

Exerpts from autobiographical work by Oliver Loveday
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From "Clouds in My View"

My first trip to my new home on Happy Creek Road was on a nice fall afternoon with the leaves off the trees. The clouds were hanging low and the view reminded me of Chinese paintings on silk. I wanted to paint this feeling I got as I looked across the valley from the ridge above the cabin at the wisps of moisture that made the fog and clouds across the valley and distant mountains. The cabin was half a mile up and off an old horse and wagon road one would have used to haul corn to the gristmill at Boyd's Creek one hundred years ago. This access road had a public road before internal combustion engines became the primary means of transportation and it was still a right of way, through the other farms and mountain property, to this remote cabin that had not been lived in since World War II. The cabin was tucked up against the knobs, as Dad would say. These were the first line of mountains south of the valley that connected the area north of Sevierville with a gentle passageway over to Maryville.

The ridge north of the cabin had the highest peak that the local foxhunters called "High Point". The old road was still passable but was so rugged that one would need four wheel drive to get up to the place where fox hunters spent the night while their dogs ran the foxes. To get to the cabin, one had to take a right turn down the hillside from this access road on a trail that would challenge even a four-wheel drive vehicle. There was a spring fed pond at the bottom of this drop off and the cabin was a short distance on past the pond. The cabin was in a semi-circle bowl of hills so there weren't a lot of sounds of human activity coming from the closest neighbors half a mile away. It had never been wired for electricity, nor was there any running water except what ran off the roof when it rained. I had to carry water in. It was perfect for a retreat into solitude with nature and a break from all the insanity my life had been going through in the city.

[...] During the fall months the access road up from Happy Creek Road was passable by two-wheeled-drive pickup truck, so I could drive my things to the trail down to the cabin. But after this it had to be carried down the rest of the way, or hauled down by wheelbarrow. Dad helped me move the things I couldn't carry by myself and I set up domestic life in the main room of the cabin. A frame addition had been added onto the log cabin section of the house adding a bedroom and kitchen, but the windows were all missing. I had enough space in the original cabin, which included a fireplace. I sealed up the walls with tarpaper and put rags in between the logs where any chinking was missing. I laid down tarpaper to seal the air leaks in the floor and laid down some carpet I got from a friend who had just replaced theirs, fixed a few broken windows, and the cabin was ready for winter. Dad brought his chainsaw and helped me cut up some firewood. I had to cook over an open fire in the fireplace until I had enough money to buy a Coleman camping stove. Dad had a Coleman lantern he had used to go camping with that he loaned me so I had some light in the cabin at night. I would get up in the morning and fry eggs over the fire, walk down to my truck at Happy Creek Road, go to school all day, work at the pottery studio that evening, and return home to my little cabin in the

mountains. I would do yoga and meditate for an hour and call it a night, hoping the alarm would wake me up the next morning.

[...] I rearranged things around a little in the cabin so I could put up a long piece of fabric that cut the room in half between the front and back. The fireplace was in the back of the room and I had the bed and couch in the back part of the room so this made it easier to keep my living space comfortable from the heat of the fireplace. I slept on the couch during the coldest weather. I would put two or three quilts on the couch so half of them would be under me and then fold the other half on top of me after I lay down. The fire would go out at night and it would get down pretty cold, so this kept me warm enough to survive the cold spells when it got down below zero outside. The top piece was the comforter that grandmother had given me eighteen months earlier after returning from my hitchhiking adventures.

Somehow I slept through most of Christmas break. I didn't know a person could sleep almost none stop for days on end like that. It felt good to lay down and not have to get up until I couldn't sleep any longer, go outside to relieve myself, drink a cup of tea, and go back to sleep. I came out and visited my family on Christmas day and made it to Jack's for his annual New Year's Eve party. Other than that, I didn't do much else except sleep for several weeks. If the failure of my first marriage, to Cindy, needed an emotional expression, it was through this marathon bout of sleeping that I processed my depression. A month earlier I had written the first poem, Full Moon Song, about my experiences of living in the mountains. It was inspired, or something, of a conversation with Arthur Rimbaud and his poem, After the Deluge. The quiet time in the valley and cabin were starting to sink into my spirit and heal my troubled being. The impact of sleeping almost non-stop for two weeks would change my creative energies away from this voice expressed in that poem. It was a turning point for me in my life. [...]

Walks up from Happy Creek Road to the cabin were meditations in their own right. Once the winter weather made the access road too muddy to drive up except with four wheel drive, I had to park along the road by the mailbox and walk the half mile home each night. I would stop along the way as I returned from the pottery studio at school and look up at the clear brilliant night sky at the last clearing along the access road before turning down a footpath I had made as a shortcut to the cabin. One night I felt like I could hear someone talking to me but I couldn't make out where the voice was coming from. I stood for a while and felt the energy of this sensation and realized that it was coming from a three hundred year old oak tree that was growing along the fencerow by the trail. Later in my readings I found accounts of yogis and sages in many parts of the world that had experienced communication with trees in a manner that transcended normal communication.

Trees have a slightly slower vibration than humans so the sensation of talking to them on a telepathic level is like talking to someone very old who talks very slow and with a deep voice. Each time I would walk by after that I would stop and touch the tree for a minute or offer it something that I might have to eat, like it was an old friend that would appreciate this act of kindness. A few years later when I started using tobacco as part of

my meditation I would offer what was left of my smoke to the tree in the yard wherever I was living. Years later I would learn that a great many tribes in various parts of the country honored trees in a similar manner but during this winter trek home each night I would make sure no one was watching and I didn't tell anyone about my conversations with trees. Most everyone already thought I was a little crazy for living out in the woods all winter anyway.

From "Rainbows and Hobos"

A snowstorm blew in one night and the next morning I woke up to find two feet of snow on the ground and the temperature close to twenty below. The power and telephone lines were out. It was a work day but there was no way I was going to be able to call in, never mind try to show up for work. I put wood in the stove and got it hot enough to cook some breakfast. I had a cup of coffee and then started dressing to go for a hike out in the crisp clear morning air. I put on insulated underwear, a pair of jeans, and a pair of wool pants on top of this. I put on an insulated long-sleeve shirt, sweat shirt, wool shirt, wool sweater, and Army field jacket with a liner in it. I had on a pair of socks under a pair of wool socks inside a pair of insulated hiking boots. On top of all of this I had on a wool overcoat. If I fell down, it would have been a great struggle to get back up. I trekked through the field across the road from the house and down along the creek for a ways. I got to a good point where I could hike up the ridge. The snow was a dry powder that was easy to walk through at the moment. I was soaking wet within a few minutes of hiking up the ridge because of the physical exertion and plenty of clothing. I was panting heavy by the time I made it to the top twenty minutes later. The wind was blowing along the ridge top at close to thirtyfive miles per hour. The snow along the top had blown over to the side of the hilltop creating a snow bank six feet high. I pushed through this onto a wind swept area along the top of Little Pine Ridge. As I stood there in the freezing wind, the moisture inside my clothing immediately started to chill. I knew I couldn't stand in this wind for very long. I felt something looking at me and looked to the north. A hawk was riding into the wind heading west just above the treetops. As I looked up it looked down and we made eye contact. I was grateful it doesn't take long to get an answer to one's prayers in these conditions. I walked along the ridge top towards the south and dropped off the south facing side so I came down at the nextdoor neighbor's house. I stopped in to visit with them for a few minutes to make sure they were doing well, and then went back to the house for lunch and an afternoon of peaceful solitude.

From "Double Oracle"

Dream sequence: I was on a bus with a group of people. They were all singing songs that were driving me crazy. I thought I was back on the bus going to New York City with my classmates in high school. I listened to the songs. This wasn't Rocky Top they were singing. I knew the songs but I just couldn't place them. I wanted to drive the bus, but someone told me I needed to listen to the songs and remember. As I listened I looked out of the bus window at the landscape outside. It was a mountain road coursing over a landscape bare of trees. I didn't know where we were going. The mountains in the distance could have been the Western Himalayas or somewhere east of Cuzco, Peru. As I

listened I started to remember. The songs were the same songs we sang when we journeyed from the Seven Sisters to the Seven Bald Peaks. I remembered the songs and started singing. Everyone was very happy.

There was a traveling circus along side the road up ahead. Suddenly everyone wanted to stop and enjoy the afternoon. I wanted to press forward and arrive at our destination before dark. No one would listen to me. The bus pulled over along side the road and everyone got out. I reluctantly got out with them. I wanted to find a hot dog stand or something similar and get something to eat. I noticed a sideshow with the sign in front of it that read, "Fortune Teller: Rolling Thunder". I decided to get in line and ask him if I should marry Ella or not. It was a long line and I waited. Finally I was standing in front of him. He looked at me and I asked, "Am I supposed to marry Ella?" He looked at me for a second and then he split into two images of himself, then they realigned themselves and he continued, "You are asking me the wrong question, and the answer to the question you should be asking me is: Yes. If you live in the traditional way for one year, you will take over my work when I die, which is to feed the people. I want to show you the kitchen from which you will feed the people." He got up and led me out a side door outside where there was a small canvas canopy set up with a table and cookware setup like a camp kitchen. A woman was working already. He introduced us and said this woman would be helping me to feed the people. As I turned around, the kitchen was growing rapidly into a small encampment large enough to feed a small army.

RT said, "Now I need to give you some things you will need in order to feed the people." He took me into a large storeroom where I expected to see sacks of flour and other food items. It was a room with shelves but on them were ceremonial drums, eagle fans, Sacred Pipes, rattles, and other items. He picked up a large sack and started to fill it with items he removed from the shelves. When he finished, the shelves were empty and the sack was full. He handed it to me. I woke up.

In my waking hours I had been working on the audio tapes of percussion of suspended metal pieces with the microphone positioned so it would pick up the internal vibrations that were inaudible to the ear. The sound was very hypnotic to me and I enjoyed working with this setup, but the equipment I had available was limited. I wanted to do something else. The video crew had worked with the City Dancers earlier in the year and I had the phone number for Cindy Robertson, the director of the dance company. She had been the same person who fell off stage during a bad lighting situation while rehearsing for the dance performance at UT eleven years earlier. I called her up and told her what I had in mind. She suggested that we meet at a local restaurant in Knoxville and talk about the idea some more. She sounded really interested in my proposal. When we met she introduced me to her companion who was waiting at the table with her. They were currently involved in a romantic relationship. He was a piano teacher, musician with a church group, and owner of a small recording studio where he produced recordings for local musicians as part of his Christian outreach to the community. As we talked he became very interested in the proposal as well. He understood the concepts I was working with and wanted to help record a short track that the City Dancers could use as an audio track for a dance piece. At the end of the meeting we had agreed on a date for a

recording session at his studio, and the possible use of the audio tape in an upcoming event that Cindy mentioned but I didn't quite understand yet. The meeting had gone well.

I loaded up all the things I needed to do the percussion track on the recording and headed down to Rockford one night in the early fall of 1987. The studio was in a small farmhouse a few miles from where some of my mother's relatives lived. It was easy to find in spite of it being off the beaten path. I went in and started setting up my pieces as he got out the microphones and wires running from the room with the recording equipment to the makeshift studio. Everything was set up and I started the first double track of the eight-track recording. As I did the percussion track on the suspended metal pieces a young kitten came into the room with me. It started playing with the microphone wires hanging from my suspension frame. I became concerned that it would cause additional sounds but there was little I could do with the tape rolling. I would bend over and try to shoo it away in between tapings. The sound engineer could see me from the waist up from his sit in the equipment room. Later I told him what had been going on. He laughed and said he had figured I was doing some sort of dance in order to get into the mood of the piece. It was a good laugh when it was over.

The piece lasted for approximately seven minutes. This part sounded really good. For the first time I was able to wear headphones and hear instant playback as I worked on the piece, so I knew what it sounded like and could space each reverberation out or lay thick waves of sound on top each other. I would do the next two tracks as spoken text. I had tried to write something that I would read, but I couldn't come up with anything. I decided to wing it and go with whatever came up spontaneously. The theme for the piece was Spiritual Warrior. I wanted to do a spoken text piece that would relate some of the ideas I was having about a person engaged in a spiritual discipline or journey. The use of the word, warrior, in the title implied a need for discipline rather than identifying someone engaged in combat. The tape was rolled back to the beginning and the recording engineer motioned through the window of his control room that he was ready. I took a deep breath and started to talk. I ended the piece with the first two lines from a poem, Homage to Artaud.

"I would not mess with your horizon.
I would not eat your only landscape."

I repeated the lines and said "Ho! Wadoni!" This was a Cherokee word used to end a prayer. The text tracks were complete. Now we would add a piano track and a track of chanting. The piece was mixed down within a half hour. I sat at the mix board and adjusted the volume of each track in real time. We played the final mix back and listened. Within two hours we had completed an eight-track recording and mixed it down to a seven-minute audio piece ready for use as the sound for a choreographed dance piece. Cindy showed up and listened to it. She was elated. I loaded up my metal pieces and headed back home with my copy of the final mix.

Now I had returned from my second trip to New York City, had finished up the carpentry job, and was working on props for the dancers for the premier of the dance piece. They

were performing on New Year's Eve in the downtown area of Knoxville as part of the festivities being put on with the Knoxville Arts Council. They were going to premier the piece as part of "Dancers under glass", a performance to be held inside a restaurant while onlookers viewed them from the sidewalk. I had been asked to make masks for the dancers to go with the new piece. The Arts Council was using this performance as the lead story in their promotion of events in the downtown area, which meant that I would be interviewed by the media and photographed with the dancers in their practice studio.

This publicity was the only payment I would get for my time and efforts. My welded metal sculptures would be shown on the sidewalk in front of the restaurant during the performance. I was suddenly gaining more media exposure for my work than I had achieved to date in Knoxville, and I would be able to share some of my thoughts on spirituality and the use of art, poetry, and music as a discipline in responding to fear as a spiritual warrior. I started reading everything I could find on the topic so I could draw from the spiritual teachings available through the printed texts. I found nothing that would provide me with easy quotes or help outline the concepts I wanted to present. While this was a common theme in Native American culture, it wasn't something that had been written down in the manner I had interpreted it through my work. I was finding myself needing to articulate something I had generated from my own perspective regarding spirituality and the need to use a discipline to help address fear. I had to do the same thing in the interviews as I did with the spoken text part of the audio piece.

"What do you mean by the term, spiritual warrior?" I was sitting in the Sunsphere at the Knoxville World's Fair site, overlooking the hillside where Tenth Street used to be. The newspaper reporter had gone over some questions about my personal background and music concepts that had brought me up to the point where I had conceived of "Spiritual Warrior." She wasn't that familiar with experimental music, but had heard of John Cage and a few other references I offered. Now she sank her teeth into the meat of the interview. I took a deep breath and exhaled these words. "A spiritual warrior is someone who chooses a discipline and uses that discipline to control fear, rather than letting fear control them." That was the first time I had ever heard a definition of the term I had coined to title the piece. The newspaper article gave a slightly edited version of the definition, but I didn't care. She wrote it down close enough for newspaper reportage.

I was able to gain access to the video equipment the night of the performance and tape it for use on the community access station. With the dancers doing this part of the performance with no lighting except the ambient glow of the streetlights outside, this proved to be a challenge. As I watched the piece being acted out in front of me, I saw the dancers create the idea on the tape with flesh and motion. Three months after the conversation with Cindy Robertson in a restaurant, I saw this connection between my work with percussion on metal and spoken text become a reality on stage with dancers. The percussive sounds I had heard on the porch of the small mountain cottage that I had been staying in while Patty and I were estranged and heading for divorce almost five years earlier had become something beyond my wildest dreams. I was trying not to walk on air. I returned the video equipment to the television station and headed home for the night.

A few days later I came back to town to take part in the monthly poetry readings that were being held in Laurel Theater. I had read several times over the past few years at this event as well as at another monthly reading organized by one of the professors of law, which was hosted in a restaurant in west Knoxville. That night I arrived a few minutes late and wasn't sure if I was coming in to the right event or not. I heard someone singing a cappella in the most amazing voice. The song was from a recent recording by the all women's group, Sweet Honey in the Rock. As I walked into the auditorium I saw the usual circle of friends sitting around on folding chairs with this one young woman completing her rendition of the song she was sharing with the group. It was a small informal group on this evening and I had a few new poems to read. One was a topical poem, "Hey Ronnie, I hear you got a new bomb." Sally was there.

Sally liked my writing a lot and we talked for a little while after the meeting. She was in town on Christmas break visiting her family before returning to college at UMass. She had study pottery at UT the year before and was a houseguest with one of the ceramic professors while in town. The next day I stopped by my friend's studio who knew everybody in town that did art and asked for the professor's phone number. He found it and I called. Sally answered. A few minutes later I had directions and an invitation to stop in for the evening. A few days later we headed up to my place, with her following in her car to stay for the remainder of her holiday break. For the first time in my life I was experiencing what it was like to be in love so deeply it consumed all my energy. Sally was a dancer who could respond to my every move in mind, body, and spirit. Our passion flowed into poems, song, dance, art, sky, and stellar magic. We walked through the snow and looked back to see whether we were actually leaving footprints.

She left. The next month I had the worst long distance phone bill of my life. I was an emotional wreck. I couldn't eat. I couldn't sleep. I could do art. I could write. I could talk on the phone constantly if she would let me. It became apparent that it would be cheaper for me to drive to Massachusetts than it would be to continue paying for the phone calls. In spite of all the work I had been doing and showing over the past six months, I had not sold any art work up to this point. I was broke. I didn't have any visible means of support. Friends were helping out with funds where they could. Sally sent me her parents' gas card. I had never used a credit card in my life. The first time I stopped to get gas and use it, my hand was shaking so badly I could barely sign the name on the card. The gas attendant stared at me. He took the clipboard and looked at the name, looked at the credit card, and handed me the cardholder's copy of the receipt. I headed on down the highway, amazed that one could actually get away with something like this. Once again I was heading up the interstate for points north. I would bypass the City and go through Wilkes-Barre, over to Hartford, and up to Amherst.

I was two hours away from Noah and Gabriel, but I couldn't call them or see them. I tried not to think about this too much as I spent the next few weeks with Sally. She was in classes and there wasn't much to do when she wasn't around. I went to all the art shows in the area. I went down to Mount Holyoke College to see if one of the art professors there was an old friend from art classes or not. She had the same name, but she wasn't the same person. I found a space where I could show my artwork. The person scheduled for

March had canceled at the last minute. I had an art show lined up in Northampton. I installed the show and loaded up everything to head south again. The previous two weeks had been like a dream but reality beckoned from beyond the snowy hills of Massachusetts.

Ella had contacted me with the news that Rolling Thunder would be doing a talk in Palo Alto in a week. She would come to Tennessee to pick me up if I wanted to go. She knew a little about the dream I had of him a few months earlier. I had said I needed to visit him and relate the dream to him. It was an important dream to me and in the spiritual workings of the Old Ways one should attempt to relate a dream like this to the Elder if at all possible. Money came via Western Union so I had gas money home. I left Sally on Monday morning in Massachusetts and drove straight through to Tennessee. When I arrived that evening Ella was already there. She had supper waiting. We ate and I crashed after we shared more body heat. Somehow this woman had the ability to wipe the tapes clean of all else that was going on in my life at the moment. We loaded up the next morning, taking some camping gear, art work, and ceremonial items needed to pay tribute to the energies in the air whenever possible. She was riding on a borrowed credit card as well. Somewhere outside Memphis she lost it in the bathroom of a gas station. She called and had it canceled and we headed on into the night.

We landed in Dallas the following morning with no more cash in our pockets and the fuel gauge below empty. We slept on the floor at a friend of hers. He was a young entrepreneur with a growing portfolio of high-risk venture capital investments. He checked his bank account, current investment returns and projected capital needs and declined to invest in one of my pieces of art. He went to the bank and got us enough money to make it to Albuquerque. Ella stopped in to visit a former employer who was now owner of a gallery of antiques. I would learn more about this part of Ella's history a few days later. We headed west into the evening rush hour traffic. Somewhere on the west end of the state I woke up to hear Ella pulling over along side the road. I asked her what was wrong. She said she was stopping for a while to sleep. She had driven well into the night but we were still a few hours from New Mexico.

The next morning I woke up in the back seat of the car and looked out. We were one of several cars parked off the side of the road. We got back in the front and headed for Albuquerque. That night we were in a housing development with houses built in every style from split level to adobe to Frank Lloyd Wright. Our hostess had been the one who had provided Ella with the car and credit card to travel east to pick me up. She was owner of an accounting firm in Albuquerque and a member of the religious group involved with the project Ella was stumping for. She wasn't home when we arrived, but she had left the key under a gutter drain by the side of the house. Ella retrieved it and we let ourselves in. After a quick rest stop and raid on the refrigerator, we stood in the back yard and sang our songs to the sunset. We weren't anywhere near Kansas in this movie, Toto.

The next morning a few calls were made to interior designers in the area to see if they wanted to look at my art work. Ella and her benefactor got no bites, so we headed west again. She began telling me stories about her benefactor and the family, and everyone

else along the way that we had stopped to see. Before leaving Dallas she had stopped by a large antique store to visit an old friend she had worked for a few years earlier. It appeared like Ella had worked in a local theater there for a while, as well as working in the marketing of traditional artifacts from Africa that were very popular in Dallas at the moment. The room contained over a million dollars worth of woodcarvings, textiles, metal works, and ivory pieces. Sitting in a warehouse space full of these ritual objects gave me the willies. I was glad to leave. The car we were riding in had belonged to the benefactor's son, but he couldn't use it at the moment. I couldn't figure out if he was running from the law, in treatment for cocaine addiction, or in a correctional facility. As long as we didn't get pulled over for suspicion of being him, I didn't care.

Ella drove west. She drove fast. Somewhere in Arizona we got pulled over under suspicion of breaking the speed limit. The Rez cop looked at me asleep in the back seat and asked Ella if I was sick. I was drained from all the body heat loss I had been experiencing over the past few days, but other than that, it felt great to sleep and let the miles roll on by. He gave her a ten-dollar ticket for doing 85 mph in a 60 mph speed zone. She paid cash. It was a good day to be indigenous on a Reservation.

We made it to Palo Alto on Friday afternoon. Ella had an idea of where the talk would be taking place, but she wasn't sure. She tried to call the number she had to contact Rolling Thunder or those with him for this event. No one was answering. We went to eat at a Mexican restaurant. It was almost as good as the food we had at the one in Nevada at a small stop in the mountains, but the price was four times better. I enjoyed my food. We were almost broke now. We needed to find a place to stay and I could tell that this town wasn't going to appreciate it if we pulled over by the side of the road and slept in the back seat like we did in the middle of nowhere in Texas. I got out my Rainbow Guide of contact information for people from all over the United States who had signed up to be in the guide at National Rainbow Gatherings. There were several entries with Palo Alto addresses. Ella started calling the numbers. After a few tries she got an answer and an invite to spend the night at a house nearby. She had asked if we could park in the driveway. We were given the guest room. The house belonged to the father of a young man who had attended a gathering several years earlier. The young man didn't live there but had been by to visit when we called, so his father had put him on the phone. After a few minutes of figuring out the nature of the call and what we needed, Ella had directions to their house and we were on our way. The father was a professor of physics at Stanford University. He showed us to our quarters and we retired for the evening.

The next morning the son returned with his girl friend and we visited over a well-cooked breakfast. The physicist was involved in research in the high-energy lab. We talked shop for a few minutes. Everyone else blinked for a few seconds to hear a Cherokee artist from the mountains of East Tennessee talking about subatomic particle theory and offering a few suggestions of how to increase target resolution to detect shorter particle paths. The discussion moved to art as the professor's current female companion was an artist from Switzerland. I gave a brief explanation of the migration of theories in physics to visual explorations through painting. Both of them understood my concepts. By now the omelets were all eaten and the discussion moved to deeper issues. The son was exploring

the idea of living in a society that functioned totally on barter with a growing group of friends that were interested in dropping out of the cash economy totally and learning to live as their ancestors had. The professor loved the idea. He was willing to support the effort any way he could. He gave us some travel money and we thanked him. We loaded our things back in the car and got ready to leave. The son asked us what phone number we had called. I looked it up and showed him. He said that the house phone number had been changed a year earlier and this number would only give you a recording if you called it. He didn't want to mention this in front of his father, as his father didn't believe in this sort of thing. We nodded and left.

We found the place where Rolling Thunder was giving his talk. The event was a fundraiser for him since his bank account had been depleted after the work at Meta Tanta, which had gone through some changes in the past few years. Ella told the folks at the door that she was his granddaughter and they let us in for free. It was a good size audience with a good representation of diversity from traditional Native Peoples to anthropologists to New Age healers seeking insights they could use in their work. I hoped to gain an audience with RT so I could relate the dream I had. I could still see white lines running past my eyes from having traveled from four hours west of the Atlantic Ocean to a few miles from the Pacific Ocean in five days with very little funding of my own since I had left home a few weeks earlier. There was a small collection of people on stage with RT, all dressed in traditional clothing. The women had on nice skirts, some of brain tan deer hide, while others were in cotton textiles with nice designs that reflected their Native heritage. The men were in blue jeans and ribbon shirts. It made me feel good to see this group appearing so well dressed.

Someone had gone up and related to RT that we were there. They came back and asked us to join the rest of the audience and we would be given some time to spend with RT during lunch. I found out later that we would have been invited to join the rest of the group on stage if Ella had been wearing a skirt instead of blue jeans. Rolling Thunder considered a woman in jeans to be trashy. He was an opinionated old man; there was no doubt about that. I sat and listened to him share his experiences and knowledge, some of which I had read in the book by Doug Boyd many years earlier. This was the first time I had actually seen RT in person throughout the years except for the one glance I had of him at Meta Tanta in 1977. His wife had died a few years earlier and I could see the toll it had taken on him. Still, there was something very familiar about him as I listened. It took me almost an hour to figure it out. He talked to us from on stage the same way the Southern Baptist preachers of Cherokee descent had spoken in church when I was a child growing up. For the first time in my life I had a clear understanding of how I had been educated in the Old Ways as a child under the guise of Christianity.

Everyone took a break at lunch and RT invited us up to visit with him. Now was my chance to share my dream of him. I sat and listened to him, answered questions, and ate the food that someone brought for me. The three of us sat and ate together. RT was very impressed to meet a young man of Cherokee descent from Tennessee. He told me a few stories that weren't in the book or on tape. Something in my gut told me to not tell him the dream right then. It wasn't the right time. I didn't understand this but went with my

gut. He looked at me hard for a minute and asked if there was anything else we needed to discuss before sending us back off stage while he concluded this part of the talk. I nodded that I had nothing left to talk about right then. He nodded and I took my leave.

The rest of the day went quickly after that. I could tell that RT was having a hard time with drinking now that his wife was gone. He had diabetes and this was not a good combination. I got to visit with some of the people who had come from the Reservations in the region and got contact information from them. That evening it was time to head on to the next event on Ella's itinerary. We went over to tell everyone goodbye before we left. RT was upset about something and it was very evident from the sound of his voice. Someone told us it wasn't a good time to speak with him. We conveyed our gratitude from a distance and continued on. As we turned to leave I watched RT kick something, then hobble about for a few minutes in pain. Six or seven months later this would result in gangrene in his foot and a life saving air flight from his home in Nevada to a hospital in San Francisco. Not knowing this at the time, I walked away having failed to do the one thing I had journeyed to do. Three years later I would finally tell him the dream. Today was not the right time.

Ella had an appointment to visit the founder of a halfway house for drug addicts in San Francisco a few days later. We bid my friends goodbye and headed across the bridge. Eighteen months later I would remember this crossing. We found the location of the office where we were to meet the woman who had created the most amazing non-profit endeavor for drug addicts in recovery. The halfway house included a place to stay, jobs for those that were ready to work, and donated materials to build a new building on property that had been donated to the organization. Everything was being done with donated funds and materials that the residents solicited via telemarketing. She listened to Ella pitch her project and plans to do a similar arrangement for Native children at risk. The woman asked a few questions and I could tell that she saw the same flags on the field that I sensed. She asked what she could do to assist in this project. Ella wanted her to be on the Board of Directors. This would add validity to the project, if nothing else. She said that she would consider the proposal and opportunity when it came closer to organizing. She invited us to visit several of the facilities where work was being done, then join the residents of the half way house for supper later in the evening. Ella thanked her as she summoned someone to guide us from locality to locality in this spontaneous tour. A few hours later we parked across from the Golden Gate State Park and entered the halfway house to enjoy a great meal while visiting with several residents of the facility. Our next stop was at a store in Sunnyvale. We made our salutations to our hosts for the evening and drove south.

Before we went to the store we had to meet one of Ella's contacts along a dark stretch of highway outside of town. The woman was a Native American and a supporter of RT and other Native causes, but her husband worked for company that required him to have National Security clearance. Because of some political concerns, she wasn't supposed to be meeting with anyone engaged in questionable activities. Obviously attempting to help Native children at risk or dreaming dreams about a Cherokee medicine man made us a threat to national security. Her paranoia was real. She had stopped at the bank earlier to

get some funds for us. She held them under a special light. They would be traced back to her. This was turning into the trip with Coyote on acid.

A week earlier while driving up through Fresno, we had stopped at a museum that featured a display of contemporary Native American art work with Coyote as the central subject. Could he have agreed to any other role? We left and went to the bead and craft store in a commercial district, where a couple was living in the back of the store with their daughter. They had lived along a river in northern California but logging on the mountains upstream had caused the rainfall to run off instead of soaking into the ground beneath the canopy of trees, causing an increase in flooding along the river. Their home had been washed away in a flash flood. Now their daughter required medical treatment, but lacking the documents needed to get help at the BIA hospital, they had traveled down to the Bay area to seek support. They had heard about Ella's project and hoped the organization she was working for could provide some support.

We spent the evening visiting with them before sacking out on the floor behind the display case of shells and nuts used in traditional regalia. I had shared my story with the man about the dream and my quest to share it with RT, only to feel that now was not the time. He listened and nodded to each point in the story. As it ended he turned to me and said, "So now you carry this dream inside of you until you meet this man again. Neither of you can die until you have told this dream." The next morning we loaded up and got ready to head further south. He handed me twenty dollars. I knew it was considered a blessing to help out someone on a spiritual quest. Those twenty dollars would have to get me a long way with several trips across the country before my dream would be told. Later I heard someone donated the funds needed for their daughter to get the medical care she needed. The funds could be traced back to the benefactor, but that didn't pose any serious threat to national security, so all was well.

The next leg of the journey would be down the coast past Los Angeles. One stop along the way didn't make a lot of sense, but I was riding with someone who clearly had some sort of mental disorder, so it all fit in. The visit was with a woman of Armenian descent who was in RT's Rolodex file. Whatever that meant. She was single and a really good-looking middle-aged woman. I wanted to add her to my Rolodex file, but Ella wouldn't let me. The interstate rest stop at 10 Mile Oasis featured a lot of old bread vans that had been turned into taco stands. I ate breakfast the next morning and contemplated the possibility of swimming out into the Pacific Ocean for a little ways before coming back onto the military reservation we were in the middle of, just for early morning kicks. The signs warned me that if I crossed the cyclone fence that live ammunition was being used in military practice activities. It was a good taco. I left a little along the fence for my unseen friend, Coyote. I hoped that in doing this our friendship would remain as such. The open windows let the coastal winds stream in all day long as we drove south. We stopped at a city park in Santa Barbara to say our prayers in the sunset. I took off my shoes and rolled up my pants so I could walk out into the water. The wind ripped into my eyes so strong they were watering. I could barely see to make my way across the parking lot, down the pebbled beach, and into the Pacific Ocean. I could feel the rip tide pull the pebbles away from my feet and try to pull me into the ocean. I sang my song and said my

prayers to the setting sun. Later I would record the experience in a poem, "Turquoise Woman."

Sometime later, in the middle of the night, we drove past the City of Angels. The AM radio stations were all speaking Coyote and singing love songs I couldn't understand. I understood the irony of the parody, "Born in East LA", but that didn't make me want to go there. Daylight had us driving up the mountains towards Valley Center and the Songs of the Earth/Eagle Medicine Gathering. We stopped to visit the organizer and visionary artist at his house trailer in town first. A short rotund man with long hair pulled back in a braid, TP was a stone carver and graphic artist who had turned his attention to organizing this annual event each year after having a vision of a four day ceremony based on the kiva altars similar to those done in Chaco Canyon a thousand years earlier. His wife was an instant sister when we met. She was a schoolteacher with a growing family. They gave us directions to the gathering and some fresh fruit to eat. It was hot already and I needed something to calm the early morning rumbling in my stomach.

Once we arrived at the gathering we met with TP again. He showed us the tent someone had provided for wayward travelers that needed lodging provided. It was in a perfect locality for me. The east side of the tent was tied off on a windbreaker fence that shielded the west side of the largest sweat lodge I had ever seen in my life. It would hold seventy-five people. For the next five days I would spend the majority of my time within spitting distance of this fence. Some food was ready and we were called over to the kitchen, where we were introduced to everyone. They gave me a bowl of food and pointed out the chili in a coffee cup. I wasn't sure if I was supposed to eat the entire contents of the coffee cup and I didn't want to insult anyone if I didn't. I watched until I was sure no one could see me and I took a taste of the rich red contents on the tip of my spoon. I decided to add a little to my bowl and leave the rest to someone else. It was good food.

Ella was busy meeting some people and there were arrivals at the airport in San Diego that needed a ride to the gathering. I was asked if I would drive the car in to pick them up. TP's brother, LP, would ride with me since he knew most of the arrivals and spoke Spanish. I readily agreed, since there was gas money to support the effort and I would rather have the wind blowing over my face right now than be working on the unfinished kiva that was being dug by hand. It was mid-March, but the weather here was approaching ninety degrees in the day while a light frost would fall at night. As we rode along LP noticed the turtle shell rattle in the seat. I had been using this to accompany a few songs earlier. He asked if he could use it. I agreed. As we road back down the mountain towards San Diego he sang sweat lodge songs and Sun Dance songs. The air felt good and skies weren't thick with fighter jets yet. That would come closer to the airport. The next trip would be to meet people that Ella knew. We drove back down the same route to pick up a load of women that were full of energy and excitement. Coyote sat in the back seat and flipped his Rolodex at me while I enjoyed ice cream during a fuel stop in Escondido. The women all talked about how long it had been since their last moon and what a difference menopause made when it came time to do ceremony. Coyote threw his Rolodex out the window and sniffed my empty ice cream cup.

One more trip into town with LP and the car filled up once again as we picked up fresh arrivals at the airport. LP needed to stop by and check on someone in town before going back up the mountain. He gave me directions in Spanish and pointed at each turn as I drove along and listened as the occupants talked with him in Spanish as well. We made the stop in the fading dusk and everyone got out greeting their friends that lived here in an apartment complex overlooking the coastline a short distance away. Finally we all piled back in and LP turned to ask me something in Spanish. I replied in English. Suddenly he remembered that I didn't speak Spanish. He laughed and told me that I should have said something. Everyone in the car knew English, but they just enjoyed conversing in Spanish. I told him that I didn't mind. I enjoyed listening to the beauty in their voice. That was what I heard from my new friends in either language. They spoke English the rest of the trip. I arrived back at camp and made my way to the kitchen with everyone else. The air was cool finally and the fires smelled good to me. I was at peace. Coyote was chewing on something that looked like a wadded up index card. Rolodex entries weren't supposed to happen for the next four days. This was ceremony. No more romance, drinking or drugging, recording devices or foul language until after the ceremony was over. Ella was exempt to at least one of these rules because she was certifiably El Loco. At least that was my rationalization as we shared body heat each night. I didn't know any better. I was an assimilated Cherokee from Tennessee.

The next four days were the most magical days of my life to date. Native people from all over the United States, Central America, and South America had journeyed to the gathering to honor the vision TP had of praying for world peace and harmony within an open kiva while Elders of all Nations that could participate be given an opportunity to share their wisdom and knowledge with those gathered together. Other people from all over the world joined the gathering as well, including Tibetan and Zen Buddhists, an Arch Bishop, a representative from the Governor's office, and an ample representation from the New Age community seeking insights they could use in their work. On other weekends these New Age seekers would be attending workshops with well-known personalities at a price that was almost half my annual income during any other year of my life. For the next few days all they had to do was make a donation to the kitchen and rough it in the Southern California hills with the Natives. Prayers were offered by the Elders and Grandmothers within the kiva each morning at sunrise and again at sunset. During the day, time was scheduled for those amongst the collective Elders to share their wisdom if they wanted to do so.

Sweat lodge ceremonies were scheduled during the day and in the evening as well. I left the sweat lodge fire long enough to stand in line for food before going back to watch the fire. There was plenty of firewood and the rocks were volcanic. I was in heaven. A spry middle-aged man was the head fire keeper who had a lot of experience doing fire and door for sweat lodges. He was from a Reservation just across the border in Nevada along the Colorado River. He slept in an old white Chevrolet station wagon that he drove over to the Gathering. He gladly accepted my assistance and gave me helpful hints on how to do things the way different water pourers wanted them done. He was a lot of fun to work with and I learned a lot. We joked about how he had to drive all the way across the London Bridge on his way home. Working together at events like this helps create

timeless bonds that transcend time, but his hometown really did own the relocated London Bridge. I didn't attempt to explain any of this to Coyote.

There was a lot that took place during those four days. One of the women attending the gathering had to be brought in with a fake I.D. from a South American country because she was working against the drug cartel there in an effort to stop the exploitation of the indigenous people. The Natives were being forced to work in the cocaine factories at gun point. She was in the country to try to bring more attention to this, but she couldn't make any public appearances or she would not live very long. The issue was well known in international circles and it would have been easy for the media in the United States to bring more awareness of this to the public, but that would hurt profits. We spoke for a short time with the help of an interpreter. Her eyes showed her weary spirit and tragic saga but her smile conveyed the hope she gleaned from each new encounter at the gathering. As she walked away it was like she disappeared behind a shroud of smoke, as if she didn't really exist. She brought a human face to the reality I had been reading about in indigenous newspapers for over fifteen years.

One morning the first sweat lodge ceremony had been completed and I went to get lunch. When I came back I found that my favorite spot had been taken, by an old farmer in light cotton pants and a shirt. He had on a hat to shield his head from the heat of the day. He had made it through the line before I had and was eating. We nodded and I joined him. We sat and ate in silence mostly. I made a comment about how good the morning felt and he nodded, so I knew he spoke English. I had met people that could speak several European languages and several indigenous languages, but no English. So I took care to show respect and not converse too much if I saw that someone wasn't that fluent in English. It was the only language I knew. After we completed our meal we talked for a little while until it was time for the next scheduled event to take place.

Grandfather David was supposed to give a talk right after lunch. He was the last surviving Hopi Elder to have gone into the kiva after World War II with the Elder's Council and open the "gourd of ashes" bundle. He had become a major proponent of nuclear disarmament since this event and had spoken several times before the United Nations Assembly in New York and Zurich, The United States Congress, and any other government body that would give him an audience. I looked forward to meeting him and hearing his talk today. He was friends with Rolling Thunder and it was through this friendship that a meeting with the Dalai Lama had been arranged some years earlier. I related a little of my dream and recent experience with Rolling Thunder to my new friend to help channel some of my excitement as we sat and waited for everyone to finish lunch. I had a good view of the road into the gathering and kept watching to see if Grandfather David would be arriving soon. While I got up to add wood to the fire, several of the organizers came and talked to my new friend for a few minutes and then left. I sat down and waited in silence.

My coffee tasted really good after working the fire for a few minutes. Soon a large crowd of people came and joined us. Several of my friends were seated facing me a few feet away, so I got up to join them and wait. The person introducing the Elders came up and

talked to a few people for a minute, going over the list on his clip board. Then he turned to the group waiting to hear Grandfather David speak and related the guidelines regarding the need to refrain from recording anything during the gathering. I relaxed and tuned all of this out. I smelled the fresh scents drifting through the afternoon breeze. I leaned over and brushed my arm against the arm of my friend, feeling the goose bumps rising up on her arm as the introductions ended and it was time for Grandfather David to “take the stage” and address his audience. My lunch companion stood forward and started to speak. I sat dumbfounded. My humble corn farmer friend was Grandfather David.

Grandfather David talked about the Medicine Wheel and the need for balance between the genders. He related observations that were being made that suggested that the Earth was out of balance globally because of human activity and we needed to change the direction we were going in if we didn't want to end up where we were heading. He never mentioned nuclear disarmament the entire time he talked. He kept looking at me while he related things that made me feel like he was looking inside my heart and answering each question, one by one. The talk ended and like a wisp of smoke from a fire, he was gone.

As I worked with my friend at the sweat lodge each day, we would sit by the door during the prayer rounds and listen. Several days into the gathering I lined it up so someone else would be helping out with the fire and I could get a sweat in. Again I listened to each prayer and learned from those that had been praying in this manner for many years. I heard many prayers said where the person gave thanks for their sobriety. This sounded strange to me. I had never heard anyone offer gratitude for their sobriety in the sweat lodge before.

One of the camps was called Thunder Lodge. They were all teenagers in recovery that were living in a group home north of L.A. Many of them had left their families and homes on the reservations because conditions were so bad that living on the street seemed to be the better option than remaining in a virtual war zone fueled by drugs and alcohol. The streets had exploited their youth and crack cocaine had brought the war into their own bodies. As they lived in the traditional environment at the group home, they were learning to respect their minds and bodies through the Old Ways. Throughout the gathering I heard people talking about the toll drugs and alcohol was taking on the indigenous peoples throughout the Americas. It gave me new insights into my own struggles and the need to abstain from drugs and alcohol. A few conversations with the young people gave me much needed insight into the need to provide as much traditional experiences as possible to the indigenous children to help prepare them for the challenges ahead. I didn't mention the fact that someone was doing the very thing Ella was advocating to her. It was a long ride or walk back to Tennessee and now was no time to ruffle feathers.

One of the last events scheduled would be a tepee ceremony. The morning of the last day of the gathering I was asked to join a small group of workers to help set up the tepee and provide hot coals for the road man to use as part of the blessing and purifying ritual he would do before the ceremony. The tepee ceremony would start after dark and last all night. There was limited space and a long list of people had requested the opportunity to

take part in the ceremony. Ella was one of the people who would be taking part and she asked TP if there would be room for me as well. He looked at me for a minute and then shook his head. I smiled my acceptance to his response and went back to the sweat lodge fire. I helped with the remaining lodges that day and was ready to enjoy a relaxing evening with the close of the ceremonies at sunset. LP came around after the last sweat lodge ceremony and asked me if I would do fire for a sweat that had been requested at sunset.

A second lodge had been built close to the large flattop lodge that was being used for the large group sweats during the day. The smaller lodge was the same style lodge that I had helped build almost six years earlier. I agreed. He told me what he would need done and left. I prepared the stones on the fire and watched as the flames licked up into the sky, consuming the wood and heating up the volcanic stones. Several hours passed and no one showed up. I added more wood on top the glowing red stones to keep them hot. Finally after sundown LP showed back up. After four days of doing the fire, I was tired and exhausted. I wasn't in a very good mood by now. I voiced my feelings and he stood patiently and listened. When I had vented enough, I turned and asked him if there would be room for one more in the lodge. He looked at me for a minute and smiled. He nodded and I hurried to find someone who would help with the door while I went in to pray.

This particular lodge turned out to be a healing lodge for one of the women from Mexico who needed a good hot sweat before she went into the tepee ceremony. I showed the young man how to do the rocks, as he had never done door before, then I joined the group inside the lodge. I ended up in the very back against the wall. I sat and watched as the rocks started coming in. They were still perfect. It made me feel good to see them glow in the dimness of the lodge. I had been concerned that they would lose their heat due to the long delay that had occurred. My fears were unwarranted. The door was closed after the first group of rocks had been pushed in, the lodge and everyone in it smudged, and the water bucket had been pushed in. I could see everyone's faces from the glow of the rocks. As the songs began and water was poured on the rocks, the steam rose to the top of the lodge and curled back down along the wall onto my head and shoulders. Four days of doing fire in the dry southern California sun had taken its toll on my skin. The steam burned into my sun burned skin. It was all I could do to keep from screaming. I tried to protect my face but I didn't have a towel with me and there was no place to hide. I sang the best I could and prayed hard. As we sang LP would pour water and hold up two eagle wings and fan across the rocks. The steam would come back and hit me square in the face. Finally the first cycle of songs was completed and the door was opened. More rocks were brought in. They glowed brighter than the ones that had just gone through the first round of the ceremony. More water was added to the bucket. The blanket was dropped once again and the second cycle of songs began.

The additional rocks increased the intensity of the ceremony and I was struggling to remain in the lodge. I needed this purification and I prayed constantly in order to focus on what was in my heart instead of what was on my skin, or more to the point, what had been my skin. As the second cycle came to an end and the blanket was raised up once more, I started to feel better. The steam had helped clear all the damage from the sun and

heat over the past few days and I had been able to remain sitting upright throughout the last song of this cycle. As the blanket was lifted and the light of the fire shown into the lodge, LP looked around at the tight packed double circle of people that were in the lodge with him. They were all lying as close to the ground as they could possible get. The only other person sitting up besides him was me. He looked at me and I could see his teeth shining through his big smile as our eyes met. He called for more stones. I was able to sit up and sing to my heart's content for the rest of the ceremony. I knew the steam from the stones had helped me let go of all the things I had brought into the lodge that I no longer needed. The Pipe was passed around during the break between the third and fourth cycle and the last of the stones were added to the growing pile in the pit in the center of the lodge. Soon the ceremony was over and I crawled out with everyone else. The woman who had asked for the lodge was shaking everyone's hand as we left. I stood up in the evening air and felt the night breeze blow off the moisture from my skin. I was clean inside my body and spirit. As the people that would be taking part in the tepee ceremony moved to the other side of the grounds where the ceremony would take place, I finished up the food and beverage that had been shared afterwards and went to the tent to sleep. I sank into a deep sleep.

The next morning Ella came and woke me up. She was laughing and her eyes glowed brightly in the morning sun. She told me that sometime during the night she looked up and watched as I came floating down the smoke hole of the tepee and sat down by the fire keeper for a while. Later she looked back where I had been sitting and I was no longer there. I grinned. I had gotten a good night's sleep and no one could take that away from me now, no matter how busy the rest of the night had been. The only thing I remembered from the previous night was a dream about looking for a piece of glow-in-the-dark fry bread. I was a spiritual warrior riding the analog winds of freedom against the digital microwave of new clear channels. I was grateful to be me.

A closing prayer was said and the altar was removed from the kiva. Soon a group of young men with shovels started filling the hole back up. Everyone started collecting their things and were breaking camp. Contact information was shared along with hugs and tears. Promises were made to stay in touch and everyone looked forward to seeing each other again. Ella came to tell me that there was a slight problem in our travel plans. She had loaned the car to someone the night before to drop someone off at the airport. The timing belt had broken and it had been towed to a repair garage in San Diego. Several women that were friends of TP lived in a community south of L.A. They invited us to spend the night at their place before giving us a ride down to San Diego, where we would stay with the daughter of the woman who owned the car. When it was time to go, we loaded up our things in the car of our soon-to-be hostess and headed down the mountains toward the coast once again. I sat in the back seat and listened as the women discussed the events of the past few days in Spanish. We arrived at the apartment in a neighborhood where everyone spoke Spanish. Our friends were artists and social activists that used theater and silk screening of fabric and paper as easy ways to communicate the issues the community was facing. The modest apartment where they were staying provided them with a place to live at the moment. I could hear from their stories that things had been going much better for them financially before they became active in working for social

justice in the working communities in California and throughout the United States. They were working to gain fair wages and health care benefits for workers that lacked an education or knowledge of how to engage in collective bargaining. The point they made in their discussion was the need to recognize all indigenous peoples of the Americas as Native Americans and organize across tribal boundaries as well as falsely imposed national boundaries. They had a working shower in the bathroom. I started singing my favorite post-ceremonial song as the hot water ran over my skin. "I'm not coming out. I'm never coming out. Don't even try, because I'm never coming out." That night I fell asleep to the sound of women talking in Spanish on into the night. The world could wait if it needed me to save it. I had done enough for one day.

The next few days were spent in an apartment in San Diego a few blocks from the Bay Watch beach. The water was too cold to swim in, but I enjoyed walking over to the beach and taking off my shoes to continue walking until it was time to turn around and head the other way. The timing belt was replaced on the car and funds were collected so we would have enough gas money to make it back to Albuquerque. We loaded up and headed for points east. The daughter of the owner of the car was glad to see us go, in spite of her appreciation for our cause. She thought her mother had gone off her rocker when she joined the cause, but she kept her peace and did what she could to support her. She worked as a private contractor for the Air Force. She had an office on the base and had security clearance, so she didn't talk much about the work she was doing. I didn't tell her much about the work I was doing either. Her den where we had been staying reminded me of some of the rooms I had slept in over the years. The smell of spilt beverages after an evening of partying and the cigarette ashes dumped into the carpet gave the room a sharp contrast to the smells I had been experiencing the past week. It reminded me of where I had been and where I didn't want to go again.

The Interstate signs told us the way north and then east towards Bakersfield as we headed towards our next point of arrival. Not long after we left San Diego we came upon a border patrol. They asked me for my visa and green card. I showed them my Tennessee driver's license. They asked questions about where I had been and where I was going. They understood English, but not Elizabethan English. I made sure my accent sounded like I was from East Tennessee. They quickly turned their attention to the trunk of the car. "What is in there?" "Art work" I replied. This wasn't a normal stop, I secretly whispered to Toto. Coyote peeked around the side of the car hoping they would ask him to see his green card. It might be green, but it wasn't a card he wanted to show them. They asked us to open the trunk. Ella put the key in the keyhole and unlocked it. Artwork lay on the top of blankets. They felt around and nodded, satisfied that we weren't stowing any bodies underneath the artwork. We closed the trunk and went on down the highway. Had they asked us to remove the artwork, we would have had to explain all the stones, dried plants, buffalo skull, and other objects in the trunk. Neither of us wanted to go through that right now. We breathed a sigh of relief. Twilight soon faded the view of palm trees and desert shrubs. Ella drove through Needles Pass and pulled off to sleep a while just inside the Nevada line.

I woke up the next morning to see a new desert view in the purple sunrise. We were short on funds, so Ella bought some cheese and crackers for us to eat. We were headed for the Four Corners area. As we made our way up along the central northern part of Arizona, I could see the sky darkened with particulate and I knew we were downwind from a large surface coal mine. The profits made from the removal of coal from these mountains weren't shared with the indigenous peoples whose homeland had been encroached through government regulations and political bribes. I was riding out a flu bug that had been passed on to me from one of the children I had held while their mother had taken part in a sweat lodge ceremony a few days earlier. The combination of a fever and the dark sky during broad daylight gave it all an ominous feeling. I was sure the heavens were about to open up and dark creatures would descent upon us all and wreck havoc upon the Earth. We arrived in Diné country and found a place to spend the night. The fever broke. I woke up the next morning to the sunrise breaking over the desert south of the Grand Canyon. We weren't here to be tourists, so the canyon wasn't on our list of places to stop. We headed east past Tuba City. I love that name.

By mid-morning we were going through Hopi country. The cliff walls and bare rocks appeared just as I had read about them in the books over the years. It was a hard land to live in and a hard land to navigate about. We were going to Third Mesa. Very small road signs showed the way. Ella had a vague idea of where we were going. Someone had given her directions already, or she had been here before. This wasn't clear. She mumbled to herself a lot sometimes when she drove and I learned to not ask for clarity. Finally we pulled onto a long dusty lane and drove up to an adobe structure that looked like it had been there for several centuries. Looks aren't deceiving out here. We got out and headed for the front door. I heard someone over by the shed. An old man was lying down under some blankets resting in the morning sun. He got up and I saw it was my farmer friend from a few weeks ago. He remembered us and invited us in for a visit. I grabbed a stone from my home in Tennessee and went over to greet him as he welcomed us into his home.

After we sat down the old man offered us some coffee. Ella declined but I gladly accepted his last cup from the pot on the wood cook stove. He joked about the abundance of coffee grounds he gave me. I laughed and took a sip. It was good. I offered him my stone, relating a little about it. He accepted it and spent a long time looking at it, turning it over, and feeling it. He gave it the attention I had always understood stones were to be given in the Old Ways. Finally he sat it down with a nod and turned his attention to Ella. She asked him questions related to her project and the need to network with the people of the Hopi Nation as part of the endeavor. He listened for a few minutes and then asked a few questions. He suggested that she meet with someone down in the local village that was active in similar work. As she took down the name and directions, a knock was heard on the door. It was a well-known anthropologist from Albuquerque bringing a group of graduate students to meet Grandfather David.

The old man rose excitedly as our conversation ended and explained that he had been waiting for this second set of guests all morning. We made our way out. As I walked past him he looked me in the eye and nodded knowingly. We made our way down to the small

collection of modern buildings the directions sent us in. Ella found the location we had been sent to and inquired about the contact person she was supposed to find there. They weren't around at the moment. We waited a short while before the phone rang. It was the person in question. They weren't going to be back until the end of the day. We went to the next location and the same thing happened. The effort to contact someone on the Hopi Reservation that would talk to Ella about her project had run dry. We traveled east to Chinle. We found the campground east of town and bedded down for the night. Ella didn't feel good. She got the back seat of the car while I slept out under the stars.

The next morning Ella wanted to get an early start on the next leg of our journey. She wasn't good at giving up details so I just went along for the ride and waited to see what showed up around the next corner. We drove up the canyon road until she found a parking lot. It was early morning but one could already feel the heat of the day starting to rise up from the stones. We got out and she got several things she would use during prayers and we headed down the trail. A few hours later we arrived at a river with the ruins of a pueblo on the other side. There was one way to get there and the water was run off from snowmelt further upstream in the mountains. A few hours drive west of here the north side of the Grand Canyon would remain snowed in for another month. The river was up to my chest and my skin went numb from the cold instantly. We made our way across the river and did what we could to dry off before looking around at the scene before us. As she went to say her prayers in private I squatted by the river and listened to the sounds around me. I heard the wind blowing through the canyon. I heard the water slapping up against the bank wall of rocks. I heard the birds singing as they went about their morning duties. I said each sound. I said them again. I heard a song in my voice. I sang. I could hear children playing along the river while their mothers and grandmothers talked as they went about their work. I heard the peals of celebration as men came walking around the distant bend with game suspended from large branches on their shoulders. I heard the raptors cry out in the air above me. As I slowed my song to a soft hum, this all faded away and I was back on the banks of the river with the ruins of the pueblo behind me. I gave thanks for this song that would always help me to remember the Old Ways.

We started walking back up the trail. The heat of the mid-morning was now at full force as we greeted hikers who were coming down the trail. There would be a small crowd at the ruins in a short time. I continued to collect small orange and red pebbles whenever no one was in view. My pockets would be full by the time I got back up to the rim of the canyon. Ella had to stop and take a break behind a boulder for a few minutes. When she came back she handed me the objects she wasn't supposed to be in contact with during this time of her monthly cycle. Things had just started. In the distance I saw a young coyote run around the corner and disappear. Life was good. We made our way up to the car and started to return the things we carried down with us and unload the things I had gleaned along the way.

A couple of local women were parked nearby selling crafts from their family workshops. One of them watched me carefully remove the feather Ella had handed me a short time earlier and place it in sage and red cloth. "Nice feather" she called out. I was nervous that

they might take issue with us coming to a sacred site and us not from the area but they showed no signs of offense. They looked away and smiled as I unloaded my pockets. I hummed my new song under my breath as the wind blew across the canyon rim and down into the depths, making a lonesome sound come riding back up from below. We got some food and drink and sat on the rock fence in front of the car. Ella went over to talk to the women. I stayed where I was. They had on skirts and I could tell from the way they responded to my presence that they knew I was traditional and would honor that protocol. Ella was in jeans. They talked and laughed with her for a short while, then gave her a small item from under the display case on the back of the truck. She showed it to me. Her daughter was expecting her first grandchild. This would be for the new one when it came into this world. We headed down the canyon and east towards the next stop on Ella's unspoken itinerary.

Maybe it was just the high altitude getting to me finally, but I seemed to know where I was when we drove in the south entrance to Chaco Canyon the next morning. We drove along the north side of the loop and stopped to view the pueblo ruins along the way. Sometimes I would ask Ella to stop so we could go look at something. It wasn't a marked point of interest, but she didn't mind. We would walk over to the canyon wall where we would find carvings in the cliff wall there. I touched them. They needed to be cleaned up and made fresh again. The desert lichen was taking a toll on them. I looked up at places on the wall and pointed them out to Ella. "This is a star map" I said. I explained what it was for and why we needed to make sure it remained preserved. To everyone else it looked like part of the canyon wall. To me, it looked like work. We rode on up the canyon. It would rain soon. I missed the smell of rain on the cornfields. It hurt to be there and it hurt to leave. As we started up the north access road out of the canyon the car stalled. We were low on gas but we weren't out of gas. Ella let the car roll back down to level ground. The car started. She gunned it up the slope until the car leveled off on the canyon rim and headed northeast towards the closest paved road twenty miles away.

Ella wanted to go to Taos. There was a short cut across the mountain. She had ventured through there a few years earlier when she lived in Taos. She found it on the map and we made our way down the state highway until we got to the turn off. I loved this small town on the western side of the mountains. I wanted to live there. I wanted to find somewhere to sleep that night and wake up in this town the next morning. I wanted to go anywhere besides up this road we were heading up. A light rain had started at sundown but as our altitude increased, the rain turned to snow. It got heavier as we drove beyond pavement and started up a logging road. The snow was already a half foot deep at this elevation. The car made its way up the mountain as we broke through the old snow with several inches of fresh snow on top of it. I could tell that this wasn't a good idea. I found the road map and a flashlight. I checked the map again. Sure enough, we were heading for a pass that was over 13,000 feet in elevation and it was still March by my clock. I suggested that we turn around. Finally we almost slid off the side of the road and she agreed. I got out and guided her back to a wide place where she could turn around. We headed down the mountain and south to Albuquerque.

We spent the night in the guest room of Ella's friend and benefactor's house. As I woke up I could hear them talking in the other room. I had a good breakfast as I listened to them continue to talk about the situation at hand. Funds were tight and the woman's son was still having trouble with cocaine addiction. That didn't bother me any. We headed north towards Taos the next day. After several stops, we arrived at our destination in front of an old pueblo house. An old man answered the door. It was almost midnight and I was tired. Ella knew this older couple and as she introduced me to our host, I held out my hand and said "good morning." He looked at me for a minute not sure if I was just being cute or what. He invited us in and showed us the guest bed. We were visiting one of the oldest road men in the United States. His English name was Tell Us Good Morning. The next morning we enjoyed a great breakfast with him, his wife and son, and several younger members of the family. His wife may have understood English, but she wouldn't converse in English in front of me. She watched everything and seemed to understand all that was going on with us modern types. She reminded me of my grandmother and it made me lonesome for her again.

We visited a couple of folks around the village that Ella knew from when she had lived there before. One friend was working on some outfits for her children for an upcoming event. As Ella and she visited and she sewed on the garment, I heard someone groan from the couch in the other room. I turned and saw a young man asleep on the couch. He had been out partying the night before and I knew exactly how he felt that morning. His older sister would look up from her sewing and shake her head each time he groaned. She wouldn't chide him but one could see the sadness in her face. Soon Ella and I were wandering about the Pueblo. Tourists were milling about the shops and booths as we walked through. Ella pointed out areas where members of the pueblo were the only ones allowed to go there.

We left the pueblo and traveled into town where she stopped at a station and asked the mechanic on duty to look at the gas tank. She thought that this might be why the car was stalling out when we went up steep inclines. He couldn't find anything wrong with the fuel line. We had to stop by a small shop where money was being wired to us. She made out the check for a small amount and then told us that she didn't have enough cash on hand to convert it to paper money. I generally wouldn't have made an issue, but this time I did. She finally called the owner of a nearby business and asked them to cash it for us. We got paper money to eat on and buy gas. We went on up the road to an access road. She turned off and drove onto property I remembered from the movie, Easy Rider. Ella had lived in one of the buildings on the commune grounds of Bear Lodge for a while with her children some years earlier. She had stuff stored there still. She wanted to check to see if any of the clothes were small enough for her unborn grandchild. I wandered around the grounds as she dug out boxes and went through the clothes. Memories came flooding back, or up from the earth. I felt the energy of hope that had sprung from the earth here twenty years earlier and the energy of greed and jealousy that had covered it up and turned the dream into a nightmare. I found the latrine and went in to do my daily constitutional. As I sat there on the seat and counted, I was sure I was using the largest outhouse I had ever been in. Fifty people would have come and gone while I was there when the commune was at its peak occupation.

I found Ella again and sat down in the morning sun and waited. If I walked around any more I would start to get a contact high from the earth. When she had completed her search for baby's clothes we left and made our way to a small gallery down the road. It was owned and operated by a local Native American artist. He remembered Ella from her time in the area. He wasn't interested in looking at my art and most of the art he had in the gallery was for the tourist trade, not fine art like they had in the galleries in town. He was still struggling with the challenges of drug and alcohol addiction and the toll it had taken on his finances and creative energies.

A few more days in New Mexico and we headed east once again. Ella wanted to stop overnight at a very special place in northern Texas, which took us off the Interstate, which would have been the fastest way home. It was spring in Texas and the night air was thick with humidity and heat already. We found the state park she wanted to spend the night at and we fed mosquitoes all night long. It was an unusual place. It had the same red stone that one found in Minnesota. We weren't able to collect any. There were too many rednecks camping there already. Sometimes it's better to wait and try again another time. We headed east. I had left my artwork with her friend in Albuquerque with the promise that she would give some of her friends in interior design an opportunity to look at it. I looked forward to getting home. I had been on the road for almost two months now. It had been in the dead of winter when I left for Massachusetts. Now it was early spring and the air felt good.

When we got back to Knoxville Lorna told Ella about some people living in Knoxville that would be interested in her project. We went by a potluck dinner being hosted by a young woman from Rogersville that also knew the drum maker that had taken part in the Kelly Brown video. It was a good crowd of people and Ella impressed them with her knowledge of the unseen. We made contact with two men who were active in the local Native community. Their families were tribal members of their respective tribes, so they would be asked to sit in on the board of any organization wanting to access funds related to Native American issues. The local community depended upon them to serve on the board of the annual pow-wow held on the World's Fair Park. They knew a lot of shakers and movers in the community and would be valuable contacts for Ella. She called them and they invited her over for the evening. Midway through the visit one of them invited her to spend the night. Things were getting confusing. The next morning there was some displeasure expressed by our two male hosts at the fact that I had slept with Ella the night before.

We stopped by to visit one of the poets who read at the poetry readings each month. He was a graduate student in journalism who had lived in Little Rock before relocating to Knoxville to attend school here. As we were leaving the car died for the hundredth time in several weeks. It wouldn't start. The battery ran down. Ella said that Lorna was doing bad medicine against her because I was spending time with her instead of going back to the house trailer where Lorna had moved a few months earlier. It was getting more and more confusing. Ella wouldn't let anyone work on the car. We had to stay with this couple and their daughter for the next few days. They weren't set up to feed houseguests for more than a few days and relations were getting strained around here already. One

morning when the couple was off to work or classes and we were watching their daughter, she went into her parent's bedroom and got some of their personal items to show us. She came into the living room and held them up. Ella knew these were personal family items and asked her to put them back. She was four years old and didn't understand. Ella went back into the bedroom and made sure she put them back where she found them. Nothing more was touched and Ella didn't touch the items. When the woman came home and noticed that these things had been disturbed, she told her husband that Ella and I had gotten into these belongings and she wanted us out of the house that day. He came home and insisted that we start the car. I was one hundred per cent supportive. He hooked up battery cables and jumped the car off. We loaded up our things and went to my parents to visit. As we left and headed up 411, the car died again. I called for a wrecker to tow the car to a local garage. The fuel pump had been damaged while the timing chain had been replaced back in San Diego. This was common with that engine. The two men in town called one of the organizations in Nashville and got approval to pay the tow bill and repair bill with funding from their foundation. We headed back home. A few days later Ella left for Texas to see her daughter and wait for the arrival of her first grandchild.

A few weeks later I installed a show of artwork in the lobby of the cable access television station in Knoxville. They got a lot of traffic through the lobby from the local arts community, so it was an opportunity to continue exposure for my work. Back home I continued to work on paintings, jewelry, writing, and do more ceremony over the next few months. One spring morning I went out to greet the day when I felt a burning sensation. I knew this was not good so I went to the Knox County Health Department later that day. I had planned to be in Knoxville, so it made it easier than to go across the mountain to Rogersville first. I went through the diagnostic process and left with a bottle of antibiotics for a sexually transmitted disease. I contacted Ella, Lorna, and Sally and told them that I had contracted this from one of them and could have possibly caused the other two to contract it from me. Sally and Lorna both screamed at me and went to see their health care provider. They both came up negative. Ella refused to see a medical doctor, saying that she would treat it with natural herbs and I couldn't have possibly gotten it from her. I must have gotten it from one of the other women. Coyote grinned and snickered up his sleeve. I ate my pills and shut up. A few weeks later another burning sensation had me going to the health department again. This time it was chlamydia or non-specific urethritis. I got more pills and more distress from three women. This was all the complication I needed for one lifetime.

I had been working with a regional publication out of Asheville for several years after attending the regional gathering and meeting some of the other writers with the paper. They held a spring gathering each year to present workshops on various disciplines and issues. I volunteered to do a poetry workshop, as I had been active in editing and writing for the journal and other publications. Scheduling the workshops for a gathering is always an issue and the organizers did their best. Various people saw me the first night of the gathering and said they wanted to take my workshop. I related some of the things I had to share and a few ideas I wanted to throw out for group interaction. They were all enthused with these ideas. The next morning the schedule came out and I chuckled to see that I was

slotted to present my workshop at the same time that two of the most popular presenters would be doing theirs. No one showed up to take part in my workshop. I relaxed and enjoyed the day.

I had met some new friends and was enjoying the visit to western North Carolina in the springtime. There was some talk about doing a sweat that evening and JJ, one of the regulars at events like this, was willing to pour water if the fire marshal would agree to let us have a fire. The conditions were unusually dry for this time of the year and a ban on fires had been issued. A few phone calls were made and it was arranged to do the lodge fire, but no other open fires were approved. I was given the opportunity to do fire and I welcomed the chance to help this friend from the gathering the previous year do a sweat lodge ceremony.

As the fire burned and the rocks heated up, I could feel the energy of the evening turning in a direction I wasn't comfortable with. Several women were very hostile towards indigenous culture and felt that they could participate in the sweat lodge ceremony, regardless of the teachings suggesting that they abstain during their time of the month. JJ was adamant about the need to honor traditions and I was standing next to him the whole way. As soon as his lodge was completed, I broke camp, loaded up my things and left the gathering. Later I heard that he did also. I never participated in any of the events sponsored by this group after that. Several other members of the publication that had helped found it would also discontinue working with the group due to the lack of respect towards indigenous cultures.

Two years after having started out seeking a new circle of friends, damage control was in progress and I was starting to narrow down the list of people I was willing to associate with. I was becoming more aware of the need to focus my energy on the traditional values of my indigenous culture and limit the amount of time I spent with those who were disrespectful of my heritage or race. As my spirituality continued to grow and strengthen after spending the past few months with traditional peoples from across the country, I was more aware of my own need to abstain from drugs and alcohol, but I wasn't fully there yet. The Old Ways would continue to grow as a way of living, but the old ways of my past were still fading slowly with time.

From "Voices in the Dark"

Several people had mentioned the new director at the Knoxville Arts Museum was interested in Native American art. I called and left my number and he returned my call. I explained who I was and the nature of my work. He was very interested and encouraged me to drop off some slides of my work and resume for him to review. I could drop these off at the front desk anytime during regular business hours and they would get them to him. I stopped by one evening after picking up Lorna and her sons to give them a ride home. After I dropped off the packet of slides and information about my work, I returned to the truck. I heard sirens in the distance, but this area was near the fire station and police station. I didn't think much of it. The parking lot was a short walk from the museum and it took me a few minutes to get there. I watched as four Knoxville police

cars turned off Western Avenue and headed towards the parking lot. I had almost reached the exit of the parking lot when I was surrounded by cars with blinking lights. An officer walked up the side of the truck and asked to see my driver's license. I handed it to him. He left with it to run it through the computer. All the officers were out of their cars and walking around the truck. The two young teenage boys were sitting in the back of the truck, terrified that they would be removed from their mother and taken off to juvenile detention or something equally horrible. The officer returned with my license and apologized. The security officer monitoring the security system at the museum had called in the alarm, relating that a suspicious person had entered the building and left soon afterwards. I explained that I had just left slides and materials for the director to review, as I was an artist. A call was made through the dispatcher and this was confirmed. Now the officers were mad. One of them had looked at my plates and said, "Did you know your tags were expired?" I didn't have the funds to renew them. There was no reason to lie about it, so I responded that I was aware of this. "If the highway patrol catches you, they'll give you a ticket." That was all they said. That was the only response I received from the Knoxville Museum of Art in my efforts to educate the staff about my work.

[...]

During the summer and fall I had begun working with oil paint on aluminum plates. I didn't have the funds to buy canvas and I wanted to get some of the ideas down onto some type of surface as quickly as possible. By the fall I had completed over fifteen pieces in oil and approximately ten pieces in watercolor and an equal amount of pastel drawings. I completed one of the most important pieces of work in welded steel, Solo Dancer, the previous spring. It had been featured in the Creative Process video. As winter approached I had a good body of work to choose from for the upcoming show in February 1989. Lorna wanted to come up to visit and see the work I had done. We would pick up a pot roast on the way up from Knoxville, along with the other items she would need to make a good dinner. She had asked me to give Leo a call and invite him over that night also. When I arrived home I called and Leo said he needed a ride that night. He was a little spooked about driving since he had been picked up for drunk driving and possession of marijuana a few months earlier. He was working to get the charges dismissed, but he hadn't found out who to pay off or how much to pay them yet. Then he would need to come up with the funds. So I went and picked him up.

It was a rainy December evening a few weeks after Thanksgiving and in between parties. Leo was thirsty. I had enough money to pick up a couple of six packs. He asked me to drive over to Gate City where the food market there had a real good selection of imported beers. I picked him up and off we went down the back roads from Tennessee to Virginia and Gate City. We hadn't seen each other much for the past few months and it was good to visit and get crazy again. He related all the tunes he had been listening to "Blue Monday", a favorite radio program on WETS-FM out of Johnson City, TN. He had taken part in the fund aiser that fall and was still telling stories about his drinking escapades with the station director. We got beer and headed back home. It had been over one year since I had the dream about Rolling Thunder. I felt like I had honored my commitment to the dream, although I had failed to relate the dream to Rolling Thunder the previous

spring in California. A few beers with friends was not going to hurt anything. We each cracked one open and headed back to East Pumpkin Valley. It was good to hang out with my old friend and relax after a few hard months of solitude.

[...]

I was scheduled to be a guest on the morning show at the local television station whose studios were in an old historic stone building north of downtown Knoxville. I drove down to my parents to spend the night so I wouldn't have as far to drive the next morning. I got up at 4:30am and made my way to the station. The anchorman for the show was there, checking the news headlines. I asked him if there was coffee. He had to make some. Sometime after I had arrived at the station it had started raining. It was freezing rain, changing to sleet and snow. By the time we went on the air everyone in the viewing area was watching the show to see what the weather would be like and if there would be any school closing. I didn't notice this until later. I had brought a painting to show if there was an opportunity to do this. It was a small canvas oil painting I had painted the previous summer to serve as an illustration for a poem I had written to go in an arts journal, but neither the poem nor illustration had been accepted. The painting depicted a shaman dressed as a bear doing a ritual dance. When it came time to show the painting, the announcer held it up and said, "Is this a depiction of the devil himself, or what?" I couldn't believe my ears. I wanted to get up and walk off the show. The assistant director who had served as coordinator of the show had to appear on the show also. She remained civil to me throughout the show. Nothing was mentioned regarding the manifesto I had posted on the wall that she had removed or the need for me to sign the waiver of liability form.

[...]

Nothing sold at the gallery. I barely had enough money to pay for gas to drive down and get my work. I got it out and loaded in less time than the parking space sign allowed for. [...] Thirteen years after graduating from the University of Tennessee, I had taken my work as far as I could in Knoxville. I felt good about the effort I had made but couldn't keep going the way I had without some other support. With the experiences over the past fifteen months behind me, I didn't know what it meant to live a year in the Old Ways, but I knew I couldn't drink any more and that also meant I couldn't do any other drugs either.

I didn't fully understand the experiences I'd had back at the cabin up from Happy Creek almost thirteen years earlier, but I was starting to get some insights into what it might mean to my life. I had done everything I could to keep my relationship open with my sons, Noah and Gabriel, but that best effort failed through the usage of allegations I couldn't disprove without generating funds in some other way besides working for hourly wages in East Tennessee. In order to get my visitation rights enforced and restore contact with Noah and Gabriel I would need to leave the area.

I went to the sweat lodge by the creek and prayed alone. I didn't know what to do next. I felt as lost as I had ever been. I was damned if I did and damned if I didn't. Like the

voice in the dark said, I was trying to absorb too much of other people's pain. I didn't know how to stop other than to stop. I couldn't drink any more. I had to honor the Old Ways and I didn't even have an Elder I could go to and ask for guidance. I sat out under the winter sky and looked at the stars and prayed for direction. I turned on the radio to listen to WETS-FM do their weekly installment of space music, or New Age jazz. I heard a familiar thump and knew what piece they were playing. I had sent them in a tape of Spiritual Warrior. "I am awake. I have awakened." The universe played my own words back to me in answer to my prayers. Wadoni.