

My Gateway Voyage: An Experiential Account

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From August 26th through September 1st 2000, I participated in the six-day intensive Gateway Voyage residential program run by The Monroe Institute (TMI), the non-profit consciousness research center located in the breathtakingly beautiful surroundings of rural Nelson County, Virginia. To call it an extraordinary experience is a vast, but perhaps necessary, understatement. This is a clear case in which words do pale when it comes to capturing the essence of the experience.

My nominal reason for doing the Gateway at this time was the receipt of a modest research grant from the university in support of my current project, an exploration of whether and how nonrational states of consciousness can initiate and guide rational philosophical inquiry. Many great philosophers, including, for example, Socrates and Descartes, claimed that certain exceptional experiences had influenced or inspired their thinking. By and large, however, mainstream modern (and even postmodern) philosophy has paid scant attention, let alone respect, to such holistic claims. Since TMI maintains that its patented Hemi-Sync sound technology harmonizes the functions of the left and right cerebral hemispheres of the brain (or the intuitive and rational aspects of mind), the program seemed an ideal testing ground for my hypothesis that philosophy is a whole-self activity. As Nietzsche declared, we must be our own guinea pigs.

In truth, however, I had wanted to do the Gateway ever since learning about the existence of TMI, when I read Robert Monroe's second book, *Far Journeys* (1985), back in the early 1990s. I confess that I have had spontaneous psychic and mystical-type experiences ever since I can remember, but I have always wanted to be able to go into these areas consciously and intentionally. When I read what Monroe was doing at TMI, it struck me that this was the method for me. I appreciated his ideological independence, his iconoclasm, and his insistence, as he would later write in *Ultimate Journey* (1994), that no dogma or prejudice should stand in the way of a full-fledged inquiry into the nature of reality. Although much of *Far Journeys* was incomprehensible to me except as

allegory, it nevertheless struck a deeper chord. I was left with the strong impression that Bob Monroe was one of the great visionaries of the twentieth century.

Yet, I hesitated. Indeed, it took me more than eight years to get to TMI. (In the interim, Bob Monroe made his own final passage out of the physical.) Perhaps it was fear (of myself, the unknown) that held me back. But when I arrived at the Nancy Penn Monroe Center and began chatting with my fellow voyagers (there were 25 of us plus three trainers), I soon discovered, to my surprise, that this was not an unusual delay. Some had planned on doing the Gateway for five, ten, and even, in one case, twenty years! The view of the trainers was that this is absolutely as it should be. Things unfold as they do for a reason. We had assembled collectively at this particular time for reasons unknown, though perhaps not ultimately unknowable, to us. And whatever experience we would get would be the one that we need. Rigid expectations (such as, "I must have an out-of-body experience!") would only get in the way. These reassurances had their intended effect of relaxing my own expectations—at least somewhat. What would be, would be, I told myself, trying to short-circuit my usual self-consciousness.

Here I should interject that I am not normally what I would call a "group" person. I prefer a quiet stroll along a deserted beach to a boisterous cocktail party. However, by the end of the program, I was sharing in an esprit du corps that had the power of rocket fuel. I know my fellow voyagers felt the same.

With the notable exceptions of race (almost all Caucasian) and gender, we were a fairly diverse group. Only 8 of the 25 were women, however, which the trainers said was unusual. (In most cases, the ratio is closer to fifty-fifty, with a slight preponderance of males.) Age-wise, we ranged from 70-something to 20-something, though by and large we were boomerish 40-somethings. Many occupations were represented, including doctors, lawyers, corporate executives, computer engineers, paralegals, telephone operators, and happy retirees. Participants came from as far away as Sweden and as close as Richmond, with a good sprinkling from California and a smattering from the Midwest. While some of the voyagers (like myself) were either familiar with the Monroe methods from home use of the Hemi-Sync tapes or had some other form of meditational or spiritual practice (martial arts, Zen, Siddha yoga), a good number were neophytes and had not even read any of Monroe's books. Many admitted to having had a variety of psychic and other exceptional experiences, even as children.

Saturday Afternoon.

The first afternoon was taken up with arrivals, check-ins, and a brief tour of the Center. With its knotty pine paneling and informal atmosphere, the Center reminded me of a cabin in the Maine woods. After my brief intake interview with Lee, the Assistant Trainer (who described TMI as "the only true western mystery school"), I checked out my CHEC (Controlled Holistic Environment Chamber) unit, which has been accurately described as a Pullman berth or the closest thing to a sensory deprivation tank. This is where we would be listening to the Hemi-Sync tapes (on headphones or through speakers) and sleeping each night. My roommate's bags were already stashed in his corner of the cozy, den-like room. I wondered who he was. (Coincidentally, it turned out that Ken, an affable fiftyish semi-retired computer technician from California, was born and raised in the same eastern Pennsylvania coal town where I was born, and also that he had lived for a time in New Jersey, not far from my present residence.) I stashed my own stuff in the empty closet and went downstairs to the social area, where I nibbled on the snacks and sandwiches that had been set out for us new arrivals. Voyagers were trickling in and getting acquainted. It had the anticipatory feel of being in an airport lounge prior to departure. By five o'clock, when we had all assembled in the dining room for our first dinner together, I was eager to begin the voyage.

After a hearty repast, we convened in David Francis Hall for the organized opening of the program. Instead of introducing ourselves, our trainers asked us to pair up with a fellow voyager and get to know him or her a bit. Then we would introduce our new friend to the group by telling something about them that was not obvious, but nevertheless revelatory about some important aspect of their nature or character. I paired with Hanh, a Vietnamese-born computer engineer with whom I had enjoyably chatted earlier that afternoon. This provided me with my first inkling that the week would be full of surprises.

Hanh and I talked again of why we had come to Gateway. Both of us wanted clarity about our respective lives and a deeper, richer connection to Source. Hanh mentioned that he had recently become a student of Zen Buddhism. Then he stunned me by telling me about an epiphany he had while filling out the Gateway application.

"The question asked why I want to come to Gateway," Hanh remembered, his eyes lighting up. "All of a sudden, I realized why. I want to be the Sun that brings energy to Life. I want to be the rain that makes plants grow and brings freshness to the Earth."

My own heart danced as I listened to Hanh's words. Later, when I stood up to introduce him, I described Hanh as a poet and a mystic. As I read my account of Hanh's epiphany to the group, I found myself choking with emotion, barely able to finish. Part of me, at least, knew why: I also wanted to come alive, and give life to others. Something inside had grown cold and dark. I was haunted by a secret grief.

After the introductions, the trainers ceremoniously collected our wristwatches in a strongbox that resembled a treasure chest. From now on, bells would be rung to indicate times for assembling in the white-carpeted room where we would be debriefing tapes or other activities, such as meals or morning exercise. We were to enter into the right-brain zone of No Time as far as possible. Linear, left-brain anxieties were to be minimized as much as possible.

It worked. Although I kept track of the days in my journal, the week was punctuated by the natural, if sometimes dramatic, ebb and flow of inner experience, rather than the artificial external markers of hours, minutes, and seconds. For this reason, the rest of my account will be in the form of an impressionistic sketch of key inner experiences and realizations as opposed to a rigorously complete and chronologically accurate record of events. The latter would not be possible in any case, and the mere attempt would be untrue to the spirit of the entire voyage. Here, then, is my recollection, based on my journal notes made immediately following each experience:

Saturday Evening

This is our first tape exercise. We are practicing what Monroe called "resonant tuning," a yogic-like breathing and vocalizing technique designed to facilitate the level of consciousness Monroe referred to as "Focus 10" (the state of body asleep, mind awake and alert). Sensations of pressure in my big toes are accompanied by a tingling, pulsating sensation that spreads out on the bottoms of my feet and on my hands. I now have the clear and unmistakable impression that I have two distinct sets of hands and feet, and that they are not quite in "sync" with

each other. It is as if the second set of appendages (the nonphysical energy body?) is not in the same position as my physical hands and feet. I also feel a tight band of pressure around my head, as if I am wearing a cap that is at least one size too tight. This sensation persists even after Bob's voice on the tape brings me gently back to C1 (the state of normal waking consciousness).

Sunday Morning

During the night I dream that I catch a big fish. Since my astrological sign is Pisces, I interpret this as a reference to the larger self for which I search. After breakfast, we practice entering the state of Focus 10. I think I hear the blood rushing in my own head. I am deeply relaxed, but not asleep. Suddenly, in my mind's eye, I see an image. It's Bob Monroe, in full angelic regalia, white robe, wings and all! I sense amusement on his part, as if he's chortling, "Well, I'm no angel, but if you need to see me this way, that's fine by me." Am I imagining this, I wonder—is "Bob" just my symbolic shorthand for guidance, or the archetype of the Wise, Old Man—or am I really in contact with him? I ask Bob's image, "Is there anything you can say to me, anything evidential, that would enable me to verify whether I'm making this up or not?" "It's too soon; it would be distracting," he replies. "Trust the process," he reassures me, "you're doing fine." Then, suddenly, he's gone.

After the exercise, I am reminded of a vivid dream I had of Bob Monroe months ago, in February, well before I was certain that I would be attending the Gateway. I dreamt that I was walking by a lecture hall when the marquee caught my eye. Bob Monroe was listed as one of the speakers. My first thought was, "Why, he's dead. How could he be giving a lecture?" Then at once an explanation involving "time loops" and other things that I cannot now recall, but which made eminent good sense at the time, entered my head. "Well, O.K.," I thought. "I always wanted to meet him. Now at least I can go in and listen to his talk." I find myself sitting in the second or third row of a small lecture hall with graduated seats, like an operating theater. A tall, balding, bearish-looking man with rumpled clothing whom I recognize as Monroe is standing in the center of the pit. He and his assistants are passing out white plastic "identity cards" about the size of a credit card, and some other strange-looking device that we are supposed to use by visualizing our energy flowing through it. Monroe is discussing some rather large piece

of equipment, about the size of a dentist's chair, that he's going to demonstrate and asks for a volunteer. I find myself walking front and center and sitting down in the "chair." "Well Joe, now if you'll just relax..." Monroe begins. When I realize that he has used my first name, I am taken aback. I did not introduce myself. How does he know me? I wonder. I interrupt to ask him. Monroe just chuckles warmly, like a tolerant grandfather. "Sure, I know who you are," he says. "In fact, I visit you from time to time to check on your progress. Though lately I've been unable to do so.."

What had struck me most about the dream, and again of my vision in my CHEC unit, was the vivid sense of the presence of a gentle, warm, and wise individual. Whether it was "really" Bob Monroe or whether I was merely personifying a source of wisdom (either inside or outside myself), I did not know. Whatever it was, it radiated high intelligence, good will, and concern for me. One of the trainers to whom I mentioned the experience (and the dream) indicated that others had had such "Monroe encounters" during Gateway. It would not be the last time during the week that I would experience the presence of a Friend.

In Focus 10, we are taught to sense and expand our Resonant Energy Balloon (REBAL), a field of nonphysical energy surrounding and penetrating our physical body. It feels as if someone is applying a tourniquet to my right leg. I'm also getting that tight "headband" feeling again. Suddenly I hear a "clicking" sound (not on the tape), as if a metal latch is being opened or closed. I behold an image of an old wooden cabinet with an open door. At the same time, I feel as if I am opening that door with my left arm. Yet, my physical arm has not budged from my side. Then I briefly "see" (as with all of these "seeings," they are half nonvisual impression and half mind's-eye snapshot) the image of a map. There is an oval-shaped island located in the center of an oval-shaped lake, with an asterisk at the extreme right side of the lake indicating a message, "You are here." Afterwards I realize that the "map" also resembled a large eye, the central island being the pupil. In our debriefing sessions, a number of voyagers have been reporting the presence of luminous eyes, seemingly either human or animal, staring at them in the blackness. The trainers invite us to read this image metaphorically, an "eye" for an "I," so to speak. Who or what is the self that is looking at me looking at it? I know I have a ways to go before I get to the center. I've just unlocked the treasure-chest and found the map. But the map is not the territory.

Sunday Afternoon

In a Free Flow Focus 10 exercise (in a Free Flow there are no verbal cues and you can do whatever you want in the allotted time), I invite the inner self, or guidance, to make itself known and to assist me in understanding the true purpose of my life. Among the impressions I receive is the eerie sound of echoing laughter of many voices. It is an "Olympian" laugh, somehow godlike, coming from afar, yet compassionate and not without humor. But it is definitely not human. When I mention the laughter to Karen, one of the trainers, she asks me what I think it means. "Lighten up," I reply without hesitating. But there's something else there, too. And it's a bit spooky. I don't mention this to Karen. I'm not sure why. There was another impression I received during the exercise, having to do with a childhood experience in which I was certain that I had been able to foreknow the future. Karen gently suggests that I am receiving a form of validation now, but that I am not fully open to it. "It's like you're being offered a rose," she explains, "but you keep saying, 'No, I want the lily'." The lily: what is it? Objective proof? Intellectual validation? And what, then, is the rose that I am refusing? At first I feel defensive. I thought I was being open. Am I more closed down than I realize?

Monday Morning.

This is our introduction to Focus 12, the state of expanded awareness. The trainers caution us that we are dealing with subtle energies that express themselves in subtle ways, and that we must therefore be alert to seemingly small and insignificant details of our experience. They also say that we may only recall some of the things we experience in these expanded states later on, after the exercise is over. Focus 12 does feel somewhat different from Focus 10. In 12 I have the impression of a trap door located in my forehead, which is slowly opening to form a kind of inverted pyramid over my head. Several visual impressions dart past my inner eye (as they had in Focus 10), including the image of a French door (not unlike the one that divides my dining and family rooms at home) opening to reveal a darkened room. I can't make out what's inside. Later, in another Focus 12 exercise, I behold another series of fleeting inner images, including what looks like a wooden plaque painted with

various colorful symbols, including a Native American totem pole with an eagle at the top. To me, the eagle means vision and freedom.

Monday Afternoon

Over lunch, Jon, an optometrist from California with a dry sense of humor, makes a joke about the Wizard of Oz. This immediately reminds me of a forgotten image that had flashed before me in the morning's last Focus 12 exercise. (The trainers were right.) I saw myself being fitted with a new pair of shoes. Are these like Dorothy's magic slippers? Will they take me "Home"? Am I being invited to assume a new stance, a new perspective? The open door, the eagle, the new pair of shoes all seem to suggest, in complementary ways, the accessing of a new form of awareness. It feels as if I am being encouraged. But by whom or what? Where is the feedback coming from?

Later, during a Free Flow Focus 12 exercise, I request a "meeting" with the source of these messages, or what the trainers refer to as "guidance." I'm not even sure I believe in such a thing. Much to my surprise, I am greeted with the image of a handsome man sitting at a table and a pretty woman standing beside him. They appear to be dressed in 19th -century clothing. The man in the vested suit, who looks to be in his thirties, has chestnut-brown hair and a full beard. He is smiling broadly. I know, or he tells me, that his name is Arthur. The woman wearing a long dress standing next to Arthur has black hair done up in some sort of a bun. Maybe she's in her twenties. Her head is tilted back in a playful way, stray locks of her hair casually falling down around the bun, and she, too is grinning. She introduces herself as Melissa, but says that she prefers the less formal Lissa—which seems to fit her personality. Then a third impression superimposes itself on this friendly tableau. It is an old woman with dark, weathered skin and white hair. She does not smile or speak. Her name is Noona. My sense is that she is a Native American.

Afterwards, I am reminded of an eerie dream that I'd had years ago. In the dream, I am trudging along the snow-packed ground in an arctic-like environment when I see an old woman with black, leathery skin. She appears, like a spectral vision, out of nowhere. That old woman, I now realize, was also Noona. But just who is

Noona? Is she "real," or simply a figure out of my own imaginings? Am I just making it up as I go? Am I gaining conscious access to the archetypes, the Oz-land machinery that manufactures my own dream images? Or am I perceiving nonphysical entities and energies and then translating those perceptions into terms that I can comprehend? Part of me rejects the whole idea of "guidance" as hokey, a leftover folk superstition. I don't know what to think. I recall the words of the Cheyenne writer Hyemehosts Storm to the effect that each of us contains a man and a woman, a little boy and a little girl, an old man and an old woman. Perhaps Arthur and Lissa are members of my own "inner council." (After returning home, I was glancing through my journal when I came across an interesting item. Several months previous, during a meditation, I heard the name "Arthur Green[e]" uttered "out loud," so to speak. It didn't ring a bell or mean anything to me, but I jotted it down. Was this the full name of the Arthur guide I glimpsed at TMI? Or had I unconsciously picked up the thread of that earlier experience and merely woven an image around a name?)

Monday Evening

We troop into David Francis Hall after dinner for what the trainers mysteriously dub a "special program." The subject that is introduced is remote viewing, which we are invited to try firsthand by going into Focus 10 or 12 and reporting on the impressions we receive about a set of geographical coordinates mentioned in a video clip. I am dubious that I can achieve the various focus states outside the CHEC unit and away from the tapes, but I am willing to give it a try. As soon as I breathe deeply and shift focus, three successive impressions pop into my mind with astonishing speed: stone, black, and triangle. We go around the room and each of us tells what we got. Many mention seeing a spindly structure like a spider's web, others describe seaside scenery where land and water meet. I fear I must be way off, but I dutifully report my results. The target turns out to be the St. Louis Arch, and the individual on the video—who we will momentarily learn is the famous remote viewer (and live guest) Joe McMoneagle—is giving a stunningly accurate remote viewing not only of the arch, but also of the surrounding area. However, the second object turns out to be Devil's Tower in Wyoming (the image that obsessed Richard Dreyfuss's character in Steven Spielberg's movie *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*). Perhaps, then, my

perception of "stone, black, and triangle" jumped ahead to the second target. Joe himself is introduced shortly thereafter and gives a mind-boggling talk on remote viewing, his near-death experience, and the paranormal. There's so much energy flowing around that by the end of the evening, when we troop back to the Center, I have a massive tension headache. I overhear Jon, the California optometrist, complain that he, too, is feeling so much energy in his body that his head hurts.

Tuesday Morning/Afternoon

We are introduced to Focus 15, which is described as the state of No Time. We aren't told much about it beforehand in the briefing. "Just go experience it for yourself" is the idea. I feel myself momentarily pooling out in all directions as Bob's voice on the tape takes us from Focus 12 to 15. In 15, I feel like an astronaut in space; weightless, gently rocking from side to side in slow motion. One of the images I see looks like a section of a wooden dartboard, with triangular-shaped "slices" marked off in woods of different shades. Even as I attempt to hold the image, it is replaced by another. I watch as three women in shawls enter a house of mourning. Their backs are to me and I can't see their faces, but I know they are despondent. Who are they? I wonder. I am reminded of the ancient Greek figures of the Three Fates. There are other images, but that is the one that sticks in my mind.

In the debriefing after the tape, the trainers explain that "No Time" really means that all times, past, present, and future are available. Then John, one of the trainers, turns the page on the presentation board in front of the room. The picture revealed is a sketch of a wheel of time with the number 15 inscribed in the center and spokes leading out representing different dates (200 BC, 2000 AD, etc.). I am intrigued. Did I actually see something like this in the meditation? Was this my "wooden dartboard"? "Oohs" and "aahs" erupt throughout the group indicating that others had had their own glimpses of such "wheels." I mention my image of the Three Sisters to the trainers. As I do so, I am surprised by the emotion in my own voice as I describe the image. Karen gently suggests that there is something there for me in that image. Suddenly overwhelmed with I know not what emotion, I can only nod in agreement.

The next exercise, a Free Flow 15, produces a chaotic cacophony of images. I seem to be riding the tumultuous wave of feeling that had built up in the debriefing room. For the first time at the Gateway, I am experiencing raw fear. I feel caught up in some sort of emotional vortex, and I'm not sure where it is taking me. The sense of spinning (out of control?) is almost nauseating, like having a hangover. All the images are indistinct, zooming by in a blur. I ask about the image of the three mourners. What does this mean? Old parts of myself must die, I am told. The women represent my feminine side. They are grieving for that which is, and must be, lost.

Coming out of the exercise, I feel shaky, tense, fragile. By lunchtime, I am verging on a panic attack. The image of the three sisters in mourning still haunts me, and I don't even know why. I am swollen with nameless emotions I cannot pin down or even feel. I worry that I may burst. Can I handle this? The feelings are building up to some sort of crescendo. I don't know if I'll be able to continue the program. Or maybe I'll just go back into the CHEC unit and just lie there and not listen to the tapes. The anxiety, which comes in waves, is itself frightening. What is behind the fear of fear? This emotional pattern seems familiar to me, yet I am in the grip of a nameless terror that shoots fiery hot bolts of fear through the very core of my being. Lee, the assistant trainer, joins me for lunch at a table for two. I don't know if he notices what shape I'm in, but I figure I'll try to act calm and maybe I will be. I feel like I'm trying to soothe some frightened animal. We chat about something having to do with my research, but my mind keeps turning inward, to this heavy knot of a fear ball that seems to have localized inside my stomach. Suddenly I am shaken by a great spasm of fear that I do my best to conceal. Lee seems not to notice, or if he does, he says nothing. But his presence has had somewhat of a calming effect. Maybe I'll make it, I think. Then the next minute I wonder, Did I make a mistake in coming? What's going on?

I join most of the rest of the group for the afternoon tour of the lab facilities. Skip Atwater, the genial head technician of TMI, gives a lively presentation on the Hemi-Sync process and his own early experiences with Bob Monroe's work at the old Whistlefield location of the institute. Despite my inner turmoil, Skip's presentation interests me, and his good humor snaps me out of myself just a bit. I manage to ask him a question during his talk in David Francis Hall. By the end of the lab tour, I feel a little less shaky, a bit more confident. I've got to figure out what's going on, I tell myself. I don't want to run from this. Go through it. Ride it out.

The next tape we do is *The Visit*, in which Bob's soothing voice takes us on a guided meditation that includes a walk along a beach and a journey deep inside a cave to a door. Beyond the door, Bob tells us, is a white light, where "Friends" have been eagerly waiting to give us certain messages. I find myself sitting on a couch, waiting to see who shows up. Dave, my late father-in-law, sits down beside me, looking fit and well rested, and younger than I remember him. "Tell Cyndie I love her, and that I'm all right," he says. Then the scene fades. I feel a vague pressure, as if there are others waiting in the wings who wish to come through. But some part of me resists. I tell myself I'm just making it all up. But if so, why, I wonder, would I choose to see Dave of all people? Is there a special meaning here?

After *The Visit*, still reeling from the emotional roller coaster of the morning, I am now assaulted by new questions from all sides. I don't know what to think about my own experience, even though in theory I accept the existence of life after death. The "message" from Cyndie's father sounded hokey, like the vague reassuring platitudes produced by various self-professed spirit mediums. Yet, it was totally unlike Dave to make such an open statement of feeling. If I were subconsciously producing such an encounter, wouldn't I stick to what I knew of his personality? Moreover, only a few weeks before, I'd had a strangely realistic dream in which Dave had appeared. He asked me several times whether I'd gotten the Chock Full O' Nuts coffee, and I impatiently replied that I hadn't had time. It was as if he had been trying to jog my memory. When I told Cyndie about the dream the next day, we both laughed as we spontaneously burst into the old ditty: "Chock Full O' Nuts is that heavenly coffee. . . ." Was it really Dave trying to get the message through to me that he was O.K. by calling my attention to an old advertising jingle? And now, he was showing up once again, because I didn't seem to get it the first time around. Or was his uncharacteristic emotional openness meant to trigger an opening of my own?

It is during (or, more accurately, just before) the next tape exercise, called appropriately enough, *Release and Let Go*, that the dam finally breaks. I am ensconced in the CHEC unit with my headphones on, waiting for the exercise to begin. As is customary, the trainers provide some inspirational music in our CHEC unit speakers while we voyagers are attending to emptying our bladders and putting on our ready lights to indicate all systems go. The music, I realize, is the old spiritual, *Going Home*, which has numerous associations for me. The music itself and

the thought of "home" trigger an overwhelming sense of nostalgia, loss, and sadness. Tears flow down my cheeks. I cannot stop sobbing. I finally feel the grief of the three sisters. Now I know what had been hiding behind the mask of anxiety. The death of loved ones, the missing parts of myself that had been sentenced to solitary confinement, the ways in which I had compensated for my childhood sensitivities—Home.

I am sure that I will not be able to do the tape. But as I hear Bob's familiar reassuring voice asking us to "Begin your preparatory process," I surprise myself by being able to follow along. In the exercise, we are prompted to return to our Energy Conversion Box, an imagined container where we usually store our anxieties and other preoccupations that might interfere with a session. Now we are instructed to open the box and release some of the items stored therein, allowing them to float up and away. One of the items I find myself jettisoning is a black suitcase. After the exercise, I feel cleansed, purged, traveling light. The sadness lingers, but only as an afterglow. It does not frighten me now. By the end of the day, I feel as if I have endured a severe storm. This is the calm after the storm. My tee-shirt would read: "I have survived."

Wednesday Morning

We are to have a silent morning; even direct eye contact (a form of communication, after all) is discouraged. I feel a bit like a monk, having to remember to avert my eyes to the floor when I pass a fellow voyager. The highlight of the morning exercises for me is the second tape, where in Focus 12 we are to open ourselves to receiving five messages from our Guidance or Higher Self. Part of me cringes at the thought. Am I afraid of hearing something? Is that "something" my own inveterately self-critical voice? Or is it rather that I'm afraid of hearing nothing at all—that I'll discover there's only emptiness inside, the same silence that we are supposedly cultivating this morning on the outside. I'm not a little apprehensive.

As the exercise begins, I can feel myself flinch, as if ducking a feigned punch, as I invite messages from my unnamed source. But I am absolutely flabbergasted as five successive messages flash into my awareness with astonishing rapidity and clarity. "You have no time to waste," I'm told in no uncertain terms. "You have many gifts

to give." "You have held yourself back for too long." "You have every reason to be thankful." And finally: "You are loved."

It is not at all what I expected. I am greeted neither by a litany of my flaws nor a frustrating wall of silence. I am being encouraged, reassured, strengthened for the mission ahead. But what is the mission? And who or what is doing the encouraging? Is this my own subconscious speaking? How come it never spoke to me like that before? If I have no time to waste, then what, exactly, am I supposed to be doing? I feel enormous gratitude for these messages, and I thank the universe. But I also have unanswered questions.

The next exercise, *Repatterning*, takes place in Focus 15. As Bob tells us to count up in our minds from Focus 12 to Focus 15, I momentarily feel as if I am lifting out of my body! I have never had a fully conscious out-of-body experience while awake. This is the closest I have come. In 15, I glimpse a number of fragmentary images. I also hear an inner voice quietly counting numbers. It is a man's voice, and it has a German accent. (I learn later that Gunther, who has a heavy German accent, occupies a CHEC unit in the room down the hall from mine. He says he wasn't counting out loud. And even if he had been doing so, and at some volume, with my headphones on I could not have heard him through my physical ears. And it was not a physical hearing in any case. Focus 12 is known as the "state of expanded awareness," which includes psi perceptions.)

Wednesday Afternoon

We are now to be taken from Focus 15 to Focus 21, which is described as a portal or bridgehead to other realities or nonphysical energy systems. I feel very spacey, as if I'm floating several feet off the mattress in my CHEC unit. I experience Focus 21 in the form of a Stanley Kubrick-like movie set, a huge barn of a sparsely furnished soundstage in which everything, including the couch and cocktail table (the only objects in sight), is white. An illustrious parade of comic figures makes a series of quick cameo appearances: Woody Allen, John Cleese, and the cartoon character Wiley Coyote! It is so bizarre. At first, I'm annoyed. "What is this, some sort of joke?" I complain. I was expecting something otherworldly, and all I get is Hollywood! Afterwards, I am more appreciative of the symbolism. I recall that a few years back I became defensive when someone I'd met at a writer's

workshop asked me if it was difficult for me to have fun. In truth, I sometimes felt as if I'd lost my sense of humor and my natural capacity for spontaneous play. Everything was always so damned serious and important and so utterly scheduled. Could it be that my own personal bridgehead to "other reality systems" lay through the forbidden territory of joy?

During the debriefing following the exercise, Robert, who has said little, speaks up. He is a huge bear of a man, a retired member of the military and a Vietnam vet, who is studying with native shamans from North and South America. But now he declares with great enthusiasm that he left his body during the exercise and visited the same spirit Grandfathers that he has encountered in his shamanic journeying. "The Grandfathers wanted me to reassure the group that everyone is getting it," Robert emphasizes in his trademark growl. "We're all There."

But where exactly is *There*? I wonder.

At lunch, I corral Lee, the assistant trainer who did my intake interview. "Lee, I believe Robert when he says that his Grandfathers want us to know that we're all getting it," I say with intensity. "But if we were indeed all 'there,' then why is my experience of 21 so different from his? Why don't I see the Grandfathers?" Lee responds with equal intensity that while my head is seeking objective proof, my heart is looking for something else. "You have to know that you can experience your emotions and survive," he tells me pointedly. "I suspect that when you were a child, you experienced real magic," he adds knowingly. Those evidently were the two dots. The question would be: Could I connect them?

Later that afternoon, in another Free Flow exercise in Focus 21, I feel as if a bolt of energy has been fired into the back of my neck. I hear a "cracking" sound. I'm not sure, but I think my physical neck may have moved in response. Or was it my energy body? I can't be certain. Afterwards, I am puzzled about the experience. What does it mean? A number of voyagers report that they are being "worked on" at "energetic levels" by their "nonphysical friends." Like a car being brought in for a tune-up, I suppose. Hanh overhears me ask Shaaron, the Yoga instructor, a question about the esoteric significance of the back of the neck. He tells me that the back of the neck may represent a supporting aspect of the throat chakra, which has to do with such things as communication

and career. "If you have the will to make changes," Hanh advises, "you can." I hope he is right. Maybe with a little help from my friends!

Thursday Morning

This is really the last day of the program; Friday morning is departure time. I wake up feeling a bit out of sorts. I'm not sure why, though it could be the aftereffect of a strange dream in which I glimpse a dead or dying German Shepherd dog. I'm also feeling sore and tense in the back of my neck. I wonder if this has anything to do with yesterday's "treatment."

The first tape is a Focus *10 Free Flow*. Once again I have the sense that I have two distinct sets of arms, and that I can move one set around inside the other. Nothing much happens during the tape, but when I come out of it I feel restored, peaceful. I get what I needed. Then, all heaven breaks loose: the *Super Flow*.

During our pre-tape briefing, the trainers announce that the next exercise is a culmination of sorts, putting together all that we have learned in the various exercises up to now. The tape is called *Super Flow*, and it will take us through all the various focus states we have experienced. We are all anxious to "graduate." So everyone heads off to the bathrooms for a quick pit stop and hurries back to their individual CHEC units.

As soon as I have drawn the curtain of my CHEC unit and turned off the lights, I click on my ready light and put on my headphones with a heady feeling of expectancy. Instead of the usual musical intro (meditational or New Age type music), however, I am greeted with the bouncy strains of an overly familiar dance tune from weddings and Bar Mitzvahs past: the *Macarena*! What a riot! My sides begin to ache from laughing so hard. But as the silly dance music fades and Bob's soothing voice comes over the headphones, I surprise myself by quickly going into a deep state of relaxation. What follows is hard to put into words.

It feels as if I am riding on top of a great wave of energy, like a huge thrilling surge of water. I have a persistent sense of just about being able to lift out of my body. I sense starburst-like pulsations of energy around my hands and feet. Again I have two sets of arms, one inside the other. And the images zip by fast and furious, one after the other, almost too quickly for me to absorb. I have to remember all this, I tell myself.

I behold the image of feet, and I know instantly that it means gaining a foothold in this new territory. I see a silver chalice and feel as though someone is putting it to my lips so that I might drink from the cup. Then I have the impression that I am being fed the bunch of grapes I see hanging before me. Next I glimpse an artist's case filled with paints. Then the action shifts, and instead of a solitary image I see an entire scene. A dark-haired woman of middle age sits on a park bench, with her head in her hands, in obvious emotional distress. Two other individuals in human form appear to be standing beside her, looking on in sympathy, while to her left hovers a kind of shadowy "presence" that looks like a cloud or a distortion in the air. One of the humans (a male, I believe) tells the other, "Bob has explained it all to her." I know that the "it" is death, and that the "Bob" is Bob Monroe, who is the amorphous "cloud" hovering to the side. Then fade-out again, as I am welcomed into a cabin in the woods by a man and woman. I can't see inside the cabin—it's too dark—but as I walk towards the open door, a German Shepherd dog (the same type of dog I had glimpsed in my dream of the previous night) runs out.

There are other images, but I cannot retain all of them consciously. Many slip easily through the net of my left-brain awareness like tiny darting fish. More important is the pure unadulterated joy, the ecstatic pleasure, the sheer fun, of riding these enormously powerful surges of energy, as I can only imagine a surfer rides the ocean waves. I just can't do justice in describing the tremendous sense of gratitude I feel for this experience. At one point, I once again hear the echoing "Olympian laughter" of many voices that I had experienced in a previous exercise several days before. Now I feel as though this "inhuman" laughter is expressing my own innermost being. It is coming from "out there," but also from "in here." The gods and I are one. Somehow the two perspectives have come closer together.

Thursday Afternoon

The *Super Flow* tape is so lengthy that there is no scheduled debriefing afterwards. We are to head right to the dining room for lunch. I stop at my desk to scribble some notes down in my journal. I manage to chuckle at my roommate Ken, whose wide eyes and even wider grin suggest that he is equally blown away by his own experience. I am absolutely euphoric. I have never experienced anything like this before. The image that keeps

popping into my mind is the scene from one of my favorite movies, *A Christmas Carol* with Alistair Sim as Scrooge. When Scrooge returns from his out-of-body adventure with the spirits with a renewed love of life, he can't stop singing and dancing. That's how I feel, as if I'm walking on air, or like the cat who has just swallowed the canary. I have this huge grin plastered across my face.

Somehow, I make it down to the dining room and find my way to the salad bar. I have not yet been able to actually look anyone straight in the eye. Standing in front of me in line is Patricia, a tall, blond, sixty-something seeker from New Orleans who is attending the Gateway Voyage with her husband Sam. Patricia had had some deep experiences that she openly shared with the group during our debriefings. Several times, in listening to her heartfelt accounts, I felt myself experiencing twinges of wistfulness and even, I confess, envy. Patricia's experiences (and her poetic way of expressing them) seemed so much more profound than mine, and I yearned to get into those same spaces. Although we were cautioned by the trainers not to compare our experience with anyone else's, I found myself unable to refrain from this with Patricia for some reason. Her accounts never failed to move me.

Now I can sense that Patricia is glowing every bit as brightly as I am. Very slowly and tentatively she turns her head in my direction and our twinkling eyes meet. Unable to contain ourselves, we simultaneously explode into roaring, guffawing, side-splitting laughter. I have never laughed so largely in my life. Maybe the whole dining room turns around to look, I don't know. I am too absorbed by the look in Patricia's eyes to care or notice. We know. We see it in each other's faces. We had both been There. Robert's Grandfathers were right after all. Nothing more needed to be, or could be, said. I had my confirmation at last. I gently place my hand on Patricia's shoulder, and, with grins larger than the Cheshire Cat's, we just shake our heads in a silent knowing acknowledgement of the amazingly joyful, playful, expansive thing that we had just enjoyed. What a gift!

Thursday Evening

Later that night, we meet as a group in the debriefing room for the last time. Each of us expresses what the Gateway has meant to them. "I feel young again," I declare, my voice filling with emotion. Maggie, sitting beside

me, gently pats me on the back. There is trust, openness, humor, and joy. I feel connected to parts of myself that had gone dark, like abandoned, unused rooms in a once tony mansion. I feel connected to all the seekers in this room. And I know that the connectedness that I have experienced all of my life to the universe as a whole is no illusion. Having gone deep inside myself, I have also met up with something beyond that self. Reality truly is vaster, and more mysterious, than we can ever know or even imagine. There's a lot to explore. I am ready.

Postscript: A-Musing.

From my reading of Joseph Campbell, the renowned mythologist, I know that the hero's return from the dark forest of adventure is the trickiest part. Gold can easily turn into ashes. You may get laughed at, or even killed, for saying the "wrong" things. To be sure, I'm no hero. But as I prepare to leave TMI for home, I am aware that it will be a challenge to maintain the connections I have experienced here so vividly and intensely. I still have many questions, perhaps more than ever. My worldview has not been turned upside down as a result of my experience here, for the simple reason that I was not a materialist to begin with. Yet quite clearly something has changed. When I told the group that I felt young again, I think I may have come closest to expressing my meaning. To be young is to play, to laugh, to sense that all is possible, and to be open to wonder. Plato said that wonder is the basis of all true philosophy. Maybe he was right. What Gateway provided was a fresh infusion of wonder, a B-12 shot for a fatigued philosopher.

Now I wonder: Can I take the next step? What is the next step beyond the Gateway?

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