

NOLA MYTHS AND LEGENDS & SF REDUX

The 1997 Journals of Tono Rondone
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Volume One: NOLA MYTHS AND LEGENDS

Chapter One The Tower of Babel

February 28, 1997

The clicking of horse hooves on the moist Decatur Street pavement. Fluttering leaves seen through tall windows; beyond, a uniformly gray early dusk sky holds its rain back from the wind and the world below. Breaking a bagel in Kaldi's Café – broke bread and drank wine with the Lord at noon today, Friday, a birthday Piscean at a Piscean Age Mass.

Life is good. I don't want for anything today. Can't say that everyday, but I should be able to. It drops down to forty degrees at night in the summer in Ethiopia. This February in New Orleans is springtime warm and humid now. Not everybody is going to like you. Small groups sitting at tables, mumbling, pouring over Tarot cards, The Cranberries droning on over the stereo. Heads in writing tablets, pens in hand; chess games and drug deals. Hippies in capes and hats and A shirts, girls with no hair or plenty of curls, young punk street people, crusties pierced and tattooed – artists; portrays and street scenes, and thalidomide people in wheelchairs called Angel and Numbers – my good friend in dreadlocks from Chicago.¹

Shorty, one of the little people, comes in.

"Did you leave any money out there?" says Numbers, "all I want is fifty cents."

"I got a hundred bucks saved," Shorty gloats. "Already had two heart attacks, though."

Cued up for coffee. I love this place. Done good work in this café. Taught the hippie kid with the foul mouth about the power of words. The world is the word, fleshy, sanguine soaked eddies, fleeced lined whirlpools wearing baseball caps & wallet chains. Tourists wash up in foamy brine to the bar, wide glazed over eyes scan the ambience of the place. The guy in the \$200 a month room in the war zone, crack & mugger infested Bywater 9th Ward district doesn't bathe enough (if at all.) The futon will never come clean again. Fred, thank God for old Fred the barber, next Ye Olde Hummingbird Hotel. Good birthday cut today. And the music flowed off my fingers and my voice sung words that rose into the clouds and out to the banks of the Mississippi River. No ocean here, no waves like in California. I miss the sea, the gulls, the seals and the waves, and the wind off Fort Point in San Francisco. My three kids are there and I miss them too. These girls I raised from babies into real human beings full of love and promise and energy.

¹ Numbers, born Barrett Howard, died a few years later of cancer. He was very young at the time.

The bathroom is full of noxious gas. They're painting away the graffiti. Layer upon layer of ideograms, the myths of the people, symbols of a bathroom wall. The veve of a Voodoo loa. The smell clings to my clothes. It took me too long to piss.

We say I love you, we say hello. We communicate with words, but words are not enough, words represent thoughts and action represents words. Few people of words are also people of action, but the words precipitate action in others. Just as thoughts become the impetus of the words we decide to speak. There is no need for words when the idea is known among two people or sixty. Strange foreign travelers pretend that they are not being spoken to when they don't know the language being spoken to them. They won't even look at them. They pretend the person doesn't exist. Ignore them right out of existence because they are afraid, they don't know the words.

Skinny card reader in black stiletto heeled boots. A fancy cane falls to the floor. Pockets of cool pervade the early evening air. Everything is vibrating, every person and thing – everything is the same thing except that everything is vibrating differently, at different frequencies. Ledbetter & Besant. Astral planes. “Astral Airlines – Our Planes Are In Your Mind!”

You don't have to go to the Himalayas to become spiritual. You don't learn from a master simply by hanging around her. You might go fishing instead of hearing the esoteric teachings. It isn't that the lamas didn't want to impart their wisdom. Nobody asked. Saints are reticent beings. Even angels not equal to human beings.

She's a six foot three inches tall Bongo Jeans girl. \$4.25 today playing and singing in Jackson Square. Shannon's here, at Kaldi's Café again as I sit and write. A photographer. She talked of Utah, the cave of the dinosaurs, millions of caves ago. A naked woman in the hallway, shut out from her room while in the shower down the hall. Her skin sagged and wrinkled. Fat skirted her body – I threw her a shirt & went for the manager. Speaking in tongues. All around me in this Tower, the ruins of a civilization, pockets of resistance, isolation and fear in the jugular vein. Or a celebration of life in America – New Orleans – on a Friday night. Circles of friends. Counting spare change on a table. In comes Numbers.

Letters have significance too, *matrika shakti*, the energy inherent in letters, in sound, or *sabda* in Sanskrit. There are sacred languages in this Tower. Sacred symbols. Sacred words. Sacred sounds. And the profane. The band is playing the blues, rhythm & blues – a big, round black woman is wailing the blues on Bourbon Street. Germans, French, Algerian, Wisconsinites, New Yorkers, Moroccans, Israelis, Argentineans, Africans, Arabians, Finnish, Italians, Greeks – they're all here. From Puerto Rico, Jamaica & Cyprus.

Go off, out the door after that young redhead. But don't forget not to fall off the Tower. Don't you hear me? Woke up this Saturday, did my laundry, went to work, but no one hears me, no one listens, no one understands. My walkman is on, my ears plugged up so I don't have to hear the song of the sirens. So I don't dash myself on the rocks straining to hear the haunting siren's song.

Did Odysseus plug his ears with wax so as not to hear their song too, or did sailors dash their boats onto the rocks straining to hear a fabled sacred sound that was actually not there at all? What language is that anyway? Where are you from? How many miles, how many eons, did it take for us to come to this horrible mess of hundreds of languages and dialects, no one understanding on another? Now they will teach

English as a second language to inner city kids in Los Angeles – the city of pregnant & illiterate angels, where the Tower is built wide instead of high.

Chapter Two Master Monkey Man

March 3, 1997

He saw 80,000 employees of large corporations & small businesses caught in a tree of gossip and fear. He envisioned Garga in a punk plaid skirt and a black T-shirt combo with calf high boots and a tattoo of Christ's crown of thorns, Raven, Shakti, the active, female aspect in all her godliness and radiant splendor meeting Shiva when the pipe opens up inside your spine. Surrounded by a heavenly host, all the clouds of the apocalypse parted, the master monkey man crossed over the bridge and sat with a fat, juicy mango on a branch of the tree of heaven, of eternity.

I'm always thinking of other people, wanting to help them, never wanting to do them any harm or exploit them. I do some of my best work here. Even the angels are not equal to human beings, even the angels envy us. Yes, we may be lower than them in creation, but we have been imbued with abilities and power that these greater beings do not possess. It's always like that. Human beings have created a veritable plethora of new species of creatures, haven't we? Machines? Soon we will invent a machine that can reproduce itself, and then all the distinction between machines and humans will blur inextricably. Don't machines have powers that their creators do not? A plane can fly – a car can go a hundred miles an hour. Computers can calculate faster by far than a man. And don't we envy their awesome capabilities?

Sometimes I'm silent among the gossip, aloof to the crowd, but do not interpret this behavior as inconsiderate or revealing a lack of compassion. It's just that I'd rather say God's name silently to myself than engage in the chatter, the gossip. Preach *Gospels* (Good News) instead. The Banana King, the Cuban American refugee turned San Francisco Golden Gate Park Resident was a bodhisattva for sure. Edmond (AKA Fritz) was that big monkey man that stayed behind and renounced greedy mangos until all the street people everywhere could feast on delicious fruits of the sweet Tree of Life.²

Why have I lived everywhere it seems? All life of Earth, everywhere the same. Still, some spiritual hotspots exist, like Marin County, California, or Nepal, Sedona, Arizona – and some places, like Poe's House of Usher, where nothing grows and everything decays like Harlem or Watts or Sao Paulo's shantytown. Live in fertile areas, flourish where plants and animals thrive too. Want to save yourself? Save everybody else. How? By not saving yourself. Do you get it? Christ did. You must too. Master Monkey Man. What sacrifice are you will to make for the greater good?

Hans, the five foot tall Nazi enthusiast in full German officer's uniform will later put on Eva Braun's dress and will look better as a woman. What have we forgotten? How much does a lump of flesh here or there mean anyway? Orion threw his spear

² Edmond Moore was to become one of the main characters in Rondone's first novel, *Pop Goes the Weasel*, completed in 1998 in San Francisco.

across the southern sky tonight with the Mississippi River on my right shoulder as I walk down Royal Street, Calle Real.

Why does fiction make sense but life doesn't have to? Why should fiction make anymore sense than life? Answer that one first – then proceed to real fiction that makes sense like real life. What is real life? Monkey Man, The Master, knows that real life is sweet, real life is eternal, real life goes on over there, on that higher tree, while on this tree the king below waits for the dawn of death day to harvest mangos and take away the souls of those monkeys not blessed like Master Monkey Man with the ability to cross over to the other real life tree. There, on the other shore, a great being will spread his yellow robe across Monkey Man's shoulders and give him sweet mango juice, after bathing him in the clear, clean water of the celestial river. Because this Master Monkey Man did not worry about his own life; the MMM cared more about other monkeys. The MMM did not gossip and drool, he did not hesitate to provide his back as a bridge for 80,000 of his kind to fly over from the tree of death to the other shore. This MMM knew he couldn't be a yogi, couldn't be a saint or Buddha in this world as long as his fellow monkeys were in peril and so gave it up for the greater good.

To simply shut up in the face of gossip. To sacrifice all deeds to the greater good. To not complain. To not hate or envy. To love unconditionally. How will the MMM teach these virtues? How else, but by example? He will board the ship of dharma and take the devas across the ocean of the world. He will relax and let God's will work through him. He will be humble. If he cannot be completely pure in body and spirit he will remain steadfast in his quest and practice devoutly and with great patience and faith, knowing that when the fruit ripens, the petals of the flower will fall off naturally. He will thank the Great Being for the brioche and coffee and orange juice and kind Martha who runs the Louisiana Deli Kitchen on Julia Street in New Orleans for her free breakfast Tuesday morning (his birthday present from her) and he will give thanks for the job he goes to now and for all his friends and acquaintances and co workers and family members and books and movies and music and art and literature and most of all, the MMM will thank his lucky stars that his heart is filled with love, never ashamed of love, borne in silence, with a smile on his face and another smile in his heart.

Someday, someday all is forgiven. Kevin, my Turkish American friend that's young with long brown hair that looks like Jesus found another copy of the same edition of The Upanishads that I loaned him and he lost. \$1.50. I told him to buy it. Right after I hit him up for a fin until Friday that is. Good monkey!

Chapter Three Email to My Guru

March 4, 1997

To: Shri Swami Gurumayi Chidvilasananda@syda.com

From: Tono Rondone, tonouno@earthlink.net

RE: A Question – No, Questions

In the last few days, I feel as though I have experienced *a change in my attitude* about my religious practices, about devotional chanting and *japa* (mantra repetition), scriptural study and most of all meditation. I know there is no difference between the inner guru and the outer guru and why don't I get in touch with the inner guru instead of writing a letter to the outer guru. But Gurumayi, isn't it all right to want a spiritual director in times of need during the process of yoga?

Maybe I should say I've noticed a change in me. I was reading a book by Vivekananda Swami about Raja Yoga – the chapter on *pranayama* (control of the breath) and I realized I would never be a yogi in this lifetime. I could never remain celibate. I could not stay physically pure and my mind would always think thoughts of an impure nature. I also work too much – probably two day jobs soon and writing my second book and painting a third painting and playing guitar in Jackson Square for tips.

I also became concerned because I've been practicing meditation -- *asana* (posture), *pranayama*, *pratyahara* (concentration), *dhyana* (meditation) and mantra repetition – for years now without your guidance (except for one session in Sausalito in 1995) and two sessions the tour before that one, and watching videos of you shown at the Oakland ashram when I lived in Emeryville three blocks away from the ashram). I became concerned when I read Vivekananda's warning to aspirants about the possibility of insanity resulting from a half baked effort in meditation and *sadhana* (spiritual practice) especially without the aid of a guru. So I decided to give up the seeking, the desiring, for spiritual attainment, the yogic attainment of samadhi or turiya (the ultimate goal of yoga, liberation and bliss).

Then, the next time I sat for meditation, it was unexpectedly good, I thought, probably, I rationalized, because I had sat with this feeling of resignation or acceptance of my destiny without any expectations or desiring of some result of my meditation. Still, the Blue Pearl, that fleeting, brilliant, tiny pinpoint of intensely blue light which appears before the closed eyes of a meditator if they're blessed with shaktipat, rarely occurs during my sessions. Of course, your guru, Baba Muktananda, has explained the significance of the Blue Pearl so eloquently in his Play of Consciousness, so I won't elaborate on it here.³

I think I have seen in meditation the lights of the subtle and causal bodies, the white one the size of your thumb and the black one the size of the nail on my little finger (Readers may know of the subtle body as the astral plane). I mean, I can't keep playing

³ Chitshakti Vilas, The Play of Consciousness, by Swami Muktananda, © Shree Gurudev Ashram, 1st Edition, March 1972. From a rare edition in the author's library.

this mind game of “I don’t expect anything, I’m just going to do it,” or “I can’t be a yogi.” What should I do? Should I stop meditating?

I don’t think Swami Muktananda would suggest that, but at the same time, if Gurudev caught me smoking cigarettes an hour after meditation or lusting after a woman wouldn’t he kick me out of the ashram immediately? I don’t feel like a yogi, although I love yoga. Can’t I become a householder saint instead? Isn’t that what some of the saints of Siddha Yoga did? Wasn’t Tukaram a householder? And Kabir? I think Baba taught that this was possible; so what is the difference between a saint and a yogi? A rishi and a guru?

I guess it doesn’t matter, all this chatter, all these questions. I know I want to love my fellow human being as 1) friend, 2) family, 3) sexual lover, 4) by charity and compassion for strangers, 5) by teaching what I have learned through experience and study. And I know that I want to love God. I know I want to set a good example by my behavior – be happy around other people, not gossip or complain, work hard, be responsible, live up to my word, not stealing the most insignificant thing, not conducting myself with insincerely with women or committing improper sexual acts, not lying or cheating. I know I must meditate on my own inner self and let that self meditate on me. I know I must sing God’s glory and repeat God’s name – and I love doing all these things!

So . . . my wonderful friend Coulter whom you know suggested long ago that I write you a letter – even if I never mailed it – and now I have finally followed his wise advice. Thanks for listening. What joy it would be, what a blessing, if I could sit with you and discuss these things. I will pray that I am fortunate enough to meet you again someday.⁴

Love,

Tono Rondone

Chapter Four **Dear Sandra Santa Cruz**

March 6, 1997

It is always very good to hear from you. I want to describe to you the scene here, the life I am leading in New Orleans. I hang around the French Quarter nights and during the day on my days off, which aren’t that many. Old, old looking buildings with a lot of filigree wrought iron, horse carriages, street musicians and artists flocking together in Jackson Square along with hippies, Japanese tourists, Superbowl frenzies and absolutely, positively the most outrageous spectacle of

⁴ The author did see his guru again in 1999 in California. He had his young wife with him at the time, and immediately upon being seated, devotees took her, due to her age, almost within touching distance of the guru, where she heard and saw Gurumayi’s entire satsang (sitting with one’s teacher and hearing her lesson.) Afterwards, Jennifer Jacklin was beaming with all the energy she had received from the teacher. Tono and Jennifer have been together ever since and have a young daughter Sophia.

the entire week before Mardi Gras I have ever seen anywhere (and I am lucky to have lived through it – I haven't touched a drop of alcohol since September, either!)

I've been working a retail sales job and holding my own but I have also not been so poor in probably twenty years. I've been here about five months now and I've written my first book⁵ (non fiction and of a spiritual nature) and painted two nice paintings of Jesus (One carrying His cross to Golgotha and the other of Him and an angel in the garden at Gethsemane)⁶. I've also played music in Jackson Square, right off the Mississippi River, and on Bourbon Street and made money doing it (but not much.)

There are lots of Aleister Crowley devotees here, lots of stripper chicks too, and young, young street kids, maybe sixteen years old. That would be like my twin daughters setting out for Miami in July or something!

I have made some wonderful friends and acquaintances here, creative, spiritual – the cultural currents run deep here. It's definitely not as superficial as California.

I've been living in a hotel room (a cell is how I refer to it) just about big enough for a bed, a sink and a TV set. I do have my VCR, a microwave oven, a broiler oven, my puja (altar in Sanskrit), my paintings, books, clothes, a guitar, pictures, candles, CD's & tapes, a backpack and a suitcase . . . and a .38 caliber pistol which I haven't touched but now I'm planning on moving out of this \$520 a month room without a batch to a room with a private bath below a large house for only \$200 a month. But it's in the middle of a drug and crime zone, so I'll probably have to take a cab home at night. You know, the kind of neighborhood where you can count the number of gun shots in the middle of the night.

There's a bunch of Tarot card readers at Kaldi's Café on Decatur Street – this is where I hang out and write or word process on my laptop. I also try to talk to people – to keep the human portion of my humanitarianism intact. I try to teach the little that I know for sure and also shut up and listen and learn. Like learning not to condemn anyone and not to injure by word or deed. To have compassion and charity. I have no girlfriend or lover. I am lonely, no kids either. I miss them with such urgency that I understand human attachment far better now than even before in my life.

I do fall in love everyday though! And yesterday, for sure. But it never amounts to anything. I just end up still alone and horny -- did we fuck like two minks that first afternoon! You're good, girl. I want you to take care of the temple of your body and not forget God everyday.

I was taking it pretty tough, this yoga path, but then I realized that I was pushing myself beyond my ability and now have relaxed about it more and having a little more fun smoking weed again. And cigarettes. Drinking coffee, coffee, coffee. I can't remain celibate either – the pressure is just too great and orgasm feels too good. So what's a fellow to do? Ha Ha!

I haven't given up the path though; I still feel I'm special and that God wants me to succeed in the endeavor to perfect myself as God does want it for all of us – it is our ultimate destiny, so why wait?

⁵ *Letters to My Children* by Tono Rondone, ©1996.

⁶ www.thoughtcrimesink.com

If you want a copy of the book, Letters to My Children, send \$10 plus shipping and handling. A special stapled edition available, signed by the writer's manager, who drinks like a fish.

I *agape*⁷ you baby.

TONO

Chapter Five The Courage To Be

March 7, 1997

I have finally resigned myself to the fact that I may lose everything I own at any time. That I may be out on the street at any time, out of a job, out of money, cold and hungry. My possessions have been dwindling since June and if I have to leave Louisiana, I will have to leave things behind. I am getting older now and I can see my old age looking financially very bleak. No Social Security, no pension, no retirement savings – plus years of payments for back taxes and child support.

Did you know that if you remove the pickles, lettuce and tomatoes from a cheeseburger and throw it in the garbage in New Orleans you'll get 90 days in jail? They call it cheeseburger molestation. Also I heard today that one unfortunate fellow got himself 90 days for stealing a melon from The Farmer's Market. "Yeah," I heard a man comment from the next table, "Dial M for Melon."

The next day, Bones, who works at Kaldi's, give me a *Hatha Yoga* book called "Power Yoga" to peruse. It's good – full of a lot of Sanskrit terminology, philosophical too – religious, however, I'm not too sure. Why do seekers need to contort their bodies to experience *bandhas*, for example, the rhythmic contraction of various muscles, which lifts *prana* and *shakti* (vital energy) from the abdomen into linking chains of *bandhas*? The only *asana* (posture or position of the body) that is required is the lotus position or the easy posture, sitting cross legged with spine erect and eyes closes, with your hands in some kind of a *mudra* or gesture (like having your palms upward, resting on the thighs, with your thumb and third fingers touching, forming a circle, for example.)

In the book, they call yoga *Ashtanga Yoga*, which means eight, like eight arms, movements or paths. The book did have a good explanation of *Kundalini Yoga*, sections on *prana* and a good bibliography.

I didn't take my guitar with me today or my small canvas to sketch upon in the café, no laptop or book to write in, so I'm telling tales of New Orleans as they happen. It's an absolutely perfect day outside – sunny, clear, dry, hot in the sun but cool in the shade. Beautiful. The thing is to be in the present, from moment to moment, because that's all we've really got. Life is a series of moments, one following upon another. But so many of us are either stuck in the past or anxious about the future. Meanwhile, life

⁷ *Agape* in Greek means the love of God. The word love in English has many problems, because there are various forms of love and English doesn't distinguish between them. There are at least two other forms of love as differentiated by the Greeks: *Phlios*, or brotherly love, and *Eros*, or sexual love.

passes us right by. Then we're old and life is over and we wonder why we haven't ever enjoyed a single moment of it.

I'm in the café. The cult of coffee. There's a lawyer woman in here in black jeans and a motorcycle jacket on. She looks vaguely sexy and maybe she's more beautiful than I first perceived. The music is in the distance and it's dance music, just barely there but pleasant and rhythmic. Even Korin's lawyer friend whom I talked to about the inadvisability of moving into that atrociously violent and crime ridden neighborhood concurred. Korin's the girl that lives upstairs and has offered the bottom room to me for \$200 a month.

In walks Dave the painter from the Square. Dave is convinced he's possessed by a demon. Out walks lovely Shannon, the black and white photographer of the big prints. I remember getting so drunk on champagne with Lisa Holoboff when I first started working at Macy's in San Francisco for some reason. I was seated in a chair in her kitchen and she was wearing a bathrobe that kept opening up as she stood in front of me between my open legs. Her skin was soft and colorful, her breasts pretty and young and pert, her belly nicely curved, plunging smoothly to her deep secret within her equally creamy full thighs and appealing pubic hair. Why did we – she – have to get so drunk in order to have sex? It ruined it for us, for me for sure. It's all for the best. You've got to shut up sometimes and turn everything off. Out the door goes the almost toothless and good black street scene artist – he's a wonderful artist and a nice man, with warm, smiling eyes whose on the street almost everyday selling his paintings and drawings. Sometimes you have to just get completely quiet if you want to hear the voice of God speaking to you. There was no God in that Ashtanga Yoga book. The sun glares off a bus seen through an open window on my way back from the bathroom. Time floats along – hour after hour – minutes flow, come and go. In comes Aly, a sixteen year old punker with a new three quarter shaved head (her front one quarter has hair.) In the Quarter, there is hardly any place to play guitar and sing without being heard by somebody. That lawyer woman kept starting her sentences to me with, "I'll be straight with you." GOD ALMIGHTY! First I think about that no grace is ever wasted and that if I cannot completely purify myself and realize God in this lifetime than I can do it in the next. But then I think, do I really want to go through all this again? Or what about other worlds or realms like hell, or heaven or becoming an angel? I can't imagine a human being becoming an angel. I don't think it works like that. They say that even the angels envy human beings. She doesn't even know how much I love her, what it meant to me to be with her. Or maybe she does. Dear God – is it your wish that I am alone now? I know that everything happens for the best. Then why does loneliness feel like suffering? It must be you wish – and the result of my karma. Maybe or. I had a great time in Florida with Debbie, running into Davy Jones of The Monkeys. He was sitting near the pool in two leg casts. Must have crossed the wrong drug dealers. Big, beautiful, blond and voluptuous Debbie Sharp, who later married a factory foreman and settled down in Racine.

I AM FREE – FREE IN THE SPRING IN NEW ORLEANS!!!

Chapter Six Mundane Night

March 10, 1997

Sometimes I can't sleep but I drag myself up and go to work all day long anyway. I am irresistibly drawn to any woman wearing the orange robe color. Like a tight fitting orange T shirt with The Harvard Review logo the front and "Editorial Offspring" on the back. I was born on a Monday so I could get a full week's work in right away. NAW.

I actually had it pretty easy as a kid, unlike my mom that started working when she was twelve – my twin daughters' age right now. Mom began bottling beer by mouth and siphon in Milwaukee at that age.

They're playing Irish jig music in Kaldi's tonight and a friend reminds me of when I used to drink Guinness, Scotch whiskey and Bailey's Irish Crème. Two rounds of them and you're speaking Gaelic. Of course, I don't drink at all now.

6 PM. It's a delicate balance, I realized while riding the quaint trolley that runs between the Riverwalk shopping mall along the Mississippi to the French Quarter stop at Dumaine. It's a delicate balance, one I'm learning to deal with, this writing business. One, you are what you think – you are what you write. The world is as you see it. So, two, when you're writing, like I have been in this book, you let your mind have free rein and you lay down what comes up, which in one sense is good because I think that part of my function as a writer is to say, feel, express what everybody is feeling or thinking but they can't say or write it like I can.

But the karmic ramifications of such activity I think is akin to what a guru takes on when she gives *shaktipat* (the divine transmission of vital energy which ignites in the recipient the ability to progress in yoga.) So like a guru, if this comparison is valid, I will have to be able to burn off this karma I take on voluntarily for others when I express thoughts that we all have. In other words, if I write about my loneliness, or the pain of attachment, or lust or confusion (negative or non constructive, illusory tendencies), and others who feel as I do read these passages, they may actually be purged of them, if I do my job well; I can die for them metaphorically or maybe not so metaphorically if I can't burn off the karma and instead succumb to it myself.

The other extreme is never to have the thoughts at all by becoming a perfected yogi. Controlling the mind. Meditating. Chanting the name of God. And definitely not feeling these things I feel like loneliness, fear, anxiety, loss, lust, confusion, a self loathing and suicidal tendencies. My God!

I talked to a Canadian girl – a punk – kid without an ID to work in NOLA. Imagine, she WANTS to work! Canadian, what's that? Another nationality? Ridiculous – get her employment instead of her begging on the street and sleeping in a squatter's dwelling like they do down here. Abandoned, condemned houses abound in NOLA, unlike San Francisco.

Bones is set in her ways – can't seem to suggest any new thing to her without her telling me why she can't do it. I tell another friend about how I, at forty eight years old, have had a pretty good life, how I've been exposed to and in possession of some of the

finer things in life and therefore have “raised expectations,” which translates into sorrow because I have none of them now, basically. Imagine, if I had been rich, and had lost it all! Unless I was Buddha, born rich and renounced it all. Yes – who won the war? The one C, S, N & Y sang about in “Wooden Ships?” Walk down Broadway, NYC, and look up – you’ll see who won the Second World War. SONY. PANASONIC. TOSHIBA. All these things in my head. And it’s only Monday night.

Chapter Seven The Punks Flee

March 11, 1997

The musicians are warming up, tuning their instruments, the trumpet warbling, the big stand up bass hitting harmonics. Long ago, Sartre asked these questions in his book, “What is Literature?” Why write? What should one write about? And to whom should one write? These same questions haunt me tonight, or should I say plague me?

I got hammered today at work. Not drunk I mean but out performed by everybody – I sold practically nothing. And I can’t pay my rent next week. I’m going to have to try and pawn what little I possess tomorrow on my day off.

The jazz band starts up nice and bluesy, not too loud or offensive or too demanding to listen to comfortably while doing other things like writing. There are several really nice women in Kaldi’s tonight, fine young college students and some exotic looking dark curly haired woman in black bell bottom slacks and a tight fitting stripped top. I have nothing she wants.

I drum on the table with my pen and rings just like I used to do when I was in fifth grade to get attention. A man with no arms, just twisted misshapen Thalidomide hands reaching out at about chest level, walks by. Those damned pharmaceutical companies! Why should I be repulsed by him and attracted to that lady? I shouldn’t be attracted to one or repulsed by the other – that’s the point, that’s the lesson here. And I shouldn’t be depressed about work or rent or the lack of women in my life. I ought to be able to just sit here alone and write the Great American Novel while no one takes notice of me. Confucius said that. “The superior man is the man who knows he’s superior, though no one takes notice of him.” Or something like that in The Analects.

She takes her contacts out, the exotic babe across the room from me, at the opposite table. Glasses on now. I want to go over there and talk to her . . . but I won’t. I don’t seem to have any follow through with women anymore, like a bad golfer. My grip is okay, if I could get a grip on one of them, but my follow through sucks and so I end up alone in the rough looking for my balls. Ha ha! I can meet ‘em and get hugs, but I don’t pursue them at all. What does this mean? Am I jaded? She’s gone now, exotic black slacks bespectacled chickadee. The band ends their song. Armless Al is nowhere in sight. APPLAUSE. AUTHOR! AUTHOR!

I have the third Christ painting to do – 3 out of a planned series of 13 works of Jesus. Then maybe I can get a show of a café gig.⁸ I frame them. Think! Work – work incessantly but, I know, poor old miserable me, I know – DO NOT DESIRE THE FRUITS OF YOUR LABOR. This is hard when you're looking at the gutter like its home, thinking about ending up like Poe lying dead in the streets of Boston – and he was probably the most popular and successful American writer ever. Poe – what a prodigious output, yet he was a tortured prodigy. What happened? Did he write that way, about those things because he was like that, or did he become that about which he wrote?

That is the fear, part of the answer to Sartre's questions. What to write about – or what NOT write about. It's kind of like my refusing a movie role once because it required me to play a part I did not want to play, a part I did not want to associate my mind with, a John. You should always write about what you know. So even in the most divorced pieces of fiction, like some science fiction yarn set far in the future, you should still call upon your personal experience to fill in the details. Much like Phil Dick did. Very much like Phil Dick did.

So, why write? Because you could do no other; otherwise it's just a day job for dough. I think Samuel Johnson is credited with saying that nobody but a fool ever wrote anything except for money, which goes to show you what a moron he was.

I suppose the urge to write, the irresistible, overwhelming need to communicate, is what brought the entire universe into existence. I mean, aren't we like God? Wouldn't God be seized by the same compulsion and obsession that drives all true creative humans? What to write about? What you know, even if it's set in totally unfamiliar circumstances. And what did God know about, more specifically than atoms and molecules? Consciousness! To whom to write? To everyone and anyone, because we are all the same, no matter what apparent differences there may seem to exist between individuals. Even God's trees have consciousness!

Here in NOLA they drink coffee with chicory in it – and I add vanilla as well. Very good. I will keep meditating even though I may go mad. The madness comes in my visualization of middle aged suicide now. Therapy. The rape of me. Writing as therapy. Swing band swing. I've also been thinking about leaving all my possessions finally and getting it down to a backpack, a suitcase and a guitar. And maybe not even the guitar anymore. NAW!

I've got to get back to California in July to see my kids again. This I will do instead of seeing the guru.⁹ Is that okay God? The punks in Kaldi's couldn't take the jazz band – all gone now.

Turn of the century, 1997, French Quarter, New Orleans, Louisiana. What was it like here in 1897? Turn, turn, turn of the century soon. Will it be all over soon? So now I force myself to write, and as I write, I hope to find the answers to those existential questions. Why live? For whom to live? How to live? Should I die, give up my life for what I believe in? That a man shouldn't have to be a slave to wages to live, shouldn't have to worry all the time about what he will eat or what he will wear or where he shall live.

⁸ See www.thoughtcrimesink.com for the three paintings Tono did complete during this period. The other ten have yet to be accomplished. But with him, you can never tell.

⁹ Tono didn't return to Cali in July, the birthday month of his twin daughters, but returned two months later.

That we must work but that somehow God will take care of us if we live in God and through God. There are no paragraphs in this book¹⁰ because each chapter is really just one big thought, one big paragraph, one single idea hammered out in a hundred different ways. All made out of the same stuff, forcing myself to turn it on and let it flow, later to be challenged to shut it off. It's like the ocean is turbulent one minute and serene the next. Placid or agitated, it's the same water.

People are funny; that's a surety. A young couple – a small dude with horn rimmed glasses and a bowl cut hairdo looking befuddled with his girlfriend who's probably a stripper – the middle aged couple now across from me, a heavy set woman with a nondescript man blinking like a twitch in the night, the punk in me that can't stand any more jazz from that band either

Chapter Eight **The Sacred Rose: Lady Lorena**

March 12, 1997

Looked into Everybody's Café on Carondelet Street when the bus I was sitting in drove by it. All I saw inside as the fleeting bus passed, though, were black faces. Everybody's Café – which translates into "It's okay for black people to be in here." It's just Richard Prior's joke about justice: "Yeah, I found out about justice when I got thrown into jail. I looked around, and that's all I saw – just us."

A beautiful bartender on a bike. But how can she be a bartender? Is it just a role in the play of life, or does what she does rub off on her – if it right to sell liquor to people? To aid and abet drunkenness? Is it all right to be a marijuana peddler? Can we act without accruing the karma of our responsibilities?

I'm giving up being ambitious. I've given it up. I've renounced ego trips. No, it doesn't matter if I show my paintings. It doesn't matter if I'm not the best salesperson at my job or even if I'm the worst.

Money comes from home today, from mom and dad.¹¹ Oh dear, they have been supporting me since July and it's March now – almost a year. This can't keep up. I'm ashamed to go to my mailbox to receive the money -- but no one knows. I tell no one much – hard to show your weakness or fear to another. Got to be strong and uplifting, confident but humble, a kind example to others, in order to help them be strong and happy. Mom sends along with two crisp looking fifties a catalog of psychic goodies: under the category of KITS FOR YOUR EVERY NEED is "TURN EVIL BACK DOLL KIT."

Lady Lorena means business! The Seattle girl in red likes me enough to ask me what I'm doing so I say, "Writing my second book. I already polished one off in five

¹⁰ Tono added paragraph breaks later when he transcribed the journals in 2006-2007.

¹¹ Val and Jim Goudie. Val and Jim sent Tono money right along during this period and before. A year later, Jim Goudie died suddenly at age sixty six. Tono has been living with and taking care of his mother ever since.

months so I'm writing another one." She asks, "What's it about?" "About right here, New Orleans. It's called NOLA Myths and Legends." She smiles and moves off for coffee, not knowing she's just entered into the piece herself.

I will not compete. What I told her was not to impress her – they are just facts about the actor, about Tono. Yet what I write about has to make people into better people, doesn't it? Why would I want to write things that, when people read it, it would depress them or denigrate them instead of uplift and encourage and educate? So that's the answer to Sartre's queries.

Lady Lorena continues: "THE MAGICAL MARRIAGE KIT!" I think I'll buy this and send it to my ex-wife. Reminds me of an action hero comic book or a TV series: THE FABULOUS ADVENTURES OF THE X-WIVES! God knows I've had enough of them. X people. Like we used to be but now we're all X'd out. Or maybe my ex-wife purchased Lorena's "BREAK UP DOLL KIT" just before she walked out on me after six years of marital martial law.

A gothic vamp in a floor length black velvet dress strolls in holding the butt end of her drab garment in a fabric bunch. Severe, severe black and rouge eye makeup like an Egyptian whore/queen. Black velvet shawl on her head with a black sash. Ankh necklace along with a June bug encased in clear plastic in the form of a big thumb sized raindrop. Like an Egyptian scarab – perfect for her and when I ask her about the pendant she responds courteously which makes me realize that this incredibly beautiful and meticulously dressed fashion deva is a very nice person.

And guess what? She has a book in her hand which she lets me look at called "The Original Handbook for the Recently Deceased." By Claude Needham. Shades of Beetlejuice no doubt! And she's just like the girl in that movie: "*I am alone. I am utterly alone.*" But she's not, she's with a little punk gentleman and I don't blame him a bit.

The book is an American Bardo, like the Tibetan Book of the Dead, for Californians. I hand the vamp Lady Lorena's catalog. She asks me "Have you been to any of the Voodoo shops?" I tell her, "I know Miriam, a Mamba on North Ramparts. Ada sits down with me. I've never met her I wanted to almost since the first time I saw her. She's attracted to my guitar¹². I tell her I've got to pawn it. She asks me if I want to sell it. \$350 I say, I got into it \$350, bought it in Santa Cruz, CA about six years ago. I don't want to sell it but it was fine talking to Ada. What eyes, what a lovely body. She reminds me of Wendee – Honolulu Wendee the stripper with the pierced clit.

Turns out, I laugh loud and cover my mouth, Ada's from Santa Cruz!

So I ask Ada if we can be friends now. She says, "We'll see." She's thirty years old! I tell her the truth about my age and I'm letting my gray hair grow out – not dying it like I have been up 'till now. I have been masturbating too much – my cock hurts. Reaps havoc on your body – depletes it of *ojah*¹³. So you're less powerful. Reaps havoc

¹² A pristine 1968 Harmony Monterey double f-hole arch top acoustic guitar, stained tea red. Tono later sold it during the later stages of his writing of POP GOES THE WEASEL in San Francisco, much to his chagrin.

¹³ Ojah = Vitality; luster; splendor; energy; spiritual energy; the sexual fluid is converted into *ojas* in the course of yoga when continence is practiced (from the verb root vaj = "To be strong.")

on meditation too. Oh God, Ada's wearing an ankh too. I'm surrounded by female immortals.¹⁴

Ada tells me she leaves NOLA every summer and comes back in the fall. Good idea. Been thinking about doing that myself. Don't think I can handle the summer heat and humidity any more that I can handle the freezing cold winters in Wisconsin. My good friends in New Orleans are gone now. Numbers, Michelle, Martha. Got more movies from the NOLA library today to watch – shows you how empty my life is I suppose. Or at least how empty I let it seem when I forget God which is in me, with me all the time. I forget God but God does not forget me. I must keep meditating everyday.

Draven, Winter's boyfriend who's eighteen, sits with me awhile before Winter shows up at Kaldi's. He's looking for work as a bike courier, with no luck so far. Winter's getting pissed he's not working and they're living together. Draven says it's eating him up inside (interesting way of putting something, something which I would never say. Maybe that's why some people get eaten up by cancer – because they predict it in this manner in the speech.) because Winter feels like she's supporting him. Maybe they should break up he thinks. Winter is a topless waitress at Big Daddy's on Bourbon Street. Michelle who I've just mentioned above was a stripper there too, and she's the first girl I met at Kaldi's who followed me to the House of Blues to watch Cracker and make out. Then she took me home and let me make a certain oral kind of love to her, which she did not reciprocate. It often amazes me how some women can allow men to please them without feeling the need for reciprocity.

Anyway, I tell Draven to forget about breaking up with Winter and just find that job. Slow down, Tono. Lady Lorena's Psychic Catalog. Mail order voodoo for the Bible Belt. Draven could be my son – and in some ways he seems like that to me. Just a kid but one that's going around now pretty well in America. Lake Charles, Lafayette, Austin. He wears a CRASH WORSHIP t-shirt. Heard about them, an NYC band, from a beauty in California. Thanks mom. Keep'em coming'.

Chapter Nine The Gypsy in Me

March 13, 1997

The trip you make when you are moving – cold (no job or place to live) – to a new major city is, in my experience, a memorable one and enjoyable in its anticipatory and hopeful aspects, but one not without traumatic aspects to it as well. Trauma of this nature is exciting too and challenging, with the possibility of growth and renewal and creative inspiration but, of course, it's also risky and fraught with the fear of the unknown and the possibility of failure and detachment and loss, especially if you're on a limited budget or downright poor.

Birth is painful and exhilarating at the same time. I have been born and reborn in five major American cities so far: Racine, Wisconsin, Phoenix, Arizona, San Francisco,

¹⁴ The ankh is actually fashioned after the appearance of a sandal toe strap. Often seen in the hands of the Egyptian Gods, it symbolizes their power of going. Hence, the reference to immortality; they keep on going forever.

New York City and now New Orleans.¹⁵ This pretty much covers the length and breadth of the continental United States. I am a gypsy. I'm told my great grandmother on my mother's side was the leader of a gypsy caravan in Hungary. You know, like the old gypsy woman who tells Larry Talbot, whose been bitten by a werewolf in the classic movie, *The Wolfman*, "Even he who is pure at heart, and says his prayers by night, may become a wolf when the wolf bane blooms, and the moon is full and bright." Gypsy – from the word "Egyptian." That's me.

My uncle is funny and typical of a gypsy spirit. He lived in the same house for thirteen years or something like that and never fixed it up too much because he was always going to move yet never did.

Tonight, it's later than usual for me at Kaldi's – 10:12 PM. Just after work. Work is just work. Why attach more importance to something than it really has? Work is work, and for good reasons. I will not compete, but I will be competent in my work to the best of my ability. Reliable, dependable, responsible, not proud or arrogant or envious. I will not pay attention to other people's business when my own business needs my full attention. I will not base my self esteem on how I beat my co workers in sales and I will not complain when I am the last or when things happen in a way that I think is unjust. There are no unjust ways when all ways are God's way.

What's the reason why life humbles us, sooner or later? Why are we tested in numerous ways? Would you buy an expensive car without first testing driving it, putting it through its paces? Then why should God buy us without similar evaluation? As swami Vivekananda mentioned as well, "Without suffering, who would turn to God?" So we should welcome it, not complain about it. Look at Job!

I wrote my first book while working full time at a retail gig in New Orleans. By God's grace alone – I had very little to do with it. It was an inspired time in my life, a time when I was carried on the wave of purpose and reason which benefited from all the positive motivation I could muster and, with my guru's aid, by Christ's blessing, I did fulfill my promise to write this book. Thank you, Swami Muktananda. Thank you, sweet Jesus. But I don't want the credit. Not me. I do want the work, but not the credit, not the fruit. Because the work is the fruit.

Perhaps I traveled and lived around the country so much because no one can be a prophet in his own town, as Jesus pointed out. Not that I'm a prophet, mind you, but I am an artist. Painting, music, literature, acting. That's akin to being a prophet – I think I'm safe in saying that. I'm reading Thomas Merton again. Some of his last writings. An old guy in Kaldi's told me months ago that Brother Merton, a Catholic monk and a prolific, articulate mystic author, died of electrocution in a hotel room in Cairo. Tripped on the AC cord of a portable heater and it fell into the bathtub with him in it or something. I could have easily done that this winter in my little cell at the Hummingbird Hotel. I was using this great broiler oven under the sink, with the top off and the red hot cooking filaments exposed, as a heater. Wow! Learn Tono. Strange, too, because I understand that Cairo and New Orleans are on exactly the same latitude on the globe. And the symbol on the side of cop cars in NOLA is a crescent moon and a star. And it got hella cold down here, too, much more so than I would have ever expected.

¹⁵ And in 2000, Tono moved to Las Vegas, where he edited and annotated *NOLA Myths and Legends*.

I think the upside of working retail sales now in New Orleans is a heightened appreciation for people on my part and a heightened sense of gregariousness; but I am a very private person, too.

There is something uncomfortable abroad in Kaldi's tonight. The French Quarter is a transient place I think. Most of the people here are just passing through on their way else – many of them out of the country I suspect. One's last stop before expatriation.

My hands feel numb and my mind doesn't want to flit about tonight, tackling a thousand and one different trains of thought. I talked of San Francisco with my boss tonight. The Claremont Hotel in the hills of Berkeley. Union Square. Grant and Green. Johnny Nitro, a local musician acquaintance of mine who was at his best when playing at the Saloon on Fremont alley. Chinatown. Sausalito and Marin County. Stinson Beach and the Pacific Ocean. North Beach and the best brioche in the world made by Victoria Pastries.

And I thought today about my daughters – the twins are becoming young women and I should be there for them. Every time I see a girl who is about the same age as my kids I think about them. Amazing, me, a father of three, as in love as a father could be, and also a tax fugitive from California. Yup – a rambling man that's for sure, for the last nine months now.

A girl comes and puts little Audrey on my lap and I play with her for awhile. She's a pre language baby between one and two. Cute. Smart. Already holding my pen in a proper writing position and writing in my notebook. I had three of these, loved and raised them until I had to leave California because my job sucked, no money and bills were bad, and taxes were worse. And the government was swooping down on me so my salary could buy bombs and fund secret CIA drug smuggling operations.

What will I do? Starting to find it hard to imagine I'll be in NOLA through the summer. Got to see my kids again. Got to get more mobile. Got to rid myself of possessions. Can I. YES.

Chapter Ten Dreams of Ghosts

March 15, 1997

Accordions and electric guitar dominate the ambiance of Kaldi's Saturday afternoon. Plenty of clouded over sunlight left around 5:45 PM now. The place is packed with tourists. I am Parisian – or maybe Italian or quite possibly Brazilian. David sits down and we discuss the five step selling process. He's got a new job at the Maison Muertot Art Gallery on Royal Street. He shows me photos of his sculptures – I tell him they're great and comment somewhat deeply about the feelings and emotional responses his work evolves in me. They act symbolically – they speak to me about the civilization that produces such work, about what the civilization has done to the artist to make him want or need to express himself in such a manner. One of his pieces was a dinner table complete with eight full settings of plates and bowls and eating utensils. However, the entire table and implements was covered with shards of broken glass, and there's barbed wire everywhere and other deadly and

harmful paraphernalia littered about the table. It's a horrific sculpture expressing the depth of his pain at having a family that sat down at such a table and destroyed one another. But the table of David's youth had none of the implements of destruction and pain he adhered to his sculpture. At that table, the damage came from words I suspect, mostly; the hurtful words of his parents and siblings.

Autumn Leaves played on the accordion and the guitar – a sweet serenade. People were in a buying mood today. I sold a lot of products – high ticket stuff. God. I can't pay my rent. I tell David how much I miss female companionship and he moves off. David wouldn't take Muktananda's *Play of Consciousness* from me when I offered it to him. Ruth took but didn't read Muktananda Parahamsa Swami's *Meditate*. I met Kathy in Kaldi's,¹⁶ too, like everybody else – Darla from Dallas, Brooke who worked at Kaldi's part time, Donna, a Christian girl from New Zealand who was Brooke's roommate. Kathy was the first Lesbian that I have fallen in love with. Beautiful blonde hair, tanned skin and deep brown eyes – part Cherokee I suspect. A singer. In a relationship with an older woman (Kathy's twenty six and her lover is forty.)

The challenge in writing is to make the piece you're working on say something beyond the mere words on the page, something between the lines. What's the purpose of the narrative – what's the benefit to the reader of this stuff you're writing? If it's just a slice of life thing – a naturalistic theater thing – okay, but what's the point? There's plenty of that on television soap operas and situation comedies. What an artist does is to extract the meaning from these apparently random, meaningless actions and words we see and hear everyday; he makes sense of the often seemingly senseless events, if he's good. It's not only that this is how so and so talked and acted in the late 90's in New Orleans. I want to say more than what is simply on the page – I want to make you think more deeply about why you say and do the things you do, and I want you to think more intensely about the actions and words of others, because it's important to your well being. And I want you to think about spiritual things and not just evoke fear and pity in you, Greek *catharsis*. If I can gather my powers of concentration sufficiently, then my energy and what I'm saying to the reader passes more directly into them, and can uplift and educate her.

Ghosts and prophetic dreams came up in conversation today with a lovely Texan girl, an airline stewardess, at the store.¹⁷ She told me that she often has prophetic dreams and actually dreaded them because they frightened her – but she also understood that the future seen in such prophecy isn't set in stone but can be altered by us. I wanted to question her much more extensively concerning her experiences but she couldn't or wouldn't meet me in Kaldi's later for coffee. Too bad.

Ghosts came up as well. But first, let me narrate for you my only prophetic dream experience. Scenes in the play that is one's life.

The dream occurred, if it's proper to even talk of a dream as actually occurring, a couple of weeks before my planned second trip to Jamaica. I had "honeymooned" for about ten days in Negril, Jamaica at the beginning of marriage number one – that's a whole other story! In the dream, I was back in Negril walking down a dirt path, with seven miles of white sand beaches to my right and the jungle brush to my left.

¹⁶ Kaldi's, a coffee shop on Decatur Street near the famous Café Du Monde, had been a bank originally and revealed its former incarnation by its the bold, solid, two story, high ceiling architecture.

¹⁷ Tono worked as a salesman at The Sharper Image at The Riverwalk on the Mississippi in 1996-97.

Up on stilts, to my left in the jungle arose a white house whose first floor had been converted into a bar. Ahead of me in the middle of the path was a young black man, weaving about with a beer can in hand, obviously drunk. As I approached, I recognized him as one of the two teenage scammers I had met on my previous visit.

His name was Leroy and his accomplices was named Edgar. Of course, they each had another name; Leroy was also Buck, and Edgar was, I forget, maybe he was Sam or something. They were the kind of guys powdered Alka Selzer and tell you it was cocaine, or catnip and tell you it was ganga.

So, in my dream, there was Leroy, or Buck, standing in the middle of the road and saying to me, "Hey, man, how ya doin'?" Come on into the bar, and I'll buy you a beer!"

Motioning me up the stairs, I decided to take him up on his offer and ascended the stairs. In the bar, I buy Leroy and myself a beer. Leroy suggests that we go out onto the open back porch which looks out onto and above the jungle, where we are alone together. As I'm looking out into the brush, from behind, Leroy stabs me in the kidneys with a knife and I die.

Needless to say, I awoke in a shock and a cold sweat. I had never died – and certainly never been killed – in a dream before. It shook me up so much that I almost canceled my then scheduled and ticketed trip to Jamaica altogether. But I did not cancel it but flew into my fate, so to speak, instead.

Armed as I was with this prophetic information, I did not go to Negril immediately upon my arrival in Jamaica but instead stayed in Montego Bay for a couple of days, frequenting my favorite discothèque where the bartender called me, "Ah, the Meyers man," because of my penchant for that sweet dark Jamaican rum – or, a Planter's Punch, as they refer to it on the island.

During this two day stopover, and at the upstairs disco, I met this pretty young Jamaican girl from the inland Blue Mountains, and during the hours we spent together after sex, she told me about the duppies, or ghosts, and how, yes, she believed in them and feared them. There was an article in The Daily Gleaner, their newspaper, relating to duppies, which I reproduce here:

Measures to Deter Duppies

Andrea Hopwood, Contributor

WAYS TO PREVENT A DUPPY FROM MOLESTING YOU:

- * If you point at a grave you have to bite your 10 fingers or they will rot.
- * Coming home late at night? Turn around three times at the gate so that the duppy will not follow you in.
- * Duppies do not like light, so leave a light in the bedroom of the 'dead yard'.
- * Duppies cannot count, so you leave 10 coffee beans at the entrance of the room.
- * Duppies do not like salt or water, so leave a bowl of water at the entrance and food cooked with salt.
- * White rum is sprayed by mouth into grave and sometimes used to wash the gravedigger's face.
- * Paint your house a different colour.

WAYS TO PREVENT THE DUPPY FROM LEAVING THE BODY OF THE DECEASED:

- * A bowl of salt is placed on the stomach of the deceased.
- * Sprinkle coffee in the grave.
- * Perfume is put on the body so as to be identified if the duppy returns.
- * Money is put in the coffin, and the duppy is instructed to bring back change.

HOW TO PREVENT THE DUPPY OF AN EVIL PERSON FROM ESCAPING:

- * The body will be turned upside down in the coffin.
- * The body will be buried north/south to prevent the face seeing the sunrise.
- * Put pins in the feet of the body so it cannot walk.
- * Pin the shirt cuffs and pants legs into the coffin.

WAYS A WOMAN CAN PROTECT HERSELF AGAINST HER COMPANION'S DUPPY 'MINGLING' WITH HER:

- * A woman would cut a small amount of pubic hair and place in her companion's hand or pocket.
- * Furniture in the bedroom is rearranged. Changing the position of the bed and turning over the mattress.
- * Putting an inch (tape) measure on his side of the bed. Tying the inch measure around her waist or hanging it on the door or dresser mirror as a means of protection.
- * Placing his belt on his side of the bed. Placing a torn white handkerchief in his hand and repeating the words "This is your pay; you are not to come back."
She can wear either black or red bloomers with elastic in the legs.

WAYS TO PROTECT CHILDREN FROM A DUPPY:

- * Never let baby clothes stay on an outside line overnight because duppy will play with the baby.
- * When a parent of a young child dies, pass the child over the coffin or the person's duppy will follow the child.
- * Tie a red bow in the hair of the child or wear a red chemise to keep away the duppy.

On the third day of my second trip to Jamaica, I went to Negril by bus and, after I was deposited at the Negril stop, I found myself walking towards town on the same dirt road I had seen in my dream, with seven miles of white sand beaches on my right and the jungle on my left. Then I saw the converted house up on stilts in the jungle and Leroy staggering in the middle of the road in front of the house and beckoned me to have a drink with him.

Without looking up or acknowledging him in any way, I walked a wide berth around him to the right and moved down the road until Leroy and my death were way out of sight. Every single detail of the dream had played itself out on that third day I was in

Jamaica, except that I had been able to change the future so to speak by actions contrary to the one's I had performed in my dream.

The future is not set in stone, but it is out there to be divined and changed if we so choose (or if we have it within our power to choose.) We have, I discovered, not only the power within ourselves to change the future but we also have the power to *see* the future in prophetic visions (and perhaps psychic trances, etc.)

Of course, all power is God's power, comes from God – and this vision, this insight or wisdom or enlightenment I received from God proved abundantly to me that there is a God, that there are other dimensions and realities which exist just as absolutely as the reality we claim exists due to the information we receive from the five senses. An interesting observation I made during this experience which illustrates the point is that every detail of the dream seemed real to me while I was dreaming them, and I can remember every single detail of the dream twenty five years later, while it was actually happening, every this about the experience seemed dreamlike and in slow, unreal motion. I just kind of floated through it, down that dirt road past the now not a murderer Leroy and that bar in the jungle.

Chapter Eleven **Post St. Patrick's Day Blues**

March 18, 1997

I guess there is some correspondence, I don't know. It's the day after St. Patrick's Day, Tuesday, and nothing seems very good. Although I have so much to be thankful for, to thank God for, still I've not been feeling good physically and money has been so terribly tight these past two weeks.

I also have started smoking pot again, since a week before my birthday in February, and I've now pawned my grandfather's gold pocket watch that he left to me and my guitar.

Meditation has been erratic, though still practiced almost daily. I cannot leave my body alone, so celibacy isn't possible, and this bugs me seriously. The body! How blessed we are to have one, and yet, how vexed at the same time. With ejaculation comes the dissipation of prana, so instead of the joy and peace I should be basking in, I find loneliness and meaninglessness after a moment of physical pleasure.

Patsy Cline goes off the stereo. I could use some old Talking Heads music – More Songs About Buildings and Food. That album was just old when I first moved to San Francisco in the late 1970's. God – the late '70's! Now it's the late 90's. twenty years gone up in smoke, just like the wind blowing through the leaves of the Tree of Life. And what's left?

Reading the Wisdom of Solomon (Anchor Bible Edition) and Gnosis, by MacGregor. The first chapter of Wisdom is so Siddha Yoga-ish it isn't funny, and it isn't coincidental either. Truth is truth, and after several decades of being a student of comparative religions, I've discovered that when you find the same sentiment expressed again and again in different texts, that is the best evidence of the truth of the sentiment you can find.

But does Truth really set you free? Of course it does, but you have to be able to recognize it, contain it, apprehend it – an interesting verb in this context. Because how many of hear the truth but don't follow it anyway? One has to be strong to apprehend the truth – and you can't be strong if you're dissipating your energy by too much or too little work, too much expenditure of sexual fluid, or drinking too much alcohol or smoking too much weed, etc.

I pick up a left over edition of The New York Times and look over the front page. I never read the newspaper – haven't for twenty years now. Nor do I watch TV. I only watch movies, and then only ones I can rent from the library. TV, newspapers, magazines, most if not all mass media trafficks solely in chaos, and the journalists are chaos merchants. There IS no good news in the media, and the more educated you are, the more well read you are, the more apt you are to be propagandized. Jacques Ellul, the famed French writer, turned me on to that one. I put down The New York Times – it just makes me paranoid. Stories about unemployment in NYC.

I love the library here. A young black librarian named Alicia gave me as a birthday present a laminated card with Jesus carrying his cross, just like the painting I did of Him down here in NOLA. Wendell the painter called Jackson Square *The Court of Public Opinion*. – that's where all the NOLA street painters display and hopefully sell their artwork and where street musician's perform as well.

Suzanne, the artist friend of mine from North Carolina whom I met through Martha, and Wendell join me for coffee. Film, Art and Religion are discussed. Did Buddha believe in God? Wendell said there is no deity in Buddha's teaching. People from different places love selling their artwork in Jackson Square in the French Quarter. Wendell likes the social aspects of painting in the Square. He does exceptional street scenes. His palette is unique – his color schemes and perspectives. Suzanne's work is unique as well, and completely different than Wendell's. The glory of diversity! Suzanne's work is surreal, semi realistic, kind of naïve surrealism.^{18[1]} Neither of them want to be in a gallery in NOLA.

Two days ago, while I was walking down Royal Street, with a painting of Jesus under my arm, a guy ran across the street from an art gallery, asked me if the painting was my work, then asked me to stop by the gallery and show some of my stuff to him and his partner. But as of yet I haven't and doubt that I will. Suzanne said that when she came to New Orleans she had this fantasy Voodoo world idea of what it would be like but it turned out completely different.

Billy stops by and talks to Kevin – who describes himself as a busboy – yet Kevin knows Spanish fluently, is a handsome Turkish-American boy that looks like your classic Jesus painting, and has a wonderful knack of jewelry making. Billy looks like Jerry Garcia and has three grown children, all very nice people, two of which worked at Kaldi's café. Billy's a devout Christian; proud, vehement and verbal about it.

Billy sits and converses with Kevin. Kevin swears too much. We talk about California. I reiterate a sentiment I read in a book long forgotten now that when someone moves to California from somewhere else, and they cross over the Sierra Nevada Mountains to get there, they go mad – and are assigned a cult to follow

^{18[1]} Suzanne did a portrait of Tono in magic marker that he later colored with watercolors and used by as the bio picture in one of his novels.

We talk of the artist as mythologist – a mythologer. The artist as teacher. Myth has to be re invented in every age, like most truth. What good is the creation myth in the bible if it doesn't tell us something about how to live our lives today?

They play Patsy Cline again on the stereo in Kaldi's! Fifty year old music, and neither Suzanne nor I would have wanted to be her. A guy stops at my table and says something about my painting, "Excuse me, isn't that supposed to mean something? I've seen a lot of people with tattoos like that." I tell him, "Yeah, it's the sacred heart of Jesus . . .," referring to the third in my series of paints of or about Jesus. I continue, ". . . a heart with a crown of thorns around it, flames coming out the top of the heart with a cross above the flames and a slit in the left side of the heart dripping blood. I painted it inside a white oval surrounded in black – a cosmic egg floating in the barrenness of outer space. Everybody seems to like it, some more than others. Some days nothing; some days an explosion of creation, manifested in the individuals around me in the good ole post summer heat of New Orleans.

Chapter Twelve **Ghosts and the Disappearing Guru**

March 19, 1997

A couple of years ago, I went to attend an all day session with a Tibetan lama in Berkeley, California at The Buddhist Center downtown. He didn't speak a word of English. I had been turned onto him by a Tibetan friend of mine who had sold me a wonderful brass singing bowl and came to my house to perform a ritual with it using special Nepalese incense that I can purchase down here in NOLA too.

This friend of mine showed up at my door early one morning on Saturday and woke me up just in time for me to throw on some clothes and race down to the center for the beginning of the session. I plunked down twenty five bucks, unheard of today, and sat awaiting him. I felt extremely and unusually uncomfortable, I was unshaven and disheveled, and as the Rinpoche began his lecture, I couldn't sit in the easy yoga posture on the floor without discomfort.

At one point in the session, he led us in meditation, insisting that we keep our eyes open, saying the meditation with one's eyes closed in no meditation at all. Now, this is absolutely contrary to the way I was taught to meditate by my guru, Gurumayi; we meditate in darkened rooms with our eyes closed.

Of course, after paying twenty five dollars to be there, I acquiesced to meditate the way the Tibetan teacher demanded, and began to do so in the fully lit room surrounded by scores of other participants, with my eyes wide open and staring directly at the guru. He was this cute little monkey-gorilla type of a man in a yellow robe and a furry yellow hat; he stroked affectionately the faces and heads of his young American aides, and languished on the podium on the stage resting his head in his hand and his elbow on the podium seemingly absentmindedly while we meditated before him.

The guru had an excellent American translator; he did a marvelous job – I believe – but since I don't speak a word of Tibetan, I can't know for sure. Anyway, this was how the guru was able to communicate to us, through the translator.

There were two Buddhist type broad banners hanging on the wall behind the teacher, one to his right and one equally spaced to his left, each with a large circle on it. As a meditated, staring directly at the guru sitting behind the podium on the small stage, something very strange happened. My eyes started to cross rather involuntarily – then all at once the two circles on the banners directly behind the podium became one – and the guru vanished!

It freaked me out at first; I thought my crossed eyes were playing an optical illusion type trick on me, so I purposely uncrossed them, shaking my head like a dog shaking water off his fur, then staring at the podium again. My eyes crossed again quite without my consent, and once again, he was gone!

I have subsequently attempted to make someone else disappear in the same manner, by staring at them like I had stared at the guru and crossing my eyes, but it has never worked. My conclusion concerning this is that this was precisely why the Tibetan lama wanted us to keep our eyes open while we meditated, that this was the lesson he wanted to teach us – to those who had eyes to see, that is. And what did I see? I saw his ability to vibrate at a different rate than gross beings do and thus become invisible to us.

I believe there are several realms, worlds, or dimensions, if you will, each of which are occupied by beings that vibrate at different rates. The occupants on each vibratory level interact with one another readily, since they are vibrating at the same rate, but they normally do not see or interact with beings vibrating on other levels. In this sense, they are occupying different realms in the same "space." Thus, all these beings pass through one another as they move about mostly without ever knowing it.

Occasionally, however, interaction between two different realms or planes does occur, when, for example, a perfected master enters another state of vibration as this Tibetan lama had done, or like when an angel sent by God appears to someone, or a ghost manifests himself on our earthly plane. What's the difference between Heaven, Hell and Earth, or between angels, ghosts and demons except the realms that they represent and inhabit, the different vibratory levels that determines their manifestations? And once you have proof of the existence of one other level than your own, how can you deny the possibility of an endless number of levels?

Suzanne the painter told me recently of an experience she had in a Royal Street apartment she had lived in years before. It was around midnight. She had just gone to bed but decided to get up and go to the bathroom before she fell asleep. As she walked into the darkened kitchen on her way to the can, she ran smack dab into a ghost. It was a man dressed in a Civil War uniform, including the distinctive hat of an infantryman. He had a beard. When they saw each other they both froze. She could see right through the white apparition, and the image of the man stopped at his knees.

The apartment building she had been living in at the time was over two hundred years old, so it was definitely around during the 1860's and was probably once inhabited by the man before he became a ghost, killed most certainly in the war. When Suzanne saw the spirit, the hair on the back of her head stood on end – a sure physical sign that one has actually experienced something. You can't get that kind of physical reaction in any other way.

I also experienced the presence of a ghostly element in an apartment near Suzanne's on Royal Street when I went there to check it out as a possible rental. I walked into a wood paneled room and immediately felt its oppressive, claustrophobic attributes, unusual since one wall had two large high French door on it and ceiling high windows. I didn't realize it at the time, why I had felt this claustrophobia; later, discussing the phenomenon with my friend Numbers, he mentioned maybe there's a ghost – because I told him that the apartment had been vacant for a few months and that someone had just moved in and right back out again in one month recently. So I had sensed the vibrations but had not *seen* anything.

Chapter Thirteen The Big Easy?

March 21, 1997

I'm not quite sure about the origin of the appellation "The Big Easy", one of the many alternative ways of referring to New Orleans -- NOLA, The Crescent City, Nawlins' – but I am pretty sure about this: there is nothing easy about making enough money to live here, especially if one is interested in pursuing a career in the arts.

Of course, NOLA has an extremely artistic atmosphere, one that makes California seem like the Disneyland that it is – all façade and make believe. Music and musicians abound down here – I have played with many talented street musicians recently. Painters of great talent permeate the place – two of which have done my portrait. And photographers. And, of course, there are many practitioners of the occult arts here as well – tarot card readers, magicians, astrologers, voodooists – and they are evidently proficient. Also, many people write – but I have not personally interacted with any authors who have produced books since I began my first book and now this second piece. Still, the literary tradition of New Orleans ala Ann Rice predominately prevails.

I finally met Jocko and his wife Valentine who are from Bulgaria today through my good friend Numbers. We are the same age – Jocko and I – and he observed, while photographing me, that I obviously had the "look" and the bearing or aura of the "artist." So be it. As Jocko was shooting me, I remembered a quizzical expression James Joyce had struck in one of his famed early photographs. A journalist asked Joyce later what he was thinking of when the photograph was taken, and he answered, "I was wondering if the photographer would lend me a quid."

Indeed. Which brings me back to the topic of this chapter – how not easy The Big Easy is, moneywise. I am now being exploited by a huge corporation, getting paid \$5.50 an hour, while the owner makes millions.

The sun sets on an absolutely glorious Spring day – sunny, dry, clean air after a day of rain yesterday. I am going to starve now. I do not have enough money to live on and pay my horribly high rent. I cannot buy a thing – even essentials like laundry and shaving supplies – and I cannot continue working at this job I have. God has such interesting lessons to teach us if we will just submit to God's will.

There is no use in railing against one's fate or karma. Go with the changes, they happen for a reason. Bend with the wind or you will break. What will this poverty force me to do? How will it change me? What will I learn? How will I grow? I am beginning to understand, dear Lord.

Who says that we do not have free will? Who says that even in poverty and oppression we are powerless and helpless? I don't believe it! God has decided to test me and all belief, all faith, which, after all, must be based upon knowledge and not blind acceptance of someone else's philosophy, must be tested and tempered, to be real.

So . . . it is true that my writing will be furthered by this struggle – with my guitar in the pawn shop and no money to buy canvasses to paint on or paints to paint with, for example – this creative enterprise will now be my only possible outlet for my expressive tendencies. And, of course, meditation.

Meditate when you can't eat. Meditate when it is necessary to detach yourself from your needful body and troubled mind. It's nobody else's fault; no one is responsible for my karma but *me*. God gave me the free will to get myself into the karmic swirl I'm in and God gave me the free will to change my karma as well. All one can do is to effect the present which thereby effects the future – the past is gone; the karmic result of the past is one's present condition.

One more cigarette, one more cup of coffee. I will simplify, as Thoreau said with great truth, as Jesus advised.

Two "magicians" sit next to me at another table in Kaldi's. One speaks profanely – fuckin' this and fuckin' that. They do not realize the negativity of those vibrations. And they gossip. But what of the logs in their own eyes? Why is one magician's black dog so handsome and well groomed while the magi himself is disheveled and ill kempt? Jocko and his wife were very exquisite and genteel but not haughty or assuming. Jocko and I hugged as we parted, though we had just met. Amazing.

Chapter Fourteen **Accident on St. Charles Street**

March 22, 1997

Another Saturday night and I ain't got nobody. I saw Judith, my last lover, on St. Charles Street last night with her new boyfriend Richard. Richard's forty three and tattooed all over both forearms. Judith wore a black knit top, black hot pants with black tennis shoes and white socks. Her short, boy length hair was now dyed blonde. When she first sees me, she tells me she quit drinking. She tells me this because we basically stopped seeing one another because she was always coming over to my room at the Hummingbird inebriated – and I don't drink.

Of course, when she tells me she's quit drinking there's a beer can in her hand which she explains by, "Well, but tonight we had dinner and celebrated – a bottle of wine, etc." So Richard, Judith and I go down the street together and into the Rosdale hotel bar down the street from the Hummingbird (where I have been being fleeced with

weekly rent of \$135 for a room the size of a closet. For the past five months.) They buy more beer and me a 7-up.

We talk a bit; I talk to Richard more than I do to Judith, because she, as usual, is distracted and running off to phone people while I'm there. She was always that way around me; in fact, she explained her drinking was caused by a nervous condition, or that she drank because of her nervous condition. Still, the alcohol didn't seem to help much.

Richard works on an oil rig in the Gulf of Mexico as a cook. He works "four and seven" -- four weeks of seven days a week -- then he has two weeks off straight. Wow. I tell him how much I'd like to go out on the rig with him and chronicle that kind of life. He tells me I'd have to -- that I could never imagine it without doing it. I'm hip.

Winter pays me back the five bucks I lent her months ago tonight at Kaldi's while I write this. She's back at work now as a topless waitress at Big Daddy's on Bourbon Street. David the sculptor tells me in the bathroom it's a full moon. Now I learn it'll be a lunar eclipse too beginning at 9 PM. Draven, now Winter's ex boyfriend, sits down with me and starts elucidating his recently discovered virtues of dropping acid.

He tells me he tripped for the first time yesterday and 1) He could tell what everybody was really like, and they weren't too pretty, and 2) I forget. Anyway, having been where Draven is now decades ago, I tell him not to put too much faith in artificial means of expanding his consciousness because there are side effects and it's not controllable-reproducible but meditation is and it's 100% organic too with no negative side effects.

Judith and I met the night before New Year's Eve and broke up the night before Ground Hog's Day with it her birthday so I it wasn't exactly a long term relationship. It was an extremely foggy night in December, around ten thirty, and I as foolishly riding home on my bike with a pizza in one hand and wiping the moisture of the condensed fog off my spectacles with the other hand. I was riding between the street car tracks on St. Charles Street thinking to myself that on a night like this some drunken nut might easily run me down without ever seeing me when all of a sudden I eat it in the middle of the street.

I thought I broke my knee and definitely wounded my butt and my pride but the pizza, amazingly, survived unscathed. Shows you where I priorities were on that night. A girl came out of the fog as I sat dazed on the curb and asked me if I was all right and that is how I met Judith. Then a couple of weeks later she's living at the Hummingbird and we have a date which consists of meeting her at the bar down the street, the same one I'm in with her and Richard later, and then going to my room and doing it. Then she keeps showing up at the door of my room night after night and we keep doing it again and again but she's always drunk kind of and I can't really talk to her although I like the sex pretty much but she does not bathe too often either and comes over after working as a stripper at Baby Doll's on Iberville.

So I say, "hey, you drink all the time and I want to expand our relationship beyond this room and bed so meet me sober at Kaldi's in the quarter at 2 PM on Friday," to which she says she "Will do," but of course she doesn't show. So that was the end of our relationship. And I've been alone ever since. Now it's the sixth full moon I've been in NOLA -- I arrived on the full moon in October.

The UK Subs are playing the Angel on April 13th, a twentieth anniversary show; boy, would I like to go. Sun burnt punk child Aly, sixteen years old, bums a smoke from me. They're hard to come by now – I'm stricken with poverty. Sun's going down, moon is coming up. Aly's got a cute little German Shepherd puppy – why do all these street punks keep dogs when they can't even keep themselves?

Judith tells me to visit her at Baby Dolls and tonight, what the hell, it's Palm Sunday and I can't go to church at St. Louis Cathedral because its packed with "Christian" tourists like it is only on pre Easter and pre Christmas. I might just go to the strip club instead.

Chapter Fifteen **The Day After the Full Moon Eclipse**

March 23, 1997

“O f all sad works of tongue and pen, these are the saddest: It might have been.”

I heard that phrase in an old movie I was watching last night so I thought I'd stick it in here as a point of departure. Of course, we all know that regret, remorse and remembering sucks, right? Just like anxiety and fear, even hopes and dreams. Because what concerns, what thoughts like these do is to distract us from concentrating on the here and now, the present, the only "time" there really is.

Does the past exist? Only in our memories. Does the future exist? Only in our dreams or not yet at all. And it is not fixed. Not unalterable.

Like Angel. The last time I saw Angel she was walking across Valencia Street on 16th in the Mission District of San Francisco, her face was eaten up by drug abuse, and she was dressed like a hooker. And Angel was a beautiful girl once. I was with my twins, Ciara and Teresa, and they knew her too. Even they, at twelve years old, could tell how bad off Angel was.

Then, all of a sudden, last night, I meet her on Royal Street in NOLA where she's from, I discover, and she's all plump and sassy and clean she tells me. And I kind of believe her. But she does look a lot better, living down at the Rebel Arms a block down Decatur from Kaldi's. So you never know. People can change. I think a bigger problem is that often other people don't want to let them change, or hold grudges against them, as they were before they changed.

Here's an interesting moral question: Yesterday, I was planning on buying \$10 of marijuana although I know I should stay away from the stuff – it depresses me, makes me sad I have discovered, and except for a couple of weeks during my birthday, I've not smoked it since the summer.

Anyway, I didn't have ten dollars, only nine, so I put it aside and cashed my last \$100 bill to make ten but then I lost the nine! I felt like this was God's way of punishing me so I accepted it and didn't buy the weed. Then, a little while later, I went to Walgreen's to buy shaving cream, razor blades and orange juice. I gave this very

distracted cashier seven dollars, she gave me forty five cents in change, then told me she owed me seven dollars more. I knew she had made a mistake but didn't say anything.

Now, I believe it is wrong to steal even the most insignificant thing. But I also felt that since I am so poor now, this was God's way of forgiving me and giving me back the nine dollars I had lost earlier that day. Did I do wrong to shut up and take the money? Well, anyway, that is what one gets when they start messing around with bad things in the first place so Tono, learn the lesson.

David sits with me and rearranges his slide portfolio. Korin, my new landlady, comes in and sits with a baby on her knee. I'm moving into her \$200 a month apartment on Friday. Suzanne rolls in dressed in maroon, right up to the red hat on her head; she's even got maroon shoes on, speckled with paint as all good painters' shoes should be. This is Suzanne's Rose Period. Then I meet Suzanne's boyfriend Eric who sits with us and Joy who I don't know anything about except she mentions, I think, that she has a little child and she's a pretty brown haired Jewish girl in bell bottoms.

Soon, my little table is surrounded when at first it was empty and I can't take it so I depart. It's an absolutely fabulous beautiful clear sunny dry warm day. Not too hot yet. I dread the thought of summer here. Will I be able to stand it? The Jews did in Egypt – Cairo and New Orleans – on the same longitude. But can this German Hungarian Sicilian Gypsy Jew take it? I sweat like a dog.

This is my day off, the day after the eclipse of the full moon. Puck, who owes me my Raja Yoga book by Vivekananda, shows up two days late for our scheduled appointment with the excuse of the eclipse. I give him the astronomical explanation, it's just the shadow of the earth when it gets directly between the sun and the full moon, but he's taking the savage pre intellectual approach, primitive punk Crowleyist kid that he is when I think it might be the result of a drug hangover instead. Well well well.

Joy sits with me again – really beautiful non brown eyes and bright white skin – not Jewish but Catholic, talks of Yoruba and bums a smoke. Her daughter's four and she's lived in NOLA a decade. I start to tell her about Siddha Yoga meditation but she moves off.

I should mention that I did indeed make it to Baby Dolls strip joint last night and saw Judith in a long wig talking to some big bodied older man at the bar and drinking something in a champagne glass – it was almost full though. The place was small, with a bar running along the left side of the room and a stage with mirrored walls running along the right side, maybe twenty feet wide. It was dark, dark and dirty, with bizarre looking female employees talking to men and getting drinks bought for them. It was spooky, with low black lights reflecting weirdly off the people's faces – my idea of a stripper's hell. My God, this is where my ex lover works!

Why would anyone want to compromise themselves this way for money, and not much of it at that? I've got to call my folks today and beg for \$250 up front to move on Friday. My mom and dad have helped me more than any people should have had to, I guess. Oh dear – what is to become of me? Gemma, the actress and cashier from work who lent me the word processor I wrote my first book on, made a clear sticky tape thing which says on it "PERSON WITH NO MONEY" and I'm wearing it today on the pocket of my T-shirt. Fitting.

Old Prince is being played on Kaldi's stereo today. Reminds me of days in California when I was working at Macy's advertising department about the time I fell in

love with my youngest daughter's mother Kristin, who broke my heart and left me to be alone ever since. She's moved in with her lover Kevin now in the Sunset District of San Francisco and lives happily ever after. Maybe.¹⁹

Chapter Sixteen **Two Day Journey Into Night**

March 24, 1997

The double French doors in the old Louisiana Products Groceries & Deli owned by Martha are thrown wide open and I'm sitting at the table so close to the open doors that I'm almost on the sidewalk on Julia Street. The store is very unassuming but very homey and friendly – and I'm drinking the best 50 cent cup of coffee with chicory in town.

It's around 4:30 pm on a glorious afternoon; the sun is still high enough now to send its rays across the street on the walls of the buildings there. Directions are just about impossible to ascertain with any degree of certainty in NOLA, but I fathom that I'm on the west side of the street now.

I still don't know whether or not I've been facing East for the last five months while I have been meditating in my little cell at The Hummingbird Hotel around the corner from where I sit right now, but it feels like I have been. The meditation there has been very good; I have seldom been disturbed, day or night, and I know, regardless of the size or cost, I will miss the place and the neighborhood when I depart.

And Martha. I'll have to tell Martha I'm moving this weekend to The Bywater district on Esplanade Street above Ramparts, which is a rather dangerous neighborhood as I've already mentioned. Muggings, robberies, murders – I must admit I'm kind of scared, intimidated. I'm trying to decide whether I'll carry my snub nosed .38 Smith and Wesson revolver or not, or if God or Jesus or Shiva or my guardian angel will protect me, but I must move because my job has really screwed me and other workers over, we poor miserable sales people scratching out a meager existence tooth and nail, dog eat dog, while the corporate executive greed mongers make millions a year in San Francisco where The Sharper Image is based.

How long can this country continue to thrive exploiting the working class as the corporations do? The middle class is already practically disappeared, and the gap between the haves and the have nots is increasing every day. And the government, formed to protect us from the worst in ourselves – like this oppression and greed – is now nothing more than an arm OF the corporations. They were elected to solve these kinds of problems for the society but now they have BECOME part of the problem.

The fact that our constitution specifically gives the people the right to dissolve such a flawed and corrupt government is lost on most people, but anyway, they're just words now. How can the people, the working class, ever rise up and toss off the United

¹⁹ In fact, Tono went on to have a fourth daughter, Sophia, in 2005, and just before that, after ten years, Kevin left Kristin and divorced her.

States government, when the government has all the power and money and media while the only thing WE have, at best, is a few pop guns.

The fact that I am a college graduate, a white male, a former West Point cadet, and a former corporate big wigs myself only serves to legitimize my observations – we are a sick and dying body without a doctor or a remedy in sight. When will the shantytowns be erected next to the city skyscrapers like they had (have?) in Sao Paulo, Brazil?

Will God send us another flood or a rain of fire, another holocaust to cleanse the earth of its human iniquity or will another avatar, another Krishna or Jesus be sent to help us clean up our own act?²⁰

The church bell at St. Pat's down the street tolls 5 pm. It's Holy Week. I move on Good Friday – I just thought of that. Funny name for the day Christ is nailed to the cross, and a funny coincidence, except that there are no coincidences. Everything happens for a reason – and everything happens for the best; you better believe it.

It's laundry time now – first time in two weeks I can afford it. At least I'll be closer to Hula Mae's 24 hour Laundromat on North Ramparts Street now where I always go – clean machines, not too expensive except for the round trip cab rides. I must buy a used TV, a used bicycle and either change my lifestyle a little (not much really, since I never have dates or go to bars or clubs) to get home before dark because of the neighborhood.

I had slightly bad dreams last night – violent because I'm worried. I feel a bit disenfranchised at work because I'm the top salesperson so far in March and the month's almost over. It's lonely at the top and it's lonely when you're not. A six foot tall beauty sits down across the room from me in Kaldi's, it's after work now; I've been agog about her since October but have never spoken a word to her. NOLA's a strange town actually – not much true love, although there is some. Not for me yet though.

I pray to God to send me a girlfriend knowing how absurd that sort of prayer is, still . . . God is my father, so I ask like a son asks a parent. If even an earthly father wouldn't give his son a piece of coal when he asks for a piece of bread, how much more so should God give to his children if He is sincerely asked?

The second assistant manager at work, Leslie, is showing schizophrenic tendencies. I hope it isn't contagious. I really don't think she knows it. Meditation keeps you constant because it keeps you in touch with your true inner self which doesn't fluctuate like your thoughts and moods do, or the state of your physical body.

Inconsistency is a sign of a lack of self knowledge. The sun sets. 6:30 pm. Soon, light will increase with Daylight Savings Time. Halleluiah! Audrey, little Audrey is at Korin's breast at the table next to me now. I wonder if I'll be called upon to babysit since I'll be living directly below them come this weekend.

I'll be close to The Purple People's bookstore and meditation center too. Great. I'm tired. The psychic strain plus the physical labor of work. There should be no psychic strain but there is, mostly thanks to the management at work and the lousy sales

²⁰ Of course, this passage was written in New Orleans years before the Hurricane Katrina disaster, but it is worth remarking upon its ironic air of prophecy. The writer would have suffered along with the other poor people killed or relocated in NOLA after the flood, because he was poor and without a car, and in his opinion, the disaster was an act of sabotage and not solely due to the hurricane itself.

commission structure. Some days I really feel like a stranger in a strange land. Things are changing with the waxing of the moon.

I haven't talked to my kids in weeks – and I haven't finished the glossary for the first book yet. I haven't sent my parents a copy of the manuscript yet, nor photos as I promised I would. No friends call me at work or write me letters. More caffeine and cigarettes. This week is going to be tough. And everybody keeps talking about the long, hot summer to come. What was once a streetcar named Desire is now the Deside Municipal Bus that tools down Decatur Street past Kaldi's on its long day's journey into night.

Chapter Seventeen That Lonely Equation

March 25, 1997

Now I'm writing a day ahead because I've stayed out awhile longer. What to do? Get it down on paper, pique the imagination, clarify the situation, map the condition, chronicle the urges, gauge the fears, measure the love, discuss the disgusting. B.S. These are word games that don't explain anything.

I have very few close friends. You've got to think hard to figure out who you are; you've got to concentrate especially around a lot of people and especially especially around a person you really like, like Korin my new landlady, and also, for sure, around Raven, who called me over to her table to sit with her yesterday and I haven't been able to think of another woman since.

Oh, oh -- I think a three warlock coven is being formed to my right. It's three guys in punk regalia; no, two guys and a female, as I realize by looking over at the table more closely. The girl wiccan says "Hi" to me. A Puerto Rican and a Mexican – two Latino young ladies that frequented my shop yesterday – just walked into Kaldi's, Mira and Katia. Mira comes over and says hello, we chat standing. They can't stay; it's back to the hotel for a shower. I kiss Mira's hand as we part and I still can't tell, they're probably gay, but it's gotten weirder here as I've observed previously.

Body odor is in the air. Change – why is change so frightening? Why should we resist or fear that which is inevitable? You can put off paying taxes for a few years but you can't put off change or death. You can't stop yourself from growing old. Everything that is born dies.

I love the way Kaldi's separates the clientele by its atmosphere – yuppies generally turn and run a moment or two after they've entered the front door. Bones got a great bass guitar – a Harmony like my pawned guitar, mid '70's model. Really nice. She let me play it and I raved about it to her. She was understandably happy. A nice pretty short haired punker with all the trimmings, Latino or Native American or maybe both, bums a cigarette from me when she's broke.

Shit! When I get so much charity from my parents, I really want to spread it around. The thread in this piece is Raven because in a pause, when I'm not thinking about her or seeing her often, she pops back into my mind. I haven't been conversations

lately with women, one on one, and Raven and I talked for a long time. Her smile, the light of happiness and the love in her eyes infectious stand before me. And her glorious body, light as a feather, tall with good posture, pure white skin, and shocking electric pink-red hair tied back into a ponytail except for some bangs on either side of her head.

This is my kind of girl and I am twice her age – what is this, a Lolita complex. I can't help love her even though I know she does not feel the same way about me. (Like Gable says to Monroe in *The Misfits* when she tells him that she doesn't feel that way about him, "Well, don't get discourage girl, you might!")

She went over to talk to and eyed later for awhile this punk guitarist – they'd make a good couple – just like the fuzzy haired boy/goth/punk who looks like a girl and the skateboard T-shirted Tennis shoed punk girl who I thought was a boy in the corner – but I think Raven and I would make a great couple too because with her by my side, my mate, I would be made whole again. God, how I miss being together with a woman that I loves me – that seems to be a million miles away from me now.

Maybe if I hang in there and be myself, she'll realize how formidable I am in my own humble way or maybe she'll just fall in love with me because of my goodness, truthfulness and compassion and understanding and patience and strength and discipline and knowledge and experience and savor faire and intelligence and sensitivity and creativeness and handsomeness and kindness and courtesy and loving heart . . . and humor!

Or maybe she'll find out that I love her and she needs that kind of love – maybe she's kind of tired of being alone like me but not likely because at twenty five she hasn't had enough time yet to get that lonely. Like in one of Jim Thompson's books, and I paraphrase here: "*She came to the door and I immediately knew she was seventy years old. Nobody could have gotten that ugly in under seventy years.*"

I know I shouldn't need another person and that I have everything I need inside myself, yet I'm torn between love of creatures and love of God. Yet, they don't contradict one another, because God is in other creatures as God is in me. How is that? $1 + 1 = 1$? Yet that is what it is when a man and a woman become united in love before God. Mathematically that must mean the equation is really $\frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{2} = 1$. Each person, male and female, are only $\frac{1}{2}$ and need the other to become a whole 1. Without the other $\frac{1}{2}$, it's a lonely equation.

Chapter Eighteen The Whirl of Souls

March 27, 1997

Angelo read his tortured prose poem to me in Jackson Square today within earshot of his wife, Asia, who's apparently German, and his son, Angelo junior, eighteen months old and big, bright and sweet as a child is innocent and smiley. Angelo's poem, entitled *Suicide*, was written, says Angelo, to articulate the hopelessness and despair of the suicide victim – and I guess it does simulate the way a truly suicidal person thinks or feels. But to what purpose and to what end?

If it serves to spread despair and hopelessness, then I am against it. If, however, through some weird catharsis, his poem should serve to invoke fear and pity in his listeners or readers, perhaps it will repel them away from such attitudes and behavior – but what will it repel them towards? I prefer to pull them towards me in my writing, to pull them towards something good, rather than point out how bad things are with us.

I caution Angelo about the potential danger he's facing in writing all these "Tell it like it is" slice of life stories – he takes on the karma of the people he portrays and must find a way to burn it off or it'll burn him up. This leads Angelo to ask me if I'm into T.M., Transcendental Meditation, and I acquaint him with Swami Muktananda and Gurumayi. He asks me how well I know Siddha Yoga, if I could teach it to him, and if so, how much I would want to teach it to him.

"I know it well but I'm not a guru, and you must have a true guru available to you if you begin Siddha Yoga meditation practices." I told him. "In fact," I explain, "that's one of the problems in life. Everybody wants to be a guru, but nobody wants to be a good disciple. You truly have to learn before you can teach."

Then I realize that this exact conundrum is what I faced when I wrote my first book, "Letters to My Children." And I know that I was probably premature in the writing of that book, but oh well. It still was a good exercise and there is some knowledge and wisdom there that may benefit others later on.

It's always hard for me to meditate just before a move like this. Tomorrow I move out of The Hummingbird and tomorrow night I'll be sleeping in my new room. While it is hard to stop yourself from thinking things sometimes, one should at least stop themselves from articulating those thoughts. My x wife told me on the phone last night in San Francisco, "I suppose I should tell you that we're going to get married." (She and her boyfriend whom she has been living with, with my daughter Atria) "And we've managed to save a little money, so we'll be honeymooning in Paris. Life is good. I feel truly blessed."

The music on Kaldi's box night is Led Zeppelin like rock, slow and heavy, but it works. I said only encouraging and congratulatory things to Kristin, but of course, my broken heart bled inside and I thought unfortunately many things I will not write either. Imagine losing your lovely wife and marvelous daughter to another man, etc.

Still, I am no judge, I do not have the option of condemning or upholding anyone, and I would much rather deal with the log in my eyes rather than looking for the mote in my neighbor's eye.

I just met a Romanian punker, tattooed and pierced to the hilt. On her upper arm she had a beautiful hand drawn winged dragon, her guardian she called it. She had a primitive skateboard and torn fishnet stockings taped up with silver duct tape, plus a neck collar and chains, an A shirt and a faux leopard skinned bra, all topped off with a sock hat and bottomed out with combat boots. She was unwashed and crusty. And all these punks around here are mostly very, very young. So what's the crime there?

They clown around at the table next to me just like kids should, except these kids don't go to school or live with their families but squat and crash and live on the street.

Raven shows up and sits down with me. We're immediately joined by Stacy whose been reading across the room, and the Romanian punk named China in singing at the next table so I'll pay her to stop – which I do. Except I tell her as I hand her a dollar

bill that she has to continue singing instead. Then the long haired painter show up and Raven goes off with him and the coffee. It's okay.

I compliment the punk because her singing was grand. She really had a pretty singing voice and when she asked me what I thought of her singing I tell her so.

"See, it was well earned," she observes about my charity, holding up the dollar I gave her. China told me she used to have hair down to her knees, although it's buzz cut now, and she sold it for four grand. She calls me over to her table; she's been sitting with Jason, who left California like myself, giving up a marketing job in copier toner to work as a bus boy in NOLA. And he's into meditation as well – though a bit too pushy for me and I tell him I'm not a guru but only a disciple and move back to my table.

The scene started with just Raven and I for about two minutes, then Tracy and George, the overweight kid with long hair and a pretty good painter moved in, then China and Jason, finally Draven comes. So it's getting really packed and I'm getting as usual uptight because of too many people and too much small talk – but Draven, who's young, good looking, intelligent and sensitive, tells me about his dream which indicates to him that he has been circling his energy from the center outward when he should be circling it inward instead.

I clasp my hands, look up at the ceiling, and say halleluiah again. Then we strike a fine metaphor of a pebble which, when thrown into a pond, first displaces water equal to its mass and sends ripples outward to the edges of the pond in concentric circles, and until those vibrations return and the pebble is surrounded by quiet water, it and the pond will not be at peace with one another.

So China moves over to sit next to me when she finds out I'm leaving, so she can sit next to Draven then, and they'd make a good couple, and Raven has been keeping up a good conversation with Tracy and George but has hardly talked to me at all and sometimes when she talks I can't hear her anyway because she doesn't talk loud enough and I'm a bit deaf in my left ear. But I do hear her say to me indicates to me that we are now miles apart in many ways and yet, after I leave Kaldi's and get back home to the cell I'm finally escaping from tomorrow for a new place with Korin, I love her and long for her tender kiss and caress, and I wake up in the morning with a God awful pain in my neck and the prayer still on my lips that God will you send me my mate my Eve – and Martha, at the Louisiana Groceries and Deli, to whom I tell I'm leaving the neighborhood today, says Happy Easter to patrons when they enter or leave, and I realize it is Good Friday, of course.

Chapter Nineteen

The Long Good Friday

March 29, 1997

In Coop's on Decatur Street next to Molly's, which is owned by Monahan whom also owns the house I'm moving into, and whom I saw pointed out to me in conversation one day close to St. Patrick's Day, I wait for a veggie burger with a slice of raw onion on it and fries with melted cheddar cheese on it – to go. It's Good Friday, which I will discuss in this chapter.

The name Good Friday always puzzled me, since it's the day Christ suffered his worse torment, indignation, misery and pain. In spite of this, Jesus' reported death on the cross by crucifixion, which is chronicled in the biblical writings of the New Testament and widely held as historically accurate, requires, in my opinion, closer scrutiny.

The initial "fact" which struck me as odd is how relatively fast Christ died on this particular Friday. From everything that I've ever heard or read about death by crucifixion, it is an excruciatingly slow and painful process, during which time the crucified individual's lungs slowly fill up with bile until the victim literally drowns in their own bodily secretions.

Now, it has been determined that Biblical accounts indicate that Jesus was put up on the cross at around 9 o'clock in morning and taken down by no later than 3 o'clock in the afternoon. There was a definite, religious reason for this apparent haste. The crucifixion had to be completed by the evening because it took place on a Friday, which is The Day of Preparation for the Jewish Sabbath, Saturday.

There were, in fact, numerous ways in ancient times in which men crucified each other, some faster and some, slow and painful. Death by asphyxiation usually came after a protracted period of time, with the victim's arms raised above their head and his body leaning forward on the cross or log or stick.

To speed up the process, sometimes the legs of the victim are broken so they are unable to prop themselves up by the small wooden block placed under their feet. This is what was reportedly done to the two criminals who were crucified along with Jesus that fateful day, but not to Jesus himself. Instead, a Roman soldier stuck him in the side with a lance.

Then, amazingly and pretty much without precedent, Jesus' body is taken down from the cross and given to his disciples. Usually the bodies of criminals, particularly ones of a political nature as Jesus surely was, once dead by crucifixion, would be displayed at the gates of the city, or their heads would be cut off and hoisted on stakes as a warning to others of the consequences of such sedition.

Were the Roman soldiers and the disciples working covertly in harmony?

First of all, a lance puncture wound in just the right spot could have the effect of draining the very fluids from the crucified individual's lungs, preventing death rather than hastening it. Reportedly, after the Romans gave the body of Jesus to his disciples, they took him to a cave, unguarded by any soldiers, and wrapped it in heavy muslin which was packed with expensive and hard to come by medicinal herbs such as aloes and myrrh. Why go to such an elaborate expense? To what purpose – unless, of course, Jesus was not dead at all.

As a spiritual master, it is without a doubt that Jesus would have been well versed in meditative practices. Like yogic masters of India and Tibet, he would have been able to lower his metabolism through meditation to the point where he would have seemed almost dead, like those yogis who are buried alive for six hours and then dug up again and are still alive. Meditative practices, too, could reduce or eliminate the pain associated with his crucifixion, because there are numerous states of consciousness available to experienced practitioners of the art of meditation, much like the pain of a boil is not felt when a person is sleeping.

Then, three days later, Jesus' body disappears from the cave, (where he has been convalescing), and he is seen walking around, visiting his disciples, with them sticking

their fingers in the now already partially healed lance wound, thanks to the healing action of the medicinal herbs. Yes – my hypothesis is that Jesus did not die on the cross at all, nor did he ever intend to “die for our sins.” That doctrine came later, created by St. Paul.

What actually happened is that Jesus escaped actual death, although obtained official “dead” status so his persecutors would stop their tyranny; then, secretly, he and Mary Magdalene, his wife (not a prostitute at all) stole off to Kashmir, where they, like Moses before them, lived out a long and happy life in the real “Promised Land.”

I’m picking this narrative up again on Easter Sunday morning at Kaldi’s. Croissant D’or was packed with . . . yuppies who live in the quarter. No – no – no, not that way. It rained as I left the house pretty hard but stopped only four blocks later, by the time I reached North Ramparts on Esplanade. There are a lot of beautiful trees lined the boulevard of Esplanade – the tropics at the best time of the year.

Things are going to have to slow down in the summer. Homeless Jim – I might as well call him Siddha Jim – because he looks just like a white haired and gray bearded dark skinned toothless saint – was leaning up against side of a building recently upside down. His shoulders were on the sidewalk and his feet were on the wall. This is always the way with Siddha masters – their ways are completely unfathomable to ordinary people, and no two of them act alike.

Two swell looking babes sit across from me – perfectly sexy – but they don’t fit in here and I don’t really trust women that look the way they do. They’d slit your throat for six bits. Oh, well – Easter Sunday. I was thinking about Alicia from the library. Very beautiful eyes and I’ll bet that’s not all. She’s a black girl with smooth tan skin lighter than my own.

Look at people when you talk to them. Make eye contact. Really see them. It’s a lot of fun lately at work because I’m looking at people and really seeing them, making eye contact. The eyes are the windows of the soul. But . . . why do I love Raven? Where, oh, where is Raven? Or with whom I show say. Great kind of industrial rock Gaelic jig music playing on the box.

I don’t know -- it’s so paradoxical. Why do I fall in love with a girl like Raven who seems to like to stay out late and stay up late, go to bars and clubs and drink alcohol, and she likes all kinds of friends around and goes after other men when she’s sitting with me? *Je ne comprend pas*. I don’t get it, even in French.

I’m no punk – but I used to be I suppose, back in the late seventies in San Francisco; I mean, I did play music with members of The Dead Kennedys, The Mutants, The Offs, Pink Section, Black Flag, SVT, etc. I am a musician, a singer, songwriter, a painter. I am a writer now too, writing everyday now, so that it has become an integral part of who I am. *You are what you do*. This is my choice. Just like I choose to love Raven because of her eyes and smile and because of the friendship she has shown me. And that may be why I love Alicia but with her there could be more. With Raven, I don’t think I stand a chance.

But I digress.

I love how in the Jnaneshwari, a brilliant commentary on the Bhagavad Gita, Shri Maharaja goes on at length about a point and then admonishes himself for it – and his guru tells him to get on with it!

So Christ probably didn’t die on the cross. I think it’s ridiculous, that phrase that Jesus is accredited with mouthing while hanging from the cross: “Father, why have you

forsaken me?” If he said that at all, he said it to trick the viewers of his crucifixion into thinking he had capitulated and renounced God, so they’d get bored and leave. That would convince them and they’d be laughing and walking away from Golgotha after that remark. Then, in three days Jesus would be well enough to make several appearances around to Mary Magdalene and Thomas.

A couple spoil their lovely child then start throwing a ball to her. She is precocious; they remind me of Kristin and I, or Martha and I, with our young children, how much the attention shifts from each other to the kids and it’s hard then to have a life together or not get bored with each other – and I could not make them happy. Kevin wants to sell me a bike for \$30 and fix the tire for \$10. A 15 speed mountain bike, as if there were any mountains in NOLA. Everybody’s here again, but now, Easter Sunday night, I’m all alone. I should get a phone in my apartment again. Now when I go home at night I don’t have to go down Bourbon Street, watching the lights and listening to the noise and people and music that is Bourbon Street most nights.

In the end, Jesus rises not in resurrected life and ascends into heaven but in complete recovery due to his own healing powers (through God of course) and the quick thinking and medicinal knowledge of his disciples, then high tails it to India and dies at eighty years old in Kashmir. Now that IS A MIRACLE.

Chapter Twenty Interview With a Shell

March 31, 1997

“What’s on the platter tonight at Kaldi’s?”

“Hot Pants” by James Brown. Smokin . . .”

“How’d it go when Shannon²¹ the photog came over to your table?”

“I don’t know. She looked absolutely divine. New vest. She said she was off to dinner but not a date. Definitely not a date. Still, I don’t know. I love her so – really – and would like to make advances towards her in an honorable way but I probably won’t because I never seem to do that anymore.”

“How about that move? How’d that go? How’s your new apartment?”

“The move went off without a hitch. Two trips in a small car. That’s what I’ve got my possessions down to. Yes! The place is actually great. Rather perfect, but the bathroom stinks of piss and I need to get a hold of a lot of bleach and disinfectant to try and eradicate the odor. Incense and Ajax are not enough. It’s a great deal for only \$200 a month but I don’t know how long it’s going to last and then what?

“And that second job, how’d you get that?”

“Yeah, just today I got that new second job, at a whopping \$6.50 an hour! Anyway, it’ll be only one day a week probably, maybe two days sometimes and I’ll be working around Becky, who is astonishingly beautiful in a Spanish like manner. I start tomorrow selling sunglasses at a kiosk in a high class tourist mall outside the entrance to Saks Fifth Aveue. Classy broads there, whew!”

²¹ During the transcription of this text in late 2006, Tono spoke to Shannon Brinkman on the telephone for the first time in nine years, and learned that she’d just had a baby girl, Roya, four months previous.

“Are you afraid of deterring your spiritual attainment by working too much?”

“Well, yeah, except that I’ve kind of given up on the idea of being a yogi or maybe I’m already one. Anyway, working too much or too little does impede one’s spiritual progress generally speaking, but six days a week is okay – just keep that seventh day holy!”

“Have you talked to your kids in California lately? Do you know how they’re doing?”

“It’s kind of getting lopsided lately; either I write a letter, send pictures and tapes to Atria, my youngest daughter who’s eight, or I talk to my twins, Ciara and Teresa, who are twelve years old, but I seldom converse with all three of them simultaneously or in close succession because I think it’s too draining, too stressful, since I can’t see them and I’m not taking care of them anymore. They’re not orphan children though; they all have their families in California, their mothers have remarried and both have good jobs. I’m the orphan dad, actually. So, last it was Atria; I didn’t even call Ciara and Teresa on Easter, but I really felt like it was a strange “holiday” anyway. It’s a religious holiday for Christ’s sake, literally!”

“How’s your love life?”

“What love life? No, that’s not true; I fall in love everyday. I should call Alicia at the library and ask her to meet me on Thursday for a soda and maybe a game of pool. Like we discussed. That would be fun – she’s nice to me. I’ve had two lovers here, sexual partners. Very short lived though. I wish I knew what happened to Barbara. She sent me a desperate note about her being in the hospital and some treatment center or a halfway house but I couldn’t bring myself to track her down. Drugs I guess. And I never heard from her again after that note. Judith, I’ve already discussed in these pages. Michelle, absolutely angelic Michelle, also a stripper at Big Daddy’s, headed for California and New York City I’m told but will return supposedly. Anyway, we had only one night of passion, and she wouldn’t let me penetrate her with my penis nor would she touch me or get me off. She only let me touch her and kiss her everywhere. I still fell in love with her forever. And of course, there’s Raven who’s angelic as well but only interested in me as a friend and on the lookout for a boyfriend for sure so what’s the use of loving her, except that I do and could not stop if I wanted to. And I know that having the love and affection of a creature is no more of a guarantee of peace and happiness than is having a lot of money. So I’m not complaining – at least today.

“So over all, how has New Orleans been for you?”

“Really good. I’ve got to count my blessings. I’ve got two jobs now. Lots of acquaintances and friends. Good health. An apartment. I don’t starve or want for essentials normally. My mom and dad are so good to me; they send me money all the time. I was the best salesman at my prime gig in March. I’m still meditating and thanking God most days. I’m writing books, painting paintings and will bail my guitar out of the pawnshop in April.”

“Any last words before we close this interview?”

“Yeah – all this talk is really about Tono, the individual, but actually, that’s a mere shell, only a role I play. Honestly, I’m not my body or my mind or Tono, and that’s why I meditate – it’s to remind myself who I really am. And I wish I had asked my x wife a question the last time I spoke to her on the phone. She said life is good for her,

she said she felt truly blessed. The question I wanted to ask her is: “Who do you suppose it is that blessed you?”

Chapter Twenty One April I’m No fool Day

April 1, 1997

I have to take the middle path. I could not lead my life without renunciation, without meditation, without prayer or devotion or the love of God and my fellow human beings.

A little girl laughs infectiously near me and I avert my attention to look at her. She laughed the laugh Atria used to laugh. Maybe in July I’ll have to move my things into storage when I go visit my children in SF. I wonder if they’ll even care I’m there?

I remember Cheryl, an ex girlfriend of mine who cheated on her husband and hooked up with me while telling me she was separated from him, which wasn’t true at all, she told me that when she went to Ohio to visit her kids they didn’t even care, and when she came through a mountain pass and a sunset in Northern Nevada and thought of me she cried.

Maybe I will go to California for a week and then move home for July – September and then head back to NOLA. Wow, that would be a trip. What a great lifestyle! The middle path – I could not live my life without some indulgences or pleasures or activity or work or the love of a beautiful woman – yes, I am a householder (without a household or someone to hold at the moment, though), not a saint. But I could be a householder AND a saint, the likes of which inhabited the Maharashtra²² district of India.

The music on the box reminds me of that first PIL album that came in a round metal can – you know, vinyl records, before CDs, Public Image Ltd, just after the breakup of The Sex Pistols, with Jah Wobble on bass. I wonder if I can get that on tape? I’ve been listening, finally, to Bob Willis. Incredible song on this tape, an instrumental. I put in my sonically hermitically sealed custom molded earphones and put the tape in my cassette player (a \$10 value at Walgreen’s), and it drowns out the six foot tall diva who I am in love with who talks a lot around me it seems. She seems to love to hear herself talk, and this time she’s talking about “female genitals and flower construction” with three friends at the table next to me.

She’s with her pretty girlfriend who must be a disease or birth defect individual because she’s very small, thin. Polio? Willis sings: *I want to be ready to walk into Jerusalem just like John*. Six foot’s face kind of looks like Kristin’s without glasses but thinner. She is very beautiful to me. I think she’s a bit disturbed that my earpieces prevent me from hearing her voice.

Oh – I was thinking the strangest thing today at work. A raggedy punk girl walked past the kiosk and I thought of how we people at times get these limiting ideas

²² The third largest state in Northern India, with Bombay as its largest city, and the state where Bhagavan Nityananda and Baba Muktananda met in Ganeshpuri.

about ourselves, we convince ourselves of lowliness, our lack of self esteem prevents us from rising above and reaching our full potential. Maybe it's our environment, the people that raise us, that tell us we are pieces of shit and will never amount to anything. Maybe people just don't get the right influences or information.

It's there, but you have to be taught it's there; you have to have some success to believe you can be successful; you have to accomplish something to have confidence, and you have to have confidence to accomplish something. Catch-22.

So your parents make a big deal of your little accomplishments when you are a kid – or they don't care or worse.

Man, it's COLD here tonight. Strange – I thought we'd seen the last of cold weather. What a climate. I'm in the South, deep South now. First time. West Coast, East Coast, Southwest desert, Midwest and now – deep South.

Now six foot becomes so animate she's talking to me with her body. Why can't I meet her?

A street band with a bearded banjo player and his washboard and fiddle playing girlfriend play Bob Willis music – bluegrass, blue bluegrass – fast pickin' and grinin'. A chick with a red bolo and a black dress cut low enough to reveal her pentagram tattoo sits down next to me . . . then gets up, fixes her coffee at the condiment bar and thinks better of her seating selection and moves off. My flattened Monarch butterfly I carried with me from the autumn beach of Lake Michigan is now in this book – pressed. Reminds me of Shri Gurudev Bhagavan Nityananda whom I never met in person but still he dwells in my heart.

Chapter Twenty Two Meetings with Thayne and Raven

April 2, 1997

This is going to be a departure from previous entries in this journal of myths and legends in that I'm writing it on a computer rather than in my logbook. After writing the initial draft of my first book completely in long hand, I realized that, at least for that particular endeavor, doing so helped the work along greatly.

For one thing, the words flowing out of the pen in your hand makes you think a little more closely about the honesty and integrity of what you're producing; and for another, you tend to be less verbose about what you say when you've got to write down every word with what might as well be a hammer and chisel. I chose a certain type of non ball point pen but you get the idea.

But matters of more puzzlement left me unable to work at Kaldi's tonight after working both my full shift and a partial shift at my new second job, although I'm catching up on the writing work now at home. The book is taking on an interesting new emphasis, because I never thought I could write alone in my room on a Wednesday night at 9:52 PM, but here I am.

This aloneness I'm now experiencing, not confiding in anyone or talking to anyone about myself much while talking to a lot of people about themselves and their lives and what they want or what they are doing has left me with a lot more to say on these pages. That's okay – that seems to be the fate of the writer. How in God's name can you write anything good while you're with others and how can you write anything with any humanity in it if you're not around humans, too? So to be an effective writer you have to both be in solitude and also among the throng.

Take a writer like William Blake, the great English mystic, poet and painter. One has the impression that a man like he would have lived aloof, alone in some ivory tower, removed from the hustle of everyday life, while creating his lofty, paradisiacal verses. But nothing could be further from the truth. He was totally immersed in the happenings in London. In fact, he was so in the know that he advised Thomas Paine, the great political writer, that the police were after him and to get out of town, which Paine did and came to America. The rest, as they say, is history.

Okay, let us progress to my telling you about a remarkable meeting with Thayne, age six. First, I quote from The Gospel of Thomas: "The man old in days will not hesitate to ask a small child seven days old about the place of life, and he will live . . ." Thayne came over to me from the next table and said, "Hi, how're you doin'?" I said fine and we began to chat.

He was a very present young man, quite talkative and articulate and friendly; cute, sincere, forceful and determined. I had to use all my child skills to get beyond his unruliness from time to time. I got him writing his name and mine right away, we battled over the pen, played tic tac toe for awhile, and after he beat me two times out of three and then won the rubber match, Thayne suggested an interesting twist to the game. He said, "How's about this time we play and we'll both be zeros?"

He told me that he'd been kicked out of school seven times and now his mom teaches him at home, and I could see why, because Thayne was light years ahead of most kids his age (and older too). But it took someone like me to recognize that as well; many others would just dismiss him as a nut case. Of course, his mother recognized the genius of this young boy, and she seemed to love him and to nurture him well.

At one point during the extraordinary half hour I spent with this young man, I took a rudrakha bead mala²³ out of my pocket, the one with eighteen large beads on it, the one restrung by Kevin right at the table in Kaldi's, that first time Raven came and sat with me, and gave it to Thayne to hold.

Handing it to him, I said, "What do you think of this?"

He took the mala, closed his eyes, began fingering the beads one by one just like a Buddhist monk would, and started saying various words, most made up ones like, "shoobee", "clameal," "jahbah", things like that, just as if he were chanting a mantra like I have done thousands of times by now probably. He finally handed the mala back to me saying this: "But the overall feeling I get from this is – peace," in full seriousness yet with a bit of fun mixed in too.

²³ A mala is a string of beads either worn or held in the hand. It is often used to recite prayers or mantras in the Hindu and Buddhist tradition, similar to the use of the rosary in the Christian religion. Rudraksha beads, literally "the tears of Shiva", come from a tree native to India, and are said to have curative and purgative powers.

I laughed from deep inside myself with incredible joy and we hugged each other like dear old friends do. Then I broke off with him and told him he'd better go back to his table but he kept coming back so wonderfully and when I left he made me promise that when we saw each other again we would talk and hang out together again.

I was truly touched and meeting Thayne was a great experience for me; he brought me a lot of joy and peace and love. Amazing

Then, several days later, maybe a couple of weeks later, while I was going to talk about the night lights and the sights and sounds of Bourbon Street, instead I am going to talk about having dinner with Raven. Oh, man – I met her at Kaldi's tonight and she looked so beautiful and so hardcore, with her orange hair pulled back over her head and her bangs swept out of the way so you could see the tattoo of the crown of thorns around her upper brow, with more visible tattoos on her neck, back, arms and stomach.

We sat together for awhile talking about things, work and her new rockabilly boyfriend and The Angel, a club she goes to often, and then I suggested we get Cuban food on Iberville at this great low cost restaurant. It was the first time I've had dinner with a beautiful woman in months.

We talked about our spiritual beliefs and our lives; it was a lot of fun being with her. I was so proud to be with such a spectacular young lady, and I found out so much more about her . . . and I found out, of course, that she has absolutely no interest in me as a man or a lover. Not that I pushed it or would ever do that, but she doesn't like me even to touch her and she never touches me. It is so hard not to feel rejected or worthless or unhappy because secretly I am in love with her and will never be able to tell her and she wouldn't care if I did.

It's not her fault, and I don't blame her – I'm old enough to be her father. This age thing is getting to be a veritable drag. I know now that this will be the last time I am ever alone with Raven again. We talked about New York City, she's from Albany, and I liked thinking about her and me together and in love in the East Village. Such a foolish fantasy. Am I all washed up as a lover? Won't I ever find a woman I love who loves me too and with whom I can really be myself and be with her too?

The mailbox is empty; there is nobody home in my heart. Sometimes you just have to cry and let things go. Why am I not enough for me? Why do I think I need someone else? Why does life have to hurt so much sometimes? At times like this, I wonder what the heck I'm even doing here in NOLA anymore. But where is there to go? Because wherever I go, there I am, there my loneliness is. Poor people, poverty in this body of mine, poverty of the mind.

Chapter Twenty Three **Swami V Returns**

April 3, 1997

It turns out that Thayne's mom, a beautiful and very sexy woman, works at The Witch's Closet and I see her this afternoon when I go into the shop to buy charcoal to burn natural incense on. I still don't know her name but it's

strange that I should meet her the very next day after sitting down with her amazing little boy Thayne, who drew a picture in my logbook which I called Thayne's yantra.²⁴

Puck came and sat with me and over coffee we discussed Raja Yoga, which is the name of a book by Swami Vivekananda, about the highest form of yoga (raja means king), which I lent to him – and which he was kind enough to return to me. He mentioned following Swamiji's instructions on nasal cleansing, after which he felt so clear and fresh in his head, but when he smoked a Lucky Strike cigarette, his body began to feel like lead.

Kevin sold me his bike for \$35 – only \$5 down and I've got it work but haven't used it yet because I can't afford to buy a lock for it, which is more than mandatory down here. In NOLA, you can't leave anything out and unattended unless it's bolted down fast and locked up tight. Theft replaced baseball as the favorite city pastime years ago.

Puck is a young Piscean like myself, and has turned out to be a true friend, a very good person and a valued comrade and confident. He dresses very eclectically and if I'd judged him by his appearance, what a loss it would have been, not to have gotten to know him because I thought he was weird because of his garb. I've had a few here, friends, comrades in arms, people that I could talk to and more importantly, listen too.

The important thing is to LIVE creatively, as Gemma at work has reminded me again. Gemma is an actress as well as the cashier at The Sharper Image, and is the most artistic co worker I associate with there. She left me with the playfully ironic departing comment: "Love you. Mean it," which I told her I would use, since anything you say is fair game for a plagiarist like me. In fact, all writers in some sense are plagiarists. There's nothing new under the sun; or as Goethe is accredited with saying: "The problem is not to think of something the first time, but to think of it again."

Yes, work. They are hammering me – the highest grossing salesperson last month and yesterday too. I am looking for a face – I am looking at eyes. Eyes sparkles, the shine, they enliven. I need to buy a new canvas – and another light for my apartment to paint by. Maybe a spot with a reflecting shade. This is my last day off – I'll be working seven days a week now. Things are changing. I don't know which way but I know I must keep looking within. And keep on loving not hating.

I am alone. I am not alone. Everyone else has someone else. No one else has anyone else. Unless you have yourself, you will always be alone. If you have yourself, you have the whole world. What can anyone do to you if you have yourself, your integrity and honor? Swami V says keep your back erect, keep your spine straight. I think I need amino acids and ginseng again. I desperately need a Mac laptop – where? How? How . . . do you feel? How's life? "Life is good." I say. "How do you feel? You seem down." "No, I'm fine, I'm not down." There is nothing wrong. I thank God everyday. People are good – I have no animosities, hatreds, aversions or loves, except that I love a lot of things. Like I'm on the can this morning and, having left the door to my apartment open, in walks this little shaggy dog to say hello. Or I talk for a long time with Alicia at the Library where I return from with three excellent books and more audio tapes – Bill Monroe, not Bob Willis!

Alicia is a doll but I don't think we're going to be anything but friends. Kevin is nice but a strange sort too, as we all are. David's paintings are up in Kaldi's and he's

²⁴ A yantra is a sacred drawing used in meditation, from the Sanskrit

tripping. No one for me, yet. Raven likes George who's sitting across from me. He's pudgy but handsome for sure younger than I. David's twenty two, Kevin twenty six, Raven, twenty five, Puck, twenty four, Rebecca Ravelo, my boss at The Sunglass Hut is twenty four, Numbers is more my age but looks younger, Suzanne, I don't know because she's so big but she could be thirty. Most of my acquaintances are young – Draven, eighteen, Winter, twenty seven, Michelle, twenty two.

David is tired and frustrated, he says; Ada is terrible 'cause she's in love and the boy is scared of his love reportedly. I'm going to do a black and white experimental painting of Christ's heart on cardboard and nail it to a board probably tonight or soon. Demonic Dave is my age and looks it. He's the guy who's convinced he's possessed by an evil spirit who I saw in the vestibule at St. Jude's church on North Ramparts Street standing before a statue and shaking violently while stinking, as usual, of Dragon's Blood essential oil, which he says helps keep the demons away. Didn't seem to be working though.

When will the feminine energy circulating around me finally focus in on me? Just one please, Lord, jus the right one. Read – The Metamorphosis of the Gods by Andre Malraux, The Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism by Lama Govinda and Tantra Art by Ajit Mookjee and, of course, continue reading Raja Yoga, by the returning Swami V.

Life is good.

Chapter Twenty Four Catharsis by Daylight Savings

April 6, 1997

It's a brilliantly sunny day and the change of the time to "Daylight Savings Time." I wake up with an hour to make it to work. I succeed in getting there on time, after shaving, ironing, brushing, straightening up, taking a cab, grabbing a cup of coffee at Kaldi's, buying cigarettes at Sydney's and walking to Canal Place. But my lovely manager, whom I adore, is a half an hour late and does not know the clocks were moved ahead this morning at 2 am.

Then, miraculously, I am through with work at noon and walking along the Mississippi River in gorgeously hot, dry and sunny weather, with Sol directly overhead, glinting majestically off the mild waves of the huge, high and mighty channel of water. It is clear; rain has cleansed the air, and things are sparkling bright and fresh. It is a glorious Spring Sunday. The Dobro slide guitar player in Jackson Square has an ensemble which includes upright bass, washboard percussion, accordion and harmonica, and turns out some very toe tapping music.

Tourists are everywhere and The Quarter is packed. It doesn't get any better than this in NOLA. Glad to be alive – I meditated at 3 am this morning (really 4 am!) again. I have to stay away from my body; I have to leave the energy inside me rise up the sushumna²⁵. Last night, Saturday was painful. This morning, out of the cab I took to Kaldi's, stepped this blonde in black leather pants and a sleeveless black evening blouse

²⁵ Sushumna nadi: the pranic channel between the [ida](#) and [pingala](#) which goes up from the bottom of the spine.

with a smile on her face – she had obviously spent the night with some very lucky man. Not me, though.

Instead I go to work and not get to see Becky in a darling short skirt but I also get introduced to Stacy, a tall buxom college student co worker with long, beautiful bare legs and fashionable heeled shoes on. Another veritable knock out! Becky, Stacy, Erika and I work at The Sunglass Hut now. God, give me strength. Is this a test? Do you want to see how much I really love you and want you, Lord?

Still, as beautiful a day as it is, I have nothing to do, no place to go, and I am alone. Last night I had dinner with Raven, but it just made things worse. Why? I love her and want to be with her but when I am it hurts because she doesn't want me to even touch her and she talks of her boyfriend and talks to and hugs George when we get back to Kaldi's after dinner.

So that was last night but it kind of bleeds over into this sunny day which seems strange like my own little personal cloud is following me around over my heart. Why am I not attractive to women any longer? Am I just too old? Not aggressive enough? Too dull? It doesn't seem fair that I've come here to NOLA after four months of solitude in Racine, Wisconsin to be even more alone here in The Big Easy.

The young couple sitting near me in the sun while I relax under an umbrella in the courtyard of The Royal Blend on Royal Street wear one gold band each signifying marriage like Kristin and I used to wear until she left me for the last time and after awhile I pawned my ring.

Draven's leaving on Wednesday; he sits with me at Kaldi's and talks of his grandiose plans, of money and cars he will get in Austin, Texas, where his now ex girlfriend Winter is also from, through whom we met.

Three thirty in the afternoon and time is dragging along. I feel like a prisoner of time, racing against the clock. There must be love out there for me somewhere, sometime soon. It is the shank of springtime now. Now.

Later this afternoon, after a day of roaming and coffee, I sit alone and listen to glad and thankful Reggae music—in the garden of Babylon, good looking people around me. It's about six pm and still bright outside. I am tired, but reading has been good – Tibetan mysticism. I feel a bit more self contained – had to tell Draven and Daid I was too tired to speak (talk) anymore. A little more here, for a little longer. Nothing is too important. Better to let things go the way they will – let go of this idea of control – let God's will prevail.

People in love, lots of people in love. Why not, it's Spring? Still no talk to the twins or Atria. Oh my – better write a letter tonight and mail photographs. First to mom. Chain letter. What about the manuscript of Letters? When will I make copies and send them? The glossary – ten pages of definitions of the words I use in the book which are unfamiliar or unknown to most westerners -- is complete. All right! I've got to print it out but I have no bucks. Amazing.

Chapter Twenty Five Restrain Yourself

April 10, 1997

Days have passed, many more it seems between entries than ever before in the course of writing this log. And quite honestly (I'm less than honest sometimes?), in terms of my psychological perspective, the distance between where I was on April 6th and where I am now seems even greater than the chronology would indicate.

I'm not sure if my crazed writing, I don't know how else to put it, is the result of craziness in my life, or if the craziness of my writing – and thus of my mind – resulted in a seemingly crazy life. This is really a crucial, pivotal issue for a writer, one I have touched upon previously.

The premise is: The world is as you see it, which is tantamount to saying that the world is as you think it, too. So what is a writer to do? I might put it another way. It is one thing to somewhat abstractly think and feel things, and another to actually verbalize them or write them down in words. Words have inherently more impact than mere thoughts.

So by giving vent to these thoughts by solidifying them into words, it would seem that one loses control of oneself instead of getting in control, instead of relieving the tension, it builds it up. How did Swami Vivekananda²⁶ put it? Something like restraint is more difficult to exercise than giving free rein to your thoughts and feelings. And he's right about that, and about the fact that restraint is better for the soul, too, because its akin to renunciation, for one.

Like at work today. Once again, my young, beautiful and complaining co worker Lesley had me called into the manager's office for a confrontation on a mater of sales procedure. Last time this happened, she provoked me by calling me a liar and I countered by calling her dumb and stupid. Now saying that to someone is against everything I believe in; treating people the way you want to be treated is the way I want to go.

But I let my emotions run away with me; I had no restraint. And as a result, my self esteem suffered, and it bothered me a lot. So this time, I didn't fall into that trap again, I didn't let her rile me or stoop to such improper behavior, even though once again I was provoked by her. And I feel better about how I handled myself, how I had control of myself. So it's all about control.

Back to the idea about how to be a writer, or rather, what a writer should write about. The reason I figured that I could give expression to some of the misery, loneliness, pain, heartbreak, anger, suffering, frustration, fear, loss, or whatever I have been expressing in this logbook lately is that I supposed that it might do others good to read it and discover that they are not the only ones who might be feeling that way, that by

²⁶ Swami Vivekananda whose pre-monastic name was Narendranath Dutta (January 12, 1863 - July 4, 1902) was one of the most famous and influential spiritual leaders of the Vedanta philosophy. He was the chief disciple of Ramakrishna Paramahansa and was the founder of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. Many consider him an icon for his fearless courage, his positive exhortations to the youth, his broad outlook on social problems, and countless lectures and discourses on Vedanta philosophy.

reading my words it might give expression to things that they can't express as succinctly as I, since I am the writer, and then they would feel better about how they feel, they might not feel so alone in their trouble.

It's that catharsis thing, that invoking of fear and pity the Greeks were into in their dramatic pieces. That's okay, I suppose, but it's certainly not enough. I've got to go further; I've got to give them some hope, some way out of their problems. Otherwise I am just crying and complaining and really only adding to their problems because now I've got us all crying in our beer and I am the puss poet.

No -- I think I should be able to exercise more control and choose my topics with more discrimination.²⁷ Actually, I know what part of the problem has been for me lately, and it has nothing to do with New Orleans or anything or anyplace else for that matter. My problem is that I haven't been living my life honestly and virtuously. I haven't been practicing what I want to preach. And that is just plain phony. Phony Rondone.

Granted, I believe with Buddha that the middle path is the right path, that I can't be too hard on myself or others, I can't practice too much austerity or keep my bow strung too loose either.²⁸ But I can't fly in the face of what I know is wrong either and think and do things which compromise my personal integrity and still be expected to tell the truth and be a help to others, to be worthy of being read.

I've got to keep my mind and heart focused on what's in my own eye and not what's in other's eyes, as Christ taught. So, that's it then. I'll be getting back on the right track from her on out, folks.

Chapter Twenty Six The Clouds Roll By

April 11, 1997

Winter has injured herself again. She told me she'd spent a couple of days in a body cast in much pain, but she's better now. She slipped on a skateboard and landed horizontal, smashing her skull. Draven, now her x boyfriend, sits at the next table with three gutter punk girls; he apparently hasn't departed for Texas as advertised previously. I make it a point now to always do what I say I am going to do.

Two really nice things happened. I have a new little kitty. I found him skulking around St. Louis Cathedral, behind the church on the grounds, where there is this hung statue of Jesus with open arms that they front light with ground spots so that it casts a giant shadow on the high brick church wall. Splendid effect.²⁹

So there was this ruddy little Abyssinian looking male cat, not more than six months old, crying to me when I beckoned him with a squeaking sound I mad by pursing

²⁷ Vivekananda, in Sanskrit, means *The Bliss of Discrimination*.

²⁸ Once, Buddha was meditating by a river. As he sat, after practicing fierce austerities, he heard a conversation between a master violinist and an apprentice. "Do not keep your strings wound too tight, or it will warp the neck. And do not leave your strings too loose, as it will cause the instrument to be dissonant." At once Buddha awoke from his meditation and realized that this was the way. Thus, The Middle Path of Buddhism was devised.

²⁹ Tono uses this statue in his fourth novel, a historical fiction set in Syria in 300 A.D.

my lips and sucking. I picked him up and started carrying him home and was on Royal Street by a man who know the cat and said he'd wanted to take the cat home too but couldn't. It seems the parish help had been feeding him, and yes, indeed, he did need a good home and this man was happy that the cat was going to get a good home. I named him Nutley Jr after my grandpa's cat Nutley and we get on grandly.

The other nice thing was that my boss at work gave me a perfectly serviceable ten speed bike with flat tires which I pumped up and after a brake and seat adjustment and a wash it looked like new. Tremendous luck, nice charity.

I also must make note of talking to Marisol who works upstairs in the Canal Place mall where I work too now downstairs at the Sunglass Hut two days a week. I was informed by one of her co workers of her possible interest in me and so I am proceeding to attempt to arrange a meeting after work on Sunday. Maybe she'll come with me to Kaldi's or something. She is a very beautiful and well endowed young Latino woman, with long black hair and a wonderful looking face and Egyptian style eye makeup.

Today I was relieved in some way by the news that she works seven days a week too like I do, because I was afraid that she might be turned off by the fact that she couldn't see much of me or that I'd be too tired because of my work schedule. Now at least I know she'll understand.

I am so very poor right now and can't make it until next Friday's pay day. I don't have any idea how I will eat this week. I can't even afford to do my laundry although Korin said today (yes, I finally saw my "landlady" friend who rented me the apartment downstairs from her; she was holding her baby and talking to a big biker dude on Royal Street today in front of The Mystic Curio shop where I buy incense and where I purchased a cane which turns into a sword) that the laundry room in the yard behind our house is free to use.

Anyway, I hope Marisol and I will hit it off. This certainly is a Goddess town; there are beautiful and powerful women everywhere. I met a beautiful and intelligent twenty year old in Coop's Place tonight while I waited for my food to go order who blew my mind by her graphic description of her planned piercing through her clitoris later tonight. She has one piercing already, she tells me, running vertical through her clitoris; this new one will run horizontally behind the hood like a barbell.

She described her private parts to me, a total stranger, in such detail that I became incredibly aroused and she had many other interesting things to say about anthropology (forensic) and about the book "Modern Primitives" which my friends from San Francisco, Andrea and Vale put together under the Research publishing label in the eighties.

"Tell your friends for me," Lisa told me after she'd discovered I knew the writers, "that they influenced a whole generation and were responsible for me feeling all right about my tendencies (towards tattooing and body manipulation) which even psychiatrists couldn't help me with."³⁰

I also spent some time with Suzanne the painter tonight at Kaldi's and on the river. Ah – Roxy Music on the box: "Dear eyes once more inspire this crazy time . . . still falls like rain inside." Suzanne is a serious artist and a good friend I think. She is a big girl, very pretty though, and she has a huge studio in the Bywater District along the river with David the sculptor and her boyfriend Eric, also a painter. I heard some discouraging

³⁰ Tono did have a chance to pass that sentiment along to Vale back in San Francisco in 2005.

words from her previously about my religious artwork and religion in general which I decided to ignore and instead I gave her the benefit of the doubt while I worked on her in my own silent way, teaching by example.

I also described to both her and Lisa in Coop's tonight how I feel very sensitive to the energies emerging from the inhabitants of this city, how it is kind of like each individual has this little whirling cloud of moods and tendencies and when they combine they create this atmosphere which I imbibe and then produce myself, which is close to right except I should feel it but not be affected by it myself due to my practices, and to that end, I will continue to practice.

I saw Raven too, briefly tonight; she's still sick but getting better, though she looked awfully beat up. *Dance away the heartache, dance away the tears.*

Chapter Twenty Seven Weekend Friends

April 12, 1997

I awoken to a torrential downpour and peals of thunder that shake the walls of my basement apartment. The clocks are all set differently in my room due to an interruption of electrical power yesterday, I presume. It's Saturday and this weekend is The French Quarter Festival. Block parties, music, food and drink, but it'll be a wet one, I bet.

I love how the rain cleans the air so that when you look out over the Mississippi River after the rain everything sparkles and shines and you think you can see clouds that stretch all the way out to the sea, or the Gulf as they call it around here. I guess I'll be able to enjoy this phenomenon a lot down here, since it rains six feet a year on average in NOLA.

Morning brioche, coffee and OJ at Maurice's Croissant D'or on Ursaline Street. It's busy still at 8:30 am, but less hectic than during the week. It's still very dark outside and foreboding, but the rain has stopped for a time. Jazz Fest is next weekend, the real celebration of the city, not like Mardi Gras, which is a fiasco in my estimation and a nuisance beyond belief for residents like myself. And then April will be almost over.

Amazing, this thing called time. Time down here in NOLA seems different (huge lightening bolt and thunderclap, quite close.) The rain picks up again. Thank goodness I bought my waterproof Dr Marten boots. Now if I could only afford shoe polish. What's a former West Point cadet to do? Time is moving fast today. The day is already over. I sold over four thousand dollars of merchandise at work today and I'm the top dog so far this month.

I spoke to Marisol today at Canal Place and she is meeting me tomorrow after work. And Lucile called today and I'm waiting for her now at Kaldi's. Lucile is the psychiatrist lady from Durham, N.C. Simple, simple procedure – don't treat people the way you don't want to be treated. Don't lie. Don't steal anything, even the most insignificant thing. Be charitable (and don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing). Be responsible. Don't shirk your duties – take on the hardest tasks. Listen, listen. Teach by example. Don't barter with people for their friendship and love.

Here in NOLA, my friends and acquaintances are the poor and the rich, the idle and the busy, the educated and the illiterate, artists, musicians, religious zealots, Satanists, witches, topless waitresses, busboys, clowns, coffee jerks, photographers, writers, gutter punks, hippies, teenagers, black people, Indian people, Latinos, Creoles, saints and sinners, the social elite and the socially outcast. What does it matter “who” someone is? How do they truly differ from me?

In my life, I have been a waiter in New York City, a truck driver in Arizona, a cab driver in San Francisco, a West Point cadet, a drug trafficker, a professional musician, a fine arts painter, a professional advertising executive, a director of marketing for a large corporation, the father of three children, a husband twice, a retail sales clerk, a son, etc., etc., etc. Yet I have never changed at all. How is this possible?

Next day, Sunday, it has turned incredibly cold for the middle of April in NOLA. Never expected to be wearing my black turtleneck sweater anymore. In fact, when I brought down to NOLA a lot of my cold weather gear I never expected to be wearing it at all, but boy, was I wrong. It got so cold down here in winter that I almost lost some toes!

No work today; I slept many hours and woke with a head and neck ache. Kaldi’s is filled with foreign tourists again – I’m not sure I like Europeans so much right about now. Also men with huge bulging stomachs. Now it is time to control my thoughts. These uncharitable connections are not correct. This is what we call a bad mood. It can be controlled. My tendency is to be mean – instead, I’ll be nice.

Spent two and a half hours with Lucile last night, talking and talking – she was great. I think I helped her some. She is in some pain over the demise of her twenty five year long marriage which she terminated. Married to a cold fish; two sons, twenty one and thirteen. She is a doctor of psychiatry and yet it was so easy for us to get along. She was a little too compassionate or feeling or something – attachment is a problem for her. A bit of a weeping clam; she cried and swelled up emotionally a number of times, but still she is a real sweetheart. Not beautiful but not bad looking either and close to my age. She held my hand as we walked down Royal Street towards her street car. Back to Durham, North Carolina for her. I’ll drop her a line and say it was fine.

Chapter Twenty Eight **Kissed By an Angel**

April 13, 1997

Tonight I come home from spending the last three hours with Marisol. I met Marisol at Canal Place where she works at Mrs. Fields Cookies and I work at The Sunglass Hut. The first time I saw her, she was wearing a thin black choker collar around a supple, light brown skinned neck, and she immediately reminded me a little of Martha Sanchez, the mother of my twin daughters from San Francisco.

Marisol was obviously Latino and obviously young, with very long straight black hair, brown eyes and very prominent eyebrows, a shapely red edged mouth, more than ample breasts and a good overall 5’ 7” tall frame. I could tell instantly that she had an artistic side to her by the way she dressed and the way she did her eye makeup.

I initiated a conversation with her I'm pretty sure the first time we saw each other, and subsequently kept in touch with her by saying hello and chatting very briefly whenever I saw her at work. I thought nothing more about her except that I liked her and thought she was beautiful and interesting; I did not pursue her or ask her out or anything like that. In fact, I didn't even know her name, but I did ask her co worker what her name was sometime after meeting her.

Then this same co worker by the name of Sharon revealed to me, in a fairly humorous way, that Marisol had been inquiring about me to her. Sharon said to me, "I don't understand why, but Marisol has been asking me 'Who is that guy?' Have you seen him lately?"

Once I heard this, I was determined to ask this young lady to meet me after work one night for coffee, and this I did, and this we did tonight. After seeing Lucille the night before and having a wonderful time talking to her, and her and I being close to the same age, I was a bit worried that Marisol and I wouldn't hit it off, but that didn't happen.

Although the hours I spent talking to Marisol were not as intensely intellectual as the night before with Lucille, we got along fine and I felt more at ease with her than I thought I would. In fact, all day today I have been in a near tizzy about seeing her because I had the inclination to think that this girl might just be someone I could fall in love with.

Marisol turns out to be a native of New Orleans, but both of her parents are from Honduras. She is close to her family, too; she talks to them everyday. She also turns out to have a musician boyfriend that she is in love with and has been with him for the last three years. She told me this in the middle of our stay at Kaldi's. When she told me, my heart sunk, but I felt a bit of relief too because, well, I don't know. I guess I figured that if this was the case, I could relax a little more.

Then, on the way home, she let me hold her hand which I liked a lot, and later, after she showed me here absolutely marvelous paintings and sculpture, and I was leaving her apartment, in the doorway, she let me kiss her and then kissed me back deeply. She tasted so good, her mouth felt so delicious, her hand was on the back of my neck; her sucking on my tongue just about made me swoon.

That was that, and we said goodnight.

Upstairs in her apartment she didn't want me to kiss her, telling me, "I can't do this, I love my boyfriend." To which I replied, "I understand, and well you should." Yet in the doorway she kissed me in earnest. Oh, happy moment, one moment of bliss, one moment of love. It was the first time I had sincerely kissed someone I really wanted to kiss since I had kissed Michelle, the twenty one year old stripper I met the first week I was in New Orleans, and it was the best kiss I have had period since I've been in NOLA.

Marisol's paintings made me feel the bliss one feels when they come into contact with the ananda part of Satchitananda³¹, the three components that comprise the universe, and tonight, for certain, I fell in love with her. I could indeed love her so. We would make an excellent couple, no matter our age difference, about which I had to lie because of my embarrassment and my desire to not have her reject me; she guessed thirty five and I said thirty eight.

³¹ Satchitananda, in Sanskrit, means Existence, Consciousness and Bliss, and is said to be the three basic components which comprise all creation. The goal of the practice of Hinduism is to become fully aware of this reality. It is a spiritual trinity not unlike its Christian counterpart.

Oh God, please forgive me. Life is so hard now and I am so alone. Everybody has a mate but me, although Lucille didn't and felt the lack as deeply as I. In fact, I particularly thought how it helped me to finally meet a woman who felt as I do. I know I'm not the only lonely person in the world, and I have a lot to be thankful for. Marisol kissed me sweetly, dearly, with passion. It was grand and I will not forget that kiss for a long, long time. Now I am here in my new apartment with Frank Sinatra on the box and Nutley the cat sleeping soundly on a chair. Tomorrow is Monday, but tonight is the 13th and 13 is my lucky number, and tonight is the night I was kissed by an angel.

Chapter Twenty Nine God Please

April 14, 1997

I rode my new bike to work today for the first time, down cold, wind tossed streets, earlier than usual, because I awoke early due to sufficient sleep and no interruption due to meditation during Brahmamurti (the time between 3 am and 6 am, the best period of the night for such activities.) Fifty degrees this morning. I never thought it would get this cold again. Four days until Friday and I will not be eating much. The French Quarter Festival is over, Kaldi's is dead, like the Croissant D'or this morning. Probably ten thousand urologists in town now, mostly from Europe it seems. Italians, Brazilians, Dutch, Swiss, French, Argentines, Israelis; my language skills are increasing exponentially.

I know now that if I lived in France, Italy or Brazil, or other Spanish speaking countries, I would be about to speak the language fluently in a very short period of time. Which brings me to an interesting issue – what will I do about my income taxes? Tonight I must file for 1996. I owe twenty thousand to the IRS probably, and as of yet they don't know where I am. But they will as soon as I file and they'll grab me or my wages by July for sure. I've been down this old road before. Oh, well, might as well get it over with. I goes so quickly and all at once I owe yet another grand I can't pay. I don't even bother with California taxes because I'm grassed there anyway if I ever decide to live and work there again – they'll probably come and cart me off to debtor's prison. Here come the bumbaliffs. James Joyce once likened his life to a grand overture. Just before the curtain is to go up on the first act, the bumbaliffs rush in and arrest the fiddlers for debt.³²

This entry has dribbled over into the 15th of April, tax day, and at work today I saw a co worker who has not been conducting herself too favorably sell \$10,000 worth of merchandise. She has so many nice things, a good car and fine clothes and a finance and youth and beauty, she comes from a wealth Southern family, and now she had this phenomenal success and is leading me in sales for the month (I'm still in second place.) I disappointed myself by feeling envious, or by wondering why God decided to reward this

³² Tono later reworked this comedic remark in his first novel, Pop Goes the Weasel: "*Sometimes I think of my life as a grand set up for a joke in which the comic either muffs the punch line or forgets it all together.*"

person whom I feel isn't conducting herself properly. My back is in knots and I'm so tired and so poor I won't be able to eat probably all week.

I meditated this morning at 3 am but slept late too and still this pain and weakness. I don't know right now – just don't understand what's going on in my life, where I'm headed next. It's so strange. I had a good talk with Shannon just now at Kaldi's. Shannon's the photographer friend of mine, pretty, blond, thirty two year old. She spoke of her younger sister who married a gay man. She's going to Atlanta and Asheville, N.C. soon. She travels a lot in her job – horse photography. And she does her own stuff – art photograph but it doesn't pay the bills, huh!

She took a few pictures of me with her Hasselblad 2 1/2" camera just now. We'll see. I'm sick to my stomach on and off now. Probably the result of malnutrition. New Orleans seems to be closing in on me now. I haven't called my kids in weeks, and have been too poor to sent Ciara and Teresa the letter I word processed but must print out at Kinko's.

Marisol hurt me; it would have been better if I had not gotten together with her at all. Now I know why sexual stuff gets in the way of spiritual endeavors – but I don't fault her for showing interest in me and kissing me when she has a boyfriend. She's very young. She didn't do it to hurt me. Only 7 m and I feel like going home. Why? Why don't I ever go out at night? Why do I always fell depressed when I have no money? Tomorrow's only Wednesday. God, please comfort me. God please protect me from evil and sin.

Chapter Thirty Kosmic Karma Knots

April 16, 1997

The things that I never knew about are becoming known to me now, and I will never be the same again because of the knowledge of them. Sometimes in life we think we are doing things for one reason, only to discover if we listen and look and think closely enough, God is teaching us the lessons that we must learn before we die.

In my case, who's to say how many lessons I must learn? For one, I committed so many errors in my life, lived my life with disregard for and in ignorance of the truth, that for the laws of karma to be enforced, a lot of contrary knowledge must be conveyed to me, and that knowledge, like all knowledge that we really believe, must be conveyed by experience.

Another way of saying this is that we must suffer the result of our actions (karma) if it is bad karma that we created. The misery, the loneliness, the poverty, the defeat, the humiliation, the oppression, the fear, the pain I experience now teaches me lessons which will make it impossible for me to live my life in such a cavalier fashion in the future, whether in the remainder of this life or in future incarnations. We learn from our mistakes, and if we don't, we're doomed to keep on making those mistakes until we finally do learn.

You know those stories about people “on the way up” using and abusing people, only later to meet those same people “on the way down” and in turn being used and abused by them? This is kind of what I am talking about. For example, today I am lonely. Is this because so many times in my life I trampled women’s hearts under my proud and promiscuous feet?

Or now I am poor and miserable. Is this because I exploited people and acted proud and oppressive in the past, gaining unfairly while others wanted? Or I am without things now. Is this because I stole things from others? You get the idea.

So tonight, in assessing my situation, I have come to the realization that what will be in this regard is what must be, and I am going to have to shut up and take it, so that I can get beyond it. At the same time, this kind of attitude, along with the development of contrary, good karmic traits will plant seed for the future, a future filled with the cessation of suffering and pain, a future filled with joy and bliss and love and union.

I see now that it is only because of our own ignorance that we are kept apart from our true heritage, our true destiny, the knowledge (which means experience) of who we really are. This is what Jesus meant when he said that we must give up everything we own (which doesn’t mean only our material possessions but our karma as well), take up the cross (which means to accept our suffering with courage and faith and without complaint as he did as an example), and follow him (which means to live our lives by the teachings he promulgated.) This leads to the kingdom of heaven, to God, which, too, Jesus said was inside each of us.³³

Looking at things in this way, life does make sense, because we must have the time to untie these “cosmic karma knots” we form in our lives, we must come full circle back again upon ourselves, we must clean up the mess we made on the way up as we head down again, from the cradle to the grave. So yesterday at work, I actually learned some very valuable lessons, I actually burned away some pretty formidable karma I had created in the earlier, more foolish days of my life. So, I will stop railing against my fate and take responsibility for not only my present actions but my past actions as well. Thanks for the insight and amen!

Chapter Thirty One **The Poetess and the Tree Surgeon**

April 19, 1997

I gave black poetess Denise, who came to sit with me about forty five minutes before her poetry reading at Kaldi’s, the swami orange sweater I found at The Sharper Image that day before I knew her well enough by her poems. I had never met her before; she asked if she could sit with me. Soon after Denise and I engaged in a discussion of being careful about what you write and the value and efficacy of the Greek idea of catharsis, Leslie showed up, Denise’s friend of eighteen years, and it soon became obvious, her one time lover.

I joked and asked if Leslie was a tree surgeon when I was told by Denise that Leslie was very strong and could lift trees. Both ladies were thin and fair and sexy,

³³ See the Gnostic scripture, *The Gospel of Thomas*.

Leslie was white; Denise could have been except for her black features and how she talked a little like Richard Pryor during some of her readings. She wore a tight, tight blue and black two tone ankle length dress.

It was strange how long before I had heard Denise read a word of her stuff I had already initiated the discussion that her work as a word person carried with it considerable responsibility. She was the female version of Angelo whose poem on suicide had initiated the same discussion and was chronicled previously in this journal.

Does it do an audience any good to hear the ranting and ravings of a fictitious character who is mentally disturbed, who has been abused, oppressed and wronged? Does it express for the audience things which they have felt and experienced but are not able to articulate for themselves? And by doing so, does the artist serve the audience, is there a cleansing, healing catharsis, an invoking of fear and pity in the listeners, or does the drama just confirm in the listener a world view which they already hold, thus pushing them further into that view rather than releasing them from it?

Is the “art” a result of the experiences of the artist that she puts in the mouths of the characters, is this form of fiction really art or as Denise pointed out herself, is it just journalism? Are you just telling it as you see it, or does the work in the hands of a skilled and gifted craftsman become elevate to the level of art, of literature? I speak of Poe’s lyrical poetry like *Annabel Lee* and *The Raven*, and Shakespeare’s work which was produced before often vulgar crowd with bawdy overtones yet took on much more heady topics and which seemed to be thus elevated.

Later Leslie, whom I liked a lot, as I did Denise, talked to me at length and I learned that she had two children and suffered under an unsatisfactory relationship with their father and was divorce for about a year. Her mother was a disciple of the Mararishi Yogi and “meditated six hours a day and is totally wacko,” Leslie informed me. The problem with serious Kundalini Yoga³⁴ meditation is that you just can’t do without the hands on guidance of a true guru. It’s downright dangerous and shouldn’t be attempted. Unfortunately that warning is not always properly emphasized by individuals that are looking to sell books on the subject and don’t want to scare anybody away from it.

When I had finally sat through Denise’s set, and it was difficult to do so, I might add, my worst fears had been realized, although I kept my opinion to myself and left the café. I am so sick and tired of listening to angry poets spewing in the character of a fictitious first person persona how lousy life is, how they’ve been abused and misused and neglected and violated and . . . angry. Life sucks, men suck, fathers suck, families suck, pain, pain, pain.

I questioned Denise about this before she had ever opened her mouth. I actually came up with a term for these kinds of people, one of whom became pretty famous and was a friend of mine by the name of Karen Finley: *Puss Poets*. Where’s the upside, where’s the solution, where’s the beauty and the life in your work? Okay, you’ve told me about the bad, but how do we make it good? Where’s the salvation, what’s the solution? Is just reporting the problem enough? That’s the easy part.

³⁴ Kundalini = literally, “The Coiled One; the goal of Kundalini Yoga is to, through meditation techniques, awaken the coiled serpent or shakti that lies dormant at the base of the spine and cause it to rise up through a channel parallel to your spine called the susumna, piercing various energy centers or chakras along the way and uniting with Shiva at the thousand petal lotus at the top of the head.

In the personage of the embittered black man, the abused and violated daughter, the impassioned lesbian, Denise failed to reach me. Of course, I am a white male and I express myself as an artist on various levels; so what does she care anyway about reaching me? I felt sorry for her when I left the café, and I did not feel uplifted or released or cleansed by catharsis from my unexpressed emotions. I just felt awfully tired of hearing people complain about life and painting it so black.

Be careful, kids, because life is as you see it . . . and as you say it. I am going to have to write a book of poetry it seems to me, to show the world how it is done. Of course, everyone should read Muktananda's wonderful books of poetry in this regard to get an idea of what I mean. Let's teach and uplift people, educate and comfort them with a vision of the truth instead of pointing out only the lies.

Chapter Thirty Two **The Other Side of This Life**

April 22, 1997

I pull the cotton bag made in India out of my backpack, put it on the table at Kaldi's and begin to extract the jewelry I had put there so as not to let the neighbors see me biking away with all the glitter when I leave my apartment this morning.

I've lived in NOLA for six full moons now. Lime and Coconut on the box. I am sick today and slept until noon. I was surprised last night when I went into the Café Du Monde to use the WC how many people I knew from seeing them at Kaldi's worked there. Yesterday at work at The Riverwalk I met a famous rock star from the seventies and sixties, English. I was the only person who recognized him. I told him a story about when I was about sixteen years old and helped run the music venue at the YMCA in Racine, Wisconsin. The Yardbirds came to play, but their instruments didn't show up on time at the airport. I was in my first band at the time playing bass. In the locker room, I asked my guitar playing friend John if he would lend his guitar to Jimmy Page and he refused! I was so mad at him I threw a coat hanger at him from across the locker room. When I told Page this story he thought it was very funny, too. He might have been playing with Eric Clapton at the time and later went on to fame and fortune with Led Zeppelin, of course. So I have met him twice now.

Wood is too heavy though it is hard; plastic is lighter but can it be as hard? I have not seen many people made truly happy and peaceful by their outward circumstances. The rich and the poor, young and old, famous and unknown, loved and unloved, man and woman – all suffer if not saved, saved by knowledge and experience of the inner self – saved by the grace of God and the guru. *I want to live in your house* – sings Steel Pulse.

The stress of my sales job on the floor of this retail store is tremendous when you are working solely on commission, and unless you sell enough you will starve. I should cut down to four days there – it's knocking me out. I also should apply around for an ad job again. Got to get my resume together and printed out. And laundry today! Clean the room. Go to the library & take back books & tapes. Don't spend any money TONO!

It's 4 pm now and I'm doing pretty well on spending no money. I saw Spirit, a girl from Santa Cruz, at the library today; she has been down here with a Charlie Manson look alike who is now her boyfriend since I first arrived. She's got a cute body, an upturned nose and a nice personality – a little flakey, though, maybe. She's going to Ireland she tells everybody; I saw her last night at The Dragon's Den too. I didn't see Marisol and her boyfriend Joe there as I have in the past but I did see Heather, Marisol's roommate and she recognized and said hello to me. She was exquisite looking, regaled in rock starlet accoutrement.

I didn't drink last night but still had a heck of a hangover in the morning, because of the guitar player in the band at The Den who kept pitching the virtues of saki. It was two for one saki night on Monday. I'm really glad I got rid of that habit. And that other one, cocaine. The French Navy is in town. You can tell by their funny white tams with the red bobs on top and blue brims.

What am I? What is the meaning of this lonely life I am leading? *That's the other side of this life* – sang Peter, Paul and Mary in the sixties. The sixties – almost forty years ago now and I was in college at the time! I don't meet enough older women – Shannon is about the only one. I really wish she would make love to me – that would be something. Marisol too but not if she has a boyfriend. It wouldn't be the same for her as it would be for me. And afterward I would be extremely jealous. No, not worth it. Still, I went to The Dragon's Den last night in hopes of seeing her.

Chapter Thirty Three **Where The Chapters Have No Names**

April 23, 1997

This logbook of dreams, pain and fantasy is nearing two months worth of entries and is rapidly drawing to a close. This is so long now that it is my second book now, and when I get around to word processing it, we'll see if it contains any information worth transmitting to my fellow human beings.

Muktananda writes of the awesome power of silence – how the guru's deepest knowledge is revealed to the disciple in silence -- the power of being silent in the company of a saint. *Return to Sender* by Elvis Presley is playing on the box at The Croissant D'or. Johnny Rotten reports how Elvis bombed in Vegas opening for comedian Shecky Green!

Marisol thought I was about thirty five years old. Her boyfriend is forty one and complains about how old he is. Oh, boy, if she only knew I was forty eight! My room needs sweeping and mopping, and my laundry needs doing. I need an ironing board and a decent litter box for Nutley – Nutley doesn't even want to go outside in the morning already.

Where to go in the world for peace and happiness? Where has love gone in my life? Today I'll go to work and younger people will tell me what to do – what I've done wrong or something. Forget your pride Tono, forget your desires. Follow Christ's teachings. I am not celibate but I am a monk. The loneliness is really getting to me. Why can't I find a girlfriend?

I saw Spirit twice yesterday; we talked and sat together at Kaldi's for some time and it was nice – she's very smart and sensitive and obviously spiritual -- and nineteen years old! Swamiji says I must give up words, lectures, in order to see the truth. He says I must give up duality. Give up my limited sense of self. This is the same as shutting up when people abuse you or insult you like Carol Hagen does at work. The third assistant manager, age thirty one. I understand. It took me so many years to see. *I sit and watch as tears flow by* sings the radio in the background but nobody hears but me.

Chapter Thirty Four Brahmamurti NOLA

April 27, 1997

It is late, very very late or very early in the morning, the time of God, *Brahmamurti* in Sanskrit, between 3am and 6am in the morning, and I lay in bed thinking of Marisol. I saw her today briefly in the Croissant D'or on her way to her art job, where she works with her boyfriend and her boyfriend's artist friend. She was a vision of loveliness in that place; she came over to my table to chat.

But I will never know her as a man knows a woman, because she has a boyfriend and has been with him for three years. It is not our time and I must leave it alone. As I lay thinking, I realize that I cannot go outside of myself to another easily, because I know that true happiness lies within. This was a partial problem with the only two women I made love to here in NOLA so far – I could not go to see them again, they had to come and see me. But I was not in love with them. I know the difference very easily.

If I could find someone that I loved who loved me too, and we made love, I think I could follow up on the relationship, but that has not happened to me in a long, long time, if ever. I pray nightly as follows: "Dear God, I love you, you who are the first without a second. Thank you for everything you have given me today, and let your will be done through me always. Please keep my family and friends peaceful, safe and happy. Please keep even my enemies and the whole world peaceful, safe and happy. And finally, oh Lord, please grant me a mate, please give me a girlfriend."³⁵

Yet I know it will be difficult for me to go outward towards another. Even if I met the right girl now, I don't know if I could enter into a relationship with her, because of this feeling, this inability to deviate from my set schedule now of work and meditation and study and prayer, not to mention my writing. I never, and I mean never, go out at night any longer. I never hang out at bars or clubs, I don't drink alcohol, I don't listen to bands except street bands during the day. I always go home around dusk and usually am in bed by ten o'clock.

I work seven days a week now. I am what you might call a boring guy by "acceptable standards." Why should I have to act like others do? Is that a measure of my worth, my goodness? Are they happier than I because they drink or go to nightclubs and party and stay out late and make the scene and dress fashionably? I don't necessarily see that.

³⁵ A year later, in 1998, in Wisconsin, Tono met Jennifer Jacklin, and they fell in love. As of 2006, they are still together and in love, and have a wonderful young child, Sophia, not yet two years old.

What do people who do these things know that I don't know, what do they talk about? The latest song or group, the latest party or artist, the latest fashion or movie or magazine or TV show or popular book, the latest new club or show? This is pretty frivolous stuff, not the kind of information one needs to get into the kingdom of heaven I think.

Maybe I can't talk about these things and maybe I am boring, dull or square by some people's standards, but I can talk about the Self, my knowledge I have obtained spiritually and God and a guru in your life.

I can talk about how good, wholesome food is important, as is moderation in all things. Certainly too I can talk of the experiences I have had in my life, all the places I have lived and traveled to, all the various jobs I've had and all the lessons I have learned – I enjoy mostly talking about life itself, what it is all about, behaving towards ourselves and each other, what is important and good to do and what we should avoid.

I enjoy most the acquisition of knowledge and wisdom and sharing that knowledge and wisdom with others who are capable of listening and receiving the knowledge. As Jesus said often: "Let those who have ears, hear; let those who have eyes, see. I have come to the world to transmit this knowledge and wisdom, but no one is interested. I have come to you with the cool water of truth, but I find none thirsty; everyone is drunk."

So tonight, during Brahmamurti, instead of meditating which I do most nights, tonight I write this entry and read Swami Muktananda's book, *The Perfect Relationship*.

Chapter Thirty Five Last Spring in NOLA

April 27, 1997

This entry marks, among other things, the sixtieth day of chronicling time in this logbook and six months of habitation here in NOLA. Energy, strength, clarity, personal power, the ability to control the forces of nature.

First thing in the morning, Draven plops himself down at my table at Kaldi's to tell me how he's on his way to a job interview and how tough it is for a kid with no references or ID to get a job. It took me seven working days to get a job in NOLA. I am just beginning, I think, to understand who I am. It is more important to have something to say and to say it right than to just fill up a lot of pages with an ever expanding lexicon of words, words which don't mean much.

I feel like a mad monk consumed with lust right now. I should buy a canvas & do a painting. I am leaning in the direction of a self portrait based upon Suzanne's magic marker drawing of me. It's important to do the creative stuff. It's what sets us apart as a culture and a species. Like David and Eric's and Suzanne's huge warehouse floor sized studio in the Baywater. A beautiful expression of American culture you will not find anywhere else in quite the same arrangement. Remember that big broken down houseboat in North Sausalito that the hippies had inhabited since the sixties but it was twenty years later? Same thing, Eliane, the French comedian I met when I first moved to

San Francisco from Paris, she turned me on to that place. It's fun to remember the places I've lived and traveled through. I've been very fortunate to have done so much traveling in this country. It is an extremely beautiful and diverse and exciting country, filled with a lot of energy and interesting people. The people in Racine don't have much vision or ambition or drive because if they did they'd get outta there but don't. Well, some do, the smart ones I think.

Too bad – I wish my hometown was here or in San Francisco. My kids sure were lucky to be born and raised in SF!

So I have decided to write a play which could be put on at the warehouse space my friends rent, which means, among other things, that I'm going to have to say adios to this writing project; but, it's Spring, Spring, Spring – and this might as well be PARIS! So instead of saying goodbye, I'll close this journal with "A Bien Tot."

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