins.

"Yeah, it is, but Sri will hopefully learn from it... just as we are."

He has been blessed and guided in a magically good way. Plus, he has a strong spiritual nature and a church that is probably the most powerful on earth. Amen. I personally feel like Sri is being taken care of by Babaji Himself, as all my prayers are coming true. Sadly, the atmosphere was very heavy at Carol's, as Mr. Death was lurking nearby.

Cheyenne/Arapaho Bobbie, a very close old friend of Carol's, arrived upon the scene, smashing into Carol's car in his beat-up roadman truck. Most of the roadmen I've encountered seem to own very little. It's usually their medicine box with peyote, devotional instruments and paraphernalia, and an ailing means of transportation. Except these medicine dudes are extremely rich in spirit, from a lifetime of meetings and experiencing nearly everything under the sun that a man can suffer or endure. They know, as they've been there. That's true self-realization. They also definitely know their way around the tipi and all the explicit rules of sacred geometry concerning the running of a *fireplace*. Carol had continually promised Sri that she wouldn't die until after his meeting. What a promise to keep. She would hold onto her fading life force, somehow. However, she almost scared Joya and me to death by nearly dying the day *before* Sri's meeting. While Joya was calling 9-1-1, I was praying the hardest I've ever prayed in my life, for Carol to not

leave us yet. Joya put all of her health skills to use now. Surprisingly, Hawk and Trish, who would be running Sri's second meeting, arrived moments later in the dark from Washington State. Talk about timing! Carol somehow stabilized again, a miracle. When I told Carol the next day how hard I had prayed for her, she calmly said, "I was just getting you ready for tonight's meeting. You know, to pray for your sunny boy."

"That's cool. She knew you'd be praying hard for your kid's life."

"That was Carol. She had a great cosmic sense of humor, a lot like God."

As I'd just returned from India, Carol knew I could live on practically nothing and was well schooled in the art of karma yoga, i.e. work. I did the dishes non-stop and helped out around the place any way I could see fit. My brother Alan, from my prior Bellingham days, attended Sri's meeting. It was blessings to have this kindred soul pray for my son. Alan hadn't experienced psychedelics in years. He had previously eaten about a hundred hits of acid in one fell swoop, years ago, when the police raided his house. He still saw auras around objects occasionally, waiting for the world to catch up to him. The incredible singing of peyote songs took Alan and me to what seemed like the third ring of Saturn. The Navajo language can sound like it's from another realm, especially in the tipi. Standing outside later, we both knew that this was as good as it gets. This was yet another form of paradise, only without palm trees. The stars of New Mexico felt *so* close and plentiful, much like they appeared to me in the Himalayan foothills. It seemed like you could see the entire Milky Way in perfect clarity and almost reach out and touch the stars. Alan gave Sri a beautiful colored kite and Carol had a special Batman cake ordered for his sixth birthday celebration. Jai was very into Batman, to say the least. I looked over at poor Carol in her wheelchair, surrounded by all of her closest friends for her very last time. Talk about heavy! Everybody was talking loudly and carrying on, while wide-eyed Carol took it all in.

Now, I could literally smell death in the air. As she had promised, Carol hung on until Sri's meeting was over. Then quietly, she left us. Her best friends, Eugenia and Muriel, helped Joya attend to all of the funeral arrangements. They washed and dressed Carol before her cremation. Later, they buried the ashes on her property. Sadly, Carol's passing took its toll on these women and others. They mourned heavily and had to be treated ceremoniously later for their own healing and deep depressions. Carol's death especially affected Joya. It's *so* hard to let go of our loved ones. It's the ultimate lesson we'll all have to face at some time or another. To me, death is a final chapter in the book of *this* life and an affirmation that we are *not* a body. Divorce can be an ongoing living death or an affirmation that life goes on, with a body.

"Well said, my friend. Can I bum some Keefe coffee off you? Have you got enough to make it until commissary this week? I'll pay you back, I promise."

"Would you like an order of fries with that too, Larkins?"

So far, this divorce experiment seems to be....

Joya had a plan for us. Instead of staying at Carol's property while she completed her herbal schooling, Sri and I would move north of Silver City into the Gila wilderness to live with church friends, Ted and Melinda. This was a dream come full circle for me, as I'd seen the Gila back on my musical tour of 1980, while playing in Silver City. Arriving at the property near dark, in a pocket of private land known as Gila Hot Springs, I hit it off immediately with Melinda and crying baby Rio. She was one beautiful cosmic mother, insisting we arrive before sunset on the auspicious new moon of the month. Wow, do you wanna know my Sun sign too? Ted soon returned home from Silver City, and we sat up late drinking herb tea and talking about gurus, peyote and big plans for their property. They had plans! The following day, we erected my new blue

three-room, eight by twenty foot nylon tent. Now, Sri and I could be comfortable here. I started reading him Herman Hesse's book, *Siddhartha* at night. He loved it, and at such an early age. During the day, he started playing with his new friends Roman, Emile and Lilly. Classify these as good times, at least for awhile.

The Gila cliff dwellings were four miles up the road from Doc Canfield's store and the only show in town here. It was fun to walk with the kids through the river sand, hearing bull frogs bellow low moans, to buy Jolly Ranchers and see if we got any mail. The Canfield family had ruled this area for years and was now threatened by the numerous peyote meetings happening in their valley. The sound of the water drum echoed off these rock walls loudly. The police were even called in once, as sacred firewood was stolen. This was like modern day cowboys and Indians! Ironically, this area *was* where the Apaches had hidden out from the cavalry during their final days. Geronimo reportedly took birth about two miles over the ridge from us, on the east fork of the Gila River. Rumors have it that he actually soaked in the hot springs here, where the temperatures reach 132° F. We had three outdoor pools of decreasing temperatures to soak in daily on this property. I attended *so* many peyote meetings here, and throughout New Mexico during this time frame, that it is difficult to remember clearly exact details. After Joya's graduation, which Sri and I attended and where Marcellus Bearheart Williams lead a sweat, her school bus blew a rod driving to the Gila. Triple A towed it in, finally. Our master plan was to share parenting our son-the great divorce experiment. I made many new friends here like Keith and Val, Maritza and Eric, Al and Peter and Cynthia and Bo. Another Alan, who resembled Glen Campbell and also played guitar, lived across the river from us. He had a trippy black tarred cinder block house on the hill and worked for minimum wage with the Forest Service, as a guide at the nearby cliff dwellings.

"It sounds like you found yet another paradise, Rideout."

“I felt that I had in many ways. Yeah, I’d found another one. Our neighborhood was *so* beautiful and big- like 2.2 million acres! The setting sun, hitting the red rock hoodoos, was incredible to see in our valley. When it thunders here during the summer monsoons, it echoes off the canyon walls like God playing drums.”

“Gosh, that is only the next state over from Arizona. When I get out of here, I think I’ll check out those hot springs, Rob,” commented Larkins.

“There are many hot springs in that area. I really hope you do go there. You’d enjoy it, Randy. Remember me when you’re soaking.”

I began secretly drinking with Alan from across the river and occasionally smoking pot. It was fun to hang with another musician. Soon, I manifested an adobe cabin for two hundred dollars a month, at the source of the geothermal springs. The Gila River was flowing and babbling below. This rental belonged to Doc’s son and had a huge concrete hot tub in the bathroom. Far out! I loved this place already. Now that I had a home front, I needed to return to Bellingham to retrieve more of my belongings and my cat Angela. I would take Sri and Shanti with me on this road trip, and meet up with Joya there later, as she too had some unfinished business up north.

“You had to drive that long distance all over again, ungh?” asked Larkins.

“Yes, but it was fun this time. I had my kid with me.”

Sri and I stayed three days with my friend Peter’s mom Beverly, in Orange County, California, so we could experience Disneyland together. Peter owned the house where Yogananda appeared to me and Jolene. He also sadly died about a month after I lost my dad- another great loss. He had the biggest heart of anybody I’ve ever known. It was nice to be with his mom. We had a ball at Disneyland - how could we not - and returned home each night exhausted from all of the stimulating activity. When Sri saw the General Electric parade of lights, he held

tightly to his new Davey Crockett musket, exclaiming loudly to be heard, “Dad, this is the *best* day of my life!” I felt exactly the same way. The love I felt for my son, right then, was beyond any love I’d ever known. I’m sure every parent knows what I mean. I could have broken down right there crying in thankfulness to God. When we saw the Lion King parade performing the African chants, I nearly did break down. My heart felt *so* wide open after India and this incredible parade, with all the rhythmic music, was reminding me of India. I was *very* grateful for all the new blessings in my life- a cool house, beautiful neighborhood and new friends. One ugly incident did, however, mar Disneyland for me. When I was attempting to photograph Sri with Raffiki, a large Mexican mother shoved me onto my back, so she could photograph her many kids first. I lost it, screaming the *F* word and telling her to go back to Mexico. Little did I know then, that this was the introduction of racism in my life?

“You know a whole lot more about racism now, my friend. Prison makes each inmate face that issue, that’s for sure.”

“How right you are, Larkins. I think our lesson here is to overcome racism, not to give into it. We have our work cut out for us.”

We also spent a day at Knox Berry Farm and enjoyed the holographic Spirit Lodge very much. Beverly really took a shine to Shanti while we played, buying a leash and taking her for walks. Upon leaving the “happiest place on earth” and Beverly behind, we visited my long lost cousins, Patty and Harriet. These are the daughters of Uncle Harry Rideout, my deceased dad’s deceased brother. Patty and her hubby took us riding the myriad waterways near Fremont in their fast ski boat. That was a first for Sri. We also talked a lot of family tree stories, as I secretly drank red wine behind Sri’s back. That’s easy to do when he’s six years old. I hardly knew these distant relatives at all and felt I needed a drink. I have never bothered to see them again, as they felt like total strangers. They are probably upset about that. Who knows?

When we reached Seattle, Sri and I stayed overnight with the Chilean earth mother I'd previously dated. Her spoiled nerd son was now grown-up. I found Chile quite self-absorbed, talking only about her. When she couldn't remember my name, Sri and I split. Another note on Chile and her son; my mom gave her a beautiful silver necklace she had made years ago at night school, and a lovely woven Indian skirt. Chile still wore these with pride. Mom must have been touched by her on some deep level that I surely never was. I'd given her son all of my *Weekly Reader* childhood books, back when she and I were dating. He loved these books and became *quite* the reader. On this short overnight visit, he asked me if I wanted them back. No. You can keep them. He said that they were *still* some of the very best stories he had ever read. Life was very wholesome back in the '50's, and I guess these books reflected that. Maybe I should have kept one? I've never seen Chile or her son again, either.

"That sucks that she didn't even remember your name... weird," Larkins reminded me.

"It made me feel pretty cheap, that's for sure. People sometimes just aren't what you remembered them to be."

Back in Bellingham, I packed up yet again, putting the remainder of Joya's belongings in my yurt to be stored. We'd deal with that stuff later. Joya had returned to Bellingham to retrieve her red Toyota Tercel from our divorce. She and Sri drove back to our Gila home together. Again, I had yet another boring four-day drive alone, to my new adobe cabin at the headwaters of the Gila River. So far, this divorce experiment seems to be working out just fine.

"There you go again, Rideout... living up to your last name."

Those days in Gila Hot springs....

The next chapter of my life would soon take a very negative turn, due to my escalating alcoholism and general depression over my recent divorce and subsequent losses. I *still* wanted Joya back, believing love and forgiveness could heal our broken trust. Now, this was an impossible dream. My heart continued to cry, for myself and especially my son. He needs a dad, Joya! Can't we make this work *somehow*? Oh Rob, get over it, I reminded myself. You've got to let her go and get on with your life. Sometimes, that is *so* hard to do. Back in my adobe cabin, I began decorating with my souvenirs from India. The Shiva statue and colorful batiks looked wonderful in this place. And oh, how I loved soaking each day in my deep hot tub. Looking out the window, there were many metal pipes next to my cabin. These pipes carried the hot water across the river to most of the homes in our neighborhood and to our budding counter-culture resort that we christened *Wildwood*.

There was also a large datura plant with its night blooming white trumpet bell flowers in front of my cabin, overlooking the river. How auspicious is that? I'd found yet another lingam here- an ancient lava rock eighteen inches high, shaped like half an egg. I applied the three yellow horizontal lines and red dot tilik to it, and began a daily ritual of circling it clockwise, while reciting the mantra. The lingam was placed next to the sacred datura. This is a Shiva plant for sure. When young Sri slept over, I had him praying with me here too. After India, I *so* wanted *some* kind of ceremony in my life, on a daily basis. Since I craved it, I would just create my own. I also wanted to instill a spiritual practice in Sri at an early age. The five foot long by four foot deep hot tub proved to be a real blessing. I'd soak long and hard, then run down stone steps to the nearby Gila and jump in. What a rush that was! I even started my day by submerging myself in the cold river water, before chanting, as I'd done in Haidakhan.

"You are nuts, man. I'd never want to do that!"

"Well, it's the oddballs and misfits who do interesting things, like this, in their lives. I still shower or bathe twice a day, if I can. Water always makes me feel better. Some guys here only

shower once a week! I could never do that. In fact, Pod Father Brad asked me to tell Frail Gale to start showering daily... or pay the consequences. Nobody here likes a stinking inmate. We live too close together.”

“Did you tell him?”

“Yeah, I did and he got pissed off at me for telling him! Nobody likes being told they stink, Larkins. And that’s especially true for Frail Gale. That poor dude is just really freaked out even being here.”

“Yeah, I know. It’s hard to believe he survived Vietnam. So what happened with your hippie commune or what ever you were creating in the Gila?”

“It’s called *Wildwood*, Bunkie.”

Ted and Melinda had a tendency to be very persuasive about getting free help for their own benefit. I had to look at it as more karma yoga- work performed for God. Soon, they were *so* financially broke that they came crying to me for a twenty-five hundred dollar loan. I gave it to them. Sadly, it took over five years to *ever* get my money back, all in odd nickel and dime installments. I learned that you *never* loan money, you give money. As I pleaded through the years for my promised reimbursement, they actually got angry at times, as if *I* were the bad guy. Those were some of the first coyotes in sheep’s clothing my trusting naïve personality would encounter. And I still loved them, despite it all. Melinda once told me that I seem to love everybody, a friend of the world. But I see again how blind love can be sometimes.

“Christ told us to love everybody,” interjected Larkins. “It says so in the Bible.”

“You are *so* right, my Christian friend.”

Another financial disaster was investing with Joya, Ted and Melinda and old Peter, in a schoolhouse building for our children. We went through the local politics and school boards to get approval as a semi-charter school. Silver City and

Mimbres were just too far away for an education. This was a scholastic challenge for everyone. We parents all tried teaching thirteen kids, from pre-school ages up to nearly high school. This trial included three Native American children. These kids had serious emotional and learning disabilities, not to mention Attention Deficit Disorder. The father of these kids was a crazy Vietnam vet who'd left his kids in the care of his former Apache girlfriend. They all tried living in a tipi, complete with a woodstove. Sadly, these urban chiefs couldn't handle tipi life like their ancestors. Girlfriend wrangled horses for the Canfield family and looked like a Liz Taylor/Sacagawea combination. She was a very stunning maiden and super cool. Her uncle, she claimed, could have been a stand-in for our old previous neighbor, Geronimo. In time, we finally negotiated semi-qualified teachers for our Gila Hot Springs School. They didn't last long. I taught Sri to read in my cabin. He learned quickly, and I saw clearly how very bright and gifted he is. I even tape recorded him reading his very first book, *The Foot Book* by Dr. Seuss. I'd previously taped him in Sedro Woolley, singing and carrying on excitedly. I would give him these tapes later in life, to blow his mind.

“Wow, the school sounds like quite a challenge. What happened to Joya's bus that you stayed in, after India?”

“Joya sold her deceased bus with the blown rod to Keith and Val, as a temporary living space while they constructed a straw bale house. I helped Keith move trailers of straw from far off Deming, New Mexico. I also helped Cynthia and Bo get log Vegas for their upcoming cabin. It was all just more karma yoga. And I was always thanked. Joya and Sri moved into our communal schoolhouse. They needed some kind of semblance of a home front. At this time, I received an unexpected visit from Bruce and his wife Janine and their two boys, Alex and Paul.

“Is that the same Bruce who went to Fiji with you?” questioned Larkins.

“Yeah, the same dude. Remember, Bruce and I had spent five months together in tropical paradise, plus hundreds of hours on stage entertaining drunks. He too got over his illusion of a tropical bride, and married hair dresser Janine, in Fiji.”

Sri enjoyed the company of their sons immensely, as he mainly played with girls here in our isolated community. Bruce, Janine and I enjoyed drinking vodka immensely. Their surprise visit sparked my relapse into serious trouble. I hadn’t been drinking lately but after they left, I began buying whiskey to either drink secretly alone or with Alan across the river. I thought nobody would notice. Wrong! Even Shanti would rat me off. She’d leave me to spend the night at Cynthia and Bo’s tent. They would ask me the following day, if I’d been drinking that night. When I asked how they knew, they said Shanti told them! The smell of whiskey would make Shanti move away from me on my truck bench seat. She’d give me dirty dog looks, as if to say “Here he goes again- goodbye Rob.” Keith and I even jokingly said Shanti could write a book about everybody here and all their dirty laundry. Call it, *Shanti Speaks*. People say dogs are dumb animals. I don’t think so, not my Shanti. On many hangover mornings, in guilt and shame with Shanti staring at me, I poured the rest of a whiskey bottle down the drain, swearing never to drink again.

“I’ve done that *so* many times too. What a waste of alcohol!”

“A lot of alcoholics go through that step, repeatedly,” I answered back.

I’ll always remember Sri and his new girlfriend Emile. They were like a brother and sister, even looking alike with their long blondish hair. A unique wandering couple named James and Vicki stayed with us for awhile. They had lived on horseback in the deserts of Arizona and New Mexico for over two years. Vicki was now pregnant, so they needed a place to settle down from their nomadic lifestyle. To our surprise, they also had a female 90% wolf, named Critter. Critter ate many of Ted’s kittens and attacked Shanti, too. This was *not* cool. They were finally asked to leave, as the daily two-hour pow-wows

over their destructive presence were taxing our communal energy heavily. We had enough on our minds just trying to school our children and make house payments. However, I'll never forget seeing Sri and Emile, with their red bandana headbands on, riding together on James's horse. Those days in Gila Hot Springs *definitely* had some *very* special moments, to me. We were living our dream, or at least trying to.

"Wow, that's special in itself. I don't know that I ever had a dream, now that I think about it. I guess just being employed was my dream. However, now my dream is just getting out of here alive."

"That's the dream of everybody here, Larkins."

I found a secluded sixteen-foot-deep cave above the Gila River. I soon showed all the kids. I felt that I could live there forever, if a fire didn't give away this secret to the Forest Service. Doesn't everybody have a secret desire to live in a cave or is it just me? It was another sacred spot of the many I've experienced. The Gila wilderness is probably rich in such spots. Maybe that's why there are so many petroglyphs. On the dietary healing order, Ted got us all into drinking cambouche tea. This tea is made from sugar and a fungus that looks like a semi brown rubber pancake or part of Frankenstein's brain. A lot of people were partaking of this new healing fad and we drank our share of this medicine, but with no apparent results. Oh well, maybe we didn't do it long enough.

"You call it medicine... what a joke," commented Larkins. "I can't believe the things you've tried."

"Try this."

The next medicine that I finally experimented with was *Amoroli* - my own urine. I studied the pamphlets from the Nebraska doctor and my Rishikesh book, and decided to have a fair go with it. You never know until you try. And I usually try anything once. But that first sip was the hardest! Not really the taste, which was salty like miso soup, but mentally

overcoming the mass-minded grossness of this discipline. However, I never got sick, when everyone around me was coming down with “something.” My urine book stated that *Amoroli* was one of the most advanced forms of yoga, as few could find the mental courage to even try it. I continued this yoga for some time, until my alcohol drinking polluted me too much to even consider partaking of my holy water. It wasn’t holy anymore.

“You’ve got that right, Rideout. It just grosses me out that you’d even do it. Yuk!”

“I understand your feelings. Now, just forget about it. Pretend it never happened... okay? And for God’s sake, don’t tell anybody here.”

As part of Ted’s master plan for *Wildwood*, we began creating tipi spaces for overnight guests. As the Gila River can flood, often heavily, we stabilized the eroding banks with iron river jacks to catch floating debris. This was right out of my environmental classes. A previous twenty-year flood had nearly wiped out this property and drowned baby Rio. Ted’s family had been up to their waists in flood waters, as they scrambled to higher ground. Melinda sewed tipis now, designed by her adopted Indian father, on a new industrial sewing machine. We men searched for tipi poles. Soon, we erected five rental units that visiting Europeans felt was the Wild West experience. We did meet some very interesting guests, that stirred memories of my travels, but our counter-culture resort was not a profit venture by any means. It was more like a mom and pop, hippie nickel and dime campground. Struggling, we could barely make the mortgage payments on our communal schoolhouse. Things were falling apart. Trying to create a spiritual community was very challenging on many levels, especially the financial one. There was also the emotional level, but I don’t even want to go there.

Silver City, home to Billy the Kid, was a grueling one and a half hour drive in low gears through the pine trees and cliffs of the Gila wilderness. Just getting weekly groceries was an all-

day ordeal. Soon, we ordered health food in bulk, from a food conspiracy through the Silver Food Coop. We did eat well here, as everybody was very diet conscious. Our kids didn't know how good they really had it. Our church friends, Peter and Al, resided in Silver City. Peter came off as an old angry Jew, who actually had a *very* kind heart beneath his often grumpy persona. His artwork was often controversial, with sexual and religious undertones. He'd spent time in a Zen monastery near Jemez, New Mexico and still meditated daily. He was my tough-love teacher in many ways, always busting my balls as we smoked cigarettes sitting out on his back porch overlooking the town. Sadly, his meditations were shortened due to progressive back problems. He had also lost his daughter years ago; something he never talked about but was still deeply affected by. He, too, was a recovering alcoholic and tried desperately to counsel me about my disease. Oh how I listened, but I couldn't really hear him.

Al owned an energy store that sold wood, pellet and gas stoves. I worked part-time for him, usually cleaning and running errands. Both of these men became good friends. We'd sat up on peyote many times together, looking into each other's souls. As they say, if you want to know somebody, sit up all night with them on the medicine. Then I unexpectedly received a letter at Doc Canfield's store. It was from Wayne. He informed me that he'd finally buy my yurt. But I needed to return to Bellingham and deal with Joya's stored belongings there. In retrospect, I should have let her handle this predicament, as it was *her* unfinished business in my yurt... not mine. But trying to be a good ex-husband and friend, I volunteered to drive the 1700-mile gauntlet yet again, if she'd help me out on gas, motel and U-Haul trailer expenses. I would later look back and wonder if she ever *once* realized the kind of friend I was desperately trying to be for her. After all, she is the mother of my son, so this was the *least* I could do. I still loved Joya, and love being blind, what more can I say?

“You’ve got to be kidding me! Not again. You’ve driven more since you came back from India, in a few months, than I drive in years.”

“I was just doing what needed to be done. I felt it was my karmic duty.”

I drank while driving north and luckily got away with it. I drank too in motel rooms in four different states, after driving twelve to fourteen hour days. This was a quick trip- a recon mission only. Much of my remaining things, like my treasured drum set, I stored in the attic of my childhood home with dad’s widow Pam. Now my yurt looked sad. Nobody was home. Teri’s daughter, who’d house sat Angela here, had had her baby and moved out. I was actually glad to be getting rid of the yurt. It felt cold and was already looking moldy. As I stood in the wet woods looking at it, I was reminded of yet another dream gone sour. Why did I ever build this thing? I now have an adjusted opinion about yurts in the Pacific Northwest. I’ve been there and done it.

“You sure didn’t live in it very long. What a waste of money, Rideout.”

“I know. At the time, it seemed *so* right, but then everything changed so radically. I’d invested most of my money from my L&I settlement into that damn yurt. At least, Wayne bought me out, thank God.”

Joya gave me directions to her mini storage unit in Flagstaff, where she wanted her things stored. Before arriving in Flagstaff, I stopped off in Cortez, Colorado in the Four Corners area to look up a beautiful peyote couple who lived on forty acres facing Mesa Verde National Monument. With his father, they were building two *earth ship* underground houses, like I’d seen completed at the Baca ashram. I’d seen these houses under construction before, when I attended a meeting here. I’d hoped they could escort me to North America’s near-by best cliff dwellings. However, it was not meant to be. Only the dad was home. The young newlyweds were up in Seattle at a friend’s wedding. I didn’t want to haul a trailer up the steep

hill to see Mesa Verde, so I drank and smoked blonde hash with the father instead. Maybe I'd see Mesa Verde later or maybe not. It hasn't happened yet. So, after finding Joya's storage unit the next day, I cried profusely as I unloaded possessions that were once mine too. This was emotionally *very* hard, one of the worst parts of when it's over. I had to feel that divorce knife once more, cutting deeply into my continual bleeding heart. Grow up Rob, commanded the inner voice. Leaving the storage shed with tears in my eyes, I pulled into a Quickie Mart and bought some cheap whiskey for my ride home to New Mexico. Why not? You would too. Whiskey, for me, is a tricky evil spirit that sneaks up quickly. As I drove over the speed limit into St. Johns, Arizona, I saw the red and blue light special in my rear view mirror. Busted! Not just for alcohol this time, but worse. I had that blonde Moroccan hash on me too, that was a welcome home present. Well, welcome home Rob, you are in *serious* trouble. Would I ever learn not to drink and drive? Not yet, not even close.

"Man, you're in big trouble. You must have been scared out of your mind. Were you?"

"What do you think?"

Arriving back in the Gila....

After a near sleepless night in Apache County jail, I bonded myself out the following day. I *was* scared shitless and would have to return later for sentencing. I remember telling the cops that this hash wasn't even that good. It just smelt good. It was a gift to me when I returned home safely from India. Couldn't they understand that? They laughed hard, as they let me roll a cigarette. I gave them no trouble. Then, I drove home to the Gila feeling very sick inside. How could I tell Joya? She'd trusted me and thought I was trying to get a handle on my drinking problem. Nobody seemed to realize how very sick I was, suffering deep depression and anguish from the mental

hell I'd created. Nobody cares for me, is how I felt. That is just stinking thinking, to quote AA. Outside of Springerville, I missed the road sign to New Mexico. With a trailer in tow on a narrow road, I feared turning around. I've never been much good with those damn trailers anyhow. I just continued driving south in Arizona, knowing somewhere I'd be able to go east again towards home. As I drove through the mining town of Morenci, with the largest Phelps Dodge open pit copper mine in North America, the cops' lights flashed on behind me.

"Oh, God... not again!" exclaimed Larkins.

"Oh yeah, I sure didn't cotton to this."

I asked them why I was stopped. Their reply was that my trailer lights weren't working properly. Loose connections solved that, but as this was a notorious drug trafficking route, they searched the truck also. I told them nervously of my last night DUI incident and of my truck being totally searched already. After last night, I really didn't need any more stress! Their dope dog found nothing, of course, but I was educated to the fact that pot smoke actually stays in upholstery. The dog's nose had indicated that. I bet their German shepherd could write a book too- probably a police novel.

Arriving back in Gila Hot Springs late at night, I was totally worn out, on *so* many levels. I desperately wanted to wake up Joya and confess to help relieve my horrible guilt. I much needed to get this off my chest, but decided to let her sleep soundly with Sri, in their schoolhouse room. Morning would come soon enough. As the sun rose over our small community, I explained painfully on the lawn what had transpired on the last leg of my moving mission. Joya cried for me, but had no real idea of my deep inner sickness. God knows I sure didn't, at this point. Fear, big time, was next arriving at Doc's store, when my public defender sent me the court papers. It read that I could be looking at years in jail, with fines in the thousands of dollars. This is enough to scare anybody! Again, I had to drive eight hours back to St. Johns, AZ just to see a judge for a five minute arraignment. All of my fear became a rationalization to

drink *more*- much more. While most people would quit drinking at this point, I did the opposite. I tried playing my songs at an open mic at the Buckhorn Bar, in Pinos Altos, outside of Silver City. My renditions of Jimmy Buffet songs went over well to a drunken, mainly female, happy hour crowd. But I received no employment there. Feeling rejection again, I drank whiskey and smoked cigarettes passionately on the curvy mountain ride home. The party was in my mind, full on. I drove off the road in a drunken blur and was miraculously saved by a small juniper tree supporting my truck over a very steep cliff. A local angel pulled me out, before any cops found out. This story would come back to haunt me many times.

“Jesus, you’re life was going to hell, Rideout. Couldn’t you see that?”

“Yes and no; I was still in heavy denial about a lot of things during this time of my life. I was confused about so much. And I surely didn’t understand *anything* about this disease, called alcoholism.”

There were many more peyote meetings. I soon met Lloyd and Muriel, two powerful souls who really understood a lot about life, alcoholism and respect for the medicine. I must confess that I honor Lloyd, probably more than any person I’ve ever encountered in my life. I’ve been around the block a few times and so has Lloyd. He is a recovering alcoholic Navajo roadman who transforms into Babaji, to me, when singing in the tipi. He puts 110% into all of his healings for others. A book could be written on this God-man but it wouldn’t do him justice. Muriel brought a film producer/blues singer friend, named Rhonda, into the tipi for her first time. She resembled a Franco Fellini character, with her three hundred pound body, red dyed dreadlocks and rings on every finger and thumbs. She knew actor Richard Gere personally and said I was his double, not so much in looks, but personality-wise. Nice compliment, Rhonda; just what my ego needs. Rhonda had worked on the movie *Little Buddha* with Bridget Fonda and singer Chris Isaac. Lloyd met the Tibetan lamas from this film, as they put a colored sand *mandala* to rest together in the Columbia River.

This was Eastern holy men meeting one of the best of our Western holy men. And all was quiet, as there was really nothing to say when you know, they know. Only the sound of the river meeting the ocean could be heard. How symbolic.

“You have met some very high dudes in your travels, Rideout.”

“I seem to have been blessed that way; just like the psychic Christians predicted back when I accepted the Lord, as you born-again say. I’ve also met some very low life dudes too-like in here. It all balances. Even these losers here have the capacity to be high dudes, if they wanted to be. The choice is always ours to make.”

During our days here, we started building a straw bale communal room, under the direction of Sunray, from my home state of Washington. Sunray is an extraordinary extreme builder, with nearly a dozen odd-looking houses on his own property. He even does seminars internationally and has been seen on TV. He visited us many times, enjoying immensely the geothermal water and our efforts at communal living. He usually walked around practically nude. We all got hands-on experience with straw bale, mud plaster and cob. Sunray was *Wildwood’s* resident sadhu.

I attended another peyote meeting run by old Bobbie, below Taos on the Rio Grand River. This meeting was for a young college girl’s graduation. Her father was an insomniac artist, who had one of the world’s wonders on their property. He had tunneled for seven years, at night, into the mountainside; creating a labyrinth maze of tri-level tunnels, complete with lights, music, animal skins, furniture, a stuffed fox and even his deceased parents’ ashes. He too had been on TV for his unique creation. This artist must have been a mole in his previous incarnation.

At this meeting, I met an Indian elder named Anthony, who’d had a lifetime of peyote and looked exactly like Johnny Carson. Here was another *real* character that I feel fortunate to have met. After looking at Babaji’s photo, he claimed his

father had raised the dead! Like Jesus or Babaji. I also met a hippie sadhu, named Yuri, at the geothermal pools near the cliff dwellings. I had heard tales of him, so it was meant to be that we met. He was a kindred soul with much spiritual wisdom. I invited him home for dinner. He loved his pot, as I presently loved my alcohol. After India and years of smoking the herb, I finally got tired of it. Somehow, I enjoyed the numbness of alcohol, over the expanded awareness of pot. I wanted so badly *not* to feel or face the constant pain in my heart and the fear of this present DUI in Arizona. I was trying desperately to forget.

At about this time too, I attended yet another peyote meeting at friend Jerry's property outside of Silver City. Here, a Jewish man from the tribe of Israel expressed himself around the sacred fire, saying he was from the Seattle area originally, but now resided in Tuba City, Arizona with a Navajo artist. While talking together outside after a pee, I said I too was from Washington. We agreed to talk more in the morning. His name was Roderick and he asked about Joya. I explained that she was my ex-wife and about our divorce experiment in parenting. Little did any of us know then, what destiny had in mind? After this meeting, Roderick began visiting Joya. Next to come was the courting dance. After another very heavy peyote meeting, where Joya ate more medicine than seemed humanly possible, they became a couple. Soon, she would be moving from our jointly owned house in the Gila, to begin a new life in a Hogan up on the Navajo reservation. My son Sri would be going with her, marking the end of our co-parenting divorce experience and the return of even more trouble in my progressive drinking career.

"How can it get any worse?"

"Oh, it can. You'll see."

As Joya and I had discussed upon our breakup, we needed to stay focused on what was best for Sri- always! In theory, this sounds easy. I had no idea how hard it would actually be for me. If I thought I'd felt heartache before, it was *nothing*

compared to what was coming. Divorce, and its results, is often worse than death, especially when children are concerned. Somebody seems to win, while the other loses, or so it seems. The winner has all the parental work to do, which is immense and demanding. They see their child each day, growing up and learning about life and love. God bless them, as teachers and caregivers. God have mercy on the estranged losing parent who waits for a phone call, visitation, picture or letter to connect, once again however briefly, with the child he helped create and nourish. Such was the role I chose. I'm sorry to say that I didn't succeed very well in it. It became my main excuse to self-destruct- another rationalization that I'm not really loved or good enough. Why would God do this to me? Why go on living, when what I was living for, was taken away from me? What purpose did my life have now? And crazily, will I ever be privileged enough to ever see the home videos taken of my son during our estrangement? These are heavy questions that would take me years to answer. Sometimes answers can be found in prison. Doing time gives one time to look within. True answers are *always* found inside, waiting to be heard. I love my son *so* much, that goes without saying. And nothing can ever change that. I have to accept that everything is perfect the way it is. This is all happening as planned, for the growth of my soul, and only good can come out of it.

"It amazes me that you somehow keep your faith through all of this."

"Well Larkins, it all comes down to faith. When you lose that, you might as well be dead."

Maybe you should consider

It was finally time to appear in Apache County court for sentencing of my second DUI conviction. I decided to drive up to St. Johns the night before, where I planned to camp out next to a creek and do court the following morning. The sunset was

fantastic, as I drove from southern New Mexico north into Arizona. I could handle some whiskey, I thought. As the Alcoholics Anonymous Big Book clearly states, we alcoholics drink at the precise moment we should not. This court date was *very* serious business; surely not time to even consider drinking. However, I fell again and didn't even see my destined campground in the dark. I rolled into Springerville listening to loud music and going ten miles over the speed limit, to see a cop turning around to follow me in hot pursuit. There was no shoulder that I could see to pull over onto, so I drove another mile before I stopped. The cop had a loaded gun on me now, and I was on my knees getting handcuffed again, with my face rubbing the front tire. Hello, DUI number three. So after yet another night in this now familiar jail, I entered the courtroom chained and clad in orange. My probation officer and public defender couldn't believe this. They about fell over. How could one get into *so* much trouble *so* quickly? Today, we would deal with DUI number two, the probation officer stated, shaking her head in disbelief. Luckily, the hash charge was dropped and not even mentioned. When I questioned if the cops had smoked and/or sold it, the judge became furious. I never should have brought it up, oops and I apologized immediately, stating that such stories were common on TV news shows like *60 Minutes*. Had they pushed the charge, I would have been off to prison now, as benign hash is classified as a dangerous drug, right up there with heroin. How absurd! Don't they know it's a sacrament in other cultures? Sometimes, I just can't believe America. My public defender pleaded with tears in his eyes to the judge that I had lived the life of Job. That was humbling to hear. I'll have to look up Job in the Bible. DUI number three gave me ninety days in jail. I was allowed to return to the Gila before serving my sentence. Al had a friend in Springerville who would store my truck and Keith and Val agreed to house-sit Shanti. Cynthia gave me an earful of recovery advice. Sadly, Bo's brother had recently committed suicide over his battle with the bottle. He just felt he couldn't win. My present problem was affecting them deeply. Nobody wants to see a friend die. And they certainly didn't want to see me go. As AA says, alcoholism's last stages are jail, institutions or death.

“You really screwed up, my friend. That is embarrassing, to say the least. Heavy karma, as you would say,” commented Larkins.

“How right you are. It was heavy karma. Wait till you hear the rest of the story.”

I served my three months working as a kitchen trustee. I made enough money to cover tobacco and candy on weekly commissary. I should note here that I started smoking tobacco after India. What a crying shame I ever started. Tobacco was always smoked with hash in the clay *chillums* and I slowly got used to this dangerous herb. Tobacco is used to pray with in the Native American Church, so I was around it again upon my return in 1995. As I basically quit smoking pot, tobacco now provided me with a social outlet to perform the smoking ritual, legally. It also killed both of my parents.

As a trustee, I had my own private cell with no Bunkie. I also got much stronger coffee, as I made it, to keep my bowels active. All jail diets are largely constipating starch. Here, I gained a lot of needed weight that I’d lost in India, like twenty pounds. I had privy to all the leftovers before they hit the disposal. We often had interstate transfer vans of convicts stop overnight, to give their butt-sore prisoners food and a shower. We all twisted rollies on gray metal tables for these poor underprivileged prisoners. Some were doing life sentences for murder. Many had spent weeks on the road, going around the country, before finely being dropped off at a yard which was only miles from their original starting point. Some, I would find out later, actually spend years traveling the country in these prison vans and buses. They never get off *the loop* and have no mail, legal access, commissary, address or human rights - forgotten souls of the system.

“That is not right!” shouted Larkins loudly.

“I know; I feel the same way, but it happens. It’s felt that if they let these inmates join a yard, they’ll stir up major shit. So they stay on the bus, doing the loop and just existing.”

“It makes me feel lucky to be in a DUI yard, now.”

“You’ve got that right, Larkins. It could be a lot worse. I really pitied these inmates. One asked to bum a smoke, so as I rolled it, I asked him what he was in for.

“Murder,” he replied.

“Keep the whole pouch,” I told him.

I met a Navajo artist, Heroldton, who drew me an original masterpiece of NAC art - the tipi, medicine, musical instruments and peyote water bird. I got all this in exchange for some color pencils and a couple of Snickers candy bars. I would later have this picture copied and framed, to be given away as presents to fellow peyote friends. Ex-wife Jolene sent me an expensive thermal jacket for Christmas, and Keith and Val came by for a surprise visitation. I grew a beard again here but shaved it off later, leaving the moustache. The black brothers called me Sam Elliot. That’s a good one- from Jesus and Richard Gere to Sam Elliot. I’m not even close to him. Joya sent pictures of Sri with short hair now. He got tired of being called a girl and asked Mom to cut off his beautiful long locks. Gone now was my long haired, beautiful little hippie boy. I didn’t even recognize him in the photo. His blond ponytail probably still resides in Joya’s medicine box today. I wondered how she and Roderick explained my being in jail to him. He is much too young to ever understand. In Sri’s Tuba City class photo, he was one of only two Anglos in the class. The Navajos accepted Sri wholeheartedly and he soon learned to sing songs in their language. I was happy he was experiencing another culture right within our own country. I too, was experiencing another culture, to say the least. I met an inmate who had been in the worst prison riot in U.S. history. This occurred in Santa Fe, New Mexico, where overcrowding was beyond belief. He’d witnessed a black inmate’s head cut off with a welding torch, then carried down the run on a broomstick. He never forgot the smell of burning flesh, as he shook in fear under his bunk. Life behind bars can definitely be scary.

“Did you see the Mexicans smash one of their own the other night?” asked Larkins.

“Yeah, I did. He was playing cards with the brothers; wrong in their book. I watched it from my bunk, trying to keep my eyes looking down. Inside, it was blowing my mind. I’ve never even been in a fight in my whole life- believe it or not. I despise and abhor violence in any form, Larkins.”

“I do too. I’m glad you’re my Bunkie, Rideout.”

“Thanks, Larkins. I’m thankful you feel that way. I’d hate to have a violent guy sleeping above me. I’d have to sleep with one eye open. Let’s get back to my tale of woe.”

Before my release date, I met a fellow inmate who’d soon be getting out. He set me up for a date with his ex-girlfriend. He said she was hot. Upon release and getting my truck back from Al’s friend, I drove over to connect with him and my blind date. The girl didn’t even acknowledge me, as we all sat together in her apartment. Talk about uncomfortable. Am I invisible again? She doesn’t look so hot to me right now. I’m the one who’s fuckin’ hot just being in this room! He’d said she was straight, but that day she suffered a hangover from drinking and snorting coke the night before. This whole scene felt *so* weird and awkward, that I left pronto for the Gila, feeling self-created rejection once again from women. Here come those old abandonment issues. And they are coming on strong! How do I handle this? Outside of Springerville, I noticed a neon bar sign advertising “liquor to go.” So, after ninety days of sobriety and lock down, I felt I could handle a pint of cheap whiskey. Wrong! This was yet *another* major ill choice. I drove perfectly into Glenwood, New Mexico, north of Silver City. There, I stopped for one beer. The whiskey wasn’t quite enough. I needed more. Another mistake! An off-duty Fish and Wildlife officer bought me the beer, as we were the only two in the rustic bar. When I confided in him about my jail release, he said he used to be a cop in Apache County. Wouldn’t you know that would be my luck?

“Be careful on your drive home,” he advised me. At this point I should have slept in my truck. However, I was *so* close to home that I couldn’t wait.

Outside of Silver City, those now familiar red and blue lights began flashing again in my rear view mirror. Oh God, now I’m screwed! After three months in jail, I was incarcerated again in three hours, but in the horrible drunk tank of Silver City’s system. This place was packed wall to wall with smelly vomit on the floor. I didn’t like it already. The following morning, Al bailed me out quickly, as I used him for my one free phone call. He then presented me with a diploma- for the World’s Greatest Asshole. That’s exactly how I felt. Couldn’t anybody see how sick I was? I certainly couldn’t, not yet. I didn’t even know how to ask for help yet. Luckily, when I appeared in court for these new charges, New Mexico looked at this DUI as my first, instead of my fourth.

“You’ve got to be kidding me!”

“No, they discounted the previous one in Washington and the two recent Arizona convictions. This was my first and only one in the *Land of the Enchantment*.”

Boy that is exactly how I felt about New Mexico now. I paid my fines quickly and completed the now-familiar alcohol classes as well. I also did AA with Al at noon. I even took young Sri to an AA meeting, where he asked me if he too would be an alcoholic. God, I hope not! This so-called disease can skip a generation. I pray it does, for my son’s sake. With both Joya and me being addictive personalities, Sri carries the seed of possible addiction, genetically. Being raised spiritually with the medicine and seeing my life of trouble from the bottle, will hopefully be enough to protect him with wisdom and good choices, should he ever be tempted to experiment in hell. I pray daily to God for him to *never* walk a step in my moccasins... just let Sri stay on that peyote road of beauty and truth.

“I’m still not sure how I feel about your kid taking peyote, but it sounds a whole lot better than alcohol.”

“There is totally nothing to worry about, Larkins. Peyote is not like alcohol, at all. It can’t be used recreationally. It doesn’t work that way. It’s a truth serum.”

During this time of anxiety, I attended another NAC meeting back at Jerry’s property, outside of Silver. There, a participant said to me, “Maybe you should consider having a meeting.” I was finally convinced to sponsor my own meeting, for my troubled, crumbling life. With this recent DUI, I’d just broken my probation with Arizona and could be looking at possibly serving some hard time in notorious Florence penitentiary. I needed help to put on a meeting with all the necessary preparations.

“So, how do I begin?”

“Just ask,” I was told.

I called roadman Lloyd in Albuquerque and set up a date, with the required tobacco smoke over the phone and prayers confirming my commitment. Before this meeting, I briefly played music for Sunday morning brunch at the Holiday Inn. This was the same room where I’d received the tragic news of John Lennon’s death, back in December of ’80. I also attended a healing meeting for Sarah in Wilcox, Arizona. Sarah was dying of terminal cancer. She had spent many years in South America with the natives, somehow getting sick and it showed. Here, we had cows looking into our tipi through the canvas door flap in the morning, and this particular tipi had poles the size of small trees. Who harvested these? It took three men to erect even one pole. This was a very heavy tipi for some very heavy karma. Sarah kept shouting *Namaste*, a Hindi greeting that actually means “my soul bows to your soul,” throughout the ceremony. This was far out to me but *so* East Indian that I had to explain to our Native Americans what she meant. Old roadman Bobbie fed poor Sarah such a massive amount of peyote that she filled a large coffee can many times in her purging. Later, she tried to end her healing ceremony early. No! This being her first meeting, she literally had *no* idea of what she’d gotten herself into. It was both sad and heavy to be at this

meeting, but also comical at times. At one point she grabbed me, saying “Give me some of your energy. You have *so* much!” How I tried, Sarah, how I tried... as the Tipi turns. How did Jesus do that anyway?

“Did she get well?” asked Larkins.

“The meeting helped her to accept her upcoming death, I think, more than anything.”

There are a few more interesting tipi stories to chronicle. Having sat up in many meetings in various remote locations across New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado and Washington, I don’t remember exactly where many events occurred. However, I do recall a psyched-up housecat running up and down the tipi shell at dawn, scaring many participants, as they thought evil spirits were around. The sound of the music and power of prayers was *so* powerful at one meeting, that a cougar sat outside next to the firewood, listening. This definitely startled the fireman, as he was gathering an armload of wood, but it seemed like a good omen. The funniest tale was of a Jesus freak carrying a wooden cross, supported by small wheels, around the country on his holy mission from God. He accidentally stumbled upon a peyote meeting, stating he was looking for a place where people were worshipping. He was directed to go down the hill towards that tipi. When the fireman came outside for wood, he about fell over, as there stood the Messiah complex facsimile. The fireman quickly told the participants inside, that the One they were praying to, was standing outside.

“Bring him in,” they all excitedly yelled.

So, Jesus sat with the Indians and was *fed* lots of medicine. Soon, this son of God realized he was *not* the only one. I often wonder how his ministry changed, after he walked out that canvas tipi door.

“That *is* a good one,” shouted Larkins. “I can’t stop laughing! I wonder if that actually happened.”

“You never know with the Indians. You’ve seen the way they joke here. Maybe this guy realized his divinity in the tipi.”

Roadman Bobbie stated that his grandmother had been nearly given up for dead when she was twelve years old. Doctors had done everything they could with no hope left. She was doctored up with hundreds of peyote buttons for three days. Suddenly, she stood up, claiming she saw Jesus and was now healed. This dying child lived to be over eighty years old. At one meeting, in the morning after all the singing and prayers were over, Bobbie’s chief peyote button was passed around, before putting it back in his medicine box. This old dried peyote, with numerous cleavage lines, looked like a green version of Sedona’s Bell Rock vortex and weighed heavy in the hand. It had been in his family for five generations; believe it or not! How many meetings and healings had this holy spineless cactus seen?

“Man that is *really* old. It probably hosted thousands of meetings.”

“Yeah, imagine all the stories it could tell!”

I must further mention a deeper respect for women that peyote has shown me. Behind every strong roadman is his powerful wife or a significant female. Morning water is brought into the tipi at around 4 a.m., always by a woman and usually it’s the roadman’s wife. The meeting then shifts from masculine to the feminine principle. Divine Mother is now here, in all of her glory, as she prays over the morning holy water, giver of all life. She then prays for everyone in the meeting as if she knows exactly what their needs are...and she usually does. This is the one time during the service when everybody is on their knees, out of respect. Female prayers always touch my heart *way* more deeply. I always feel the love my mom had for me and the love God has for all of us as Divine Mother. I see and know now what a fantastic mother Joya is to Sri. I always did know, but it feels more magnified in the tipi. Men will never understand women. It’s been that way

since the dawn of time, as we all know. Men seem to be like little boys, who seldom grow up until it's almost too late. God knows I'm one of those. To me, the spiritual depth of women is awesome. Girls do grow up and reflect Divine Mother, who takes care of us all. And believe me; the women's prayers usually cover all bases. Sometimes, I wish I could be a woman-maybe for just a day or two.

"Don't ever tell anybody that here!"

"Like I don't know that already, Larkins? I would never *ever* say that in prison. This stuff is only for your ears and yours alone. Let's keep it that way."

There are so many other life stories during my Gila days that it would take many more pages to tell them all- the ones I can even still remember. One, however, is pretty incredible. I had met a couple of substance abuse counselors in the Silver City area who were heading to India. Varanasi was their appointed destination. I told them at Jerry's rustic southwest home to look up my sadhu friend, Hari Hara, at Asi ghat. I described him and where his wooden closet shack was located. When this couple arrived in Asi ghat and asked about the sadhu, they were taken to a temple and shown a statue of Hari Hara - half Vishnu, half Shiva. They explained that they were seeking a holy man by that name, not a *murti*. Then, when they were eating at that same outdoor café catering to western appetites, the lady counselor, named Bo, heard somebody call her name. Hari Hara approached them and displayed a photo of him and me, from a copy I'd sent him. He was also carrying a black ebony wooden bowl from Thailand to show, that I'd sent too. They about fell over! How could this holy man know *her* name or the fact that I'd told them to look him up? Again, India is not for everybody, but if you go there; try to keep an open mind. Some can obviously read them!

"That is bizarre, to say the least, Rideout. Did you ever follow through with your peyote meeting, to get some guidance and spiritual help?"

"Oh yeah, I sure did."

I felt as if my entire life were on....

I needed help now. Since Joya and Sri had moved up to Tuba City to be with Roderick, I moved into our schoolhouse; with the new Iranian teacher, Afasani. We did not hit it off well at all. I was told to leave my room during school hours. What's up with this? I owned over thirty-five hundred dollars in this losing investment, yet I could only eat and sleep here. Shanti actually slept under the covers at night with me for warmth as this schoolhouse was freezing cold, with what little heat there was never reaching my bedroom. However, I had some work to do. I needed to procure the right cottonwood branches and logs, to prepare the firewood for my upcoming healing meeting. I luckily scored a huge truckload off state property near the cliff dwellings. It took me days of secretive work to drag the desired wood to a hidden area, where I could pick it up at night with Bo's help and large landscape truck. We actually did this smooth move in one evening, with flashlights in our mouths. Then, days were spent peeling off the bark and chopping off knots with Ted's Bowie knife. I finally stacked it all proudly, from the smallest diameter to the largest as Johnny had shown me, with the grain going the same direction. Again, it is believed that the degree of perfection here is essential, for a successful meeting.

I arranged with Jerry and Mary to conduct the prayer service on their property. I had attended many meetings there and it was easy for participants traveling from far-off homes to find. Mary and Chen would be helping me with all the food preparations, thank God. They both knew how to shop economically, to help cut costs to a minimum. My meeting ended up costing about four hundred dollars for food, gifts, gas, medicine and help. When the destined evening finally arrived, there were over fifty people from four different states, who'd all come to pray for me. The news got out about my problem.

Who were all of these people? I certainly didn't recognize many of them. Good God, this was blowing me away already. I did a sweat lodge with Lloyd, near Jerry's pond, to prepare myself. Then, much political church discussion ensued, as to whether to hold a house meeting too, for all of those who couldn't fit into the tipi. Everybody was talking loudly at once. Why all this fuss over me? This suddenly got very heavy, with superstitious undertones, but I said to go ahead with a second meeting anyway, so everyone could be included. David ran that house meeting on Jerry's living room floor, complete with the crescent moon sand altar and fire coals on a sheet of plywood. A beautiful couple named Leo and Raven came up from Kerney, Arizona to pray for me. They started the *Peyote Foundation*, complete with a newsletter. They propagated the spineless cactus in greenhouses, and even grafted it onto San Pedro cactus, another psychotropic cousin, much to the dismay of many pure peyotists Native Americans. Later, they would be busted big time. Now however, they were here to support me with their prayers.

It's very difficult to put into words what happened in this healing meeting. Ted ran the sacred fire, while Brother Lloyd fed me more medicine than anyone had ever seen. This was definitely *way* beyond the adult dose! I ingested peyote as powder, chips, fresh buttons, special golf balls with spit and ash, gravy and tea. I never puked, but Keith said he felt me changing dramatically, as he sat on his pillow next to me. I'm sure the colors of my aura rivaled the Aurora Borealis. Everybody spoke to me about the dangers of alcohol, especially old Peter. He dumped on some very tough love, and many felt he actually hit me below the belt. He ain't heavy; he's my brother, to quote the Hollies song. That's old Peter. When asked how I was doing, I could barely find my voice—probably a first for me. The songs and beautiful singing had taken me to somewhere near Pluto. Dimensions were changing inside the tipi. Sometimes, friends seemed very far away, within eight feet of space. Other times, they somehow seemed larger than life. I sensed I was in Lord Shiva's living room, as the crackling fire and crescent moon altar took on a personality

of their own. Then Lloyd prepared four, very special golf-ball-sized peyote. These were to be eaten on my knees, in front of the altar. The fire was *so* darned hot that I was sweating profusely. Peyote likes it hot, I was told, as it grows in very hot terrains of Texas and Mexico. My prayer smoke would soon be taken, after the midnight water and Lloyd's outdoor prayers to the four directions for my recovery. These special peyote balls were in preparation for the cosmic moment. When I took that prayer smoke, shaking like a leaf, it felt like a window opened. I now had a direct line to God, asking Him for help with this deadly disease. All night, I felt as if my life was on trial. Whether I lived or died would be decided here. Or so it seemed, to me, on this karmic night of judgment, redemption and guidance.

"Jesus that sounds intense!" exclaimed Larkins.

"It was *so* intense and emotional too. It was a courtroom like no other that's for sure. Thank God these kind of experiences happen only once in your life. Let's hope so anyway."

When the four hundred-year-long night finally ended, I was literally unable to leave the tipi. Lying down, I saw children's feet under the canvas and heard the friendly sounds of laughter and loved ones' voices. Could I ever put the pieces of my puzzle back together again? Will I ever remember everything everybody said to me? Will I ever come down from where peyote has taken me? Am I really healed? When I finally crawled out of the door flaps, I nearly fell asleep on the remaining woodpile and started to sunburn. It felt *so* good to feel the sun's rays and finally be out of that tipi. Ted had prayed that if I ever did drink again, God forbid, I would *never* get behind the wheel. That sadly would be another prayer that wouldn't materialize, or at least for a very long time. After they managed to spoon feed me some broth, as I still had no appetite, I helped Lloyd clean up and bury the altar sand, as it was now considered toxic waste and unsafe to be around. Lloyd and Muriel stayed on, after everybody else drove home. They had to. The medicine was still working heavily on me. I wasn't even close to coming down. I didn't want them to go.

Lloyd burned more cedar and fixed special smokes for my mind. His smokes taste *so* good, with lavender, sage and anise seeds mixed in with tobacco, that anybody could become addicted to smoking. He instructed me to call him tomorrow to check in. Then diet for the next three days on the peyote tea, which he had left for me in large mason jars. I would faithfully follow my doctor's orders. Next, Melinda called me from Tucson, at precisely the right moment, and sensed exactly where I was at spiritually, mentally and emotionally. She's done her time with peyote and is very intuitive. I love Melinda so much. Her phone call and caring voice meant more to me, at that moment, than diamonds or gold. I felt extremely open and overly sensitive. Finally, after being alone awhile and reflecting, the needed emotional breakdown came. I couldn't stop crying in thankfulness to God. I realized, once more, how special I am in His eyes, to have so many friends come from so far away to help me out. How could I deserve this? This was probably one of the most intense nights of my entire life- another turning point. It took a good week to touch down on earth again. Shanti was very supportive too, with that love that only dogs can give. I realized what a great soul she is, in her canine form. If Shanti ever materialized into a girl, I would have my true soul mate. Oh God, how I loved my Shanti. *Om Namah Shivaya.*

More meetings and close encounters....

After the peyote ordeal, I called my Arizona probation officer. Miraculously, I would *not* be going to prison, but to the Salvation Army's Adult Rehabilitation Center for six months- the ARC, located in downtown Phoenix, Arizona. Talk about miracles. Now, I still had one more month in the Gila wilderness, before I could begin my rehab experience. I

continued to work part-time at Al's stove store. Pure hearted Al was having lots of exotic health issues. I heard years later, that he sold the store and moved back to Idaho, to live with his mother.

We were now losing our communal schoolhouse. We could not meet the financial payments. Our community was falling apart. Joya and Sri had moved up to Navajo land. Keith and Val were building their own straw bale home, as were Cynthia and Bo. Afasani was looking for other work and Ted's family was struggling as usual and thinking about moving to Tucson and putting their property up for sale. It did finally sell, many years later. This whole experiment in spiritual community was a huge financial failure and a great lesson in buying real estate with others. As previously noted, I took the greatest brunt of the losses. What's the lesson here? Don't talk about it, I guess. When I look back now at all the free work I did to prosper this dream, I feel like a fool. How could I have been so blind? I have nothing to show for it, except a few pictures, stories, memories and a lot of karma yoga. When you get burned by bad choices and decisions, it's very easy to become cynical about life.

"Those words ring true to my ears," commented Larkins.
"But you still chose to make those decisions."

"To top it off, I have one more meeting in the tipi that needs mention."

"I've got to hear about another meeting?"

"Humor me, Larkins."

It was another meeting for young crier Rio, Ted's son. At this time, mother Melinda was pregnant and only allowed in her son's meeting at early dawn to pray with the cedar. As she was praying out loud, about ten of us heard a whirling sound, descending from above down towards the fire. No words could describe this sound, as it was like nothing we'd ever heard on earth before. Then the *sound* reversed its direction, as it spiraled slowly out of the top of our tipi. Talk about weird! All

of the Indians heard it and others sitting outside the tipi heard it too; come from the east, hover over the ceremony, then pass on. Upon leaving the sacred area, we finally asked each other what had happened. Were these spirits or a close encounter? Eric and Maritza were *so* blown away that they couldn't sleep that night and couldn't stop talking about the supernatural incident for days. Ironically, three days later Melinda aborted and, when taken to the hospital, no fetus was found. Certain participants were allowed this experience, while others only heard Melinda's prayers. Close encounters of the tipi kind. Even a year later, those of us privileged enough to have experienced the supernatural all agreed that we'd encountered something not of this world. Maybe it was the Twilight Zone.

"That is a tough one to believe. I guess you had to be there, right?"

"Yeah, right. I'm just telling you as I remember it. It blew a lot of us away at the time. It wasn't some kind of mass peyote hallucination either. You don't hallucinate on the medicine."

Before leaving for rehab, I had my long hair cut much shorter. Now the gray really showed. The beautician said she would sit my cat Angela for the next six months. Boy that was sweet of her. Keith and Val would take care of Shanti again and my aging truck. God certainly looks after my animals. Sri was having his fourth peyote meeting coming up but Roderick advised me that outside Anglos weren't welcomed much, up on the Navajo reservation. This reeks of paranoia or superstition to me. After stressing the fact that I *am* Sri's real father and needed to be there for him, I made my mind up to go, regardless. He is my son too, Roderick. I arranged to attend the Tuba City prayer service with Jerry driving us and supporting me. It was a very long drive from Silver to Tuba and we arrived just before dark. We'd traveled through the beautiful Arizona Painted Desert and stopped briefly at the three Hopi mesas, to pray and lay down tobacco near their kivas. Those ancient mesas are really worth a visit. Kachina dolls are cheaper there and the real thing too. They are carved *only* from the roots of cottonwood trees.

“I didn’t know that.”

“I didn’t either, Larkins.”

We had a surprise awaiting us, however, when Jerry and I arrived in the dark, headlights shining from of his big red pickup truck. Sri and family had just returned from the peyote gardens in Texas. Their Hogan was filled with more peyote than I’d *ever* seen! Some were huge, nearly eight inches in diameter, aging about forty years old. These are very special, as peyote seldom reaches that age anymore due to over harvesting. Lloyd and Muriel conducted Sri’s last meeting. I cried heavily, as I prayed for him, Roderick and Joya and myself. None of us were having an easy time in this complex changing relationship. Lloyd fixed Sri a beautiful beaded macaw parrot fan, which he presented later in the ceremony. My son was getting older now and looking gangly at age eight. I feel *so* blessed and honored that Sri has this way of worship in his life. At his young age, he has no idea how very fortunate he is to have this supreme spiritual gift. I *so* envy the way he is being raised, compared to my highly dysfunctional upbringing of anger, fights, fear and alcohol. If I had been raised this way, maybe I would have made better choices in my life. Who knows?

“I too was raised in a dysfunctional family. I’ve never known what normal is.”

“I think it may be too late for us to ever know. If you look around us, nobody seems to be normal here, Larkins.”

At this meeting, I asked Lloyd, who had adopted Sri into his Navajo *near water clan*, to please watch over his spiritual development. Lloyd was now Sri’s uncle, as Joya and I are Lloyd’s brother and sister. These relationships are taken seriously. Thanks to the recent Texas pilgrimage, there was no shortage of medicine at this meeting. Many of the Navajos thanked me in the morning, for traveling so far to pray for my son. I *was* accepted after all on the rez and received a good blessing for my efforts. I also wanted Roderick to know that I *truly* bless his relationship with Joya. I had *finally* let her go.

Roderick is definitely her soul mate. I could feel the karma of Roderick's future, taking on the responsibility of my ex-wife and parenting my young son. He certainly had his work cut out for him, as I carried my heavy cross of alcoholism toward my final Golgotha. Looking back now at how well Sri's life, education and home front are doing, I believe the four yearly meetings that we sponsored, had a very beneficial effect. "Thank you, Creator, for taking pity on me and hearing my prayers, especially for my son. Now please help me, as I face the fiddler- for six months of intense rehab in downtown Phoenix, Arizona."

"So, away you go. I never did rehab. Was it hard?" questioned Larkins.

"Like anything else, it's what you make of it. Do you *do* the program or fight it?"

The army of recovering....

In June of 1997, Keith and Val drove me in my Toyota truck to the ARC- Adult Rehabilitation Center. I treated them to fish tacos on Mill Avenue in Tempe, which was the least I could do, before checking in. After completing a successful urinalysis, I was allowed into the army of recovering abusers of drugs and alcohol. Keith and Val could go home now. The ARC, located on South Central Avenue, is also the main processing plant for the entire greater Phoenix metro's numerous donations to the Salvation Army. Lord, I worked – called work therapy - forty hours per week, sorting every imaginable donation on earth, labeled "bric-a-brac." We had various departments' here-clothing, toys, books, furniture, bicycles and more. We also had our own swimming pool and ate donated food from Basha's and Safeway. It was quite plentiful and good. We were paid about eleven bucks per week, which I spent on tobacco and treats at our nightly café. It was fries and ice cream for me. The first month, no phone calls or outside

contact was allowed. Many had a tough time with this. We each had our own demons to deal with, and a personal counselor for weekly sessions assisted that. With everybody here coming off something, personal melodramas kept the place pretty lively. AA meetings were required daily. We often drove to outside meetings around Phoenix in our packed Dodge van, listening to loud rock music, which I couldn't stand. Once on the way to a meeting, we even saw a prostitute giving oral sex in a car, from our van window as we sped by.

“Now you're talking!”

At one AA meeting, I got to see Dave Mustane speak. He is the leader and guitar player for the famous heavy metal band, *Megadeath*. Some of these Phoenix meetings, like this one, are so large that the guest speaker actually uses a PA system. Famous Dave had a good rap, I must say, having been to heaven and hell repeatedly, as well as about fourteen treatment centers. He claims to have five Mercedes Benz's and a knock-dead gorgeous babe for his wife. Lucky bastard! He does take his sobriety seriously, however. I spoke with him afterwards. I told this hair god that I couldn't stand his music, and felt that it led and promoted teens into the dark world of drugs and alcohol.

“What did he say to that?”

“It kind of pissed him off.”

He claimed to love *The Beatles*, as he sized me up. I wondered if he had ever cut his long hair off for sobriety, as I had done. “We'll go to any lengths to achieve sobriety,” as the AA Big Book says. I don't think “lengths” here refers to hair measurement. Sobriety is far beyond one's crowning glory—even mine.

“You're sure about that? To me, you seem kind of hung up on your hair,” commented Larkins.

“Yeah, I'm certain. Just for the record, I've worn my hair about every length and style you can imagine, from short to shag to pony tail and a perm, but I'm still me underneath it.

However, you wouldn't believe all the shit I've put up with for just *having* long hair. Are people jealous or offended, or do they just want me to look like them? Everybody is hung up on their hair, Larkins. ”

I also attended an AA marathon, where I did seven meetings in one day. We had a fantastic library here too, as we could donate any books we wanted from the non-stop conveyor belt in the book section of our factory. After ninety days, I purchased a rebuilt mountain bike. It was made over by my roommate Brian, from Seattle. Sadly, he died later of a heroin overdose. I never even knew he was into that stuff. His mother found my address in his belongings and wrote me of his death up in Colville. It really saddened me. Brian was a good guy. This disease of addiction can be deadly, that's for sure. Many of us inmates would peddle together all over downtown Phoenix, going to AA meetings, coffee shops and stores on our bikes. This aspect of in-house recovery was totally fun and gave us a sense of freedom. I later gave my bike to Roderick as a Christmas gift, so he could enjoy peddling with Sri. I made a good friend in Jim Hunter. He had a sense of humor much like my own, and we really kept each other laughing a lot. A sense of humor in recovery really helps. To me, a sense of humor is one of God's greatest attributes. Jim would dress up, from our unlimited wardrobe, like some sleazy Las Vegas lounge singer and snap his fingers, Vegas-style, singing *Mack the Knife* or *New York, New York*. We also toyed with women's wigs, as our recovering beauticians cut our hair very short here. Soon I was in the ARC band, playing contemporary Jesus songs on an electric guitar and looking like a gray haired lawyer. We had to practice a lot, as these strung-out musicians suffered from attention deficit disorder and blown-out memories. I found this *very* frustrating, after playing music professionally for nearly thirty years. We finally managed to learn half a dozen songs. Our combo performed on Wednesday night graduations in the chapel. Everybody wore suits and ties on these often emotional nights. The smell of perfume and cologne was strong. Everyone loved hearing our electric soft rock inspirational songs and seeing the recovering

girls, who worked with us, brought over from their apartment complex. No fraternizing was allowed with these dark ladies. However, couples did evolve and often went AWOL to start a new life of addiction together. At Wednesday night graduation, some of the personal testimonies were real tearjerkers. The Sally Ann's recovery program was *always* praised. At Sunday chapel services, another suit and tie affair again, many brothers would thank God and the Salvation Army, only to be busted the next day for ripping off a dozen pair of shoes and Perry Ellis cologne. Instantly, they were expelled from the program. Our ARC band had access to a donated station wagon, to travel to other local churches and perform our holy songs. Everybody that attended these churches knew we were in recovery. We were the lucky ones. Classify these as good times too. After ninety days, I could also leave the institution twice a month from Friday night until Sunday night, if I tested clean upon return. I rode the Greyhound bus up to the Verde Valley to hang with Sri a couple of times. Roderick and Joya had married and moved off the reservation. They had purchased land in the Verde Valley of central Arizona. These visits were good, but I felt like a songbird out of its cage, knowing I'd soon have to return. Joya lent us her red Toyota again and Sri and I drove to Sedona. I purchased a beautiful Pendleton Indian blanket of the Apache sun in turquoise, red and yellow. I've always wanted one of these colorful blankets. It was so good to see Sri's home front progressing. Joya was doing wonders in the garden and Roderick had his own sweat lodge next to a drainage stream. Grandma Pauline had relocated from Canada and was now happily living with them too. Sri's blessed with a full family and a functional one at that. Who knows, maybe they'll have another kid? I'm just so happy for all the answered prayers, Lord.

Back at the ARC, Vic, the *Unusuals* keyboard player from my '69 music days, would pick me up each weekend for time at his Tempe home. Vic is a music master. Classical piano is his bag and he practices at least six hours per day, year round. Vic also had a swimming pool, so his weekend visits were most welcome. We occasionally took in movies too and went

out to lunch every time at *Souper Salad*. I must say that Vic came through with flying colors for me. As part of rehab, we all did the Twelve Steps of Recovery. They are the core of recovery, like it or not. I found a temporary sponsor, Jeff, who helped me complete a thorough self-evaluation of my sins and fears, and make subsequent amends to the many people I had hurt or offended. Joya and I had a great healing in her car, as she drove me up to their home one weekend. I feel that the Twelve Steps are truly the essence of all religious teachings and can certainly help anybody; if they honestly work them. I really felt that this time in recovery was helping me to heal my aching heart and get a better understanding of this crazy thing called alcoholism. At least, it was a start. Recovery is a lifetime job, day by day sober. I had my work cut out for me... again.

“When I did my personal inventory,” exclaimed Larkins, “I found fear was behind everything. Unreal!”

“Everything unreal *is* of fear. Love is the only *real* thing. The ego always sees fear or anger, its other face. It fears its very own death more than anything. It doesn’t want us to wake up.”

Our band fell apart, as the other members all relapsed and were expelled. Goodbye Brothers and good luck. I was given a donated twelve string guitar and played Willie Nelson renditions of gospel songs, solo on graduation nights. I was greatly appreciated and loved this new gig. In many ways, I prefer a solo gig over being in a band- much more freedom and total control. I can pull the songs off a lot faster alone. One Navajo friend gave me a small replica of a peyote water drum at his graduation. This little gift was beautiful and would hang from my truck’s rear view mirror for many years to come. After three months of sorting bric-a-brac under the control of my black female boss, I was promoted to the treasured job of painter and furniture restoration. I had my own paint room, coffee pot, radio and hidden mattress for secluded naps- which I never took. But I did take worn-out furniture and make it look beautiful again, for resale. At least it was a creative job

and I got some experience with an airless sprayer. There were a number of paid female Mexican employees who'd worked here for years. They were all very nice, and obviously not in recovery, but I couldn't imagine a lifetime of old clothes, furniture and bric-a-brac. I also wrote ex-wife Jolene and found out how she had been dumped, after seventeen years of marriage, by her second husband David. He had run away with his sluttish Italian beautician, leaving poor Jolene blown away. She had helped raise his three children and felt much cheated. Since I could get a weekend off now, I suggested that she fly out from L.A. and see me. She did. Vic picked her up at Sky Harbor Airport and then they picked me up at the ARC. After not seeing each other for over a decade and a half, it was like we'd seen each other just yesterday! I couldn't believe it when she stepped out of the car. She had hardly aged physically at all. I had rented her a room at a motel on Mill Avenue, and after getting her settled in, we went for coffee across from ASU. We could hear *The Rolling Stones* playing their loud concert across the street.

"Would you like to go?" she asked.

"We'd better see if tickets are even still available."

Tickets were still available, so she treated us to the concert. The Stones sounded predictable as ever and we, the old stoner first generation hippies, were completely straight at a gig burning with ganja. *Sympathy for the Devil* brought the house down on this *Bridges over Babylon* tour of hit songs. I had borrowed Vic's guitar, so after the concert I serenaded Jolene until early morning hours in room 108. That is a very sacred number in India and numerology but somebody had puked on the rug here, so at 2 a.m. we found an open head shop to purchase a pack of Nag Champa incense. Jolene had never heard me play guitar, as I had only played drums during our marriage. It was quite a surprise for her and she especially loved my original songs. The next morning, she treated Vic and me to a beautiful outdoor breakfast in Tempe. The puke smell was too much in that room, so she moved into Vic's spare room for her second day. She confessed that she dyed

her long hair. She suggested that I should try it, as it slowly washes out in a few weeks, she said. Wrong!! I returned to the ARC looking twenty years younger, but the splattered dye stained Vic's bathroom wall. I put a calendar over it. Hopefully he won't find it for awhile. In the next two years, I was now caught in the vicious cycle of continued hair dying, as it doesn't really *ever* wash out and new gray roots look like hell. Some fountain of youth! I never should have done this. When I played Jolene some peyote tapes, she confessed that she always thought of me as an Indian. That's a nice thought. She was also very happy and concerned over Sri Ram. She would never have her own children and we both wondered what our lives would have been like, had we been parents back in our twenties. All water under the bridge now. May God, Christ and the Great Gurus always bless and guide Jolene. She really is a good woman, who has suffered her share too.

"It sounds like you still love her, to me."

"That goes without saying. I'll always love her on some level."

When we said our goodbyes at the airport, she began crying. She said that if I *ever* got into trouble or needed anything in life, to contact her. Somehow her words felt like a premonition of things to come. We really are psychic, but usually doubt it. Our short visit dispelled any ideas of us ever being a couple again, to me, but we could always be the best of friends. That's actually a greater blessing. One can never have too many friends.

Finally, in December of 1997, I was about to graduate the ARC. For the last few days, I was moved out of my dorm and into my very own private room. Yes! Then, I bussed back up to the Verde Valley and spent a couple of days with Sri and family, before we all returned to Phoenix for my special graduation ceremony. After playing guitar for *so* many graduations, it was finally *my* turn. It proved to be an emotional tearjerker for all involved. For Sri, and all of the other fathers in the treatment center, I performed my last song

on guitar. It was a song written by *The O'Kanes- Daddy Needs to Grow up Too*. I had to hold back tears just to get through this touching ballad. I was given *The Life Recovery Bible* and sobriety pins by Major Angel, who looked like a bald eagle if I ever saw one, and his piano playing wife. They both expressed how much my music had touched them and how very special I was. I would be greatly missed. Again, I was holding back tears. But this time they were tears of joy. But now life must go on, sober, and the real test is in the outside free world. It was now fast approaching. I quickly escaped to the smoking area, to smoke one last rollies with my crazy buddy Jim Hunter. I will sure miss this guy's sense of humor. I hope he makes it but I have my doubts. Poor Jim was also into heroin. Outside, Joya and Roderick presented me a jar of medicine, for my long road trip home and new life back in Washington again. This was yet another time of saying goodbye to my heart's deepest love, Sri Ram. At least I could rest easier now, knowing that he was doing *so* well. All parents *only* want the very best for their children. Many of my prayers were being manifested before my sober eyes. But the big question, still left unanswered for me, was how well would I actually do now in my recovery? At this point in time, I really felt that the ARC program and peyote had *totally* healed me. How very wrong I was. Sadly, I still hadn't hit my bottom, and had much more to learn about alcoholism and the recovery process.

"How long did you stay sober this time, Rideout?" asked Larkins, as he pumped up his pillow. Then he slowly ate another watermelon Jolly Rancher in front of me.

Now was the time for me to....

Vic drove me back to Silver City on Christmas Eve, to get my truck and dog. En route past Globe, we ran into snow. Vic loved this, as he'd been anxious to try out the four wheel drive on his Subaru. He dropped me off at old Peter's hillside shack, after a last fish dinner together downtown. The snow was

really coming down hard now making visibility bad and Vic was worried about getting home safely. He was itching to go and did quickly. Christmas day at Peter's was the classic worst one of my entire life. He'd been invited to dinner with some peyote friends. I was not invited, as I'd just gotten out of *rehab*. How hypocritical. I used to pray with these same people! So, I sat alone in Peter's freezing house, eating only brown rice in silence. Peter's cat rubbed up against my leg, reminding me to be grateful. Merry Christmas, Rob - "I am with you always."

On Boxing Day, December 26, Peter drove me through the long and slow winding road of pine trees back to Gila Hot Springs. Finally, I'm reunited with my beloved Shanti and my aging Toyota truck. This was to be my last memory of seeing our communal area. It hurt to look at the canyons. They all echoed fond and sad memories. We had all tried *so* hard, in so many ways, to make this work. It just wasn't meant to be. I felt very sad inside, as I looked around one last time, saying my final farewell to another paradise. Oh well, at least Keith and Val's house was progressing well, as was Cynthia and Bo's. Goodbye, holy Gila. We gave it our best shot. Dreams don't make noise when they die.

In the NAC tradition, now was the time for me to sponsor my "appreciation meeting" to give thanks for all the prayers and blessings I'd received. Al put me up in his small trailer, alongside his semi-retarded dog, Girl. He had mucho peyote growing in pots and trays all over this small living space, along with Cousin San Pedro cactus. I literally slept with the medicine. *Again*, I harvested the required firewood and made all of the necessary preparations for this meeting. And again, Lloyd would be the master of ceremonies. This was a much smaller, more intimate meeting of very dear friends. Alan flew in from Atlanta, Georgia with his twenty-one-year-old son, Darshan. This was to be Darshan's first initiation with peyote. Eric and Maritza, my hard-working karma yoga friends, supported me with prayers and their usual hard work. And again, Leo and Raven, and Ted and Melinda attended. Melinda asked to speak formally to me during the meeting. She stated

that I was her very best friend in the whole world. Wow! The medicine brings that out. She then gave me a beautiful elk skin cedar bag that she had specially made. Alan leaned over and whispered, "I feel that way about you too." He confided that I had more real friends than anybody he'd ever known. After all I'd lost in life, I suddenly felt incredibly rich! Maybe Alan was right. Friends are truly God's greatest treasure. Lloyd told me to share my special prayer smoke, after I spoke with God, with Brother Alan, as he'd come a very long way to support me. And again, I was shaking like a leaf as I prayed to God. Alan presented me later with a long woolen vest from India. I still treasure it today. This time around, Lloyd didn't dose me up with mega medicine, thank God. This was a "thank you" meeting, not an "emergency room" service. Another struggling alcoholic named Jesse gave me his hunting knife and Guatemalan colored belt. All of these gifts from friends still carry a fond memory and blessing today. I never forget gifts like this or where they came from.

After saying my goodbyes, I was now off with Shanti to retrieve aging Angela from the hairdresser's house. Nobody was home, but I luckily found my aging tabby cat darting around the yard in the dark. She was doing her cat thing, as only they can do. I grabbed Angela and left the hairdresser a thank you note. I soon ate medicine, listening to peyote tapes the whole long drive north to Colville. This was quite an experience in itself. It gave me time and the right mind-set to process where I'd just been and come out of. Soon I'd start life's next chapter with my old friends, Tony and Barb Harmon. What will this be like? I no longer needed a map to find my way home- even on peyote.

"How many times now have you driven between Arizona and Washington, Rideout?"

"I've done it too many times to remember, Larkins," I sighed. "Would you please give me one of your Jolly Ranchers?"

"Not a problem."

We were called, “Clean and Sober”....

Back up in Colville, I got lost in the evening snow, trying to remember the correct rural road to Harmon’s farmhouse. Upon finding it, I couldn’t tow my U-Haul trailer up their road, due to the ice. Wow, this weather was certainly different than Arizona’s. I walked up to their farmhouse unexpected, surprising the Harmon’s and especially their Great Dane dog, Buck. Their old dog Tiger had passed on. This new dog did not know me and charged out of the front door, instantly attacking my arm. After that greeting, Barb fixed me dinner. I was semi in culture shock, to be with these dear friends again, in this great old farm house- after three and a half days of my truck cab, Shanti and Angela and 1,700 miles of asphalt. My fur girl’s shyly made friends with Buck and their other dog, old Sadie, sniffing butts and all that. Tony made sure our animal friends were *not* allowed in the kitchen eating area. To quote him, “Nobody likes a begging dog.” How true, Tony.

The following morning, we used Tony’s four wheel drive truck to tow me up the icy road to their 120-acre spread. I got a mini-storage unit the next day, and finally got that U-Haul off my bumper. I really don’t like trailers! I had called MVD in Santa Fe, prior to leaving New Mexico. I had been assured that my current driver’s license was legal and valid. I drove for the next year *not* knowing that it was *only* legal in New Mexico, but not in any other state, as Arizona still had a hold on it from my numerous DUI’s. Sometimes, ignorance is bliss.

“You were very lucky, my friend,” commented Larkins.

“Boy, don’t I know that,” I said, as I thought about all the fear I didn’t experience, due to my ignorance.

The upstairs attic room was perfect for Shanti, Angela and me. I set up an altar in a corner and began my daily prayers, chanting and meditation. This usually included Babaji’s Aarati, Yogananda’s songs and, of course, a few choruses of *Om Namah Shivaya*. While going through my box of family

heirlooms upstairs, I felt Mom's presence strongly. I noticed the distinct smell of her perfume in the air around me; an odor I hadn't smelled in over fourteen years. My hair stood on end. I used my hawk-like nose on the heirlooms but came up negative. They always had that old smell, semi moldy. Then I felt a deep sense of love surround me alone in this attic room. Hi Mom, and thank you *so* much. I needed that.

"Jesus Rideout, that is right up there with your sister appearing to you."

"Yeah, it was my mom's way of letting me know."

"Letting you know what?" questioned Larkins.

"That there is no real separation in death. Death is just a dream, just as life is."

"There you go again, with all that metaphysical bullshit. You know I have a hard time accepting it."

"Well, you're not alone there, Larkins."

Pam Rideout sent me a large manila envelope that my dad had told her not to mail, until long after his death. She warned me in an introductory letter that I may find some shocking facts. She was correct. Dad had written a short version of his life story for me. Many family skeletons came out of the closet now. Dad had given himself a vasectomy, without ever telling my mom. No more dysfunctional kids for this couple. My mom's suicide attempt was explained in further detail too. He told how Mom had taught him to smoke, drink and cuss. In short, his story was quite sad. My poor dad actually had a pretty miserable life. His greatest loves were the dogs, Porsches and work. Family came in behind those. How pathetic. He also greatly resented being called a Jew his whole life. With that Rideout nose, he just looked Jewish or Indian. I've been told that a few times, too. After reading his words, I was glad that he took the time to put some personal family history down on paper, sad or not. Maybe I should do that for my son. We all have a story. The exercise is to tell it.

One Saturday morning after our grocery shopping, we went to see about possibly buying a horse. Why not? We had the perfect place for one. We all fell instantly in love with a young white Arabian mare. We named her Ayla. She was a true beauty. Tony had never been around horses much, but learned quickly how to saddle, bridle and ride her. He learned real quickly. However, Ayla wasn't the gentle lady we'd expected. She was more like a stick of dynamite or a lightning bolt. Harmon's also boarded a friend's older Morgan horse, so at least our Arabian rascal wasn't alone. Months later, Ayla and Barb went down on slippery pine needles in the front yard. Barb suffered a mild concussion, losing her memory of the accident details. "So tell me Rob, what happened?" I told her what happened over and over again. She was taken to the hospital for observation and then had the guts to ride Ayla again, to overcome her fear. But now our naughty horse had a restraining rope, holding her chin down to her chest, to prevent bucking. One horse power is a lot of kinetic energy. With all of the metal and screws in my leg, I shied away from riding Ayla. Horses can sense fear, so I thought I chose wisely. The sweet smell of cows was reminding me of my childhood pony farm days. I know quite a bit about horses. My sister and I rode Shetland ponies two weeks a summer, for three years, on this farm that was a child's version of paradise. It seems even cow shit can activate fond dormant memories- for me anyway.

Work was slow for Tony and me during this winter of 1998. We watched a lot of Judge Judy on satellite television, as we drank mucho coffee and took long walks in the woods. It was awesome to tromp through the snow covered fields and forests together. Barb supported us with her job as a bank teller. God bless her. She is such a hard working woman. During our laid-back winter, Tony and I took a road trip across the state of Washington to Bellingham and Sumas, our old haunts. I ate medicine and didn't tell Tony until about six hours later, somewhere near Moses Lake. We had a much-needed, brother to brother talk about the wandering heart karma of previous years. Tony clearly realized in defending himself what a strong soul mate he has in Barb, and his real true love for her.

As I consider him my brother, I'm really glad we had this talk. That's what friends do. They can call each other on their shit. After hitting a new Indian casino outside of Bellingham, we then visited with Gary and Peg Mulroney. They couldn't believe my alcohol stories and DUI's. Gary had been in recovery for many years and had never got into near the trouble I had. I met the new owner of my parents' house, next door to Mulroney's. All the carpet had been torn up to expose beautiful wooden floors underneath. If my parents could only see this, I thought. I still had a few things up in the attic I needed to deal with. Then I noticed he'd pruned the hell out of most of the yard trees. Many were our small live Christmas trees, planted decades ago that had grown into beautiful conifers. It was very sad to feel this house, my old childhood home. The scene in Bellingham was changing too. It was no longer my home. Where is home, really, but in God?

"After losing your house in the woods and that place in Gila Hot Springs, I bet you felt weird... no home I mean, right?" asked Larkins.

"I wouldn't feel at home anywhere- for a long time to come, Bunkie. It takes time to establish roots."

After leaving Whatcom County, we visited Sunray, the extreme house builder who'd visited us in the Gila. He was wearing clothes now. His present property was near Mount Vernon. What a trip that was! There must have been about ten bizarre architectural experiments on this property. Plus, a huge tripod log framework about forty feet high that housed a real rush of a rope swing. There wasn't a straight line or regular angle in any of Sunray's creations. This blew Tony away, who tends more towards conventional construction and John Wayne movies. Sunray's latest project was pre-fabbed wooden yurts. These were beautiful, compared to my canvas one, and meant to last. Sunray definitely is up there on my character list and I think probably on Tony's list too.

As spring approached, construction suddenly picked up. I helped Tony do some custom solid laminate countertops and an

additional room and roof job for some friends. Ironically, these friends, Dave and Shannon, would become my guardian angels a decade from now. Finally, I was measuring, cutting wood and pounding nails again. For my forty- eighth birthday present, Harmon's gave me carpentry tools and a lot of moral support.

Then at an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting at the Colville recycling center, I met Norma and Eric. Eric was born missing one hand, but had a small single fingernail which he used to pick guitar.

"I know you!" stated Eric.

"How could this be?" I answered back.

"Joya sent us over to your adobe cabin in Gila Hot Springs, when we traveled to Arizona for a peyote meeting. Now do you remember?"

Is this a small world or divine synchronicity? Eric became my AA sponsor and this happily married couple introduced me to the Native American Church over in the nearby Okanogan area of Washington State. I crossed over Sherman Pass with them, to sit up with Anglos who'd been church members for nearly two decades. These new friends could sing those peyote songs very well, especially Eric. In fact, he is one of the best medicine singers I've ever heard, Indian or non-Indian. I finally took Tony to a meeting there, but he failed to eat enough medicine and really got very little out of the service. At about 2 a.m., he suddenly missed Barb and actually wanted to go home. No Tony...no! This reminded me of dying Sarah wanting to end her meeting in the middle of the night. In the morning, it was all I could do to keep Tony there long enough to pack up some food for our spacey drive home. Peyote was definitely not his cup of tea. Being a non-smoker, of tobacco anyway, he also found it hard to breathe in the smoky prayer-filled tipi. To each his own or, "Follow your bliss," to quote Joseph Campbell. How well I know that peyote isn't for everybody. It's one rugged way of worship. The goal is to be well enough to *not* have to attend such meetings. I wasn't there quite yet.

At another AA meeting, I met a fellow musician named Sean. As well as recovering from alcohol, he too was doing his best to stay off meth, crystal and coke. He'd been clean for over a year, but still had trouble sleeping- from *so* many stimulants detoxifying out of his system. We joined our musical talents and new sobriety, to become a duo known as *Clean and Sober*. He was Clean and I was Sober. Sean played great solos on my classical Yamaha guitar, while I pounded out the rhythm on my Hondo acoustic and sang all the lead vocals. I taught him harmony parts too, which he taped and studied at home. We played a lot of old obscure *Bee Gee*'s songs, which stunned our audiences. Sean was a super nice guy and we harmonized well together. We played many Saturday night alcohol-free gigs at a new age center/coffee shop on the mighty Columbia River. We played one sunny afternoon for *Normal* and the *November Coalition*, a prisoner activist group- people fighting to legalize pot and families fighting to minimize long prison sentences for their locked-up pot growing significant others. Mitch, my childhood friend, fellow band mate in *The Rebels*, and old housemate after Ecuador, came up from Spokane to see us play. We hadn't seen each other in over twenty years. We actually saw *The Beatles* together three times in 1964 and 1966. He and Jan were now divorced and he suggested that I date her. Really? Why not? She's a great lady and a fellow intuitive Pisces. However, the potheads at this fair grounds gig did not cotton to our name. You've got to be kidding me. Clean and sober they definitely were not and their wall of denial must have been threatened somehow.

"Sean, I think we're playing for the wrong audience. We're so much more than just a name."

"I know, Rob. It's ridiculous. Aren't they listening to us?"

Jan and I did try dating briefly. She treated me to a Broadway stage play musical, based on songs of Leiber and Stoller from the '50's. We also ate many times at an outdoor Thai restaurant, overlooking the Spokane River. When the NAC people in the Okanagan sponsored their huge yearly barter fair, we drove across Sherman pass and enjoyed

ourselves immensely. This yearly barter fair is an American version of the Kumbha Mela, but on a *much* smaller scale, of course. Ganja food was available, which enhanced the party atmosphere. There were about three generations of hippies, complete with school buses, VW vans, tipis and lots of long hair and dreads. And, numerous bonfires, ongoing drum circles and various live bands. Washington has three to four such fairs every year, complete with schedules posting the needed details. Nothing serious ever came out of our dating, as Jan and I are more like a brother and a sister. After losing Joyce, God has blessed me with many good sisters.

Finally, a new company started up in Colville - Northeast Wildfires. I was trained, quick and dirty, to perform “mop up” at forest fires. Realistically, we thinned trees for Boise Cascade 95% of the time. This was by far the hardest work I’ve ever done! I went through three Stihl chainsaws and two pair of expensive logging boots. We cut down trees by the thousands, per ten-hour days in heat well over 100°, walking atop slash piles over five feet high. In short, this was very dangerous work. The *F* word was heard constantly throughout the woods, as other thinners either fell in the slash or had their precious saw caught in a binding cut. Beehives were often hit, stinging many, and a bear actually walked into camp one fine day. When we were paid nine dollars per hour, I could survive. But when we switched over to payment by poorly measured swaths, everybody got screwed... big time! I would cut over fourteen acres and only be paid for five. The colored ribbons changed so often that nobody knew for certain whose area they could be thinning. What a way to run a business! We often drove over two hours at 3 a.m. to our logging camp. It was often easier to camp out for the week and hear the sound of chainsaws, as some drunken asshole decided to tune up his tool at 9 p.m., than waste time and gas on these long drives. Shanti ate the Indians’ elk, which they stupidly left out unprotected- duh! They threatened to eat her, as their ancestors had done. When these losers rammed a chipmunk onto our truck radio antenna, I’d seen about enough of this business. One big boy even had a classic nervous breakdown, throwing his chainsaw into the *dog*

hair woods. He could only measure cut acreage now, as his psych job, but got paid as unfairly as us drones. This new company sucked big time and appeared to be going down in flames; just like a forest fire. We needed a fire to fight, after this crap, and we got a few, luckily. We did mop-up on three small fires in our yellow Kevlar fire retardant jumpsuits. This was just dirtier, hard work. A helicopter delivered hot coffee and restaurant take-away food from a pallet descending from the sky. I did get to see some pretty incredible forestlands that not many non-loggers would ever see. Again, that all came with the job.

“I used to be a logger, Rideout... over on the Olympic peninsula. I’ve seen some pretty incredible woods too, so I know what you mean. It’s *so* peaceful to work in the woods, even if we are making one hell of a noise.”

Back home with Tony and Barb, domestic stress was rising. I felt as if I was wearing out my welcome. “Fish and visitors stink after three days,” to quote Ben Franklin. I was not clear about what exactly was expected from me, to live on their estate anymore. It was time for me to find my *own* place, something I could afford. During my real estate search, I finally relapsed; after nearly one and a half years of sobriety.

“How did that happen? I thought you were doing so well.”

“Harmon’s left for a weekend and I had the farm to myself.”

I went kayaking alone on the Colville River and then afterwards, I felt an incredible urge to drink. I thought about calling Eric, my sponsor, but I didn’t. The desire to drink was overpowering me. It was fuckin’ overwhelming! I felt like Dr. Jekyll turning into Mr. Hyde and it was already too late to pick up the phone. I knew I was going to drink, as I consciously bought a pint of cheap whiskey. One part of my mind was just watching it all play out, not judging. Returning to the farm, I quickly fed the cows. Then I began my secret relapse, as I played my guitar and dotara on the lawn. Nobody would *ever* know my secret sin but me. I went a month sober, and then repeated this performance when Harmon’s left once again. I

recognized that I deeply needed them for backup, to keep my sobriety. Heaven knows, they *are* my best friends. I was now headed for serious trouble and I had no idea, of course. I couldn't tell them. It was all too much fun again, to wallow in my sentimental memories. This disease of denial is very tricky. It lets you believe, "I'm not sick." You have no idea of just how *very* sick you actually are.

"Well said, Rideout."

"It takes one to know one, Larkins."

We alcoholics hold....

After purchasing my own three-bedroom trailer for six thousand dollars in Kettle Falls, I instantly fell into the daily routine of malt liquor after work; and driving home exhausted with an open bottle between my legs. I was still on a three-year probation sentence with Arizona, but Washington refused to accept their inter-state compact. As Arizona had never crossed this bridge before, I had to call them weekly, on a toll-free number to check in. I lied that I was sober and attending AA meetings bi-weekly. They had no way of monitoring me, unless I got into trouble. I was being super careful and very lucky, so far. I was still working for Northeast Wildfires, while living in my new secluded space ten minutes north of Colville. Sri flew up to Spokane for a weeklong visit. Jan and I took him for dinner at our favorite Thai restaurant overlooking the Spokane River. Later, I showed him a beautiful, flowering botanical park. After seeing the pictures we took, I hated seeing that damn dye in my hair. Back in Kettle Falls, we picked Bing cherries on tall ladders at a fruit orchard near the Columbia River. Sri loved swimming with Shanti at the Kettle River beach. Shanti would pull him around by her tail in the

warm water. Classify these as good times again. Then we drove over the North Cascades Pass, seeing a small bear cross the road en route. We were going sailing with Dan, Kirk and young Sequoia in the San Juan Islands.

“Is that the same Dan who built your house and drove you to you airport?”

“Yeah, the same Brother and I stayed in his cabin during that year of separation from Joya and Sri.”

However Sequoia, Dan’s son, drove Sri and me nuts, while his father shouted loudly over the ocean waves, proving to be quite the German sea captain. I didn’t drink around Sri at all during his vacation with me. We alcoholics hold a lot of secrets and shame. I couldn’t let him know about my relapse. *No way*. We camped out on a small island that had cliff nests of protected peregrine falcons. No ferry stops here, but many sea-going kayakers joined our secluded beach camp, keeping their distance for personal space. The next day we sailed over to Orcas Island to soak in the hot tubs at Doe Bay. Joya and I had brought a very small Sri to this same resort years before. We’d had such a fight, that Joya had disappeared for hours. This place did *not* have such good memories for me, as I looked over at the room we once stayed in. However, this cruise was Sri’s first time on a sailboat and proved to be another fond memory. That old turtle Kirk was as slow as ever, getting from the hot tubs back to Dan’s sailboat for our return voyage back home. He wanted to hang out longer with the naked hippie girls.

“I’d like to go to this Doe Bay. It sounds like my kind of place,” interjected Larkins.

“It might be a little too hip for you, Larkins.”

Next, we visited Christian on Lummi Island. Looking at the ocean and sparkling lights of Bellingham across the bay, I flashed on this being the exact same spot where Jody and I had been married. Sri began to really miss his mom. We let him call home. This was the longest time in his young life that he’d ever been away from her. I felt sad for him, as I was trying *so*

hard to be a good dad and show him a very special time. What we parents won't do to show our love, even if we are alcoholic.

When we returned to Eastern Washington after our sailing adventure, heartbreak was awaiting us.

"How heavy was it?" asked Larkins.

We picked up Angela from Harmon's farm and then went grocery shopping and to Wal-Mart. She somehow escaped from my mini truck while we shopped. We didn't even notice, until we were unloading the groceries back at my trailer. We returned quickly to both stores and left messages with a construction crew outside and store employees; be on the lookout for a near deaf, half-blind old gray female tabby cat. Nobody called back. Angela was seventeen when she left us. They say cats often know when it's *their time*, so maybe its better that it happened this way. I burned cedar for her and felt very sad. Even Shanti seemed to miss her, as they had grown up together. I'm glad Sri was with me during this dark hour. He was seeing his father cry. To me, the loss of animals is just as heavy as that of human friends. Fur friends *always* give unconditional love and ask *so* little from us in return. I'll look forward to seeing her again up yonder, when I have my life review, upon graduation from this planet of sorrows.

The day arrived, much too soon, to take Sri back to Spokane International Airport for his flight home to Arizona. After our final farewells, I cried my guts out driving home. I *hate* being a single divorced dad! Why God, is it my karma to see *so* little of the one I love *so* much? This question would be asked by me for many more years to come. Then I got drunk back in my trailer, at exactly the wrong time. True alcoholics have the knack for doing that. Stepfather Roderick called. I never should have answered that damn phone! But I did, and it was far too obvious that I was drunk. Roderick clearly understood my emotional pain and geographic problem, without judgment... but the shame, guilt and relapses were killing me. I now felt that I could *never* stay clean and sober very long. Why not just drink and enjoy it? What a way to die! I felt like

I was fighting a losing battle. I now understood why Bo's brother blew his brains out. How do people *ever* stay sober, when their everyday lives are so boring and mundane? I had lost my dream, somewhere, somehow. I had no love life or even the prospect of one. I was working my ass off to pay child support and barely breaking even financially. And I was *not* playing nearly enough music to satisfy my soul. I was a loser, the living dead. Alcohol was taking me down and I really didn't give a shit. However, I hadn't hit my bottom yet-not by a long shot.

"You are a loser, dude, if you are drinking to die."

"I was just thinking about it, as I drank."

Harmon's hosted a Northeast Washington barter fair on their property. Christian drove over the pass from the Bellingham area with two girlfriends, Carol and Melee. All three stayed with me. We had quite a blast at the fair and my home front. Sean and I played to thousands of hippies and I received the ultimate compliment of my entire musical career. A young beautiful, blonde dreadlocked lady, who'd lived in a Krishna ashram, said my voice touched her heart more deeply than any singer she'd *ever* heard. Her name was Violet and when asked where she was from, she said, "the Spirit." We drank wine together, hers, then she danced away back into her spirit world, I guess, as I never saw her again. An old gypsy crone sold ganja pumpkin cake that had one dancing in half an hour. Was this the '60's or the '90's? The Bellingham girls loved these magical treats and ate up daily. After our full days at the fair, the goddesses cooked up big time back in my trailer. My bathroom looked like a storm had just hit it - hair dryers, cosmetics - you know. It was really nice to have so much nurturing female energy around me. Carol, an author, gave me a copy of her book, *Northwest Single Men's' Favorite Recipes*, as I sold her my old kayak for one hundred bucks. I also turned her on to Willie Nelson. Later, she bought nearly everything Willie had ever recorded. I really felt alone again when these divine mothers said their goodbyes. Loneliness is *such* a drag. We'd all experienced something very special, a

very heartfelt connection, and Harmon's got to reunite with my spiritual sister, Christian. Christian also met Tony's brother Greg there, who kind of resembles *Superman* Christopher Reeves. They had a temporary long distance phone relationship but nothing more than that. Christian's true man would be coming soon.

Eric and Norma held sweats next to their small pond. Harmon's had never done a sweat lodge and Eric can run a good sweat, as well as he sings. Everyone got a blessing, swim in the lake and a fantastic meal with fine fellowship. Another dinner for Eric's birthday brought a surprise musician from the Pacific Northwest. He turned out to be Kim, the saxophone player from Seattle's *Viceroy's* of my teen years. At fourteen, I used to stand in front of the stage watching this dude's band in rapt awe. I was much honored to meet one of my musical heroes. I asked Kim about *The Fabulous Wailers*, my favorite Northwest band whom I'd sat next to at the Beatles 1966 concert. He said that Ron Gardner, the lead singer, had been burned alive, in a small trailer, while selling Christmas trees! I was deeply shocked by this distressing news. Ron Gardner was one of the best lead singers I'd ever seen and one very cool dude. He should have been famous, I always felt. For every person who "makes it" in the music business, there are thousands of others who are equally deserving and just as talented. This humble sax player, at Eric's Birthday party, confessed that he'd damaged his eardrums with new age ear candles by accident. Bad karma happens to musicians too. Lord, how well I know that.

After Sri's visit, I thought hard about living so far away from him. Seeing him only once a year was unbearable to me. It just plain sucked. What to do? I was sick of felling trees and being so damned underpaid, not to mention the extreme danger of this job. After some thought, I called my Tempe friend Vic, to see if he knew of any work in Arizona. If he does, I could be closer to my estranged son. Luckily, Vic's friend Rick owned RBC Construction and would hire me on as a laborer for ten dollars an hour immediately. Rick was a father too and had

played drums in Bellingham's *Goose Creek Symphony* back in the day. This was great news. So I set up my life now to be gone for six months on a scouting mission for a locale and job near Sri Ram. "Seek and ye shall find." I ironically reunited with peyote brother John Kimmey, whom I'd met at Sri's first meeting. John agreed to house sit my trailer. He also wrote his book about Hopi prophecy, entitled *Light on the Return Path*, there. I was given a first autographed copy later. He wrote on the title page, "Rob, Keep those chants going. We're almost home!"

How many times now had I driven this route to the Southwest? It seems like too many to count. Which way should I go this time? Shanti and I packed up once more and said our goodbyes to Colville. I bought a pouch of *American Spirit* tobacco, in the pissing rain, at a discount smoke shop down the road. I'll need it on the road again, to the one state that always seems to bring me trouble. Or maybe I'm just trouble, looking for a state of expression?

I was on a scouting mission....

Vic would let me live in his Tempe home for a month, no more. Geniuses need their space. Like many others, he fell in love with Shanti immediately, taking her for walks in the nearby park. His orange trees were producing abundant sweet fruit that we peeled daily. We also continued to eat out regularly at cheap Chinese buffets and our favorite, *Souper Salad*. And Vic, still as predictable as ever, played that grand piano his six to eight hours a day. This was like living with Beethoven. He blew me away many times as I lay on my bed listening to his heavenly music.

My new job was a piece of cake, compared to the hard labor I'd just left. Hell, anything would be a piece of cake after that. RBC was in the dirt business, constructing house pads for new homes north of the Scottsdale city limits. I'd drive daily over

an hour to work at 4:30 a.m. When they found out I had a chainsaw, I was soon cutting Palo Verde and junipers for a chipping machine. I also spent a lot of time behind a flat shovel and large landscape rake. I even took “Rake 101” to learn the precise science of leveling crushed gravel and AB perfectly. On Fridays, I often got to drive the water truck, to process dirt and clean the neighborhood streets of our weekly mess. My foreman was a recovering alcoholic named Louie and one heck of a character and good man. He’d often let me off early, but made sure I still got paid my forty weekly hours. I even did side work for him at his house on weekends. Vic paid me to prune his palm trees up on a tall ladder with my huge chain saw. That was one dangerous job that I don’t *ever* want to repeat. These southwest trees are *so* different in character from those of the Northwest. I guess that could be said about the people too. So, with Vic being basically a recluse and my month up, I now needed to find a new place to live.

“Was that hard to find?”

“To say the least; I had to comb through ads on bulletin boards and search the newspaper ones too.”

I ended up renting a room from Steve and Waxy, a bizarre musical couple. They were hard-core Goth punk rockers and Steve was super paranoid, as he’d just been released from prison! I couldn’t even conceive of that one.

“Well, you can now!” shouted Larkins, smiling at me and then slapping his knee in joy.

“Yeah, but back then, prison wasn’t even *in* my vocabulary. I thought I’d luckily escaped that by doing rehab.”

Their house was directly in Sky Harbor’s flight path, so outside telephone calls were next to inaudible due to the jet roar every ten minutes. This odd couple reminded me of vampires, always keeping the drapes shut, very few lights on ever and basically only active at nocturnal hours. They had a recording studio and full drum set in one room, so we often

rocked out. Waxy would wear a blonde wig and a wedding dress for their off-the-wall performances, which weren't very often. I continued to drink copiously, feeling so uncomfortable living with these strange roommates. We really didn't have much in common, except music. And I was usually pretty plastered when I played with them. It certainly made their songs more tolerable.

"That must suck living with roommates, after owning your own place," commented Larkins.

"It really sucked! I felt so lost, in so many ways. I wondered if I would *ever* have a place to call home again."

After I thought Shanti and I had found a temporary "home," the vampire couple decided they only wanted this casket for themselves. Maybe my drinking was affecting them. Who knows? Even with the hassle of moving once again, it was a blessing to be leaving this macabre environment.

Owning a dog makes finding a roommate rental very difficult. It was a blessing that Angela made her exit when she did, or my chances would have greatly diminished. I called many ads in the Phoenix rag, *The New Times*, until I connected with Michael. He owned a nice house on Vineyard, across the street from a park on the borderline of Tempe and Phoenix, not far from Sky Harbor Airport. Michael also had two dumb dogs, so Shanti was no problem. He also had two more roommates. One was a lesbian with a stud in her tongue, who lived in a backyard cottage rental. The other roomy was full breasted Zivodonna from Croatia. He took us all out to an evening of hard drinking, to break the ice of our communal living situation. That was exceptionally fun and a story unto itself. These ladies were crazy! Michael had a huge hi-tech television and a swimming pool in the backyard. The park was perfect for Shanti's walks and bowel movements, and provided some small token of nature in this concrete inferno. Phoenix seems to have four seasons: tolerable, hot, really hot and what the hell.

Now that I was back residing in Arizona, I received a phone call from the probation department, requesting me to complete

a UA - urine analysis - for detection of drugs. My three years of easy probation was nearly over and this was my first UA- wouldn't you know it. I'd smoked pot once, with the vampires around Christmas and was worried that it might show up. I purchased *The Stuff* at Headquarters head shop for twenty dollars, hoping to avoid detection. It worked *too* well, stripping some ingredient out of my urine that should have been there.

"Did they ask you to pee again?"

"Yeah, and luckily the probation department waited another month before my repeat pee-performance."

"It takes that long for pot *not* to show up."

"Duh, I know that. I passed final inspection successfully, thus completing my court ordered probation. Thank God, alcohol doesn't show up... because I was still killing King Cobras daily."

I was also still dying my hair in the vicious cycle of eternal dark hair. Nobody wants to grow old and I certainly didn't want to look old before my time. But, of course, my present lifestyle was just aging me. A couple of black crack whores at Taco Bell thought I had a wig on, as they tried to proposition me. I was carded for I.D. twice at Circle K, for not looking old enough to buy beer. Good God, the power of modern chemistry! All of the store clerks gathered around to see the birth date on my driver's license. Nobody could believe I was forty-nine. One said, "God has been good to you." I responded with, "No, L'Oreal has been good to me." After the heartfelt pain I'd been avoiding in my life of escapism, I wasn't sure anymore if God was ever good to me. Of course, this is just more stinking thinking, as I was still so caught up in living an illusion. In my opinion however, dyed hair should be left to females, not real men. I would free myself from this trap in time.

"I can't imagine you with dyed hair, Rideout. That is so un-hippie."

“I know. Now, I like my gray hair, but it took a long time to get there. You either lose it or it turns grey, it seems, so I’m just grateful to have hair at my age. As I heard Emmylou Harris say in concert one time, ‘These are my eagle feathers and I’ve earned every one.’ That’s exactly how I feel now about my grey hair.”

“That’s a good way to look at it but you need a haircut, eagle dude. It’s getting too long.”

“No way, Larkins... I’ll cut it when I get out. It’ll be *real* long then, like it was back in the early ‘70s.”

“I envy you.”

“Don’t. It’s just hair.”

I also played my classic Americana songs at retirement communities in nearby Mesa. The old wealthy retirees loved my romantic renditions and I was paid forty dollars an hour. Of course, an hour was all I played, but it helped satisfy the musical need in me. I *do* love to sing, and especially those old songs. They sure don’t write ‘em like that anymore.

Then Eric called me from Colville, to say that he would soon be flying down to visit his mother in Scottsdale. He asked if I knew of any peyote meetings happening in the area. Yes, there was a meeting coming up that we could attend, ironically at Leo and Raven’s Peyote Foundation in Kerney, Arizona. I picked up Eric at his mother’s million dollars mansion. She was obviously wealthy and Eric’s hippie lifestyle and values were about the exact opposite from hers; a lot like my own relationship with my upper-middle class family, now deceased, of course. Leo’s property was beautiful, as was the desert drive getting there. We had to call ahead, from a general store pay phone, to get the gate that opened their bridge across the Gila River, unlocked. I flashed on this river water coming from where I used to live in New Mexico. All rivers lead to the ocean, as all paths eventually lead to God. There is no new water. It just keeps reincarnating in the perpetual water cycle. We are all drinking the same water our ancestors drank. How

can people *not* believe in reincarnation, when all of nature speaks of it?

“That’s a good one. Let me mull it over awhile.”

“Take your time. We’ve got forever, Larkins.”

Many of the Indians at this meeting were suspicious of the greenhouses and open gardens of peyote. I’d never *seen* so much medicine! It was way more than at the Hogan up in Tuba City. Leo had obviously put years of hard work into his horticultural experiments. Many disapproved of his grafting peyote onto San Pedro cactus and this came up later in the meeting. And many also really disapproved of a roadman friend and his wife getting busted for growing weed and making their livelihood in the California pot trade. They claimed to be true to the medicine. They were obviously addicted to ganja money too. Pot is taboo around peyote. Alcohol might as well be the anti-Christ in liquid form. I confessed to Eric about my relapse into drinking again, as he’d kind of been my AA sponsor back in Colville. He was very sad and concerned.

“You only wake up when you’re ready,” he calmly stated.

“Yeah, I know. Nobody can do it for me.”

Sadly, shortly after this meeting, Leo’s property made headlines as the largest peyote bust in state history. The Feds confiscated all of the medicine, feathers, fans and even their personal photo albums and jewelry. I never found out what finally happened to them, after lengthy courtroom appearances. I hope they didn’t lose their precious property. The medicine is like Shiva- don’t mess with Shiva! I’m beginning to think that alcohol might be like Shiva too or maybe his dark consort Kali, who wears a necklace of human skulls. What am I messing with? I drove Eric back to the airport, still feeling the effects of the meeting and wondering when I’d pick up the bottle again.

I didn’t have to wait long. After many decades of high times and lows, changes and travel, it was now time to turn fifty

years old. Michael wanted to treat me to an incredible call girl for my birthday present.

“Wow that would be nice.”

“I considered it, believe me.”

However, after much thought, I opted for a tattoo instead. I’d had my Sanskrit Om tattoo on my left wrist since 1985 with Jody in Fiji. Now I wanted to expand that tattoo into a bracelet design, with Sri Ram’s name written into it. I luckily happened to meet a young girl on Mill Avenue who had incredible tats.

“She had incredible what?”

“I said tats, Larkins.”

She turned me on to a famed national tattooist named Jay J., who’d tattooed porn star Tracy Lords and weirdo Marilyn Manson. His work was featured in many tattoo magazines. Michael said he’d spring one hundred dollars for call girl Donna, but only seventy for a tattoo. Jay J. informed me that my new skin art would cost exactly seventy dollars. Perfect! Donna would only last a few minutes but this tattoo would last a lifetime. Jay J. came through with flying colors. Now I had my son’s name forever on my wrist, proclaiming my undying love for him and God. Tattoos can be good. I look at mine as stained glass on the temple, if you get my gist? They can also be a bit like Halloween costumes too, displaying a hidden side of your personality. Tattoos, personal books and music collections can reveal a lot about a person. Just look around.

On this fiftieth birthday, I tied one on with roommate Zivodonna. She had fallen head-over-heels in love with Elvis’s voice, so we danced drunkenly to *It’s Now or Never* in our rental living room. Christian had informed me that she’d be in town, but I did not expect to pick her up at the airport. Suddenly, the phone rang and she asked for a ride, failing to give the needed details as to her exact whereabouts in Sky Harbor. As we drove the short distance, Zivodonna asked what Christian looked like, so she could hopefully locate her in the crowd.

“Shirley Temple with short hair,” I replied.

“I’ll be back,” she yelled, as she took off running wildly towards the entrance doors. Jesus, this lady sounds like the Terminator.

Miraculously, Zivodonna and Christian returned hand in hand, as if they were old friends.

“I love Zivodonna,” exclaimed Christian.

“I know what you mean.”

We luckily made it back to our Vineyard house without incident. When I reflect back on all of the times I could have gotten another DUI, and didn’t, it’s incredible. Every true alcoholic knows what I mean. Drinking and driving is the ultimate high stakes gambling game, which can have *horrific* results. Statistically, a first time DUI offender has driven 1500 times drunk before he gets caught! I remember hearing an alcoholic share his story for MADD (Mothers against Drunk Driving) back in 1992. He had sadly killed two beautiful girls in a drunken head-on collision in Rome, Italy. Every night of his tortured life, he relives the memories of this nightmare tragedy; a living hell. To this day of my present prison incarceration, I will always be grateful that I never killed anybody while driving under the influence. I deserve the sentence I’m serving for the bad karma I created. I could never live with myself if I’d drunkenly killed another. I think I would have to check out too.

“I feel the same way,” commented Larkins. “The guilt would be too heavy to live with. I’m having a hard enough time dealing with the guilt of killing my spirit with alcohol.”

“It sounds to me like you’re beginning to wake up, Larkins.”

Christian had flown to Phoenix to help her new fiancé, Randy, pack up his storage unit of tools. Randy had driven his old truck down from Washington to meet her, but the truck blew up west of Glendale. So, we picked him up, along with her dog, and got to Randy’s storage unit before closing time on

Sunday afternoon. They had now rented a U-Haul truck for their long journey home. I had spent probably four hours total with Christian on this quick moving experience. Having never met Randy before, I told him how very much my sister meant to me and made him promise to take good care of her. Treat her like the Divine Mother that she is, honoring and respecting her at all times. Marriage is serious stuff and I'll be watching like a protective brother. After all, she is one of my sisters and we've both been around the block a few times.

During these six months in Tempe, I drove up to the Verde Valley a few times to visit Sri Ram. We hiked Sedona together and explored Montezuma's Castle, Well and ancient Sycamore tree, as well as Jerome and Fort Verde. I read local newspapers in hopes of building up some knowledge of potential jobs and housing. I did find a couple of possible trailer rentals, and Leo turned me on to an older peyote boy in Old Town Cottonwood to connect with. His name was Ron Livermore and he had rental apartments on his property, but nothing available yet. Ron too had been to India in the early '70's, down the road from Babaji's cave at Neem Karoli Baba's ashram. Ron was devoted to Sri Ram, whom my son was named after. Ron was a good connection, who would come into the divine play later.

Now that I had made up my mind up to move to Cottonwood, I needed to return to Kettle Falls, and sell my trailer. This again was a big decision, but made so I could be nearer to Sri and hopefully more into his life as his father. I probably needed him more than he needed me. His mother Joya had given birth to a baby boy on Thanksgiving Day, naming him Falcon. So now Sri had a brother, for which I'm *very* thankful, but putting me further on the back burner in my sick head. At this point, there were no concrete answers to my many questions and doubts. I just had faith that God would create a path for me again in Arizona. Vic and boss Rick treated me to a last Thai supper, before my long drive north, *yet* again. I didn't even look at a map anymore.

"Your name truly suits you, Rideout. And that's the naked truth."

“You’ve mentioned that before, Larkins.”

Back at my Kettle Falls trailer, I found a very fortunate situation for selling it quickly. Nobody could cash me out presently and real estate sales were in a slump. Things did not look promising at all until a middle man stepped in for his returning friend and cashed me out at six thousand dollars. This friend and his family were approved by the trailer court powers that be, so I was good to go. I continued to let John Kimmey live there in his Winnebago, while I packed up everything again, in another U-Haul trailer. With this move, I really needed to lighten my load and be selective about what I *really* wanted to keep in my changing life. I sorted through all of Sister Joyce’s old school work and historic family photos of my deceased parents and grandparents. I had no idea who some of these people were. Sacrilegiously or maybe not, I piled up these heirlooms and prayed. Then I set fire to those memories. I felt like I was destroying a piece of history - my history - but nobody would really ever care or even know. Are we really immortal? Or do we face a second funeral, like this, when photos of us are burned up after we’re already dead. I sat and cried next to my fire, as the dancing flames erased old brown tone photos forever. Fire is *so* intense and final, as we all know. I know it too well, after seeing my beloved cabin burn down. I did, however, save the best photos of my family history, to pass on to Sri at some point. Then I played my dotara and chanted ancient mantras, much to the delight of John Kimmey. He told me to *always* keep chanting.

“I bet you miss chanting here in prison, don’t you?”

“I manage to keep the mantra *Om Namaha Shivaya* going as much as possible in my head. I’ll sing when I get out- like a lark!”

So once more, it was time to say goodbye to Harmon’s, the Colville area and a few friends. Tony and Barb promised that they would come visit me. I hope so. They were soon to come into a large amount of money from an insurance settlement. Tony had been burned badly, in a negligent propane fire that

destroyed his shop, Model A and nearly his life. He had been battling the insurance companies for a couple of years and now the check was in the mail. So after my move, they moved too. In fact, they *really* surprised me. They sold their farm, liquidated all of the animals, including the dogs and cat, and renovated a 1954 Chevy truck into a camper. Tony had seen such a hippie camper at the '86 Expo World's Fair and recreated his own model. The truck is a masterpiece of '60's Americana, painted like Pepperland, complete with stained glass, barn boards, yin and yang sign, Woodstock and white clouds. They soon traveled the country, like modern day easy riders, making news headlines in many small town papers. Their new gypsy lifestyle caught me off guard, as they were *always* such concrete homebodies. As I was about to carve out a new life in Cottonwood, A.Z., they were out searching America for something smaller than one hundred and twenty acres. Again, "Seek and ye shall find," as the Good Book says.

"Now you're speaking my language," commented my born-again Bunkie.

Another phase of life in Arizona begins again....

So, in the spring of 1999, I drove triumphantly back into Old Town Cottonwood. My trip down was basically uneventful. I did, however, finally get to see amazing Bryce Canyon in Utah. It was well worth the price of admission and left one feeling like they'd driven through an IMAX movie - very grand on a larger-than-life scale.

This next phase of my ever-changing, ego dominated life is not easy to talk or write about at all. In fact, it is damn hard and embarrassing as I must face head on, just how depressed I'd become with life, God, and attempts to see my estranged son. So bear with me. It's now time to face my shame, guilt and many character defects, as I review those sick years of hard work and bare existence in the Verde Valley.

I fortunately scored an antique red trailer in Old Town, for three hundred a month at some trailer slums, all utilities included. However, I could not have a dog, so Ron Livermore agreed to house Shanti for me temporarily. Ron fell in love with my dear dog. Everybody does. She's a charmer, for sure. This rental was very small and extremely narrow, but at least it was ground zero for my new base of operations. My immediate neighbor Ryan overheard the plumbers at his jobsite say that they were looking to hire a helper. The very next day, I was hired on the spot. I took this stroke of good luck as a blessing. I was obviously meant to be here. The spirits had accepted me and in more ways than one. It didn't take long before I found the alcohol spirits and un-Christian fellowship only two blocks away, at Cactus Kate's Saloon. As I didn't know anybody yet, this seemed like a good place to start. I would drink there daily after work, trying to ease my loneliness and fit into my new neighborhood. Then I'd walk home around the corner and slide drunkenly through my narrow trailer, to crash in the petite bedroom. Thank God, I don't have a roommate.

My new job was a year's worth of *very* hard work - plumbing eighty apartments. I learned everything from "underground" to "rough-in" and finally, "top-outs." - All the politically correct plumbing terms and steps of sequence. I basically did a lot of back-breaking grunt work, from ditch-digging to drilling hundreds of holes for gas line through ceiling joists, with sawdust in my face on a high ladder. And it was unbearably hot outside; so hot that you feel condensation on your butt from the water in the toilette bowl. We worked four ten-hour days, which made for three-day weekends and, of course, excessive drinking. I tried playing a few retirement homes, as I'd previously done in Mesa. Sadly, they didn't pay as much here. My medicated wheelchair audience often nodded off to my laid-back torch songs. *Don't Get around Much Anymore* was a song they could all well relate to, and I considered it one of my faster tunes.

After sweating all day at work, I often walked the short trail through the dry wash to the dirty Verde River. I'd sit under the bridge to Dead Horse State park, drinking a forty ounce of malt liquor before my usual dip in the shallow brown water. It actually became a kind of daily ritual. Sri had given me a Sedona hiking book, so each weekend I began exploring many red rock trails and the four cosmic vortexes. Oak Creek Canyon, Boynton Canyon and Cathedral Rock, all became my favorites. I was hip to Sedona from before, with Jolene back in 1971. Now I really got to know it! When I'd been living in the octagon with Joya and young Sri, we'd received newsletters out of Sedona from two *walk-ins* named something like Viviraw and Viviray- extraterrestrials here to help out or kooks of Sedona? Sedona seems to have this sort of reputation. Gabriel of Sedona even made *60 Minutes*. He claims to be Michael's messenger from the *Urantua* book- Michael being the real name for Jesus. Far out man! His followers are all upper class well-off folk who let other devotees raise their kids. They even have their own band, recording studio and substance-free dances. Osha, formerly Bhagwan Rajneesh, has his main camp now in Sedona too. They have a bookstore café and a meditation center next to Oak Creek Brewery. In short, Sedona is a trip - mainly in earth tones of red, brown and many shades of orange, and just a touch of bullshit.

Now that I was residing here, I began having Sri for visitations. These were actually few and often far between, but definitely better than once a year. As I worked as a plumber's helper, I also checked into possible real estate. I still had a few thousand left in my savings and hoped I could possibly invest it into a place of my own. Wrong! The cheapest old trailer I could find on a single lot of crappy desert land would cost well over \$50,000! This was unreal. I was now reduced to suffering under some landlord's whims. After owning my own house and acreage, renting is a definite drag! I was seeing that Arizona is expensive. It's out of my ball park anyway. This fact just added to my growing depression and fueled my fire to drink more. I'll *never* be able to afford my own place again! What an alcoholic rationalization to drink.

“We can always find a reason to drink, Rideout.”

“Yeah, we’re alcoholics.”

So after roughly a month of living in my small red trailer, a ratty basement apartment became available at Ron Livermore’s place. The apartment was basically a dirty wreck, but held some unique attributes and was larger than the tube trailer. I worked hard cleaning up other renters’ garbage, cobwebs and mice shit. Later, I trapped twenty-seven mice and three pack rats. This place should have been cleaned before allowing a renter in. I was never reimbursed for the efforts that my tight landlord should have undertaken. I did have an antique claw foot bathtub for extended soaks and a great natural neighborhood to explore. Organic veg gardens and the Verde River flood plain was just a walk away. Even a stand of huge bamboo graced my morning walks with Shanti. Shanti already knew this new neighborhood well, from being here with peyote Ron. It was great to be reunited with her. Ron was presently serving ten years of probation. He hated alcohol, so I had to be secretive about my chronic habit. Living in the modern apartment above me was a recovering alcoholic named Don. He came from old money of Folgers’s Coffee. His story of wealth and subsequent loss was right out of AA’s Big Book. As my mom used to say, alcohol is a great way to numb out. Maybe for awhile you can numb out your worries and troubles, but the price tag is enormous.

After putting a lot of time and energy into this cock eyed rental, Livermore began slowly raising my rent by fifty dollar per month increments. What’s up with this? He would never talk to me about his rent increases. He would just leave a note on my French doors- pay or move out. Don, from above me, knew I was drinking malt liquor daily and soon Ron did too. Oh boy, here we go. The rent increased again, making this humble abode now a waste of my hard earned money. This may have been Ron’s way of getting me to move out, before our talk about my obvious drinking problem. Other things were changing here too. In Livermore’s growing lust for rental money, more apartments were being added on above my sunny porch and window. Now, the sunlight was fading fast in this

dark subterranean cave, and my ears and nerves were pounding from the constant construction noise and hammering. Then, my job, as a plumber's helper on the eighty apartments, came to an end. What a job! I tried working for another company for three months but the stress was just too much. This job was nothing like the last one, the boss had bad body odor, everything was go, go, go and after awhile it just didn't feel right anymore. I also fell drunk on my porch and cracked three ribs- very painful, especially lifting heavy gas lines. I had *never* quit a job in my life, but I quit working for this company. There is always a first time for everything; what would that decision create for me now?

My faith and prayers....

I took a trip down to Tucson to consult with Ted and Melinda, on the possibility of me relocating there. I was a bit confused about etching out my life in Cottonwood. It was good to see them again and scope out Tucson. I hadn't been here since Jolene and I visited Jan and Mitch, after we drove home from Dallas in the mid- seventies. Mel's German girlfriend helped me to remember that I had *solely* moved to Arizona to be near my son. The Verde Valley is where I should be, not Tucson! So I returned with renewed confidence, to yet another rental trailer, knowing I would somehow find new employment and hopefully more quality time with my dearly beloved son. But I was also scared inside too. I was scared over many things. Would I ever find my calling in life or just stumble along aimlessly? I definitely needed more visits with Sri, to even feel like a father. I continually saw what a fantastic job Roderick was doing rearing him. However, hearing Roderick call Sri "Son" really tore at my heart. I felt like a loser, not a father at all. Major abandonment issues were my rationalization to drink. I've lost *too* much in my life. Nobody cares for me. People say they do, but why must I always live and feel *so* alone?

Ted and Melinda reminded me that I still needed to sponsor my last peyote meeting. Not again! Haven't I had enough meetings? We called Lloyd and arranged for me to meet him at Wal-Mart on Saturday afternoon, up in Gallup, New Mexico. A small meeting would be held at Lloyd's cousin's place, way out in Navajo land. The drive alone was *so* confusing that I thought I'd never be able to find my way back home. This was a much different meeting than I was used to in the tipi. Cousin Deswood had spent all day erecting a corrugated tin shed in my honor. Many res dogs, similar to Varanasi's pariah hellions, dominated the area. I saw how very poor these Navajo were. I saw too the underlying spiritual conflict that exists between born-again Christians and the old medicine ways of peyote. They even mentioned that maybe, someday, I could possibly help them bridge this gap. Too many Indians had left their old ways for the Bible. It was confusing them.

Prior to the actual meeting, we sweated for over four hours on the medicine. I felt like I didn't even need a meeting now! However, it was about to begin, very late at night. Less than a dozen attended this prayer service and many were young Anglo hippies from Colorado that I'd never met. It's always amazing to see who shows up. As usual, Lloyd performed his magic and we all got a good blessing. Now, I just needed a job to accompany my new living abode. Before the ceremony ended, Lloyd told me that I almost *got it*. Got what... total enlightenment? Eat more medicine, Rob. The Indians have been great teachers for me, especially around peyote, but sometimes I just can't quite figure out exactly what they mean.

"Hell, I have a hard enough time understanding the Chiefs around here," remarked Larkins.

"I know what you mean, but they do add some humor to prison life, at times, and needed spirituality too."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Well, every Saturday night they sweat out there, in their little lodge, singing a lot of the same peyote songs I've heard sung in meetings. That's why I sit next to their fenced off piece

of Federal ground, listening. I love it, especially in here. They've actually thought about inviting me in, but know they can't."

"The whites would have you smashed! They think the Chiefs are praying to fuckin' hot rocks in there. They don't understand any of this, Rideout."

"I know they don't. It's too bad. I really envy what the Indians have. When they get done sweating, they pool their food, pray together holding hands in a circle, and then sit down and share chow in true fellowship. What do we have? Nothing! Even the Mexicans and blacks have more going for them, than we do. We Anglos seem like a race of loners."

"Have you noticed how the Chiefs always shake hands in passing? Or how the Mexicans hit their knuckles together for handshakes?" asked Larkins.

"That's what I'm talking about."

After breakfast of eggs, toast and strong coffee, I somehow found the right county road leading back to the interstate, away from this distant remote Navajo world of love, prayers, res dogs, cowboy boots and superstition. Few whites ever see the backside of the reservation, as I did this weekend. It made me flash on Castaneda visiting Don Juan. I really respect the old ways and traditions of our Native Americans but feel incredibly sorry for them as they, along with millions of others, struggle through the confusion produced by Christian Churchianity brainwashing. Religions based on fear are just wrong! I personally feel that Jesus' promo men have been the single largest dark force in human history. Believe as we believe or go to Hell. They sure have made hell a reality here on earth, with all of the wars confirming that God was on their side. There is no *better* way, only *another* way. All roads ultimately lead to God. Will those kinds of Christians ever *really* get it? I once heard in an AA meeting - "Religion is for those who fear Hell, spirituality is for those who have been to Hell."

"There's a lot of truth in that statement," commented Larkins.

“I couldn’t agree with you more. The most spiritual people I know have suffered the most, it seems. There is such a great difference between organized religion and spirituality. With religion, people seem to be looking for answers to their prayers. With spirituality, you are living the answer to your prayers.”

Mom, in her Celtic ways, always told me that we create our own heaven or hell right here on earth. Why worry so much if such places as Heaven and Hell exist in an afterlife, when we only have right-here-now today. But most of us worry anyway. The Indians say that “worry is praying for what you don’t want to happen.” I choose to follow what Babaji says; “Have faith. Everything depends on faith.” God is faith.

My faith and prayers landed me a new job again, working for the grounds department at Sedona’s premier Escapement Resort. This luxury get-a-way is a four diamond, four-star resort, where casitas can run as high as seven hundred and fifty dollars per night. It is located in a sacred secluded canyon, which houses a Sinaqua cave dating back to 1100 A.D. Escapement is very beautiful. I now felt like I was working in a paradise lost. Tony Harmon visited me briefly after I started this job. We climbed to the top of the vortex across from our grounds department office door. I told him to look back behind him.

“That’s where I now work, Tony.”

“I can’t believe what I’m seeing!”

The resort is integrated beautifully into the red rocks and painted the same color. We then explored Sedona, the secluded swimming hole on Oak Creek with the Tarzan rope swing, and Jerome. Tony was blown away by my new neighborhood and the allure of the ochre color, canyons and history. I don’t think he was all that impressed with the smallness of my trailer, however, but he would definitely be back to share this with Barb.

At work, I had my own John Deere 4x4 gator to escort me around the seventy acre complex. Each grounds man had his

own swath of the property to keep weeded, swept, pruned and looking perfect at all times. Paradise must look beautiful at the prices these “guests” were paying! Every morning we did our garbage sweep to remove unsightly cigarette butts and plastic water bottle debris from this pristine environment. Skunks and javelina from the peccary family would constantly eat leftover food trays placed outside casita doorsteps. The housekeeping department was grounds crews’ ongoing enemy. In their battery-powered golf carts filled with towels and linen, they would continually drive over our pristine grass or hit special red landscape rocks, leaving ugly dark tire marks as evidence. To top off their ignorance, they would accidentally drive into huge Mexican ceramic pots containing small trees, breaking a five hundred dollar decorative item. Housekeeping! Our job was unending and often thankless. After a few months of maintaining Area 7, I was trained to be the greens keeper; a solo position of advanced work to mow and manicure our six-hole joke of a golf course, as well as a very large croquet and putting green. Keeping the grass green in arid Arizona was a challenge. I learned much about irrigation repair and water valves and adjustments to four differing models of sprinklers. As we used reclaimed water from our onsite sewer treatment plant, problems arose daily. Many sprinklers were continually clogged with dissolved excrement, condoms and red plastic drinking straws. Somehow, our holy water got contaminated with industrial degreaser, which soon began turning our grass yellow before it died off big time. Was this Housekeeping again or somebody’s vendetta against the resort? Many claimed the resort was cursed by the Indians or spirits, for building this moneymaker on sacred grounds. Shit was always happening here, which kept the poor maintenance department on their toes too. It took months to remedy our eyesore grass problem. We finally had to reseed many areas and patch in turf bought in from an expensive sod farm far away. A javelina pack of about forty pigs searching for grubs nearly destroyed the golf course. They would literally roll back the turf in twenty square-foot-diameter sections nightly. We experimented with expensive electronic beepers to disturb their

nocturnal attacks, but got no results. These peccary can't see very well and probably can't hear very well either, but they can smell flowers a mile away. They ate roughly two hundred dollars worth of flowers per night, near the lobby's arched entrance. This was an expensive problem now. One of our Mexican crew cunningly captured a baby javelina and ate it for dinner with his family. This same Border Brother even caught a red fox on the tennis court. He chased it into the center mesh net, where the fox's nose got stuck. Then, without getting bitten, he brought El Zorro back to our grounds garage and fed him food from the employees' café before releasing him. One false move could have been rabies treatment. Rattlesnakes were popular too, on the Mexican diet. They caught them also. They claimed it made your rod hard. Yeah, that's a good one. Who needs Viagra?

To work here, I had to comply with the hair code. So, cutting my hair very short once again, *finally* removed the last of the dark cursed hair dye. No more would I ever cover up my hard earned eagle feathers. I now looked like a gray haired probation officer. I personally don't like short hair, as one side is always worse looking than the other. However, I always get compliments on how much younger I look. Go figure. No visible tattoos were allowed around our elite guests, so I began wearing the watch that Joya's mother Pauline gave me for my fortieth birthday. It covered my Om bracelet tattoo, but was the first time in over a decade I'd looked at numbers on my wrist, instead of the eternal symbol for NOW. From years without a watch, I can judge time quite accurately. Everybody could learn a lesson here. During this "time," I played a few open mic at Sedona's Oak Creek Brewery. It took a lot of energy on my part to drive back to Sedona from Cottonwood again, and then play for free, for maybe fifteen to twenty minutes; just to get my foot in the door. The drinking crowd of tourists and fellow local musicians appreciated my renditions of songs, but I soon got depressed about ever breaking into the Red Rock music scene. There were just too many musicians already established here and too few places to play. A local talent agent told me that Sedona is more difficult to break into

than L.A. After working hard all day, that gauntlet drive again for four songs just wasn't enough incentive. I chose to drink at home instead. I mentally gave up on professional music. Nobody wants to hear anything good anyway. They still want those same dog food songs from decades ago; that shit I never want to play again. I'd rather just sit at home and play for friends or wherever an opportunity might arise. Play I must, and play I will, on some level! Music *is* my soul and it needs that expression. Without it, life feels incomplete and empty.

A new player in my life melodrama appeared at work in the form of ex-Marine opportunist Ross. At first I perceived him to be a bit slow, as he couldn't remember where his three irrigation timer boxes were located after nearly a month of weekly checking them in my old Area 7. However, Ross was just getting started. He had been retired for years, giving his large landscape company back east over to his son. Our British supervisor Keith claimed that Ross was a leader of men. Oh boy, we were all soon to find out the validity of that. Ross proved very good at kissing ass with Escapement's political hierarchy and chain of command. He made me wanna puke! He always said *Sir* and *Ma'am* when responding to commanding voices on his radio. Soon, every department of the resort knew Ross's saccharine voice and rising reputation. He was headed up the success ladder here and nothing meant more to him; a true blue hyperactive achiever. Soon, he began to treat me as if I knew nothing, telling other employees not to listen to me. I often knew much more than he did, having worked at the resort quite a bit longer, but Ross always had to be in command. He represented all that I despise in authority figures - anal retentive alpha dog energy that lives for power... spiritual energy stuck in the lower three chakras.

"It sounds like Ross really pressed your buttons. Maybe he is showing you where you are stuck."

"You have a valid point, Larkins. Whatever we don't like in another is *always* within ourselves, or we wouldn't even see it. It's like looking in a mirror. I obviously have a lot of work to do in the forgiveness area."

Stay in your area....

When we lost Limey supervisor Keith, Ross worked overtime and for big bucks trying desperately to land this coveted salaried position. The winter of 2000 A.D. dropped eighteen inches of snow in the resort's canyon. Sedona proper only got a foot. We plowed roads and shoveled sidewalks for nearly a week straight. Our new leader of men came out smelling like a rose, financially. He didn't do much physical work, which sent four of us to chiropractors, but he *sure* supervised us on how to correctly remove unwanted snow, so accidents could be avoided. Do they sell bullshit repellent at the Escapement gift shop? Despite our efforts, thirteen guests fell on ice and had to be treated medically. Ross karmically lost out on the supervisor position, to a professional workaholic with a college degree, named Don Smith. Ross's ego and feathers were definitely ruffled. How could Escapement do this to him? Hadn't they witnessed what a team player he'd been? Obviously not, as Don's Tucson resort experience and degrees won over. Don quickly put our grounds department through many unexpected changes. Gone were the extended breaks, unnecessary trips back to the shop for needed tools, or coming in seven minutes early at the day's end. He ruled us now with an iron gardening glove. This job was no longer fun. Also, a semi-lazy Mexican lifer named Arturo became my immediate advisor in Don's new work efficiency strategy. Arturo would continually call me on the radio asking, "Yes, Rob, what your location? What you doing?" Jesus, the whole resort was hearing this! Do they think I'm lazy? I knew he'd be over immediately, to see that I stayed in my area and didn't help others, who were swamped in their unending weed control. Ross and Arturo had me demoted from greens keeper of the golf course to monarch of the smallest kingdom at Escapement. This was truly a thankless job, to say the least, and everybody was easily replaceable here. I felt I was just an employee

number without a face. I felt exactly like the illegal Mexicans working in housekeeping.

“That sounds crappy, but that’s what politics are like on big jobs with lots of employee turnover.”

“Yeah, I know. There were some funny times that compensated for some of it, however.”

Escapement had one bit of comic relief in the form of a gay Indian employee. Tourist postcards used to exist of this famous orator and story teller. He’d march around the sacred canyon with his band of tourists, dressed fit to kill. His wardrobe was a mosaic of fur, blankets, scarves, feathers and beads, which often had us laughing our guts out. He was rumored to be designing a fashion line out of the Far East. This was obviously for those fresh out of the closet. His voice was loud. It echoed through the red rocks, as he educated his disciples to the facts of life here a thousand years ago. Oh so spiritual, and he made the big bucks here- not men, but money! But after a decade, he too was fired for failing to follow the rules. Many guests cancelled their reservations upon finding out that their favorite Indian was put out to pasture. Such was Escapement, a circus in the fast wealthy lane of a sacred canyon.

A couple of winged creatures deserve mention too. Ravens mate for life and often live up to fifty years. They are considered to be the smartest of birds and actually sacred to many Indian tribes in the Northwest and Alaska. Their I.Q. is up there with wolves, coyotes and dogs. We had a couple at Escapement. I’d even see them chase hawks away, high up in the sky, from their domain of our canyon. I came to look upon our ravens as mascots and I often got quite close to them. They hung out a lot on the golf course, looking for grubs in the greens. This was an indication of trouble to come down the line, as the javelina would be the next to arrive. Later, I only noticed one raven, the one who had a damaged wing. I found one of his feathers, which I put on my favorite cowboy hat in memory. Poor raven; he too knew the pain of losing a mate.

The real feathered character was Roger the roadrunner. He'd stand next to me as I used the loud whipping weed eater, probably hoping to find some bugs I'd stir up. It was touching to see a roadrunner up so close. I'd only seen them before zooming across roads in New Mexico. They are the State Bird there. Anyway, our Roger found his way over to the employee café. Eddie, my Navajo Mexican neighbor, gave an onion ring to our feathery friend. That's the last we saw of Roger for weeks. I don't think the greasy treat agreed with him at all. It might have looked cute, however, as a deep fried collar on his neck.

The tourist market was expanded by creating a six million dollar health spa called The Journey - a world class destination point. This new spa was a separate entity from Escapement proper, across the flash flood wash, and had its own pools, massage rooms and exotic menu. A three-day package stay ran about \$2,000. And the journey here was very New Age and not cheap. A shot of wheatgrass juice cost five dollars! I used to grow wheatgrass back in 1976, and that shot price alone could cover me for well over a year's worth of the green rejuvenilac. For about \$150, you could have special smooth stones heated and placed on various body spots. One innocent female technician, upon opening the door, encountered an elderly guest masturbating on the clean sheets of a therapy table.

"You've got to be kidding me. It must have blown her away!" exclaimed Larkins.

"It certainly shocked her into the reality of her journey here."

Another wealthy guest dropped her thirty thousand dollar diamond ring down the water pipe, flooding the quartz shine on petrified wood in the crystal grotto meditation nook. This blooper took over eight hours of digging up the earthen floor, to cut plumbing pipes in search of the prize. Finally, Rotor Rooter came to the rescue and extracted the lost symbol of undying love. Other guests actually tried to drive their expensive cars up sidewalks, designed only for our gators and

golf carts. We did have job security here, thanks to many rich, sometimes drunk, ignorant guests.

Soon, Ross and bossy Don conspired to separate me from the herd. I was transferred to work alone at The Journey, my new special area. I had enjoyed the main resort area, as I met many tourists from all over the country and world. Now I was bored beyond belief, picking up single leaves with a damp finger for something to do. I had this spa area spotless. One day Arturo complained that my sweat smelled of King Cobra malt liquor. This was *not* good! Everybody here knew I drank daily after work. Many mornings I arrived at work reeking from a previous night's drinking. We kept a wildlife list of animals spotted on the property in our grounds office. One day, I noticed that one of the Mexicans had written that I had spotted a "Cobra Cink at Circo K" - I got the point. My drinking wasn't funny anymore. Sadly, I really didn't care either. When you're going down, you're going down. I still hadn't really reached my bottom yet.

"How deep is your hell, Rob?"

"Deep."

To back up briefly from some of these tales, I attended the wedding of Sister Christian to Randy in August of 2000. She insisted that I perform musically at the large Lummi Island gathering. She billed me as coming from Sedona. Well, in truth I just worked there, but it sounded exotic to Washington ears. Her wedding took the cake. Carpenter brother Dan put me up in his new short box school bus. He, too, now had a fiancée, the reverend Iris Clearwater, who had formally rented our octagon in Sumas. While renting, Iris had forgone coffee, choosing instead for her morning rush, to utilize the Tarzan rope swing. Christian's friend and a fellow musician Ted drove me to the spectacular wedding day on Lummi Island's west side. Jan had driven over the Cascades from Spokane to attend this sacred day, too. I kicked off the musical extravaganza and was followed by Ted and then the steel drum band from Seattle, *The Toucans*. A Capela female group

brought down the house and Ted's satirical songs about humans, being essentially rabbits, had everybody laughing. He's got that right. After dinner, a jazz band set the mood. Christian's father, historian Keith, was soon to cross over his present incarnation, but he lived long enough to take his daughter's hand to the altar. As these newlyweds said their "I do's," facing the Pacific Ocean between two huge lone seaside pine trees, the sun set and rainbow fragment sundogs appeared cosmically in the twilight sky. Perfect timing, Christian! I promised not to drink at her wedding, but alcoholic promises are seldom kept. The feast had copious amounts of fresh salmon, in keeping with the Pacific Northwest tradition, and artichoke hearts, salads, good wine and about everything else one's stomach could desire. This wedding was like out of a Hollywood movie. Two old acquaintances, Christopher and Holly from Everson, even had a brick-fired oven pizza truck here. This was quite the reunion of new and old friends. Randy resembled Richard Gere, with his Shirley Temple Black bride. It seemed like a marriage made in heaven but they too would have their tests. Every marriage does.

After the wedding, I went sailing again with Dan and Kirk. This was basically a repeat performance, of the same exact islands and Doe Bay hot tubs on Orcas Island, which Sri and I had previously done with these salty dogs. Dan and I got very loose and Kirk, in his sobriety, took on the responsibility of feeding us all at a beach campfire. The kayakers kept their distance. Again, we had a hard time pulling Kirk away from the nude hippie girls at the hot tubs. Kirk is always our slow turtle friend.

"There's that Doe Bay again. I'm definitely going there when I get out."

"Well, knowing you, you'll probably get drunk behind the wheel again and end up back here, never getting to see Doe Bay."

"You don't have to bust my chops, Rideout. I plan to stay sober when I get out."

“They all say that. But unless you change your ways, *really* change, you’ll be back, Larkins. Don’t you get anything out of our substance abuse classes, besides not wanting to attend them?”

When we finally set sail for home with a storm brewing in the sky, it was totally black outside, with the waves rising fast. Dan hadn’t read the Bellingham Herald’s schedule of Indian fishing days. When we entered Bellingham Bay, it was like floating into a mine field. There was about fifty gill nets stretched unseen below the ocean’s surface. We got snared immediately and had to radio the Coast Guard for advice. They sent a helicopter and a fast powered ship to our rescue...like immediately! Before the bright searchlight displayed Dan’s pot pipe on the bow, he quickly kicked the paraphernalia over the side to a cold grave in Davey Jones’ locker. This smart move literally saved Dan’s sailboat. Paranoia strikes deep, even at sea. We then had to use a butcher knife, from last night’s dinner, to cut the fishing net off the lodged propeller. The old native fisherman was very pissed off, demanding Dan’s phone number and address. He definitely wanted reimbursement for this accident. Using a 12 Volt light to detect hidden nets, it took us a couple of hours to traverse this trapped bay. Arriving back to the marina around 2 a.m., I swore to myself that my sailing days were over. I’m definitely a land lover, especially the woods, streams and mountains. Sadly, Dan and I wouldn’t be in touch with each other for a few years to come. This hurt, as we had shared so many heavy life experiences together. Dan was there the day our cabin burned down. He helped us build the beautiful log-sided twin octagon, and saw Sri sit up his first time on peyote. He also gave me his cabin to live in, when Joya had me removed from our house. He aided me in so many ways I’ve failed to mention during my divorce and Dad’s death. However, you can’t kill love, because love won’t die. Dan and I did reunite through letters. Love can also be expressed through a pen.

In our employee smoking area, I met Scottie, a Scottish blooded alcoholic sex-fiend engineer. He invited me to his birthday bash and provided a tent, so I wouldn't be tempted to drive home under the influence. That was smart. However, this Scottie *only* had sex on his Celtic mind and lips. His perversion was a joke between employees at Escapement. But he could be fun at times. During the Salsa festival in Old Town, I ran into Mr. Sex and we had a ball drinking together at Cactus Kate's saloon. The following week, we did Jerome's two drinking holes together, with Scottie trying to hustle girls for us. His skills weren't up to par that day. I let him drive us home in my truck, but as he only lived six blocks away, I said I could drive myself home safely alone from there. Wrong!!! I missed my driveway, and then backed up into the neighbor's car across the street. I only bumped a fender lightly, causing no damage, but instead of confronting me directly, the fat neighbor lady called the cops. Of course, I was oblivious to this. I was sitting on my porch in my underpants still drinking when the police arrived. I guiltily denied driving but they knew better and took me off to Yavapai County jail, outside of Camp Verde. I bonded out the next day but was now worried sick. My good God, this was DUI number five! When I appeared for court a month later, I was told that my case had been dismissed. You've got to be kidding me! Thank God. Did my fat neighbor change her mind? Could this really be true? I just don't know. Something really reeks of fish here.

She was like a....

Just prior to this fifth DUI, I was telling my Old Town alcoholic friend Rick that it would be nice to meet a woman who plays music. His near-pickled brain remembered a former girlfriend who he thought fit this criterion. Her name was Mariah, who, as well as being a guitar player and blues singer, was a sculptor and painter too. She wasn't home when we went to visit her at a tiny apartment/art studio which was,

ironically, only four blocks away from my trailer. So, I walked back later and introduced myself to a rather large, paranoid-looking woman. We agreed, on the spot, to hear each other's musical skills, trading off songs together for a few hours. Mariah was Scottish, with a semi Paul McCartney face. She was big in the heart and tongue. Mariah had been raped at a young age by a black gang and definitely had her share of anger issues. This, I would experience first hand. She was a bit like an unpredictable stick of dynamite, which could explode at any time. When angry, she also reminded me more of my mother than any woman I'd *ever* met. We were a match made in hell, a fatal attraction; each was an accomplished professional at pushing the other's most sensitive buttons. But again, she was a very gifted musician and artist with incredible talent. Why such gifted people are always semi crazy, if not full blown crazy, I'll never know. Her art sold quite well in Arizona and Hawaii. She was a semi Krishna devotee and a borderline follower of the local cult. We often argued about Shiva's qualities versus Krishna's, among other things. How stupid is that? About the only things we did agree upon were good movies and food, and the dysfunctional songs of singer/songwriter Tom Waits. She borrowed nearly every tape I had, especially all of Turkantom's holy chants, to make copies for herself. Soon our dating was turning into a lot of negative verbal warfare and repeat insanity from my dysfunctional childhood and marriages. We *never* should have met each other, but we did. In some weird way, it was meant to be. Oh, how the lessons come to me. It wasn't all bad, however, like when she turned me on to the wetland marsh behind Tuzigoot Indian ruins and a private swimming oasis at Spring Creek near Cornville. Here we would walk old Shanti, to exercise her arthritis, and swim with snapping turtles and crayfish. And, of course, I'd drink my daily maintenance malt liquor. Her German aerial photographer friend Hans heard me sing at her studio and gave me a gift of free fly time over Escapement Resort. Hans was the Verde Valley's Ernest Hemingway and had flown over eighty countries in his same small Cessna, with his camera. His fabulous book of photos

and text was currently being translated from German into English. Our Sedona flight was fantastic and I was amazed at how very many dirt roads actually existed between Cottonwood and Sedona. A person could get lost out there!

Tony and Barb were presently wintering in Phoenix, with Tony's brother Greg Harmon. All three drove up for a visit and to celebrate Tony and Barb's twelfth wedding anniversary. We all went to Escapement for a tour, complete with champagne, weed and lots of beer. Classify these as good times. Mariah and I played songs beneath the ancient Sinaqua cave, while pink Jeep tours applauded this unforeseen entertainment. We did sound good together, as hard as it was to be together.

Later, Mariah and I showed our guests some beautiful art galleries at Hillside in Sedona, and then we all went out dancing at Cactus Kate's. We dressed up from my hippie wardrobe, which brought the house down. The band, who played only '60's and '70's classic gold, wondered where we got such costumes. Barb really did justice to my vintage '67 Magical Mystery Tour Indian shirt. This night was more fun than Halloween.

However, 2002 started off with a fight between Mariah and me and then some heavy unexpected bad news coming in the mail. When you receive registered certified mail, it is usually *not* good news. My recently dismissed DUI had been reopened again by the state, and this revelation scared me shitless. I searched for a good lawyer immediately. One lawyer in Sedona wanted five thousand up front, promising to get me off! Oh, that's a good one. His office was plush beyond belief. Finally, I settled on David of Cottonwood, for fifteen hundred dollars. He was a strange nervous man. But *somehow* ... God, good luck and mistakes miraculously made this DUI my first in Arizona, costing me another fine and twenty-four hours in jail. When DMV got hold of my record, I lost my driver's license for three years. Soon, under immense guilt, shame and stress, I contracted Bell's palsy. This affliction is like a face stroke. My left eye would not blink or shut and my left lip hung lower.

Half of my face felt frozen. This is not good. I continually bit my tongue and found eating to be a real hassle. I had to tape my eye shut at night and wear an eye patch during the day. Talk about looking avant-garde. Driving, illegally now, became even harder with no depth perception. Fixing underground sprinklers at work was near impossible.

As if sent from above, Divine assistance came in the form of Dr. Robert, a Sedona acupuncturist. His Dutch wife worked at The Journey's spa and she introduced me to her healing hubby. Dr. Robert's fine thin needles produced the desired results in my sagging face and mental attitude, after only two sessions, costing about one hundred and sixty dollars total. Chalk that up onto my alcohol tab. Who ever said drinking was cheap? By this advanced stage of my disease or drinking career, I'd lost thousands of dollars. The worst was yet to come.

Soon the continual fighting between Mariah and me necessitated a breakup. "I usually don't date guys who mow lawns," she told me.

"Yeah, well... I detest a fat woman, Mariah, who has a hypodermic needle tattooed on her breast. How gross is that?" I countered back.

We knew how to cut each other to the bone. This on again, off again relationship had been another trip to hell, where I seemed to live most of the time anyway. Hell is definitely in the mind, where we perceive illusions as real. Before we finally called it quits, Mariah awoke me one night saying, "I found you a cat!"

"Great, that's all I need right now."

She'd found this young kitten screaming in the parking lot of Circle K. I agreed to keep this young flame point white Siamese with striking blue eyes overnight, then decide his outcome. His name was obvious upon laying eyes on him. He was Mr. Blanco. He kissed me on the lips that first night in bed, as if to say, "I'll be the very best cat you've ever known and thanks for the new home." Blanco became just that. He'd

already won over my heart by the following morning and was quite the gentleman concerning his cat box. Early on, I realized that this was no ordinary cat, but a very pure spirit in cat's pajamas. Shanti, at first, seemed upset and jealous that he'd entered our scene. After losing her fur friend Angela, she'd gotten quite used to living alone with me. Soon however, they became the very best of friends, even kissing each other on the nose and napping together. Melinda and a much older Rio surprised me with a visit at this time. Ted was selling time-shares at Los Abrigatos in Sedona that weekend, so Melinda decided to catch up on old times. It was a joy to see my friend again, but I've never seen her since that day. I remember her saying that I was her very best friend in the whole world. Some friends enter our lives to stay only a short while. Others, always, somehow stay in touch.

Mariah and I finally called it quits. Thank God. Extinguish your torches and go back to camp. Fatal encounters can drive one crazy, as if we weren't already. She accused me of being very narcissistic and basically a hedonist- living only for myself and the bottle. There was a lot of truth in her statements. That "damn beat" musician lifestyle and hippie dream had seduced me over the decades to do what felt good, without thinking of the consequences. As previously stated, I had a hard time dealing with her looks, bi-polar schizoid personality and especially her explosive anger at everybody and everything. She was embarrassing to be around in public. We definitely brought out the very worst in each other, always hitting below the belt. She even had the gall to read my private journal and write sick cruel words in it, as a surprise for me later.

"That's just wrong!"

"That was Mariah."

She drew a beautiful portrait of me at the Kumbha Mela, from a photo my French friend had taken, only to destroy it in anger. Unbelievably, this scene repeated two more times! I was amazed that she could *even* reproduce such art perfectly

again, let alone shred her own creations. She was Kali Ma reincarnated- Shiva's wife's most demonic side- destruction. She even penned a song about us that had a cleaver hook, "I love the Shiva in you and you love the Kali in me."

Before I awoke back up to my....

One Sunday night, I biked down to Riverfront Park for an open-air concert series. *Danny Rhodes and the Messengers* were playing and I had my forty ounce of King Cobra in my daypack. Seated on the ground, right in front of me, was a beautiful mother with her three-year-old toddler. She had the longest, most beautiful legs I'd ever seen, and an aura to match. I was stunned. I asked if I could join her. That's how I met Lyn and son Tyler. When I mentioned that I had played music professionally for nearly three decades, she asked if I still played now. She wanted to hear me play and said, "I'm a good listener," giving me her phone number. Thank you, Jesus! I peddled home with my heart lifting and mind pounding. I had to know more about this mystery mother. I would, all in due time.

Tony and Barb invited me up to their new property in Colville, for a house warming party. I used a week of my paid vacation time to accept their invitation and away I flew. After selling their one hundred and twenty acre farm, they'd traveled the country for a year in their hippie Chevy camper, searching for where to put down new roots. Ironically, they found home to be twenty wooded acres right back in familiar Colville. Their new gabled mansion was beautiful and two year-round streams graced their property. Christian also attended this gathering, finally reuniting with the Harmon's again. We kept a bonfire burning for three days, as we drank beer, played music and shared stories, games and great food. I told everybody about my new Siamese cat and potential love interest in Lyn. Harmon's were sad to hear that Mariah didn't pan out, as they really liked her. They only saw her best side. I

was overjoyed to be seventeen hundred miles away from her dark presence. However, an attempted intervention occurred between me, Christian and Tony before I left. After extreme drinking, I *still* wanted more beer. My dearest friends on earth were trying their best to wake me up. Don't tell me to stop drinking! Hell, you don't know what my life has been like. Little did I understand then that drinking was making my life the way it was: worse. I was *really* in a dark space at this time, as my life was spiraling downward. I'd get that beer when I got back to Arizona and never let anybody *ever* interfere with my drinking again! Drinking is all I know how to do now.

A fellow Escapement friend, redheaded Banquet Patty, drove me back to Cottonwood from Sky Harbor Airport. Now I depended on rides, as I couldn't drive legally anymore. My neighbor, Mexican Navajo gang banger Eddie, had taken care of the fur kids for me, but accidentally turned on the heavy ceiling fan, causing it to tumble to the floor. I had to inform my finicky landlord Ken, to keep my damage deposit safe. He could be very intimidating over his rentals, as I'd find out later, big time.

I'd also met another alcoholic lady who had packed llamas in Washington. While driving six blocks illegally to visit her, I didn't stop fully at a stop sign. From out of nowhere came a State Trooper. I was sweating profusely, as he ran my driver's license. It was already over one hundred degrees outside and hotter than that inside my fearful brain. He was only going to give me a verbal warning, before he got his radio reply that I was driving illegally. Off to jail again, until I could bond out the following day. How many jails have I been in now? This time, I had the added costs of tow and impound charges. I would now lose my once suspended but now revoked license for yet another year, totaling four. Mariah and I were talking again but keeping our boundaries. She asked me to pick her up at Sky Harbor when she returned home from a disastrous Hawaiian business trip. Doesn't she realize that I'll have to drive illegally? She'd returned home two weeks early, at night, demanding that I come immediately to fetch her. This was *not*

good timing for me, as I had to perform my twenty-four hours in jail the following morning. To top it off, her flight was seven hours late, so I was up all night at the boring airport, before she ranted and raved the whole way home. Some things never change. I got back to Camp Verde just in time to book myself into the county jail. I was totally exhausted from lack of sleep and Mariah's nagging anger over how people treated her in Hawaii. I slept most of my "easy time" away that day. That night, I saw *Easy Rider* on TV. I was out the following morning. There is no feeling like walking out of a jail, early Sunday morning, with the sun coming up. Once more, Mariah and I decided not to see or call each other. Maybe I could finally emotionally rest for awhile. I called Lyn to see about a date, but found our work schedules very conflicting, regarding getting together anytime soon. We had some great phone conversations, however, and she definitely wanted to see me. This was a ray of hope. I explained my shamed driving status, caused by irresponsible drinking and she totally understood. How could anybody really understand? Everything about Lyn was hitting a deep nerve in a good way. We finally set up a time and day in October, when she'd pick me up for our long awaited date. However, unforeseen circumstances would soon postpone our close encounter.

"God certainly makes you wait, doesn't He?"

"It seems that way, Larkins. Sometimes, things are worth waiting for."

During this time period, I wasn't having very many visitations with Sri Ram. His young life was getting much busier with school, homework, friends, sports, church meetings and a functional family life. He was also learning to play the saxophone. The few times that we did get together- to go bowling, play video arcade, hike Sedona and always go out to eat- were often months apart. I took him in July on the Verde Valley Railway, as a belated birthday present; nearly three months late. I also remember him learning to use his new roller blades at Riverfront Park. He was getting his balance again, just like when he learned to ride a bike. Each visit

seemed like a dream that lasted just a few hours, before I awoke back up to my empty life of mundane work at Escapement and daily drinking after work. On these visitations, I drove illegally, *never* telling Joya, Roderick or Sri my true status. How could I tell them? I was very careful, but also *very* guilt ridden and paranoid. I began to feel like I was really losing my son. I knew he could *never* even begin to know or understand the pain in my heart over my loneliness and sense of loss, as well as the immense shame of being a single alcoholic father, secretly lying, secretly dying. Maybe someday he will be mature enough to understand all of this. Maybe someday he will. I pray to God that I'll never lose his love. After taking him home, I'd drive slowly back to my small trailer, smoking cigarettes along the way and wondering how my life *ever* got this crazy. On some deep level, I just wanted to die. I was sick of being me and tired of life. I couldn't make correct choices anymore. My life seemed *so* pathetic and meaningless to me. The guilt of a wasted life was killing me. I definitely need your help now God, Christ and Gurus.

"Wow Rideout, you really *did* get down. I can feel your pain. That sucks that you didn't get to see your kid much, after moving down there and all."

"I had much to learn about loneliness, Larkins."

Back at work, I was bored beyond belief, grooming the small parcel of land around the spa. Now I carpooled with domineering Ross, using my Toyota truck to haul us daily to our job site. Of course, Ross was the designated driver. The less illegal driving I did, the better were my odds. Actor Mel Gibson and his wife stayed at the spa, but all I saw was his flowered shirt and a pair of Levi's through the casita window. Mariah Carey stayed at Escapement too, back in Area 7 when I patrolled that turf. Somehow, the *National Enquirer* got hold of this news and claimed she was at a fat farm in Sedona. The resort had a fit! We all had to sign confidentiality forms, protecting these private, beautiful VIPs. If we *ever* disclosed their presence to *anyone*, on or off property, we would be terminated immediately. I never did see Ms. Carey, as black

plastic covered her casita windows. Escapement Resort probably had about as many stories to tell, as the red rock walls of the historic canyon.

While grooming The Journey one early morning, I entered the spa to find it completely empty. Where were all the beautiful people and assorted homely staff members? I found everyone in the small library, glued to the large screen TV. As I watched, I saw the second airplane hit the twin towers in Manhattan. This day, September 11, 2001, would be etched in everybody's psyche forever. Many resort guests were from New York and, in a state of shock, began phoning home immediately. This act of terrorism had dramatic effects on Escapement's business in the months to come. It had dramatic effects on everybody, everywhere. Isn't it a pity?

Then one night, while I was drinking King Cobra as usual, the phones rang and guess who? Mariah! I had told her to *never* call me again, but as I was about to hang up, she said, "Stony is in town. Let's have a vodka party." This Stony was her ex-boyfriend from L.A. I had heard much about him and his skills on guitar and the bottle. They arrived on my doorstep immediately. Sadly, I liked this crazy Stony of Iraqi heritage from the get go. He resembled a sleazy longhaired Nicholas Cage. He also loved his weird clothes and vodka. He was a real lovable loser, much further down the path of last stage alcoholism than me. We were making music on my two guitars within five minutes, while Mariah quickly unpacked all of his worldly possessions onto my porch area. Stony was now here to stay, like it or not, for a little while anyway. A few days after his arrival, he and Mariah took a walk, leaving me alone and semi drunk. Stony conned me into buying him vodka daily, as he'd go into DT's without it. Sadly, he was telling the truth. I found where he had stashed his beloved medicine and began hitting it. Hell, I'd paid for it, after all. I had rarely drunk distilled spirits since my days in New Mexico, sticking solely to malt liquor for my daily maintenance program. Tonight, however, shit would happen.

“A lot of real alcoholics I know only drink vodka. Personally, I can’t stand it,” commented Larkins.

“I never should have touched it.”

I fell down my two porch steps, desperately trying not to squash Mr. Blanco. I had now broken my ankle very seriously. I crawled to the phone and called Mariah’s studio. Luckily, she and Stony had just walked in, hearing my painful voice pleading on her message machine. Accidents can bring out the best in people. They ran back to find me in excruciating pain, with my left ankle facing the wrong direction. Strapped into my chaise lounge, I was transported to the hospital in the back of my truck. There I was treated poorly at first, as I hadn’t arrived to the ER in an expensive ambulance. As I only lived about one mile away, this emergency ride had thankfully saved me hundreds of dollars. The following morning, I was operated on, hearing classical music as I went under. Nothing was ever said about my drunken condition- absolutely nothing. Thank God I had medical insurance through my job. Now, I would be laid up for the next ninety days. That’s a long time. And this severe break *really* hurts! And again, alcohol had caused it all. This was seriously another nail in my cross of guilt and shame. I was given Demerol intravenously to keep the pain down and I have a very high pain threshold. Now I had a total of twenty-six screws, all in the left side of my aging body. Seven new ones and a plate had just been added to my ankle. Surprisingly, at 4 a.m., the night nurse informed me that I had a visitor. Do they actually allow visitations at this hour? Who, besides Mariah and Stony, would even know I was here? Jim Mess, half drunk, entered with a beer in his daypack-for me. I refused the beer. My good God, how could he even think I’d want one? This was the alcoholic mind in action. Hadn’t alcohol caused enough pain this week already, not to mention bad choices, like letting Stony live with me? Jim also offered to take me to breakfast in the hospital cafeteria, but I declined for room service instead. In his drunken delusions, poor Jim didn’t quite realize that I was yet unable to even *consider* getting out of bed, much less have a casual breakfast

together as if nothing had really happened. Denial sure isn't that river in Egypt. Then I got a phone call. Now, who would be calling me here? It was lovely Lyn. She'd come by to pick me up for our first date as planned. Loose Stony had told her all about my fall from grace. We'd play phone tag a bit longer while I healed and get together later down the road. At least, she'd proven that she was still there and very interested in me. Her phone call really meant a lot to me. Lyn came through like a ray of hope. Divine Mother plays a good game, in her myriad forms.

More lonely days mixed with craziness...

After this accident, I now began my unexpected ninety day vacation of living off the food bank and time-loss benefits. The first month, I was required to elevate my aching ankle above my heart twenty-four/seven. All I could realistically do was watch TV and read. I'm glad I spent the money for cable. It was well worth it now. I soon acquired bedsores on my ass from lying down so much. Crazy Stony had gone back to L.A., thank God. This poor dude was trouble wherever he went. I was medicated with 7.5 strength hydracodone for pain and, of course, my daily intake of Cobra. The pills had a side effect of an internal nerve itch, impossible to scratch. It was similar to overdosing on Fijian grog. This condition really made sleep difficult. Every day became like the movie *Groundhog Day*—exactly the same. I had to crawl on my knees through my tube trailer. Even standing for a short while to prepare food was extremely painful. My ankle just pounded with pain. Taking a bath, in my four-foot tub, was a real ordeal, as I couldn't get my healing ankle wet. The skin, where the bone had popped through, was blackish purple, and my doctor talked of a possible skin graft. Mariah and I were now talking again, as she felt guilty, I think, for her Stony being an indirect cause of this accident. I wanted to blame him also, but knew *too* well that it was *all* really my own fault. I'd created this karma. The

pain pills constipated me. On a trip to Flagstaff with Mariah, I bought figs and prunes to get my clogged bowels moving again. A clean colon is *so* essential to good health, and not just physical health; but mental and spiritual health. Few people *really* realize this truth. Who wants to be full of shit? I finally resorted to an enema bag.

On crutches in my three hundred dollar Velcro boot, Mariah would take me grocery shopping. The amazing 99¢ Store saved a lot of money. However, when shopping one Sunday, she exploded again in Basha's checkout line. She loudly threatened to leave me there stranded, with my five bags of groceries. The grocery clerks all looked on dumbfounded. This was *so* embarrassing. Everybody in the store was hearing this. I was about to call my neighbor Eddie for a ride, when she abruptly returned, screaming at me to get in her trashed out purple Volvo station wagon. She then drove us in circles around town, screaming, ranting and yelling at the top of her lungs. She wanted to see me cry and suffer, for all the emotional pain I'd inflicted on her.

"I thought you mentioned that you'd both made your amends and apologies, during Stony's stay," reflected Larkins.

"It sure seemed like it to me."

Apparently we had not, to her satisfaction anyway. It was shocking seeing her rage so out of control. This psycho was out for revenge. She repeatedly stated that she wanted to see me grovel. Again, I felt like I was in Stephen King's book, *Misery*. I'd seen her anger many times before, of course, but this was *total* psychotic insanity today. I somehow think she was venting her rage at Stony too, for breaking up with her some years ago. She had deeply loved him and probably still did. When she finally dropped me off, which I totally thought would *never* happen the neighbor girls helped me get my groceries into my trailer. That was the final "last straw" with loud Mariah. We've never spoken again since that bad karma day. At this point, I'd been sober for nearly three weeks, even

declining a couple of wild parties next door. Now, I chose this stress to rationalize relapse once again.

“Your choices are clearly alcoholic ones,” commented Larkins.

“You’d drink too, after what I’d just been through,” I responded, knowing well that Larkins was totally right.

I discovered that I could actually ride my bike in the Velcro boot, so off I went to Circle K. And once again, that first sip fired up the pattern of daily drinking. In a very sick way, drinking did help me to endure this coma. I’d listen to my favorite music, reminiscing and crying in my beer, or should I say malt liquor? The only visitors I had were the neighbors, Banquet Patty and a grounds crew stoner, named Roger. He would stop by the neighbors after work, to buy and smoke mass pot, and then come over and check in on me.

“Hey man, are you sure you don’t wanna get stoned?” would be the first words out of his mouth. “Let me tell you what happened to Ramon at work today. You’ll love this!”

“Go ahead, Roger. I’m all ears and I’m going nowhere fast.”

His short visitations always meant a lot to me, as they kept me posted on all that was and wasn’t happening at work. This was truly one of the loneliest phases of my entire life; endless days of sheer boredom. I had a lot of time to reflect on everything and I sure didn’t like what I saw. I didn’t see Sri at all during this time. I would call Lyn to stay in touch and slowly learn more about her over the phone. Banquet Patty had scored me a second phone from work, so now I had one in my bedroom too. It used to really irk me when I’d crawl as fast as my knees would permit, down the hall, only to answer the phone and discover that was the last ring. Didn’t people know I was crippled, in more ways than one?

With my internationally traveled rucksack, I would bike to the community food bank for weekly free staples to supplement my reduced income. I had a freezer full of good bread and cupboards lined with white rice, canned veggies,

macaroni and peanut butter. The frig was full of many fresh vegetables nearly gone bad. Thank God, I could get around on my bike. While I was peddling down Main Street for a food stamp interview, a one-eyed driver, wearing an eye patch, accidentally hit me. He couldn't see me. I wonder why? He paid to have my bike repaired, but I had to sign a waiver on any medical. I seemed physically unharmed, beside some bruises and the hell scared out of me. Then the pain set in later and I had to visit my Portuguese chiropractor friend three times for vertebra adjustments. Drivers just don't see bikers. Later, I was nearly hit three more times, on the busy streets of Cottonwood. Hey, watch where you're going!

This time alone gave me ample opportunity to reflect on other alcohol related accidents. I had previously broken or bruised my ribs numerous times. I had nearly broken this same ankle before and had small facial scars from falling down drunk many times, most of which I don't remember. I even smashed my glasses into my face trying to ride my bike drunk. I got up again, trying to find my balance, only to fall again, just missing an oncoming car. My body mirrored my drinking karma. Mine was the face of a fighter, in a losing battle with the bottle.

"You were nuts trying to ride a bike drunk, Rideout."

"I was nuts, plum out of my mind."

Soon, sex-crazed Scottie became homeless and tried living next door with my partying neighbors. Being basically a sponge, he was soon asking me for monetary loans. And I, the gullible sucker, helped him out. I even put up the title of my truck to bond him out of jail. When my questionable neighbors kicked in Scottie's ribs, he awoke me at 2 a.m., crying and needing a place to stay. He was already wearing my winter ski parka, so he might as well sleep on the floor now. Borrowing my truck to visit his new sexfriend, number 1502, he arrived home four hours tardy and drunk. How *dare* he drive my truck drunk! When I confronted him, he began ripping out the spark plug wires. He'd just tuned up the truck this morning. Here

was a semi male version of Mariah- extreme mental illness. He had to go. How and why do I attract these people into my life? And how are they a mirror of me? Why are they my teachers? I guess they are mirroring just how very sick and disgusting I really was, at this stage of my life.

“I don’t know what to say about your life, Rideout. You really are attracting some very strange people, in my estimation.”

“I hear you, Larkins.”

As my bouts with depression continued, I wondered where I’d gone *so* wrong in my life. I think I knew the answer. Here I was in my fifties, working manual labor, low paying jobs. I had a total of five years of college under my belt and nothing to show for it. I knew *so* much intellectually, but had not applied my knowledge to better myself. My self-centered delusions of a free life had given me decades of false joy, through the sound of music, drugs and alcohol. I was a real loser, in my own mind, still in heavy denial and very afraid, as my karmic clock kept ticking steadily forward. How or why does one keep on living? One day at a time, as AA affirms, without letting the past and guilt ruin my NOW. I’d hated my living arrangements for years. I’d eaten off a cardboard box in Sedro Woolley, lived in a tent and an expensive yurt, rented small rooms in others’ houses with weird roommates and was finally reduced to this 1957 tube of a trailer, surrounded by crack houses and Mexican drug dealers. How my aching heart *longed* for a cabin back in the woods again! That, above all else, was my goal when I dropped out of college in 1970 and went looking to homestead in Canada. I’d found my place in the woods on Sumas Mountain, only to lose it to accidental fire and later, permanently, through divorce. How many times would I be forced to start over? Is life like the Monopoly game, where the shake of the dice makes you go back and start all over? In my confusion, it sure felt like it to me. Then those truthful words of the Christian prophesiers came back to haunt me, “if you want to know God, He’ll take everything from you.” The only profession I’d ever really loved or felt any passion for, was

making music. But now that I'd excluded myself from that scene, I was reduced to unskilled labor jobs to pay bills, child support and rising food costs. I was just barely getting by financially, and could see no way I'd *ever* realistically be able to afford my own place again. That thought is super depressing! Landlords would rule my world now, like medieval kings over serfs. My present landlord was very alpha parental, treating me as a child. I've always had a problem with authority figures and the damning teachings of Christianity. Maybe that's why I played music- to live in a beautiful song for a little while, where everything flows in the groove. In that groove, I could beat the pain out of my life on my drums. Boy, I felt stuck and trapped in my present situation, and this painful broken ankle just mirrored my stinking thinking. Did Kris Kristofferson write, *Why me, Lord?* for me?

My cable TV was a blessing now. Previously, I had hardly watched much TV at all, as I either went to bed early for work or was preoccupied drinking. Now, I had the daily schedule down pat. I'd watch sexual dating fluff like *Blind Date* and rock documentaries on washed-up musicians, like myself, *Where are they now?* But my greatest TV joy was a twenty-four hour marathon of *Leave It to Beaver* and *The Beverly Hillbillies*. I had grown up with both of these staple sitcoms in the radical '60's, and they remain at the top of my personal comedy list.

"Wow, I actually like both of those shows myself. Do you remember all the stuff we used to watch when we were kids?" questioned Larkins.

"Oh yeah, I remember. There were some *good* ones and a hell of a lot of westerns."

In my childhood, television was just getting off the ground. Only one family in our neighborhood even had a television set. But that would change quickly. My first memory of seeing TV was, *The Mickey Mouse Club* and *Howdy Dowdy*. Soon, we would all have these small visual talking boxes - oh yeah! My baby boomer generation and our parents would huddle around

this new visual joy to savor such westerns as, *Bonanza*, *The Rebel*, *Maverick*, *Have Gun, Will Travel*, *The Rifleman*, *Wyatt Earp*, *Bat Masterson*, *Cheyenne*, *Wagon Train*, *The Real McCoy's*, *Gunsmoke*, *Stagecoach West*, *Rawhide*, *Zorro*, and *The Virginian*. No wonder our heroes were always cowboys! My early musical influences came from *The Lawrence Welk Show*, *Sing Along With Mitch*, *Hootenanny*, and, of course, *The Ed Sullivan Show*. After the Beatles rocked our world on Ed's show, we saw popular bands on *Shindig* and *Hullabaloo*. Functional happy families were portrayed on *Ozzie and Harriet*, *Donna Reed*, *My Three Sons*, *Father Knows Best*, and again, *The Beaver*. Oh, to have a family that didn't drink, scream and ignore their children! Family fun, education and new humor were reflected in *Walt Disney's Wonderful World of Color*, *Car 54 Where are you?*, *Dobby Gillis*, *The Flintstones*, *Gilligan's Island*, *Candid Camera*, *Flipper*, *My Favorite Martian*, *Mr. Ed*, *Topper* and *77 Sunset Strip*, when crew cuts, Brillcream's a little dab'll do yaw and combs ruled America's youth. Oh, those were the days! Crime was much more seen in movies and sitcoms, instead of on the six o'clock evening news. Our scary shows were *Outer Limits*, *Alcoa Presents - One Step Beyond*, *Alfred Hitchcock Hour* and, later, *Night Gallery* - a predecessor to *Twilight Zone* and *X Files*.

At the movies, Lord Walt Disney ruled. The Mount Baker Theater in Bellingham was the babysitter for most of my classmates and me each weekend during our adolescence. Double features, two movies- not one, were only twenty-five cents and this included the RKO newsreel. Shirley Temple blew me away. I still think she has to be one of the greatest child actors of all time. How could this four-year-old sing, dance and act the way she does, let alone remember her lines? Talk about cute; she was the original charmer. Kind of like Huck Finn of *Tom Sawyer* and Eddie Haskell of *Leave it to Beaver* being the original bad boys. One movie hit me deeply as a child, and I finally purchased it decades later, when the first video catalogues arrived in my mailbox. It's the 1935 classic of Rudyard Kipling's *Jungle Book*, starring actor Sabu as Mogli, the jungle boy raised by wolves. Little did I know

then that this film would be the seed for my India and Babaji path? I was very drawn to India and all of its charms and mysteries because of this classic movie. I learned later that Herikhan Babaji, in his 1970 incarnation, looked exactly like the East Indian actor Sabu. Or maybe it is the other way around. Babaji can play hide and seek really well too. *Om Namah Shivaya*.

I was still actively calling Lyn between all of this TV watching and, rest assured, our first real date would finally be materializing. It's about time.

When I dream....

On November 29, 2001, my favorite Beatle and spiritual brother, George Harrison, died of cancer. I had absolutely *no* knowledge that he was *so* ill, and was shocked beyond belief when I saw a tribute to him on early morning TV. My God, John Lennon is gone and now George! This was a tragedy, *especially* to me. I had just missed meeting him by one day in India. That would have been a dream comes true, as when I met old Willie. But it wasn't meant to be. Then, the much needed emotional breakdown occurred and I cried from my depths, just as I had when Sister Joyce passed on. I loved George Harrison as if I personally knew him. This, of all days, was the day that Lyn would finally be picking me up for our first date together. She wanted to show me her newly acquired Cornville property and home. It had been months now since we first laid eyes on each other, but she looked exactly as I remembered her, when she knocked on my trailer door. I had tears in my eyes as we stared at each other. Arriving at her cute little house, she served up smoked salmon with cream cheese on bagels, as we drank champagne together. My first song sung to her was George Harrison's, *Isn't It a Pity?*, in memory

of our recently departed musical brother. We had a magical time together, despite the tragedy, and I was much impressed by her young son, Tyler. I also admired the way she kept her house so neat and tidy, not to mention her charismatic personality and sense of humor. Did she clean the house up just because I was coming or is she always like this? When we held each other tightly, Lyn said, "Look how we fit together."

"Wow that sounds promising, Rideout."

"I thought so too."

This could be taken on many levels. Soon, I was getting pretty drunk around Lyn. And after every date, I was falling helplessly more in love with her. Was this more of the ego's illusion or real? It's hard to tell when you're drinking. She pointed out that she didn't fit my previous female mold, having seen pictures of both ex- wives. She wondered what I saw in her. I told her. I saw everything I'd ever really admired in her and the loving big heart that she has. Losing Sri so early, I longed to help her raise Tyler. He needed a father figure, I thought. With my active alcohol addiction, I wasn't making much of a positive impression. Lyn understood alcoholism, however, and was very patient with me. Even if we never became lovers, she expressed that she loves me eternally, forever. Maybe that's better than sex. It sure lasts a lot longer.

"She came and saw you here, right?"

"Yeah, she did, and it really made an impression on me."

During that fall of 2001, I would ride my bike through Riverfront Park, where I'd have a beer and smoke awhile. I did this daily for exercise, fresh air and to escape the Groundhog Day trailer. There I met another old hippie and his skinny, paralyzed, wheelchair bound girlfriend. His name was David Lee Bond, and her name was Kathy. Dave had a beater guitar, which a local Mexican was using to sing Spanish songs on, as we sat on the grass. I asked if I could play a couple of songs too. "Go for it," answered Dave. I played Harrison's *Pity* and

Willie's *Angel Flying Too close to the Ground*. Dave and Kathy greatly enjoyed it, so we agreed to get together again sometime. I didn't see them again until the spring of 2002, slowly walking together, hand in hand, down Main Street. I was invited over to a fish fry, along with alcoholic plumber Larry, from my early Cactus Kate's days. Dave explained that he had a three-day jury trial coming up soon. He had fallen off of a roof at a store in Old Town years ago, and this accident could land him *finally* a very big insurance settlement. He'd been through the wheelchair, crutches and cane like myself, but still suffered constant pain from many intense surgeries on his heels. He needed his pain pills.

Then, in June of 2002, the unexpected happened. With alpha Ross driving us home from work one Friday afternoon, he said, "We need to stop at Shop Rite in Sedona...now."

"What's up?" I asked.

"The beer deal of the century, Rob!" he answered back.

We purchased eighteen cases of *Red Dog*, for only five dollars per case of 24 bottles, filling my truck. This was practically free- an alcoholic's dream comes true! While I was enjoying a cold one on my porch, still basking in unbelief, Dave suddenly arrived. He was visibly much shaken up. His hands were trembling hard and he obviously needed a beer, smoke and to talk. After his three days in court, he explained, he had won over a third of a million dollars in a unanimous jury decision. He arrived home all excited to tell his stroke-ridden girlfriend Kathy, only to look in the window and find her being screwed by his nefarious friend Mike, who'd just been released from Yavapai County jail hours before.

"That's really messed up man!" shouted Larkins. "I bet Dave hates women after that scene."

"It deeply affected him, and Mike too, to say the least. But you're right. Dave later joked about starting a Woman Hater's Club."

“It isn’t rocket science to deduct where he was coming from.”

Dave asked, “Can I spend the night?”

“Of course you can, Brother... have another beer too. You definitely need it.”

Dave never went home again. He ended up spending the next ten months on the floor of my petite living room, with his little nest of garbage in the corner. It consisted of receipts, plastic wrappers and med-scripts. Dave immediately borrowed bus fare off me, to send crippled Kathy back to her father and out of his life. Sadly, Dave’s homeless street friends took over his house, like ferrets at Toad Hall, which would cost him big-time later. And we became very good friends. After being *so* lonely for *so* long, I now had a spiritual brother again of some sorts and constant companionship. Dave seemed like a missing link in my life’s puzzle. He was. However, at this point, I should have heeded the old saying, “Beware of wolves in sheep’s clothing.” My alcoholic thinking only saw another lovable loser, like myself. He needed help and I could help him. And I needed help too, and Dave provided that on many levels. He was a charmer, with his cool laid back ways and hippie wisdom. He had definitely been around the block many times as his life stories began to unravel. Dave’s plumber friend Larry was moving to Colorado, to do seasonal work through the summer and fall. Larry badly needed a place to store his Winnebago, which he bought off Dave. I agreed to put the beast in my back yard, so Dave could get off the floor and have his own larger space. However, I did not tell my landlord. We pulled off this illegal move for a month. Then the landlord did a drive by and called me, very irritated. He gave us one month’s grace to move it. We ended up parking it next door, across the cyclone fence, at a house remodel site. Soon, this new situation had Dave’s homeless friends spending nights in Larry’s rig. It wasn’t on my property now. During Dave’s first three months with me, not too many people knew where he was staying. Things were pretty peaceful on our porch with a lot of Shanti, or peace, as they say in India. We’d

listen to music, drink beer in the lawn chairs, watch the animals play, and tell our life stories over and over again. We also watched customers visit the crack house in our alley or various nefarious activities next door at the neighbors. Then the word got out about “Dave’s new place”- not mine, but his, Dave’s. Soon the real losers of Cottonwood were appearing like flies on shit. This was *very* stressful for me. I’d work hard daily at my thankless job to help support Dave, then return home to find cigarette butts and beer cans littering my yard. There was a constant wet area of piss near the corner of my tin storage shed. It was all I could do to get lazy Dave to water the grass and roses, about a twenty-minute chore.

“I would have thrown that moocher out pronto, man!”

“Believe me; I thought about it a lot. I didn’t have the strength. Alcohol was robbing me of all my good judgment.”

“God, you’ve got that right, Rideout.”

Dave was, however, a great cook having cooked as a Merchant Marine and on offshore drilling rigs. He performed culinary magic in my little kitchen. Once we talked about which of us would die first. He plainly told me that when he died, he wanted his ashes returned to the sea. I promised I would do that for him, if I was still around, as I had with my parents’ ashes and Joya’s dad. Sadly, this would never come to pass. Dave had also been a mechanical engineer making measurements to within a millionth of an inch. He claimed that his name, along with a few others, is even on the moon for all eternity, as part of NASA’s cosmic garbage he helped create. Dave was sadly dying from metal filings in his smoked-out lungs, along with chronic asthmatic breathing difficulties. When I was at work, he’d called 9-1-1 three different times to be taken to the ER. His life revolved around just breathing, pain medication and the big question; when would his large insurance settlement arrive? Even with the promise of big money coming, Dave *only* longed to own a VW Karmen Ghia again, as a chick magnet, and a few new Hawaiian shirts. His nickname used to be Hawaiian Dave. This housemate was on

the phone daily, calling his lawyer in Prescott for further information. Days became weeks and weeks became months, but always with the admonition to be patient as these settlements take time. Everybody at work thought I was *totally* crazy to support Dave. I was, but it happened. All by my saying yes, when he landed on my porch. A decision made with eighteen cases of beer influencing me. Dave promised that when he received his fortune, we would be traveling together to Amsterdam- to celebrate with legal highs and hookers. So I gave him more money for his needed birth certificate for a passport. We listened daily to Dutch band *Pussycat* singing their beautiful song, *Amsterdam*, as we daydreamed with our beers of canals and tulips, hash and women. With one third million dollars coming and alcohol pumping through our veins, our visualizations were pretty grandiose.

To support Dave and myself, I now had to dip into my savings account. This was the very last of my savings from the divorce house sale. Over time, I had spent five thousand on Dave. He continually reassured me that I would be paid back in full, and made sole beneficiary in his will. "I'll make you a fucking prince," were his exact words. Sadly, it would never come to pass... not even close.

"This Dave had a good con going, Dude. Couldn't you see that?"

"Love is blind, Larkins."

Back at Escapement, I was given Area 7 again, the smallest parcel to maintain. I literally could not find a weed, leaf or blade of grass out of place. Even paying guests commented that my area looked absolutely perfect. So, I would help others clean up their areas out of sheer boredom, only to be reprimanded by Ross or supervisor Don, to stay in *my* area! The politics, constant radio calls and oppressive chain of command at Escapement were making this job a real drag. Gee, it used to be so fun. Then, I was commanded to maintain the golf course, as well as Area 7. Our yearly pay raise amounted

to an additional \$.16 per hour - what a sick joke! My work just tripled.

Sri finally came for a couple of sleepovers.

“Did he have any idea of what was going on with you and Dave?”

“I think he had his suspicions. He told me to tell Dave not to drink around him.”

Little did he know how much Dave and I did drink when we weren't around him. Shame on me; but I was numb to shame at this point. We saw Harry Potter's movie in Sedona and ate breakfast once at the hospital's cafeteria. That was strange, but I always wondered what it was like to eat there, after Jim Mess's invitation to eat there, as I lay in bed with a broken ankle. That brought back memories. Again, the guilt would eat away at me, as I drove Sri around Yavapai County illegally. I was totally living a lie. Sri was always such a joy to be with, but our time always seemed too short, for me. More and more, I didn't feel like a father at all. I felt like Sri was slipping away in front of my eyes. This realization was quite upsetting. Roderick raises Sri daily, while I watch him grow up thorough pictures, phone conversations and occasional visits. Dave and I drove to Sri's high school once, to see him play sax in his jazz concert. I nearly cried hearing his first solo, which brought the house down. “That's my son!” I wanted to shout, as Roderick videotaped him on stage. I'm sure he felt the same way. This constant depression of feeling as if I was losing my son, when I really wasn't, became another rationalization and self-deception to drink more. My sick, deluded mind continually affirmed that nobody cares for me. I sure didn't care much for myself, that's obvious, so obvious. I had *no* control of my mind. Where and when would this cycle end and would I *ever* come to grips with my alcoholism and abandonment issues? Sometimes the answers come in ways unimaginable.

“Don't get all cosmic on me, again.”

“Why shouldn’t I?”

Dave and I did peyote together a couple of times. We sat up all night on the porch listening to George Harrison and peyote songs, crying and praying. That night, I realized just how much Lyn meant to me. I was falling in love again, I felt, but wondered if she felt the same. We have a sixteen-year age difference, which means nothing to either of us. She confessed that her preferred model of man was the biker type. Lyn gravitates towards Harley Davidson’s and has been attending biker rallies at Laughlin, AZ for years. In short, she is a “wanna-be” biker mama with a heart of gold. She would lead me on sexually, then state that it’s probably better that we don’t consummate our love, as it could ruin our present great relationship.

“She sounds like a prick tease to me,” stated Larkins dryly.

“Nothing is ever what it seems.”

We shared a few great dates, back where we’d met in Riverfront Park. We’d take pizza and beer and let Tyler play on the jungle gym. I’d play her new songs on guitar. She asked me to learn Gordon Lightfoot’s *Beautiful*. That song is precisely how I felt about her. I also learned Willie’s version of *When I Dream*, which became her favorite song. Lyn seems to feel the depth of my soul more than most I’ve met. She has given me compliments that have floored me. We are both still totally open to what God might have in store for us, or what we might have in store for ourselves.

Don’t mess with the medicine....

Jerry Jeff Walker came to Sedona’s cultural Park the summer of 2002. The last time I’d seen him was in the mid ‘70’s; he’d been *so* drunk that he could barely play. I bought Lyn and me

tickets and off we went to hear Mr. Bojangles. I also brought a bottle of Ten High whiskey.

“Oh no, not again Rob!” exclaimed Larkins.

“You’re sounding like my mom now.”

I figured whiskey went well with Jerry Jeff’s music. Hell, he plays country music like I like it. When I had to pee, Lyn got me to the public restrooms. When I emerged, I couldn’t see her or find our spot on the large amphitheater lawn. However, she found me. I was trying to climb up on stage to finally meet ol’ Jerry Jeff. I really wanted to hear him sing my favorite song, *Stony*. Luckily, the laid-back Sedona security staff didn’t throw me out. What a reversal of roles. Now I was in the same shape as Jerry Jeff was thirty years ago. He did finally play my song, dead letter perfect. When we got home, I was *so* drunk that Lyn and Dave covered me up on the neighbor’s cement carport to sleep off my Ten High.

“That sounds like a cold place to sleep, asshole.”

“I was out cold anyway, Larkins.”

When I awoke the following morning, I discovered that brother Dave had stolen my peyote. He rationalized that he was praying for Lyn and me at the concert. Oh yeah, Dave. I told him how serious I took this crime to be. Soon, he was bitten by a mongrel dog near his groin walking home, stung by a bee and scratched by Mr. Blanco- all in the same day! Don’t mess with the medicine, as it will come back on you. Dave was also stealing my pain meds. That bastard! I was now seeing that he had a very addictive personality, much worse than mine. But I was too deep into my disease to throw him out. I needed his company. I don’t want to be lonely anymore! I anxiously awaited his financial settlement, to get my money back on this karmic investment.

“You actually thought Dave would pay you back?”

“Well yeah, at this point I did. Dave was well aware of just how much I’d helped him and I did trust his word. Only later, I would begin to wonder about his sincerity.”

Dave really wanted to see Gordon Lightfoot perform that summer in Sedona. What the hell. I bought the tickets for him, Lyn and myself. This proved to be an incredible concert, with Lightfoot performing about ten nautical songs in a row. Dave was in oceanic bliss, but I was very stressed out. I had chosen to give Lyn my beaded Indian bracelet, as a token of my devotion. Dave had warned me not to do this. "That bracelet should be yours... only," he cautioned. With her very narrow wrists, the beautiful ornament soon fell off, to be lost amongst thousands of adoring fans. I got very upset and headed straight for the beer garden. I needed a drink badly. Here, I listened distantly to the remainder of the concert and drank beer with John, the Forest Service representative at Escapement. Dave and Lyn were out frantically searching for my dear beaded treasure. When they returned empty handed to escort me to Lyn's car, we saw a lone card table set up by the exit stairs. There, in the center of this small table, sat my bracelet! Obviously, people in Sedona are either very honest or cosmically aware of karma's laws, probably from the influence of the four vortexes. This was a modern day miracle for me. Also at this concert, I left *not* in a blackout drunk; a minor miracle.

The insanity of Dave's motley crew grew daily on my home front during the fall months of 2002. Pipestone Charlie, Tony Baloney, Dale and Shawnee, half coyote Persimmon, and a couple of homeless families with small kids and mongrels dogs were showing up continually. Also a drunken Navajo convict, who worked at carnivals, often secretly slept on the porch or in the back of my truck. My life resembled a B comedy movie, the kind that is *so* cheap and crappy that they are actually fun to watch late at night. My garbage can was overflowing with beer cans and forty ounce bottles, *way* before the scheduled pickup day. I was progressively getting angrier about this scenario but holding it in, as I returned home from work exhausted each day. If my landlord had any idea of what was going on here, he would have had a fit or possibly a heart attack. Artist Jim Mess was totally out of his mind sometimes, throwing onion potato chips on Dave's long hair, and then

dousing it with beer. We even had to water Jim off with the garden hose, to make him realize his insanity. Then, he would sit on his truck's tailgate, out in the street, swearing at me from a distance. Then unexpectedly, Jim's mother died, leaving him a small fortune. Now, Jim paid for Shanti to have special arthritis shots up in Jerome. This was his caring, good side. He wanted to see our special friend make it one more year, if possible. On the way home from his mother's funeral in the Carolinas, Jim purchased a farm house and property in Arkansas. He soon packed up all nine cats, the old orange Mercedes van he brought back from Europe, and his massive collection of stereo equipment from Goodwill. He moved away without ever saying any goodbyes. Even if inspired by alcohol, many of our times had seemed like holy encounters. I dearly loved and respected Jim. Then to lose his friendship, with no goodbye, just plain hurt. I even gave him my beaded *Be Here Now* bracelet, made by our mutual friend who'd served time in a Spanish penitentiary with Jim back in the early '70's. More often than not, your drinking friends aren't your true friends. Oh brother, where art thou? I hope farm life agrees with Jim, or he is probably dead from alcoholism. He always claimed that Cottonwood, or Rottonwood as he called it, had made him an alcoholic. Sadly, geographic moves seldom cure alcoholism.

"You got that right, totally. Alcohol will follow an alcoholic anywhere on this planet."

"I know. Look at all the times I moved. It certainly followed me."

One Saturday morning, I worked at Escapement to make up hours for a rained out weekday. At about 7 a.m., who should be standing alone in my Area 7, eyeing the canyon's red cliffs for his very first time? It was jazz singer and world icon Tony Bennett, who left his heart in San Francisco long ago. Tony is definitely an American legend, having sung for many presidents and royalty around the world. He'd, ironically, never seen Sedona before and mentioned that he was a painter. I already knew this. So, I took Tony Bennett in my 4x4 gator up to the top of the property, where he could paint to his dear

heart's content, overlooking the resort from a bird's eye view picnic table. When we returned to his casita to fetch his art supplies, he said, "Just a minute Rob. I have to go pee pee first." Even modern day gods have a human side. Tony had never heard of a vortex, which he called "votex," so I explained Sedona's phenomenon, before giving him a vortex brochure I carried for emergencies in my truck's glove compartment. Pass it on; I can always get another in uptown Sedona. Bennett began painting Capitol Butte. I mentioned that psychics here claim it to be the center of the lost continent of Leumaria. He'd never heard of Lemuria, but had heard of sister continent, Atlantis. So, he titled his large painting, "Capitol of Leumaria." Who knows, maybe someday I'll see it in a published book of Tony Bennett's art. It wouldn't surprise me. Sitting together in the morning sun, we talked of music and his upcoming Sedona concert that night. I confessed of my musical life and we hit it off beautifully. I was in the same fraternity as him; we spoke the same language. When I said my goodbyes, he thanked me sincerely for helping him out. No way would I even consider an autograph, but I did say, "Tony, you have one of the greatest voices I've ever heard, and when I get home today, I'm listening to your best hits cassette." He lowered his head, with his cap on backwards, and said in a very low and humble way, "Oh God, Rob, thanks a lot." Meeting Tony Bennett was right up there with meeting Willie Nelson, only much longer and deeper. However, the consequences would be life altering for me.

"I've never met anybody famous," complained Larkins.

"Well, most famous folk are just like us. We're the ones who put them up on pedestals."

On Monday morning, I excitedly told supervisor Don of my close encounter with Mr. Bennett. He looked very uptight this morning, not good, and said, "Listen to this." On the phone machine was a message from the weekend manager on duty, stating that a gray-haired grounds keeper had told a guest about Tony's presence on property; a major screw up. I had thought these guests were cool, but they shot their mouth off just like

me. The cat was out of the bag. I'd broken the sacred vow of confidentiality and was terminated within two working hours. As well as losing my job of nearly two years, I'd now lost my retirement plan, health insurance and a lot of good take home food from our employee café. This daily buffet had a huge salad bar and excellent chow. It really helped cut down my food bill, as I often brought dinner home for Dave and me in Styrofoam containers.

So, this Monday in October 2002, I drove home illegally without Ross. I needed to tell Dave the bad news and get seriously drunk. I've never been fired from a job in my life. This definitely added more shame to my already depressed ego. Upon pulling up in the driveway, I found a new homeless couple from Colorado seated on my porch. Wouldn't you know it! How do these people find me? Is nothing sacred anymore?! I was really getting sick of being called "brother" by "brothers" who were abusing my space and decreasing my pocketbook. I sure don't need more people right now. Ironically, this couple turned out to be quite charming. Later that day, when I was numb and still in financial shock about my future of supporting Dave and myself, Ross did stop by. He'd left something in my truck. As he departed he said, "Robert, stop drinking and stop talking;" how true and how hard. Sometimes the truth *really* hurts! My whole story is a testament to exactly that.

"I can't believe they actually fired you."

"It was my own fault. My loose mouth caused it all. I didn't play by the rules. It was a great lesson for me."

I began my job search immediately, as I'd receive no unemployment benefits for being fired. I found work quickly, with a landscape maintenance company out of Cornville called Green Care. In many ways I welcomed this change. This new job was in different areas of Yavapai County, landscaping residential homes and commercial businesses. The new daily variety was *not* boring, as Escapement had become. And there was no radio on my belt now. I saw many multi-million dollar

estates in Sedona and Village of Oak Creek, as well as mucho cigarette butts, weeds and lost spare change at Sonic Drive-In, Walgreen's and Best Western Motel. On my first working day, I was shaking like a leaf when I signed my tax information papers. Later that morning, my new boss Matt asked if I had a drinking problem. "No," I replied, "I just drank a lot of coffee and am a bit nervous about starting a new job." Well, I fooled them, I thought, for at least a little while. We alcoholics sure look through a glass darkly, always steeped deeply in denial. Inside, I was realizing just how much my alcoholism was beginning to show. My life was pitiful. I was living lies.

Lyn only lived about a mile away from Green Care, and I got off work at 1 p.m. on Fridays, her day off. So now, we were seeing much more of each other on a weekly basis, instead of once every other month. It always felt *so* good to hang out at her place, drinking and singing songs in the sun, as we watched Tyler play in the yard. I needed this occasional distance from my own crazy home front. Then Larry, the Chicago drunk plumber, called to say he'd be returning soon from Colorado. Dave did not like this news at all! In fact, he was very upset and easily agitated just at the thought of Larry returning. He owed Larry money too, and foresaw the dynamics of our living situation changing dramatically. Dave was right. Larry initially said he'd only stay a week, until he could find a place for his mobile living unit. Sadly, this was not to be. He rigged up his heavy duty extension cord to my outside power source and spliced into our cable TV from his parking lot next door. Soon my power bill was sky high. And getting ol' Larry to cough up his share of the bills was like pulling teeth. "Don't bust my chops" was his favorite saying. He always had money for whiskey, beer and smokes, but never for his debts. Here came more of that "brother, brother" bullshit. After having helped Scottie, Dave, crazy L.A. Stony and Larry, not to even mention all the street people of Cottonwood and the drunken Navajo carnie, I felt like the biggest sucker in the world, or at least the Verde Valley. Of course, they all told me that I had the biggest heart of anybody they knew, but my head was in the wrong place. Boy, they got that right! However, on some level I felt

that I was helping those who have far less than me. Misery truly does love company and I had plenty of company. When Sri would come for a sleepover, I had to warn them all to stay away far in advance. I sure didn't want my kid to know how incredibly crazy my place had become. Whatever you try to hide will eventually show.

I really did try to limit my illegal driving. I would peddle my bike weekly to the Laundromat on Main, next to Suzie Q's. My world traveled Millet rucksack came in handy once again for this chore. I'd put the laundry in wash and then pound a forty ounce malt liquor while smoking cigarettes, behind the laundry matt, as it dried. Shanti and Mr. Blanco were always there to greet me when I pedaled into the driveway. And, or course, Dave and now Larry's ongoing outside party.

Green Care gave all employees a free Thanksgiving turkey. They also bought us lots of free beer on the Fridays when we cleaned up the company work trucks - "Truck Appreciation Day." What a company. It was fun to drink with the crew and bosses for some sort of needed bonding. Alcohol can be good for that. I even seem to speak and understand Spanish better half drunk. Sadly, I really tied one on visiting Lyn before this Thanksgiving. She drove me home in her car, thank God. I had to humbly return the next day for my turkey and truck, like a dog with his tail between his legs. I thought it was over, but she somehow forgave me. How could she? I was driving illegally again to work, but always obeying the speed limits and watching my mirrors carefully for cops. Oh, how I hate driving like this; always driving in fear. Dave cooked up our turkey royally and sleazy Larry stole all of the leftovers for his Winnebago fridge. Then, out of the blue, crazy Stony returned from L.A.

"Oh God no, not again!" exclaimed Larkins.

"Yep, here we go again."

In a blackout drunk, Stony had his sister Tanya drive him out to Cottonwood from L.A., to start a new life near his estranged teenaged daughters, who could have cared less, I'm sure. He

arrived again with no money or a place to live. Sound familiar? Mariah wouldn't have him more than a day or two. I battled with getting this crazed loser out of my space too. He called his enabling sister four times long distance to take him back to California, only to return again - four times! Can you believe that? This alcoholic dude needed to be hospitalized, seriously. And now married sister Tanya began having a crush on Dave, which only complicated matters. Soon my telephone was ringing constantly, with calls for Dave and Tanya or an angry wife looking for Tony Baloney. As previously stated, I've hated telephones since my childhood, when phones rang continuously for my dear doctor dad. I only used a phone for communication with Sri, Lyn and work, and now this ringing bell was becoming a major annoyance. Again, all thanks to Dave, my disease and my lack of discipline and clear boundaries. Then on Christmas day, drunken Larry fell through my louvered glass door window, causing a tremendous heat loss in winter. He didn't replace the broken panels for over a month, now really increasing the natural gas bill. Oh Brother!

"That Larry sounds worse than Dave, in my opinion anyway."

"We all had our problems, ricocheting off each other. Larry was no dumb shit either. But I'd really gotten to know Dave quite well from living with him, and now this relationship triangle was getting outright strange. "

"Well, you've got three alcoholics living and drinking together. What did you expect?"

The cosmic side of Mr. Blanco needs further mention. One night, crazy Stony and I went for a late night beer at the Chaparral Bar, about four blocks away. Stony said that, while walking home in yet another alcoholic blackout, I began crying loudly about my life. I have no memory of any of this, but I sure don't doubt it. Then, I sat on a street curb stubbornly, he said. He tried to get me moving again, so the cops wouldn't bother us. Suddenly, and from seemingly out of nowhere, Mr. Blanco appeared, leading us home. He'd never been this far

away from his enclosed yard. Shanti and Blanco had undoubtedly heard me crying. Shanti must have sent him on a recovery mission, as she couldn't get over of the wire fence in her old age. I knew Blanco was no ordinary cat, but this blew my mind. However, the big mind blower was right around the corner, waiting to change my life like never before.

Even alcohol wouldn't numb this....

Stony returned in January, 2003, after spending some time in county jail. In court, he had met a foxy young dysfunctional girl, who was having a party in Centerville. He said she was a babe. I should note that Stony started mixing my blueberry grape juice with his vodka. His new blue brew we christened Romulan ale, ala *Star Trek*. After drinking King Cobra all day, he persuaded me to go in search of this party with him, promising the girl's mother would love to love me. I'd had an afternoon nap of sorts and felt rested, but my blood alcohol level was still very high. I *never* should have been driving. I *so* wished now that Dave had stopped me. But seasoned drinkers can often disguise how very drunk they really are. We got lost in Centerville, between Cottonwood and Clarkdale, and I ended up backing into a mailbox. The owner of this postal unit called the police, who arrived immediately. This was *major* trouble; not only another DUI, but considered *aggravated*, as I was driving on a revoked license. The cop let Stony walk. He then dropped off my truck keys to Dave, who retrieved the vehicle the following day. Now, I was off again to Yavapai County jail, on DUI number six - a felony. I was finally about to hit rock bottom, beyond my wildest imagination.

"So, that's the beginning of how you got here," reflected Larkins. "What a strange, bizarre story, Rideout."

“Yeah, everybody’s got their story and I’ve heard even worse ones in here.”

Ironically, the jail judge on Sunday morning had previously been sexy Scottie’s public defender. Imagine that. He was now the mayor of Clarkdale, as well as a judge. He luckily remembered me from a visit to my trailer, returning my truck keys when Scottie got a DUI using my truck. He released me without bail immediately. This was certainly a modern day miracle considering my record. He also stated that I’d be doing *some time* for this felony. How *much* time was the big question? And are we talking prison or jail? I was allowed one phone call and luckily Dave answered. He and Pipestone Charlie picked me up in my ailing truck. They also had a beer and smoke prepared; just what I needed. I arrived home in *major* shock this time. This was much worse than losing my job! The immense fear of what the future would bring *totally* took me out of the Here and Now. I don’t think I’ve ever been *so* scared in my life. I became paralyzed with fear. I hardly ate and even alcohol wouldn’t numb my worried mind. Fear thoughts continually repeated in my brain, like a broken record. I soon received paperwork assigning me a public defender out of Payson. It took well over a week of phone calls to finally reach the cheap lawyer. He advised me to get my life together in the next month, before I was sentenced to prison, not jail.

“I’ve dealt with those guys too,” said Larkins. “A lot of ‘em don’t seem to know what they’re doing, as they are just learning to be lawyers. They’re green. It can be a big hassle, even though they’re basically free.”

“Well, this guy came off like he was too busy to even pay much attention to my case. Geez lawyer, we are talking about my life here.”

I had to tell my employers at Green Care about my troubles. I had to tell more than them but they were the first. Thankfully, they stood by me. Going to work became a daily living hell, of knowing I’d never see or do any of these activities again. Everything now was seen through new eyes, as if I were seeing

it all for the last time. This was definitely a major shift in consciousness caused by my thoughts. We do create our own reality. It was hard to keep my wandering mind on my work. My fellow worker, Geneo, had his day in court coming too, for violence in a Mexican restaurant. He was also working in heavy fear. Misery loves company; we were quite the depressed pair of landscapers. I'd given up coffee over six months prior and, for the record, had only smoked pot maybe about once a month or less for the past six years. I felt these were big advances in my addictive personality pattern. Plainly, I was sick and much sicker than I really knew. I felt I was very close to death, on many levels. I probably was. I'd just given up on life. I'd never be the father I *so* wanted to be and God sure wasn't making His presence known, after decades of chanting, meditations, gurus, books, prayers and peyote. St. John of the Cross called it, "The cloud of unknowing or the dark night of the soul." Does anything *really* work? I don't know anything anymore! I'm *so* tired of this battle with the bottle and all the mess I'm in. What *is* going to become of me?

"You were drinking to die, weren't you?" questioned Larkins.

"You could say that. Self-pity and the bottle make an evil combination."

I'd been shaking daily *so* badly that I could barely shave, holding one hand with the other. I had to down a forty ounce King Cobra just to balance my dwindling checkbook. It was totally embarrassing to be trembling at a checkout line, trying to dislodge money from my wallet to buy more beer for Dave and myself. I couldn't even look the clerk in the eye. Now I'd become a blackout drinker. I would drink heavily after work, so I could pass out by 7:30 p.m. The little death of sleep was far more comfortable than my waking reality. I often didn't remember the next morning, if I'd eaten dinner the night before or not. Dave would inform me later that I had *indeed* eaten seconds of his labor of love cooking. You could have fooled me. And Dave was fooling me, which I'd find out later. I was now clinically in the last stages of extreme alcoholism, accompanied by super heavy denial of my problems. God help

me now!! I'd traded my old hippie days of "getting high", for days now of "getting low." Alcohol, being a depressant, had taken me *super* low. And I let it all happen.

My fear of prison grew daily. Every negative image imaginable flashed through my mind. Oh God, not me. Wayne, another friend of Dave's, came by to drink. He'd just been released from a DUI prison in Phoenix, serving two and a half years. He lived in his old red Econoline van and had a clear plastic TV, which he'd bought in prison. He scared me with his prison tales. He was actually joking with me, but I didn't enjoy his sense of humor. I now wondered where Dave would live when I went down. Poor Dave. He still hadn't received any of his promised settlement money and had become totally dependent on me for support, on all levels. I felt very sorry for this pathetic hippie brother. When he got drunk, his secret powerful death urge surfaced. He repeated *many* times how he just *longed* to die. He was freaked out about receiving so much money and his band of vulture friends could smell blood coming. Dave was stressed. His once simple life was changing quickly. Like me, Dave too had a lot of fears, but for totally different reasons than mine.

"It blows me away that you still care about Dave, after all he's sucked you for," said Larkins, with a very strange look on his face.

"Yeah, I know. Love just keeps on giving, right?"

Now I had to make the dreaded phone call to landlord Ken and explain my DUI troubles. Hopefully, we can work out a win-win situation for my leased trailer, animals and belongings. After explaining things, he definitely did not want Dave staying there. He knew Dave partied. Thank God, my landlord never knew the full extent of this last year of parties, daily drinking and beer-laden garbage cans! He would have had me evicted long ago. Landlord was out of town much of the year with his wealthy Chinese wife, so I had to contact him via his 1-800 number. He called back, agreeing to let me sublet the abode to Michael, a fellow worker at Green Care. I didn't

know this Michael very well, at all. He was the only card I had. I worried a lot about Shanti, Mr. Blanco and all of my cherished possessions. What would become of them all? Michael needed a place of his own, as he and his girlfriend weren't exactly getting along. Landlord was deeply impressed by Michael's eleven years of alcohol sobriety. He did smoke pot, however, like a chimney. So Michael was legally allowed to take over my trailer when I went down. At this point, I still had *no* idea of exactly how long my prison sentence would be; maybe four months with five years of probation or maybe up to four years of hard time. Poor Shanti was falling down much more often now. She could barely make it up the two steps into the trailer. Her days were numbered. She had cataracts on both eyes and had basically gone deaf too. She continually went in and out of the front door too much, actually irritating Dave and me, as she couldn't seem to make up her mind. What had happened to my poor old beloved friend? We would soon be saying our final farewells. Words can't begin to express the love I felt for Shanti- by far my finest fur friend ever. I'll never forget the Indians saying, "You've about worn that dog out!" I had and I knew it.

Finally, the needed emotional breakdown came. Lyn stopped by alone and I lost it. I cried from the depths of my soul, as when my sister Joyce had died- about my upcoming prison sentence and fears, and about what a living hell I'd made of my life. I had finally hit my bottom- finally!! Everything was coming up, not just prison fears. The emotional release was like Mount Saint Helens erupting inside of me. All my fear and anxiety was coming to the surface in a torrent. Lyn kissed me repeatedly, assuring me that she loved me and that I *would* make it through this ordeal. Somebody loves me, oh my God! This tearful experience bonded me even deeper to Lyn. Thank you for this angel! I am amazed at how God takes care of me.

"I too had my moment of fear before prison. I think a lot of inmates go through that."

“It was definitely an overwhelming experience and very humbling.”

Now I had to confront Sri with my truth and shame. I wrote the hardest letter I’d ever written in my life to Sri’s family. Upon receiving it, Roderick called me and said he wanted me to tell Sri myself. However, when Sri finally called, the ice had been broken by Roderick’s reading of my letter to him. Now I felt like the naughty child, with roles reversed, as my young son spoke to me as an adult. He was *very* reassuring and maturely understanding for his young age. That blew me away. Sri is so smart and intuitive. He felt that all the peyote prayers had saved me from a certain death, by placing me in a “safe” place like prison. As Lyn had stated many times, I *am* an alcoholic. These continual problems all stem from uncontrolled drinking to excess and not facing or considering the consequences.

“Did Sri want to see you before you went away?”

“Yeah, he did but I only wanted him to remember me as he’d last seen me, at Christmas time. I didn’t want him to see me this low and depressed.”

God forbid that. And I planned on drinking now until I got legally incarcerated. My time was short. I might as well go out in style. God knows, I needed it. I would be without it soon enough. I actually *longed* in my heart and soul to be without it... but not right now. Sri told me later that crazy Stony had hit up his mother Joya for beer money at Circle K, before they stopped by my trailer at Christmas. And there stands Stony in my yard, reeking of beer, wanting to meet Sri. The insanity that alcohol carries is a never ending story.

In preparation for Michael taking over my living space, I made pages of lists and important notes, that I felt would be beneficial for him to follow. He failed to come by, as promised, so we could go over these last minute instructions. This was *not* a good sign in my book. Now I was *very* concerned about his reliability and trustworthiness. At this late hour, I just had to go with it. I felt like I’d jumped over a cliff and was waiting

to hit bottom. Everything was being pulled away from me now very quickly, as my tacky neighborhood and patterns of living would be changing in a matter of hours.

My last day of work with Geneo was like doing everything for the *very* last time, in slow motion. My consciousness was uniquely altered but clear and centered, as I pruned roses, looking out towards Sedona's red rocks. My boss from Green Care came by and matter-of-factly stated that I could have my job back upon release. As I didn't get fired, he wrote in my employee file, "absent due to incarceration." Thanks Matt, that's a good note to leave on. Another humbling experience occurred a few weeks earlier, while I was detailing out Walgreen's area. Joe, a Mexican I did six months with at the Salvation Army's ARC, lived in Cottonwood and recognized me from our old days of in-patient recovery. He had over six years of sobriety now. I told him of my woes and upcoming prison stint, all because I didn't take sobriety seriously, as he had done. I had failed to work the program. I felt ashamed of myself and very humbled, as he listened. Here was a man that I thought would *never* make it. But he had; and now I envied him. Joe passed no judgment on me. Joe knew that you only wake up when you're ready. This time I was *really* ready and I knew it. I was *finally* sick and tired of being sick and tired. Now that is a ray of hope. Let the needed healing begin, Lord. I'm ready.

After work and final goodbyes, I took my guitars and most cherished possessions, like the Shiva statue, to Lyn's for protected storage. And I sang her my last songs.

"You've *never* sounded better, Rob. Now you're *really* singing from the heart," she said, moving closer to me.

She also intuitively noticed an inner shift in me, saying, "You're ready now. Just stay positive." Little did she know then how *very* much those words would mean to me, or of the faith and strength that would follow in the many months to come, from staying positive? Staying positive would become my new mantra. I also heard my mom's mantra, "Oh God,

Rob” ringing in the back of my head. I gave Lyn my gold Om ring to remember me by. She said she would wear it, until she picked me up on my release day. Sri had asked me why I still wear my wedding ring when I’m no longer married to his mom. I replied that I’m married to God and that beautiful gold Om ring always reminds me of that. It is as much a part of me as the Om tattoo with Sri Ram’s name and the rudraksha seed mala that I always wear around my neck.

“Jesus that sounds like something out of a cheap romance novel,” laughed Larkins out loud.

“Well, it gave me a warm feeling to think she’d actually do something like that, for a sick dude like me.”

Back home, Dave had called his lawyer yet again. But this time he was asking how to take a loan out against his still promised upcoming insurance settlement. Poor Dave was really freaking out now! He was told that to borrow twenty thousand minimum, it would cost him sixty thousand! He was advised to hold out a bit longer and not lose forty thousand dollars, as “the check is in the mail.” In desperation for his predicament, I gave in to help Dave one last time. He needed hard cash to live on somehow, while I went up river to the slammer. My heart went out to him. We went to Bank of America together on Saturday morning, February 22, 2003, and I withdrew one thousand in cash to get him by. Lyn cautioned me about this move, and then preached angrily at Dave, via the phone, about paying me back. I now had only five hundred dollars left in my once abundant savings account. Dave assured Lyn and me once more, that he’d pay me back on his five thousand dollar debt and then some. No worries, mates, as Dave would be filthy rich soon. Wanna bet? The final icing on my cake was, “Don’t bust my chops” Larry the Chicago plumber. I had unplugged his industrial extension cord and my cable TV, as he was weeks behind on his share of my monthly utility payments. I would never see any money out of Larry now, as he *knew* I was going down and could just blow off his debts to me. Everybody knew I was going down. I had my last beer on Sunday night, February 23, 2003 on my porch, with Richard, a meth head painter

doing the remodel next door. Ironically, gaunt Richard had dated Lyn years ago, before she'd been married and divorced.

He said, "Lyn has the best heart of any woman I've ever met."

"Those are my exact same sentiments, Richard."

"Would you like to drink another beer?"

"No, I think I'll just say goodnight and goodbye. I've had enough to drink." After closing the trailer door, I knew without a doubt that I had just drunk my last beer.

So, going to Superior Court, with Dave driving my truck on the morning of February 24, 2003, became the last day I would ever see my wolfish "brother" friend alive, and my first day of a new incarceration lifestyle for years to come. As Michael failed again to come by my trailer before moving in, we stopped by his job site in Cottonwood for a quick goodbye. Thank God, we found him. I'd already said my final salutations to Shanti and Mr. Blanco. However, I was so nervous and shook up, as Dave sat in my idling truck, that I didn't take long enough with poor Shanti. She was so old and worn out, that it probably didn't register anyway. I still feel badly now, over the rushed farewell to a lifelong friend. Shame on me. I should have given her more time, something I'll regret forever. Mr. Blanco took off running around the trailer, symbolic of his future to come. I knew I would never see Shanti again, and prayed I would somehow reunite with my spirit cat. Michael reassured me that I could trust him and not to worry. I sure hope so. Upon arriving at the courthouse and jail parking lot, I gave Dave my cigarette lighter and the remainder of my Top tobacco along with my truck keys. He accompanied me into the courtroom silently. I knew that when I signed my plea agreement, I'd be legally incarcerated, where I'd wait another month or more in jail to be finally sentenced to a prison term. As the judge called out, "The State of Arizona versus Robert Rideout, Case #..." I saw Dave, with his ponytail across the back of his blue ski jacket that he'd found in a dumpster, exit the courtroom. He never even turned around to look back at me, with a goodbye glance. It *really* hurt that he

left that way, with no thank you or recognition for all the help I'd given him. What's up with that Dave? It sure doesn't help my nervousness in front of the judge to see you leave that way. I guess it's so much for all that "brother" bullshit, huh?

"Jesus Rideout, your whole tale is just too much. It's one hell of a story, literally. Maybe you should write a book."

"Maybe I should do just that. Who knows, it might help to heal the guilt and shame over living such a life."

"Attention in the dorms. We are now conducting voluntary UA's, gentlemen. First come, first serve, before we start calling out your numbers."

"Come on, Larkins. Let's go get the piss test over with, before the line up gets two hours long. Drink some water if you have to. May you pee in peace in prison?"

"Fortunately, this is my last one. I'm out of here, next week. No more of this crap for me."

While walking down the hall....

I *must* forgive my parents, my self and my past. In Christian guilt, I still somehow feel I haven't punished myself enough for all the dysfunctional behavior and pain that I've inflicted upon others. I've come to realize that forgiveness is the key to happiness and healing, and truly salvation from guilt. But I find it easier to forgive others, than to forgive myself. I've hurt myself and many loved ones beyond belief through my self-pity and destructive behavior. It is *so* easy to put the blame on my deceased parents and the dysfunctional home front I grew up in. I barely survived. But I know Mom and Dad were just doing the best they could, and having a hard time with their own relationship and parenting skills. I feel *so* sorry and sad that my parents never found much happiness in their lives. Judgment and stored resentments literally killed them. They

become that disease we call cancer. So the journey for truth and healing continues, both inside and out, for me. And forgiveness is the only way there. In fact, forgiveness is the *only* way- period, to forgive myself for dreaming this illusion. And to forgive the deep unconscious guilt that I left God, when in truth I *never* did.

While walking down the hall, after another substance abuse class, I suddenly felt a warm glow come over me. The yellow paint on the walls seemed brighter somehow, almost transparent. Maybe I hadn't really noticed the walls that much, except the patch spot where some angry inmate had punched a hole, causing a *lockdown* for a few hours. But now, everything seemed to be expanding; including me. I found myself smiling, beaming actually, as I finally felt totally forgiven- by myself! I know God does not forgive me, as God does not judge. I now "got it" that my ego had been my judge and jury, always condemning me, just like it does everyone else. Maybe that is what the Indians meant. The huge weight of guilt and shame was now gone, and the walls and ceiling of this hall seemed to disappear momentarily, like when the rising sun burns fog away. I was free! In prison, I felt free and almost floating. My spirit rejoiced for this blessed shift in consciousness. No more would I do my time down here. For months now, I'd been constantly reviewing my list of "secret errors and character defects." As this all takes time to process, maybe I am in the right place? That's what seems to happen here when you're finally alone in your bed, alone with your thoughts of the past and apprehensions about tomorrow. I think for every inmate, a lot of stuff comes to the surface here- deep stuff. A lot of prayers are *always* said in prison- probably more than in a monastery. Incarceration can be similar to what happens in intensive meditation retreats; you face your own fears, chattering mind and inner demons until, hopefully, you come to peace with them. This all happened to me in the hall in one instant. Then as I looked at myself in the mirror after shaving, I realized that there is really nobody I would ever want to be, but me. I finally love Rob for exactly who and what he is- all of him, the good and bad. And I have to laugh to myself about

this ironic twist of fate- finding and loving myself here in prison. I may learn more about myself here in this pressure cooker, than I ever did on the “outs.”

Writing about my feelings is not always easy. Alcohol abuse had taught me to stuff my feelings away for later. Well, that “later” is here now. And a lot of buried feelings have come up since being off alcohol for many months. I now know how it feels to be happy, really happy- without the aid of intoxicating substances. The freedom of not having a monkey on my back is intoxicating in its own natural way. I finally feel good just being straight, but I do realize this could be what’s referred to as the “pink cloud” of sobriety. To maintain this state of joy will require daily work. To keep anything, you must give it away. So, to keep my joy, I would share it with others by helping them in any way I saw fit. However, prison is a hard place to display love openly, as so many here have a lot of tough guy defenses in motion. Being the nice hippie guy that I am, I actually got reprimanded by our pod father for being “everybody’s friend”! That sounds like something Melinda would say. Misery loves company, not someone who is happy and free. I needed to wipe that smile off my face quickly. But I could still laugh at this cosmic insanity in my head.

“Keep it light, Rob” I’d been told by Cherokee Trish at a child’s birthday peyote meeting. She saw me mentally drifting into some unknown space, as I stared at the fire and altar. Her words brought me back instantly and I felt what she meant. Yes, keep it light! Don’t get all heavy over stuff. The choice is always up to me, so I choose to be light- which I really am. Trish’s words let me remember just how precious life is. Yes, keep it light for a child. This has me flashing on my own son Sri, when he was a child and of how very protective I was- not wanting any bad vibes around him. So, as I felt for my son, I must now try to do here in prison. Keep it light, on as many levels as possible. All of us inmates here are like children; children that never grew up and are now being weaned from the bottle, in more ways than one.

The state institutionalized DOC diet basically sucks. I've made reference to this before. The only live food is three mouthfuls of iceberg lettuce, called "salad," and maybe oranges or apples on the weekends. All of the other vegetables are boiled to the max. Flatulence is a daily occurrence. What's that smell next to my bunk? They actually sell laxatives on commissary to help unclog the high starch diet. I put a kite into medical explaining the need for more fiber. As a result, we now have natural veg fiber sold at our store. Many inmates are currently purchasing this item. We need all the help we can get here. The wealthy inmates can afford to buy tuna and whole wheat raisin bagels to supplement the daily diet. Many are stuck, *literally*, with what we're given to survive on. You must learn to spiritualize your food here, asking God to somehow make it nutritious enough to sustain life. Multi-vitamins are fortunately available too, on the store list but most can't afford them. Still, one should pray deeply before he eats, knowing that Father knows best. To quote the Good Book, "this too shall pass." I just wish it would pass through my colon faster.

There are always vultures hovering around in prison. These are the takers, always on the lookout for anything they can bum. It's hard to even open your drawer or locker, without somebody's eyes watching to see how much coffee, smokes or chips you possess. One small white con from Washington, with eyes like a wolf, used the whole Washington Brother scam to hustle me. I must have the word "sucker" across my forehead. This Tom was as smooth as Dave. I bought him Folgers Coffee, not Keefe, and Irish Spring soap for five dollars. Understand that five dollars here, is like twenty-five in the free world. Tom was in protective custody soon. I was only one of many to whom he owed money. Not paying your debts in prison can get you smashed, usually in the shower. I knew I'd never see him again, as he would be sent off our yard to a worse place. But I got the last laugh on him. He requested a certain book on a detention library request form. As I was librarian, I printed in pencil, so my handwriting couldn't be

traced, on the first page, “Where’s my five dollars, asshole?” I’m sure this loser got the message, loud and clear.

Peeing is not easy for me here. There is always somebody standing or talking right next to me when I’m trying to concentrate. And we have to pee monthly for those damn urinalysis tests, with a mirror aimed at our peckers so the guards can see all. Many meth and pot inmates come up dirty. Many don’t, as they have their tricks. And many just have a hard time peeing. Who would even want to be stoned here? Further charges, loss of early release or transfer to a higher yard, can all result from a few moments of being high in prison. They repeat the same behavior that got them in here in the first place. How do these guys expect *not* to come back? I met one longhair who’d done four years here. In less than a year out, he’s back again, but this time he’ll serve eight long years. Do the math: a total of twelve years, for not learning his lesson. But it’s always the judge’s fault or the police, etc. That is an ideal example of the power of denial. It can be one hell of a thick wall.

Today is Flag Day, February 24, 2004. This marks exactly one year since I became incarcerated and I’ve put up my own white flag, surrendering to alcohol. This is my AA birthday, again. As my sobriety was “forced”, I don’t feel quite the same joy or sense of accomplishment that I did back in Colville of ’98, when I got my one year chip and cake at an AA meeting. Ironically, a friend’s letter arrived yesterday reminding me that it is *still* special. I even plan to attend AA here tonight, to celebrate my birthday.

So, after cleaning toilets and being Mr. Library guy, I finally got outside clearance and received the job of landscaper at the Central offices of DOC. Every Arizona prisoners’ records are kept here- the holy of holies. I loved this job, as I was finally alone for a few hours and away from the world of chronic inmates talking shit. I kept the parking lots, sidewalks and surrounding grounds looking top notch. After all, I’ve been a landscaper for years.

“Hey, Rideout...over here,” I heard a voice call out from behind some bushes. It was Larkins, dressed out in casual street clothes and smoking a cigarette. He’d stopped by to see me, now that he was free.

“Jesus, Larkins, don’t let anybody see us talking or I’m in big trouble, man. You know that! What’s it like being out for you? Are you doing okay?”

“Yeah, you know. I’m living at the Y with a lot of other released guys. It’s weird and kind of lonely. Many of our friends have already relapsed. I hope I don’t.”

“Well, good luck and get out of here now. I can’t let you get me into any trouble. I’ve still got lots of time to do, Larkins. It was good seeing you though.”

Then, after a few months of this coveted job and making about seventy-three cents an hour, my number finally came up to the top of the list for, the job of all prison jobs, Greater Phoenix Auto Auction. Drum roll, please. Now I could work some long hours and save up money for my life in the free world again someday.

And work I did! Most days were usually ten hours long and I did as many weekends as possible too. I performed what were called *extractions* here- extracting dirt from auto carpets, using a *jitterbug* air-powered rotating brush to scrub in Blue Max soap, and then suck it all out with high powered overhead vacuums. The Phoenix heat was well over 100°, for what seemed like weeks on end. With this new job, I could now afford peanut butter and raisin bagels, to support the lacking institutional diet. Our daily sack lunches were *so* bad, that most ended up in the garbage cans. What they called cheese was like thin yellow Velveeta slices in plastic. It would melt in the heat looking like plastic oil. At lunch, we could choose to dine in any vehicle of our choice and listen to the radio, and then maybe doze off briefly after eating. Suddenly, the lights would flash on and off. It’s back to work again, balls to the walls. On the bus ride home to the yard, you had better watch where you sit. Every seat is spoken for here by an inmate who

has been on this bus much longer than you. And the seating order here determines your place in line when we get home; home to be stripped searched *again*, before we can line up to shower off all of today's sweat, dirt, verbal abuse and memories. At one strip search, it was discovered that I had removed the liners from my tennis shoes.

"What's this? Where are the liners for these shoes?" questioned the guard. He didn't look very happy.

"I purchased these shoes outright and I did this to give my feet more room, as they were a bit too tight," I responded. "You know, they make these shoes in China and the sizes are always screwy."

Now they confiscated my shoes, all because I had altered DOC property! Give me a break. These are *my* shoes, I bought them. Now I was forced to wear the DOC issued China made plastic work boots that hurt like hell and make your feet sweat. In time, a benevolent C.O. got my tennis shoes back to me. At least, I'm taking home two dollars an hour now, at this job. And again, it is time for them to count us- back to your bunks.

After work one day, big changes occurred back at Phoenix West. The warden decided to move all inmates, who have outside jobs, into dorms 7 and 8 only. Most people don't accept change readily, and inmates are no exception. However, after I got used to dorm 8, this move was *way* better. Now, there were no pod fathers, as they weren't really needed. Here, we all knew each other well, as many of us worked together each day outside. Finally, there aren't any of the unemployed inmates hanging out in our doorways and bathrooms. There is much more respect in our dorm now. Respect is what it is *all* about in prison.

As I walked down to the smoking cage one day, I flashed on all the "time" I've done over alcohol trouble. I've had numerous odd nights in jail for twenty-four hours, ninety days in St. John's jail, then six months in-patient at the ARC rehab, not to mention numerous hours at alcohol classes and AA meetings, and now two and a half years in prison. I feel *so*

freaking stupid- all because I looked to a bottle for relief from the pain of my life. The only good thing, I guess, and maybe it's just an excuse, is that I am not alone- at least here. Many inmates have stories *far* worse than mine. Still, I feel like a real loser sometimes, even after forgiving myself. It's often hard to believe that God was with me through all of this total insanity. I just didn't know which voice was His. The shame and guilt is *so* strong, I pray I *can* recover, really recover this time. I thought I'd never drink *again*, after the ARC. But I did relapse, alone, after nearly one and a half years of sobriety. This disease is just *so* tricky. It just plain sucks.

Now I'm off again....

Wow! After working over ten hours at Auto Auction on the fall equinox, September 23, 2004, I find out at 9:30 p.m. that I'm being moved, *now*, with twelve others, up to the new prison complex in Kingman, Arizona. Roll up fast! We had all heard rumors about this new super-max prison, but never thought it would affect us. There was *no* time for any kind of goodbyes to the inmates in my dorm. I was called into the guard's office to watch him itemize and record every single thing I was issued. Then he taped up my box, the one thing I own that contains my pens, friends letters, toothbrush and Spork, and wrote my ADC number on it. Now I am off again, on that notorious DOC prison bus, to drive chained all night long with others to Kingman. Upon arriving in the early morning light, I saw that this new prison is huge, in comparison to Phoenix West, with only about four hundred total inmates starting it off. We are the first to arrive, but soon about eight hundred more will be coming. Thank God, I won't be around for that. We have brand new mattresses, pillows, sheets and blankets to sleep on. The chow is way more abundant and better tasting. This move was kind of a shock for me. I really didn't want to move. I only have seven more months to go to my release date and would have preferred to

stay in Phoenix, where I was comfortable. Now, I see that this move was perfect.

“Where did you come from?” asked another older inmate.

“I came from Phoenix West. I heard that I was even handpicked by the warden to be here, as my record was so spotless.”

“Me too,” he answered. “But I came from Florence.”

As a new prison just starting up, they desired mature inmates and fresh fish just coming into the system. That *is* a good strategy. They picked those that know the ropes and those too new to know. The rest of the losers still learning the ropes would be coming later- to establish politics, fear and the Convict Code. A few of my friends from other pods followed me up here from Phoenix West. This new yard is huge. If you walk four laps around it, it equals one mile. We have a great view of the surrounding mountains too and the air is *so* much cleaner than in Phoenix. However, the winds often blow strongly across this desolated area 51, making it hard for smokers. Presently, there is no work, but that will be coming. This prison isn’t quite finished yet, so many here will have jobs getting it up and running for the others that will be arriving after I’m released. I’ll be getting out, thank God, before this new yard officially becomes Arizona’s Super Max DUI prison. I *will* miss the money from Auto Auction that I was saving, but not all that hard work. The library here seems to have a greater selection of books, or at least quite a few I haven’t read yet. With only about seven more months to serve, I will concentrate on studying the *Course in Miracles* in earnest and reading some of these books too.

One real blessing, so far, is the *no pod hopping* rule. At Phoenix West, all pods were open domain for inmates to fraternize. Now, I basically do the rest of my time with sixty others in Dorm 2, Pod B. Any further relationships occur in the yard or chow hall, as you must now stay in your own area. This reminds me of Escapement Resort – “stay in your area, Rob!” In our area, most are now reading books or learning to,

as they don't have a TV set yet. Besides the handpicked few from other yards, most inmates here are brand new to the system. They don't know how good they have it, at this point, as the conditions here are exemplary so far. All of this will change, of course. You can bet money on that.

I saw the changes starting to occur, as my months here passed. At times, I felt like a seasoned con, as I watched all these new young fish adjusting to their life in orange. Many would have their own clear plastic TV in time. And many would become caught up in the evolving yard politics. You can't have a prison without politics. Ours was just beginning. It was interesting to watch which anal alpha-dog inmate here would become a respected leader. Obviously, so to speak, it would be someone who had been around the block a few times or the yard in this case.

I was just flashing on Phoenix West and all the long hours of work I did there for next to nothing. I was a dorm porter for ten cents an hour, a librarian for thirty-two cents an hour, a landscaper for seventy-three cents an hour and finally Auto Auction at two dollars an hour. I always took each job seriously, doing my best for God alone. Work is worship. All of the small money I am grateful for as it helps out on commissary. Auto Auction helped me to get a nest egg of around \$1,670.00 for my new life outside in April, 2005. Oh God, I worked for it! When I think of all the other inmates basically fucking off, I wonder now why I ever worked so hard. I'm just my ADC number here- not even a real person. Nobody really cares or lets you know you're doing a good job. I was seldom ever thanked or praised. Why not slack off like everybody else who doesn't give a shit? Well, I just can't do that. My psychic side seems more developed in prison, as I am around four hundred and fifty to five hundred dudes daily. I can sense their auras easily and tell if there is any active intelligence or God consciousness in them. Sadly, I don't meet many here who are ready for the deeper truths. Everybody is on *such* different levels of awareness. Here, it's all about me, myself included. That is why we drank. We're all very self

absorbed, addicted, selfish S.O.B.s. And I am sick of it! You cannot even have a normal conversation here. Inmates might listen momentarily, but then sidestep or stage hog your conversation totally. You know what I mean?

Above, on the bunk across from me, resides a slob known as Dogfish. He breathes only through his open mouth, like his nose doesn't work anymore from snorting too much white powder. He snores like a freight train, keeping many awake. Dogfish has been down before- seven years in Florence and now back again. This gross dude has a huge poorly tattooed OM sign on his forearm. He doesn't even know what it means! He has about forty weirder cartoon tattoos all over his fat body; like where is the circus dude? Now, he uses our metal shelf as a foot stand to climb up to his upper bunk. Gross! I see footprints and possibly athlete's foot growing on the shelf. Then, there are the two white knuckleheads down the row, who talk full volume after 10:30 p.m., with no respect for anybody trying to sleep. That has got to stop! We quietly pussyfoot around at 6 a.m., so the sleeping losers can escape their time in dream world. Many stay up here all night, and then sleep all day- especially the fat Chief behind me. He has now gotten two tickets in a row for sleeping in, when he should have been in class. These dudes don't have a clue on how to do their time, yet. And all of my criticism of them, just shows me how institutionalized I've become. You've got to obey the Convict Code here, dudes. Or you *will* suffer the consequences.

I got into it today with fifty-nine year old Bob from Colorado- another ADD inmate. I tried to let him see that we all create our own reality, through our thoughts, words and deeds. I told him that he chose to be here, in prison, on *some* level. It is all perfect.

"Boy, I can't see that!" he shouted angrily at me.

"Nobody wants to accept their shit here; blame it *always* on somebody or something else, Bob."

When I touched on reincarnation, Bob mentioned Hinduism. He definitely believes you only live once and there is nothing

after death. How sad! Bob is obviously a young soul. Why people are such spiritual midgets, when we are all really *living God forever*, just baffles me.

I have been flashing on losing my beloved cabin in the house fire of 1987. Oh Lord, how I *loved* that place and enjoyed all of the hard work and energy that I put into it. After the fire, I had to lose our beautiful octagon, and even more land, to divorce. That one still hurts. I can only hope something better will come my way up in Colville. It is not easy starting over again at age fifty-six years old. I hardly ever flash on my accident now, but I should, as I nearly died. The intense pain is certainly gone. It's hard to even remember now all the exercises and physiotherapy that I went through; months in a wheelchair, crutches and then a cane, while doing intensive college homework and classes, while living in that depressing Sedro Woollie house with my young son coming to visit his seriously depressed alcoholic Dad. Why did I *ever* choose to go through all of this? Hopefully, my story can help somebody, somehow. I just want the entire subconscious hurt to *really* heal. I want to be well.

Today is the day before Thanksgiving. Thirty-five new cons arrived before lunch, bumming coffee and tobacco, of course, after they got processed. And I've got it, as I've worked so hard for twenty months to earn it. Here, have some; it is just give, give and give again. That's life's greatest lesson- even in prison.

I had another profound moment of clarity today. I think I saw Mr. Blanco and David Lee Bonds' purpose in my lonely life. They both were divine gifts of love from God. They were what I needed in my sad depressing life to remind me of just how special love is. I miss them both so *very* much. I must have been with Dave in a former lifetime, to have felt so at one with him. I can't explain it. I fully realize that Dave had his shady side, but I loved him despite it all. Blanco defies description. He was *so* much more than just a cat. He was more like a fur angel that was sent to me for just a short mission.

Thank you, Lord, for both of these souls. I just wish I could have had more time with them.

I just wrote another song today called, *Last Call for Alcohol*. Now, I've written sixteen songs in prison. It will be fun to put melodies and chords to them when I get out. Wow! Now they're moving me down to bed number four. What is this all about? I put a kite in over a month ago asking *not* to be moved, as I am now considered a short-timer. Somehow, they think I'm a Chief, an Indian. Consider yourself Sioux, remember?

"What race are you, Rideout?" asked a white female C.O.

"What do you think?"

Well, this move turned out to be a blessing in disguise. Now, I have more privacy and less inmate bullshit to put up with. I don't really hang with anybody here. Nobody is like me. Now, that's an understatement and I am totally fine with it, totally. After living around, literally, hundreds of inmates for twenty months, I now stick to myself. I have learned how to do my time; easy time. Many here see me as anti-social, but I just feel better off alone. I have more peace. I've heard all of their stories so many times before. The faces are different but the stories are the same. My books and songwriting keep me busy and content. These remaining months, I will live in my world of silent friends, books and the teachings from *A Course in Miracles*. Thank God for that gift.

Another moment of cosmic clarity just occurred, concerning my situation with my son. Simply stated, God took Sri from me, because I couldn't take care of myself properly. How can I take care of another, until I learn to love and care for myself? I am learning now, in prison, how to do just that.

Today I feel fear- the fear that I may have cancer. A red spot on my chest is still there, after two weeks of tetracycline and ointment. My mind has played out scenarios of possible skin and /or lung cancer from years of sunshine, pot, secondhand smoke in bars and now a decade of daily tobacco use. As I watch this fear, my mind sings the words of Tim McGraw's

song *Live Like You Were Dying*. Then I play out the big one—what if I have cancer? Joyce died in ‘74, Mom in ‘84, and Dad in ‘94—now me in 2004? How would I live now, if I knew I only had maybe a year of life left? That sure wouldn’t give me much time after my release. I see now what Dave must have gone through mentally, while living with me; he *knew* that he was dying. I feel he killed himself on heroin because of his fear. I despise fear, especially after realizing what a supreme illusion it is. I study the *Course* for spiritual strength and to align to the truth; God is. So why worry? But, if by chance, it is my time to leave this body, then I will just have to make the best of it. I can always go back to India or spend my last days near my son.

“Did they take you off the yard yet?” questioned the prison doctor.

“No, they haven’t yet. I’m just a worried inmate who can’t get any answers. Please speak to them again, will you?”

The prison doctor insisted that I be taken off the yard for a biopsy, at a skin cancer clinic in Kingman. After weeks of waiting, I was finally taken there, along with another inmate. We were dressed out in orange transport jumpsuits, shackled at the ankles and handcuffed for our ride. Then, the two guards driving us put real bullets in their guns. Wow! It was a nice treat to see what the topography looks like on our twenty minute drive there, between our new super max complex and the town of Kingman. When I entered the clinic, other patients seized up in anticipation. Who was this orange, chained soul entering the doctor’s office? Can’t they schedule the appointment, so that we don’t have to see him? After a brief examination, I was told that I do *not* have skin cancer, but an acenetic keratosis. This is common to Anglos my age; they’ve been exposed to major sun over long periods of time. I’m guilty again, of sun without sunscreen. So in two minutes, the doctor froze off my chest growth with liquid nitrogen and removed my fear. I feel a whole lot better now! I just beat the karmic odds of my family’s death patterns. Whew! Maybe I will make it to ninety.

Today is Sunday, December 19, 2004. Roderick and Sri are the first ones to show up for our special Christmas food visitation. Joya made me three exotic vegetarian dishes with lots of garlic and crushed espresso beans on the Christmas tree desserts. Then Roderick said a prayer for me, which brought tears to my eyes. He really is a good man. He also gave me fifty dollars, which I would use on commissary. Sri said that I looked happier here, with a brighter aura than I had had in Phoenix West. I don't quite know how I look, as the cheap plastic mirror that I use doesn't really give me a very good picture of myself. I do know that prison stress ages one quickly. Today, I feel much better here in this prison and my heart feels good, from their visit. However, I somehow wish I could feel closer to my son, Sri. He called Roderick "Dad" again. I see I don't even know my son.

Presently, I'm watching seven Mexicans stare at a huge piggy bank of Tweedy Bird, made from rolled up painted newspaper. This probably costs a lot of ramen soups and pouches of tobacco. Simple cartoon characters are real big here, especially with Mexicans. Jesus, how old are we... three?

At 1a.m. this morning, the sound of a loud bomb went off. It was actually thunder and lightning bolts hitting the tall outside yard lamp, blowing out all of the lights and TV sets in our prison. By this point, many of the inmates now have their treasured TVs. This could prove to be a very interesting day. It was. I worked that afternoon with other inmates installing new beds in the unfinished part of the prison, while outside electricians came into our yard, to fix the electrical problem. Sometimes work here can be a little strange. I stood for five minutes at work today, waiting for an inmate to help me lift one bed. He got very angry at me.

"Do you want me to slap you up along the side of your head?"

"Chill out. I just wanted to get back to work".

"What's the rush? Are you going somewhere?"

To me, it's easier to work than just waste time and stand around. We already do enough of that, all day incarcerated here. This lazy inmate will probably relapse anyway and be back shortly. He still plans on drinking when he gets out, just like most all of the rest. Another young blonde stud can't wait to have long hair. His two inch ponytail is tied in three hair bands already. That's *so* institutional! He's continually staring in the mirror to see if it grew anymore overnight. Give me a break! Later, the TVs were up and running again, thanks to the electricians, and institutionalized life goes on again.

We just started our new alcohol classes today. They seem much better than those at Phoenix West and the workbook is quite good too. I enjoy these classes, as I try to learn more about this disease of alcoholism. But many here do not, as they are mandatory. They're teaching us the truth about watching our thoughts; you are what you think! And everybody could benefit from this truth, not just alcoholics and inmates.

There is a new fat con named Tim, over in pod 2A. He is from Clarksdale, Arizona and looks a lot like Michael Moore. Today in the chow hall, I asked Tim a question.

"Being from Clarkdale and all, do you happen to know David Lee Bond?"

"He died in my house over a year ago," he replied. "Dave was sitting on the couch, apparently fine, but when we checked on him next, he was dead. Too bad, as I really liked the guy."

"I did too."

Incredible- what are the odds of this? So, Tim and I now talked of Dave.

I just woke up from a *very* heavy dream, nearly crying. I was telling Joya of the pain I feel in my heart, over losing my son Sri Ram. In the dream, I wanted her to feel that same loss in her soul, to know what it's like for me. Then I had an insight, that this same pain must be what God feels for all of us- the pain of separation. As I was surfing through the TV stations, I stopped at the Christian station. A song was playing and the

words were “thank you for showing me what a father is all about”- how perfect.

Just as I’m sitting down to shit, the Mexican bathroom team arrives with their chlorine, masks and brushes. This always happens, as there is *never* any privacy here. Even at 2 a.m., somebody will come in and smoke on the toilet next to you. Or they will stand at the next urinal and want to start up a conversation, making it very hard to concentrate on doing my thing here. The lack of privacy in prison has got to be my biggest bitch. It would also sure be nice to have a pair of tweezers.

Prison has given me the opportunity to be creative- God’s greatest gift. I began writing this book here in prison. I wrote my first poem here too. My poem is a social commentary on prison life. I was inspired by Allen Ginsberg’s 1956 poem, *Howl*. My poem is entitled:

Scream

I do my time in the institutional coma to the sounds of felons farting, belching, bitching about DUI laws, sanding Popsicle sticks, noisy Spanish headphones blasting from clear plastic radios or TVs, PA speakers shouting “count time” or “pill call”, rapidly repeated toilet flushing, exclamations of fucking this or that, or mother fucker, sounds of pod father’s advice or council, verbal questions of “what’s up?” or “what’s happening?”, telephone conversations consisting of “I love you” and “don’t forget me”, shouts of “when is commissary this week”, loud snapping and whipping of still damp returned laundry and the clamor of the closing pod door by some dumb fuck who still hasn’t figured out the word “respect” yet.

I see my time on the institutional yard through orange eyes, watching constipated inmates exercise and walk off starchy commissary guts, while listening to gangster rap music and hip hop on commissary headphones, smoking rollies with orange stained fingers on their way to GED glasses or substance abuse classes, full of angry denial ridden felons suffering attention deficit disorder while playing with crayons, AA’s Big book and

pre-toddler coloring books, wondering how much money is *still* on their books or which week we're at on the chow menu or when the short timer leaves this week, can a bottom bunk finally open up for someone still serving eight more years of his sentence and will his old lady ever visit him, maybe at the Christmas food visit so he could taste once more non-institutional food that his loser mind can barely remember, while he folds gently his DOC boxer shorts, checking for skid marks before sweeping dust bunnies from under his rack, in his house on Memory Lane, while remembering how his estranged children looked years ago when they called him "Daddy", before he drank his guts out and decided to drive, but luckily not killing anybody or himself, only killing all hope that he will ever be happy again, as he one day re-enters life in the free world of terrorists, child molesters, road rage and street racers, misguided world leaders, Paris Hilton mentalities watching Donald Trump's reality show on new large screen plasma technology that reflects doomsday prophecies are here in crumbling family structures, grade school drug problems, gay republicans, actor governors and Tsunami relief concerts, as hell on earth manifests, and the fundamentalist Christians rejoice that they were right, he wonders if maybe it is safer to just stay down up river and be institutionalized, until hell does freeze over or state legislation finally passes the 65% law. And he screams, as his mind remembers the words to the Jim Reeves' song, *Welcome to my World*. Jan. 25, 2005

I also created a small poster for a statewide DUI awareness contest. I was the first to submit my creation and the staff absolutely loved it! They even called me into their office to talk about it. It's a picture of a "one way" street leading to a "dead end" sign, with the DOC orange razor wire gates at the end of the street. The car is a whiskey bottle, with a crazy looking dude driving on top of it; very simple but true. The caption read, "Boy, you're going to carry that weight a long time". I ended up getting second prize in the state inmate contest. If this were made into a TV cartoon, with the Beatles music behind it, it could reach a lot of youth. It hasn't happened- yet.

When I reflect on all the prayers being said, on my behalf by my friends, I realize how loved I truly am. If God is Love, then there is only Love. It's what we all seek, sometimes find for awhile, struggle to hold onto and often, only see it slip away again. But do we ever *really* lose love? I don't think so. Love seems to play hide and seek, constantly changing forms to make the game more enticing. Here I am. Can you recognize me now? I know now that only complete love for my real, eternal Self can bring the psychic change I need to recover. Recover- what a word. I'm just trying to recover my Self, which has never left me, but only been forgotten. I can never recover my lost past, except in distorted memories, which totally seem like a dream now. In writing this book, it is hard to believe that this story was *ever* my life. I still have that burning desire to express love, despite this often, negative prison environment. I've always loved life deeply, and I knew that at an early age, until I let alcohol delude me into thinking I was incapable of ever giving or receiving true love. So, how can you mend a broken heart? Was I just a hopeless romantic in love with love? Maybe I can mend by realizing that my heart's breaking was all part of an expanding process, to hold even more love. I feel too that our loved ones never *really* leave us. What we loved in them is right within us, in our own hearts. What we loved in them is merely a reflection of our own true Self. We are all a part of God, looking at and loving Himself.

It's common knowledge that life has certain critical moments- call them turning points, where lifelong decisions are made. I know when I first saw a picture of Ringo's Ludwig drum set, taken from behind in a 1963 *Life* magazine, that my life would *never* be the same. I hadn't even heard the Beatles' music yet, but something clicked. I often wonder how my life would have turned out if I'd chosen an art history career over the music business. Music and drugs had such a strong hold over me during my formative years that I was propelled to accept an enabling job that would keep me in semi-poverty and active addiction. Music can definitely be like a very powerful drug, to a musician.

Jolene wrote me a couple of letters that really hit home. I wish to quote her words directly from a letter dated 9/23/03: “I too wish you could have had more years with Joyce - but above and beyond that, I wish you could have had a more loving family - period. My brother survived the same ‘no love’ abuse from our father as you did yours. It is a horrible life to endure that mental torture. We can all be thankful for our Real friends that we encounter in life - these people are our Real family.” More insight of our divorce was revealed when she wrote on 9/5/03: “The message you wrote about your mother was touching. I had no idea she tried to commit suicide after I left you. I do know that if I had been accepted into your family (meaning your Mother and Father) that the chances of me staying would have increased a hundredfold. I always knew they hated me. I never knew exactly why. Because I was born Catholic I guess. I had hoped when they met my Mom and Dad that they would see that I was from a good family and things would change. They did not. They treated me like an outcast piece of shit - always. I tried so hard to get points by giving your mother beautiful gifts and she would give me in return, *How to Cook a Bear* - a pamphlet on cooking bear meat, and we were vegetarians - for Christmas. It doesn’t get much worse than that. The next year your mother and Joyce went in together and got me a manicure set that cost five dollars. They may as well have slapped me in the face. Remember our wedding gift from your mom and dad? That is the classic moment in time that I will never forget - suspended in space for eternity for me to replay whenever my brain requests it - your Dad moving over to the little cabinet where he had his check book and writing us a check...How awful...” These quotes just reaffirm what lost, dysfunctional parents I had. On 4/15/04, I received another letter from Jolene with further insights about my parents. She wrote this letter from Iowa where she was visiting her own parents. She expressed her parents’ love for me still, after all of these years. Then her dad yelled out, after she read my letter aloud for them, “Rob never had parents even when they were alive.” Now that’s a heavy one. I think if Joyce had lived, many things might have been different. I

might not have felt so orphaned, and possibly wouldn't have developed full-blown alcoholism. What if? The need for a family is a basic human necessity. So many souls are deprived of that basic factor. It's no wonder we have so many lost souls wandering through life, looking for answers in drugs, alcohol, religion and relationships. Had things been different, like if I'd been straight and "normal," maybe a career in art history could have given me better financial security, with a teaching position in some big city or college. I'll never know, for I didn't choose the high road, but the low. Music just possessed my heart and soul. That damn beat had me. And that, for good or bad, was the path I chose. "My life has been a song," to quote those Bee Gees, but a song I've always tried to sing from the heart, even when going through the turning points.

Even though I lost Mom back in 1984, my second mother, Leona [Jolene's mom] has always come through for me. She has never forgotten my birthday, being a fellow Pisces, or to send me a Christmas card each year, usually with money enclosed. She *always* makes me feel loved, remembered and special in her kind inspiring words. Isn't that a mother's job? Before my mother died, she said, "You won't even think about me when I'm gone." As the years pass by, she is proven right. Memory seems to keep more of the good than the bad. Emma Morell, up in Surrey, British Columbia, always said she was my Black mother. Remember, she and Henry Morell were the transplanted Fijians, responsible for me touring their island paradise in 1979. I've lost contact with them since my divorce from Joya. I know Emma would be very upset, if she knew her White son was in prison. So God has provided me with semi-surrogate mothers, always showing me unconditional love where my own mother failed. Yogananda said that a lack of love often results in alcoholism. How that hits home, or better, lack of a home right now.

I must set some....

Do I need goals? Years ago, I read a quote by silent Baba Hari Das, “A Yogi has no future.” This may have helped me to stay Now-orientated, but failed to provide guidance for the popular Five Year Goal Plan. I’ve never considered myself much of a high achiever, alpha-dog personality. Being a Pisces water sign, I’ve preferred to just kind of go with the flow. But now faced with prison time to reflect on my past, I see I must set some achievable goals for my future, both materially and spiritually. Maybe these goals will manifest or possibly change over time. I don’t know. Anything can happen. But for now, my Number One Goal is sobriety at all costs. Just to accept life on life’s terms, not altered thorough drugs or alcohol. I never want to lose sight of my Higher Self again. I must daily remember surrender to God- here, now, always. I *never* want to take anything for granted ever again, knowing well that the rug could be pulled out from under me at any moment. *Om Namah Shivaya* - Thy will be done Lord, not mine.

Goal Number Two is to think before speaking. My tongue has gotten me in about as much trouble as alcohol, but without the legal ramifications. My judgmental thoughts about others have been expressed verbally too many times, and the result was only pain to me and others. My mouth has often been very cutting and cynical. I know that. I learned a lot of this style from my mom and the shredder peer group I hung out with in high school. I only see what I don’t like in others, because it is in me or I wouldn’t even see it! You had better watch your mouth in prison and don’t talk shit or the consequences could be disastrous. So now, I’m trying harder to think before I speak or act. That Christian concept of the Trinity of God - Father, Son and Holy Ghost - can well be interpreted as thought, speech and action, for that seems to be how the divine manifests in daily earth life.

I took note of a poster in classroom 4 here. It read, “Your time, their future.” An 800 toll-free number will put me in touch with an organization designed to help young people learn about the destructive lifestyle of substance abuse from prisoners like myself. Far out... here is Goal Number Three.

I'd *so* like to share my experience of heaven and hell, in hopes that maybe somebody could learn from my downfall and be wise enough *not* to make the same choices I did. Maybe I should publish my book? I plan to get in touch with schools and churches in Colville. I'd like to try to reach today's generation of kids. It would be fun to play some songs on guitar, as most kids like live music, and tell of my musical career. Then I could explain how the pattern of addiction became a life-style. In short, how I got into it and ways to get out, before one falls to the depths of prison.

Goal Number Four, sorely needed by my soul, is to perform music again. I could be a drummer in a band or a one-man act on guitar, or maybe both. We'll see. Music has always been my first love and passion. I feel it's my gift from God. This goal I *definitely* plan to express and manifest. It is what I was born to do. I've now written close to twenty original songs and I'm still writing here in prison. This is only a beginning, I realize, but I plan to keep singing and writing. Nowadays, I don't hear much on the radio I like, so I might as well pen something I do like.

My ongoing Goal Number Five goes without mention - continued communication and healing with my son, Sri Ram. I can't even begin to imagine how deeply I've hurt him, through my many wrong choices and selfish sick behavior. Possibly Sri and I will enter the sacred tipi again, as he has suggested. Let our healing continue on deeper levels, one way or another. This may come to pass. When I reflect on the four church peyote meetings that Joya and I sponsored, to set young Sri's life on a good path, I bow in gratitude to Creator for hearing and answering our family prayers. The Native American Church, with peyote as the sacrament, is by *far* the most real and powerful church that I've *ever* encountered. In all of my years of spiritual searching, the answers were just behind that canvas tipi door, with the sacred fire, holy water, blessed medicine and tobacco rolled in corn husks taking my prayers to the Source of all life. It's been said that the tipi is Divine Mother's breast. How true that is. I've always felt that I was

finally Home, being nurtured, when I've participated in ceremony there.

So for now, these are the tangible goals that I've set for myself upon release from prison. A yogi may not have a future, but it doesn't hurt to have some goals, whether they come true or not. It gives one direction and something to work towards.

If God is Love, then I've been searching for it all over the place. "How long 'til my soul gets it right?" sing Indigo Girls. How true. After some childhood affection from my parents, which was usually packaged in the form of gifts or lessons - "See how much we love you, Rob?" - I felt what I would term *Love* in music- especially in the early Beatles' raw music. Playing and creating music is definitely a spiritual experience. Any real musician knows this already. Music is a divine act in which we most closely approach God. I became devoted to music goddess Saraswati early on and still am. I don't deny this, no way. When songs hit my heart and make me cry, I feel the touch of God. That's why I love Willie Nelson and George Harrison's songs *so* much. They do that for me. These guys are as deep and simple as they come. Many might disagree with me, but this is my story and my truth. I own up to it. "Follow your Bliss," was Joseph Campbell's mantra. I mistakenly thought Bliss could be found in drugs and alcohol, only to be shown briefly the light, and then thrown into the pits of darkness for decades. True love and bliss sure weren't found down this destructive path. I've tried to be honest in the role drugs and alcohol has played in my life. It's been my cross to bear, as a psychic pointed out years earlier. It was important for me to be honest in relating all the drug stories, as weird and bizarre as some of them are, so I could clearly see the progression and reality of the disease of substance abuse. For many years, I definitely had my love affair with altered states, always looking for lost love outside of myself, instead of inside.

So let's try travel, a la Marco Polo. Maybe love is in another part of our world. After traveling to nineteen foreign countries, no matter where I went, there I was- still Rob, in a different

stage play. The educational value of foreign travel is priceless beyond words, but love was fleeting again. These people were at home, loving it totally, while I watched them alone in my head. I could see love in those dark shiny eyes of the Hindus and Fijians. Did they know something I didn't? Is this world of illusion some kind of divine joke where everybody knows the answer but me? Sometimes life can feel that way. I often envied the poor of India and Fiji. They really had nothing, but they have love. They have everything. So did I, if I could realize it. Quit playing hide and seek with me, Divine Mother. Reveal Thyself.

After thirty plus years of vegetarianism, I've found a profound love for good healthy food and resulting better health. I've really hardly ever been sick a day in my life. Knock on wood. When many get the flu and the famous common cold, it seems to pass me by. I believe that all illness is spiritually based denial, in one form or another. We actually fear waking up and we make ourselves sick, unknowingly. Sickness is a cry for healing and help and often attention too. We even choose to kill ourselves at some point. Don't be shocked. That's just how it happens. Accidents are the same way. And I know that from personal experience. I realize this view is highly debatable, but who really knows? Do the doctors know? Give me a break. My ol' man was one and he didn't know the first thing about health but only drugs, as that's the way of Western medicine. If you succumb to their beliefs, you *will* be dead or a slave to your health insurance premiums. Anyway, I sincerely believe a vegetarian diet can increase your love of life, by generating higher energy into the heart chakra. Jesus and all yogi masters know this. Heavy meat eating and dead food traps the cosmic life force into the lower three nerve centers of our being. In a nutshell, the first center, or *chakra*, deals with survival and self defense, and is located at the base of the spine. The second *chakra* is sexual and sensual feelings, located in the lower back, behind the genitals. Number three is power and ego-power, located behind the solar plexus or navel. We all live most of our lives trapped in these three centers of consciousness, our lower ego self. When the energy moves up

to the fourth center, the “Christ heart” in the center of our chests, we experience love and compassion. The remaining three higher centers lead to psychic vision and ultimate enlightenment. From personal experience or self-realization, the vegetarian diet doesn’t keep one trapped as much in the lower self. Much more love is experienced in your life and heart, along with resulting better health. All of this is Basic Yoga 101. The skinny will survive. Psychedelic drugs can raise the spinal energy, or kundalini force, to those higher centers. The trap is that they won’t keep you there and you may lose your mind. You’ve got to get there naturally, not via chemicals. Alcohol too may temporarily touch the heart center, as many sentimental drunks know. Usually however, you’ll plummet down into those lower centers, where the Higher Self is not heard at all. So, if you are what you eat and think and the temple of God is your body, I highly advocate proper nutrition as an aid toward Self-Realization. Take the time to try it and see your Self. I chose to eat the turkey DOC diet here, as I needed to break my mold of, “I’ll never eat meat again” vegetarianism. Now, I can choose to be a vegetarian again, like I was for thirty years, or eat meat occasionally, if I so choose; it’s all about moderation, anyway. And it is *definitely* about elimination too. What goes in *must* come out. I’m dogmatic about this. So if you’ve learned to fulfill your body’s needs with proper nutrition and fiber, you’ll eliminate daily all of yesterday’s consumptions. You won’t be carrying around a lot of garbage inside of you, in more ways than one. Correct balance of assimilation and elimination is optimum health. Your body will tell you all of this, if you learn to listen to it. You’ll feel much lighter and brighter too, in the long run; like a humming bird. You will literally vibrate on a higher dimension. You might be glowing.

I love to read, but could I find love in books? As a young child, I had a difficult time learning to read. My worried parents got me a subscription to *Weekly Readers’ Children’s Book Club*. Each month, I ran to greet the postman as he delivered my latest cardboard box containing a new read. I learned quickly now to read and fell head over heels in love

with books and the escape they provided from my parents' constant fighting. Books took me to distant lands that I would someday visit. They planted seeds in my head. They also educated me on many subjects and helped lead me toward my spiritual quest for God. However, painted cakes don't satisfy hunger. On the spiritual path, books can show the way, but then comes a time to lay them aside, listen to your inner voice and walk your talk. Attachment to books can cause fundamentalism. After over three decades of reading spiritual material, I should have a degree in comparative religions. So now in prison, as an escape, I indulge in simple novels. Many of them touch on spiritual matters too, but not to the extent of reading the words of self-realized masters like Yogananda. Words from souls who really know God can touch the heart center deeply, awakening sleeping love.

Relating love to the various women in my life, both ex-wives included, I must say singer/songwriter Gram Parsons coined it best, when he penned the song, *Love Hurts*. Love relationships certainly have in my case. But the joy of love in a *special relationship* was still worth all the pain. I have loved most all of the women I've previously written about, in one way or another. Each certainly taught me more about myself and God and my weak points in relationships. Love takes many forms and I was deceived to think that one form could last forever. Forever *always* changes. After losing the physical form of all the girls I've loved before, and a few that I didn't mention too, I'm still left with many memories of love in my heart. That love I'd looked for in women was to be found in my own heart. I was really looking for me, mistakenly in another. Love is never lost, as it's all there is, when everything else is gone. The concept of soul mates and twin flames can be confusing, however. I believe now that we all have many soul mates, not just one. These are often the loved ones we've shared many incarnations with, doing it again until we get it right. And we somehow always find each other, to finish the karma of our unresolved love. Then when our work is finally completed, the relationship may terminate- i.e., divorce or possibly death. The only true soul mate is our own Higher Self- the unchanging

soul, the Christ Self or what Hindus call, Shiva. This is what I mistakenly sought for in women. Another soul can never make you fully complete. Only two whole souls can come together as one, in *holy relationships*. In *special relationships*, fragmented people think another can make them whole, only to find out when they're alone, that they're still fragmented, not whole. Get whole or holy and the whole holy world is yours.

I do miss the joy of sharing life with a complementary female and maybe it will happen again someday. Who knows? I'm not ruling it out but I need to be a whole person first or the same mistakes will repeat themselves again. With Lyn, I have a ray of hope. Only time will tell, if she feels the same way as I do. We're all doing time, not only those of us here in prison.

Yogananda said, "God, Guru, and Self are one." Now that's far out! So the love I've always felt for Babaji, divinity made flesh, and Yogananda and Jesus, is really the love for my own Self. As Babaji said, "I choose only a few," and that realization came upon me, as I sat as the twelfth disciple in His camp at the Kumbha Mela festival of ten million holy men and seekers. I've been *so* blessed! God has let me see and experience so much in my lifetime, both good and bad. This attitude of gratitude has helped me immensely in prison. I'm finally grateful to be who I am. I'm even grateful for this prison experience.

Sometimes I wonder why I've had so many troubles, amongst all of my life experiences. I once read that if your evolutionary need should require it, you might be harassed by troubles to make you less attached to the world. Sickness, similarly, can make you less attached to the body. This often happens much more to people on the spiritual quest, as they have asked or prayed for speedier development. Fellow inmates often ask me why I'm in prison, if I know so much about the spiritual path. Boy that one hurts! I didn't correctly apply what I knew to be true. I failed to "walk my talk," a real spiritual hypocrite. Shame on me! However, the real I just watches, forgives my mistakes, and continually teaches, as He leads me on to greater awareness in this divine melodrama.

Many Hindu holy men claim that the Lord can be worshipped with form (personal) or without form (impersonal). God doesn't care, but worship *is* essential to knowing Him. It purifies the heart. Ever since seeing my first Hindu calendar picture of Lord Shiva, I've been drawn to that image of God. Shiva is cool. He has incredible hair, looks beautiful, loves music, and is all powerful. Babaji in human form had all of these traits. You become what you worship, so I still go with the Shiva. Shiva is an original word for the Self. Therefore, I am Shiva, in a sense, and so are you. Many have told me that I'm crazy. Yeah, just like a fox. But I've been crazy for God my whole life, in a good way.

When a light shines in darkness, the darkness comprehends it not. Also, it takes One to know One, if you know what I mean. Organized Churchianity has been a thorn in my side since becoming a "Christian," long ago back in the Superior Cleaner coffee shop monastery at age nineteen. I have continually let myself be drawn into arguments over the Jesus, *only* Son of God issue. How people can be so naïve, to believe that only one spoke on the wheel of life can lead to the center, is beyond me. The Jesus spoke is *only* a different path. *All* paths lead to God, as all spokes lead to the center. He designed the game that way. So find your spoke and stick with it. Whatever works? Please don't damn the other spokes to eternal hell, whatever that means, or deny their reality. I do love Jesus, don't get me wrong. I'll always consider him my first guru. As he *is* the Voice for *A Course in Miracles*, I even feel closer to him now than ever. Jesus emphasized that we *too* are the Sons of God, not just him alone. Christians seem to misunderstand this point, preferring to worship the waiter, Jesus, and his menu, the Bible, over actually eating the food, God. Do I make myself clear? Jesus showed his path to Christhood, as Shiva and peyote show their paths to Self-realization. It was Paul who introduced the belief that Jesus died for our sins. I feel as if I've already died for my own sins here in prison and have been resurrected into a much greater awareness of the Christ self. The teachings of Jesus are valid. All of the other stuff is just an ego ploy distraction, to keep

separation going. The popular '60's expression was, "You do your thing and I'll do mine." But let's love each other along the way as ourselves, honoring diversity- not separation, as we trudge the spiritual path together. We really are all in this game together and no one gets left behind. Life is a big "do-it-yourself kit", with everybody waiting for you to figure it out.

I have a lot of free time here to write letters. It's so great to get a response from my friends when they finally *do* write back. Love expressed in a letter. Of course, I live in a time warp here, kind of like a conscious coma. Lyn wrote, "how precious time is out in the 'real world' and how 'much time' I have here being confined." A blessing of incarceration is how much more *now* time I seem to have, as life inside is *so* simple without a lot of duties, worries and responsibilities. I think most everybody could benefit from a stay in prison, especially the judges, police and attorneys who assisted in putting us here. As Joseph Campbell said, "This moment *now* is the heavenly moment." So indirectly, if I stay focused, I often get a glimpse of that heavenly moment- a *holy instant* in the here and now of the Department of Corrections.

Ever since my out of the body encounter with Yogananda in 1970, I've had no fear of death. I know I am an eternal soul who lives in a body, the true temple of God. Even during incredible drunken blackouts, depression and car wrecks, I feared not dying. Martin Luther King, Jr. stated, at a civil rights rally in 1963, that no man is really free if he fears death. He said that the minute you conquer the fear of death, you find freedom. Looking back at my life, there were many times I was close to death. Subconsciously, I'd wanted to die over the losses and pain in my life. I just couldn't see any way out of the horrible mess I'd created. I was afraid to live, not die. Because of alcohol, I never really processed a lot of the pain in my heart correctly. I've always felt things *very* deeply, like I'm too sensitive. I know now that I am empathic. Drinking helped numb these deep feelings. I drunkenly cried alone for years, thinking that would help somehow. But it didn't, and I pretty much gave up the fight, feeling I had nothing to live for.

Sentimentality is akin to wallowing. Friends told me to live for my son; a son I hardly saw or really know. As God seems to still want me around a bit longer, I plan to get off the pity pot of the past and enjoy the future possibilities of my life, goals and son. If all things truly work towards the good, then maybe the best is yet to come. That's certainly a hopeful thought from where I sit here in prison. So now I'll strive to become as a little child, to enter the kingdom of God. If we stay childlike in awe and wonder of this universe, we don't *really* age. I'll always remember the ancient sadhu I'd met in Herakhan, who was well over ninety years old but still looked and acted like sixty. That's my goal - forever young - Eternal Shiva. You are as young as you feel and, somehow, I've always felt young- even in prison with graying hair. At least, I've still got some and it's still growing.

I discovered from doing a self-diagnostic personality test, in a quirky little book entitled *The Animal in You*, that I most resemble an owl. At least that's another raptor, like my red tailed hawk totem. Under "Advice for an Owl" I was told to share my wisdom. It's my path to immortality. Well, I do know a wee bit about music. To repeat, I often strongly feel God's presence in music. I wish more people did. But I basically took a sabbatical from music in prison. Old songs just stir up old memories and there are already a *lot* of old memories coming up here in my head, without music stimulating more. Since returning from India, I hadn't played music as often as I would have liked. Then, I couldn't seem to find any gigs that liked my songs anyway. I was basically tired of music, jaded by it. I had a lifetime of it already and had *lived* many of the songs I'd sung. Today's music just saddens me. It seems to mirror a world of shopping malls, credit cards, breast implants and sex and drug related crime. One journalist described it as 7/11 music- you basically mumble seven words repeatedly, while you scratch your gentle area eleven times. Sweet! Many of today's singers are freaking clones. They all have that *American Idol* style of emotional wailing, linked to a hip-hop bass thump. As for the capital C in country, it got buried long before Johnny Cash died. Most of what passes for

country today sounds like pseudo rock and roll with a steel guitar. So I chose not to buy a radio with headphones here. I would give music a rest for now. However, it is hard to totally escape it, even here. Working at Auto Auction, I heard songs blaring from various car stereo systems. A lot of inmates love to rock out when they work. One day, as I was extracting dirt from floor mats, bent over and sweating my guts out, I heard *My Sweet Lord*. I crawled into the back seat and hid. Then I broke down and cried alone. This divine song by George Harrison was always my number one favorite. I'd seen Yogananda during this song. Today, here at Auto Auction, it brought on an emotional release. I realized again just how deeply I love God and music. They are one and the same to me. I didn't want to let myself enjoy music in this strange time warp, but it was happening to me anyway. How could I *not* enjoy God? I vowed then and there that I would *always* try my best to play songs from my heart when I get out. And I would sing too from my heart, with greater depth and seasoning from all of these life experiences. Singing from the heart would become my path for connecting with the inner Self. Give me my dotara.

Music is sound and all sound vibrations stem from Om, the Cosmic Intelligent Vibration or Voice of Spirit. There is so much good music, of such variety, that it's overwhelming. We really don't need any new music, if we took the time to review all the past songs. Today's youth probably wouldn't agree with me, but what do they know? Their karma didn't let them incarnate as budding hippies back in the cosmic days of good hash, LSD, Vietnam and the British invasion of music gods. Today's music gods make money, not music. The beat goes on. The beat in New Age music isn't as obvious but it's there. I was buying my first albums up at the Banyan Bookstore in West Vancouver around 1970. Sadly, that is one city I'll never be able to visit again, due to this DUI. Canada, where I spent so much time, will not allow felons of any kind. So let it go, Rob. Anyway, the healing vibration of music in various cultures has always interested me. The seven keys correspond to the seven spinal centers or *chakras* in our bodies, of which I've already

spoken about. There is a lot to be said about the science of sound. I know, as I've personally chanted holy songs alone or occasionally in groups for nearly forty years. I was using hemi-synch tapes and meditation tones *long* before they came into mainstream use. And I love the pagans of India, as they hold the handle on chanting God's many incredible names in tongues that ring beautiful to the ear. Chanting the names of the Lord is very high yoga. You don't really need any instruments. The human voice will do the trick quite nicely, especially if it is filled with devotion. God loves everybody's voice.

Show me your records, tapes, CD's, DVD's and books or tattoos, and I'll give you a reading. Any sensitive borderline psychic can do that. Everybody has their favorites, including me, and they reveal who you are. Willie Nelson has deeply touched my heart with his voice, words and bumble bee sounding guitar. He is controversial, no doubt about that - either you love him or you don't - period. George Harrison's songs take my soul straight to God. He's the heavy one in my book. And Jimmy Buffet's music reminds me of the loose, carefree lifestyle I experienced across our country and in Banana Republics - a love for altered states in tropical places, with couples in and out of love. In Michael Keaton's movie, *Jack Frost*, his son asks him, a musician, if all musicians are flakey. Keaton replied that it was mostly drummers. That hurt to hear but I know drummers are a breed of their own, a musician's best friend. Most good drummers are *definitely* intense. We have to be, to kick ass on time all night. My God, we *are* the spark plug of the band! But *never* think the music business is easy. Maybe fun, but never easy. I've driven thousands of miles just to stay working, packed heavy equipment too many times and uprooted my home front for a song. The tavern environment is like playing in hell. Drunks and smoke are what you play your beloved songs to. After the song is sung, it will never be remembered. But another song is waiting to be sung. Many musicians, like me, became alcoholics as an occupational hazard of this business. Many died too. The heavy second hand smoke and my screaming of

popular rock songs nearly ruined my vocal chords during the '80's. After seeing an ear, nose and throat specialist, I was informed that surgery could be very risky. Voice lessons were sorely needed instead. I learned to sing in the lower keys, where I should have been in the first place. Also, going to bed at 4 a.m. and sleeping until noon is not really in synch with the natural laws of creation. It takes its toll on musicians. Now, I love getting up early and sleeping at night, instead of vice versa. Being in a band is also like being married to a bunch of cats. Musicians tend to have strong egos and band practice can become real work, before a song is actually played. In many ways, I now prefer to play solo, like I did at the treatment center. I've paid my dues to music and bands. I spent nearly every week or weekend of near thirty years singing my ass off. Who *even* remembers or cares? Maybe some scutter who hears *Sunday Morning Coming Down* on a juke box, and flashes on a Bellingham hippie singing that song once long ago, when he was drunk in a bar on the Canadian border. I'll surely never know. However, if asked, I'd probably do it all over again—with quite a few changes, of course.

I'm still processing the shame and low self esteem I harbor, from eking out a living doing menial low-paying jobs, resulting from a lack of choosing a better, more stable career than music. But music let me sing and that's what I love. I was once told, by an ex-girlfriend, that singing will keep you young. She too sang and looked wonderful. The human voice is the ultimate instrument. I don't mean this egotistically, but my voice has made people break down and cry a few times. I fondly remember a peyote girl named Brigetta who had this power. I think the Indians call it a "crier." That makes sense. It's the power of the Holy Spirit channeled through a human voice. You may not know the words, but you *will* feel the meaning, right in your heart while shedding tears.

I'm eternally grateful for God's Grace and His divine messengers in my life. For years, I was absorbed in worshipping Yogananda, Babaji and Jesus for protection and guidance. Even though I never spent time with them on the

physical dimension, by tuning into their vibration, I still feel blessed, guided – if I would listen - and protected. This became the functional family I was seeking, for the parental guidance I lacked. One pitfall was *too* much emotional fixation on the guru. The answer is not outside but always inside. That is what the guru is *always* trying to tell us, but it is often easy to get hung up on their beautiful pictures. Having Yogananda's darshan in 1970 was the awakening in my life and a *major* turning point. This was divine Grace, giving me a temporary glimpse of the goal- a sense of the right direction and inspiration to continue on the Quest.

And what a Quest it has been. My high school annual burned up in the house fire of 1987. But under my picture, it read, "Goals- to go to college, get good grades and be free of the man." The "man" referred to the system- the one that now has turned arid Arizona into a penal state, where I'm presently incarcerated. Of course, I realize that I must cooperate with man's laws. But having accomplished my first two high school goals, I plan now to succeed in freedom from "the man." I now interpret "the man" to be illusion or what the Hindus call Maya. The truth is simple- do you want ego or God, truth or illusion? That's all our choices really boil down to. I choose truth over illusion, as I stumble towards the light.

Before I leave....

I remember in the early 1980's, arguing with my parents; we'd all been drinking. Mom shouted to my dad, "Rob's dye has been cast!" She was referring to my lifestyle of addiction- to pot, alcohol and, of course, music. She tried to warn me earlier about my Scottish-Irish predisposition to alcohol. "Be careful. This disease runs in your veins." "But I'm not sick," said my mind in denial. Hell, I was having way too much fun to be sick. Now I see clearly just how very sick I've been, for many, many years. I must break this mold, if it's the last thing I do. To quote holy man Dick Gregory, whom I heard speak

back in '79, "When you gonna wake up? Y'all gotta lot of work to do!"

Thoughts continually flood my mind here, so I write them down. When I look in the mirror after my morning ritual shower, I see a heavy looking face, especially around my eyes. For too many years, I got away with looking many years younger than I am. I'm not so sure anymore. I prized my self-image as a free spirit, loose but free of so much of the BS that traps society. That's why I liked alcohol. I thought I was still hip as shit, when I was a drunken asshole- so sad. Now my aging face shows it. I'm getting those Willie Nelson eyes. I cling to *A Course in Miracles* like a lifeline, to teach me who I really am; not bodies with an aging face, but eternally the holy Son of God Himself.

The negativity of this place is something. You've gotta be strong everyday and every moment against all the sick vibes here- mental and emotional children expressing their frustrations and so caught up in their egos. So off to class I go again, where everybody hates being there but me, it seems. I want every tool available for continued recovery. Keeping my sobriety here is easy, but keeping my sanity is another story and daily chore. It is almost over.

I just got big news today. My interstate compact between Washington and Arizona has been approved! My CPO said they may roll me up even earlier than April 14. Wow, that's exciting. We just called the DOC central office and are now awaiting more signatures. Then I will know for sure. To top this news off, gray-haired Bryan over in pod 2A just told me that Jim Morrison is alive in Chile! He claims to have met Jim many years ago there. Boy, that's a good one.

What a shocker! I get rolled up this Tuesday, March 29, 2005 instead of April 14. Lyn had always said that she would be there to pick me up on my release day, wearing my Om ring. Things did not work out that way. She was unable to pick me up, so I called Roderick, Sri's step dad, and he said he would come for me on my momentous day. Tony had written that he

would drive down and pick me and my possessions up, for the trip back to Washington. Ironically, Tony was already here in Phoenix for his father's birthday. So, I called our mutual friend Mark to get Tony's father's phone number.

"Hello, Mark, this is Rob. I'm calling from prison to see if you have Tony's dad's phone number. I need to get hold of him right away."

"Tony is standing right next to me, Rob, as we speak. Here, talk to him."

Tony arranged to borrow Mark's van in Phoenix and cancel his flight back to Washington. Now, he would not have to fly back to Washington, and then drive down to Arizona again, to drive me back to Washington. Sound confusing? This is where the rules of getting out can get tricky. If I did *not* have a specified ride on my release date, I would be kept here for a longer period of time and lose my early bird release option. So it all worked out great, just as God had planned it. Now, we seem to be having another major lockdown. The cops are all in black tee shirts with *tactical team* written on their backs, shaking us down big time. This is no problem for me, however. I am almost laughing, as I'm nearly finished with all of this prison bullshit.

Before I leave, I still have a few more reflections on Dorm 2, Pod B. Elmer is a gray-haired Navajo, about my age and a Vietnam vet. He is a strange guy. Always itching himself and constantly rubbing some sort of skin cream all over, like always; did he get into some agent orange? We're all orange here, of course, but that Chief is too much. Another speedy Navajo is Ashley. He seems to always be shitting, like fifteen times a day and even at 2 a.m. - probably from laxatives. He then takes a shower at 3:30 a.m. Even at Phoenix West in my dorm, he was first in the shower at that ungodly hour, then walking quickly, faster than me actually, wherever he goes. Weird inmate Bob, the Colorado atheist, hasn't spoken to me in over a week now. He has no friends here and probably has very few on the outside. It is easy to see why. The crazy

Italian Bernard – AKA – wing nut, nutmeg and screw loose, wants my bunk when I leave. He only sleeps two hours a night, but nobody ever sees that. Poor Bernard is always pacing around, with only three more years to go. I see that old fat Gary and overweight Dogfish are still studying the chow menu. They'll eat anything anyway, so why even look at the menu? Then there are the Satanic Nazis here. They hate America and would rather live in some foreign land where life is better. Their eyebrows are already shaved off, of course, and lots of tattoos are prevalent on their bodies. These kids, which range in age from about twenty-three to twenty-seven years old, all hang out together like a pack of wild dogs; how ironic. Is there any hope for healing our world with you youth like these dudes? They even laugh at the word God. Wow, have they ever got a lot to learn... maybe here?

Now I only have twenty-seven more hours to go! I'm the most envied inmate here. I have earned it! I gave my shampoo and chips to Joseph, another longhaired hippie. I gave my coffee to black Foster and returned some books to other friends. Now I have all of my class certificates to show my parole officer. I also have many class certificates from Phoenix West too. So now, I *am* excited! How could I not be after twenty-five months and five days down? I just gave my stinger, to heat hot water, to "hard drive" Jerry, my young neighbor. His mother is crazy and institutionalized again; these poor kids have a rough road ahead of them. God bless them all. I feel like I could have helped so many here to "wake up", if they'd desired to really face their denial. Each soul awakens when he chooses. It sure took me a very long time! And like I learned, it usually takes a tragedy to *really* change. Yet through all of this, I can honestly and truly say, "Thank you Lord for this experience and for your guidance and protection through it all. Amen".

Before getting out, I still have a few last thoughts, like to know yourself, you have to know your past. This book has been my attempt to do just that, for myself, my son and my friends. Sacajewea felt that the past is never past- it comes

back to sit with you. Writing has become therapy, to help me see my past and sort out things in my mind. Writing this book was both fun and difficult and at times, heart wrenching. I encountered many mental blocks on certain names and dates. Through prayer, the correct answer always came. In my attempt to tell my story, I tried to do it justice, but somehow it *still* seems lacking. I have literally relived my life many times during the years it took to write and rewrite my memories. It was often very painful to realize what a loser I've been- a spiritual fool and now a convict, with mucho regrets over wasted mistakes and misguided time. As my divine vision in 1970 was an awakening point in my life, my divorce from Joya was a turning point downward, but not her fault by any means. After the house fire, Sri's birth, my near death accident and loss of my home again, I really didn't know if I could go on. Everything I had worked for was suddenly destroyed or taken from me. Sometimes, I feel I never should have come to Arizona to be near Sri. I should have bit the bullet years ago, over my estranged relationship with my son, and lived my life up in Washington. Maybe I wouldn't be here in prison now; maybe or maybe not. I kind of regret too that I don't really have a home anymore. I have to create that now. Bellingham was a magical town to grow up in during the 1950's and 1960's- a virtual paradise on many levels. We had international Vancouver, B.C. only an hour north and progressive Seattle south of us. Three hundred San Juan Islands sat west of Bellingham Bay and Mount Baker graced the eastern morning sunrise. With a population of only 35,000, Bellingham had a small town feel, where people were friendly and very hip. I'll always feel that the music from northwest bands was exceptional and way ahead of other states. Bellingham was my childhood Liverpool, but now Colville looks like the Promised Land. It really doesn't matter much to me where I live anymore. Like they say, "Home is where the heart is," so wherever I'm at, I'm home. However, a cabin in the woods or a rustic farmhouse still sounds very tempting.

I still have regrets over my father's death. I tried *so* hard to get it right with him before he crossed over. Then I became a

drunken dad, a forgotten father just like my own dad. How does one “Be Happy?” I realize that I can’t recover my childhood or find my home in the past; I can only forgive my perceptions and memories of it, to find true happiness. That is all I really want, for myself and everybody.

My mom once told Jolene’s mother, Leona, that I had an inner strength to spring back from anything, like a cat. Leona wrote me this, many years after my mom’s passing. Only acting on knowledge and living each moment in love will let me achieve my goals. My true goals have always been spiritual in nature- just to be a *real* human being. In closing, my life has truly been a tapestry of turning points. Some of these turning points have been magical and many turned out to be tragic. My magical ones would include seeing *The Beatles* three times and experiencing the cosmic ‘60’s, traveling through thirteen European countries, having Yogananda’s darshan, falling in love with special beautiful women, playing music, sojourning in Ecuador, Fiji, India and Thailand, sitting in Babaji’s cave and at the feet of holy men at the Kumbha Mela festival, seeing my son born, building my own house, sitting up in the tipi, living in the Gila Wilderness, and meeting some of the most incredible characters on earth, including celebrities like ol’ Willie and Tony Bennett. These turning points were like beautiful songs, whose melodies I will *never* forget. The blue turning points began with my dysfunctional family life and lack of love, and then progressed to deaths of my sister, loved ones, parents and the downer of divorce twice. Drunken auto accidents, relationships gone sour, house fire, falling off the roof with subsequent college incarceration and alcoholism are all turning points I wish I *could* forget. Financial loss, abandonment issues, job termination and prison and jails complete this list of turning points I wished I’d *never* heard of, let alone lived. But I *did* live them, and I accept full responsibility for my choices that created them, knowing that they no longer have any control over me. I know now that there is a better way to live, as I release my past without guilt or shame, and continue to choose once again. At the next turning

point, I will hopefully be making better choices under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

March 27, 2005
Kingman Prison

One more song....

I am now into seven years sobriety, approaching sixty-one and living in a charming farmhouse overlooking the Colville valley, with my two tabby cats, Maya and Baba. After prison, many baby steps and much self-patience was required to start my life anew in the “free world”. Then the miracles began to manifest.

Backing up to the day I was released from Kingman prison, when my final morning arrived, I was all ready, of course. Again, I seemed to be invisible. Other inmates would not talk to me now and appeared to not even notice me, as I wheeled my DOC issued bedding and wardrobe to its final destination. Then out I walked, in my street clothes once again, into Roderick’s waiting car. He appeared to be tired, from his lengthy drive up to get me. As we drove slowly past the razor wire decorated fence, Roderick stopped the car.

“My God, why are you doing this? Keep on going Roderick. I’m free now!”

“Here, burn some cedar for yourself, to cleanse off all the vibrations of where you’ve just been,” he answered back.

Thank you, Roderick. That was a very sweet gesture and much appreciated. We talked nonstop on our three hour drive back to the Verde Valley; about prison, Sri, my new life and parenting. I felt very close to Roderick and saw again, what a good man and father he really is. Then he drove me to see Joya, before we picked up Sri from high school. She and I held each other briefly. I felt that, somehow, she vicariously

experienced all of my pain and healing in that one embrace. Next, Roderick took me to the Verde River and left me alone to pray. I immediately splashed water on my face and sat back to roll a smoke. My clothes felt heavy, strange and cumbersome, compared to the orange pajamas I'd become so used to. The trees blowing in the wind near the river seemed to whisper that I was free. Yes, I was free again but I was also in shock. How do I describe what it feels like to be a bird outside of its cage, once and for all? I realized that I had become "institutionalized", taking orders regularly and ready to jump when told to. I would now have to use the advice I'd been given by a Chicano inmate – "Go slow Rob, go slow"! Maybe I can this time. I was always in a hurry *so* much of my life; not taking the needed time to think things through before acting. Yes, go slow. I fired up the smoke I'd rolled and began to pray.

We picked up Sri, and he and I had some alone time together at Lyn's house, before she came home from work- like one hour alone. I *so* wanted more time with everybody, but it was not to happen. Tony arrived the next day with Mark's van for our trip north. It was so good to see him again; what a true friend! I only saw Sri and Lyn so briefly. This certainly was not much of a visit, after so long down, but better than nothing. Tony highly approved of Lyn, but how can I have any kind of relationship with her now, if I am moving to Colville, Washington? This is looking pretty plutonic to me. Lyn had my long hair in braids, with a head band, as we said our goodbyes. And now, I was wearing my rudraksha mala again around my neck and my *Om Namaha Shivaya* bracelet on my wrist. Most of my possessions from the mini storage fit in the van. The rest I gave to charity. Thank God, all of my important belongings were still in one piece. I had worried for over two years that certain possessions, like my own tapes of India, could be missing. The only things missing of any concern were my mountain bike, binoculars and chainsaw. I'm sure dead Dave pawned them off for pills, when I went down. At this point, I didn't care. I was just grateful to have everything else loaded up with us now, on the interstate heading towards California. When Tony and I left the Verde Valley, we headed

north through Flagstaff, then west through Kingman. Twenty minutes outside of Kingman, I pointed out to Tony the prison yard, off alone in the distance to our right. I have no idea what he thought as we drove by, but I was still flooded with memories. I could almost see orange inmates walking their laps around the complex. My thoughts were still in prison, even though I was “free”. This is going to take some time. I wouldn’t really be free until I had more of a chance to process all of this. Again, go slow, Rob, go slow.

By evening, we were seated in a California Mexican restaurant, awaiting our enchiladas and being serenaded by an eight piece mariachi band. This was all too much for me. Tony was enjoying a beer, as I stared at the cocktail lounge walls lined with liquor, knowing I would never touch that again. The music was reminiscent of the salsa festival in Old Town Cottonwood. Then, we spent time with Tony’s two sons and their families, before heading north. Both sons are California cops, so I felt a bit strange expressing where I’d just come from. But I’ve known both of these young law officers since they were boys, visiting Tony and Barb up on our Sumas Mountain. They were actually cool about it all, and I was grateful to have somebody as a sounding board, to listen to my story. But this too would change quickly. I soon found out that many folk do *not* like hearing prisons stories. Tony was already getting tired of my stories and told me so. Jesus, we still have a few more days of driving to go! So who do you talk to, to process an experience like I just went through?

We spent one night, somewhere in California, in a motel next to a K Mart. As Tony watched TV, I went off on my own to purchase needed underwear and a tooth brush. As the sliding doors opened, I entered as if in a dream. I saw music CD’s in front of me, pulling me to look. I’d promised myself certain CD’s upon release, ones I’d heard bent over in a car at auto-auction, but now I couldn’t move! It was as if I were seeing everything for the very first time. This was a total reversal of seeing everything for the last time before prison. I remember a similar feeling of shock, when shopping at K Mart after our

house burned down in '87. Feeling *so* wide open, everything was just *there* in crystal clarity- just being stuff on a shelf.

When we arrived in Colville, I immediately called my parole officer. This was very important to me, as I was now on an interstate parole compact. I may be out, but there are still many hurdles to jump before I can finally get the state of Arizona off my back, once and for all. Right now, all of this is serious business to me. Of course, I passed the mandatory pee test with flying colors, as I've had no alcohol or pot in my system now for over two years. My P.O. was a real sweetie and said I wouldn't have to see him again. As far as he was concerned, I'd served my time, learned my lesson and shouldn't be hassled anymore. Thank God for a real person. The remainder of my "community supervision" would be turned over to unsupervised probation out of Spokane. He assured me that they would never contact me, as they're too preoccupied with real cons. So, essentially, I was free of probation or community supervision, the politically correct terminology. I still planned on attending AA meetings, even though I was not required to. "Meeting makers make it," at least until you can make it on your own.

Upon arriving at Tony and Barb's home front, I was awestruck. The house I saw years ago was now completed and beautiful beyond words. When Tony showed me my own bedroom and private bathroom, I was about ready to faint. Again, this was all just *too* much. I would now have a space to decorate with my belongings, which were still in Mark's van. So the next few days, I unpacked everything- decorating my space and storing the rest in a crawl space under Harmon's house. Everything I owned now was here with me. Much of it brought tears to my eyes, as memories came flooding back. I also called Bunkie Larkins, only to discover that he was actively drinking again and never did get his driver's license. How sad. After all he and I talked about and shared, it just kills me to think of what might happen to him. If he doesn't die first, he'll probably end up back in the system. I'd never want to

repeat the prison experience again. However, eighty-five percent of those released will be back. What a crying shame.

Tony walked me through their new cabinet shop and consignment store. I was soon sanding and staining doors, and helping to restore dining room tables and chairs. I was grateful and ready for any work, as this barter situation helped to cover my room and board. I wouldn't actually make any hard cash for quite a while. I wouldn't even be able to apply for a driver's license for over another year yet, so for now, I was at the mercy of Tony and Barb for employment and housing. And they came through for me, again, just like they had in the past. When I think about it, I've been with Barb in my life longer than both marriages combined. Wow! She truly is my sister, to say the least. People always ask if Tony and I are brothers. We definitely are brothers, even as different as we are.

At first it was all fun living together, but then I could feel the stress of having me around again; it was having its effects on Tony and Barb. I'd experienced this triangle scenario before. I was still finishing my final lessons from, *A Course in Miracles* and daily trying to keep God foremost in my mind. But now, this was *not* so easy. I actually felt closer to God in prison than on the outs. I knew this would happen, and it did. I was desperately trying to hold onto the clarity of perception I had, prior to my release. I had studied the *Course*, so much at Kingman that my mind was constantly repeating and hammering home certain truths. While that was a needed mental phase then, now I needed action and the ability to put these truths into just that.

I attended AA and soon got my three year sobriety chip. I spoke of my experience. Many had *no* idea that there are special prisons for drunk drivers. At least here, I could talk about prison and get some of this burden off of my chest. AA is good for that. But as the months went on, I no longer felt I needed their program. This wasn't my path any longer. For a true alcoholic, this can be a very scary realization. Every time

I had left AA before, and stopped going to meetings, I eventually relapsed. You can't do it alone, as they say. And I agree with that. But now, I am *never* alone, when I remember the higher Self who walks with me. AA's own Big Book teaches this, but many get *so* attached to the book, just like fundamentalist Christians do with their Bible, that they miss the message. All of this finally came to a head for me during a Saturday night meeting, when I saw how stuck most AA folk are in understanding the Higher Power. I no longer needed their program, as I felt the *Course* to be much more suited for my recovery. I was tired of hearing the old war stories and affirmations of "I am an alcoholic". Maybe I am, but I am always a child of God, first and eternally! And that's what I plan to affirm.

I could be around alcohol now, and I was. I seemed to be put in situations to test my pink cloud of sobriety. My first summer out, and still living 24/7 with the Harmon's, I attended many parties, blues festivals, barter fairs, of which northeastern Washington is noted for, and local bars after work. There, I drank coffee and ate peanuts, and sometimes became the designated driver, illegal that I still was, for our long ride home. There was absolutely *no* temptation for me to drink; at all! I am *so* grateful that the desire to even think about drinking has been lifted from my soul. To me personally, after all I've been through with alcohol that is *real* freedom. And I treasure my freedom daily. I want every person with an alcohol problem to know that it *can* be overcome! Look at how low I had to go to finally wake up. My God, if I can do it; anybody can do it. And I was doing all of this to myself, to show me that none of it was the way to do it. My God self was giving me awareness that I was not on the right track.

Now, I daily seek to keep that awareness and stay focused on what's important. Both patience and accepting change were very important for me after getting out. Now, I could feel the weight of trying to create a new life. "Go slow, Rob". I worked burning and clearing Harmon's thick woods, into a more hobbit-like setting. And Barb trained me on retail sales

and credit card machines at their store. I was continually working, it seemed, but just to get by. My greatest fear was that Tony and Barb would ask me to leave. Where would I go? We talked of a possible cabin or trailer in their woods. Where should I live, to put down my roots? I've lived in *so* many places that I'm not sure where to put down roots, or if I even know the meaning of the word any more. And what am I going to do about employment that actually pays? As I presently can't drive, and Harmon's house is twenty minutes outside of town, this posed some problems. It also gave me time to consider my options. Do I want to pursue my old hippie dream again of living in the woods- the chop wood and carry water yogic lifestyle of my past? I've been there and done that. Now, it all didn't matter that much to me anymore. I can be happy pretty much anywhere, as I am finally content and at home with myself. Not to mention that the cost of land, etc. is *way* out of my ballpark presently. So, I chose Tony's offer of building a small living area upstairs above their cabinet shop. This would put me in town, where I could walk or bike around at least, instead of being stuck in the woods. And I would continue to barter work for my rent. This gave us all some needed distance and space, but proved to be a *very* dusty living environment for me. It would take a flexible con, like me, to live in a place that is small, cold and constantly being bombarded by noise- power saws, loud music, door ringers, phone calls, and various people coming in and out at any hour of the day or night. But it was all good. I had a little space to call my own. At chaotic times, it actually reminded me of prison. Except my "house" was way better. I used Indian bedspreads for fabric walls and had my faithful drums all set up again- finally. Colville's local reggae band practiced weekly in my "living room", as they had a previous arrangement with Tony on the upstairs space. That was cool. I got to play drums along with them and met some new local musicians too. And my Thai/Fijian/Iowa friend Tim Welch came to visit briefly, showing pics of his three kids now and mother wife Aoy, on a laptop computer. I too was learning my way around a laptop that Barb had lent me. I'd have my own

soon enough. You're crazy not to have a computer nowadays. Tim always was a good one for staying in touch and thanks to the internet, it makes this much easier now for both of us.

Not long after being released, I performed my originals on guitar at a dance at the American Legion. I was opening for Spokane's hottest blues band, *The Fat Tones*. As it was Sri Ram and Willie Nelson's birthday, I wore my hair in braids again with a red headband. I hadn't had my hair this long since the early seventies with Jolene. I got many compliments on my songs and singing and was told that I should record a CD. *The Fat Tones* gave me their approval too, and then blew my mind with their awesome music. It sure felt good to play again, especially my own songs, in front of a live audience. I'd dreamt about it for *sooo* long. What a rush. I would now do my utmost to record and copyright my originals and see if I could find a niche musically in this area of northeastern Washington.

Work was a bit slow coming but it finally did arrive. I landscaped the personal properties of three prominent figures in the local area. They even drove me to and from their job sites, as I had no wheels yet and they understood. Soon, word of the new hippie Gardner grew, and I had continuous work. Then the "Guardian angels" appeared back in my life, in the form of Dave and Shannon. I'd met them back in '98 when Tony and I did some remodel work on their house. Now Dave was managing his wealthy mother-in-law's properties and had work for both of us- cleaning up years of garbage off of repot property. It was dirty smelly work in the woods for good money. We made these once ugly pieces of real estate shine again for potential buyers. Now I got to see much real estate with price tags. Wow! Land prices are *so* high that I'll never be able to afford anything. Again, who cares?

Dave and Shannon also had me house-sitting their beautiful home and cats, while they traveled at various times during fall and winter. This was a real treat for me to relax in a bathtub, be warm and watch cable TV and movies. Maybe someday I'll have these creature comforts again. While house sitting, I

realized how much I cherish my alone time. I would journal my feelings about this and of going through the process of re-entering the real world again and creating a life once more. After being around inmates, people and friends nearly 24/7 for years now, I feel I deserve time alone. People probably see me as a loner, but it's hard for me to hang out with drunks- cards or no cards. All of the cross talk and stage hogging just reminds me of the patience it took to be around *so* many dysfunctional inmates. So lately, I've chosen to separate, not isolate, in hopes of finding more inner peace and maybe some new folk who vibrate on higher frequency levels than alcohol.

That happened too. I was soon playing guitar monthly for the Dances of Universal Peace and meeting many highly conscious individuals. I was feeling that God had placed me exactly where I should be; in an aging hippies paradise! A hip mid-wife told me proudly that our area ranks high in the overall percentages of male uncircumcised babies. Now that's far out.

Alone, I became very creative in this shop apartment. And Mick, a flute player from my past, came back into my life with CD recording equipment. Soon, I had eighteen original songs recorded and ready for copyright in Washington DC. And I began sending promo packets to various publishing companies, to see if any of my songs would sell. I did get one positive result from Americord, who sent a recording contract and fabulous cover letter, praising my song *The Party is in my Mind*. Except, they wanted me to pay them four hundred dollars to have their musicians and vocalists record my song! That doesn't seem right. So I Googled Americord and learned a lot about song sharks and the music publishing industry. Wow, have I got my work cut out for me now. There are so many new ways to market music online or yourself for that matter that this will all take some time to figure out for the best approach. Just having my own CD professionally done in a studio here would be a good start. I'm presently contemplating that.

Mick also reintroduced me to the "mind machine"- a light and sound device for achieving total mental relaxation,

visualization and far-out cerebral states like Alpha, Gamma, Theta and Beta. I soon purchased one online and began tripping on my bed without drugs. The combination of rapid strobe lights flashing through closed eyelids, to the oscillating rhythm of Tupperware drums, produces visual effects in the mind that draw all one's attention to the third eye. This tool is not a toy; it is designed for deep concentration. I always feel like I've had a mental bath afterwards, where all my worries and mental strains just flow down the drain.

I awake daily now with greater joy in my heart. I did also in prison, but this is different. I'm just *so* grateful to be alive, really alive and finally out of that negative environment of fear. When you have done hard time, like I did, you can relate to what it must have been like to be in a concentration camp, where people are jammed together in fear, trying to make the best of the situation. For the ones who survive, life has a whole new meaning. You never take anything for granted- ever again. This was one of the blessings of my incarceration- having a whole new perception and respect for each moment, of each new day, from here on out. When I did finally earn solid cash, peeling logs for a friend's pole barn, I stared at the dollar bills for a long time. My life has been like a Monopoly game, going from Park Avenue to Start Over. I just pray now to stay awake and remember and respect the hard earned lessons of prison. I also pray for the ability to let this prison experience go- not to be filed in the X files, but as the greatest turning point in my entire life.

Before all the work began, I took a much needed trip down to Arizona in late February of 2006, to finally spend some time with my son Sri and see my plutonic friend Lyn and her young son Tyler. It was a great trip and I got to be there for my ex-mother- in- law Pauline's, Sri's grandma, birthday. She looked good but I could tell she wouldn't be around a whole lot longer. Sri's brother Falcon really took to me, but boundaries had to be set so that Sri and I could have some alone time together.

“Hey, Rob, can I go with you and Sri over to Prescott?”

“No, Falcon. If you come with us, I’ll have no time with my son. I’m sorry. I hope you understand. We’ll go for a walk together when I get back.”

“Do you promise?”

“Yeah, I promise, Falcon.”

Then after a few days on their home front, and really appreciating this time with Sri’s family, I had some quality time with Lyn and Tyler. While Lyn was working, I explored Sedona alone, and ended up purchasing the cowboy hat of all cowboy hats, in my estimation, and made of woven palm fronds from Mexico. It’s waterproof with cool lines to its shape. Right after purchasing the hat, it began to rain. This was reminding me of Shivarati; it rained when I played guitar. This was seen as a blessing, as Arizona has been in a drought for many years. When Lyn and I went to pick up Tyler from school, we saw a beautiful double rainbow over Sedona. We stopped her car and photographed each other. When we picked up Tyler, he showed us a picture he had just drawn. You guessed it- a rainbow, but he was inside and didn’t even know what was going on outside, up in the sky. Such is synchronicity.

Then, after a year of living above the woodworking shop, a better living situation presented itself. I moved into a small upstairs apartment with Mick, my flute playing friend, across from Safeway- how convenient. Our house was built around 1912 and rumored to be haunted. I wouldn’t experience the ghost until later. I basically lived in my bedroom here. The very small kitchen and bathroom resembled something off of a ship. The miniature living room was already dominated by Mick’s wall hangings and paraphernalia. So, I just did what I’m good at: living alone in small spaces. This living situation worked out fairly well rent-wise and was warmer and cleaner than the shop apartment. But still, this was just a place to eat, sleep, read and watch DVDs. It wasn’t home. It just didn’t have that feeling. At this point of time, I scored work as a carpenter’s helper working on a remodel. Now I was making

good money and finally able to send Sri some back child support. But of course the best child support I can really give him is to stay sober. Boy, don't I know that! He is so proud of me now, after all we've been through together. But monetary compensation was needed by me, to free my conscience of the months when I wasn't around. Then, in October of '06, the Okanogan family barter fare sprung forth again. I went, of course, and had a blast. This fair is big- like twenty-five thousand hippies, covering four generations and hundreds of acres of land. Now, I finally had a car, a driver's license and an ignition interlock device to blow into for the next year to activate this vehicle. I named my 1999 Chevy metro, Carmahow appropriate. I parked next to Tony and Barb, with their '54 Chevy hippie camper. I've been to many gigs in this charming camper and told Tony to leave it for me in his will... please! Whenever we've stopped for gas in small towns, people's faces start gawking and staring out of windows at this nostalgic piece of hippiedom. I really got some interesting stares when I smoked a rolled cigarette, in my braids and headband, standing next to "Imagine"- the name of the truck on the hood.

Then my dear friend Bonnie from Bellingham arrived, and finally found our camp amongst this huge assemblage of "family". This fair is like a smaller western version of India's Kumbha Mela festival, especially at night with all the fires burning and dread locked sadhu looking youth smoking up. Bonnie is my dear deceased friend Peter's sister and a living female version of Peter. I love her so much and we go back very far. We pretty much hung together the whole fair, walking down every colored coded street till we were wore out from reminiscing about our pasts and trying to take in all of the beautiful people and exotic products for sale. A book could easily be written about this three decade, ongoing annual festival, but that is not my intention. However, money is more the norm here now than bartering and they are changing the name to the Okanogan Family Fair. Even hippies eventually upgrade on some levels. Boy, I know I sure have. I actually own, use and have a love/hate relationship with my laptop

computer. I never thought I'd own one, years ago, but now I don't want to live without one. So, after three incredible days of feeling like I was back in India again, I decided to follow Bonnie back over the North Cascade Highway to Bellingham, my old home town that I hadn't seen in eight long years. They say you can't go back home. Well, let's see.

When we stopped over the pass on the western side, I wanted to treat Bonnie to blueberry ice cream at Cascadian Farms small organic café. As we got out of our cars, it was raining, of course. Nothing here had changed, yet. As we walked quickly, dodging raindrops towards the entrance, I told Bonnie of my long overdue homecoming. Well, talk about synchronicity. Peg Mulroney walks out of the front door, my parent's neighbor and old friend from the past. This was an auspicious sign for sure. And Peg was the first of many friends I would be seeing in the next week. But Bellingham had really changed since my last time here with Tony in '98. Now it resembled a small Seattle, with gourmet coffee shops and Thai food everywhere. There was even a new Thai restaurant one block from Bonnie's house. Her house sits on the exact spot where Paramahansa Yogananda appeared in my third eye back in 1970. Peter's former house burned down years ago and Bonnie rebuilt on the same lot. Just like certain holy objects did not burn in my house fire, the same phenomenon occurred with Peter. His Bible did not burn and inside was a picture of me sitting on the front porch of his house. Fire definitely has some unique qualities as an element, especially when it comes to making up its mind.

During my five day stay at Bonnie's house, I called and visited many old friends from my past. I convinced Steve to go with me on a drive out to the barn that Jolene and I had lived in from 1971 to '74. We found the driveway so overgrown that I doubted even going down it. But we did, and as soon as I saw the old barn, still sitting exactly as I remembered it, I knew what was meant now about "you can't go back home". As I looked closer and walked through our once pixilated abode, there were absolutely no signs that we had *ever* lived here-

none! It was a barn again full on, with hay and funky odors. The small pond, where I'd mercy killed our injured retarded cat Angelo, was now filled in completely. Sadly, only three of the thirteen apple trees remained. Steve and I scoured the field for mushrooms, but upon hearing a dog doing the alarm bark, we headed out. I just wish Jolene could have seen our sacred valley and barn, once more too. Then again, maybe it is better to see it all through memories, filtered by our own consciousness, as we like to remember it. We all know that everybody remembers things differently. This book is proof of that! Do you follow my gist? Everything written here is only *my* side of the story, not the whole truth by any means. I'm certain some of the main characters in my life would agree, as each person has their own interpretation of what happened and how it played out. Truth can only be experienced, not written about. It is lived.

Upon arriving home, I found out that I was no longer needed as a carpenter's helper on the remodel job where I'd been working. This was a bit of a shock, as I'd gotten used to a fat paycheck each week, especially after basically making no money the year before. But fate stepped in again, instantly providing work on another remodel. This time it was for Tony's business. Cool. Now I would be on a payroll and able to collect unemployment benefits someday, if needed. I worked this two month job until it ended in December of '06. Our friend, that I'd peeled pole barn logs for, died in a blackout drunken accident, causing everybody to reassess their drinking and driving habits. His death was a real shocker, as he was much loved by all. But it really pissed me off, as I'd had many talks with him while working; about all my DUIs. I'd hoped my testimony would be "wake up call" advice for him. But I remember how it was, when I couldn't hear either. As Tony made the cedar casket for our friend, I thanked God that he was not making it for me. I am *so* fortunate to be alive. I could have been dead many times too, and all from alcohol!

To start my new year of 2007, I scored work outside in the snow, pruning pines on a tree farm. This work was right up my

alley, as I've had plenty of hours behind a chain saw. I basically gave juvenile and teenage trees a much needed haircut. For many conifers, it would be their last trim until they reached maturity and the saw mill years from now. I would suit up with boots, helmet, face screen and an attitude of gratitude, as I worked totally alone on acres of snow clad trees, in a picturesque mountain valley. When the sun came out, reflecting off the acres of pristine white snow with blue sky in the background, I sometimes felt as if I were in some sort of mystical winter paradise. Deer and wild turkeys would stop by on their migration routes, to nibble the newly fallen pine boughs. And I would return home each day feeling great, from all the chilled open air exercise and from the realization that God was providing me with constant employment. I was now starting to feel some roots sprouting for this area of northeastern Washington. I was *really* starting to feel at home here. And most of my prison memories were fading fast, back into the background where they belong.

In the spring of 2007, I landscaped again for various folk in our area. Then I scored what was to be one of the best work experiences of my entire life- building a shop/garage with an overhead double gabled apartment all below Northport, Washington on the mighty Columbia River. Tony began this job with me, but soon I was working with Jared, a new kindred soul in my life and a great working partner. We fit together like peanut butter and jelly, or maybe the Odd Couple. Work was fun. Shortly after beginning this new pattern of driving to work, on one of the most beautiful roads in Washington, I was cordially invited to attend Sri's graduation from his Arizona high school.

I flew down once again and settled into Grandma Pauline's spare bedroom. I realized that the promises of AA were all coming true in my life. I no longer had fear of financial insecurity. Look where I am presently at, attending my son's graduation! Talk about miracles! And Sri is graduating with honors too. I finally got to meet his girlfriend Renee and her Dutch mom and Montana dad. When the grand show began

outside in the warm Arizona evening, I was seated next to all of Sri's immediate family and an adopted grand parent figure who had his camera firing away. This was a milestone moment for me, to even be *here* seeing my once little boy, now accepting many awards for all of his scholastic and musical achievements in high school. All I could think of was, "Boy, is he ever off to a good start in life". My heart was feeling *so* deeply the blessings I was watching, all acted out in front of me now. Everything I ever prayed for my son, I was seeing as accomplished. Now, Sri even looks a lot like I did back in the day. Like father, like son- at least in looks anyway. I had to hold back tears many times, as I watched Sri holding the love of his young life, Renee.

The following day, I put playing cards on brother Falcon's bike spokes, to make that ticking sound kids like. Then many folk arrived for Sri and Renee's graduation party. Sri's letterman jacket was on display with a saxophone and Rideout insignia. Also many honor medals and class compositions graced the table with various pictures. I wore a T shirt, picturing Sri at age five, which drew attention and a few good stories. I also returned Sri's Ganesh statue, which had been *so* blessed at the Kumbha Mela, back to him, to keep as his own now. He was old enough now to understand its significance. The whole day was very emotional and heartfelt for me, especially seeing how in love Sri is with Renee. That night in bed, I read many of Sri's essays and book reports. I was getting to know my son, finally. He is a *very* good writer, as well as a musician. Ironically, he read and adored many of the same *exact* adult books I'd read in prison!

Earlier that day, Roderick got me alone and asked, "Have you called those church people in your area to see about sitting up? Remember the holy man in India told you to follow the ways of the Redman for America."

"Yeah, I did call them but it didn't work out. You know Roderick, I think that statement by the guru was meant for you, not me."

Later he asked why I wore all the beads. He was referring to the three rudraksha malas I happened to be wearing. Somehow, it obviously hit him as being too east Indian and he thought I'd outgrown that path.

"I wear these seeds for medicinal value, as they work on your nervous system and raise your energy up to the higher chakras."

That made more sense to Roderick. Little did he know that Babaji's teachings and mantra is still my path over the Native Americans ways. I can't help it. That is just the way it is, in my heart. I respect their path of peyote meetings and sweat lodges but worshiping Shiva and chanting daily the mantra seems to be my path. Should I try to explain all of this to him? No. He would never understand. Few do.

Then more deep emotions surfaced again, as I hugged Sri one last time, saying our goodbyes standing in Lyn's driveway. Holding him closely with my eyes closed, it was as if Sri were five years old again. I could literally *feel* love pulsating between our two bodies, as our hearts beat as one. I'd cried earlier this morning after saying final farewells to Grandma Pauline. Her health was not improving and I knew then, that I would never see her again. Somehow in our last talk alone together, I felt Pauline really knew the joy I was feeling over our son Sri Ram. I also felt she knew all the pain I've been through, living alone without my son much in my life. Elders have a way of knowing and she had been in my life a long time. This must have been quite a moment for her too. Maybe she even remembers the morning we named Sri Ram together. I still do! I'll *never* forget that.

My time with Lyn and Tyler was short but sweet. I played songs on my guitar to my two most favorite fans and we splashed in Oak Creek, which borders their property. Tyler had just had his eighth birthday party this Memorial Day weekend, so the place had tents set up on the lawn amongst squirt guns, broken piñatas, musical instruments and animals wandering about. I chose a tent for my sleeping quarters and

for a space to lie down and process all the emotions running through me. On Memorial Day Monday, Tyler and I walked uptown Sedona, exploring all of the beautiful new age and southwestern shops, while Lyn worked at a nearby Oak Creek Brewery. I always have *so* much fun with Tyler. He reminds me of Sri at that age. That evening, we ate at a Chinese buffet in Cottonwood. I mentioned to Lyn that it would be incredible if somebody from my Sedona/Cottonwood past showed up. Well, guess who walks in but fast Eddie and his wife Rochelle, my old neighbors. What a small world! Eddie disclosed that his brother Ray died drunk behind the wheel recently, and that he too had gotten into a bad alcohol related accident. His face now had twenty-nine screws in it, covered over well by much cosmetic surgery. Eddie *didn't* get a DUI, as the cops felt so sorry for him after losing his brother Ray. For Arizona, that is really something! Where is justice?

After flying home from Arizona, I scored a weekly gig playing my songs every Friday evening at a local café. I loved this gig, whether there were many customers or not. It gave me a weekly musical outlet to play my songs and to try to let the music play me. This was one of my prison goals come true. I hadn't had much luck trying to reach people with my message of recovery. But sometimes playing, I'd tell prison stories of how and/or why I wrote the song I'd just performed. Slowly, my name and reputation were getting known from this weekly gig. But sadly, our small town just doesn't have many musical venues. A musician here has to be creative, to even be heard. And again, I need to get serious at some point and go into a recording studio with my original songs. The Internet just might be worth pursuing musically after all.

As my summer passed, working long hours as a carpenter's helper and singing on Fridays, I got to float the Kettle River a few more times. This is one of the highlights of our corner of God's country. On the three-hour aqua ride, we always encounter a family of bald eagles, which has their nest atop a large Ponderosa pine. The small whitewater ripples provide an adrenaline rush and sometimes, spillovers. This free natural

recreation really bonds all the floaters on the river. When I've looked behind me, relaxing on my back in the sun on my plastic floatation air mattress, I've seen a long colored snake in the water, made up of dozens of flotation devices of every shape and color shade. It is slowly following me down the babbling and bobbing river current, to the sandy beach where our cars are parked. However, we pay for this joy by enduring the long winter months of ice and snow. But that I can handle. At least we don't get the heavy rains that torment the west side of the state, where I used to reside. I am much happier here now, in a small town like I experienced in South Dakota, with very little traffic stress and a community of like minded individuals who cherish and respect this panoramic paradise too.

Then the Guardian angels did their magic. Dave and Shannon had been watching my evolutionary progress since my prison release, seeing me start over and jump all the hurdles in front of me, and not drinking. They witnessed my love for this area grow and knew how much I've wanted some place to *really* call home. My life with Mick in our small apartment was more like existing, instead of living. He proved to be quite the quirky guy in many ways, one of which was always restacking my bananas compulsively. He has a good heart but lived his waking hours on the phone or internet multi-tasking and telling everybody who would listen about his dooms-day prophecies. It was pretty obvious to all who knew him that he is our town crier. He means well, but sadly most of it is bullshit. Everybody knows people like this. He's just a parrot squawking. Mick has never followed any spiritual practice for any length of time. He prefers to surf the net instead. He showed some interest in Babaji and Shiva, from living around me, but to no lasting effect. I'd hoped when we first started living together that we could play music too, as we're both musicians. But that only happened infrequently, as the ringing phone took precedence. As time went on, I really wanted to live alone. Would that *ever* happen? I've lived in so many different houses, rooms, apartments, tents and pods, not to mention strange roommates that something has to give for me,

someday. Well, the someday arrived with a phone call from Angel Dave informing me that he'd found my place- my place! Tell me more Dave. It was a two bedroom farmhouse with a basement, newly remodeled bath and master bedroom, carport and view of Colville valley and town that looks like a postcard. This sits on over one hundred acres of valley view farmland at a perfect rent that I could afford. Across the street, the base of Monumental Mountain, living up to its name, has logging roads for extended walks and a pond in the field is home to much wildlife like herons, muskrats and waterfowl. This was all *too* good to be true!

"Well, it's not a sure deal yet, but you could drive by and check out the place."

"I don't know Dave. I don't want to get my hopes up too much. What if it doesn't come through? Then I'll just be heartbroken."

But as God would have it, it did come through. And changes came through for roommate Mick too. He was now moving to Mexico to teach English and be near the Mayan culture he so dearly loves. He's into all the Mayan 2012 predictions, of course. Who knows, maybe he'll find his next wife down there. It wouldn't surprise me as he's always looking for a woman to complete him, online and off. As he was going south, I was moving into my dream farmhouse to complete this book. In fact, this book probably wouldn't have happened at all back in my old small upstairs apartment. This new house was a *major* sign and inspiration for me to write. I had absolutely *no* intention of ever moving from my present living situation with Mick. If he moved on, I would rent the apartment by myself somehow or get another roommate. But then things took a turn, another one of those turning points. I let an elderly friend read my original writings and she inspired me to do something with it. She too had led a life similar to mine and felt I should get my story out there. And she is an advanced student of *The Course in Miracles*, to say the least. When this new house seemingly came out of nowhere and was totally in my budget, how could I *not* interpret this as a sign

from God, as a peaceful setting to pursue my writing? Now, my song of gratitude just got louder... way louder.

Before moving out of our apartment, Mick sold off pretty much everything he had for his move to Mexico. So, I scored some much needed furniture and a stereo system for my new abode. I also bought out Mick's half of our gravity inversion table, which I daily use for hanging upside down. This is way more practical than my rope and beam inversion attempts back in the '83 Sumas cabin. I had previously mentioned that our apartment was supposedly haunted. One night, I noticed that my large long red macaw feather that Bonnie gave me was missing. It always resided in a potted spider plant in my window sill. When Mick came home, I confronted him about my missing feather. He hadn't taken it or seen it possibly fall out the window. We were both very perplexed, as I had looked under the bed four times already and my room is only *so* big. Where did that bright red feather disappear to? As I sat alone on my bed, after Mick left the room shaking his head in disbelief, I suddenly felt something poke me under my right thigh. Looking down, I saw that I was now sitting on the feather! It was under my thigh and it sure wasn't on my bed two seconds ago. Mick confessed that the ghost had been rolling out the toilette paper on him, as he sat waiting for shit to happen in the middle of the night. At least this was a trickster spirit and not some weird poltergeist phenomena. It is also the first time I've experienced a ghost. I wonder how Larkins would react to this story. I'm sure it wouldn't faze him, after all he heard me tell him.

After painting one bedroom in my farmhouse a shallow pond blue, carpenter friend Jared helped me move in all the heavy stuff. Again, the Guardian angels came through by indirectly scoring me a new couch, table and chairs, entertainment center, desk and outdoor furniture, as only angels can do. In no time at all, I was totally set up inside- up and running. Then, as I was going to get boxes for my final move, I saw an ad for part-bobcat kitties at Safeway's reader board. I got the last little female feline and named her Maya, after the lady who gave her

to me. Maya also means Illusion, the material world we all live in. As Maya and I moved into the new dream house in October of 07, I also became unemployed again. I wasn't really worried. My faith was strong, as I knew this was only temporary. When my summer job with Jared ended, I qualified for unemployment benefits. Cool. I'd never had that before and it wasn't much, but it presently helps keep me and Maya alive, so I can finish this book. Sri Ram emailed me that he and Renee are now engaged with wedding plans for next summer. My God Sri, you are only eighteen! But after much thought and prayer, I totally stand behind him now. I see his young life unfolding and blossoming in ways far different and more promising than my own life did. My son isn't a hippie or even hippie minded. He's been raised by a functional family, that taught him the values of love, respect and prayer. He is quantum leaps ahead of me, when I was his age. Maybe he is mature enough, this early in life, for marriage. Sadly, his Grandma Pauline wouldn't be there for his wedding. She passed on to join her two deceased husbands early in January of '08. Her death touched me deeply. I remembered all the dinners we ate together, Sri's birth and the times when she and Collin came to dance to me at the Canadian legion. And my heart *really* got opened again, when I thought of the grief that Joya must be feeling over losing her mom. Pauline's passing showed me just how very much I still do love Joya, unconditionally now, despite all of the heavy times we have had in our past. Forgiveness is truly what life *is* all about.

Sri and Renee did get married in July, 2008 at age nineteen and I was there with Bonnie to sing for them. Thank God, I'm *still singing, somehow*, after all I've been through. Their wedding resembled a peyote meeting, as many Indians graced the ceremony and open air reception afterwards. Christian flew down to marry them. Everybody here knew Roderick had been battling pancreas cancer. Nobody was talking about it today; he looked great. Many healing meetings had been held in his behalf. I watched him see *our* son start a whole new life, under the wedding tree on Sedona's first homestead. It was a sunny

hot glorious day. He and Joya looked radiant but fearful of the future. They had every right to be.

Before Bonnie and I flew home, we took everybody out for Thai dinner. Roderick had just given me a relic Tibetan coat from 1970. With my long grey hair, I now looked like I stepped out of *Lost Horizons*. While seated in the restaurant, Roderick leaned over to me and said, “I love Rob. You know that don’t you?”

I thought of all the times he had prayed for me in the tipi and his own sweat lodge, forgiven me, sung in my ear in prison and cedared me off the moment I got out. Roderick had done the job I couldn’t do- raise our son, Sri to manhood and to his wedding day. Here sat one *very* good man next to me. I knew this man loved my son as much as me, if not more. Hearing Sri refer to him as Dad didn’t matter anymore, at all.

“Yes, I know you love me, Roderick. I really know it. I hope you know I love you too.”

Sri came to visit me alone, later that summer after their honeymoon. This was a much needed time to really get to know each other better. Sri was now on my turf with two cosmic cats. When Maya reached nine months old, I got her a companion, as two cats are better than one. I named the little male bob-tailed Manx, Baba, after Babaji. Words can’t describe how much they mean to me. And talk about beautiful! These two are *way* up there with Mister Blanco, if not past him. It’s hard to believe but true. They reflect where I’m at now. Sri loved the cats and all of their quirky antics. They seemed to sense he is my son, as only cats can do. Now Sri was finally old enough for me to tell him *my* side of the story. Thank God. And I did tell him some, as we walked through the woods, later playing my guitar on the porch to a setting sun, with my own very happy son sitting next to me. Sri enjoyed my songs, especially the originals where I explained when and why I wrote each song. This was a dream come true for me. I’ve got to get a CD of these songs recorded. Then Sri asked me, “Dad,

is Babaji God?” Wow, that same question has been asked by numerous people around the world, countless times.

“God only knows. To me and quite a few others, Babaji is Shiva incarnate,” I answered. “So, in that respect, yes He is God. He is one with God at all times, as Christ is too. Babaji is that love and inner voice in our hearts. He left his physical body in ’84 to teach us that. He is *so* much more than these pictures I’m showing you, Sri Ram. Having me for your father really connects you to Babaji or we wouldn’t even be together. I feel you and I have been together many times before to even be my son. Maybe we were even twins? It would sure be fun to know, wouldn’t it?”

“You are crazy, Dad. But in a good way.”

“And you are a lot like me, but you don’t know that yet, Pumpkin.”

“Dad, were *The Beatles* really all that good?” What a question. How do I answer this, to my young accomplished musician son?

“Yeah, they really were. They were *the* best, ever. I wished you could have been there. It’s the only way you could ever truly understand. When I think about it, you wouldn’t even be sitting here next to me if it weren’t for *The Beatles*. They started me on the paths that ultimately led to meeting your mother.”

Sadly, on December 3, 2008 Roderick passed over to the other side. It seems like he was just here a moment ago. Now, Sri only has one dad, me. I *really* feel for Joya. She not only lost her mother recently but also her first born son to a new wife and Roderick to cancer. Joya is back to the same predicament as she was after our divorce- single mother raising a young child. Only this time it is Falcon. The pain she must be feeling now, is probably similar to what I felt when Sri was taken from me- sad but true. I pray God gives her the needed strength to get through this one. This cross could be heavy.

So where am I at now, concerning my hippie dream of living a life of truth, simplicity and love? That was Babaji's message. I am still doing it, not in the form I once treasured, but right here on a farm with my cats, approaching my golden years. Through the influence of the Guardian angels, I scored steady work only three miles from home and even bought a motor scooter to drive there cheaply. Getting Baba to keep Maya company was a good move. Over time, this squirrely independent little fur man stole my heart away as much as Maya did. I feel *so* blessed to have both of them in my life. Maya stalks around shyly, looking like a panther or lioness while pixilated Baba is busy opening doors, rolling out the toilette paper or keeping tabs on the farm outside, looking like a bobcat. I've never seen a cat *so* mechanically inclined as Baba. He can figure anything out. These cats absolutely make my life in *so* many ways. I always knew I loved cats, but not this much! They bring out the fatherly love in my heart and reflect it back. I still chant *Om Namaha Shivaya*, on my two stringed Indian dotara, as part of my daily spiritual maintenance routine. This practice is important to me first thing in the morning and the cats seem to love it too. They've been hearing the dotara's hypnotic sound since they were small kittens. I really enjoy starting my day by singing to God and praying for all my friends, living and deceased. I am a Western sadhu forever, at least in my mind. Have I thought about sitting up again? No. I haven't felt any need to go back in the tipi. Maybe I will someday with Sri Ram. I'm not ruling that one out. I will always respect peyote but, for now, I'm where I want to be. Create your own form of devotion that suits you. That is what I've done and I can't stress this enough. We forget *so* easily! It's good to have the truth hammered home daily, by reading a piece of scripture or inspirational words that remind you of what life is *really* all about. Or singing to God like I do is another way to remember the Divine. My altar is such a reminder too and makes my bedroom a very sacred place. My most favorite pictures Babaji, Yogananda, Sri Ram, my parents and sister Joyce grace my brass Shiva statue, along with rudraksha malas and special stones, reminding me of all the

good and beauty in my life, not to mention the blessings. Everybody could benefit from an altar in their home. This is not some cultist bullshit. It's another reason I loved India so much. Every home there has a family altar. But as much as I love my altar, which is just an extension of me, form isn't that important now. Reality is always within and not without. I chased shadows *so* much of my life, looking for myself. I had a hasty ego, always going *too* fast. I'm now learning to go slower. However, after all the heavy losses I've endured, I realize now the freedom I've gained. Learning to live with less is *way* better! Less is more. By keeping my life simple, I now do not have the stress levels that once plagued my existence. I'm just *so* grateful for all I have in my life, that I don't worry much about wanting more for the future. There is no *more* anyway. Only the same old thing packaged differently. I've got everything I could ever hope for now. And does it give me peace? If it doesn't, I'm learning to let it go. I live so low key that I don't need a cell phone. My land line telephone with a message machine suits all of my needs; old school. And remember, from my childhood, I really don't like ringing phones anyway. And now I despise how cell phones create separation by ringing when you are having a conversation with somebody. Away they go when those tones rings. Cell phones don't know the Convict Code of Respect. I don't watch much commercial TV either, but movies and contemporary series I choose off of Netflix instead. I've pretty much seen every movie made, of every book I read in prison. I never would have thought that possible a few years ago. Now I can watch only what I choose to watch and I've seen some great adult drama that puts my story to shame. How the world has changed. How I've changed too. Clear out the garbage in your life and it will clean out your mind to be quieter- to hear the Voice of Spirit, Babaji. That is what I've been trying to do, ever since studying *A Course in Miracles*, incarcerated. Every day now is a day of mind training for me, to keep my mind open and receptive to hear Spirit's voice. The ego's voice is always there, judging and perceiving everything as separate from me. Spirit shows me that it is *all* me. I am *all* that there is. There is

only one God. I am that I am. Knowing this now, I can never think the old way again. I may not always remember but I *will* be reminded by the Voice that speaks for God, telling me I could see peace instead of this. I need to remember to listen. The choice is always ours; to choose once again. And that choice is between judgment and fear or love and forgiveness. Haven't we all judged long enough and seen the consequences? I'm learning now to forgive myself for having dreamed up what I call my life. This book is a song of self-forgiveness for the bizarre life I did create. To all of the long lost friends, who may have been portrayed as trials in my life, I love you always and ask your forgiveness for how I remember it all playing out, in the Illusion. I hold no judgment and thank you for teaching me forgiveness. I now view my life experiences as a spiritual fire that has been slowly, and often painfully, opening my heart to embrace even more love. And God had nothing to do with it, except to be there with me, as I stumbled through my unfoldment. I did all of this to myself; to learn who I am. And now I am not my own worst enemy anymore. That enemy was crucified in prison. Now, I AM resurrected, loving every moment of life as it comes at me. I try to enjoy everything I do. The daily joy I now carry in my heart reflects my love for life. Life and God are synonymous to me. God is *so* simple, standing right in front of us each moment that we fail to see Him, due to the clouds of judgment and dogma covering our eyes. But, as the clouds lift, I still feel like a child, naughty or good, forever and ever, an eternal child of God. I finally know that I know. And I now know too, that I am *never* hopeless or alone; if I choose spirit over ego, life over death, sobriety over alcohol. The choice is always ours, so may we all choose wisely. However, my mother's greatest fear of me living alone with a cat may just be my present greatest blessing. I see that I have many of the characteristics of a cat, so Maya and Baba and I get along just fine. I respect and treasure being alone now, as I found what I was always looking for in relationships; myself! May your own tapestry of life be a mosaic of realizations and self-forgiveness.



THE END

