

# **A YEAR IN WILDERNESS SOLITUDE**

by

**FRANK R. (BOB) KULL**

**B.Sc., McGill University, 1993**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF**

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

in

**THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES**

**Interdisciplinary Studies**

**THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA**

**November 2005**

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## Abstract

This dissertation is part of an ongoing exploration of who I am and what it means to be alive. It is an account of one man who lives alone for a year in the wilderness and reflects on his experience. A research question - What are the physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual effects of deep wilderness solitude? - motivates and shapes the work.

I develop an innovative methodology of vigilant mindfulness combined with radically honest journal keeping and narrative writing to examine and document my own lived experience in solitude. I extend interdisciplinarity and integrate spiritual practice with academic study, and I share my work with the non-academic community.

During the year in solitude I discovered unexpected answers of the heart that emerged gradually through daily living. The more deeply I trusted the process of living and accepted the world and myself as we actually are, the more joy, peace, and wonder I experienced. I believe humans often act in ecologically destructive ways because we are experientially alienated from the natural systems that sustain us. Solitude can catalyze transformations in consciousness that might lead to more sustainable behaviour.

Broadly, a thesis is an invitation to reflect on something from a particular point of view. I use personal narrative to evoke an experience of wilderness solitude and to invite the reader to reflect on how our culture experiences the non-human world, on how we experience ourselves and each other, and on the relationship between direct experience, intuition, insight, and conceptual knowledge.

Rather than write only about solitude, I use my edited daily journal to speak directly to the reader from solitude. Reflective essays frame the journal entries, explore various themes relevant to my lived experience, and place my research in a cultural and academic context. Two DVDs contain a movie recorded in the wilderness and a video recording of a public slideshow in which I describe my year in solitude. The recordings bring visual and auditory layers to the dissertation, and the post slideshow discussion adds an interactive element.

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## Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Patti Kuchinsky for her intellectual and logistical contributions to the Solitude Project and to my Ph.D. work. She was a constantly reliable primary contact person, technical assistant and medical advisor during the year I lived in solitude, and she has contributed enormously to the process of creating this dissertation. Her own journey to spend a month with me on the island in southern Chile was a courageous act of faith, and her presence was very important to me as I re-entered the social world. I am deeply grateful for her friendship, honesty, and support, and for the psychological, emotional, and spiritual love and wisdom she continues to offer me.

I believe the most important step in the process of graduate studies is selecting a supervisor and supervisory committee. This is especially so for a non traditional and interdisciplinary project such as this one. The relationship between teacher and student is a delicate dance grounded in respect and trust. From the perspective of student, I am aware that I am being guided and trained. In order to develop, I must give myself to what can sometimes be a painful and frustrating process. I can do this only if I believe my mentors are encouraging me to find and follow my own vision and are not pushing me to conform to theirs.

I am extremely fortunate and grateful to have had the privilege of working with Dr. David Tait, Dr. Lee Gass, Dr. Carl Leggo, Dr. Karen Meyer, and the late Dr. Peter Frost. What a wonderful experience it has been! They have always challenged and supported me, and have trusted the process to lead us all into the unknown together. As Lee once said after a committee meeting, "That was great! Did you see it? The air was blue with energy and ideas." I have received deep insights and wisdom from them all. They are also demanding and appreciative editors, and working with them has greatly improved my skill as a writer.

I also wish to thank the following people and organizations for contributing generously to this project: the land and people of Chile, Dr. Barry McBride, Dr. Pille Bunnell, Alejandra Silva, Dr. Jason Harrison, Greg Callahan, Kevin Callahan, Juan-Pablo and Mane Cerda, Dr. Christian de Quincey, Janet Beddoes, Deb Wilson, Dr. Bart van der Kamp, Betsy Alexander, Ron Marsh, Heather Akai, German Coronado, Axel Anderson, Robin Clark, Dr. Michael Fisher, Karin Konstantynowicz, Lesley Fell, NSERC and UBC for financial support; Chilean Navy and National Parks Service; Canadian Consulate, Santiago, Chile; Individual Interdisciplinary Studies Graduate Program, UBC; Forestry, UBC; MAGIC, UBC; Civil Engineering Workshop, UBC.



## Introduction

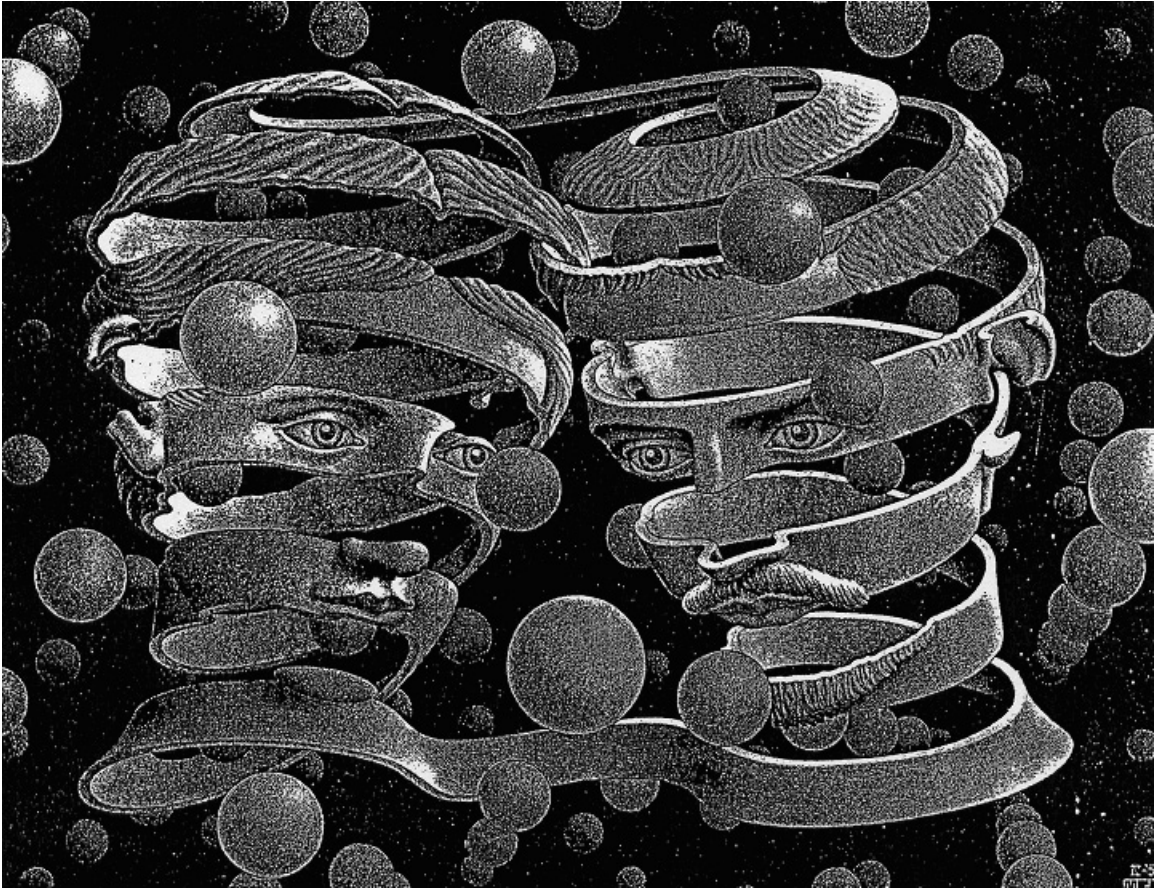
Coming into Wilderness Solitude is like studying where everyone speaks a language you have forgotten so long ago it now seems completely foreign. You know you have something important to learn, but you don't understand. It just takes patience to keep listening and listening.

I hear the voices of nature and try over and over to translate what I hear into human conceptual thought language so I will "know I understand in my mind."

But the language of nature cannot be translated into human concepts. It is deeper and different. I realize I have heard and understood when my heart softens and opens to love and peace and beauty around and within me.

Wilderness Journal, January 17, 2002

## Bond of Union



*Bond of Union* by M.C. Escher, 1956. Courtesy of M.C. Escher Foundation.

**Figure 1**

This dissertation is part of an ongoing exploration of who I am and what it means to be alive. It is a step in my wanderings toward a loosely held destination, toward the mysterious unknown and into relationship with the non-human world. The research question, *What are the physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual effects of living for an extended period in deep wilderness solitude?* energizes and shapes the work. However, this is not an abstract discussion of solitude, but a personal narrative of living alone for a year in the wilderness, reflecting on that experience, and locating it in a broader cultural context.

Several questions arise: What commonality is there between my experience and that of other individuals who might take themselves into solitude? Would other solitaries recognise what I have experienced? Sometimes my inner difficulties and insights seem idiosyncratic, at other times apparent truths emerge that carry a sense of universality. Experientially, there is a qualitative difference between what seems relevant to only my personal history and that which feels like common ground for us all. Still, how to know? Simply because an insight seems universally true to me does not mean it will to you. What value might my personal journey have for others? Peter Frost<sup>1</sup> articulated what seems to me the most valid criterion for a dissertation, “I ask that the writing touch me in some way, or that I can imagine it touching someone else.” Finally, only you can answer these questions as you read.

This story joins a long history of solitary exploration and writing as it emerges from and is embedded in a cultural climate of materialism, environmental degradation, and the recent introduction of Buddhist meditation to the West. At a time when many have begun to recognize that our long-held worldview of human *against* nature is no longer tenable, the reflections generated by living for a year in wilderness solitude might help heal our alienation, from the non-human world, from each other, and from ourselves.

In a broad sense a thesis is an invitation to reflect on something from a particular point of view. In this thesis I use narrative to invite the reader to reflect on the effects of deep wilderness solitude, on how our culture experiences the non-human world, on how we as individuals experience each other and ourselves.

One important aspect of wilderness solitude is its power to catalyze a transformation in consciousness and a shift in perception. The felt experience of belonging to the environment that sustains us, rather than feeling cut off and alienated, is psychologically and spiritually healing and may have profound implications for changing our ecologically destructive patterns of behaviour. My intention in this work is to explore and document the process of such transformation and to share it with the reader. Rather than simply describe my own explorations, insights, and inner movements, I wish to evoke an experience for others.

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Are we actually separate individuals? For me, Escher's drawing, *Bond of Union*, (Figure 1) beautifully depicts our situation. Evidently, each of us has a distinct perception of the world and we can never know the actual experience of another. We are profoundly alone. Yet through language - in its broadest sense - we can intertwine and to some extent share our experiences together. More, if we are willing to quiet our minds and peer beyond the allure of language, we might realize that we are fundamentally united. But the drawing is not inclusive enough, because I sometimes experience all people and all non-human organisms as manifestations of our common flowing Life. All is Alive, and, finally, the planets amongst which we float are us. Our sense of separateness, while not exactly an illusion, is not the whole truth.

While an exploration of the physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual effects of deep wilderness solitude is a central thread in this dissertation, my broader intent is to bring together personal spiritual practice and academic study. In this I am also breaking with tradition, but I believe the integration of these different aspects of my life is a natural extension of interdisciplinarity.

An interesting difference between academic and spiritual practice has to do with the relative importance of conceptual knowledge. Within academia, discovering new facts and developing new interpretations or new theory are often considered the primary criteria for making a scholarly contribution. In the spiritual realm inner transformation - which may be linked to seeing through and letting go of ideas, theories, and conceptual

understanding - is central to development. In this work I explore the tension that can arise when these different domains of experience are brought together. I also examine my perception of the differences and seek to integrate not only academic and spiritual practice, but artistic and scientific modes of exploration and expression.

Although I examine, utilize, and criticize various theoretical models, I do not adopt a single over-arching theoretical frame for my explorations. I have found that my actual lived experience refuses to completely fit into any conceptual structure. Thus there is a flavour of radical empiricism here.

This approach follows logically from my direct perception that conceptual thought is a subset of life and consciousness rather than the ground of our existence. Given that perception, I accept theory as useful but do not feel obliged to embrace any specific theoretical stance. Such a lack of theoretical grounding may be seen as a weakness, but acknowledging and honestly reporting all the unruly and ambiguous aspects of my experience is more important to me than theoretical coherence. To the extent I do use theory to organize my thinking, I lean most heavily on Buddhist philosophy and the Integral Model developed by Ken Wilber. I approach these conceptual creations as metaphors rather than accept them as concrete representations of reality.

The procedure of studying oneself is academically unconventional. In this work I am both researcher and subject because I can see no alternative for an in-depth study of the experience of solitude. If I were to merely read the writings of other solitaries I would be studying only their verbal reports and not their actual experience. If I were to spend time with a solitary to study his or her life, they would no longer be living in solitude. Both these approaches are valuable, but to deeply explore the actual lived experience of solitude I had to go into the wilderness alone.

There is on-going debate about what constitutes a Ph.D. dissertation. A narrative, in and of itself, can be a form of reflection and analysis, but I have chosen the more traditional format of interspersing a series of interlude essays between the months of the journal. These essays contribute formal reflection on my wilderness experience, place that experience into a larger cultural context, and examine various areas of theory and practice that have had a strong impact on my life.

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In writing this dissertation I continue my own inner work as well as share with others what I've learned and not learned during my explorations in solitude. The writing itself is a vital aspect of the research process. There is risk and pain as well as satisfaction and joy in writing so nakedly rather than using an impersonal academic voice, but for me it is vital to integrate actual lived experience into my scholarly writing.

As a storyteller, it is not enough for me to merely describe my year in the wilderness. I must lure you to join me there and vicariously experience it for yourself. The heart of this story beats within the words and silences of my wilderness journal. It's been tempting to shape the narrative into a more traditionally structured plot: to speak with a culturally-centered voice, graft on scattered journal entries to add juicy flesh to the account, and relegate the journal to an appendix. But I doubt such a narrative would live, and I've felt called to allow the voice from solitude to beckon you more directly through the journal itself. So I've trusted the sometimes mysterious process of writing and editing to spin an organic yarn from the tufts of daily life I recorded in the journal and then to weave this yarn into the fabric of your life too.

During editing, I extracted various themes from the journal and considered using them as organizational elements to provide conceptual coherence, but my deepest intuition has urged me to follow the temporal flow of life's inherent rhythms and to let solitude speak for itself. There are recognizable stories to be found here, but - like life itself - it isn't clear that the larger flow has any meaning beyond its own being or goes anywhere other than more fully into the here and now.

The complete journal is nine hundred pages, so I've needed to choose what to exclude. This felt vaguely dishonest until I remembered that the original entries were themselves highly selective excerpts from the vast flow of daily experience. It was only one among many possible accounts. While the journal does not pretend to accurately reflect *objective* reality, neither is it a work of fiction. I have not intentionally misled you or myself, but have tried to tell my truth, even if it is personal and only partial. What I

wrote and have retained in the edited journal is an indication of who I am and what seems most important to me.

One example of the difficulty in editing the journal is the repetitiveness. Dark inner storms of frustration, fear, anger, and depression counterpoint fierce external storms throughout much of the year. To exclude all of this repetition would yield a distorted idealization. Repeating cycles of pain and doubt, peace and joy were and are part of my life. To pretend otherwise seems unacceptable to me. I usually distrust idealized heroic stories because they do not accord with my own experience. Worse, if I do believe them and compare my actual experience to their reported ones, I feel despair as though I'm deeply flawed. We already have enough of such heroic writing.

I wanted to develop a coherent structural vision before beginning to write the dissertation, but that structure didn't materialize until much later in the process. I also believed I should find and maintain a consistent voice for the whole year of the journal, but in the face of inactivity that dream slowly faded and I finally began to edit the journal one day at a time. I let each sentence and paragraph emerge as it would. The process is not complete, nor will it ever be.

There are many voices here, some that come from far beyond academia. Different points of view emerge from various emotional tones and alternate states of consciousness that sometimes seem - and perhaps are - contradictory. My allegiance shifts between self-identity as a social being and my sense of belonging most profoundly to the non-human world. I continue to work toward healing these fractures, and have discovered that embracing the paradox can catalyze a transformation in understanding.

Mullah Nasrudin, a famous, possibly mythical, Sufi mystic who did or did not live in the 14th century, is the central character in many Sufi teaching stories.

In one story he is a trial judge, and after the prosecution presents its case, Nasrudin says with conviction, "You are right!" "Wait," complains the defence, "you can't pass judgment yet, we haven't presented our side of the matter." When he has done so, Nasrudin says, "Yes, you are right!" The court reporter,

somewhat displeased with this odd judge, scolds him, “But you can’t agree with both of them, sir.” “Yes!” says Nasrudin, “you too are right.”

(My own version based on variations I’ve heard or read)

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Island time, like all time, had two facets: cyclic rhythms and linearity. After five months I put away my watch and then later the calendar. I lived with the shifting spill of light on mountains and sea, the changing lengths of day and night, the ebb and flow of moon and tide, the call of migrating birds, and the fall of rain and winter snow. The mysterious pulse of emotional cycles fascinated and sometimes troubled me. While it is untenable to create sharp divisions in experience, the journal is divided into individual months and this structure has not been imposed in editing. During the year I sent an “I’m ok” email via satellite telephone on the first of each month, and this commitment punctuated the flow of days. So while I lived more and more within the flow of the world around me, cultural time was still present.

The interlude essays, which frame the journal writings and provide context, are more analytical than the journal, but still informal. They are not written as abstract discussions, but are intended to explore and describe various themes directly relevant to my lived experience. Patti Kuchinsky has contributed so enormously to this project that it feels important to include, as the final interlude, her own story of the year I lived in solitude and her journey to Chile.

The prelude recreates the last email I sent before going into solitude. The post-solitude segment describes the month I spent with Patti on the island and my re-entry into the social milieu. It also includes abbreviated writings from the past three years. The dissertation also includes a Postlude after the Concluding Section in the form of a DVD movie.

There are four appendices. The first is a video recording of one of the slideshow presentations I’ve given since my return from Chile. I believe an important part of my work is to share the experience and the effects of solitude with others both within and beyond the university. The public story I tell during the slideshow has a different flavour



than the deeper more complex story in the journal. There is more humour and laughter. The slideshow brings a visual and auditory layer to the dissertation, and the post slideshow discussion adds an interactive element as well. Also included on the DVD is a photo gallery of the images I use in the slideshow that can be viewed at your own pace. The second appendix lists supplies, equipment, books, email traffic, and expenses. The third appendix shows a series of maps. Higher resolution copies of the maps are included in the photo gallery. The fourth appendix provides a link to the website I developed with the help of my nephews to share my journey into solitude and my academic work with the public.

~ ~ ~

This dissertation has been realized in the context of the University of British Columbia's Individual Interdisciplinary Studies Graduate Program, which encourages students to develop innovative and non-traditional approaches to research and writing. One of the risks in doing such non-traditional work is that the scholarly contributions may not be apparent from a traditional angle of view.

In another delightful Sufi teaching story Mullah Nasrudin was walking home one dark night and came upon a man on his hands and knees looking for something beneath a street lamp. Nasrudin asked what the man was looking for. "My gold wedding band," the man replied. So Nasrudin stopped to help look. Finally after an hour the mullah asked the man if he was certain he had lost the gold band in that spot. "No, I lost it down the street a ways, but it is too dark to look for it down there."

(My own version based on variations I've heard or read)

This work is an empirical field study of the effects of deep wilderness solitude. The methodological procedure of using myself as the research subject by spending a year in isolation in a remote location and using a hybrid cross of vigilant mindfulness and brutally honest social science journaling to record my own lived experience is innovative.

I report my experience using a writing style that integrates rigorous narrative truthfulness, evocative description, poetics, and scientific analysis. I invite the reader to experience the spacious wonder of wilderness solitude, to explore inwardly, and to question his or her relationship with nature, with conceptual knowledge, and with our cultural and personal identity constructs. Thus the reader's experience is honoured as much as my own.

Through the lens of my own experience in solitude, I examine theoretical models and question the adequacy of such models.

I offer the experience of solitude as a valuable contribution to our on-going quest to develop sustainable ways of living with our non-human neighbours.

I extend interdisciplinarity by manifesting a generalist approach in all aspects of my own work and I serve as a test case for the legitimacy of integrating spiritual practice and experience into academic research. I demonstrate that valid academic work does not preclude honouring non-rational methods of exploration.

I share my academic work with the non-academic community via public presentations, media interviews, and the Internet to help relax the boundaries between the academic and non-academic communities.

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Thank you for joining me on the journey.

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Peter Frost was a valued member of my supervisory committee until he passed away on October 18, 2004. His contributions and guidance have been very valuable to me and his presence is missed.

## Prelude

### Last Email Message from Town

#### Puerto Natales

2/4/01, Sunday, 10:00 PM: It's been an intense two days. Yesterday in Punta Arenas I went to the government warehouse to complete the paperwork so I could claim my crates of gear, which finally arrived from Vancouver last week. The Regional Director of Customs thought my project interesting and signed a waiver that allowed me to import the gear without paying duty - as long as I take everything with me when I leave Chile. The whole process, including storage fees, cost only \$30 CAD. Good news since my finances are very tight and I'd heard rumours of other visiting scientists who had been charged high import duty on their equipment.

Earlier in the week the Chilean Navy had finally agreed to transport me to where I intend to build my camp and live for the year, but yesterday when I met with the officers again I discovered they aren't willing to take me all the way. The area is so remote that marine charts don't show depth soundings and they're concerned their ship might run aground on submerged rock. They'll leave me and my gear on a beach 20 miles north of the bay where I plan to go and I'll need to haul everything the rest of the way myself. That will require six or seven trips in my inflatable boat, which will be slow since it moves at only five mph when heavily loaded. The officers are polite, proper, and friendly. They feel responsible for my safety and want to be on my monthly check in e-mail list. They have a 24 hour hotline I can call on my satellite phone if I get into serious trouble. It feels good to have that safety net.

After talking with the navy, I called the man who had promised to transport my gear from P.A. to Puerto Natales and he told me he couldn't do it after all.

Bummer. I decided to check again with the cheapest trucking company in town. Two weeks ago I tried to get an estimate from them, but they refused to quote a price even though I told them the approximate volume and weight. Yesterday (when I was freaking out because the navy told me I had to have all my gear on the P.N. dock by today) we struck a deal without problem.

Over and over when I've tried to arrange things ahead of time I've had to either give up or have watched my plans fall apart. But over and over, too, things have worked out at the last minute in some unexpected way. Why do I still resist living by faith? I'm totally stressing myself and it doesn't seem to do much good. But perhaps the last minute miracles won't happen if I stop the preparatory work.

After arranging transport, I went to the hardware store and told them I'd go to their warehouse in the afternoon to pick up the building materials I purchased last week and left there. They said the warehouse would close for the day in ten minutes and that I'd have to pick up the materials on Monday. This was not what they'd previously told me, and I freaked out yet again. I said I absolutely had to be in P.N. by today, so they called the warehouse and asked them to wait for me. But I still needed a delivery truck. "Here I am," spoke up a man standing nearby. We rushed to the warehouse and added those materials to the huge pile of supplies already stacked in the backyard of the house where I was renting a room.

The transport truck showed up on time and we went to the customs shed to pick up the crates of gear. I expected a hang up of some sort, but amazingly things proceeded without a hitch. Then we returned home and began to load. By the time the lumber, hardware, and food, etc. were in the truck it was crammed full. We agreed that he'd pick me up at 8 a.m. this morning.

Shortly after the driver left, a woman at CONAF (Chilean National Parks Service) called to say she had captured two kittens from the back patio for me. It hadn't been my plan to take a pet into solitude since one of the joys of living alone is that I'm free to follow the flow of the moment without considering the

needs, desires, or direction of flow of anyone else. I don't claim this freedom is good or bad, only that in taking a companion the situation is altered.

I'm taking the cat at CONAF's strong suggestion. Southern Chile is troubled by frequent Red Tide that makes bivalve shellfish, such as clams and mussels, poisonous. The government has an extensive testing program for the commercial fishing fleet, but local people use cats as guinea pigs. If the cat pukes or dies after sampling suspect shellfish, I won't eat them myself.

Totally exhausted, I headed back downtown on foot. The two kittens - wild, even savage - were loose in her office. No one has spent time holding them and they weren't eager to alter the arrangement. With difficulty, I captured one - a female who definitely did not want to go into the box. She snarled, clawed, and bit me. Then I snagged the other - a male. Hmmm. In a year, this could lead to a bunch more cats. As I sat there considering, the female was still snarling inside the box and fighting to get out. I decided that if she really didn't want to go I wouldn't force her. So now I have just the male.

The truck picked us up at 8:30 this rainy morning. The kitten didn't seem to like the drive and cried most of the way. We were heavily over-loaded and at one point the truck started to swerve back and forth across the road. It got worse and worse, and then the driver touched the brakes. I thought we would flip, and yelled, "No brakes, no brakes," and he finally got the truck under control. What a mess that would have been.

Here in Natales a couple of Navy enlisted guys helped us unload. Then the driver and I went to the hardware store. Over the phone yesterday they said I could pick up the two 55 gallon drums they were holding for me today even though they would be closed: the owner lives next to the store and would open up for me. But when I knocked, there was no answer. "Uh oh," I thought, "this is where things start to fall apart." But the door finally opened and I purchased the drums (plus more nails even though I thought I already had plenty).

The manager of the propane company in P.A. had told me I could pick up the three tanks he'd reserved for me in P.N. at anytime, but the propane station was locked when we arrived. The woman next door told me the manager was out of town. "Uh huh, *here's where things fall apart.*" But just then the assistant manager pulled up.

"Yes, we have your tanks. Lucky you caught me ... I'm about to go fishing." We loaded the propane and went to the gas station to fill the 55 gallon drums and six 5 gallon cans. Then back to the docks.

By then, four navy guys were working and had most of my gear on board their ship. We unpacked and inflated my boat, then loaded it, the gas drums, and propane tanks. It was very windy all day, but the rain held off until we finished. It still seems incredible that everything worked out and I'm ready to go. The crew offered me a cup of coffee, which turned out to be a huge steak dinner. They asked if I wanted to sleep on board, but with the kitten and my exhaustion I opted for a pension in town.

I've come to this Internet Café to send you this last e-mail before leaving for solitude at dawn tomorrow morning. Finally, it looks like preparations have completed themselves and I'm away. It's been a long process and I'm worn out - ready to sit in my shelter and rest. All I need do first is ferry my gear from where the Navy drops me to the bay and build the shelter. With luck it will take about three weeks. As it stands, this may be the last news you receive from me until next year other than the brief monthly check-in e-mails, but it's also possible that I'll send reports of my life from time to time. I'll let things unfold as they do. I hope you all have a wonderful year in your different lives. Take good care. Thanks so much for your support and caring. It means a lot to me.

## February 2001

### Survival Kit:

Food, Water, Stove, Pot, Cup,  
Space-blanket, Blanket, Tarp,  
Rope, Machete, Satphone, GPS,  
Compass, Batteries, Jumpsuit,  
Life-vest, Kayak, Foot-pumps,  
Anchor, Oars, Paddle, Waders.<sup>2</sup>

2/6/01

Morning: I left Puerto Natales at 7 a.m. yesterday on the 20-meter Chilean Navy patrol boat, Yagan. The Captain, as all the officers I've met, was courteous, correct, and reserved. The enlisted men were great and took charge of moving all my gear from the dock to their ship while I was off picking up last minute items and filling containers with gasoline. It took 10 hours to reach this tiny island where I now sit writing. A beautiful trip: cloudy with some wind and rain. Since marine charts don't show depth soundings for this area, the Navy refused to risk their ship on submerged rocks and agreed to take me only to the end of Staines Peninsula 20 kilometres to the north of the bay which is my proposed destination. (See map showing Detail of Navigation Route, Appendix 3.)

The crew started to ferry my supplies to a partially protected beach in their small Zodiac, meanwhile lowering my own inflatable boat into the water. I hadn't had a chance to test my outboard since shipping it from Canada, and was a little anxious about whether it would start. Happily my trust in it was justified. Once in the boat, slapped with 40F spray, I noticed that all the Navy guys were wearing survival suits - and I was not. Hmmm. Not buying one seems like a fairly important oversight in my planning. I can keep dry in chest waders and raincoat, but if I capsize or go over the side so heavily dressed I'll be in trouble.

The weather deteriorated and the captain, not wanting to risk his men in the rough sea, decided to move two kilometres north to more protected water and unload the rest of my gear on a small island in the lee of a larger one. Luckily I remembered that the waterproof bag filled with stuff I need these first few days - including camp stove, temporary food supplies, and extra clothes - had already been carried to the beach. We radioed the crew to bring the bag back to the ship, and then moved north. Unloading took a long time, and knowing they were in a hurry, I told them not to bother packing the lumber up into the trees, but to just leave it on the beach. It was a slow grunt wrestling the two heavily loaded crates and 55-gallon drums of gasoline from the boats onto and up the beach into the bushes, but I knew that later I wouldn't be able to move them by myself. We finally had all the gear ashore as dark was falling about 8:30 p.m. They immediately left to seek safe anchorage from the building storm.

Wind and rain. The lower beach in this small, shallow cove is covered with rocks - mostly 6-10 inches in diameter - then, higher up, grass, dense brush, and trees. Before they left I asked the crew to help me lay a semi-level bed of 2x4s in the grass and stack plywood on top to make a platform for the tent. I set up the tent in the dark, then sat and watched the tide come in, and in, and in. In my tired and ignorant state I'd thought the grass was above the high tide line. I was wrong. It turned out to be sea grass, and at 1 a.m. the tide was lapping the underside of the platform. I jammed additional 2x4s underneath to lift the plywood, while cursing at and pleading with the tide to stop. Uh huh. I took everything back out of the tent and carried it to higher ground. The Navy guys were smarter and had put most of my supplies on the rock high above the tide. But at my suggestion they'd left the lumber on the beach and it was now floating in a foot of water, so I waded over to heave it up into the bushes.

Just when it seemed the tide was at its peak, the wind picked up and drove the sea to the bottom of the plywood again. Exhausted, cold, discouraged, sitting in the dark rain on a tiny island in middle of nowhere, I felt pretty damn forlorn



and started to question what I'm doing here. Inside a cardboard box wrapped in a plastic garbage bag, the kitten I'd brought with me wasn't too happy either I don't imagine. Finally the tide started to ebb, and I put everything back in the tent and slept. My body hurt everywhere.

Afternoon: Rain on and off all day. Windy, but here in the lee of trees only the strongest gusts get to me - unless the wind shifts from northwest to southwest; then I'm fucked. The Navy captain said that rarely happens though. I moved the tent platform higher up the beach and raised it a half meter off the ground. I'm very glad to have stayed dry so far, but a bit worried about all my food down where the Navy guys started to unload my supplies. Hope they set everything above high tide but until the wind drops I have no way to check.

### 2/07/01

Windy still. I think it may be difficult to move all my gear the 20 kilometres south to the small bay where I want to go. I'm also wondering whether to run a reconnaissance trip or just start down with a load - if it ever gets calm. It's very, very beautiful here. Across the way to the west there are rock cliffs, and with the binoculars I can see more than 30 waterfalls cascading to the sea. In the other direction, when the clouds lift, there are snowy peaks and glaciers of the southern Andes. I'm waiting for the wind to die and feeling frustrated.

### 2/08/01

Rain and less wind. Maybe the weather will never get calm here; this may be it. I dream of carrying all my gear to the bay at the bottom of the fjord formed by the mainland to the east and the Staines Peninsula to the west in four trips, but that probably really is a dream. More likely it will take six or even seven. Earlier today I went to check my food and propane tanks on the other beach. The Navy guys also miscalculated the high tide line. Everything was

there, but the propane tanks had floated around and the food bags been lapped by the sea. Hope the waterproofing held, but won't know until I get a cabin built and have a dry place to unpack. Brought back first aid kit, a jar of peanut butter, and another small gas canister for the camp stove, and moved everything else to higher ground.

It was quite calm for a while, and in hindsight I realized I could have run down to explore the bay. Instead I went to look at waterfalls and came upon four dolphins. They played with the boat for a while. Wonderful. Wet, cold, and - Arrrrrrgh I lost my black toque. Luckily I know where I have two more. Meanwhile I'll use the hooded sweatshirt to cover my ears.

2/09/01

Puttered around, looked at marine charts, and continued to train kitten to go outside to shit. A tent full of gear with sleeping pad and blankets on the floor is not the best place for the task. I'm impatient. Before this I've never had trouble with such training - probably because I've only had cats where it was warm, and there was a hole in the door for them to come and go. Here it's cold and rainy and I need to unzip the tent flap to let kitten in or out. He must have shit in here at least six times, and cat shit is not my favourite smell. We have a new rule: "No! Outside." Then a small swat and a heave out of the tent. Also a swat to stay away from the camp stove when it's lit and away from my food at all times. I get most upset when he claws at the tent's mosquito net to come back in. But for the most part I'm glad he's here with me. He sleeps curled up behind my knees or snuggled into my belly.

I'm trying to just "be here" instead of being prevented from going where I want to be. This is part of the process too. I don't control the world. Over and over during the preparations for this journey I had to let go of my plans and let things happen as they did. It's the same here.

2/10/01

This is summer? I've been here five days, and have seen sun for a total of maybe 20 minutes. There's almost constant wind now, but supposedly there won't be in winter.

Slept late this morning. It was cold last night and I'm not using the sleeping bag. I brought a down bag because winter might be pretty cold, but in this climate down can be a problem. If it gets damp it will lose much of its insulating capability and be difficult to dry. So I plan to keep it wrapped in plastic until the cabin is built. Meanwhile I'm sleeping in long underwear, T-shirt, flannel shirt, wool vest, HoloFil vest, hooded sweatshirt, and a snowsuit. On top of that I have two blankets. I barely kept warm last night with the tent sealed up. It's so bitter raw and damp now in summer, what will winter be like?

Four dolphins spent a couple hours maybe 30 meters from shore in front of camp today. I went out on the rocks to call and sing to them.

This afternoon I took the boat partway down the fjord to see how rough it is out there. The GPS unit worked great the other day - located satellites with no problem, gave me location, direction of travel, and speed - today it won't work at all. Shit! Luckily I brought a spare, but now that this one's broken, I have no spare. It's supposed to be waterproof but I suspect there's a bad seal. Damn. I plan to make some long journeys through this archipelago of islands and if the only GPS I have craps out, I could easily become seriously lost and not find my way back to here. I'll keep the good one protected from the rain and only use it to check my position now and then. It's still packed away somewhere in all my gear.

Headed south for about seven kilometres then turned back because of rough water. It got rough, settled a bit, rough again, but never really flattened out. I'm feeling anxious to get going, but don't want to take foolish chances. It's beautiful here in any case.

Kitten asleep on my leg. He's learning and so am I. He didn't shit inside last night and I awoke to let him out a couple times. Getting chilled, so I'll close and fix instant mashed potatoes for dinner. We're eating cheese, the last of the bread and ham, soup, oatmeal, and mashed potatoes. It's not easy here, that's for sure.

2/11/01

4:00 PM: Long slow day. Last night I set the alarm for 7:30 a.m. to get up and move the boat further from the beach before the receding tide left it grounded. I have wheels I can mount on the transom, but not sure I'll use them since the beach here is covered with rocks. For now I've tied the boat on a line stretched between anchor and shore where it floats except for about three hours at low tide. I keep hoping I'll awake to calm seas and no rain so I can begin to move my gear, but it rained without break all night and until noon today.

I feel like an alien in this watery world. All the creatures here - except kitten and me - seem to be water beings. This morning vague tendrils of terror wafted through me. This is the terror of existence that arises in solitude. Alone. A tiny solitary speck completely vulnerable in the face of an infinite universe intent on my annihilation. Eventually I'll cease to exist, and my instant death is possible at any moment - right now. No wonder we invented God. Yet I cling to the Buddha who found joy, peace, and bliss without a God. I know, or at least remember from other solitary retreats, that there's light and peace beneath the terror.

In Buddhism one takes refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. Who is my guide and inspiration? Who do I lean on that has wandered this pathless land before? Yes, the Buddha. What is my Dharma,<sup>3</sup> the source of deep knowledge? There are many. Certainly Buddhist teachings, but also the wisdom of Deneal Amos, the I Ching, the Bible, Chuang Tsu, and, most importantly, my own

lived experience. Who is my Sangha, my community of fellow journeyers? Patti is primary now. I wonder if she always will be? Susan, not so much in terms of wisdom as for her love and respect. Lee, Carl, David and Pille, Barry, my family, Diane, Madeleine, Will. There are so many.

Today I stayed late in the tent - this small bubble of dry in the wet hugeness that surrounds me. I've been here a week. In planning, I somehow never considered I'd be stuck like this. I wonder if I really am? If I take half loads, I think I can make it to the bay without problem. It's the trip back against the wind, chop, and spray that concerns me. I'm trying to be patient and wait for the weather to improve, but at the back of my mind I question whether it ever will. Perhaps it's never calm and clear here. The wind might quit for a day or two, but I need a week to move all my gear. Strange that I never clearly asked anyone which month I should arrive. I just assumed that summer here, as on the coast of British Columbia, would be best. But this weather is exactly what I was hoping to avoid until my cabin is built. It's always risky to extrapolate from what you do know to what you don't.

The satellite telephone will be a problem in the rain. I need the laptop computer and the phone hooked together to send email, and neither of them like water. Not sure I'll be able to link to a satellite from where I build the cabin, and may need to put up a small shelter somewhere else just to use the satphone to send the "I'm ok" message on the first of each month. Happily I still have almost three weeks before I need to send the first one.

Earlier at low tide I put on chest waders and went out to free the anchor that had gotten caught in the rocks a few days ago. Too bad the GPS isn't so easy to fix. I wonder if I should email Patti to send another one and ask the Navy to bring it to me? Hmmm, I just tried it again and it worked for a few seconds and then went blank. Pretty sure it has moisture inside, but at least it isn't totally fried. What have I got to lose?

Later: Against all the warrantee disclaimer warnings, I pried off the rubber water seal, opened it up, hung it for an hour in the tent, and then warmed it over the camp stove for a few minutes. Closed and tried it. Whoa!!! It works. This is very good news. From now on I'll keep it in a Ziploc bag when I use it in the rain.

2/13/01

Let's see, yesterday - what? Oh yes, I did chores. Mixed two-cycle oil with a gallon of gas for the chainsaw and got it running. Cleaned up the tent. Way too much stuff in there, but it's dry and I'm thankful for that. Put together the mounting bracket for the four horsepower outboard motor I brought as a backup. I hope I never need it, but if the 15 hp outboard quits, the 4hp should let me limp back to camp. Readjusted the tarp over the tent to give a bigger semi-dry area in front where I usually cook and eat. Put together a survival pack of food to take when I go out on the lake<sup>4</sup> in case it gets too rough to return.

I'm told the wind drops from March until September or October, and really blows in December, January, and February. I'm feeling more and more restless to get down the lake to the bay.

It's slightly warmer today than yesterday and the blackflies came out for the first time. Hungry buggers. Guess there's not much flesh around. Not so rainy today, but the lake is still rough. Two dolphins came by for a while. Kitten is not shitting in the tent any longer, but he did get into my cheese. I discover I'm pretty violent in my castigation: not just No! but no and a shake or a swat and at times a sail through the air. When it comes to a test of will, I'm not at all skilful and need practice. I've decided to not hit kitten any more, or at least pause so the tap is not in anger.

I've started to read *Entre el Cielo y el Silencio*, a book in Spanish about shepherders on Tierra del Fuego south of here. Also read about working with

fear in *Seeking the Heart of Wisdom*, a book of Buddhist meditation instruction. It presents a clear, pragmatic approach that I hope will help defuse my fear here. I'm glad I brought it, but at the same time sense that Buddhist philosophy and pure meditation are probably not my path.

2/14/01

Finally a calm morning. It rained for a while and then cleared up, and there was some blue sky. I went down the lake to the bay I had in mind as "my spot." It's nice but I didn't find an easy building site. Checked most of the shoreline and settled on a couple possible places that are protected from wind out of the north, west, and south. There's a good beach with a river crossing it, but the hillside where I'd need to build is steep and wet with thick vegetation. The beach would be my area of activity. I saw a condor and a family of ducks. The trip down took about an hour and the ride coming back wasn't too bad even against a small swell and some chop.

I decided to pick up the food and one propane tank from the beach two kilometres south of here and head back to the bay, but it didn't happen. With the boat so heavily loaded the outboard sounded like it was straining, and I could only travel about eight kilometres an hour. It will be nearly a three-hour trip down, an hour to unload, plus two hours coming back if the lake gets lumpy. It was 4:30 by the time I had the boat loaded and I didn't want to be on the water after dark, so I came here instead - intending to head down tomorrow if the weather holds.

Coming back, I realized I could just stay on this tiny island. The view is spectacular and most of my gear is already here. There's a greater chance someone might come by here, but somehow that doesn't really bother me. There's no stream, but it's rained every day since I arrived. I plan to collect rainwater from the roof of the cabin I build and store it in a 40-gallon plastic barrel, so

water shouldn't be a problem. I've seen a couple standing dead trees in the forest near by, and if they're not rotten I could fell them for firewood. I think the solar panels will work ok here except maybe in June and July when the sun might dip behind the trees to the north.

One lovely thing is that dolphins come by here. Not sure I'd see them in the bay. But the biggest plus is that I wouldn't need to move all my gear. A southwest wind could be a problem here because this spot is not protected from that direction. It's much more open and wild feeling here than down at the bay. I don't know what to do; sleep on it I guess. The blackflies are much thicker today. Oh well, better them than cold, wind, and rain. Getting dark, time to cook dinner.

2/15/01

Set clock for 7 a.m. Rain. Went out to check the lake. Not bad, but not calm enough that I wanted to chance a trip with the loaded boat. I realized how resistant I am to moving all this stuff - especially with a small motor and unpredictable wind. I imagined having half my stuff at the bay and the weather crapping out for weeks, or getting stuck down there with tent and sleeping gear still here. None of my imaginings were encouraging. I could feel myself shifting toward staying here.

Feels like I'm letting go of another preconceived ideal and accepting a gift from life. This is where the Navy dropped me (by chance?), and it's probably the best all around spot I've seen. It's very beautiful. Maybe I've just stopped to really see what I already have instead of reaching for an imagined something better. I consulted the *I Ching* to ask if I should stay here. The hexagram was "Wanderer" changing to "Retreat" which seems to support my decision to stay.

I unloaded the boat and covered the food sacks with a tarp. Checked a few and none seem to be wet. That's very good news. While I was in Punta Arenas a



local outdoor guide told me that considering the weather here, he strongly recommended I put my food in watertight barrels. I couldn't afford barrels, but I took his advice to heart and sealed everything in a second layer of plastic and nylon bags. Glad I did. Water has seeped through the outer layer on the bags of rice. If I hadn't double wrapped them, I'd have a serious problem with wet rice.

One of the things I learned during logistic preparations was to really listen to other people's advice rather than pretend to already know everything myself. Many people have been generous with information and support, and my willingness to listen to their suggestions has saved me a lot of grief. As I unloaded, I realized I felt light and happy for the first time since arriving here.

It's only been ten days but feels like much longer. I've been fretting about the need to start building while it's still summer, but I couldn't because the lake has been too rough to move to the bay. Now I can build anytime and am in no huge hurry. It will happen. This morning when I decided to stay here, I figured if someone (most likely a fisherman) comes by, so be it. Doesn't really matter. That attitude arose from a peaceful, balanced state of mind. But now I feel a little anxious and question whether I've made a poor decision. Will I spend the year wondering if someone's about to show up any minute? This worrying mind causes me distress. It has to do with feeling not ok about who I most deeply believe myself to be. It's a though I can fully relax and be me only when I'm alone. This year may be a good opportunity to work on the issue. For now, I'm here and feeling pretty easy about it.

2/16/01

A wild night with wind and rain roaring in the trees. And sometimes, like a huge presence, they swooped howling down and even here in this protected nook the tarps over the tent flapped and shuddered beneath the assault. I'm glad I

took time yesterday to tie everything down more securely. As far as I can tell, all is still dry. It's 10:40 a.m. and I'm just having morning coffee.

Yesterday I hooked up the two-burner stove to the large propane tank I brought from the beach where we'd left it. The other two tanks wouldn't fit into the boat and are still there. The stove is working fine, and I found no leaks by smell or by using shampoo to check for escaping gas bubbles. I want to save the small butane canisters I brought to use if I go exploring. But heading out in this climate for overnight trips in a small open boat isn't too inviting. Finding campsites will be very difficult since everywhere is wet, rough and brushy, or below the high-tide line. One option is to rig up a removable plastic shelter over the boat and sleep there.

I also moved the tent back toward the ocean yesterday, but it should still be at least half meter above high tide when the moon is full. I'm a good 40 centimetres above the shrub and lichen line. I want to start laying out the cabin, and the tent would have been in the way where it was. What I expected to take a couple hours, took all day. I used the cabin's roofing material for a platform. I'll stay here until the cabin floor is built then put the tent there. If it works, I'll stretch the biggest tarp over the building site so I won't have to constantly work in the rain.

I've been calculating the area of tarps and plastic. I knew I'd forget to bring at least one important item and I have: plastic to line the inside of the walls to create a dead-air space for insulation. On my building materials list, the inner wall plastic was on the same line as the heavier plastic for the outside walls. When the owner of a hardware store in Vancouver suggested I use tarp instead of plastic on the outside, I crossed off all the plastic wall material without really thinking. Luckily I brought plenty of other plastic and tarps and will be able to make do. I also have maybe 30 large garbage bags that I can open and use. It will work out.

Cat and I were restless in the storm last night. He was in and out of the tent at least six times before I finally made him settle down. If he was in, I worried he might have to shit and let him out. If he wanted in, he'd scratch the mosquito net which got me to open the flap immediately. We have five main rules so far: No shitting in the tent; Absolutely no clawing the tent and especially not the mosquito net; Eat only food in his dish or peanut butter from my finger; No getting in the way while I'm working or cooking; No sleeping near my face. We're getting there. Yesterday I decided to move the tent before eating and ended up not cooking until 5:00 p.m. Poor cat was very hungry but only snivelled a bit then went to sleep. I brought one package of dry cat food and figured a treat was in order, so gave him some.

I ate oatmeal as usual and later Maggi chicken soup which gave me the shits. It was wild and wet outside so I stayed in and used my improvised chamber pot. One hasn't lived until one has shit in a plastic bag. Very nice. Today I get to wash it out. I've been shitting on the beach at low tide. All in all, since I'm alone here, I think it's best way to go until I dig a hole in the trees.

I think I'll miss the rich variety of land mammals I'd likely see on the coast of Canada. There are only a few species in southern Chile - huemul (a sort of deer), guanaco (llama), puma, foxes, and some rodent fellers - and I doubt there are many here on the wet coast. This tiny island probably has none at all.

I do have frogs though - very vocal neighbours that have an amazing repertoire of sounds. I've been trying to figure out how to describe them, but there are no comparable sounds in English. (Often the problem with a foreign language.) They don't sound like any frogs I've heard before. The sound is a sort of cross between frog and cricket; an almost metallic, mechanical, or even electronic clicking. They make many different sounds. And loud! Each seems to find a place to celebrate in a pool under a rock that acts as an echo chamber. I can't tell how many of them there are. Sometimes it seems like only one, and sometimes like three or four. Sometimes they sound like a New-Age jazz

ensemble riffing off each other. One will wind up with a series of clicks and trills while the others lay back and are either silent or hold a sort of steady rhythm. Then another will join in and they intertwine their songs together. It's quite wonderful.

They're only about three centimetres long. Elegant with yellow belly, spotted back, and long delicate toes. I spotted one of the little buggers yesterday and stomped it. No, no, but when I was feeling anxious about moving my stuff down the lake and thought it might be some kind of insect keeping me awake half the night in a roaring storm, I admit that fantasies of extermination did cross my mind. They certainly do like the rain. Just chirrup away when it starts coming down. Anyway, good luck to them. Hope cat doesn't get them.

It's still raining, but I may go out and work for a while clearing brush from the building site. I find I'm not in much of a hurry to build. It will get done, but will probably take another month at least. I'm looking ahead to long months of grey rain, I imagine this climate will push me inward: into myself and into the cabin. I wonder what this will mean in relation to the notion of being one with nature?

When leaving Puerto Natales I looked back and watched the town diminish into the landscape - sun shining through clouds, across hills, and onto roofs and windows. If all goes well, I thought, this is the last view of a town I'll see for a year. There was a glorious rainbow back there, and I took it for a sign - why not? - of good times ahead. Then I turned to actually look ahead and saw stormy skies and wind chopped water. Leaving behind sun and rainbow to head into ... what?

Yesterday, another lovely rainbow. Interesting to try to pin down the borders of the colours. The mountains were spectacular. High clouds allowed the peaks to show and sunbeams to stroke the flanks of the hills and the face of the sea. I've never really watched these moving shafts of light before - have only

seen them as a touch rather than a caress. But yesterday I watched them form and shift and fade again. All is change.

I haven't shaved since I arrived, haven't bathed, and only brushed my teeth four or five times these ten days. Haven't felt the need. Cat shit on my hands and blanket, my own shit on hands and beach. Just the way it is.

Lovely evening. The rain has stopped for a while and silver light is slanting into the far hills. The mountains beyond are hidden in cloud. For visuals this is a perfect place. To the east across the channel, rock-rugged hills, and beyond, snow and glaciated mountains with sharp almost needle peaks. The wind is picking up now to riffle the sea and bring the roar of waterfalls from rock walls a kilometre and a half to the west. All afternoon it was flat calm. If I'd seen this two days ago I might now be moving my stuff to the bay. But I've begun building and am glad to be getting on with it.

Work went well today. Rained hard all morning and I lounged; decided to get going when the rain eased about 1 p.m. Hacked an opening in the brush and laid out the cabin. The soil is very soggy with the water table only about 15 centimetres beneath the surface, so I'm using the still rooted stumps of four small trees as support posts. I'll also set in eleven 4x4 inch posts. One corner of the cabin will rest on the rock ridge that juts into the sea to form one side of this tiny cove. Another corner will rest on a length of a tree I cut and laid in the mud. I had to chop bushes and fall six small trees to clear the space for building. Coffee water is hot, rain is raining, cat just woke up, frog is calling, and I am away.

2/17/01

Morning: Perhaps I'll use the odd extra nail in the cabin. My intention has been to resist my usual tendency to over-build since I must take the cabin apart again in less than a year. But Holy Mother what a storm last night. It made the

storm of the night before seem moderate. Cat was jumpy again so I let him out, and about 2 a.m. all hell broke loose.

Thankfully that's all that broke loose, though I lay here worrying the anchor would drag and the boat wash onto the rocks, or that this whole shelter would come down. I have two 2x4s on edge resting on rocks and tied to trees as supports. Then five 2x4s laid flat as stringers and sheets of plywood on top. Tent sits on the plywood, and above the tent I've stretched a tarp over an A frame structure built of 2x2s to keep plywood, tent, and area in front of tent dry. Everything is lashed together with twine.

Rain hammered down driven by the steadily roaring wind, and occasionally a ferocious gust would come shrieking over the trees behind me and the tarps would snap in and jar the tent. The tarps are heavy-gauge, but I've tied them in place with cheap plastic twine rather than cut up good nylon cord. With the wind last night I thought the whole thing might give way.

At one point I stuck my head out the tent flap to check on things. None of the ties had broken, and cat was sitting out there just digging it all. I suppose I'd have been doing the same if I weren't feeling anxious. There's a lesson here I think. The boat is still tied out in the cove between the anchor and a big rock on shore because I haven't cleared the beach of rocks to pull it up above high tide. It was getting blown around but seemed ok, so I lay there in the tent and tried to copy the cat's example with both inner and outer storms.

A whole universe of noise. Groans and roars, whistles and shrieks from the wind, surf pounding on the rocks and rain on the tarps. Occasionally, in a lull, I could hear the frog still chirruping out there. Brave heart. Who would hear him in all this? I wonder if the frog in his pool beneath the rock is aware of the raging storm and of how his voice vanishes in the tumult?

Finally about 3:30 a.m. the storm eased and I looked out again. The bases of the front A-frame had dragged, and the tarp, while still tied, was flapping

loosely. I stripped naked but for boots and raincoat and went out. I adjusted the A frame, retied the tarp with stronger cord, tightened the boat tether, and re-covered the two crates still half full of gear with the plastic that had blown free. As soon as cat saw there was work to do he came in the tent and went to sleep.

What a storm! I can't remember ever being in such a gale. Thankfully everything weathered it without problem, but I won't skimp on nails in building the cabin. And it's protected here. What must it have been like out in the open? The other day I walked to the exposed point 100 meters west of here and was almost blown over even though there was just a breeze around the tent. I can't imagine being on the water during last night's storm. My original plan to bring all my gear from Puerto Natales to here in the inflatable boat - at least at this time of year - was nuts and based on ignorance. I'm glad I had the sense to change my plan when the locals told me so.

This has been almost like a hurricane: big storm two nights ago, dead calm and raining yesterday, stormy again last night. This morning woke up lovely with even a bit of sun. I wanted to dry damp clothes so strung a line and hung them out, then immediately brought them back in when it started to sprinkle. Out and in, and now here's the sun again, so back out they go. This weather makes Vancouver seem stable, even benign.

I think I may be spacing out. Outside the tent I wear neoprene chest waders or rubber boots with felt liners (actually only one felt liner, since my prosthetic foot doesn't get cold). The other day I put on liner and boots and leapt from the tent platform into the ever-present puddle, only to realize I'd forgotten the boots. Amazing how quick a felt liner sucks up water and how long it's taken to dry. Today when I put on the right boot I noticed it felt very loose. Oh. I'd forgotten to put on the leg and was slipping the boot onto my stump. I'd better take care; can't afford to space out here.

Later: Excellent news. I just linked to a satellite with the satphone antenna set up on the ridge of rock right near the tent. The five-meter cable I have will just reach from there to the cabin where I can use the satphone and laptop out of the rain. This is Great!

Later: Dang, it's pissing down again. Was going to work, but not in this. Fifteen meters from here, my boat and motor float in the cove. I wouldn't be here without them, the tent, stove, and tarps, etc. They are useful things that improve my life. But when I consider what their manufacture and maintenance implies, I'm conflicted: the resources consumed; pollution produced; living conditions for the factory workers who built them.

Seems to me that the tragedy of the commons is our culture's overriding metaphor. We realize we are causing serious environmental degradation, but as individuals we feel the technology and consumer goods that are the source of that degradation are good in our lives. Few of us want to personally renounce these things, so we look for alternative solutions: sustainable development; down with big business; recycle; and on and on. But finally, we will need to renounce some of our good things, I think. Am I willing? Certainly this trip belies that notion. How high-tech I've become. Previous trips into wilderness solitude involved canoe, tent or piece of plastic, food, and fishing gear. Of course this journey is longer and more extreme. I wonder about the future.

2/18/01

Morning: I hurt. My hands are cut, swollen, and sore. Right thumb starting to split at the tip which is always a problem when camping in the wet and cold. Shoulders and arms ache, even phantom pains in the stump of my leg. Yesterday was a heavy workday. I dug holes half meter down to bedrock for the foundation posts. The soil is completely saturated and the holes immediately filled with water and sloppy mud, so I carried bag after bag of rocks up from beach to



pack around the posts. When I leave here I'll cut them off below the ground and they'll rot. Actually, since they'll be standing in water they may already be half rotted by then.

I got in all six main posts and worked on the intermediate ones too. They're not vital, but will help prevent floor sag and vibration. For their bases I carried up six large flat stones that will rest on the ground and with luck won't settle too much. If they do, I can crawl under the cabin later and shim them up. There's about half meter of space beneath most of the cabin, enough to store firewood if I ever get any. I may have to cut some green trees and let them dry for six months, but I'll try to avoid that.

Construction went well with no major fuckups or frustrations. I worked steadily but didn't rush. Of course I made a bunch of wrong length cuts. But I just fixed them and didn't get angry with myself. This always startles me. I measure several times and then cut a board too short anyway. When I realize the mistake and try to figure out how I made it, I can't. It's very odd. I also set in the first of three horizontal support beams. Each will be six meters long and supported by five posts. They ought to be at least 2x6 inch beams, but that would have cost more, so I'm using two 2x4s together to create 4x4s.

Today I'll finish the posts and set in the other two beams. A layer of plastic over the beams will act as a vapour barrier and create dead airspace for insulation. On top of the plastic I'll lay a 2x4 floor joist each half-meter and then the plywood floor. Hope to have the floor in tomorrow or the next day. This should be the heaviest and hardest part of the job. I imagine attaching the wall tarps will be frustrating - especially if there's wind - but not as physically difficult. Everything I'm doing here I've done before at some point in my life. I'm very comfortable using the chainsaw because I worked with this same model clearing land and cutting firewood 25 years ago. This kind of living is what I like and am good at.

The frogs were not in full voice last night. I hope the cat isn't killing them during his nightly prowls. We need all the frogs we can get. It rained steadily all night and is sprinkling now. It's rained every day since I arrived. There's been almost continuous cloud cover with only two or three hours of partially blue sky in almost two weeks. But the quality and density of the clouds vary. Heaps of kelp on the beach this morning, torn loose by the storm I guess. Strange rainbow yesterday. The sun was high and the rainbow a low arc over the water.

Evening: It's been a beautiful day. Just a sprinkle of rain, and sometimes sunny with interesting clouds and a breeze. It was even warm enough to work in a T-shirt for a while. I'm more and more glad I was dropped off here and have decided to stay. What a gift. The mountains today are glorious. A day for photographs. Blackflies were out and a bother, but it's cool now at 9 p.m. and they have gone.

The birds are unafraid and cat is stalking them. When I see him I yell NO! He knows what no means by now. Hunting is his natural urge, but the birds are too lovely to let him kill. I suppose he'll succeed as he grows up. One small one with a spiky topknot<sup>5</sup> landed on a branch above my head today. I held up a finger and he flew to it and paused there for a moment.

Work went slower than yesterday. I set in the rest of the posts and nailed the other two support beams in place. Carried up and cut to length the nine floor joists. Selecting and carrying lumber is heavy work. On my first stormy night here when the wood was floating in the rising tide, I flung it into the bushes. Now I need to search through the pile to find the straightest pieces for the joists. It's wet and heavy since it was sawn green just before I purchased it and has been soaking in the rain since then. I'd hoped to get the joists in place today, and would have except-

I discovered the second major missing item. I'd planned to staple the tarp and plastic onto the wooden frame to cover the walls, roof, and sub floor. It was

a good plan. I brought a staple gun and 2000 staples. Unhappily, although I paid close attention to their length, it never crossed my mind to check the width. I just looked at the box, recognized the colour, and grabbed them. None of the staples I brought fit the staple gun. Unbelievable. Luckily I brought a pound of one-inch nails and can use those, but it will take a lot longer. Oh well.

2/19/01

Evening: Tired, sore, not in the mood to write. It was a long day with rain on and off all afternoon. Made it harder to work, but the blackflies went away and I filled the water containers. Having coffee now and waiting for lentils to cook. I'll put rice on when I finish the coffee since I have only this cup for measuring. I make lousy rice. Seems like a simple task, but somehow I always screw it up. Cat on knee, frogs under rock carrying on. The ocean was a bit rough and coming from the northeast instead of the usual northwest, but it's calming now.

The mountains were super clear today, and I put the binoculars on them. Beautiful needle spires, and finger glaciers from the Southern Ice Field pour down between jagged rock peaks. I haven't yet seen full sun on them or the flash of blue fire from the glaciers' compression ice. If I were a climbing fanatic I'd be drooling here. Perhaps one day I'll climb the hills that lie between here and the mountains. I won't chance falling though. Here alone the stakes are too high.

Building went along. I got the joists in, floor nailed down, and the 2x4 corner studs and triangular braces cut and ready to nail in place tomorrow. After that the top plates that support the rafters and the 2x2 wall studs will go up. Thought about where to place windows, and spent time figuring out wood supply. I didn't plan well when I put my tent up and today had to remove some of the 2x4s that were supporting it. I'd planned to set the tent on cabin floor and work around it, but have decided to leave it where it is until I get the cabin closed in.

There are two dead trees on the shore of the islet out front that might make good firewood. But I like their look, and wonder if I'll drop them. Aesthetics and pragmatism.

2/20/01

10:00 AM: Another stormy night. Everything seems ok, but I feel very vulnerable here. Often wind and rain hammer at my shelter, but last night the sea was up too. It's coming close to new moon and I knew there would be strong tides, but last night waves pushed the water much higher than I'd expected; into the bushes and under my tent. The platform was still half meter above the highest water, but when I looked out into the dark with the flashlight to check on the boat all I could see was moving water. It was unsettling, and I stayed awake until 3 a.m. when I was sure tide had started to ebb.

At 5 a.m. I was jerked awake by a huge boom that echoed back from the rock cliffs across the channel to the west. I guessed it must have been lightning, but there wasn't the crack I'd expect from a massive strike like that. Just a boom, like dynamite going off. Later I realized it was probably an avalanche. Still windy and rainy, but now in daylight anxiety has ebbed with the tide ... for the moment. I'll be glad to move into the cabin which is four meters back and a meter higher than here. I wonder if winter tides will wash under the cabin?

Evening: I'm whipped again. Got a lot done. Nailed in corner studs, triangular braces, and top plates, and built a stepladder to reach the roof from inside the cabin. I still need to build a taller straight ladder for working from the outside. I also secured things against tonight's high tide, but so far the sea is pretty calm. I think the only things still within tide's reach are the two wooden shipping crates. There's still equipment stored inside, so I propped them up on rocks and inside set stuff that doesn't like water on top of other stuff that doesn't mind being wet. Hope nothing gets damaged.

A lovely rainbow today and through the rain and clouds the faint presence of distant hills. Ah, now I remember. This is so beautiful and I'm incredibly lucky to be here. Next time in the city when I'm bemoaning not having money, friends, a good job, or ... I must remember this.

2/21/01

Morning: Cold, grey, windy. I wonder what winter will be like? My body is very sore; hands most painful with arthritis and many lightly infected cuts. One of the local bushes has spiny leaves and I've pierced my fingers on them several times. They probably have tiny poisonous barbs because they hurt like hell.

The three most common trees here have different coloured wood: the tiny leafed trees<sup>6</sup> have a beautiful red heart beneath white sapwood; the holly bushes<sup>7</sup> with really spiny leaves have yellow wood; the spiny small leafed trees<sup>8</sup> have hard, tough, white wood. There's one small cypress<sup>9</sup> just in front of the cabin. And there's a tree with large shiny leaves and wood that has a sweet delicate odour.

Last night was calm and the tide didn't come up very high. I hope to get studs in and window and door holes framed today. Wonder where the dolphins went. I've yet to go fishing and am getting hungry to try my hand. There's a shallow-water kelp bed just off the beach and I hope to catch some small bass out there.

5:00 PM: Must be coffee time. The day is still cold and snotty with spitting rain. Sea is grumpy and wind must be from northeast since the channel to the east, semi-protected when wind is from the northwest, is rough. There is a small island just behind this one, and behind that, a kilometre or so further north, a much larger and higher island that provides more protection. In front of me to the south is another small island about 200 meters from here. Closer in to the southwest is a tiny islet. These three small islands form a basin that is quite protected and usually fairly calm. Some large diving ducks and cormorants fish

there and soon I plan to join them. I'll try with rod and reel, and also set out a trotline with 10 hooks over night and hope I don't catch any of my winged neighbours.

My boat is tied in a tiny cove about fifteen meters across and, depending on the tide, between six and fifteen meters from the beach to the tips of the rock that form the sides. At low tide the boat is almost on the bottom and I can easily wade to it. If I want it at high tide I loosen the rope tied to shore and pull it across to the rocks on the far side of the cove. It works ok, but I want to figure out something that feels more secure and is easier to use. The beach is too rocky to haul the boat out of the water.

Didn't start work on cabin until after 1, but that's not unusual. I'm always slow to start on the day. Happily it's still light until almost 10 p.m. so I can work until after 8. Things are moving along and I have most of the studs up. Still need to frame windows and door, and probably won't finish today - especially since it just started to piss down rain again. I hadn't intended to build so skookum, but every time I think "that's good enough," the memory of the fierce storm the other night drifts into my mind and I drive in another nail or two. Peace of mind for dark, windy nights.

Later: Dinner was soup with macaroni, rice with Soya sauce, and a piece of chocolate for desert. Yum. The ocean is calming, tide coming in, rain has stopped, and I can see hills but not mountains. And me? Feeling ok I guess. Too much physical stuff going on to pay much attention to anything else. Got all the studs in and the three window holes framed. Usually plywood walls stiffen the corners, but since I'm covering the walls with tarp I need to reinforce the corners with triangular bracing which requires a lot of angle cuts. They take time. Been cold all day, but I've stayed dry; or perhaps I'm getting used to being clammy. I hang sweat damp socks and T-shirts on a line in the tent. Clothes that have gotten rain-wet hang under the tarp outside. Considering there's no good way to

dry clothes, I'm doing well. Kitten cuddled up in my lap. Things could be a whole lot worse.

2/22/01

Morning: Cold, grey, windy. A night of rain, pain, and dreams.<sup>10</sup> Raining still and I'm not in the mood to work in it. Maybe I'll drink coffee for a while instead. What have I done coming here? I still sense that something deep inside called me to such an extreme locale - perhaps to urge me inward. My notion was to spend a lot of time outside in nature, to become woven into the natural world again. But in this climate I wonder how much time I'll spend out and how much holed up in the cabin?

Evening: Woof, is my back sore! Where is my chiropractor now when I need her? The day continued windy and rainy on and off. When I'm working I notice the rain less than I do when huddled here inside. I'm glad I'll be using pressboard for the roof of the cabin under the tarp. It will muffle the sound some. Sometimes here in the tent I feel inundated by the endless rain beating overhead on the tarp.

Building went along today. I seem to get worn out after about six hours. Framing is almost finished and looking pretty good. I'll start putting tarp on the walls tomorrow. The roof will go on last since it will seal better that way and I can continue to work on the walls from the floor inside which will be much easier.

Just as I'd quit for the day and paused to look out over the sea, I saw a large bird I hadn't seen before. It swooped to perch on the front top plate 10 feet from me. Long, slightly curved, pointed, black bill, stubby tail, grey-coloured body with white flecks, grey-black legs and feet. It sat for a few minutes then flew off.

2/23/01

9:00 PM: Lovely, quiet evening. Cloudy, but there was some pale orange in the sunset sky - first colour I've seen since I've been here. Rice and lentils cooking. Two new birds the size of small geese on the rock out front. One is pure white and the other has a speckled brown black or perhaps dark-iridescent green (the light's not good enough to tell) breast, black wings and back with splotches of white.<sup>11</sup>

Work went ok considering. Measured and cut two tarps to cover the four walls. They are white and allow light to pass through so the cabin should be fairly bright even on cloudy days in winter. I built the cabin 10 feet deep by 16 feet wide, 5 feet of which - on the northeast side facing southeast toward the mountains - is a porch that opens to the front. The front and rear walls are 7 feet 4 inches and 5 feet high respectively. The sidewalls slant up from back to front. I planned and built the cabin frame to fit the tarps I bought in Vancouver.

Today I discovered that one of the tarps does not measure approx 13'6" as labelled on the package. It is 13'2" along one edge and 12'11" along the other. Arrrgh. If I were near a store, this would be a minor inconvenience; I could just exchange the tarp. But here it's a real hassle, and under different circumstances might even be life threatening. I believe this would be grounds for a letter of complaint. I can make the tarp work, but will need to scab in another piece along the bottom to create a watertight seal. Got the back wall partly covered, and if the weather is good tomorrow I may get the other three up.

With the recent new moon the tide is very low this evening so I cleared rocks from the bottom of the beach to make an easy landing place for the boat. Getting dark and rice and lentils are ready.



2/24/01

Morning: A change in weather? Sea is flat calm with just a light wind riffle from the southeast. The light is different too; more silver than grey. I can see the snowy mountains, and it feels like a crisp fall day. This is similar to the lovely day last week, but I don't know the weather here yet.

Last night was another restless, uncomfortable one. I was cold and hurt everywhere. I seem to hurt all the time with so much heavy work. Back and shoulders feel like they're clenched into deep spasms, and my hands ache and burn. I take ibuprophen, massage my hands, do stretches to loosen the knots, and try to accept and relax into the pain, but nothing helps much. I sleep bundled up and it's not particularly cold, so I'm probably chilled at night because of the damp. Already I'm ready for some warm blue sunshine; imagine how I'll feel in a year!

Evening: Raining. Good, that should settle the dust. Rice is cooking. I have a new system. I put it on and let it cook until I smell it start to burn. Seems to work pretty well. Flat calm all day - hills reflecting grey and blue in the sea. Glorious rainbow this morning. They're common here which is wonderful. Another nice thing about the climate - since I'm a man - is that I can piss right off the porch without nasty smells lingering.

Long workday. I finished attaching the tarp walls and sealed the corners and seams with silicone. It came out pretty nice: looks tidy and I hope it will be wind and rain proof. Just need to spot nail (through small pieces of hard plastic so the nails won't pull through the tarp) in a grid pattern over the whole outside. This will prevent flapping in the wind. Putting the tarp up sure would have gone faster if I could have used the staple gun rather than pounding in close to a thousand nails with the hammer. Next big job is the roof; then windows, door, bed, and table. At that point I can move in. It's getting there. I wonder if this

calm will last, or if another nasty storm is on the way? I guess a storm will come or not, and I'll be here.

2/25/01

Morning: Rain. Grey but calm, with a light ruffle from the southeast. Hard night until about 2 a.m. Very tense and stomach was upset; almost like all the silicone I got on my hands yesterday poisoned me. Seems unlikely unless they put something in it here that isn't in Canadian brands. In any case I'll be careful not to get it on my hands again. Possibly I'm just getting uptight about the constant rain.

This tension seems similar to the fear I've felt toward bears in the past - as though danger out there is coming to get me. But here there are no animals - just wind and rain. It's mostly my own feelings I'm resisting, because physically I'm reasonably comfortable; warm and dry with food to eat. I've been meditating 30 to 40 minutes in the evening. As usual I spend more time caught up in thinking than in simply remaining aware of the thought process, emotions, and physical sensations with a quiet mind. My primary focus of awareness is sound: rain and wind, waves on rocks, frogs, birdcalls. The sounds of water surround me.

Last night my hands really bothered me again: arthritis plus all the cuts and scrapes. I did stretches to relax back and legs, ate some chocolate, took some ibuprofen, and finally went to sleep. Woke up at 7:30 this morning still groggy and in no hurry to work in the rain.

Midday: I believe Cat's habits are wearing off on me. It's noon and I just woke up again. Feeling much better and ready to work. Hope to get the roof rafters in place today, and maybe tomorrow the roof will go on. As far as I can tell, it's rained lightly but steadily since last night, but it's still very calm. Perhaps this is a taste of winter weather.

Afternoon: Rain. I've been working in front of tent under the tarp, but it's time to don raingear. Yuck. It's also time in the larger scheme, to walk the walk. I've written and talked long and passionately about surrender. In my preparations for coming here I was repeatedly hammered with the need to surrender my preconceived plans and adapt to what was actually going on. Now there's rain. The rain is. The rain is not going away. Nor am I. If I don't begin to practice accepting life - including rain - as it is, I'll have a lousy time here indeed.

The tide comes in and washes my shit away. Poof. Gone. It's so easy to understand how we have damaged sea and sky, rivers ... and our hearts. Greed. To want just a little more. It makes perfect sense. What's the harm? I reach out to grab, and the agitation of wanting and grabbing dissolves in the currents of my heart. Poof. Gone. Until slowly, little by little, my heart fills with greed, the present moment of my life is polluted with toxin, and I can no longer enjoy what is. Time to work. I want a cabin!

Evening: Worked late, and I'm having Mac and Maggi for dinner yet again which won't make cat happy. He doesn't seem to like macaroni and dehydrated soup. He does like lentils and rice though. Set rafters in place today, and with them overhead the cabin got a lot smaller. Another six inches of height would be nice, but then the tarps wouldn't cover the walls. I'll have to drag two sheets of pressboard out from under the tent tomorrow for the roof. This game of musical materials is hard work. To cover the cabin walls I had to replace the tarp that was over tent with plastic. Hope I'm not hit with another big storm or the plastic might not hold.

Splendid afternoon. Some blue sky for a short while and even a direct ray of sun for about five minutes. The clouds lifted and the mountains loomed sharp and mysterious against the silver sky. A kingfisher flew by calling. Up on the ladder nailing down the rafters, I heard the dolphins blowing and looked out. The world seemed new from up there; a few vertical feet can sure change perspective.

Two of the dolphins were swimming along as they usually do, but a third seemed to be swimming in a circle and breathing heavy or even panting. Then he leapt from the water white belly up. Now I'm no dolphin expert, but it is late summer, and something seems fishy. Good on them. As dark comes on there's an ominous feel in the air ... or is it in my heart? The sea has begun to move - restlessly it seems. Does it portend an outer or an inner storm?

2/26/01

Sun! I'm actually sitting in it as I write. Oh. Well I was a minute ago - yes! - now again. And blue sky in places too. No rain so far this morning. Amazing. Interesting how the sound of the sea gently lapping the rocks is lovely and peaceful when it's the only water sound on a dry morning. When I heard no rain I leapt up fairly early to empty the tent and pull out three sheets of pressboard from beneath it. Then everything went back in and still no rain. What a gift. Clouds over the mountains are ragged - layered dark grey, silver, pale yellow - and moving fast. Sunlight slides across the rock cliffs to the west, flickering on the waterfalls. Kingfisher landed in the nearby tree: brilliant rusty-orange nestled among dark, dead, angular branches. GPS has crapped out again and I've opened it to dry. I'm in love with my felt boot-liners. I use one to work in (which gets a bit damp from sweat) and one to sleep in. I've yet to get a cold foot.

5:45 PM: Coffee time. It just started to sprinkle but held off until I got the roof on, so for the first time I didn't have to wear raingear. It would have been a much more difficult and unpleasant job in the rain. Even so, humping the pressboard up onto the rafters wasn't easy. The cabin has started to dry inside so I may try to stretch plastic over the roof before dark to prevent it getting soaked again. When I came to the tent to make coffee I saw the camera with the telephoto still mounted. Was it just this morning I saw the kingfisher? I've

been here three weeks today, and have been working on the cabin for a little less than two. Doesn't seem like it.

Just caught a glimpse of my first nutria<sup>12</sup> as it disappeared around the corner of the cove. It was moving pretty fast but looked a bit like an otter with a long tail. Damn, are the rocks ever slippery here! I go around half the time like a crab on all fours.

9:15 PM: The wind is up some and coming from the west. Boat is tugging at its leash which always makes me uneasy, and the plastic over the tent is rattling and slapping. Hope it holds. Rice and lentils cooking, and I'll be eating in the dark. Finished the roof and covered it with plastic, but the plastic isn't as new as I thought and it may leak. I remember now that I used it for a couple months while camping in Quebec years ago. It will be covered with tarp, but if I get another sunny day tomorrow I'd like to patch any holes I find with duct tape.

The ladder fell on my head today. The other day a 2 x 2 - which is now part of the ladder - also fell on my head. Maybe it doesn't like me. (Twenty-five years ago during my first long wilderness retreat in Canada, a branch fell on my head and I sensed that the tree didn't want me near it. In solitude perceptions and attitudes tend to change.) I also fell off the ladder today; or rather it went over, and I jumped. After that, I started to tie it in place. Can't afford a serious injury. Cat just awoke from his day of sleep and will probably keep me awake again tonight. Not sure what to do about it.

2/27/01

Well she's pissing down again out there today. My dream has expanded from a whole day without rain to two nice days in a row, and then three, etc. Greed. Plastic on roof leaks. Disappointing but not surprising. I'll try to patch it before covering it with tarp. Want to minimize the chance of leaks, which in this climate

is a challenge. I brought plenty of duct tape, but need a dry day since it won't stick to wet plastic.

A hummingbird<sup>13</sup> just came by. Perhaps I'll put out some sugar water. Heard the kingfisher a while ago and got one shot of him before he flew. Oh, it's stopped raining. Maybe it will get warm and sunny. Uh huh. Day after tomorrow I need to send the monthly "I'm ok" email, and I should get the system working before then. GPS is still misbehaving. Seems to only work when warm, so there's probably still moisture inside. I sure like the small Bushnell field glasses Mom gave me after she lost her sight. Have yet to use the bigger waterproof ones I bought especially for this trip. They aren't as handy and don't seem as sharp and clear.

4:00 PM: Must be coffee time and maybe quitting time too if this rain keeps up. Shit mother it's wet out there. There was an hour of pretty good weather this morning, and after I dried the plastic with paper towels I stuck duct tape over the holes. Paper towel is magical; nothing else dries as thoroughly. As of now the leaks have stopped and it's been raining hard for over an hour. If the rain and wind give me a chance, I'll stretch tarp over the roof later today.

2/28/01

Morning: Cloudy but not raining. Woke early and I'm tired and cranky. Too much work, too many aches and pains, not enough sleep. But there's no reason to take the day off since I find little comfort lying inside reading. I don't miss sex or ice cream, but a hot tub ... ah now there's a thing; not just the heat, but the release from gravity. In Canada I had fantasies of building a tub here and solar-heating water to soak in, but I doubt there's enough sunlight. Actually, my real fantasy was to find an unknown hot spring. In the meantime, I'll try to get the tarp on today and make sure the satphone is working.

Cat is hunting birds. I yell "No," but instinct is too strong. I set down my oatmeal, put on my leg and rubber boots, and go to harass him. My allergies are kicking in as he gets older and I don't think I'll let him into the cabin. Instead, I'll attach a small chicken wire enclosure with its own swinging door to the inside of the wall so he can go in and out, see me, and be warm, but not wander around the cabin. It's ironic that after all my effort to stay away from cats in Vancouver because of my allergies, I bring a cat to sleep with me in the tent. At the moment I'm sorry I did. He's getting to be a pain. I doubt I'll actually use him to test for red tide toxicity in the shellfish which is why I brought him - at the national parks official's suggestion. Supposedly that's how local fishermen check for toxicity. Feed suspect shellfish to a cat and see if it either pukes or dies. So far all I've seen here are mussels, which while very tasty also concentrate toxin most readily and are not worth the risk to sample.

Noon: Tarp is on. It's also much smaller than the package claims. Grrrrrrrr. I made it fit, but the roof has less overhang than I wanted. I never expected to nail the cabin together this securely, and I'm running short of nails. It's time to check the email system. Hope there's no problem with it. I've had enough problems for a while.

Evening: I can't believe it was just this morning I got the tarp on. Seems like yesterday at least. It's a cold day and there's new snow low on the hills. But the sun burst through and for ten minutes there was glorious warmth. Spent all afternoon trying to get the antenna for the satphone rigged up. Previously I could link to a satellite from the corner of the porch, but today I couldn't find an antenna location that would let me use the satphone from the cabin. I guess I'll use it from the tent tomorrow. In the meantime, having the phone on for so long searching for a satellite killed the battery. So I dragged down one of the 12V truck batteries, opened the storage barrel with the electronic stuff - yet again - and found the battery connector. Fucking Hell! This is already a hassle and I started getting ready for tomorrow days ago. Why am I not surprised?

Of course when I had the barrel open, shit strewn everywhere, and was most worried it would start to rain on the electronic gear, Cat came over to get in the middle of where I was working. I set him aside and he returned. I set him aside again and he came back. I tossed him into the mud and he decided to stay away. Cats are the most fucking stubborn animals in the world!

But it was also a glorious afternoon! Double rainbow and three dolphins came by. They are definitely making love. Two would roll up and swim on their backs and then the third would swim over one or the other of them. Then two would swim belly to belly on their sides. They were less than thirty meters from shore in front of my camp. It was very erotic and surreal.

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<sup>2</sup> The Quotes that head each month of the journal were posted on the inside of the door to my cabin to remind me of things that I tended to easily forget. Some of the quotes are from other people, and some, that do not cite a source, are my own.

<sup>3</sup> The journal footnotes have been added later after I returned to Vancouver.

Dharma is a Sanskrit word which in Buddhism most commonly means Truth or the body of teachings expounded by the Buddha. I stretch it to include any teaching or wisdom that has had a direct positive impact on my life.

<sup>4</sup> Interesting that I refer to the sea as lake for the first weeks, perhaps because my previous solitary retreats have been on lakes. They also suggest that I wasn't fully present while making these early journal entries.

<sup>5</sup> Thorn-tailed Rayadito: *Aphrasturas spinicauda*.

Incredible as seems to me, I didn't take a field guide for South American birds or plants with me, so I gave them names that described them. I've decided to retain the names I used and include these notes to identify the scientific and common names I learned after leaving the island. I later identified the birds using two field guides (Couve, 2000; de la Peña, 2001), my photographs, and my memory. Any bird or plant identification I am uncertain of I mark with a (?) or show an alternate possibility. There were many birds and plants I've made no attempt to identify.

<sup>6</sup> Coique: *Nothofagus betuloides*.

<sup>7</sup> Taique: *Desfontainia spinosa*.

<sup>8</sup> Chaura: *Pernetya mucronata* (?).

<sup>9</sup> Cipres: *Pilgerodendron uviferum*.

<sup>10</sup> In the original journal I recorded dreams from time to time, but in editing I decided that they don't add anything important to the narrative.

<sup>11</sup> Kelp Goose: *Chloephaga hybrid*.



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<sup>12</sup> In southern Chile nutria is the vernacular name for the sea otter: *Lutra feline*. I didn't, however, know this and it took me a while to figure it out. This is not the same nutria as the semi aquatic rodent, *Myocastor coypus*.

<sup>13</sup> Green-back Firecrown: *Sephanoides sephanoides*.

## Interlude 1

### Historical and Academic Context

Thirty years ago an experience as real to me as the weight of a stone splashed into the pool of my life. The effects still ripple across the surface and through the depths. Since then I have sometimes ignored the memory of what happened, sometimes surrendered again to the call of solitude, and sometimes worked to integrate into my social relationships the sense of peace and joyful aliveness I sometimes experience when alone.

~ ~ ~

There are times when Life seems to snatch us up in its current and carry us along toward some unknown destination. We sense something deep inside calling us and suspect that if we resist we will wither into a hollow shell. In my late twenties it was like that for me. I sensed I needed time alone and watched myself buy a canoe, purchase supplies for three months, and paddle alone into the back-country of Tweedsmuir Park, British Columbia.

Solitude is strange and powerful and can be frightening. I almost lost it out there, I almost didn't come back. After six weeks, without other people to help maintain my identity, the facade of autonomous self-sufficiency started to crumble. Fear crept in as I awoke to my vulnerability, not only there in the wilderness, but always - everywhere; how tenuous is living, how instantly possible death. Bears loomed large in my solitary mind. Each night was worse than the one before as I crouched by the safety of my fire hiding from the dangers in the darkness beyond. Finally I knew I had to either return to the safety of civilization or face the darkness alone.

So I left the fire and walked into the forest, inching my way through the dark. I lay down and waited. Time passed, and even the distant glimmer of the fire had died when I heard a bear coming toward me. Terror struck as the bear snuffled closer and closer; I could feel myself losing it and slipping over the edge. Beyond reason and without reserve, I called for help. In that moment of surrender, I was lifted and found myself floating in a pool of light. I looked down and sensed myself lying peacefully on the forest floor. No longer was the world a hostile alien place, but my home. Even more, there was no longer any true separation between myself and the world.

After that night I spent three weeks woven into the tapestry of life and glorying in the beauty of lake and wind and mountains. Lost in wonder, cradled

and caressed by the universe, my mind and body drifted in the ebb and flow of nature's rhythms. And there was something else out there, something beyond the physical and beyond definition. I was part of that too, and felt accepted and at peace. I decided that someday I would like to live a whole year alone in the wilderness.

Eventually I left the magic of the woods, and in the chaos of the human world that clear inner light slowly faded. I lived a year in depression and grief for what I'd lost and felt shame that I had somehow failed an important spiritual test, but didn't know what I'd done wrong. Eventually I discovered Buddhist meditation practice and learned that the joy and loss of peak experiences are inherent to the spiritual path.

~ ~ ~

Twenty years later I found myself graduating from McGill University with B.Sc. degrees in biology and psychology, and with an NSERC fellowship to pursue graduate work in biology. But something was missing in my life, and once again I heard solitude calling. I spent two months alone in northern Quebec, and during that time the world and I came alive again. I looked back on the previous five years in the university and it felt like I'd become an empty intellectual shell filled with facts and theories that seemed to have little connection to my heart and to my own lived experience.

I decided against graduate school, worked, saved money, and left for South America. A year and a half later, sailing up the remote wild coast of southern Chile, a plan that wove together the apparently disconnected threads of my life began to emerge in my mind. Perhaps I could use the fellowship to carry out an animal behaviour study while living alone in this remote wilderness for a year. This would allow me to fulfill my long-term desire to spend a year alone and also provide the opportunity to explore how I might integrate a shift of consciousness into a pragmatic scientific study (Tart, 1973).

Qualitative researchers in the social sciences often acknowledge that personal perspective is a vital component of any study. But while philosophers of natural science may recognise that supposed scientific objectivity is illusory (Grene, 1995; Polanyi, 1958; Putnam, 1987) this awareness is not usually manifested in pragmatic research. The external world is generally accepted as ontologically real, and striving for objectivity crucial (Sattler, 1986; Wilber, 1995). My particular interest was to question a basic

assumption of Neo Darwinian Theory that organisms exist as independent entities and evolve only through the dual mechanism of chance mutation and natural selection.

The shift of consciousness I had experienced during previous wilderness retreats resulted in my experiencing the world not as a collection of separate entities, or even as an integrated system, but rather as a flowing whole. This flowing whole seemed to include consciousness as well as matter.<sup>14</sup> It seemed as though evolutionary change might involve teleological directionality as well as simple trial and error. In order to explore this possibility, I would take myself into solitude where a psychological change would allow me to perceive the world from an altered state of consciousness (Ornstein, 1991).

But once I'd begun graduate studies, my focus slowly shifted and I came to realize that an animal behaviour study was peripheral to my core interest. What truly fascinated me was an exploration of the physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual effects of deep wilderness solitude on a human being: in this case me. Rather than research the effects of solitude on other people's lives, I would be both researcher and subject and study my own lived experience from the inside. I wanted to examine our relationship with the non-human world and how a transformation of consciousness that allows the felt experience of deep belonging might lead to a change of behaviour that would be less damaging to our earth.

As I began to pay closer attention to my immediate lived experience, I became aware that my intention for my Ph.D. was broader than simply studying the effects of solitude. I wanted to use my project to heal the painful rupture I'd felt between academic study and my own lived experience; between my head and my heart. As an undergraduate I'd felt there was little opportunity to bring my own deepest questions and yearnings into my studies. Now I wanted not to discuss the problem, but to exhibit one solution in my own work: to integrate personal spiritual journey into academic work and use academics as a kind of spiritual practice.

At times during the years of academic study to prepare for my journey into solitude, I became weary of abstract thinking and would go to the library, pore over maps of the Chilean and British Columbian coasts, and imagine myself hidden away among the

fiords, channels, islands, and peninsulas. I was looking for a place far from the equator since there is something in stormy weather that calls me inward to depths of feeling and awareness I don't usually experience in a gentler climate. And I knew I would need to go to an inhospitable climate to find complete solitude. I also knew from experience that I would need to be at least 150 km from the nearest town if I were to feel disengaged from civilization and on my own.

I wanted to be on the coast for three reasons: first, I love the sea; second, winter temperatures wouldn't be so extreme that I couldn't spend most of my time outside; third, because of my prosthetic leg<sup>15</sup> I would need to transport my supplies and explore the region by water rather than by land. Since I would be using an inflatable kayak and a small boat with outboard motor for transportation, I wanted to be in an area of protected waterways where storms would be less dangerous.

In talking with people who know B.C. well, I began to realize how much air and sea traffic there is along the coast: logging, mining, commercial and sport fishing, sail and motor cruisers, kayakers. If I wanted to experience and explore the effects of absolute solitude, the coast of B.C. was not remote enough. It would be much cheaper and logistically easier to stay here than to transport my gear and myself to southern Chile, but I would likely be disappointed with myself for having done so. I focused my gaze south, and in doing so cast my fate literally and metaphorically to the wind. (See map of The Americas, Appendix 3.)

I also worked on my lists when I needed a break from my studies. The logistics of preparing to live for a year in the wilderness without coming out for supplies are daunting. I had to think ahead to everything I would need to survive, add items I might need if things were to go bad, and then add some treats for physical and emotional comfort. I don't generally plan far ahead when I travel or camp, but this time I knew that if I waited until it was nearly time to leave before making lists of what I needed to take, I might forget something vital.

**Logistic Preparations: Canada**

In September 2000, having passed my Ph.D. qualifying exam the previous July, it dawned on me that it was time to focus on physical preparations. I had intended to be gone long before, and although I didn't realize it, others speculated that I might never actually go. But that possibility didn't seriously cross my mind. I consolidated the lists I'd made during the previous two years and grouped items together into subsets: tools; building materials; camping and fishing; boat and motor related items; household; clothes and toiletries; electric and electronic - including wind generator, solar panels, satellite telephone, laptop computer; repair kits; first aid; food.<sup>16</sup>

One logistic challenge was to obtain everything as cheaply as possible since I was financing the project primarily with money I'd saved by working as a teaching assistant and living as inexpensively as possible during the previous three years. My main academic supervisor, David Tait, and his wife, Pille Bunnell, were a great help in that they invited me to live with their family and charged a minimum for room and board. At the last minute UBC unexpectedly contributed \$10,000.

I already had most of the tools, fishing gear, and camping equipment I would need. I bought nearly all the other equipment second hand, but eventually purchased the wind generator and solar panels new. During the months of September, October, and November, I shopped, looked (rather unsuccessfully) for information on the area in Chile where I intended to go, applied for a Chilean visa, obtained shots, and took care of all the details to be absent for a year and a half. In October my mother died and I went to California to be with her during her last days.

Another task was to pack and ship my gear to southern Chile. I had stuff squirreled away everywhere inside and outside the house, but somehow squeezed it all into two one cubic meter crates. I took the crates to the transport company, labeled them with my name and the CONAF (Chilean National Parks Service) address in Punta Arenas at the other end of the world, and drove away wondering if I would ever see them again. I had no money left to replace the gear should the crates go missing.

Obtaining permission from Chile to spend a year alone on the remote southern coast with its inhospitable climate was an interesting and, at times, nerve wracking challenge. My friend Juan-Pablo Cerda used to work for the Chilean government and knew which department of CONAF I needed to contact. I sent in my application forms to CONAF and began to wait - unconcerned since I still had almost a year until my proposed departure date. Months passed, I sent emails, CONAF did not respond, and slowly I became concerned.

Finally in September I told Juan-Pablo I was up against the wall, and we did what we should have done much sooner: he called a friend. I've lived many years in Latin America and know that personal contact is the most efficient way to get things done. Juan Pablo's friend had another friend who works in the CONAF office in Punta Arenas, and he asked her to help me obtain the permissions I needed.

Alejandra Silva should be in charge of CONAF for all of Chile. She is friendly, helpful, reliable, and very efficient. She emailed me information about the region, pointed out that the climate is extremely inhospitable, but that if I was willing to sign a notarized form releasing CONAF from responsibility for damage to my equipment and injury or death to me, they had no problem with my proposed project. Within two weeks I had their written permission in hand and rushed to the Chilean Consulate here in Vancouver.

It is easy to obtain a three month tourist visa and also easy to renew such a visa. The problem was that I would need to leave Chile each three months, cross into Argentina, and return to Chile. That would be impossible, so I applied for a one year residency permit. By then, I was starting to feel tense. I had already shipped the crates of gear to southern Chile and purchased a non-refundable airline ticket with a departure date in five days, and I had no visa. The Consul told me it would take only three or four days to obtain the visa, but his bureaucratic assistant was less sanguine. He warned me that the Consul, only recently transferred to Vancouver, was unrealistic and said the process usually requires at least two weeks. This was not good news and my stress level ratcheted up. I went back and told the Consul what his assistant had said. He replied that his assistant had a pessimistic attitude toward life and assured me there would be no

problem. He was right. Three days later my visa was ready, and two days after that, on December 15, I was on my way to Santiago, Chile. That last month was fairly frantic, and by the time I reached the airport I was pretty wasted.

### **The Road South**

I awoke to rain and to the fact that I was headed south away from the sun and warmth of Santiago into clouds, wind, and cold. What have I done? Why did I choose to make this exploration in southern Chile despite warnings about the weather? As is usual for the larger movements in my life, I have no rational answer: just an inner call. The steward came by with a breakfast of sorts: cheese sandwich, pastry, and instant coffee to be slurped through a straw on the lurching bus.

The bus ride lasted two days and nights and was a mix of normal, strange, and semi-non-existent. Since there is no road down the Pacific side of the Andes - the Chilean coast is far too fractured - we crossed into Argentina and followed the same route I'd hitchhiked four years previously. (See map Tip of South America, Appendix 3.) When I'd hitched, the trip took nine days. I'd carried a backpack, camped out, eaten wild blackberries while waiting long hours beside the road, gotten stuck at a border crossing for two days, and just when I'd decided it would take forever to reach Tierra del Fuego, a long-haul truck picked me up and carried me all the way.

This time, once my luggage was stowed, I didn't have a thing to worry about. I looked out the window or slept, and when it rained I was snug and dry. On and on, like a boat or ship in space, the bus rolled and dipped over the Patagonian grasslands: mile after endless mile of brown, green, gold and silver, with the odd slash of brilliant red or orange. And always the wind, making me wonder about my own future on the sea as I drifted between South America and the life I'd left behind in Canada.

### **Logistic Preparations: Southern Chile**

I arrived to Punta Arenas tired but not too sore. A new stage in the journey, and new thoughts to pester me: would the crates actually arrive, and how would I transport them overland 150 miles north to Puerto Natales. (See map Punta Arenas to Puerto



Natales to Retreat Site, Appendix 3.) Once I left P.N. to go up coast in my small boat looking for a place to stay for the year, I'd have plenty more to worry about: wind and rough water, rain, where I'd build my camp. After so many worries had dissolved with the aid of helping hands, it seems like I'd have learned some faith. At some deep level I did have faith else I wouldn't have begun the journey, but on the surface I still fretted and projected my fears onto the world around me.

The next day I registered with the police and applied for an I.D. card. While reviewing my paperwork, the officer frowned and said there was a serious problem. I began to review my past sins with a mental nod to Interpol and the FBI, but wisely didn't confess any of them. He pointed out that the name on my passport was Frank R. Kull but my visa was for Frank Robert Kull. Serious stuff indeed! I explained that in Canada we use middle name and initial more or less interchangeably. He didn't seem reassured, so I repeated the assertion several more times - always a good tactic I find - and he finally decided I wasn't trying to con him and said he would contact Santiago to correct the discrepancy.

Then I presented myself to CONAF. They were very friendly, but regarded me with some scepticism, and I was soon awarded the nickname Gringo Loco. They said that at this time of year the water where I planned to go would be too rough for my small inflatable boat but that their ship could take me if I would pay \$1,500 CAD for fuel. That was far beyond my budget, and this was the first major glitch in my plan. I came at this time of year assuming summer here to be about the same as summer on the coast of B.C.: long warmish days and fairly calm weather. Wrong. Summer is the windiest time of year. They suggested I talk to German Coronado, captain of their boat and the official in charge of several huge national parks and protected areas along the coast.

The next morning I bussed to P.N. to meet with German. He spends most of his time in Puerto Eden, a tiny fishing village 30 hours by boat north of P. N. and knows the coast well. He told me that two of the areas I'd marked on my map as potential places to build my camp are sometimes visited by commercial fishermen but that no one ever goes to an inlet about 150 km by water northwest of P.N and closer to the mountains where

fishing is not very good. I could see no real option but to trust his judgment and hope for the best.

German said I could catch a ride with them for much cheaper than \$1500 if I was willing to wait until the end of January when they make their regular patrol and pass within 40 km of the inlet. I agreed since I was in no hurry now that I knew the weather would not get worse in the next couple months. In any case I had to wait for my crates to arrive and needed to buy food and other supplies that were too heavy to ship from Vancouver.

Punta Arenas is a nice place. The people are warm, open, and honest. In Vancouver it seemed like the other side of nowhere, but once I was there for a while it felt like the center of the world. I rented a large room in a private home for the six weeks I ended up staying there, which I needed because by the time I left I had a huge amount of stuff. I paid \$16 CAD a day for room and board, which wasn't cheap, but nothing in Chile is cheap. Doña Mercedes, who owns the house, is a fine cook and the food was excellent. She thinks her own thoughts and speaks her mind. I liked her a lot.

In Vancouver I thought I'd purchased most of what I'd need, but I continued to shop in Punta Arenas too. I wouldn't have access to stores for the next year so I needed to buy everything I thought I might need. And there were all the tasty little items I had no idea I needed until I stumbled across them.

I learned to scan shop windows as I passed. Strange and fascinating what some of the places offered for sale: a clothing store with one small shelf of power tools; an auto parts centre that sold home-made jam. I found a tiny bookshop with a few used novels in English, and I bought several to read while still in town. Most of the things I needed were relatively easy to find, but some items were a challenge. I never did find stove pipe to fit the wood stove I shipped from Vancouver and had to have it custom built. I spent a lot of time searching out the cheapest prices for everything.

Just to spice up the shopping experience, the Spanish system of naming is backward. For instance, someone told me that a store called Aysen sold oatmeal, dried fruit, rice, beans, spices, etc. in bulk. So I searched the phone book for the address, but it's not listed under Aysen. It's listed under Packagers Aysen. And it could just as easily

have been listed under Distributors Aysen, Bulk Foods Aysen, or several other unexpected headings. English definitely has its own drawbacks, but in this regard it works much better than the “backward” languages.

My crates were supposed to arrive about the same time I did at the end of December, but they didn't. Anxious, I walked to the port every few days to ask whether anyone had heard anything, but no one had. I finally tracked them down sitting on a dock near Valparaiso, but it took another two weeks for them to reach P.A.

CONAF told me their boat would not be traveling up coast anytime soon. Another ride I'd been working to set up also fell through, and the uncertainty of the endlessly shifting external situation was frustrating. I tried to relax and go with it, but over and over got caught in my expectations of how I wanted things to be and how I thought they should be. I had no idea how I might eventually make my way up coast with all my gear, but I imagined something would eventually work out.

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<sup>14</sup> See Interlude 6.

<sup>15</sup> When I was 40 years old I was living in the Dominican Republic and working as a SCUBA instructor. One day I was riding my motorcycle to the other side of the island to go diving with the whales that come there to calve their young. A pickup truck came out of nowhere and wiped me out. I was flown to Montreal and spent a year in the hospital having multiple surgeries in an attempt to save my lower right leg. The procedures were not successful and I now use a below the knee prosthetic leg. After the amputation, walking was very painful and I decided to take some classes at McGill where I could use my brain instead of my body so much. It was a difficult transition from being a very active SCUBA instructor and motorcycle rider to a sedentary mature student. Entering university so late in life gave me an unusual perspective on the educational process.

<sup>16</sup> See Appendix 2.

## March 2001

When listening for your heart song,  
listen for us as well.  
(Patti Kuchinsky)<sup>17</sup>

3/01/01

Morning: Restless day/wind up and ocean moving/mountains in view. The communication system seems to have worked. At first I thought I wasn't connecting to the satellite, but then ... yes! AORW FRANCE on line. Perfect. Now to wait for replies so I will know my message got through.<sup>18</sup>

5:00 PM: Talk about speaking too soon. The first email this morning apparently did not go through. Sent it again and I think that one made it ok. Problem is that my link to the satellite can be broken but it looks like the message was sent. To be sure, I must check that a call has actually been logged. If I don't hear back from a real person by about 6 p.m. I may call Patti. I did manage to pick up an email she sent several days ago saying they've been a bit concerned since I'd said I would send my latitude and longitude coordinates as soon as I found a place to settle. With all that's been going on, I spaced it. But considering how much hassle it is to send messages and that they don't seem to have been very worried, I don't feel too bad. I'm now recharging the satphone and laptop for the second time and need to become more energy efficient since there is so little solar power here.

Moved all my foodstuffs into the cabin today. This frees up the two tarps I need for the porch walls. I also emptied and dismantled one of the shipping crates to use for making shelves. Going to clean up cabin now.

7:30 PM: Waiting to check email until the water recedes some. It's storming again. Some rain, but mostly wind-driven spray swirling in horizontal

sheets. Even my protected cove is rough with the boat yanking at its tether and small waves breaking over my dangling feet as I sit on the platform in front of the tent. This storm tide rushing under the tent is too close for comfort, and I'm ready to move to the cabin and put more distance between me and the sea. I'm glad this is happening in daylight. The mountains have gone. Ten minutes ago they loomed forbidding to my eye in misty silver light beneath a higher layer of solid grey. Here comes the rain! I'm glad to not be on the sea in this. I saw a frog heading for higher pools a while ago - staying ahead of the incoming salt. Hope she made it. Hope I make it too.

11:20 PM: God what a storm is raging out there. Worse than the last big one and lasting longer. I've been lying here dealing with anxiety - trying to separate it from the auditory and tactile energy of the storm. Working to settle into an acceptance death. Boom! Crash! The plastic and tent vibrate in an especially ferocious blast. I put on headlamp and unzip the tent flap to peer out and check the boat. Oh shit, it's broken loose and is up against the rocks on the far side of the cove.

I strip naked and don chest waders, boots, and raincoat, then take my knife to see what's to be done. On the beach I find a paddle that was in the boat. I wonder where the other paddle and life vest are? The rope is still tied to the front of the boat, and I realize that it's pulled free from where it was tied to shore. I tie it to a stout tree to keep the boat away from the beach until the tide goes down. I'll set the clock - as if I'll need it - to wake up again in four hours.

I hope the motor didn't smash against the rocks. I hope ... for so many things. Tomorrow I'll find a way to haul the boat up the beach above high tide. I just don't like to have it floating out there.

Before climbing back into the tent I check the tie down loops on the plastic that I'd re-enforced with duct tape. They seem to be holding which is amazing.

I also check the cabin, and even in the howling wind it's steady as a rock. Well, I wanted adventure.

3/02/01

Morning: The storm lasted all night. Roaring wind and sporadic rain. I looked out periodically to be sure the boat wasn't banging against the rocks. It looked kind of weird, but I couldn't see clearly in the dark, and I was pretty frazzled and very sleepy. Woke at daybreak to see the boat floating upside down. Oh shit. I'm not sure this is a real disaster since I'm not hurt or stranded away from camp, but it's a very serious problem.

I had no idea what to do, but had to do something. The tide was down so I stripped naked again, donned chest waders and went out for a look. I rescued the 4 hp motor from the bottom where it had landed when the boat flipped, retrieved the gas tank floating beside boat, then unclamped the 15 hp from the transom and carried it to shore.

I figured it would be a huge hassle to flip the boat back over, but it was actually pretty easy. I pulled the boat into shallower water and to stop it from slipping away from me, attached a rope to the far side, ran it underneath, and tied it to a tree behind me. Then I lifted my side of the boat and walked ahead, raising it higher and higher, until the boat flipped. I chain sawed an opening in the brush above high tide, cleared more rocks from the beach, and dragged the boat up. What a grunt. Foot pumps, life vest, and paddles had washed up on shore, and the only thing missing was one rubber glove.

I was right to be anxious about leaving the boat in the water, but I never imagined it would flip. Other than fire, submersion in salt water is the worst thing that can happen to outboard motors. I need to read the outboard manual now to see what I can do to save them. If I can't get them to work, I'll probably need to contact the Navy. I guess I could live without the motors, but two

propane tanks are still on the other beach, and the tank I have here isn't enough to last a year. Without the motors I have no way to get firewood or go fishing and exploring. This could be a pretty unpleasant year stuck here in the cold and wet with no way to heat the cabin. Shit, the wind is coming up again. Ah hell.

10:00 PM: Too tired to write much. Worked almost all day on the 15 hp outboard. There was a section in the manual titled, "Motors Submerged in Saltwater." What a fantastic gift from the universe! Following the instructions I washed everything in fresh water, dried all electrical connections, and used alcohol to absorb any remaining moisture. I also stripped and cleaned the fuel lines, fuel pump, and carburetor. Put everything back together and the fuel pump leaked. Damn. Finally fixed the leak and tried the motor. It ran!!! Doesn't sound as good as it did, but it does run.

Question is will corrosion slowly eat the electrical connections I couldn't clean? I forgot to bring a socket large enough to remove the flywheel, and some electronic components are hidden underneath. I brought a flywheel puller and spare components, and can't believe I forgot the socket. Anyway the motor is working and I'm very, very thankful. I'll get the propane tanks the next calm day. Worked on the 4 hp too but it showed no sign of life, so now I have no backup motor. Time for dinner and sleep I hope. It's pretty calm tonight.

3/03/01

Morning: Full night's sleep; first in a month. After yesterday I was exhausted. I'd slept sporadically in the storm and woke to the flipped boat. Worked non-stop all day and didn't eat anything except some coffee in the morning. Last night I taped my split fingertips to ease the pain, put in earplugs to dampen the sound of wind and water, and tucked the blankets close around me against the cold. I crashed about 10:30 and slept straight through until cat woke me at 7 this morning. Then back to sleep for two more hours.

I woke to a sky with broken clouds and patches of blue here and there. The mountains are semi-clear and my pen casts a faint shadow. A hummingbird just came to investigate the red sleeves on my jacket and hovered within a foot of me; some of the birds here are very tame. There is a faint breeze from the northwest and the sea is moving, so I won't be going for propane tanks today. Yesterday, the weather went through radical changes, but it was nice every time I was outside and rained and hailed only when I was in the cabin working on the motors. That was a blessing.

Received email replies from my contact teams in the North and from the Chilean Navy and National Parks Service. The parks official said he hoped the winds hadn't bothered me too much, so I guess these storms are unusual even for here. I wonder, have the winds really bothered me much? That will depend on whether the outboard continues to function, which I won't know until either it quits or my year is complete.

I want to explore this anxiety while I'm here. It's very deep and seems to poison my life. I've seen over and over that things work out - often not as I'd planned, but sometimes much better - yet still I look ahead with fear. Instead of relaxing into life I'm often needlessly tense and worried. The big storm was an example. I worried that the cabin wouldn't hold together, that the tarps over my tent would break loose, that the boat would break free, or that some other undefined bad thing would happen, but I hadn't thought at all about what actually did happen. Once faced with the real problem I dealt with it efficiently. Even when things get really fucked up - like losing my leg in the motorcycle wreck - life continues. So why not let go of the worrying?

Last evening I saw the two black and white geese on the rock out front. I fetched the field glasses and edged to within 15 feet of them. Beautiful. One is completely white with yellow legs and black eyes and bill. I think he's the male but only because he's the larger. The other has yellow legs, a ring around each eye, and a pale pink bill. Her breast is dark brown black barred with white. Belly



and tail are white, and the wing tips show some iridescent blue green. In flight she is spectacular. A black line runs down the centre of white wings. Back and tail are white with two dark lines. Another lovely gift.

3/04/01

Morning: Rained enough last night to fill the water containers, and it's now windy with sun and clouds. Tomorrow I'll have been here a month. I've been so busy working that the effects of solitude haven't been particularly noticeable - at least not consciously. The question arises: how will I turn this into a Ph.D. dissertation?

My cooking and eating gear still consists of two old pots I've had for years, a cup, small bowl, tablespoon, and teaspoon. I eat oatmeal, raisins, peanut butter, dehydrated soup, macaroni, rice, lentils, chocolate, coffee, sugar, powdered milk, Soya sauce, and cooking oil. I'll open the other foodstuffs and kitchenware once I move into the cabin where it's dry. I catch rainwater from the tarp over the tent in a big cook pot I bought in Punta Arenas and store it in two 2½-gallon containers. My reserve supply is in the big washtub that has filled on its own straight from the sky.

Last night at midnight I woke to a nasty back ache. I put a tennis ball under my shoulder and rotated my arm to massage the pressure point which helped some. Patti taught me that. I'm realizing more and more how much she's shared with me. Such a good friend.

Cabin is closed in and the floor is drying. No leaks as far as I can tell. Today I'll build shelves, and tomorrow perhaps move in. I'd like to build a bed first, but the wood I need is under the tent. I'm out of 1x2 inch boards, and could use another half dozen or so. Still have some 2x2s, 1x3s, and a couple 2x4s. If I run out, I can use trees.

So much of what I do is oriented toward what others will think of it. I find myself considering over and over how Patti will see my work on the cabin if she comes down at the end of the year.

Evening: Work went slowly. Got some of the inside plastic wall lining up and the major shelves built, which filled immediately. Tomorrow I'll put up the rest of the plastic, and if there's time build a table and bed. Then I can move in, and I'm ready!

Free floating anxiety - even dread - of the wind and sea; or rather of the raw natural world. There are no dangerous animals here but the storms have a primal power. The tide is coming high and close in the gathering dark, and it's raining and blowing. What if? Another huge storm hits and this time my tarps and tent are blown apart? A rogue wave strikes and I'm washed away?

3/05/01

Morning: Grey/calm/rainy. Rained all night, but no wind, so my dread was internal and projected outward - not a real premonition. Slept ok after 3 a.m. which seems to be a pattern of sorts most nights. I'm restless, chilled, and sore until 1:30 or so, then take more ibuprofen, stretch, and sleep pretty well until 8 or 9 in the morning. Tops of the hills are covered with new snow and it's cold. I need to get the stove set up and some firewood in.

Cat is growing fast. He sure eats a lot for his size. I didn't think to bring extra food for him. Hope I catch fish. It's hard to get started on my daily work, but once moving the energy builds and carries me. The guy who said getting started is half the battle sure had me pegged. This is so for decision making too. Any decision is better than none since it can always be changed. Shit, I'm a slow learner.

There is a delicate grass that grows in the inter-tidal zone. Tall thin stalks topped with seed heads bend in graceful curves, and the slightest breeze sends

them into swaying shivers. On calm days, the soft pulse of the sea rocks them gently back and forth, hour after hour. When it storms, waves rush in and flatten them almost horizontal, back and forth, hour after hour. How can something so delicate be so resilient?

Evening: I've moved into the cabin! The bed and table are not built, but in the afternoon I got a sudden urge that it was time to move, so I'm cooking on the stepladder and sleeping on the floor. It felt good to take down the tent. I've been here four weeks today. I need to put windows in. I'm so accustomed to being outside that I keep going to the porch to see what's going on out there.

A while ago I went out to the rock with the pint of Deluxe 10 year old whiskey Diane gave me as a gift for the journey and thanked Spirit for bringing me here; thanked all the people who have helped make this retreat possible; then thanked Diane for the booze and took my first drink since I arrived. I watched rain slanting against the rock cliffs to the west and heard the roar of a passing hailstorm drumming on the surface of the sea.

3/06/01

Evening: It's so noisy here especially at high tide. The sea crumples and rushes against the rocks, the wind roars in the trees, rain pounds on the roof, and the sound of distant waterfalls swells or fades depending on wind direction and runoff. Sometimes at night it's overwhelming. Strange that way out here where there's supposed to be peace and quiet I sleep with earplugs at times. I think this resistance to noise is linked to my resistance to meditation - to just being with the sounds. I'm sitting for only half hour in evening and then my back gets very painful. Uh huh and so what? Sure glad I moved into the cabin. Last night's tide was highest yet and there were waves.

Cat and I have been at it again. He sure is a wilful fuck. Gets into the middle of whatever I'm doing. Seems to only give up once he senses real anger or

pain. I haven't hit him again, but a of couple times he's tried to claw me when I've squeezed him till he cried. Am I just getting his attention or am I mistreating him? He's still very affectionate, but I wonder. Last night he was after a large moth on the porch which seemed fair since I won't let him hunt birds. But the moth was beating against the porch roof and Cat clawed up the tarp wall trying to catch it. No! Won't take long for the tarp to leak at that rate.

My moods shift as fast and furiously as the weather: joy, thankfulness, peace, anger, fear, frustration, calm steadiness. Stay with it, Bob, and keep watching and waiting. There is some blue sky now.

I was warm last night for the first time, but what a hassle tucking the sheets, blankets, and sleeping bag around the sleeping pad. I'd taken off my leg to meditate and decided to balance on one leg to make up the bed. Then the batteries in the headlamp died and left me doing it by touch in the dark. Only thing is, six of my fingers are split and wrapped with duct tape so I couldn't feel anything. And of course right about then Cat jumped into middle of things. But it was worth it to be warm.

Today it seems like the tasks I must complete before I can rest are endless. The table is finished, the bed half built, and it's visually too crowded in here. I've decided to lower the bed three inches and make it six inches narrower. There's a huge mess too: gear piled up, wood, sawdust, and tools everywhere.

3/07/01

Midday: Time for breakfast/lunch. Peaceful low tide morning and I feel much safer with more exposed beach. Spacious. Free. I imagine the tide will be very high tonight. A while ago I walked to the far point to look at some dead trees and they seem pretty rotten. Finding firewood could be a problem and fires may be a luxury rather than a daily occurrence. Took down the plastic-covered A frame I had over the tent and stacked the lumber beside the cabin. It looks

nice and green out front now. I'm ready to go for the other propane tanks. Hope the outboard is still running. Got out more oats, lentils, and salt. Had to grin. I brought 15 pounds of salt! Looks like I had 12 and then decided to bring three more just in case. That's over a pound a month. So far I've used maybe an ounce. What was I thinking?

3/08/01

Morning: Some blue sky and calm at the moment, but wind will be up soon/tide on the make. I dream of a week of warm - say 60F - weather. I think Cat and I are having a parting of our nocturnal ways. He woke me up four times last night. Came in and settled right by my face. I kept putting him under the covers and he kept going back outside. Finally barred the door with him outside and put in earplugs so I wouldn't hear him crying. I've made him a cozy nest in a box on the porch.

2:00 PM: Time for breakfast. Sometimes when I tell people about my solitary retreats they ask, "What do you do all day out there alone?" Sometimes time stretches on forever, usually when there is physical, emotional, or spiritual discomfort, otherwise the days zoom by. I've yet to start building today, but yesterday I lowered and narrowed the bed and came up with a better design for shelves and sliding drawers underneath. Since it was fair this morning, I fetched more equipment from the waterproof barrels, brought in the stuff from the other crate, and dismantled it to use for shelves. Now all my gear and supplies, except the propane tanks down on the other beach, is near the cabin and out of tide's reach.

Almost went for the propane a while ago since it was fairly calm and tide was high which makes loading and unloading much easier. But the wind came up and ocean started to whitecap. During the past four days I've worked outside a lot. Each time I'd just finished what I needed to do, it started to rain. Yet I had no

conscious awareness of hurrying or sensing the rain coming. Coincidence? Cosmic gift from the Great Boo Haha? Or am I subliminally hooking my rhythms in with the weather?

I found the thermometer and it reads 45F. This feels like about what it's been most days. Some summer. I stepped on a nail and the rubber boot is leaking - just enough to get the felt liner slightly damp and my foot cold. Shoe Goo repair tonight.

I'm getting very ready for a fire. Want to warm up and dry everything. The question of firewood preoccupies me. I've rarely had trouble finding dry wood in Canada. On the west coast there's a huge supply of driftwood logs and you can be fussy about what kind of wood to burn. Maybe there's plenty here too and I just don't know how to find it yet, but I've seen very little driftwood and the trees in the forest are soggy wet or rotting.

Evening: I saw the Moon! I'd just finished eating dinner on the porch and saw that the whole sky was showing stars. Zoom - inside to put on more warm clothes and rubber boots, then back out. In those five minutes the sky had clouded over. But I went down to the low tide water's edge to watch the night. Moonbeams were flaring from behind dark clouds theatrically lighting hills, sea, and other clouds. Then through a break the full moon appeared. I bathed in the beauty and called to her. Sent hellos to Susan and Patti, my moon lovers and friends. And then she was gone. Imagine wanting to plant a flag there. The magic is in opening to her spell here.

3/09/01

Injury. I've seriously damaged the rotator cuff in my right shoulder and can hardly move my arm. Shit, I really didn't need this. I've filled the hot water bottle with 40F water and taken an anti-inflammatory. Not much else to do but rest it and then do exercises. Now I need to decide if this warrants code yellow

email.<sup>19</sup> All it took was a moment of inattention. The low tide rocks here are treacherous. They must be covered with micro-algae, and other than ice I've never been on anything as slippery. They look normal, even dry, but have no traction at all unless there is a crack or rough patch. Part of the problem is that my rubber boots don't have Vibram soles and so don't grip. I knew the risk of falling would be a major danger here, and so it has been.

A nutria was fishing at the water edge and I wanted to get a closer look, so I went out onto the rocks. I was half watching him - moving only when he dove - and only half watching my feet. I went down hard with no warning at all. Oh shit this hurts! Wish I had the stove set up and a good supply of firewood in. On other hand I'm very glad to have built and moved into the cabin.

There were two ducks in the water when the nutria swam around the corner. Boy did they get up onto the rocks in a hurry. Didn't go back in until they were sure he was gone. Saw a condor earlier. Wheeling black and wild, high against the grey sky.

3:00 PM: light breeze/sunny moments on and off and I have a few things drying on the line. Just heard some serious thunder and am watching the puddles for first sign of raindrops to bring clothes back in.

The pain in my arm and shoulder comes and goes. As long as the arm is supported it doesn't really hurt, but if I put any strain on it - ouch! I imagine I'll have some nasty nights ahead. At least I know from when I screwed up the shoulder three years ago not to immobilize it. I'll continue to move it within the pain range. The sea water is 46F. Rainwater is 40F, so I'll continue to use that in the rubber bottle on my shoulder. So much for plans of getting cabin done, solar panels and wind generator set up, outhouse built, stove installed, and firewood in. This could lay me up for some weeks as far as heavy work goes. I'll take care not to fall again, keep cold on the shoulder and exercise it, stay warm, and read I guess.

If I had to bugger my shoulder, watching a nutria was a good way to do it. Fascinating animal. In Spanish, nutria means sea cat and it's well named; the face definitely looks like a cat. Not sure what it was eating, but if shellfish that means there's no red tide here - according to the national parks official. It was diving repeatedly, but not cracking anything open when on the surface. When it saw me it stopped and stared. Me too. In a sense it was greed that caused the fall. I wanted to see how close I could get.

Serious thunder coming closer, light fading, sky closing down, wind picking up. There's a cold front and a big hailstorm moving through - only small stones so far though. Never thought of hail when I decided to make cabin from tarp. Ah, a kingfisher just flew into the dead tree beside the cove.

I've had about enough of the active life for a while and might rather like to be intellectual again. By the time I'd finished my Ph.D. qualifying exam I was sick of books and ready to get on with this project. It's now been eight months of almost non-stop activity and I'm fried. Would have liked to get my camp completely set up before taking a break though. I figure another couple weeks of work to get the major stuff done. Oh well, things will be what they will be. Now and then - usually in the middle of a storm - I have the feeling I've bitten off more than I can chew here, and I must admit I'm glad to have the satellite phone in case of real emergency.

3/10/01

10:45 AM: 40F/rain and some blue sky showing. Last night I slept well and was toasty warm. But jeez, I was wearing long johns, flannel shirt, two wool sweaters, Holofil snowsuit, felt liner on foot, and wool cap on head. Then I zipped myself into the down mummy bag supposedly rated to 0F. But I still felt a chill until I threw a blanket over the sleeping bag. It was only 40F, and even with the damp having this much trouble keeping warm seems odd.



The only place I feel safe walking here is on the ten-foot wide strip of beach I cleared for hauling up the boat. With the tide this low I moved a few more rocks I could see for the first time, then decided that with my injury I was being nutso. Arm and shoulder still sore, but the cold water bottle seems to help. I kept it on most of yesterday and again today. Some movements are ok, but some - woof! The worst is reaching out to pick up something. The only time the arm is really comfortable is when it's resting on something. I need to start exercising it today. I don't want to wait even a few days or the muscles will stiffen up and begin to atrophy. There's still too much work to do and I can't afford to lose strength.

Injuries and pain tire me out, and I'm tired of pain in my life. Seems like I've had more than my share - physical and emotional. Or maybe other folks just shrug it off and get on with things. Interesting that I fell on the low tide rocks. Just the other day I wrote how peaceful and safe I feel at low tide and how vulnerable at high tide. Appearances.

6:30 PM: Tide falling. Checked the chart, and this tide is about as high and low as it will be all year. Sea is calm and this would have been a good day to go for propane tanks. I worry that the outboard might be corroding in some vital place and not keep running for long; worry, worry, worry.

What's that sound? Have I heard it before? It's like the wind bringing the roar of distant waterfalls, but not quite. A motor? Ah, the teakettle. Just got it out and am not used to its murmur yet.

I've been cleaning the cabin. Needed to tidy up construction mess for mental and physical well being. Found my carpenter's level which I'd been looking for all week. When something goes missing here it's much more serious than in town where there are stores to buy another one.

I also decided to have a look at the onions, garlic, and potatoes that were still in plastic bags. Good thing since some are starting to rot. I'll hang onions

and garlic tomorrow. So the injury has a positive side. Probably wouldn't have checked them for a couple weeks yet and by then the mould would have been much worse. I still need to look at the meat and cheese.

Fairly mild today. Winter temperatures are supposed to be about ten degrees F colder than now. I'll need to find at least enough wood to have one good fire a week to bathe and do laundry. Haven't bathed since I arrived but don't feel particularly dirty. I happened upon my mirror yesterday and saw myself for the first time since I got here. Grizzled look: shaggy hair and grey beard.

Songs keep running through my head. One repeats over and over, and then another takes its place. For a while it was *Now I walk in Beauty*, the Navajo prayer song, then the silly old pop tune, *Up on the Roof*, and after that the country western, *A Good Hearted Woman in Love with a Good Timing Man*. The last was particularly tedious since those are the only words I know and they may be wrong. Today it's *Deep in December it's Nice to Remember*.

And that's the trick. Somehow in looking back, most any situation seems to have been ok. The challenge is to live that acceptance in the present and not just in memory.

3/11/01

7:00 PM: 62F/glorious day/sunlight and scattered clouds over the mountains/first day it hasn't rained at all. Yet I'm still wearing long johns, two sweaters, a sweatshirt, and vest. Weird. Ah, the dolphins just showed up. God, what a spot this is. I sit here and all these critters come by living their lives. There are kelp beds and shellfish in the large shallow basin out front, so I guess it's a good place to feed.

Cat was just after a bird, but when I said No strongly enough he broke off the chase. Hummingbirds are working the feeder three feet from my head. They're still nervous when I'm sitting here but getting used to me.

Screwed legs on the stove (dreaming of a fire), decided where to put the outhouse, stretched damp clothes out to dry, and hung onions and garlic in the open air. Shoulder sore but feeling better, and I can use the arm some now. Exercise and cold pack are helping. Have started taking multi-vitamins, Vitamin C, potassium, calcium, and iron supplements.

3/12/01

9:45 AM: 45F/glorious morning/blue sky and broken clouds/mountains sharp and clear/flat calm/didn't rain all night, and the humidity seems down. Last night while meditating I opened my eyes to an orange moon glowing through the trees. Her position has changed during the past few days and she is more in the south and easier for me to see. I went carefully out to the rocks and soaked in the quiet beauty of it all.

The only novel I brought from Canada is *Right Ho Jeeves* by P.G. Wodehouse. It's a frivolous story that I've read several times before, but I love the language and can read it over and over. Reading novels is an escape for me and I decided not to bring any others because I've come here in large part to remove myself from the easy escapes human culture so seductively offers. But in Punta Arenas I found a bookstore with a few used books in English, bought several to read in town, and brought the ones I hadn't finished with me here. I've now read *Dolores* by H. G. Wells, *The Perfect Storm* by Sebastian Junger (Don't think bringing that one was such a good idea considering my small boat and the weather. Kind of like taking *Jaws* on a SCUBA vacation.), and am in the middle of *The Family Moskat* by Isaac Singer. How different is their world from my present life.

5:00 PM: Coffee time. I was convinced it never did this here. It's been sunny and warm all day with only a few scattered clouds in an otherwise clear blue sky. The sun inspired me to hook up the solar panels. I built frames to face

north-northeast at 45 degrees from vertical and weighted the bases with heavy rocks to hold them firm in the wind. Eventually, when my shoulder heals, I'll move them to the point and hook up the wind generator there too, but for the moment they're on the rock ridge in front of the cabin. Not sure the sun will reach them here over the trees in winter, but now they get direct sun from morning until 3 p.m. If I cut down a couple trees, they'll get another three hours of sun, but I like the trees and they protect me from the wind.

The rocks continue to do me in. I think I'm being super careful, but I slipped and fell hard again today and re-injured my shoulder. It's very sore. I also took a sponge bath in the sun! As I suspected, I wasn't very dirty. I seldom sweat and there's no dust here. Dolphins dropped by briefly. I wonder how many days in the year will be like this.? For now, this one is enough.

8:50 PM: Mountains are glowing with day's-end light. The sun is gone, but I've hooked up the electrical system and will have light to cook by. So I sit here with no dinner started and watch evening fall. What luxury. Looking out over this quiet evening it's hard to believe the weather I've seen the past five weeks.

3/13/01

10:00 AM: 52F/cloudy/breeze/ocean moving/mountains clear. Not a bad morning at all. Not like yesterday, but decent. Shoulder sore and I have cold water bottle on it. Cat snivelling and I'm not sure what his lament is. He doesn't like black beans and eats only the rice, so I'll mash them together since he needs protein.

Checked solar panel output and it's less than what one small fluorescent light uses. And this is still late summer. By June there will be only eight hours of light from sunrise to set; add maybe one more of twilight. If I'm in bed for nine hours, I'll still need artificial light for seven - if I want to see. I'll plan to use

the laptop only after dark because I won't need to use light then. Need to hook up wind generator soon.

5:30 PM: A mini storm just rolled through. Strong wind, rough water, rain. Solar panels didn't quiver. All the water containers filled up. I jury-rigged a temporary gutter of plastic and duct tape along the back edge of the roof that catches more water and fills a 3-gallon pail in about 15 minutes of steady rain. Organized electrical system this afternoon. The inverters convert 12-volt direct current from the main batteries to 110-volt alternating current to charge the laptop and AA flashlight batteries. The main batteries link directly to the satphone and 12-volt light. Cabin still a huge mess, but I got the door hung and it fits pretty well. Makes the place feel cosier.

The Simon and Garfunkel song, Cloudy, is going through my head bringing memories of New England colleges in the fall. Co-eds, wearing boots and wrapped in scarves, move through swirling evening leaves on their way to rendezvous. There's something mystical about them for me, a sense that they know the secret; not know as knowledge, but in the way they feel. Like they're where they should be, doing what they should be doing; comfortable and confident with themselves in the world.

3/14/01

5:35 PM: Cold/rain/wind. Not feeling well: old, achy, and worn out. Wonder what it is? Maybe now that I've slowed down because of shoulder, the last frantic months are catching up to me. I'm finally cleaning up. Picked up and straightened all the bent nails, and I still have about 350. Most of the building is done except for outhouse, entry porch, steps, and awnings, so if I'm frugal I should have enough. I can also make nails by cutting heavy wire into short pieces. I used the chainsaw to rip two 10 foot 2x2s into 1x2s for shelf frames.

8:45 PM: Just opened cheese and meat. Cheese covered with mould as expected, but it's perfect just inside. The smoked meat is fine, but the bacon has some light mould in places. I think it's not a problem. I often eat salami that is getting pretty odd when I'm camping. Smells ok so I'll scrape it, soak it in brine, and give some to Cat. He had some mouldy cheese and now is crying outside from the smell of smoked meat frying. Potatoes are next.

Time changed pace today and the clock slowed to a crawl. Not the second hand - the minutes are still moving along - but the hour hand. I feel I've been here a long, long time and that a year is forever. Two days ago I marvelled at how fast the weeks had passed. Now, Monday seems to have crept into the past. I suspect this has to do with physical discomfort. Like the weather, these moods come and go. Feeling lonely and missing Patti and Susan.

3/15/01

3:00 PM: 60F/rained earlier, but now sun is glowing through the clouds/breeze/ocean on the move. Damn, writing hurts the shoulder. Washed meat in hot brine and hung it to dry. Cheese is done too. Scraped the mould off. Cat likes scrapings. Only perishables left to deal with are potatoes, and except for a few mouldy ones they're ok. Little by little things are coming together. Five more shelves to put up then I can organize everything.

5:45 PM: This calls for a celebration. Out comes the whiskey. Seems like every day I find something to celebrate. I look forward to my daily belt. Luckily I keep it small and have only gone through about three ounces of the lovely stuff. I also brought one bottle each of Scotch, Brandy, and Drambuie. Just enough for a taste each night. But back to the cause for celebration. I'm sitting beside a fire! It's just a tiny test fire outside, but it is wood burning.

Haven't been out in the boat for a month, and have only moved from this spot once to walk the 100 meters to the point. So I decided to look for firewood. I chopped some twigs and small branches off a dead tree at the point, which my

shoulder didn't like at all. They caught fire easily. Doesn't mean finding firewood won't be a problem, but at least this particular wood does burn. I've been worrying about firewood since I talked to a man in Punta Arenas who used to dive for sea urchins along this coast. He said it never stops raining here, and is so wet that clothes never dry and the wood won't burn. He was wrong on all three counts. It rains a lot but not all day every day, clothes slowly dry, and this wood, at least, burns. How often I get tangled up in anxiety or false hope based on other people's information.

Measured the distance from cabin to point, and the electrical wire I brought should just reach. A second cause for celebration! I'll set up solar panels, wind generator, and batteries down there where the panels will have sunlight all day even in winter. The site is open to the wind so I'll have to really anchor the generator tower. They say there is no wind here in winter, but they may mean no raging wind. Hard to imagine not even a breeze.

The dolphins just came by. One of them leaped out of the water and swam on his back beating the surface with his tail, so it looks like they're still in courtship mode. Or could he have been saying hello to me? I wonder if they know I'm here? I wonder if they know what humans are?

3/16/01

Quarter to four: 53F/spitting rain/breeze/whitecaps/mountains half visible. Got the two small windows in. Hope they don't leak. Shoulder sore but at least it's working. Saw a mosquito in the cabin today and killed it without remorse. I like the door open and lots of bugs come in. One really good thing about having translucent walls is that the blackflies stay against the walls and don't bother me

3/17/01

Morning: 43F/bits of blue here and there and sun trying to shine through/sea moving some. There is a crack in the rock on the far side of the cove, and at mid tide when the sea is working water gurgles and echoes in it. Cranky night with shoulder, but the chill in the air makes the water bottle colder. What a blessing to be pain-free for a while.

Got half the ceiling plastic up yesterday. I knew the job would be a pain, and it is. Working overhead with a sore shoulder in a small work space; trying to keep the heavy plastic stretched tight; holding a tiny staple - one of 1000 or so I need to use - with duct-taped fingers and driving it in with a hammer. Everything went wrong, and for a while I was yelling and cursing - a lunatic perched alone in the middle of nowhere, cussing at a piece of plastic. The peaceful scene shattered by profanity echoing off the rock walls of Staines Peninsula. Decided to quit for the day.

Later as I was getting ready to meditate the physical world was against me. I slipped the water bottle under the six layers of clothes but it refused to stay on my shoulder. Then the blanket I wrap around me fell to the floor, and when I reached for it, the pillow I rest my arm on fell from my lap. When I reached for that the water bottle slipped, and when I re-positioned it the blanket had fallen to the floor again. And of course pain was the steady background. Finally had to stop and laugh. Afterward I went out to see the stars and even the Milky Way was shining.

Afternoon: Yikes what a hailstorm. Stones the size of small marbles. I saw it coming across the water - a wall of opaque white moving in front of the hills - and then it was on me. The ground is turning white and I'm feeling anxious. Hope the porch roof holds. Sometimes I'd rather be in a wooden walled and roofed cabin, but this definitely puts me in close contact with the weather.



3/18/01

2:00 PM: 44F/strong, gusting wind/rain/sun/rain again/ocean in a frenzy. Cat is also in a frenzy: crying and repeatedly coming into the cabin even though he knows he's not allowed. I tossed him out and he came back in. Then I heard strange noises and saw his box shaking. Weird. I hope it's just dreams of adolescent disquiet and not some physical ailment.

Had a look at my frustration and anger; how it affects me inwardly and how I express it toward myself, Cat, and my work. I miss so much and bring so much unhappiness to myself and those around me by being intense and prickly rather than content with the world as we are. Never mind the root causes, it's just a habit to feed the anger and allow it expression the way I do. If I can come out of this year with a softer aspect and more patience, the journey will have been worth it.

Got a bookshelf built and the books put up. I look so intellectual now. Already I scratch my head at some of the titles. Still, who knows where my mind will itch in six months.

7:15 PM: Strong gusting wind, but everything including solar panels seems solid. Dead calm and then wham, the whole cabin vibrates. Glad I built it so solid even though I'm low on nails now. Just finished kitchen shelves. Took much longer than expected and I don't know if I'm worn out and working slowly or it was just a fiddly task. Not feeling well and suspect it's a physical symptom of the anxiety I link to the wind. I'd really like to have a barometer to see if feeling poorly is correlated with barometric pressure. Too bad the one Patti mailed to me didn't arrive in Puerto Natales before I left.

3/19/01

2:30 PM: 53F/cloudy with some blue sky/calm. New birds this afternoon.<sup>20</sup> Straight stubby beak, tail like a robin, charcoal dull black colour. A sort of

electronic beep trill chirp. Hope they come back. Hummingbird is wolfing down honey-water.<sup>21</sup>

Got the transom wheels mounted on the boat, but had to jury-rig them to fit. Saw a rock on the beach that looked like flint, so I brought it up and smacked it with a file. Sparks. Cool. At some point I'll see if I can get a fire going with it. Memories of being 12 years old in the Boy Scouts.

8:00 PM:

Tranquil evening. Fwap, fwap, fwap. Wings beating and feet slapping the glassy water, a scattered flock of diving birds just took off a few at a time. Black backs and white bellies glowing in the evening light. A hawk flew by low down, and two eagles higher up. A seagull circled, calling. Cat tried to stalk it.

Whoa, so much for peace and quiet. All of a sudden the two resident ducks with pale yellow bellies and bright orange bills started to squawk and run across the water.<sup>22</sup> A nutria in hot pursuit chased them for a long way. She'd pop up to gasp for air and then back down to continue the chase below the surface. At one point she came to the low rocks that show at low tide, raced across, then plunged back into the sea. The ducks finally got away, but that animal is a serious predator. Cat better be careful near the water's edge. I wonder if she'd leave the water to come up and rob my bacon? Better keep it hanging up high just in case.

3/20/01

9:45AM: 44F/no wind or rain for the moment, and it is quiet but for the distant murmur of waterfalls. I miss and long for quiet here and hope there will be more still days in winter. The wind often feels oppressive in its almost constant presence. It's a huge Presence in my mind and frequently limits my activities. Impossible to plan boat or kayak trips ahead of time since the wind is

unpredictable and can quickly become ferocious. If this calm holds, I'll fetch the propane tanks and other supplies in a while.

1:40 PM: Excellent! Everything went smoothly. I stretched and exercised shoulders, ate breakfast, and got the emergency kit together: blankets, tarp, warm clothes, food, water, stove, lighter, cook pot, machete, satphone, kayak (since the backup outboard isn't working). Wheels worked fine to get boat down to water, but I haven't tried to haul it back up yet. Day was sunny and glassy calm with no wind at all. Motor was difficult to start as I'm not yet sure how much choke to give it. Nothing had blown away in the big storm. Rather than trying to wrestle the 200-pound propane tanks into the boat, I tied them on and towed them. Got them up into the trees where they will stay until I need them. It's a relief to have them and the other stuff here and to know the motor still runs.

But that's not all! On the beach where I went for the tanks there are three big driftwood logs. May need to dry for a while, but they'll be perfect for firewood. Can't believe I didn't notice them before - unless the storm brought them. I believe this calls for a visit to Diane's whiskey. If it remains calm, I'll go for a load of firewood after lunch.

8:15 PM: Today is one of those times to give thanks. (The practice, of course, is to give thanks - not only after the fact but in the moment - no matter what the circumstance.) A huge day physically, emotionally, psychologically. I discovered the motor still works, and I have all my supplies here, enough propane for the year, and a supply of firewood!

I cut and hauled 20 small rounds of light dry wood that should work well as kindling and 12 large rounds that are solid and heavy, not as dry, and will be more difficult to split. From the butt of the log I cut two big chopping blocks. The tide was very low and it was a nasty job getting the wood to the boat over the slippery rocks, but I wanted to take advantage of the calm day. Wheels worked for hauling the boat up, but it was a grunt. I'm very sore and not sure I'll be

able to sleep tonight or move tomorrow. Took a Tylenol 3. I brought only 50 of them and wish I'd brought 100.

The logs on beach today are the only ones I've seen and I looked pretty carefully when I went to the bay a while back. Coincidence? Synchronicity? Strange that the places the Navy left me and my gear are both so amazing.

It's so still out now I can see stars reflected in the sea. Two of them - large and low over the eastern mountains - twinkle from red to greenish blue.

3/21/01

8:45 AM: Hard to believe days like this can happen here. I think of all the rain and wind these past six weeks, and now this. It's perfectly clear and calm. There's frost on the boat. The mountain crest is a sharp purple line against the pale blue sky. The sun is just showing through the trees and not yet shining on the western face of the mountains. But in the hollow of their shadowed mass, a single golden jewel is shining. I put the glasses on it to see a tiny wisp of cloud caught by a slanting sunray.

Now the sun is piercing from behind and glowing through scattered kelp leaves floating in the basin. A large black moth clings to the white wall of my shelter. To the west, the rock cliffs glow in the golden light, and waterfalls shimmer down to the sea. Further out there is a light wind ruffle, but here the water is glassy calm. Seabirds call their drawn-out foghorn honk, hummingbirds are feeding, cat's asleep, and I'm writing these notes.

Was up before 8, stiff and sore but better after exercising. What to do? I was planning to try fishing across the way and bring in another load of wood, but if the wind doesn't blow up this is a perfect day to cross the east channel and explore an inlet that leads into the mountains. I could use some rest and a treat, but my work ethic grumbles that I should take advantage of the calm to fetch more firewood. For now I'll finish coffee, prepare the boat, and rejoice.

7:30 PM: 44F/flat calm. It's been clear all day, but now there are wisps of cloud over the mountains. Earlier there was a ring around the sun. I crossed to the inlet and followed it for five miles to where it ends near the base of the mountains. Magic. A crystal river pours in which, according to the map, drains a lake a couple miles up. It might be cool to go up river one day in the kayak. At the river mouth there's a large sand flat scattered with driftwood, but it's too far to bring any back. It's the first sandy beach I've seen and it was nice to walk around without worrying about slipping and falling. I also spotted driftwood on the way back, but it's all at least five miles from here. Along the way I saw some pretty places and kept thinking, "I could have built here." But on such a day as this, everywhere is alluring. It's when the storms roll through....

Motor seems to be working fine, but top speed with gear in the boat is only about 11 mph. Part of the problem is that the wheel mountings cause water to splash into the boat and then prevent it from leaving easily which adds weight and drag.

Back here I went west to Staines Peninsula and found three driftwood logs. Cut and brought home 20 medium rounds which need to dry since the log was under water at high tides. Carrying the rounds across the non-slippery gravel beach to the boat was easy. Chest waders already have a leak that needs patching. Chainsaw worked well but is cutting crooked since I pranged the chain on a rock. I'll sharpen it, but it will be hard to correct. I want more dry wood and if weather holds I'll go for another load tomorrow.

Found a delightful beach and stopped to sunbathe. I was wearing long underwear and full raingear, but I sunbathed none the less. Blackflies out in force and I used bug-juice for first time. This morning I put an extra container of gas in the boat - just in case - even though I was sure I wouldn't need it. The main tank ran dry as I was coming home. Having a load of wood seriously increased gas consumption. Glad I'm anal about this "just in case" thing. According to the GPS, I traveled 26.5 miles today.

It felt great to be on the water. Now it feels wonderful to be back here. Looking forward to settling in and reading by the fire. The cabin is a mess and I'm more and more eager for it to be organized and tidy, but if the weather holds that will have to wait.

2:45 AM: I just finished unloading wood. I'd left the boat - still loaded - floating in the cove until high tide so I wouldn't have to carry the rounds so far. A while ago I beached it and - according to plan - started to toss rounds out; then Cat showed up. If one of the rounds had landed on him, no more cat. I yelled at him and he took off. But the only light was from my headlamp and I couldn't see where he was, so I carried the heavier blocks by hand. Once unloaded, I lowered the wheels and dragged the boat up the beach. All went according to plan.

But Maturana (1998) claims that plans don't work: that they prevent spontaneity and lead to tyranny; that what is needed is vision and direction.<sup>23</sup> I agree that micro plans don't work, and perhaps a general plan is really just a version of vision and direction - within which spontaneity can operate. But I'm also becoming clearer that planning ahead continues to be an important aspect of this project.

3/22/01

10:15 AM: 50F/flat calm/high overcast/tide low and coming in. The weather in March has been much better than in February. That was one dog bitch of a month to arrive and set up. Yesterday was first day of Fall and I celebrated by going up the inlet to the mountains and gazing in wonder - even though at the time I didn't remember it was the equinox.

Very interrupted sleep last night, and I'm tired and sore. Both arms and shoulders ache but I'll go for wood anyway.

I wonder.... What am I learning here both for myself and that I can take back to share with others? During my first three-month wilderness retreat in British Columbia 25 years ago, I learned something profound I couldn't put into words. Now, I'm quite good with words but don't feel I'm learning or writing anything new. This journal is evidence: time; weather; descriptions of the land and sea and daily life; but no major shifts in consciousness or perception.

In one sense this is ok, even perfect with me. If beauty and wonder are all there is, if there is no other manifestation of Spirit or God, then so be it. This is more than enough. But I feel I ought to have something to share when I go back. As Patti said before I left, "When listening for your heart song, listen for us as well."

I guess things will work out. Slowly I'm beginning to learn to have faith in the process. The Bob Marley song, Three Little Birds, is drifting through my heart and mind. "Don't worry about a thing, cause every little thing going to be all right." I have no idea how I'll turn this Zen activity of "gathering wood and carrying water" (or in this case, carrying wood and gathering water) into a Ph.D. dissertation. I have books to read, but they are about other people's experiences. How will I synthesize my own daily existence into something of value in terms of a Ph.D.? Faith in the process.

Saw jet contrails for the first time yesterday far away over the mountains, but it didn't seem to affect me. I don't have a sense of super solitude here a hundred miles from the nearest town and far from the world of other people. No sense that boats might be passing on the other side of Staines Peninsula 15 or 20 miles to the west. I'm just here. Of course that might change in a hurry if a boat pulled into sight.

While looking in the woods for a place to build the outhouse I discovered a small world of delicate ferns and mosses. Secret grottos under the trees. I'm

always facing the sea, the mountains, and the sky - the big and the awesome; but I'll turn inward too before long.

Cutting and hauling wood has already been a lot of work and I'll need much more for the year. When I eventually light fires in the stove I'll need to take off layers of clothes. Does this make sense? Why not just keep on the long johns, sweaters, snowsuit, toque, and mitts? It's like Thoreau (1884) noticing that using a horse to plough requires more land to feed the horse and more work to clear the land, etc.

6:30 PM: Looks like it's raining off to the south. Another long productive day. Found a large driftwood log on the eastern side of the island to the north. Tried to fire up chainsaw and starter cord broke. Shit! Happily I was only a mile and a half from here so came back to put in a new cord, then returned to cut a load of wood. Most of it's still in the boat until the tide comes in. Jeez, what a lot of work. I need a holiday. I now have about 70 rounds which might last six to eight weeks depending on how it burns and how often I have a fire.

I was slowly coming back when the dolphins appeared and started playing around the boat. They'd cut underneath, spin and slice back past the bow so close their waves rocked me. Then they'd speed toward shore 40 meters away, skid into a turn against the rock wall and, sometimes three abreast, come roaring back. At the last instant they'd dive to miss me, then turn and swoop back just beneath the bow. I think part of the game was to see how close they could come without actually touching the boat. I got bumped a couple times and could almost hear the others jeering at the clumsy one.<sup>24</sup> Whew. Intense. They are so beautiful. If I hadn't known they were playing it might have been sort of frightening.

2:00 AM: Woke to sounds of ducks calling and running across the water. Sensed the nutria was out there and wondered if it was lurking around attracted by the smell of bacon. Strange to think it's only 11 p.m. in Texas and 9 p.m. in B.C.. Patti is probably reading or meditating, and Susan might be visiting friends



or cleaning up after dinner. I often think as I go to bed about midnight that it's still early evening for them. Being up in the middle of night here is different than in society. Here, once it's dark it's dark; 10 p.m. feels about the same as 3 a.m.

3/23/01

6:45 PM: Blackflies savaged me today. Now I'm on the porch, and while there are lots of them flying against the translucent tarp, none are around me. If I move three feet forward into the opening I'll get bit, but back here I'm left in peace. This is very weird, but I'm thankful. Years ago I discovered that in an open-ended translucent enclosure blackflies and mosquitoes stay near the walls and ceiling.

Fish for dinner! Only four small ones, but plenty. The biggest is nine inches, the smallest seven and a half. Hard to catch because they just nibble lightly at the bait. Went north and found some dry wood and also saw the first sign of humans: a large fishing float and some plastic bags washed in by the storms. I cleaned it up. I fished a kelp bed in front of a beautiful rock wall naturally etched into abstract hieroglyphs and stained red in spots. First time I've tried fishing and did catch dinner, but it took a while.

Hope it rains tonight. What? Did I just say that? Yup. Might drown the blackflies and I could use the water since I didn't collect any today. Who knew there would be a four-day drought? But I've still got water for several days if I'm careful.

10:45 PM: Beautiful night; breeze blowing; ocean lapping the beach. The fish were tasty, but ohhh the bones. Stars are super bright, and I think I'll go bathe in them for a while.

3/24/01

Noon: 55F/cloudy with bits of sun and blue/strong breeze/sea on the move. Lazy day. Checked battery and it's still fully charged. Extended rain gutter. It sprinkled some and I caught a litre or two. I'll use rainwater trapped in rock pools for washing until it rains again. Fish and potatoes for breakfast/lunch. All fried in grease! Yum! Gave Cat the heads and bones. If I get energized I may clear a path to where I'll build an outhouse. Feels good to stay here today. I was out in the boat for only four days but it felt much longer.

5:45 PM: Been breezy all day/sea fairly rough/sky partly cloudy. This is great. I'm looking out my 3 x 4 foot Plexiglas window and the world comes straight in. Now I won't be able to hide from the enormity of the cosmos - unless I put up curtains. Hmm. Maybe curtains aren't primarily to prevent others from looking in, but to allow those inside to not see out. Place is a disaster: clothes, dirty dishes, trash, tools, and wood shavings everywhere. Arghh!

03/25/01

10:45 AM: 51F/overcast/breeze/ocean moving, especially in the west channel. Happy day, it's raining! Who would have guessed I'd be saying that here? Am I losing my mind? Actually, it's only sprinkling but the sound of water falling into the rain bucket has changed from striking bare plastic to splashing into water. So there's at least enough for coffee and porridge. Silly me; I still have at least five gallons in reserve.

On previous solitary retreats, concerns about my safety or place in the world have troubled me. This time, with increased age, I thought I'd have to deal with physical deterioration and disease, but I didn't expect this constant pain. Of course the shoulder stuff may be nothing compared to tooth pain if I start to have problems there.

Noon: This "Worry Mind" is sure fucking powerful. What if? Because it's so cold and humid here I actually need very little water. During the first week I just kept the large cook pot full of water I collected from a small area of the tarp over the tent. Now I have enough water in reserve to last ten days and a catchment system that collects water from half the cabin roof. Yet I run scenarios in my mind about what if the sea remains too rough to take the boat to the nearest creek, maybe I should use part seawater to cook my porridge, and should I boil the water I might need to use from the rock pools.

This is loony. Basic survival requires a competent ego, but it has usurped control and is no longer a servant/friend of my whole being - which includes spirit, intuition, and love, and finds joy and peace in surrendering into the flow of existence. The ego wants to dominate, and in order to justify its overbearing presence, creates illusory problems to solve.

8:00 PM: Twilight/sea has calmed but is still moving in a light breeze/tide coming in/mountains hidden in cloud. Kingfisher sounding from the island 200 yards to the south. It's been a lonesome day on and off. Not only do I miss Patti and Susan, but I miss having the ability to live with anyone in a harmonious way. Cat just jumped up for some loving. I'm getting pretty attached and wonder what I'll do with him when I leave.

The water worry inspired me to hook up a real rain gutter. Nothing like a five-day drought to focus the attention. First I criticize the ego's insurrection, then let it do what it wants. All in a day's activity.

3/26/01

8:45 AM: 46F/blue sky with clouds/tops of mountains hidden/calm. I need to make a couple small opening windows for ventilation. The cabin is so vapour tight that unless I open the door, the windows fog up when I cook and I can't see out. Blackflies still inactive, but I imagine they'll be fierce later if the wind

doesn't blow. I hope here is like Canada and the flies only nasty for about three weeks in fall and spring.

Midnight thought: Pain and suffering result from holding on physically, psychologically, emotionally, and spiritually. There are many ways to do this and many ways to talk about it, but the basic difference is between holding tight and being open and loose. Doubt, hate, certainty are ways of holding tight. Faith, love, questioning are open and loose. The trick is to stay open without clinging to the looseness. Yet aimless drifting may bring suffering too.

I'm trying to live one day at a time. I wake up stiff and sore, and feel I'll be stiff and sore forever. One of my challenges is to learn to meet physical pain with openness, patience, and compassion, rather than with fear, frustration and anger.

Noon: 57F/sea calming/high light clouds/mountains clear. Continues to be a lovely day. Bedding hanging out to air for first time since I arrived. I changed mountings on boat wheels and hope water doesn't splash into boat now. Cat dozing in the sun. Ducks are out front. I'm glad to have them for neighbours and hope they stay all winter.

7:30 PM: Rain and wind, but not a real storm so far. Collecting water. Lazed in the sun this afternoon. Just enough breeze to keep the blackflies away. Took off leg and boot. This is the first time it's felt like summer even though it's fall. But the day was too perfect for working to laze for long, so I decided to stretch electrical wire to the point. Ran the wire through the dense brush just above the beach and tied it to a tree every 15 feet or so. Amazingly, I brought just enough to reach. Cleared a spot for the solar panels in a small hollow somewhat protected from the wind, and figured out where and how to erect the wind generator. Tired and sore, and it's taking longer and longer to do each job.

12:20 AM: It's sure nice to have light to read by, but a while ago I turned it off to save the juice and went out to the low tide beach. Clear, clear sky

washed clean by rain. So many stars. Dolphins came by but I couldn't see them; only hear them breathing.

3/27/01

11:00 AM: Wet/grey/windy/cold. So much for summer. Ocean up in arms. Arms up in shoulders; both are sore and achy. When I leave here perhaps I'll head far north to the desert where it's hot and dry to soak in the sun. In the meantime I think I'll make a second cold water bottle from boat patching material and Shoe Goo.

A condor just flew over low and I had time to put the glasses on it. I've never seen one close before. Long splayed wing tips and white head. He hovered against the wind and then hooked a wing and was gone. A rainbow built itself against the western cliffs. Sun shone on a patch of sea accentuating the rolling swells and roaring whitecaps.

Late afternoon: Broken sky of grey and blue/wind and rain have passed/sea settling down. A beautiful gull is swooping to steal the catch from three diving birds. All are stark contrasts in black and white. What can it mean? Why did the scene seem peaceful when the ducks were diving for fish to kill, but has lost that tranquil quality now that the gull is after them? Identification perhaps; I don't much identify with fish, but do with the diving birds. Or perhaps because I can't see the underwater mayhem; out of sight out of mind.

There's a longing and loneliness on me today. Still, it's not so different from the ache of eating alone in a city restaurant. What I really want is a double scoop ice cream cone - chocolate and pistachio. Ah, a hummingbird just flew so close to my face I could feel the breeze from his wings. Maybe he saw his reflection in my glasses.

8:40 PM: Today for the first time I ate from the wooden bowl Anne gave me as a going away gift: golly, I must be either a hippie or groovy spiritual

seeker. And I must be getting skinny. I've started using two thick stump socks instead of one thin one, and all my ribs are sticking out. The fat has melted off out here. I've lost probably 20 pounds. I'm eating plenty, but with the work and cold I guess I'm burning a lot of calories.

3/28/01

10:20 AM: 50F/wind getting down to business/sea ripping and roaring. I'd thought perhaps the wind had gone until next spring, but I guess not. Slept long and pretty well last night from 11:30 until 5:30 a.m. Woke with sore shoulders. Jeez, I sound like a broken record. Exercised, put cold water bottle on shoulder, and slept again till 10. Trees are shedding, leaves blowing, and some are turning color. Wonder how intense the colour change will be. I'll know within month or two.

6:20 PM: Storm has passed for now and sea is calming. Hard to believe I've been here almost two months and I'm still getting organized. My shoulder has slowed me down, and once I moved into the cabin I lost some urgency. But now it's time to get it done. After organizing food, I need to set up stove, solar panels, and wind generator. I also need to hook up water barrel and propane light, design a better system to haul up boat, build outhouse, entry porch, steps, and awnings, and get more firewood. Then, before I know it, it will be time to tear everything down which will be a huge sad job.

Good news! I brought 13, not seven, bars of chocolate. Since I've been in Chile I've drunk only instant coffee, but I have seven pounds of real stuff with me for that first morning cup. I have about 200 potatoes which is a couple of meals a week for six months if they last. Only a few are spoiled but some are starting to sprout, so I need to collect some moss to store them in. I've measured the oatmeal and rice and there sure won't be any extra. I hadn't figured that Cat

would eat 20-25% of what I eat. I also expected to catch fish regularly, but often the sea is too rough.

3/29/01

10:15 AM: 50F/grey and rainy/mountains hidden/breeze/sea neither calm nor rough. Just another day. Now I remember ... it's been like this most of the time I've been here - except that magical spell when there were some blue skies and calm days. Slept well again and after two nights of good sleep and two days of not too heavy work I feel better. How immediate and intense life can be: get up, deal with pain, drink coffee, cook and eat, write in journal, read, listen to rain on the roof, watch the tide come in and slip away, watch the ducks and hummingbirds, exercise, meditate, dream, shit, grumble.

6:00 PM: Been sorting and measuring food: dividing all items into four portions - one for each three-month period. I expect to have food left over, but since I can't count on being picked up just when I've been here a year, I'm setting aside a reserve to last an extra month. I have no scale so I'm dividing the bulk items by volume. Food consumption looks pretty good and the only thing I need to cut back on is oatmeal. Finally getting the place organized and tomorrow should see it mostly done.

I was folding up the sacks I've had the food stored in since Punta Arenas and got hit by a wave of longing. This feels like an ending rather than a beginning. So much has happened: getting to know Punta Arenas and finding what I needed to buy; packing all the gear and supplies; finding transport to Puerto Natales and then to here; having my food on a beach a mile from here during 10 days of rain, wind, and high tides; looking at the bay where I originally intended to settle, and deciding to stay here; building; boat flipping; injury; beauty.

Waves of loneliness and longing have swept over me all day, keeping company with the cat's-paws on the water. For what? For whom? Susan, Patti, family,

Sapeye Lake and rainbow trout, Baja California and amberjack, sun and warmth? Perhaps the essence of longing is an awareness of the absence of people and places that have been important in my life. A remembering of the wonder I've been blessed to experience. I imagine I'll long for here too some day: grey skies; whitecaps on the water; hummingbirds at the feeder; Cat on my lap; heart in my chest - lub dub. It is enough

3/30/01

9:15 AM: 53F/cloudy/sea restless but not rough/no wind/mid-tide and coming in. I wasn't in mood to exercise shoulder last night so I let it go, but the way I feel now may put me in the mood next time I'm not. I'm going to start wearing a copper bracelet that might help the arthritic aching in my hands.

I'll write the I'm ok email today and leave it in queue to be sure everything is working. There's one spot twelve feet from the cabin where I can link to a satellite which lets me use the satphone and laptop inside cabin where it's dry. This is very cool. There must be just a small hole in the trees, because if I move the antenna 18 inches in any direction the reception fades.

5:00 PM: What a mess on the table! Been measuring and labelling food again today. Milk, pudding, chocolate, spices, etc. Each item has a month written on it. From past experience, I know I can go around and around trying to remember how much I can use each week. Things like powdered milk come in large cans, so I've calculated that a small can needs to last ten days. If I die here, folks will probably think, "Wow, very organized, too bad he died of a stroke, or drowned, or...."

The sea has calmed, yet anxiety is still on me. I feel myself tighten against it, but know that only by surrendering to my own suffering and death will the clenching fear dissolve; only by letting the world come in and by flowing out to meet it. Of the teachings I've heard from meditation instructor Jack Kornfield



the need to acknowledge and accept anxiety has been most helpful. It is not My anxiety. Anxiety is part of our human condition and we need to learn to treat it as an old friend - or least a familiar acquaintance. Advice from most sources says to do something to avoid anxiety, but in this endless activity much of our experience - joyful and painful - is lost. A hard bargain.

3/31/01

8:45 AM: 41F/breeze from the east-southeast/sea fairly calm with a swell coming straight onto the beach/mountains veiled in broken cloud - peaks peaking through. I awoke to the sound of no rain and feel pretty good. How strongly the weather affects my mood. If the rain holds off, I will gather moss and set the chimney in place. Tomorrow is April 1 (equivalent of October 1 in the North) and it's time to hook up the stove. I want to move the solar panels to the point and hope it will be calm day after tomorrow. Uh huh. Order it up!

1:30 PM: Time for breakfast/lunch. My staple meal is rice and lentils, black beans, pinto beans, or peas flavoured with tomato paste, onion, garlic, bacon, spices. I also have 20 kg of pasta, plenty of bouillon cubes to make soup, and 20 kg of flour to make fry bread once a week.

It's been a productive day so far. Hooked up propane light, built a satphone antenna tower, collected a sack of sphagnum moss and it's drying in the sun. Not sure how damp it should be for storing potatoes, but for sure not as wet as it is. Ring around the sun so it might rain again soon, but for now the air feels light.

7:45 PM: High layer of cloud; but no rain all day/sea still running toward me from the southeast. Got the chimney up and in through the cabin wall. Had to climb on roof to brace the pipe. That back corner is muddy, un-level, hardest to get to, and riskiest to work on. Still need to hook stove up but the tough job is done. Propane light works fine, but is noisier than expected. Ripped some 2 x 4s into 1 x 2s with the chainsaw and now have wood to work with. I need a

load of gravel. The soil here - a tangled mat of fine roots - holds a huge amount of water and turns into an incredible mud hole as soon as it's disturbed. Shoulder is, of course, sore. Next big job is outhouse. Will be nice to shit in comfort sitting out of the rain. Saw two nutria a while ago. First time I've seen two together, so perhaps it's mating time. If I hadn't looked just then, I'd have missed them. Wonder if they come by everyday and I just don't happen to look when they pass.

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<sup>17</sup> Patti sent this to me just before I left Vancouver for Chile. It still brings tears to my eyes.

<sup>18</sup> After investigating different options, I decided to purchase a second hand Thrane & Thrane Capsat Mobile Telephone. The Capsat is a mobile Inmarsat Mini-M terminal with telephone as well as email capability. This unit, about the size of a laptop computer, is much more expensive, larger, and less portable than the alternative, Globalstar hand-held telephone. However, my priority was reliability. At the time I was preparing for my journey, I was told that Globalstar was in financial difficulty and might not remain in business. It would have been a major drag if their system had ceased to function and left me without the capacity to communicate - both to send out the monthly Check in email and in case of emergency.

Inmarsat's primary satellite constellation consists of four Inmarsat I-3 satellites in geostationary orbit. Between them, the main "global" beams of the satellites provide overlapping coverage of the whole surface of the Earth apart from the poles. A geostationary satellite follows a circular orbit in the plane of the Equator at a height of 35,600km, so that it appears to hover over a chosen point on the Earth's surface. Other mobile satellite systems [e.g. Globalstar] use larger numbers of satellites in lower, non-geostationary orbits. (Paragraph excerpted from Inmarsat's website. [http://about.inmarsat.com/satellites.aspx?top\\_level\\_id=3](http://about.inmarsat.com/satellites.aspx?top_level_id=3))

The two satellites available to me in southern Chile are the Atlantic Ocean Region West (AORW) located above Brazil, and the Atlantic Ocean Region East (AORE), located above the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of Africa). I found my most reliable connection by orienting the antenna to point slightly east of true north at an elevation of 35-40 degrees above the horizon and linking with AORW.

<sup>19</sup> Before going into solitude, I set up a code system with my friends, family, academic committee, CONAF, and the Chilean Navy. The default is code green. That indicates all is ok and that I will email on the 1<sup>st</sup> of each month. If they didn't hear from me by the 3<sup>rd</sup> of the month, they would come looking for me. For a rough list of the number of emails I sent and the subject they referred to, please see Appendix 2.

If I felt myself to be at risk – either because of injury, sickness, or because I was going on an extended over night trip away from camp in the boat - I would send a code yellow email and explain the circumstances which warranted it. I would also specify a date by which I would email again. If they didn't hear from me on the specified day, they would come looking for me. If I was going on a trip, I would indicate my proposed route and destination.

If I felt my life was immediately at risk due to serious injury or illness, I would send a code red email describing my condition and specifying the time I would send the next message. If they did

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not receive word from me at the stated time, they would come to rescue me - or retrieve my corpse.

The regular 1<sup>st</sup> of the month email was more for peace of mind than anything else. If I were to have a serious accident and not be able to send out a message, chances are I wouldn't survive until they realized I wasn't sending the check in message.

<sup>20</sup> Blackish Cinclodes: *Cinclodes antarcticus* (?).

<sup>21</sup> I have since learned that giving honey-water to hummingbirds is not at all good for them.

<sup>22</sup> Flightless Steamer-duck: *Tachyeres pteneres*.

<sup>23</sup> This is how I understand what Maturana said at the Cybernetics Conference I attended in Santa Cruz, California.

<sup>24</sup> When I project thoughts, emotions, or intentionality onto the world around me, I do so in a self-reflexive way, often with tongue in cheek. I'm not claiming that such projections are accurate and that I can actually know what animals - or the wind - think or feel, but in solitude the visceral experience can be intense and magical - at times terrifying. And, if I cannot logically claim to know the thoughts or feelings of animals, neither can I dismiss such intuitive identification. I simply don't know. In any case, the rational mind is only one aspect of our being, and personalizing animals and elemental forces seems to happen naturally in solitude.

## **Interlude 2**

### **Ruminations on Methodology**

**The intuitive mind is a sacred gift and the rational mind is a faithful servant.  
We have created a society that honours the servant and has forgotten the gift.  
(Einstein, 1972)**

**Theory is good, but it doesn't prevent something from existing.  
(Charcot, 1966)**

I see my research as a process of transformation that opens me more directly to the mysterious unknown rather than encloses me in a conceptual fortress of theories and facts. Thus, instead of going into the wilderness with a set of structured research questions grounded in theory, my intent was to go with an open mind to see what would happen. I was not, however, a *tabula rasa*, but had lived for more than 50 years in Western Culture and in various subcultures, and so carried a battery of ideas, beliefs, expectations, desires, fears, and doubts, which often tended to hold the flowing present moment at bay.

Still, my basic intention was to go as a radical empiricist willing to experience and value whatever mundane or unusual physical, emotional, psychological or spiritual experiences I should have. Carrel (1935) points out that any schema we accept of what a human being is or should be will narrow our conception and not be a full representation. He argues that even very rare experiences should not be disregarded, but accepted as part of our human potential. We are the sum of all observations made using a broad spectrum of methodologies. When we refuse to acknowledge certain aspects of our lived experience simply because we cannot make sense of them, we impoverish our world.

The journal includes explorations into the meaning of my experiences, and embedded in those internal dialogues is an implicit questioning of the “so what;” what does this work offer to others? I don't know. I can only trust that some of the wonder, joy, and insight I've found in solitude has found its way into the words. Some readers might recognise themselves in the journal and feel a sense of companionship; others

might find my decision to spend a year alone nearly incomprehensible but still want to hear about such an alien way of living. My primary intent is not to categorize, analyze, or theorize about my experience in wilderness solitude, but to evoke it (Ratcliff, 2004) as fully as I am able and to expand the space of our living together.

As my research approach has become more immediately self-reflexive, the project has come to embrace more than the fieldwork of living a year in solitude. That phase remains the focus, but the logistic preparations and the current phase of writing have also been opportunities to develop mindful awareness.<sup>25</sup> This moment, as I sit writing this sentence, becomes part of my exploration of education as spiritual practice (or spiritual practice in the context of education). The move into circular, self-reflexivity happened while I was writing my qualifying exam essay, *A Pathless Land*. I began to use writing the essay as an example of what I was writing about. In doing so, I sensed something open in me, felt a surge of energy and excitement, and thought, “Yes, this is it! This is what I’ve been looking for. This is the most direct way to bring my own life into my academic process.”

### **Spiritual Practice**

Before discussing methodology further, I want to locate myself with respect to spiritual growth. Although I have practiced meditation for years and have devoted much effort to inner work, I consider myself a beginner in developing moment by moment, non-judgmental awareness and acceptance of living in all its ambiguous, mysterious Suchness;<sup>26</sup> in surrendering myself to impermanence and death as integral aspects of Life; in experiencing my living as a sacred manifestation of the Oneness of all beings.

I’m not sure the term *spiritual* is very useful if thought of as something special and apart from ordinary life.<sup>27</sup> The journey may be no more than becoming a mature human being. One of my own - and my culture’s - immediate tasks is to acknowledge and integrate our shadowed side and heal the rifts between mind and body, self and other (Jung, 1959; Wilber, 1979). It is seductive to project an abstract idea of Spirit out into the ether and seek salvation in our own imagination, but this is as misguided and deadening as is denying the existence of Spirit altogether. Barbour (1990) discusses two

aspects of spirit - immanence and transcendence - and shows that different spiritual traditions tend to focus on one or the other. Western religions tend to lean strongly toward the transcendent and there is now hunger to redress this imbalance.<sup>28</sup> We are beginning to rediscover Spirit in the physical here and now; in our flesh - even perhaps as our flesh.

Some spiritual systems categorize stages of development in great detail. I am too pragmatic to be very attracted to abstract discussions of theology. What fascinates and beckons is direct experience, insight into, and understanding of the mind/body process as lived here and now. Of particular and intense interest is the experiential shift from feeling alienated from an essentially static and lifeless existence to a sense of belonging in a world that is vibrantly *Alive*.

### **The Practice of Mindfulness<sup>29</sup>**

Varela et al. (1991) extend the work of Merleau Ponty and argue that it is important to study cognition not only from the perspective of an external observer, but also from the perspective of lived experience. In *The View From Within: first-person approaches to the study of consciousness*, Varela and Schear (1999) discuss three methodological approaches in Western and Eastern traditions, and claim the Buddhist practice of mindfulness meditation is an efficient means to directly explore our own mind/body experience.

The practice of mindfulness is not limited to the meditation cushion; as mindfulness develops it carries over to everyday life. The practice is not esoteric or about intellectual speculation. Very simply, it is intended to focus the mind and reduce the distractions that prevent clear and direct observation of what is happening in the moment: bodily sensations, emotions, feelings of pleasantness or unpleasantness, restlessness, sleepiness, doubt, the sense of volition or intention to action, the process of thinking.

Merely pay attention to the breath. No need to make adjustments. Breathe in and notice the breath, breathe out and notice the breath. Notice the shallow breaths and the deep breaths, just as they are. Notice the still moment between the in-breath and the out-breath. Almost immediately we realize how seldom we are actually present to ourselves

and our environment. Watch a breath, watch a second breath, watch the beginning of a third and fwoop the mind is gone. We are not even aware we were gone until we wake up seconds or long minutes later and realize we have been lost somewhere in planning or remembering, fantasy or analytical thought.

Use this simple, but definitely not easy, practice to steady the mind and pay close attention to the here and now and all else will follow naturally. Teachers can be important in guiding us over the rough patches and in suggesting avenues for exploration, but our truth is discovered in our own actual, embodied existence in this moment, and this, and this.

When we pay attention to the arising of thoughts and bodily sensations, we may gain insight into the relationship between them. So many questions. Does language constrain experience? Must I live in language? Does cultural and personal history condition my life? How solid are my opinions and the stories I tell about who I am and how the world works? Is the way I conceptualize the world inherent to that external world or is it my own reified and projected invention? What lies within or behind these conceptualizations? Is there an I? Am I separate from the world? All of these questions arise and dissolve in the mind/body flow, and intellectual speculation does not provide the answers we long for.

### **Meditation and Solitude**

There is similarity between mindfulness meditation and solitude. When sitting with eyes closed in silent meditation, even in a group, you are alone. Meditation is the conscious intent to steady the mind in the present to notice whatever arises in a non-judgmental way. Sometimes restlessness prevails; sometimes there is peace; sometimes insight. The goal is not to cultivate any particular experience, but to develop equanimity to be with whatever arises; to begin to de-condition the habitual attachment to pleasant experience and avoidance of unpleasant experience.

For me, this tends to happen naturally in solitude. Daily I wake up to myself, live with myself, go to sleep with myself. In the absence of linguistic input, the mind begins to settle and clear and I am carried into more intense awareness of emotions and bodily

feelings. Awareness of transience and death<sup>30</sup> becomes more immediate in the wilderness. During group meditation I have never been confronted with existential angst and the immediacy of my own physical death as intensely as I have been forced to face this terror in the wilderness. And there is the risk of panic. In a controlled meditation setting, a teacher can guide students through personal difficulties, but in solitude I must face my fear alone.

Meditation and solitude fit well together. Meditation is a powerful means to stabilize the psychological fluctuations that can develop in the absence of a social matrix. Because maintaining mindfulness in a social setting is difficult, solitude can be a powerful spiritual tool. There are few distractions and my mind naturally slows and deepens even without strong self-discipline. It can be left to freely range until, like a wild animal in a large cage, it ceases to restlessly pace and settles into stillness.

I am interested not only in the workings of my mind, but also in transforming my lived relationship with the non-human world. In solitude I am released from being so immediately tangled in the intricate social web and free to explore other levels of existence. I have the opportunity to relax and experience myself as part of the rhythms of nature.

One challenging aspect of using mindfulness and solitude as method is the question of who is doing the exploring and who is being explored. As far as I can tell, these nodes of experience never hold still. In waiting and listening for insight into the nature of the mind/body process, the mind/body process changes. Very odd. Neither the viewing scope nor what's under the scope hold still.

### **Mindfulness and Postmodernism**

Positivist researchers who argue for naive realism claim to objectively study the Real World and assume their perceptual experience (often modified through the use of instruments) to be identical with that Real World (Maturana and Varela, 1987; Ratcliff, 2004; Wilber, 1995). Hypotheses about how that Real World works are to be proven true or false. Critical Theory and Constructivism both argue that the experience of our senses does not mirror a pre-given Real World, but is a construction. The primary goal of these



research orientations is to elucidate the social, psychological, and biological processes by which these constructions arise, and so to liberate us from the illusion of certainty. Both agree that insight into the constructed nature of what has been reified into concrete social and psychological reality is the key to freedom and change (Charmaz, 2000; Ellis, 2004; Ellis and Bochner, 2000; Richardson, 2000a; Wilber, 1995).

There are differences between Critical theory and Constructivism. Critical theory focuses on social power relationships that create and maintain structures detrimental to various disenfranchised subgroups defined primarily by race, gender, economic status or belief/behavioural patterns. Social reality, while originally constructed, has become entrenched and for practical purposes is now solid and Real. The goal of research is to increase awareness of manipulation by those in power and to facilitate political/economic resistance to such manipulation. I take constructivism to focus primarily on the internal condition of self-oppression by our own internal processes; by the stories we tell ourselves about our lives. The goal is personal insight into and freedom from previously unconscious conceptions that limit who we are and cause us to suffer. In this, constructivism seems to closely parallel mindfulness practice.

These two research orientations differ in their foci of concern and in their analysis of the underlying causes of suffering. Each orientation is grounded in a particular political, social, or spiritual matrix of beliefs and assumptions, and may defend that ground as exempt from questioning (Wilber, 1995). Marxist theory begins with the assumption that classes are real and distinct. The primary cause of suffering is exploitation of one class by another. Feminism may assume not only that men and women have historically been and remain in deep conflict, but also that the apparent inequality of social roles reflects relations of absolute inequality. The domination of women by men is seen as the central cause of suffering. Constructivist research seeks psychological rather than social or political solutions to suffering. Since reality is personally and collectively constructed, the focus is on re-learning new patterns of thinking and perception.

While both these theoretical perspectives assume the existence of a real self, Buddhism assumes selflessness, and attributes suffering to the internal process of creating

and clinging to the illusory self; existence as a separate entity is seen as the fundamental source of suffering.<sup>31</sup>

Another apparent difference between the approaches of critical theory and constructivism and that of meditation practice is the method of exploration. The former use analytical thinking to critically examine usually accepted assumptions and so develop insight into the psychosocial processes at work. Meditation explores not only these processes, but the dynamic qualities of knowing and consciousness as well. Within a still mind, there arise insights into political and economic injustice that require redress, but there is also awareness of deeper causes of suffering and a more immediate possibility of spiritual release.

In postmodern discourse, self-reflexivity suggests the same thing as mindfulness. Both terms refer to developing awareness and understanding of mind/body and cultural processes - particularly those aspects that result in the sense of a solid self. Both approaches involve de-centering or dis-identifying; learning to see our many selves as a dynamic vortex of relationships that develops within a matrix of physical, cultural and spiritual conditions. Mindfulness practice and self-reflexivity *may* be profoundly different as well. Meditation is not an intellectual activity grounded in thinking. The source of understanding is insight arising from a still mind rather than from discursive analysis.

The social science approach usually is to train the mind to think logically and to systematically explore the world.<sup>32</sup> In meditation, constant thinking is seen as a symptom of an undisciplined mind. In the extreme case, Krishnamurti (1968) claims that the thinking mind is completely self-enclosed and can never come into contact with anything beyond itself. In discussing the reasoning mind, Jardine writes:

We live, it seems, in a world of our own making that has ourselves as the center. With this last move, the phenomenal world (i.e., the world en-formed by Reason) becomes self-enclosed and self-referential.  
(Jardine, 1998, p. 111)

While thinking is a natural part of the mind/body process that needs to be respected and utilized, care must be taken to not become caught in the thoughts generated and so

lose awareness of the thinking process itself.

It may be a matter of individual difference, but I don't really *get* something until I experience the *Aha!* of holistic insight. Thinking can prepare the soil and also examine the insight to see if it makes sense within my existing worldview, but deep understanding eludes me without the experiential flash.<sup>33</sup>

### **Narrative Explanation**

In shifting from a quantitative to a qualitative research approach it is important to recognise that there are two (at least) fundamentally different ways of explaining events we experience (Ellis, 2004; Polkinghorn, 1988; Richardson, 1997). Logico-mathematical reasoning is the foundation for quantitative explanation. An event is thought to be understood when it can be described as belonging to a category of cause and effect relationships. It is defined as a particular instance of a more general law that holds irrespective of time and location. Thus a stone falls on my foot because it has mass and all mass is subject to the pull of gravity. I can accurately predict this will happen each and every time a stone is released directly over my foot.

In the life sciences, categories become fuzzy because no two instances are ever completely identical. Statistical analysis is necessary to describe tendencies to behave in certain ways. This is particularly so in complex sciences such as ecology and psychology. The more variables involved in the system under examination, the less likely it is that accurate prediction will be possible. In an effort to manage this uncertainty, experimental studies often create artificially simple contexts into which only a limited number of variables are allowed access. Such studies can be criticised to the degree that the artificial context no longer resembles external circumstances, and they are unsatisfying because they say little about the world in which we actually live.

Narrative description is an alternate means of explanation (Bochner, 2001). A particular situation is studied and a detailed story is told about the events leading to the situation in question. Meaning is derived by placing the situation within a historical context that includes the intentions and goals of the individuals involved (Bochner, 2001). Thus, if someone wants me to explain gravity to them but I am engaged in writing

this paragraph on different kinds of explanation, and if to attract my attention they decide to drop a rock on my foot, I am apt to find this second explanation of the pain more adequate to my lived experience than a statement that all mass is subject to gravity, this chunk of granite has mass, therefore. ...

Narratives are open to multiple meanings and celebrate the complexity and ambiguity of life (Ellis and Bochner, 2000). While a narrative explanation may be richer and more relevant to the particular situation under observation, it is difficult to locate this instance within a larger class of similar instances. It can be criticized as having no general relevance to anything else. It tells me why a particular rock landed on my foot, but nothing about the trajectory of rocks in general.

It is important to clearly recognize these distinct ways of knowing/explaining the world. Qualitative research often tends to be compared unfavourably with quantitative research as though the former were just a sloppy instance of the latter; as though categorization is still the goal, but vague descriptive words have been substituted for precise numbers. But this is not the case. They do not merely show different degrees of rigor, but are based in different modes of explanation.

There is a trade-off here. It is not that one style of knowing and explanation is good and the other bad, but rather that they complement each other. In human life an event is not considered senseless because it cannot be placed in a proper category or because it is seen to break a universal law, but because we cannot fit it into the plot of the story we tell about our lives. If I am asked why I did something, my answer is usually in the form of narrative rather than categorical. However, it is important to balance these modes of explanation in our lives in order to maintain perspective and to place our immediate experience in a broader context.

### **Autoethnography**

Autoethnography follows naturally from the insight that “everything that is said is said by an observer” (Maturana, 1978). The research is expressly presented as the personal narrative of the researcher. There is no covert assumption that the author speaks with the disembodied “voice of authority” (Ellis, 2004; Richardson, 2000b). It is accepted

that another observer would not necessarily experience and interpret events in the same way, or even frame the same activities in the ongoing flow of life as important “events” to be interpreted. Emotional impact is welcomed and described as a vital aspect of any experience. In writing, the author speaks from his or her heart and mind directly to the heart and mind of the reader. The primary intention is to evoke resonance in the reader through first person narrative rather than to provide objective description and analysis.<sup>34</sup>

Before going into solitude, I participated in an autoethnography workshop led by Carolyn Ellis.<sup>35</sup> While I was exposed to some new ideas there, the experience was even more valuable because in some important ways it clarified and validated the direction I’d been moving on my own. The orientation to exploration and to writing that has naturally developed in my own work is very similar to autoethnography. The method is open-ended rather than formal. Pay attention to what is happening and figure out what you need to do to explore, live, and describe the situation.

But my research is perhaps not precisely autoethnographic in light of Ellis’s definition that “Autoethnography refers to writing about the personal and its relationship to culture. It is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness” (Ellis, 2004). The primary focus of my research is my self in relationship with the non-human world rather than with culture. In some sense it is impossible for a human to leave the cultural matrix, and seeking solitude is a cultural phenomenon, but my emphasis is on the auto rather than the ethnographic.

## **Analysis**

Not only did I work to remain mindful in the present moment, but I also struggled to make sense of the flow of my experience. The search for understanding often relied more on intuitive insights than on logical progression of thought, but there were threads of insight that wound through the year - often disappearing for a time only to re-emerge into consciousness - and seemed to deepen and clarify over time. Some threads remained tangled and frayed, but I have included them nonetheless as part of the experience.

The spirit, if not the formal techniques, of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2000) permeated my year in solitude and the resulting journal. While I took some of the

theories I used to contextualize my experience into solitude with me - Buddhist psychology and Wilber's Integral Model for example<sup>36</sup> - I also developed and modified explanatory ideas in response to my living and reading. But I seldom accepted any of the theories as more than useful likely stories for very long, and over and over abandoned them as internally inconsistent and not successfully explaining the mysterious "Suchness" of my lived experience.

### **A Hybrid Cross**

My methodology is a hybrid cross of meditation retreat and lived-experience research in wilderness solitude: mindful observation layered with analytic introspection and the recording of my observations and ruminations in a daily journal. I do not attempt to "prove" anything or to describe the effects of solitude in an abstract, general, or objective way. Yet the journal is as honest as I know how to make it. In its original form, it most often flowed naturally from deep inner places. While it has been edited for length and readability, I have not intentionally biased or censored the original writing.

Exploring lived experience from a personal perspective is vulnerable to criticism. It may be seen as subjective and self-absorbed.<sup>37</sup> Yet self-knowledge is vital to our understanding of the world and our place in it. I do not separate myself as researcher from myself as subject, and my intention is personal transformation. Wilber (1995) points out that inner development is a process of decentering away from seeing the self as all important and this leads to broader awareness and deeper connectedness with others. Mary Oliver writes:

#### **The Journey**

One day you finally knew  
 what you had to do, and began,  
 though the voices around you  
 kept shouting  
 their bad advice -  
 though the whole house  
 began to tremble  
 and you felt the old tug  
 at your ankles.  
 "Mend my life!"

each voice cried.  
 But you didn't stop.  
 You knew what you had to do,  
 though the wind pried  
 with its stiff fingers  
 at the very foundations -  
 though their melancholy  
 was terrible.  
 It was already late  
 enough, and a wild night,  
 and the road full of fallen  
 branches and stones.  
 But little by little,  
 as you left their voices behind,  
 the stars began to burn  
 through the sheets of clouds,  
 and there was a new voice,  
 which you slowly  
 recognized as your own,  
 that kept you company  
 as you strode deeper and deeper  
 into the world,  
 determined to do  
 the only thing you could do -  
 determined to save  
 the only life you could save.  
 (Oliver, 1986, p.38)

In solitude I have learned to be relatively self-sufficient, and this is so of my methodological approach too. My approach is to: *pay attention* to ongoing moment by moment experience, to insight into the processes by which experience arises, and to the social and biological conditions/ing that influence experience; *explore* modes of communication with myself and with others that allow me to describe what I experience, enhance mindfulness, encourage insight, and catalyze transformation.

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<sup>25</sup> Please note that I tend to use consciousness, conscious experience, and awareness interchangeably to refer to being awake and aware of the world. I tend to use mindful awareness more specifically to refer to being aware of being aware. For me, the experience of mindful awareness (being present to the moment) or not being aware of being aware slips along a sliding scale rather than being all or nothing - even though in each moment I seem to be either mindfully aware or not. These are notoriously slippery terms, and I use them in an evocative rather than a technical way.

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<sup>26</sup> See Interlude 8.

<sup>27</sup> A clear and simple image used by Watts (1958) is that spirit is the invisible inside of things and the material world is the outside. The inside cannot be found by reducing complex entities into their simple components. All that will be visible is the outside of those simpler components. Pull apart an ecosystem and you find the outside of organisms. Dissect an organism and there is the outside of organs and cells. The physical senses cannot find spirit; it is invisible to the senses. Likewise, thought cannot grasp spirit. Spirit cannot be sought or grasped. It reveals itself to a quiet mind and soul. Spirit is everywhere; the inner aspect of all things. The ground of being. To be touched by spirit, you must surrender to things just exactly as they are in the here and now.

<sup>28</sup> It is, according to Wilber, vital to not equate physical nature with spirit. This is regression into nature worship. But it is equally vital to not focus entirely on the transcendent, which results in disembodied dualism. Spirit dwells in nature and is the ground of all being, but is transcendent too. This is one of the subtle insights of solitude that seems impossible to express in language. It is not that spirit is separate from physical form, nor the same as physical form. ...

<sup>29</sup> The following discussion of mindfulness meditation is based on my own understanding. It is hybridized primarily from the Theravada teachings of Joseph Goldstein and Jack Kornfield (1976, 1987) and personal insight into my own mind/body process. This basic mix is seasoned with a sprinkling of Chuang Tsu (1964), Krishnamurti (1968), Trungpa (1976), and Watts (1958).

<sup>30</sup> Lee Gass (pers. com.) points out that this may be awareness of mortal danger rather than of death. There is definitely the awareness of danger for me too. Perhaps the sense of danger is linked to the terror of ceasing to exist; of being no more.

<sup>31</sup> The question, What drives the process of categorization and the structure of the particular categories we construct? is central to critical theory. And here we can get trapped into believing that our particular perspective on what is really going on is the deepest explanation. As Wilber (1995) points out, there is insight and value in all these hermeneutic explorations, but proponents of one theory or another often believe that they have the deepest meaning. Certainly the social power game is often seen as driving the process. It is valuable to become aware of how sexism, racism, and economic domination, hold certain social constructions (both physical and mental) in place. But is this the whole story? What of existential angst? Fear of personal and social annihilation? Longing for certainty and stability in the face of universal change? What about the misplaced craving to fill the spiritual vacuum by infinitely expanding the self? Is there an onion of meaning here that we can peel, a hierarchy of insight into the workings of the mind/body process? Are spiritual explanations more profound than political ones? Once I certainly thought so. Now I wonder if they are just different windows through which we might explore our lives? Also see Interlude 8.

<sup>32</sup> While all creative exploration and discovery may involve insight as well as logical thinking, I do not remember receiving any training to develop this cognitive faculty during my academic schooling.

<sup>33</sup> David Tait (pers. com.) has described his own thinking as proceeding by spontaneous, holistic/intuitive insight that reveals a glimpse. The rest of the view is obscured by fog or mental clutter. Directed linear/analytical thinking holds the newly acquired view open and moves clutter around, which often reveals a further spontaneous holistic/intuitive insight. While David says this is a poor metaphor, it seems clear and useful to me in that it helps me relax the hard line between intuitive insight and linear analytical thinking.

<sup>34</sup> *Tales of the Field* (Van Maanen, 1988) is a classic that I have seen cited frequently. But seventeen years can be a long time, and I sense the book may have become somewhat dated. Van



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Maanen delineates three main genres of ethnographic writing: realist tales; confessional tales; impressionist tales. As he presents these different styles he gives them all equal weight, and only at the end of the book does he snatch back this generous gift by pointing out that the realist tale remains the bread and butter approach. The confessional, which describes and owns the role the researcher played in gathering data and writing the report, is made analogous to a methods section that no one much cares about unless one has come up with interesting results in the form of a realist description of some interesting piece of the social world. The impressionist tail is hooked onto the end of a more somber and encompassing description and analysis. Essentially the impressionist tale addresses the outliers in the data; incidents that analysis cannot make sense of, but that are often exciting and colourful. This approach still largely assumes objective reality as central to the proceedings. Autoethnography weaves together confessional tales and impressionist tales.

<sup>35</sup> Writing Ethnography Workshop, Spring 2000, Conducted by Carolyn Ellis, Dept. Communications, University South Florida.

<sup>36</sup> See Interlude 7.

<sup>37</sup> Polanyi (1958), Maslow (1966), and Sattler (1986), among others, have pointed out that all knowledge is fundamentally personal knowledge. Transforming the subjective into valid public knowledge results from describing personal experience, clearly stating the methods used to generate the experience, and offering the collective an opportunity to confirm or disconfirm. The important question is not what aspects of experience should be accepted as valid for research, but rather what methods are appropriate for each domain of experience (Clandinin and Connelly, 1994; Guba and Lincoln, 1994).

To exclude personal lived experience as a field of exploration is to preclude the possibility of direct, empirical observation of inner experience by the researcher. In that case, only second hand reports of such experience would be available for study. Personal lived experience is located in the upper left quadrant of Wilber's model (Figure 2, page 364). Interpretation of personal experience will depend in part on cultural contextual meaning represented in the lower left quadrant. To study linguistic reports instead of looking directly within reduces upper left, individual experience to the lower left, language-based, collective experience. While perhaps not as violent as reducing all inner experience to right side physicality, this never the less devalues trans-linguistic aspects of experience. I can see no way of exploring the relationship between direct experience and language except through the exploration of personal experience.

This is especially so when exploring the experiential effects of solitude. If I had read another person's writings, I would have been studying a second-hand report. If I had found, studied the life of, and interviewed an actual solitary, that person would no longer have been in solitude. The only direct way to study the lived effects of solitude was to take myself into the wilderness alone.

## April 2001

Every Little Thing  
Is Gonna Be Alright.  
(Bob Marley)

4/01/01

9:00 AM: 44F. Blue sky. Mountains, half hidden in a misty negligee, present themselves to my imagination. Sun shines gold through floating kelp leaves stirring them to leap from the sea to my eye where they remind me of swirling autumn leaves. The grey back, creamy belly ducks are diving out yonder and blending with the sea. Only their bright orange bills catch and throw sunrays in my direction calling, "Yes, we are here."

A new month, time to send word that I'm ok. I think the email went out, but won't be sure until I receive a reply. I get uptight when I have to deal with the monthly communication process. It takes my mind far away to other people and places. I'm still not certain it will actually work, and if the message doesn't get through, the navy might come to rescue me. That would be a real drag.

Damn, when the wind comes straight in like this it's cold! The sea isn't really rough and I'd like to look for fish, but it would be a grunt to launch the boat against the wind. Might be a day to wash clothes. Been working and sleeping in the same three shirts, two pairs of pants, two sets of long johns, sweater, sweatshirt, and vest since I got here.

3:00 PM: Another coffee break. Emails went out and replies are back. Patti sent medical advice for shoulder, but nothing I didn't already know. Path to and space for outhouse cleared. Since the spot is in the trees and protected from wind, I'll build just a plastic roof to shed the rain and a seat rather than a whole house.

No question, activity dissolves (or covers up) anxiety. But one of the things I've come here to learn (or remember) is how to feel comfortable without having to constantly do something. This is something modern cultures need to re-learn if we are to survive and enjoy our living. It isn't non-doing that generates anxiety, but rather fretting about doing or not doing. When I'm in the moment without worrying about what I ought to be doing, my mind seems at ease. Since planning is useful, the relevant question might be how to think about activity without becoming anxious. If I try to micro-plan everything, my imagination goes wild since I can't actually know what might happen. In any case, things often fall into place naturally as the actual situation unfolds.

Evening: I think I slowly need to shift whom I'm writing to. For now, this journal is to someone other than me - maybe to Patti. In the future I need to write what I myself might like to read. I'm out on the windy point. Sun about to drop behind Staines Peninsula and wind coming from the southwest. The wind is either changing direction or here in the open it has been blowing this way for the past two days and bends around the trees near my camp. Too bad I get so little sun on my cabin, but if I did I'd have a lot more wind too. In the late afternoon the mountains are shaped differently than in the morning. I like it out here. It feels far from home.

Got hole for outhouse dug which immediately filled with water almost to the surface. After chopping down bushes, disrupting the soil, and creating a pile of mud, and considering that when it really rains my turds might escape to the sea anyway, it might have been more ecologically friendly - but not as comfy - to keep shitting on the beach at low tide.

4/02/01

9:15 AM: Exquisite morning. 34F/flat calm/blue sky clouding over/low tide coming in/frost on the boat/. Black flies awake already, but I hope the frost

thinned their ranks. I'm on the point for coffee and sunrise over the mountains. Want to check position of sun in relation to how I'll angle the solar panels. From here I can see the chimney is slightly crooked. The top needs to move three inches or so. Will my perfectionism drive me back up the ladder at the risky back corner of the house?

Reading Annie Dillard's *Teaching a Stone to Talk*. She is such a charming writer. Witty, sharp, a very light touch. She doesn't say anything "New" but says many valuable things in a new way. I like the combination of spirit and naturalist.

9:00 PM: The weather stayed calm and I got a lot done today. Drilled guy wire holes in the 20 foot pipe I'm using as a wind generator tower. Used vise-grips to tighten a metal-drilling bit into the woodworking brace. Pipe steel is soft and the system worked surprisingly well. Pumped up the boat which is leaking air, loaded it with solar panels, batteries, tools, pipe, ladder, wire, and wood, and went to the beach near the point. I carefully carried everything over the slippery rocks and fell only once. Took much longer than expected to mount the panels, but I wanted them super secure since the point is completely exposed to the wind. Hooked them to the batteries and covered batteries and voltage regulator with plastic. Finished at 7:30 and decided to go fishing.

When I came back to drop off tools, put on warmer clothes, and get fishing gear, I thought I'd only be a few minutes so just dragged boat up and didn't tie it to a rock. I've never done that before and never will again. It took longer to get ready than I'd thought, and happened to look out to see the boat drifting away on the rising tide. Shit! I ran down, waded in, and just caught it. Another 30 seconds and I'd have had to swim for it. Another couple minutes and I would have had to pump up the kayak and paddle after it. Good thing there was only a faint breeze. I was very lucky and am chastened and grateful.

By the time I changed clothes it was nearly dark, but I went anyway. Stayed out for 20 minutes and caught eight so small I'm not sure how to prepare them. At least Cat will be happy and he'll eat less of my food. I caught them close by where I can go in the kayak most days.

I heard an airplane today east beyond the hills. It flew north then later back south. Sounded like a big prop plane - probably military. Neither the noise nor the fact of a plane passing bothered me much, but then I started thinking: What if they fly over this way, what if they come everyday, what if boats start to arrive? Ah yes, the world of "what if." If it doesn't rain tonight, I'll be into my ten reserve gallons tomorrow. But the outhouse hole is filled with clear water, so I could dig a shallow well anywhere. Or I can just take water from the outhouse hole until I shit in it. This, I believe, would be called multiple use of resources.

4/03/01

9:00 AM: 46F/cloudy/mountains clear/ breeze from the northwest/sea calm but moving. Not an easy night, and just when I thought things were getting better. I've started the exercises a physiotherapist showed me when I buggered my rotator cuff several years ago, and I figured that was the magic secret. But last night shoulder didn't let me sleep much.

10:30 AM: Very weird. Cat had some sort of seizure. I heard a rattling sound and saw his box vibrating. I thought he was having a dream, but the box started to really shake and he came crawling out, froze up and lay still, then became totally frantic and started to yowl. I thought he was dying - perhaps from eating mussels with red tide toxin on his own - but he finally came out of it. One odd residual is that he's started to come into the cabin. I've taught him he can't come in even if the door is open, and he's been very good for the past couple

weeks, but just now he walked in like he has no idea he's not supposed to. Maybe some memory circuits got fried. Very odd.

3:30 PM: Wind is up and there are whitecaps. Highly unproductive day so far. Fished where I was yesterday evening and caught a single two-inch fish. Maybe they're nocturnal. Maybe I'll hook up stove today. Not sure why I haven't yet. Possibly because once it's working I might want a fire all the time and need to collect firewood all the time too. Or perhaps because once the stove is working I'll really be settled in, and psychologically I'm not ready for that yet. It's crossed my mind that Cat might have epilepsy. He seems ok now and his memory is back. He wolfed down five fish heads and backbones and hasn't touched his rice and beans.

8:00 PM: Getting dark. Didn't go fishing again. Rain put me off. If there were trout out there or even snapper.... Didn't get stove in, but finished trim on the windows. Lowered the propane lantern and put an aluminium foil reflector behind it. I'm cautious about heat and the cabin's plastic walls and ceiling. A fire would really suck. The lantern puts out so much heat I hardly need a wood stove. A small tree I cut yesterday has a rich sweet smell. I want to identify it when I leave here.<sup>38</sup> Hard to believe I didn't bring plant and bird field guides with me.

#### 4/04/01

9:30 AM: 46F/rain. Mountains have departed for some unknown destination. Even Staines Peninsula is barely clinging to corporeal existence. Shoulders very grumpy. Amazing how quickly everything tightens up. I exercised for an hour before I went to bed at 1 a.m. Woke up stiff and sore at 3:30. Got up and exercised for a while, then back to sleep. At 8 I was knotted up again. Ah, but this first cup of coffee. Stormed again last night, but this morning everything seems secure and dry. Solar panels sitting out there, chimney in place, windows sealed, water containers full. Propane light worked fine last night. Plenty of

warm yellow light. It raised the middle front 2/3 of cabin ten degrees above the outside temperature to 62F. Nice to relax, read, and feel comfy. Little by little a feeling of snug comfort is mixing with anxiety when a storm rolls through.

At some deep level I guess I'm confident in my ability to cope and to solve problems, else I wouldn't be here. But on the surface I'm a bundle of doubt and anxiety. Well not exactly on the surface. There I carry a patina of self-reliance, even arrogance. It's just beneath the surface that turmoil roils. Perhaps the deep confidence is not in myself, but in something greater - Spirit, God, Inner Voice. It's that Something I've come here to find if I have the courage. Or perhaps that Something called me to communion and I responded.

For months I've busied myself with activity, and now it's difficult to slow down. During the day there are times when I pause to just be, and these breaks, rather than formal meditation, may be my natural practice. Perhaps the scattered moments will stretch and join into a more continuous attitude of listening, watching, and waiting ... for wilderness solitude to have its way with me.

10:45 AM: That was wonderful. The two nutria appeared on a rock 100 feet away. One tried, without much enthusiasm, to snatch something from the other and then they returned to the water. They dove repeatedly and finally one surfaced with a fish it had to bite and chew. My, what big teeth they have. Rolled on back to eat. They were close to shore, so there are sizable fish nearby. Neat animals. Powerful black paws. Strong tail. Small stubby ears. Ducks were up on rocks looking concerned as they do when the nutria are about.

7:20 PM: Dusk. Have barely begun clean up and haven't even considered the stove. Been doing electricity/electronics all day. Charging the laptops is a problem. The inverter keeps kicking out, and under load I'm only getting 11V. I took inverter and a laptop to the point and near the batteries it worked fine, so I think the voltage-drop is caused by the long wire. The batteries need to be close

to the wind generator to be fully charged but here to charge the laptops, so I may have to carry them back and forth. Fucking hell, my whole life is haywired.

A while ago the orange billed ducks were feeding in shallow water near the beach. It wasn't deep enough to dive, but they had to stretch to reach the bottom. So they were turning completely upside down - sort of like stinkbugs - and paddling fiercely with their orange webbed feet to keep themselves in place. Tail feathers pointing straight up, creamy yellow belly and ass bobbing above the surface, head and neck hidden.

#### 4/05/01

7:00 PM: 51F/raining/fairly calm. Soup's on, and I've got to get un-chilled. Still no stove installed. Spent all day at the point. Cut down two dead trees that were casting shadow on the solar panels. I'll use the wood to heat rocks for the sweat lodge I plan to build down there. I took an inverter and hooked it right to the batteries so 110 V was running through the wires. Fewer amps, lower resistance, less drop in voltage, no problem charging laptops. But the only lights I have are 12V, so I can either use computer or have light. Fuck! It would have been so easy to bring an 110V to 12V converter. Just wasn't thinking. I suppose I can just walk back and forth to the point, and switch between charging computers and having light. But that would be a drag on dark rainy nights. Oh well. Full moon soon and it's a very low tide.

#### 4/06/01

10:00 AM: 54F/cloudy with faint blue showing here and there/mountains hidden/hills coming and going through the mist/tide on the make/sea fairly rough/some wind on the point but only a breeze here. Cat settled on lap. Ceiling is wet over the door. On a nice day I'll go up and patch the tarp. Still have two rolls of duct tape, one tube of caulking, and two tubes of Shoe Goo. Shoulders



not too sore. My writing is boring me. Feeling lopy and brain-dead. World seems ok.

A moment ago the eastern channel was flat grey-green. I knew it must be rough out there since surf is sloshing against the windward rocks of the island to the south and a swell is running through the basin. Then the sun flashed through the clouds and the channel came alive with golden light and sparkled with shining flecks of white. Now the sun is gone and the sea flat grey-green again.

Logic tells me that the whitecaps are still there and that that vision is instantly possible again at any moment. I sit - not even waiting - and watch the nearby grass tremble in the same air that whips those far-off flecks to white. The distant light is gone, yet not, since it cleared the sleepy torpor from my eyes. And though the sun has disappeared, the grass comes shining through.

Later: It's raining now ... sheeting across the sea; splattering rock pools into vibrating ripples; drumming on my roof; rattling against my ear to anchor me where I sit. It's raining now....

In the basin there are cobra-headed diving ducks - the most delicate sea bird here.<sup>39</sup> Shining black back, back of neck, and top of head. White throat, breast, and belly. Not grey; pure white. The line between is razor sharp, which gives the bird its look - like dark branches capped with snow. They are somehow reassuring and give a sense of peace and calm. In the dark their hooting calls ease my fears and carry me to the coast of Mexico and the mountains of the Dominican Republic. One honks its hollow note, another answers from close by. Then, if you tune your ear, from down the channel to the south, you can hear a faint reply. Like roosters in a thousand distant pockets of the rural night.

But the black/white line of neck and head also looms from the low-slung body like the hooded threat of a cobra. It has that same visual - and, to small fish, perhaps visceral - feel about it. In the boat the other day, I came upon a rock inhabited, temporarily, by 15 or 20 of them. They swivelled at my approach, then

lifted off until I passed. They shoot like arrows through the air, all arc forgotten. Lean and linear, wings beating hard, bodies steady as airborne rocks.

I recall, as from a place and time far away and half forgotten, the paper, *A Pathless Land*, I wrote for my Ph.D. qualifying exam. A paper filled with ideas, questions, and dreams for this solitary adventure. A proposal to investigate the experience of solitude. Now my world has shrunk to this small beach and stretch of water; to what I'll eat for lunch; to hooking up the stove and rain barrel; to pain in shoulders, hands, and teeth. My world has become ordinary, and how can this become a dissertation?

Faith: not only in the physical process, but in the emotional and intellectual processes too. If I have a stake in what happens here - set expectations - I'm not really open to discovery. If I do produce a worthwhile dissertation, it will be a mystery, and I won't know what's being born until it sees the light.

Afternoon: Still reading Annie Dillard. She is a brilliant wordsmith - finding just the one of 25,000 words to do the job. Yet sometimes she irritates. A bit too consciously articulate. Too metaphoric and artistic. Too much made of each thing. Still, she inspires, seeking to see then say the world just how she wants it to sound.

I, on the other hand, have no words for this feeling. I could use spiritual language and call it emptiness, or use emotions and call it loneliness longing sorrow. Perhaps it's purely physical - only wind and rain. No, not only - in neither sense - but rather Wind and Rain in their full catalytic power to evoke.

I was thinking - as I ate lard fried potatoes - about not having many taste treats until I leave here. About the goodies waiting "out there." How different if I were going to stay forever; if this were all there would ever be. Years ago I used to think about leaving the rural mountains of the Dominican Republic. My shack was poor as any: tin roof, dirt floor, and wood-slat windows. Yet I could leave at any time for Canada. I was free, my neighbours were not.

But I'm learning the illusion of that notion. There is no way out. Ever. In every right now, I am always right here. Sure, I can leave and return to the land of ice-cream and hot showers, but while eating my double scoop, I'll be right there. The only escape is unconsciousness, which seems a high price to pay.

7:30 PM: One of my teeth is bothering me and I'm rinsing it with hot saltwater. I thought of having it pulled before coming here, but that would have left big gap in front and I wasn't ready for that or for going through the hassle of getting a bridge. I thought it would be ok, but it seems to be getting infected. Hope it doesn't get really bad; I've had enough pain for a while.

Cat is acting like an asshole today. Moaning for no apparent reason and trying to climb on me. He seems to get this way when I am filled with loneliness, sorrow, longing. Does he pick it up from me? Does some external influence, perhaps the wind, affect us both simultaneously? Is he always like this but it irritates me more when I'm feeling glum? Is there some other hidden cause - or no cause at all?

Stove is in and looks good sitting there. I built a frame beneath to hold two inches of gravel for fire protection. The cabin smells of the sea since there are bits of kelp mixed with the gravel. The outhouse base is built and in place. Now I need a seat and roof. Tomorrow is full moon and I could have a fire to celebrate. That's my carrot to get the outhouse done.

Midnight: Time for dinner. A couple hours ago I went out to put something on the porch and got hit in the eye with an almost full moon shining through a gap in the trees. I took the binoculars and walked to the point. The mountains and craters are fascinating, but most wonderful are the small bright spots that seem connected by curved shining lines to a larger bright spot on the upper right. Like a gob of brilliance smacked the moon and splattered leaving streamers behind. Like waterfall fireworks. Like Indra's web.

4/07/01

8:50 AM: 46F/calm/clear with clouds/sunrise over mountains orange gold and glorious. Tide so low I could have walked across the mussel beds to the small island out front. Kelp strewn across the flats like orange fright-wigs the morning after a juicy debauch. A silhouetted bird with a long curved beak seemed to be fishing. Stood lean and upright on non-webbed feet. Everything seems to be resting, but I'm going to work on the wind generator.

5:30 PM: Flat calm/no rain. Perfect day for the job. Just back from the point. Wind generator installed and looks good. There was a problem. The aluminium housing was not symmetrical and the rotor rubbed as it turned. I filed the problem spot, but at high speed being out of true may screw things up.

This morning a hummingbird flew into the cabin and got stuck trying to leave through the Plexiglas window. I tried to herd him toward the door but he kept banging frantically against the pane. I finally cupped him in my hands and released him outside. Ah! What a tiny gem. I would have liked to hold him longer but thought he might have a heart attack. The butter belly ducks just went quacking, flapping, and running across the water. I looked for but didn't see the nutria. Out beyond, a whole flotilla of cobra-headed divers just swam past.

9:30 PM: Full moon tonight, but it's cloudy out. No matter. Last night was my full moon. Susan gave me a World Peace Flame candle last time we were together. I usually don't go for such things, but I'll light it for a while each full moon. World peace is a desired state and it won't hurt me to soften and find my place in the process. Tooth hurts and is worrisome.

4/08/01

7:40 AM: Dawn/cloudy/windy/ocean sounds rough. Not happy to be up yet, but can't get back to sleep. Shoulder sore and coffee calling.

2:30 PM: I have no experience with wind generators, but from what people told me I was expecting a sort of mellow whump, whump, whump, as the rotor turned. The wind is blowing about 35 mph and gusting to probably 50 which is not unusual for here, and that sucker is wailing like a banshee. It starts with a low moan that changes to a rough growl, and then, when a gust comes through and the blades twist to dump air, it winds up like it's going to take off from this earth and join the hounds of hell. Sounds like an airplane climbing steeper and steeper and then going into a stall - which is exactly what it is designed to do to protect itself from over-revving in high wind. Ironic since this is the kind of noise I came to get away from. I finally couldn't take any more and, following the instruction manual, shorted out the wires to slow it down. Of course now it's not charging the batteries. I think I'll email the guy who sold it to me for advice.

Damn! I just threw out more onions than I've eaten since I got here, and others are going mouldy too. Not getting them out of plastic soon enough was a mistake. Oh well, I'll eat lots for next few weeks and hope there are enough sound ones to flavour the beans for a while. Outhouse seat is built and I'll make hole in it next. How big should it be? A truly metaphysical question. I ought to use the laptop for this journaling. I'm in the habit of the pen now though, and out here on porch sometimes mist floats in which the laptop wouldn't like.

7:20 PM: Outhouse is finished. I attached a feedbag I picked up in Punta Arenas to the front of the bench to prevent peeing on my boots. It says "Product of Canada." Although solitude has glorious, even sacred times, outhouse humour is right here too.

Drinking coffee and watching mountains and sea, it occurs to me that I seldom pause to be fully conscious of my situation alone here in the middle of nowhere. But in this moment I consider all the other people living in solitude around the world. I sense them as my tribe even though we will never meet - unless we leave the circumstance that binds us. It feels good to know they are there, somewhere, as I am here, somewhere.

10:30 PM: Windy and wild/bright with moonlight and clouds/high tide/ocean up and snorting. I feel like I've been hit with a board. Shoulders, back, arms, and hands all ache. Seems like I've been working for days straight, yet I'm restless and unhappy to be still. My tooth feels better this evening. Saltwater rinse is magic.

4/09/01

9:30 AM: 40F/cloudy with some blue showing/base of mountains vague/high winds and rain/ocean very rough. She's stomping and snorting today. Cabin vibrating like it's sitting on jell-o. Reading *Desert Solitaire* by Edward Abbey. Good book so far.

9:00 PM: Been windy on and off all day/fairly calm now. Rain barrel hooked up. Cut a hole in the side of the 40-gallon plastic barrel three inches from top and inserted a plastic pipe with just enough slope so water will run in. The pipe runs out through the porch wall and catches rainwater falling from the roof gutter. The end away from the barrel is open, and when the water in the barrel comes up enough, rain will stop flowing in and run out onto the ground instead. This way the barrel won't overflow and flood the porch. An automatic shutoff valve with no moving parts. Cool.

Split a round of firewood to see how my shoulder would do. Three weeks ago when I tried to split some, shoulder was very weak and painful. Today was better but I wouldn't want to split too many. Still haven't finished cleaning up or organizing cabin, but I've run out of steam. Would be nice to build a fire but I'm too tired to enjoy the celebration, so will wait another day. Have I only been here two months? Seems like forever, or even longer. Think I'll take tomorrow off if I can stand it. I suspect there are strong feelings I'm keeping at bay with activity. Haven't had a full day off in a long time.

Had first civilized shit out of the rain today. How pleasant.

4/10/01

11:20 AM: 37F/clouds breaking up and some blue showing through/sea fairly calm/breeze chilly/snow lower on the hills than I've seen it/low tide and peaceful. Rained on and off all night and barrel is almost 3/4 full. Didn't get to bed as early as intended. Went to outhouse, and sitting feeling comfortable, looked up through the trees and got bushwhacked by the moon. What an enchanting time this full moon has been. I remember thinking I might never see the moon here. The weather has been great but I bet serious rains are on the way.

Searching the Chile guidebook for hot springs. Planning ahead. Silly, but these chilly mornings do that. I miss hot running water more than anything else. Showers have always been a source of pleasure and relaxation. I'm feeling more relaxed, like pressure is lifting. I look down the hours of the day without feeling I've got to get busy. Still plenty of small tasks to do, but they are pattering rather than big jobs. They will get done when they do. Guess I'll use some of the large rounds of firewood for steps since there's only a bit of lumber left.

Late evening: 40F outside, a toasty 65 in here. How civilized. A fire in the stove, a slice of cheese, two dried figs, and a drink of single malt scotch. I'm writing by the light of a candle that was in the package Patti gave me to open on Christmas last year. Somehow I missed doing so then and this seems like a fine occasion. Patti is very smart to understand how much treats like this can mean and has a huge heart to prepare them. She sent gifts for last and next Christmas and one for my birthday in July. Stove is working well, but the wood is not very dry and needs some coaxing to keep burning. It's actually warm in here. I'm down to long underwear, T-shirt, flannel shirt, wool vest, and Holofil vest. Wonder if I should chance stripping further.

I took it easy this morning. Sent emails asking for technical support with wind generator - which is, I suppose, breaking solitude, but feels ok. This

afternoon I organized and put stuff away. I finally feel moved in and settled. Rain catchment and water barrel working perfectly. Fills to within three inches of top and then stops automatically. I'm good at solving these kinds of simple mechanical problems and might have been happier if I'd lived 100 years ago.

A while ago I smudged the cabin and myself with the sage I brought and with what looks like a cedar growing in front of the cabin. As I was smudging I gave thanks for what I've been given and for all the people who helped make this journey possible. I gave thanks for my skills and me too. Amazing to be here after so long. It's been 25 years since I first thought I'd like to spend a year in solitude. So far, my connection with nature has not deepened as it did in the past. It will happen as it happens. I can only ask for the courage, trust, and patience to open myself and wait.

4/11/01

Morning: 41F/grey/rainy/windy/cold. Yum. First cup of real coffee since last December, almost four months ago. I can already feel the buzz. And a fine morning it is for it too. I'm on the porch and not sure when I'll build a fire. I still think firewood - like food, booze, and painkillers - needs to be rationed. There's plenty out there, but gathering it is hard work. Unless it's flat calm, loading the boat and bringing back a full load is problematic. The other consideration is that when I light a fire I go inside, close the door, and shut out the world which is just what I wish to stop doing. So in general I might save fires for when it's dark.

Been thinking about going exploring in the boat. I feel a longing to wander and especially to see one of the inlets where glaciers come down to the sea, but it now seems unappealing. Can't count on the ocean to stay calm, and it would be difficult to find places to camp or to tie up and sleep in the boat for days of rain and wind while waiting for storms to pass.



My favourite little bird just came by. Dark brown back, light grey breast that drifts to golden rusty brown on sides of belly. Two bands of the same colour over head and spots of it along back and wings. Maybe three inches tall, very quick. Insect feeder I think. Roots around on ground some, but often forages along the bark of branches.<sup>40</sup> A new diving duck is working the water edge of my front yard. Much smaller than the other divers I've seen; only seven inches tall. Grey brown back darkening to charcoal on top of head. Small topknot. Cheeks very distinctive. Dirty white with a tracery of darker lines that look almost like tree branches.<sup>41</sup>

Stepped on Cat a while ago, the third time in as many days. I didn't feel compassion for his pain when he yowled or upset with myself for causing the pain, but rather annoyance with him for getting under foot. He used to get in front of me when I peed off porch. If I didn't notice and picked him up for some loving afterward, I got to pet a pissed on cat. Most unpleasant. He has learned to not do that and I imagine he will figure out not to get under foot too.

Now, settled into the cabin, I wonder what will happen in these long stretches of dark grey time with no work to fill the hours? This is what I came for. All this preparation has been, in one sense, just that. I've been at it steadily for eight months. Of course from another point of view it has not been preparation "for" anything at all, but just part of the total process of this retreat, and of my life. I've stopped my half hour evening meditation. Wonder what that's about and where it will lead.

Noon: 40F outside and raw. Got tired of being cold and lit a fire. So much for rationing firewood. A joint in the chimney is leaking and dripped pungent liquid onto the Thermarest before I noticed it. Don't know if it's from wood or rain. Not sure what to do about it. At the moment I'm catching the drips in a pot. Shit continues to happen.

Truly this is a sensual pleasure. I'm warm and drinking my second cup of real coffee which tastes even better than the first. I'm also eating my first piece of fry bread with the last of the butter I brought. I've noticed before that after some time in the bush what I crave most is bread and butter. A wave of wishing Patti or Susan could be here to share this with me.

Speaking of sensual pleasure. In organizing I came across the almond oil. I haven't even opened it yet. During my first long wilderness retreat 25 years ago, sexual desire, and even thoughts of sex, vanished so completely I didn't realize they had gone until I emerged, saw a woman, and was hit again by wanting. The absence of desire is not so absolute here, but close. I've thought about masturbating maybe half dozen times in the past two months, but didn't want to go there and the desire quickly passed. Maybe now, in a warm cabin wearing fewer layers of clothes, more aware of my skin, less tired from work, and with more time on my hands, I'll also get some oil on them.

Wild out there. Sea coming from the northeast so it's rough in the basin. I think I'm getting closer to trying to describe the movement and colour shifts of the sea as the wind blows across it. Same with clouds and light on the mountains. I may try to slow my stream of writing and search for words that are hard to find to describe sights and feelings hard to define.

4:00 PM: Storm is roaring and the waterfalls on the Staines cliffs are in full flood. I'm feeling fearful and lonely. What if cabin starts to leak everywhere? What if I run out of firewood and can't find more? What if I feel like this forever? In the past I used to think what if I can't find a mate and am alone forever? Now the feelings of fear and loneliness are more immediate.

5:15 PM: Has it been only an hour? The tide continues to rise toward the boat, toward the woodpile, toward me. The wind and rain come on steadily and it seems like it has stormed and will continue to storm forever. Anxiety and loneliness - no matter what I tell myself about projection - are viscerally linked to

the weather. From experience I know that the peace I long for will come only through surrender that includes deep acceptance of death as well as of the immediate present just as it is. Ah for some companionship now.

5:50 PM: This anxiety is insidious. Since Vancouver I've been worrying about one thing after another: I wouldn't get my visa on time; the crates of gear I shipped from Canada would be lost or stolen; I wouldn't find a way to get into the wilderness. The first night here I worried that I would get washed out, then after I got a temporary shelter built above high tide, that I would get blown out; that the food I left a mile from here would get soaked and ruined; after the boat flipped, that the motors wouldn't work; once I hurt shoulder that I wouldn't be able to finish the cabin; when it didn't rain for five days that I would run out of water. All through those times, I held onto the expectation that once I had all my gear here, firewood in, water tank hooked up, stove working, THEN I would feel safe and secure. But here I am - warm, dry, and well fed - still feeling anxiety and dread.

This is nuts! I'm creating needless suffering for myself and destroying my pleasure in living. But even though I can see it intellectually and have been through this over and over, the fear persists. Tightly clenched shoulders and slight nausea, eyes squinted, a sort of vague electric current running through my body. There are only three things to do: medication (which I have if I need it); run from or fight the feelings; follow Jack Kornfield's advice to recognize anxiety as an old friend or at least a familiar acquaintance.

I am also working to untangle the cognitive component. Excitement and anxiety seem to have the same physiological manifestations. If I believe I can deal with the situation creating the arousal, I feel excitement. If I believe I cannot cope, there is anxiety. Going to raingear up and go outside to give my imagination a rest.

7:00 PM: The tide has peaked and is receding. Wind, for now, has dropped and shifted to out of the northwest. Rain pouring down. Across the slate green western channel the massive rock of Staines Peninsula is a paradox. It undulates north to south with domes separated by deep hollows from which waterfalls crash down the cliffs to the sea. More immediately solid than the much larger but distant glaciated mountains to the east, it is massive, solid, unambiguous. Yet - half hidden in the raining mists which fill the hollows and drift across the rock faces - mysterious and phantom-like, only partially real.

Beyond, through, or within its physical presence, the rock evokes in me a world of experience that cannot be grasped, defined, or named. Feelings wrapped in swirling mists that veil half hidden physiological states.

Medical science is comforting. It is certain of the world much as orthodox religion is certain. It's somehow less frightening to see these dark feelings as a chemical imbalance than to attribute them to unconscious neuroses or mysterious transpersonal causes. Medicine has a point. The chemicals in my body are as real and solid as the rock of Staines Peninsula. But there is more: ambiguous, paradoxical, lived experience. If I lose this, my life becomes flat and lifeless. Yet if I reject the solid foundation of the physical world, I wander rudderless and lost in solipsistic imaginings.

11:15 PM: But when the wind softens, the rain stops, the sea calms, and the tide ebbs away, then, with no effort at all, my belly unclenches, my heart eases, and my spirit soars with love into the quiet night.

4/12/01

9:00 AM: 47F/cloudy/transient rain/light breeze/sea semi-calm/mid tide. Shoulders sore but not bad. Last night I took the first ibuprophen in almost 48 hours. Yesterday was the first day without painkillers since I've been here. So I

guess the warmth and lighter workload are helping. I'm also becoming reconciled to doing exercises as the quickest way to alleviate the pain.

Just read in *Desert Solitaire* that Abbey thinks joy has evolutionary value. "Where there is no joy there can be no courage; and without courage all the other virtues are useless." Where is my joy? I'm exactly where I've chosen to be. I'm safe and secure with good coffee in my belly and a bowl of rice and beans in hand. I have enough food and supplies to last the year. I'm cold by choice and can light a fire anytime. I'm free to call and leave here when I choose. During the past year I've passed my Ph.D. qualifying exam and prepared for and come on this journey. I'm loved, supported, and respected. Where is my joy, and where my "felt" courage?

In the past I've thought that courage comes as a result of facing fear. But I wonder if courage and joy are somehow hidden beneath or within the fear itself and are found through staying with the fear? A subtle difference and neither view seem right nor wrong, but just two ways of looking.

Winter is coming. I can feel it. Of course I could feel it two and a half months ago in mid summer too. Both my long retreats in Canada were ending at this time of year: winter coming in, time to get out. But this time, if my courage and health hold, I'll be staying.

Afternoon: Hung cheese and bacon on the porch out of Cat's reach. Each month I'll re-wipe the cheese with vinegar. I'm amazed at how much I don't know. By chance I found that solution to prevent mould in a book. I tried oil thinking to cut off air, but that was the wrong direction. Needs acid not base. Should have figured it out since when I taught SCUBA diving in the Dominican Republic I put vinegar in my ears for fungus. All things tie together if you let your mind range widely enough.

4/13/01

9:00 AM: 46F/rain/calm/mountains hidden. At 4 a.m. I finally took a Tylenol 3. Getting pretty weary of the pain. I can never remember a time in my life without pain, but it's getting worse and is more constant now. In pain management they teach you to relax into the pain and visualize a place of peace and beauty - a refuge - and go there in your mind. But here in this place of peace and beauty, where do I go now that I am filled with - no, not filled with, touched by - pain?

Noon: Cocksucker, I am so god-damned, fucking tired of falling down. I just slipped and fell again and I hurt everywhere. I think I've torn the rotator cuff in my left shoulder too. I can't ever remember falling down like this - even on ice in Montreal. I just want the world to fuck off and give me a break. I'm trying to be very careful, but one slightly off balance step and down I go. The moss, algae, mud, rock, and grass are all incredibly slippery. Or maybe it's the combination of them with my prosthetic leg and rubber boots.

I feel like I'm starting to lose it. It doesn't feel safe to take a step or even stand anywhere except on the landing area I've cleared and on the small patch of gravel down by the point. Worse, I'm starting to see the rock out front as actively malevolent - watching and waiting for the chance to harm me. So far I haven't hit my head, but whores and fucking sluts, everything else just aches and aches. I'm so tired of the pain.

Evening: Rain mostly stopped. Feeling better. Took a short nap and the pain has eased. Have a fire going and it's nice to take off all the layers of clothes; to sit relaxed and warm without a shirt, and put on the capsaicin oil I've made from cayenne pepper without having to reach under everything.

Heard back from Paul who sold me the wind generator, and he said to bring batteries to the cabin and charge them from the point. This contradicts what the

wind generator manual says. So I hope the "help desk" of the company who makes the generators also responds to my email.

Midnight: 42F/beautiful evening/light breeze/sea rippled/stars overhead and to the north and west, clouds south and east/moonlight filtering through the clouds shines along a rippled path toward me.

4/14/01

10:00 AM: 45F/overcast but not raining/sea moving but not rough/mountains visible halfway up. I'm chilled, sore, and grumpy. Coffee tastes good. Abbey's desert world is vast, his vision and explorations painted large and in detail. My world feels constricted and shallow: cabin, tiny beach, wind, rain, moods, pain. I feel I'm shutting down and the world is disappearing. Too concerned with self, comfort, and survival. This has happened before. On the other side - if I make the passage - is joy and wonder. But why, over and over, must it be so hard and painful? Will the drama end - as Patti and I have talked about - once I am truly tired of it and let it go? Once I don't need it to feel "special" any longer?

Later: The day remains overcast without rain/not quite 50F/sea still grey green and restless/light wind in the trees. Nothing has changed: all is still in endless motion. Sitting on the porch reading and feeling peaceful, Cat asleep in my lap. Pain is a part of the experience of being alive I will never escape. But perhaps I can loosen the grip of MY pain and the self-pitying complaint, why ME, and accept pain as part of the world, like the sun, rain, and endless movement of the sea.

Later: The anxiety came back. Why? How? From where? I was working on the ventilation hole and noticed that the tranquil sound of the sea had become vaguely threatening. Was it only that the effects of food and coffee had worn off? Had the urge to read from the book by Rumi that Susan gave me. Opened it at random and read:

*This being human is a guest house.  
Every morning a new arrival.*

*A joy, a depression, a meanness,  
some momentary awareness comes  
as an unexpected visitor.*

*Welcome and entertain them all!  
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,  
who violently sweep your house  
empty of its furniture,  
still, treat each guest honourably.*

*He may be clearing you out  
for some new delight.  
The dark thought, the shame, the malice,  
meet them at the door laughing,  
and invite them in.*

*Be grateful for whoever comes  
because each has been sent  
as a guide from beyond.*

(Rumi)

Easy to agree with, hard to live. But just what I needed to hear. I miss Susan badly now. Funny, but I don't "miss" Patti in the same way; perhaps because she is so much here with me, or perhaps this particular longing is yearning for skin and sexual intimacy.

4/15/01

10:00 AM: 52F/some wind/sea restless/high overcast/mountains shining sharp and clear all the way to the peaks. Got to bed at 2 a.m. feeling good after reading some Rumi reminders. Woke at 6, exercised, and back to sleep until 9. A while ago some animals swam by moving fast. Might have been nutria but looked bigger.

9:30 PM: Raining. Had trouble with fire again. I need to go slower in adding the big pieces of wood. Toasty in here now.



I planned, prepared, and looked forward to this retreat for so long. Eager to be in Nature; longing for immersion in the eternal timeless world. And now I feel cut off, lonely, and frightened. Going through the days and wondering if I'll make it. Joy and peace? The rare glimpses are no more profound here than while riding my bicycle under spring blossoms in Vancouver.

I need to get a handle on my frustration and anger. If I don't, I'll have a miserable old age. I'll be alone and bad company even for me. I need to make a commitment to myself to stop being unhappy and enjoy this retreat and the rest of my life. Each day. Life will be what it is - pleasure, pain, success, failure. It's my reaction that's the issue. Now I'm anxious and in pain. So be it. It changes nothing to be angry or unhappy that it is this way.

4/16/01

Energetic morning: Sea and wind moving, but not ferociously/some blue sky/sunshine touching the face of Staines. If it stays like this clothes should dry fairly quickly. A load has been soaking all night and I'll scrub them soon. In Puerto Natales the park warden was pleased when I told him I planned to use homemade soap out here. But I also brought one small box of detergent and have added a bit to the laundry.

Tough night. Up until 2 a.m. exercising shoulders. Homemade capsaicin oil didn't work and I had to use some of the commercial stuff. What will I do when it's gone? Something else to worry about. Finally got to sleep but woke stiff and sore at 4 a.m. Up to exercise and apply cold water bottle. Back to sleep until 7. Up to exercise, back to sleep till 9. This seems to be a pattern. Exercise then sleep for a couple hours and wake up stiff and sore. Exercise and sleep for two more hours. No way to get comfortable and everything hurts more because my whole back is tense despite all the exercises and stretches I'm doing. Maybe these aches and injuries are my body's reaction to finally coming out of high stress

mode. Often one gets sick as a reaction, but there are no cold or flu viruses here to infect me. Hope I start to heal soon.

Cat is sitting by the door quietly muttering and moaning. My first reaction is to tell him to shut up! But I do my complaining in these pages, and he has only his voice. So I bit my tongue, let him mumble, talked to him, and gave him a bit of rice.

Yesterday was Easter Sunday - spiritually, a very important day. Christ has risen! Spirit lives! It passed without me recognizing it and I feel sorry I didn't celebrate. For me, the message of the resurrection is that spirit can transform physical suffering. It's not about actual physical death, but that the physical need not dominate the spirit.

Coffee time: Feels like it's thinking to rain, but hasn't all day. Across the way I saw a rainbow - first one in a while - and took it as a sign. First load of wash is on the line, a second load soaking, and water for a bath heating. Everything was filthy and it took all morning to wash one pair of long underwear, three T-shirts, three stump socks, a pair of gloves, and a neck warmer. And this load was the easy stuff. Now come the heavy loads: pants, shirts, vests, sweatshirt and blankets. Washing by hand is hard on back and shoulders. I remember the women in the Dominican Republic down at the river washing clothes for the whole family. Good to do it in community. Makes the load lighter.

People ask, "What do you do with all your time out there alone?" Well today, for example, I did laundry, took a bath, and cut my hair which was a slow and unpleasant process because of low power supply. Feels like the clippers cut halfway through each hair and then yank on it til it breaks. Also shaved for the first time, clipped nails, brushed teeth, and even flossed for first time in months. Glad to be trimmed and clean though it was ok before too. I'm skinny and the skin under my chin and on upper arms is loose. I'm no longer a boy. When did this happen?

It's time to let go of the macho "I can tough it out" mind-set and start taking care of myself: body, emotions, mind, spirit. In a sense, I have been taking care of myself but without much tenderness or self-love. Taking care of myself because I must to survive, not because I deserve the attention and care.

4/17/01

41F/no wind/sea shining silver white to the east and darker green brown where it reflects the island out front/clouds over the eastern mountains are high and light yellow with patches and bands of blue and grey/to the south they are streaked into curves by the wind. The sounds are soothing: an occasional goose honk and ripples reaching out from surfacing dolphins to caress the shore. It would be a perfect morning to collect firewood or go wandering if I were up to it, but it also feels good to stay quietly here.

I'm eager for routine, a bit of regularity. I felt it making coffee today. I make two cups each morning - one to drink immediately, one into thermos for afternoon - and use whatever is empty to make it in. I want a special container just for coffee so I can do it the same way each morning. I'm learning when to start heating water during my exercise routine so it will boil just as I finish. (In Vancouver, preparing breakfast and coffee, and reading the morning newspaper was my most ritualistic time of day.) Thinking that, I realize I haven't missed reading the news. It's a relief to not know anything at all about the outside world.

Slept pretty well in spite of waking up to exercise every two hours. I dream of sleeping through a whole night. I think I've had only one such night here. I wonder - within a context of spiritual quest - why living has to be so hard? I wonder if everyone experiences life as hard?

There needs to be relationship of some sort. Without that it's a dead life. Perhaps this is what I'm missing and waiting for. My commitment here is to

relationship with Self, Nature, Spirit. If I spend my time longing for relationship with Susan and fantasizing how it will be after this year, I'm wasting this precious opportunity. Then when I come out, I won't have done the work necessary to allow me to be in real relationship with her. Nor do I know she will still want it. I don't feel this concern with Patti. What we share is solid. Our lives are deeply linked. Back to laundry.

8:30 PM: A gift of a day, just what I've been asking for. How easily and unconsciously I lost faith in the process. (As I write these lines, I realize that for the past week I've been sunk into doubt and anxiety.) I decided to take the kayak for a paddle and realized I've built it up in my mind to be a major undertaking. But it was an easy task to inflate it with the foot pump and then I was away. Wandered around in the sun, took photos, discovered a small beach on west side of the small island out front, collected some limpets for Cat and came back to pick up fishing rod. Tried several locations but caught only four tiny ones. There must be bigger fish since dolphins and nutria spend time here, but I don't know where they are or how to catch them.

I'd hoped the dolphins would join me to get acquainted and play, but they came over, took one look, and were gone. At one point I heard a sort of coughing scream from the east channel and saw a nutria (I think) out in deep water leaping up, then down under water, and back up again. I bet it was either in heat, rut, or had just gotten laid.

Stayed out fishing until the sun was long gone from the sea and climbing the western face of the mountains. Warm brown changed to orange, mauve, and finally delicate rose on the tallest peaks. Was on the water for about five hours and came in very chilled. Built a fire and had instant warmth. Really needed to get out there. This is what I envisioned: inflatable boat for longer trips; kayak for close by. Of course there were more fish in my vision.

4/18/01

8:30 AM: 35F. An easier night than in a while and I woke to dawn in a clear sky. Such mornings are rare here. I could be in lake country far from the sea. A low mist lies in the channel to the south, and the blue above is veiled and accentuated here and there with puffs and streaks of light, the clouds changing from rose to pale yellow. The sea is a mosaic of silver glass that reflects the sharp mountains and opaque velvet made so by the delicate wind ruffle. This eases my heart. I wonder what my time would be like if I were spending this year in a warmer, drier location?

The weather also brings restlessness. It's a day to be on the move or with a lover. Maybe I'll get the boat in the water and head to Staines to try fishing. Last night a strange sound came from over there. A loud, almost motor-like, vibration. Heard it several times and had no idea what it was. Sent chills up my back. I even brought the chainsaw and axe up onto porch. A nutria just came by fishing. Hard to believe this is the same species as the creature I heard calling and saw leaping out in the channel yesterday. That beast seemed at least three times as large as this one. Perhaps this is a youngster and that an old granddad.

8:30 PM: Didn't go to Staines. Farted around with electrical shit instead. After morning coffee I lay for a while in the sun just this side of the point where there are flat non-slippery rocks, some moss, short grass, and sand. I think that's where I'll build a sweat lodge. Some cormorant-looking birds were sunbathing, backs to the early sun, wings spread wide.<sup>42</sup> Neat.

Checked email. Wind generator help-line says not enough juice will get to batteries from 100 meters away. Either move generator and cabin closer together or learn to live in the dark. Some help. Guess I'll try bringing batteries back to cabin and see what happens.

This evening I split wood and at dusk went out on the water for a while. Wind blew up so I paddled in close to the beach, tied up to the kelp, and caught some fish. I guess dusk is the time they bite.

The inflatable kayak is perfect. Light and easy to get in and out of the water. Probably won't paddle far since the wind comes up so unexpectedly and I can make no progress against it. From now on when I go in boat I'll take the kayak too. Since the 4hp motor isn't working the kayak is my only backup in case the 15 dies. Come winter I'll also be glad to paddle out to the sun. My cabin is already mostly in shadow now that the sun is moving to the northern sky behind the trees.

4/19/01

Afternoon: From what I've seen, this is a sort of typical decent day here. 51F/medium high cloud layer/mountains semi-visible except for peaks/moderate wind/sea moving with whitecaps. Went to bed at 2:15 a.m. and slept on and off until 10 this morning. Strange how my schedule has shifted to staying up so late. I'm spending three to four hours a day just working on my body. I'm not so susceptible to the cold anymore either because I'm warm for five or six hours in the evening or I'm slowly adapting. Getting used to water and cat noises too. Cat was sitting in open doorway a while ago, snivelling quietly as usual, and I said "Ssshhh!" He looked up quite startled, eyes opened wide as if to say "Oh, was I moaning again? I hadn't realized."

Just noticed that I haven't put my amulet back on since my bath. I've worn it for five years. I'm also not wearing my watch, and only occasionally wearing the Leo ring that was Dad's. Don't like the stuff on me.

8:30 PM: Just back from fishing in the dark and rain. Icy hands and serious shivering. Cat on porch is warm, dry, and eating fish. I'm thinking, "What's wrong with this picture?" Caught a dozen just big enough to eat. Getting

a system worked out: stayed dry; took headlamp for when I need to see; used pieces of fish from yesterday for bait; had kindling ready before I went, and fire started easily. But I didn't take time to kill each fish as I caught it, and so they died slowly. I don't like doing that and will pause to kill them from now on.

4/20/01

10:00 AM: And this would be a sort of typical bad day. 42F/not raging, but nasty/sky closed down in a low bed of cloud/mountains and hills are gone/surface of sea streaked with wind froth skirling away to the southeast/sheets of rain drive horizontally/kelp floats soggy and sullen without sunlight to lift it up to dance and shine/a break in the cloud layer drifts over and faint blue glows, but soon it too follows a path to the southeast/grey slams shut again and blue is just a fading memory. My world grows small: porch, Cat in his box, stack of firewood, thoughts of warmth. I see only the mid-tide beach of rock and sea grass, moss climbing the stunted trees on the small bluff to my left, and, in the far, far distance, the small island lying heavy in its sodden bed 200 meters to the south. I search the West and finally sense a faint silhouette of the peninsula looming through the wet. I hear wind starting to move through the trees behind me. Not roaring yet, and far from the demented howl of a full storm, but waking up again.

The lid begins to lift and light filters down less murkily. Southeast, the hills - as if by magic - slide back into being. Another patch of blue floats past above me. A ray of sun shines into a translucent silver drop hanging delicately from the patch of lichen growing on a twig of the tree in front of my cabin. In the channel whitecaps that have always been there become explicit.

Three large boulders on the shore across the basin leap up and shout, "We are here!" I've looked that way a thousand times and they have lain dormant, almost invisible, but now the slanting sun has stroked them into full tumescent

existence. All around is grey opaque, but the three boulders, shaped and filled with texture and colour, bellow, "We are here!!!"

Southeast the receding lines of hills are gone again; just as well, I have no words for what I see when the mist thins. What are these lacks of colour? Grey, black, silver are not enough. A full monochrome spectrum reaches out from that deep distance. Close hills are dark and solid and each line behind lighter in mass and tone.

Rain pounds again and wind buffets my shelter. Will the walls still hold this time? Is hail coming on? Will it hammer through my roof this time? Am I safe here alone in the face of this wild shifting weather?

In the mud and grass my resident bird<sup>43</sup> hunts, apparently untroubled by wind and rain. Wait. It has paused to plunge into a hollow in the rock and flutters there having a bath!

Now the storm front moves in with a crash, and wind slams my cabin walls. Even here in the lee of hill and forest, trees lean and sway in the gusts. Even here the sea churns through the narrow gap and into the protected basin. Hooya! Yet this is mild compared to the February storms. As suddenly as the front rolled in, it is gone. Breaks in the cloud show blue. One leg of a rainbow arcs over the Staines rock face and the sea laps softly on my tiny beach. Until the cycle repeats again.

5:30 PM: This would have been a fine day to build a fire and hunker down inside. Instead I stayed out, opened my senses wide as I could, and watched the weather moving through. I often had to choose whether to describe what I was seeing in words or photograph it. The changes came so fast it was impossible to do both.

Got some pulleys rigged up for exercising. Used rocks and fishing sinkers for weights. Should work better than the elastics I've been using. I'm making a second cold water bottle using boat patch fabric, the screw top from a one-litre



plastic coke bottle, and Shoe Goo. I'll start to sprout some lentil seeds tomorrow. Consciously I'm not very aware of smell here. Vision, touch, hearing, taste are all very strong, but I seldom notice smells except kelp, firewood, smoke, and food.

4/21/01

11:00 AM: 45F/grey/windy/mountains half visible/swell crossing the basin east to west. Place cleaned up, black beans cooking, clothes hung out. Will they dry faster out there in wind and occasional rain showers or inside the cabin? Cat on lap. Quite polite. Knows to ask whether he can come up, and if I say no he waits until invited.

At Buddhist meditation retreats you are urged to sleep as little as possible to develop more continuous awareness. We tend to escape from consciousness into sleep (as well as into many other activities and substances.) Here, little by little, I'm becoming clearer that there is no "away" where I can go. I would like to escape, but sleep is not working and I don't have enough painkillers or booze to go that route. I begin to see more clearly the squirrel-race circles of my thoughts and to feel the results of that endless empty activity. It's not that thinking is bad, but it becomes addictive and will not end my suffering as I expect it to.

3:30 PM: Whoosh, where did the day go? Be dark in four hours. Seems like I've been busy. Cooked, ate, cleaned up. Water bottle is a total failure. Goo didn't stick at all and water poured out. Fixed the bail on my old Garcia Mitchell 403 trout reel. Excellent reel. I've had it since I was a kid. Did some filing and bending and now - for the moment - it's working again. I brought two ocean rods and reels with me and only added trout gear in case I get a chance for some freshwater fishing once this retreat ends. Now, unless I find bigger fish, it looks like I'll be using the trout rod here too. End of retreat.... Caught myself looking at the cabin yesterday figuring out the best way to tear it down and burn it next February. I'm nuts.

Two hummingbirds just flew into the cabin. One made it back out through the open door, but the other tried the Plexiglas shortcut. I rescued and held her a while to caress the shimmering gold, rusty green, and iridescent magenta top of her head before letting her go.

Feeling grief for Mom. It's not because she's gone and I won't be able to share with her any longer, but for our time together when she was alive. Grief for all we couldn't share because so much stood between us. There's a deep hurt in me that I was and am cut off - a loner - not only from sharing love with her, but with anyone. I guess we did the best we could, and maybe the union I longed for is always frustrated between mother and son.

6:15: The rain has stopped and the sea is calming. The world feels cozy and safe for now. I'll go fishing in half hour unless it starts to piss down again.

4/22/01

Morning: 40F/storm weather coming in from the west southwest/mid-tide and on the make. Inside, things are much the same. Emotional weather coming in from the northwest - longing for warmth and loving, sunshine and smiling eyes.

Today is Sunday, a day of rest. I may build a fire early and have a bath if I feel inspired. I want to figure out how to keep the fire small to minimize wood consumption and keep cabin warm but not hot. This is important for resource conservation and to minimize work. I've already brought in the closest driftwood logs, and four or five months from now will have to scavenge further away for poorer quality wood. So I prefer to be frugal now.

Didn't use capsaicin oil last night. Tennis ball under shoulder seems to work better, and it's a relief to not be so dependent on the cream since none of my experiments making it from cayenne pepper have been successful. For the past days I've cut back to two ibuprofen a day. I want to feel what there is to feel; to not hide from the pain, but search for other ways to ease it; to see if

emotional and psychological stress is creating the muscle knots. I also want to stop worrying that my supply of painkillers won't last. Seems silly to be dependent on them.

Afternoon: Went to the point to feel the wind, water, sun, and clouds in my eyes and ears, on my skin and in my bones. Back here I was greeted by the rich smell of split firewood. Some smells vaguely like cat piss but other is as sweet and fragrant as a sun-drenched orchard in spring.

This daily writing feels like breaking solitude, as though I'm in conversation with someone and keeping myself tied to that level of experience. It might be diffusing the intensity of immediate experience. When I think of not writing, I'm hit with a wave of isolation, and loneliness. At meditation retreats they recommend you not read or write and I may move into that space here, but it's not time yet; no not yet.

What have I learned so far that might be useful to others? Nothing I can put my finger on except practical information about how to do this sort of retreat. I'm holding loosely the notion of bringing back something to share. If I'm given something here and am able to share it, then I will. If not, I'll continue to live my life in a private way. I wonder where it will lead?

What is this longing I feel? Is it loneliness? Do I miss and long for God? Spirit? My soul? What are these?

Evening: Fishing fever has come back in a hurry, but I imagine it will mellow and I'll just go out three or four times a week. Hands quit working tonight due to the cold and I came in before dark.

4/23/01

Noon: 46F/breeze/sea fairly calm/some blue showing/raining on and off. It's been a fix it morning: repaired long johns and snowsuit suspenders, re-levelled

table, and put some more nails into floor where the plywood was warping. Lentils are starting to sprout!

I just emptied the rain barrel. Water had started to taste of creosote which is not a pleasant flavour. Surprising that rain falling through a drift of smoke from the chimney will pick up such a strong taste. Means I can't catch rain when I have a fire burning. It's such a pleasure to have good water and fresh air. Sometimes I long to be with people, but know that when I return to Puerto Natales there will be cigarette smoke everywhere people gather.

Started to re-read *Nature, Man and Woman* by Alan Watts. It's a captivating book. First read it when I was 19, and it had a powerful impact on me. I'm amazed at how much of what I think and say is in this book. Don't know if I internalized the thoughts I read, or if I've discovered and continue to discover the same insights through my own inner explorations. It's also possible that the perspective Watts presents has become an integral part of the cultural matrix I inhabit.

7:00 PM: I like this sitting warm inside and looking out through the window, but not as much as I like being bundled up out there. Fire banked low, headache banked low too. Maybe from not eating all day. When I woke this morning I saw the same sight I'm seeing now: mottled clouds, low tide, calm but moving sea. Hard to notice any change in the direction of the light when it's overcast. This could be dawn.

4/24/01

11:00 AM: 46F/grey skies/mountains mostly hidden/sea fairly calm/rained hard last night and has just started again. Before going to sleep I let the fire die, waited for rain to wash the roof, and then tasted the water. Seemed ok so I started to collect it. Barrel filled during the night and tastes clean.

Cat doesn't know where to turn. He's gluttoned with fish - belly tight as a drum - and has a mess of heads and backbones waiting to be eaten. He also has rice and beans in his dish since I wouldn't want him to not have a balanced diet. Hard to believe he was a wee kitten two and a half months ago. He's been crying less the past few days which is a relief. I'm happy with him sleeping on the porch, especially since I spend a lot of time out here too. In winter I may change the arrangement.

Sent message to satphone company asking how to connect more efficiently with a satellite. Only took 15 minutes to set phone up, send message, and put it away. But I need to stop sending "official" emails. Time to settle into my days, hours, and minutes; into the here and now. I've tasted and spit out some limpet a couple times. Tomorrow I'll swallow a bit. I assume it's ok since Cat is eating it.

#### 4/25/01

Storm: 43F/cabin shaking in the gusts/hills vague in the distance/mountains nowhere in sight. Noon and having morning coffee. Often in the wilderness, unless there is fishing to be done, I stay abed until 10 or 11 wrestling with inner demons. Today I seemed to feel the tension of tightly clenched muscle in deep layers of my body, emotions, soul. I fear I will always be clenched into a knot like this - cut off from love, peace, and full participation with the world and people around me. I heard Cat playing on the porch and every thump seemed a hammer stroke to me.

What is this core I'm knotted around? I don't want anything to touch that place, but the rain, wind, cold, and Cat keep battering at the walls I build. What is the pain in there, the wound I'm protecting? I'm not sure there is anything at all. Perhaps I'm clenched around the mere illusion that there is something to defend. A closed loop of empty habit: defences defending only themselves.

Could it be shame that I'm weak or cowardly? Fear that I'm not up to this experience? Spiritually I feel I'm still in hiding, crouching out of the infinite eternal flow of existence. I've often spoken and written about opening to "wild aliveness," yet I've been here nearly three months and still feel as cut off from my own aliveness and the flow of the world as I did when I arrived. I'm afraid to surrender to my own fear and suffering, to vulnerability and death. And I'm tight with fear not to. If I don't, I will have lost a unique opportunity that may never come again.

I might need to take the boat on a trip away from here; or that may be a foolhardy attempt to escape from these feelings. But it doesn't feel like the right time yet. I want to wait and see what the winds do in May. They are still blowing hard but with less frequency than they did last month.

I sense I've seen all I will see here - except perhaps for snow. No new animals or birds will appear, no different weather. What has been is what will continue to be. The only surprises will likely be unpleasant ones: people appearing, motor failing, getting caught on the sea in a storm, physical injury or teeth giving out, cabin falling apart. If this is all there is, what will I have in my pocket to take back and share at show and tell?

7:30 PM: What a storm. Wham. So fierce I went out to look things over. All seems fine, but what a hassle building a fire. It was roaring and then just flat out died. I had to re-lay the kindling from scratch four times. Even the cigarette lighter wouldn't light easily. Chimney won't draw and sometimes smoke blows back out the draft hole into the cabin. Must be a super low-pressure area passing through.

A while ago I suited up and went out into the pouring rain. Felt stirrings of grief for Mom - a sense of loss that she is no longer in this world. I can no longer visit her and know that no matter what, she loves me deeply and forever. Now there is no one to share the things I shared with only her. I felt heartache

and longing and then tenderness and caring for the animals and plants who live here. So often I just hack them out of my way, but when I remember that this is their home and see myself as a guest, I'm happier and more peaceful.

4/26/01

11:30 AM: 36F/no wind/sea fairly calm/socked in with no mountains or hills visible/first snow, wet flakes mixed with rain. Feels like the beginning of winter and I want a bigger supply of firewood. Buddhism teaches that craving pleasure creates suffering. Something inside me cries that life without pleasure would not be worth living. How innocent and sensible are the pleasures I crave: a morning cup of coffee; a cabin snug and sturdy in the storms; the warmth of a fire and plenty of firewood; the absence of pain; seeing a friend or hearing the clear words of a teacher; peace and freedom from craving.

Each moment is a matrix of strong or faint cravings for or against something. How radical to think of being free from these. I don't think I know anyone who is seriously working to be free from all desire. Free from craving gross pleasures - lust, gluttony, etc. - yes, but beauty? friendship? clarity? love? peace?

Will I ever read this journal? In the past I've never gone back to read the journals I've occasionally kept.

5:00 PM: Snow is low on Staines Peninsula giving the rocks a different shape and feel. From the point I saw a face there for the first time. Stern (not malevolent) and staring - one eye twisted - straight back at me. Implacable. A clear (?) mirror. I stood up straight and thought "Yes I'm trying, but I'm the youngest child and only son, and that conditioning goes deep." Then through a break in the clouds, blue sky and warm sun with no wind. How lovely and rare. Just what I've been asking for. Thank you.

Years ago in solitude a light opened in my soul and I believed I would have a relationship of joy with that light forever; I would follow wherever it led.

Returning to the world of people the light dimmed, the joy died, and I lost my way. That was perhaps the most painful experience of my life. It was like falling deeply in love and then, for some unknown reason, losing my lover. Now I think I'm terrified, not only of the love and need to surrender, but of the pain I'll feel when I leave here and am not strong enough to be true to that love and inner light. I ask for courage to surrender and allow my heart to be broken-open. What else can I do? I fear the unknown and the helplessness involved, but if I continue to protect myself I'll die inside in any case. I've been through this country, or at least to its borders, before and know that once I face my fear and surrender, there is joy, gratitude, and wonder at why I resisted so strongly - yet again.

4/27/01

11:00 AM: 42F/sea calm/tide low/some blue sky/sunshine on snowy hilltops.

The day stretches out before me and I wonder  
how I'll fill my time and pass the hours.

Will I be as fully present as I can be,  
or lazily wait for time to fly  
and February to arrive?

For years I've looked forward to this time alone  
which may be my last long stretch of solitude,  
and this life my only voyage through here.  
How far away can death be?

How strange the mystery of existence.

What is it doing here?

Why something instead of nothing at all,  
Or not even nothing?

How strange to avoid living each moment fully.

4:30 PM: How, I asked this morning, will I fill my time today - knowing there is nothing new here anymore? After three months I'd seen it all.



I filled the last five hours accepting a wonderful gift from the sea. At first I fished the kelp beds along the west side of my island. Plenty of nibbles but no fish, so I paddled out to try deeper water. The bottom fell then levelled off at about 150 feet. I dropped the sinker to the sea floor and soon thought I'd got snagged up. But there was give and take. The light rod bent double and I needed both hands to slowly pump the line back in. Snapper! I sent the weight back down, and this time pulled up two together. Then I came back in to rig the ocean rod with bigger hooks and more weight.

I used a rock to anchor where I'd caught the first ones and quickly caught five more. I tried further from shore, nothing. Closer in, nothing. Perhaps there's an underwater ridge where I fished at first. Intuition? Even if I wished to, I cannot see this but as a gift. I stopped once I had ten, which each weighed 3/4 to 1-1/2 pounds. In the cool weather they will keep a few days and who knows when it will be calm enough to fish again.

What is it about fishing that links me so deeply with earth and water? When catching food I feel embedded in the flow of the world. There is a wonderful sense of generosity in the gift of food. And sometimes there is more. Today, floating silently in the kayak fishing for my food, I felt I could have been living a thousand years ago. The gear would have been different, but that's peripheral to the process of asking for food with line, hook, and patience.

Purist catch and release fishermen, in some deep sense, don't get it. Fishing isn't a sport, it's spiritual communion with the non-human world. To call it a sport is like calling gardening a pastime or church a social activity. On one level all three labels are correct, but if that's all it is, you have missed the heart of the matter - the place where you are no longer only you but part of something greater. Communion: take this bread and eat of My body, take this wine and drink of My blood; join in one body and one blood. Plant these seeds, eat of the fruit, and become one with the earth. To catch and release fish is like planting a

garden, tending the plants, and turning the harvest under without eating it. Very weird.

10:30 PM: While fishing I wondered - again - how to leave fear behind and find peace. And then - again - I saw it. It is not finding peace by getting rid of fear; it's making peace with fear that will always be with me as long as I am an individual human being.

No matter how I slice it, whether I think of God or an impersonal universe, terror is part of the equation. Many Christians, wishing to believe all is sweetness and light, have forgotten the God of the Old Testament who inspired Awe and Terror. But Christ on the Cross is the essence of pain and perhaps terror. I, too, prefer the soft side of God, days like today - calm, sunny, and safe. But in the night when the wind roars across the channel and over the trees, that is God (or Nature) too.

My pretension to experience everything seems like empty posturing. Had I been in my small boat during some of the storms here I wouldn't have made it. I will never be able to experience all of nature directly, nor do I need to. I'm a particular manifestation of nature integral to the whole. I don't need to do anything to be part of the whole, I cannot be otherwise. I just need to be who I am and accept my place and the depths will open. A lizard is part of the whole, but doesn't need to go into direct desert sun to prove it. If it did, no more lizard.

The experience of belonging to the flow does not depend on personally experiencing every aspect of the whole. This is where I often get screwed up in my thinking. I confuse the small individual manifestation that I call me with the flowing whole. Then I think I need my small self to expand to become identical with the whole. Jung called this ego inflation. Identification with the whole is different and always already is.

And now it's time for cocoa and bread. Shoulders sore from paddling, dragging up the anchor rock, and reeling in fish. The new cold water bottle works fine and this is a good night to test it.

4/28/01

10:00 AM: 42F/grey drizzle/sea on the move/breeze was from the northwest, but it's calm now. Cat puked last night and I worried that the heavy bones of these fish had damaged his stomach. By now I would really miss him were he to die, but there was nothing I could do. This morning he is fine and has dragged another fish carcass from the bucket. I'm trying to teach him to eat his grizzly load in one corner of the porch instead of dragging it all over.

4:00 PM: Snack time, rice and beans. With all the fish, I haven't eaten beans for two days and I've missed them. It occurs to me to wonder how it smells in here. I can't tell, but to someone else's nose it might stink of wood smoke, firewood, glue, waterproof spray, bacon, creosote, me, and especially fish. If there were bears here, I'd be in mortal terror - and with good reason.

I wonder what I would be studying if I were a practising biologist. What would I be looking for and how would I go about it? At some point I might see if I can think that way for a while. For now, I'm just trying to really notice the world as it is in front of me.

4/29/01

Sunday, 11:40 AM: Warmed up to 50F/cloudy/windy/sea rough. Had to write the weather report from memory since I'm using the laptop and the only way to see the screen is to cover the window with a towel. Hooked up wind generator this morning and it's howling and growling down there. I may have to choose

between the noise of the wind generator during the day and the hiss of the propane lamp at night.

4/30/01

Evening: 42 degrees/calm/some blue sky and golden clouds showing through the rain-spattered window. I've needed to see some blue. Been a stormy day. Haven't built a fire yet, but will soon. Making an insulated bootie from wetsuit rubber I brought to make hood and gloves for collecting abalone. I'm definitely not planning to go into the water here. It's cold, and even at low tide the only shellfish I've seen are mussels and limpets. I can harvest the limpets at low tide without getting wet and I won't eat the mussels. I assume there are clams in the sand flats since I see shells, but they, like the mussels, are filter feeders and concentrate red tide toxin.

Funny how one thing leads to another. At UBC I had a quote on my office wall. It was about waiting without hope or expectation and about love finally blossoming from a thousand times broken heart. Wanted to put it on my door here but guess I didn't bring it. In looking for it, I decided to take passport, money, and ID cards from my knapsack and put them with other important papers. Then I remembered that since I went into the water to catch the escaping boat I haven't checked the stuff hidden in the hollow of my leg. Everything was soggy, so now I have photocopy of passport, travelers check receipts, and a bunch of \$20 and \$50 bills hanging from the line behind the stove. I look like a miser admiring my hoard and must admit that when I counted the money and recorded the amount on the list with the food and other supplies, it gave me a sense of pleasure and security. Weird. Never did find the quote.

Feeling rebellious but there is no one and no system to rebel against here, so I'm rebelling against the weather and my own pain - against "how things are." As

I stop fighting and ease into the pain, it fades and disappears, so apparently I'm creating much of it by my own resistance.

I feel very vulnerable to fluctuations in my circumstance: pain, weather, emotions. It's like there's no buffer between the world and me. When it's sunny I feel happy and joyful. The wind comes up, I feel anxious. It's grey and rainy, I'm glum. Pain strikes, I'm depressed, frightened, and angry. Even after many years of search and meditation I don't seem to have a tranquil place inside. I often try to block out unwelcome stimuli and this creates even more tension and pain. The skilful way is to remain open and relaxed without becoming caught in the cycles of pleasure and pain; to be mindfully aware without clinging or rejection. But I so rarely seem able to do that.

I sometimes sense there is no inside or outside to me. That the weather and my feelings are a continuum. Now and then, like today while meditating, I sense the world is not, cannot be, against me since there is no separation between us. We are one process. I am the wind and rain and physical pain. In those moments I feel some peace and joy, but they are few and far between.

I project my pain and fear onto the world so I can have the illusion of escape. If I go to a warm dry climate, this pain will stop. If the wind dies, so will my fear. But there will be other pain and other fear, and the need to escape will never end. Pain and fear are part of the world as am I. We all have it. My task is to make peace with pain and fear and to realize that finally there is no possibility of escape since there is no real separation between the world and me.

Tomorrow is May 1 and time to email that I'm ok. I do think I'm ok in spite of pain and uncertainty. Cognitive, emotional, and spiritual ups and downs are all part of the journey.

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<sup>38</sup> I never found out what this tree is.

<sup>39</sup> King Cormorant: *Phalacrocorax albiventer*.

<sup>40</sup> Thorn-tailed Rayadito: *Aphrastura spinicauda*.

<sup>41</sup> White-tufted Grebe: *Podiceps rolland*.

<sup>42</sup> Olivaceous Cormorant: *Phalacrocorax olivaceus*.

<sup>43</sup> Dark-bellied Cinclodes: *Cinclodes patagonicus*.

### Interlude 3

## Writing from Solitude

Silence is the home of the word.  
Silence gives strength and fruitfulness to the word.  
We can even say that words are meant to disclose  
the mystery of the silence from which they come.  
(Henri Nouwen, 1981, p. 48)

August 5, 2003

It feels late. The small hand is pointing at midnight; I wonder where the big hand points? It's just a year since I returned to Vancouver from Chile; a year here I haven't been writing the story of the year I lived there in wilderness solitude. It's been a good year: I've told a public story of my time alone via slideshows, website, and media interviews; I've participated in many conversations in person and via email; and over and over I haven't begun the hard work of telling the deeper, more complex and ambiguous story - the story I rediscover each time I open my journal from those days and months.

Usually when we tell our stories we tell them from the outside. They took place in some other time. A good story, we are told, should have a beginning, a middle, and an end. But this story is all middle and that makes it harder to tell. Perhaps that's why I've had such trouble with the beginning: there isn't one. At least that's what I tell myself.

There is another reason I tell myself for not writing. I've found I have nothing to say. No, that isn't so. I have much to say, but no universal answers to give. As solitude slowly brought me back to myself, more and more I had to admit I knew less and less. It's tricky to turn such awareness into a dissertation, but in quiet moments I remember.... What I have to offer is the story of my own

**lived experience in deep wilderness solitude, and perhaps together we can wander the spaces and sacred silences always waiting for us.**

**I often find myself writing without consciously knowing what I wish to say. Nebulous notions, multifaceted and complex, swirl through my mind and I'm at a loss where or how to begin. But I have begun ... with a single word that leads to another and so these sentences meander like a lazy stream through a wild meadow as I wait to see what comes sliding down the slippery bank to mingle with the sometimes murky water.**

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Daily journaling was important during most of the year. Writing, like thinking, is magical, but has a dark side. It's easy to get lost in the words. Weick claims we can understand lived experience only once it's gone (Weick, 1995).<sup>44</sup> Thus, sense-making through the written word can be problematic in that it tends to pull us out of the actual present unless we remain aware of the moment by moment living process of writing. This is one reason writing is discouraged during mindfulness-meditation retreats.

Placing importance on the content of experience is a habit of mind that tends to be addictive, and one intent of meditation practice is to become aware of this tendency to cling to certain experiences and to reject others. Attachment to particular opinions, theories, or stories we tell about the world (even attachment to the stories we tell about clinging) brings suffering. Writing can point to how suffering arises, to how we structure our experience, to the groundlessness of self and world,<sup>45</sup> but writing can also dam internal waters.

Years ago during my first long wilderness retreat, writing was not part of my daily activity. Only near the end of the three month stay did I set down some short metaphorical poems that seemed iconic of the experience. Later I wished I had written myself directions on how to return to that mysterious land of flowing Aliveness.

This time I wrote much more than I had expected and eventually realized I wasn't simply describing the journey, but leaving a trail of crumbs to lead me back. I questioned



if the writing might be buffering the immediacy of my lived experience and wondered whether I would ever read the journal afterward. When I began the work of editing, I was grateful for all I had written; not only because it has become the heart of this dissertation, but because living with the journal has been integral to integrating the experience of wilderness solitude into my life in the city.

The journal is long, often painful, and sometimes messy. Although I've edited out much detail and repetition, I have not omitted anything - even painful and shameful passages - I feel to be important; nor have I added anything.<sup>46</sup> In my fear of being accused of rampant narcissism and of losing the reader, I've been tempted to omit more of the repetitive descriptions of daily life and the reoccurring inner turmoil than I have; to present only the most significant highlights that portray especially meaningful events or insights, but something in me resists. I cannot completely remove the cyclic repetition without idealizing and falsifying the experience. The weather, the challenge of survival, and the experience of physical and emotional pain were always important - sometimes overwhelmingly so. This physicality grounds the mind in the body and contextualizes the psychological and spiritual explorations.<sup>47</sup>

Wanting to honour the rhythms of life as I recorded them, I have not moved passages from one day to another although I have frequently rearranged paragraphs within any given day to smooth their flow. I have polished the text to enhance readability but in doing so have attempted to retain immediacy by using verb contractions and sentence fragments, and by frequently omitting articles and personal pronouns.

I have also removed many ellipses and qualifying statements such as "I think," "there is a sense," "it seems," "we'll see." These terms, often ubiquitous in the original text, indicated my growing awareness that I was not in charge and had no definite answers about anything. There was damn little certainty in my life, and when I did feel certain it was a habit of mind rather than a real conviction. Removing so much of this tentativeness has altered the feel of the text somewhat, but has also enhanced readability.

Although much of the writing is lyrical, I rarely play with the physical space of the page. This understated formatting seems to most comfortably carry the weight and simplicity of daily life.

The journal is sometimes rough and irregular, not well-rounded nor nicely squared at the corners. It is incomplete, full of unanswered questions; inconsistent - or rather, multi-voiced (Tierrney, 1998). There are cultured voices of insight, analytic critique, and aesthetic caress. But there are other voices too: frightened, enraged and uncivilized. Voices from far places howling wild and often unheard in the hallowed hall. Listen.

Once I had edited the journal and was faced with the task of writing these interludes to create a broader cultural context for my personal experience, I began to feel I had to add a layer of analysis to make the story academically acceptable. I briefly considered extracting some of the various themes that run through the journal to use as a theoretical base to impose overall conceptual coherence and meaning to my experience, but decided that by doing so I would gain little and would lose much of the embedded immediacy of meaning that I believe is inherent in the natural flow of living. The embedded themes, as well as the chronological flow of events, create a sense of continuity as they appear, disappear, then reappear to deepen, intertwine, sometimes build toward resolution, and sometimes simply fade from view.

### **Narrative**

When I delved again into the theoretical writings of Ellis, Bochner, and Richardson, I was reminded that an autoethnographic story can itself be its own theory and analysis.

Thinking with a story means to experience it as affecting your life and finding in that experience a truth about your life. In thinking about a story, we reduce the story to content and then analyze it, hoping to find larger categories, themes, or patterns.

(Frank qtd. in Ellis, 2004, p. 197)

The journal is thinking with a story rather than thinking about a story. Bochner writes that autoethnographic stories:

... follow certain conventions of storytelling. They contain similar elements and follow similar patterns of development. These include: (a) people depicted as characters; (b) an epiphany or crisis to provide dramatic tension, around which events in the story revolve, and towards which a resolution and/or explanation is pointed; (c) a temporal ordering of events; and (d) a point or

moral to the story that provides an explanation and gives meaning and value to the crisis.

(qtd. in Ellis, 2004, p. 32)

I am a storyteller by inclination and practice, and I know how to use narrative conventions to capture an audience. I enjoy and find value in storytelling, and the slideshow presentations I give about the year I lived in solitude tend to loosely follow accepted conventions. Here, though, I am called to a different standard, and my goal is to captivate not through telling a structured story - although there are structured stories enough in the journal - but to let the mysterious ambiguity of life to have its way with me. I believe with Leggo that a conceptually imposed coherence and meaning are not necessary or even truly possible, and my approach here is to trust that my life in solitude was inherently coherent and meaningful and that the meaning lives in the words of the journal.<sup>48</sup>

[W]hy should my writing create the illusion of coherence when I really want my writing to re/present the multiple subject positions that I occupy in my living experience? I am not one main and complete idea. I am a legion of ideas - ideas without end. ... Instead of being coherent or incoherent, I seek in my autobiographical writing to explore and conjure a universe of discursive possibilities in a dazzling and dizzying explosion of opportunities for living. (Leggo, 2004)

Life is its own meaning (Maslow, 1966; Polanyi, 1958), and we look for conceptual meanings beyond immediate experience when we do not live our lives fully and then attempt to fill the emptiness from elsewhere. As Joseph Campbell (2000) said so nicely: "People say that what we are all seeking is a meaning for life. I think what we're seeking is an experience of being alive."

I am ambivalent about my identity and fluctuate between experiencing myself primarily as a cultural member of society and feeling myself to be a solitary embedded in the non-human world. While I continue to work toward inner harmony and integration, I must acknowledge these differently aligned aspects of my being: the student writing this interlude in Vancouver is not identical with the man writing his journal far away in the remote reaches of southern Chile. This is why that voice from solitude insists on being

centrally present and on contradicting the culturally accepted form of a structured narrative.<sup>49</sup>

### **Life Scripts**

There is also, of course, a culture-based saga of physical adventure and spiritual transformation that runs parallel to and weaves its way through the account of daily life: the autobiographical quest of the hero (Conway, 1998). But over and over that script is interrupted by the unruly wildness of the hero's soul. Cultural ideals of personal success, social progress, and freewill are questioned in full view of the cyclic storms of depression, rage, fear, and doubt about his place in the social matrix and his felt lack of spiritual progress.

Despite differences in theology, moral orientation, and self-discipline, the man in that story may have more in common with St. Augustine and his surrender of personal agency to Divine Will than with the stereotypical self-oriented striving of our culture's secular hero (Conway, 1998). His goal is not to conquer either the external world or his own inner nature, but to give up the illusion of ownership and control and experience himself as part of the ebb and flow of something greater than his individual ego.

But his goal of attaining enlightenment remains elusive - except when it does not. Through a shift of consciousness the quest comes to an end as he realizes there is nowhere to go and nothing to get. The notion of a holy grail out there - or even within - is illusory, and what he's been seeking he has always already had: he is not a special hero, but simply a speck of life like all other specks; unless he isn't. Personal agency always reasserts itself and these two aspects of his being struggle and then tentatively begin to dance together.

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When we see the scripted story our family and culture have cast us in, what are our options? Must we either knuckle under or, as Conway suggests, attempt to create a new persona/story for ourselves and thereby change our relationship with ourselves and our world? But in creating a new story, are we not enmeshing ourselves in yet another

cultural story - a story of re-writing? Any story we create - if we believe it and take it as our own - will limit our freedom to be who we are not in that new story.<sup>50</sup>

At times in solitude I was deeply concerned about the story I was telling myself - and imagined I would eventually tell others - about my experience and about who I am. But in times of peace and self-acceptance, the need for a coherent narrative seemed to fade. Just as scientific theories are likely stories about a world that is deeply mysterious, so are personal narratives about who we are. When we slip beyond words, we are simply mysterious beings in the present.

But personal stories do seem indispensable as we wander through our days (Leggo, 2004), and some stories, like some scientific theories, align with our lived experience more closely than do others. There is a sense of fit with whom and how we experience ourselves and the world to be. This fit is crucial - even though our stories and theories structure our experience. While there is fluidity, change, and circularity, there is also continuity and consistency.

In spite of questioning cultural norms, I am vulnerable to their power and did sense different stages in my life during the year and this is reflected in the journal.<sup>51</sup> While these stages do indicate changes in my inner and outer experience, they are also, to some extent, probably attributable to our attachment to the notion of progress; to my belief that personal transformation would signify a successful conclusion to the enterprise; to my desire to create a more dynamic plot. I believe I can detect this shaping in the editing process too, even though I tried to be aware of and resist the tendency toward systematically skewing the sections I deleted along the timeline.

In part, I may just have become tired of over and over recording the dark difficult times and began to notice how seldom I described the joyful ones. When I am settled into the moment, I seldom feel the urge to write about it and so the journal became unbalanced toward the painful. Also, while inner and outer storms continued to roll through, my relationship to the weather softened as I worked to experience and accept things as they are rather as I would like them to be.

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<sup>44</sup> Since sense-making requires a finite duration of time, I can never conceptually investigate or know the present moment; only the past. Slowly I am remembering to value (not understand) the moment by moment experience of writing as I would fishing or scuba diving. Instead of focusing so tightly on the “so that” aspect (the content/meaning) of the writing, I am learning to feel my feelings and think my thoughts as they arise. It is a process, alive and mysterious in this moment, that I can never grasp.

<sup>45</sup> See Interlude 8.

<sup>46</sup> In the early months I wrote journal entries longhand in notebooks (which Patti Kuchinsky later heroically transcribed with virtually no errors at all - even though I had trouble reading my own writing) and there were often several entries for each day. After I switched to using the laptop I usually only made one entry. I have retained this format in the edited journal. With regard to the amount of repetition I have omitted and retained, it is useful to recall that what the reader meets in a few minutes I wrote over many days and the repetitiousness of the entries was not evident to me.

There is another factor involved. Over and over I would struggle with difficult inner turmoil, experience release, and think I had gained some sort of stable insight or at least some perspective. And over and over, I would again become caught in the same inner turmoil and the same sense of release. Each time the turmoil would fill my world, and each time the insight flashed into my mind as if for the first time.

<sup>47</sup> While editing these painful passages, I sometimes thought, “Oh shut up, you whiner!” but pain, introspection, and depression are an important part of the inward journey.

<sup>48</sup> While these interludes do serve to contextualize, interrogate, and analyze my experience of wilderness solitude in limited ways, the actual text of the journal remains the main narrative thread.

<sup>49</sup> Paradoxically, the voice from solitude must remain silent and cannot be heard even speaking through the pages of the journal. As soon as the solitary begins to speak, even if by writing to an imagined future reader, he is no longer alone. Yet in his silence he is most intimately part of all others.

<sup>50</sup> Epstein (1995) writes: “The crumbling of the false self occurs through awareness of its manifestations, not through the substitution of some underlying ‘truer’ personality. The ability to become aware of self-representations without creating new ones is, psychologically speaking, a great relief. It does not mean that we drop the everyday experience of ourselves as unique and, in some way, ongoing individuals, but it does mean that whenever we find ourselves entering narcissistic territory, we can recognize the terrain without searching immediately for an alternative.”

<sup>51</sup> The stages were not distinct from each other or mutually exclusive but loosely show my focus of attention: physical work oriented toward survival; reading philosophy, psychology etc; psychological self-analysis; spiritual work/meditation.

## May 2001

Don't take it personally.

5/1/01

11:00 PM: 40F/calm/drizzle. First time I write today - surprising considering how frequently I've been writing. Maybe because it's more trouble to hook up the laptop than to write in the notebook by hand. The "I'm ok" email went out and replies came back with no problem. Wrote a short personal note to Patti because she said it means a lot to her. Want to curtail these communication flurries. They're a distraction and an escape.

Fish weren't biting much this morning; caught only one snapper. Wind came up and the anchor rock didn't hold kayak in position. Finally realised there were whitecaps and I wouldn't come out in such conditions, so I better not stay out either. Holy mother, was the wind ever cold out there. If it doesn't blow in winter, I wonder when it stops?

When I got back I organized the next three-month supply of food. If last month is any indication, rice, milk, and oatmeal are the only items I might use up. Finished making the wetsuit rubber bootie and it keeps foot toasty.

Reading Alan Watts writing about Big Mind in Nature Man and Woman, I remember that the main reason I'm here is to place myself in a context that encourages awareness of Big Mind. But I'm keeping myself anchored in my thinking mind with all the electrical and satphone concerns. Everything is working now, even if not perfectly, and it's time to let things be and little by little relax into the now.<sup>52</sup>

5/2/01

3:30 PM: 49F/high overcast/flat calm. Went fishing about 10 this morning and stayed out until 3. Very chilled and decided to build a fire early. Started easily and warmed the cabin to 70F. How nice. Haven't actually enjoyed the fire lately because it's such a hassle to start and by the time I've split kindling and blown on the flames, etc. I'm not cold any more. Caught three snapper and a 20-inch shark of all things. Swallowed the hook so I had to keep it. Still trying to get a sense of how and where to fish.

Sitting quietly in the kayak I became aware of my clothes: cheap rubber boots I bought for this trip; shirt and pants from Goodwill; long underwear Patti bought me for our last camping trip; thermal undershirt from my years in Montreal; t-shirt from Christmas in California; silk scarf from Susan; wool vest that was Dad's before he died; wool cap I bought in Peru 25 years ago; broad-brim hat I've worn constantly for the past seven years. A mosaic of my life and relationships.

At one point I paddled to the small island just north of here. Above the rocky beach, there was a firm carpet of short grass where I could walk for 100 paces without fear of falling. I did some fast laps to warm up and felt much younger. I've been feeling like an old invalid creeping around, always watching my step not to slip and fall. Haven't had much sense of playfulness on this journey, of light hearted fun. There's been pleasure and joy, but little easy play. Mostly it's been serious work, and when not physically active I'm still usually focused on spiritual/psychological work and on dealing with pain.

Thinking about my perfectionism and Patti. The perfectionism that drives me spills onto the women I'm close too. I want them to meet some supposed standard of perfection too, although I have no idea what that standard is.

For a while today I slipped out of my tight little self and into Big Mind; out of the matrix of judgment and criticism and into being myself in the world just as



we are together. I discovered this acceptance and freedom years ago during my first long journey into solitude, but lost it when I returned to the world of people. Since then there has always been a schism between my little fucked-up self and Big Mind.

For years I've worked to heal some of the wounds in the little self so that I don't need to escape. I don't know if I've been at all successful or if healing is even possible. Maybe we just are who we are, and the only freedom is out of ourselves into Big Mind. Perhaps here I'll have a chance to explore this question. The perspective gained from outside the small self is invaluable. Trying to change things from the inside seems like a futile task.

Enough. The sky is blue again, and it's still a lovely day out there.

11:20 PM: The mountains are shining in the 2/3 full moonlight. Went back out fishing and evening on the water was still. Just a small roll to the kayak as I sat not catching anything. It was glorious to be on the water all day. Because of the wind, I've spent little time out there during the past three months.

Something went splash in the afternoon light. I paddled over for a closer look, but the critter had gone. I think it was a nutria - mostly because I can't imagine what else it might have been. My Spanish dictionary says nutria is otter, but they sure seem different from the otters in California. I've never seen an otter chase down a fleeing bird, swim rapidly across an open channel, or make the kind of screeching growl I heard the other day.

Up the west channel, sunset light shone gold on distant islands. Over the trees, the waxing moon came through thinning clouds. Cabin was cozy, still slightly warm from the afternoon fire, and it would have been nice to have had someone to come home to.

5/3/01

9:00 AM: 43F/high cloud/mountains half visible. It's just dawn, and still a month and a half until winter solstice and the shortest day. Strange to imagine

that people in Canada are expanding into the longer days and warmer temperatures of summer while I'm hunkering down into the dark belly of winter. I've never thought nor read about the effect of alternate seasons on politicians from the northern and southern hemispheres trying to communicate with each other. They're never in synch psychologically.

Was up at first light to prepare to go for firewood, but the wind blew up just before dawn and now the ocean is on the move. Was thinking again about Maturana's claim that plans don't work because they can be followed only in the absence of freedom. This is especially true in terms of the self and the inner life. If I make plans and force myself to stick to them, there can be no spontaneity or freedom of action in the present moment. Perhaps a balance of flexible intentions would work.

I'm making the effort to be mindful of my body. I think I'm unconsciously clenching my muscles and the only way to relax is to become conscious of doing it first. It's as though I'm always tensed up to reach for something or some experience, or tensed up to ward off the blow I expect life to deliver at any moment. Flight or fight as a base line. There is little relaxation and much pain living this way.

Mom's death was the end of the dream that we would finally find communion without all the junk in between. This is the dream of my life, and the grief in part is that it will never happen - with any woman. Little by little I realize that I treat the women in my life and myself the same way Dad treated me - with criticism and heavy judgment. Both Mom and Dad are dead and gone, but I continue to play out the same scenario in my present life. I don't think there's an easy way out. Just steady day-by-day awareness and work to relax deep habits. Old stuff, but I need to keep seeing it and letting it go.

I want to make a conscious effort to remember my dreams. Not that I want to analyze or even write them down, but I suspect I've fallen into the habit of repression and that might be one reason I wake up stiff and tense.

4:00 PM: Split a bunch of wood so it can dry. The stuff I've been burning is very wet and hard to get started. Filled gas tank for outboard. I brought 140 gallons and in three months have used less than 20. I never expected the sea to be rough so much of the time.

Have had the wind generator hooked up since this morning. If my voltmeter is accurate, it took a couple hours to recharge the batteries. I figure the wind on the point is blowing about 30 mph, and the generator putting out 500 watts. If I lose 300 of them in the long wires coming to the cabin, 200 still arrive here. My lights each use 15 watts, so every hour the generator should replace 14 hours of light-use. It should take about an hour and a half to recharge the batteries after using both lights three hours a day for three days. Probably none of that has any relationship to what's going on in the physical world.

Midnight: Been raining for hours and I feel like it's beating on me even though I try to let it be and not resist. Feeling restless and at loose ends. Lonely. Grief for Mom and Dad. Where will my life lead and with whom? Will I end up alone at the end? I've eaten every kind of treat I have - cheese, peanut butter, dried fruit, bread and honey, popcorn, chocolate, coffee, booze - and still I want something else. To go to a movie and drink a coke, escape from the here and now for a while. Got out my few photos: family, Patti, Susan, and of me too. Gave me pleasure and comfort to look at them.

5/4/01

1:30 PM: 51F/Grey/sea rough but calming. Rain stopped at dawn. It had been falling steadily since yesterday morning. Just 39 more days and we'd have been Biblical. Guess it sometimes rains like this in Vancouver, but there I'm more buffered indoors and don't really notice. Blackflies are super active today. There

were a million on the porch, and since I have the door open there are now half a million in here. Below the light, my altar is covered with corpses. Sacrificial.

Hooked up solar panels this morning. They don't put out as much juice as the wind generator, but I intend to use the panels on a regular basis and hook up the generator only when the batteries get low. From the point I looked west across at Staines Peninsula and realized I'm getting hungry to go back over to explore and fish where waterfalls pour into the sea. Southeast I saw, more clearly than before, the exquisite mystic blue of the hanging glaciers. There is nothing else I've seen that shines with that glacial blue. Tender and intense. Slips through my eyes straight into my heart.

Haven't used the boat for almost a month. Is that possible? Two months since I fell and first hurt my shoulder. Amazing. Tomorrow I'll have been here three months, a quarter of my stay if all goes well. It will match the longest I've previously been alone. After that I'll be into new territory. What a silly idea. Each moment is always new territory.

I am - I guess I should acknowledge - apparently afraid of commitment. But why? In one sense it's because of the loss of freedom involved. In another sense it might not be commitment I avoid but breaking my promise. I see myself as inconstant in keeping long-term commitments, and since I don't like to break my word avoid making commitments. I hope my work with Patti and Susan has softened that some. I've told them both I will not disappear from their lives. Both offer the freedom to be who I am.

More serious and central is my commitment to my own spirit or soul. During my first long solitary retreat I committed myself to staying open to nature and to the inner light. During the past 20 years it feels like I've strayed far from that promise. I become caught in daily doings and don't seem to have a steady centre of orientation that goes with me through all the changing external circumstances.

I hope (and fear) I'll find something here that will be a constant in my life - something that will hold me, or something in me that is steady.

9:30 PM: I finally used a solid onion. Until now I've been using the good parts of spoiled ones. Then I got distracted, and it burned. Grrrr. Ate them anyway. I lit the propane light for a while to exterminate the bugs in here. Worked great, and the light, not me, gets the bad karma. I can see myself at Nirvana's pearly gates talking to a stern Buddha with a large illusory book. "Says here you murdered a bunch of blackflies on May 4, 2001." "No, no, it was the light that did it." "But you lit the light with blood on your mind." "Oh no, I only wanted to see the clear yellow light." "Uh huh. Back you go as a fly swatter." As I write that I get a creepy feeling. I mean, what if?

Got the boat-haul system rigged up. Set the five foot high tripod I made from branches about 20 feet ahead of the boat and attach it back to a tree. I tie the haul rope to the top of the tripod, run it through one pulley on the front of the boat, back through a pulley attached to the top of the tripod, and back through a second pulley on the boat. (Brought several pulleys with this in mind.) Then I pull on the free end of the rope. Have to pull in four feet, but exert only 25% of the force, to move the boat a foot. Transom wheels on the back and two heavy plastic tubes on the ground that the front of the boat rolls over make the job easier, but it's still a grunt. Had the project in mind for some time and it feels good to have it done.

In the late afternoon the sea calmed and I went fishing for an hour. Heard a roar from near Staines Peninsula that I've heard before and wondered if it could be the granddaddy of all nutria. Today, duh, I figured it out. Sea lion.

When I came in from fishing, I thought I'd just check to see if there's any new emails. Hunger for contact. Won't check though. The longing I feel for Susan will only get worse once I return north. Can't see any way we can be

together, so no matter what happens I'll likely be more lonely back in Canada than I am here. Maybe I'll just stay here....

5/5/01

Three month anniversary: 49F/warm and flat calm all day/cloudy and sprinkling on and off. If this is typical winter weather, neither the wind generator nor solar panels will be much good. Main thing is to keep satphone and laptop charged at all times. One calm day and I'm away into fantasyland. But in general there is less wind now than there was before.

Been a productive day. Up early and got all the gear ready. Looked like I was taking off for a month instead of a few hours, but if the outboard craps out, or if the sea gets too rough to return, I'll be marooned in semi comfort. Fetching wood went smoothly. High tide made it much easier since I didn't have to carry the rounds far over slippery rocks. Got most of the log cut and then the saw went bad. Shit. I think it's gas trouble - maybe a clogged filter or jet. Glad it was the saw and not the outboard. Dread. It was raining and I didn't want to screw with it there, so I chopped the rest of the log in half with the axe. I could just hump the two pieces into the boat. Think I replaced the wood I've used so far.

Headed over to Staines to fish and see if I might spot a sea lion or whatever is roaring over there. Fishing was excellent where I held the boat in position close to a waterfall plunging into the sea. Caught ten and they quit biting. Headed north along the shore looking for sea lions. Didn't see any, but it's very beautiful over there. The rock face slams straight down to the sea. In one place there is a deep undercut. Tide was high and there was less than a metre of space between rock and water, but at low tide I might go in and do some chanting. The acoustics must be awesome.

Came home and cut branches to build a sweat lodge tomorrow. Will look more like a small crooked tepee than a lodge since there are no straight or very flexible branches here. Shoulders sore of course. A lovely day. Celebrated by toasting the world with a taste of Diane's fine old whiskey.

5/6/01

10:30 AM: 44F/calm and overcast/low tide coming in. Rough night. Shoulders very sore. Woke up over and over, exercised, used the cold water bottle, capsaicin cream, tennis ball, and took ibuprophen. Nothing helped. Plan to sweat today. Need to collect 15 stones before the tide covers them. Then I'll carry wood and start a fire. Once it's burning, I'll lash the lodge poles together and cover them with a tarp.

5/7/01

No entry.

5/8/01

9:00 AM: Glorious dawn. Groggy from lack of sleep and coffee is on the boil. Still not the moment to write although I'm filled with tales to tell from yesterday and the day before. There's so much love, gratitude and pain here.

10:00 PM: For days I haven't been able to close my inner shutters, but that's why I'm here, so why complain now that it's difficult and intense. Too tired and sore to write. Perhaps tomorrow. In any case, I'm reading the book *Hermits* by Peter France and it speaks of the value of silence. So much of what he says about solitude is how it is for me. So much I don't want to accept. Negation of ego - the only path to real peace - is hard; hard I say.

5/9/01

9:00 PM: 42F/sea on the move/rain and breeze all day, but some blue sky now and the breeze has dropped away. It's been four days since I've written much, and I still don't feel like writing. But a lot has happened I want to record, and I feel it's part of my work to do so. Until now the words have flowed easily. Perhaps it's been a way to maintain my sense of contact with others. Reading *Hermits*, with its strong call to silence and humility is touching me. In some sense this pouring out of all that's happening to me - as though it's of great importance - seems arrogant. On my first long wilderness retreat I wrote nothing until the final week and then only some short poems. I wonder whether that retreat was so powerful because I wasn't anchoring myself in the languaging level of consciousness by writing?

And with that, I'm away. I was up soon after dawn on Sunday to gather stones, build a fire, and set up the sweat lodge. The wood I'd cut at the point was wet, partially punky, and difficult to light. It slowly flamed up, but was not hot enough to heat the stones until I split and added some firewood from the cabin. The lodge went up easily. I covered it with the tarp that usually covers the boat - the same one I bought years ago for shade in Mexico. I like the sense of continuity that comes from using things I got for a different purpose and have kept a long time.

The day was perfect. Sun and cloud and enough wind to feed air to the fire. Late in the day I decided the stones were as hot as they would get. I set a bucket of water inside the lodge and smudged each stone - which then became a Grandfather - with smouldering cypress needles (which is as close to Cedar as I'll find here) as I moved it from fire into lodge. I stripped, smudged myself, entered the lodge, and pulled the flap door closed.<sup>53</sup>



I sprinkled sage on the Grandfathers, introduced myself, said why I'd come, and began my prayers. I prayed for healing in my shoulders and for courage and strength to deal with the pain. I poured water on the Grandfathers and the sweat poured off me. When the heat had gone I brought in the other stones and repeated the process but with sweet grass this time. It felt very good to be there and wonderful to be bathed in the wet heat. My brothers and sisters at UBC were sweating at the same time and I joined their circle. There was a full moon and my link with Patti and Susan was also especially strong.

By the time I'd dressed and taken down the tarp (I left the lodge poles in place since I don't think the tide will come high enough to disturb them) it was getting dark. The sky cleared and the moon shone down as I sat soaking in the last warmth from the dying fire. I miss sitting by a fire. It's different to have the cabin here compared to previous retreats when I camped and was more exposed to the elements. But when the breeze came up I was happy to load everything into the kayak and paddle back to my refuge.

It was a hard night after the sweat. Up until 4 a.m. Tried painkillers, capsaicin cream, cold water bottles, and tennis ball. Nothing helped the ache in my shoulder, and I didn't handle the pain with equanimity or grace; just wanted to escape from it any way I could. Pain woke me again at dawn. Tried to hide in sleep but couldn't, so got up and was glad I did. Perfectly clear sky and mirrored sea. A fine day for exploring. I checked the charts, got the survival kit together, lashed the kayak across the front of the boat, and headed north up the east channel where I hadn't been before.

Kept close to the far shore to look for firewood, and saw many driftwood logs but most were four or five miles from here. It was the first time I'd really run the boat since changing the wheel mounting which helped a lot. According to the GPS I was making 15 mph. The temperature was only 40F, but with sun, no wind, and heavy clothes it felt balmy.

Went to explore a long narrow inlet east off the main channel seven miles from here which squeezes into a narrow neck half way down its length. The water was opaque and strangely streaked with glacial silt stirred up by the strongly running tide. I saw something that looked like algae on the water and wondered what it might be, but it didn't seem heavy enough to trouble me so I didn't try to avoid it. The sound of crunching told me it was ICE!

A strong current moved through the bottleneck where the inlet narrowed. I pulled to shore and walked down for a look. Whooooo! The tidal bore was a churning rapid. The water level dropped a meter on a run of 25 m or so. Took photos, but the moving water will be blurred. All the electronics on the camera, including light meter and speed settings, died some time ago, so I can only shoot manually at 1/90 second. Luckily I brought a spare light meter with me and can set the f-stop on the camera manually. Since I can't develop any film until I leave here, I have no idea if I'm getting usable photos. All I can do is keep shooting and hope for the best.

Walked back to the boat, pushed off, and pulled the starter cord. Nothing. I was drifting close to the rapids when the motor finally started. So far it's been reliable, but since it was submerged I'm anxious that it could quit at any time. This is most worrisome far from camp or across open water.

Further north I cut into a large bay with a river coming in that looked enticing. Being alone and far from camp I decided it was too risky to go up - but went anyway. The water was completely opaque with glacial silt and I worried I might hit rocks. Yup, just as I feared, I hit rocks, but luckily didn't damage the prop. Turned back to the bay, shut off the motor and drifted, soaking in the afternoon quiet. A condor soared over the ridge of a glacier to the southeast.

Coming home I swung across to the west channel by weaving between small islets along narrow passages with swirling current patterns created by the running tide. Saw some plastic debris I'll clean up one day. Tried my luck in a snapper

hole beneath the rock walls of Staines Peninsula and in half hour had nine. Cranking them up 150 feet was hard on my shoulders and I waited until I thought I'd hooked two or three before reeling in. Lingered to watch the sunset before coming back to camp. Feels good to have enough fish in the larder for four or five days.

Another night of pain and snivelling. Awake until 4 a.m. and then up again every couple hours until first light yesterday. Wanted to sleep some more, but dawn was so exquisite I made coffee and stayed up. Strange mysteriously dark reflections from the mountains rippled across the glassy water of the east channel. Then colours began to shine though.

Tinkered with the saw and found a wad of debris blocking the secondary fuel filter. Put it back together and it started right up. Filed the chain and went for wood. By the time I unloaded, stacked the wood, and dragged up the boat I was toast.

Sat on porch in the dark meditating until I heard a flock of birds running and flying across the water for no apparent reason. Opened my eyes to a huge golden moon rising over the mountains. To the southeast I saw a strange red light high on the mist-covered mountain. Through the field glasses it looked almost like a giant fire, but after a while I realized it was the red planet/star I've seen before - its light magnified and diffused by the mist.

Another hard night. Shame that after the wonderful gifts of the past days I have so little acceptance of pain as part of the over-all experience. I ask for help and try to open myself to it knowing intellectually that pain is part of being alive. I re-read meditation instruction on relaxing into pain: a lot of what we experience as pain is actually the psychological tension of resisting strong physical sensation. But when my shoulders cramp up, I just want to escape. After broken sleep I woke this morning to a grey day. Slept again until after 10 a.m. Ah, thank you, I needed that.

Today I relaxed, exercised, read *Hermits*, and not much else. I feel so weak in the face of pain when I read of spiritual warriors who realize that pain is not only inevitable, but beneficial in that it keeps one humble and open to help from a higher source. These past four days I've felt so blessed and grateful for all I've been given, but nights are different. My shoulders don't trouble me much while I'm active, but when I lie down they really kick in. During the day I can be philosophical about pain as part of life, but at night when I actually hurt I have no reserve of stoic equanimity.

This lack of patience, humility, and equanimity also manifests itself in my frustration when things don't go the way I think they should/want them to go. Perhaps tonight I can show a fraction more grace in the face of the pain. I need to face my own mortality, and here is a good place to start. This is not abstract philosophical stuff, but immediate physical actuality.

5/10/01

Midnight: 38F/clear/calm. I've seen a lot of moonrises, but few like tonight's. I knew the mysterious golden light to the southeast must be the moon though it was much further south than I'd have expected. One mountain peak, darkly silhouetted, was haloed in misty light that spilled over the surrounding peaks. I expected the moon momentarily, but the glow stretched through time and became brighter - and brighter. Finally, nearly full, it slid over the peak and sent a band of gold down the sea toward me. Out in the channel where the water was ruffled the band was wide and diffuse, but as it came into still water it focused itself into a narrow ribbon of smooth ripples. Closer still the ribbon unravelled into distinct yellow threads, each riding its own ripple crest was woven into the surrounding dark. Out came Diane's whiskey.

It was another gorgeous day. Calm, cloudless, blue. I woke, refreshed after almost eight hours of unbroken sleep, to frost on sea-grass and boat. I

considered rushing out to explore, but decided to hang with the urge and the worry that if I don't go today, I might miss my chance. The cabin is continuously in shade now so I took coffee to sit in the sun at the point. What's with these damn blackflies? Don't they know that when frost arrives it's time for them to leave? Read a while and did some short walking laps on the small gravel patch. I miss walking.

It was calm with an afternoon high tide, so I ran over to Staines to pick up some fish, then headed north along the west side of the island north to where I spotted a log a few days ago. It took only an hour and a half to cut, carry, and load the wood. I think I have enough now for maybe half my stay. It was warm and wonderful in the sun out on the water. This is how the weather was when I visited this coast five years ago. No wonder I came back!

Cut myself for the first time since I've been here - with the chain saw, which happily wasn't running. I was sharpening the chain and sliced my knuckle. A warning. But when cutting wood later I took a careless step with the saw running - a very dumb thing to do - slipped, almost cut my leg. Strange. For the past week I've been very aware of the possibility of cutting myself with the hatchet while splitting kindling and have tried to be extra careful. I've noticed before that often when I think to be extra careful, I do shortly after just what I cautioned myself not to do. Precognition of some sort?

I'm pretty sure now that the pain in my left shoulder is not caused only by psychological/emotional tension. There is real physical injury. I look forward to having enough wood for the winter and giving both shoulders a chance to heal.

5/11/01

11:30 PM: 35F/calm/moon and stars in a cloudless sky. God Bless you Myrna Nelson. She's the doctor who wrote the prescriptions for my medical kit. I asked for 50 Tylenol 3's but she suggested I take 100. I thought I'd declined

since I didn't expect to need that many strong painkillers. But last night my shoulder was so painful I decided to take one. The bottle seemed very full, and checked the label - 100! Happy day. I've only used three or four so far because I've wanted to save them for an emergency such as a broken leg, but now I feel freer to take one now and then when things get nasty.

Today I did almost nothing physical. Thoughts and feelings of restlessness kept arising. Much of it seems linked to my notion of how I'll appear in the eyes of others (and myself) if I don't do certain adventurous things while I'm here. I also seem to feel I'm missing something by quietly staying here, but I know I must be still to explore my inner life. Often, spiritual exploration gets set aside in my urge for physical activity. Pride may be one reason I force my shoulders to keep on working even though I have several months wood in. I do want the comfort of being settled so I can really relax, but there is also the pride of having a strong resilient body that can suck it up and take it.

In *Hermits* the need for humility is addressed over and over as being the key to spiritual growth. Hard. Pride goes so deep. Once I think of pride not in terms of excessive pride, but in terms of any pride at all, whew. The self. Keeping up the image. What a relief to let go of that even a little bit for a short while. A lot of my distress hinges on Why do I suffer? Why do these things happen to Me?

Took book and coffee to the sun on the point. Still and warm, even the blackflies not too bad. It was so calm that as the tide came in there were no ripples at all; just a slow rise in level. I watched the water creep up smooth round stones until its surface was almost 1/4 inch above their still dry tops. All these circular mini-walls of water that would then collapse with a rush. I guess surface tension held them like that.

The rock down there is perfect for lounging: flat with a slight slope facing north toward the sun, and not slippery at all. I lay and basked feeling very

blessed. The kelp was golden in the afternoon light and I could see down between the fronds into green depths below. This has been the best stretch of weather so far. I dream of it lasting but know it will not. Sunset on the mountains was ruddy orange slipping to rose and pale purple.

Saw another neat sight the other day: small lavender blobs spinning in a pool. Some sort of larval cluster I think. Now and then a wee lavender speck would whiz off and hook up with another spinning blob. Looked like a pretty frantic life style to me, but I guess they like it.

The black and white geese have different vocalizations. The white one makes soft rapid cooing/chirping/clucking sounds, and the black and white one gives single resonant honks. The black and white one seems dominant and, to my mind, likely to be the male. But I wonder.<sup>54</sup>

#### 5/12/01

Midnight: 28F/clear/cold/calm. Woke not long after dawn at 9:15. Heavy frost covered everything. Shining sea and not a breath of breeze. Five miles southeast of here, on the far side of the channel that leads to where I originally planned to stay, a long hook of land juts out and forms a deep bay. Near the bottom of the bay an inlet reaches east into the mountains. A short river feeds into the inlet and drains a lake that, according to the chart, is about the same elevation as the sea. I wanted to explore the inlet and perhaps the lake.

Crossed the channel and headed south until I came level with the tip of the hook that was now a mile west of me. Ahead I saw a smudge on the water I recognized as ice. Made sense since the sun had just cleared the mountains enough to touch that side of the channel. Backtracked to the west thinking I'd hug the sunny side, but ice covered the whole bay. Stopped to break some off and it was over 1/4 inch thick. I wouldn't be exploring any rivers today. Decided

to go down to where I'd originally planned to stay, and headed out into the main channel, but that was frozen too.

Started to worry that maybe the day had gotten colder without my noticing and that I might get frozen away from camp. Would be hard on boat and motor to crunch through ice. Headed back north and the ice disappeared. Maybe it freezes down there because so much fresh water comes from the glaciers with little tidal exchange to wash it out.

This country is incredibly beautiful. I love the brown badlands feel to parts of it. Idled for a while in front of a giant amphitheatre carved into the bare rock wall where scrub trees climb the slopes and cliffs. Huge square boulders scattered here and there and water falls crash onto rock and sea. The sea was so calm that half a mussel shell, caught in the tidal flow, floated by in the middle of the channel.

The spot where I've built is a cold hole. I was gone all afternoon and it was quite warm out in the sun, but when I got back it was still 34 degrees here with plenty of frost on the ground. I stuffed a bunch of sacks around Cat's box for more insulation, but he has thick fur and I doubt he's suffering.

The fire was awful. It's easy to build a fire with good dry wood, but when the fire misbehaves I don't welcome it as a challenge. I want it to start burning immediately. Took three tries to get it burning. Weird. The weather has been dry for several days and yesterday I split a bunch of kindling to dry by the fire last night. I need to figure out which kind of wood will work best for kindling. I sometimes get a faint glimmer that instead of becoming upset when things go "wrong," I could perhaps welcome the opportunity to develop patience.

Still reading *Hermits*. According to the author, the Desert Fathers deeply realized the need for humility and obedience. At times I've also felt this need to obey - to surrender the ego's decision-making activity. But how? Not belonging to a religious order, who do I obey? I think surrender and obedience - although



not spoken of that way - are also central to Buddhist meditation practice. In remaining still, without grasping or aversion (nice dream), we are obedient to the moment, to how things actually are right now - to the will of God. In accepting things just as they are and not as we would like them to be, we surrender self-centred will. In keeping beginner's mind,<sup>55</sup> we remain humble in the face of the unknowable.

Ah but ... words. It is moment-by-moment practice I need. I can see a year here won't be nearly long enough. I would need five to make a real difference in my life. In the meantime, tomorrow is another day, and tonight my heart is soft with love.

5/13/01

10:30 PM: 41F here, 54 in the sun/breeze from the southeast pushing a swell against my beach; not violent, but insistent/dark and clear/moon not yet up. Today is Sunday, my chosen day of rest, and I took it. Did a minimum of exercise to loosen shoulders and ease the ache, had coffee on the porch with Cat on lap, then took chair, coffee, and book to the point. I spent all day until sunset there with cat. I'd thought of starting a fire and staying indoors, but didn't want to cut myself off from the calm sunny blue-sky day. This weather can't last and I want to hoard it in my bones.

Read the section on Thomas Merton in *Hermits*. He doesn't convince me. Too sure of himself. Too dogmatic in telling me what solitude is about - what is healthy and unhealthy to do. The universal "You" slides too easily off his pen. And he never actually spent much time in solitude. For years he petitioned the Catholic hierarchy to allow him to live within the Trappist Order as a hermit, and when he was finally granted the privilege had visitors all the time. His brother monks tried to protect his solitude by turning visitors away, but Merton told people about a back way to his cottage. Even sending an email and waiting for a reply

seriously alters the quality of my solitude, so it's hard to imagine he got far into it when he was frequently with visitors as well as writing and receiving letters, etc.

All the hermits in this book had a lot to do with people - otherwise we would have no record of them - but after years of solitude first. What Merton writes seems pretty on to me, but I wonder how much is his own direct experience and how much he internalized from reading? He argues the need for silence to escape the incessant flow of language, but the man wrote over 300 papers and 37 books! And he died pretty young too.

As I muttered and judged his life experience, I noticed that the quiet spaciousness which had been growing in me all day began to fade. Discounting people as being inauthentic is also what I do to myself and so stay bound to doubt and a sense of worthlessness. His life, as is mine, was what it was - full of contradiction.

I lay on the rocks with closed eyes and listened to the water lapping the shore. The quality of the sound soothed my ears and soul. How different from the anxiety of three months ago when I felt the rain and surf beating incessantly against me. I was actually glad this morning to have a scatter of high cloud and a light breeze. It made the day softer and less crystalline brittle.

As I sat reading, I heard heavy breathing and looked up. A sea lion was working the kelp bed just below me. This is what I saw from the kayak last week. I'm pretty sure it's also what I saw and heard out in the east channel several weeks ago, and what I've heard bellowing from over by Staines. Cool. Nice when a bunch of separate mysteries consolidate into one bigger mystery which we call sea lion.

Watched one of the creamy-breasted ducks having a bath. What a trip. It was dunking itself then fluttering and flapping, and looked like it was actually turning somersaults. The dolphins came by for a while, and a smallish hawk

perched in a dead tree above me. I wonder what they and the eagles eat? Perhaps other birds. I have yet to see rodents here. Seeing all this and the nutria earlier reminded me that I see much more wildlife sitting still than I do when out in boat or kayak.

I sponge bathed and shaved a while ago and have long underwear soaking. Yuk, time to do laundry again already? But weeks have passed.

Been thinking about my response to blackflies and to the fire not lighting. On the physical level it seems natural to be irritated by the bugs and frustrated with the fire. After all, it's more pleasant to not get bit or to not be on my knees blowing into the draft hole. But my psychological response makes less sense. I feel like my survival is on the line if a bug bites or if the fire won't light, and this is what causes me to react so strongly. Instead of just brushing the bug away or accepting a small bite, I freak out, wave my hands, and slap - causing myself much more pain than the bug would have. Instead of hanging in with the fire calmly until it burns, I curse, mutter, and fret.

It is this psychological reaction that makes the pain in my shoulders so distressing. Yup there's pain and I can't do all I'd like to do, but that's just the way it is. My survival is not at stake. If I want to be free of these angry responses, I need to surrender my strong attachment to survival. Physically, of course, my natural drive is to survive. But beyond that, the psychologically frantic holding onto life and feeling anxiety and anger around imagined threats to that survival is unhealthy and painful.

Enough. Bread is ready to eat with hot chocolate.

5/14/01

8:30 PM: 40F/breeze from the southeast pushing the sea directly toward me/clear, but not many stars. Another beautiful day. Took the kayak to the windward point of the island out front to collect dead twigs for kindling. Finished just as the sun was setting behind the shoulder of Staines Peninsula. The ridge

where I stood was maybe 50 feet above the sea and it gave me a different - in some sense more ample - perspective on the area. It's the first time I've been above sea level. I paused to give thanks for the blessing of this time in solitude. I seldom really open myself to realize that for the first and perhaps last time in my life I have been completely alone and undisturbed day after day. Only occasional contrails far to the east are signs of the world of people.

After unloading I split some wood, and Cat got in the way. He probably just wanted to be close after being alone all afternoon, but for me he was in the way. Then he knocked down the bags of twigs I had just stacked up. I lost it and yelled at him, and as usual he disappeared under the house. A little later I called and he jumped into my lap so I guess he doesn't take my yelling too seriously. I felt bad and explained that at this time of day after I've been working, I'm just barely holding it together and his added confusion sends me over the edge, and that I was sorry I had yelled. But I wonder. Why should I feel bad about yelling at him? What are acceptable ways to express anger? I often feel giving the cat a swat or a not too hard kick is not particularly inappropriate. Animals sometimes interact with each other using snarls, swats, and snaps.

5/15/01

8:30 PM: 38F/calm/stars dim. How nice, the fire caught easily tonight. I used some twigs as kindling then added small pieces of the wood I cut today. Went east across the channel and found several rocky beaches with plenty of semi-dry logs. Felt somewhat vulnerable coming back across the three mile wide channel with a load of wood and the engine straining.

Finished *Hermits*. It was good all in all, and I might use some of the quotes in my eventual thesis. The last person the author writes about is writer poet Robert Lax whom he also interviewed. Lax has been living pretty hermit-like for most of his life, but within society. He doesn't see himself as a classical hermit because he isn't self-sufficient in his abilities. Says a classical hermit must be

able to chop wood. He tried it once without success and doesn't think it's the sort of challenge he'd want to respond to if he didn't have to. How strange. What limitations we put on ourselves, as though chopping wood is some sort of extreme activity. But in one sense his intuition is right. He probably wouldn't like it out here. Chopping wood implies a constellation of other more difficult survival activities: finding, cutting, and hauling the wood; keeping the chainsaw sharp and running; handling a boat; etc.

I've been meditating - quite a bit I think - in snatches rather than in long stretches of time. Loving kindness, mindfulness of what I'm doing, exploring the tightness and pain in my back and shoulders.

5/16/01

7:00 PM: 41F/rainy/sea on the move. Ah yes, this is the anxiety-producing weather I'm familiar with. The day woke up cloudy and so did I. Siphoned gas from one of the 55-gallon drums into the five-gallon containers I take in the boat. Split wood then cleaned up and organized the porch and under the cabin. It all looks better now. Decided to check the 4 hp outboard before putting it out of sight under the cabin. Whoa, spark! I've been convinced for almost three months that it was dead. Maybe it was just wet when I tried to start it before. But the second plug had no spark at all. Weird.

Inside the cabin is damp from condensation around the walls and stuff is starting to mildew. Bummer. Need to take everything from under the bed, table, and shelves, dry it, and wrap it in plastic bags. Hope I still have enough to go around. Again and again I've blessed the carryout boys who helped me take my groceries from the supermarket to my room in Punta Arenas. I asked if they would double bag everything and one of them grabbed an inch thick pile of plastic bags and gave them to me. At the time I thought he was being wasteful but didn't want to say anything. I've been glad to have all of them, have used most

several times, and patched many with duct tape. One of my rubber boots split. Shit! I'll try to repair it with Shoe Goo. Before the year is over I'll probably be sorry I bought cheap boots instead of spending another \$100 for good ones. Didn't imagine I'd be spending this much time in them.

The weather has been a welcome change today. First clouds and rain in over a week I think. It's felt familiar and comfortable, less brittle than the past days of clear skies, cold, and perfect calm. Felt good to stay here today and do things around the house. Walked to the point this evening to feel the fierce wind - and enjoyed it as I usually do the wind. Big difference between going there to visit it and having it come roaring down on my cabin uninvited.

Been reading *Nature, Man, and Woman* again. Most of what Watts says is based on Zen Buddhism and Taoism. Seeing through the illusion of self/ego is the only way to true peace and happiness. I wonder. If we claim that, then most Christian mystics were and are misguided because they believe in an eternal individual soul. Perhaps it's just different language. We can talk about surrender to the way things are without trying to change them to increase pleasure and avoid suffering, or talk about surrender to God's Will. In both cases the key to peace, joy, and love is to give up self-directed will and a self-centred worldview.

Walking back from the point, I was thinking about writing these journal entries. It's not writing that's the problem (if there is a problem), but thinking about what I'll say and mentally describing to myself what I'm seeing and feeling. When I do that I'm not really here in solitude but in an imaginary future where someone is reading these words. Through writing I'm holding on to my social identity and maintaining a sense of self through interaction with other people rather than finding a deeper identity as part of the universe or in relationship with God.

5/17/01

11:30 PM: 41F/some stars now but it's been raining and blowing on and off all day/sea on the move. Ice on the puddles is gone. Nice to have it not so cold. I used a nail yesterday! - first one in weeks - to hang a bucket of fish heads out of cat's reach. Today I used several more. Also organized the electrical system inside the cabin. Now it's easy to change the input from solar panels to wind generator. Finally cleaned up the brush piles beside trail to outhouse. Tonight I took everything from under the bed to dry and put in plastic bags. Is it ever wet under there! Happily, my books are in the open up high and staying dry.

This afternoon one of the resident birds was gobbling up grains of rice just below the porch. Cat was sitting far enough from the edge that he didn't see the bird till it flew up right in front of his face. Really startled him and he leapt back. Pretty funny role reversal.

Phantom pains going crazy tonight. Christ, give me a break. What creates the experience of pain? It's clear that the same physical sensation is sometimes experienced as pleasure and at other times as pain. Context is important, but what aspect of context? I think in part it's whether I welcome the sensation or it comes against my will. A sensation I welcome is pleasurable and the same sensation feels painful if I don't want it. The question is how to choose the pain so it can become pleasure.

I'm trying to let go my dream of being physically perfect. Mortality is evident in this pain. I'm getting old and decrepit - headed toward 60. Had to go through a lot of this stuff with my amputation and would have thought I'd be done with it, but I came back to pretending to be able-bodied and eternal. I resist, but know that peace lies in relaxing into my humanness - accepting my flaws and the flaws of those around me.

I long for wisdom and understanding. I've always placed great value on Insights, but in some sense they're a dime a dozen. They come and they go. I no

longer know what I'm seeking. If all is transient, including clarity and peace, then what is there to seek? I feel peace, love, and gratitude flowing over me at times but no sense of a Supreme Being. And I still have no idea what my soul is. There are thoughts, emotions, physical sensations, and - though Buddhism says it's an illusion - a sense of I, but what is the soul? What does it look or feel like? How does it manifest itself to me?

5/18/01

10:15 AM: 47F/cloudy/breezy/sea on the move. Phantom pains are back today and I worry they will continue and get worse. Last night, for the first time, I felt I was becoming overwhelmed and worn out to the point where I can't deal with any more physical discomfort and maybe I'll just end it all.... Scary feeling. I look ahead and see a never-ending stream of pain and it's too much.

Since I arrived here there has been a series of events battering at ME. This has always been my basic mode in life. Here alone I have to face it. There's a constant edge of anger and frustration when the world does not behave as I think it should, when my sensations and emotions are not what I want them to be. There's a private inviolate me in here that I don't want to have impinged upon except as I choose. Yet I've lived to expose myself to as much of the world as possible instead of creating physical buffers around me.

It's not skilful to compare what's happening here to my first long wilderness retreat, but I continue to do so. There I dealt with similar issues, but around acute fear rather than physical pain, anger, and resentment. What scares me now is remembering the intensity of that experience, how I was pushed to the edge of panic and insanity before I let go of my defences. I'm not sure I still have the strength and courage to face that intensity, but if I don't somehow surrender to my life the way it is, I'll have a long desolate road ahead. I feel I've been on this journey a very long time without reaping much benefit, and now I'm not sure



where to turn. No wonder I've been staying up until 3 and 4 a.m. Nights are quite difficult.

Today is another day. A hummingbird just flew in and I cupped him in my hands, petted him lightly, and carried him back outside.

11:30 PM: Pissing down rain. My Ph.D. dissertation has moved to the far back burner. I'm more interested and concerned with my inner work as a human being. I saw clearly today that I have a strong goal in being here. And that - in some sense - is just the problem. Goal oriented behaviour - the whole notion of progress and getting somewhere is one of the things screwing up our culture. Paradoxically, the place I'm trying to get to is right here: fully experiencing each day as meaningful in and of itself.

Ah how I beat myself up. I've been hammering on myself because I'm not dealing with the pain very well and am still caught in my angers and frustrations. No wonder I'm uptight. I have this frowning judge sitting on my back a good part of the time. And this judge even criticises me for not having gotten free of it yet. I feel its presence as malevolent, yet it is just an aspect of my character and not a bad part when in balance with the whole. Sometimes I feel stifled by the criticism and rebel even though I've seen that rebellion is as big a trap as conformity, and often I fall into the trap of trying to please this inner presence without being conscious of what I'm doing.

Sometimes too I see myself as a more relaxed and fuller human being, and think this is what Patti sees when she says, "I wish you could see yourself as I see you." I hope out here I come to live in the space where I do see myself and the world around me with less critical eyes. What a relief that would be.

But for now, it's time to deal with pain again. I sure miss hot water. I've been using it for years to ease tightness and aching.

5/19/01

Noon: 40F/rain/light wind/sea on the move/mountains gone and hills barely visible. Phantom pains have eased off. I think I wasn't using enough stump socks now that I've lost so much weight and the leg was loose and jamming the nerves. I like daily sweeping as part of my morning ritual. Always a bunch of debris on the floor. Glad I brought the broom; almost forgot.

Have set June 1 as when I might start building fires during the day, but not sure I will. It's sort of an ascetic practice to stay with the cold until evening: eight hours of ambient temperature, eight hours of warmth, eight hours in the sleeping bag.

Had a glimpse yesterday of the interpretation I put on physical events like the weather. There is physical weather - sun, rain, wind - which just is, and my emotional response - pleasure, peace, anxiety - that I associate with the weather. If I can tease them apart and experience weather as weather and emotional response as emotional response, it might be less constantly dramatic and draining. This is so of pain too. Woven into the sensations is the emotional layer which includes the belief that the pain will last forever or become unbearable and that I'm being mistreated or have been bad in some way. It is this emotional layer which makes the pain so difficult to be with. I wonder why I don't cry? Is there such a deep well of grief in me that I fear to let go because I'll never stop?

8:30 PM: Still rinsing teeth with saltwater morning and night to keep infection from exploding. Shoulders have felt a bit better the past couple days of not straining them with heavy work. Split wood and took 4 hp outboard apart. How cool. The flywheel puller I can't use on the 15 hp because I don't have the right size socket to remove the nut, works perfectly for the 4 hp. Have no idea if I'll find and solve the problem, but at least I can work on it. Trust the process.

Not long ago I wrote that it's much nicer to live in faith than in doubt, but I so easily get caught in doubt and anxiety. The latest is all this pain. I feel I'm doing something wrong. I tend to think my childhood was screwed up and I got saddled with perfectionism. But if people who believe in multiple lives are correct, then perhaps perfectionism is one of the things I'm working on in this one. Expand the frame of reference and trust the process.

Sitting on the porch feeling, listening, and watching the dark settle over mountains and sea, there was surrender and opening into that peaceful space of stillness. Again I see how misguided are my efforts to "get" somewhere. I'm already here. There is nowhere else to go to. The aliveness I seek is everywhere and I'm in it and it in me. It's only that I'm so often closed to the conscious experience of it. Trying to get somewhere else psychologically only removes me further into a conceptual dreamland.

5/20/01

11:45 PM: 51F/cloudy/wind and a moving sea/no rain all day. Sunday. This morning I took sweat-lodge gear plus some firewood to the point in the kayak. Got a fire going, tended it for a long time, and finally went into the lodge mid afternoon. Wonderful to be hit with the moist heat, drip sweat, and be barely able to breathe. Second round was even hotter and there was still energy in the Grandfathers when I'd had enough. If this is the last sweat I do here, I'll feel satisfied. I asked for strength and guidance, prayed for many people in my life, and gave thanks for all I've been given. Wished there was someone here to share it with.

Afterward, I sat by the sea to let my sweat evaporate before dressing. Dolphins and eagle came by. As I sat naked without leg or glasses I thought, "Well Spirit, this is all there is: skin sagging under the arms; missing a leg and a bunch of teeth; eyes not so hot, hearing not so good either; scars everywhere.

Here I am." Then I thought of how I would appear to a woman. And my biggest fault is that I would expect her to be perfect! Now that's a problem.

Haven't taken pain pills in a couple of days. They don't seem to help much, and I'm exploring the sensations of pain. Will see what tonight brings. Wind generator's howling at the point and I'll short it out soon.

### 5/21/01

Noon: 40F/blue sky and clouds/some wind/sea moving. A morning of mild sorrow and despair. No way out. I'll never escape my life and fulfill my potential for joy and freedom. I've been over this ground so many times - hoping and believing that this time things will be different and I'll be saved from myself. Even realizing there is no way out - and that surrendering to that fact really is the only way out - is illusion and another manipulation.

Is this low a reaction to the high of the sweat? If so, what's the point of all the effort to sweat or do anything else in that vein? Perhaps reading *Nature, Man and Woman* has brought on these feelings and thoughts. Almost all my hard-won insights are there. I might as well have just read the book 50 times over the last 25 years and saved myself a load of grief, hard work, and pain.

### 5/22/01

4:30 PM: Cold/grey/rainy/windy on and off. The 4 hp outboard is working! I cleaned the electrical connections, sanded and adjusted the points, and voila! spark in both plugs. Cranked it a few times and it started right up. This is very cool, but when I use the boat I'll continue to take the kayak so I can at least make it to land and call for help if both motors die. I'm not confident in either of them since they were submerged. I'm tempted to say I got the motor running and in one sense that's so, but I also feel gratitude, as though it's a gift that it's

running. It's like fishing. I go fishing and sometimes catch fish, but they are always a gift. My fishing skills make it possible to receive the gift, but my skills are also a gift.

Even with this very good news I still feel sorrow and anxiety. Back is tense and painful. Maybe it's the weather (stormy and a very high tide at my doorstep), or just anxiety period. Fuck, this shit never ends. But it's good to notice that it continues even when the supposed external sources dissolve.

Had boat pumped up and gear loaded to go for wood, and wham the wind came snarling down the channel and clawed it into whitecaps. The weather here is like the rocks - dangerously seductive. The rocks look smooth and safe, not slippery at all. The sea was placid, and 15 minutes later it was savage out there.

One of my favourite land birds<sup>56</sup> just landed on my leg then flew to the bacon hanging just under the porch roof. There are a bunch of dead blackflies stuck to it and she started to gobble them down. Hope she comes back to finish the job.

Put the booze away. It's become too important. Silly since I only sip about 1/4 oz daily. Just a security addiction like coffee and chocolate.

5/23/01

Midnight: 38F/stormy weather continues. I remained land bound, going no further than the chopping block and the beach to pull the boat up higher.

Late last night a luminous pool of crystal water rippling over shining pebbles opened in me and I bathed in it. Ah. At times there have also been moments of freedom from this straightjacket of self-criticism. Times when I experience myself as just a man ... living alone in the wilderness of southern Chile. A fairly decent man doing the best he can. A man I like and am tired of beating on.

But often, in the face of all I've learned during the past 30 years, I still cling to the memory of the experience of Wild Aliveness from my first long wilderness retreat. By doing so, I vacate myself from my current experience as though I'm not truly alive now. But whatever I'm experiencing - even the feeling of deadness - is part of the flow of my life.

This evening an inner light shone up from within and a voice called "Come to me, trust me, depend on me. You cannot do it yourself. You are trapped where you are and your struggling efforts to free yourself enmesh you more deeply. Come to me." "Yes," I replied, and surrendered. Yet my pride was soon sneering. This is the work I came to do. As time goes by, I imagine the intense importance of each event will settle and I'll be more able to be with the flow of experience as it arises and passes on. Or maybe not....

5/24/01

11:00 AM: 36F/brrr/stormy. Woke in the dark to the patter of rain on the roof. Took me back to my days as a logger. Yuck. Depression nibbled the edge of my psyche as I imagined living in some small town with a steady job, a committed relationship, and no plan to ever leave. I notice the depression is linked to certain mental images I label "the future" and not to actual present conditions. Those thoughts have the quality of non-changing permanence which is a core part of the difficulty. In the present, things don't happen that way. Everything is always changing.

I got up, exercised, and made coffee. The mood shifted and so did the weather. A storm front has moved in and eighteen-inch waves are breaking on my beach - biggest I've seen yet - and a very high tide is on the way. Anxiety. The cabin shakes with the gusts of wind.

I have a book written by a psychiatrist who is also a meditator. It points out the impossibility of fulfilling the pervading desire of all humans to be perfect

and discusses the link between non-perfection and anxiety. Useful to see my experience in a wider, more communal context.

6:00 PM: The storm has passed for now. The tide came higher than I'd seen it and wet the bottom layer of the woodpiles. According to the chart there will be still higher tides in June, July, and August, but they will be during daylight hours. In February high tides came in the dark when I couldn't see what was happening. Snowed for a while today but none stuck to the ground. Wonder what tomorrow will bring? Hell, never mind tomorrow, how about the next few hours?

5/25/01

10:30 PM: 36F/raining/gusting wind. Nice to see the solar panels and wind generator on the point and realize they've kept me in light for more than three months. Been a gentler day than yesterday. First real snow. Wet, but flakes so huge - some more than an inch across - that they swirled and drifted as though light and fluffy.

I've not been looking forward to snow because it's hard to walk in with my prosthetic leg, cold on the hands, and might build up on the porch roof and cause problems. Yet today the snow was beautiful and I enjoyed it. The future does bring difficulties, but these can be opportunities to interact with the environment and rise to the challenge. I seldom look ahead with confidence in my ability to cope and so suffer uselessly in advance.

Days - even in the cold - are easier than nights. In the day there is the world to see and things to do. The pain is less intense. At night the world closes in and my body grows large. Only rarely do I experience the sensations of my body as natural manifestations of the universe - like wind and rain.

So often I take the world personally, as though the wind and rain are directed against Me. It's insane to take them as a personal affront, and I

sometimes smile at my antics as a sort of game. But it's such a deep habit that, often unconsciously, I take it seriously. Time to let this game go.

This afternoon I was listening to the sounds of water, the gentle lap of the ebbing tide. I spend a lot of time listening to water and am just now listening to learn. A crack in the rock on the far side of my cove gurgled and whumped - each sound unique - and it seemed to be the sea saying: "I am this, and this, and this." I closed my eyes and followed the sound into the universe and felt myself float free. Then I heard the calm voice that calls, "Depend on me," whisper, "What about me?" So easily I forget. In that moment my heart opened and I was flooded with peace and love. Yes, my heart. Clarity of mind is not enough without love.

The bird that was eating bugs off the bacon flew into the cabin today and was trying to leave through the Plexiglas. She banged her head and fluttered onto the table then noticed a dead fly lying there. "Oh, a fly, I'll just gobble this down before I continue to freak out." It was so cool. Eventually she found the door and left, but later flew back in and found this and that to eat. Now there are little gobs of shit all over.

In the evening light I watched the creamy-breasted ducks - black against the snowy hills - patrol their grey green turf. They've never before seemed so territorial as now with an intruding pair skulking around. A land bird chases another of its kind from my front yard. This game of tag goes on and on. It's not as though one is the victor and the other driven permanently from the area. No, they both seem established here and both spend a fair amount of time running instead of eating. To my eye and heart, it doesn't seem to matter much who's running ahead and who's behind. It's just what they do.



5/26/01

10:00 PM: Drizzling outside. I know, I was just out there puking. A couple hours ago I ate some limpet. I chewed a little yesterday and spit it out. Tonight I swallowed a bit. As I chewed I noticed a metallic taste and should have spit it out, but for some reason swallowed instead. I doubt that it's red tide poisoning since there is supposedly no taste associated with that toxin and Cat ate some and is fine. But I feel slightly odd and so - even though it's two hours later - decided to puke. Hope I'm ok. Should know in another couple hours I guess. Wish I knew why I do things like this. Eyes are a little heavy and I feel slightly feverish. It may be getting hard to breathe too. My tongue, lips, and fingers feel slightly tingly. Wow, wonder if I'm going to die. Wouldn't that be the shits?

Went fishing at Staines this afternoon. No fish which is surprising since I've caught plenty every other time I've gone there. They may not bite when it's stormy like today which would be ok since then I won't need to fish in rough water. Heart is beating faster.

I put the 4 hp on the boat and ran it for half an hour. Worked perfectly. It moves the boat along at just under 5 mph, which is better than I expected. This is cool (assuming I don't die in the next while).

Cat's been having one of his snivel days. Started crying this morning and been at it ever since. He seems to have two cries: one says, "I want," and the other says, "Poor me." Actually, that sounds a lot like me and it's probably all projection on my part.

Splitting kindling today I sliced my finger with the hatchet. Not a bad cut - just enough to remind me to be more careful - but it sure bled. Still feel like something is very wrong, and going to lie down. If this is the last I write, good-bye everyone. I love you all. This journey has definitely been worth it.

5/27/01

Midnight: 32F/calm/starry/beautiful. Well, I'm still alive. Last night got a little weird. Stayed awake until 3:30 a.m. to be sure I wouldn't die in my sleep. Still not sure if I actually poisoned myself, but doubt it since Cat ate most of the limpet and is fine. Probably head stuff. Shoulder very sore last night and I took four ibuprophen. Not having taken any for several days, I was aware how drugged I felt. On the other hand, if I hadn't taken them I might have been more upset about the possibility of dying. Silly stuff indeed.

Today is Sunday, theoretically my day of rest, but it didn't work out that way. Decided to cross to Staines. The 15hp is missing when I crank it wide open. Sure feels good to have the 4 with me. Fishing was good. So far, it seems like they only bite when the weather is clear and calm. How they sense this 150 feet below the surface is a mystery.

Took the chainsaw and after fishing fetched the rest of a log I'd been cutting during the last good weather. Originally I figured maybe a dozen loads of wood in total would be enough. Now I have eight loads in and wonder if they will even see me though the winter. I'm glad to have as much wood as I do, and want to get all I figure I'll need for November, December, and January before the end of October. Once the summer winds hit I can't count on crossing the channel, and I've already cut all I've seen close by.

Been reading some Buddhist teachings in *Seeking the Heart of Wisdom* about restless mind. Boredom and restlessness are two sides of same coin. I'm coming to see that from a Buddhist perspective the vast majority of our culture's activity is likely driven by boredom and restlessness. I'm the epitome with my life style. Not a cultural rebel at all, but right on the cutting edge. Yesterday I noticed that out in the boat moving I felt much better and more relaxed. Didn't matter that I wasn't catching fish, what was important was to go and try.

5/28/01

4:30 PM: 35F/socked in and snowing lightly/no wind/sea calm. First afternoon fire. Feels good, but it would be nice to have a small fan to move the air around. It's easily 15 degrees colder at my feet than up here by my head. Planned to build a fire this morning when I saw it was grey out, but decided to split firewood first so the activity would warm me up. Felt like it might snow so I split enough for a few days just in case. By the time I stopped for breakfast/lunch it was 2:30 p.m. One thing sure leads to another. This is something to keep in mind when I have trouble deciding what to do; just do anything and follow the stream of activity to where it leads. But I need to make a conscious effort not to spend all my time doing just for the sake of activity to avoid unpleasant feelings.

Caught myself thinking today that I wish winter were already over. Yet the next three months may be the heart of this whole retreat. After that it will be spring then summer and I'll be looking ahead to leaving. It's time to stop telling myself I will start to really live in some imagined future time and circumstance. Once that imagined situation arrives, I dream up some other future situation. I know intellectually that here and now is all there ever is and I'm working to stay in the present and live each day as it unfolds.

I've taken another vow to not yell at or hit Cat for crying. I get instantly furious when he whines, and instead of responding with compassion because of his suffering (he must feel out of sorts or he wouldn't be crying), I lash out. This is what I do to myself when I'm hurt or frightened. Instead of nurturing myself, I give myself shit and push on through. If I can practice being patient and kind with cat, perhaps I will treat myself more gently too.

Quiet, sad, lonely afternoon ... but lovely and tender too. Still snowing and it's sticking to the ground. No wind and small flakes coming steadily down. I have

a feeling there might be inches before morning. Makes me lonely for someone to be here with me.

5/29/01

2:15 PM: 40F/grey sky with an occasional sun ray on the hills/sea mostly calm with some movement/enough wind on and off to work the generator. Shoulders continue to hurt, but either they're slowly improving or I'm reacting less strongly against the pain.

A flock of black birds that make elegant electronic sounds landed on the low-tide beach to feed together without any apparent territorial squabbles. After the hummingbirds and other territorial bullies, it was cool to see them hanging out together. Does the heart good. I think they're some sort of corvid.<sup>57</sup> Same black body shape, cocky movement, raucous communications, and beady intelligent eyes. They used their beaks to flip over rocks to look underneath for food. Probably sand fleas or shrimp they're after. When one found a good rock, others would scramble over to join the feed without any apparent discord.

The small bird that's been cleaning bugs off the bacon landed on my shoulder today and then flew right into the cabin without concern. She's switched from bugs and is eating fat on the smoked meat. I keep telling Cat NO when he stalks her. I don't really expect him to stop since the urge is so primal, but maybe I can make him tense enough to throw off his timing when he pounces. I wonder if this is the Church's plan with sex? It's not that they expect to actually stop unmarried folks from fucking, but at least tense us up enough that we'll do it badly and not really enjoy it.

Been considering my relationship with Cat again. Why do I accept whatever the ducks, eagles, kingfisher, and other birds do, but am offended by some of cat's behaviours? I think it has to do with a sense of ownership. He is in some sense (at least in my mind) mine and should do as I wish him to do. This is a

problem in all my relationships. As soon as I get attached, I become possessive and controlling. The most serious case is with myself. I feel I somehow OWN myself and have the right to control what I do and feel and what happens to me. From there it follows that the world is Mine to do with as I wish. But I didn't make me nor do I own me or the world. I'm just part of the flow of the world.

I sometimes feel that there is no escape, no possibility of transformation and change. At other times I feel a release into joyful freedom, and realize I was wrong. Then it too is gone and I'm back in the same old same old. Today I glimpsed that these shifts are part of a single cycle. Feelings and thoughts of being trapped in this little self without hope of change, release into Big Mind, and then caught again in small mind. Around and around. But there is also a faint glimmer that if there is no way out - and yet there is the experience of freedom - then there can be no In or Out. I immediately glom onto this insight as a possible way OUT.

There is the nagging sense that I will fail in my search here. I will not find or accomplish what I dream of - even though I'm not sure what that is. But what I came to do - I tell myself - is FAIL. Ego failure is the only way to the freedom that is always right here. I sense I think too much, and worry I will fail to really fail and so fail to really give up and surrender myself to the universal process. I will cling and snivel and waste this wonderful opportunity. Of course I immediately run to write it down so I will at least have this to bring away. If I can't learn to walk the walk, I can at least learn to talk the talk more creatively and clearly.

6:30 PM: If I were to study the resident birds scientifically I might get a more complete sense of what they're doing, but I don't have the desire to do the necessary work. The only critters that have captured my interest enough to motivate a study are the otters. (I now think the nutria is an otter. The creature I had come to think of as a nutria is a mythological beast; a hybrid of otter and sea lion.)

Like most people, I do casual science all the time, motivated by immediate personal concerns. I hypothesize and test the hypotheses, about where, when, and how to catch fish; about what firewood works best and how it looks on the beach. I try out different electrical systems and capsaicin oils for my shoulders. But abstract theories don't attract me any more, and as far as I can tell I have almost zero interest in trying to construct a mathematical model of what I'm seeing and feeling.

In *Nature, Man and Woman*, Watts quotes Van Kaam as saying, "Life is a mystery to be lived, not a problem to be solved." For me, the line separating lived experience and conceptual understanding is not as hard and sharp as it used to be. In the past when out like this, the world seemed to be a wonderful mystery - spontaneously Alive and beyond all rational explanation. Now I look and also think about how the world might work. But I don't yet have the strong sense of wonder and mystery I've had before, so perhaps the line is still hard and sharp and I have merely stayed on the near side.

11:00 PM: Low-pressure zone. Smoke drifting down around the cabin from the chimney and from the stove each time I open the lid to adjust the fire. On my first retreat I decided I'd rather be an artist who communicates directly rather than through inanimate photographs. I wanted my life to be my work of art. I wonder about the aesthetic quality of my life as I move through my days here. It feels lumpy, turbid, and prosaic rather than rhythmically poetic.

If I eventually write a book about this experience, I suspect my days now will not seem interesting to anyone. There's not much exciting going on. Same old crap going round and round my head and heart, with now and then a small new insight. But this is how I'm doing my work: going over the same ground again and again, slowly seeing things from different angles. Today I caught myself secretly considering the need for something exciting to happen - some sort of accident or disaster to deal with. This is truly scary. If I set out to do risky things with the secret hope that I'll have problems and so a story to tell, it is fairly suicidal.

Years ago I heard about rock and roll drummer fucked up on drugs and booze who cleaned himself up for a time. Then he went back to serious self-abuse. When asked why, he said that when sober he couldn't drum with deep feeling. I thought he was nuts to sacrifice his life to be a good drummer, but now I wonder if I'm doing the same? Seems to me that many of us sacrifice our spiritual, emotional, and psychological health to be: a better scientist, politician, business man, lover, soldier, environmentalist, spiritual seeker.... Self-sacrifice for what we love is our cultural ideal, but I wonder. Is it just ego-tripping and escape from facing existential angst?

Thomas Merton has gotten under my skin, but it will pass. I read a quote by him on page 54 in *Solitude* by Koch. "The hermit's whole life is a life of silent adoration. His very solitude keeps him ever in the presence of God.... His whole day, in the silence of his cell, or his garden looking out upon the forest, is a prolonged communion."

This was written by a man who either had his head up his ass or was bullshitting the public. I've spent a lot of time in solitude, and have listened to and read many meditation teachings (meditation being a form of solitude) and nowhere does Merton's statement find support. On the contrary. The mind and heart are all over the place from the most trivial, mundane, and negative to the joyful, peaceful, and sacred. Solitude is like the rest of life only with less opportunity, perhaps, for escape into diversion. And where does Merton get off saying under which conditions one is or is not in the presence of God?

Or this: "Not all men are called to be hermits, but all men need enough silence and solitude in their lives to enable the deep inner voice of their own true self to be heard at least occasionally. When that inner voice is not heard, when a man cannot attain to the spiritual peace that comes from being perfectly at one with his true self, his life is always miserable and exhausting." This is claptrap. I personally agree that we all need solitude, but who am I to say I'm right? Maybe others find their source of spiritual insight and peace through interaction

with others. Ah me, petty, petty, Bob. Think I got it out of my system for the moment. His writing is, though, accessible and well written. No wonder he is the most well known and popular hermit in America.

5/30/01

11:00 PM: 38F/balmy /breezy/full moon drawing near. Was looking at my moon tables earlier. I've never realized the moon has a regular cycle of declination between furthest north and furthest south. In winter here the moon is always furthest to the south when full; in summer the new moon is furthest to the south. Of course the opposite is true in the northern hemisphere. Pretty cool.

Looking at the limpets on the low tide rocks today I wondered how much they move around and if there is pattern to their movement. I flashed on a simple study. I could number their shells (with the nail polish I brought for just this sort of marking) to identify them as individuals. Then, each day at low tide I could locate each limpet on the rock and record its position on graph paper. After a month I could connect the sequenced dots and have a track of their movements.

Neat how interested I've become in their movement when just yesterday I was thinking that I couldn't understand how such abstract questions emotionally arouse people. What intrigues me is to see them and the mussels apparently sedentary when all else is in motion. I picture a computer animation of their movements for the month. It might look like a slow motion folkdance. Or maybe they only move 1/4 inch a day. Why this sudden interest? Perhaps because I've had experience with sessile marine creatures, or possibly because it seems relatively painless to do this study. I think I'll paint nail polish dots on a shell or two to see if it sticks in the salt water.

Cat started crying again today. I grabbed him by the scruff of the neck and splashed water in his face. I've heard cats hate it and it doesn't hurt them. Still, picking him up by the scruff to splash water in his face is much more



aggressive than just squirting him with water. It's not clear whether he would prefer a swat or water in the face. When I'm sweeping he attacks the broom, and if I keep sweeping and the broom smacks him it doesn't faze him at all. He's pretty big and I forget he's still a kitten - only five or six months old. He might grow out of this crying naturally, but he definitely must stop. I may need to find him a home down here and no one will likely want a cat that cries all the time. Other than that he is pretty cool and quite handsome too.

On my beach  
ten thousand  
broken mussel shells  
slowly turn to sand.

Yesterday  
each was,  
like me today,  
alive.

I crunch my booted way  
among their corpses murmuring,  
brothers.

Down the channel  
to the west  
a fierce north wind  
sends foaming whitecaps south.

At my feet  
the soft slosh of ebb tide  
roars in my heart.

5/31/01

7:00 PM: 40F/cloudy/windy/drizzly. The last of the hummingbirds have gone for the winter and already I look for their return. Played with Cat last night. It's only the second or third time I've played with him. Strange. I usually play with animals a lot. Haven't felt very playful here. Shoulders seem to be slowly improving. Been meditating on the physical sensations and emotions linked to

those sensations. I'm beginning to sense a whole deeper level of tension embedded in the muscles of my back.

Feels like years of stress locked up in there. I feel very lucky to have the chance to explore all this and hope I use it well.

Started *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by Paulo Freire. He writes about creating the future and that triggered thoughts about whether self-directed personal growth is really possible or an illusion. The duality I've set up may be part of my perfectionism. Absolutism. Either/or. As if either there is the possibility of change or there is not. Bam. But both these notions are only thoughts that run through my mind. Whichever I give energy to is more likely to manifest. Possibly both freedom and inertia - not just one or the other - are part of the process. At times it will seem like I'm stuck, have always been stuck, and always will be stuck. At other times I will feel more space opening in my experience of being alive.

Took the chimney apart today and there is good and bad news: the pipe was clogged with soot and this is the good and the bad news. It's bad news because it means I'll have to take the chimney apart and clean it each month. It's good news because now the stove works much better. The fire started easily and the stove isn't smoking now that there's a good draft of air. The other good news is that I can clean the chimney from inside the cabin and don't have to climb onto the roof.

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<sup>52</sup> I should add this note to define Big Mind, but I don't know how. In some sense the whole journal is about sharing the experience of Big Mind and the journey from small mind to Big Mind and back - over and over. For me, the term has many meanings, none of which can be clearly grasped, even though the shift from small to Big mind is experientially real. Perhaps it is best to leave the term undefined so you can discover for yourself what it means to you. I will discuss it further though in Interlude 8. The term was originally used by Suzuki Roshi in his book, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*.

<sup>53</sup> I'm describing only what I did in solitude. I participate in the First Nations sweat circle at UBC, but I'm not writing about that tradition which is not for me to share.

<sup>54</sup> I learned during their breeding season that my preconceptions based on cultural conditioning were incorrect. The white bird was the male and the black and white one the female.

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<sup>55</sup> This term also comes from Suzuki Roshi and I'll discuss it with Big Mind.

<sup>56</sup> Thorn-tailed Rayadito: *Aphrastura spinicauda*.

<sup>57</sup> Austral Blackbird: *Curaeus curaeus*. Interesting that they turned out to not be a corvid at all.

## **Interlude 4**

### **Solitude as Object**

**He who does not enjoy solitude will not love freedom.**

(Schopenhauer, 2005)

**Solitude is a torment which is not threatened in hell itself.**

(Donne, 1952)

**Our language has wisely sensed the two sides of being alone. It has created the word loneliness to express the pain of being alone. And it has created the word solitude to express the glory of being alone.**

(Tillich, 1957)

Early in my doctoral studies I decided against reading about solitude or the writings of other solitaries before beginning my own retreat. Naively perhaps, I did not wish to colour my experience by tinting it beforehand with the experiences of others. I developed this appreciation for ignorance during many years of overland travel and I seldom read about where I'm going or plan far ahead when I set off to wander. So often I have seen tourists obliviously marching down vibrant streets, noses buried in guidebooks, steps directed toward the next recommended site to see. I prefer to wander more aimlessly, letting daily events and conversations with locals carry me where they will, or to sit quietly on curb or bench watching to see what life might bring into my field of awareness.

This empty minded approach has advantages and disadvantages. It leaves me open to a wider variety of experiences, but vulnerable too: there is more wonder and more risk; more "wasted time." In using a guidebook, whether for outer or inner journeys, the adventure is muted as you follow a supposed expert's advice, which tends to take you out of relationship with the immediate present. Since others are also following that same advice instead of their own meandering footsteps, crowds and competition can build. In going my own way, I may not go as far or as quickly, may miss sights others see and so

have less in common with them, may lose my way, but I also see things few others do and have the space and leisure to bathe in the wonders I encounter.

After my year alone I have found pleasure and value in what others have to say about solitude. *Solitude: A Philosophical Encounter* by Philip Koch has been very useful in contextualizing my own experience, and in reading it I became quite glad not to have chosen to write *about* solitude from a philosophical perspective. Koch's book is more erudite than I could or would want to attempt to write, and I am content here to loosely follow the trail he has blazed. In writing this dissertation, I don't feel an obligation to philosophical consistency, but in observing his belief in the efficacy of rational argument to resolve disagreements, I do question whether I sometimes break faith with logic by so wantonly embracing mystery.

Koch's style is clear and conversational, and his approach - grounded in his own personal explorations of solitude - is balanced: he gives precedence neither to solitude nor to social engagement. I recommend the book to any reader who wishes to learn more about the place of solitude in our culture and individual lives. The following discussion has drawn extensively from his work, and all the quotes attributed to him are borrowed from *Solitude: A Philosophical Encounter*.<sup>58</sup>

### **Features of Solitude**

Koch identifies three features that define solitude - physical isolation; social disengagement; self-reflectiveness - but argues that the essence is disengagement from other subjects:

What, then, is solitude? It is a time in which experience is disengaged from other people. All of the other features of solitude that come intuitively to mind, the physical isolation, the reflective cast of mind, the freedom, the silence, the distinctive feel of space and time - all of these flow from that core feature, the absence of others in one's experiential world.

(p. 27)

I agree with his definition to a point, but would like to add a caveat. Solitude may not depend on the physical absence of others or even the absence of others in our consciousness, but rather how we react to their presence. If we engage with them, in

either a positive or negative way, we are not alone. However, if we do not reach out to beckon them closer or push them away, but simply notice their presence, we remain free in our solitude. Finally though, trying to define solitude is, like trying to define relationship, an impossible task since there is no one thing called solitude. The experience varies among individuals and within one individual across time and circumstance.

By almost any definition I spent a year in solitude, but even so I was keenly aware of a wide range of experiences in my sense of myself in relation to other people and to the world around me. At times I was fully engaged with the present moment, with the flow of the non-human world, with the mysterious presence of Spirit. At other times I was lost in memories of other people or in imaginings of future social interactions. While I remained physically apart from and generally out of communication with other people, the quality of solitude varied widely.

When building the cabin I often wondered how what I was creating would seem to Patti if she eventually came to the island. Was I in solitude at those times? When writing an email to request information about my electric system from a tech support person, was I in solitude? While writing in my journal and sly thoughts of an imagined future reader crept into my mind, was I in solitude?

### **Containments and Completions of Solitude**

Can we ever be completely alone or completely engaged with others? In *Labyrinth of Solitude*, Octavio Paz writes: “Solitude is the profoundest fact of the human condition. Man is the only being who knows he is alone” (1961, p. 195). Proust puts an even sharper edge to it:

Notwithstanding the illusion by which we would fain be cheated and with which, out of friendship, politeness, deference and duty, we cheat other people, we exist alone. Man is the creature who cannot escape himself, who knows other people only in himself, and when he asserts the contrary he is lying.  
(qtd. in Koch, p. 160)

Wilber (1995) and de Quincey (2002), on the other side, argue that intersubjectivity is primary. Our sense of isolation arises from a particular perceptual angle as Escher depicts so brilliantly in his drawing *Bond of Union* (Figure 1). Buddhism sometimes goes further to claim that all separateness is illusion. One reason for going into solitude is to explore the unity that lies beneath our apparent aloneness; beneath the need to connect through social engagement mediated by language. The only way to satisfactorily answer the question, “Are we truly alone, locked into separate minds and bodies,” is experientially through a transformation of consciousness.

In philosophically questioning how solitude and relationship fit together, Koch develops the notion of containment. Social relations act as a container for our time in solitude, just as our solitariness is always present in our relationships. In interweaving these two fundamental aspects of our being, he heals the false dichotomy between social and solitary.

He uses St. Anthony and other Desert Fathers as an example of containment. Even though each lived a solitary life out of sight and hearing of the others, they met for prayer once a week, assisted each other in times of need, and always welcomed guests with hospitality. Their solitary lives were pursued within a web of social and spiritual relations. Yet I believe this containment can be (and in the lives of true solitaries is) reversed. Relationship with God, Spirit, or non-human nature becomes the containment for social relationships.

Some of the various layers of containment for my retreat into solitude were: my sangha, the dharma, and the Buddha; a one year time frame and return to the social milieu; the Ph.D. project and journal writing; the memory of my first long retreat into wilderness solitude; Cat; wind and rain. I spent a great deal of time working to dissolve, expand, or at least soften the boundaries of my conceptual containment; to relax my grip on social identity and worldview and settle into the mystery of living.

Koch also speaks of the completions of solitude: the experience is completed in sharing it with others. I find this need in myself, and question it. If I claim that solitude is valuable and meaningful in and of itself, but need to share, even validate, the experience through journal, slideshows, media interviews, and conversations, am I living

a lie? Is trying to share our solitude a futile endeavour in any case? Must the voice of solitude remain silent? Some experiences are so sacred they should be honoured in silence and not be diffused or profaned by talking about them. For more than twenty years I scarcely mentioned my first long retreat into solitude.

Koch develops the points of view from proponents of both sides of the argument I've briefly presented above and concludes:

Collecting all these observations in a summary: the ways in which communicative encounters with other people are incomplete have either been falsely exaggerated by the lonely philosophers, or, when true, do not prove that aloneness is any more ultimate a state than encounter.

(p. 190)

[T]he view that aloneness, whether as loneliness or as solitude, is the deepest, truest most ontically primary state of human being cannot be sustained by argument.

(p. 195)

And

What is the place of aloneness in human existence? Given the failure of arguments to the contrary, I am inclined to accord to it an equal status with encounter. Both are states of Being and Knowledge, both are full of illusions and lies.

(p. 199)

### **Call to Solitude**

What is it that calls or drives some people into solitude? Maslow (1968) found a greater detachment and desire for privacy in self-actualizing individuals. Storr writes:

Most psychiatrists and psychologists agree that human beings differ in temperament, and that such differences are largely inborn, however much they may be fostered or suppressed by the circumstances of childhood and by subsequent events in a person's life. This is especially true when considering the individual's reaction to solitude. At the very least, we all need the solitude of sleep; but, in waking life, people vary widely in how much they value experiences involving human relationships and how much they value what happens when they are alone.

(1988, p. 85)



Storr also describes how our feeling may urge us to leave our habitual social setting to spend time alone:

In the ordinary way, our sense of identity depends upon interaction both with the physical world and with other people. ... My relationships with my family, with colleagues, friends, and less intimate acquaintances, define me as a person who holds certain views and who may be expected to behave in ways which are predictable.

But I may come to feel that such habitually defining factors are also limiting. Suppose that I become dissatisfied with my habitual self, or feel that there are areas of experience or self-understanding which I cannot reach. One way of exploring these is to remove myself from present surroundings and see what emerges. This is not without its dangers. Any form of new organization or integration within the mind has to be preceded by some degree of disorganization. No one can tell, until he has experienced it, whether or not this necessary disruption of former patterns will be succeeded by something better. (1988, p. 35)

Solitude provides a respite from the demands of social life in which personal healing might happen:

[A]lthough the desire to be useful can be a sign of mental and spiritual health, in our goal-oriented society it can also become the source of a paralyzing lack of self-esteem. More often than not we not only desire to do meaningful things, but we often make the results of our work the criteria of our self-esteem. ...

When we start being too impressed by the results of our work, we slowly come to the erroneous conviction that life is one large scoreboard where someone is listing the points to measure our worth. And before we are fully aware of it, we have sold our souls to the many grade-givers. ... A life without a lonely place, that is, a life without a quiet center, easily becomes destructive. When we cling to the results of our actions as our only source of self-identification, then we become possessive and defensive and tend to look at our fellow human beings more as enemies to be kept at a distance than as friends, with whom we share the gifts of life. ... In solitude we become aware that our worth is not the same as our usefulness.

(Nouwen, 1974, p. 18)

In our culture, specialization has been carried to such an extreme that daily life can become narrow and boringly repetitious. Activities we used to enjoy in childhood and youth are lost to the demands of adulthood. In solitude there is the need and the opportunity to do everything for myself: build a shelter; repair equipment, clothes, and

other gear; catch fish and cook food; fetch and split firewood; build a fire; keep a journal and take photographs. For me, the satisfaction of self-reliance is one of the joys of wilderness solitude.

Possibly, the most often cited reason for going into solitude is for spiritual communion, which involves surrender of individual autonomy to Something Greater: God, Spirit, nature, or our human family. For many aboriginal peoples the shaman spends time in solitude so he can mediate between the human and more than human realms (Abram, 1996). Charles Alexander Eastman writes about the attitude of American Indians toward the Eternal, the “Great Mystery” - before contact with Europeans:

The worship of the “Great Mystery” was silent, solitary, free from all self-seeking. It was silent, because all speech is of necessity feeble and imperfect; therefore the souls of my ancestors ascended to God in wordless adoration. It was solitary, because they believed that He is nearer to us in solitude, and there were no priests authorized to come between a man and his Maker.

(qtd. in Koch, p. 284.)

From analyzing these and other writings, Koch identifies five virtues - valued states or activities most easily realized in solitude: Freedom, Attunement to Self, Attunement to Nature, Reflective Perspective, Creativity. My journal contains many references to these virtues and I have considered using them as a theoretical frame to conceptually organize my own experience, but to what end? If I were to focus on locating myself in relation to others, I and the reader would gain little and we would lose much of the spontaneous immediacy of the journal as well as the virtues themselves.

### **Objections to Solitude**

There are also objections to spending time in solitude. Until I read Storr while on the island, I'd never really questioned whether or not spending time alone is considered psychologically healthy or socially acceptable; it has simply been an important part of my life since I was a young boy. I've discovered there has been a rich and sometimes acrimonious argument about the matter at least since Biblical days.

Ecclesiastes (4:9 - 4:12) warns:

Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour.  
 For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone  
 when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up.  
 Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone?  
 And if one prevails against him, and two shall withstand him; and a threefold  
 cord is not quickly broken.

But the great Biblical mystics Moses, John the Baptist, and Jesus all went into solitude to face their demons and commune with God.

Since then there have been many others such as Hume who have condemned the pointless selfishness of spending time alone.

Celibacy, fasting, penance, mortification, self-denial, humility, silence, solitude, and the whole train of monkish virtues; for what reason are they everywhere rejected by men of sense, but because they serve to no manner of purpose; neither advance a man's fortune in the world, nor render him a more valuable member of society, neither qualify him for the entertainment of company, nor increase his power of self-enjoyment? We observe, on the contrary, that they cross all these desirable ends; stupefy the understanding and harden the heart, obscure the fancy and sour the temper.

(qtd. in Koch, p. 211)

Storr credits object relations theorists with fostering the current widespread belief that the only value and meaning in life is found through social relationships:

If we were to listen only to the psycho-analytic 'object-relations' theorists, we should be driven to conclude that none of us have validity as isolated individuals. From their standpoint, it appears that we possess value only in so far as we fulfill some useful function vis-à-vis other people, in our roles, for example, as spouse, parent, or neighbour. It follows that the justification for the individual's existence is the existence of others.

(1988, p. xiv)

Koch lists various objections to solitude. Apart from the uselessness and dangerousness of spending time alone, perhaps the most common objection is that withdrawing from social engagement is self-indulgent and irresponsible. Thoreau answers this at length in the conclusion to *Walden*, and Nouwen writes:

Many arguments for the value of solitude do not defend solitude in and of itself, but only the beneficial effect it can have on one's relations with other people and one's contribution to society.

Solitude is essential to community life because in solitude we grow closer to each other ... We take the other with us into solitude and there the relationship grows and deepens. In solitude we discover each other in a way which physical presence makes difficult, if not impossible. There we recognize a bond with each other that does not depend on words, gestures or actions and that is deeper and stronger than our own efforts can create ... There we grow closer to each other because there we can encounter the source of our unity.

(Nouwen qtd. in Koch, p. 244)

In solitude we realize that nothing human is alien to us, that the roots of all conflict, war, injustice, cruelty, hatred, jealousy, and envy are deeply anchored in our own heart.

(Nouwen, 1981, p. 34)

Social responsibility is a balance of give and take. At present, I give slideshows and interviews to contribute to the society that supports me. After my first long wilderness retreat, I volunteered to do social work in the rural mountains of the Dominican Republic for two years. My sense of responsibility and belonging to a social network seems to deepen in solitude.

At times when I am unhappy and confused, I too wonder if spending time alone is selfish, but when I am clear I realize I cannot know what contribution I am making to the world. I am of the world, and to the extent I heal myself - assuming that wilderness solitude does promote healing<sup>59</sup> - I heal the world. To say a solitary is shirking responsibility is to claim to understand the full workings of reality. All we can do is be true to our deepest calling and trust that we are doing what we are meant to do.

To the objection that solitude is escapist and that the choice for solitude is a choice for a world of unreality, Koch replies: "Direct encounters with Nature, Self, and the Mysterious in solitude are in fact generally acclaimed to feel more self-authenticating, more luminous with Being, than most social encounter" (p. 230).

Many of the claims that solitude produces deleterious effects are couched in terms with loaded meanings that are often carelessly conflated. Thus solitude, aloneness, isolation, alienation, loneliness and longing are sometimes used interchangeably even

though they have quite different meanings. Aloneness, for example, refers to a physical state, while loneliness and alienation to emotional experiences.

In Chile, shortly after I emerged from my time alone, I was invited to be a guest on *La Belleza de Pensar*, a television program primarily oriented toward intellectual and artistic discussions. The previous guest was a philosopher who claimed that the most serious social problem in Chile today is solitude; but I described the joyful freedom and peace I find in solitude. Later I recognized that he was not talking about being alone as such, but about the experience of feeling isolated, alienated, and lonely. This is an important distinction.

Perhaps we should use solitude to refer to the sense of spaciousness of being alone and isolation to the feeling of being cut off from - . The sense of isolation does not depend on external circumstance. During my year alone, I often felt isolated not only from others (in my mind and heart) but also from the non-human world around me; from Spirit; from myself. At other times, with no change in physical circumstance, I felt fully integrated into the flow of the universe, which included not only the world immediately around me, but also my web of human relationships. Nor are loneliness and longing identical. I often felt lonely without actually longing to be with anyone. In time I came to suspect that my longing for another person might actually be a longing for my lost connection with my self and with Spirit.

### **Is Solitude for Everyone?**

Is spending time in solitude something everyone should do? Petrarch, defending solitude, writes: "I am not so much proposing a rule for others as exposing the principles of my own mind. If it commends itself to anyone, let him follow its suggestion." (qtd. in Koch, p. 209).

Thomas Merton, with his tendency toward global prescription, holds a stronger view:

Not all men are called to be hermits, but all men need enough silence and solitude in their lives to enable the deep inner voice of their own true self to be heard at least occasionally. ... If man is constantly exiled from his own home,

locked out of his own spiritual solitude, he ceases to be a true person. He no longer lives as a man.

(qtd. in Koch, p. 113)

I am sometimes asked whether I recommend solitude to others. I do not. Deep wilderness solitude is not something to be taken lightly: it is difficult, dangerous, and sometimes frightening. You should go only if called to it from deep within. If you need encouragement from someone else, you are not ready for the experience.

One complaint I have with Koch is that he does not seriously examine the surrender of the self to become part of Something greater, which is one of the challenges and freedoms of solitude. When I embrace my loneliness and vulnerability instead of running from it, it opens out into a sense of deep connection with other people, with the non-human world, and with Spirit. Nouwen, using Christian language that I must translate for my own use, reminds me that my own dark times do not arise simply from my own neuroses, but are a manifestation of the difficulties faced by anyone who turns inward. In his words:

In solitude I get rid of my scaffolding: no friends to talk with, no telephone calls to make, no meetings to attend, no music to entertain, no books to distract, just me - naked, vulnerable, weak, sinful, deprived. Broken - nothing. It is this nothingness that I have to face in my solitude, a nothingness so dreadful that everything in me wants to run to my friends, my work, and my distractions so I can forget my nothingness and make myself believe that I am worth something. But that is not all. As soon as I decide to stay in my solitude, confusing ideas, disturbing images, wild fantasies, and weird associations jump about in my mind like monkeys in a banana tree. Anger and greed begin to show their ugly faces. I give long, hostile speeches to my enemies and dream lustful dreams in which I am wealthy, influential, and very attractive – or poor, ugly, and in need of immediate consolation. Thus I try again and again to run from the dark abyss of my nothingness and restore my false self in all its vainglory. ...

The task is to persevere in my solitude, to stay in my cell until all my seductive visitors get tired of pounding on my door and leave me alone. ... That is the struggle. It is the struggle to die to the false self. But this struggle is far, far beyond our own strength. Anyone who wants to fight his demons with his own weapons is a fool. The wisdom of the desert is that the confrontation with our own frightening nothingness forces us to surrender ourselves totally and unconditionally to the Lord Jesus Christ.

(Nouwen, 1981, p. 27)

The attitude that we can find real value and meaning in our lives only through intimate interpersonal relationships has not been widespread in our culture for very long, but its power is difficult to resist. Even after the wonder, peace and joy I have experienced in solitude, I still often feel something vital is missing from my life because I am not involved in an intimate sexual relationship with a mate. No matter how rich my relationships with friends, family, non-human nature, and Spirit, I sometimes lose my balance and slip into despondency about my solitary state.

This feeling of lack is more difficult to accept here than it is in the wilderness. There, when I'm feeling the pain of loneliness and longing, I can justify it by telling myself, "Well of course I hurt, look where I am and what I'm doing." Here in the city, it's easy to feel that no one wants to be with me and to forget that I actively choose to be alone because I find peace, joy, and fulfillment in solitude.

Three years after returning from solitude, I find great value in Koch's writing in making more visible the interweaving of solitude and engagement in my own life. The boundary between solitude and engagement does not always seem permeable, but a wall I must climb - in both directions. I often feel isolated rather than simply alone, and often fear a return to deep wilderness solitude. I continue to work to make the boundary more porous.

Koch recognises that his book cannot objectively defend the value of solitude, that it is an inner debate between our various selves about how we wish to live our lives: "My purpose, rather, has been to enable us to better understand the origins of certain inner questions which nag at our solitude" (p. 216).

The value of spending time in the wilderness has been studied empirically by Greenway (1995) who has been leading groups of students on two to four week retreats since 1970, and spending three days alone is an option for those who wish. He has documented the effects of the experience on some of his students, but makes no universal claims about the supposed beneficial effects of spending time in the wilderness:

I do not believe the therapeutic effects of wilderness can be proven by scientifically objective measures and with statistical confidence. Nor am I fully confident that, within the dynamics of my own culture, these effects are in fact

therapeutic, whether proven or not. I have observed many (mostly futile) attempts to prove beneficial outcomes of various psychotherapeutic approaches and realize wilderness therapy deals with even more variables.

He goes on to say:

While studying the wilderness experience, I honor it as an experience of exquisite beauty, of obvious impact on individuals, and so profound and complex that using the word *spiritual* seems appropriate.<sup>60</sup> Whatever the wilderness experience is, and whatever its benefits, it is worthy of respect and a flexible research approach.

As with much participatory anthropological research, my approach has been rooted within the process and confirmed by experience. Objectivity is an interesting and useful mode of knowing, but should not be mistaken for the reality of experience. I have tried to avoid grabbing hold of symbols and findings to create theories.

(1993, p. 207)

Even though his focus is much more on the effects of wilderness than of solitude per se, and the retreats are shorter, I find parallels between the effects he has documented<sup>61</sup> and what I have experienced in wilderness solitude and after my return to the social world. To sum up my own view of the place of solitude in our lives:

Although solitude has long been recognized in many cultures as an opportunity to journey inward, in our current cultural climate seeking solitude is often considered unhealthy. We are social beings and tend to think that meaning is found only through relationship with other people. This is only partially true. Interacting with others is one aspect of being human, but we are more profoundly social than that. The structure of our minds, the consciousness that experiences the world, emerges in a communal setting and is itself social even when we are alone. Biologically, each of us is a community. We share our bodies with bacteria, viruses, fungi, mites, and many other flora and fauna.

We are also spiritual beings. To be fully human we need relationship not only with other people, but with the non-human world, our own inner depths - and with Something Greater. For me, that non material Presence is mysterious, sacred, and intellectually unfathomable. It can be experienced, but not defined. And in coming into a deeper relationship with my self, I also develop the capacity to be more deeply connected with others.

(Kull, 2004, p. 110)



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<sup>58</sup> I considered suggesting Dr. Koch as a possible external examiner, but learned that shortly after publishing his book he retired from the University of PEI due to a serious stroke that affected his memory. I phoned to thank him for the book and he said he remembers little of what is in it. He does not seem particularly troubled by the change in his life, and does seem like a very nice man.

<sup>59</sup> But see Greenway, 1993.

<sup>60</sup> This was my experience too. Although my intention at the beginning was to explore solitude through a purely secular lens, I eventually had to admit that I could not fully live nor write about what was happening without using spiritual terminology.

<sup>61</sup> The following data are taken from Greenway, 1995, p. 128.

90 percent of respondents described an increased sense of aliveness, well-being and energy;

90 percent stated that the experience allowed them to break an addiction (defined very broadly - from chocolate to nicotine and other foods);

80 percent found the return [to “civilization”] initially very positive;

53 percent of those found that within two days the positive feelings had turned to depression;

77 percent described a major life change upon return (in personal relationships, employment, housing, or life-style);

38 percent of those changes “held true” after five years;

60 percent of the men and 20 percent of the women stated that a major goal of the trip was to conquer fear, challenge themselves, and expand limits;

57 percent of the women and 27 percent of the men stated that a major goal of the trip was to “come home” to nature;

60 percent of all respondents stated that they had adopted at least one ritual or contemplative practice learned on the trip; 18 percent of those studied longitudinally (nine out of fifty) stated that they were still doing the practice after five years;

92 percent cited “alone time” as the single most important experience of the trip; getting up before dawn and climbing a ridge or peak in order to greet the sun was cited by 73 percent as the second most important experience. “Community” or fellowship of the group was cited by 80 percent as the third most important experience.

## June 2001

Our task is to see and accept the world  
as it is, not as we would like it to be.

(S.N. Goenka)

6/1/01

Midnight: 34F/light snow on the ground/windy/sea rough. Another month. Check-in went smoothly this morning and the process took only half hour. This evening I picked up the replies. Cool. Got frames for both awnings built which took most of the day. Cut wire for nails. Incredible that from the thousands of nails I brought, I'm down to the last hand full. Measured food tonight and am set for another month. I've wasted psychic and emotional energy worrying about running short and begrudging Cat what he's eating, but I'll have plenty of staples left over. I'm eating hardly any pasta at all and also not using my full supply of rice, beans, or oatmeal.

I wonder if the people who told me there is no wind in winter actually believe it? Only the navy captain said there is wind all year. This afternoon it shifted and howled down the beach to smite my cabin. I've always liked the wind, but now feel it's out to get me.

I sense this deep anxiety is existential angst I project onto the wind. I feel threatened and want the security of certainty and safety even though I know it's an illusion. There is a potentially real danger in my anxiety: in my need to escape the fear, I might decide to "face it" and take the boat into the channel during a storm. I might be projecting my anxiety onto the wind and rough water, but they exist as real physical forces in the world. I feel grateful to the wind for the opportunity to explore this stuff.

Only three weeks until the sun starts back to me. Winter solstice has never meant this much. If I didn't "know" the sun would come back, I'd probably be terrified to see it disappear day by day into the north.

Interesting that before I came here I thought so little about leaving at the end of the year. I was just concerned with coming in and figured that somehow I'd get back out with the CONAF boat or a fisherman. But it may not be so easy to make arrangements via email. It will happen somehow since no one wants me to die, but may take a while. And with that new worry, I'll say goodnight.

6/2/01

Somehow lost a day.

6/3/01

5:30 PM: 36F/grey/windy/sea moving. Sunday, a day of long empty hours. Yesterday I looked forward to having a fire and staying inside all day, warm and relaxed with no physical or psychological work to do. Today - without the strong input to the senses I have outside, without a walk to the point, without an evening fire to look forward to - the hours stretch long and empty. I've been awake for nine hours and have another seven or eight until I can sleep again. I miss Cat and guess he's out there missing me too. I look out the misted window and see a grey world where now and then sunshine slants over the hills until grey settles in again. The snow swirls by, blocking the light, and is gone until it comes again. I could meditate and will tomorrow, but that's a productive activity and for long I've looked forward to leisure.

I feel exhausted, like I haven't stopped to really rest in years because these feelings of emptiness would catch up to and swamp me. Yet I feel I've accomplished so little in my life compared with others. Just when I get

established, these feelings of unhappiness and meaninglessness arise and off I go to escape them. Now there's nowhere to run, nowhere to hide, nothing to do. I've chosen these leisure hours to explore the feelings. It's not that I don't want to do things, but I'm tired of my activity being driven and often joyless.

Winter wasted no time getting down to business yesterday, but last night it cleared up and a nearly full moon shone clear on snow and sea. I had hopes for good weather today, but it's socked in tight. I got out the last of my winter clothes, and as I did a Simon and Garfunkel song came into my mind and heart. I can't remember the name, but one of the verses is, "Then I'm laying out my winter clothes/And wishing I was gone/Going home/Where the New York City winters/Aren't bleeding me/Leading me/Going home."<sup>62</sup> Traded in the silk scarf Susan gave me for a hand-woven wool one from another friend. Also got out my heavy winter mitts. I'm looking for a way to be on the porch all day without getting cold hands or feet. Glad I brought a down parka.

As I sat on the porch with Cat on my lap, I wanted to write a poem about the swirling snow, the quality of the light, and the birds black against the white; but I didn't want to move. Now it's gone. In the cabin I felt attacked by the wind, so I went to the point. Cat came along and it was nice to have his company. Facing the wind and driving snow, I could see gusts writhing over the sea toward me and would take the warning to crouch and brace myself for the onslaught. I felt fine to be there - not anxious or threatened as I do here in the cabin. Here I can do nothing but wait. There I go to meet the wind and can leave when I wish.

I sliced some smoked meat today and found a nest of maggots inside one of the bones. I cut them out and fried the rest of the meat. I was surprised how unpleasant I found them. Wonder if I'll find more. Still not using painkillers or drinking my evening sip of booze. Weird how concerned I get about running out of something and then just shift my attention and stop using it with no big deal.

The two tamest birds come boldly onto the porch now; not only into cat's territory, but also to eat his food. I think they've learned to come when I'm here since I won't let him attack. He sits on my lap and watches them only a couple feet away. He does twitch now and again, but mostly stays still. If he wants to hunt somewhere else that's fine, but not in front of me. Neat animal.

I guess I'll do something with the fire. It's getting chilly in here and dark out there. I'll bake bread and bathe, and then hang with the long heavily empty hours as they stretch for months ahead of me.

6/4/01

1:30 AM: 32F/clear/still/beautiful. One-day-shy-of-full-moon light pours down on untrodden snow. A black line on the beach marks where the recent high tide ended and the snow begins. To the west, the Staines rock face shines from without and glows from within. Nearby, the sea is shining too, and out further another dark line - analogue to the tide line here - marks where the wind riffle begins. I can see occasional cat's paws skitter across the moonlit water.

Tonight Cat is asleep in his box, but last night he was out with me until late. Together we watched the white and black geese - glowing phantoms in moonlight and shadow - feed on the low tide rocks. Again and again he began to stalk and I would softly call, NO, NO, NO! until I thought to simply call him to me. He's good about coming to my call, and once on my lap traded the pleasure of two birds on the rock for a scratch under the chin.

Last night too a tender release into the flow of the world; sensing myself to be a manifestation of the One. Wondering why I resist this opening so. It feels - beforehand - like a negation of me, like death, but once caught in the flow there is the joy of belonging to and participating in the Whole. Yesterday I wrote about the heavy hours of emptiness, and just a while later went outside and felt myself float free. There is often darkness and despair before release. In the

fragile places where I feel most vulnerable and so try to avoid, the walls of my self are weakest and most easily dissolve. Just there.

Any self, no matter how healthy, is inherently unsatisfactory in that it's cut off from the true flow of living. But there should be a way to feel relatively good in this small I without becoming isolated inside. It seems twisted that the only reason I seek freedom is because it's unbearable in here. Once I float free, I feel "Perfect" just the way I am, as all things are perfect, yet inside this small self I suffer. Is this suffering - as the path to freedom - perfect too as the old Christian mystics claimed and as it sometimes seems to me?

The only thing really worthwhile for me socially is to share this experience of freedom with others. But not everyone will follow the path I'm following, so there needs to be a way people can work with what's already happening in their lives. Perhaps I can encourage others - if I ever learn myself - to welcome the darkness, difficulty, and fear. So far I don't know how to find even my own way Home, never mind guiding anyone else there.

In the afternoon today I felt a dark Presence and tingled with fear - as I'm tingling now writing about it. It wasn't the same quality fear as my usual anxiety, but deeper and not associated with anything external. I took refuge in the Buddha, the Sangha, the Dharma, and in Christ - the inner light I sense. Will this darkness become a challenge for me? Is it madness?

I spent a lot of time today just sitting and being with the world and with myself in it. I also split wood, built a frame for the porch, and when the tide went out collected flat rocks from the beach. The snow is beautiful and there is only a couple inches so walking isn't a problem.

The black birds were feeding on the beach and I noticed one standing on the boat. All of a sudden she called and the rest flew into the trees. Then Cat appeared. Cool they had a sentry posted. The little grey and brown guy landed on my head on his way into the cabin. Sure is getting tame. Hope Cat doesn't get

him. The sea lion is bellowing across the channel and I wonder if he's calling to the moon or if he has flesh and blood company? Time for a cup of cocoa.

6/5/01

Midnight: 34F/overcast/breeze from the southeast/full moon. Three things especially seem to cause shoulder pain: jerking the starter cord on outboard and chain saw, jigging and reeling in the fishing line, hauling up the boat. I've also noticed that when doing something as simple as slicing onions I often have my shoulders hunched up and tense. So I'm using more energy and causing more strain than necessary for the job at hand.

A day of productive activity. Up at 9:30 to a clear cold morning. Sea was calm with some light chop from the southeast which is the calm sea cold temperature direction. Good day for fishing and fetching firewood. Had coffee, a small piece of fry-bread, and a dab of cold rice and beans, then forgot to eat again until tonight. Shovelled snow out of boat and kayak, went to Staines, and caught a mess of fish. It was slow and took work, but I have fish for most of a week now.

As I cruised the shore I spotted three sea lions on a ledge four feet above the sea. Except for a pup tucked into a nook, they hit the water as I approached. I circled but not close enough to harass them. Perhaps they'll establish a colony there.

I motored south to a bay to cut wood. Tide was high, the beach was smooth, and I didn't even need to change from rubber boots to chest waders, which was a treat. Once I have the waders on they're great, but my prosthetic leg makes pulling them on and off a hassle. It was cold enough that I didn't take off raincoat, wool cap, or scarf when working. Brrrr.

It's definitely winter now. Cold overcast day, everything covered in snow. I had a sense something was out of whack, then I got it. The only place I've spent

time in inflatable boats was in the Caribbean wearing a bathing suit and teaching SCUBA diving, so it seems odd to be bundled up in the snowy cold. I felt this is no place to be doing what I'm doing this time of year, then remembered there are guys in  $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch wetsuits diving for sea urchins not so far from here.

Tonight is full moon but it's buried in falling snow. I'll light the peace candle and meditate later, but first fresh fish for dinner even though it's after midnight.

### 6/6/01

Midnight: 34F/raining/calm. Seemed like a day of rhythms. Meditated this morning then prepared to go for wood. Three eagles<sup>63</sup> landed in the half dead tree on the far side of my small cove. Neat-looking birds: black crown; yellow-orange beak and throat; dark breast with white flecked pattern; yellow legs and feet. One was young and its mature plumage hadn't yet grown in. Had the dishevelled look of a shag hairdo. Birds like that tree. The kingfisher<sup>64</sup> hangs out there, and I've seen hawks there too.

They looked like they were hunting, but when one of the adults flew down to the beach the small local birds didn't seem concerned and continued to feed only three feet away. The adults eventually flew off leaving the young behind and I heard them croaking from the other side of the trees - then silence. The fledgling was edgy and kept peeping and hopping from branch to branch and finally flew off after its folks.

I timed the tide just right and getting wood was quick and efficient. Got a solid load and the trip home was no problem even though a breeze came up from the south pushing a swell and some chop ahead of it.

Gentle evening. Slept a while and read Krishnamurti, slept and ate, etc. While building the fire I was thinking of what I might write here and the sense of the day's easy rhythms came into my head. At that point the fire was behaving well and I planned to include that in the activities that had gone smoothly. Then



when I added more wood, bam, it just went out. I had to redo it almost from scratch but even that went smoothly, and instead of fretting I made popcorn while I waited for it to take off. Something else to include as an example of the day's mellow rhythms. But when I started to eat the popcorn, it tasted funny, and I realized I'd squirted ketchup all over it instead of hot sauce. I ate it any way. Hi ho.

Took ibuprophen when I got home and had a shot of brandy. Finally decided to take a vacation from the pain and downed a Tylenol 3. There seems to be two distinct mind-sets around pain. If I'm focused inwardly I can accept and openly experience pain more easily and that dissolves a lot of the tension. But when I'm trying to accomplish something in the external world, pain is in the way and I want it to just go away.

Krishnamurti is a powerfully clear thinker and writer. "Suffering is the process of isolation." Bam. He also says obsession comes from imaging that our lives can be different, and so not accepting the actual as it is right now. I've known that for 30 years, but still struggle against the simple truth that things are what they are and not what I would like them to be. Apparently, one of the things that is what is, is my resistance to accepting things as they are.

6/7/01

10:30 PM: wind/sea moving/cloudy with clear patches/a heat wave. 41F today and I even saw a couple of blackflies. Rain barrel almost filled over night. Had planned to go for wood, but the sea was moving slightly from the northwest, and there were whitecaps by noon. I'm slowly getting a sense of the weather, and when the wind comes from the northwest it's apt to continue for a few days. Got the small outer porch built today. Been a long time coming. Still have to make steps.

Krishnamurti is so stern and uncompromising. I feel like a weekend spiritual dabbler. I've been here four months and my awareness of my inner processes remains dim and dull. He's very good at pointing out traps. I know that clutching after certain psychological/spiritual experiences is a dead-end street, yet still I grasp. When I finally grok the painful futility of it at gut level, I'll give it up.

6/8/01

1:00 AM: 40F/stormy. Just woke up. Been sleeping on and off since 7 p.m. Avoidance mode. Shoulder and back tight and sore. Stayed in bed for a while this morning meditating and exploring the pain and fear. Got awning over the porch built. Sitting out there more in the open gives a whole new perspective on the world. The cabin looks less like a pillbox now. Once I'd finished it I felt relaxed for a little while and then the deep discontent returned. I've burned much less wood tonight than I did when it was cold. Hadn't put that together with the wood use estimate. I want to take Tylenol 3 and go to sleep, but not sure if I will. Let me out of here....

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* Freire says we can be fully human only in dialogue, in naming the world together. To do so requires humility, honesty, and openness. It's not my world or yours that's true, but our world which we discover/create together. This is the direction I need to move in my life. Away from self-sufficiency and pride toward humility and communion. I started the book because I've had it on my list for so long. Planned to read it quickly since I didn't expect it to be very relevant to me here. But it's just what I need to hear now.

6/09/01

No entry.

6/10/01

2:30 AM: 32F/tender night/clear, but softly so rather than crystalline/wide ring around the moon/sea lions and sea birds are calling. In here my heart is crying. It's been a hard two days of physical and psychological/emotional pain. Tonight when I got out the mirror to shave I saw my face and eyes and felt sorrow and compassion for the hurt I saw there. Anger and rebellion hiding a boy crying for his father's approval and receiving only harsh criticism no matter what he did or how well he tried to do it. No wonder I'm a perfectionist always hoping that if I do things well enough I'll finally feel loved and accepted.

I'm coming to see how much of my activity is driven by pain: if I can just do it right, I won't hurt any more. The trap is that it works - temporarily. For a short time I do feel better, but then self-hate and criticism set in again and I need to accomplish something else - perfectly. What really troubles me is the pain I cause myself by holding so much tension in my neck and upper back. My response to the pain is not tenderness and compassion for myself, but anger and harsh judgment. After all these years of inner work how can I still be so locked up? I must be stupid, stubborn, or irreparably damaged. Or personal growth is an illusion. At the core is my demand that things be different than they are. I don't want to make peace with the pain; I want it to disappear. But given the actual, this would mean I'd be without body, mind, or emotions.

Sitting under the moon tonight I briefly sensed that what I'm going through here is not to teach me how to get rid of pain, but to teach me to open my heart to myself in pain. Pain is part of life, and if I don't open myself to experience it I can't be truly alive. Nor can I open myself to others because that would risk experiencing their pain. And fuck knows I got enough of my own I'm trying to escape.

Today was Sunday, my day of rest. Only I didn't. I cleaned water out of propane regulator, cut the top off a tree near the rain gauge, cleaned windows, buried garbage. Then since the afternoon was sunny and calm, I zipped over to Staines. On the way the motor started to miss, but the problem fixed itself. Caught three nice snapper. Sea lions were not about.

6/11/01

12:30 AM: 41F/a few stars showing through a high thin overcast sea moving from the south but calming now at low tide. Got up at 10 a.m. No wind. A light frost on the ground, but not cold enough to freeze the sea. Packed survival kit, tools, and spare outboard parts for a trip down to the bay where I'd originally planned to live. Added air to the boat, filled the gas tank, dressed warmly, and took off.

The thin winter sun hung low in the north as I left camp. Mountains loomed against the grey sky. Sea flat calm. Not too cold. Motor running smoothly and it was nice to have the seat I use in the kayak back in the boat. Figured I could make the 14-mile trip in a little over an hour, but half way there a breeze coming up the channel from the south started to chop up the water. Wasn't bad, but I had to slow down to ease the jarring. Then things started to get wild as the wind picked up and shifted to the southeast. I had some second thoughts, but decided to keep going since I've never seen really nasty weather from that direction. It got worse and I started to seriously consider turning back since if it got too bad I might not make it home. But I really wanted to make the bay and kept going.

I saw a dark line of wind-blown water awash in whitecaps coming across the channel toward me. Looked much worse than what I was already in. Oh shit, this isn't good and I'm not at all sure I want to be here. Moved from the seat to my knees to lower my physical - and spiritual - centre of gravity. The channel doglegs along there and the wind was now hitting me broadside. I worried the

boat might flip. The waves weren't so large - maybe three or four feet - but steep and breaking, and the wind was whipping streaks of foam from the crests.

Decided I really should turn back even though I was only a couple miles from the bay. Headed home. Moving with the wind and waves the storm didn't seem so bad, and I knew I'd be unhappy if I gave up unnecessarily. So I turned back toward the bay. There was a ribbon of pale blue sky low over the southern hills and I hoped the worst had passed. The wind started to rage again and I was completely drenched with spray and thinking this might be a good time to be wearing the life vest, but I couldn't stop concentrating on the sea or let go of the tiller to put it on. The wind was blowing straight into the mouth of the small bay, but since the entrance is partly shielded by an island, it was much calmer inside.

I often have trouble letting go of what might have been to stay engaged with what actually is. I'd hoped that I'd think the bay not as nice as this island where I am. Wrong. It's lovely. Lies in a bowl of hills, and while there isn't a view of the wild mountain peaks like I have here, the smaller closer crests there are beautiful too. A condor soared the hills. The lesson is that I can't base letting go of what I don't have on the rationalization that it isn't as good as what I do have. I must simply choose to be with what actually is.

Put on the life vest, said goodbye to the bay, and headed back into the teeth of the storm. I was crashing directly into the wind and waves until I rounded the corner from the bay into the channel, but before I made it I hit a patch of drifting kelp and fouled the prop. Damn. Ducked behind some rocks to clear it and then out I went. Holy mother it was nasty out there - the kind of sea I've often looked at from my island and thought, Shit, I'm glad I'm not out in that. But the boat and motor handled it well and so did I. Rounded the corner and headed down wind with the swell on my rear quarter. Seemed calmer and I moved back to the seat. Started to surf down the waves, and to prevent digging in the nose of the boat I decided to shift my weight toward the rear. I usually sit far forward to balance the outboard's weight and encourage the boat to plane.

I have a four-foot extension handle on the motor so I can throttle and steer from up front.

In sliding the seat back I accidentally jerked the kill-cord attached to my wrist and switched off the motor. (The idea is that if I ever fall overboard, the boat won't keep going without me. It would still be nasty in the cold water and difficult to climb back into the boat in wet clothes and rain gear, but at least I'd have a chance. If the boat kept going, I'd likely be dead.) This wasn't good because I was close to shore and the wind and waves were pushing me toward the rocks. I reattached the cord and tried to shift the motor to neutral, but it had jammed in gear and wouldn't start. Things were getting tense. I reached down to turn the prop by hand. Once free, motor cranked up and I escaped from the looming rocks.

The boat moved easier once the nose was up and I tried to stay in synch with the waves. Ten minutes later, the sea was glassy calm again with just a gentle swell rolling the surface. Huh? Did I dream all that? No, I'm wearing the life vest, and in spite of being covered head to toe in rubber, I'm damp and cold. Looked back and saw the sea still wind whipped and churning with whitecaps. The ribbon of blue still hung over the southern hills. Back here I checked the chart and saw that an east west valley slices the mountains and might funnel the wind down there.

Strange day. I wish Cat could tell me if it was rough and blowing here, too.

6/12/01

11:20 PM: 40F/sea calm/no wind. Fried potatoes and bacon for dinner. Still four days of fish in the larder, but I decided to vary the menu. Peaceful day. Exercised, cleaned cabin, put away the clothes drying by the stove from yesterday (Only yesterday?), and sat on porch meditating and contemplating the world. Also adjusted the wind generator to see if it will charge the batteries

more. The solar panels won't see much sun for the next month and a half so I've switched to propane light to save electricity for computer and satphone, but it's noisy.

Gentle afternoon. Spent time with sea, mountains, and self. I'm so seldom here when it's calm. Felt relaxed and bathed in the beauty of it all. How joyful it would be if I could see such beauty in myself and in other people. I asked Spirit to guide me and the reply came back, "What do you think is happening, moron?" A softer voice reminded me to trust the process.

When I opened my eyes sunset was exquisite. The eastern face of Staines was shadowed, but rich yellow light shone on the highest domes from the setting sun beyond. The peaks and ice fields of the Andes were glowing gold. One leg of a rainbow, pointing almost straight up, hung in the air. The northwest sky, translucent almost glacial blue, was streaked an impossible orange, and below, just above the hills, there were delicate whorls of cream yellow cloud the colour of the ducks' breasts.

As night fell I sat on the porch contemplating the world inside and out. Yes, beauty inside too - of consciousness and visions and.... Peaceful sitting there with Cat until I came in to build a fire and take a nap.

Woke feeling grumpy and groggy. Went to fetch some potatoes and Cat got right under foot and as usual it made me furious. I often seem to feel "bad" after a spell of feeling "good". Almost like coming down off a drug high. I first noticed it in Vancouver driving home from meditation. Instead of feeling patient and peaceful, I would get angry at other drivers.

In *Nature Man and Woman*, Watts talks about feeling "blah" after sex and points out that it's not the ecstasy of sex that creates this reaction, but grasping for that ecstasy. Perhaps it's the same with me. I'm so hungry for joyful experience that I cling to it and feel disgruntled when it passes. I also catch myself turning away from joy, believing it's not to be trusted since it won't last.

Relationships, too, are not to be trusted, and since I'll sooner or later be left behind, better to disengage and protect myself before it happens. Good to write this down since I hadn't seen it clearly before.

Going to make cocoa and read *Pedagogy* which is displeasing me. Too black and white. Very Marxist dialectic. He also makes absolutist statements comparing men to animals, and of course animals are just unconscious dumb brutes with automatic behaviour. How the fuck does he know that with such certainty? Anthropocentric.

No rain to speak of in days. The mud in front of the porch where I pee and toss dish and fish cleaning water is starting to smell rank. Trying to decide what to do about the mud since I'm finally tired of slogging through it. I need gravel and may take boat to look for some nearby.

6/13/01

Midnight: Starry night/perfectly still/just an occasional rustle of water against rock. Another glorious day. Woke at first light and got up to exercise, make coffee, and watch the dawn. Went to the point until 4 p.m. and saw neat critters as I often do when I stay here on the island. The four sea lions swam by and an otter appeared below me in the kelp. I got out the glasses and we peered at each other for a while. Actually, I think he snorted and sniffed more than looked. Maybe his eyes aren't so hot. Went fishing in the evening. Nary a bite. First time I've had kayak out in a month.

Slow, peaceful, steady day. I feel guilty I didn't accomplish more but this is what I came here for. I'm slowly relaxing (at least for the moment) into how things are. There is peace and inner light. I still long for that sense of wild aliveness, of being inside my life looking around rather than outside looking in, but it will come when it comes - or not....



I remember now. Without the direct lived acceptance of death I cannot feel truly alive. Death is part of life, but the ego/conceptual self creates an illusory sense of permanence and invulnerability. If I wish to dissolve the shell, I must accept what the ego is trying to deny. Pain, too, is part of life. Period. No exceptions. If I want to feel truly alive, I must open myself to experience the pain of my existence. There is no other way. How strange that this is so hard to see and accept. Yet in these moments when I do, it feels easy and natural. I get everything backwards and feel frightened of what will happen if I truly surrender. But suffering is caused by resistance, not by surrender.

I often say with pride that I believe in God/Spirit sometimes. That is, I experience It sometimes, and when I don't, I no longer know if there is or is not God/Spirit. I've thought that people who expound God often do not really experience the Presence, but have only a conceptual belief since the direct experience is transient, not constant. But I wonder.... Piaget showed that in a child, object permanence is a stage of mental development that takes time to develop.<sup>65</sup> Until then, if a ball is hidden out of sight the child thinks it no longer exists. Once object permanence is achieved, the child knows the ball continues to exist even if he doesn't actually see it at the moment. Maybe this is so for spiritual development too. Perhaps I'm just immature, and when I don't have a direct experience of Spirit it no longer exists for me. Perhaps when I mature I'll have a sure sense that Spirit always exists even if I don't sense it at the moment.

I saw three new birds today; or at least three birds in a new way. An elegant hawk landed on my beach.<sup>66</sup> Tossing fish heads down there is a good idea. It was café con leche brown with lighter flecks. I also saw woodpeckers for the first time<sup>67</sup> There was either one male and two females, or one adult female with two young. All were black or gunmetal blue and had topknots. One had a brilliant red head. Fairly large birds, 12 to 15 inches tall. Wonderful call, but now I can't remember it. I also saw a cobra-headed diving bird on a rock with its back

to the sun. I'd thought they were black and white, but the wings in that light were almost silver.

What a blessing today was. I give praise and thanks.

6/14/01

No entry (or I've lost a day).

6/15/01

11:30 PM: 39F/overcast/calm/frost. Was just getting started on the day when I heard a motor. At first I tried to figure out what it really was since I often hear sounds I think are a motor that turn out to be something else: hummingbird, bumblebee, kettle coming to a boil, waterfall. But this really was a motor. A boat appeared just past the point, then circled back and the motor stopped. Fishermen? I wasn't pleased and went out to see what was going on and ask them to please go away. Two men were walking down beach toward my cabin, one carrying a box.

Ah, German Coronado from CONAF; I bet they brought my barometer. Sure enough. The Chilean mail service may be slow (Patti mailed the barometer to me in Punta Arenas a month before I left there), but the door-to-door service is impeccable. As they approached, German held up the box and called that he had brought it as though slightly nervous that after four months alone I might have lost my mind. I think they were curious to see my camp and wanted to check that I would probably survive the coming winter. I invited them in for coffee and a look around. They really liked the cabin and asked to see the satphone and GPS. Showed me a kind of tree that burns well even when green, so if I run short of driftwood I can cut some of it. I showed them the wood that worked well as

kindling before I ran out and they said it's cypress. So I'll look for more.  
Excellent information.

I told them about the outboards getting submerged and they asked if I would like them to take flywheel off the 15 hp to check underneath. Since it's working I decided to leave well enough alone. Hope that wasn't a mistake. German said it will be calm like this for the next two months, and I do feel a change in the air.

They suggested I leave the cabin standing when I leave so there will be refuge here, but I'm not sure I will. Would be much easier not to tear it down and nice for others to benefit from my work, but I doubt it would last long. Eventually the tarp would rot and scatter in the wind. That would suck. And I'd like to leave the island as much as possible like it was when I arrived.

They might pass 20 miles west of here again in six weeks, and if I need supplies they said they'll bring them to me. Cool to have the barometer. Should help predict stormy weather. Forgot to ask them not to tell anyone where I am since I don't want more visitors. It was nice to have company and I think we all enjoyed ourselves, but I'm feeling troubled after the visit. I talked too much and got too "social." I've noticed before that after social interactions during which I feel energized and spontaneous, I'm often down like I've done something wrong. I worry that others see me as too wound up and self-centred.

Clinging to any previous experience takes me out of the present moment and causes suffering. I blame myself for not feeling "Wildly Alive," and go back and forth between recognizing that that experience, like all others, is transient, and thinking that the reason I'm not experiencing Wild Aliveness is because I'm weak and afraid. There is the rare flash of insight that seeking that experience actually locks me away from it. It comes through receptive surrender to things as they are and not through active grasping after a memory. But grasping too is part of being alive. Yikes, it's all so complicated!

6/16/01

11:30 PM: 32F/calm. The overcast sagged lower and lower all day, until this evening the mist was down to the water and the world shrank. Then I truly felt alone. Back, neck, and shoulders stiff and sore. Head filled with noisy conversations. How pleasant it would be to not feel I need to work to improve myself all the time.

Brought in half dozen large flat rocks to lean around the stove to absorb heat and modulate the temperature in here. Spent all afternoon moving the solar panels as far as I could out from the tree line. Hope they produce at least enough juice to continue using laptop for journaling.

6/17/01

No entry.

6/18/01

9:30 PM: clear with clouds/medium wind from the northwest/sea moving. Can't remember if I wrote yesterday or not. Losing track of time. It was misty in the early morning and then sunny all day. No wind at all. Spent most of the day at the point reading, taking photos, just being there, and letting myself be. Peace, acceptance, and flowing. Ahh. I'm shy to try to describe these experiences of release and freedom and have not written much about them, but a lot about the painful experiences of holding on and self-judgment.

Today I intended to go for a load of wood and do some fishing, but the breeze came up so I stayed put. The day warmed to a languorous 45 degrees. So far June has been pretty mellow. Not nearly as grim as I'd expected. Hasn't really rained all month and the barrel is 2/3 empty. If it doesn't rain soon I'll take boat to fetch water. I don't want to use my reserve in case the sea gets

rough. Can't imagine it will stay as nice as it's been, and July and August might be pretty harsh.

Generator has been hooked up all day. Just enough wind that it's humming along without howling. Yesterday the solar panels had direct sun for more than six hours and I'm back to using electric light. Cleaned two of the boat valves that have been leaking and repaired the foot pump. Split wood for the sweat and moved one of the wood piles because there will be very high tides in the next few days. Shoulders sore. Wonder if I'll need surgery eventually?

6/19/01

No entry.

6/20/01

Midnight: 40F. A night of thanksgiving, and I've many blessings to be thankful for. Tomorrow is winter solstice and the sun starts back to me. It was sunny with some clouds all day and the panels did good work. Now it's raining and the water barrel is nearly half full. I brought in a big load of wood.

Woke early to a clear sky. High tide wasn't until 2 p.m. so I was in no hurry. A condor flew over low and a hawk scavenged a fish carcass from the beach. Meditated and exercised and it was time to get ready to go. Breeze sprang up but on the water I found it wasn't very rough, so headed across the east channel. No problems cutting, loading, or coming home again. Motor worked fine even though it was hard to start this morning.

Afterward, I went to Staines. Choppy ride and fishing was slow. When it was time to come home the motor wouldn't start. Checked fuel filter, removed and poured gas on sparkplugs. Nothing. I was getting nervous by then since it wasn't long til dark, and decided I'd better use the 4 hp. It didn't want to start

either, but I finally got it going and headed back across the channel. It worked fine ... until I was 30 feet from my island and then it quit too. Unbelievable. I tinkered and got it running just well enough to limp back to camp.

Very, very glad to make it, and thankful to be here. I could easily be stranded in the rain on the rocks across the channel, or worse, floating somewhere in the dark out on the water. This alone has made it worth having and repairing the 4 hp. Cool this happened close to camp on a fairly calm day. Would have been nasty in the wind storm down by the bay the other day.

Yesterday I wrote in the Solstice Report<sup>68</sup> that both motors are working fine. Today neither is. Don't think I'll change the report though since it might cause folks to worry. I suspect both motors have electrical rather than fuel problems. If I'm lucky, the 15 hp might just need new plugs. Got a hunch the 4 is running on only one cylinder. Can't believe the only spare parts I brought for it are a carburetor kit and sparkplugs. But I hoped I wouldn't need to use it at all.

I feel it's time to stay close to home and settle into just being here. But probably that's a rationalization and I'll feel differently if I can get the motors to work again. I think I have enough firewood if I'm careful. Another option is to contact CONAF and ask German to bring spare parts and a socket next time they come near here. It would break my solitude, but if I can't coax the motors to run it might be worth it.

When I got back from fishing Cat jumped into the boat, but he wasn't near the fish so I didn't pay much attention. Then he gave a cry and I realized he had a hook in his mouth. Shit! I've been very careful to remove the bait from the hooks to avoid just this. But today with motor problems I forgot. Happily only the point, and not the barb, was in his lip. It would have been really nasty had he swallowed the hook or buried it in his tongue. Once I'd freed him, I clouted him a couple of good ones and yelled No! Afterward, I realized that I've been building up to smack him for a few days. He seems to have become disrespectful

of late, or perhaps he's just loving and I'm feeling crowded and wanted to push him away.

6/21/01

No entry.

6/22/01

No entry.

6/23/01

Evening: Calm/was expecting snow but it's raining. I guess writing the Solstice Report wore me out. Felt no call to record anything here the past two days. Solstice was nice indeed. Sent emails without problem and by afternoon had a reply from Patti. She said lots of people ask about me which is surprising and feels good. Shoulders, of course, have been very sore since collecting firewood. Feeling slightly better today.

Excellent sweat. Took some doing to get fire moving, but the rocks got good and hot. Cat found his way down and hung around. He was in lodge when I wanted to bring in the stones. Told him to leave and he just lay there. I was worried I would burn him and yelled at him to leave. He didn't know what to do and sort of cowered in there as I stood outside the door and yelled. He finally came out and we made up quickly. In the sweat I focused most of my prayers on gratitude and on others. The whole process takes about five hours and uses a lot of wood, so I think I'll sweat only once a month.

Hasn't rained much in a month, but is now, and I have a fire going too. Collecting water in the washtub to keep creosote taste out of the rain barrel.

Can't believe I've been hoping for rain. Nuts. But now the motors are on the blink, I'm land bound and can't go for water if need be. Same old anxiety, but how silly. The water table is only four inches below the ground surface and there's a pool of fairly clear water at the point.

Since I can't take the boat fishing, I went in the kayak yesterday but no bites. So I floated on the calm sea, meditated, and let it all flow through me. My time of gobbling fish every day might be over for now. Been pretty fixated on food for the last while - using it as escape. Maybe I can settle into an easier relationship with eating.

My nephew, Kevin, is getting married today. Called to wish them joy and happiness in their life together, but their machine answered. Just as well. I didn't want to talk, but to let them know I've been thinking of them. Amazing to sit here in the middle of nowhere, dial their number, and hear their answering machine.

I was frozen in this morning. I sat listening to the ice groaning and creaking as the tide pushed it onto the rocks. Yesterday I anchored just west of here to fish, but quickly realized it wasn't a good idea. The kayak was lying across the path of ice being carried by the tidal current that can move through the basin pretty fast.

As I listened to the enchanting sounds of water flowing through me today, I realized how inviting they are as a path out of my static mechanistic consciousness. They are always subtly changing, and as far as I can imagine unpredictable and beyond modeling. If I relax and follow them as the days and weeks go by, water sounds can guide me back to the living universe.

Today I sensed that emotions are part of the field of life here. Like the physical movement of wind and water, the behaviour of the animals and my own activity, the emotions I experience are a manifestation of our common life.



I like *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, but Freire doesn't seem to walk the walk in his writing. He insists on the absolute need for leaders and educators to be in dialogue "with the people" rather than "filling the people" with what the educators think is the truth - which would be brain washing. But he doesn't approach his reader with the same open dialogical spirit. Instead he lays out how education must proceed. Metaphysically he's a Marxist and asserts that dialogue with Elite Oppressors is impossible. He has defined social reality as grounded in struggle rather than mutual understanding. He talks about the illusion of the myths Oppressors foist on the Oppressed - one being that Reality is given and unchanging. Yet in defining the nature of struggle between concrete classes he is doing the same kind of mythologizing. I've never met anyone who is simply an oppressor or completely oppressed. We are all a variable mix of both.

What I find useful is the possible application of the oppressor/oppressed schemata to my inner life; the ego oppressing the rest of my being. Possibly dialogue with ego is impossible and instead it must be firmly resisted, but I tend to think this is mistaken. Rather than fighting the ego, the path lies toward balance and integration.

As I suspected, the 4 hp is missing spark from one of the plugs. The 15 has spark in both plugs, and when I poured some gas into the cylinders it fired up. So it looks like a problem with fuel. Hope it's just a clogged jet in the carburetor. Not in a hurry to fix it since I sense it's time to settle down for a while. Tired of dealing with the boat.

This morning I saw a bright light shining from the frozen surface of the east channel. Must have been an ice fragment reflecting the sun. Through the binoculars it looked like a diamond shimmering with intense and beautiful colours.

6/24/01

Sunday Midnight: Got my wish. Been raining steadily for 30 hours and has washed clean the mud out front. An inch in the gauge this morning and more today. Rain barrel long since full. Warmed up 10 degrees and all the ice has melted. Long slow day. Water too rough to take kayak fishing. Spent the day reading *Right Ho, Jeeves* and escaping into food and sleep. It's not that I'm unwilling to experience negative emotions, I just get worn out with it. Same with pain. Just get tired of it.

Been feeling again the absence of the deep clear insights I experienced during my first wilderness retreat. Keep trying to let it go, but it's hard. Getting a crash course in humility, patience, compassion, faith, and love - for self as well as for others. I'm pretty far out of balance away from the heart and into the head. Tonight, as is my habit on Sundays, I made bread, sponge bathed, and shaved. Tooth getting very loose and I continue to rinse with saltwater and peroxide. Not very painful, but I worry that problems are looming.

Had a dream last night: A man was acting berserk. Other men surrounded him and held sticks with nooses on their ends that were around the wild man's neck. He was screaming and trying to attack the men and they were holding him away from each other. Another man without a stick kept darting in, attempting to do something to the wild man, who tried to punch him. Finally he managed to remove some sort of insect or spider from the wild man's neck that was giving him an extremely painful bite and making him crazy. The man calmed down and started to cry.

This is what's happening to me here. Something painful is attached to me and is being removed, and I'm fighting against the process because of the pain and my ignorance of what's happening. I'm weary and feel this pain will go on forever. I can see no lasting peace or joy in the future, only brief moments that fade to more pain, depression, and futility.

Cat did something quite civilized yesterday. He gave his "I gotta shit" meow and went right down to the low-tide water edge to do so.

The wind is howling tonight. I can hear it roaring down on the point. First time it's blown like this in a long while, and I didn't expect it again until September. Hope the solar panels are ok. They're completely exposed where they are now. I tied them securely, but I may walk down and check in a while. Depends what the tide is doing. It's hard to get there at high tide, especially in the dark.

6/25/01

Midnight: 41F/Stormy day with rain and wind almost as strong as worst storms in summer. Went to point last night and the panels were fine, but today the wind has been much stronger so I went back and lashed them more securely. The rest of day I read, meditated, and contemplated this and that. Finished *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Trying to sort out how what he's saying can be integrated into a more spiritual view of things. Started to read *Flow* by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. Shoulders feeling better. Slow day. Good.

6/26/01

12:30 AM: 41F/raining. Another slow day. Meditated for a couple hours and exercised. In general I've been meditating for an hour and a half first thing in the morning and then informally throughout the day. Spent most of day reading *Flow*. I think he's talking about what I call Wild Aliveness but from a very different perspective. He says it comes from setting a goal and focusing full attention on achieving it. My sense is that that's a shallower experience than surrender, choiceless awareness, and non-action in the moment. I think his flow is ego-centred and the deeper experience life centred.

I've been looking again at my ambivalence about whether I should work on "improving" my self or abandon the self to go into the beyond. In my mulling and indecision I'm doing neither. I don't think there really is a conflict. It doesn't have to be either or, it can be both: when in small mind, work there; when in Big Mind, flow there.

I've also been chewing on whether to ask Patti to send down replacement parts for the outboards. Do I want to break solitude and pay German to bring them in? I could take a chance (assuming I get them running) but it would be a major drag to have them fail and be stuck away from camp. Just day before yesterday I was settling down to stay put here on the island, then in *Flow* I read a quote from a mountain climber about challenge. Out came the charts. My restless mind that wants to feel competent and adventurous is snorting and raring to go.

Carried some bags of gravel up from the beach to dump in the mud out front. Will keep at it slowly so I don't bugger my shoulders again. Everything is wet and it's still raining. Well I asked for it. Taped the sound of rain today. I've taped myself singing a few times too. Sounds great to me as I sing, but on hearing the recording it's awful to my ear. Voice is rusty from disuse.

6/27/01

11:30 PM: 41F/on and off rain/some wind/sea moving. Glorious double rainbow this afternoon. This is like it was in February and March but with less wind and colder. Sanded and adjusted the points on the 4 hp this afternoon, and got spark in both plugs. I'm not ecstatic about it because the motor was working perfectly until it wasn't any more. Still, if it continues to spark that's good news.

Peaceful day. Read, thought, meditated. Feels like I'm slowly settling in. Flow seems to be a sort of peak experience, but it's apparently different from experiences reported by mystics. In Flow the self is still in charge, but you are

not aware of it since you are so focused on the task at hand. The experience strengthens the self. (Actually, Flow talks about self-concept rather than self). In eastern spiritual practice you either abandon the illusory ego-self for the true Self, or discover there is no real self.

Flow is activity based (including mental and aesthetic activity). There is a goal and there are skills, and when these match and you are deeply focused, Flow develops. I think many of my activities here Flow. But activity also tends to mask the deeper experience that sometimes emerges when I'm still and become aware of the universal flow to which I always already belong.

In meditation, peak experiences are not sought (of course I'm doing just that) but experienced and released as part of the flow of living. In Flow they are an end unto themselves. *Flow* uses reading and sports as examples of Flow. Krishnamurti states that reading is often (probably when Flow develops) an escape from facing the world as it is. *Flow* agrees that the experience can become addictive. I think I've lived much of my life chasing the experience of Wild Aliveness. Buddhist meditation teacher Joseph Goldstein (1976) states that losing oneself in an activity such as sports does not lead to spiritual growth.

I'm going to have to make notes during the day to remind myself what I want to write here at night. Got out charts today and looked at the route to the glacier I want to visit. If I do go it won't be for at least a couple of months. I need to watch my energy around the trips I might make. Unless I were to have serious problems, I'd be gone from here for ten days at most. I'll be here (unless I have serious problems) another 200 days. If I let worrying about ten out of 200 days fill my thoughts, I'm a dufus for sure.

Sitting  
bundled up.  
eyes closed

I feel Cat  
pressing down  
through his paws.

The rain has stopped for now.

I taste  
morning coffee  
and smell  
fresh-split wood.

The rain has stopped for now.

I hear  
water swell  
against stone,  
and wind  
among the trees.

A far faint  
woodpecker's stutter  
cuts like a knife.

The rain has stopped for now.

6/28/01

1:00 AM: 44F/partly cloudy/calm. Lovely evening, almost balmy. Strange day. Everything seemed to go wrong. I kept dropping things and stumbling, and then fell out of the chair while getting up. Not a hard fall, but just what the fuck? I think dropping things and losing patience stems at least in part from pain. Sometimes it just gets to me.

Removed carburetor from the 15 hp to clean it. Left the motor on the boat so I wouldn't have to carry it to the cabin, but in stretching to get at the carb I couldn't clearly see what I was doing and broke the plastic cover. Oh shit! Didn't get as freaked as I would have expected, just as I didn't get as happy yesterday

when the 4 sparked in both plugs. Sure hope I can repair it. May email Patti and ask her to buy me some stuff.

Still reading *Flow* and wondering if what I experience is what he calls Flow. I'm just used to exploring and reading about a whole range of "non-ordinary" experiences, and he (an academic psychologist) seems to lump many experiences into a single category he calls Flow. Seems to me that most Western psychology has a rather limited view of consciousness: awake, asleep, dreaming, psychosis, Flow.

Csikszentmihalyi claims Flow is enjoyable because it orders consciousness which is what religious activity used to do. But, he says, we no longer expect Flow experiences to link us with the Gods. I think he's selling us short. Spiritual experience may not link us with the Gods, but it does meld us with the universe and with Spirit. Or rather, in these states we can become aware of the unity that has always existed. To assume that Flow type experience is only about ordering the consciousness of the individual self to generate a dollop of enjoyment is extremely limiting.

Tonight I sat listening to the water and then to just one cluster of gurgles coming from a crack in the rock. Within, I saw patterns of circles and light somehow linked to the sounds. Little by little I feel the world and myself come Alive again. Patience my heart. Again I sense that the mechanistic laws of science have no direct link to the Life of the world which is profoundly and mysteriously spontaneous. Yet those laws are also a manifestation of Life since they have been imagined by our minds. I feel less fragmented now than I did 25 years ago during my first wilderness retreat. Then, human and nonhuman seemed radically at odds and I could find no place for myself since I was human but felt I belonged to Nature and not to the human world.

Is there a self or not? Tonight, it doesn't matter; presence or absence doesn't change the quality of the struggle to be free. And once I relax into the

flow, it also seems irrelevant because the apparent self is at ease with all around it. The self may be illusory or not, but it seems counter productive to fret about it either way.

As I sat on the rock in front of the cabin, I wondered: Did consciousness arise via evolution with the development of the human brain and culture, or is it inherent in the universe? For me, the question cannot be answered logically, but only experientially - like the question, Is there God? There is no right or wrong answer that can be proved or disproved. I either experience the world as conscious or I don't. Is consciousness inherently language based? That query certainly is, but when I step back to become aware of the space of consciousness I have no idea of the answer, and can see no way to find out. As soon as I frame the question I'm in language and carry the answer with me.

Such speculation seems trivial to me at the moment. What's important is whether my mind is swamped by and identified with the incessant chatter of rehearsing the past and planning the future, or I quiet the mind and float in the sounds, smells, feelings, and thoughts of the immediate present in all its shifting dimensionality. Because yes, that experience is beyond language.

It has been a sweet night, and now for some hot cocoa.

6/29/01

No entry.

6/30/01

11:00 PM: 36F/rain and wind. Emailed Patti yesterday to ask her to buy several items to send me. Went out in kayak this afternoon. Calm and raining lightly the whole time. Caught one small snapper and will eat him for Sunday



dinner tomorrow. Found several cypress trees on the north side of the island and will fall one soon for kindling.

On the bluff to the other side of my cove there is a large cypress with a deep gash that - according to its growth rings - was cut roughly 33 years ago about when they created this protected area. Perhaps it was a marker blaze. It faces the sea and, when there was no underbrush, would have been visible from a long way out. Weird to find it here after all these months. I wonder if people have been all through this country and no matter where I'd set up camp I would have found human sign? Someday someone may find my tracks here too.

Repaired the plastic top of the carburetor. A couple careless minutes required hours of repair work. I crazy-glued the break, then melted small holes on either side with a hot needle, and lashed it with dental floss. Over that I laminated a metal patch with Shoe Goo. Seems like it should hold, but plastic is strange stuff and difficult to repair.

Sitting outside last night was quiet and still inside but sort of dozy too. Moonlight on the Staines rock face. Peace and traces of feeling vibrantly Alive. Ah. The world truly is mysterious when I'm experiencing it in its Aliveness. With just these few glimpses of flowing life I feel more relaxed and patient about letting solitude have its way with me and letting the process work itself out at its own pace. I imagine this patience will, like everything else, pass.

What is the relationship between conceptual theory and the flowing present? For me, the more aligned they seem the more I'm living in a conceptual construct and experiencing the world as a dead machine rather than a living organism. But I seldom realize I'm not living in a living world. I've often wondered how other people might perceive the world, but since it's almost impossible to recognize you're not feeling truly Alive unless you've had the experience and lost it, it seems impossible to get a meaningful answer simply by asking someone if they feel alive in a living world.

I'm not sure I want to ask German to bring outboard parts. I might not need them and it could be another way to hold myself on the surface of this experience. The two-hour visit would not be a problem, but looking ahead to it might be a major distraction.

Still reading *Flow*. Csikszentmihalyi uses the concept of Flow to explain the whole human experience. In some sense he's talking about escapism. He shows how to organize the mind so as to not experience the darker feelings of life such as fear and doubt. He uses the example of Icelanders huddled in their shelters using story to structure their consciousness so as not to dwell on the fierce winter wind outside. Here I'm trying to allow myself to experience the wind and the fear. In that embrace there is freedom.

Everyday I play a couple games of solitaire which does fulfill his criteria for Flow. But while enjoyable, I'm aware it is not why I've come here. It's a respite from staying present to experience my own life and the world around me as they are and not as I would like them to be.

Meditation is also a structured activity done for its own sake; has the goal of sitting still and staying present to what is actually happening; has feedback in noticing if you are actually present; is about cultivating attention. But it is not about imposing an artificial structure on the mind or shutting out unpleasant experience. The intention is to bring stability to the context of the mind - to awareness - rather than to the content.

Csikszentmihalyi seems to believe that consciousness is chaotic until we control it. He counsels imposing an artificially structured Flow instead of relaxing into the mind's living rhythm. He advocates structure to exclude the dark side of life, but he is actually excluding the whole living world I think. In *Nature, Man and Woman*, Alan Watts contrasts such a mechanistic attitude to the organic approach of Zen which allows the mind to follow its own natural course and participates in that flow by quietly observing it.

I need to be careful not to natter about abstract notions but stick with my actual experience. Deep peace and harmony seem to arise when I surrender to the flow of the world, not when I'm staying busy to shut it out.

If I discuss this in my dissertation, I could use Krishnamurti, Wilber in *Spectrum of Consciousness* talking about choiceless awareness, Alan Watts in *Nature, Man and Woman*, and I think David Jardine in *Descartes and the Rage for Order*. I think he too talks about just this point of feeling that everything beyond our structured control is dangerous chaos.

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<sup>62</sup> Simon and Garfunkel, *The Boxer*.

<sup>63</sup> Crested Caracara: *Polyborus plancus*.

<sup>64</sup> Ringed Kingfisher: *Ceryle torquata*.

<sup>65</sup> Piaget and Inhelder, 1969.

<sup>66</sup> Uncertain identification.

<sup>67</sup> Magellanic Woodpecker: *Campephilus magellanicus*.

<sup>68</sup> During the year I sent out "Reports from Solitude" that briefly described something of my life, feelings, and reflections. I sent them on the winter and summer solstices, the spring equinox, and at the end of the year.

## Interlude 5

### A Glance at Other Solitaries

**I would rather sit on a pumpkin and have it all to myself,  
than be crowded on a velvet cushion.**  
(Thoreau, 1854, 1971, p. 37)

There is a long tradition of writing about solitude, although most of it is not about deep wilderness solitude. Some of the writing is beautiful and I would enjoy quoting it at length, but instead will simply point to the original sources along the way. What I would like to do is glance briefly in the direction of a few other solitaries to see what our differences and commonalities might be. I find many aspects of my own experience in the writings of others, but will mention only a few that seem most important. I will at times use Koch's notion of containment to refer to worldview and socially-based self-identity, and discuss the release from that psychological containment through a shift of consciousness.

#### **Imaginary Solitaries**

Two imaginary solitaries, Robinson Crusoe and FedEx systems engineer, Chuck Noland, played by Tom Hanks in the film *Cast Away* (Broyles, 2002) are interesting examples. My circumstance was fundamentally different from theirs in that I went into solitude intentionally and knew I would be leaving again, while they were thrust into isolation and would likely be stuck there for the rest of lives. I read and watched their stories for the first time shortly after I emerged from my own year alone, and my reaction to each was intense but different.

I was surprised in reading *Robinson Crusoe* (Defoe, 1719) that when I translated the language from strict Christian terms to my own hybrid Buddhist/Christian/naturalistic idiom, I could identify much of my own inner experience there even though, as far as I can discern from later research, Daniel Defoe, himself, never spent time in solitude. I

continue to find this fascinating since Defoe had profound insight into the spiritual transformations that occur in complete wilderness solitude.

During his time alone Crusoe settled more and more deeply into relationship with God, and in this sometimes painful transformation loosed himself from the limiting perspective of his social identity. This is most clearly evident in his perception (from a hiding place) of the cannibals who occasionally came to the island to slaughter and feast on other humans they had brought along for the purpose. At first he was disgusted with their pagan savagery and could think only of killing them. Then as he examined his own value system from the perspective gained in solitude, he recognised that they were not evil but simply doing what was natural in their cultural. He, on the other hand, by judging them and wishing to kill them was committing an evil act. It is this transformation of consciousness, the surrender of the indoctrinated self as sole arbiter of right and wrong, which Defoe portrays so well in various ways. This is the difficult and painful process of de-centering Wilber describes.<sup>69</sup>

The book *Searching for Robinson Crusoe* (Severin, 2002) has little to do with the “real” Robinson Crusoe, Alexander Selkirk, but does examine other sources of information and inspiration that might have been available to Defoe. Strangely, the author does not discuss the psychological or spiritual experience of the marooned people he describes. This strikes me as remarkable considering how important such aspects of experience were for Crusoe. What is going on? When Defoe wrote *Robinson Crusoe*, did the inner experiences of a castaway seem as strange and intriguing as the physical; was there a more general interest in spiritual/psychological experience than there is today?

My first response to the film *Cast Away* was negative: it seemed to me the screenwriter, director, and actor didn’t know what they were talking about. They simply portrayed our current cultural fantasy of what being alone must be like. I recently viewed the film again and softened my judgment, but was still disappointed; the story began and ended with a man alienated from and struggling against the non-human world.

Noland spent four years alone on a tiny tropical island, and during that time it never seemed to occur to him that he was embedded in a living world. His consciousness was

cloistered from the world around him by the “object relations” mindset that the only possibility for intimate engagement is with another human being. Instead of finding his way through his cultural conditioning to develop a relationship with his own inner depths, with the trees, sea, and sky, with Spirit, he created a surrogate human from a volleyball.

He never surrendered himself to actuality, to live fully in the present, but remained emotionally centered on his memories and imaginings. The film didn't question this mindset or hint at the possibility that he might have found his way toward meditation practice - even given the recent flourishing of such practices in the West. Even though Noland did lose the outward trapping of civilization, he always remained a man *against* nature - although we in the audience were brought into relationship *with* nature via wonderful cinematography.

On reconsidering these stories, I recognize that both characters did expand their containment, and each remained contained: one in Christianity and the other in human relationship. However, Crusoe's inner transformation was much more profound. Perhaps the authors of each story focused on breaking free from what they perceived as the most limiting aspect of their culture: Crusoe from a self-centered life; Noland from a frantic obsession with time.

### **Actual Solitaries**

Turning to writings by actual people who have taken themselves voluntarily into solitude, I find a blend of various motives: spiritual quest; love of nature; preference for living alone; the challenge of achieving a goal. Generally, seeking absolute wilderness solitude involves some degree of meeting a challenge or achieving a goal, and at times the whiff of heroism slips into the writings of such individuals; they overcome almost impossible odds and finally achieve their goal, which may then transform their life ... forever and ever, amen. During my first long retreat into wilderness solitude, I felt certain my life had been healed once and for all, but am now less confident that such peak experiences ever endure. They seem to be part of the flow of our living.

Solitaries vary in their focus of attention: outward and/or inward. In the About Solitude Interlude I mentioned the Christian Desert Fathers. They exemplify solitaries

who seek solitude primarily to surrender themselves and come into relationship with or identify with Something Greater (Merton, 1960); for secular seekers, this Something may be physical Nature, but it is always Sacred. Chris Czajkowski (1999) and Richard Proenneke (1973),<sup>70</sup> on the other hand, scarcely mention their inner life. The scope of their writing embraces only the external world (They both had a profound appreciation for the beauty of life.) and, occasionally, emotional tone. It is unclear whether they were troubled by introspection.

An extreme example of a solitary refusing to explore his inner world is found in *Bold Man of the Sea: My Epic Journey* (Shekhdar and Griffiths, 2002).<sup>71</sup> Shekhdar considered loneliness and depression to be enemies and speaks of girding himself in his battle against them. He saw all inward looking as dangerous and probably pointless. He claimed he was too busy to have time for such frivolous activity, and, in fact, did everything he could to keep his mind on the external surface of things. He played as many as 50 games of electronic solitaire a day, constantly listened to whatever commercial or shortwave radio programs he could tune in, called his family at least three times a week via satellite telephone, sent numerous emails, and worked out a business plan on his laptop. All these activities were in addition to the basic survival activities of maintaining himself and his boat as he rowed and drifted across the Pacific.

Shekhdar claims to have been disappointed to not directly experience the existence of God, but how could he? He kept his mind so full of trivial activity there was little possibility to notice God's Presence. Yet still, in his description of his trip and himself, changes take place even if unbeknownst to him. His connection with nature deepens and softens somewhat. Necessarily, being in a small boat at sea for nine months, he surrenders his demand to be in control of everything. His perception of, and relationship with, a shark that follows his boat becomes less aggressive as he considers matters from *her* point of view.

Surprisingly, the solitaries I've read who did not go into solitude specifically in search of the Sacred did not seem to prepare themselves psychologically or spiritually. Even those on an inward as well as an outward journey devoted little time and attention to inner preparation. Perhaps this is why some had such difficulty dealing with the

psychological and emotional stress they had to face. Both Patterson (1999) and Simon (1998)<sup>72</sup> spent time in introspection, but neither write about meditation practice or other spiritual training.

This is, I believe, a reflection of how we fragment our lives or at least our writing: we are either physical adventurers or spiritual seekers, but seldom integrate these different aspects of ourselves. Before my first long retreat into wilderness solitude I, too, did not prepare for the inner turmoil I would face, and I nearly went insane as a consequence. Until we acknowledge our inner world and the value of psychological and spiritual training, we will remain unprepared to engage our inner life fully and with equanimity. For me, Shekhdar's account exemplifies how much we lose when we avoid an exploration of our inner world.

### **Existential Terror**

Existential terror, usually repressed or at least muted in the social milieu, can sometimes fill the solitary mind. Nouwen<sup>73</sup> describes this terror of nothingness or dissolution of the self exquisitely in the Christian vernacular. In solitude I am more clearly able to see how we use our relationships with others as mirrors to maintain our personal identity; through our interactions we hold each other's persona in place.<sup>74</sup> I hold an idea of who I am - a conceptual identity - and in subtle ways invite and manipulate others to treat me as this persona needs to be treated to survive. In solitude, without this constant mirroring, the persona can begin to unravel; believing we actually are the persona, we may literally feel like we are going to die. Hence the terror.

There are three possible responses to this unravelling: embrace it, avoid it, or go mad. If we have some understanding of what is happening and the desire to seek a deeper center of ourselves than the shifting sand of our persona, we might make the effort to stay with the terror, loneliness, doubt and despair, until our ego-self dissolves into Something greater. Then there can be self-acceptance and peace. It is as though a carpet is being pulled from beneath our feet, and we feel we are falling into the void. If we remain still, we discover there is a solid floor beneath the carpet; or rather, the living earth. Even though there is no static solidity, the sense of doubt and insecurity disappears



and we feel cradled and cared for. But this is only possible once we surrender our self. Individuals on a spiritual quest may go into solitude just because it is an intense catalyst for such transformation.

Avoidance has many forms. Commonly when the terror and loneliness wash over us, we avert our attention by keeping ourselves busy with activity or other escapes such as reading or television, we mute the feelings with some sort of food or narcotic, or we lose ourselves in other people. It is tempting to say that anyone who does not struggle with existential terror is in some sort of avoidance mode, but this may not be fair. I can know only that this is so for me. Some solitaries such as Byrd (1938),<sup>75</sup> Simon, and Patterson write about their struggles, but Thoreau (1971), Czajkowski, and Proenneke barely mention inner turmoil.

It is clear though that some solitaries, either because they do not experience the loneliness and terror or because they accept and transform it, feel at ease with themselves and express little desire to leave their life in solitude. Others come up to that dark place and do not allow themselves to embrace it naked and alone. They escape their solitude one way or another: physically, via regular radio contact, or through reading. Patterson, finally, calls to be towed to shore rather than stay with his longing for other people for even one more day and so make it in on his own. Simon and Byrd lean heavily on their radios for companionship and claim it is the dark that is impossible to bear alone. Still, many spiritual seekers have walled themselves up in caves for years on end. Byrd was apparently seriously delusional and possibly close to death from carbon monoxide poisoning, and it is fascinating to wonder how much of his suffering was due to poisoning and how much to psychological disorientation. Shekhdar was determined to reach his goal of being the first to row solo unaided across the Pacific and he hung on and waited for the wind and current to carry him to his destination - some three months after he had expected to arrive. Indeed, setting the record was apparently the only thing that made the journey worthwhile for him. Simply spending time alone was not, in and of itself, a valuable experience.

I've found commonalities as well as differences between the experiences of solitaries. Patience seems to develop with the growing realization that we are not in

charge of the world. Civilization is designed to buffer and to avoid facing the uncertainty of life (Becker, 1973). In wilderness solitude this illusion quickly drops away as we are confronted with our need to adapt to the world around us.

There is a tendency for solitaries to anthropomorphize and describe the non-human world in metaphorical language. This is especially evident in some of Thoreau's writing. Beyond the web of interpersonal human relations, we either falsely invest other organisms with sensibilities they do not have, or we become more sensitive to what is usually invisible to our city-dulled senses: it is not clear which.

The third, and for me most vital, commonality all solitaries seem to share is the experience of feeling vibrantly, often ecstatically, Alive in a Living world. Thoreau said, "There is nothing inorganic" (1971, p. 308), and Byrd wrote, "There came over me, too powerfully to be denied, that exalted sense of identification - of oneness - with the outer world which is partly mystical but also certainty. ... There were moments when I felt more *alive* [emphasis his] than at any other time in my life" (1938, p. 120). It is unclear from Shekhdar's writing whether he consciously experienced this sense of vibrant Aliveness, but then he seemed intent on avoiding being psychologically alone with himself. Even so, I detect in his descriptions of sea, sky, and fish a deepening sense of feeling at home with the non-human world.

Still, what beckons my imagination are the solitaries we know nothing of; those who do not write or talk about their experience; those that fully abandon containment or alter their center of gravity from social to Something else. What of Lao Tzu after he wrote the *Tao Te Ching* for the Gate Keeper and disappeared over the pass and into the mountains beyond? What of them, my heart asks. Koch, Nouwen, Merton, and Maslow tell me that engagement with the Beyond must always be transitory, but they know only that it has been so for them and for others who have reported the same. And my heart still asks, What if ...?

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<sup>69</sup> Wilber (Interlude 7) does severely criticize such cultural relativism. He does not, however, convincingly present any alternative except to universalize his own cultural values.

<sup>70</sup> Chris Czajkowski built a log cabin in a remote area of British Columbia's Chilcotin wilderness and lived there alone for part of each of 10 years. (N.B. Czajkowski may have described her inner life in one of her other books that I have not read.) Sam Keith & Richard Proenneke wrote

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a book about the latter's life in the Alaskan wilderness where he built a beautiful log cabin and lived alone for over 30 years.

<sup>71</sup> Shekhdar was the first person to row solo and without assistance across the Pacific.

<sup>72</sup> Patterson sailed solo from the south Pacific to Vancouver. Simon sailed his boat to the far North of Canada just west of Greenland, froze himself in intentionally, and wintered there alone.

<sup>73</sup> See Interlude 4.

<sup>74</sup> The claims I make in this section come from personal insight into my own psychological processes, but I believe these processes are, at least to some degree, common to many of us.

<sup>75</sup> Byrd Spent several months alone in the Bolling Advanced Weather Base during the 1934 Antarctic winter.

## July 2001

Life is a mystery to be lived,  
not a problem to be solved.

(Van Kaam quoted in Watts, 1958)

7/1/01

No entry.

7/02/01

Midnight: 44F. Been using cypress for kindling the last few days. What a difference. Soon I'll paddle around the island to fetch some more. Doesn't take much to start the fire, so one kayak load should last a long time. Yesterday was a busy Sunday. Mended clothes and raingear, started a wash, organized monthly food, sent and received check-in email, cleaned and reinstalled carburetor on the 15 hp. Repair job is holding.

This morning at high tide, I tried to fire it up. Nothing. Checked plugs and there is no spark. Emailed Patti asking her to consult her local outboard mechanic for advice. I'm very lucky to have her out there to do these things for me. She is perhaps the only person who I feel not only understands me, but deeply cares.

The 4 hp is running fine again - at least for now. I'm clearly aware today how much technology is anchoring me to social reality and identity. There is good reason mystics simplify their lives, and if I do another long retreat so will I. I'll try to let go of this stuff once I get both motors working - if in fact I do get them working. I may not be able to use the boat for the next seven months except for very short trips with the 4 hp. That feels ok. I imagine I'll get restless, but when the winds come up again I'll be mostly stuck on land in any

case. And I have the kayak for calm days. Glad I brought in all the wood I did. Even without the boat I can find enough more nearby to see me through.

Just the other day I was beating myself up for being anal and a perfectionist for wanting to have so much wood. I need to learn to trust myself more. I also need to think clearly about perfectionism. It's not that I should do sloppy work, but only let go of harsh self-judgment. In believing that whatever I do isn't good enough, I destroy the joy of accomplishment and sap my own creative energy.

Cat had another seizure today. Very strange. Must be strange for him, too. He's so spaced out after. Wanders into the cabin and meows and meows. Tried to claw up my leg as if I were a tree, and I freaked and knocked him down. Mostly though I was patient and comforting. He loses all sense of identity for a while, but seems to reorient himself in a couple hours. Reminds me to be careful as I'm exploring beyond my own identity.

7/3/01

No entry.

7/4/01

Late night: 38F/light cloud/breeze/nearly-full moon. Losing the urge to write again. Yesterday I communicated via email with Alejandra who works for the national parks. What a huge help she has been. I don't think this project would have happened without her support. She thinks there won't be a problem with German bringing supplies. Probably in August. Treated yesterday as Sunday: had a fire almost all day, bathed and shaved, started reading *The Perfect Storm* again.

Put the clock away today. Want to let go of time if I can. Losing that structure triggers anxiety. Also going to be more formal in morning meditation:

I'll set the timer for 40 minutes, and my intent will be to not move during that period. Then I'll send people, plants, and animals good thoughts for about 20 or 25 minutes. After that, exercise, clean cabin, and have coffee. All takes about three hours. I worry I'll lose this discipline when I leave solitude. To begin the day with three hours of personal work in the social world is not easy.

Continue to read *Flow* and go back and forth between agreeing and disagreeing when he advocates controlling the content of the mind to exclude unwanted experience. The meditation I practice works with the space in which experience arises: learning to be with whatever happens without becoming overwhelmed. The chaos/psychic entropy Csikszentmihalyi sets out to exclude is produced, I think, by the separate self and its desire to maintain its identity through excluding whatever it imagines as threatening or painful. It's like being in the forest at night with a flashlight and imagining monsters out there in the dark. The only way to really deal with the fear is to turn off the light and realize the monsters are projections of our own imaginations. Same is true internally. If we always maintain control, there is no opportunity for the new and unexpected - for life - to enter.

I'm trying to let go and trust something greater than my small self to pull me to it. As I write this, I feel fear. What if something dark and evil pulls me? It's important to maintain discipline and integrity, and that requires effort, but the effort is not to structure content and exclude unpleasant experience, but to remain open and present to whatever arises.

All alone, I argue with Csikszentmihalyi about the need to stop all this endless mental activity and allow the mind to settle and experience whatever comes into it. Then I realize I'm doing just what I'm telling him we should not do: filling my mind with activity. I'm really arguing with myself to understand what I think and feel.

I napped in the evening and woke feeling groggy and negative. I hope to understand what causes these feelings when I awake and how to deal with them more skilfully. It requires energy and focus to move out of that space, even if the effort is focused on simply remaining non-judgmentally aware of the feeling. But when I feel like that I don't have energy and don't want to be aware. So what to do? Ah. Ask for help from something deeper.

When I FEEL energized, alive and motivated by a new circumstance or a new woman, then I'm captivated and engaged. But once the rush wears off and things become routine, I don't have the discipline to generate the energy to transform the situation back to life. This might be what happens spiritually too. When I feel the surge of release and peace all is cool, but once it's passed I don't have the discipline to hang in and continue my practice. I'll continue to work with this, but not forget that the deeper solution is surrender to something beyond my own small mind.

Today was slow and easy. Been keeping track, and if I cut some of the trees from here that German said burns green, I may have enough wood without going for more in the boat. Now I'm going out to sit under the moon, and I imagine Cat will sit on my lap. He usually sits on me for an hour or two a day and I get tired of him there sometimes, but feel he needs the contact.

7/5/01

No entry.

7/6/01

Late Night: 36F/high energy night/strong wind from the southeast, cabin shaking in the gusts/sea pounding the beach and rocks. Sat on the rock and felt the blow. I actually feel it more in here since the whole cabin is shaking. Snuck out so Cat wouldn't come. Very tired of him today. With this wind he wants to be on top of me and I want some space.

Found a loose wire in the 15 hp yesterday and once I tightened the connection I had spark. Put motor on boat and pushed it to the water at high tide. Started ok but wouldn't keep running. Still seems like a fuel problem. Tomorrow I'll heat the new plugs and pour gas in the cylinders. If it still won't fire up, I'll take carb back off and strip it down again. The 4 was also hard to start today. Arghhh. Technology.

Today the sea was flat calm. No hint of this weather coming - at least not to my senses. Took the chainsaw in the kayak to the north side of the island. Felled a mostly dead cypress and brought back a dozen rounds. Saw got stuck and I bugged my shoulder again yanking it free. When will I learn? Wonder how long it will be super sore this time? Mind scattered with lots of inner chatter. Trying to stay steady as the wind buffets the cabin.

7/7/01

Late night: 36F/remnants of a breeze/moon and stars shining on snowy Staines/swell softly crumpling on the low tide beach. Glorious night. Good technology day. Drained the laptop battery. It's been taking less charge lately - down to 55% max - and I wondered if it was dying which wouldn't be a good thing? Now it's charging right up again.

Got the 15 running pretty well. Still a little rough and misses at high speed, but I think it's done that for a while. Not sure what the problem was. I'll test it in the sea as soon as the water calms down. Cleaned chimney and tonight it's dripping creosote like crazy which stinks up the cabin. I'm hungry for fish and would like to see about catching some for dinner. Got out charts to check the route to the glacier. Looks to be about 70 miles. With good weather I might make it in a day, but more likely two there and two back. If the wind strikes who knows how long it would take.



Was feeling good about the laptop battery and getting the 15 to work, and then started to feel anxious again. This need to stay occupied with goal-oriented activity in order to harmoniously structure consciousness is what *Flow* talks about. But this is exactly what I don't want to do. I know I can feel good by staying ahead of negative feelings, but I want to go deeper and feel good - being still - just as I am. In any case, it's good to hear that anxiety is part of the human condition and not just a personal glitch.

In meditation one stays with the feeling and the presence of mindful awareness is what restores harmony. I still resist accepting that constant effort and vigilance are required. The price of freedom - psychological as well as political - truly is eternal vigilance. Why this should annoy me is curious. Attention is also required in the physical world to split wood, run the boat, catch fish, so why do I believe harmonious internal activity should happen automatically without conscious awareness? Perhaps because we're not taught to pay attention to our internal world in the same way we pay attention to the outer one.

Finished *Flow*. Finally, I liked it. In the last two chapters he does go somewhat beyond the individual ego, but until then it's all about the I. He's better at discussing interactions between individual and world which is where meditation seems to have less practical advice to offer.

7/8/01

Sunday, my day for an all-day fire. A good day for it! Wind blew up from the south during the night and by morning was pushing spray and waves onto my beach, and the cabin was shaking like a leaf; like a very long earthquake, or as though a train were rumbling past next door. By far the worst buffeting I've taken. Feeling too tightly hunkered down inside, I step onto the porch to breathe deep and shake myself loose from the tendrils of anxiety that reach for me from dark depths.

Condor! Low and sweeping down the wind toward me. Entranced, I watch through binoculars as she circles and climbs the updraft close over head. Black with white collar below, when she banks into a turn I see her back is pure white but for stark delicate tracery of black head, spine, and splayed fingers of up-curved wing tips. Calligraphy painting a poem of grace across the sky.

Only a seagull can begin to match such lyric beauty. I watch her float light as a feather in the roaring wind. What is this feeling that soars with her across the wide spaces of my heart? Joy, love, admiration? I watch and watch as she soars up the wind stream, then flaps twice - huge wings arching down into a hollow curve - and is gone. And I am left staggered on earth, clutching a tree for support.

7/9/01

Late night: 33F/clear blue and sunny all day with a light breeze from the south. Went to lizard at the point. I needed it. Hadn't realized how much I've missed sitting in direct sun. It's been a long while again. Decided to go fishing if motors still working. 15 started rough, but smoothed out when it warmed up. 4 wouldn't start. Grrrrr. Took cover off and the choke wasn't engaged. The linkage is poorly designed and you can't see if it's engaged without removing the cover. Once choked, motor started fine.

I still get angry dealing with motors. I don't know much and am always uncertain what the problem might be and doubt my ability to fix it. Then, after I do everything I think I need to do and it still doesn't run, I get furious and curse at the motor instead of calmly looking for the problem. My anxiety about the motors failing far from camp is out of proportion to the risk. Unless everything really screwed up at the same time, I don't think my survival would be threatened. I always take the satphone and from now on will take the kayak too.

I seem to usually get angry at Cat for two reasons: when he gets in my way while I'm working or walking; when he "hangs on me" by crying because he wants attention or by jumping out of his box and staring at me each time I open the cabin door. I think the anger arises because I want to do what I want to do when I want to do it, and because I can't stand anyone making demands on me. No wonder I have problems in relationships.

Tonight I caught myself thinking that I just can't stand any more demands. I felt totally exhausted trying to fulfill expectations. Yet I'm alone and the demands are internal self-criticisms. My shoulders are tight and sore - as though I'm being whipped.

7/10/01

Late night: 36F. Another cold beautiful day, but I didn't get to enjoy the sun much. Went fishing to Staines, and was in the shade here preparing to go and in the shade cast by the rock walls over there too. Had to work but caught enough for four meals. Motor cut out once, but otherwise ran fine. Hauling boat up the beach is still tough on shoulders.

Started to read *Care of the Soul* by Thomas Moore and like it a lot. The author was a catholic monk for years and is now a therapist. His approach is more spiritual than psychological: accept the mystery of life, and explore and honour yourself just as you are. Very different from *Flow* which - in its claim that Flow is the best one can hope for - I begin to see as a disservice to the public.

*Care of the Soul* is catalyzing the sort of spacious self-acceptance I experienced on my first retreat 25 years ago. Surrender to the shadowy, painful side of living and of myself. Moore clearly differentiates between care and cure. The goal of cure is to fix the self and be done with the problem. Care is a lifelong work. Care is not about changing the self into an idealized socially normal person without hang-ups or problems, but about becoming more complex. The

intent is not to get rid of or change anything, but to expand the context and integrate all aspects of character. In this integration all parts become acceptable and make sense, and there is harmony.

I see a difference between care and meditation. In care, which has a western orientation, there is a strong focus on the complexity and uniqueness of the individual person. Meditation focuses on impersonal process. For me, acknowledgement of the unique person is important. Meditation can get dry sometimes. One of the joys and challenges of solitude is having the space to explore more and more of myself.

Pain is an important aspect of what is going on here. It's the dark hard side of living that must be embraced if I want to live fully. Nice theory, but me ... I fucking hate pain.

7/11/01

No entry.

7/12/01

No entry.

7/13/01

Late night: 33F/cloudy. Seem to have lost a day. I thought this was the 12th, but it's turned out to be Friday 13th. Yikes! Peaceful day. Calm and quiet. Snowed three inches last night and this morning. Just enough to turn the world silent and white. Very beautiful. Yesterday was clear with wind and waves coming straight onto beach. Took chair, warm clothes, thermos of coffee, and book, and paddled kayak to the island out front for several hours in the

afternoon. Found a flat, non-slippery rock that faces north, gets full sun, and is protected from the south wind. Water was somewhat rough, so I wore the life vest and was surprised at how secure I felt. I'm usually very aware that if I should go into the water with all my clothes and rain gear on, it wouldn't be at all easy to get back into the kayak or to shore.

Last night a brief sense of deep belonging and the experiential awareness that I am the World. It's so easy to get lost in thinking about the experience, but when there is a moment of identity there's no mistaking it. More and more, I doubt whether there is any way to share this process and make such experience easily available to others. It just seems like a long, long journey without rules or regulations. A pathless land indeed! I can't imagine many people would want to follow such a pathless way and so can't see how this experience could have much impact on environmental issues. I've been at this for many years and still have only rare glimpses. Most of the time I still experience the natural world as a backdrop to my individual doings.

*Care of Soul* is talking about narcissism. I suspect the underlying dynamic for narcissism, perfectionism, and low self-esteem is the same. Different concepts to describe self-focus, isolation, and judgment. My special concern with myself is to escape this narcissistic cycle and experience the world as vibrant, alive, and immediate. What a circular trap. Focus on self because my experience is so self-focused. *Flow* would say to pick an external goal and go for it, but *Care* is saying to pay attention to the feelings and experience them more deeply. They are the soul trying to tell me I don't love myself enough as a manifestation of the universe. Such self-acceptance brings me back into the universe as it manifests itself in me. I like this very much.

The list of things I want to improve in myself gets longer and longer. In trying to fix myself, in not accepting myself as a living being with feelings, needs, desires, and fears, I'm treating myself like an "object" to be manipulated and controlled. I feel like giving up, admitting failure, and letting myself be - and it

feels damn sweet too. But I wonder. Is this another extremist move? Perhaps there is a softer more balanced approach?

Moore says there is the possibility of loving the self without being narcissistic. A similar issue is important in "lived-experience" research and writing: how to report one's own experience without it becoming self-involved crap. How can I give my personal experience not more objectivity, but a broader perspective so it is a report on one person's explorations in solitude that might have broader relevance? Writing a dissertation will damn sure be a challenge. One core theme will be to trust the process. I still don't trust the process of spiritual growth. Still try to insist on my own way.

I'm back where I was a month ago with the pain in my shoulders. Using all my usual resources, and tonight I took a Tylenol 3. It occurred to me today that the damage I'm doing to my shoulders comes from interacting with the world aggressively. The force I exert in hurting myself, I exert on the external world too. Today instead of firing up the chainsaw I used the Swede saw to cut wood for the sweat. The day was too peaceful to disturb, and considering it's Friday the 13th maybe it was a good thing. Got a good load cut but apparently did a job on my shoulders.

The trip to the glacier has started to loom. Do I have to go? How will I feel if I don't go? Will not going trouble me forever? Will the motor quit or the wind get ugly? Will I find places to camp along the way? Fear. Today I saw that actually going or not going doesn't have to be the main issue. Just watching my inner process around the possibility is very interesting. It's clear that I'm very concerned about failure to face my fear.

Getting along better with Cat for the moment. Trying to let him be who he is and not control him so much. If he wants to chase birds, so be it. Working to let him cry and groom himself on my lap. I'm slowly waking up to the fact that he's part of the universe with his own existence, and I can learn a lot listening to

and watching him in his spontaneous aliveness. A big piece of loving him, the ducks, myself, and the trees is slowing down to feel the world rather than being so aggressive to do, do, do.

7/14/01

Late night: 36F/two more inches snow/cloudy/wind from the northwest. Scrubbed roof around the chimney so rain won't pick up the flavour of creosote. Checked email from Patti and sent her a reply. Still deciding on the supplies I'll ask German to bring.

Spent most of the day on the porch reading *Care of the Soul*. It's getting more complicated. I long for a simple practice I can remember to do. That's why meditation is so nice: just pay attention. But I'm becoming more aware of how impersonal it sometimes seems. But in the end, there might be no need to deal with individual stuff. Just leave it behind or dissolve it.

I'm beginning to regularly remember my dreams for the first time since I arrived. Many are disturbing. What to do with them? For the moment I'm just letting them be without seriously trying to figure them out. I'm also beginning to have sexual fantasies. Guess there's a bunch of stuff I've been keeping a lid on that's starting to come up.

Saw a knockdown drag out fight between the two pairs of butter belly ducks. They are very territorial but until now their interactions have only been calling and ritualized posturing along the boundary line. Today one of the ducks from the pair that lives around this island got mixed up with both ducks that live around the island out front, and they were kicking the shit out of him/her. Finally the lone one dove and disappeared. The other two patrolled a while and then swam off. A bit later I saw a shape I didn't recognize. Put the glasses on it and it was the lone duck swimming very low in the water, head just above the surface, to be hard to see. Earlier in the day they came to drink the fresh water that seeps down

the beach here. Watching them I realized I'm made from the same stuff and by the same processes they are. Felt tears in my eyes.

7/15/01

Night: 33F/couple more inches of snow/sunny/calm. I sweat in the snow. Today is the third Sunday of the month and I wanted to join the sweat circle at UBC. Half way through, I realized that it's summer in Vancouver and they haven't been sweating since May. Had to laugh at myself. But some will be preparing for Sundance and I can support them from here. What courage, especially those who pierce their chests and rip the flesh to break free. I can barely imagine it. Even the thought of dancing for days without eating or drinking frightens me.

Saw dolphins and an otter and heard sea lions for the first time in weeks today. Was thinking the other day that maybe these critters had gone for the winter but perhaps it is I who hasn't been noticing.

Awake most of the night. Southwest wind hitting the cabin and triggering anxiety. Small self-feeling under attack and vulnerable in the face of the unknown. I complain about fear, but if it's true that we fear the unknown as a generic condition, then the path out of small self and into Life/Spirit must lead through fear.

I talk about surrender, but the experience of feeling weak, vulnerable, and dependent brings up feelings of shame. Partly the shame comes from our strong cultural ideal of individual autonomy and self-reliance, and partly from my own deep rebellion and pride. Pride might be another face of shame: I don't want to be naked and ask for acceptance just as I am. Ah, but it's cold and lonely within these walls.

I also refuse to look up to anyone with humility and dependence and refuse to assume the role of teacher or caregiver for anyone else. If I can work this out in



its true arena - relationship with and surrender to Spirit - my relationships with people may become richer and more relaxed.

The feeling of anxiety seems to depend on how tightly I hold myself and how rigidly I build protective walls: the more open I am the less threatening the Other seems. But it's hard to know. Is the experience of peace and freedom an opening to Unknowable Mystery or just quiet time within my own small self? Projection can be subtle.

I've often thought that having a sense of gratitude is more important than concern about to What or Whom I'm giving thanks. Now I wonder. It's not important to define the What or Whom - if I do, I impose limitations - but it is important to move beyond a personal experience of gratitude to that Someone/thing greater than this small self.

I've done three spates of emailing to request technical support for the electrical setup, medical advice, outboard parts and other supplies. In all three cases I think I've been seeking personal security by making things physically safe and controllable. In this I've been confusing physical vulnerability with the need for spiritual surrender. I'm frightened of the powerful mysterious Presence even though I believe it is loving. The fear comes not from it, but from my ego freaking out over loss of control. Once the shift happens and I experience myself as part of Something larger, there is wonder and peace, but beforehand it feels like impending death.

7/16/01

No entry.

7/17/01

No Entry.

7/18/01

Night: 31F/calm/clear. Been near freezing and snowed some more. Last night I saw two shooting stars. Beautiful day today: clear/calm/crisp. Dressed warm and went to read in the sun. Came back to work on the 15 hp. Checked electrical components for corrosion and bare wires. Some possible problems but nothing obvious. Only worked a couple hours but am wiped out. Internal conflict, physical pain, being cold all day, age? Doing much less daily work now than I did during the first six weeks here. Could force myself, but don't have the energy to comfortably do much at all. Haven't felt like writing either, and still don't.

Been a rough couple days psychologically/spiritually. Feeling like I'm not going to achieve what I came here to do. It's becoming clearer to me that I came to transform my consciousness from this I/Bob Kull-centred experience to living from a more collective decentred place where I'm part of the flow of life. Painful to feel I'm failing. Shame. When I leave here I should just go my way and not say much to anyone since I have nothing real to share. Whatever I say will be a sort of lie since I'm not walking the walk, but only talking about the transformation.

I think this transformation has been my deepest goal for the past 25 years - since my first wilderness retreat, or even since I did LSD when I was 19. I've given up so much for it: security, career, family. Of course from another perspective, I've lived as I have because I've wanted adventures and have not wanted responsibilities. I'm getting older and if I don't find some sort of fulfillment on this retreat, I'm not likely to before I die. Painful to feel that in some sense I've wasted my life.

What makes it so hard is that after all these years and all this experience I still don't know how to break free of this small tight mind. It's ironic. The more I try the less likely it is to happen because it's the I/ego that's trying to break free which actually reinforces the tightness. Yet being caught in the small I is

just what drives the need to "succeed" in breaking free. Once out of the closed loop, I no longer feel the need to succeed or any shame of failure. I'm content to just be, and if I've failed so be it. Of course from that open space I haven't failed and do have something to share.

At the point this afternoon, almost unnoticed, I slipped free. The same thing often seems to happen: I become exhausted, give up fighting, and slip free. There must be an easier more sensible route, a way to flow into that open space with less struggle.

In terms of a system for bringing about this transformation, I'm as bewildered as I was 25 years ago. I read Wilber<sup>76</sup> and he makes the process of growth and development seem straightforward. But my journey feels like a struggle with no clear rules or procedures to move me in the direction I want to go. Everything I try keeps me stuck and only when I finally give it up is there release. But when I try to consciously surrender that doesn't seem to work either. There is always a small flicker of looking over my own shoulder to see if the "surrender" is working. There is a sense of "doing this so that..." which is not surrender, but negotiation.

When I'm more open, I realize the success/failure dichotomy I get tangled in is a confusion of small mind. There is no absolute success or failure, just process and journeying. I won't leave here with any definite answers, but will have something to share with others - perhaps a warning against any set system that promises success.

I've noticed something with Cat. When I tell him to get down from my lap I expect immediate action. When I don't get it, I assume he's wilfully ignoring me. But if I get his attention first, then say get down and wait a second or two, he often does. It's as though it takes some time to process the information. Not sure if this is just the way it is with cats or if his seizures have fried some circuits in his brain.

Last night I sensed that the biological world we lose by building a conceptual reality to buffer against uncertainty, suffering, and death, is profound and meaningful. Now we're trapped in our conceptualization and cut off from the living world. Instead of trying to control Cat so much I would do well to pay attention and allow him to invite me into his world, a world from which I'm excluded. Re-entering that world is part of why I'm here. I've been there before, and it can be frightening at times. When I opened myself to him, Cat seemed demanding and aggressive - butting me under the chin with his head, wanting to lick my face. I felt slightly threatened even though I think he was showing affection.

Could there be a message here about relationship? Do I feel threatened and withdraw to protect myself when others only want to be close and are not trying to dominate or overwhelm me? I think this is what Patti keeps trying to tell me when she says she doesn't want anything but to love me.

This morning Cat jumped onto the food shelf where I insist he not go. I freaked and whacked him on the butt. He turned to stare at me and I smacked him on the side of the head. What instant anger when he thwarts MY will! After a while I called and he reluctantly came and we sat together. He seems so forgiving, but who knows what damage I'm doing to our relationship. I would be ashamed for anyone to see me hit him that way.

If it stays calm and doesn't snow again, conditions will be good for cutting firewood in next four or five days. I'm reluctant to go because it will damage my shoulders again and put me back into pain for a week or more. I'll try to remember to be gentle with myself. Enough. For not feeling like writing, I sure wrote a lot.

7/19/01

No entry.

7/20/01

Late night: 26F/calm/clear. May have lost a day again. Oh well.

Yesterday I mostly sat in sun and read. Decided to go for firewood today if motor working. Got out clock and set it for 8 a.m. to be ready for high tide. I've gotten so slow. I blink and an hour is gone. Pumped up boat and can hear a leak near the floor boards. Tested the 4 hp and it's working fine. The 15 was cranky starting and ran badly until I fiddled with the low speed fuel adjustment. Cold morning and there was some breeze. Decided to bag firewood and go fishing to Staines instead. Caught only three in almost four hours, but it was nice over there.

Motor worked perfectly until I opened it up to full throttle on the way home, and then it started to miss badly. Amazingly, the repair manual describes exactly this symptom. Says it's probably the ignition module which I can't do anything about until German brings the socket set. Will the problem remain confined to high speed or will the motor crap out completely and leave me stranded?

Tried to be very gentle hauling the boat up, but shit are my shoulders sore again. I should probably forget about wood for a long while, but don't think I can afford to. Once the wind returns, it will be much harder to get and I don't have a full supply in yet. I'm burning much more than I'd expected.

Saw two sea lions hauled out on the Staines rocks. Big. Very, very big. I wonder if that's why fishing has gotten poor? How many kilos of fish do they gobble up a day? I can understand why fishermen shoot them. Serious competition. Yesterday the red headed woodpecker came around. Beautiful bird. Flew to the wind generator's steel pipe tower. That threw him for a loop. I wondered if he would hammer on it the way some Mexican woodpeckers hammer on metal billboards, but he just checked it out and flew away.

Reading *At Home in the Universe* and it's a pleasant distraction from intense personal work. Kauffman seems to see himself as making the profound discovery

that life is at home in the universe. But of course we are ... we're here. And if we're here, it's because, one way or another, the universe brought us forth and has sustained us.

He postulates life arising spontaneously once enough different kinds of molecules gather to build a self-organizing, self-sustaining network. This equates life with organisms, and if the whole universe is Alive he's missing the point. I suspect he'll address this later in the book. This seems analogous to the idea that given enough neurons in a network, consciousness arises spontaneously. But this is still pure materialism and doesn't address the possibility that consciousness is as fundamental to existence as matter is.

The truly profound mystery is what any of this - including ourselves - is doing here. Why something instead of nothing? Why does the universe exist at all and why is it self-organizing? Self-organization is a metaphysical rather than a scientific question I think. If you reject the idea of dualism and an external God, then the universe must be self-organizing. It's here and continues to exist. If you accept the notion of an external God, then God must be self-organizing.

Also been reading Krishnamurti. Powerful, disturbing. He's so extreme and absolute in his view. Everything is utterly this or utterly that. He talks about comparing what actually is to the myth of what we think should be and says that this conflict is the source of most of our discontent, conflict, and confusion. The myth has no reality or sense at all. Pure illusion. Wow. Social reformers such as Paolo Freire would definitely not agree. They see the "should be" as most important, and the "what is" as grist for the mill of transformation.

Personal myth is a real risk. We tell stories about the past and forget these stories are our creations built on selected aspects of experience. The stories describe a self-identity we come to believe in: I did this or I thought that. Once I believe the myth to be literally true, I become - in my mind - the person in the myth I've created. Then the real problems begin. I must now live up to my

expectations for this character based on what he has done in the past - what I've created him to have done. When the actual being that I am does not behave the way I've created the hero of my myth to behave, I feel like a failure.

I have expectations of what my current experience should be based on my first long wilderness retreat. But my memory of that retreat has been strongly coloured by a story I later wrote about it. When writing that story I condensed and idealized the messy actuality into a more dramatic narrative. By now I've come to take that idealization almost literally. This brings me grief since my current experience does not and cannot match that imaginary history.

My task is to try to not do that with this retreat - both for me and for others who might compare themselves to me. I need to treat this as a scientific enterprise and not "cook" the data about what is happening here.<sup>77</sup>

I notice different experiences when I slip free from my small mind. Usually there is a sense of no-self and I experience a quiet empty space within which there are sounds, feelings, and physical sensations (including this body). Things are simply happening. There is love for the world and for myself. Big mind. Peaceful and beautiful. More rarely there is the sense of myself as other - as though seen from beyond - just a man in the world who belongs here as one being among many; all of us alive and real. This is exquisite and what I long for.

7/21/01

Late night: 35F/drizzle/calm. Crossed the east channel for wood today. Cut a bunch of redwood. I'll search the shores near here and if I find more, I won't need to cross the channel again. I felt light hearted partly because my supply is replenished, but perhaps it's more about facing my fear in the physical world instead of experiencing it inwardly. But it can be a trap to set up a situation onto which I project my fear and then feel free only when I face it. This gives no freedom and can drive me to do dangerous things.

7/22/01

No entry.

7/23/01

Night: 29F. Two more glorious days. Since tomorrow is my birthday, I'll accept them as birthday gifts. Why not? I often take the wind as a personal affront, might as well claim the good days too. Clear/glassy/cold. But in the boat in the sun I was warm. Yesterday I went for wood. Chainsaw misbehaved and finally quit completely. Finished cutting with the Swede saw. Felt good to get more of the redwood which burns hot and steady. Took a Tylenol 3 and the wave of relief from pain was very nice. I also like the codeine buzz. After all, I used to be a druggie, and, who knows, may be again some day.

Back at camp Cat came running to meet me as usual. I don't know if all cats are as affectionate as this one, but he acts more like a dog than how I expect a cat to act.<sup>78</sup> Jumped onto the boat and I gave him some love before starting to unload. Then he went to check out the kayak which was tied along side. He's not supposed to get onto the kayak since his claws could seriously damage the lightweight material of the inflation tubes. When I looked up he had his back paws still on the boat and his front ones on the kayak. I yelled, No! A classic spread-eagle situation. The kayak drifted further from the boat and Cat was left hanging in thin air ... for just a moment before he found his way down to the water. It was pretty funny, but I realized he might freeze and ran to scoop him out. No need. He instantly hoisted himself up and lit out for the cabin.

Poor Cat. Looked like a drowned rat. He has thick fur and usually looks quite large, but soaking wet he was pretty scrawny. I zipped up after him to make sure he didn't go into his box and soak his bedding. Dried him off with my



towel. He didn't like the procedure much but I kept a tight hold on him and he acquiesced pretty calmly.

Today he got underfoot while I was unloading. I told him a few times to move and then said that next time I was going to give him a kick - which I did. I personally don't feel bad doing it, and if I could ask him he might prefer a kick to water in the face, but imagine I would look like an asshole through the eyes of others. One thing seems clear, symbolic gestures don't work. All you usually need to do with a dog is demonstrate displeasure, but cats don't seem to give a shit how you feel so it takes a physical stimulus to get through to them.

This morning there was some clear-day fog that burned off by noon. Took fishing gear and three empty barrels to Staines and went looking for a small waterfall dropping into the sea or a stream running down a smooth beach. Followed the shore stopping now and then to fish and listen for the sound of running water. Didn't even need the anchor rock to fish, but just drifted slowly in the calm warm sun. A sea lion showed up. Hung around swimming in the clear water under the boat. Sleek and graceful. Once she showed up the fish quit biting, but I'd already caught six snapper.

Found a small creek with an easy landing spot where I had to carry water only 20 feet to the boat. Then I scootched through some brush to where I heard water falling and found a lovely grotto under the trees. Around a rock jutting from the small pool, a collar of perfectly round half inch spheres of ice had formed from the spray. They sparkled like jewels in the dim light. I've never seen that before. What a lovely gift.

Tomorrow I'll be 55. What does that mean? Headed toward 60 which sounds pretty scary. I look at my life and wonder what it's about. Seems to me that I am and have been living as if I had some goal in mind - but I don't know what it is. Perhaps - like my Ph.D. - it's an epigenetic journey the destination of which I cannot know until I arrive. I wonder what I'll do when I leave here? I

may keep wandering as I've done for so many years, but I need to make a living somehow and to have meaning in my life. My physical adventures may diminish in the coming years - or maybe not. Happy birthday to me!

7/24/01

Late night: 34F/calm. This has been one of the nicest birthdays I can remember. Woke to trees and bushes covered with fresh sticky white. But it was above freezing, and all day I could hear the drip of melting snow. I've been doing just what I wanted all day: eating bread with honey, drinking coffee and some scotch. Lit a fire in early afternoon and have been inside and warm since then. Yum. Started to read *The Family Moskat* again - slowly - and it should last months. Will have fish for dinner and a bath later.

In the morning I sat on the porch and opened my presents from Patti. What a sweetheart! Coloured pencils a small sketchbook. I drew a very rough sketch of the view from my porch. Too bad the pencil set doesn't have grey or silver - the most important colours here. She also gave me a yo-yo. What a funny present. In Spanish, "Yo, Yo" means "I, I". Interesting. If you focus excessively on the self, you will likely spend a lot of time going up and down.

Patti enclosed a note saying she hopes I'm finding my song here. As I read it I started to cry and said I hope so too. It's been long that I've not known my song. Painful to wander lost.

Nature also gave me a gift. I think it wonderful but I'm not sure everyone would agree. A hawk - perhaps a falcon - was perched in the dead tree on the far side of my cove. It lifted off, swooped over the sea, and just above the water intercepted a small bird flying from the other direction; fwoop, snagged it in its claws and continued on its way. Fast. Efficient. It's the first time I've seen a raptor catch a bird in the air. I've seen osprey and eagle snag fish, and goshawk catch rodents, but this was something else. Very beautiful.

I've intended to cast an I Ching for some time, but haven't been sure what question to ask.<sup>79</sup> In concrete situations the counsel I receive usually seems ambiguous, but for spiritual questions my mind is often blown by the insight I find in the answers. Sometimes the hexagrams I cast seem mysteriously miraculous. Today was one of those times. Patti's birthday note catalyzed my question. I asked, "How can I find and live my heart song - deep meaning and fulfillment, peace, love, beauty and aliveness - here on retreat and for the rest of my life?"

I was given the hexagram Holding Together. It's about community rather than individuality, waters flowing together in the sea. It's about being a leader, or, without the capacity for that, becoming a follower. It instructs the questioner to ask the Oracle whether or not he or she has the qualities needed to be a leader. I was tired by then, had lost concentration, and thought I would wait until tomorrow to ask whether I have those qualities. But something called me to continue. I used coins this time instead of yarrow stalks since that method is quicker and less demanding.

I cast the same hexagram again which, simply by chance is very unlikely.<sup>80</sup> The two results differed slightly because the second, instead of remaining stable, transformed from Holding Together to The Receptive which is one of the two primary hexagrams: Creative/yang/male; Receptive/yin/female.

This hexagram is exactly to the point since I'm struggling with the need for acceptance and surrender rather than aggressive activity. The commentary on the moving transformative line in Holding Together addresses the need for a leader to resist wooing or intimidation and to allow people to join freely and follow or to go their own way. How to lead without alienating all but a few fanatics is one of my questions. Here is the answer: stay true to myself and if others gather around, good; if not, ok too.

I've been concerned that since I haven't found any Answers here, I don't really have anything to share with others in good faith and honesty. If I pretend

to teach something I don't know myself, I'm living a lie. But perhaps I can model not finding Answers and yet being alive, independent, and continuing to search.

One of the dangers with the I Ching is that it talks in mythic terms and it's easy to start thinking of myself in those terms. Inflated ego. There are leaders in the world, and I can't deny I have a strong character, but I also have self-doubt, fear, and a need for freedom. Perhaps I should swallow my pride and become a follower. The hexagram clearly states that going my own way as an independent is not a skilful path.

It is compelling to draw the same hexagram a second time. I have difficulty accepting that there is, or at least might be, a Reality/Consciousness/Presence/Spirit greater than me. Even with all that has happened, I still tend to attribute such notions to projection. Here is evidence - not proof - that there is something real beyond my own little self, and this is a good thing.

Another good thing is that during these sunny days the batteries are charged back up. I've wallowed in the blue sky and sunshine for the past few days. Ah sun, come on back.

7/25/01

Night: 42F/cloudy/breeze from the northeast. Warmed up today. During morning meditation I heard the dolphins blowing and looked out to see them close by. One made a rare groaning noise, and I swear another blew bubbles. Cleaned roof so when it rains again I can catch the water. Washed clothes. Don't much like doing it, but it feels good to have clean stuff to put on. Have switched to using homemade soap instead of detergent. Better for the environment and for my body too. This way I'm not so concerned about whether I've rinsed it all out.

7/26/01

Night: 43F/calm/cloudy. Natives are restless tonight. Dolphins splashing out front and the bull sea lion bellowing not far away to the west. Snow is melting and I'm ready for it to be gone - until it snows again, if it does. I've enjoyed it. So far winter has been much nicer than the wind and bugs of summer. I'm trying to consciously notice and enjoy the absence of blackflies.

Tried to start the chainsaw. Gas poured out the muffler. This is, I presume, not a good sign. I'm thankful it waited until I have most of the firewood I'll need. I have a Swede saw, but it sticks badly. Maybe with oil on the blade it will work better. Split wood this afternoon and that's all I did today - except the normal routine: meditate, exercise, clean up, prepare and eat food.

Seems like everything I do is driven by desire for pleasure. I can't see what would move me if it were not for pleasure. The pleasure may be subtle - wanting to feel fully alive or peaceful or something else - but it's still pleasure. Mostly I seek direct, immediate pleasure which is, perhaps, why I live the way I do. Decided long ago that sublimation is crap. Now I'm not so sure. It can certainly be a trap if the supposed pleasures never show up, but it looks to me like people who succeed in life do so because they operate on a different level or time scale in the payoff of pleasures. I wonder what moves someone who is beyond acting from desire for pleasure, if in fact anyone is? Buddhism teaches that equanimity yields a very subtle pleasure, so I guess the pleasure principle drives us up to (and maybe including) enlightenment.

I need to accept death. I can feel my body going downhill with the constant pain and loose teeth, etc. I also sense that in terms of personal accomplishment I've peaked. There is no longer the dream that someday I'll set the world on fire. I need to be careful though not to create yet another myth that will drive my life when I leave here. And here and now, over and over, I need to let my experience of this moment die so I will be open to living the next one.

7/27/01

No entry.

7/28/01

No entry.

7/29/01

Night: Getting harder to write every day; just don't feel the urge. Today was Sunday; empty day. I look forward to Sundays when I can read a novel and don't feel I must accomplish anything - even meditate or work on self. But Sundays are probably the hardest day for me. Without structure or purpose, depression, doubt, and emptiness come rolling in. I feel like I have been and am still wasting my life on a futile pursuit, and don't even know what I'm chasing. But I sense I'll know when I find what I'm looking for - if I ever do. It's like fishing in rough water. Lots of random tugs that MIGHT be a bite, but when I actually get a bite there is no mistaking it.

One premise in coming here was that the pursuit of material possessions, which is destroying the environment, is misguided. They cannot give the satisfaction we seek, so we need to run ever faster to stay ahead of the meaningless of our lives. I've claimed that when we slip out of the conceptual domain we create together and into to the actual flow of life, living just in itself is meaningful and fulfilling. Yet, in actuality, I seldom feel that way here.

When physical and emotional pain rolls through, it feels somehow wrong. Life was not meant to be this way. In Buddhism it's said that suffering is inherent to living, but why should it be so? Even if, as the Buddha claimed, there is a way out, why should it be so difficult? The injustice enrages me. Or rather, my own

personal suffering does. I can be philosophical about someone else's suffering, but not my own. This self-centeredness is a dark aspect of my character, and I'm also seeing sadistic tendencies.

The concern that I'm failing here and won't have anything worth saying when I come out is a trap. To claim that living in the present is inherently meaningful and fulfilling and yet secretly need to find meaning through sharing that awareness with others is dishonest. And somehow it's not enough to just describe what it's like for me in solitude; I feel I need to find an Answer. From an academic perspective describing my actual experience is more acceptable than spouting some supposedly universal Truth and suggesting how to find it.

I don't think it's the pain, loneliness, or emptiness in themselves that really trouble me. What really troubles me is that they trouble me. If life itself is worthwhile when we live it fully, then those experiences too should be valuable and welcome rather than rejected as unsatisfactory. I may be escaping in a lower key than most people - eating a piece of chocolate or drinking a coffee - but the intent, process, and result are the same.

I've usually taken Krishnamurti's statement, "Truth is a Pathless Land", to mean that conceptual theory cannot take us into the truth of our experience, and that each of us must find our own way there. But I begin to remember that truth is not somewhere else we must follow a path to reach. It is always right here in this moment even though we are often blind to it. We don't have to go find truth, but only open our ears, eyes, mind, and heart to what already surrounds and fills us.

I checked my email yesterday and had a birthday greeting from Peggy in which she hoped she wasn't intruding. How small a link is such an email when compared to the internal dialogues which keep me hooked to that world. I've been here almost half a year and still feel very engaged in the social process. I'm

trying to settle into my immediate experience but it's slow going. Perhaps I'm hiding from fear of the unknown by clinging to my social identity.

Today it was 46F, the warmest it's been in two months. Whew, a heat wave. Blackflies are out, snow is almost gone, and soon the winds will start again. I wonder if I'll go to the glacier before they grow too strong, or if I'll go and get caught in rough weather, or not go?

Built a fire and took a nap in the afternoon. Woke feeling joyful. From a straightjacket of perfectionism and self-judgment, I slipped free into the space of letting myself and everything be just what it is. This often happens on Sundays. I feel empty and lost most of the day, and then my experience opens into peace and harmony during the evening. I'm learning not to cling, but to let it be and then pass.

I think what I really like is the rush of release rather than any particular experience. If so, it's self-defeating to want the sense of freedom to be permanent. It's the sense of release that I love so much in travel. To leave everything behind and head off into the unknown. Perhaps I need that so much physically because I hold on so tightly psychologically.

Got chainsaw working.

7/30/01

Night: 42F/calm/clear/ $\frac{3}{4}$  moon. Got up early to go fishing at Staines. Looked out and saw clouds and some wind ruffle. Shit. Decided to go anyway. When there's wind, fishing is much harder since the anchor rock can't stop the boat from drifting. I don't use the real anchor because I don't want to risk snagging it on the bottom. As I was adding air to the boat, the foot pump broke. Shit. I got the other pump and it broke too. Now I have two broken pumps to fix before I use the boat again.



By the time I got to Staines the sun was shining, the breeze had disappeared, and it was warm. Fishing was excellent. I also found a grove of redwood trees growing right on the beach. Motor worked ok but still misses if I crank it up. Left rear pontoon losing air, but I don't want to patch it until the weather warms up.

Back at camp I unloaded and decided to take Cat for a ride to see if he would be ok in the boat. He immediately climbed onto the pontoon and I immediately dragged him back down. Took a few times but eventually he sat calmly on the life jacket. If he's on the pontoon when I turn or the boat rocks, he might fall into the water. Can't say he really liked the trip, but he didn't freak out either. If I do go away for a few days I may take him with me. I think he'd rather be in the boat than here alone.

In response to Patti's birthday note saying she hopes I'm finding my song I wrote back that songs abound but singing them is tough. In an email today she said to relax and let my song sing me. That's what I'm trying to do. Surrender and let life live me. Seems like it should be so easy....

Was thinking last night about the aphorism "Life is a Mystery to be lived, not a problem to be solved." Do I really believe that? Do I want to surrender and let life live me? To be mysterious and free? If so, the problem to be solved is how to shift from seeing my own life as a problem to experiencing it as a mystery. But trying to solve the problem of learning to surrender at will is another trap! The whole process of surrender is a mystery to be lived.

While eating breakfast I heard a ruckus and looked out to see two butter belly ducks hammering each other. Looked like a cockfight on the sea. Flapping to rise up and attack, first one was on top and then the other. The female of the pair just watched mostly, but every now and then she'd give the old man a rest and attack the single male too. They never ganged up at the same time though. Finally the single one dove with the pair hot on his tail. The pair soon

surfaced, but I never saw the other one again. Was he the male from one of the local pairs or an intruder? If the local male, where was his mate?

Until the last few days the two pairs have been symbolic in their aggression and territorial defence. Maybe they're adjusting boundaries, or maybe the lone duck was an outsider looking for a territory. I'd like to be able to differentiate between the male and female. I think one is larger but can't really tell unless they're standing on shore together. Neither seems to lead in swimming, landing, or diving. I think the one watching the fight made the honking sound I've associated with what I thought was the male. Wonder if any behavioural studies have been done on them.

7/31/01

Night: 40F/partly cloudy/calm/almost-full moon. Decided to sit out on rock at dusk instead of later as I've been doing. I'm too drowsy later on. Glorious evening as dark set in and the moon lit sea and mountains. For a while, it all opened out into nameless colour, shape, and movement. Sometimes just a few words remind and catalyze. Reading about differentiating concept and reality in Goldstein and Kornfield's *Seeking the Heart of Wisdom* gave me pause. The notion of separating map from territory seems like a simplistic model of perception, but it also seems to describe my experience.

Softly, everything came Alive. Ahhh. Yes, that's it. All of Existence together is Alive. Experientially, a tree, a rock, a bird, is not alive because those things are conceptually-created fragments and concepts are not alive. The process of creating concepts is a living process, but the concepts themselves are neither alive nor dead. I don't think the fragmented world can be experienced as truly alive in the vibrant sense. Only the whole pulsating cosmos is Alive.

I'm more and more taken by light on water. The soft shifting grays, whites, and pale greens. Yesterday afternoon, reflections from the golden sunset sky and

shadowed rock were exquisite. I watched ripples from two directions create a crosshatch pattern that was broad and heavy close to me, and became smaller and finer further out. The distance/texture relationship is beautiful. Like seeing a field of boulders diminish in size into the distance.

A piece of the butter belly puzzle fell in place today. A pair swam into the basin, and something in their upright posture was different than I'd seen before. They glided casually along looking around as though trying to appear like they belonged there. If they could have whistled, they would have. Since all these ducks look the same to me, I didn't realize this wasn't the local pair until I heard the locals sound a warning and saw them heading for the intruders. They too were swimming like I hadn't seen before. Low in the water - crocodile eyes just showing - as though sneaking up. They dove and I could see them swimming just beneath the surface. Up for air and down again, then back up to attack. But the intruders spotted them coming and took off. The locals chased them far out into the channel.

This was all pretty strange since usually the approach is visible and loud. Both pairs flap, call, and charge, but break off while still about 20 meters apart. Then I heard another warning call and saw the pair that holds the territory by the island out front charge the pair that had just been chased by my local guys. Huh? Three pairs? Ahhh, this is a new pair looking for a territory.

The territories for the two local pairs are established and their confrontations are largely symbolic to maintain the status quo. But this new pair is being dealt with harshly to prevent them getting a foothold. That explains the major fight yesterday and the sneak attack today. I wonder where the intruders came from? In my boat wanderings I don't recall seeing many of these ducks. Is the whole area blanketed with established territories, or is this area of kelp beds prime real estate?

These ducks seem more and more interesting. I hope they mate and brood close by. I might make a floating decoy with a patch of bright orange on the head to see if they'll attack. I have a hunch the orange bill is the trigger since they don't pay any attention to any of the other kinds of diving ducks that come through now and then.

Winter more than half over, and my time here half over too. There are days I think I might as well leave now, and other days I doubt I'll be ready to leave after the year. What a lot of energy I wasted fearing winter. So far it's been much nicer than summer. More sun, less wind and rain, maybe 15 or 20 degrees colder.

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<sup>76</sup> See Interlude 7.

<sup>77</sup> Now, two years later as I reread this, a further consideration arises. Who is the I that's creating the myth of who I am? In solitude I wrote as if the creator is somehow separate from the myth that has been and continues to be created. In wanting to be a hero, or even an antihero, I colour my history to emphasize the heroic aspects and minimize the banal. Is there any way out of this dilemma? It seems as though any self-image or worldview will be created by an already conditioned mind and so must be a myth. Is this a bad thing? And is this just idle speculation long after the fact?

<sup>78</sup> Although I named him Cat since he was the only one there, I usually called him Pup and thought of him as the pup.

<sup>79</sup> The I Ching: Book of Changes is an ancient book of Chinese wisdom and oracular prophecy. During my first long wilderness retreat I took only two books with me: Chuang Tsu, a Taoist sage, and the I Ching. I began to consult and study the book at that time and for some time afterward, and during various periods of my life since then, including the present retreat. The method of consultation requires the questioner to articulate a specific question and then manipulate either 50 yarrow stalks or three coins to obtain one of 64 hexagrams as an answer. Each hexagram is a microcosmic representation of the current macrocosmic real-world situation and has teachings and advice associated with it.

<sup>80</sup> Probability of 0.00024, if I've got the math right.

## **Interlude 6**

### **Philosophy in the Service of Lived Experience**

Existence is beyond the power of words  
 To define:  
 Terms may be used  
 But are none of them absolute.  
 In the beginning of heaven and earth there were no words,  
 Words came out of the womb of matter;  
 And whether a man dispassionately  
 Sees to the core of life  
 Or passionately  
 Sees the surface,  
 The core and the surface  
 Are essentially the same,  
 Words making them seem different  
 Only to express appearance.  
 If name be needed, wonder names them both:  
 From wonder into wonder  
 Existence opens.  
 (Lao Tzu, 1972, chap. 1)

**The world is not to be put in order, the world is order incarnate.  
 It is for us to put ourselves in unison with this order.**  
 (Henry Miller qtd. in Cook, 1999)

Wandering and wondering across the brambled fields of philosophy is an ongoing hobby/habit, but I question my good sense in including these ruminations in this dissertation since by the standards of professional philosophers they will appear simplistic. However, I am not a professional philosopher nor intent on becoming one, and it has been a relief to realize that my social identity does not depend on me understanding philosophical works that seem unnecessarily opaque or do not directly illuminate my experience of living.

While philosophical questioning has been important to me not only here at the university but for many years before that, this project is not primarily a philosophical work. The project is an exploration within the academic setting of what it is to be alive, which for me includes philosophical questioning, retreats into solitude, and spiritual longing/transformation.

I wander among the ideas of other thinkers and wonder about my own life for two kinds of reasons: it gives me joy to see the world from broader, perhaps deeper, perspectives, and I feel comfort to realize that no one, including me, has been able to unambiguously conceptualize the mysterious flow of life, except by ignoring inconsistencies. Some philosophers do seem to think they have done it, though, and sometimes I am fooled into agreeing with them. Then when I compare my own unruly existence to their reified conceptual models, I begin to believe that the models are correct and I am flawed rather than seeing my own life as primary and the models as static idealizations of the flowing juicy wildness of living.

### **Language and Thinking**

Maturana and Varela (1987) claim that as humans we live in language. This dictum is sometimes implicitly accepted (Culler, 1997; Leggo, 2004) but is it so? For many of us, thinking - whether it's focused logical thought or background repetitive noise - does seem to be a mental habit, even an addiction, and since most of us tend to think in words, it is tempting to identify our conscious experience with language. But to do so begs the more difficult questions: do we and must we live *exclusively* in language?

I understand Maturana and Varela to also claim that when we label something as a table, the object and the word for it arise together in the distinction we make between that area of the world and all else. The act of distinguishing something *as an object* and naming it takes place in language - within the context of a shared linguistic domain. We enact a world together through having made and continuing to make common distinctions.<sup>81</sup>

Culler agrees that language limits and structures what we are able to experience,<sup>82</sup> and also points out that it can be a potential means of escape from our conceptual prison.

Language is not a 'nomenclature' that provides labels for pre-existing categories; it generates its own categories. But speakers and readers can be brought to see through and around the settings of their language, so as to see a different reality. Works of literature explore the settings or categories of habitual ways of thinking and frequently attempt to bend or reshape them, showing us how to think something that our language had not previously anticipated, forcing us to attend to the categories through which we unthinkingly

view the world. Language is thus both the concrete manifestation of ideology—the categories in which speakers are authorized to think—and the site of its questioning or undoing.

(Culler, 1997, p. 59)

From Culler’s perspective we can use language to question linguistic categories and to develop a different awareness and perspective, but we are still operating in language. My questions remain.

It seems clear to me that much of the content of consciousness is structured by language, but is the space of awareness itself? In thinking about these questions, I am, by definition, lodged in the linguistic domain since I think in language. But if awareness itself is not language-based, then it should be possible to see the thinking aspect of mind from a perspective outside language. Wilber (1995) argues that we can observe the working of the rational mind only from a trans-rational perspective. He claims we cannot explore the process of thinking using thought itself as the tool. We need to establish an observational platform outside the thinking mind.

There is a catchy Buddhist saying: “Meditation is not what you think.” Descartes’ famous claim, “I think therefore I am,” is equally catchy. These statements epitomize what I see as a fundamental difference in how meditation and philosophy often view the relationship between consciousness and thinking. Meditation does not equate consciousness with thought, but sees thinking as one function of mind that often dominates consciousness. To an untrained mind, or to a mind that is narrowly focused on thinking, it may appear that the content of thought is identical to consciousness.

For me, such notions are meaningful only to the degree that I explore them for myself through meditation and introspection. This is difficult to do while immersed in the daily ebb and flow of language, but in solitude when external language-use is not required, there is an opportunity to glimpse what is usually obscured by the constant swirl of words.

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I quiet my mind and allow awareness of the languaging/thinking process to arise. I do not think about or analyze it, but simply notice the experiential space structured by language. I experience myself to slip free from cultural/linguistic conditioning and am amazed that with infinite possible individual experience we can communicate at all. I see that much of our shared experience is not only made possible, but is also constrained by the structure of language. Where am I at such times? What is the medium of my awareness? What basket do I use to retrieve the memory of those insights? Am I still grounded in language, or is awareness itself beyond the hegemony of the thinking/speaking process of mind? If so, can anything be said about it?

In a flash of insight, I finally understand intuitively with mind, emotions, body and heart what I've long known intellectually. There is a sense of joyful relief as the fiery quality of the questions cools. It is not that the questions have been brilliantly answered in a new way, nor have they disappeared, but I am no longer troubled by them. I am satisfied with a simple analogy.

I live in language as I live in my body. In the same way that I am always grounded in my body and cannot leave it completely behind, my experience is always grounded in language and cannot leave it completely behind. But I do not live *only* in my body if I choose to develop my mind. So too, I am not stuck *only* in language if I choose to still my mind and see through the layer of conceptualization.

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While my lived experience is not completely structured by language and cannot be fully expressed in language, can the phenomenon of a consciousness experiencing the indescribable arise *only* through language? Are animals conscious? Do they live in language? Do trees? Does the rain? If we, as humans, enact a world together through the linguistic distinctions we make, how do pre-linguistic beings perceive their world? In solitude, I sometimes hear the call of the steamer duck and the howl of the wind as imbued with possible meaning and consciousness that is no more necessarily the product of my own projection than is the meaning and consciousness I attribute to the sounds I hear from other people in a social setting. My scientific training warns against



anthropomorphic projection, but that warning loses its power in solitude as the non-human world comes vibrantly alive again.

Abram (1996) explores the relationship between language and the signs embodied in non-human nature. For him, language is not essentially a system of abstract signs, but a manifestation and extension of physical gesture: all animate nature exists in a web of physical signs. Perception is the bodily (i.e. physiologically automatic, not requiring thought) interpretation of these signs. As we have become disconnected from the felt experience of our bodies, we have lost the sense of living in an animate and meaningful world. We have restricted meaning to the isolated world of human language.

As I sit here in the city writing, my intellect is again sometimes confused by these seemingly intractable questions. It is only when I quiet my mind with its burning desire for conceptual answers that I feel balance and peace. Yet this is troubling. I feel I should be able to answer the questions and am shirking my intellectual responsibility by not continuing to try.<sup>83</sup> After searching for so long, it is painful to admit that I just don't know. The whole subject remains darkly mysterious to me. "Congratulations!" a Zen Buddhist might say, "You have found 'Don't Know Mind.'"<sup>84</sup>

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Varela et al (1991) suggest that the source of my distress is in the desire for certainty; what they call Cartesian Anxiety.

We have already seen in our exploration of human experience through the practice of mindfulness/awareness that our grasping after an inner ground is the essence of ego-self and is the source of continuous frustration. We can now begin to appreciate that this grasping after an inner ground is itself a moment in a larger pattern of grasping that includes our clinging to an outer ground in the form of the idea of a pre-given and independent world. In other words, our grasping after a ground, whether inner or outer, is the deep source of frustration and anxiety.

(p. 143)

If one accepts without question that an ontological reality exists, then two responses are possible: realism, which posits the possibility of discovering that objective reality, or subjectivism, which argues that all that can be known is the subjective experience of the

individual. But discovering a solid inner ego-self is as impossible as discovering a pre-given independent external world, and since neither of these approaches provides any certainty, anxiety is produced. The anxiety is not the result of uncertainty as such, but rather arises from a particular state of mind. One of the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism is that suffering results from grasping for certainty and permanence in an impermanent world of change. Since the mind tends to desire security and fear the unknown, it can be difficult to realize and accept this uncertainty.

My attempt to grasp the workings of language exemplifies the difference between thinking about something conceptually and experiencing it directly with an *aha* insight: the movement from intellect to heart. My questioning, driven by desire for clear unambiguous answers, led to confusion, pain, and a sense of failure, then to a flash of insight conceptualized in a simple but satisfying way, and finally to joyful surrender into the mystery of existence. This particular case also exemplifies my more extensive explorations in solitude and my efforts to understand my life.

### **Epistemology and ontology**

As I look inward, I see that wondering about language has led me toward epistemology and ontology. In my wanderings I have read and especially appreciated the work of Varela, Thompson, and Rosch (1991). I often notice that I'm still caught in dualistic thinking about realism and subjectivism; the path of inner transformation is not a short or easy one. I am slowly relinquishing the dream of a God's Eye View and rediscovering my physically and culturally embodied existence. I live in an actual world; my experience is neither abstract nor imaginary. It is real to me in this place at this moment, but it is not necessarily universal.

According to evolutionary theory, we humans, like all other organisms, have evolved on earth (Darwin, 1959, 1971). We are believed to have emerged from within the biosphere rather than to have been deposited from without. In theory, neither we nor any other organism manifest a perfectly optimal design (Gould and Lewontin, 1979; Sober, 1987). This lack of perfection includes our perceptual processes: both our bottom-up physiological sensory system and our top-down psychological interpretation system

(Ornstein, 1991). We continue to exist as individuals because we are adapted well enough to survive. Our lineages continue because we leave enough reproducing offspring to prevent extinction.

We accept, if not celebrate, that we are not physically ideal. Our lower backs often hurt because they evolved for a different posture than we generally subject them to. Our teeth are not perfectly designed. However, we do not always carry this awareness into our perception of our perceptions. We often unconsciously assume that we see the world perfectly, as it “really” is. It is neither intuitive nor easy to confront this assumption (Maturana and Poerksen, 2004). For example, I have known for some time that my experience is not a universally accepted, direct representation of the “real” world. I realize we don’t all live in the same world. Yet my actual, default experience, unless I consciously challenge it, is that I am seeing what is actually out there as it is without my active participation in enacting my experience.

Both non-technical meanings of “fit” are usefully descriptive here. We are fit enough as individuals to survive and leave offspring, and we fit into the physical and social world well enough to survive and leave offspring. This includes our perceptual processes. What we experience the world to be fits well enough with what it is (even though we cannot know what it is or is not) that we survive and reproduce - or not.

Fit is not the same as optimal match. Von Glasersfeld (1984) used the following two analogies to make the point. First, the relation of our experience to the “world as it is” is that of a key to a lock. Many different keys of different shapes may open the same lock; others do not. Many different experiences of the world will fit well enough to survive; others do not. Simply because a key opens a lock or our experience of the world allows us to survive and leave offspring, does not mean that the shape of the key exactly matches that of the lock or that our experience exactly matches the shape of the world.

The second analogy: imagine a ship threading its way on a pitch black night through a passage bounded by rock cliffs. The pilot cannot see the shape of the passage and so doesn’t know the optimal route to follow. He knows what isn’t optimal only when the ship crunches into a rock. Each time this happens, if the ship doesn’t sink, the pilot will note the position of the rock. Each time through the passage, the pilot plots more

points until he can make it through without crunching into the rocks. At this point the pilot may believe the illusion that he knows the shape of the passage, but he does not. The passage could have an infinite number of different shapes that would not block the route followed by the ship.

The same relationship can describe our experience of the world. Our perceptual processes construct a version of the world through which we move - physically, emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually - until we bump into an obstruction of which we were previously unaware. Then, to the extent we are open to change, we alter our notion of the world. Finally, we cannot know which version might be the closest representation; we can only know those that allow us to survive and minimize our suffering. We can never know how the world “really” is, but only our own experience of it.

The process of tuning our experience is complex and involves comparing our current experience of the world with that in other circumstances, with other people’s experience, and with our imagination. Even the notion of fit versus match loses meaning since we have nothing with which to compare our experience except our own previous experience and the experience of others. At this point we are left with no option but to give up referring to the world as it “really” is (except as a kind of shorthand) and rather refer only to our personal and collective experiences of the world.

In the following example I begin by imagining how a simple object like a table might look to a spider or an infant. It seems evident that they would perceive it quite differently than I (an adult human) do. At this point I might say, “Yes, but I see it as it ‘really’ is. Now I imagine seeing the table as a physicist might claim it “really” is; electrons swirling through largely empty space around jiggling clusters of protons and neutrons. Their version, they might assure me, is the most accurate. I can also imagine the table as I would see it if I were the carpenter who had built it: shaped and sanded the surface, turned the legs on a lathe, assembled and varnished the pieces. I would be aware of every variation in grain, each small flaw in workmanship, the nearly invisible, bloody stains from my sliced finger. Compare these versions to your own. Which is the most

accurate representation of how the world “really” is? Or, are they all equally accurate from distinct points of view?

As a social example, I think of two people reading my journal: one is intrigued by and identifies with the inner explorations; the other finds them self-indulgent, tedious, and irrelevant to his or her life. I imagine who each of them - via the journal - perceives me to be. I compare those two experiences of who I am to who I experience myself to be. Which of the three is objectively correct? Who am I actually? Is there an ideal, unbiased, accurate answer? If so who could know with any certainty that he or she has that complete and unbiased answer? Or, is the person in the journal actually someone different with each of us?

This is the position I find myself in. I can not coherently claim to experience the world as it “really” is. First, my perceptions are constrained by my physical structure. My perceptual gear is sensitive to only a narrow band of the stimuli that impinge on it and then constructs an experience based on the neural response that is triggered by the stimuli (Sekuler and Blake, 1990). My cognitive filters (unless I consciously examine them) automatically narrow the stream of input so my finite capacity for attention can deal with those elements most important to my survival. Cultural training strongly affects what I perceive and how I interpret it (Hallen, 1988). Finally, my personal epigenetic history can affect me so strongly that I actually project preconceived attributes and then accept my perceptions as existing “out there” (Freud, 1930; Jung, 1959).

To this point in my inner rambling things seem pretty clear but still incomplete. I suspect I have covertly invited dualism along with me. The unknowable “real” world lurks in the trees waiting to leap like a monkey onto my back. The idea of being isolated within a world of my own construction is disturbing because it seems solipsistic and lifeless. In my soul I know that the mystical teaching, “Thou Art That” is so. We humans did not create ourselves. We are part of something larger. I close my eyes and imagine the natural processes of evolution working through enormous stretches of time, or the formless presence of God dancing creation into the void. I come from and belong to that. Truly, I am That. But am I? Is that felt knowledge any more sure than the positivist’s dream of objectivity? And here, the wheels begin to spin and I lose traction.

I re/turn to the lived experience of my body. Over and over I come back to my immediate experience of embodiment in the physical in this time and place. This awareness not only resists the assumption of pure objectivity, but also protects against flights of pure disconnected subjectivity. My experience of the world is real. But that world/experience is neither universal nor permanent. I feel my bodymind relax into this middle way ... until the next time the grasping for certainty arises and my mind begins to clutch at thoughts in the wind.

All aspects of my experience, except perhaps consciousness itself, seem open to contextual interpretation. The contexts of some aspects of experience are more widely shared than are others. Gravity, for example, affects all matter equally. Some perceptual experiences, like core primary colour identification, tend to be common to all humans (Sekuler and Blake, 1990). Some, like the demarcation lines between named colours, are not. Perception and conception are closely intertwined, and not only genetics but also culture profoundly affects the meaning of any human experience.

Do autopoiesis and structural coupling<sup>85</sup> presuppose a fundamental division between things? If we bring the world into being through the distinctions we make, are those boundaries our mind's contribution to the world that arises in its relationship with the physical? If so, it seems the notions of autopoiesis and structural coupling might arise in those same distinctions. Is there some deeper level of experience where these apparent divisions do not apply and everything is a manifestation of the flowing whole? The experience of such unity is very powerful. William James (1958) points out that if you question the validity of such an experience, the person who describes it is apt to respond, "Have you had such an experience?" If you agree, she will smile and say, "Well then." If you admit to not having had such an experience, she will reply, "I have," and that will pretty much end the discussion.

Because it exquisitely depicts several ideas of interest, I would like to glance back to Escher's drawing (Figure 1). We see two separate individuals floating in space. Both are gazing at the sphere before them, and it is evident that they do not, and can never, perceive the same exact surface of the sphere at the same time. They are each alone in their own world. But they can describe their world through language (or images, or

music) and in this way their thoughts intertwine and together they create a shared world. Yet looking deeper it is evident that the individuals are not separate at all but manifest an underlying unity, and this unity signifies the unity of All that exists - and perhaps All that does not. The experience of this unity is beyond the reach of thought, but awareness of it may arise within a quiet mind; in solitude the mind has the opportunity and invitation to become still.<sup>86</sup>

### **Dualism/Non Dualism**

Most fundamentally, the dualism/non-dualism schism manifests itself in the relationship between mind and matter.<sup>87</sup> For dualist thinkers, mind/soul tends to be identified with a transcendent God that is fundamentally distinct from matter, but experientially the split falls between consciousness and the physical world. Varela et al. (1991) discuss the felt split between mind and body and argue along Buddhist lines that this experience of disembodiment arises from the habitual and unconscious mental *process* of abstracting sensory experience into dualistic concepts rather than from an ontologically “real” dualistic world. Through the practice of paying close attention to our bodily sensations and to our mental process of both abstracting those sensations and projecting preconceptions into our percepts, we can reintegrate mind and body and heal the illusory wound.

De Quincey (2002), in his excellent book, *Radical Nature*, describes four philosophical schools of thought that attempt to create internally consistent worldviews that include the relationship between consciousness and matter: materialism, idealism, dualism, panpsychism. He points out strengths and flaws in each. Materialism and idealism begin by giving either matter or consciousness precedence as the primary “stuff” of the universe and then attempt to show how the other - which is fundamentally different in kind - can arise spontaneously. This spontaneous arising is essentially creating something from nothing which is, according to de Quincey, philosophically forbidden. Dualism gives both matter and consciousness equal status and then attempts, unsuccessfully, to demonstrate how they relate to each other. Such a relationship is also philosophically impossible.

De Quincey, himself, argues for panpsychism<sup>88</sup> and claims that consciousness and matter are not separate at any level of organization. Consciousness, in one form or another, goes all the way down from human to elemental matter. This does not imply that rocks can think, but only that they, along with all else, have some subjectivity: they are not merely objective things. I find it difficult to imagine that a “rock” has subjectivity, but I can easily imagine that all organic forms do. More important to me is my experience that the whole flowing universe, when it is not divided into separate things - into living and non living - is fully alive and conscious.

De Quincey points out that panpsychism has a long and respectable history in the West, even though it has fallen on hard times of late. This is important to me, even though I suspect that thoughtful materialists, idealists, or dualists, who experience the world through one of those lenses, could point out internal inconsistencies in arguments for panpsychism. As far as I have been able to tell, all conceptual systems have internal inconsistencies, and what I find reaffirming in de Quincey’s presentation is that panpsychism has a respectable philosophical reputation.

This matters to me personally because when my mind is still and clear I perceive consciousness to inhere in the world, and not just in me and perhaps a few other “higher” animals. Consciousness may be called Spirit, Life, God, or any of many other names, and manifests to me experientially as Presence of *Something*. It is not that I believe panpsychism is necessarily the correct philosophical position to hold, but rather it is one well-crafted story I can relate to that other people have long used to make sense of their lived experience. I am not alone.

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<sup>81</sup> I wish to thank Dr. Pille Bunnell for her clarity, patience, and generosity during our conversations about Maturana’s conceptual system. Not only has Pille helped me to understand Maturana’s ideas (as she understands them), but the experience has been pleasurable - something I cannot claim for my reading of his own writing. My brief discussion of Maturana’s ideas is necessarily based on my own understanding and not on his or on Pille’s.

<sup>82</sup> This is the often invisible base of social power relationships. It is within the matrix of language that class and gender identities are maintained. Such a matrix has both positive and negative aspects. It is the basis for social cohesion and shared meaning, indeed for living in a common world, but unjust social structures that damage some members of the population are very difficult to transform because they are often defined as “real” by the structure of thought and language.

<sup>83</sup> For a long time I have believed there is something wrong with me because I have been unable to develop and maintain a clear understanding of “How the World Is.” Over and over I have



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become frustrated with my failure and have given up the struggle only to cycle back and begin again. Even years of meditation practice has not freed me from this pattern since I have never really identified with the Buddhist worldview as an alternative to that of western culture. I have continued to view my experience of uncertainty as personal weakness rather than realizing its source in grasping mind. Even when not actively engaged in the search for certainty, I have felt I was simply avoiding the problem rather than understanding its source. This is analogous to physical desire. When desire becomes attached to an unobtainable object, frustration results, and the burning question arises, “What is wrong with me that I can’t get what I want in life?” There is no answer to this question since desires are inexhaustible. Freedom is not found in temporary fulfillment, but through insight into the process and accepting things just as they are.

<sup>84</sup> See Interlude 8.

<sup>85</sup> Maturana and Varela (1987) propose the terms autopoiesis and structural coupling as defining characteristics of living systems. Autopoiesis refers to the autonomous, self-organizing qualities of living systems. Their internal activity is self-directed. Internal activity may be triggered by stimuli from the surrounding environment, but its course is determined not by such external stimuli but by the physical structure of the living entity. An organism does not exist in a vacuum but always within a surrounding environmental matrix with which it is structurally coupled; physically, biologically, socially, and, for some organisms, culturally.

<sup>86</sup> Spiritual knowledge might be summed up as the deep awareness that, *we are all one*. This includes not only other humans, but the entire universe. This is not intellectual understanding only, but a transformation of being. Spiritual qualities are manifestations that reflect this awareness.

<sup>87</sup> Also see note 10, Interlude 7 for a slightly different perspective.

<sup>88</sup> I cannot do justice to de Quincey’s argument in this short interlude, and I strongly recommend the original work. Also see Note 13, Interlude 7.

## August 2001

Even if our efforts of attention  
seem for years to be producing no result,  
one day a light that is in exact proportion  
to them will flood the soul.

(Simone Weil)

8/1/01

Late evening: 41F/calm/raining with moon shining through. A good day.

Sent check-in email and received replies. Heard from Alejandra. She has the packages Patti sent and says German will be here on the 9th. I sent Patti a new shopping list. Not sure how she will get the additional stuff to German.

Calm sunny day with some prairie cloud formations. Rare to have such clouds floating in a clear sky here. Went to Staines to fish and fetch redwood. Motor still acting weird when starting. Runs for a few minutes then slows down and dies. I wait a while to restart it, and it's fine from then on. Fished deep and caught four snapper. I think there are more of them at that depth, but it sure is hard on the shoulder reeling them up.

Saw still dumping gas out the muffler when I fill the tank, so I filled it halfway and it worked fine. Brought back a good load of wood and put it down by the sweat lodge. For months I saw hauling wood as a burden, but now it's difficult to stop since it's the only task that gets me moving. I miss physical activity and feel restless.

Started to read *Solitude* by Anthony Storr. Both books I've read on solitude spend a lot of energy justifying solitude as healthy and valuable. I've never questioned that, but apparently many people - psychologists in particular - define humans as exclusively social, and healthy only when engaged in intimate interpersonal relationships. Now that I think about it, I suppose some folks do

consider what I'm doing crazy and a waste of time. But who gives anyone the right to decide what a human being is or should be?

We seem to believe we are individual beings who need to 'come into' relationship with each other through social interactions. But we are more profoundly social than that - we are collective beings. I'm part of the human matrix in my consciousness whether alone or with other people. I'm searching for and working to open myself to a deeper level of connectedness that doesn't depend on the form of surface relationships.

We are also Spiritual Beings. To be fully human it is fundamental to cultivate a relationship with ourselves and with Spirit. Solitude can be a powerful catalyst in this process.

It is valid to question whether I'm being irresponsible disengaging from my social obligations to spend time alone. I've been supported financially, emotionally, and intellectually by other people, and have a responsibility to contribute to their lives as well. I agree that a key sign of maturity and emotional health is the ability to form intimate and mutually respectful relationships; I have work to do there.

8/02/01

Late night: For the past few days barometric pressure has been low - 29.6 or so - and the weather has been fairly calm and mostly sunny. Now the pressure has climbed to over 30 and it's raining and blowing. This is backwards. I had hoped the barometer would help me predict storms, but not so far. Moonlight is casting shadows from tree branches onto the translucent porch roof. Exquisite black on white calligraphy. I wonder why shifting from three-dimensional colour to two-dimensional black and white affects me so strongly?

There's been a shift in consciousness these past few days. An opening into spacious stillness and peace. I'm not always there, but when I notice I'm not and

pause to relax, it flows back effortlessly. Feels like solitude is working on me. Trust the process. Doubt and self-judgment are absent - well faint, since if I pay attention I can still sense them in the background.

Seems like happiness at these times is not the issue: there is peace, love, and joy. When I feel locked out of this space, then there is unhappiness. I think this is why I resist taking anti-depressants to mask my empty feelings. I really am missing something vital in life when locked into my small personal self. Sensing the loss and trying to be good enough to get it back might be what drives my perfectionism. But trying to be perfect is not the way home. This feeling of absence is what drives so much of our culture's destructive materialism: looking for peace and joy in the wrong place.

In *Solitude* Storr quotes a passage from Admiral Byrd's journal where he says he feels more alive than he ever has before. YES! I'm just barely sensing that aliveness now, but there is a strong inner light and sense of Presence; a joyful radiance. I feel blessed, like we should all be this way all the time. I have a lot to learn about equanimity because I'm loath to lose this experience. Be patient, and trust the process.

Mornings remain difficult. I feel grumpy and resistant to ... everything. Don't want to get up, don't want to stay in bed. Shoulders hurt and so does heart. I'm trying to relax into things the way they are instead of fighting against myself until exhausted. Sometimes I look ahead to leaving here and dread losing this peace and quiet, and sense of openness and belonging.

Thought I'd done almost nothing today, but then paused to consider: meditated, exercised, read, fixed the foot pump again, cleaned chimney, organized food, spread the gravel I brought back from Staines into mud holes, chopped wood, and patched long underwear. I seem to move so slowly and get sore and tired very easily.

8/03/01

Night: 39F/calm/full moon shining through the clouds. Grey pus is oozing from around the tooth that's been bothering me for the past months. Very loose and feels like the tooth it's attached to with a double crown has broken. Whole thing is moving and I'm going to try to find the balls to pull out the infected one. If I can't get it out, I'll have to go to the dentist in Puerto Natales with German whenever he comes. Would mean being in Natales at least a week and I really don't want to do that. The worst will be if the tooth starts to seriously hurt since the only way to get to a dentist quickly is call the navy for emergency rescue. I'll begin antibiotics tonight. Had planned to let infection loosen the tooth even more before trying to pull it, but I'm feeling poorly so better start taking them.

Guess I'll take two or three Tylenol 3, smear Orajel on the gum, tie a string to the tooth, and try to yank it out. It's very loose, but my teeth have roots that go down forever. I think and hope the tooth has a root canal. So far it's not painful, but I'm fearful of pulling it and having it hurt like crazy or break off in there. In a way - assuming I can pull the tooth and control the infection - I'm sort of glad I have to deal with it. The chronic infection may be affecting how I feel. Hope it doesn't explode with pain and that I don't have to go to Natales. Well, what will be will be.

8/04/01

Night: Brilliantly clear. Sun on the roof and in the front yard too! Wheee. So relaxing not to have wind. 32F all day and dropped to 28 after dark. Moonrise into a crystal sky and mirror sea. I thought we were in for a very cold night, but the pressure has fallen, clouds have come over, and it's warmed up. Heavy frost over everything.

Sweat today, and it took a long time to build a fire big enough to really heat the rocks. It's so much work and takes so long to do everything alone. With more people we could share the load. But once in the lodge praying, all those thoughts receded.

Cat is so civilized. Today I confirmed that he goes to the low tide water's edge to shit. Interesting to watch how I feel about Cat. I often go out to the porch quietly so as not to wake him because I don't want him to come stare at me and want affection. I feel imposed upon, like he's breaking into my private space. If he wants loving and I don't feel like it, I'm trying to not pay him attention. Or give him just a quick scratch and a word to let him know he's not alone. Sometimes I let him pull me into affection even when I don't feel like it, and that's good too.

I noticed myself thinking I don't trust the weather here. This is not the same as being cautious and aware that the sea can get rough in a hurry - physical conditions I must prepare for and adapt to. This is emotional self-defensiveness, an internal movement of imagination I project outward; almost a paranoia, as though Nature is out to get me. Going to the glacier for example. I imagine a storm stranding me on an exposed rock, or having to call for help because the motor packed it in. The desired situation is to have calm clear weather, have the motor work perfectly, and find good campsites easily. It is comparing two imagined situations - one I want and one I don't want but expect - that creates anxiety.

Tooth about the same. I can twist it almost 45 degrees and move it up and down. Seems like it should come out easily but when I pull there is no give at all. I'm not looking forward to trying to get it out. Emailed Patti to ask if there's anything I should be especially careful of. When I've had teeth pulled in the past, the dentist always carefully scraped the socket to be sure all the infection was cleaned out.

But I imagine that would hurt like hell without Novocain, so I may put a wick into the socket to keep it open and draining for a week or so while the antibiotics do their work. The tooth will come out - if I have the jam to pull hard enough - but will likely need a lot of force and may hurt like hell.

8/05/01

Night: 40F. Been a cloudy day with wind out of the northwest bringing warmer temperature. Collected ice from the puddles this morning and wrapped it in sawdust and a life jacket. Should last a few days and I might want it when I pull the tooth. Received an email from Patti with answers and reassurance. She said that in the larger picture this is no big deal and won't be nearly as painful as my shoulders have been. Reminded me that people have been pulling their own teeth for centuries. That I should stop being such a wuss, tie the tooth to the door, slam the door, and get on with my life. What a good friend and what good advice. Only problem is that I don't have a door ... at least not one heavy enough to slam. Guess the only thing to do is tie the tooth to a rock and drop the rock. Will wait a couple more days though. Hope it comes out without a huge hassle and load of pain.

Unpacked next three months of food. Consolidated what's left into one barrel and will use the other for reserve water. Probably never use the reserve, but I'm glad to have it. Flashed back to when I put the food there not quite four months ago. Things were still disorganized and I hadn't completely moved into the cabin. A month before that I was living in the tent; food and propane a mile away, cabin not built. I dreamed of being set up as I am now, but I'm still tired, sore, and discontent. Now it's my tooth. If I can just get this tooth out, then I can settle into a meditation space and explore my relationship with nature and spirit. Uh huh.

It's not going into solitude or the wilderness that brings a sense of peace. It's getting away from our life's concerns and engagements. Usually we stay only a brief time in the wilderness and our disquiet doesn't catch up with us. But I've been here long enough that this has become my normal life and all my usual concerns are in operation. But there are fewer distractions and escapes here so I can see the process more clearly.

8/6/01

Late afternoon: 41F/rain/calm sea/no wind. Glum day. Still, I asked for rain to fill the barrel. Intense on the porch when rain drums the tarp roof. Inside here it's much quieter since there's a layer of fibreboard under the tarp. It often rained like this in February and March, but there have probably been only 15 or 20 really wet days in the last four months. Sat on porch most of day, but now I'm glad to be in this cozy cabin. Fire started right up. A few months ago I had to blow and fiddle sometimes for an hour. Now I've learned to keep the chimney clean, use cypress for kindling, and split wood ahead to let it dry. When it's occasionally fussy, I'm not so freaked since I know that with patience it will burn and I won't die from the cold.

Wonder what lies ahead now that the days are getting longer. I'm trying to be with the restless emptiness rather than running from it, but I run none the less: to a spoon of peanut butter, coffee, a nap, a game of solitaire, or to writing here. Tooth still sore but not painful - yet.

For a long time it seemed to me that the artistic endeavour is grounded in dealing with the pain of individual existence - of having a self. I could either depict my pain to glorify or rationalize it, or create escapist images to distract myself and others. But any approach would reinforce the separate self and the suffering that arises from it. Instead, I decided to work to dissolve the self and its inherent suffering. Not sure I still see the issue so black and white. Art can



simply be part of living and perhaps a path toward self-abandonment; perhaps. Or maybe the dream of losing the self is just that and I would do well to find a more realistic approach to my pain. Meanwhile the rain falls and the tide and my breath ebb and flow.

8/7/01

Night: Tooth is out! Meditated, exercised, split some wood, and fetched a rock from the low tide beach. Took a while to find the perfect tooth-pulling rock. Had to be the right shape so the string wouldn't slip off, and heavy enough to pull the tooth with a single jerk. Would be a real drag to drop it and have it yank on the tooth, but not enough to actually pull it out - and then have to do it again. Read for a while, then decided it was time to face this thing.

Built a fire and shaved since I thought my face might be sore for some days to come. Slathered Orajel on the gum, took two Tylenol 3, and held the icepack against my cheek. Took off my shirt so it wouldn't be splattered with blood, laid padding on the floor to muffle the crash of the rock, and was ready to go. But the thought of tying the tooth to the rock and dropping it just caused my ass to pucker up. So I decided I'd try to work it out slowly by tying the tooth to a leg of the table, pull up with my neck muscles, and at the same time wiggle the tooth with my fingers. Then if I couldn't get it out, or couldn't stand the pain, I'd see if I had the balls to tie the tooth to the rock, drop that sucker, and be done with it.

I told myself it was ok to feel afraid. Thought about all the women who go through childbirth, and about the old prospector in Canada who was trapped up river by an early freeze, got scurvy, and had to pull all his teeth with pliers. Thought about having my foot ripped off in the motorcycle crash and about the pain from my torn rotator cuff muscles. This tooth thing is really minor in comparison.

It wasn't just the pain I was nervous about, but doing it to myself. Reminded me of cutting a fishhook out of my thumb while living on a remote beach in the Dominican Republic. It wasn't the pain - doesn't hurt much to slice yourself with a razor blade since few nerves are affected - but rather the idea of cutting myself. If I hadn't done it, I'd have had to leave solitude and go to a doctor. Same situation here.

I meditated and asked Spirit for courage. When there was a sense of peace I began. I'd accidentally tugged the string while tying it to the tooth, and felt a small wave of pain just from that, so I figured actually pulling it out was going to be nasty. Pulled and wiggled the tooth. It hurt, but there was no give at all. Got set to sink into the pain and started to seriously pull up with my neck and at the same time move the tooth with my fingers. Almost immediately it popped out. Fwoop.<sup>89</sup>

What a relief. Root intact, hardly any blood. As usual, my imagination was much worse than the actual event. Hung tooth on altar as a trophy and to remind me to not take too seriously my imagination's dire speculations. Felt fine to have that mess out of my mouth, but as the Tylenol wore off I noticed pain in the other bad tooth on the rear lower left. If it lets go it will be much harder to deal with. Hopefully I can nurse it along with salt rinse and antibiotics. Now I look like a hockey player from the old school.

Rained steadily for 36 hours. Now the barometer is up, temperature has dropped, and the rain has eased. This morning after only 24 hours of it, I felt it would rain forever. This is what happens when I feel empty, down, and restless. The feelings in themselves are unpleasant, but what makes them so hard to face is the sense of permanence. I know rationally they will pass, but I feel that no matter what I do they will be here forever. I try to stay with the feelings since it's powerful to see them pass away on their own, but I usually do something to escape.

The notion of introjection may be incomplete or wrong. It's based on the belief that the external world is separate from me and that I introject objects or experiences from out there to in here and assume they're "causing" my emotional state. For example: when the sea is calm and the sky clear, I usually feel peaceful and happy; when the wind comes up, anxious; when it's raining, semi depressed. But, if the Hindu statement "thou art that" reflects underlying reality, then there may be an identity between emotions and the external world.

When the wind blows, I experience auditory, visual, olfactory, and tactile phenomena as physical manifestations of moving air. Perhaps there is an emotional manifestation of the wind too; a quality of emotional tone that can be interpreted as excitement (when I'm confident in the situation) or anxiety (if I feel I might be overwhelmed). I'm woven into the world and have co-evolved with it, so why shouldn't any physical event have an emotional - and probably spiritual - component too?

I'm getting a stronger and stronger sense that Cat experiences a similar spectrum of emotional energy as I do. Today, a glum rainy day, he sat at the door quietly moaning. That expressed just the way I felt. On warm sunny days, he's definitely languorous. Of course it's possible he picks up and introjects my moods, but to me it makes cleaner sense to assume an emotional aspect to the world that animals as well as humans experience - each in our own way.

I'm seeing more and more clearly how much time and energy I spend justifying my existence to society instead of living fully in the here and now and letting my relationship with society be what it naturally is. The other day I noticed that as soon as I have an insight into something I immediately grab it (rather than simply appreciating the quality of the insight) and begin to extrapolate and build a universal theory. Something I can use to validate my experience. Now there's an insight....

8/8/01

Late night I think: 37F/calm/clear. Went to Staines fishing. Nothing for a long time but then it got hot. Caught a dozen and they were still biting when I left. I'm starting to feel all this killing. A couple fish were still twitching as I filleted them even though I'd stabbed them in the brain when I caught them and they'd been out of the water for hours.

I wrote Alejandra to ask when the boat is coming (supposed to come tomorrow) and if she would send 40 ampicillin capsules. Doubt I'll need them, but if I do I'll sure be glad to have them. I feel bad to keep asking her to do more favours. Back tooth seems better today, and it feels great to have the front one out.

I'm remembering that I came here to slip out into wildness and explore beyond socially constructed reality. But the socially constructed reality I wish to leave for a while is inside me. Each of us has created one and they're not identical, so we each live in a unique world. To some degree many of us share a common reality, but even so we supposedly can't enter each other's world. I wonder.... At times I've sensed I'm beyond my individually constructed reality and into a collective space we all share. If that's so, I should be able to meet others there, and so far I haven't. So possibly that sense of common ground is only an experience I have in my personal world. We might share a common experience that there's a common space, but that doesn't necessarily mean there really is. No way to prove it one way or the other. You either experience that common space or you don't.

One strong criticism of the notion of the collective unconscious is that there is no obvious mechanism by which archetypes can be inherited. Another possibility is to think of archetypes not as globally existing entities, but as imaginary beings created by our minds. With few exceptions, seeing colours is universal. The boundaries between colours may shift from culture to culture, but the core colour

distinctions seem universal. Perhaps we also create common archetypal experiences through a universally common process of imagination.

Instead of keeping Cat away from my face because of allergies, I've started to let him come right up and smell me. He gets his nose just touching my lips, sniffs a while, and then settles into my lap. Today I sniffed him too and it was captivating. A rich living smell and strong sense of connection. No wonder animals smell each other like they do.

8/9/01

Night: 33F/cloudy/calm. Sea to the east and into my cove frozen when I woke up. Sun and high tide melted or moved the ice by late afternoon. New sea birds have arrived: black head, back, and chest; white belly; long red bill; high-pitched peep, peep cry.<sup>90</sup> A hint that winter is passing and migrating birds are on the move. Sea lions roaring over at Staines. May be a new bull in the neighbourhood.

Was looking closely at Cat today. His face is beautiful. The exquisitely delicate swirl patterns of tawny hair around his ears reminds me of a moth. He may have had a fit while I was rock sitting last night. Heard thumping and when I came back to cabin he wandered in. Pretty sure sign he was disoriented. I picked him up, gave him some loving, and he went to sleep. Seems ok today.

Trying to characterize solitude is like trying to describe relationship. Impossible since there is so much variance. In solitude you can be: focused on the external world; entranced by trying to create conceptual order; immersed in artistic work; studying inner emotional experience; exploring spiritual dimensions of universal wholeness and love. It can be liberating because the only limiting factor is your own capacity, but difficult in that other people can often catalyze growth. In solitude you pretty much must do it on your own.

Part of the reason I'm unwilling to exert the effort required to do formal science is that I'm seeking an inherent experiential harmony I can intuit directly in the here and now that's deeper than conceptual ordering by the rational mind.

It's not particularly relevant which stage of spiritual development I'm at. Orientation seems much more pragmatically important. If I'm holding on to my self as the centre, there will be suffering and stagnation. If I'm open to change and growth and being part of something greater, there will joy and peace.

Twenty-five years ago during my first retreat I decided that the only thing worth dying for is living fully. In a sense I've been committed to that even in the face of disapproval from others for being self-centred and irresponsible. Now I'm becoming aware of how deeply I fear disapproval. I spend a huge amount of time thinking ahead to how others will see what I'm doing and how I'll be able to "share" my experience. I need to remember that if I'm true to my own nature, I'll be making the contribution I'm meant to make, even if everyone else disapproves. Over and over I see that my work is to be here, trust the process, and live this experience day by day to the fullest.

Finished *Solitude* and it reminded me of Jung's belief that all psychological growth is essentially religious. There is a natural process of growth we must trust and surrender to. Our ego cannot direct the process, so we must open ourselves to something greater. Over and over I doubt this and try to run things myself, but that's what the ego always does.

8/10/01

Late night: 36F/calm/clear. Awoke to a fog bound morning; the only sounds were the distant rumble of falls on Staines Peninsula and sea ice rustling against the beach: a momentous mystic moment that stretched through timelessness. The eastern mountains, vague and ephemeral in the melting mist, reflected from a sea as glassy as any I've ever seen.

Took out the camera for a single shot and spent an hour and half a roll of film. Where does the photographic urge comes from? The light or my soul calling? It was good to focus on framing, images, and quality of feeling evoked. Still working with blacks, whites, and greys barely accented with color. My shots are becoming less studied and more simply what I see though the lens.

Made a cooler for the fish. Stuffed sawdust around a plastic pail inside a woven sack, filled the pail with ice, covered it with more sawdust, and wrapped the whole thing with the life jacket I don't use. Should keep ice for days and I hope the fish will last a week in there. I also moved another propane tank to the cabin to be ready to hook up when the first one runs out. It's lasted much longer than I expected. These last three weeks would have been good weather to go to the glacier if the motor were working well. Still no date for when German will arrive with replacement parts.

I have strong feelings about going to the glacier and spend hours thinking about the possible discomfort of what would likely be a four or five day trip. I sense that if I don't go I'll feel deep sorrow as though an important part of my task here was not completed.

I've been thinking of Perfectionism on a large abstract scale - e.g. the retreat won't be perfect if I don't go to the glacier - but today I realized that perfectionism is operating here and now moment by moment. Well duh ... when and where else could it be operating? My psychological explorations often start in the abstract and then I slowly become aware of habits manifesting the actual here and now.

8/11/01

Night: 30F/calm/partly clear. A day. Woke up, meditated, and exercised. Back to daily routine even though I don't really enjoy it. Played with chainsaw to see if I could figure out why it's leaking gas from the muffler. Nope, but it

worked fine until I let it stall and then I couldn't start it again. Just as well since I was feeling bad about shattering the evening quiet. One nice thing about being alone is I don't hear anyone else's noise and don't need to worry about anyone hearing mine. I wonder sometimes if the animals mind the racket?

Slowly I'm giving up the battle to change myself as a no winner. I'm tired of it all and want to let myself be who I already am - at least while I'm here. Until I let myself be, I can't relax into life as it is. Today I briefly had a larger view of myself as simply a man and a natural part of the world - just as I am.

8/12/01

Late night: 40F/some wind/sea restless/cloudy. Another day, *no mas*. Got up, sat, and exercised. This evening I was sitting out on the rock and Cat was wandering around whining. I kept saying shhhh, shhhh, and finally screamed SHUT UP! That did it, but I had to smile. Peaceful evening, dark settling in, and then the bellow, "Shut Up!" rolling down the channel and echoing off the rock face of Staines Peninsula. One reason I get so upset when he whines is that he's interrupting me while I'm talking to myself (thinking). Might be good for me though since I could do with thinking quite a bit less.

When I daydream about talking with others, I'm talking to myself in every sense. Not just because I'm talking internally, but also because all the thoughts are different points of view that I, myself, hold. From somewhere in me comes the question, "Who gives you the right to decide what a human being is or should be?" This is important for me to consider. I'm spending a huge amount of time and energy trying to fix myself, but who am I to know how I should be? All this Self-improvement Work is just a way of trying to escape from my life - of refusing to surrender and embrace the world and myself as we are. I'm also trying to escape life by solving my problems once and for all so I can live without suffering. But that means to not be engaged in living.



*Care of the Soul* talks about the need to marry Soul with Spirit. I don't usually think in terms of soul, but once I adjust to that language I find Moore is saying things that describe my experience more closely than anything else I've read. He says one aspect of the Puer personality is sadism/cruelty. It is hard to admit, but I recognise myself there. I do have a mean streak that I cover up with charm and spiritual awareness.<sup>91</sup>

Bucked the wood I brought in as long pieces the other day. Saw still cranky, but did the job. Started building steps. Been planning to do them for months but "hadn't gotten around to it." Today, almost without thinking, I began to build. A taste of Wu Wei - letting things happen in their own time. Washed clothes. I've worn the sweatshirt and snow pants almost every day for the past four months and they were filthy.

Feels like maybe the winds have started again. Been blowing all day from the northwest. Hope the weather stays calm at least some of the time for a while yet. Still wonder if I'll go to the glacier. Fear. Sat with the feeling for a while then walked to the point where the wind was blowing stiffly, but not roaring. All of a sudden, I thanked Brother Wind for helping me explore my soul. Felt good to give thanks for a change instead of yelling, "Fuck off!"

8/14/01

Night: 36F. Seem to have lost a day. Can't remember if I wrote yesterday and had the date wrong or I missed it. No matter. Woke to rain and wind. Lit propane stove to take chill off the cabin and cleaned up kitchen area. Looks much better now. I often light the stove for a while in the morning, but it fogs up the windows and if I stay inside I can't see out. Checked email, but nothing from Alejandra saying when German is coming. At the moment I feel ok with whatever happens - even if he doesn't come at all.

The last section of *Care of the Soul* talks about re-animating the world. There is a collective world soul that every being and object is part of. Rare to read about this feeling of existing in a Living world. I paused and it washed softly over me. The cabin and everything else came alive. Such tenderness and love. Tears blurred my eyes. This is what I've been seeking for so long, and as usual I've had it backwards. I've been focused on My Experience of sensing the world as alive rather than focusing on the world itself. Now, my attention naturally and softly touched the world around me - including myself as part of that world. It felt cozy and comfortable, like I was cradled and held. At the same time I was aware of the fierce aspects of existence: fear, pain, death.

In some sense this is what I've been looking for since I left home at 18 - chasing phantom feelings and trying to grasp experiences. Without this sense of being Alive in a Living world, no place, job, or relationship feels right, and off I go searching again. But Life can't be grasped. I can only open myself and allow it to flow in. With this sense of Aliveness, it wouldn't matter where I go. Anywhere would be fine since no place is more alive than any other place. It is being in love but in a soft quiet way rather than a passionate love affair. I was surprised by the unexpected shift today. It just happened. Trust the process, Bob. Trust solitude to affect you.

During the past 25 years I've had the sense that I've wandered down many dead ends and detours along the spiritual path. *Care of the Soul* says that in seeking Spirit there may be a direct path, but in cultivating the soul it's a labyrinth of wandering and wondering. Somehow in following my heart these past years I've been caring for my soul. I'm grateful for *Care of the Soul* and hope I might touch someone else this way through writing or storytelling.

How would logging have to change if we accepted Native Americans' statements about "brother tree" as a literal rather than a metaphorical or sentimental expression of experience? How would we live if we actually

experienced the world and ourselves as fully Alive together? We need to take life to live, but I think we would try much harder to avoid wasting lives unnecessarily.

This afternoon I had a sense of deep relaxation. Like I can rest now. I've been searching for so long and have finally come home. But restless mind is an unruly beast and habits take time to change.

8/15/01

Late night: 39F. Started to rain at dark and has been coming down hard ever since. Feels like the northwest wind is back for the summer. It's been blowing hard all day. Glad I'm not out there on the sea somewhere, but I sure would like to go to the glacier.

I've felt for a while that my altar is incomplete. There are rocks, feathers, a piece of firewood, sage and sweet grass, a bird's breast bone, a few things from Patti, some photos, a bit of Mom's ashes, Dad's ring, my tooth, and my amulet. Today I added a small dead wind-swept branch to remind me I'm not in charge and in gratitude to the wind for helping me learn/remember that. It is also an offering to propitiate the wind in the hope I'll not be caught on the water in a storm.

Finished steps. Feels good to have them done. Only took six months. Spread gravel on walkways. Still need more, but not much. All my outdoor projects are done except to move solar panels back to the more protected location now that the sun is coming back. Of course the boat, outboard, and chainsaw continue to need attention. Hope cabin doesn't start to leak or have other problems.

Finished *Care of the Soul*. What a rich book. Speaks to the soul and not just the mind. The difference between spirit and soul is confusing. If we can't even tell where a tree ends, how can we divide and categorize spirit and soul - or even ego for that matter? Perhaps spirit is abandoning or transcending the self

and soul is living within the human condition and finding richness and meaning there. Both are important. Having Cat here may hinder my spiritual freedom but be very good for my soul.

8/16/01

Night: 44F/windy/cloudy/sea on the move. Shit, things are falling apart. Just yesterday I wrote that I've finally gotten almost everything done - unless something falls apart. This morning I took apart the stovepipe to seal the joints with gasket maker and found the pipe has rotted through in spots. Unbelievable. Only four and a half months of use. So much for dreams of this place being trouble free for the year. Had the pipe made in Punta Arenas, and even their best metal was poor quality. Rotated the pipe, wired patches over the holes, and emailed Alejandra to ask German to bring new pipe when he comes. Huge hassle getting the pipe apart to rotate it. Had to climb up on the roof several times. Everything went wrong - except, happily, I didn't fall. Ironic if now that I have all this wood I can't use it.

The fluorescent light is misbehaving too and I doubt it's just the bulbs. I have two non-fluorescent lights but they use more juice. Bummer to always have problems with things, but I had to buy most of my gear second hand because I'm doing this project on such a tight budget. Just hope the satphone and laptop continue to work because I haven't a clue how to fix either of them. I suppose problems with gear on this sort of adventure are to be expected.

Was watching the butter belly ducks today and admiring how self-contained they are. No matter what the weather, they seem comfortable in it. No possessions or equipment to worry about. All they must do is preen each day.

Pissed-off all day about having to fuck with the stovepipe. Felt like the world was actively thwarting my efforts. Kept knocking stuff down and dropping things. I'm often angry when I work with the physical world. Rather than engage

my materials in dialogue, I want them to obey my Will without resistance. I seem to have only two speeds: either laid back and accepting things as they are, or caught in expectations and pissed that things aren't going the way I want them to. No happy medium. I seem ok with routine tasks like splitting wood, cleaning cabin, cooking, fishing, but as soon as repairing something mechanical is involved I get uptight. Busted my butt to build this place and want to enjoy being here without having to fix things that fall apart.

Many times each day the diving ducks patrol and defend their territory. Life for all of us is an on-going engagement. Yet I seem to want to solve life once and for all and live without problems or conflict. If I can give up the dream of a permanent solution and engage the world as it is I'll be happier and more productive.

A strange thing occurs to me. For wishing to relax and not have to exert so much effort to maintain my life, I'm living totally backwards. Over and over I work to get established in some situation then pack up and head off to start again - doing something different in a different place. No wonder I'm tired. If I'd stuck with the same thing and put this much energy into it I might be rich and famous. Or not. Probably bored out of my mind though.

Started *Eye of the Spirit*. Very different tone from *Care of the Soul*. As always, I appreciate Wilber's intellectual scope, but he often seems to take his model literally - as though the world is actually constructed of holons made up of the four quadrants he has conceptualized. But the model is a conceptualization in his mind - a human creation. It was not lying around as some objective fact waiting to be picked up.

8/17/01

Night: 39F/Rainy and windy almost all day. Pulled boat up further and stacked some firewood higher too. This is as high as I've seen the tide and

tomorrow will be higher yet. Water was swirling around the chopping blocks and into the sweat lodge. No damage as far as I can tell. Hooked up a full propane tank and now have good light again.

A mishap with Cat. When I go to the outhouse he follows me and cuddles right up. Would get onto my lap if I let him. As I stood to pull up pants and raingear, he - still on the seat - stood on his hind paws with his front paws on my lower back. I reached back and brushed him off, and whoops, down the hole he went. It's only 18 inches deep and full of water, so he climbed out in a hurry. But he didn't come out smelling like a rose. No, in fact he smelled like shit and looked like a sewer rat. Jeez what a creature. I had to laugh. Figured I better dry him off or he might get seriously chilled, but the only thing I have to dry him with is my towel. So then my towel was full of shit and I had to launder it. Ah lord, the tribulations of an impatient man.

Reading along in *Eye of the Spirit*. Going pretty quickly since none of it is new to me. It's a simplified version of *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality (SES)*, also by Wilber, and I'm reading it to re-orient myself before I dive into *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality* again which is much more difficult. As usual, I like Wilber's broad vision but get hung up on his apparent certainty and heavy focus on structure. It speaks to my mind but not to my heart - at least so far. It's good to be reminded that, in contrast to modernity's materialism, variations of the so called Perennial Philosophy/Great Chain of Being (matter, animal nature, rational mind, subtle mind/soul, causal mind/Spirit) have formed the basis for many cultures' worldview.

The dual aspects of Spirit as transcendent and immanent go a long way toward conceptualizing my experience: transcendence is the peace, clarity, and inner light I often call Big Mind; immanence is what I call Aliveness. I've been trying to sense the physical world around me as Alive, but it still tends to appear mechanistic. But of course. If I focus only on the material outer surface the

world will appear dead and mechanical. Aliveness is inward - the awareness that arises in a still mind.

8/18/01

Early night: 38F/starry/calm. Went fishing about 45 minutes before high tide and had no bites for almost an hour. Then they started to feed. So my theory about fishing at high tide still holds. Caught 14 but put one back. It just floated and kicked occasionally, but I decided to leave it for the eagles or some other critter. When I looked again I couldn't see it, so I hope it revived and swam down. Was more mindful today to pause to give thanks for the fish as I caught them, and to be sure that I got the knife into the brain so they wouldn't suffer. Several were still twitching as I filleted them later. It brought home to me even more deeply that I am taking lives. If I didn't like to fish and eat fish as much as I do, I might give it up.

Very low tide tonight and I walked down to see more of the sky over the trees behind me. Cat's eyes glowed wild and eerie in the flashlight. Felt chills up my neck (feel them again as I write this) and trembled as though some inner energy was trying to break free. I've felt this before and it's led to release and opening, so I stood there and stayed with it. My rational mind was frightened of the unknown but I reassured myself it was ok. Some dark savage stuff came up. I felt my face twist into a snarl. A Presence growled, "You are mine." I hung on and worked with it as best I could: asked the inner light for help; asked the shadow presence what it wanted; stayed steady and let it be; disagreed that it was going to control me; gave myself love. It said if I allowed it to come in, it would give me power. No thank you. Courage and strength yes, but power no.

I'm frightened of this Presence. It seems outside me, but that's the nature of the shadow. We don't want to recognize it as part of who we are, and so repress and project it. Don't know what this darkness will be if I have the

courage to face and acknowledge it, but I think it has to do with my fear and unwillingness to take a stand and engage fully in life.

The dark Presence said that this is who I am whether or not I want to recognize it: the rage that roars up when my will is thwarted; that which smacks Cat for doing something I don't like; my cruelty toward women. I sense that in denying this aspect of myself I'm left with fear since I feel I don't have the courage or resolution to face conflict. My anxiety and anger toward the wind is somehow linked with this shadow too.

Finally came in to light a fire and warm up. Later I went out for a pee, and the Presence said, "I'm waiting for you." While slicing bacon, I almost really cut my finger and a voice said, "I'm gonna get you." I asked why it would want to get me. I think the rage may come from denying my "manhood" because I fear that if I stand up for myself, when push comes to shove I'll whimp out. Better to not take a stand in the first place.

I usually believe that I see my shadow, but rarely actually own this side of myself viscerally. Tonight I felt the darkness of some of my behaviour in my gut. What's truly frightening is to be unaware of the darkness since it then manifests covertly in my actions and causes suffering to myself and others.

I'm glad I have resources to bring to this. Meditation teachers say that terror and other dark energy will likely surface from time to time. As always, the counsel is to observe without judging: neither reject nor get sucked in. Equanimity. And there is Patti's courage and support. If I really need to, I can email her or even call. In several dreams these past few days I was a fugitive being chased and women helped or saved me. I cannot do this on my own and ask the Inner Light for courage, strength, patience, compassion, and humility. Five more months alone could be pretty tough. No wonder I want to keep busy. It will be interesting to see what happens in the coming days and weeks. I feel vulnerable, but expected there would be difficult issues to face here.



How to explain the presence of evil in the world? Mystics claim that Spirit, the ultimate ground of existence, is Love. If so, and if all the manifest world is Spirit Incarnate, why then is there evil? It seems to me that without resorting to duality there are only three basic options: 1. There is no Spirit or God. It's all blind chance at worst and impersonal process at best. In that case there's no reason why there should not be evil in the world. 2. Spirit/God, like everything else, has a shadow side. Pain, disease, and death - as well as human cruelty - are inherent to life. If Spirit/God is Love, then Love is not what we normally think it to be. 3. There is no actual evil in the world. It is created through perspective and attribution. For example, am I evil to catch, kill, and eat fish even though they are not necessary to my survival?

From this perspective, I think the issue of evil centres around the ego. I label as evil anything that threatens my survival - or even causes me serious discomfort. But if I'm able to see the world without myself (which includes family, cultural values, etc) as its centre, then yes there is suffering, but not evil as such. Then even humans that kill other humans are not evil but simply playing their part in the drama of life.

If I surrender myself to the flow of life and death, then I may not judge the acts of another as evil even though that person may be doing evil from his or her subjective perspective. However, their subjective judgment would be based on the notion of freewill. But I wonder, do we actually have freewill or is it just an illusion to allow us the comfort of supposed control in the face of the mystery of our existence?

8/19/01

Late night: 48F/rainy/windy. Empty Sunday. All day I've felt like a stone rattling down a deep well. Over and over I've decided to stay with the feeling and over and over have eaten something instead. I'll keep at it though. Tomorrow I

intend to fast and drink only tea. Perhaps I'll fast on each new moon from now on.

This morning I prepared for a super high tide since the wind was blowing and the sea on the move. Anchored sweat lodge frame with heavy rocks, tied boat to stay put if it floated, moved chopping blocks and lashed rope around the woodpile. Been expecting this day for months. Nothing. Water came only as high as it did two days ago.

Spent the day reading *Family Moskat*. Smoke blew out of the stove a few times due to low barometric pressure.<sup>92</sup> Fluorescent light still not working properly, but I have no spare. Been using the propane light and even with the stove's drafts closed it's hot in here.

Joy comes from living fully in the here and now no matter what the circumstance. To live like that I must surrender to life as it is, and give up wanting things to be different. The hardest is to give up wanting to give up wanting things to be different. A spiritual Catch-22. Peace is found through experiencing myself as part of something greater. But how to deal with Pain and Evil I don't know.

What have I learned that I can share? I want to get it right before I say anything. If I can't walk the walk, then talking the talk is shameful. But keeping silent is also hypocritical since then I'm not openly acknowledging my doubts and weaknesses.

One style often used by new age gurus is to flash a big smile as a sign that he or she is walking the walk and it WORKS. "I've found the Answer/System and will share it with you." I find this approach distasteful and don't trust it. We need to come clean about our process, doubts, and flaws. I've always liked Insight Meditation teachers because they don't set themselves up as gurus, but as fellow journeyers who can guide others who may not have walked quite as far along the path.

As *Care of the Soul* says, soul work is right where things are hardest and where you don't want to be. That's where the ego wall is weakest and where we can most easily open up and let something from beyond flow in. Does this mean I should celebrate my flaws? Certainly it's where I am apt to be more humble about my life. The trick is not to try to fix the weak spot, but acknowledge it and be with myself as I am and not as I would like to be.

Fear seems inherent in having a separate self. There are different ways to deal with fear: you can face it; if you are quick at repression, you can deny you have any; you can avoid it by attacking what triggers it, by staying busy, or by not feeling anything at all. But finally, the only real freedom is to surrender the self.

8/20/01

Night: Rain and strong wind all day. Temperature hovered around 50F which is the warmest it's been. Now the rain and wind have stopped, the temperature dropped, and the pressure climbed some. Perhaps the centre of the low has passed.

The high tide I expected yesterday came today. Water was 18 inches higher than I've seen before: to the foundation posts of the cabin and half way up the woodpiles; onto the rock where I sit and into the trees where I was pretty sure it never goes since most trees can't stand salt. The boat was pulled up as far as possible and was still floating. Whew. No damage except the lowest porch step washed away. Good thing I lashed the woodpile, else the waves might have carried some of it away. Even where I lived in the tent for several weeks when I first arrived was under water.

Watching the waves, I remembered that the inter-tidal zone was one of the first places I realized that beauty and harmony can arise from the "conflict" of

opposing forces. Water or rock alone isn't so beautiful. A metaphor for the conflict in my own life.

But today I found myself identifying with the plants being "attacked" by the sea and didn't feel the peace and equanimity that arise from standing back and letting the process go its way. I wondered how I could loosen the clasp of feeling under attack by the elements. Then I remembered that I came here to be "shaped" by the experience of solitude in nature. In that moment I relaxed my grip on who I think I should be and how the world should treat me, and opened myself to the process of change and growth. Ahhhh. This isn't the easiest day for a fast perhaps, but symbolic. I'm getting some physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual fat trimmed off here.

Interacting with people I often feel I'm defending my personal space instead of engaging to establish a cooperative relationship. I try to keep an appearance of friendliness, but inside there's often the tension of feeling the threat of encroachment. Painful way to live. Perhaps I can also learn to open myself to be changed by my interactions with others instead of trying to protect the status quo of my current identity.

Yesterday I sensed the world as Holy and looked to see what usually keeps me from that vision. Seems like desire. Buddhism teaches that desire causes suffering. It also seems to encase the soul and prevent experiencing all of life - the good, the bad, the painful - as Holy. Peeling away layers of desire allows the sense of sacredness to flow in. Makes sense. To see the world as sacred means to fully accept it as being "right" just the way it is. Desire is rejection of what is; the wish to have something different.

I wonder if I need prolonged psychotherapy if I want to grow emotionally, cognitively, and spiritually. Little question but that I have some serious neuroses going on. No surprise since most of us do. I wonder whether the personal work I've been doing over the years on my own and with friends is accomplishing what

therapy would accomplish, or if I'm going in circles? This question is futile for now but I'll re-consider it when back in Vancouver.

Good news! I was wrong yet again. Tried the spare fluorescent bulbs and, bright light! Hadn't been aware how dim the other bulbs were and had forgotten how much nicer it is not to have the noise of the propane lamp.

Been thinking again - always a dangerous thing to do. In the future, I need to remember that I can never take enough light plastic twine when I go camping. It's so useful. I just happened to grab a roll to bring with me at the last moment and I'm sure glad I did.

### 8/21/01

Night: Another stormy day but not as intense as yesterday. Walked to point this morning and along the way picked up some plastic washed in from who knows where. Mounds of uprooted sea grass and kelp high in the bushes. The beach has a new face. No major structural changes, but it looks scraped and polished like it has been born again or gone through a major spring cleaning.

Cat continues to intrigue me. I've been looking deep into his eyes lately. Have also been sleeping with the door unlatched. In part I was latching it against Cat. Yesterday it was raining and blowing when I went to check the solar panels, so I told Cat to stay at the cabin. Nope. He came with me. By the time we got back he was soaked and even though it was a warm day I decided to dry him. Not sure if he's neurotic to be so attached or just a loving friend.

### 8/22/01

Night: 40F/calm now but rainy and windy all day. Last night the wind generator started to roar and howl so I went to short the wires at the generator. The wind down there was savage. Cat, as usual, came with me. This morning

when there was a lull in the wind I moved the solar panels back to the more protected spot where they were before they lost the sun in early winter. Again Cat came along. Couldn't believe it. Pissing down rain, but he stayed with me and got wet.

Last night at the outhouse Cat, as usual, got in the way. I've scootched him over a bunch of times, but he keeps getting right where I need to sit. I lost my temper, grabbed him by the scruff of the neck, and tossed him away. Instead of coming right back when I called, he just looked at me. Finally he came back and I gave him some loving. Even though I hate to admit it, I actually enjoyed blowing up at him. It gave me pleasure to dominate and maybe even hurt him a bit. I think this is the sadism *Care of the Soul* says is part of the Puer complex. I also noticed that afterward I felt tender and liked him even though previously I'd been feeling distant and cold toward him. It's as though my internal distress gets projected onto him and once I dump it, I feel better - and remorseful. I do this same thing with women, though non-physically, which I think is classically abusive.

Cat often seems to demand that I attend to him and I feel guilty when I don't. The guilt triggers anger. Or maybe I didn't get my needs met when I was a boy and Cat's demands trigger my own rage. I often feel that women I'm in relationship with want something I either can't or don't want to give, and then I feel guilty and become angry and mean or withdraw emotionally or physically.

Patti is aware of my feeling that women want something from me I don't have or don't want to give. Over and over she tells me I don't owe her anything. But still I don't completely trust her and think that sooner or later she will lay a guilt trip on me. I try to not close off as a preventative strike.

Wilber points out that narcissistic rage is a characteristic of early development. In that case I'm not unique but just haven't outgrown it yet. In any case, I need to remain open to the feelings that come up so I can let them go and move on. I also need to remain aware that Cat (and other people) is a separate

being with his own life and distresses. To practice acknowledging the existence of Other.

Sitting on the porch watching the day darkening to night, I looked up to see the orange bill butter bellied ducks swimming into the basin. Silhouetted in the steely grey light, they looked like heavy gunboats or battleships cruising in to patrol their territory.

I sat out in the pouring rain for a long time today and slowly realized that I only sense the world in front of me rather than all around. I'm outside looking in at it not inside looking around. This is the basic phenomenological experience of dualism, and I think it's linked to fear of death. If I remove myself from the flow of life, nothing can sneak up on me from behind! But in doing this I'm no longer truly part of life. Life is always out there somewhere else and I'm always trying to get to where it is.

I think this is a common experience in our culture, and trying to find what's missing from our lives drives much of our activity. It's Life that's missing. But realizing that, I still don't feel the Aliveness I crave because I'm still chasing it by trying to "surrender to what is" so I can feel Alive. A subtle kind of grasping. Nothing to do but notice what I'm doing and remember that whatever I'm doing and feeling is already Life. Even feeling lifeless is part of being a living actual person. Why is this so hard to get?

8/23/01

36F/clear/calm.

8/24/01

Night: 32F. Partly cloudy in the morning, but pure sun this afternoon.

First time I've seen the sun in almost two weeks. Calm all day except for a couple

of hours of breeze. I hope it freezes tonight so I can collect ice for the cooler. A plane flew by today out of sight on the other side of Staines Peninsula. I'd forgotten how peaceful it is here. I make the only motor noise there is.

Spent most of the day in the kayak. Paddled around the island out front for the first time and then to the bigger island north of here. Stopped along the way to pick up plastic the storm tide washed in. I guess one of my jobs in life is to be God's garbage collector. As I paddled along the shore of my island I heard Cat. He'd followed me all the way to the other side along the shoreline. It's probably only 300 yards, but very rough and I wasn't in his line of sight most of the time. I called hello but decided not to pick him up. I figured if he got there he would make it home again. What a pair we are: I love to be alone and he seems to hate it.<sup>93</sup>

Shot half a roll of film and think I got some nice images. Weird language: shot photos; caught fish. Doesn't actually feel that way. I do catch fish, but when my heart is open it feels like the fish are given to me. I don't take a photo, shoot a scene, or capture something on film. More like my eye and heart are attracted to a flow of form and colour and I feel called to honour a fragment by framing it to share with others.

Still no word about when German might be coming. Except for the outboard parts, I could almost say don't bother. If the motor was working well, now might be a good time to go to the glacier. But my real work is to open myself psychologically and spiritually to the flow and risk of life instead of hiding behind the walls of ego and culture. This is a moment-by-moment challenge in all circumstances. To create a "special challenge" like going to the glacier won't lead to a balanced way of living day to day.

Liking and not liking Wilber. Mostly yes, but he's such a structuralist and often seems to reify his model rather than seeing it as a mental construct.<sup>94</sup> He supports the model with "empirical" evidence, but most of the evidence comes from



psychological questionnaires and I'm leery of such tools. For me the world is much more fluid than he portrays it to be.

Last night I suddenly sensed myself to be One among Many - just part of existence. How lovely to feel deeply "part of" for a few moments.

8/25/01

Night: Finally, after being here seven months, I left the beach and went into the middle of the island. Good day for it: sunny, which was important to help maintain my sense of direction; not too cold; wind keeping me off the water. Decided not to wear rain pants - eek, my security blanket! I hardly go anywhere without my rain pants. Knew I'd get wet, but it would be easier to climb through the trees and brush without them. Managed to sneak away without Cat. He probably wouldn't have liked the trip, and I certainly wouldn't have liked him crying the whole way.

I'd never been in anything so tough except for Salal on the west coast of Vancouver Island. This was not so much dense vegetation as just very rough. Many downed trees and/or (usually couldn't tell which) steep jumbled rock formations. Never took a step without gripping something solid, and several times saved myself a bad fall when thinking I was on solid ground I'd take a step and there would be nothing under my foot. When I'd peer more closely through the brush, I'd see I was standing on a fallen log seven or eight feet in the air.

Without sun and compass I'd absolutely have lost my way once I lost sight and sound of the sea, and might have wandered in circles for a long time since there are steep rises and hollows as well as rugged rocks and fallen trees. What a place. Took over an hour to reach the other side of the island and it's not more than 150 yards. On the other shore I somehow felt like an explorer of a new land even though I've been there before by water.

Found a cypress log that washed in with the storm tide. Nice gift. Lots of good kindling. Someone somewhere sometime made some cuts on it. Wonder who where when. Also picked up some plastic. Sad to think of the mindlessness of people who toss stuff overboard. It just hurts.

The trip back was easier. Stopped to rest on the highest point of the island where it was semi-open and I could see the water and mountains in several directions. The dark Presence came again and felt like it was attacking from outside. The classic projection of shadow by ego that doesn't want to recognise it as part of the self. I sensed that I must appear demonic to Cat when I rage at him for crying. More projection.

Wilber describes different defence mechanisms that operate on different levels of psychological development. In neurotic people there is mainly projection and repression. In healthy mature people suppression and sublimation. When I read that I was confused, but on the hilltop I got it. A lot of dark stuff is usually buried and unconsciously held in check by cultural mores. If I want to experience these aspects of myself I need to assume personal responsibility to not become swamped by them but to remain focused on the inner light. This seems like the move from repression and projection to suppression and sublimation. Repression is an unconscious process and suppression is consciously acknowledging the shadow material and choosing not to act it out. There are many ways to sublimate the shadow's energy, but I think the most direct is to channel it into being aware of the energy itself.

Wilber also points out that the process of growth is disidentifying with one level of consciousness and transcending it to the next more inclusive level; what is context at one level becomes content at the next. In *Tree of Knowledge* Maturana makes the statement that as humans "We Live in Language." But I don't think he could make that statement if he were fully embedded in language. He can only perceive our relationship to language because he has a perspective from beyond

language. A fish cannot say, "We live in water." If it's all you know, then it's the context of experience, not content.

A good thing about reading Wilber is that I'm finally coming to accept the importance of daily meditation. Anyone working to open themselves has to go through the same process one way or another. But I'm surprised he doesn't address the experience of the world coming vibrantly Alive. This is different than the clear inner light and it's magical. Seems to me that if this were part of his experience, he would find it important enough to write about. I certainly do. Perhaps his insistence on the Pre/Trans Fallacy locks him away from some rich aliveness which is part of the Pre/rational physical world. Perhaps.

During my first retreat I experienced "Something" non-physical, but couldn't define it at all. Now I'm using the word Spirit for that Something. Is my current experience different, or am I just more comfortable with the word now?

8/26/01

No entry.

8/27/01

Late night: 36F. Tender night. Half moon showing though broken clouds. Calm and quiet. Just came in from rock sitting. Strange how much easier it is to write about daily doings than inner experiences. Yesterday, Sunday, was, as usual, a melancholy day. Feeling empty like I've failed in my life. Seems I've been working on inner stuff for so long and have made so little progress. Sometimes I feel all I really want is a job I can enjoy and a relationship that's joyful.

Still grasping for the experience of feeling truly Alive. It seems so little to ask and yet.... There are brief moments when I give up and surrender to things as

they are. Then there is a softening and quieting in my soul, the world does come alive, and I find comfort in my place in it. But immediately I start to cling to the experience and try to examine it to discover how I got there and how I can stay. In that grasping movement it evaporates like morning dew and leaves me dry and isolated once again. There is often peace and inner light, but the deep sense of being Alive in a Living universe shining with Spirit remains an elusive longing.

Woke at first light today to the sound of wavelets crumpling onto the beach. As day came on I could see the cypress through the window shivering in the breeze. Not a day for exploring in the boat. Went back to sleep.

Woke up again, meditated, exercised, read, and got busy with domestic tasks. Washed windows, buried garbage, stacked wood, brought in a sack of twigs for kindling. Reorganized the food on the porch. I'll have plenty of rice, beans, and pasta left over, but I've used about half of everything else. Cleaned up the debris the storm-tide left behind near the cabin. Small jobs, but it feels good to have them done.

Been reading *Gaia: a Way of Knowing*, a collection of work by various thinkers. The editor, William Irwin Thompson, wrote an introduction with lovely words and thoughts. Maturana - one of the contributors - on the other hand, has got to be one of the worst writers I've ever read. I think what he says is probably interesting and valuable, but I'm never sure since the way he says it is barely comprehensible to me at the best of times. Not sure if I don't understand his ideas, or if I do - or would if he'd express them clearly. Once I finally do get a passage, I think, ah, oh yeah, well ok.

8/28/01

No entry.

8/29/01

Night: 38F/clear with light clouds/some breeze/sea moving. Yesterday was calm and clear. Went fishing and exploring. Wanted to see if Cat would go with me. I put him in the boat, he jumped out. Put him back in and held on, but when I thought I'd pushed far enough away from the beach and let him go to start the motor, he made a mighty leap back to land. Decided to try one last time since it was a test to see if I'll take him with me should I go away for more than a day. Rowed back to shore, called him, and, lo, he jumped into the boat. He was sooo good all day. Only had to tell him to get down off the pontoon once and to leave the fish alone twice. I liked having him along. He was completely calm and seemed to actually enjoy the trip - as did I. Caught a dozen snapper then went northwest to look at a deep narrow inlet on Isla Owen about six miles from here. It was delightful in there. As usual I was a little nervous about the outboard, but it worked fine.

Sat on rock for quite a while last night under the three quarter moon - content to have wandered a bit. No wish that I'd gone further or done more. According to the GPS I covered only 20 miles. If I go to the glacier it will be four times as far just to get there.

Strange that I'm regularly staying up almost all night. Went to other side of island today to pick up the cypress log. Took Cat with me and he seemed to like the ride even though it was choppy. Stood with his front paws up on the pontoon so he could see out. Looked like a dog in the back of a pickup. Cut cypress into rounds, and when it was time to go called Cat and put him in boat with me. Immediately he jumped back out. Grrr. By this time the wind was up and pushing the boat onto the rocks. It took quite a while to coax him back to where I could reach him and lift him into the boat. Grippped him tightly until I'd pushed the boat out, but when I let go to start the motor he leapt out again. Fuck it. I figured if he made it home the other day, he could today too.

My behaviour troubles me. I get so angry at the little guy and then act violently and cruelly. He's starting to shy when I come around. Still comes when I call, jumps up onto my lap, and likes to play, but the harsh treatment - even though rare compared to the loving I give him - is having an effect. Must try harder to be aware of this stuff and not act it out.

Picked up a load of gravel from the island north of here and spread it in the mud holes around the cabin. Looks good. Split cypress into chunks so it can dry. Great wood. Well seasoned and hardly any knots which is particularly good for kindling. When I'd finished I stopped for a look around and saw wonder....

The peeping cries of newly arrived red-bill sea birds call to me and I look to see them sharing the mussel rock with the pair of white and black geese. The orange billed butter bellied diving ducks are working the kelp beds in the falling tide.

Across the channel to the west, the rock walls of Staines Peninsula drift into and out of sight behind swirls of mist and slanting rain streaks. But here, just here on this rock and the small island beyond, sun pours down and the trees shed their drab shadowed green and shimmer - almost iridescent. Rapt in wonder, I watch a rainbow magically appear and fade back into wherever it came from.

Into this mystic stillness an eagle flies; majestic or ponderous, depending on your eye. The male goose honks a warning but doesn't move. Minding its own affairs, the eagle flaps steadily over. But what's this? One of the red-billed peepers lifts off, climbs in a steep curve, and attacks eagle from behind. I wonder if they'll stay and breed? And now as the light fades to grey again, the ducks join the others on the rock. Community.

I drop the notebook and feel myself sink more deeply into the world before my eyes, ears, and soul. All desire to write leaves me. What has happened to my flow of language? I fall mute before such wonder and beauty. I try to describe the delicate shades and patterns of shifting color as wind swirls water

around immovable rock, but my images feel dull and trite. There is no dance between word and world. What I see and feel begs a sensuous tango, but my words march stiff and static in plodding lines across the page.

8/30/01

Night: 36F. The weather continues to mystify. Barometric pressure went up, temperature dropped, and it started to rain. I'd come to believe that rain comes with dropping pressure and a temperature hovering around 41F. Oh well, another theory shot to hell.

Read today and filled the five 5-gallon gas containers from the 55-gallon drum. I usually hate to siphon gas because I always get some in my mouth, but I think I've finally got the trick. I used to use a short opaque hose and couldn't tell when the gas had made it over the hump and was headed down toward my mouth. But I brought a ten foot piece of clear hose with me here, so I can see when I've sucked the gas up out of the drum and it's flowing downhill, and still have time get the hose out of my mouth before the gas arrives.

Got my first good laugh in months today - from a thought. I was reading Maturana until I couldn't stand it any more and went to siphon gas. Was struggling to understand a convoluted sentence and felt my mind tighten down. Looked up from the book to the sea and sky, and took some deep breaths to relax. Tried the sentence again, and again felt my mind cramp up. Back to simply breathing in the beauty around me until I felt my mind soften, then back to the book. Finally gave it up, and the thought "I'd rather suck gas through a hose than read any more of this crap," drifted through my mind. Cracked me up. Good.

In his writing Maturana goes round and round. I'm not sure if he's saying something subtle and profound, and so - like a Zen master - must use the form he does to be able to express it, or if what he's saying is quite ordinary and he's trying to make it seem profound by his stilted writing style. Today he went on

and on about how things come to be the way they are, and in frustration I exclaimed, "God damn it, just say, co-evolution and we'll know what you're talking about!" But if I said that to him he might respond that he's not talking about co-evolution. Maybe someday I'll get clear on it, maybe not.

Tonight I got hit with a wave of the "oh shits." For the past few days I've been edging toward making an overnight trip to an inlet 25 miles north of here. Days are getting longer and the temperature warmer. I'm tired of waiting for German to bring outboard parts, and the motor works ok as long as I don't rev it up too high. I was looking for a description of the inlet one of the naval officers gave me and found a note saying the best months to explore are April to August since the winds become strong again in September. I could have easily made the trip during the past two months.

Of course I didn't know that in advance, and the temperature was cold and the days short, but this feels like a rationalization for not facing my fear. If I were going with someone else I would have gone long ago. My own imagination has held me back. I've seen this so many times over the years but still get swamped by fear. What a drag. If I don't at least try to make it to the glacier I have a hunch I'll carry the failure for a long time. The actual danger is slight I think. I could run into serious problems, but the worst that's likely to happen is to get stuck for days on some exposed rock waiting for the wind to die. Or, if the motor quit, I might need to call for help. More than fear of death, it's fear of failure and needing to call for help that worries me. Perhaps what I really need to face is not fear so much as failure to face my fear on occasion. What a weight to carry.

I'm sort of glad German hasn't arrived yet. It's allowed me to realize I can make do with what I have and don't really need all the stuff I asked him to bring.



8/31/01

Night: 38F/Wild and woolly last day of August. The second half of August has been generally foul. Today it blew all day and rained, hailed, and snowed. Feeling restless and discontent.

I often project my experience of fear onto the world so I can avoid the external situation I tell myself is the source of that fear. Today I noticed this same dynamic operates in facing fear. I project fear out so I can confront the situation I've convinced myself is the source of it. Once I confront the fear, I've dominated it and don't need to experience it any longer. To truly face fear is to simply be with the experience and do nothing to avoid or attack it. Or is this a rationalization for not going out to face my fear?

There is something else I'm glimpsing that's not clear yet. Projecting feelings into the past and future instead of actually experiencing them here and now. A sort of intellectual dislocation. I project my fear onto the glacier trip, and in doing so avoid experiencing it in the present moment. Much of my concern is how I imagine I'll appear to other people if I do or don't go. Perhaps the main reason I want to go is so I can relax and enjoy the rest of my time here knowing I've done what I believe I should do. Cat is feeling the restlessness today too. Been whining all day.

A new pair of beautiful birds recently arrived: rich rusty brown breast, filigreed black and white belly and sides, light grey head and neck, some white on wings.<sup>95</sup> Found a lovely nook in the woods near the point. Delicate ferns, mosses, and lichen.

Finished *Eye of the Spirit*. It's my least favourite of the Wilber books I've read. In other writings I've enjoyed it when he waxes poetic about nature since the descriptions have been brief. Here there is something ponderous and pedestrian about his poetic words. In the last chapter he claims Spirit to be the same as Awareness. He defines enlightenment as waking up to notice that we are

always already aware and so always already enlightened. The issue is not to become aware, but to notice that we already are. Ok. He goes on to describe how everything is happening within this choiceless awareness instead of out there. The whole world is inside oneself and so one is One with Spirit. This is ok too, but it's just one side of the process I think.

The other side is, in the words of Trungpa (1988), to become tiny like a grain of sand - an infinitesimal part of the infinite universe. In this sense it's not all happening within me, but I am part of the whole and deeply identified with the rest of existence. Even in the spaciousness of Big Mind, part of what I'm aware of is my small self sitting within the huge universe being aware of myself being aware. It is this experience which carries the rich sense of deep aliveness and tender humility.

Wilber seems to focus exclusively on the former experience which could be the basis for his argument that the Biosphere is part of the Noosphere rather than the other way around.<sup>96</sup> Evolutionary biology and most ecophilosophers claim that humans are part of nature. Wilber argues that Nature is part of our human mental/cultural world. Both are correct I think. Physically, there is no question but that we belong to the biosphere. This is the grain of sand side of things. But the biosphere we conceptualize and the evolutionary process that embeds us in the natural world are experiences in the human mind: the noosphere.

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<sup>89</sup> This is an example of how stories can be subtly changed to increase dramatic intensity. In the slideshow presentation I give, I describe this episode and claim that I actually tied the rock to the string and told myself to drop the rock. Only when my mind - imagining the result - refused to tell my hands to let go did I change tactics and tie the string to the table leg. Interestingly, after telling that story a number of times, I had come to believe it myself until I edited the passage in the journal.

<sup>90</sup> Magellanic Oystertcher: *Haematopus leucopodus*.

<sup>91</sup> Puer is the face of the soul that is boyish, spirited in a way that is perfectly depicted in the image of a male child or young man. Because the puer attitude is so unattached to things worldly, it isn't surprising to find it prevalent in religion and in the spiritual life. For example, there is the story of Icarus. One way to understand this story is to see it as the puer putting on the wings of spirit and becoming birdlike as a way of getting out of labyrinthine life. Anyone can

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turn to religion or spiritual practice as a way out of the twists and turns of ordinary living. We feel the confinement, the humdrum of the everyday, and we hope for a way to transcend it all.

<sup>92</sup> More correctly, smoke descending instead of rising is caused by an inversion.

<sup>93</sup> Lee Gass has pointed out that Cat may have liked to be with me rather than hated to be alone.

<sup>94</sup> See Interlude 9.

<sup>95</sup> Ashy-headed Goose: *Chloephaga poliocephala*.

<sup>96</sup> See Interlude 7, note 14.

## Interlude 7

### Ken Wilber's Integral Philosophy

**Spirit slumbers in nature, awakens in mind, and finally recognizes itself as Spirit in the transpersonal domains.**  
(Wilber, 1996, p. 246)

**Science is clearly one of the most profound methods that humans have yet devised for discovering *truth*, while religion remains the single greatest force for generating *meaning*. Truth and meaning, science and religion; but we still cannot figure out how to get the two of them together in a fashion that both find acceptable.**  
(Wilber, 1998a, p. 3)

I encountered the work of Ken Wilber not long after finishing undergraduate degrees in biology and psychology. At the time I felt a deep conflict between the scientific knowledge I had internalized and my personal journey of exploration. Wilber's vision provided a broad and deep conceptual map on which I could locate many of the fractious thoughts and feelings squabbling in my mind and heart and soul and so helped to resolve inner conflict.

I have since studied several of his books with mixed feelings. For me he is a courageous thinker who attempts to embrace, balance, and synthesize everything he encounters in the world. He reads enormously and his passion is to develop an overarching conceptual system: a single unified theory of knowledge that celebrates both diversity and wholeness. In *A Theory of Everything*, Wilber writes:

I therefore sought to outline a philosophy of universal integralism. Put differently, I sought a world philosophy - or an integral philosophy - that would believably weave together the many pluralistic contexts of science, morals, aesthetics, Eastern as well as Western philosophy, and the world's great wisdom traditions. Not on the level of details - that is finitely impossible; but on the level of orienting generalizations ... a holistic philosophy for a holistic Kosmos, a genuine Theory of Everything.

(p. 38)

Wilber dances gracefully and plods pedantically from positivist science to hermeneutics and aesthetics, from evolution of the individual (physical, psychological, spiritual) to evolution of culture, from body to mind to spirit. He also brings the insight that arises from personal spiritual practice to his work: when discussing spirituality, he is not merely speculating, but speaking from his own direct experience as a Zen practitioner. This gives him a broader and deeper perspective than I find in many other writers.

In many academic circles Wilber is not highly regarded, if not unknown: perhaps because he is not fully credentialed in the academic community; perhaps because he sometimes reads like an arrogant zealot; perhaps because authors he bitingly criticizes often claim they do not recognize themselves in what he says about them; perhaps because in his effort to synthesize everything into a unified theory he lumps together apparently disparate ideas and sets his own vision above all others.

In other circles - transpersonal psychology, East/West studies, meditation groups, and popular readers - he is sometimes seen as a guru. I try to consider what he says with an open heart and uncertain mind. I find his model to be extremely useful, especially if I remind myself to approach it as metaphor. My purpose here is not to attack or defend the model he proposes, nor to focus on an analysis of it as a metaphysical theory. I present it as a framework I sometimes use to open and organize the space of my lived experience. I will briefly discuss three major strands that weave through Wilber's work:

1. Evolutionary, developmental perspective
2. Hierarchy/holarchy theory
3. Multi-faceted ontology and pluralist epistemology

These are not the only major themes in his work, but they are the three that have been most important to my own thinking.

### **Strand One: Evolutionary and Developmental Perspective**

Wilber's evolutionary perspective is not limited to biological change, but encompasses consciousness and culture as well. Individual psycho-spiritual development is explicitly recognized to take place within an evolving cultural context. Consciousness and culture interact and impact each other. The cultural matrix supports and constrains

capacity for personal development, and is also a reflection of the stage of psycho-spiritual development of the members (Wilber, 1979, 1981). Since my project focuses on personal lived experience, I will direct this discussion primarily to the individual's stages of development.

Wilber follows Piaget's model of the stages of cognitive development from infant (sensorimotor), to child (preoperational), to youth (concrete operational), to adult (formal operational) (Wilber, 1995, chap. 5 and 6; Piaget, 1977). Wilber (1981, p. 23) argues that these stages correspond to Gebser's depiction of cultures as primarily archaic, magic, mythic, and mental, and analyzes the characteristic lived experience (and world view) that emerges and dominates at each stage of the individual's (and culture's) development. Wilber then extends the model past Piaget's final stage of the rational thinking ego (formal operational) and into transpersonal spiritual stages. The whole process is one of decentering from egoism.<sup>97</sup>

An infant at the sensorimotor (archaic) stage begins the journey experientially embedded in the physical environment with no sense of a separate body; the world and self are one. Since the infant does not experience itself as part of something greater, the unity is defined as archaic. Its own experience is all there is. In the preoperational (magic) stage, the baby differentiates her body from the external world, but thoughts and emotions are not identified with the body or an "I." The child's desires and thoughts seem to be reflected in everything. She cries for milk, and it magically appears.

When the child enters the concrete operational (mythic) stage the world is no longer controlled magically by the personal desires of the child, but rather is controlled by mythic, non-human figures: Gods and Goddesses. These figures are very real, since at this stage thought processes are still concerned with concrete objects and behaviours. The primary identity of the individual as well as her personal efficacy arises through relationship to these powerful Others.

Piaget, among others, saw the formal operational (rationality) stage to be the culmination of human development. The universe is experienced as obeying cause and effect physical laws which are understood by means of logic and reason. The processes of the material world and the collective activity of the human community constitute all of

reality. Personal efficacy results from discovering physical and social laws and using this knowledge to predict (and manipulate) activity of the material and social world. In the West, development of a healthy, autonomous ego is the generally accepted hallmark of maturity.

Wilber, citing mystics from various traditions as well as some Western psychologists, argues that humans have the potential to move beyond the rational into spiritual domains (1995, chap. 7 and 8). Also see Goldstein (1983), James (1958), Krishnamurti (1968), Smith (1991), Suzuki (1970), Tart (1973), Underhill (1930), Varela et al. (1991), Watts (1958). In continuing to grow toward personal and spiritual maturity the child, youth, adult (may) re-integrate herself experientially with the surrounding physical, emotional, and cognitive matrix. True spiritual growth is not *back* into pre-rational myth, magic or oceanic oneness, but *forward* through rationality to trans-personal identification with all forms of life and finally with pure Spirit.<sup>98</sup> This identification is radically different from the original experience of oceanic oneness in which the infant is not only one with, but also the center of everything.

A critical difference between the two is that in the trans-personal state there is the dual awareness of the decentered self as both individual and one with the All. This is the balance of differentiation and integration. The self is experienced - from a non-self-centered perspective - as one of multiple manifestations of Life rather than as the center around which all else revolves and as identical with the All. Self-centered identity is surrendered to identifying the self-system as part of Something Greater. Freedom is based in discipline rather than in self-indulgence. The vehicle for this journey is not infantile fantasy, romantic imagination, or rational thought, but introspection, meditation and contemplation.

Wilber's developmental approach is useful in exploring the confusion about different personal experiences and conflicting cultural claims. He insists it is vital to include the stages of cognitive development in analysis of, and claims for the validation of, non-rational experience. He is vehement in his discussion of what he calls the *pre/trans fallacy*, and claims it is a common and serious mistake to conflate all non-rational experience into a single state of consciousness; to confuse pre-rational with trans-rational stages of development.

Thinkers who value the rational mind above all else tend to see all non-rational experience as regressive; suspect at best and psychotic at worst. On the other hand, much new age spirituality, and anti-modern romanticism decries the rational mind as corrupt and anti-life - a developmental dead end - and celebrates any and all non-rational experience as spiritually significant.<sup>99</sup> Wilber refuses to deny or glorify the value of any experience from any stage of development. They are all vital to our full human experience. But he insists on the importance of differentiating pre-rational experience from trans-rational experience in any examination of spirituality and truth claims, and accuses the Romantic philosophers of sliding down the slippery descending path into pre-rational emotionality and mistaking it for trans-rational spiritual awareness.

### **Strand Two: Hierarchy/Holarchy Theory**

The second strand is hierarchy/holarchy theory. Wilber claims that a web of life perspective that rejects all organizational hierarchy is reductionist. He sees the universe as a hierarchy of holons; a holarchy.<sup>100</sup> Each “thing” exists within and is part of some larger whole and is itself the context for and composed of smaller “things.” The world is neither holistic nor particulate, but holonic: wholes/parts. There is not a fundamental particle that is itself not made of yet smaller particles, nor a single over-arching whole that is, itself, not part of some greater whole. It is not “turtles all the way down,” it is holons. The most useful image for holarchy is not a ladder, but a set of nested concentric circles. Each larger circle transcends and includes the smaller circles within.

New qualities, constraints and difficulties emerge at each new level of the holarchy. Each part/whole must balance its own autonomy needs with the requirement that it cooperate with other holons. If a subholon fails to maintain autopoietic organization<sup>101</sup> it will merge with the surrounding matrix and cease to exist. This could have consequences on the larger holon to which it belongs. If, on the other hand, a subholon fails to remain structurally coupled with other subholons or dominates their relative autonomy, their function and the function of the larger holon are likely to be seriously disrupted resulting in widespread problems. This in turn will be detrimental to the subholon causing the imbalance.



At each new level of organization, differentiation and integration must be balanced or disorganization will result. Hydrogen and oxygen atoms must both retain and alter their structure to become water. A cell must maintain its own integrity but also participate in the common function of the tissue it supports. An organ functions as a semi-autonomous unit integrated into the more inclusive organism. The citizen must balance the agency of personal autonomy with social participation.

I do not wish to defend holarchy as the reified essential structure of the universe - although Wilber sometimes does - but to suggest it as an organizational metaphor. Let's return to cognitive development as an example.

In social development there is the risk that fragile personal identity can be swamped and the individual lost in the social collective. At the other extreme, there is the risk that the self will become inflated and equate its own finite being with the whole (Jung, 1959). The challenge is to dance a shifting path between these two extremes. Individual cognitive development requires that we transcend and integrate the lower stages of development into our current experience. On the one hand we can become stuck at any stage of development or can regress to a more "primitive" level. On the other hand we can transcend but repress and deny the energy and value of all the previous stages.

Wilber makes a number of interesting claims:

1. The root pathology of modernism is repression of the power and value of earlier stages of development. The modern experience is largely disembodied - rational mind cut off from emotions, physical body, and surrounding world.
2. Much so-called new age spirituality is not an ascending movement beyond the rational into the spiritual, but a descending regressive return to pre-rational consciousness which denies rather than transcends and integrates modern rationality.<sup>102</sup>
3. Fundamentalist religion is stuck in pre-rational mythic consciousness.
4. Honouring and integrating earlier stages of development (calling up hidden magic, celebrating myth and ritual, sinking into physical sensation) is healthy and necessary as a therapeutic correction, as long as we do not become trapped there and mistake those pre-rational experiences for trans-rational spiritual awareness.<sup>103</sup>
5. The noosphere is not part of the biosphere, but just the opposite: the bios is part of the noosphere.<sup>104</sup>

### **Strand Three: Multi-faceted Ontology and Epistemological Pluralism**

A third strand of Wilber's vision can be short-handed to "Kosmos cannot be reduced to Cosmos." Kosmos is the full range of experience of all sentient beings: physical, mental, spiritual.<sup>105</sup> Cosmos is the material aspect of the world. While all experience is embodied in the physical world, purely physicalist explanations cannot account for all facets of experience. The material world is the domain which positivist science undertakes to explore, measure, and explain. This is appropriate, but problems arose in the modern moment when positivist science began to insist it could measure and grasp all that is real through the monological epistemology of physical empiricism. Everything, it was claimed, is or eventually will be reduced to and explained by physical laws.<sup>106</sup>

When neuroscientists realized that non-material aspects of the world (experiences of mind and spirit) have physical correlates in the physical processes of the brain, it was sometimes assumed that the only valid and necessary procedure is to study the physical processes and ignore the qualitative experience of consciousness itself. This approach tends to devalue or ignore those aspects of experience that do not have an observable physical location. As a result interior experience of qualities such as beauty, love, compassion, awe, and meaning which cannot be measured, lose substance and are neglected or relegated to the domains of aesthetics and religion.<sup>107</sup>

The humanities and more recently the social sciences, feeling under attack, struck back by demonstrating that positivism, with its dream of discovering objective reality, really is dreaming. All experience and knowledge has been shown to be context dependent and so the stories that science tells are just as subjective as any expressions of personal meaning. Pretty much any story is as good as any other, and anyone who disagrees is hopelessly naive.<sup>108</sup>

Wilber argues that the relativist attitude carried to an extreme is as narrow and reductionist as is positivism. Instead of all experience being reduced to the physical, the empirical, physical world is now relegated to the status of a "mere human construction." A more balanced view is that our experiential<sup>109</sup> world arises through relationship: both the psychosocial relationship among humans and the psychophysical relationship

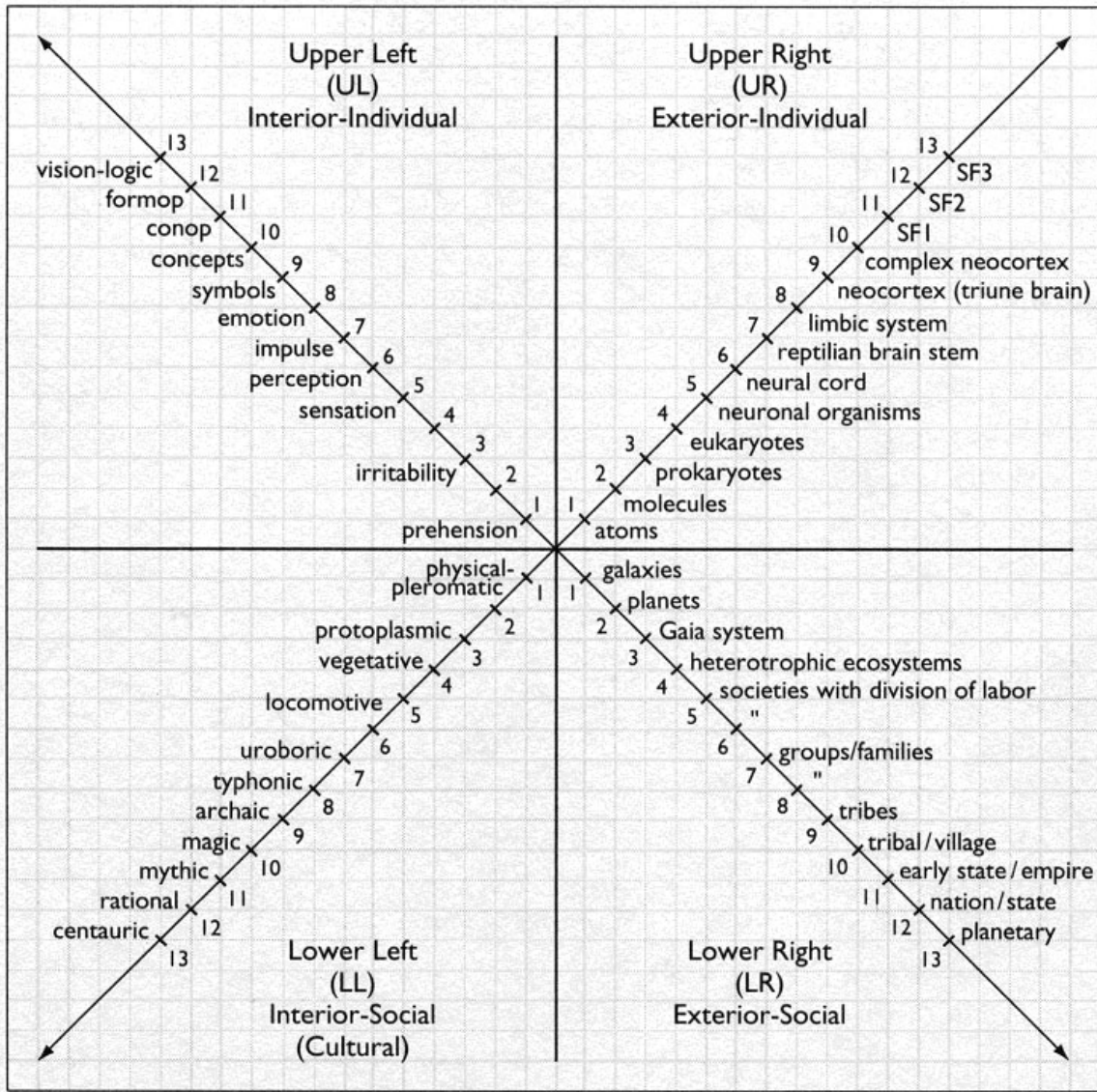
between humans and the material world. The physical world constrains, but does not determine, our experience. At the same time, our relationship with the physical world shapes, but does not determine, the behaviour of that world and the aspects of that behaviour we are able to perceive.<sup>110</sup>

Instead of arguing about objectivity and subjectivity, realism and constructivism, a richer way of living in the world is to value as many aspects of it as possible from various perspectives. Simplistically, the perception of any phenomenon has three important aspects: material, aesthetic and moral. We can question whether our interpretation is true, beautiful, and good. This opens up a great deal of space for exploration without the need to negate any aspect of experience. It does not deny the possibility for contextualized *objectivity*, yet acknowledges the vital importance of lived experience and moral values.<sup>111</sup>

### **Four Quadrants Model**

Wilber's four quadrant model (Figure 2, following page) is an attempt to represent these different aspects of experience as a geometric space. The diagonal lines represent the hierarchic evolutionary development of holarchy in each quadrant. They show cognitive and cultural development as well as increased physical complexity through time. The grid is divided into four quadrants, each representing a different aspect of experience. The upper two quadrants represent the singular aspects of experience, the lower two the collective. The physical aspects of the world available to the senses directly or through mechanical extensions are located on the right. This is the domain of empirical measurement.<sup>112</sup> The Upper Right groups holarchies of physical individuals: atoms, molecules, cells, organisms, central nervous systems, neo cortices. The Lower Right represents collectives of physical individuals: solar systems, ecosystems, social systems in various stages of development.

### Wilber's Four Quadrant Model



From Sex, Ecology, Spirituality by Ken Wilber, © 1995, 2000.  
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Figure 2

The right hand side represents the external empirical world of measurable entities. This is the quantitative, physical aspect of the world: the Cosmos. The left side shows the qualitative, experiential or internal aspect of the Kosmos. The upper two quadrants are individual and the lower two are collective. Diagonal lines represent four types of nested hierarchies or holarchies. Each larger holon (moving out from the center) transcends and includes the previous ones. All four interwoven aspects (More correctly, they are not separate or distinct except as a conceptualization.) are manifest in all phenomena. I prefer to approach this model as a metaphor which I use to stretch and organize my cognitive space.

For me, the left hand quadrants are most interesting. These show the inner aspects of the world - the domain of meaning. The Upper Left represents singular interior awareness. This holarchy is made up of the stages of cognitive development I discussed previously. Subjective perception of any experience will depend on the individual's structure of consciousness. Traditionally, this has been the domain of psychology, the spiritual path, and of aesthetics. From the perspective of a dualistic worldview, mind and soul are not seen as grounded in the physical form (brain) or in the cultural matrix. They exist independently and are unaffected by conditions in the material world. Because of this disembodiment, little effort has been made, until recently, to integrate these inner experiences with aspects of the world represented by the other quadrants.<sup>113</sup>

The Lower Left quadrant is the collective experiential reality of a community of individuals: the intersubjective worldview - shared cultural meaning; collective good. It is within this context that individual lived experience of the Upper Left quadrant arises and is interpreted. The holarchy here is of cultural progression.

This is one place where Wilber runs afoul of cultural relativists who insist it is impossible to judge one culture to be more or less advanced than another. Each must be judged solely within its own historical and ecological setting. The only criterion for judgment, they claim, is whether the culture is viable on its own terms; whether it continues to survive. I have used this argument myself. But, as Wilber points out, this is reducing Kosmos to Cosmos. Quality of the internal experience of cultural members is ignored, and no moral judgment addressing justice or ethical values is applied. The only aspect of a culture that is considered is its continued physical existence. Certainly physical survival is necessary, but among those that are successful, can valid judgments be made about the values of different cultures; about their stage of development? Are some morals and ethics universally better than others?<sup>114</sup>

It is interesting to try to locate the research of anthropologists in this schema. Researchers working in the Lower Right quadrant focus on the external form and function of the social unit. They ask, for example, what is the structure and function of religion? How does it consolidate the community, resist disorder, and enhance survival? From this perspective, there is little need to enter into dialogue with the members of the

community. Observation is required. An ethnographer is more likely to be interested in the cultural experience of community members. Rather than questioning the structure and function of religion, she will attempt to understand the meaning of religion in the lives of the people. How does it give meaning to and create a context for them to understand their living? An autoethnographer might explore and describe his own religious experience and perhaps his experience of his brothers and sisters.

The four quadrants are not separate and distinct from each other. In every moment of experience all aspects are present. No matter how positivist the orientation, it is simply not possible to exclude the cognition of the observer shaped by the social and cultural conditions of the scientific community that constrains and supports it.<sup>115</sup> Nor is it possible to ignore the values and personal responsibility of the scientist. All knowledge, even public knowledge, is first personal knowledge (Polanyi, 1958). It is equally important to recognize that even the most personal, spiritual experience occurs in a physical and cultural context.

I want to end this essay by reiterating what I see as the power of Wilber's work.<sup>116</sup> His vision of the world is complex and exciting. It is more inclusive and speaks more clearly to my own lived experience than any other I am familiar with. I will discuss some of the problems I have with his approach in Interlude 9.

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<sup>97</sup> Transformation is, I think, the clearest definition of spiritual growth. Without personal transformation there is no real spiritual understanding. There may be intellectual understanding of what spiritual growth is said to entail, but not spiritual knowledge. This is not esoteric, but analogous to the difference between conceptual knowledge and body knowledge. Knowing the theory of riding a bicycle or hearing a description of the process is not the same as climbing on and going for a ride. Nor does knowing how to ride assure one of the ability to describe it to another or to understand the process intellectually.

Transformation is a slippery word. What does it mean in pragmatic terms? While different spiritual traditions disagree in many of their teachings, I believe they hold at least one thing in common: the direction of growth is toward integration and wholeness. Different traditions may seek union or identification with True Self, Nature, God or Pure Formless Spirit. However, all agree on the need for the ego to surrender its apparent, self-centered autonomy and find its place in a larger Reality. Only here can one find the harmony of peace, joy and love.

<sup>98</sup> There is disagreement about the supposed stages of higher consciousness. Combs (2000) cites the traditional Zen teaching "Before enlightenment, chopping wood and carrying water; after enlightenment, chopping wood and carrying water. Nothing special, things just are what they are." to support his claim that while there is certainly transcendent experience, there are not higher stages or structures of cognition. It is my personal experience that the transformation from

structured, rational mind is not into another static structure of consciousness, but into a flow of integrated perspectives that moves effortlessly from depth to depth.

<sup>99</sup> There are many examples of mistaking pre-rational regression for trans-rational spirituality. A classic one is the new age practice of adopting the feel-good trappings of Eastern religion or Native spirituality as somehow pure and noble in and of themselves. While any serious spiritual practice can lead to trans-rational experience, it requires effort and time.

Christianity offers accessible examples. The analytic study of theology is a rational activity. Prayer, meditation and self-surrender to the will of God is spiritual practice. Fundamentalist acceptance of the creation myth in face of scientific evidence to the contrary is pre-rational. Believing in and praying for personal benefit to the historical figure of Jesus who now sits at the right hand of God is mythical and narcissistic. A classic example is when opposing sides in an armed conflict pray to the same God to destroy their enemies. Pre-rational prayer asks God to "Give me what I want for myself." Trans-rational prayer asks God to "Help me know and accept Your will for me." Believing that the actual wine and wafer are somehow the blood and body of Christ is magical. Praying for eternal personal life in a physical heaven with angels flying around playing harps is magical/mythical. Yet all these beliefs, if approached as metaphorical windows with spiritual significance, can be vital aspects of trans-rational spirituality. Jung (1964) clearly differentiates between treating the cross, for example, as both a manifestation of and a transparent opening into transcendent Spirit and treating it as an opaque magical end in itself.

<sup>100</sup> Wilber (1998b, p. 67) credits Arthur Koestler with coining the term holon.

<sup>101</sup> See Note 12, Interlude 6. Wilber uses and extends Maturana and Varela's (1987) notion to include culture. If the organism fails to maintain its own autopoietic organization it will disintegrate from within. If its structural coupling with the surrounding environment breaks down, it will no longer obtain necessary energy and material to maintain itself and will also disintegrate. The disintegration can take place physically, biologically, or psycho spiritually. While Wilber does not use these terms in exactly the way I do, I think the usage is compatible. A holon must maintain both internal integrity and external integration. It must transcend and integrate the sub-holons which make it up.

<sup>102</sup> Beginning from where most of us find ourselves in our actual lives, there is common agreement on the need for integration of our fragmented selves. Wilber (1979) and Goldstein and Kornfield (1987) describe the progression of dualities the mind creates. The primary division is between self and other: subject and object. We separate ourselves from the environment. The second level of dualism is between mind and body: the sense of a separate, disembodied ego within the total organism. Then the mind itself fragments into a socially acceptable persona - our preferred self image - and what Jung (1959) called the shadow - all those elements of mind we discard through repression, projection, etc. The path of reintegration begins when we slowly, and often painfully, own those aspects of ourselves we have previously rejected. We learn to see ourselves as we are and not as we would like ourselves to be. Then we work to reintegrate body and mind. Finally we surrender to the lived awareness that we are truly One with the world around us. This does not mean that we dissolve permanently back into the experience of oceanic oneness, but rather are free to move between the different levels of experience depending on what is appropriate to the situation. Also see Wilber (1995).

In loosening the grasp of the rational mind, there are two possible paths one can follow - ascending and descending. The integration of the two is important if one is not to become seduced by a materialistic worldview in which only the physical/biological is real, or seduced by a transcendent worldview in which disembodied Spirit is the only reality.

<sup>103</sup> Highlighting these potential risks tends to complicate matters. It is more comfortable - and perhaps more skilful - to stay with experience as it arises and not worry too much about pinning down whether it is this stage or that, pre or trans, transcendent or regressive. If one gets lost in this kind of questioning, the spiritual journey can become confusing, and a guide, who knows the territory, might be useful. However, with all the conflicting teachings afoot in our culture today (and not just our culture today, "Beware of false prophets," warns the Bible: (Mark 13:22) one must still rely on one's own judgment. Honesty with self and others is vital. Nowhere is the warning "Garbage In, Garbage Out" more important than in using the rational mind to examine personal experience and behaviour. If the rational mind were our only compass, we might be lost once we transcend its reach into the spiritual stages. But Wilber, citing mystics who have traveled the path, reassures that there is some presence or power, a strange attractor, pulling us to fulfill our inherent potential for growth. It is sometimes called the Omega Point (Teilhard de Chardin, 1961) which is not a finite point, but rather the Spiritual Presence that is both the source and ground of all being. The journey is, for Wilber, not a process of creation as such, but the re-discovery of ontological spirit.

<sup>104</sup> Wilber delineates three basic domains of existence: physiosphere (physical world), biosphere (biological world), noosphere (mind or cultural world). He then goes on to make the radical claim that human culture is not part of the biosphere, but just the opposite. This statement is deeply counter-intuitive and at odds with the environmentalist stance that human culture develops and continues to exist within the biosphere.

<sup>105</sup> This integrative approach is grounded in the notion of the Great Chain of Being: the fundamental insight of the Perennial Philosophy which, Wilber claims, forms the core of all the world's major religions. It is a hierarchical system, the most basic levels of which are body, mind, and spirit. In different systems of thought these domains are subdivided further and often non-living material makes up the first level. While the conceptual content of each of these domains varies among religions, the basic structural organization is always similar ... except in our scientific culture which often denies spirit and occasionally mind too.

Each domain or level of the hierarchy emerges through, is grounded in, and subsumes the lower ones. Thus a living organism finds its existence only in a physical body which is constrained by physical laws. Yet it also has emergent qualities - capacities and needs - which are not present in inanimate material. So too, mind only arises and is embodied in a biological being. To learn about each of these levels, we must use different faculties, what Wilber calls Eyes of the flesh (observation of the physical world), the mind (use of reason), and the spirit (contemplation).

To examine the physical we use our perceptual senses. Exploring the mind requires a different approach. Humans, for example, cannot be understood simply by using observational methods adequate to the physical world. To understand the experience of logical thinking, emotional quality, and intentionality, we need to open ourselves to the lived experience in question and at the same time participate in dialogue with other minds. Language is the tool for such investigation.

In exploring spirit, we also need to utilize the appropriate method: contemplation/meditation. Thinking about Spirit will not get the job done; we must surrender to direct experience. This is not unique to the domain of the Spirit. In all exploration, it is necessary to give ourselves to the direct study of the subject in question. This is a fundamental characteristic of science. If I want to understand how the physical world works, I can first hypothesize to orient my exploration, but finally I must look for myself. Otherwise I am just speculating.

<sup>106</sup> One example of this is E. O. Wilson's (1975) exciting pronouncement that all the arts and humanities will eventually become branches of biology. Another is the approach of radical behaviourism (Peterson, 1988) which denied the functional efficacy of cognition to influence



behaviour: we are conscious, but consciousness is an epiphenomenon and does not directly influence behaviour. This is not a trivial issue. If we accept that we are embodied in a material world that obeys physical cause and effect laws, then if we are to have what is normally thought of as conscious free will, this free will must derive its power from some non-physical source. We are stuck with some form of dualism. This contradicts current evolutionary theory which is based on a purely physical explanation. The existence of emergent properties is now used to finesse this difficulty, but whether free will is deposited from above or arises from below makes little difference. It seems as though dualism is alive among us. Barbour (1990) and de Quincey (2002) argue that the notion of panexperientialism allows for downward causation. As I understand it, matter behaves differently depending on its context. Atomic processes, for example, are not the same in a cell as they are in a rock. In this way, the larger whole exerts influence on the behaviour of its parts. (Also see Interlude 6.)

This is one of those wonderful paradoxes. Seeing ourselves from the outside as physical creatures, the notion of freedom makes no sense. From the inside it is obvious that we make decisions, and it is hard to imagine living with the proposition that our own freedom is illusory. When we question the existence of freedom, the foundations of our value system become shaky. This is apparent in much of the social debate today. Who or what is responsible for crime, the individual or the social matrix? From a psychological rather than from a purely physical perspective, the problem remains. It seems clear enough from the inside that I can do what I want to do, but from the outside it is not at all clear that I am free to choose what I want.

<sup>107</sup> What is needed to correct this imbalance is epistemological pluralism. There are different ways of knowing the different domains of experience: empirical observation for the physical realm; logic-based, rational thought and narrative for the mental realm; mediation/contemplation for the spiritual realm. Here again Wilber's model has been useful to me as a space stretcher and organizer.

<sup>108</sup> Wilber (1995) and Barbour (1990) argue against such extreme relativism. They point out that if this approach is followed to an extreme, not only are objective facts shown to be subject to interpretation, but the empirical content is ignored entirely which leaves only interpretation. This position demonstrates internal inconsistency. It states that there is no universal truth and that all scientific explanation is a manifestation of power, yet it is proposed as universally true and not in itself a simple manifestation of power. It may be important to differentiate between natural and social science here, in that the social world can more easily be shown to be constructed than can the non-human world.

<sup>109</sup> "Experiential world" and "world as experienced" refer to our conscious lived experience.

<sup>110</sup> Varela et al. (1991) elucidate this perspective as enactive epistemology. What we experience is not an internalized vision of some objective ontological reality, nor is it purely subjective and constructed in the individual mind.

Varela (1999, p. 1) sums up this perspective as: "What we take to be objective is what can be turned from individual accounts into a body of regulated knowledge. This body of knowledge is inescapably in part subjective, since it depends on individual observation and experience, and partly objective, since it is constrained and regulated by the empirical, natural phenomena."

The enactive orientation is not confined to exploring natural phenomena. In discussing literary theory Culler (1997, p. 67) writes: "The meaning of a work is not what the author had in mind at some point, nor is it simply a property of the text or the experience of a reader. Meaning is an inescapable notion because it is not something simple or simply determined. It is simultaneously an experience of a subject and a property of a text. It is both what we understand and what in the text we try to understand. Arguments about meaning are always possible, and in that sense

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meaning is undecided, always to be decided, subject to decisions which are never irrevocable. ... Meaning is context-bound, but context is boundless.”

<sup>111</sup> Following Wilber (1998b, p. 18), I want to suggest that all valid knowing (material, mental, spiritual) can be grounded in some form of scientific inquiry. Such inquiry has three essential components: 1. an explicit practice or method of how to proceed (if you want to know this, do this); 2. direct apprehension of data in the domain brought forth by the stated practice or method (when I follow this procedure, I experience this); 3. communal confirmation (or disconfirmation) by other trained practitioners (is there commonality in our experiences, and if not, why not?).

What does this mean for non-material experience such as belief or love or awe? Does the existence of these resist becoming public knowledge? I don't think so, but the focus shifts from content to process. If I claim to believe that God exists, my belief does not establish the existence of God, but the existence of my belief may count as valid knowledge. Still, I might not really have such a belief. I might be mistaken or unwilling to confront my fears and doubt. If I wish my belief to become valid, public knowledge, you might invite me to examine and discuss what I claim to have observed in myself. In such a case no public observation of my experience is possible. Acceptance of my claim will be based on the community's belief that I am truthfully reporting that inner experience, the internal consistency of the report with my behaviour, and the reasonableness of the claim.

From the perspective of epistemological pluralism there is no need that we should all agree that I actually have faith in God or even that such faith is possible. If we are willing to consider the world to be deeply ambiguous, perhaps no single, valid description is desirable or possible.

<sup>112</sup> I could use the whole dissertation to discuss this statement, but prefer to posit the possibility of “objective” measurement once a collectively accepted context and methodology is determined.

<sup>113</sup> Recent work by Varela and others (1991; 1999) focuses on bridging the gap between the two upper quadrants. How does the conscious experience of awe or compassion or anger, for example, correspond to observable changes in the physical substrate of the brain? Critical theory (Kincheloe and McLaren, 1994) may investigate how cultural context impacts the consciousness of individuals. In *Up From Eden* Wilber develops the links between evolving cultural forms and developmental of stages of consciousness.

<sup>114</sup> The question troubles me. If I claim that all individual and collective human behaviour is valid and go no further, I am lying. I simply do not believe this. On an absolute level, to quote Aldous Huxley, (from Wilber, 2005), “[T]here is the sense that in spite of Everything - I suppose this is the Ultimate Mystical conviction - in spite of Pain, in spite of Death, in spite of Horror, the universe is in some way All Right, capital A, capital R.” But from a relative, personal perspective, I deeply believe that individual freedom and mutual respect are preferable to oppression and fear. Yet I see no way (except to anoint my own personal preferences) to prove to someone who espouses fear-based social control that my way is superior. I can only own and honour what seems right to me and trust that the natural unfolding of the human spirit will eventually lead us both to the heart of the matter. This attitude of trust requires both courage and mindfulness.

Each of us, I think, uses the form of persuasion that corresponds to our development. If a person or culture is pre-rational, then physical or psychological fear/force will be used to coerce. Rational mind offers reason to persuade. The trans-rational individual will trust the beauty of love to transform the experience of the other. It is difficult to respond to intimidation and pain with reason or love. But if we respond to violence with violence, not only have we failed to decrease the violence in the world, but have actually increased it with our own acts.

<sup>115</sup> As Maturana and Varela (1987, p. 27) put it: “Everything said is said by Someone.”

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<sup>116</sup> How can I integrate Wilber's rational model into itself? The model is a product of the rational mind at the formal operations stage of development just as a myth is a product of the concrete operational mind. Wilber (1995, p 236-241), while showing deep respect for the work of Joseph Campbell, argues that he is wrong in his claim that myth is a source of true spirituality. He points out that Campbell acknowledges that 99.9 percent of believers take myths literally and so the deep meaning of the myth is lost on them. It is only when myth is approached as metaphor does it become a window into higher spiritual truths. Just so, says Wilber, and when this happens, the mind is no longer truly in the myth, but is appreciating and integrating the mythical quality from a higher (e.g. rational) stage of development.

I think it is consistent to treat Wilber's conceptualization in the same way. Taken literally, his model is inconsistent and acts as an anchor to prevent continued development. Only when approached as metaphor to be integrated into a wider perspective does it make spiritual sense. Rational thought, like myth and physicality, is vital to integrated development, but it is not the end of the path. To move beyond, we need to question the concrete notion of a path toward higher and more integrated being. Concern with cause and effect directionality must, sooner or later, give way to living here in the now. An important question is when is it appropriate for this to happen? Too soon and we drift aimlessly, too late and we ride at anchor imagining progress on a virtual sea. And, I need to acknowledge this analysis as metaphor too.

## September 2001

Meditate, live purely, be Quiet.  
 Do your work with mastery.  
 Like the moon,  
 come out from behind the clouds!  
 Shine.  
 (Buddha)<sup>117</sup>

9/1/01

No entry.

9/2/01

No entry.

9/3/01

Night: 41F/rainy/medium wind. The past days have been cloudy and raining on and off. Wind not fierce but strong enough to raise whitecaps. Haven't gone to Staines, but if the weather is the same tomorrow I might head over to see if it's calm enough to fish in the lee of the cliffs. Still have one meal of fish, and ice should last another week. Saturday I rigged up a plastic shelter over the boat in case I go exploring for more than one day and can't find a place to camp on the beach. Hope it works and I stay dry. Today I built a spray shield on the boat that I hope will keep me dry in rough water.

Continue to torment myself about making one or more long trips. I usually think in absolutist terms: either I go to the glacier or I don't go anywhere. Occasionally I remember I can find a middle way and go exploring for several nights to a closer place. Then I'm much more relaxed. Still no word from

Alejandra and I'm considering not checking email anymore. German will get here when he does.

Been spending more time sitting in the rain and wind at the point. Cat usually comes with me. Today I snuck away and went to sit alone in the woods. Incredible that it took so long to start doing that. Much quieter in there, very wet, and very green. Not a square inch of bare earth.

Started to consider where I might plant a garden. Maybe near the point: in the sun and out of the wind. Shoulders seem to be slowly improving. Tonight I took ibuprophen for first time in a few days. Solar panels are keeping up with my electricity use, and I hope I won't need the wind generator again. If I'd known how noisy it would be, I'd have bought two more solar panels instead.

Sweat yesterday as it was full moon and first Sunday of the month. Sweating is an important activity but it feels good that I don't need to do it again for a month. Gave thanks for my life and asked, again, for the courage and steadiness to keep working to accomplish whatever it is I came here to do. Getting clearer that I can't do it on my own - nor even figure out why I came. Nothing to do but ask for help and guidance.

Perhaps the darkness I'm so afraid of is not evil as such, but loss of control. Ego hanging on for dear life even though its need for control is killing me. Moments of surrender come and go, and perhaps one of the lessons I'm learning is that I can't depend on radical enlightenment experiences to change my way of being. It's a long process, a lot of work, and it may come to naught.

I'm reading parts of the Gaia book again; Varela at the moment. Much of what I've read lately I don't understand. Oh well.

Getting easier to tell the butter bellies apart. Don't know if my eyes are sharper or if the male's colour is changing with the coming of spring. They came to drink on the beach today, and after they went back to the water the immature eagle landed to score one of the fish heads I've been tossing down there. The

butter bellies didn't like that at all. Came charging back and chased the eagle away. Poor eagles, no one wants them around. They must scavenge eggs or attack the chicks.

Gave Cat a stern talking to this afternoon. You know the rules: don't cry, stay out of way when I'm working, stay out of cabin, stay off the food shelves, don't come up on my lap without being invited. So why do you keep fucking around and making it unpleasant for both of us? As soon as I asked I knew the answer: because he's a cat and that's what cats do - or at least what this cat does. The butter bellies do their territorial defence routine several times each day. Both pairs seem to know where the boundary is, so why not stop wasting time and energy defending it? Because that's not the way the world works. I don't believe science will ever really explain how the world actually is because the rational mind is not capable of doing so, yet in my personal life I become furious when the world doesn't behave in a logical way - which of course isn't very rational.

9/4/01

Night: 44F/calm/sea moving slightly/some stars and a misty moon. Late last night after writing I went out to the rock. Didn't really want to, but something urged me on. Soft mystic moonlight fell on a calm sea and snowy Staines cliffs. Sat a while - thoughts drifting through - over and over calling my mind back to my breath and to the sounds around me. Then one of those wandering thoughts woke me up. I've been trying to feel part of the community of life around me, and in that moment I realized, again, that I, myself, am already a community composed of bacteria, viruses, fungi, mites, and who knows what else. Each eukaryote cell in my body, according to Margulis (1987), is also a symbiotic community made up of different organelles that at one time were independent prokaryote cells.

In the past the thought of having all these critters living on, in, and with me - who are part of me - has given me a sense of disquiet, but last night I was

carried softly and gently into the flow of the world. Sacred indeed is everything. And me too, sacred. Soft glowing spirit everywhere, within and without.... No within or without. Slowly I'm relaxing and healing. Not the earthshaking transformation I'd expected, but the ebb and flow of solitude carrying me along.

I was reminded of sitting with a mummy in the Peruvian desert years ago. I'd read about the Buddhist practice of going to the charnel house to meditate on impermanence, and through my Christian goggles had interpreted that practice as a penance to face the hard fact of death. But with the mummy I felt a quiet sense of brotherhood and spaciousness; I too would go where he had gone, and my immediate concerns were not as all consuming as I usually experience them to be.

There was the same unexpected freedom last night as I realized that this me is not really just me. A sense of being woven into the flow of energy. Yes, I'm growing old and my body is beginning to deteriorate, but I'm healing too. Emotionally, spiritually, and physically.<sup>118</sup>

Just the other day I was thinking that I've finally developed the communications skills to be able to write and talk about spiritual experience - if I ever have something to say. Last night I realized there is no way I could describe it well. But that felt ok. I'm less concerned with trying to figure out how other people can easily find their way to a shift of consciousness. No theory or system can make it happen faster or easier. Like a child growing up, our spiritual lives need to be lived one day at a time.

I finally begin to understand what Wilber, Varela, and Maturana are talking about with hierarchy. In the past I've sensed the web of life as a unified field of sorts. Last night I sensed Life as myriad individual organisms each maintaining its own inner coherence and all of us organized into a hierarchy. Sweet the sense of belonging to a world of individual beings. Yet there was no sense of fragmentation. We were all still one flowing whole too.

There was just now a commotion of flailing wings outside. I hear them do this now and again, especially at night, and wonder if the otter is around. How do they ever sleep when they must always be on the lookout?

In spite of my experiences of opening to Spirit, my behaviour toward Cat does not seem to be improving. He got in the middle of my work today and I put him aside, he came back and I forcibly tossed him to the ground. No patience or compassion, but just "get the fuck out of my way while I'm trying to work." I lose my sense of Spirit and peace when I start to work. Get focused, start to rush, and become impatient and uptight.

It's like Cat is constantly testing the boundaries - or perhaps he's playing and teasing me. I'm told children always test the limits with their parents. Maybe that's just how the biological world works. Each organism expands until stopped by others around it; e.g. the continual territorial debate between the diving ducks. I've considered this before and recognized that if I don't limit myself, the world will limit me. Perhaps I live like I do because it avoids the world confronting and curtailing me. There is another way to look at this. Instead of feeling the world is confronting and limiting me, I could see it as engagement. The way I'm living now, I'm largely isolated - at least in my mind. Instead of withdrawing into myself, perhaps I can learn to engage without so much aggression and with less attachment to my own desires, goals, and plans. Ah God, this is stuff I should have learned when I was a kid.

Just noticed how odd it is to be typing on the laptop and pause to add wood to the fire. What a mix of ages and technologies. Went to Staines today and spray/wind shield worked like a charm. Stayed much warmer. When I sit on the seat I can just see over and only my face gets hit by the wind and spray. Fishing was poor. My shoulders and back are very sore from pulling up the anchor rock several times from almost 200 feet down. When I got back the tide was down and I had to haul the boat up a long way. No wonder I like to catch a bunch of fish when I go. I guess it can't be good fishing every day, but WHY NOT?



On the way back I was washed with a wave of restlessness. I wanted to go somewhere or do something, but I couldn't think of anyplace I want to go or anything I want to do. Not even make love. Restlessness. I might not really WANT to go exploring, but only feel I need to as part of the process of being here. Like going out to the rock at night. Something I feel called to do. I continue to prepare so I'll be ready if the weather improves and I decide to go. A few days ago I annotated the chart with the longitude and latitude of various prominent points along the route to the lake with the glacier so I'll be able to track my position on the map using GPS. Been watching the barometer more closely and can make no sense of the relationship between it and the weather.

9/5/01

Night: Woke to morning sun slanting through the window. Ah joy. Didn't expect it back to the cabin this soon. First sunny day in a week. Hung the wash out to finish drying. Cat and I sat lizard-like on the rock. Ah me, what a spring day: slight breeze, 50 degrees, clear sky, no bugs. Wanted to stay in the sun, but worked on boat instead so I'll be ready to go away for a couple days tomorrow if the weather holds. At the moment it doesn't look too good: barometer falling and sky clouding over.

In *Gaia* Varela says animals allow us to see the world they have created for themselves by their continuous structural coupling with the surrounding medium. That's a cool way to put it. It's not that they (we) create the physical suchness of the medium, but rather create their own world by choosing what aspects of the medium they will engage with. I see a good example of this in the butter belly diving ducks. Their behaviour allows me to "see" the boundary line that stretches across the shifting sea between their two territories. Without them to show me, I couldn't perceive it at all: indeed, it wouldn't exist. But now it does exist and is as real as the border between Countries - which I have always thought a stupid

illusion. But perhaps not. The process of establishing boundaries is apparently inherent to some animals' behaviour.

Interesting that when a question arises in my mind I often see the answer soon after. Today I saw the female butter belly sleep. She settled into a patch of kelp to keep from drifting, tucked her head under her wing, and dozed off. The male was feeding close by and seemed to keep watch.

9/6/01

Late night: 40F/cloudy/breeze/sea moving. Intuition last night was right on. Set clock for 7 a.m. and meditated. By 8 it was cloudy, a light breeze had come up, and small wavelets were washing the shore. Decided it was probably going to get rough and didn't prepare to go. Sure enough it got breezy. Headed to Staines for wood and to fish the high tide.

Part way across I realized it was much rougher than I'd expected, but kept going anyway. Blowing way too hard to fish, and the waves breaking on the beach were big enough that loading wood would have been a real hassle. So I bagged it. Whoa! I actually let it go and started home without even trying to fish or get wood. Just gave up. Stayed out in the rough water for a couple hours instead of coming straight home. Was worried I might not make it back. Need to test the motor when it's calm to see if it only misses when water is splashing up around it.

I'd thought that I've been projecting my general existential anxiety onto the motor - that it might die and leave me stranded. But I may actually be anxious with good reason. Motor doesn't sound right. Don't think I'll go too far until German gets here with the parts whenever that might be. Definitely not going anywhere unless the day is flat calm.

According to the chart, the area I want to go is about 20 miles north of here where a river flows into the sea from a small lake. There's a second lake a short distance further up river where a glacier seems to end. Both rivers

together look to be only a third of a mile long. The topographic map shows little altitude gain, so depending on how rough the country is I might be able to hike to the upper lake carrying the deflated kayak, or pull it inflated up the rivers. If I can't get to the glacier 70 miles north of here, perhaps I can get to this smaller closer one. Don't know whether it has a wall that shines blue and drops chunks of ice into the water, but I'd like to take a look.

Even if I go for only one night, it will take hours to prepare the gear since I might have to wait out a storm for days before I can make it back. I intend to leave Cat here with plenty of food. I imagine he'll hate being alone, but I worry that when I land somewhere he might not come back into the boat when it's time to move on.

Noticed last night how difficult it is to move beyond language. Not impossible, but language is very addictive. In part, meditation is about stepping outside the conceptual domain of thought.

9/7/01

Late night: 40F/cloudy with some stars/breeze/sea fairly calm. Last night was luxurious. Built a fire early and lay down for a nap; got up, ate, read a while, and had another nap; got up, read a while, and had another nap; got up, ate, read, and watched dawn come through the window into the warm cabin. Beautiful yellow and orange clouds over clear sharp mountains. Each time I woke from a nap the fire had burnt to coals but started easily again. Walked to the point and then came back to bed. Covered the sleeping pad with sheets, and for the first time since I've been here took off my long johns and slept naked.

Tonight is less peaceful. Started reading *Thoughts Without a Thinker* by Epstein, a Freudian psychiatrist and a long time Buddhist meditator. The book relates the two practices which is interesting and useful, but triggers all my

psychological stuff again. I'm sick of re-hashing the same old same old. Maybe that's the point. When I get sick enough of it, I may finally give it up.

In two weeks it will be spring equinox. How did that happen? Just yesterday it was winter solstice! Received an email from the national parks office that said, "Only a little time remains now," as though the main point is to be able to stay the full year. Been here seven months and have five to go, so I'm just over half way. But in one sense he's dead on. Time will begin to fly and there really is only a little left.

Ha! Saw the butter bellies screw today, and the one I thought was the male was on top. Cool. They had sex in the water and then head bobbed and preened for a while; he worked mostly on his wings and she concentrated on rearranging her ruffled tail feathers. Hope they nest where I can watch what they do.

Thompson, the editor of *Gaia*, criticizes E.O. Wilson for ignoring the individual and focusing on the selfish gene which he claims is an abstraction in the mind of the observer. But an individual is also abstracted from the flowing whole. And in some sense we do observe species, even though that designation may be an abstraction too.

There is a Zen koan: "If the many return to the One, to what does the One return?" If I think that returning to the One refers to the atoms and energy of the individual returning to the common flow of the universe, I'm mistaken because the flow is within Existence. I need to sense not only that which exists, but also that which does not. Emptiness. There is a much greater difference between zero and one than between one and infinity. And I need to take care not to reify nothing/emptiness/God into Something. That's the slip from zero to one.

Deep,  
     still,  
         pool in my mind.

Is this why  
     the quiet sea  
         beckons so?

Back at the university,  
     I made plans to write  
         a tale of solitude.

Here  
     bathed in Multiplicity  
         what tale can I tell?

Good intentions  
     swamped in my softening heart,  
         I'll return tail between my legs.

I sit on solid rock  
     as wind and sea move me.  
         I ply the clouded sky  
             as gull, as condor.

Late I sit  
     on solid rock,  
         sunk in a deep still pool.

And the sea mirrors my reflections.

### 9/8/01

Late night: 40F/strong winds/on and off rain. I just left the porch for the first time all day to go to outhouse. No place to go, nothing to do. Thought to work on boat but it's been rainy all day. Sat, read, and watched the butter belly ducks. The female is feeding much more than the male now; her crop huge and distended. The close pair had several strong interactions with the other pair and chased away the single intruder.<sup>119</sup>

When doing the ritual defence with the other pair, they all make noise and try to look as large as possible: the females stretch their necks up, and the males push their breasts out, rear back, and beat their wings to hold themselves out of

the water; both have tails up and spread. They sometimes charge but always turn away to show their white tails before actual contact, and then swim parallel to the boundary - male always between the female and the other pair. When intent on mayhem with an outsider, they attack silently, and sink low in the water or even dive as they go after the intruder.

I think she'll begin laying eggs soon. I wonder if she'll lay one a day and start to brood once the whole clutch is laid? Will they both brood to give each other a chance to feed, or will she do it all? Her feeding more than the male might be for energy to grow eggs, or to build reserves for when she's brooding. Will they guard the nest before they start to brood? If not, and I can find the nest, I might rob an egg or two for dinner. Yum. They probably wouldn't mind....

I wonder what happens if a male or female dies? Does the other continue to defend the territory and wait for a new mate to come along, or do they remain solitary, or do they leave to look for a new mate/territory? If I had started watching them 30 years ago, I might have done some banding and even perhaps a removal to see what happens. There are a bunch of questions I could ask, but in the meantime I'll just keep watching.

While they were feeding close to the beach, I could see the female under water - orange webbed feet fluttering to keep her at the bottom. I could also track her movement by the bubbles she exhaled. Later I watched her preen; bunches of down stuck to her bill and dangled down on both sides like a Fu Manchu moustache. What cool birds. I'm glad to have them for neighbours.

I feel frustrated and threatened by the wind - especially when I think about going on a long boat trip. One of the few places my ego can feel in control is with Cat. Stay off food shelves and kayak, out of cabin, don't cry. When he doesn't respect this, I'm angered and react strongly. At least that's how it felt today. The solution is to give up wanting to hold myself apart and needing to maintain control. This is what I want, but I'm afraid of the unknown and of death.

As far as I can tell, there is no way to predict the wind. Today was cloudy with a moderate wind from the northwest - as it has been for the past two weeks. Then tonight - barometer holding steady and not especially low - the wind slammed through and has now dropped off again.

*Thoughts without a Thinker* is good: clean, straightforward, and subtle. He's discussing the two false selves we all create: one is inflated and the other deflated - in Buddhist terms solid existence and solid non-existence. Before my first retreat I think I was pretty locked into and rebelling against the deflated self. Once I saw that and also saw the inflated mirror, I realized the lack of solid self and the impossibility of really knowing who we are. But I suspect that during the past 25 years I've been trying to maintain an inflated self a lot of the time. I can certainly feel myself flip back and forth here. When I'm successful in something I feel grand, and when I fail, I feel like shit. Back and forth. This is the exact dynamic the book describes. Happy day, I'm normal! Whew, it's pouring down rain.

I feel like I'm slowly settling into solitude: trying to be here without spending so much time worrying about the future and my social relations; trying to settle into the mind set that this is all there is and ever will be. Just this. Here and now.

9/9/01

No entry.

9/10/01

Night: 40F. Yesterday, Sunday, was a long empty day. Finished the Singer book and, as with the first time I read it, it left me feeling glum. Sundays are hard even though they are supposed to be my day of enjoyment and leisure. I'm trying to maintain open space so I can see what I find hard to deal with. At one

point I sank deeply into the feeling of emptiness and it opened out and transformed into love and peace. Anxiety, I think, transformed into joy. This seemed important at the time, but less so now. Only built a fire tonight even though the day was cold and rainy. One woodpile is almost gone and I can see I'll need more wood.

Emotions - like wind and rough sea - lose their ferocity when I go into them, but gain power if I hold them at bay. When I hide in the cabin, the wind threatens, if I go out, it's just wind. Instead of going out to transform the Wind into wind, I stayed inside with the anxiety the Wind triggered. But reason is important too: emotions, like the sea, can swamp me if I don't take care and remain alert.

Last night I got out the charts and marked the longitude and latitude for 18 points along the route to the glacier - just in case. As I was working on it, the wind shifted to the southwest and hammered the cabin. Everything was vibrating. I took it as a sign ... but I'm not sure of what. Was it that the wind will fuck me over if I go, or, since in spite of anxiety the cabin and I survived with no damage, that I shouldn't let my fear prevent me from going?

Today has been a day of sorrow and grief. I awoke this morning with that old feeling of not getting anywhere. Of going round and round in circles. I hear about people making progress in therapy and spiritual practice, but feel I've been at this shit for 35 years with little to show for it. Have pride and stubbornness prevented me from following a spiritual teacher, from going into intensive therapy, and caused me to waste my life?

I've told myself many stories over the years to justify my life as a social loser: life is a school, and I'm not here to be successful but to learn; I'm on the spiritual path; I've sacrificed everything to travel; I've been following my heart. But I'm coming to see that many people who follow their hearts have found or created successful careers in which they are alive and learning; and there are jobs that include travel.



So what is it with me? Am I such a coward I can't establish and defend a social identity and territory? Or so self-centered I can't be bothered to do what's required to find my place in the social world? Or have such low self-esteem I feel I have nothing to offer? But many people who are fucked up have successful careers. I've tried so hard to not be like my father, yet I've followed his footsteps in this. Shit, I'm 55 years old and feel my life is almost over and it's too late to change - even if I truly wanted to which I'm not sure I do. I've worked so hard to learn and stay alive, and fundamentally I've failed and am not far from where I began.

I know that just because you feel depressed (this doesn't really feel like depression, but more like despair whatever the difference might be) doesn't mean you're a loser. The feelings and thoughts are not to be believed. But since getting beyond such feelings has been a major focus in life, to still have them seems like an indication of failure. I feel like Sisyphus, and question why I've wasted my life doing this when it's clearly not going anywhere.

I've often felt before that I'm not doing whatever I'm supposed to be doing with my life. It is (it seems in this moment) what's kept me searching. I've also tried to stay with these feelings before instead of running off searching for the ideal place to be. But the strong sense of "Why bother?" saps my energy and prevents me from fully giving myself to whatever might allow me to be successful. This feeling is the rock. It takes all my energy to deal with the feeling and I have nothing left for productive activity. But if - as I've claimed for years - life is inherently meaningful if you live it fully, then this feeling of meaninglessness should be meaningful too - if I live it fully. Arghh. Useless circular crap. If such self-abuse doesn't help me relate to myself and to others more openly and lovingly, then it's just masturbation.

This afternoon I was washed with a wave of grief for Mom. I cried as I acknowledged to myself how much I loved her and she loved me, and how much I caused her to suffer by my inability to open up and be tender with her these past

years. I tried so hard, but each time I went to visit with good intentions I'd feel threatened, guard myself, and hold her away. Where did such hurt and rage come from? I have a dozen narratives to explain the family dynamic, but so what?

In my grief today, I also discovered shame. Have I ever really acknowledged how deeply ashamed of myself I am? Shame for who I am and who I am not. Especially my fear, weakness, and self-centredness. It feels like this awareness is a key, but how many times in the past have I felt I'd found the key, and still I'm stuck in front of a locked door that leads to integration, happiness, and success. I also have to admit that I was ashamed of Mom, and I'm ashamed of myself for this too. Feeling ashamed of someone who loves you must be one of the most hideous and damaging things you can do. And this is what I've done to all the women who have loved me. I don't know if I can't face shame of myself and so dump it on my mate, or if I really am ashamed of them. I do know that I believe Other people will judge me by whom I'm with and I've never felt content with my partners.

Running from these feelings has led me to be suicidal in subtle ways. To stay ahead of the shame or to disprove my cowardliness I've done things that have almost killed me. But even as I write that, I must admit I love to be out on the ragged edge where things are risky: scuba diving deep and alone, riding motorcycle, solitary journeying.

For now, there is nothing to do but keep trying to stay present with whatever is going on here and now. Not much spiritual/nature mysticism though; mostly just this same old psychological garbage over and over again.

9/11/01

Night: 44F/rainy/calm. Another day of difficult emotions. What's the difference between anxiety and fear? Is fear a response to something that's

happening now and anxiety a response to an imagined future happening? If so, anxiety sucks. At retreat the Buddhist meditation teacher, Joseph Goldstein, counselled staying in the present as a way of dealing with anxiety. After all, the future is just a thought that we think in the present.

Have almost finished *Thoughts without a Thinker*. It's very good. Epstein talks about being able to experience anxiety and excitement at the same time. Hmmm. I've thought for a long time that these two emotions share the same physiological component; when we believe we can handle an intense situation we feel excitement, and when we believe we can't we feel anxiety.

Why do I so seldom feel excitement? The boat trip to the glacier for example: deep down I believe I'll be able to pragmatically handle whatever situations arise, yet I don't allow myself to feel excited by the possibility of going. I have a sort of magical fear - as though feeling excited will invite disaster. Better to stay calm and expect the worst. If I feel excitement, I'm vulnerable. I wonder about the connection between not allowing myself to feel excitement and my chronic anxiety. If I open myself to the possibility of disappointment and disaster and let myself experience excitement, will this balance the anxiety and form a more balanced integrated whole?

Took the kayak to look for the diving ducks' nest today but couldn't find it. When I got back, Cat was not around which is unusual. I called, waited, and called some more as it started to get dark and began to rain. Still nothing. I was getting worried and wondering if something had happened to him, but finally here he came from the direction of the point. He'd circled the island. I was very glad to see him. While he's around I often feel crowded, as if I'm not free to be myself, and find him an irritation, but when I think he might be gone, I feel the loss and miss him.

I'm usually slightly uncomfortable with other people because I feel I can't be who I really am but must alter my behaviour in subtle ways. Perhaps this is why

love affairs have been so important to me. It's the only place I feel completely accepted - until the flush wears off.

Epstein talks about the Basic Fault of not feeling ok about ourselves and acting out the need for love that was missing when we were kids. He claims low self-esteem is endemic in our culture. One useful thing about reading such a book is that it puts my own experience in context. We all suffer such pain, and in realizing our commonality individual suffering is eased.

In some sense the suffering of starving, tortured, and diseased people seems unreal to me and it's difficult to feel real compassion or grief for them. But what does seem real are the countless people who experience themselves as failures and their lives as disappointing. I don't know if this is an issue of developed countries in particular, or if people from all cultures (who pay attention to their feelings) experience this sense of failure. It may be inherent to the existence of a self: we all fail in that we all die. This sense of failure, of not living up to our potential, is very real to me and I grieve for others who suffer so.

### 9/12/01

Late night: 42F/cloudy/breezy/sea moving some. Grey day. Read Wilber mostly. Had considered not reading any more, but I've started *Sex, Ecology and Spirituality*, and will try to read 50 pages a day. I'm fearful of giving up reading to be with my lived experience 24/7. Tried to re-glue patch on boat without removing the floor or loosening the patch any more than it already is, but it didn't stick. Maybe the boat is damp and salty. May try to rinse the area and use a heated rock to dry and warm it. Other than that I meditated, thought, and continued to struggle with fear around the boat trip. Hard to accept the inner turmoil as a natural part of my process instead of seeing it as a huge waste of time.

Woke up this morning after a night of dreams feeling lost and confused. Feeling anxious about ever finding my place in the world and that I'll never be peaceful, happy, or free. Then I just let it go and asked for help. Surrender brought peace but also the disappointment that I'll never UNDERSTAND. The only way I seem to find peace is to give up trying to understand and accept the world as mysterious and uncertain.

I've based my identity and self worth on the willingness to experience everything - to be fully Alive rather than rich, famous, loving, or successful. With fear preventing me from going to the glacier, I feel a failure because I'm not meeting my expectations of myself. Is it more skilful to question the self-image or go and face the fear? But by projecting my fear onto the boat trip, I don't have to face it here right now. The real fear is within, not out there. But I may need the out there to force me to face the fear within.

I'm realizing that I'm very attached to my physical comfort here, so it may be this rather than fear that's getting in my way. When I think of the future, two things worry me: that I'll lose my physical comfort and that I won't experience emotional intimacy. Strange that I've lived my life in a way that tends to maximize both physical discomfort and lack of intimacy.

Just got a wave of anxiety that indeed my time here is getting short and I haven't accomplished any of the really important inner work. Still feeling dead, confused, and cut off from the natural world and my body. Shit. I try to stay open to the confusion, pain, and fear, and trust the process to bring a higher order of organization out of the chaos, but when there is actual discomfort, I go into avoidance immediately.

The butter bellies swam up to each other and, with no apparent foreplay, mated today. Later I heard them call a warning and saw them swim out into the eastern channel. I couldn't see anything until I used the binoculars and finally spotted the intruder. These birds have amazing eyesight. With the light as it

was, it seems unlikely it's the orange bill colour they react to, so maybe it's shape. I think I'll make a decoy and check it out.

Have the butter belly ducks begun to feed in shallower water because the returning sun has altered plant growth patterns? There are ecological questions about the impact my actions (e.g. use of gasoline) might have on their feeding behaviour. The formation of strong pair bonds and their territorial defence behaviour beg a theoretical framework. Evolution, natural selection, and critiques of neo-Darwinian Theory, as grounded in the presupposition of individual competing organisms, come into play. Finally as I watch, I'm led back to a blank sort of amazement at their existence - to the mysterious wonder of the Orange Billed Butter Bellied Diving Ducks.

Cat seems to have found playmates in the diving ducks. He stalked them on the beach today. For a while he stuck his head under a rock, and I'm not sure if he was actually interested in something under there or thought they couldn't see him because he couldn't see them. He got very close before the male noticed him and flinched away into the water. Cat then turned his attentions to the female. She just lowered her head and hissed, and Cat wandered away. I was sort of hoping he would jump on one of them. I doubt he could hurt them unless he was very lucky, and the image of him clinging to the duck's back as it ran flapping across the water struck me as pretty funny.

9/13/01

Fierce night. Rain and northwest wind roaring in the trees. I'm protected here but feel like there's a wild animal out there trying to get to me. But as the months pass, I'm becoming desensitized and more confident the shelter will continue to protect me. I'm slowly realizing more clearly that what I fear will come to get me is already part of my own mind.

Woke up early to go for firewood at high tide. A light wind was already blowing, but I decided to go anyway. As I got out of bed, feeling groggy from not enough sleep, an inner voice said, "don't go." How to listen to inner voices without going crazy and how to know which to believe? What is sound intuition, and what's only fear? When actual danger is involved - like taking a small boat into rough water - the question about whether intuition is sound carries a heavier load.

I decided to go. Had coffee and breakfast and loaded survival gear and chainsaw into the boat. It started to piss down rain and I decided it was a sign not to go, then changed my mind again. Water very rough out in the channel and there were waves breaking on the beach where I wanted to go for wood. Second time in a row I come home empty handed. Glad I brought in as much wood as I did while the weather was calm.

Today pretty much convinced me to give up going to the distant glacier. The motor seems to be running rougher than it was and is knocking louder. In that regard, my instinct to not make the long trip might be sound. I still plan to explore the inlet 25 miles north of here and see if I can walk to the glacier there. I'll wait for a relatively calm day and hope a storm like this one doesn't hit. If I don't go to the glacier I imagine I'll have the opportunity to face my fear sooner or later anyway.

For a long time I've been relating to myself and my parents as if my character was all the result of upbringing with no input from my own inherent nature. How strange. Given the family dynamic, I could have responded differently than I have. If I want to attribute all my stuff to nurture, I need to do the same for them. We have all done the best we could. Mom gave all she could in the face of her own fear and despair. Dad's judgments of me came from his own sense of inadequacy; he must have judged himself cruelly, even if not consciously.

Read my 50 pages of Wilber today. I remember this part from my first reading several years ago. Had problems with it then and again now. The whole section (based on the work of other people) seems hopelessly muddled to me, but at the end he gives a summary that's right on. So he continues to be an interesting challenge. I get to struggle, criticize and hopefully come to see what I think and feel more clearly in the process.

I wonder about new knowledge. Perhaps really new notions arise now and then, but not often I think. For a long time thinkers have seen the world in different ways, and the scope of potential worldviews probably doesn't change much. Perspectives might be refined over time, and the language used to express ideas changes. There is probably little that post modernism has "discovered" that Buddhist thinkers hadn't explored long ago.

### 9/14/01

Night: Lovely day, second one in over a month. Mostly sunny, high 45F, light breeze from the southwest. Went fishing to Staines, but no bites at all, and got a load of redwood. I cut up a tree trunk growing horizontally close to the ground and mindlessly kept going even though smoke was coming from the chain where it was nicking rocks and shells. Finally got the rounds, but the chain was toast and I didn't have a file with me. So I finally had a day calm enough to go for wood, there I was with a saw that wouldn't cut.

I amaze myself when I do dumb stuff like that. Start doing something semi-thoughtlessly and won't quit no matter what. But I also didn't quit cutting and filled the boat with five-foot sections instead of short rounds. Had to use some outboard gas in the saw because it took so much longer than I'd expected.

After I unloaded I took the boat back out for a slow easy circuit around all four islands in this cluster where I live. I love to be on the water. Nice to be close to home and not worried about the motor. It sounded pretty bad pushing



the load of wood, but if it's nice again tomorrow maybe I'll explore the inlet southeast of here. According to the chart it's about 15 miles to the far end. This calm weather might last a few days and be a good time to explore the inlet northeast of here for a night or two, but I think I'll resist and hope German gets here with the spare parts.

Watched the male diving duck feeding. He seemed to be harvesting small mussels or snails from the kelp and cracking them in his bill. I think the female is brooding. I hope he'll eventually lead me to the nest so I can see it even if I can no longer rob any eggs. Earlier, I came upon a single diving duck near the island behind here. He freaked and ran flapping across the channel toward Staines. Kept going and going and going until I could barely see his splashes even with the binoculars. What energy! Wonder why he kept going so far even though nothing was chasing him?

Extreme low tide. Walked out on the exposed flats and watched clams squirt in the slanting afternoon sun. Found a tiny sea urchin, a chiton, and a couple small spiral snail shells - none of which I'd seen before. Eyes must be getting clearer.

Came in to put on warmer clothes, happened to look out window, and saw I'd left the kayak untied at the water's edge with the tide rising. Totally spaced it. It was already getting dark, and if I hadn't seen it I might have woken up tomorrow with it gone. It might have stayed in the cove, but also might have drifted away in some unknown direction. Can't believe I did that.

Long day and I'm sore and tired. *Thoughts Without a Thinker* talks about focusing bare attention on pain. When reading it I felt bad that I hadn't done enough of that when my shoulders were really sore. So I haven't taken any ibuprophen yet to see if the pain will fade on its own and if I can stay with it instead of sending it away with drugs. Also to see if when I relax into the pain, it will open up from pain into sensation.



9/15/01

Night: 49F/cloudy/calm. Set clock for 8 a.m. to go exploring, but there was already a breeze from the northwest. Sunrise was astonishing and I stayed up to watch it. Wonder if I miss a lot of beautiful sunrises by sleeping late. I didn't meditate which changed the tone of the morning somehow; sweet lonely why are we alive feeling.

I watched the diving ducks swim over to the neighbouring territory. At the boundary the male hung back, but the female swam right in and started to feed. She kept calling to him and finally, apparently against his better judgement, he followed her. The other pair was not around and the close pair stayed over there feeding for a while and even climbed onto the rock that's the home base of the others. Then they came back to their own territory.

All this was new to me. I wonder if all animals are as individual as these seem to be? If I were to watch the other pair as closely, would their behaviour vary significantly? If I continued to watch these guys for five years, would they continue to act creatively for the whole time? Is the notion we have of instinctual behaviour in animals overstated? Are they as individual as humans? Most animal behaviour studies I've read treat a whole species as a common unit.

This afternoon they again swam boldly into the neighbouring territory and climbed right out onto the other pair's home rock. Suddenly, a warning cry and in roared the others. Whoopsy! These guys were off the rock and underwater in a heartbeat. Once into their own territory they resumed their normal border defence display as did the other pair. Ah, the female ... always leading the male into trouble.<sup>120</sup> I think these guys are trying to expand their territory.

At the super low tide I went onto the flats with shovel and waited until I saw a squirt, then dug. Didn't find whatever squirted. Cat wandered out to the rock that's usually cut off by the water. Was getting dark and I worried he might get stuck there with the rising tide which would be a real problem since the rock is

submerged at high tide. I wonder if he's aware of the potential trap? I called, and he finally reappeared.

Out on the mudflats my mood shifted to a sort of sweet sadness. Looking around at the sea and mountains, I had the sense of already being gone from here and missing it terribly. Al Green singing "For the Good Times" has been going through my head all day.

Read Wilber in between wandering around and watching the ducks. Seems to me that what he's doing is pretty reductionist. In searching for commonality between all thinkers and researchers, he's reducing variance. This is like an animal behaviour study that focuses exclusively on commonalities and ignores differences. Reducing variance can give a distorted picture of what's going on and give the impression that we understand the world better than we actually do.

But I like Wilber's claim that differentiation and integration make up the process of growth. I'm way too differentiated I think. Too independent and fearful of opening myself to integration with others because I might lose my freedom. The only time I feel really integrated is alone in the wilderness. I think this sense of excessive independence is a common experience in our culture. This jibes with the I Ching hexagram that said I need to hold together with others.

I can put this notion together with Epstein's description of Basic Fault and Eastern embeddedness. He claims that in meditation practice Westerners often begin by being isolated from the world and themselves, and the first step on the spiritual journey is to reconnect. Easterners, on the other hand, come from a culture where they are embedded in family and surroundings, and their early task is to break free. The terror in their case is of freedom and in our case of ego loss. Perhaps what psychiatrists call the Basic Fault is not a problem of individual family dynamics, but an imbalance in the Differentiation/Integration process of growth.

Epstein says the only way out is to ask, Who Am I? and see into the emptiness of Self. But I wonder. Perhaps what needs to happen is rebalancing to allow the ego/self to find its place in the larger whole. This makes more sense to me than claiming the self is an empty illusion. This may be what he's actually saying.

On my way to the point yesterday I noticed a path has formed where I walk through the grass. It gave me a sense of comfort and security. Perhaps what I'm trying to do here is lay down a path between my different states of consciousness. Not come up with an abstract theory of how to make the shift, but simply cover the ground again and again until I know the territory and have laid down a path in the walking.<sup>121</sup> I wonder how this fits with Krishnamurti's (1929) statement, "Truth is a Pathless Land"? Perhaps in laying down a path I'm simply returning to old territory - to memories rather than staying in the ever-changing present.

9/16/01

Late night: 45F. A tender day. Woke to gentle rain and a flat glassy sea. Ah, quiet. Went to Staines fishing the high tide. Relaxing to slide over the water without worrying about chop and building swells. Like leaving a rutted dirt road to roll along smooth pavement. It's been a long time since I've had such pleasure in the boat. Fishing was slow but very pleasant not to fight drift. Little by little the bucket filled up. Since my ice is gone, I put the filets in a plastic container and floated it in a pool of ground water under the trees. It's 40F and the fish should keep for at least four days.

It rained lightly most of the time, but I stayed dry. Nice to be out in the gentle rain. Wisps and streamers of mist wrapped themselves around the hills and drifted into the hollows of Staines Peninsula. The rock walls and waterfalls were perfect and perfectly beautiful. How blessed I am to be here

I "waste" so much time beating up on myself - trying to change and improve. Why? I try to let nature be as much as possible, why can't I do the same with myself? Today on the water I felt my heart softly open and remembered that this is the feeling of travel away from the safety of home and into the unknown. I still fear the trip to the glacier, and yet being away from the cabin might carry me into this openness too. There is something deep in me calling, or I wouldn't be so concerned about whether I go or not.

I heard the sea lions while fishing and went to visit. Wow, there are now ten of them. One dominant bull, 8 smaller adults, and the calf. They were a delight to watch. I got within about 30 meters and could see them clearly with and without the binoculars. I was leery of going too close since I don't know how far out the bull will defend his territory. They swam back and forth along the rock in a tight pack, sometimes sort of leap-frogging over each other. They would pause, lift up to gaze at me, and then resume their swimming. It looked like play to me - like they were swimming together just for the joy of it.

Mom and calf stayed on the rock ledge, reared up on their flippers, leaning this way and that. I wonder if their movement had to do with depth perception? They seemed to weave back and forth as if the movement gave them a better look at me. Always they were touching: mostly the calf had one flipper over mom's back. Finally she too went into the water and left the calf alone. The ledge they were on was four or five feet above the water and I couldn't see how the calf would get back up if it went into the water, so I didn't get any closer. I watched one of the others get back up, and he fell back several times before he made it. How nice to have them for neighbours. I wonder if the colony will continue to grow?

9/17/01-9/21/01

Usually 42-45F/generally stormy with winds from the northwest but some gusts from the southwest.

9/22/01

Night: 36F. Spring Equinox.

Time is:  
a worm,  
a caterpillar,  
a grub.

Minutes creep into days;  
days trudge toward the end of the week.

Then lost in the long grey sleep of our absence,  
a sudden startling shift.

A transformation.

Years have flown and carried us  
toward the dark dread of our death.

Are you remembering to remember:  
to pause and notice the life living in you?

to feel  
the tender autumn light  
flicker across your waters?

to drift  
with the clouds and mist  
into the mountains and canyons  
of your soul?

to float  
in the ebb and flow  
of joy and sorrow, love and grief  
through the wide empty basin of your heart?

What a glorious first day of spring it's been. The weather has been raw for the past five days. Lots of rain, almost no sun, nearly constant wind.

Been reading Wilber. Had hoped to finish *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality (SES)* by now, but am only on page 300 of 525. I'll get there. Liking it mostly. Cleaner, more thoughtful writing than his "pop" books. He makes the spiritual path seem so straightforward - like an engineering problem, or learning to play tennis. That has not, however, been my own experience. For me it remains a mysterious art to open my heart and mind and surrender to what is rather than trying to control everything.

I've been staying up until almost dawn most nights. Yesterday afternoon and evening the weather shifted to calm and clear with only a light breeze from the southeast. I intended to sleep early so that if today was nice I'd get an early start, but I got into writing the Equinox Report and before I knew it, it was 5 a.m.

Woke today to a clear calm dawn. By 9:30 the sun was over the mountains and shining on Cat and me. Breeze didn't build, and by noon I was on my way. I'd considered packing camping gear and heading north to where the glacier pours into the lake, but with only two and a half hours sleep decided not to push it. I intend to go to bed early tonight, get up early, and if the weather is still holding, I might go tomorrow.

Today I explored the inlet to the southeast I've intended to visit for six months. Glad I had the patience to wait for a good day. It feels like movement is a deep part of who I am, but once on the way and less tightly wound, I remembered that such exploring is NOT what I came here for. On the contrary, I came to practice being still and receptive rather than constantly active and seeking.



It was a good trip. I only made eight or nine mph at first since the motor started to miss when I cranked it high enough to lift into a plane. Then I remembered that if I slow to a crawl and accelerate rapidly, the boat lifts up much easier. After that I was doing 12 to 14 mph in the calm areas and 11 or so in the chop. The motor continues to behave well except that it misses if I open it all the way. Would like to get that fixed, but still no word from Alejandra about when German might come with the parts.

Along the way I saw a rock wall crumbling into the sea that looked like a good spot to fish. Wham. Even before the bait reached the bottom I had a fish on and pulled up a nice snapper. Next three times down I pulled up six nice fish - all of them as big as the biggest I've caught by Staines.

The inlet is beautiful. At the far end I fished the mouth of the small river that drains the lakes I'd considered trying to reach in the kayak. Nothing. But it was a treat to listen to the babble and watch the sun sparkle on moving water. I miss that here. The river was much too fast to paddle up and too rocky to walk up pulling the kayak. The only hope might be to deflate and pack it cross-country, but I didn't try.

Along the way I looked for possible campsites, but there were always signs that the tide goes right into the heavy brush. Now though, at half moon, the tides aren't so high and I could probably camp on most any beach. I followed a narrow side inlet that reaches south into the foothills. Sweet in there, but at the far end - as far from anywhere as you can go - I found a bunch of plastic crap that had drifted in with the wind and tide. What a drag. I cleaned it up and brought the trash back with me. I also found huemul (rare local deer) turds but saw no sign of them.

Back here, I went to visit the sea lions. Whoa! The colony is growing fast. It started with one sometime in the fall and I counted 18 today. I wonder where they come from and how they know there's a colony forming here? Do they return

every year? No wonder fishing has gotten poor over there. A lot of hungry mouths to feed.

A very beautiful bird recently arrived. Neutral grey back, creamy white on belly with strips of it coming up in front of the wings. The breast a rich warm rusty brown which is separated from the belly by a heavy black line. The eyes are ringed in white, and there is a white band around the head just above the eyes. Saw two of the males fighting yesterday, and it was every bit as exciting as a cockfight.<sup>122</sup>

Psychological explorations have continued these past days. I'm getting pretty tired of being tangled up in not accepting myself and trying to improve. I guess when I get really tired of it, I'll quit. Was thinking that the butter bellies' aggressive behaviour is much more interesting than their love-making, but then realized their daily behaviour is part of sex too. Gonna fix fish and rice for dinner and then go to sleep. May sit under stars for just a while first....

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<sup>117</sup> In Dhammapada: the sayings of the Buddha, rendered by Thomas Byron.

<sup>118</sup> This is what Wilber misses when he claims the biosphere is part of the noosphere and not the other way around. Conceptually, our notions about and perception of nature arise within our cultural heritage, but from a different perspective we and our culture belong to the biosphere. I didn't make the world or myself even though my perception of it is a culturally conditioned perception. According to evolutionary theory the biosphere is our source. Wilber agrees with this, but still argues that the noosphere is the more inclusive holon. How then do I account for this sense of belonging to the world that made me? And how do I account for "feeling" the butter belly ducks in my body. We usually experience the natural world as belonging to us humans as our resource, but we also belong to the natural world. It's our source and our sustenance. It is our home.

<sup>119</sup> For the sake of simplicity, I call the orange billed butter belly diving ducks (steamer ducks) whose territory was the shore line of the island I was on and the near side of the basin "the close pair" and call the pair whose territory was the far island and the other side of the basin "the other pair."

<sup>120</sup> Patti continues to complain about my anthropomorphic comments, and I continue to insist that I do it with tongue in cheek or with the awareness that I am describing a lyrical experience and not making an objective claim.

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<sup>121</sup> Caminante, son tus huellas  
el camino, y nada más;  
caminante, no hay camino,  
se hace camino al andar,  
Al andar se hace el camino,  
y al volver la vista atrás  
se ve la senda que nunca  
se ha de volver a pisar.  
Caminante, no hay camino,  
sino estelas en el mar.

Traveler, the path is your tracks  
And nothing more.  
Traveler, there is no path  
The path is made by walking.  
By walking you make a path  
And turning, you look back  
At a way you will never tread again  
Traveler, there is no road  
Only wakes in the sea.  
(Cantares. Antonio Machado, 1929)

<sup>122</sup> Rufous-chested Dotterel: *Charadrius modestus*.

## Interlude 8

### A Sketch of Buddhism as it Speaks to my Life

**Never think that I believe I should set out  
 a "system of teaching"  
 to help people understand the way.  
 Never cherish such a thought.  
 What I proclaim is the truth as I have discovered it  
 and "a system of teaching" has no meaning  
 because the truth can't be cut up into pieces  
 and arranged in a system.  
 (Buddha)<sup>123</sup>**

How often I imagine that someone somewhere must have the Answer and a system they can teach me that will end my suffering. Buddhism is often presented as a system of practice that will lead to enlightenment, but the quote above shows that the Buddha himself, at least in some contexts, denied he could provide such a system.

Buddhism has a long history, and the original teachings have morphed into many different forms as they've traveled from India to foreign lands - including, most recently, the West. The philosophy, psychology, and practices have evolved in the minds and bodies of innumerable individuals during the 2600 years since the Buddha lived and died.

My own relationship with Buddhism goes back 30 years. I became quite depressed after emerging from my first long retreat into wilderness solitude and felt I'd lost my spiritual way. Eventually, my sister Nancy mentioned that she had recently attended a ten day Buddhist meditation retreat and had hated it, but thought I might like it. She was partially correct: I didn't actually like it, but I did find it enormously valuable and reassuring. Soon after, I attended a three-month silent retreat.

Here I will not attempt a comprehensive overview, but do want to describe those aspects of Buddhism that have had a pragmatic effect in my life. I have not read much Buddhist theory, nor do I consider myself to be "a Buddhist." For better or worse I tend to follow my own meandering path and often seem to lose my way in dense thickets of self-doubt, but Buddhist teachings and meditation practice have been very useful in

exploring, accepting, and, perhaps, understanding myself. The following discussion is based largely on my understanding of the teachings of Joseph Goldstein and Jack Kornfield (Goldstein, 1976; Goldstein and Kornfield, 1987), two Western meditation teachers who trained in the Theravada tradition in Thailand and India.

For me, sitting practice and learning to accept immediate lived experience are the most important aspects of Buddhism. As I described in the *Ruminations on Methodology* interlude, the basic practice consists of paying close and continuous attention to the breath, which stabilizes and concentrates the mind. Then, with bare attention of a quiet mind - without judgment or explanation - one simply notices whatever comes into the field of experience.<sup>124</sup> Thoughts continue to arise, but slowly the obsessional identification with each thought softens and a sense of peace and equanimity develop. This practice does not depend on holding a particular worldview, believing in a spiritual dogma, or following a guru. According to Buddhist teaching, the Truth of existence will manifest itself through this practice.

I tend to keep my thinking about Buddhism pragmatic and straightforward. For instance, most practicing Buddhists believe in the birth/death cycles of reincarnation. I spend little time wondering about what might or might not happen after death and focus instead on my life in the here and now.<sup>125</sup> This is how the Buddha taught as well. He refused to answer questions about abstract metaphysics and dedicated his words to the practical alleviation of suffering.

### **Basic Teachings**

The Buddha taught Four Noble Truths: suffering is inherent in being alive; attachment and delusion are the cause of this suffering; there exists a path to ameliorate suffering; the path is found in the “middle way” and practice of the Eight Fold Path. Life involves physical, emotional, and psychological suffering. This is self-evident once we stop pretending otherwise. One of the most ubiquitous forms of denial is to picture a future in which suffering will no longer exist in our lives; to imagine our current suffering is a temporary anomaly. Our cultural drive for progress is based on the utopian

social ideal of an end to suffering. Fundamentalist Christianity and the belief in a pain-free eternal life after death is another manifestation of this longing.

Buddhism teaches that the root causes of suffering are attachment, aversion, and delusion. We are attached to sense pleasure; to our opinions and theories about how the world is and how it should be; to various social, political, religious, and scientific rites and rituals; to the belief in self, in I, in me, in mine. This teaching can be loosely summarized as desire for and attachment to pleasure and security.

The other side of desire and attachment is aversion to and avoidance of pain. The strong sensations we generally label as pain are inherent to living, but we can work with the quality of our experience in relation to them. If we resist the sensations - and one subtle way we do this is by labelling certain sensations as painful - we intensify those sensations by our resistance and thus create additional suffering. Another common way we resist pain is by taking it personally and having a “why me?” attitude. If we can relax into pain as a natural part of living that everyone experiences and let go of the self-judgment that something is wrong with “me” because “I’m” experiencing pain, we can alleviate our suffering to a large degree. Much of our suffering is caused by attachment to the idea of a separate autonomous Self that must defend itself and can achieve a permanent state of affairs with only pleasure and no pain.

Attachment to certain kinds of pleasurable spiritual experiences and aversion to other darker experiences also causes suffering. The desire for and belief that I deserve a state of permanent inner clarity and joy has troubled me for years, and I often feel something is deeply wrong with me or my spiritual practice because I have not achieved such a state.

The Buddha taught that the journey from suffering to freedom is along the Noble Eightfold Path: right understanding; right thought, right speech, right action; right livelihood; right effort (in meditation); right mindfulness; right concentration. I, myself, still rebelling somewhat against my fundamentalist Christian upbringing, tend to resist prescribed ethical teaching. However, Buddhism does not use language of condemnation, but speaks in terms of unskillful and skillful means: actions that do or do not generate more suffering.

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A central tenet of Buddhist teaching is that there is no Self in an absolute sense. This notion is subtle and can be difficult to explore and discuss. Many writers undertake that discussion more skilfully than I can,<sup>126</sup> but there is one issue I would like to mention since I have not encountered it elsewhere. Buddhism claims that the practitioner will discover Truth through direct experience during meditation. No account is taken of the influence of methodology on results. In philosophy of Western science, it is acknowledged that methodology constrains what can be asked and discovered about the world (Sattler, 1986). I find it strange that this awareness is not more widely discussed in modern Buddhist writings. It seems to me that I answer questions about Self/no-Self differently depending on the method I use to explore. Katagiri Roshi (1998) writes, “I have been reading your Descartes. Very interesting. ‘I think, therefore I am.’ He forgot to mention the other part. I’m sure he knew, he just forgot: ‘I don’t think, therefore I’m not.’”

It looks to me like the Self is not a permanent entity, but does exist as a center of volition and activity. Whirlpools and tornados might serve as partial analogies. In and of themselves, neither exists; both are manifestations of the movement of water or air. But they do have causal power once they come into being. *Perhaps* it is the same with consciousness. When the mind becomes still, the “I” dissipates as do whirlpools and tornados when the movement of water or air ceases. Meditation is designed to slow the mind and body, and in using this methodology it might be impossible to detect the Self - which only exists as a center of movement when mind and body are active with thought and volitional behaviour. Perhaps.

### **Traditional Teachings and Direct Experience**

In solitude I questioned the relationship of my own direct experience to traditional spiritual teachings. Buddhism is an empirical practice: students are taught to accept only what they experience for themselves. Yet great value is placed on the ancient teachings of the Buddha who was, it is claimed, a fully enlightened being and so saw the Truth of existence. When my own experience did not accord with traditional teachings, there

were a number of possibilities: the teachings have been idealized or corrupted while being orally transmitted and translated into different languages; my understanding of the teachings was partial or confused; my perceptions were distorted; the cultural context of my experience was different than that of the Buddha; our current collective understanding has evolved beyond that of the Buddha.

This question is not unique to me, but has been common in our culture at least since the scientific revolution. Gould (2003) among others describes the conflict between the early empiricists, who argued that all valid knowledge must be based on direct observation, and the traditionalists, who claimed that the work of researchers was to re-discover the lost wisdom of ancients such as Aristotle and Plato.

Wilber (1981) explores this question in terms of culture. He argues for cultural as well as physical evolution and criticizes philosophers who see current culture as degenerate and want to return to some Golden Age in the past. He claims that the knowledge and sophistication of spiritual explorers as well as that of natural and social scientists continues to progress.

For me there is value in both my own explorations and in the traditional teachings. I don't claim to have discovered uniquely new knowledge during my time in solitude, yet my work does contribute an additional perspective and broadens our experience of what it means to be alive. I continue to question whether our understanding of ourselves and the world is progressing in a fundamental way, or if we are simply developing explanations of a different sort that reflect our current language and cultural context.

### **Emptiness**

A Buddhist teaching based on insight that may arise during meditation is that our normal experience consists, to a great extent, of conceptual categories, and that beyond/beneath/within these categories the world flows without fixed boundaries. As Wilber (1996) puts it, we can draw but not impose boundaries onto the world. When we see that nothing is solid or permanent, see into the process of how we construct and name objects by distinguishing them from the surrounding matrix, see that without the background matrix an object cannot exist, and see that each object is part of the



background for each other object, our lives change and we can relax ... until we forget again and slip back into conditioned habits of perception.<sup>127</sup>

One meaning of the terms Emptiness or Groundlessness is that the world of discrete objects, including the self, is conditional and empty of permanence or self-sufficiency. The term Suchness is sometimes used for the flowing Reality beneath or within the level of conceptual reality. The term Emptiness also points to Something more. Wilber writes:

This is why, in nondual Suchness [Emptiness], it is absolutely *not* that each being is a *part* of the One, or participates in the One, or is an aspect of the One. In other words, it is not, as in pantheism, that each is merely a *piece* of the “One,” a slice of the pie, or a strand in the Big Web. ... As Zen would have it, Emptiness is not the sum total of Form, it is the essence of Form  
(1995, p. 347)

And

Pure Emptiness and pure Consciousness are synonymous. Consciousness is not a thing or a process ... it is ultimately Emptiness, the opening or clearing in which the *form* of beings *manifest* themselves, and not any particular manifestation itself ... [all italics and quotation marks by author]  
(1995, p. 530, n. 2)

The *Heart Sutra* from the Buddha (Bancroft, 2000) states: “Form is emptiness, emptiness itself is form; emptiness is no other than form, form is no other than emptiness.”

### **Control and Surrender**

In some of the journal entries for June and July, I wrote about the difference I perceived between the approach of Western psychology as exemplified in *Flow*, and the approach of Eastern (and to some extent Western) spiritual practice. In *Flow*, Csikszentmihalyi claims that happiness arises within a mind whose content is controlled and structured. In order to be happy, we can't let the mind run wild but must concentrate on pragmatic thoughts and activities to exclude the dark depressive chaos of existence.

Moore, in *Care of the Soul*, shows another way that is similar to Buddhist teachings and to the Taoist notion of wu-wei (non-action). This does not literally mean not doing anything, but refraining from ego-directed activity toward accomplishing a desired goal. In terms of inner work, the intention is not to structure the content of experience by

building a wall of mental and physical activity that prevents unpleasant thoughts and feelings from entering, but rather to stabilize consciousness itself - the context within which all thoughts and feelings arise; to honour and care for all aspects of ourselves and our experience. We do not fear the dark and chaotic, but allow everything to arise and dissolve - as all experiences arise and dissolve - without rejecting or clinging. It is this equanimity, the confidence to be with life in all its manifestations, which brings peace and joy.

This dichotomy between East and West is an artificial generalization that I do not want to defend as literally true, but I would like to look at it as a possible metaphor with broader implications for how we live our lives. Posit a spectrum. At one end is the caricature of the Eastern mystic: scrawny, long matted hair and beard, dirty, covered with flies, making no effort to better his lot or improve the world in any way. At the other end is the efficient modernist technician: fully focused on getting the job done, improving his personal life by seeking more status and a higher salary, which will fulfill his desire for more material goods. He is intent on developing ever-more-powerful technology to control and improve the world and his own body.

The goal of the mystic is to embrace the suffering as well as the pleasure of life and to experience all as sacred. He works with his own mind to accept and value the world - including himself - just as it is and so improve his quality of life. The technician accepts his inner self as given (indeed it is often invisible), sees pleasure as good and pain as bad, and works to change the external world - including his own body- to improve his quality of life. Both seek to be happy, but go about it in different ways. Which one is correct and which mistaken in his approach?

It seems to me that both are right. If we attempt to avoid all suffering by controlling the world, our emotions, and our bodies, we run in an ever-more-frantic circle trying to deny who/what we actually are, as though we can escape from the universe. On the other hand, we (or someone who takes care of us) do need to act to survive, and we do have the capacity to alleviate some of the suffering of life through adjustment of external circumstance. It is not either acceptance of the world as it is *or* activity to

change the world, but acceptance *and* activity based on wisdom rather than avoidance and greed.

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<sup>123</sup> From the Diamond Sutra, edited by Bancroft, 2000.

<sup>124</sup> Concentration, mindfulness, and bare attention are three fundamental qualities of mind that develop during meditation.

<sup>125</sup> Buddhism teaches that the reason we stay on the wheel of life and death with its inherent suffering is because desire pulls us back to be re-incarnated again and again. Although such speculations do not attract me, I recognize that I must die to each moment in order to be fully alive and present in the next.

In editing the journal and re-living the seemingly endless cycling between small mind and Big Mind, I came to see that the notion of physical death and reincarnation might be a metaphor for the psychological process of release from attachments of the small mind into the freedom of Big Mind, and then the plunge back into small mind driven by some sort of desire. When I finally saw this, there was a strong sense of Aha! Of course this is just another opinion. ...

<sup>126</sup> Mark Epstein (1995), a Freudian psychotherapist and long time meditator, is very clear and straightforward in his discussion of false selves and true self (or the absence thereof.)

<sup>127</sup> Goldstein (1976) writes: “The intellect is the thought-conceptual level of the mind. It can be trained, developed, and used; or it can be a hindrance. It depends how clearly we understand the thought process. If there’s clear insight into its nature, it’s not a hindrance at all. If we mistake the thoughts about things for the things themselves, it becomes an obstacle in that it confuses concept with reality. But, in itself, the intellect is just another part of the entire mind-body process.”

The differentiation between direct experience and conceptualization is not found only in Buddhist teachings. Polanyi (1958) writes: “As observers or manipulators of experience we are guided by experience and pass through experience without experiencing it in itself. The conceptual framework by which we observe and manipulate things being present as a screen between ourselves and these things, their sights and sounds, and the smell and touch of them transpire but tenuously through the screen, which keeps us aloof from them. Contemplation dissolves the screen, stops our movement through experience and pours us straight into experience; we cease to handle things and become immersed in them. Contemplation has no ulterior intention or ulterior meaning; in it we cease to deal with things and become absorbed in the inherent quality of our experience, for its own sake.”

Maslow (1966) differentiates between Suchness meaning and abstractness meaning and sees them as complementary rather than mutually exclusive. Abstract meaning is found in relating one experience to another; in creating a whole from the parts. The whole and its parts then have a meaning the individual parts did not have. Suchness meaning is immediate. The ultimate meaning of any experience is simply itself. There is no need to look beyond to categorize and analyze. “What is the meaning of a leaf, a fugue, a sunset, a flower, a person? They ‘mean’ themselves, explain themselves, and prove themselves.”

A metaphor I sometimes use to describe the relationship between Suchness and concept is to imagine experiencing the world as a swirl of shifting form, color, and movement. In order to make sense of and add predictability to my experience, I begin to search for regularity and repeating patterns. Slowly I focus on the similarities and ignore the differences between the “things” I want to clump into a single group that I might call limpets or steamer ducks. I hold up

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a clear sheet of acetate and draw an outline around each of these things. This outline is the concept I (my culture) create to help organize my (our) experience. This is a useful process and not a problem. The problem develops when the acetate becomes opaque and I can no longer see through it to the flowing Suchness beyond: when all I experience are the outlines that I, myself, have drawn. At this point I'm no longer experiencing the actuality of life, but only my own abstractions and ideas about those abstractions. I have such ideas about myself, about other people, about everything. These ideas tend to be static and give a sense of solidity to the objects I've created. When the actuality of the world doesn't fit into these concepts, there can be a painful sense of disorientation.

One of the intentions of meditation is to pay bare attention to our moment by moment experience of colour, form, and movement without trying to categorize, make sense of, or tell stories about it. Slowly, our conceptualizing mind begins to relax and we can differentiate the impermanence of Reality from our more permanent thoughts about it.

Today I was sitting on the beach watching a man and a woman walking hand in hand beside the ocean. That whole sentence describes conceptual reality. There was a sandy area I label and experience as a "beach;" two physical forms/beings I label as a "man" and a "woman" with all the correlated thoughts and judgments about marriage etc; they "walked" beside water that I know to be the ocean that stretches to Japan and beyond; once they were gone, there was a thought I labeled as "the past" and I imagined them further down the beach in a thought I call the "future." All of this is a conceptual overlay of the simple experience of the present moment.

I need to be careful here. The Buddhist teaching that we can directly know Reality beyond concept flies in the face of much Postmodern thinking. Wilber (1995) claims that making a distinction between conceptual map and ontologically Real Territory is hopelessly naive. He argues that what we experience beneath the layer of conceptual thinking is always already contextualized within a cultural matrix and not unconditioned reality. But he too acknowledges the radical difference between experiencing something directly - even recognizing that that experience is already always culturally contextualized - and thinking about something.

The conversation about concept and Reality is broad, evolving, and possibly endless. From the perspective of what matters to me, there is no need to complicate matters. I prefer to keep it simple and pragmatic. I experience a difference between thinking about something and experiencing it directly. As far as I can tell, all moments of experience include both aspects. Conceptual reality is necessary to function in the world, but when we become stuck there and lose the experience of vibrant Aliveness, then our existence loses its joy and meaning. I have revisited this discussion from the philosophy interlude because it seems important to me and because I so easily become lost in the realm of concept without noticing what has happened.

We must be careful not to take such insights too literally or become trapped in them as though they are as real as the objects we once experienced as solid and permanent.

## October 2001

If you understand...  
Things are just as they are.  
If you do not understand...  
Things are just as they are.  
(Zen proverb)<sup>128</sup>

There is a place 15,000 km south of Vancouver that will remain a refuge where I can go to be alone. To get there I will fly to Santiago, Chile, then bus or thumb down through Argentina to Puerto Natales. After that the journey becomes more complicated. I'll need to catch a ride 150 km north through the channels of La Ultima Esperanza with a fisherman or the navy. From there, in more protected water, I can use an inflatable with outboard or even a kayak to turn east toward the mountains and finally reach the hidden lake of still deep water where condors fly. There is another closer place of refuge that's simpler but perhaps more difficult to reach. Here and now it always waits - deep within me.

### 10/10/01

I'd thought to stop daily journaling around the equinox, but I'm surprised how automatically it happened. Bam, just quit writing. Been a busy 17 days since the last entry. The weather between Sept 22 and Oct 7 was glorious. Only a couple days of wind and rain, and the rest of the time calm and clear or cloudy - the sea often completely glassy. Temperatures ranged from low 50s to low 60s in the days, and high 30s to low 50s at night. The four and a half inches of rain fell mostly during three separate days. Now it's been stormy again.

On September 23<sup>rd</sup>, I packed the boat which took almost five hours, sent a code yellow email with my proposed route and destination, and left about noon heading north and east to try hiking with the kayak to the lake with the glacier.

The sea turned choppy within the hour, but it was from behind and not troublesome. Used GPS to track my location as I traveled, and compared it with the chart on which I'd noted the longitude and latitude of prominent landmarks along the route. Assuming the GPS is correct, the chart is accurate for latitude but off some on longitude.<sup>129</sup> I used to implicitly trust topographic maps and marine charts but experience has left me sceptical.

The trip was beautiful. I followed the channel north for 15 miles, turned east for another five, then back south along a narrower passage, and finally east again deeper into the foothills. During this final run the hills closed in and sometimes lofted overhead into sheer cliffs. At the end of the inlet where I expected to see a shallow river rush into the sea - and where I'd hoped to camp - I found magic instead. A narrow notch split the rock wall and let me take the boat into a hidden tidal lake. A river falling from the upper lake fed this one with crystal water. In a trance I slowly motored in and saw seven condors circling overhead. An eagle, curious about me, circled low and then soared back up as though wishing to be a condor too.

I landed at the far end of the lake and made my way across a soggy brush-choked flat, then climbed through mossy trees to see if I could reach the upper lake. Nope. The terrain was too steep and rugged and the rocks too slick to risk it alone where a fall might be a serious problem. I reached a point where I could see ahead and it looked like the glacier didn't drop into the lake anyway. Warm sunny day. Afternoon light slanting through the moss-draped trees was softly luminous. First time I've hiked since I've been here, and it felt good to be away from the sea. Stunning view back to where I'd left the boat.

There was no place above high tide to camp, so I tied the boat between an anchor dug into the beach and another out in the water and arranged the gear in the boat to make room to sit, cook, and sleep. Cold clear night. Sleeping bag damp with frost, but no matter since I woke to another sunny day. Decided to stay there, fast, and ask for a vision that would transform my life - taking the

lake and surrounding rock walls as my quest circle. Dried the gear and spent a quiet day on the beach and in the boat. The condors shared the sky with me.

I received no startling vision, but instead there arose in me a deep sense that all of what I experience in myself - the joyful and the painful, light and dark, courage and fear, kindness and cruelty - are truly parts of the whole and Spirit-filled. I need to accept and honour all my experience just as I am. And stretching out, all I experience in the world is also part of me. There is no real division between me and the world. I have a Zen poem on my cabin door:

If you understand...  
Things are just as they are.  
If you do not understand...  
Things are just as they are.

But that night I dreamed I was hitchhiking and picked up by an evil man with a knife. Later I was in the hospital, wounded, and asked if I had managed to kill him, and was told no but the police had. The dream seemed to be a warning that in accepting all of myself, including my shadow, I need to be careful not to lose my sense of balance and responsibility. If I don't control my own dark impulses, society will do it for me. In that case, literal rather than symbolic death might result.

I rigged a tarp over the boat that evening to keep off the night frost, and woke at first light to eat and pack up. Out in the inlet I headed south for a few miles and was entranced by fantastic ice fields sculpted by morning light and shadow. Finally turned back north and followed the inlet all the way to the end of its northern arm to look for the old military refuge the navy captain had told me about. Went ashore and looked for quite some time with no success. Seemed like an odd place for a refuge, but it was built during the difficulties between Chile and Argentina, so I guess the military used to patrol up there. It's not far from the border and perhaps there's a pass through the mountains that allows passage between the two countries.

Spent all day in the boat, and the sky and sea remained clear and calm except for an hour or two of breeze and chop. Came home by a different route that took me west into the broad reach north of Owen Island. Then in late afternoon I turned south down the channel between Owen and Evans Islands. Along the way I crossed wide stretches of open water that gave new and expansive views of the Andes to the east and scattered islands dotting the open ocean to the west. I soaked in the beauty of ice fields and jagged peaks, a multitude of tiny islands topped with gnarled Japanese bonsai-looking trees, waterfalls, and radical rock formations. For most of the journey I stood near the front of the boat, and as it skimmed over glassy water, felt myself flying through the wild unknown. To be completely alone in such spacious unspoiled beauty was glorious and I sometimes sang with joy.

As I approached my island I didn't feel ready to go home, so camped on the Staines beach where I go for firewood. Built a campfire, and for the first time since I've been here slept under the stars. Beneath one of the most astonishing sunrises I've ever seen, another realization quietly grew in me which was the second half of the first insight I'd had at the lake.

Not only is everything I experience part of who I am, Spirit filled, and not to be rejected, but there is no need to go looking for anything special anywhere else. Everything life has to offer is always right here wherever I am right now. There is no place more Alive and Sacred than this place. There is no time more Alive and Sacred than this time.

Spent the morning on the beach and came home. Cat was glad to see me. I was gone three days and traveled 87 miles. Sent a code green email to let everyone know I was back safely. Felt content that I'd made the trip and reconciled to not going on the long trip to the far glacier. Spent the next two days bringing in loads of firewood.



But I didn't remain reconciled. The inner conflict I'd been struggling with all winter resurfaced: desire to see the glacier, face my fear, and bolster my self-image in the (imagined) eyes of other people, versus fear that the motor would quit or storms rage through and I'd be stranded out there somewhere.

The following day, September 29<sup>th</sup>, I woke at first light to a mirror sea. Not a breath of wind. Decided to go to the glacier. I lashed a temporary plywood deck over the front of the boat and loaded it with extra fuel, deflated kayak, rope, and anchor. Stuffed more fuel, camping gear, warm clothes, 1<sup>st</sup> aid kit, stove, 4 hp outboard, tools, spare parts, tarps, camera, binoculars, satphone, etc., into the boat. There was barely room for me to sit. Took food for two weeks - just in case - and left Cat plenty too. It was noon when I finally sent a code yellow email and took off. Within five minutes the wind came up. Shit!!!!

Couldn't believe it. It had been calm for a week and now when I finally started for the glacier, the northwest wind was back. My continuing inability to predict the weather triggered deep feelings of frustration and vulnerability. Since it sometimes gets slightly breezy for just a couple hours midday, I decided to keep going against the wind, chop, and mounting swell. After six miles I ducked into the protected inlet on Isla Owen to hide and wait. Soothed by the soft gurgle of a brook babbling into the sea, I dozed off. At 5 p.m. I went out to check the channel and the wind and sea seemed to be settling, so I continued north. Decided that if it continued to calm and remained clear, I'd keep going under the full moon. I tracked my location comparing GPS readings against the chart, and at the north end of Isla Evans crossed the intersecting east/west channel that separates that island from the mainland. In the lee of the hills I headed west with gathering hopes for a gentle night and peaceful journey.

It was almost 9 p.m. and nearly dark - since clouds had blown in to shade the moon - when I rounded a point into the main north/south shipping channel. Immediately the water was turbulent with swell, chop, and tidal run all moving in different directions. I could neither continue nor turn back, and passed a fairly

unpleasant half hour creeping along the rocky shore searching in the dim light for a semi-protected nook to tie up for the night. By now it was too windy to stretch the plastic shelter over the boat, and I thought it might rain, so didn't roll out sleeping bag or Thermarest. Wrapped in a tarp and dressed in sweaters, coat, raingear and rubber boots, I passed not too bad a night all things considered. The boat got tossed around and it was cold, but it didn't rain.

The wind howled all night, and in the morning I crept out to check the channel that was my route to the glacier. Very nasty. It runs for many miles in the same direction as the prevailing wind, and a strong swell as well as frothing surface chop had built. I turned to begin the slow rough trip home. The wind and sea came from behind most of the way, but even so I had to stay constantly focused to keep the boat on course as it wanted to surf down the swells and broach. Made it back without problem, but was pretty bummed. Round trip was 57 miles. Next day I sent a code green email.

Two days later the sea was mirror calm again. I was tense with fear and frustrated that the weather is just fucking unpredictable here. Packed the boat again, sent a code yellow email, and took off. Again the wind came up, and again I hid in the same inlet. At 2 p.m. the sea seemed to be settling, so I kept going. This was my last chance to reach the glacier. If a storm hit I'd have to wait it out and keep going. My remaining supply of gas wouldn't permit another aborted attempt. The sea continued to calm, and by the time I reached the main channel the water was almost glassy. Cached one empty and one full gas can in a small cove to give myself more room and to lighten the load and continued on.

I was surprised and disappointed that the boat still wouldn't lift into a plane even though after burning five gallons of gas and caching another five I'd lightened the load by 70 pounds. This wasn't good since it limited my speed and was harder on the outboard. I tried slowing and accelerating rapidly, going with, against, and across the wind riffle, swerving back and forth, but nothing worked. The motor was clearly losing power even though it didn't sound too bad. I'd just reconciled

myself to ploughing through the water instead of skimming over it when the boat unexpectedly lifted and its speed increased from 9 to 13 mph.

After that I kept going without pause since there was still four hours of light and if I lost the plane, I might not get it back. The further I went the more I thought I might make it all the way to the glacier that day. I'd calculated the one-way trip to be 70 miles and decided to go for it since I wasn't sure how long the calm would last. A return trip in stormy weather would be with the wind and sea, and, if not pleasant, at least easier than fighting against them.

I followed the shipping channel for 25 miles but saw no boats. As the hours flowed and the motor continued to hum steadily, movement became hypnotic. Tidal currents constantly changed the texture of the sea as I passed from open water into narrow reaches and around headlands. Fifteen miles from the glacier I left the shipping channel, turned east toward the mountains, and started to see floating ice sculpted into beautiful shapes. They didn't slow me down, but did focus my attention since it wouldn't have been good to run into one of them. At one point the boat began to lurch and swerve for no apparent reason which sort of freaked me out until I realized that several large dolphins were playing directly underneath.

I finally had to stop to siphon gas from a reserve container into the outboard tank. When I continued on my way and went back to checking the marine chart against the GPS, things started to not make sense. For the first time I was uncertain of my location. I turned south into what I thought was the inlet leading to the glacier even though it didn't seem like I should be there yet and the shore didn't match the contour lines on the chart. It also seemed strange that the floating ice had disappeared when I was supposedly approaching the glacier. Took almost five miles to wake up and realize I was headed north instead of south. Ah shit!

The evening was overcast with no sun showing to indicate direction, and I was so tightly focused on the GPS that I hadn't been paying attention to the compass. When I'd stopped to siphon gas the boat must have drifted around 180 degrees. I was tired and in a hurry to reach the glacier before dark, and once the gas tank was full I just fired up the motor and kept going in the direction the boat was pointed. From the middle of the channel both shorelines looked similar and I didn't notice I was going back the way I'd just come.

Back in the east/west channel I realized I couldn't reach the glacier by dark. On the chart I saw what looked like a good place to camp a few miles ahead. A narrow opening led into an inlet half mile across and I tied up in a tiny cove protected from wind by rock walls and trees. Rigged the plastic shelter over the boat. Things were damp from spray, but I managed to keep my bedding dry. It was snug and cozy, and I was glad to be there far from my cabin. Heated some of the rice and beans I'd brought and went to sleep.

Windy night and I didn't hurry to pack in the morning since I assumed I'd be there all day and that night too. Finally took down plastic shelter to go look for drinking water and have a shit on the beach. Nipped out to look at the channel and, lo, it was calm enough to go on to the glacier. Easy trip even though the motor was missing and the boat didn't want to plane some of the time.

I crept for maybe half mile through thousands of small icebergs that had calved from the main wall to get as close as I could to the glacier. I was completely alone with no people to distract me from the incredible sight. It felt very other worldly - far even from the middle of nowhere. The thought that the motor might die and leave me stranded among all that ice was troubling, so I put the thought away and bathed in the beauty. Five dolphins showed up and played with the boat as I motored slowly along. The ice glistened in the hazy sun and sometimes glowed glacial blue from deep within. I realized that beneath all the mind chatter about needing to face my fear, it was that mystic blue that had called to me so strongly these past weeks. What wonder filled that place.

After a while I headed back to where I'd camped the night before so I'd have a start on the return trip next day. At first light dolphins woke me and I packed to leave. The boat didn't want to plane but finally got up and after that I kept going without stop all the way back to where I'd cached the gas. The return trip was as smooth as the trip out had been. Beautiful rock formations and mysterious inlets beckoned to be explored, but the unpredictability of the weather kept me moving. Along the navigation channel I saw two boats far away across the water.

Found the gas cache without problem thanks to having marked the location as a waypoint on the GPS. What a handy gizmo. It would be very easy to become lost amongst all the islands and waterways here. As long as I keep close track of where I am on the chart and in relation to camp I'm ok, but if I were to lose track of my location, it would be very difficult to figure it out without the GPS. So much of the rolling landscape looks similar. Blows my mind to think of the original explorers that had no maps. Did they go down every channel to see where they might lead?

Sea and sky seemed ok so I followed the shipping route along the west side of Isla Evans rather than cut east into more protected water. When I came level with Isla Vancouver across the channel to the west, there was a breeze coming up and the sea was slightly choppy, but I decided to chance it and complete all the trips I've wanted to make while here. I originally considered Isla Vancouver as a place to live for the year since much of the island's total area is composed of a large enclosed circular inlet with many small islands, passageways, and side inlets. But German told me fishermen regularly go there to harvest urchins.

I crossed the four mile wide channel and through the narrow opening into the inlet. Lovely and very protected, but I doubt I would've been as content there as I have been here. No mountain view and probably poor fishing since it's all shallow water. Interesting tidal currents swirl through the narrow passageways and would make kayaking exciting on extreme tides. The landscape here continues to

fascinate. So many nooks and crannies to putter in. Wandered the inlet for a while then headed back across the channel toward home. Total trip was 181 miles.

The trip to the glacier is one of the hardest things I've ever done. Not the actual trip which - because wind and sea were calm - was smooth and easy, but facing the fear and uncertainty. One of the challenges of solitude is that potential danger can loom to fill the mind. Without another person to help maintain perspective, fear that would normally be manageable can overwhelm. I'd face the fear, prepare everything for the trip, and the weather would turn foul. Or it would look like it was going to blow so I wouldn't go, and the sea would remain flat calm all day.

Over and over I imagined myself caught in a ferocious storm huddled for days on a wind whipped, spray soaked rock, or as a small vulnerable speck lost and alone - drifting helplessly with a dead motor among an endless labyrinth of mountains, islands, and waterways, far from any possible help. I'd see myself trying to limp home with the 4 hp outboard that I don't trust, or worse, needing to call for rescue which would be a serious failure and sign of irresponsible behaviour.

I think the only justifiable reasons for rescue are disastrous and unexpected storm, unexpected health problems, or unexpected equipment failure not caused by faulty maintenance. Before I went I knew the weather might turn too nasty to let me come home, and I knew there was a real possibility the motor might crap out. As it turned out my behaviour wasn't irresponsible, but if I'd had to call for help, it would have been.

Ah. To relax. I'm very, very glad I made all the trips. I feel fulfilled and complete in that aspect of my time here. Total distance during the first two weeks of spring was over 350 miles. That was my last window of opportunity. Since then there hasn't been one calm day. Some are only sort of rough, and others, like today, are roaring.

Now I can focus on inner work again and simply being here without the distraction of being bummed that the wind is blowing every day and that I didn't make the trips when I had the chance. I have plenty of firewood, almost no gas for the outboard, and am pretty sure I don't want German to bring spare parts. Unless I have a serious problem I don't plan to send or receive any emails for the next four months except the monthly check in and to arrange transportation for Patti with the navy.

The Orange Bill Butter Belly Diving Ducks continue to fascinate and mystify me. I now think the close pair purposefully instigated the fight I saw. Although this male gave way, the territorial line has shifted perhaps 15 meters to increase the close pair's territory. I was away for three days and don't know if there was another fight. I think the territorial squabble is about nesting, not feeding area. The old boundary cut across the small island out front, and now the island is completely within this pair's territory.

I have an intuitive sense that it's not necessarily the stronger male who wins, but rather which pair WANTS the territory most. In any case there has been much less territorial defence activity in the past few days than there was during the previous weeks. Wonder what the males will do around the boundary line once the females are brooding. Maybe they'll say, "Ah fuck it, let's just go have a beer and try to get along."

The close pair is doing what seems like nesting activity. They both went ashore on the small island. The male stayed on the rocks in the open. She waddled up toward the brush and stopped to preen a couple times - as though to check out the situation and not give away her nest location to a potential predator. Then she disappeared into the brush. She didn't reappear until three and a half hours later. Cool how the male keeps watch when she goes to build a nest or lay an egg. Once they'd left the area I went to search for the nest but still couldn't find it. Must be incredibly well hidden. I didn't want to tromp through the area too much for fear of scaring her away to build a new nest.

Last time I saw them copulate, she did some head bobbing just before he zoomed over and leapt on her. Perhaps there is some sort of invitation rather than he just climbing on when in the mood.

I'd like to write a paper on them from a more holistic perspective. For example: traditionally, territorial defence would be interpreted as competitive. But if instead of focusing on each individual pair, I look at the system of organization as a whole, then the fact that they so seldom actually fight can be seen as cooperative. In terms of resource allocation their territoriality can be seen as cooperating to organize resource use most efficiently. This way each pair knows where it's been feeding and doesn't need to spend time in an area another pair might just have harvested if there were no territories.

10/11/01

Today the close pair of butter bellies swam to the disputed boundary and the female swam into the neighbouring territory to feed around the rock the other pair recently occupied. The male hung back and although he entered the buffer zone, he never crossed the new territorial line. The boundary still seems to be in dispute, and this female is the one pushing to move the line even more.

Used red and white fingernail polish to mark 30 limpets today to see if they move over time. Also marked two spots on the rock to triangulate the position of each limpet, and recorded the data. In a week, assuming the polish sticks, I'll re-measure their positions. If they haven't moved, I'll continue to check each week for a month. If they have moved, I may start to measure their position daily.



10/12/01

Watched ducks most of day. Timed their dives and length of feeding bouts. She is still feeding much more than he. While they were sitting on a rock near the point I went to see if they would let me come close. They got nervous at about 25 feet so I stopped. A little later she waddled to within 10 feet of me to drink from a pool then hunkered down. Eventually he came over too. He tucked his feet up into his belly feathers. They'd close their eyes for a second or two, open them briefly and then close them again. Their eyes close from the bottom up which is pretty cool. Wonder if they ever sleep deeply with eyes shut tight. At one point she stood up and a perfectly round lovely pink ass popped out of her tail feathers and she squirted out a gob of shit.

Nice to share sun, wind, rock, and water sounds with them. A sense of unity: all of us manifestations of Life. Life studying Life. From that holistic perspective there is no observer and no observed - just observation and noticing. I wondered how much of that basic experience we were really sharing. In meditation I'm working to focus on asking, Who Am I? and on paying attention to actual awareness rather than the content of awareness.

Do the ducks and I share an identical awareness? Not content, but the space of being aware of the world. Even though I'm into the "study them" mode, I try to shift and just keep company in a choiceless way as much as I can. A sort of Zen biology. The received wisdom is that there are no facts not theory bound. Without theory for context, we cannot actually see facts. In some sense the theory creates the facts. I wonder. I have theories about what the ducks are doing, but can I give them up and just be present?

After sitting with me a while, they swam into the basin and disappeared behind the island where she's nesting - and never came back out; even though I watched closely. Then I happened to glance toward the point, and there they were. Fuck, they're magic how they disappear and reappear like that.

Had a quick look at the limpets to see if they'd moved at all. Whoa! Did they ever! Some had disappeared completely. Starting tomorrow I'll measure their positions daily. I can also do some experiments now that I know they move so much.

Why does Cat's yowling bother me so much? It's as if Cat is directing the yowling at me to demand a response. I've heard that large cats growl as they hunt to terrify potential prey into moving and giving away their position. I wonder if my reaction could be the deep visceral response of a potential prey to a hunting cat?

### 10/13/01

Rainy day. Woke up, meditated, and exercised. Didn't see the ducks until afternoon when I finally saw the male alone. Felt for him as if he were just a visitor in the female's territory now. The white goose of the black and white pair has been standing on a rock on the far island. Is this one the female laying eggs and guarding the nest, or did I have their sexes mixed up and the black and white one the female - now brooding - and this the male guarding the nest? Neat to witness all these creatures reproducing. Keeping the cycle going. I feel sort of left out of it all.

Measured and noted the positions of the limpets this afternoon. Came up with a better system than triangulation. Used a bucket lid to make a dial by painting numbers from 1 to 12 around the rim. Divided each segment into 10 small units each of which equals 3 angular degrees. Tied a 10-foot string to the centre of the dial. Marked the string at 3, 6, and 12 inch intervals. To establish the position of each limpet each day, I'll place the dial on the rock in the exact same spot in the same orientation and stretch the string to the top point of each limpet and note the distance from the centre of the dial and the angle at which the

string crosses the dial's rim. This will yield a vector I can later transform to an XY coordinate system using the dial as origin.

Rainy and cold today. A day of hard feelings at times. Longing. In the past I might have attributed this feeling to loneliness, but now I'm not sure. It might be spiritual longing. Or perhaps this is what Epstein describes as the sense of "basic fault" that results when a child doesn't get the nurturing he needs. But it seems to me that the sense of abandonment is the same, or at least related to, the sense of being cut off from Spirit - from one's own deep aliveness. Several times I determined to stay with the feeling, but over and over ate something, drank another coffee, or engaged in some activity to escape. Back tense and achy and fingers feel arthritic as I type.

Sometimes I'm still caught in magical thinking when I really want something. Talking aloud I ask the wind to stop blowing or tell the rain to wait a while, or thank them for behaving in a way pleasing to me. On one level I know I'm playing and that this is simply a way to express my feelings, and yet ... not completely I don't think. I really am trying to persuade the elements to consider my desires. Rationally I know this is silly, but emotionally I still sort of believe. In some sense that magical space is not a joyful place to be. It feels dark and threatening, as though the wind is a conscious presence that has the power to attack and so must be propitiated.

Tonight at dusk, release, peace, and love. I slipped into a deep inner space of light and visions. Ah yes, now I remember.... I think it was a sentence in *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality* that triggered the shift. Wilber was talking about exploring this huge unexplored world of consciousness, and bam - of course. This is an exploration, not something I must do just right so I'll be ok or so I can teach others.

In that openness I heard the waterfalls from Staines and experienced them as inside my body. Then shifted perspective and consciousness was no longer

enclosed in my body, but expanded freely into space all around. Both body and waterfalls were aspects of consciousness. I got what Wilber is saying when he claims that the biosphere is part of the noosphere. The physical world is part of my conscious experience, but not all of it. I also see what Wilber is saying about the biosphere not being the goal, but where we come from.

Then Cat started to cry and it hammered me. As I crashed into that tight painful space I thought, Ah shit not again. Why can't I stay where it's light and joyful? But when I'm physically traveling and exploring I don't expect everything to be easy and wonderful. I expect it to be tough, dirty, painful, and frightening at times. That's what traveling - as opposed to tourism - is. So why do I expect these inner explorations to be different?

Cat doesn't live in a space that's very attractive to me. Nor, when I'm caught in that low level am I happy there. The biosphere is, in some basic way (I think), oriented toward flight or fight. Cat crying or yowling seems to plunge me into that dark space and tightens me up. I'll keep working with it. It may (quite likely) have nothing to do with Cat at all, but be my own resistance to feeling certain things like fear around my vulnerability and death.

It's like I have an inner switch. Either I'm flowing easily in the decentred space of Big Mind, or, wham, locked down into small tight mind which (even after all these years of work) often isn't a comfortable place to be. When I slip from small mind where I cling to my isolated ego self and the security of the known, and radically shift into the larger more relaxed space, I recognise that this is where I've always wanted to be. I don't understand why - after all these years - I still resist the transformation so fiercely.

10/15/01

Sensuous van Gogh clouds this morning that looked more like a painting than a real sky.

I think the female duck is brooding her eggs. Didn't see her at all yesterday or today. I'm surprised how she began. I'd thought she would lay an egg each day until she had a full nest and then begin to sit, but she seemed to gradually increase time spent in the nest each day. Lots of other birds around too. It's a sort of avian gestalt once I open myself to the collective flow of the birds here instead of focusing so tightly on the butter belly ducks.

Measured the limpets and the system works well. In a couple weeks, maybe I'll check the data to see if a pattern is apparent. Of course there will be a pattern; the question is what kind of pattern. Something my eye and mind can detect as a repeating pattern, or the kind of free flowing pattern Alan Watts talks about in *Nature Man and Woman* that you can see in jade. I might also scrape them off the rock and set them back down as a cluster in the centre of a flat area I'll clear of all mussels. I'm curious about three things: 1. Do the same two limpets hang out together over time? 2. Is there much variance in the amount of movement between individuals - are some wanderers and some couch potatoes? 3. What sort of pattern might emerge from their movement over time?

I question the ethics of uprooting and likely killing hundreds of mussels to satisfy my curiosity. I'd have little reluctance to kill that many to eat if there wasn't red tide even though I don't need them to survive. What's the difference between killing to satisfy intellectual desire and killing to satisfy physical desire?

I watched myself making the measurements under the slanting afternoon sun: a lone man far from others of his kind kneeling on low tide rocks trying to discover something about the lives of limpets. In some sense it's not so much about limpets as about exploring ideas and playing with the notion of integrating science and aesthetics by looking at limpet movement as a dance rather than a feeding activity.

Personality always has an impact on scientific findings. What you look for largely determines how you design a study and consequently what you find. If I

were looking for average limpet movement, I might ignore the few individuals that move long distances, or average them in and so ignore their significance. But personally, I'm interested in the oddballs - the wanderers.

When Cat is quiet, I really like him and am glad to have him here. But immediately he starts to cry, I throw him out of my heart and wish he were not here at all - even have thoughts of doing him in. This response is very painful and I guess I should be glad to have the opportunity to see it more clearly even if I don't manage to get a grip on my behaviour.

Received email from Patti saying she has purchased a ticket to visit Chile for two months in February. I'll be glad to see her. Sent a message to Alejandra saying I don't want German to come with supplies. Hope I don't regret it. Cleaned chimney and there wasn't much soot, so maybe it will last until I leave. Split wood. I imagine I'll have plenty to last. Used some soil from the pile I dug up when building the outhouse hole to make a seed flat for lettuce. The soil holds an incredible amount of moisture. It's been eight inches above ground level but is still completely saturated. Cleaned fishing reel. Wonder how much more I'll use it?

Finally checked the limpets I've had in a sack down on the beach. I collected them weeks ago for Cat, but I'd been giving him fish regularly. Now I'm not fishing and I thought I'd give him some limpets instead. They were all dead and eaten by sand shrimp. Bummer. They didn't go to waste, but I did kill them needlessly, and starving is not a good way to die. Thoughtless and lazy.

Hundred pages to go in *SES*. Mostly I still very much like Wilber even though he repeats himself too much. I might like to teach a course based on his work when I get a Ph.D.

10/16/01

New moon; day of fasting. Argh, I'm hungry. Want to at least put honey in my herbal tea, but so far I'm resisting. Raining, but not very cold. Woke early to watch the sun coming over mountains behind clouds. Otherwise the sky was clear. Went out to the rock to have tea, watch the day coming on, and meditate. Low tide and I thought I might measure the limpets then (will need to switch from p.m. to a.m. within a couple days anyway since the afternoon low tide will soon come after dark), but decided not to even though intuition told me I'd end up doing it in the rain this afternoon. Yup, and the rocks were very slippery.

Cat was eating mussels again which is worrisome, so I decided to give him some limpets from a part of the study I discontinued because it was not working out. That way they won't clutter up the rock. Science at its finest. Don't like the way an experiment is going? Test subjects not behaving as you want them to? No problem. Cancel the test and feed the subjects to the cat.

Warmed up to almost 70F in the sun today, and even though it was cloudy I was suddenly inspired to take a chance and patch the boat. Everything went well. Removed the floor and there was surprisingly little debris underneath in spite of hauling wood and gravel. Must self-clean. Took off the old patch that was leaking and found an inch-long tear. Sewed the fabric and re-patched it. Started to rain just as I finished. Glad I got it done in time. Also glad the old patch didn't come off completely while I was going to the glacier or that compartment of the pontoon would have quickly deflated.

Planted lettuce and radish seeds in a flat I made from a one-gallon oil container. Gonna be a lot of work to put in a garden. Need to mix sand with the soil to allow for drainage and I may cover it with clear plastic to keep the rain off.

Feeling sort of empty and disconnected. Wondering what's going on with Patti and Susan and hoping they're feeling good about life.

10/17/01

All morning it rained and got calmer and calmer. Went fishing but had to work on boat and motor first. Cleaned ignition coil grounds where corrosion had built up again. Pontoon that was leaking is now holding air well. One of the reasons I'd resisted taking out the floor to patch the boat was because I expected putting it back in would be a nasty job, but it went in easily. I was ready to go, and wham a front moved through. Strong wind and heavy rain. Covered boat and kayak again - for how long I wonder.

In one sense the butter bellies can be seen as a flow of energy in the world - like wind or rain. This is how I was thinking before reading Wilber again. Now I'm wondering if that conception reduces everything to the physical movement of matter and leaves no opportunity for biological motivation. They can also be seen as internally motivated in the normal every duck for herself way, but shift perspective and they are all manifestations of Spirit. Then there is no separation between them and the terms competition and cooperation lose meaning.

Genetically speaking I'm worth two siblings and eight cousins. But I share most of my genetic material with all members of my species and all other species - not only with my own family. In terms of wanting our genes to survive, we should support all life if it doesn't cost us much. So altruism may have to do with the situation. For example, if there are many humans around and one is in trouble I doubt (from a genetic perspective) it would matter to me since the genetic material I share with that individual will survive through the others. But if there is only one other human and he dies, I will be the only one left. In that case I should be very willing to help that person survive since if both of us die all the genetic material that's exclusively human goes down the tube.

This pattern of behaviour is actually documented in social psychology studies. If someone is on the ground apparently unconscious, a passer-by is more likely to



stop and help when there is no one else in sight than when there are other people nearby. The usual explanation is that in the latter case the passer-by feels less responsible or that someone else will help if he does not. But maybe when there are others around, we just don't give a shit if the unconscious person survives or not. This would seem true of all life. If it was just me and a frog left, I might do all I could to be sure the frog survived. We tend to think of this in terms of company and loneliness, but I wonder.

10/18/01

That woke me up. Just tended the stove and after adding wood I noticed a small piece of orange tinfoil on the floor. Wondered where it might have come from and picked it up. Yeow! Turned out to be an ember. Must have popped out the draft hole. Nice blister.

Cat is such a trooper in coming with me no matter how nasty the weather. I went to measure the limpets this morning and as usual he was in his box apparently asleep. He usually gets up for only a brief time before noon. I thought I'd slipped away unnoticed and was glad because he tends to get in the way when I'm measuring, but shortly here he came crying all the way. Shut up as he approached. I'm sure now he knows I hate it. A totally foul morning - 40 degrees, raining, windy - but he stayed with me the whole time. Doesn't seem to mind getting wet but doesn't like the wind at all.

I've only gone out to sit in the rain a few times in really foul weather, so doing science is taking me into the elements where I'd expected to spend more time than I have. Caught another glimpse of myself today measuring the movement of limpets on a slippery rock in a rainstorm in the middle of nowhere. Madness. Human beings are truly an odd species.

Meditated quite a bit and read Wilber. Found myself disagreeing with him again today. He's setting up straw men to attack with regard to the ecological

movement. Claims that some go to find Spirit in nature through the feelings that arise when there, and that this is an egotistical activity. He says we cannot bring Spirit in from nature, but Spirit flows through us out into nature. Sounds like horseshit to me. Neither seems right. Spirit is everywhere and being in Nature can help us perceive it; and we can only perceive it in nature if we experience an inner transformation within ourselves. I'm picking nits I think.

Now that it's cold again the woodpile doesn't look nearly as large as it did last week when the temperature was warmer. Stove is smoking some since I shortened the outside chimney where it had rusted out. Might try to rebuild it with a milk can, duct tape, and wire once the rain stops.

Just had a flash of being back with people and feeling not as good as others. Then I sensed/remembered that we're all manifestations of Spirit/Life/Existence, and immediately felt calm again. This decentring from such strong narcissistic self-focus seems to prevent judging others and self so strongly. The shift requires discipline and won't come from depending on flashes of insight, but I also sense it is called up by something deeper or higher and not by my own ego. There is nothing I can do on my own.

Perhaps I should leave the cabin standing when I leave just in case I decide to return. If I do come back, I wonder where I'll build next time of all the places I've seen? This is an amazing spot. It would be nice to be somewhere more protected, but then there might not be good fishing or a view of the mountains.

10/20/01

Very windy. The pair of rusty breast geese is still here and very skittish, and Cat scares them too. Hope to get a photo, but will be lucky if I do. Another new bird has arrived. Lean and angular, and it flies the same way. Changes direction and rotates from side to side with each beat of its wings. Looks like it'll

fall out of the sky if it pauses for an instant. Looks like a seagull wired on speed. Only difference is that it's graceful and lovely to watch which hasn't been my experience with meth heads. Otter came by yesterday and caught a fish. Made me envious.

Fixed chimney yesterday and it seems to have worked fine. Not smoking for the moment. Chair broke today and I repaired it with wood and wire. Things starting to fall apart.

In *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality* Wilber analyzes and criticizes the central no-self doctrine of Theravada Buddhism and claims that most schools of Buddhism don't agree with the strong no-self doctrine. They argue that the self is relative rather than absolute. I've wondered about the no-self notion for a while. I've had the experience that there is no one in here to defend, but I've also sensed that the self may come into existence through activity and only dissolves in the stillness of meditation.

I've been meditating much more these past days and want to keep it up. The winds continue to blow which is good because it keeps me off the water and focuses my attention inward. There are moments of ease, joy, peace, and love, and also moments of longing, lack, and hollowness. I still avoid those moments although I repeatedly make resolutions to stay with them. Might settle into a basic sustenance diet for a while and give up using food treats as pleasure and escape.

10/21/01

Sunday. Grey rainy morning. Stayed in cabin most of the day with a fire. Discovered a great new trick for cracked fingertips. Once split from the wet and cold, the only thing that really promotes healing and reduction of pain is to apply ointment and tape them up. Problem is that fishing, washing dishes, or being in the rain wets the tape and gauze. Then the bandage comes off. A few days ago

I had the bright idea of cutting a finger from a surgical glove and slipping it over the gauze instead of using tape. Works perfectly.

The Sunday blanket of depression and torpor settled on me today - especially in the morning. Still have no understanding of its source or place in my psyche. Is it a valuable balance for something or a simple distraction to get rid of with an anti-depressant drug?

Today is Sunday, my day of rest.

All week

- now and then -

I look forward to Sunday.

I exercise just enough to ease my shoulder ache,  
do not meditate,  
re-read a novel rather than philosophy or spiritual teaching,  
build a fire,  
and feel no obligation to sit outside in the rain and wind.

Sunday is, perhaps, my hardest day.  
Unstructured and undisciplined,  
deep aches and longings wash over me  
and lay as heavy as gloom on my heart.

On Sundays, even more than other days,  
I escape into coffee, popcorn, and chocolate.  
On Sundays, I long to be elsewhere -  
but nowhere else I can think of.

On Sundays, I see how far and for how long  
these feelings have driven me:  
to wander; to drugs; to each new woman's body; to here.  
No, not the feelings but avoidance of them.

On Sundays, I look at these feelings  
and question, unsuccessfully,  
their source, and niche  
in this fabric I call myself.

On Sundays - after all these months -  
I feel no closer to understanding, peace, or freedom.

On Sundays, I look out my window  
and the Orange Bill Butter Belly Diving Duck is just a bird:  
eating, shitting, breeding, dying -  
over and over again.

On Sundays, I look down the remaining years of my life  
and see  
fleeting joys,  
but no lasting peace.

On Sundays, I look forward to Mondays  
and wish I didn't.

10/22/01

No entry.

10/23/01

Yet another windy, cloudy, sometimes rainy day. Measuring the limpets was a nasty proposition and I was almost blown from the rock into the sea. Measurement accuracy suffers when it's like this. Most of the limpets are pretty sedentary, but a few have taken off for parts unknown - leaving the large flat surface and moving out onto a jumble of separate smaller rocks. Wonder how far they'll go? Wonder why they go? Hunger? Sex drive? Wanderlust? I keep reapplying nail polish since it isn't sticking very well.

How does a scientific study get started? I think by different processes and for a variety of reasons. Some begin with a thought and some with an emotion. They may start from something that catches the eye and doesn't make sense; from reading the literature; because the boss asks to have it done; by happenstance and because they're doable; for semi-hidden reasons.

My original notion was to go into solitude to do an animal behaviour study and include in the study my own cognitive/emotional/spiritual behaviour as researcher. But along the way my orientation shifted from a biological study to a study of myself in solitude. Once here I began to collect limpets for Cat and started to wonder how much they move around to find food. One day I realized a study was actually practical. I could mark them, measure their positions, and track their movement over time. Of course I'd have no idea what they were doing during high tide: the ones that seem to stay put might be out feeding and come home to the same spot each low tide, but I sort of doubted it. All this was just a mind tickle until one sunny afternoon when I saw their shells were dry I felt inspired to mark a bunch of the limpets and actually begin a study.

Normally I'd have done background reading to see if anyone else has already done this study before starting it myself, but here I'm on my own. In any case, I doubt that anyone has done this same thing here in southern Chile, so at the very least this could be a comparison with a study done somewhere else. Other possibly unique aspects of this work are the aesthetic rather than survival behaviour orientation and the lived experience approach of describing the researcher's thoughts and feelings.

The Orange Bill Butter Belly Diving Duck study I seem to be doing began differently: I just drifted into it. There they were in my front yard day after day, and as I casually watched I became more and more intrigued by what I saw. Little by little I started to pay closer attention. While both studies are for my own interest, I doubt I'd be doing the limpet study except for my conversations with Lee about how scientific studies get started. But I bet I'd be watching the Butter Bellies no matter what.

Finally finished *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality*. Seems to me I've been reading that book for almost two months and by now I'm thoroughly tired of Wilber's judgmental style. Not sure if he's so fucking brilliant that he's right all the time, just arrogant, or both. I have the sense he might well be an asshole, but this may not be so.<sup>130</sup> He needs to do more editing. He writes clearly and directly which is a pleasure after some of the academic writing I've read, but he repeats himself over and over. When he waxes poetic he's heavy handed and not subtle at all. Still, reading him has been and, I imagine, will continue to be very valuable.

Finally started to build a sling chair today. Immediately the materials didn't cooperate and immediately I got angry. I'm taking it as my practice to focus on my anger and on letting it go instead of acting it out. No matter what I'm doing, if I become aware of getting angry and frustrated, I stop, relax, and let it go before I continue - instead of bulling through. This is the most important behavioural thing I can do here, and since I have no need to accomplish anything more I certainly have the time.

I'm seeing more and more clearly how anger and self-centeredness feed each other and are grounded in frustrated desire and thwarted will. Anger/self centeredness and depression/unhappiness are, perhaps, the strongest hindrances to feeling good about myself, getting along with other people, and spiritual growth.

10/24/01

Today there was weather. Strong wind from northwest and then southwest; rain, hail, and even some snow. Tonight it's calm for the first - or maybe second - time since I returned from the glacier. Probably won't last until morning, but if it does I might go fishing.

Started another limpet study today in the hail. As usual - although I'm trying to be careful - I stepped on and broke several mussels. When I remember, I toss them into the sea so Cat won't eat them. Spaced it today and caught him half way through one of them. He seems ok so far. The thought of him dying is not a happy one. I've come to really care for him in spite of my annoyance at his crying. I'm also aware when I step on mussels that I'm killing them needlessly just to satisfy my curiosity.

Started to dig a garden plot near the point. Shit! What an absolute tangle of roots under the grass. No way am I doing a garden there. Too much work for one season. I may build a couple wooden boxes and fill them with soil from the outhouse hole. Won't be much, but at least something to supplement lentil sprouts.

Saw a condor through the hail. Very neat. Also watched one of the small grey birds come onto the porch to rob food from Cat's dish. The bird is very aware of Cat. If I'm sitting alone, he goes straight to the dish. If Cat is with me, he turns around and leaves. Cat often stalks these birds on the rocks, and I've given up yelling at him to quit. As far as I can tell he hasn't caught one yet. Dolphins came by this afternoon. I think there may have been two different



groups and species. One kind seemed to have a more pointed dorsal fin than the other.

10/25/01

After I finished measuring the limpets, I jotted the following notes in the Rite in the Rain notebooks I use to record the limpet data. What an ironic perversion it's been to use the books I originally brought for writing my reflections while sitting in the rain to record scientific data.

Mountains against grey sky are simply there and solid today. I feel I'm frittering away the amazing opportunity I have here to journey deep into my mind. I wake in the morning and the long empty day stretches before me. I wonder how I'll fill it, even though I know that filling it is just what I don't want to do. I want to leave it open and empty, but then uncomfortable and unnamed feelings flood in and I head for coffee, food, or activity. These feelings seem to have been with me forever and maybe always will be. But here I have the space to explore and perhaps make friends with them ... if I use the opportunity.

10/27/01

Also from the Rite in the Rain notebook: What social value could this study of limpets have? Quantifying the flowing moment? Finding individual differences even in simple creatures that would often be lumped together as a single common group? Recognizing that from another perspective there are no differences at all? Five years from now there will be other limpets on this rock and some of them will be wanderers too. Even individual differences are common to the flowing whole. I suppose what individual limpets do isn't really important, but questioning and exploring is part of this solitary journey.

10/29/01

Don't feel much like writing, but it's almost the end of the month and I intend to stop for a while as of November 1<sup>st</sup>, so I want to put down some thoughts I've noted longhand over the past few days.

I also want to give up reading for three months while I have the space for inner exploration. I've been heading toward this year for the past 25, and if I don't live it fully I'll regret it deeply. I'd intended to give up reading more than a month ago, but as usual I'm behind schedule. I want to stay with my own moment-to-moment experience as much as possible. Perhaps I'll read a bit of *A Path with a Heart*, *Chuang Tsu*, or the *I Ching* now and then to catalyze inward shifts, and also my own essay *A Pathless Land*.

I intend to give up coffee, cocoa, chocolate, sugar, and bread for at least a month. I've become more and more aware how I use food to escape physical and emotional pain and to change my feelings from a sort of hollow depression to a higher energy state of feeling pretty good. Then shortly afterward I crash and head for some stimulus again. Round and round. At some point I'd like to fast and stay outside for three days and nights. But sleeping in the rain seems extreme to me even though I'd wear raingear and try to stay as dry as possible.

One thing I must do when I leave here is remember all the ups and downs, rather than create an idealized myth of this journey against which I compare the rest of my life.

I'm still questioning the place of language in my experience. Is the space of consciousness the result of language? Clearly, all thought is language based. Pure sensation (e.g. seeing moving water) does not seem to be, but the quality of feeling associated with that seeing may be. Reflections about that seeing and feeling are certainly language based. Is self-awareness - awareness of myself seeing moving water?

Wilber writes that the True Self (Spirit/the Witness/pure Awareness) is One: that it manifests itself (like waves of the sea) in each sentient being. It is also eternal. If so, then when I become aware of the Awareness that has always existed, how can that experience be language based? He points out that some mystic philosophers claim that Spirit "hid from itself in its eternal play" by becoming matter, and thus lost awareness of Itself. From this perspective, physical and cultural evolution is the process of Spirit growing back towards Itself. The middle stages of this process are language-based, and to reach the higher stages you must pass through these middle levels. But the direct experience of awareness seems to be beyond language. I'll continue to chew on this stuff.

I wonder if pure Spirit is not Self-Aware, and in attempting to know Itself manifested as the material universe and began its journey of Self-discovery? That is, perhaps pure Spirit can know Itself only by being mirrored by Itself incarnate. If so, then Spirit calls to us in order to know Itself and not just from compassion.

That sounds sort of sweet in a way. Makes us more than an epiphenomenon. I think most would disagree because it means Spirit is not unconditionally free, but in some sense depends on us - as we do It. But still, if all is One, there is no dependence or independence.

Once Spirit hid from itself and before mind developed self-awareness and Cosmic Consciousness, was Spirit no longer aware - in effect did it cease to exist as pure Spirit? Had the whole Kosmos gone unconscious and become simply physical? I intend to explore this question during the next months here - or not. At the moment these are just words that sound nice, but which, without direct intuition, are empty.

A core issue with me is that my spiritual awareness is ahead of my development into a healthy ego. Socially and interpersonally I'm still tangled in self-centered narcissism and not very open or giving.

How can I accept myself - just as I am - when part of me is judgmental? Seems like a vicious circle: I can't accept the flaw of my perfectionism because it causes me to reject myself for not being perfect. But the circle is broken when I do accept myself - imperfect in my perfectionism. It's the yo-yoing that's so hard. If I can accept my amputated leg, why not my other flaws: fear, rage, shame, cruelty, and perfectionism? Perhaps because these also affect other people. But here and now I'm only hurting myself - and Cat.

Maybe compassion is the point. I'm not yet accepting the universe as it is. It pisses me off to hurt, and in some sense I've been denying this deep rage. I get angry when minor daily events thwart my will, but actually I'm still furious with God (though I thought I'd long since grown past that). I think it's healthier to hold the rage in a loving space, honour it, and acknowledge its source than to project it onto the everyday world.

I suspect the rage is a symptom of my own self-criticism and self-rejection - a refraction of inner pain. This is a good thing because at least I have a chance of lightening up on self-abuse, but no hope at all of changing the structure of the universe. This realization was triggered by reading Wilber's book, *No Boundary*. I owe him a great deal and find this earlier work much cleaner than his recent productions.

I feel a sense of commonality with the male butter belly duck. I feel it in my body. We're both sort of hanging out here. I definitely have the sense that he's more than just a feather draped stimulus/response machine. Who knows for sure, but why would I want to reduce this wonderful being to an automaton? Why would I want to do that to the universe I live in? Why would I want to do that to myself?

As I've gotten more serious about possibly using the study of the butter bellied ducks in my dissertation, I've switched from simply being with them in curiosity, love, and wonder to wanting to take something from them - information,

public approval, etc. This shift from sharing to taking is a form of greed. It seems to me that much of science is based on taking, but really creative scientists give themselves to the world instead of taking something from the world to fulfill their own desires and expectations.

What can I give to nature? I'm receiving so much. Is bringing my awareness to this place a gift? Does the loving kindness meditation I do daily have an effect? Is it necessary to give if there is no boundary between us?

Nature is going nowhere. Evolution is a conceptual notion to give us a sense of progress, purpose, and meaning. Things do change via evolution, but very, very slowly compared with the endless repetition of the daily/yearly same ol same ol. Life is drudgery looked at from the outside. That's why we've invented so many ways to escape. Even personal growth (I think in the moment) goes round and round; up and down. The only way Life - as it is in nature - becomes meaningful is to step out of conceptual abstractions and into the flow of living.

This cloudy night  
the wind has finally died  
and the sea whispers  
tenderly.

Her sensuous murmur  
drifts and echoes  
through the infinite empty space  
of our mutual existence.

I can no longer speak  
of solitude without admitting  
the presence of Something  
here with me.  
Something non-material and non-personal.

Often,  
I'm deaf and blind  
and my heart is closed.  
But again and again  
an inner softening  
yields tears, love,  
peace, beauty,  
and deep, deep gratitude.

Then,  
all there is to get,  
I've already got...  
if I simply open my mind and heart  
to what already is.  
To see things as they are,  
and not  
as I would like them to be.

There is no place to go  
other than here.  
No time to be  
other than now.  
No way out,  
and no way further in  
to Life.

10/30/01

Glum morning. Even before meditation, I had a coffee. I feel that nearly everyone I know has meaningful work, a relationship and perhaps a family, a home and security. They've had the courage, perseverance, and discipline to commit to something and establish themselves as solid individuals.

At times like this I feel I've frittered away my life; haven't had the courage to say I'll commit myself to this and hold steady through the hard times because it's important to me; haven't had the wisdom to realize emotions like these will arise no matter where I go or what I do. Until finally, here I am a 55 year old man living alone on a small island working on a Ph.D. I'll likely never use and planning to write a dissertation few people are likely to read. What foolishness to pretend that braving wind and cold to measure the movement of limpets is somehow of importance. It seems like a make-work project to give my days some shape.

10/31/01

Last day in October and, if everything goes according to plan (no reason why it should, never has before), this will be the last entry for a while. Been a busy day. Woke fairly early to quiet. No waves against rock or wind in trees. Looked out to the first completely calm day in a month. Excellent conditions to measure elevations on the study site. Warmed a cup of yesterday's coffee to take along and reached the limpets just as tide was coming in.

Two days ago on a very low tide I stretched a level line over the study area. Using a fishing weight on a string as a plumb bob, I worked along the line measuring down and marking the sloping rock with nail polish every four vertical inches. Today when the tide level reached each mark, I worked around the dial - set in its normal position and recorded the distance from dial to water. From the measurements I'll be able to re-create the contour lines on paper.

In the afternoon at high tide I went fishing to Staines. Motor seems about the same as the last time I used it almost a month ago. Unloaded, the boat planed easily. Patched section of pontoon is holding air better than the other ones now. Was anxious about going, but felt good to be out and moving again. I paused to honour the gift of each fish and to acknowledge the life I was taking. Looked closely into their eyes as I killed them to see the life fade. Caught enough for a week if the pool of ground water is cold enough to keep the filets from spoiling.

Sea lions are still on their rock and I think they must seriously deplete the fish stock. Imagine how many fish 18 sea lions eat. They have no sense of sustainability; those sorts never do. First one moves into the area and before you know it a whole pack has invaded. Use up our common resources, stay up all night making a racket so decent folks can't sleep, property values go all to hell.

Rained on and off all day which is good because the rain barrel was low from washing clothes the other day for first time in a month. That day was semi-clear with a good wind, so I strung up a line at the point and hung everything there. Dried within three hours. Wonder why it took me so long to figure out?

Read an essay in *Ecopsychology* yesterday by Steven Harper, a wilderness guide who leads people on trips to reconnect with nature and with their own inner nature. He claimed they do "no impact" camping, but it's impossible to do any activity with no impact. It's like the famous oxymoron "sustainable development." Neither is possible. But sustainable impact - not damaging the world faster than it can heal itself - is possible and is context dependent. The impact I'm having here is, I believe, sustainable - even though I'm fishing, cutting firewood, chopping brush, allowing a small amount of soap and detergent to enter the sea, and using gas-powered chainsaw and outboard. But I'm the only person here or likely to be here for some time to come, so the damage I do will have plenty of opportunity to heal. If I did this same stuff in a heavily used area, it would be unsustainable and irresponsible.



Harper says that "crossing over" into wilderness psychologically is like culture shock. It puts us into a larger stranger context than we are used to and shows us a broader reality. His job as a leader is to "trust and support the process, get out of the way, and let the actual wilderness teach the lessons." This crystallizes the thoughts and feelings I've had for some time.

Also read an essay by Greenway who has led groups into the wilderness for 30 years. He claims that depression and losing the wonderful sense of aliveness when returning to society is common. He describes what people can do to not lose the positive effect: meditate, get back together with the others in your wilderness group, etc. I think trying to hold onto the experience once you return to the city is the problem. Trying to cling to past experiences instead of relaxing and letting our lives unfold naturally moment by moment is just what we usually do - and tend to stop doing in the wilderness.

As I was fishing today, I realized that my primary sense of connection continues to be people and not the wilderness. I think this is maintained by reading and journaling. Instead of being fully with whatever is happening in the moment, I'm thinking about what I'll write about it. Continually "capturing" experiences to tell others instead of living them fully and letting them go. As a case in point, when I had this insight I immediately started to rehearse what I'd write about it that I could later use in my dissertation.

When I finish writing here I'll turn my books around so none of the bindings show as a symbolic way to put them away. I intend to not write any more journal entries on the computer for some time. If I really want to record something, I might jot short notes in a notebook. I've already put away the coffee, sugar, and chocolate. Eeek! A small piece of evening chocolate in the wilderness has been almost a ritual with me for many years, but lately I've taken to nibbling throughout the day.

There isn't much to do now physically except garden and putter, and in any case I want to gently create space for new discoveries - to open myself more fully to what the wilderness has to teach me. It is going to be hard losing all these avoidance mechanisms at once, but it's time. Feels like I'm stepping over the line into the unknown and I'm frightened at the thought of the long days and nights ahead without activity to fill the hours.

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<sup>128</sup> Zen proverb, <http://www.dharmaeye.org/zenteachings/zenquotes.htm>

<sup>129</sup> I don't know if the marine charts for that area are inaccurate or if the assumed shape of the earth used by the chart makers is the same as the shape assumed by the GPS system. Using different assumed shapes could create the dislocation.

<sup>130</sup> Back in Vancouver I spoke with someone who attended a series of talks by Wilber. She said that as well as being an intellectual genius, he was extremely aware of everyone in the room, did not seem arrogant at all, and manifested deep compassion. I've heard from other people though that Wilber generally responds defensively and aggressively to any criticism of his work or himself.

## Interlude 9

### Some Difficulties (I have) with Wilber's Approach

**Wilber has been criticized, sometimes severely, for his argumentative, polemical, abrasive manner, often triggering a like-minded reaction from his critics (and those he critiques), resulting in what I once referred to as the "Great Chain of Being Nasty." Wilber seems to evoke extremes: For the most part, people seem to either love him or hate him (I count myself among the exceptions).**

(de Quincey, 2000)

Before I went into solitude I wrote the Interlude 7 essay, which briefly discusses those aspects of Wilber's integral philosophy that I've found directly relevant to my own inner explorations. While in solitude, I re-read Wilber's books *Eye of the Spirit* and *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality*, as well as parts of *No Boundary*. Most of the content of the current essay has been taken from journal entries I wrote during the months of September and October, 2001. I transferred these comments because I think they work better as an interlude, but please keep in mind that in their strongly subjective and emotional tone, they fall somewhere between journal and interlude.

While reading Wilber in solitude, I wrote in my journal that when I returned to the social world I wanted to look for published criticisms of his work. I found a thoughtful, balanced, and in depth critique by Christian de Quincey posted on de Quincey's website.<sup>131</sup> Also posted are Wilber's rebuttal and de Quincey's follow-up response. Wilber's rejection of de Quincey's criticism is harsh as he fiercely defends his own points of view and ridicules de Quincey. It is a violent counter-attack rather than an open-hearted dialogue, which is what de Quincey offered. Intellectually Wilber is brilliant, but in his reaction to criticism he seems emotionally immature. He also comes across as an intellectual bully; there seems to be a mean-spirited "don't mess with me" quality in his words and tone.

When I open at random and read *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality*, I am always struck by the breadth, depth, and clarity of Wilber's ideas. And yet the pages of my journal show

how irritated I became while reading the book straight through. My intention here is not to write an abstract criticism of Wilber's ideas, but to describe my personal response to his work.

My criticisms (listed below as numbered items), like the ones in the journal I levelled at Merton and Csikszentmihalyi, are strong - even rude. I was somewhat surprised by the intensity of my visceral response to their writings. In part this is because all experience in solitude tends to be intensified, and in part because the writings in question touched me so directly. I'm still examining my irritation, but I believe it is triggered by what I perceive to be a tone of aggressive certainty and judgment in their writing - even when their ideas propound the value of multiple meanings. I sense this unspoken "I've got the answer" tone in many articulate and vocal individuals. There is no opportunity for real dialogue and so the idea of a pluralistic multiverse becomes impossible in relation to their own theories.<sup>132</sup> Since Wilber's own writing is often tinged with anger, it seems appropriate to not edit out my own emotionality as I critique his work.

1. The main problem I have with Wilber's developmental model is the same problem I have with most supposedly universal models - scientific, spiritual, or other. It is a rigid structure with little internal fluidity. Developmental models in general, whether Piaget's, Kohlberg's (Spilka et al., 1985) or Wilber's, tend to be linear and idealized.<sup>133</sup> The child begins here, and the adult, ideally, ends there. Little wiggle room is left for individual and sexual difference, the impact of emotion and physical desire on cognitive function, or repetitive cycles in the process.

Wilber's model of logical, linear development seems to describe a predictably mechanistic world rather than one that is vibrantly alive. With minor exceptions, he leaves no room for contradiction, ambiguity, and mystery. When I try to locate myself in such a system, I am unable to do so. I am, you might say, all over the map: a wave of bodily desire, a spell of magic, the taste for myth, a measured cup of reason, and a whisper of spirit. My being seems to shift and flow to its own secret rhythms.

In his more recent work Wilber does address the issue of fluidity and linearity and acknowledges that in actuality we move regularly between levels of cognitive and

spiritual development. Nevertheless, the overall thrust of his work promotes a rigid model of linear development.<sup>134</sup>

2. Wilber sometimes falls into the trap of reifying his conceptualization and imposing it onto the world rather than playing with it as a descriptive metaphor. In *Marriage of Sense and Soul* he writes:

Now this is an interesting development. What if these quadrants, these four types of hierarchies, are in fact real? Since variations on these four hierarchies show up extensively across cultures and across epochs - premodern, modern, and postmodern - might this indicate that they are actually pointing to certain irreducible realities? What if the four quadrants are an intrinsic aspect of the Kosmos itself?

(p. 66)

When he suggests the World is *actually* made up of holons each with four aspects (quadrants), he seems to be confusing the world with his conceptual description of it. But to my eye the world is not part of the rational mind. Rather, the intellect is a subset of the whole. It is important to try to describe the world rationally, but it is equally important to remember what we're doing. This personal orientation reflects his distorted theoretical stance, which claims that the noosphere is not part of the biosphere but vice-versa. (See below.)

3. Wilber claims that everything is a whole/part - a holon - made up of smaller parts and itself part of a larger whole. Nothing is only a whole. But he presents his model as an all encompassing whole and insists on fitting everything into it no matter how violent the required contortions. His own model is not a part of any larger whole. This is inconsistent. Wilber harshly criticises other philosophers for committing what he calls *performative contradictions*: doing themselves what they criticise as invalid conceptual activity in others. Yet he, himself, does what his model claims is illegitimate.

Wilber saves his bacon by recognising his model as “part” in relation to Emptiness/nondual Spirit, but this is disingenuous. He attacks David Bohm for having only two levels in his model (Bohm, 1980): implicate (Emptiness) and explicate (manifest world), but he (even with depth of development in all four quadrants) does the

same: there is his model and there is Emptiness. This is pure differentiation with no integration. Repeating the quote from Interlude 7:

I therefore sought to outline a philosophy of universal integralism. Put differently, I sought a world philosophy - or an integral philosophy - that would believably weave together the many pluralistic contexts of science, morals, aesthetics, Eastern as well as Western philosophy, and the world's great wisdom traditions. Not on the level of details - that is finitely impossible; but on the level of orienting generalizations ... a holistic philosophy for a holistic Kosmos, a genuine Theory of Everything.

(Wilber, 2000a, p. 38)

In some deep way his view of the world is monological and non-pluralistic. He claims to be open to dialogue and new evidence, but I don't believe him.<sup>135</sup> By his own claim, the only major change he has made to his model in 30 years is his shift from retro-romantic to forward-looking.<sup>136</sup> His model is the one right one, and he judges everything by how well it accords with his worldview. He seems to assume that all humans are fundamentally identical and uses research on Kohlberg's model of moral growth in different cultures to *prove* he's right. This seems to adhere to the enlightenment notion that there is One Best way to be, which is fundamentalist rather than pluralist. Wilber needs to acknowledge that his model is part of a whole cultural fabric - like Christianity or Buddhism. It's not the complete and only picture of that fabric.<sup>137</sup>

4. The differentiation in Wilber's model (Figure 2, page 364) between individual and social holons doesn't work because it denies that holons are always in communion, which automatically makes them social. All holons are by definition social in some sense. Wilber defines an organism as individual and an ecosystem as collective. Yet an organism can be seen as a collective of cells or as an ecosystem of bacteria, mites, etc. Each cell can also be seen as a symbiotic collective of nucleus, mitochondria and cytoplasmic organelles.

Nor am I able to make sense of the sequence of development Wilber proposes for the Lower Right quadrant (Figure 2). My understanding is that the diagonal line in each quadrant represents evolutionary development, and that each level out transcends and subsumes (includes) the previous level. Thus in the Upper Right quadrant, molecules transcend and subsume atoms; in the Upper Left quadrant, vision-logic transcends and

subsumes formop. But in the Lower Right quadrant there are problems. The progression from level 5 to level 13 seems consistent, but I do not understand how a planet can transcend and subsume a galaxy, nor an ecosystem the Gaia system. Perhaps Wilber is referring to the process by which planets coalesce from galactic clouds of dust and gas, but this does not explain how a planet can subsume the galaxy it is part of. This would be equivalent to an atom subsuming the molecule it is part of.

Wilber does differentiate between the formal use of Gaia system and its broader use as meaning the total biosphere, but he accepts the second use as well as the first (1995, p. 85-87). If he claims that the biosphere evolves before a particular heterotrophic ecosystem in it, that makes sense, but if he claims that the biosphere evolves and exists before any of the heterotrophic ecosystems, this seems absurd since it is just the heterotrophic ecosystems that make up biosphere.

5. Anytime someone creates a hierarchy, implicit value judgments are smuggled in. It cannot be otherwise. Wilber points out the *performative contradiction* of cultural relativism (and I agree) but then pretends that a deeper/wider embrace of the world and the development toward Spirit are pre-given Universal Goods rather than simply his own (and his culture's) personal Preferences. He needs to take personal responsibility for his values and leave it to the flow of the universe to sort out.

6. Wilber's strong claim that the biosphere is in the noosphere<sup>138</sup> does not make sense to me. He backs away from that stance in a couple of footnotes by saying the individual is compound and both the noosphere and the biosphere are parts of the compound individual: the human being is both in and beyond the biosphere. This seems correct to me. To say the physiosphere is part of the biosphere or that the biosphere is part of the noosphere is reductionist and mixes oranges and apples; they are different. I have elements of the physiosphere as part of me, but they're not in the biosphere aspect of me. In sexual desire, for example, there is no physiosphere. In thought there is no emotion, physical pain, or hunger, although all of these influence thinking.

Wilber seems to wilfully misinterpret many ecophilosophers. It seems to me that if they were truly advocating a pure descent to the biosphere as Wilber claims they are, they would not be writing, but instead would be out living as animals. I think many

ecophilosophers simply take the noosphere as given and emphasize the biosphere in an attempt to redress the major imbalance in our relation to the ascending and descending pathways, and our denial of our dependence on the biological world. Of course some go too far and are silly and self-contradictory as Wilber claims, but I think he picks extreme examples to set up as straw men to attack. In any case their argument is that *humans* are part of the biosphere and not that the *noosphere* is part of the biosphere.

7. When criticising philosophies and spiritual practices that do not specifically align with his own, Wilber becomes particularly ungenerous in his attacks against the straw men he creates. His account of Theravada Buddhism may be theoretically accurate, but it does not reflect my actual experience with Insight Meditation Society and Spirit Rock. (See Goldstein, 1976; Goldstein and Kornfield, 1987)

8. In his writing, Wilber ascends in words and tone. He talks about the need to integrate the ascending and descending paths, but I don't have the sense that he, himself, does so.<sup>139</sup> Except for rare asides, there is no emotion, lyricism, or mystery in his work. His condemnation of the Romantic philosophers for sliding into self-indulgent emotionality and confusing that pre-rational state with trans-rational spirituality is telling. So is his insistence that the biosphere is part of the noosphere - instead of acknowledging the paradox that each is part of the other.

When he describes the enlightenment experience and the mountain existing within him (within his true original Self of pure witness) he does not address the fact that he, Ken Wilber, - a human being - is having the experience and is seeing the mountain through human eyes; that in a minute he will need to get up and eat or go to the toilet. The sense of the mountain existing within his true witnessing Self is, I think, the transcendent aspect of Spirit: the biosphere within the noosphere. The sense of being tiny - a grain of sand as Trungpa (1976) says - one being among a multitude within the universe, is the immanent aspect: the noosphere within the biosphere. Wilber's description of enlightenment as pure awareness with everything happening within, and there being no sense of separate self or duality, seems to equate with his insertion of the whole world into his model.



9. Wilber needs to spend much more time editing. There are far too many pages of repetition, especially in his more recent work. This is disrespectful to his readers and smacks of arrogance. When I compare his tone with that of other spiritual writers - Jack Kornfield or Joseph Goldstein for example - they are much gentler in their presentation even though clear and definite about what they are saying. They look for other points of view to include and so broaden their own instead of looking only for agreement and attacking all others.

10. Wilber sometimes seems to be so immersed in theoretical reading and writing that he has lost contact with the lives of common people. His notion that it's impossible to integrate EGO and ECO until the very end of the spiritual journey in the complete realization of nondual Emptiness is extraordinarily elitist and very troubling.<sup>140</sup> It means that for 99.99+% of us life is a frustrating drag. This is wrong. All along the life path there are moments of deep peace and integration. We all have moments of enlightenment - some just have more than others. For most of us, the overall sense of peace and integration grows slowly in non-linear stops and starts. I agree that final release comes only in complete Oneness with the nondual, but to focus exclusively on this is a disservice to the rest of us.

By the time I had finished reading *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality*, I was very weary of Wilber's judgmental tone. And yet ... here is another excerpt from my wilderness journal: "This realization comes ala Wilber's book, *No Boundary*. I really do owe that man a great deal." In closing, I will allow Wilber to reply in his own words:

We do not live in a pregiven world. One of the more remarkable tenets of the postmodern revolution in philosophy, psychology, and sociology is that DIFFERENT WORLDVIEWS EXIST – [emphasis his] different ways of categorizing, presenting, representing, and organizing our experiences. There is not a single, monolithic world with a single, privileged representation, but rather multiple worlds with pluralistic interpretations. Moreover, these worldviews often - indeed almost always - change from epoch to epoch, and from culture to culture. ... It is not a matter of which of these worldviews is right and which is wrong; they are all adequate for their time and place. It is more a matter of simply cataloguing, as carefully as possible, the very general characteristics that define each worldview, and "bracketing" (or setting aside), for the moment,

whether or not they are "true" - we simply describe all of them as if they were true.

(2000b, p. 260)

When this passage is juxtaposed with much of his other writing, I must, with great respect, welcome Wilber to the world where the rest of us contradictory humans live.

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<sup>131</sup> <<http://www.deepspirit.com/sys-tmpl/essays/>> The essay was originally published in the *Journal of Consciousness Studies*.

<sup>132</sup> I acknowledge that my prickly response might simply be a manifestation of my own rebelliousness since it seems clear that not everyone reacts this way to these authors.

<sup>133</sup> Jardine (1998) titles a chapter of his book "Immanuel Kant, Jean Piaget, and the Rage for Order." He considers holding a monological perspective - in which the world is assumed to be singular and unambiguous and so can be described with a single voice from a single perspective - to be one of the major problems of modernity.

Allan Combs (2000) also finds Wilber's approach to be too linear and abstract:

"Indeed, the integral structure of consciousness is the essence of spirituality, suffused with the very light of the Origin. It is an open spirituality, open both to the diaphanous light of the spirit and open to unrestrained human potential. Such consciousness cannot be contained by the linear models and mental abstractions that dominate the modern as opposed to the postmodern mind. Such models and abstractions permeate Wilber's writing from top to bottom and lie at the root of his complete failure to appreciate the postmodern experience. The integral can best be expressed through art, poetry, and music, but only clumsily in prose."

<sup>134</sup> For me personally (and this is my own hang-up to some extent) when I try to locate myself in any system of development, it sets up a sort of spiritual competition - a prideful "I'm more evolved than you are" stance. This is at odds with the spiritual humility that Buddhist "Don't-Know Mind/Beginner's Mind" and Christian teachings encourage. One of the joys of spiritual as well as physical solitude is to withdraw from this sort of comparing myself with others even if via an idealized model of others.

It is also very easy to become caught up in the intricate complexity of Wilber's model and begin to think I need to understand it in order to develop spiritually. This is a false perception. I do not need to understand nuclear physics or the human genome in order to live my life fully; nor to understand intellectual models of the human psyche.

Orientation, not location, is what is vital. If I am open to growth, change, and shifts of consciousness and perception, rather than holding onto a particular way of experiencing the world, I am where I need to be no matter where I might be located in a hierarchical spiritual system.

<sup>135</sup> See his exchange with de Quincey on de Quincey's website (note 1 above).

<sup>136</sup> See pre/trans fallacy, Interlude 7.

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<sup>137</sup> Wilber does put his model back into the world, but only in caveats seemingly inserted to deflect criticism.

<sup>138</sup> See note 14, Interlude 7.

<sup>139</sup> I am not referring to Wilber the person, but only to the writing I have read.

<sup>140</sup> See Wilber, 1995, chap. 14. The integration of ECO and EGO (the personal I into the flowing whole of the universe) is the end of the spiritual path as I described it in Interlude 8.

## November

May I have the courage, patience, humility, and trust,  
to over and over  
open my heart and body and mind  
to the world (and myself in it)  
as it is and not as I would like it to be.

11/1/01

Here I am writing.... Yet another plan shot to hell. But I stopped using the laptop and have begun to write longhand again.

The idea that animals in their "natural state" unspoiled by human contact are unafraid of people is myth. Seems likely that none of the resident birds have had previous contact with people, yet they have become less afraid of me over time. At first they were shy of this large unknown animal, and only after I didn't bother them have they become desensitized to my presence. It probably is true that they didn't actively fear me as a human and so their nervousness has more easily relaxed.

Thinking about Cat again and how "wilful" cats are in general. A pure manifestation of self-centred "wanting mind." Been looking at aspects of myself/shadow that Cat might be triggering. Then it dawned on me: the traits I don't like about Cat I've got too. Can't believe it took nine months to see this.

Wind roaring through trees.

Sea crashing on rock.

Rain pounding against roof.

Thoughts raging in tense body and resistant mind.

Until surrender...

and I become the storm.

11/4/01

Female black and white goose emerged with six chicks today. Grey fluffy little balls. She led them down the steep rock to feed and then back to their nest. Hard for the little guys to climb back up. Wonder if she picked such a tough nest site because of otters. I paddled over for a closer look. Male was close the whole time, peeping like one of the chicks. Cool family. Dolphins were here but they still stayed away from kayak.

11/5/01

Solid walls of hail interspersed with sun and blue sky, even some snow.

Black and white geese brought chicks to this side. Very alert to eagle who also seems interested in them. Chicks didn't seem bothered by the hail. At one point mom crouched, wings slung low to make a shelter, and tucked them under her. Very beautiful.

Do they feel love or concern for their chicks? If I saw a human couple behave this way, I'd say Yes! I can't give human emotions to them, but it seems just as unwarranted to claim they feel nothing - that it's all instinct. If life brought forth human emotions, why not equivalent geese emotions whatever they might be? Why would we want to insist animals have no feelings? Except ... it's difficult to live with such ambiguity. Easier to believe animals feel as we do or to turn them into machines with no sense of self or feelings at all. Much more difficult to live with the mystery that they have their own lives that we will never know ... except to some degree through empathy, intuition, and quiet observation of their behaviour. But the world is so much richer this way.<sup>141</sup>

Seems to me the most parsimonious theory about anything is: None. Everything just is as it is. Of course that's not very satisfying intellectually. There's a huge difference between being openly aware of mystery - the bare

attention of "don't know mind" - and pre-rational or pre-scientific superstition and mythical explanation.

11/6/01

I was intently focused on watching the red-billed birds happily murdering mussels at low tide, when a malevolent visage came down the binoculars straight toward me. Two fierce beady eyes - just above the water like a crocodile's - were intent on mayhem. The butter belly roared in to attack. Whee! Nearly knocked me from my chair. The red-bills seemed startled too and lifted in flight. The butter belly strutted a step then returned to the water, and the red-bills settled back to their meal.

Unusual since they generally hang out together peacefully and it seemed strange since they're allies in chasing eagle. Reminds me how rarely I see competition. In general the interactions between plants and animals seem neutral or mutually beneficial. Just needs a broader perspective to see things that way. Like a basketball game. On the surface the two teams compete fiercely, but from a broader perspective they cooperate much more. Both teams agree to meet at the same time on the same court, play the same game, and abide by the same rules.

11/7/01

Anxiety: Haven't established my place in the world, have frittered away my life jumping from one thing to another - and want to continue doing so. Do I jump to avoid this feeling, or does it arise when my feet itch and I resist wandering off? Must remember that all these feelings are part of who I am.

11/8/01

It's not fun anymore, am I doing science yet? Low tide, time to see what the limpets have been up to, but it's a nasty day out there. Probably blowing 30-40 mph and gusting to 50. Driving rain.

When it started to hail, I was briefly blown out of my "data collecting mind" and saw myself as other: a lone man in the middle of nowhere, lost on the southern coast of Chile. What was I doing? Then my mood shifted, and hunched on the slick rocks, encased head to toe in rubber, buffeted by wind, rain, and hail, I started to laugh. What else could I do? No one - except perhaps half dozen other lunatics - gives a damn what the limpets on the tip of South America are doing. Hell, until a month ago I didn't care either.

So why am I doing this when I could be inside my warm dry cabin? In some sense this kind of scientific fieldwork is fun - like any outdoor sport. Skiers try to go fast, climbers try to scale mountains, field biologists try to obtain accurate measurements under sometimes-adverse conditions.

From a non-dual evolutionary point of view, I'm not outside the universe but have emerged from within and am part of it; this includes my knowing mind. So it's not the separate mind of a scientist learning about the world, but the world learning about itself through science. Likely, even the limpets don't know where they've been, so in some sense, through my activity the world is becoming more consciously aware of itself.

11/9/01

Saw the female butter belly today for the first time in a while. I was meditating and peripherally became aware of her. Opened my eyes to see her and the male running across the water to greet each other. She bathed in sea and was gone again - back I presume to her nest.

11/11/01

All six geese chicks - grey puff balls with black legs - are still alive. Parents led them from place to place, feeding on the rocks and swimming in between. Almost like an obstacle course to strengthen them. Once they had to leap off a ledge into the water. One chick after another launched itself into space - almost like parachutists - plop, plop, plop.

I may extend the limpet study. Some move a lot - as much as 10 feet overnight - and some not at all. I want to see if the settled ones will eventually begin to wander and the wanderers settle down. One reason might be sexual. Need to do some reading eventually to see what their sexual behaviour is. Since they are grazers and need to move to feed, do the ones that are in the same spot day after day stop eating for long periods of time or do they return to a home base? Another question this study might answer is whether the wanderers show home base/territoriality. Do they have repeating routes or move randomly?

11/12/01

Sat on the point and let myself be battered by wind and rain. I think part of my grief/sorrow is that I'll never be good enough to get rid of this feeling of not being good enough. Death of my ideals. I've been here before and then forget over and over. Could this death and grief lead to freedom from the straightjacket of perfectionism?

11/14/01

I think today is only the third time I've seen sun and blue sky since the beginning of October.



The female butter belly emerged with her chicks. The chicks are brown-grey on back and top of head; white belly, rump, and sides of head; black legs, feet, and bills. Much smaller than the geese chicks even though butter belly adults are larger. When I first saw her, the male was by the far island, and I thought maybe this male doesn't help with the rearing. How quickly theories leap into my mind! But once he saw her, he came over and has been with her and chicks since.

This evening I watched as the chicks butted their way under her even though she wasn't very welcoming. Her wings are atrophied and there's not much to drape over them. I found myself disapproving of her for not welcoming them more readily. Amazing how I project my judgments onto them.

Limpets still there. Not sure my original idea of using an animal behaviour study to mirror my own state of consciousness is working. Can't see much except I'm daily more aware of stepping on mussels and am trying to be more cautious. I feel it more now when I crush one.

Yesterday there were two low tides during daylight and I noticed a systematic discrepancy between the morning and afternoon measurements of the limpets that seem to move very little or not at all. Checked the marks on string with tape measure and they were way out. Why? Duh. When I wind the string off and back onto the spool it gets twisted which shortens it. I untwist it when it gets kinky, but it never occurred to me that this would alter its length.

I thought a whole month of data collection was wasted, but then realized I could use the two limpets that haven't moved at all as a standard and apply a correction factor to all measurements on the days those two measurements are different from the correct measurement when the string is checked against the tape.

Good thing new life is emerging. I feel tired, sore, and used up today. Old. On my first retreat I thought the only thing worth giving my life to would be to help others find what I'd found, but I didn't know how. Now, I don't know how to

find again what I found then. Yet I want to make some meaningful contribution to others.

### 11/15/01

Butter belly chicks can already run across the water and dive. When mom dives, the chicks follow the male. They all went into rough water by the rocks beyond the point. Chicks were washed all over, even up onto the rocks, but it didn't seem to faze them. On land, the female keeps up a low steady single cluck. If eagle appears she clucks more rapidly and loudly and the chicks rush to her.

Why am I doing the limpet study out in wind, rain, and cold? Today it seems because that's just what I do. A form of practice/meditation. No matter the results or lack of results; but what does seem to matter is to develop a sense of grace while making the measurements.

### 11/16/01

Rain outside, glum within. Same thing? Two expressions of one underlying ... what? Yesterday was intense: new moon and my day for fasting. So maybe the mood today is a sort of hangover. No joy or grace while measuring the limpets. Tide didn't drop much, and I had to hurry to beat the rising water.

All the butter belly chicks are still fine: motoring on the surface, diving, and popping back up. Almost like Brownian motion. Could there be an underlying unity in all things?

This afternoon the wind was very strong and the butter bellies came to hide behind the bushes. Mom had chicks under her wings. Twice I saw a chick stick its ass out and shit. Hmm, wonder if that's a wired-in behaviour. Makes sense. They're all jammed in and if they shit under there, they'd be shitting on each other.

Getting harder not to think that Cat is playing games with me. Sometimes it seems like he cries just to get my reaction. He'll cry from about 10 feet away and then turn to look knowing he's out of water throwing range. Sometimes when I throw a cup of water at him and he dodges it, he takes pleasure in that - more than in not getting wet. Hmmm, I might be getting a bit crazy with Cat. I seem to hear all the hurt and want in the universe in his cry.

11/17/01

Last night a hard realization. It's rage I came here to deal with - not fear or depression. Although I tend to think I've accepted my anger, I haven't. I still look for causes in the world - things I can change or avoid. It's scary to feel that heat boil up and difficult to stay with it without trying to make use of it or hope it will go away.

I'm spending so much time compulsively imagining future conversations. How strange to make such an effort to get away from the social matrix by coming here and then spend so much time there anyway. I don't feel ok in the social setting just as I am; always need to do something more. Here there are no external expectations beyond what's necessary to survive, yet over and over I create tasks to accomplish so I'll feel ok.

Butter bellies allowed me to within eight feet this afternoon. Again I saw two chicks back out from under Mom's wing to shit, but they were already on the outside of the cluster. Will watch to see if inner chicks come out too. After they left there were three wee piles of shit around where they'd been, and none in the middle. If they do come out to shit, it's altruistic behaviour with a cost to the individual since it's colder on the outside and difficult to force their way back into the tight pack. Reciprocal altruism? The question - in standard competition theory - is, how would the trait arise? A mutation that leads to shitting on

siblings should spread and take over since it would seem to yield a competitive advantage to the shitter over the shittee.

I went looking for their nest, worming under the brush on my belly, and almost gave up again. Finally spotted a grey pinfeather. Ha! A clue. The nest was just a bit of dry grass and twigs and lots of down. Found two partial shells and assume the female ate the others.

### 11/18/01

My loosely held destination for this journey - and my life - when I'm honest enough to admit it, is enlightenment (whatever that is) and not a Ph.D. The context I long to be part of is not family, university, or society, but Universe. High-flown notions, but when held loosely this destination creates a huge space to experience living. But I become uptight and unhappy when I focus too tightly on the destination and forget to be with what is actually happening here and now.

In overland travel I've learned that what I most enjoy is not to seek special tourist sights/sites, but to relax on park benches and curbs and let whatever life presents to come into me. On this inward journey I haven't learned that yet; I'm still grasping for exciting, meaningful experiences to take back and tell others about.

Cat yowled and instead of reacting outwardly I watched inwardly as a rush of adrenaline washed through me. Intense. Quite soon he stopped.

Nature is definitely red in beak and talon today. As I was writing the above, a drama was unfolding. Something told me to look up and check the butter bellies. I spotted both pairs on the disputed boundary line. The far pair had nine or ten chicks with them, but the close pair was chick-less. All four adults were engaged in the stylized territorial defence dance which became more and more intense until the two males started to fight.

Meanwhile, eagle had been busy. I first noticed her when she swooped on the far pair's chicks. That female lunged up and drove eagle off, and a red-bill attacked from the air. Eagle gave way, but circled and came to land on a rock 20 meters from where the male ducks were fighting.

Then this female swam rapidly away, calling, and two of her chicks swam out from shore toward her. Although I didn't see the attack, I assume eagle took advantage of her inattention and nailed the other chicks while they were undefended. As I watched, eagle swooped on the two remaining chicks, but they dove beneath the surface and the red-bill drove eagle away. Since the two surviving chicks dove when eagle swooped, I'm not sure how she got the others unless they were on land.

For those of us who see the biological world - rather than a mythical creator God - as our source, we sometimes look to nature for possible lessons or metaphors: 1. A romantic vision of idyllic harmony in nature is as false as an exclusive focus on competition. 2. Aggression/competition in the butter bellies seems so extreme as to be self-defeating. The close pair expended a great deal of time and energy to breed and brood chicks. Then, caught up in aggression against the other pair, they abandoned the chicks and left them unprotected against an eagle attack. (I also became focused on the excitement of their fight and didn't see the eagle preying on the chicks.) 3. The eagles' patience paid off. They've been patrolling this area regularly since the chicks hatched - apparently watching for just such an opportunity. 4. The red-bills, which both the black and white geese and the butter bellies have attacked on occasion, are strong allies against predation by the eagle.

Nature can be a clear mirror of internal process. I've become attached to the close pair and their chicks and saw the eagle's attack as vicious, but she was just feeding chicks of her own. I disapprove of the female butter belly for leaving her chicks unprotected, and I mentally scold the male when I see him away from her and the chicks. The feeding chicks seem cute and innocent even though

they are killing too. I'm bummed since I enjoyed watching them zip around on land and water and wanted to study their shitting behaviour. This, more than any other event here, has reminded me how risky and impermanent individual life is. I'll be gone soon too - dead along with all the others.

Evening: For some time I've been watching the resident grey land birds<sup>142</sup> load their beaks with food and fly to their nest on the far island. I'm surprised at how far they come, but with the rice and fish scrapes in my dish water and the tidal flat I guess it's good pickings here.

Today I saw one load its beak, but instead of flying away it fed a bird nearby. Huh? The other bird, almost as large as this one, was an immature chick with some down still showing. The adult fed that chick for a while then flew off to feed another one further down the beach. I spotted three chicks the two adults were feeding in different areas of the beach and think they had others stashed here and there too. Makes sense. Once they can fly, take chicks to food rather than vice versa.

I watched a streaking hailstorm blow in across the face of Staines. A lovely grey veil of swirling patterns. Then in a flash I realized what I was seeing. For months I've listened to rain and hail drum on the roof. It comes in waves of intensity. Subtle changes in drop size, quantity, and the force with which the wind drives them create a complex flow of shifting sound. Looking at the swirling pattern today I realized I was Seeing the Sound of Rain.

11/19/01

Spent a long while photographing the butter bellies. Better do it now in case eagle gets the last two chicks. Mom is very vigilant and protective especially on land, but she let me come within a meter. At one point, one chick snuggled under her wing, and the other tried to butt its way under the male. He leapt like he'd been goosed - which I suppose he had.

Doing morning meditation I wish both the butter bellies and the eagles peace, happiness, and freedom from suffering. But how can they all have those things when for them it's a zero sum game? Life for the eagles means death for the ducks. I'll stay with that "truth" and see what opens up for me.

Lovely dream sequence - inspired, I think, by what I read in *A Pathless Land* about my understanding of Maturana (or perhaps by my greasy Sunday dinner of bacon and fried potatoes). I was copulating with an empty pants leg (I wonder how much of the fierce activity of amputees is an attempt recreate the lost limb) and bringing a world into being through the distinctions I made in language.<sup>143</sup> Two things were strongly apparent: 1. The cognitive activity of distinguishing things from a background and naming them is an inherently pro-creative act and so has an erotic aspect to it; 2. Since the "things" we create this way are insubstantial, transient, and only exist in relation to the background, they don't truly exist and this creative act is never completely fulfilling.

In the dream I kept copulating on and on - unsuccessfully seeking completion and fulfillment. The process of creating a world of individual things is inherently frustrating and unsatisfying. This is, I think, what spiritual masters are saying about the dissatisfaction of living on a very basic level.

I've been thinking - but in the space of Big Mind. Seems like an intuition becomes conscious reproducible knowledge only when I put it into language. Otherwise it's a fleeting sense rather than a bit of knowledge. However, an intuition may alter behaviour directly without becoming knowledge. The line between conceptual knowledge and direct experience is perhaps illusory from the perspective of Big Mind. It's not that conceptual knowledge is meaningless, but if it doesn't emerge from or lead to a deeper lived experience then it becomes a deadening prison.

I've noticed over and over these past days that it's words - some kinds of words - spoken to myself or read that shift me from small mind to Big Mind. So

words themselves are not a prison, but only certain uses of them. It seems like a lot of densely packed analytic words tightens my mind down. A few open, lyrical words often open space in my mind. I need to remember this in my writing and speaking - both with others and myself.

I usually think about self-awareness emerging through language from the bottom up - starting from no awareness. What about the butter bellies and Cat? Do they have a conscious experience of the world? They apparently have no language yet certainly seem aware of me. If so, then awareness exists before language. But empirical tests seem to show that most animals other than chimpanzees have no concept of self. From this perspective, self-awareness develops with the development of a self. Awareness was already there, but a self to be aware of comes into existence only through language. This still seems murky and dualist.

For some time I've been going to a spot in the opposite direction from the point to sit by the water's edge. From there I can't see the cabin, solar panels, or other human sign. It's my quiet afternoon meditation spot and I go there to be alone. Cat is not welcome.

Long slow evening twilight now. No idea what time it gets dark. Haven't looked at watch since first of month. Shifted from small to Big Mind, and for the first time ever (or so it felt) I got the koan of "Listen for the sound of one hand clapping." How magical and beautiful the phrase. This is all the sound of one hand clapping: wind, water, and rain, trees, rocks, and far foggy hills.

11/20/01

Day of conflict and insight. On the way to measure the limpets I saw some of the beautiful brown-breasted geese near the point. I've been trying for a good photo of them since they arrived, but they're very skittish. Cat was with me, and he likes to harass them because - unlike the butter bellies - they're afraid of



him. He headed for them but I called, No!, several times and he finally stopped. I praised, petted, and carried him back to the cabin. Told him to stay and took camera back to the point.

Halfway there I heard him coming after me. I told him to get back and he ducked into the trees. I talked soothingly to the geese (which really does work) and they let me come within 30 feet. I was moving closer when Cat stalked by me and the geese flew away.

I was furious and decided that when I caught him I'd hammer him. I was aware of my decision and questioned whether I really wanted to do it. Took camera to cabin, came back to measure limpets, and there he was casually sniffing around. I grabbed him hard by the skin on his back, yelled, and slapped him. He bared his claws and snarled - rage in his eyes. I slapped him again and yelled that he'd better not fucking snarl at me. Then I dunked him in a pool of water and threw him from me. He zoomed off into the trees.

In the afternoon he asked to come on my lap, and I petted him and thought it had passed - at least for him. But later he blatantly strolled into the cabin. I grabbed him and threw him out into the mud. I remain ambivalent about my behaviour. I think most people would upbraid me for cruelty; some might even slap me in turn. Still, it seems to me that cats in general, and this one in particular, are very wilful and expect to do as they please. Most people let them, but I'm not willing to. I'm not comfortable either letting Cat do as he pleases or smacking him. Perhaps dunking him in water again will be my next attempt.

Just as I finished the limpets, I heard the butter bellies calling strongly. They were swimming across the basin fast and alone. She was definitely searching for her chicks: head high, looking all around. She even went up to her nest site. I could feel her agitation in my whole body: loss? pain? grief? I wonder what happened. I imagine eagle got them, but how? Since losing the other five she has been extremely protective. I'm bummed both for her (he doesn't seem as

concerned) and for me. I was looking forward to watching them grow and her rear them. I've tried to just be with the experience and level no judgments or rationalizations.

Something got one of the black and white geese chicks too, but the other five are growing. Both male and female keep them close all the time. The male always on guard. Saw the red-bills copulating. Interesting timing: small grey land bird chicks out of nest and flying; black and white geese and butter belly chicks recently hatched; red bills just starting to mate; yet to see brown breasted pair copulate.

Reading *A Pathless Land*.<sup>144</sup> My plans for this retreat were very idealistic. "A still mind will naturally develop in solitude and from the stillness clear insights will arise." If I'm honest about what has happened here I'll have to eat humble pie when I return.

Watched my thoughts trying to create the sense of a Solid Self this afternoon: e.g. wanting deep insights so I can fulfill my Ph.D. promises. The dream is to establish that Self and then not have to hustle anymore; not have to fake it. To be really real. I sense this is common to us all - if not the faking it part, certainly the hustle. But it's a dream. The only way to be free from the hustle is to give up trying to create a solid self (image) or solid social presence. This doesn't mean we disappear or stop being active, but that we can relax and let ourselves do whatever comes naturally in the moment without worrying about results. A scary idea.

We train/condition members of society (especially kids) to be a certain way. But this is backwards. It's like seeing natural selection as selecting FOR some ideal form or behaviour. Nope. Some things that don't work are selected AGAINST and die or become extinct. This allows enormous freedom of variety for things that do work in many different ways. It's the same with socialization. We should train citizens only to refrain from behaviours that are unacceptable

(murder, stealing, etc.) and allow full freedom for individuals to develop as they will within those constraints.

Examining the listening process is an excellent way to watch how the mind creates categories and uses them to identify and organize sensory experience. From the unified flow of sound I choose the ones I want to group together as rain on the roof, water falling from gutter to ground, waves on the beach, waterfalls, wind in the trees, etc. It's my mind that separates them into distinct entities and attributes a source to each. What's more, when I hear a sound I can't identify, my mind becomes very alert and uneasy until it places the sound.

All this is good survival activity, but it has a downside. In conceptualizing, organizing, and thinking about these sensory impressions, the immediacy of experience can easily be lost and with it the wonder and joy of actually living in the flow of existence in this moment and this one and this one. To back off from this habitual activity and simply stay with the sensual impressions requires patience and practice; to over and over let go of thoughts and analysis and come back to the flow of sound just as it is without trying to "do" anything with it. The sense of peace and joy and contentment that sometimes arises from this concentrated stillness is truly wonderful. Flowing in the direct experience of sound, I float free of conceptual mind into....

It's the same with visuals. I look through the mist and see the vague outline of "hills." Yet if I had just arrived to this material world I'd have no idea that those vague shapes were solid rock. My mind creates those hills. And this island. It seems separate and distinct from the surrounding islands only because I don't pause to recollect the continuous connection running beneath the water.

A layer of emotion is draped on top of the conceptualization: sometimes I feel comforted by the rain and sometimes irritated; sometimes the wind energizes, sometimes it brings anxiety.

11/21/01

Thank you for this day. I awoke to a calm sea and hard steady rain, then snow began to fall. I thought it was just a flurry, but big wet flakes drifted straight down until ground and trees were white. The sound much gentler than that of rain. It snowed all afternoon and evening. How wonderful, especially to not have rain and wind for a while.

Fished for a long time from the kayak and caught eight. Staines was lost in mist - the only sign of its existence the sounds of waterfalls and sea lions. Hills and mountains to the east had vanished too. This cluster of small islands was my world. From above I saw myself drifting in an opaque fog on a shining sea. I've spent so little time on the questions raised in *A Pathless Land*. How do I transform fishing into a Ph.D.?

I continue to pay attention to thought processes within the space of Big Mind. Seems to be a thinking aspect to any *Aha!* insight. Thought may trigger that gestalt of apprehension as well as solidify it. It's a sort of dance to move in and think in a directed way, and as my mind begins to tighten, move back to the silent observer and simply notice the thinking from afar. Then once there is some space and stillness, move back in again. Thinking as an art form. Wonder why they don't teach us how to think in school?

Perhaps relinquishing one style of consciousness to allow another to emerge - e.g. moving from concept to direct experience - is a temporary change "in the service of" rather than a permanent shift.

Took down wind generator this evening. Haven't used it in months and it's getting weathered out there. It's like putting away thermometer and barometer some time ago. Instead of depending on instruments to tell me what's happening with the weather, I'm using my own senses. I was looking at the generator to check wind velocity and direction instead of watching clouds, sea, and trees.

11/22/01

Thanksgiving Day? Beautiful calm morning. Shining silver light.

It's not that we're either stuck in language or can leave it behind. Neither is so. Language is like our body: we live in our body; our body is an aspect of who we are. In one sense we begin as body and then develop mind. We are not stuck in body exclusively, but we are never separate from it either. Same with language and culture. We have the potential to grow through them and beyond. Language and culture are always an aspect of who we are, but we are not stuck exclusively there. What a thanksgiving gift this simple realization is.

While my first long retreat in BC showed me unity and harmony in all things, this time there seems to be conflict on all sides: wind, sea, and rock; all creatures eating and being eaten; birds fighting for territory; me struggling against myself.

Attachment to "wilderness" is still attachment and an attempt to prevent change. Global warming is - one way or another - part of the cyclic flow; populations become dense and crash; life goes on. But we may be able to influence the process to prevent disaster to ourselves and to the world that sustains our lives.

11/23/01

The far pair of butter bellies has reclaimed the rock that had been their home base but that they'd lost to this pair. They were without their last chick. All the chicks from both pairs are dead.

Once I stop measuring limpet movements I'll likely do nothing with the data. Maybe doing for the doing rather than for the result is a good thing. Why should our study of nature be oriented only toward sharing the information with others? Why not primarily for our own interest?

I see three faces in the rock walls of Staines Peninsula that I check daily as a sort of Rorschach blot. Perhaps they're aspects of my shadow I've been projecting and am now claiming as my own. Often the faces wear heavy frowns. None so far have joyful smiles of peace and contentment.

11/24/01

Went to the point to brace against the ferocious wind like a football player on the line of scrimmage. Something in me finally let go and I started to dance and holler for joy with the fierce power of it. Dolphins were playing in the basin, and one leaped straight up out of water. I took kayak out to play with them and they immediately left. Sort of hurts my feelings when they leave. Maybe the shape reminds them of a killer whale.

I keep slipping out of the moment. Yet here is just where I want to be. Nature expects nothing from me but to be just what I am. I keep shooting myself in the foot by importing expectations and by imagining future social interactions. The process continues and I continue to practice.

11/25/01

Sunday morning: Far pair of butter bellies pushed into this pair's territory. I was glad to see it as a possible source of excitement. Is seeking excitement a source of human conflict/war? I noticed I was mentally describing to myself what I was seeing, trying to nail it down so I'll remember.

A huge part of the inner small mind dialogue which takes me out of the present moment is me telling others about this experience.... So the only experience I'll have to tell about is being lost in fantasies of telling about this experience. Swell. Not sure if I've done this the whole time here or mostly just since I've stopped staying busy with daily activity. These imagined future

conversations may have replaced thinking ahead to cutting firewood, going to glacier, etc. It all seems to be activity of ego trying to maintain a solid sense of Self and self-worth.

I seldom have sexual fantasies, and when I do they have little seductive power. But over and over I get lost in fantasies of sharing with other people my story of this trip. I think this is why I'm so concerned with having the ultimate experience here that will transform me and give me deep wisdom to take back. What a trap. When I'm settled into the moment these fantasies don't seem to suck me in. From a positive perspective, I might say they're about wanting to share with others. But if I'm lost in an imagined future rather than being fully alive and present in this moment, I'll do the same when back with people. And just this is the problem: wasting my life lost in the past and future. What a relief to let that stuff go and relax into how things and I actually are.

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<sup>141</sup> This paragraph expresses what I actually think and feel about anthropomorphic projection.

<sup>142</sup> Grey-flanked Cinclodes: *Cinclodes oustaleti* or Dark-bellied Cinclodes: *Cinclodes patagonicus*.

<sup>143</sup> See Interlude 6.

<sup>144</sup> The essay I wrote for my Ph.D. qualifying exam.

## **Interlude 10**

### **Technology and Desire**

**Any sufficiently advanced technology  
is indistinguishable from magic.**

**(Arthur C. Clarke's Third Law, 1982)**

**Men have become the tools of their tools.**

**(Thoreau, 1854, 1971, p. 37)**

**Most of the luxuries, and many of the so called  
comforts of life, are not only not indispensable,  
but positive hinderances to the elevation of mankind.**

**(Thoreau, 1854, 1971, p. 14)**

**All technology should be assumed guilty  
until proven innocent.**

**(David Brower, 1980)**

Like many people, I have an ambivalent relationship with technology. Sometimes the relationship is pleasant, even joyful. At other times, when the machines I'm involved with are not behaving as I think they should, the relationship becomes more adversarial: much like my relationship with Cat, with the world, with Spirit, with my self.

On the island, I had only my own ability to keep the machines I depended on functioning. I often felt at their mercy and questioned my wisdom in creating such a hi-tech environment for myself. On previous wilderness retreats I had taken nothing more complicated than a fishing reel with me, and it had been a relief to not deal with mechanical devices. The downside was that if I'd had a serious accident, I would have had small chance of survival since no one knew where I was and I had no means of communication. This time, for my own "peace of mind" and to comply with requests from friends, family and the university, I took a satellite telephone so once a month I could send an email to let everyone know I was still ok, and so I would be able to call for help in case of emergency.

One thing led to another. I needed electricity to charge the satphone, so I took a wind generator, solar panels, and deep-cycle batteries for storage. Since I would have



electric power, I decided to take 12 volt lights and use a laptop for journaling. I would be in rugged terrain and a fierce climate for a whole year, and I decided a chainsaw would be useful. I also wanted to explore the area, and a boat with outboard motor would be more pragmatic than a kayak. Having only one outboard is risky so I took a backup. Gasoline was inevitable, and as long as I was taking gasoline, why not take propane and a propane stove for cooking? I wonder if I could have survived in any sort of comfort without these technological aids?

It became clear to me during the year that using one machine fostered dependence on another. Whenever I was in the boat and far from camp, I was glad to have the satellite telephone with me in case the motor failed and left me stranded in an untenable situation. I felt at the mercy of the outboard because I knew it might break down in a way I didn't have the replacement parts, tools, or skill to repair. I've never felt as vulnerable when relying on a canoe or kayak. I've always felt confident that unless I were to break an arm I could make it back to camp or out to civilization. The feeling of vulnerability due to my dependence on faulty machinery was unpleasant. The frustration and anger I experienced while trying - often unsuccessfully - to repair the outboards and chainsaw when they *refused* to run was even more painful. Thus having technology for my own peace of mind was often counter productive.

The existence of technology in our lives has become so ubiquitous that what was once a rare luxury has become not only a necessity, but a seemingly eternal reality. Electric lights, refrigerators, stoves, running water, and toilets are as fundamental to many people as air, gravity, or their own bodies: simply there and rarely noticed - until there is a breakdown. We often avoid this shadow side of our dependence on technology by relying on others to maintain the machines we need to survive.

Ah, but when our machines are working well, what an amplification and extension of power and perception. On days when the sea was calm, I would sometimes stand in the bow of the boat as the motor sped me flying across the water and out into the universe. What freedom, what joy! In those moments I was a cyborg with human mind/spirit and mechanized body. To me as a male, machines often seem like phallic amplifications; I wonder how females feel?<sup>145</sup> Does the focus change from amplification

to extension? Does the thrusting motor give way to the enhanced capacity of the solar panels to gather energy and the broad embrace of the satellite telephone?

Satellite technology is truly amazing. Sitting on a far-flung rock, I could reach out and connect with people far, far away. I could point a small gadget toward the sky and locate myself exactly on the earth. Does this wonder cast a shadow? Is there loss as well as gain? Each month I sent a check-in email and waited for replies. Each month, especially early in my stay, I worried the system wouldn't function properly, that I wouldn't be able to communicate, and a rescue party would come looking even though I was in no need of assistance. During those times I felt tight and withdrawn from my immediate environment as my attention focused on connecting with people who were somewhere else. At times my involvement with technology distracted me from settling deeply into solitude.

Not only did I become perceptually cut off from my surroundings, but I often felt less spiritually and emotionally connected with the people I was contacting. Referring back to the Escher drawing again (Figure 1), it was as though I lost awareness of our underlying unity when I focused my attention on linking electronically via technology and language.

Relying on the Global Positioning System to locate myself also took me out of the immediate environment. Instead of paying close attention and identifying landmarks along my route of travel, I could simply read a number from a display and find my position on the map. During the first months, I relied on thermometer, barometer, and clock, instead of my direct perception of the world around me. Such instruments are clearly useful, but in depending on them we lose some of the immediacy of our relationship with the environment, with other people, and with ourselves.

Since my return from solitude, I have noticed that people using cell phones often seem largely disconnected from their immediate physical environment - as though they are not really physically present. I recognize the phenomenon from my own experience with the satphone. In this sense, electronic technology is another step in our process of our minds becoming disconnected from our bodies.

Counter intuitively, cell phones and email can also narrow and impoverish our experience of the world. As the shadow side of allowing us to remain in contact with our social group, cell phones and email tend to buffer our engagement with the people immediately around us. To the extent we are actively linked to a known member of our social group, we are unavailable to interact with strangers we might encounter along the way. This is particularly evident when traveling in foreign cultures.

During the past 40 years I have traveled and lived extensively in Latin America. When I set off with my backpack to remote areas, I knew I would be out of contact with the people back home for weeks or even months at a time; I only rarely received mail along the way via general delivery. Pausing to write letters or postcards was an infrequent and significant event in my life. Traveling alone, my only social interactions were with local people or with other travelers I met along the way. I always felt like I had stepped over the edge and into the unknown.

But on this trip to Chile, when I was not in solitude, I felt for the first time that I had not stepped cleanly out of my familiar social group. Daily I visited internet cafes to check email and to engage in electronic conversation. As I became aware of myself doing this, I noticed many other “travelers” doing the same. We were all maintaining active relationships with friends and family back home, and, this made it more difficult and less imperative for us to engage fully with the people around us.

I’m not arguing that electronic connectivity is entirely a negative in our lives. I have met many interesting strangers via the email link on my website. My relationships with Patti and others live via email and telephone. But I am aware that these relationships tend to distract me from engaging as fully as I otherwise might in local relationships that include more modalities of interaction.

The above considerations have focused on the personal price we pay when we use technology, but there are also deleterious effects on the people who manufacture but do not have access to the machines they build, on our common environment - particularly the air and water, and on our non-human neighbors. Technology enriches our individual lives and we are loath to give it up, but we pay an enormous collective price for it.

Technology also has the capacity to amplify and extend our desires, a quality of mind I discussed in Interlude 8. Here, I want to reflect on the shopping list that blossomed in my mind during the months of July and August because what I experienced seems iconic of our culture's relationship with material goods.

It began with a small hole in the chimney. I noticed it when I had been on the island for only about five months. It seemed evident that the chimney would not last the full year and I would be left without the means to heat the cabin. I considered alternatives such as removing the damaged sections and running the shortened pipe straight up through the roof, but none of the alternatives seemed acceptable. The rusting chimney, in and of itself, would probably not have pushed me to consider breaking solitude by asking the officials from CONAF to bring me a new one, but the outboard was running poorly and I was worried I might run out of ibuprofen and antibiotics. Once I decided to ask German to bring in some items, I discovered more and more things it would be nice to have.

Slowly the list grew and I sent Patti on various wild goose chases in Texas as she faithfully fulfilled my requests and talked to outboard repairmen and other technicians trying to determine exactly what it was I so desperately thought I needed. I couldn't see what was happening for quite a while as my shopping list grew to include electric supplies, cheese, onions, and many other items. The bubble of desire grew in my mind and what had been a list of things it would be nice to have *just in case*, became necessities I needed for my survival. I was fortunate that the CONAF boat did not arrive when promised because it gave me the opportunity to experience how subtly and easily my desires became identified with my physical survival. Then, poof, the bubble vaporized as I realized I didn't really need anything I didn't already have.

In our culture we have seriously confounded luxury with necessity and can no longer differentiate between what we want in order to maintain a particular lifestyle with its associated social relationships and sensual pleasures, and what we actually need for physical survival. We have confounded social identity with biological and spiritual being to the point of believing we will die if we lose our social standing, which is often based on the material wealth we have accumulated. This accelerating spiral of desires

becoming necessities is driving our suicidal rush to destroy the earth we depend on for our actual physical survival.

Our rush is not only self-destructive, it is unnecessary. Recent studies suggest that wealth and happiness do not necessarily go hand in hand (Begley, 2004). Once the basic necessities of food, water, shelter, clothing, and health care are provided, additional material goods often do little to enhance our sense of well-being.

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<sup>145</sup> I use gender generalizations in the way I might use yang and yin as principles of activity and receptivity, but I'm not equating these principles with men and women.

## December 2001

I, and every other person,  
and all of nature,  
are equally and fully  
manifestations of  
Life/Spirit/the One.

### 12/1/01

Two missing limpets showed up today. One has probably been in plain view all along, but in a very unexpected place. It crossed five feet of sand and broken shell to attach to a separate rock. Had the flash today that I may be only living being anywhere that knows what limpets do over time. They themselves, living in the now (so I imagine), have no memory of where they've been. Slowly starting to feel close to them as brother organisms in Life.

Also starting to feel a close bond with the plants here - a sense of love and caring. Wearing my glasses less to bring my vision closer to home. Trying to feel Spirit/Life moving me through the world so I don't need to always focus on following, and so I'm not so freaked when I lose sight of the inner light.

### 12/2/01

Last night for a little while the world was alive and enchanted under the clouded moonlit sky, full of signs and portent, trees on the bluff standing sentinel, awe and wonder in the world. For just a little while last night. Today Cat is moaning and I am dark and grim. Even though the sun broke through the clouds, it shone on a world that's just the world again: beautiful island, sea, and wind.

Each day now I go to spend time with the wind on the point. It hammers me, chiselling my edges and perhaps shaping me in ways I cannot see. Death is

everywhere: in the diving ducks and swooping eagle, the waiting kingfisher, and swimming dolphins. On the tidal flat each step I take crushes life.

On the point in a ferocious wind I realized the plants are always there. They can't retreat to hide. I hide behind the plants; my cabin is built from them; I warm myself burning them; I eat and breathe them.

*Flow* seems to equate a still mind with an idle mind that is the "devil's workshop." The author's view is, I think, part of the problem and not the solution. A still mind is perhaps open to the "devil," but it's also the fallow field where Spirit can sow the seeds of life.

### 12/3/01

I continue to bully Cat at times and continue to feel lousy about it. I'm seeing more clearly how my cowardice and bullying are linked. Afraid to face my own fear and rage, I take it out on something smaller and weaker than me.

### 12/4/01

I've drifted into a spectrum of studies.

1. Meditation: Paying attention to whatever happens in my body/mind and external nature. Over and over coming back to simply noticing each moment and letting it go without analysis or grasping.
2. Qualitative observation: Watching the butter bellies live their lives and documenting territorial and mating behaviour, feeding bouts, brooding activity, care of chicks, etc.
3. Quantitative measurement: Collecting data on limpet movement. Statistical analysis can probably be done on the data. (Average distance moved each day, number of days moved each month, association between pairs, whether some wander and others prefer to return to the same location for each low tide.) I also intend to do an

experimental manipulation by lifting them from where they are and setting them in a solid cluster to see what they do.

I can tell a narrative about the life of the butter bellies, but have little information about limpets to use in a story of their movements. So I must use the approach of fitting the movement of each into a category I create of their collective movements. If I can figure out how to present their movements so that a pattern can be seen (not a regular repeating pattern, but the kind seen in jade), this might be something different from either science or narrative. Is this aesthetic knowing? Meditative Knowing?

I often look forward to measuring the limpets. It structures my day, links me with the tide, and pushes me into the wind and rain. The wind is exciting. Like riding a motorcycle or rickety bus over rough road.

Rock-sitting in the evening rain - a shift. Spirit/Light floods my soul and brings love, peace, beauty, and the gift of life. It seems to come from beyond/outside me. Perhaps I am that Spirit, but for now one step at a time. When I try to force the identification I seem to get lost and locked into the sense of lifelessness.

Perhaps "Wild Aliveness" isn't such a good way for me to think. Too self-important and macho. This experience is softer and more tender. It flows in as a gift and brings a sense of transformation. As with a mathematical transformation, there is a relationship between these two states of consciousness, but here the relationship is deeply mysterious rather than numerical.

12/05/01

Low day: grey and rainy inside and out. My fear is not of death, but of unending pain. Last night a bout of phantom limb pain; it's eased off so far today. No idea what might have triggered it.



When I'm down I have no stable worldview or life goal with which to hold myself steady, so I'm at the mercy of the ebb and flow of immediate experience. I long for meaning and purpose that's not ego-based but comes through me from a deeper place. If all my work here only makes it easier or more tolerable to pass through life, then it doesn't seem worth it. There needs to be joy.

That's the last thought - with its negative tone - I can remember before I noticed rain rippling in puddles. Then the soft shift to peace, love, beauty and joy. Why? What triggers it? It's as if my conscious mind has little influence. Big Mind/tender heart just comes or goes. For peace of mind and stability, I need to live in a context that includes both moments of joy and times of deadness. Else I'm on the roller coaster always.

12/6/01

Often now I feel love for the rain. The roof drumming I used to find oppressive is comforting, concentrates my attention, and carries me inward. Today fierce wind is hammering the cabin, and even that - with twinges of anxiety - feels ok.

I spend so much time worrying about whether people will like, love, and respect me in the years ahead, but there is nothing (sane) I can do about whether people like and respect me. I can only work on liking and respecting myself and other people; look for the positive and Spirit in each; allow myself to feel and accept inevitable frustration, disappointment, fear, and anger without blaming myself or the external world; remember to stay centered in myself rather than manipulating others to make me feel ok.

12/07/01

Went to fly the kite I built since it's a fairly calm day. Didn't work even in the gentle breeze. Just spun and jumped all over.

Some psychologists say depression is anger we're afraid to experience toward the world (often toward parents) and so direct it toward ourselves. I wonder. I've felt angry with Mom and Dad for a long time and still get depressed. Maybe depression is just the sense of lifelessness I have when I'm unwilling to experience painful emotions of any kind and so hold all experience at bay. Experiencing the depression directly breaks the cycle because then I'm feeling and letting the world in.

Started a new limpet study. Cleared an area in the sand at low tide, set a small rock in the middle, and placed six limpets on it. Covered them with chicken wire weighted at edges to hold them in place until they reattach themselves solidly at high tide. Surrounded the first rock with three other much larger rocks one, three, and six feet away. I want to see if the limpets will go to the closest rock. Do they have a way to sense the closest rock? Do they navigate just by what's in front of them, or can they perceive things some distance away?

For intending to not write these last three months I'm sure putting a lot down.

Long lovely twilight. The butter bellies swam into the Big Mind space of the basin. I focused on them and flipped into my own head. So I loosed my gaze and returned my eye to the cormorant I'd been watching with a more non-attached interest. Flip. And again - with more care - back to the butter bellies. I watched them and wondered where they were headed. I felt something in my body - some intentionality - perhaps from their posture or the speed of their swimming, and I realized they were headed toward the cormorant. Surprising since they usually co-exist peacefully. But the cormorant sensed it too and flew

away. As soon as it flew they changed direction back toward shore. Neat to feel it in my body like that.

The main reason I don't want to feel depression is that in relation to other people it negates what I'm doing here! It's like I have to become some superman; always peaceful, happy, and clear. Only then will it be valid for me to teach what I'm learning. There are several ways to deal with depression: 1. Keep it at bay by staying busy. 2. Drug it into oblivion. 3. Lean into it, befriend it, and make it part of my life. By leaning into and accepting it I can shift my perspective to Big Mind and then the depression loses its power to dominate and becomes a natural part of the universe. Sometimes too when I sink into it, it opens out into light and joy. 4. Do nothing proactive and let it overwhelm me. The first three seem positive and useful to some degree and in some situations.

Watching the evening basin and the shift/release simply happened. I might be able to catalyze the shift by actively trying to see myself from the outside, which is how it is in Big Mind. But to do that I must accept myself just as I am, otherwise I'm stuck inside fighting against myself and trying to be something I'm not.

But how can I accept myself as a Perfect manifestation of Life when I'm feeling depressed and very non-perfect? From the perspective of Big Mind, Everything is Perfect as it is - just because It Is. Only that and nothing more. Things are not perfect in an idealistic sense of the word, but they are as they Are. A clearer way to see it is that everything is Alright - not perfect. Nature is not perfect; it's just what it is. I exist as a full manifestation of Life. I'm fully alive no matter how I feel about it. But I may not "feel Alive" and so I'm not perfect. There is joy and freedom in failing to be perfect - to accept myself as I am.

This acceptance brings peace, love, and beauty, but not the deep sense of Aliveness. For the shift into Aliveness I need to experience "all of existence" as

a flowing whole of which I'm not the center. Either I sense everything as Fully Alive, or nothing is Alive. I can know intellectually that I'm alive and the butterflies are alive, but the actual experience of being Alive as Life comes only when the All comes to Life.

Ah, I only saw it just now: depression (like fear before it) is my opportunity. This afternoon I was trying to see it that way but couldn't. The depression just seemed like a terrible flaw. And so it is from the perspective of wanting to be a perfect self-contained individual. But the flaw of depression is the weak place in my armour that allows me to escape the perfectionist straight jacket and relax into being without needing to be perfect.

Ah, that this clarity would last, but it too shall pass. Just this afternoon I was thinking that for 25 years I've tried everything and I still get caught in a fight against depression. Now, of course, all that seems "behind me" ... until next time.

12/9/01

Lovely warm mostly sunny Sunday. Windy on the point but only a breeze here. On the new limpet study two stayed put, one went to the rock two feet away, one was stuck to a very small rock buried in sand six inches from the starting point, one was sitting on the sand one foot from starting point, and one had disappeared. None went to closest sizable rock, and none headed back toward rock where I'd gathered them. So whatever their sensory system, they don't seem to know there is a good solid rock one foot away.

A surprise today that I'm sort of hesitant to write down. I had my first real lust attack in the ten months I've been here. I've had occasional mind-bubbles before this but they didn't really move into my body. This one did. I found myself fantasizing about fucking a Latin woman, and then it came to me that on a subconscious level I've always wanted to have sex with my mother. I've

thought I kept my physical and emotional distance from her because I was angry she put demands on me I couldn't fulfill and because I sensed rejection. But at least one of the feelings I've been avoiding is sexual desire. I suppose I shouldn't take it too personally since Freud tells us that this is a universal aspect of the mother/son relationship. Still, it's not so easy to face.

I let myself feel the feelings and found myself masturbating. The wave of lust passed before I climaxed and I was glad. Sitting in the Sunday sun I felt more relaxed than in a long time. But the body lust returned and I went with it. Afterward I remained mindful of my feelings, but not much guilt or anything else came up; mostly a sense that that wasn't what I'd really wanted.

Wonder if denying my sexual desire for Mom has kept me from feeling turned on by women my own age or by women who actually become real body/beings in a long term relationship? I also wonder if this has opened a dark corner in me that will take a bunch of time and work to accept - like accepting (if not liking) my homosexual urges. I sort of hope not since I've enjoyed the peace of non-lust out here.

How little I've written describing the joyful spiritual releases I've experienced here. The shifts into a non ego-centred space: zero-centred, as Joseph Goldstein calls it. Yet it's that space that generates love, respect, awe, and peace. For whatever reason (possibly all ego selves are incapable of real love), I find that when I'm inside my small mind I'm almost completely self-absorbed in a sort of rote repetitive way. No matter what the thoughts or fantasies, they're seldom joyful or fulfilling. I'm either the star that others admire (but I have no feeling for them), or I'm the loser that no one likes.

12/11/01

Watching the tide and my breath flow in and out. Seeing what desire and aversion do to the mind; how wanting things to be different than they actually are

closes me off from living fully in this present moment. Practicing letting go of the constant inner dialogues; letting go of doubt and despair at how long it's taken to come so short a way and how far there is to go; letting go of the past, moment by moment and trusting the unknowable future; relaxing into the mysterious wonder of life in the present. Practicing leaning lightly into pain and lightly away from pleasure. Practicing balance. Practicing the shift that transforms the path to somewhere else into an endless opening into the here and now.

12/14/01

Every categorization is a process of hypothesis formation and testing. The mind seems to do it compulsively as a strong survival mechanism.

A strange male butter belly swam into the basin, called, and made himself at home. He acted so much like the resident that I couldn't be sure he wasn't until the local pair showed up and drove him off. It was, perhaps, a glimpse of how a male acquires territory: move in "as if" it were already yours, then defend it because you experience it as yours.

The limpet that hadn't budged for the past two months moved an inch and a half today. There was another one in its place. Aggression? What tests could I do to check for aggression? I've been testing to see whether individuals prefer vertical or horizontal surfaces. All this is relevant to how studies get started. I had no idea about these additional studies two months ago. It was only when I started seeing what the limpets do (e.g. one left rock to cross sand, those on vertical surface tend to stay there, now possible aggression) that ideas for new studies popped into my mind.

The limpets still seem mostly like objects rather than living beings. I feel their aliveness more when I pry them off the rock and see the animal beneath the shell. I've accidentally cut a couple with the putty knife and felt it myself. Filed the sharp corners and have been more careful since.

12/15/01

Low tide rock-sitting, listening for the Voice of God.  
Then the soft subtle shift: my whole being relaxed and I was listening  
(am now, and always have been) to the Voice of God - in every sound.

Such a small difference - from "For" to "To" - yet massive.  
In one there is straining for what isn't; in the other joy and peace  
in the wonder of what is.

Listening for the Voice of God implies duality  
as though whatever I'm experiencing is somehow not the Voice of God.

In listening for the Voice of God my mind is active, full of movement,  
and my heart feels closed. In listening to the Voice of God  
my mind is quiet and my heart soft and open.

I spend so much time and energy listening for the Voice of God  
with my mind, but I listen to the Voice of God with my heart.

My mind has definite ideas about what it wants God's Voice to say;  
it wants answers, certainty, conceptual understanding.

My heart hears God's Voice saying "I Am," and it is joyful and content.

After long hours of listening for, there is the soft shift to listening to.  
Ahhh.... Yet after mere minutes I become restless and eager to DO  
something now that I'm untangled.

Poof - just there - I'm back to listening for.

I notice too that I'm often uncomfortable with pleasure. I look forward to  
eating rice and beans, yet tend to wolf them down rather than relax into the  
pleasure of the meal. There is this thing of challenge too - like going to the  
glacier or making love with a new woman. Once the challenge is met I'm restless  
to move on. I work and struggle to slip into the flow of listening to the Voice of  
God, but once there I'm ready for something else.

Maybe it's not seeking new challenge, but escape from intimacy and connection. Yet the Voice is not threatening or demanding. Perhaps it's just ego's habit of wanting to be independent, free, and in control ... even though that doesn't make it happy. The only thing to do is spend time with that joy and pleasure and allow it to heal me.

I'm shy of telling others about the Voice of God, so in social situations that feel lifeless and dull, I try to liven things up by being outrageous or funny instead of bringing Spirit to the interaction.

12/24/01

This is the most peaceful, if not the most painless, Christmas I have spent in a long time; I will share it with the sea and sky, the mountains, the trees and the wind.

Long ago I put away my watch and calendar,  
and over and over, when I catch myself at it,  
I let go of useless repetitive thinking, fruitless planning, and idle speculation.

Coming back to my own direct experience of the here and now;  
to my body and heart and sometimes spacious mind.

To the question, "Who am I?" "Who am I?"

Since early October there have only been a few days calm enough to fish from the kayak, so mostly I am land-bound on this small patch of earth.

When I do go fishing, I feel more and more deeply the life I take in killing a fish. My emotions are ambivalent.

I feel deep connection, gratitude and appreciation for the gift of sustenance from the sea, and also sorrow (and perhaps guilt and shame) in taking the life of one of my fellow creatures.



Yet out here alone (except of course for the whole world around and within me), I see death daily and know that all beings survive by ending the life of others.

There is underlying harmony and oneness in our common existence, we are all alive together here; yet there is also surface conflict: competition for food and space.

Daily I go to the exposed point to sit or stand and be hammered by the roaring wind; slowly being shaped in ways I cannot tell.

I spend much of my time now meditating:  
sitting quietly (physically at least) listening to the rain on the porch roof and the sound of the waves against the rocks;  
watching the tide and my breath flow in and out.

This morning I completed four days of fasting and intensive meditation: sitting out in rain and wind for long hours encased from head to toe in plastic and rubber.

Watching how desire, aversion, judgment, rebellion and restlessness affect my mind. Watching how my need for myself and the world around me to match some vague ideal I have of perfection tightens and pulls me out of fully experiencing the present moment just as it is and not as I want it to be.

The process is often difficult.  
There is darkness and anger and grief.  
There is pain.

But there are also times of radiant joy when my heart and mind and body are filled with the light of peace and love and beauty.

Times when wonder fills the world around me.

Times when I want to never leave here.

12/24/01

During my four-day fast/meditation I was centered enough to let Cat's cries arise and pass away, and he cried very little. Perhaps because I slept on the porch. Over and over I've vowed to not react against the cries, and over and over have failed. Mornings are especially bad while I'm in aversion-mind anyway. This

morning I nailed him full in the face with a pan of water. And again I vowed that until January first, I'd take no action (verbal or physical) against him from a state of anger and aversion.

1. The inner state of anger and aversion arises, overwhelms me, and poisons my relationship with the whole world. My heart closes and hardens and I become implacable. It's like wearing tinted glasses: my perceptions are coloured by a filter of anger and aversion, and everything takes on that colouration. All beings and things, including myself, seem unpleasant to me.

2. What triggers the anger and aversion can be insignificant but it seems huge and feels like it will last forever. The triggering event may be short in duration, yet the painful state of anger persists long after and I remain tense and on guard waiting for it to reoccur. In this way I'm focused only on the negative and can't see anything positive. This is nutso.

3. I understand how parents could beat or even kill their kids. Killing Cat to escape the "cause of my suffering" has crossed my mind. I've hit him, and continue to throw water at him. I absolutely need to get some space around this or it will only get worse as I grow older.

4. Not confronting another's antisocial behaviour because I don't want to feel my own anger is also irresponsible. So I'm torn about letting Cat cry. But my own inner balance is more important to me than Cat's future, and others might not be bothered by the crying like I am. In any case, reacting out of anger instead of care and compassion is not skilful or justifiable.

6. I need to go "in" to face my own anger and hate directly in the same way I've needed to go "out" to face my fear. Over and over I ask for help from Spirit.

7. During my four-day fast, my nose ran a lot from the cold and wind. At one point I felt a drip form and slowly dribble down my lips and chin, but managed to stay with it instead of wiping it away. My whole being focused on the amazing

sensation and the aversion it aroused. After that the dripping was just a normal sensation. So without the aversion, cat's yowling will be just a sound.

8. A big part of this aversion and anger is because I feel like something is being demanded of me. I see that I'm almost constantly demanding something of myself and of the world. Perhaps we all are. Living within a matrix of demand is very painful.

I just went out to the porch and caught Cat watching alertly to see if he'd have to dodge water. It's as though he actually enjoys this conflict, as though it pumps adrenaline into him. Like when he's hunting. So my actions may be reinforcing his crying rather than curbing it. Maybe all these maybes are just babble and Cat is just as he is. I've noticed again how much intentionality I attribute to Cat. He - and everything else - is intentionally thwarting my will. Actually the world is simply doing what it does; each being living its own life. Why is this so difficult to see and accept when insisting on being the centre of everything causes so much pain?

I've come to realize that these journal entries are not simply a record of my life in solitude. They're also a teaching tool for the future; a way to remember what I'm learning and will likely forget once I return to the social world.

Bummer. In a moment of mindlessness I fried the Macintosh laptop by plugging it into the PC charger which uses different voltage. After my solstice fast/meditation retreat I was very dehydrated, although I didn't realize it. All the symptoms were there - droopy skin, dry mouth, disorientation - but it took a while to recognize what was going on. I knew something was wrong and even considered phoning for assistance. A Catch 22: how to recognize your own dehydration when one of the symptoms is confusion. While I was foggy, I plugged in the Macintosh and pffttt. I really liked that little computer and used it for journaling until I switched back to pen and paper a couple months ago. Oh well.

Now for a well deserved cup of coffee - the first since the beginning of November.

12/29/01

Rock-sitting in a warm moonlit breeze through the small hours and into the dawn.

Drifting into and out of the Now.

Keeping company with the Now.

Keeping company with Spirit and with my Self.

Nowhere to go, nowhere to not go either.

## Interlude 11

### Wanderings of the Chilean Limpet, *Nacella magellanica*

It's all likely stories.  
(Patti Kuchinsky)

#### Introduction

During my year in solitude, I became fascinated by my non-human neighbours, some of whom were limpets (*Nacella magellanica*): conical-shelled snails that live on the littoral zone rocks and graze on micro-algae. I began to wonder how they live their lives. Do they move long distances or remain more or less in the same spot day after day? Looking at the one by my foot, for example, I wondered where he/she/it had been the previous day or month.

Standing there in the cold wind-blown rain, I got the urge to track and record their movements and to later recreate them as a computer program. I envisioned a sort of slow dance of limpets through time across the rock. With the assistance of Axel Anderson, a graduate student in Forestry at UBC, I did create such a program, but that project does not fit into this dissertation. I include the following charts and brief discussion because the limpet study was an important part of my daily life for three months and I feel the experience to be incomplete without a presentation of the process and some of my findings. In the discussion section I also briefly describe one of the subsidiary studies I carried out to demonstrate how scientific studies develop.

#### Methodology

I numbered 50 limpets that I selected by choosing those with shells free from algae and large enough to mark with red and white nail polish. Conditions permitting, I measured the position of each limpet each day at low tide. The rock in most of both study areas was unbroken, relatively flat, and presented a mix of visually clean rock and clusters of mussels. The rock surface was covered with extremely slippery micro-algae, which I assume provided food for the limpets.

To create a measuring device, I marked the circumference of a 10 inch diameter plastic bucket-lid with numbers from 1-12 and subdivided each segment to create a total of 120 sub-segments at 3-degree intervals. I weighted the lid with a rock, attached a string to its center, and marked off distances along the length of the string in three inch increments.

Once each day during the daylight low tide I positioned the lid on the same spot on the rock in the same north/south orientation. I recorded the position of each limpet using angular rotation and distance from the center of the lid to create a vector. I rounded the angular measurement up or down to the nearest 0.5 sub-segment, and since each 0.5 sub-segment was equivalent to 1.5 degrees, this yielded a precision of plus or minus 0.75 degrees. When measuring the position of limpets close to the dial, I could estimate angular rotation more precisely, but at distance, especially when the wind was moving the string, plus or minus 0.75 degrees was the limit of my confidence and vision. I also rounded the distance measurement up or down to the nearest estimated 0.5 inch using the 3 inch intervals I had marked on the string. This yielded a precision to within plus or minus 0.25 inch. I later converted the foot and inch measurements to metric and translated the resulting vectors to an XY coordinate system using the center of the lid as the origin.<sup>146</sup>

## Results

I've found the distinct pattern of movement of each individual limpet to be fascinating and have shown four examples of their individuality in Figures 3a-6a. (Please see the figures at the end of this interlude.) It is important to realize that the only hard data is the actual points where I found each limpet each day at low tide. I have no knowledge of their actual movement between those points and the lines that connect the dots on the charts simply convey the sequence of daily positions and create a visual pattern. The breaks in the lines indicate days when the ocean was too stormy or the tide too high to take measurements.

I have done some basic statistical analysis on the movement of each limpet (Figures 3b-6b). Visually, on the graphs, I cannot detect any regular pattern of

movement for any individual or similarity of movement between individuals. I also analyzed the collective movement of the 20 individuals in one study group. Figure 7 shows the average distance between the daily low tide positions for each limpet during a period of two months. In other words, if the limpets moved directly from one day's low tide position to the next day's low tide position, Figure 7 shows the average distance each limpet traveled each day. Figure 8 shows the frequency of average distances from one low tide position to the next for the group. For example, five limpets moved an average of 1-5 cm daily and one limpet moved an average of 6-10 cm daily. When I clump the data in this way, I still can see no regular patterns.

### **Discussion: Part 1**

During the study I was surprised to discover that some of the limpets were in widely separated positions from one day's low tide to the day's low tide and other limpets that were in virtually the same location day after day. Since I knew limpets to be grazers that needed to move to feed, I wondered what the ones that stayed in the same place were eating. Is there a phase of life during which they fast? Or, were they actually moving and grazing at high tide and then returning to a home base for low tide. Since my return from Chile I have learned that some species of limpets show homing behaviour and some do not. In this case some individuals either stayed in one place or returned to a home territory - at least some of the time - and others did not.

Often when we clump things together into categories (such as species of limpet) we lose the grounded actuality of the individual. In tracking their movements, I was intrigued by the uniqueness of each limpet's daily behaviour. Each just seemed to do what it did rather than follow a regularly repeating pattern or a pattern common to all individuals. It is possible that movement patterns might correlate with sex, size, or some other variable. While I had no way of identifying the sex of the limpets, I am surprised that I didn't think to measure the basal diameter of each one's shell.

I am not claiming that statistically significant patterns of commonality could not be found in the data I collected. I don't know since I'm unsophisticated in my use of statistical analysis, and it could be that a larger data set would have revealed more. But

to my eye, in terms of movement, it is the difference between individuals that seems most apparent. Alan Watts (1958) claims that in the East, the lines in jade are considered to be the most perfect manifestation of pattern. The pattern is clear and beautiful, but it is non-regular and non-repeating. This is how the movement patterns of limpets seem to me.

One of the things I have been playing with is the integration of different kinds of knowledge. So often we draw hard lines between quantitative and qualitative, conceptual and intuitive, science and art. Here my process of exploration began with a kind of unfocused wondering about a manifestation of life I saw at my feet. Then there was the stage of rigorous collection and manipulation of quantitative data. Finally, I experience the qualitative feelings of aesthetic pleasure that arise as I gaze at the intricate non-repeating patterns depicted in Figures 3a-6a.

During the period I was conducting this study, I was also paying attention to and recording in the journal my thoughts and feelings as a scientist and my evolving relationship with the study organism, study site, and with the process of science itself. I will not repeat those observations here, but for me they are as interesting as what I learned about the movement of the limpets.

## **Discussion: Part 2**

I want to briefly discuss one of the subsidiary studies I designed to answer questions that emerged as I carried out the primary study and became more familiar with the limpets. I will also describe an interesting episode that took place after I returned to UBC and was plotting the data I had recorded in the field.

During the weeks I was tracking the limpets' daily movement, some individuals disappeared. At first I thought oyster catchers or some marine organism had eaten them. Then, by chance, I noticed one that had left the relatively flat unbroken surface of the large rock on which I had established the study site and had moved into an area of smaller broken rocks. Searching, I found several other "lost" limpets on the undersides of these rocks.

Some time later I noticed one of the study limpets on another large flat rock about 15 meters from the study site rock. In between was an area of sand and rubble. It



seemed that this limpet had crossed the sand and rubble to reach its new location. This surprised me because I had by then discovered that limpets are vulnerable to wave action and to small sand shrimp<sup>147</sup> when they are not firmly attached to solid rock. I also wondered how this individual found its way back to solid rock once it was out in the sand and rubble. Do limpets have some sort of distance perception to guide their movements?

I decided to test this hypothesis, and I describe the simple study I designed on December 7, 2001 and December 9, 2001 in the journal. Here I want to point out the collective and progressive aspects of science. Even working alone, a researcher is part of a collective and almost all studies grow out of previous studies and the information those studies produced. In this case my own on-going study of limpet movement provided knowledge and stimulated new questions that I then set out to answer. I was, of course, limited by my lack of access to the work of other scientists although I did some reading before leaving for Chile. Had the already existing literature on limpets been available to me, I would not have had to begin from scratch in my own work. Typically I would have selected and researched a study organism before going into the field and would have designed my study in consultation with other researchers.

There are, however, tradeoffs. Although such collectively established procedures in professional science produce high quality results, there is deep delight and joy in wandering and wondering aimlessly through the world until something catches your interest and you ask a question and figure out how to answer it - even though someone else has, perhaps, already answered the question before you. And perhaps the answer you come up with that at least in part explains what you were wondering about might be quite different from the answers others have come up with before you. Each of these answers adds to the rich weave of what we call our knowledge of the world.

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Once I had returned to UBC, I defined a simple computer procedure in Excel that would translate and plot the vector data I had recorded into an XY coordinate system. I hadn't yet connected the points that represented the daily position of the limpets at low tide with the lines that are shown in Figures 3a - 6a.

Vaguely at first, and then with growing interest and excitement, I noticed that the sequential positions of some of the limpets showed geometric patterns. It was as if they might have been using the earth's magnetic field to orient their movements. My mind was fascinated and captivated by these patterns that were emerging from the limpets' apparently random positions on the rock, and I wondered if I had discovered something that no one else had noticed before. Then, sitting there alone hunched over the computer, things got a bit weird. I began to imagine - humorously - setting myself up as a sort of soothsayer and using the patterns of limpet movement as my crystal ball or tea leaves to tell the future. I might even develop a cult following as the limpet guru. ... Such are the bizarre imaginings of, at least this, solitary scientist.

Then, in a flash of understanding, the prosaic and disappointing source of the pattern became obvious: my own methodology. In the methodology section above I describe how I rounded my measurements up or down to the closest division mark on the radius of the dial I had made from the bucket lid and along the string attached to the center of the dial. This two-fold rounding up or down created the artefact of apparent geometric pattern I had detected in the data.

As I rounded the angular rotation to the nearest sub-segment mark or center of the sub-segment, I slightly altered each limpet's recorded position so that it fell on one of the 240 imaginary spokes that radiated from the dial's center and crossed its circumference directly over or half way in between one of the sub-segment marks. In rounding the distance measurements to the nearest 0.5 inch, I slightly altered each limpet's recorded position so that it fell on one of the imaginary concentric circles that were separated by 0.5 inches and centered on the dial's center. Alas! Once I re-introduced a random element back into the measurements to compensate for the rounding off, the geometric - almost mystical - pattern disappeared.

What I continue to find fascinating is how readily the mind creates and projects regular patterns onto the world, and how exciting it is to discover those apparent patterns. Scientists consciously examine their methodology and data for just such artefacts, but at a deeper level, the mind unconsciously creates and projects patterns onto the world. This process is pragmatically useful because it allows for some degree of predictability, but it

can lead to a false sense of power and security and, to the extent we become caught in our own projections, can dampen our experience of the mysterious wonder in the world.

Daily Low Tide Position of Limpet Red Dot 4:4

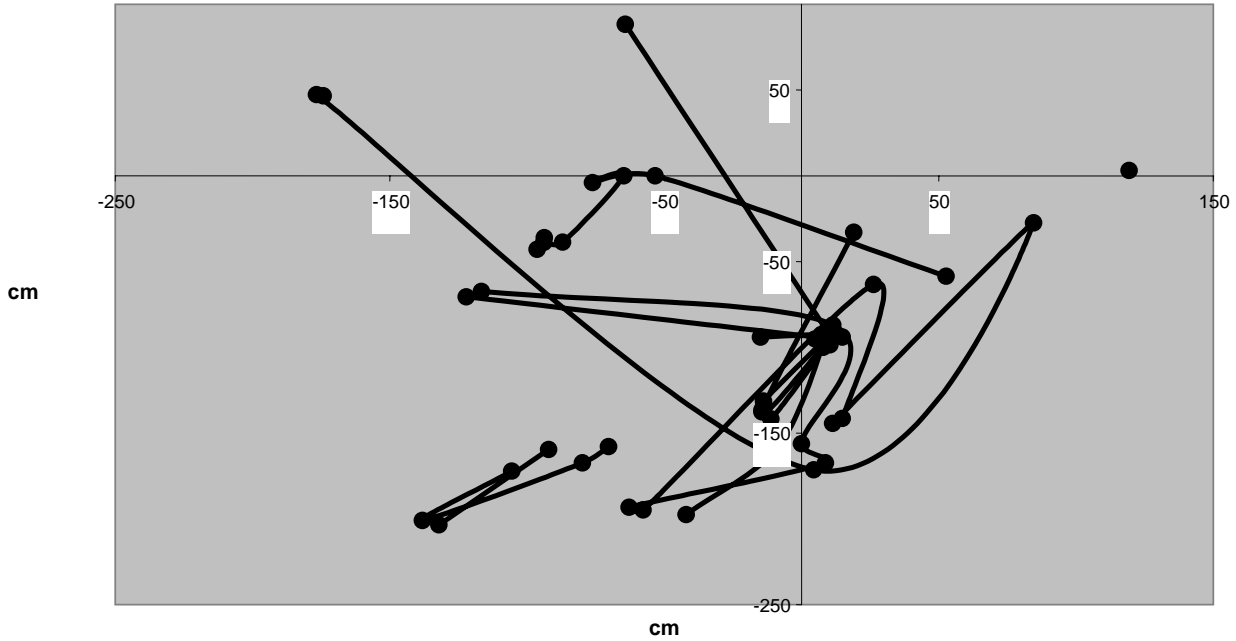


Figure 3a

Limpet Red Dot 4:4

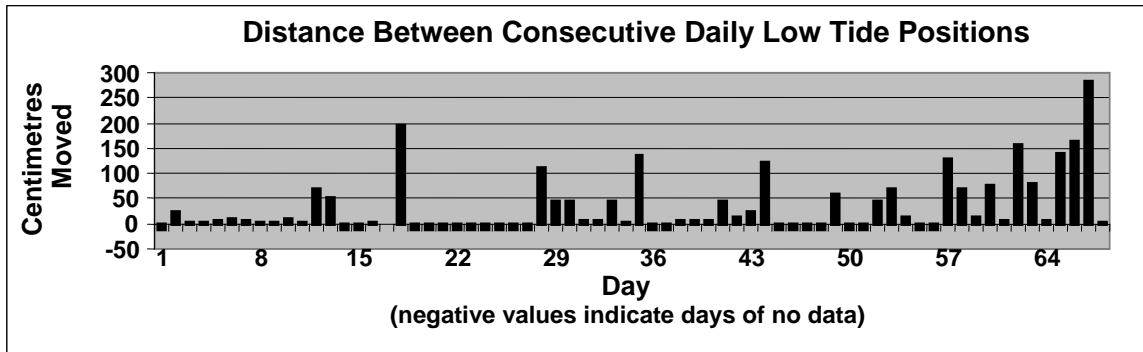


Figure 3b

### Daily Low Tide Position of Limpet Red Dot 4:5

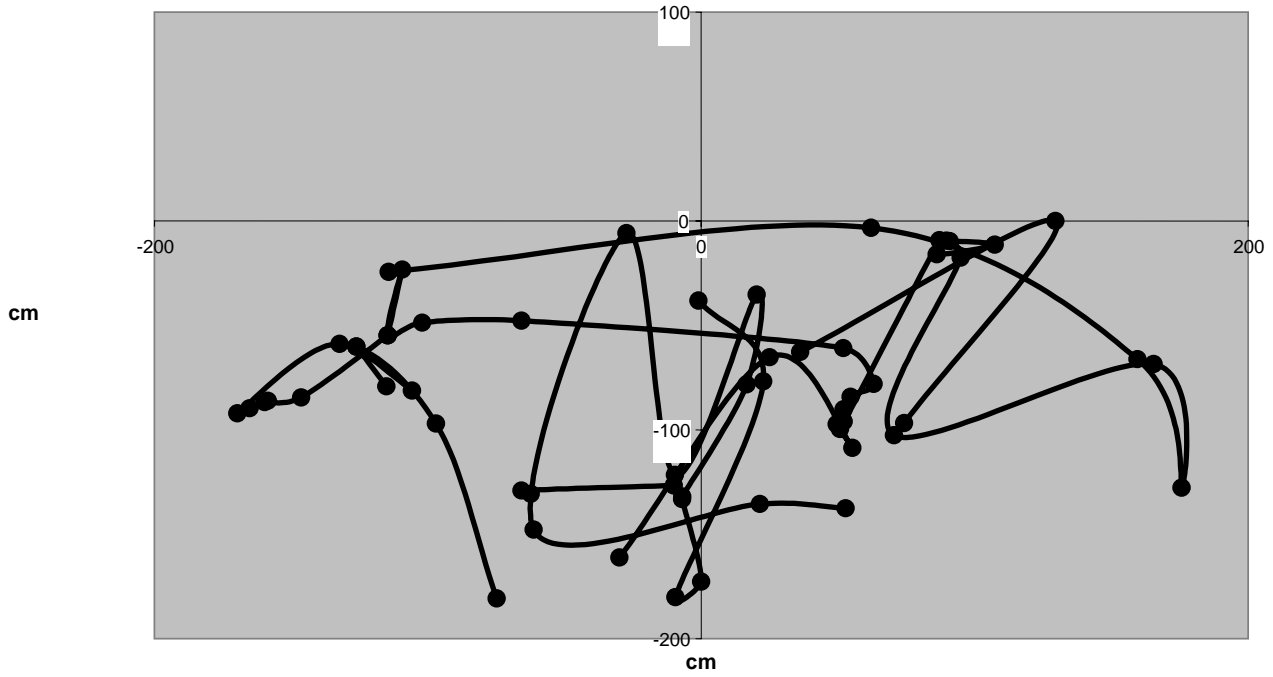


Figure 4a

### Limpet Red Dot 4:5

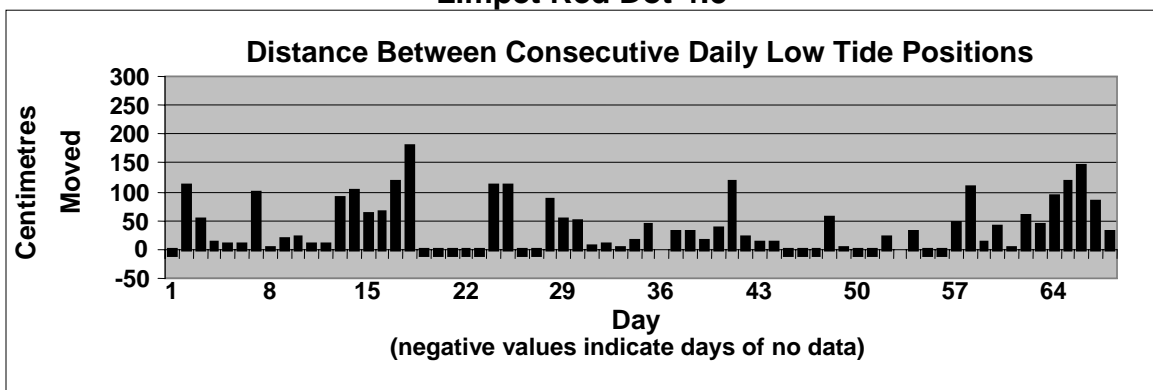


Figure 4b

Daily Low Tide Position of Limpet Red Dot 5:2

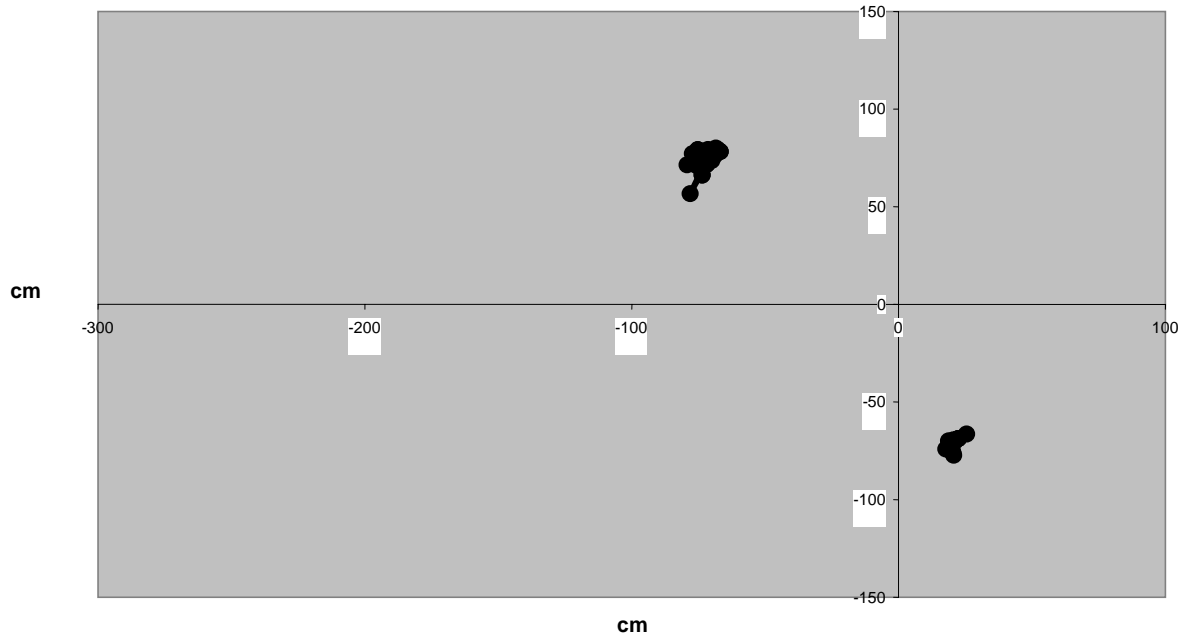


Figure 5a

Limpet Red Dot 5:2

Distance Between Consecutive Daily Low Tide Positions

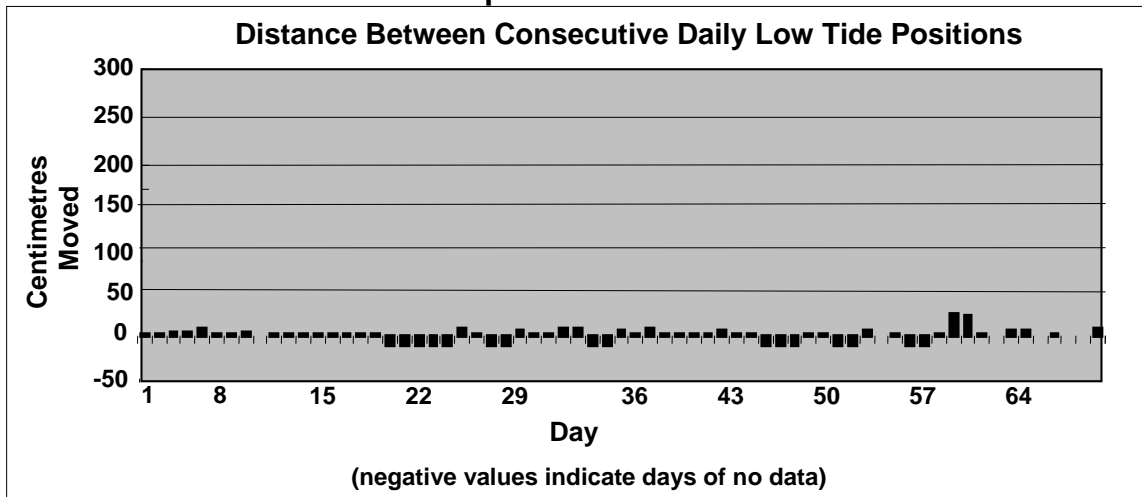


Figure 5b

### Daily Low Tide Position of Limpet Red Dot 5:3

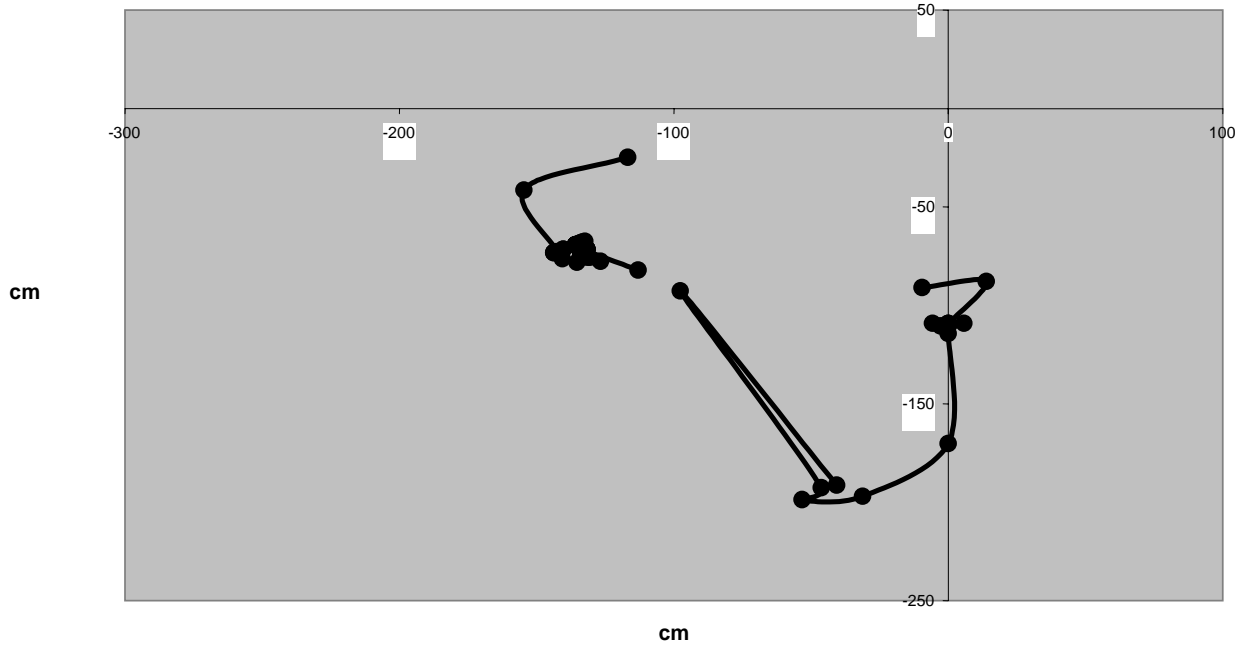


Figure 6a

### Limpet Red Dot 5:3

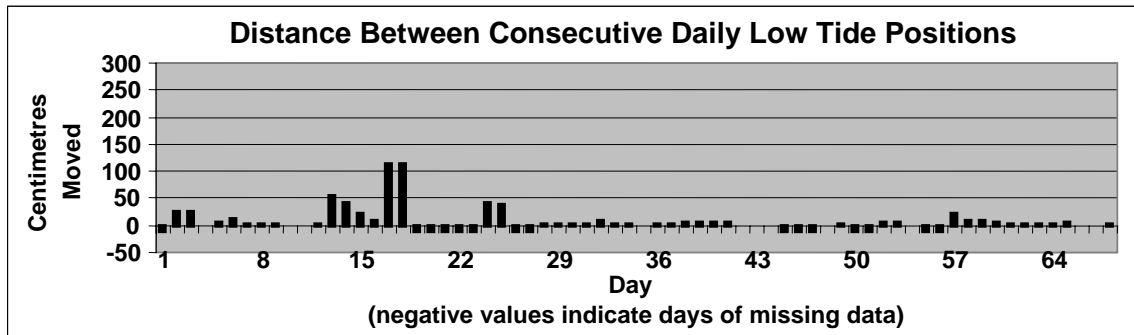


Figure 6b

All Limpets: Red Dot Series

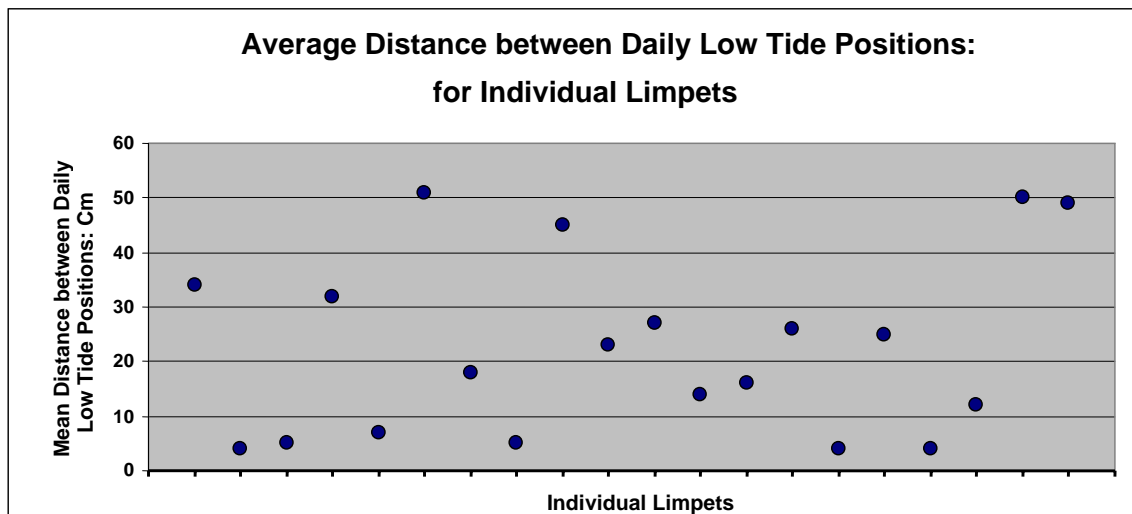


Figure 7

All Limpets: Red Dot Series

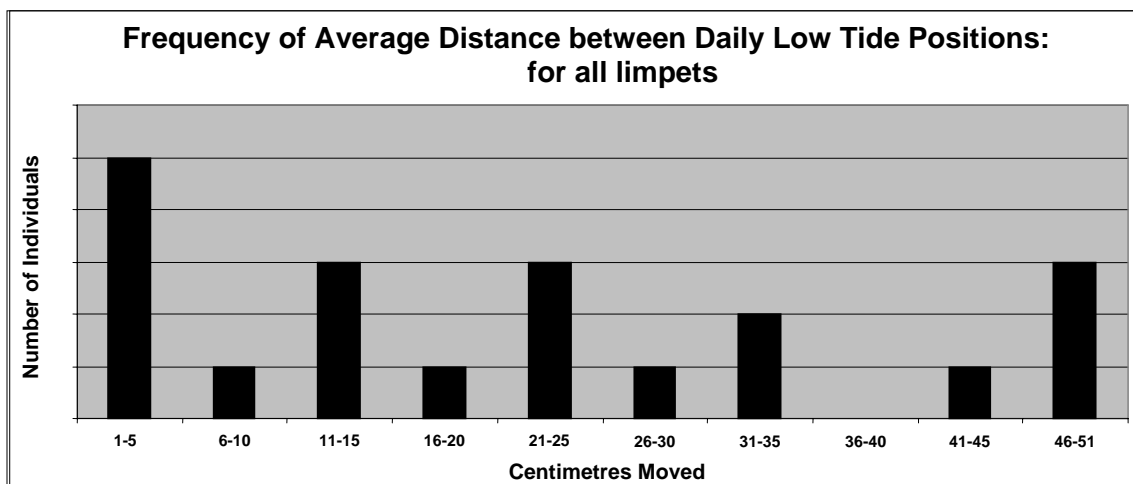


Figure 8

<sup>146</sup> I still generally live my life in feet and inches, but when I returned to UBC after the year in solitude my scientific training kicked in and I automatically converted the measurement data to metric before translating and plotting it - as if the distance the limpets moved would appear different or more real in centimeters than in inches.

<sup>147</sup> I call them sand shrimp although I don't know that this is an accurate identification.

## January 2002

Everything is Sacred.  
Every moment my death is nearer.

1/5/02

Amazing. A pair of parrots are in the tree behind the cabin.<sup>148</sup> Not very large, yellowish green body, shiny blue green wings and tail, some red on belly and underside of tail. Raucous squawking. Many other birds have recently arrived that I didn't notice last summer.

There is a tiny bird that appears to be black and flits among the dense brush.<sup>149</sup> I've only seen it once and without my glasses, but I hear it call frequently: two sharp notes, "Look up," or "wake up," or "come back," or "watch out." I've named it Dharma bird because of its frequent reminders to stay in the present.

Some time ago I saw two swallows flying nearby. One had something in its beak that turned out to be a feather. She dropped it and, as it fluttered down, swooped round to pluck it from the air again. I think she did it twice and it looked like play to me.

A jellyfish bloom floated in yesterday. Cat seemed to enjoy eating them.

Relocated limpets to a central spot to see what they do. Almost 25% have died. Little shrimp get under their shells and do them in. I tried to lift them very carefully, but guess I damaged some of the suction mechanism with putty knife.



1/6/02

What a hoot. My neighbours surprised and delighted me again. The dolphins were here as they have been frequently during the past month. They were roaring around whapping their tails on the surface, and one was swimming on his back, white belly in the air, and I'm pretty sure I saw a pink erection pointing toward the sky.

From the corner of my eye I saw the butter bellies swim into the basin. I thought it was the close pair, but they swam across into the neighbouring territory and climbed up onto the other pair's home rock. Then a single intruder appeared and the pair ferociously charged. I watched through binoculars as they came running/flapping across the water toward me.

It's hard to imagine - without having seen something similar - such an intense adrenaline-pumped rush of movement. I suppose the frantic flutter of a flock of chickens when Farmer Brown's wife appears in the hen yard with meat cleaver in hand and Sunday dinner in her heart might come close. Usually the running/flapping of the ducks seems sort of comical because they're trying to escape the imagined danger I pose in boat or kayak. But to see a charge coming through field glasses toward me was a different matter entirely and very threatening.

All of a sudden, like the Keystone Cops, all three switched direction and the intruder was chasing the pair! Huh? This never happens. Then all three hustled up onto the rock together which is absolutely unprecedented.

An interesting aspect of looking through binoculars is how it tunnels vision and focuses consciousness. The rest of the world disappears and the only thing that exists is what I'm seeing through the lenses. So I was startled when the dolphins came zooming into my field of view right behind the ducks. I'm pretty sure they were excited by the commotion and playing rather than hunting, but the butter bellies sure didn't think so.

A tidal bore runs through there where the dolphins like to play, and they swam leaping and splashing past the rock and disappeared behind the small island. Once the dolphins were gone the butter bellies seemed to remember what they'd been doing, and the intruder leapt into the water and ran flapping off in the direction the dolphins had gone with the pair - still intent on mayhem - in hot pursuit. Within seconds, here they came flailing back from behind the island - the pair in the lead, then the intruder, and the dolphins a close third.

The pair leapt onto the rock, but the intruder circled it, and once the dolphins passed by, headed back in the direction he had come. Then all was quiet once again. In the meantime, the black and white geese with their chicks in tow were peacefully feeding along the shore nearby. This whole sequence was quite wonderful to watch, and I still laugh when I remember it.

1/9/02

The inner shift/transformation seems to take place along two dimensions, and in trying to have it all at once I become confused. 1. Big Mind is still and clear, and all is happening within the space of consciousness. 2. When my heart softens the world seems small and intimate. I sense that I'm one of many, and feel tender love for everything - especially plants. Everything seems very real and alive, even the table and stove.

There is light and love, peace and beauty in both experiences, but the second feels more real and Alive somehow. Not sure where or how these two seemingly distinct experiences might fit in Wilber's model. In *Care of the Soul* they might be Spirit and Soul.

I find myself listening not only to sounds, but also to the silence within which sounds arise. It is this Gestalt of form/emptiness or existence/non existence which seems full and Alive. Together they emerge from - or perhaps form - Spirit/Tao.

Back in the human realm, there is still no word from the Navy about bringing Patti here even though I asked them if they would in the Jan 1 check in email. Trust the Process.

1/10/02

I've started to build a meditation box for Patti. She's been a huge loving presence in my life and has made such an important contribution to my stay here. Months ago I found a rock I often hold when meditating. A while back I found a slab of cypress washed up on a beach, and the notion of making a box for the rock came to me. I plan to nestle the rock in a chiton shell embedded into the bottom of the box. I saw a chiton for the first time last week, and since the inside of their shells is exquisite turquoise blue, immediately thought of using it in the box. But I didn't want to kill the only one here. Today I found another, pried it from the rock, and am drying the shell. I'll make the lidded box just large enough to hold the sun-bleached breastbone of a sea bird which will cover the rock.

I don't have many tools and one big job is to saw, chisel, and smooth a thin board from the driftwood slab before I can start to actually build the box. It will take a while. Since the sandpaper I brought got wet and was ruined early on, the most efficient way to smooth the wood is to scrape it with the machete. Cypress is wonderful: beautiful grain, golden colour, exquisite smell.

1/11/02

It's been calm and I've been leaning toward fishing for several days, but have also been questioning killing. It didn't feel right to go until yesterday. Strong breeze came up and made fishing difficult, but I caught seven.

Came back to protected water and floated quietly in the kayak. There awoke a strong sense of the Sacred. A shift to acknowledging and honouring what is

beyond/within me. It has to do with death and killing. Taking the life of fish and acknowledging that we must kill to live catalyzed this awareness of the Sacred. Somehow Death is a central aspect of all this.

It doesn't affect me much to kill fish. The pain hits when I'm filleting them with a calmer mind and heart. While fishing there is joy, excitement, and gratitude for the capture. In filleting I'm strongly aware of having killed this creature - especially since some of them still twitch as I slice through their flesh with the knife. But it is impossible to truly follow the Buddhist precept to refrain from killing and hypocritical to pretend to do so. I am a biological creature as well as a spiritual being, and to live I must take life. Yesterday I finally accepted that there is no way to avoid the pain and responsibility of my act of taking life. I am weary of killing.

But I'm not yet ready to let go of fishing. It's a deep aspect of my sense of who I am, my wilderness competence, and perhaps machismo. If I'm unwilling to personally kill here, I need to give up eating meat back in town if I wish to avoid hypocrisy.

Truly, we cannot live without killing. Some choose to kill only plants, some refrain from even that. Yet if our immune system stops destroying viruses and bacteria, we will not survive. When we walk in the forest, each step takes life.

In some sense, environmentalism with its focus of physical sustainability is not asking the deeper question. "How can we live - and respectfully take other lives - in a way that allows us to honour the sacredness of all life?" How can we live so our activities don't rend us from the experience of belonging to the earth and being part of the flow of Life? How can we sustain not only our own lives, but also the life of the land and re-establish our sense of belonging and longing for the sacred? I must have the courage to publicly ask these questions and to admit that I have no clear answers - even for myself. Each of us must search within

for our own answer, and the answer won't be conceptual, but how we actually live our lives. If we don't make this search, I think we might well not survive.

In terms of education, I think the key question remains: Are we training consumer/producers, or encouraging human beings to develop into free and responsible citizens?

There is an old familiar loneliness and heartache awakening again within me; a profound sense of emptiness and longing which somehow seems connected to awakening to the sacredness of Life and Living.

I'm going to miss this place when I leave, especially my small cabin. From the kayak yesterday I looked at the cabin and a deep sense of care and tenderness flooded me. My home. And yet, it's already gone. Soon I'll tear it down. All things are impermanent.

1/12/03

Years ago on my first long wilderness retreat, I had to admit that I didn't have what it takes to be a physical macho. Now I must admit I'm not an intellectual macho either. During these past years at the university I've attempted to analyse, criticise, create, and defend conceptual constructs of the world, but I'm not mentally clear, tough, or disciplined enough to really pull it off. I admire and envy thinkers who can maintain a coherent and comprehensive worldview, but each time I try I end up with internal contradictions and the sense that this construct doesn't work either. Then I'm thrown back to immediate experience and the pragmatic heuristics that let me muddle along. Of course I always find internal contradictions in other people's worldviews too....

1/13/02

Looking back over 25 years of consulting the I Ching it seems like the tone and intent of my questions hasn't changed. I continue to question, "How can I know what's right for me to do?" There is the underlying fear that if I make the wrong decision and do the wrong thing, I'll be lost and cut off from the inner light forever. But perhaps there isn't any one Right thing to do, and what's important is the intent of what I do and how I do it. If grasping, aversion, and fear motivate me, then whatever I do won't work. Perhaps in times of indecision I need to focus on my state of mind and let my actions follow from that. If I'm caught in doubt, indecision will always be present. Without the doubt, the same circumstance may generate no indecision at all.

Any decision involves uncertainty since no one can Know the right course of action. But I still somehow believe there must be a way of being in which this deep sense of uncertainty is not present. Some inner space in which there is wisdom and confidence that what I'm doing is right. This brings up the old question of free will. Do I have freedom or is it an illusion? It seems clear that I can often do what I want, but much less obvious that I can actually choose what it is I want.

If the Universe is a flowing Whole that I'm woven into, where is my freedom? Unless our physical notions of reality are deeply incorrect. If we are all embodiments of Spirit/Tao, where is individual freedom? If there is no self, who/what is free? What about personal responsibility for one's actions? After almost 40 years of asking these questions, I feel no closer to any answers. I sense I'm asking the wrong way or in the wrong place. I don't think conceptual thinking will get it. It requires a deeper transformation in my view of reality.

I have only three more weeks here, and they will be gone in a flash. For 25 years I've assumed that during a year of solitude a deep transformation would take place to make everything ok and my life make sense. If I don't Get It now,

I feel I'll never again have such an opportunity for quiet reflection. Not only will I be lost, but I'll still not be able to engage fully with people (a woman) because I'll always feel the need to return to solitude to find the answers I seek and crave. Ah Shit. I can see this coming already.

Yet I've also seen that the aliveness, peace, beauty, and love I'm seeking are never out there, but always right here right now.

1/14/02

It feels like I've prepared as much as I'm able. Now, all I can do is wait with an open heart for the Voice of God, for transformation and insight. To quietly return over and over to the present moment and work with spiritual hindrances. Sloth and torpor are strong now.

1/15/02

I'm not wearing glasses and my nose is coming alive. Without glasses everything looks larger and more immediate. Floating in the kayak this evening, the world seemed freshly created in each moment. Newton claimed the essential condition of matter is rest, and so God is needed to push it. But the inherent nature of matter/energy is motion and change. I haven't really felt the earth as my mother here. But finally floating in the kayak, yes.

The frog calls, and I hear: life calling to life. Telling me that I too belong. In these moments it doesn't matter if others are interested in my experience or whether I have anything to teach. More and more I must admit I know less and less. It may be hard to turn such awareness into a Ph.D. dissertation, but that's ok too. This is worth so much more.

But this is evening. Mornings are different. Dark with doubt, restlessness, and depression. As though something happens in my sleep and I must begin the journey again each day.

It's not that in order to be alive one must accept death: life/death is a single process. Deny death and life goes with it.

Nothing fits here ... no system at all. Nature just is. To be alive, I must see it as for the first time in each moment. As soon as I begin to record, classify, compare, I move from living nature to conceptual mind - no wonder I feel I don't know anything.

1/17/02

Last week the kite flew. Nice that something I did with Dad 45 years ago emerges now; something positive for a change. Spiritual hunger and love for nature are also gifts from him. I was on the point in a fairly strong wind trying different lengths of tail and different ways of hooking the kite to the fishing line, but nothing worked and I was getting pissed off. Getting the kite to fly seemed hugely important in that it was one of the few happy memories I have of Dad teaching me how to do something. Finally the kite crashed so hard the crosspiece broke, and then it flew - barely. Aha! I need more bend in the crosspiece.

I repaired it, tied on a huge tail for stability, hooked it to my fishing rod, and released it into the sky. What fun. I let out different amounts of line and watched as it swooped and danced over the sea in the turbulent gusts. Being able to actually see the complex patterns of the wind. Sometimes it would dive so radically that I barely managed to stop it before it plunged into the water. Sometimes it did crash. Since then I've gone often to play with the wind.

Flying the kite shows how my relationship with the wind has changed these past months. When I first arrived I often experienced the wind as a malevolent force, an enemy out to destroy me. As I've worked to surrender to the world as



it actually is, the wind's become a powerful teacher. Daily I spend time with the wind at the point. Rain has taught me about tenderness and love, wind about acceptance. Watching the seagulls and condors playing high in the fierce winds a couple months ago, I realized I wanted to play there too and the idea of building a kite flickered into my mind.

Usually I still avoid feelings of lonely restlessness, but they are a gift. If I don't try to run from or fill them with activity they are the doorway to Spirit and the experience that the world is Sacred.

Over and over I get caught in greed - not for things, but for experiences. It's not enough to just be here with things as they actually are; I want something special I can hold onto and take back with me. Better character, wisdom, photos and especially the completely fulfilling Experience that will make me whole and ok. The problem is that in order to know if I've actually "got it," I must step out of the ongoing flow of the present and compare what's happening with the expectations I have from my own past experience or from what I've heard and read from others. By doing this I'm actually cutting myself off from the fulfilling experience I long for.

There is also another catch-22. As long as I want to be in the flow of life, that very desire prevents me from seeing that I'm always already there. But if I don't want it, I won't make the effort to look for what is usually hidden.

Coming into Wilderness Solitude is like studying where everyone speaks a language you have forgotten so long ago that it now seems completely foreign. You know you have something important to learn but you don't understand. It takes patience to keep listening and listening. I hear the voices of nature and try to translate what I hear into thought so I will know I understand in my mind. But the language of nature cannot be translated into human concepts. It's deeper and different. I realize I have heard and understood when my heart softens and opens to peace, love, and beauty around and within.

1/18/02

Empty morning. Feeling empty and sorrowful that finally I will not get what I came here for - the Ultimate Fulfilling Experience. When I allow that feeling to be part of the flow of my immediate actual experience, it feels rich and complete. It's when I get caught in that feeling to the exclusion of all else that I feel the loss of Life.

Was up until dawn sitting under the stars. Feeling my way toward Spirit as immanent and transcendent. Perhaps the aspect of Spirit I usually think of as immanent, because it's right here everywhere, is really transcendent because it seems to be *within* everything - and not the *actual material itself*. Transcendent can't mean somewhere else - like heaven - because there is nowhere else to be. Perhaps true immanence is when Spirit becomes the material world. Both Spirit within AND my flesh, emotions, and thoughts are Spirit.

1/21/02

Three days ago I was feeling lonely and missing Mom; upset that I never truly opened my heart to her when she was alive and haven't really grieved her loss. Frustrated and angry with myself for worrying so much about my social persona and being so little able to share love. Something inside broke and I felt called to go naked into the wind and rain. Bellowing and waving my arms in a roar of frustration and pain, I went striding back and forth across the rocks at the point. Eventually, cleansed and drained, I returned to the cabin where I shivered for a long time before warming up. I might have looked insane to an onlooker, but it seemed natural to me. A sort of do it yourself primal scream therapy. What is insane is that I can't feel and grieve the loss of my mother yet I'm worried about what other people might think of me.

And what the fuck does it matter what other people think of me - or I of other people? We are what we are no matter what we think about it. What does it matter what I think of a tree or a rock? Whether or not I approve? Nothing, nothing at all.

Later I felt called to sleep in the woods. At dusk I dressed warmly and made my way into the dense forest. In the dark I crawled up and perched in the root mass of a fallen tree perhaps four meters above the forest floor. Got semi-comfortable and dozed for a while. Had expected rain and blackflies, but neither happened. I awoke clear and open in the night and journeyed deep and far in mind and heart. Joyful visions. A sense that perhaps the physical world and consciousness arose together from some beyond-perception Something that is not a thing at all. When it divided into two (now there were three) it came into existence as material and consciousness. At dawn I came home to sleep and felt deep gratitude for such a night.

Last night fierce wind and rain at the point. Came back and took off raingear, then again felt called out to be with the bios. Sat on the ground and leaned against a tree. Felt it come into me and myself flow into it - part of and belonging to the Earth. Again deep gratitude and fulfillment. This is why I came here. Feeling the earth and the living tree against my back was rich and vital. I've been so focused on the spiritual that I've sometimes lost sight of the earth as my home.

In some profound way I feel I've accomplished my work here - what I came to do. Yet in another sense I'm just beginning. All these experiences can be seen as grasping after the pleasures of spiritual materialism. The real work, the deep steady practice, is to relax and be with whatever arises in body, mind, and spirit.

I continue to get caught in anger and aversion at times, especially with Cat crying and blackflies biting. My work is to disentangle aversion from the unpleasant experience; to stop seeing the wind, Cat, and blackflies as attacking Me

personally. This is how the world is. Conflicts between organisms will always arise. As long as I identify only with my own self/body I lose the peace of experiencing things as Alright just the way they are.

1/22/02

Took the kite to the point, attached it to my rod and reel, and let out more than 200 yards of line. Small in the sky and translucent, it would sometimes disappear against the clouds; then I was sky fishing for the wind, an imagined kite my lure. It rose and plunged and felt like a fish in the sea fighting for freedom. The ultimate in catch and release - no need to even hook an actual fish.

1/24/02

Returned at dawn from sleeping on the island behind me the past two nights. Went at dusk day before yesterday over a calm sea, under a clear sky and half moon. Chilly night, but once the sun came up I slept soft and warm for several hours. Yesterday was a warm blue sky day; one of the few since I've been here. Worked with blackflies. In the evening it clouded up and started to blow. Not stormy, but cold and no place to hide. I had no sleeping bag or Thermarest, but did the best I could with plastic in a rocky nook.

I've become too hooked up psychologically, emotionally, and physically to the security and comfort of my cabin and chair. So for these last days I'm staying out as much as possible, sitting on earth instead of chair. I didn't come to live in a cabin in the wilderness, but to surrender to the ebb and flow of nature. The climate is so intense that I've come to hide part of the time with the door shut against the cold and against Cat too. I usually spend about a third of the time outside or on the porch, another third in the sleeping bag, and evenings relax into the fire's warmth.

As I look back over my life, it seems to me that I've always been homeless - physically, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually. But this isn't quite true. I've cycled between homelessness and intense attachments. When wandering free and easy, I love it and the thought of being boxed in and tied down is unpleasant. Then I reach a point where physical, psychological, and emotional comfort and security - no matter how disagreeable they often actually are - seem very attractive, and I jump into a new relationship, a new job, a new life. I lose all balance and become so tightly tethered that I become restless and break free again.

These are almost separate worldviews and personalities. One loves security, the warmth of my own little nest, friends and lovers, peer respect, etc. When I'm in that mode, the thought of wandering homeless and alone with all the fears and discomforts frightens me. Yet once I break free I love being out there, and the comforts and relationships I gave up seem relatively unimportant. Then, in some important way there is no longer any out there. It's all right wherever I am.

This is the same seeming dichotomy between wanting the security of a known self-contained Self - no matter how uncomfortable the actuality - and the longing, fear, and joy of letting go into the mysterious unknown of the flowing now. The thing I forget over and over is that in this surrender to homelessness is the possibility of being at home everywhere.

During this year I've over and over resisted stepping out into the freedom of the unknown, and over and over I've let go and stepped off the edge: physically (opening to the wind, going to the glacier, giving up food treats, coffee, and the cabin's comforts); emotionally (giving up email, self analysis, and thinking about the future); intellectually (giving up reading); spiritually (giving up the security of Buddhism to just be here in the wilderness.)

My craving for answers to take back and share is really a longing for intellectual and spiritual security, a nest, relationships. When I let go of that and step into unknowing and trust, I'm much more relaxed and peaceful. Then there is love, peace, and beauty. It's this way of being that I'd love to share. My work is not to preach but to continue to transform myself through surrender so no matter where I am or what I'm doing, I'm still in some way unattached and homeless. Wandering defenceless in freedom and unknowing. A long and difficult task ahead.

Defencelessness is a question I've been struggling with for days. If I completely give up defending myself, will nature roll over me? I think the problem is in seeing myself as a separate thing instead of a process that's an integral part of nature. Just because I let go of defending myself psychologically doesn't mean I will physically. My immune system goes on, I wear protective clothing, I'm careful while walking on slippery rocks and while paddling the kayak. I buffer myself as much or little as I feel necessary for survival - rather than defending myself against a world I imagine as my enemy.

Self or no self? The seeming Dichotomy comes from my obsessive perfectionism. All or nothing. But it's a sliding scale: a cline. Little by little I open to the universal ebb and flow, then it gets too hard and I shut back down. Then that gets too tight and I open up again. Cycles of opening and closing, like relationships, like the tides, like the seasons. Morning head and afternoon head. Small mind and Big Mind. Maybe, maybe. I cycle between and rebel against both and succeed only partially at either.

I just saw how I create myself and the world as a conceptual overlay. Underneath is what? The flow of sensation, thought, feeling. When I surrender myself, all I'm really giving up is an idea of who I am. The actual process continues. Same - although harder to see - with the external world. It's not that the conceptual world goes away; it's still there as an overlay. The concept structures what I usually experience as the world.

As I inwardly see this, where am I? Still in conceptual mind? I don't think so. I can watch the thought, "Ah now I'm seeing how the world I normally experience is a concept," arise in this open mind space. And somehow this space seems to be outside of language and concept. Same old questions, no sure answers. No answers at all beyond the conceptual level.

1/25/02

First light, first birdcall. Just back from the lovely nook in the forest near the point. Rained hard before I went at dusk and now after I returned, but only a few light showers during the night. At one point Cat came looking for me sounding his hunting growl as he came. I wanted to be alone and kept very still hoping he wouldn't find me. As he came closer and closer the hair on my neck stood up and I got a faint taste of what it feels like to be prey. Perhaps my aversion to his crying has deep genetic roots.

My intention was to explore the source of the images and visions that appear in my mind, but nothing happened except sleep, cold, and restlessness until almost dawn. Then - through doubt and fear - I moved into a place of ... nothing. No visuals, no feelings. I felt myself drifting and asked for strength to stay focused. During that time there was a shift to being receptive and waiting with an open heart. Then a sense of love and life pouring in rather than me going to get something. For a while I leaned against a tree for support, and then hugged it and felt us sink into and drink from each other.

An inner voice said I'll never really understand, and I still resist accepting that. But if I want the joy of living in mystery, that's how it is I guess. The voice said I don't need to be able to explain the world but to be a source of life for others the way solitude is for me. And in my relationships keep an open heart so we can remain together in peace, love, and beauty.

There is a new bird here with exquisite coloration.<sup>150</sup> It hides in the grass and remains still and almost invisible. Yesterday I accidentally flushed it and Cat leapt up to snag it mid air almost a meter above ground. I hollered No, No, No, he let it go, and it flew away. Hope it didn't die of shock. Cat also caught another mouse/rat and some time ago I saw him eating a foot long live fish that he'd apparently caught in a tide pool. What a hunter. Just now he came into cabin and instead of reacting as I usually do, I watched him for a while. He sat in the corner and when I quietly told him to leave, he went.

Another day in paradise. Trying to savour each one. Slowly getting it that each moment really is unique and then is gone. Nothing stays the same, but almost everything returns. Sensations of sight, sound, taste, touch, and smell, as well as thoughts and feelings all in a flowing flux. Death is always with me. I'm realizing more and more that it's not just seeing how things are, but opening my heart to the world and myself just as we are. I've lived for so long with a closed heart.

1/26/02

Spent the night in the woods again - much more comfortably. Took small Thermarest, made a plastic hood to keep rain off my head, and wore down parka and raingear. Slept on and off, and it rained lightly on and off too.

Where does consciousness come from? Does Spirit exist? There is no proof that there actually is Spirit ontologically - it might be projection. But there is the experience that Spirit exists. If we deny its actuality, we can equally deny the actuality of the physical world. Accepting the ontological existence of Spirit, like believing in matter, is a question of taste and balance.

Since there's the experience of Something that flows into me from beyond, I ask if it's eternal or came into being with the emergence of organisms? Is the Something a matrix of all organisms - a sort of collective consciousness? If so,



where does consciousness reside? If I posit that material in its elemental form and consciousness in its elemental form arose mutually in the big bang, then as the physical world has self-organized into more complex forms, so too has consciousness. And just as organic molecules are now part of the physical world and not necessarily locked into organisms, so too, perhaps, consciousness may exist in a free state. If so, could the emergent collective consciousness also have causal power? I'm still very fuzzy on all this.

On my first long wilderness retreat it seemed to me that since my body is totally enmeshed in the physical world with each molecule following the law of equal and opposite reaction, there was no possibility of free will. The notion of personal freedom seemed an illusion to soften the awareness of our own vulnerability and impermanence. But, paradoxically, I also felt I was completely responsible for my actions. I think Wilber has shown me that matter behaves differently in different contexts, and to treat biological matter the same as a rock is crazy. Perhaps consciousness can affect matter in some mysterious way.

Cat yowls outside. It grates and irritates, but instead of bracing against it I open my heart's door to meet and let it in. The aversion dissipates. Do I avoid certain sensations because they are unpleasant and arouse aversion, or do they seem unpleasant and arouse aversion because I avoid them?

Apparently - according to science - all that reaches our brain from our senses is patterns of nerve impulses. From those we construct the world we experience in our mind. Am I also constructing my self from nerve impulses? Frequently now - with eyes closed in meditation - I experience myself as patterns of light, vibration, and energy. What am I really?

1/28/02

Stormy morning. I've exercised and body scanned, and the day stretches out before me with nothing else I must do. I may go to the woods tonight for a few days. Depends some on the weather.

In a while perhaps I'll touch up the condor design on the kite I've made as a gift for Susan - not knowing whether I'll ever give it to her. For months I've wanted to make something to express how I feel toward the condors that soar overhead in the fierce wind. When I finally got a kite to fly, I decided to make a more elegant one of white tarp and paint a black condor on it with a bird feather. It's taken much longer than expected, but is nearly finished now.

I sit and feel myself sink into the now; into the experience of being the world; into being life. So often I rush to get something or to someplace, but what I'm seeking I already have always had. I am Life. I am the World. There is no real I and you but only us together.

I stretch out through time and space to see humans with our incessant activity and striving. Where are we trying to go? To the stars? But we're already as among the stars as we will ever be. Better quality of life? The quality we seek is lost in the seeking. Perhaps it's just what we do; who we are. But if we follow our desire for something, it seems we ought to have some notion of what we hope to gain by doing so. Truly we have it backwards with our continual reaching for what we don't have and avoiding what we do. What we crave most deeply we have always had.

What's the meaning and reason for our living? Life is its own meaning. Nothing to get out of it and nowhere to take anything to. Like a tornado, we spin in the tip of the funnel restlessly seeking outward. Like a snake trying to become itself by swallowing its own tail. Relax. Relax and unwind. Let the fierce winds subside, and settle back into the flowing now of the universe.

There is quiet joy in feeling Cat resting on me, and I can only imagine the deep wild joy of a mother nursing her child. I sit here a man with a cat on his lap. But if I open up, I become a cat/man on the porch. Another relaxation and I'm cat/man/porch in the wilderness. And softening my heart, I am - if only briefly - the flowing All.

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<sup>148</sup> Actually parakeets. Austral parakeet: *Enicognathus ferrugeneus*.

<sup>149</sup> Magellanic tapaculo: *Scytalopus magellanicus*.

<sup>150</sup> South American Snipe: *Gallinago paraguaiiae* or Cordilleran Snipe: *G stricklandii*.

## Interlude 12

### Small Mind/Big Mind, Dark/Light

A human being is a part of the whole called by us “the universe,” a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings, as something separate from the rest—a kind of optical delusion of consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and affection of a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of understanding and compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.

(Einstein, 1972)

It is important to see that the main point of any spiritual practice is to step out of the bureaucracy of ego. This means stepping out of ego’s constant desire for a higher, more spiritual, more transcendental version of knowledge, religion, virtue, judgment, comfort or whatever it is that the particular ego is seeking.

(Trungpa, 1972)

**Gaining enlightenment is an accident.  
Spiritual practice simply makes us accident-prone.**

(Zen saying)

In the introduction I used the terms small mind and Big Mind and left the definitions open to emerge from within the journal, but I also promised to say something about them in this interlude. Like Emptiness, Consciousness, Spirit, God - which seem to be different terms for Numinous Mystery - Big Mind is not a thing that can be defined. Small mind is a bit easier, but any definition is still suspect. I use the term to refer to: my habitual ego-centric way of perceiving and defending my self as a separate entity isolated from an external world *out there*; the painful experience of holding tightly to my opinions and to my insistence that the world be like I want it to be; being lost in repetitive conceptual thinking about things rather than being in and with the present moment.

Experientially, when I write of the shift from small mind to Big Mind,<sup>151</sup> it is not a shift from one state to another, but from a seemingly static and tightly structured awareness into an open flowing awareness whose essence is mystery and freedom. This

experience of openness is also referred to as Beginner's Mind or Don't Know Mind, because it is not bound by opinion and conceptual knowledge. Here are some quotes that evoke the spacious freedom of Big Mind:

Big Mind is the mind which goes beyond discrimination and includes everything. Suzuki Roshi would admonish us to always live in Big Mind, but that small mind is an expression of Big Mind. It's not bad. Small mind is necessary; otherwise we would not have it. But small mind should be guided by Big Mind, and as a channel for expressing Big Mind. So our everyday life should be based on Big Mind so that Big Mind is expressing itself through our speech, actions, and thoughts.

[Small mind] is the world of comparative values: this one is good, this one is not so good, the realm of like and dislike, value judgments based on personal preference. But Big Mind is the realm beyond comparative values, where we can accept everything the way it is without being judgmental and partial. It opens our mind to seeing things as they really are.

(Weitsman, 1997)

To pray is to descend with the mind into the heart, and there to stand before the face of the Lord, ever-present, all seeing, within you. ... Prayer is standing in the presence of God with the mind in the heart; that is, at the point of our being where there are no divisions or distinctions and where we are totally one.

(Nouwen, 1981, p. 76)

I call several qualitatively different experiences Big Mind. At times my consciousness and heart open out and I experience the world as within me. At other times I feel small and tender and experience myself to be one of innumerable beings living together on the earth. There is wonder and mystery in both experiences, but the sense of vibrant organic Aliveness is associated with the latter. It is this that brings a quiet smile to my face and a softness to my eyes. I feel I could continue to explore these experiences for the rest of my life and still find them simply mysterious.

One of the primary reasons I went into solitude was to explore the process of shifting from small to Big Mind (becoming enlightened) and to learn to control that shift so I could teach it to others. When I write about not finding the *Answer* I was looking for, I am referring to my failure to learn to catalyze this shift in myself at will.

In claiming I didn't find the Answer, I must be cautious not to mislead myself or others. What I failed to do was fulfill my expectations, but did find a variety of answers,

and at times I even found the *Answer*. The difficulty is that once I found it, or rather slipped into it, it disappeared. Only from the perspective of small mind is enlightenment a specific state to be achieved. Big Mind is enlightenment,<sup>152</sup> but from that perspective the concept of it as something to be gained no longer exists.

Put another way, when I think it is possible to attain enlightenment I am not enlightened - because I am caught in the web of conceptual definitions. In those moments when I'm free from the *this* and *that* of conceptual structuring - enlightenment no longer exists as something distinct from non-enlightenment.

These statements carry risks. One risk is to conceptualize the Big Mind realization that there is nothing to seek or to gain and then understand this idea to mean that there is nothing beyond small mind to experience. This is misleading and traps me in defending the small mind status quo. A second risk is to carry the experience of Big Mind into small mind and conceptualize that experiential difference as the idea that there is something called enlightenment that can be sought and grasped.

This is a problem for two reasons. First, it is the very act of seeking and grasping that reinforces the sense of separate self and further isolates me from the flowing Big Mind experience of Oneness. Second, such seeking and grasping is a form of desire for something that is not and takes me out of the here and now and devalues my actual experience of what is. It is only in the here and now that I can live fully, and it is in the here and now that the mysterious slip from small to Big Mind happens.

The two risks are to reach for the light and devalue the here and now, which includes darkness,<sup>153</sup> or to accept the here and now just as it is and thus stop seeking, in which case I stagnate. If I seek, that very seeking cuts me off from the *Answer* I yearn for. If I do not seek, I make no effort and I stagnate in the status quo. Jeez, what a spiritual catch-22. Who designed this universe anyway? It is seriously SNAFU.<sup>154</sup>

The ego desires and grasps for liberation, and that grasping prevents release. The peace of Big Mind always seems to come as a gift from beyond and brings deep joy and gratitude. Life is a mystery to be lived and not a problem to be solved, yet over and over I try to solve the problem of how to shift from seeing the world as a problem to living it as a mystery; thus I defeat my own longings. Surrender is at the heart of the mystery -

surrender and trust. It is frightening to trust what lies beyond the boundaries of understanding, but there is no other way.

Liberation, Enlightenment, Big Mind, is spoken of differently by different Buddhist teachers. Some tend to focus on a single sudden transformative flash of Realization that permanently alters the consciousness of the student (Cooper, 2003); others teach a more gradualist perspective in which consciousness is seen as a series of mind moments of short duration that constantly arise and dissolve. Each moment we are free from greed, aversion, and delusion is a moment of enlightenment. As we practice, we come to experience more and more moments of liberation.

As far as Buddha Nature is concerned, there is no difference between sinner and sage... One enlightened thought and one is a Buddha, one foolish thought and one is again an ordinary person.

(Sixth Zen Patriarch, Hui Neng qtd. in Kornfield, 1993, p. 254)

Strictly speaking, there is no such thing as an enlightened person. There is only enlightened activity.

(Shunryu Suzuki qtd. in Kornfield, 1993, p. 269)

The true path to liberation is to *let go of everything* even the states and fruits of practice themselves, and to open to that which is beyond all identity.

(Kornfield, 1993, p. 147)

In spite of such counsel, I sometimes still long for the pleasure of an imagined permanent state of Enlightenment. There is a Sufi story that succinctly depicts the foolish stubbornness of such an attitude:

The Mullah Nasrudin was sitting in his front yard picking hot chilli peppers out of a large bag on the ground beside him and eating them one by one. Tears were streaming down his face and his mouth was on fire. One of his students asked why he was eating the fiery peppers. "I keep hoping for a sweet one," said the Mullah.

(Traditional Sufi teaching story)

Giving up grasping for pleasure is not easy. Equanimity is a hard bitter lesson to learn. There seems to be no good reason why the joy, love, peace, and wonder of Big Mind should not be the permanent conditions of my life - except that they are not. I have seen, over and over and over, that everything - even awareness of Sacred Wonder - is

transient, but I still cling to such awareness and bitterly resist losing it. Yet the willingness to be with whatever experiences arise in my life is also deeply satisfying. And there is something else: it is just this equanimity that opens out into joy, love, peace and wonder. How can that be? I don't know.

If all is impermanent, can there be a state of awareness that does not ebb and flow with the rest of existence? I recognize that the experience of pleasure is transient, but it seems as though a permanent transformation of consciousness - the context, not the content, of awareness - should be possible, even though for me this has not been the case.<sup>155</sup> Is there the possibility of complete liberation from the cycles of light and dark, or is this wishful thinking based on a misinterpretation of the teachings of masters? I don't know.

I still slip into a deep longing for the certainty I imagine such knowledge would give me, and when I slip into such craving for certainty, I suffer. At times when I long for some experience I do not presently have then let that longing go, I feel profound grief as though I have given up before the final bell. At other times my heart softens into the mystery of the moment and my hungry intellect relaxes into the questionless calm of Don't Know Mind. There is still no Answer to my question, but then there is no Question that demands an answer. Or rather, to be more accurate, the Question dozes muttering to itself in the corner - waiting for its next opportunity to leap awake and shout, "What if?"

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What is the relationship between dark and light? It is easy enough to think and say that they condition - even create - each other; that only in contrast to the dark can we know the light. It is much, much harder to live such abstract knowledge. Easy enough to philosophically recognise pain as the necessary counterpoint to pleasure - until I, myself, begin to hurt. On an inwardly sunny day I can nonchalantly embrace the idea that dark clouds and rain are needed for life to flourish, but when depression wraps its wrenching arms around my heart so tightly I cannot see beyond despair, nothing at all is ok.

My experience of light seems less trustworthy than my experience of dark. Light is a rare and transient gift, dark is always there waiting. As I look at this belief, I realize it



includes an implicit value judgment: light is better than dark. I accept darkness only because I must and with the hope that acceptance will transform it into light. I see darkness as the absence of light but do not recognise that light is also the absence of dark. I still honour yang more highly than yin; as though one could exist without the other. Yet during my year on the island, I came to love the tender comfort of the night and to feel softly at home in her accepting embrace.

When I do not fully accept life exactly as it is, I dislocate myself from my actual experience. I can do this by imagining I am somewhere else from where I am, that the conditions of my life are slightly different than they actually are, that I am different than I actually am, that my lived experience is not what it is in all its swirls of light and dark. Or I can refuse to accept that the current circumstance of my life is transitory. In either case I tangle myself into a knot that I tighten with each effort to escape.

When I am able to relax into what actually is, there is a remarkable transformation as my self-imposed inner and outer boundaries soften and sometimes dissolve. Once I stop holding aspects of myself and the world at bay, I become the world; or rather I am free to notice that I have always been the world. So far, for me, part of the swirl of light and dark is that sometimes I do relax and let go, and sometimes I do not. And this is another catch-22: How can I relax into how things are, when part of the way things are is that I'm not, at the moment, accepting how they are?

As I write these words, I realize that I am conflating two meanings of dark. One refers to such painful experiences as rage, fear, pain, loneliness, confusion, and depression. The other meaning refers to the sense of being isolated from Spirit and from myself (I include confusion and depression in the first category, but they might fit better in the second.<sup>156</sup>); to being caught in small mind; to my rejection of those qualities referred to by the first meaning of the word dark. I also often confuse two meanings of Light: one is a sense of intellectual clarity, happiness, accomplishment, excitement, etc.; the other is an openness of heart that accepts the impermanence of all pleasures including intellectual and spirituality clarity.

The first kind of meaning in both cases refers to the content of experience; the second refers to context - to my relationship to the cycles of content: acceptance or

rejection, simply noticing what actually is or telling myself thought stories about what I am experiencing, Big Mind or small mind. My confusion arises when I forget that there is no clear difference between the two meanings. The context of this moment's experience becomes the content of the next moment. The empty clarity of Big Mind becomes an experienced pleasure I cling to in small mind.

I also conflate the pleasure of equanimity with the pleasure of peak experiences of the light, and this is another trap. It is spiritual pleasure not pain that most seductively calls me to abandon equanimity. Peace, joy, and clarity feel so right ... like they should be permanent in my life. Thus I abandon the quiet depths of equanimity to sail the shining surface of pleasure. But inevitably, another storm rolls through and I am caught in waves of emotion once again. The I Ching says:

[If] the source of a man's strength lies not in himself but in his relation to other people ... if his center of gravity depends on them, he is inevitably tossed to and fro between joy and sorrow. Here we have only the statement of the law that this is so. Whether this condition is felt to be an affliction or the supreme happiness of love, is left to the subjective verdict of the person concerned.  
(*I Ching*, translated by Wilhelm, 1950. Hexagram 61, "Inner Truth," line 3)

I have long recognized this analysis to be accurate, but during my year in solitude, I came to realize that it is also true of my relationship with my own deeper self. That relationship can be as turbulent as my relationship with any lover has ever been. Only when I allow my inner waters to ebb and flow in accordance with their own natural rhythms do I experience peace. But as the I Ching reminds me, such equanimity modulates both deep pain and deep pleasure.

There is nothing wrong with experiencing extreme emotional cycles (unless such cycles drive me to act in ways that create suffering for me or for others), but when the storms threaten to capsize me, it is useful to remember there is an alternative in the peace and spaciousness of equanimity.

My Question remains: Is it possible to always be open-hearted and to live permanently in Big Mind? I seem to spend more time there now than I used to, or rather, less time in the hard-edged isolation of small mind. But perhaps this is because the cycling between peace and agitation is less intense now than it was during the year in

solitude. This may be due to having surrendered some of my expectations. Seeking the experience of enlightenment now is like trying to recapture the experience of my first retreat during the time I was on the island in Chile: a futile and painful endeavour. For the present, light and dark move through me like sun and rain. Only in maintaining equanimity in relation with both light and dark do I gain perspective and allow them to pass through me without resistance.

All of these speculations are beside the point. They are seeking a conceptual answer to a question that can be answered only experientially. Thinking about it will not get the job done, and experientially there is no confusion at all. The practice is to be with what actually is in each moment; to let be and let go; to neither reject nor cling. If there is light, there is light. If there is dark, there is dark. Only through such actual practice, and not through analytic speculation, will I discover - for myself - if a permanent experience of light is possible.

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<sup>151</sup> Also refers to the journey from the conceptual mind to the heart.

<sup>152</sup> This is my current understanding, which may well change as I continue to live and explore.

<sup>153</sup> I am not particularly comfortable using the terms dark and light. These are metaphors that do not clearly represent my actual experience. Please do not take my use of them literally.

<sup>154</sup> If you are unfamiliar with this military term, please go to:  
<http://dictionary.reference.com/search?q=snafu>.

<sup>155</sup> This is only partially correct. Although my consciousness still ebbs and flows between small and Big Mind, overall there seems to be more peace and joy in my life as I continue my spiritual practice.

<sup>156</sup> Perhaps one reason we resist fully experiencing the dark emotions in our culture is that they tend to lower what our culture calls productivity. Above all else, we value productivity and success, thus we value the light high energy emotions and we try to banish the dark. Our cities, bright 24 hours a day with artificial light, are an apt metaphor for our emotional experience. When we repress our darker emotions, they do not disappear, but rather intensify and manifest as depression.

## February 2002

Truth is a Pathless Land.  
(Krishnamurti, 1929)

2/01/02

Just back from camping by the point. Slept two nights in the woods and one next to the sea. Wore rain gear instead of using sleeping bag. Couple rainy days/nights and a couple of lovely clear ones. Built a tiny fire for cooking and spent most of the time simply being there rather than doing anything. Felt I was too attached to the cabin psychologically - fearing loss of comfort. Wonderful to be out - linked more closely to sea, sky, and forest.

On the morning of the third day my heart called me to give the remainder of Mom's ashes and Dad's ring to the sea. I also hung the amulet I've worn for the past five years from a dead branch on the point where it will stay in the wind until and after I leave here. The ring is a beautiful lion's head with a diamond in its teeth and rubies for eyes. Dad wore it for almost 50 years until he died. The amulet and ring were two of my most valued possessions and it still hurts to have parted with them. But I've received so much here that I felt called to give back something important. I feel I've finally invited both Mom and Dad into my heart.

The rock walls of Staines Peninsula are full of Faces. Three especially have become very real to me during these past months. Even though I realize they're projections of my mind, viscerally I experience them as beings that live in the rock.<sup>157</sup> One a sensual full lipped woman: desire, rapture, ecstasy with the wonder of life. One an old bitter angry man: my dark side of aversion and judgment. One an ancient wise man: steady, patient, and tranquil; a face of profound

equanimity exposed to endless wind and rain. They have become very important to me, and each day from the point I bow to them and to the wind.

I can't really see the earth anymore when I look that way, but only the faces. I've clearly seen how I create those faces from the shapes and textures of rock, trees, and water falls. The impersonal stimuli have become eyes, nose, and mouth in my consciousness, and it's difficult to let them go. Now that my time alone is coming to an end, I'm working to bring those faces back to my mind and give the rock walls back to themselves. I'm focusing on details of the actual rock and trees, and moving my attention away from the centre of the faces.

This has given me a clear glimpse of how - by abstracting from the flow of experience and behaviour certain features which I make concrete and by ignoring whatever doesn't fit - I create an image of myself which I then believe to be me. In doing this with each other we largely create the social reality in which we live. Even harder than seeing the mind create such images is breaking the habit and coming to live in a more open, flowing, ambiguous, and alive world.

It's not that creating a mountain, for example, as a conceptual thing is problematic as such, but when I stop really looking at the shape, shifting light, and color, and see the mountain as static and unchanging, I then lose the actual experience and joy of being Alive. This is especially damaging with other people and with myself. I have a notion of who we are and stop experiencing the ever-changing flow of our living. We become static things rather than spontaneous beings. Perhaps the best way to cut through this layer of conceptualization is - as meditation teaches - to pay attention to the details, to the changing stimuli of life: colours, smells, shapes, movements, feelings, thoughts.

I'm not sure what enlightenment is, but I believe there have been moments. If so, enlightenment is not something I can get. It is the process of abandoning myself into the flow of the world as it is. There have been times when I could

hear the sound of one hand clapping like a clear bell in my heart and feel the sacredness of everything. It's the flow of the world once I remember in my heart that there is truly nothing to get. What I'm looking for, I already have ... always. Life.

2/6/02

Yesterday the year was completed, and what an amazing year. At times there is still the inner disquiet that I never fully let go to wander wherever the winds of life would carry me physically, psychologically, spiritually. I always came back home. As I sit here feeling this doubt and regret, I recognize it is this very niggling that keeps me from letting go in this moment. And I do let go.... With surrender, the whole inner clenching dissolves into the flowing now. I sense this cycle will be with me for some time yet, and I'm exploring opening my heart to the doubt and sorrow.

Went boat camping to the Owen Island inlet for the last three days of the year. I wanted to give the process all I had. A wonderful time. First day and night stormed and put my plastic boat shelter to the test. It worked well and I stayed dry. Not elegant in appearance, and it rattled some in the wind, but was cozy inside. Next day was rainy too and I nested in the boat, just peering out now and again. Delightful to be away from cabin, beach, and Cat.

The dolphins came into the tiny cove where I was anchored. They'd appeared as I arrived the day before, and now returned to coax me - actually the boat and motor - to play. They kept leaping completely out of the water - straight up and back down or in an arc to twist and land on their backs. What a treat. When I didn't fire up the motor they gave up and left. Alone in the middle of nowhere I was glad to have come even though I'd again been anxious about leaving the security of the cabin.

Next day was cloudy with plenty of blackflies. I used spray, shoed many away, killed some, and let a few bite to share a meal with them. Unless I'm very still and focused it's hard to let them be and wish them well as brother creatures. If I'm doing something (e.g. thinking or puttering) instead of just being in the moment, I experience them as a nuisance and aversion and anger instantly arise. Took the kayak for a long paddle down the inlet. How peaceful and beautiful in there. Sheer walls dropping into clear water and tiny islets with gnarly trees clinging to the rock. I hope to take Patti there. If she wants to, I'll anchor the boat near the inlet mouth and let her paddle off for some time alone.

That night was still and I awoke to a silent dawn.

I sat and soaked in the silence  
and in the faint murmur of a tiny stream a ways away.

(At the cabin it's never silent.  
Even when calm there is the distant rumble of falling water.)

In that quiet moment I felt the process of my time here  
come to completion.

I knew the cycles of ups and downs:  
joy, peace, doubt, fear, aversion  
would continue;  
but they

- for me at least -

are part of the flow of the universe,  
the fabric of my life.

I left the inlet and went fishing nearby. I jugged a lure which I prefer over bait now I've learned the snapper will strike it. Caught eight then stopped and headed home.

Went to visit the sea lions, but they have gone. Along the way I came upon a pair of butter bellies with four chicks. Of the eight pairs I've seen, these are the only ones with young. Wonder why the population doesn't die out. As I approached, the adults fled running/flapping across water - Dad that way, Mom straight ahead - and the chicks dove. Every duck for herself. I looked and looked, examined shoreline and kelp beds, but never saw the chicks again. How do they do that? Perhaps they have a discontinuous existence like electrons and pop into and out of this physical world. Seems like the most parsimonious explanation. But I don't know, just don't know.

Had planned to sweat in the afternoon, but the day was so perfect - clear mountains, no hint of rain, light wind, warm - that I decided to do the last thing on my list and climb the hill on island north of here. Very very glad I did. It went as expected. Left boat on a tiny beach and struggled up through a steep wet tangle of trees and brush to an open ridge above. Changed into hiking boots for the first time all year and left rubber boots by a large orange plastic marker on tree. Took satphone in case of injury.

Footing was extremely slippery where there was a thin layer of vegetation only weakly anchored to the rock beneath. It would let go without warning, and I would slip. Happily I didn't fall. New eco-system up there. Yum. No trees, sparse low bushes and tufts of grass, lots of bare rock, mostly dry with scattered pools, some frogs, a gazillion tadpoles, one dragonfly, no birds. The view looking out toward the Andes, across to Staines Peninsula, and down on this cluster of islands was spectacular. Truly magical.



Anxiety is a strong component of my indecision. Today indecision about whether I should climb the hill or stay and sweat reared its head as I was returning from fishing. I let it be as I carried wood from cabin to the point for a sweat fire, and when it was actually time to decide there was no real decision to make. It felt right to climb and I went. It's important to let things be rather than try to imagine - for the sake of certainty and security - what I'll decide at some future point in time. Just stay open until the point of decision arrives. Doesn't mean to ignore the situation or not consider options, or that anxiety won't be part of the process, only that the apparent indecision might be an illusion created by trying to make a decision before it is actually the time to do so.

Came home from the other island and sweat beneath the stars on a warm night. Used dry wood to build the fire and it was no struggle at all. Started easily, roared, and heated stones to red-hot. Checked email. Patti sounds great. She's hooked up with the Navy and will arrive here on the 14th. Perfect. I'm glad to have another 10 days alone.

Today, a new year begins. I wonder where my life will take me? I'm drinking coffee and eating bread. Desires are rampant. Feeling restless. Grey, rainy, windy. Life goes on.

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<sup>157</sup> When my Patti arrived to spend a month with me I asked her if she saw faces in the rock, and if so to point them out and describe them. She too saw the three faces. I told her about my feeling that they were real beings in the rock even though rationally I know they're projections. She smiled and said, "How do you know?" And yes, how do I know? My own scientific training tells me they don't exist as ontologically real entities in the rock, but certainly other cultures would accept them as real.

## **Interlude 13**

### **Patti's Story**

**I find myself considering over and over how Patti will see my work on the cabin if she comes down at the end of the year.**

**...Patti taught me that. I'm realizing more and more how much she's shared with me. Such a good friend.**

**(Wilderness Journal, March 4, 2001)**

My relationship with Bob Kull and with his PhD work is as intricate and dedicated as he is. I first met Bob in 1987. We were both attending a birthday party for Deneal Amos, the Dharma teacher at a spiritual community in New Hampshire, USA. The community, New Canaan Academy, and the Buddhist teachings there played an important part in our individual developmental life. It is odd in retrospect that I spent so much time at the Academy and yet only one day of my time there overlapped Bob's time there. That particular fall day we shared only a passing conversation of introductions, but I immediately recognized Bob as a charismatic man who was earnest in establishing his spiritual practice, and I had the solid sense that he and I would be working together sometime in the future.

That future rolled around, 12 years later. Through casual circumstance I became reconnected with Bob. As we explored our personal relationship I was introduced to his academic work and was captivated by the issues of solitude and by his proposed research project. In January of 1999 he told me he was planning to begin his fieldwork in September 1999 and was still trying to decide whether to spend the year on the coast of British Columbia or in southern Chile. But the project had a longer gestation period than at first apparent. There were logistic preparations to complete, seminars to attend, and papers to write. The angst-provoking qualifying exam before his Ph.D. supervisory committee also loomed ahead. September 1999 came and went.

By summer, 2000, Bob had decided to do his fieldwork in Southern Chile, but I was beginning to wonder if he would ever get off the UBC campus. I still could not see much forward movement, but as with all of his work, I had faith in the process. During that

summer I watched as Bob fell in love with Susan - despite his intention not to go into solitude with a “romantic relationship” on his mind.

In October, 2000, Bob exploded with ideas and frenetic activity all directed toward gathering supplies and equipment, and preparing for his voyage to Chile. I was exhausted just watching him tend to all the details and I worried that he would miss his deadline for departure. Then suddenly he was gone.

On December 15, 2000, I received a phone call from Miami, Florida: Bob was in layover, bound for Santiago. It had happened. He had left UBC and his fieldwork was soon to begin. Still, even in southern Chile gathering additional supplies and finding transportation was a huge activity. So much could not be decided until the last minute. Bob called me a couple of times in December and January. I was still ordering supplies and sending them down with the hope they would arrive before he left the mainland. I could feel Bob’s exhaustion and anxiety and was afraid he would reach his little island and collapse from physical and emotional exhaustion as a result of the stress and hurry-scurry. And finally “the last minute” came. February 5, 2001, and I would not hear Bob’s voice again for more than a year.

I was confident of the email communication protocol we devised and I looked forward to the monthly code-green message Bob sent from the island. I am happy to say that we never went to code-red. Bob also sent out quarterly reports that described his life in solitude. These were forwarded to more than two dozen people who were following Bob’s grand adventure. Sometimes people emailed me to see if I knew anything more than what was in the reports; I did not. It was difficult at times to keep the spirit of solitude. Like so many good things, we often want just a little bit more.

Bob was always in my heart and in my prayers and in my “practice.” I spent time each day before meditation holding Bob in my mind and heart and picturing vibrant and healthy “energy” for him. I felt especially close during the full moon when I practiced an evening of quietness, meditation and prayer for all my sangha friends. Each day (except for a time when I was in hospital) I made an origami figure and inscribed onto it one of the aspects of Infinite Heart. I held the magical belief that if I made a figure every day, Bob would be safe and sound for another 24 hours. Since I made different figures of

animals and plants and pinned each to the wall after that day had passed, I ended up with a lovely, colorful collage. Despite unforeseen chaos in my personal life and problems with my physical health, I was able to check my email daily to be sure Bob was still on code-green status. When he finally went to code-yellow (to search for the glacier) I was on alert right with him.

Though Bob was in solitude, he remained part of a network of people who watched for the monthly emails, tended to his affairs, and occasionally had discussions about his status. (For instance, there was quite a bit of talk about whether to tell Bob about the 9/11 terrorist attack. We decided against it, and for several months he was one of the few literate people on earth who had no knowledge of the attack and its shock waves.) I searched his journal (after he returned to Canada) to see if he had “intuited” anything different in the “world” around that date, but there was no indication that he had sensed anything paranormal.

In July Bob sent out a list of things he needed to repair his boat motors that had been submerged, and there followed many back and forth messages with questions and lists of things to buy. It was a difficult task as I had little general knowledge of the parts and information he needed. I also had the sense that I was on a wild goose chase. I doubted Bob actually needed half the things he asked for, and I wasn't sure they would ever get to him. My intuition turned out to be prophetic as none of the supplies he wanted reached him until I arrived at his island in February 2002. While we were communicating we were careful not to say anything personal in the emails as the emotional solitude was to remain intact. We were all about business even though I missed Bob's companionship and guidance as I tried to cope with the difficulties in my personal life. Sometimes I think that it was my dedication to Bob's project that kept me from collapsing into my own darkness and anxiety.

As medical adviser for the year, I did receive a few inquiries from Bob but I kept my answers impersonal. When he told me his tooth was abscessed I told him precisely what to do, gave him a pep talk, and tried to lead him to believe that everyone has pulled a tooth or two. My abrupt and distinct answers belied by my own worry and personal concern for his health and comfort.

I did slip once during the year and sent a personal note along with the monthly response to his “I’m ok” email. He replied in kind and it helped take the sting out of missing his presence so acutely. I believe it was the only time we engaged in personal communication during the entire year.

Bob and I exchanged promises before he left B.C.: he not to die and I that if he ever went to code-red I would be down in a flash to participate in a rescue or a burial. I knew Bob to be a man of his word and so I never really worried about his safety. I didn’t realize how much physical pain he experienced during the year until I read his Solitude Journal. In my own selfish way I am glad I didn’t know of his suffering at the time. And I, of course, did not let Bob know about my own suffering. I note in retrospect that we each tried to protect the other from undue anxiety.

Prior to departing from Canada, Bob told me he would probably want me to come and stay with him on the island after his year in solitude to help him re-orient to people and tear down his refuge. But, still, he wouldn’t know until, once again, “the last minute”. I also wondered if Bob would even want to stay in relationship with me after his stint in solitude. There were plenty of opportunities for worry and so few hints of what the coming year would bring.

In October of 2001 I made an executive decision and purchased a cheap roundtrip ticket from Texas to Punta Arenas, Chile. I emailed Bob and told him that I was planning a two month expedition for February-March, but that he was under no pressure to make a decision about wanting visitors or not. If he didn’t want to see anyone at the end of solitude, I would have my own grand adventure in South America.

And so I prepared myself for something I could not really plan or clearly identify. I KNEW Bob would need my help at the end of his year, even if he didn’t know it. It didn’t seem like the best time for me to go far from my home, but something inside said Bob would need me. I was in Texas, a 52 year old mother of two teenagers, limited finances, and I was hearing the call of the unknown.

I tried to connect with the Chilean Navy and with the major ferry service to arrange transportation out to Bob’s island. The Navy never responded, and the ferry officials said they would not make an unscheduled stop in the middle of nowhere for me to disembark.

It was frustrating to not be able to figure out transportation before leaving Texas, but I knew from previous experience in Latin America that business often doesn't move along unless you are doing it in person. I decided there was nothing to do but hope I could arrange things once I arrived in Chile. Never having been to South America before, I stepped into the void.

On February 1, 2002, I arrived in Punta Arenas at midnight after 36 hours of flights and layovers. There was a remarkable absence of wind, which I had been told never stops blowing. I had no idea that this was to be the last windless night I would experience in a long time. Even after reading the reports Bob sent out, I didn't grasp the fierceness of the weather until I was actually on the island.

In his February, 2002, check-in email Bob said he was looking forward to seeing me when the year was over. He gave me a long list of food to bring to the island. I spent 10 days in Punta Arenas making repeated shopping trips to the markets and carrying the goodies back to my cheap hotel. I didn't want to spend money on taxis so I was limited in how much I could purchase at one time. I was to suffer with tendonitis in my elbow for several months as a result of carrying the heavy bags of produce and dry goods.

During his last month in solitude Bob went completely out of email communication. Since my arrival in Chile I had received no personal note from him about how I was to get out to his island, 10 hours by sea from Puerto Natales, and I was furious with him. The anger was to cover my fear and ignorance. I felt abandoned and didn't know exactly what to do, but I still had faith in the process. I hadn't heard from the Navy, and I was completely on my own, searching for a way out to his camp.

But I wasn't as alone as I thought. Bob had suggested that I contact Alejandra Silva, a biologist with the Chilean National Parks Service. When I went to her office in Punta Arenas she reassured me everything was set with the Navy and I was to meet with the local commander who would give me a choice of dates for departure. I still have no idea why the Navy never responded to my emails, but when I went to see the commander he acted as if he had been waiting to hear from me. I felt very vulnerable while in the Navy headquarters: a plain middle-aged woman in the midst of all those young men,

sharp in their uniforms and brusque in their conversation with me. But I had secured transportation and I could relax.

My last day in Punta Arenas brought its own serendipity. In the Main Plaza a group of young people were drumming and dancing and they had attracted the attention of a documentary-filming crew from South Africa. The South Africans were trying to talk to the dancers but they spoke little Spanish, so I stepped in to translate. After the dancing ended I spent some time chatting with the crew and told them why I was in South America and about Bob's fieldwork. They were captivated and told me it was critical to get film documentation of his project.

I balked at the idea since Bob had never talked about videotaping his work. A video camera was very expensive and I would be stuck with it if he didn't want to film his life on the island. Besides, I had never used a video camera. But the South Africans were insistent that Bob's work not be relegated to Ph.D. dissertation on a dusty shelf in a library somewhere and thought that perhaps a documentary could be made of his field work. I finally agreed with them.

By this time it was late in the afternoon and I had to leave Punta Arenas the next morning. I rushed out to the duty free shopping complex, and arrived at the camera store 5 minutes after they had closed. I banged on the glass door pleading with the people inside to let me in. Ten minutes later I was back on the street with a camera, an extra battery, 20 film cassettes, and a receipt for over \$600 USD. Trust the process indeed!

I also had a date for an early breakfast with the two filmmakers. They gave me a crash course in operating the camera and basic shooting techniques.. The drive to Puerto Natales was a welcomed rest. The driver had brought snacks and we stopped a couple times along the way to look at the rolling hills and the local field animals. I felt like Alice in Wonderland, and the entire landscape called to me like the Cheshire Cat.

I spent two days at a boarding house in Puerto Natales, and at dawn on February 15, 2002, went aboard the Navy patrol boat, La Yagan. We departed before sunrise with me the only non-crew member. Shortly after casting off, the crew gathered on the captain's deck, made a circle, prayed, and passed out life vests. I was not included in this ritual and

they didn't give me a life vest. I wondered if I should be afraid but decided there was nothing to be done.

After two hours at sea the First Officer turned to me and asked, "Do you have the coordinates for your destination?" My mind froze. Where did they think they were going when we left the port? I did indeed have the coordinates and kept my doubts to myself. Certainly it was too late to start worrying. The crew expressed concern that I might find a madman on the island. It had never occurred to me that Bob might have gone insane, and I had no sense of anything to be afraid of. I suspect the Navy crew thought I was as mentally unsound as Bob.

En route I tried to imagine what it would be like to see Bob. We had spent a lot of time together camping and fishing in the wilderness, and it had not always been easy to be with him. His perfectionism sometimes spilled out onto me and we would have to step apart to deal with the discomfort. I never liked it when Bob was picky with me, but I usually just let it go because I knew he tormented himself more than he actually bothered me. It was just a fact of his way in the world. He could be a very demanding partner. Would I find it too difficult to be with Bob after he had had a year all to himself? Would I be comfortable in camp? Would he welcome the camera and the company? Would I be a real help with the work? I would soon see.

Ten hours after leaving Puerto Natales I was sliding from La Yagan down into Bob's inflatable boat. I was delighted to see him but remained fairly quiet. I had decided that during the first few days on the island I would be sparse in verbal communication as I did not want to overwhelm him with conversation and information. This taciturn approach was not necessary. Bob was a chatty magpie from the moment I arrived. He flooded me with information about the camp and himself. It seemed clear to me that he had been lonely and had missed conversation. Bob is a storyteller by nature and practice and he certainly was ready to unfurl himself. He seemed happy to share the details about his life there during the year; seemed cheerful and steady and looked a bit gaunt. I could tell he had lost at least 30 pounds since I had last seen him.

That first night on the island was warm and cozy and Bob was quite comfortable as the host. He was delighted to have the video camera and we started filming his cabin and



his stories the first night I was there. I went to sleep listening to the waves lapping the graveled shore. It was a sound that would lull me to sleep every night for the next month. It is a sound I can recall at will whenever I am having a restless bedtime.

My first few days on the island were essentially show-and-tell. Bob told stories about the cabin and the weather. We took a boat ride on a glorious sunny day (one of the best of his year) and on the trip back to the island the boat motor started to fail. It was the last time we would venture far from the island until the Navy came to pick us up, a month later. I told Bob that Deneal Amos, our dharma teacher from New Canaan Academy, had died the previous spring. He was quite touched and spoke gently as he expressed gratitude for his relationship with Deneal. Then I told him about September 11, 2001, and he didn't seem as upset as most of my world had been. He had not been traumatized by the media overexposure to the tragedy and seemed to put it in proper perspective with the other daily "tragedies" that occur on this planet.

The video camera certainly changed my experience on the island. Our original plan was to spend an easy two weeks before starting to take down camp. The leisure time never materialized. The first weeks were spent documenting various aspects of the camp, daily camp life, and Bob's stories about his past year.

I was very happy for the opportunity to see Bob's solitude post, and I think he was glad to have someone to share it with. He was generous in taking care of my physical and spiritual needs and did everything he could to help me experience as much as possible of this small world he had so intimately inhabited for 12 months. To be correct, what I refer to as cabin was not really a cabin, but a beautiful refuge. I noted the beauty of design, the attention to detail in the carpentry, the stark simplicity in form and function. It was so easy to feel at home and fall into the daily routine of living; everything seemed so graceful.

Experiencing the beauty of the mountains, sea, wildlife, and weather was a Peak Experience for me. There were moments when I felt profound joy and heard an inner voice saying "THIS is enough". This shift of consciousness was facilitated by Bob's careful approach in having as little impact on the island's environment as possible with his construction and his living. Everything he had built seemed in place and did not

interrupt the flow of the island. Camp seemed as natural and snuggled in as the dense underbrush and foliage.

Every day I seemed to discover another beautiful detail that Bob had created in the cabin, electrical system, water supply, or privy. This man had clearly been in his element when he made his home, and had been so respectful of the non-human world around him. It seemed clear that he had made himself a guest of the environment and not a lord of the manse.

I have always been jealous of Bob's field work. I am also one of those creatures who hear the siren song of solitude calling deep to my being. But it is easy for me to forget that I arrived to a comfortable camp. I never would have been able to build a camp with so many amenities. I also would not have been able to sustain myself during the fierce weather there. So it is naive of me to think that I could survive as Bob did. I just got a taste of all the best.

I was plagued by the cold, wet weather, which was nastier than I had expected. Fortunately Bob had extra down clothing and I lived with his homemade hot water bottle under my vest. Like so much of Bob's experience it is really hard to describe the weather of the "roaring 50's". I have never seen such quick and unabated changes or so many rainbows. I live in Texas and the axiom "if you don't like the weather, just wait a while and it will change" doesn't hold a candle to what I experienced on the island.

Cat took no time at all in becoming comfortable with me even though I was only the second person he had seen since he was a wee kitten. He took to sitting in my lap and rubbing up and down my leg when I was quiet. I don't remember ever hearing him make a sound. Later, back in Texas, I read in Bob's journal about his tempestuous relationship with Cat while they shared solitude. It surprised me because there was no indication that there had been hard feelings between them. They were always so affectionate with each other when I was on the island.

Watching Bob "sky fishing" was a treat. He seemed so happy and so unified with his environment when he was out on the point, rod in hand, working the long-tailed kite to keep it out of the water. It is a rather rare event to see someone "one" with his element and it brings a deep joy just to witness it. Bob seemed so carefree when flying that lovely

handmade kite. It was as if everything in his universe had disappeared, with the exception of man, fishing rod, wind, water, and kite. Bliss indeed! In retrospect I'm sorry I didn't try my hand at it while I was on the island.

Deconstruction of camp was as mindful as construction had been. It was also a real physical grunt. Truly, dismantling everything and erasing our footsteps were formidable tasks. I was physically exhausted by the end of the long days, and every morning I woke up feeling less energetic than the day before. The rain and wind never seemed to stop. The physical camp became smaller each day as we tore down the cabin and outhouse, bundled the tarp, and burned the wood frame. Even the ashes had to be sifted for nails. Bob wanted to leave the island with few traces of his habitation there, and I respect him for his commitment to that.

Despite our best efforts, our plan to be completely ready to go when the Navy arrived was thrown to the wind when they unexpectedly appeared four hours earlier than they had posted to us via email. There had been fierce storms for two days before our departure and the Navy was in a hurry to get back to Puerto Natales, so it was a mad slapdash rush to get off the island.

Suddenly, we had a major problem. The captain of the patrol boat did not want to haul out our bundles of trash. They insisted that Bob just leave the refuse on the island. This was, of course, against Bob's intent to leave few traces of his time there. I was witnessing a true display of un-resolving male confrontation. Neither Bob nor the captain would come off of their stance. At one point Bob told the captain that he was not leaving without all the waste material and the only way they could get him off the island would be in handcuffs. We seemed at an impasse.

Then I stepped forward to say that I would leave with the Navy and Bob could remain on island until I could find some commercial boat to come and get him and his piles of trash. Of course I had no idea about how to do that, but I think my suggestion helped to show the captain that Bob was firm in his decision. As soon as I said we could leave Bob behind, the captain gave in and allowed everything off the island. What a relief!!! I haven't had much experience with macho displays and I was happy when the issue was settled.

Quickly we ferried all the camp materials out to the navy boat. In a couple of hours our gear was stowed, cat was crated on board, and Bob and I were on the captain's deck as we shoved off for Puerto Natales. I was sad to leave, but physically grateful as I had reached my limit of sleeping on the hard floor of the tent we set up once the cabin came down. I ached all over.

Bob spent several hours alone on the open deck of the patrol boat, bundled up in raingear and his angora wool cap, looking back toward the island we were leaving behind. Light rain was falling. I wondered what thoughts were playing with him as we left his home of the past 13 months. His solitude was broken and remarkably enough there were few traces that he had ever been on the island. I was really curious about his ideas and feelings but honored his departure time as another manifestation of solitude to be respected. It was a quiet, peaceful ride back to Natales and we arrived in port long after dark had settled in.

Cat turned out to be quite an adventurer. While with Bob he had ridden in truck, bus and boat, and now Bob asked me to take him home with me. We got him immunizations and a health certificate, and he accompanied me on the airplane. In Texas I kept him indoors for about three weeks. He loved lying on my bed and being treated like a small furry prince. He enjoyed the attention and comfort of "in house" living and was very affectionate to all who entered his domain. After he was established at my house we decided it was time to let him out to wander. He wasn't meant to be a house cat and I hoped he was having an exciting adventure as he patrolled the Texas hills around me.

Bob had wanted me to keep Cat until he returned to Vancouver. I seriously doubted he would ever get settled enough to have Cat as a roommate, but I was happy to have the "pup." It became a sad moot point. I live in a rural area where wild hogs and coyote abound. After a week of going out to explore and returning to sleep on my bed, one evening Cat did not return. I never saw him again. I searched the roads to see if he had maybe been hit by a car. No trace. My theory is that he went out one night and had a seizure and most likely a coyote got him. I was sorry to lose him but took comfort that he had been able to live with me and continue to explore the outdoors.

I suppose the issue left to discuss is what effects of solitude I perceive in Bob. I know him probably as well as anyone on the planet, and it's hard to translate my perceptions for the reader. Solitude did leave its mark on him. How could it not? He seems gentled, not so judgmental of himself and of others, more patient, more willing to share his private time. There were still plenty of little "dances" to do on the island so we didn't crowd each other out, but over all I found Bob to be much less critical and demanding than ever before. I see him more confident in his physical skills and his academic work.

He has a countenance that reveals a man who has experienced both deep joy and pain. His eyes now have a depth of experience that was not visible before. And he presents a "lighter" touch with the Universe. Here is a man who did not find the "answers" he sought, but who now is somewhat whimsical about even posing the questions. He remains deeply committed to sharing his island experience and ideas with others and is very grateful to those who helped him achieve his dream of a year in solitude.

Bob has always been very generous towards me, but I detect that he now extends that generosity more to others as well. And these changes remain now, more than three years since we left the island. No one would go through a year of solitude and be unchanged. Certainly I experience Bob's changes as positive, but they are merely amplifications of the wisdom and gentleness that I always saw lying within him.

Bob's honesty shines in his work. Rarely do we read accounts of such bare personal truth. This dissertation offers more than a heroic tale. Herein is a picture of a man struggling to accept his own humanness. His commitment to remain open and honest to his own process is a strong invitation to each of us to abandon the "likely stories" we tell ourselves about our daily life and step cleanly and fully into the life that is ours.

Bob's work explores his year alone and places it within the common arena of solitude that we all experience at times. When I read Bob's journal, I am transported into his world of solitude and also into my own experience of solitude. I am honored to have had the opportunity to share in his journey. This too is ENOUGH!

## Re-entry

How am I to find the naturalness, artlessness, utter self-abandonment of nature in the utmost artificiality of human works? This is the great problem set before us these days.

(D.T. Suzuki, 1936)

Feb 14/04: I have just read your story in the G and M. As with most (90%) PHD's you are either eccentric or nuts. I don't know which, but I think you are NUTS.

(John E.A. Smythe, Kingston, Ontario)<sup>158</sup>

### Puerto Natales

3/31/02, Easter Sunday: I heard a siren a while ago and it surprised me; I'd forgotten sirens. I'm surrounded by sound here in town: horns honking, motors roaring, dogs barking, and the hum of human voices - laughing and talking - grounding and punctuating all else. Human generated noise is so different from the wind and water music of the island. Only the creative meowing of Cat is absent. I miss the pup. He's in Texas with Patti and her family - lounging like a prince inside their house.

It's cold and grey this afternoon. Winter closing in. Easter Sunday and I'm sitting in the cozy kitchen of this small pension writing these words. My room has no heat, but I pay just \$6.00 CDN a day including kitchen privileges. I'm the only guest now that the tourist season is over and it's peaceful here. I don't know how long I'll stay, but I'm in no hurry to leave this quiet corner of the world to head north into the hurly burly. Still, it's cold and grey this afternoon, windy and rainy, and the warmth of the North is calling.

I'm fasting today for the first time since leaving the island and my head aches. I've neglected exercising and my shoulders are tight and sore. But little by little I'm re-establishing my daily practice of meditation, thanksgiving, and

exercise. I went to the dentist last week and had two teeth pulled. Another front one is now loose and I imagine I'll be wearing dentures soon. Bummer. I'm losing more and more body parts as time passes and am starting to look pretty derelict. I have my first nasty cold in over a year. In solitude there was no one to pass on viruses.

I awoke this morning to warm sun and blue sky pouring in my window. I continued to read the frivolous stuff I found in the lobby - *G Q Magazine* of all things. There was an article that unashamedly supports a U.S. government-sanctioned policy of assassinating foreign political enemies. It was a sour taste of the psychological shifts that seem to have taken place since September 11 of last year. The intensity and openness of the hate in the article was troubling. I was deep into an analysis of the social significance of Britney Spears' religious orientation when the church bells began to ring. I walked over to hear Easter Mass.

Today is the resurrection, the heart of Christianity; a truly joyful day ... yet I feel awash with loneliness and sorrow. Strange that in solitude I so often got lost in imagining social belonging, and now among people I sit alone and long for solitude again. I feel cut off and disconnected even though I've already made a number of warm acquaintances here in Puerto Natales. I miss Patti and am glad for our deep connection.

I also miss Susan - or perhaps the niche she represents. Now that I know she's chosen to remain with her husband, I find I have little I want to say to her. I'm cutting myself off - at least in part - because she's no longer offering the full intimacy I desire. I feel hurt and angry, even though we made no promises to each other, and I claimed to her and to myself that I had no expectations. I suspect that if she was available, I would be reluctant to make a commitment. I feel as confused and fucked up about intimate relationship as I ever have. Ah shit, life does go on. Having a fulltime mate is still the dream, but it might be a

projection of inner hollowness and longing. If I were with Susan that feeling might still arise and keep me seeking. This is an area where I need to work.

I took Patti to the airport in Punta Arenas Thursday morning then spent the day visiting acquaintances from last year, talking to Customs and to the owner of a transport company about shipping my equipment to Santiago, buying a new fishing license, and wandering the city streets.

In the days before Patti arrived to the island, I was both eager to see her and sorry that my time in solitude was coming to an end. I kept counting the days, and time flew. I was fearful - with good reason - that once I was no longer alone, I'd slip off center and neglect my daily practice of meditation, exercise and thanksgiving; become entangled in chatter and daily doings; forget to open and reopen heart and body and mind to the world of matter and spirit - just as it is. Wham! Now it is a slow process learning to integrate solitude with social life.

Patti calls the island Soledad, which seems a good name to me too. It has no "written on the map" name. Since it's just south Owen Island, I sometimes think of it as Son, or perhaps Daughter, of Owen. Mostly though I like to remember it through its own language rather than through mine. It's its own place and better left without a human name. I miss it there.

### Last Month on the Island

On the appointed day (arranged via satellite phone) the Chilean Navy arrived with Patti in a fairly wild sea. I ran out in the inflatable to pick her up. The navy left and we toured some to give Patti a quick sense of the place. Then ashore where Cat was waiting. "Whoa, what's this? Another human being? I thought there was only one." Took him a few days to get used to her, but then they became friends. And when he heard voices inside the cabin he stopped yowling out on the porch. A relief.



On the second day of Patti's visit we took the inflatable for an afternoon cruise along Staines Peninsula. Gorgeous sunset. Next day we crossed the eastern channel and up a fjord to the foot of the Andes. Far from camp, the motor started to seriously misfire. I didn't dare shut it down to tinker with it, so we just limped along and hoped to make it back. Luckily the weather remained calm, and we managed to crawl to our beach before the motor died completely. It never ran again even though I worked on it quite a bit during the following days. I was bummed that Patti wouldn't have the chance to see more of the area and that we wouldn't be able to video more boat activities, but what a blessing that the motor hadn't died during the previous months when I was far from camp. Trust the process. I eventually took the motor to a mechanic in here in P.N. and it turned out to be a blown head gasket. Amazing that it made it through the year.

Patti brought a surprise with her. In Punta Arenas, by chance or by fate, she met two guys from South Africa who were filming a documentary, and when she told them what she was doing, they suggested she buy a video camera and tape the island, the cabin, my daily doings, and my perceptions of my year in solitude. She recognized that this was exactly what she should do, but arrived to the island with no idea whether I'd be interested in the idea or not. I immediately agreed that this was a perfect next step in the project. It was not only a means to record my perspective and feelings, but also would serve as a mirror in which I could see myself reflected and so gain a new angle of vision.

We began to tape ... or rather Patti began to tape and I began to talk. In fact, I seldom shut up - whether or not the camera was recording. This startled Patti since she'd expected to find me a semi-mute recluse and had expected little conversation for the first week or so. Instead she found a raving jabber box. Patti turned out to be a natural behind the camera: good eye for framing and angle; delicacy of perception; smooth transitions and zooming; steady hand/body over extended periods of time. I pretty much directed the project even though I tried not to be abusive or too demanding. Happily, we both agreed on what

needed to be recorded and think we got some good footage. Hard not to. The place is so beautiful.

For the first week Patti was there, the weather was amazingly warm and sunny. This would never do. For a year I'd been writing about how tough the climate is, and the video footage would show only warm sunny days. The lull lasted less than a week and then the wind and rain raged in again.

Being in front of the camera was interesting. At first it felt perfectly natural. I was simply telling my story without concern for effect or appearance. But as the days went by, a subtle shift took place. I started to feel like an actor concerned with my image - my external appearance. In conjunction with this shift, I began to lose my sense of steady centeredness; began to feel a bit hollow and less real. And this after just a few hours of playing an actor portraying my own life. Weird.

Two questions: The first, of course, is the obvious one about how professional actors and actresses manage - or perhaps don't manage - to maintain some sense of their own inner reality when they are constantly in the limelight both on and off the set. The second may be just as obvious, but I/we are so constantly "on stage" in our lives - always projecting an image for those around us, often at the cost of our own deep sense of self - that it seldom gets asked. How can I/we live in the social whirl(d) and not become so caught up in the dance that we lose track of our own inner rhythms?

One answer is to make do with less in almost all aspects of our lives: less money, less excitement, less peer respect, less.... This creates space to explore who or what craves more of everything and why. It is, in part, this exploration that keeps the home fires burning.

We finished most of the filming by March 1<sup>st</sup> and received word that the navy would pick us up on the 15<sup>th</sup>. Ouch. That day life would change in a big way. We relaxed for a few days and then started to pack.

But first I harvested my lettuce crop. It was pretty meagre even though I had tried everything I could think of to encourage the plants to grow. I'd mixed kelp into the soil and peed onto it; put the plants in their cartons out into the direct sunlight; brought them inside on chilly nights. Nothing worked. The largest leaf on the dozen or so scraggly plants that still survived was about the size of my smallest fingernail. But I harvested it with a flourish and ate it with tweezers for the camera. I was glad I hadn't spent a lot of time and energy digging up an area for a garden.

It was tempting to leave the cabin in place, much easier physically and emotionally to just pack our gear and go. I'd put a lot of effort and care into building the cabin, and had come to love it as home. But I had a deep sense that the right thing to do was leave the island as much as possible like it had been when I arrived. To give it back to itself and to the creatures living there. To remember that I'd been a guest and not the owner.

And so we began. We packed and waterproofed everything we didn't need, moved onto the porch temporarily - kicking Cat out in the process, and tore down the cabin. Then we set up the tent on a temporary platform, covered the whole area with a tarp, and demolished the porch. The weather was foul during the whole time and it rarely stopped raining. I worried it would be too wet to burn the lumber and we wouldn't be ready to leave when the Navy arrived, but we were lucky and had two almost rain-free days just when we needed to burn. Only coals remained when the tide came in and washed the beach clean. Patti kept the fires roaring while I carried the cabin and outhouse floors, roofs, and framing. She stripped to sports bra and shorts, and drenched in sweat and semi-cooked by the heat of the roaring flames, looked like a stolid peasant woman or a minion of hell.

Once everything burnable was burned, I scoured the burn site for screws and nails. We were left with ten large nylon bags of trash (mostly tarp that had been part of the shelter and plastic I'd picked up from beaches during the year. What a huge muddy exhausting job it all was. I had pushed both of us pretty hard to

get it done, but Patti never complained. There were a few prickly times between us, but considering the circumstance and the fact that I'd had the island to myself for a year, we did well together. Patti always cares for me and I tried hard to be kind to her as well.

As a going away present the wind shifted and day after day howled in from the south to pound our exposed shelter. It wiped us out, but we had to keep working to be ready for the Navy.

### Last Day on the Island

CONAF emailed us that the Navy boat would arrive at noon on March 15<sup>th</sup>. We would be ready. All we had left to do that morning was take down the tarp, unhook the propane tank, pack up the tent, and take down the temporary platform. We got started about 8 a.m. and thought we had plenty of time. But at 9 the Navy ship hove into view. Another storm was brewing and they wanted to reach P.N. before it hit. The officer in charge of the landing party told me that we had only an hour and twenty minutes to leave the island. He said their orders were to take Patti, me, and our important gear, and to leave the rest behind. I told him I wouldn't leave until we had cleared everything from the beach, and if we hurried we could make it.

The enlisted men were fantastic. We were all rushing to tear down the tarp and temporary platform and haul everything out to the ship a half kilometre off shore. Meanwhile the officer kept saying that we'd have to leave some of the stuff there and I kept saying no. The discussion became more intense and confrontational until I flat out told him that unless we took everything including the trash, I wasn't going either. He repeated that he had to obey his orders to take Patti and me and our most important gear.

Patti was great. She told me to do what I needed to do and if they left me there, she would find a way to come back and pick me up. I knew that if they did

leave me I'd be in trouble since all the food and camping gear was already on the ship. The officer said his commander had told him via radio to bring me to the ship so he could talk with me in person and that they would finish bringing the stuff from the beach. He gave me his word that they would bring absolutely everything, but at the last minute I decided that leaving before the beach was completely clean would be a major mistake.

That's when things got nasty. I finally held out my hands and said that with respect for him and his point of view, I had to honour my commitment to God, to nature, to myself, and to CONAF to clean up before I left. Otherwise my whole project would be meaningless. The only way I'd go before the beach was clean was in handcuffs. He backed down. It was time for me to compromise too so we could all feel ok about the situation. I agreed to leave the 2 x 4s from the tent platform since they're raw wood, and I hid them in the trees where they'll rot quickly.

Once on board the commander greeted us politely and I apologized for the corner I'd put him in. Everyone cooled down and we got underway. The storm never materialized and the trip back to P.N. was flat calm. Patti smiled and said, "Welcome back to the world." She was a bit upset that she hadn't video taped the confrontation, but it's just as well. It was, I think, mostly a misunderstanding and a minor part of all my interactions with the Chilean Navy. It would have been much more difficult and expensive to travel to and from the island without their support. Shortly before we reached Puerto Natales they apologized and said it was a national law that they had to charge us \$16 USD per person per day on the ship for a total of \$64. Imagine that. We arrived after dark and the crew unloaded all the gear onto the dock and covered it in case of rain. We were exhausted.

### Death of a Mentor and 9/11

When Patti arrived to the island in February, she brought the first news of the outside world I'd had in over a year. Deneal Amos had died in the previous spring. He'd been a strong presence in our lives as a spiritual mentor and as a source of strength and comfort. We'd both felt close to him for a long time, and we'd known that if things ever got really rough, we could always go to Deneal. Now he was gone and it seemed like there was a hole in the world where he'd been.

It felt strange not having known about his death for so long, especially since I'd sent him loving kindness meditation each day. There was also a sense of the torch being passed on. As long as Deneal was alive we could lay the main responsibility for maintaining spiritual practice in the world on him and on others like him. Now it's time for us to assume that responsibility ourselves. It's time for all of us to do our part in keeping awareness of Spirit alive in our lives; to remember that beneath often intense surface conflict, we are not alone. We are all manifestations of the same deep flow of Life. If I've learned anything of importance in solitude, it's how empty and futile life is without spiritual grounding - however Spirit manifests itself to each of us. The difficult task is bringing this knowledge into everyday life.

Patti also brought news of September 11, 2001, but it didn't strike me very deeply since all the activities of humanity seemed no more than a vague smudge on some far horizon. From the city, and even from this small town where I sit writing, the island - and other remote corners of the earth where we humans have not yet left our mark - seems distant and somehow unreal; a fading remnant of a world that once was. But when I was on the island, especially during the last months, that remote region of nature was the ancient center of the world. All the frantic activity of human society - cities, highways, pollution, and endless frothing news reports - seemed like an ethereal dream. So the news that two of

those phantom buildings, among so many millions, had been bombed didn't mean much in the whole endless flow of the universe.

It is suggestive that what many people ask me now is not what I learned by living alone in the wilderness for a year, but how hearing of 9/11 affected me. Does being one of the very few literate people on earth isolated from the events as they were happening give me a unique perspective on the world as it is today? This interest seems odd indeed, and has, perhaps, surprised me more than the event itself.<sup>159</sup>

### South Coast of Chile

5/11/02: It's been a long time since I've written. Painful how being just who I am triggers shame again now that I'm back among people. On the Puerto Natales beach, alone with sea and birds, mountains and sky, peace and self-acceptance flowed back so easily. But P.N. is gone now, a day and a half south of here. I'm on the NAVIMAG ferry heading north toward Puerto Montt which is still two days away. A while ago we passed the channel that leads to the island where I spent the year, but I was dozing and missed it. Still, it's wonderful to be among the wild islands and waterways again. I am a silent loner onboard and don't much feel an urge to engage with others

It was easy to be in Natales, hard to leave. During the last two weeks I met several people I really liked and became closer and closer to Ruben and Jovina - the owners of the pension where I stayed. They were like family toward the end. My lessons - over and over - are to accept, forgive, and forget. Myself and my own flaws and those of other people. Might I yet learn?

During the last days in P.N. I finally built and packed two crates with all my gear. I gave my leftover food supplies to the Red Cross and didn't have much luck selling the stuff I didn't want to ship. One of the batteries went for only \$30 and I traded the other for ferry passage. Gave the pick and shovel to Ruben and

Jovina in trade for eggs, phone calls, and hauling my crates to the transport company. Left the large fishing float with them too so I'll have something to come back for. The transport company is charging me very little to ship the crates to Santiago, and it should cost only \$500 - \$600 US from there to Vancouver. A good thing since my finances are pretty tight.

I went fishing with the Puerto Natales Fishing Club a couple times. First in the ocean for salmon, where everyone caught something but me. I didn't have even a strike and felt I was ruining Canada's sporting reputation. Next time we fished from the shore of a lake with a cold wind blowing straight in at us. Eighteen of us were scattered along the water edge casting out and reeling in. Guy to my left caught a nice one. Guy to my right caught a nice one. Me, not even a strike.

Standing there semi-wet from half falling in, I was thinking how much I dislike this kind of fishing when wham, a strike and a big fish on the line and I landed a beautiful trout. It was a real fight with my lightweight tackle. An hour later another strike and another nice fish. Something inside called me to let it go, which I did to the amusement of the other guys. Fishing is a social and competitive activity for them. They always count and weigh everything they catch to see who's caught the most and the biggest.

They all quit fishing before sunset, but I stayed on with the lake to myself. As the sun dropped behind the hills, I started to shiver and told myself just one more cast then I'll quit too. Wham! This one fought much harder than the others and each time I nearly had it to the beach, it stripped line off the reel again. Finally landed and kept it too. Each fish was over 6 pounds; bigger than any trout I'd caught before. It was still light when I got back to camp, so I picked up a bunch of trash previous campers had left scattered around. What an excellent day.



I've put on at least 10 lbs since I left the island. Eating for stimulation and to avoid pain. Started to take ibuprofen again and masturbate too. Slipping back into old habits.

I was a mini celebrity in the South: interviewed for newspapers and on radio and television. My first interview was with a reporter from *La Prensa Austral*, the P.A. daily newspaper. CONAF asked me to talk with him since he'd heard about my retreat while I was on the island and during the year had asked at the office if I was still out there. The article captured the spirit and some sense of what the year was about. Then a local reporter from the major national newspaper, *El Mercurio*, asked for an interview, which also made the front page.

The same day I received an email from the magazine, *Revista Caras* in Santiago asking for an exclusive interview. Friends say that if I want to be known in Chile that's the way to go since everyone reads *Caras*. But the article will probably be shallow and trite. The journalist wants to title the story "Tale of a Ship-wrecked Man." Seems dumb since being forced to survive in solitude after a shipwreck has little to do with choosing it freely.

I had a brainwave. Rather than trust them to write an accurate story, I could write it myself in Spanish and give it to them. Last night I started to write and soon realized I didn't know what I could say in a short piece that would somehow give a brief glimpse of what I've been doing. With the recent fame and attention I've sort of lost sight of the fact that I really don't have any polished gems of wisdom to share. I'm still just ambling along myself. Up and down.<sup>160</sup>

I can't tell if this mini fame and recognition is swelling my ego or not. It's nice, but under the surface glitter my life is still just what it is. I can feel myself building a shell around my heart and even when I'm with people I still feel lonely and alone. I tell myself it's because I'm not involved sexually with anyone, but in the past this hollow longing has arisen even in relationship.

Susan's decision to stay in her marriage seems to leave little room for me in her life. She says she wants to be close friends and non-sexual lovers, but I'm not sure if I can or really want to do that. Patti manifests open love toward me in an amazing way. It would have been so easy for her - and for me - to just withdraw years ago once the sexual link between us became uncoupled. But we've both hung in and it's been wonderful. I'm so grateful she's in my life and I'm trying to respond in kind and let her know how much I appreciate all she gives me.

I think Cat is dead. He disappeared from Patti's house over a week ago. I miss him. Given my lifestyle I wasn't sure I'd ever take him back from Patti, but I miss him nonetheless. Wonder if he got hit by a car, or killed by a coyote, or got tired of waiting for me and set out to search? I feel lost and guilty when I think of him. I can feel my heart shutting down with the unwillingness to go through the pain again. It feels like over and over I invest so much emotional energy in relationships just to lose my partner. Still, I'm glad for what I shared with Susan and the pup.

### Puerto Montt

5/13/02: Ferry arrived last night and we were allowed to sleep on board. I could have gone on to Santiago for free with the truck carrying my crates, but decided not to. On the ferry yesterday I cast an *I Ching* asking if I should go straight to Santiago. Hexagram 12: Stand Still. (Ascent of dark, inferior people. Withdraw into inner calm and accept no remuneration.) Important advice. I can feel myself getting caught in my desire for recognition. If I do, I'll lose the peace and joy of simply living in the moment.

I saw a cat today that looked sort of like the Pup, but without a bent ear. My heart hurt. North America seems to have gobbled him up. Wonder if it will devour me too?

For the first time in over a year I'm anonymous again. Just another tourist sitting on a bench as I write this. I feel sad and empty. No more glum than I often felt on the island, but here it seems harder to accept as part of life's ebb and flow. Went to Calvary Hill in a small town near here and followed the Stations of the Cross. Felt stronger empathy, respect, and gratitude to Christ than ever before. He had such courage to follow his spiritual path to the end/beginning. Do I? Does my path also hinge on suffering and loss?

Visited a small cathedral that replicates one in the Black Forest (this whole area was settled by Germans more than 100 years ago) to honour my Mom who grew up near there in Germany. It was closed and a woman passing by said it opened only for morning mass. No matter. Just looking into her kind black eyes gave me the sense of peace I was searching for. We can so easily give such gifts to each other.

5/15/02: I'd thought to stay here only one night but another cold is trying to get a grip on me and the weather has been rainy. Haven't felt the urge to move on. Maybe tomorrow. Puerto Montt is a friendly old seaport of maybe 100,000 or so. Yesterday I went to check buses to the town of Pucon where there are hot springs. On the way I passed a construction site at siesta time and all the guys were playing soccer. What a hoot. Smiles and laughs, but they were playing very seriously and skilfully even though wearing rubber boots. One guy had on bib style rain pants, and another took off his baseball cap with a flourish each time he head-butted the ball.

Last night I ate shellfish chowder at the fish market. Only \$3 for a big bowl of clams, mussels, abalone, and barnacles. I was the only customer and talked for a while with the lovely 14 year old girl who was cooking and serving. She works eight hours a day every day for \$150.00 US/month and goes to school

too. Gives it all to her family since her Dad can't find work. Who am I to judge, but still, to laze around while your young daughter supports you is fairly rude.

### Santiago

5/21/02: How strange to be here again. Same pension, same room I stayed in nearly a year and a half ago. The cycle has completed itself, almost as though nothing has changed. And that, of course, is frightening. The dread of backsliding, of things never really changing. Already the insights and inner transformations on the island seem far away. Yet I'm working to open myself to what I know is within and around me.

Spent several days in Pucon, soaking for hours in the glorious hot springs outside of town. It was a delight to float in the steaming water in a beautiful canyon under the sky and feel warm and relaxed for the first time in many months. I remembered looking forward to such bliss when chilled on the island.

The bus ride from Pucon to Santiago was a long 12 hours. Finally felt I was leaving the beauty and wonder of the South behind. The last 300 miles were especially dull and flat, the highway often lined with industry. The bus broke down along the way, and while waiting beside the highway for another one, a young man started a conversation and quickly recognized me. I must admit it's pretty cool to be famous for a little while. I'll soon return to obscurity though.

The Santiago bus station and streets were packed with people. I felt nervous and crowded. Uncomfortable. Watchful for thieves. Yet it wasn't really different than needing to be cautious on slippery rocks or in a rough sea. Survival skills and staying alert to the world around me.

Tomorrow I'll call *Revista Caras* and also contact one or two TV stations to see if they might be interested in an interview. Feeling intimidated here in the city. I'll take it as part of my practice to remain open and not assume rejection before it happens.

5/24/02: Yesterday was a good day. I spent several hours with a book publisher who contacted me while I was in P.N.. I like him and he seemed truly interested in my experience. I talked to a customs official about shipping my gear out of the country, and he told me to leave it in his hands and not worry about a thing. Cool. Called a TV station and they seemed interested. Said they'll let me know on Monday. *Caras* called and asked to postpone the interview until next week. Good for my ego. Last night was lonely, empty, rattling around with myself. Sent a long honest email to Susan. Wonder if it was a good thing to do?

This morning I got a flash for dissertation. Instead of trying to artificially structure it, why not write it to reflect what has and is actually happening? Just tell the physical adventure tale and within that context couch insights, questions, ruminations, and transformations as they naturally arise in the writing - the same way they arise in living. This feels good and calls me to begin.

5/25/02: After midnight this Friday in the City. I feel lonely and that something is wrong with me. I had a date with a woman I met in Pucon. I waited on the street corner but she never showed up. I feel deeply isolated. Maybe this is a reason I love wilderness solitude so much. There I don't feel something is wrong with me because I'm alone. I have clearly chosen it, and nature doesn't judge - at least on personality. I sometimes like to be alone in the city - or so I tell myself - but possibly I just don't want the kind of interaction I believe I'll find. So often it feels like there is a high wall between myself and others. A wall that tends to dissolve as I lean into it.

5/27/02: Monday noon. Spent the weekend with book publisher and his wife in their country house. Warm generous people. The maid even brought me breakfast in bed. What a luxurious treat. We drank some and I had fun, but as

usual when I let go and am spontaneous I later felt I had overdone it. In many ways I feel more comfortable when alone, but I like these people and want them to like me too. I'm becoming more aware of how I often *perform* socially instead of making honest open contact with others. I know of nothing to do but ask for forgiveness, return over and over to the present, and work to face my fear and stay open and vulnerable.

### Miami

7/18/02: Back in the USA. By now I'm used to airport security and have learned to not wear socks with holes. I notice how suspicious I am of strangers. I cause myself so much pain by isolating myself from so many warm people.

The last month in Santiago was often socially busy and sometimes quietly lonely. I met and made friends with several people at the Canadian Embassy. The woman in charge of public relations arranged a television interview on a program called *La Belleza de Pensar (The Beauty of Thinking)*.<sup>161</sup> The host, Cristián Warnken, is a well known intellectual, and famous philosophers, authors, scientists, and artists from Chile and other countries are guests on the show. I felt honoured and somewhat out of place to be invited. After the interview the host and studio crew said they had really enjoyed it. I hope so because I sure did.

I gave talks at CONAF, the Canadian Embassy, and a public school, and also told about my year in solitude to many people over meals in their homes. But much of the time I spent alone in my room in the pension watching English movies on cable TV, wandering the streets, or sending and receiving emails in an Internet café. I met a neat guy who's making a full length animated movie about unemployment in Chile - while he and all the people working on the film are themselves unemployed. He invited me to use his editing equipment and I put together a 25 minute video with music but no words from the six hours of video

tape Patti sent down after spending a huge amount of time extracting the best sections from the 30 hours we shot on the island.

During the last two weeks in Santiago I stayed with a young woman. I felt pleasure and peace in sharing intimacy with her and in not being alone so much of the time. I hope we will be together again in Canada. It was painful to leave but it was time, and I flew north to Miami. On the way I stopped in the Dominican Republic for a couple weeks to scuba dive and visit friends I hadn't seen in ten years. It was good to be back there and to feel warm again. Tomorrow I head to Texas and Patti. I look forward to seeing her and meeting her kids. From there I'll fly to Vancouver and to whatever awaits me. I will need to find a place to live, see if I can get my car to run, and begin to pick up the threads of my life.

### Vancouver

3/4/03: It is almost a year since I left the island. Time has flown and crept. Some joyful times and some hard ones. Often, especially of late, I have told myself I must begin to write and tell the tale, but there is resistance or perhaps only inertia.

I've been dealing with depression since my return to Vancouver. Doubt ebbs and flows like the tide; like wind roaring through the trees then dropping to a faint breeze. I question whether what I feel now is qualitatively different from what I felt on the island or if it's just the circumstance and my interpretation that have changed. In solitude I could better accept (at least this is what I tell myself now) the pain, sorrow, and loneliness because, "Well of course I'm feeling pain, look where I am and what I'm doing." Now, I'm just like any other lost and bedraggled city dweller.

It feels like the depression, doubt, and pain that sometimes fills me is always watching and waiting. I remain unclear how expanding my awareness and

surrendering can affect this doubt and pain. Do these grey feelings seep in when I open myself to the flow of life in all its manifestations, or are they a symptom of closing myself off from the flow? I continue to consider antidepressants as an option.

I feel disappointed that I haven't been invited to give more slideshow presentations. Sharing the experience is important to me, and from the feedback I've received I believe the presentations are worthwhile for the people who share in the experience. I've given several at UBC and thought I would be invited by other groups, but it hasn't happened.

I also feel confused about what I have or do not have to share. I think this is the continuation of the doubt, frustration and anxiety I felt on the island about not finding any answers to bring back. I still get caught in the belief that I must have *Answers* in order to share my experience. Many spiritual teachers claim they have found peace and joy and that they can show others the way. I would love to be able to say the same, but it would be a lie. I experience myself as depressed and confused even after all these years of searching and inner work. If I haven't found deep peace, joy, and fulfillment in my own life, it would be hypocritical to pretend to offer guidance to others.

Yet, I mistrust people who profess they have found the *Answer* and have moved beyond doubt and pain. I am attracted by those who share the ups and downs of their journey and the partial wisdom they have developed. One of the people who came to the last slideshow told me that what she really appreciated in my talk was not that I had found some *Answer* to give or guidance to the *Answer*, but rather my openness in sharing my own journey, including the ups and downs and that I haven't found the *Answer*.

I feel that one of the messages I have to share is that in seeking meaning, peace, and joy in pursuing material possessions, we are misguided and have no hope of success. We are looking in the wrong place for what we crave. We need to



seek inside ourselves and in the non-material aspects of the world around us. And yet, after so many years of such searching, what have I found that I would honestly recommend to others? If I am still so confused, why would I recommend this path to anyone else?

These doubts arise from my own perfectionism. I have found some deep answers for myself in spite of feeling doubt and sorrow at times. As I have always done, I focus on what I do not have instead of on what I do and this continues to cause me pain and locks up my creative energies. The difficulty is not that I experience doubt, sorrow, pain, and depression, but that often I still reject those experiences as not acceptable and valuable: as though something is wrong with me if I experience those things. At such times, I am identified with our cultural ideal that suffering is NOT an inherent aspect of living and that we can move beyond the vicissitudes of our lives - that we can find a way out.

When I surrender to the flow of light and dark and feel open and accepting, I know this is what I have been searching for. This peace and acceptance is the open space through which all the ups and downs flow. It feels so *Right*, as though it is the foundation for all else. But, (so far at least) this sense of spaciousness is also transient. When it passes I am again caught in pain, doubt, and frustration, and it seems like this supposed stable space of acceptance is also only a part of the flow, and I am left with nothing to believe in or to share; no sense of growth or transformation.

I need to remember that I'm not presenting some preconceived image of how my life should be, but rather giving as honest an account as I can of the world and myself as we are and not as I would like us to be or believe we should be.

5/28/03: It's been almost three months since March 4 when I sat down to begin writing this dissertation. It had taken me a long time to overcome inertia

and my inner demons of doubt, but I had finally begun. And then the phone started to ring.

It was the UBC Public Affairs Office. They called to say they had heard about my year in solitude and asked if I would do an interview for an article in *UBC Reports*, the university's non-student newspaper. Sure, why not? Two weeks later the story appeared and within hours I received a call from the *National Post* asking for an interview. The story made the front page and was picked up by the *Vancouver Sun* and the *Ottawa Citizen*. Local and national radio and television invited me to their programs. I often go days, even weeks, without receiving any telephone messages, but for those few days I would sometimes be on the phone talking with one reporter or producer and hang up to find messages waiting for me from other programs.

I knew it was a transient bubble that would soon pass, and so it has. I was careful not to take any of it too seriously, and in so doing I may have missed some of the fun and pleasure. People keep saying, hey I've been seeing you everywhere in the paper and on radio and TV. You're famous now. I laugh and say it's just a transient bubble that will soon be gone. It has though already lasted longer than I expected.<sup>162</sup>

The media interviews have been fun, interesting, rewarding, and sometimes frustrating. There has been one 40-minute television interview during which there was time to seriously explore the journey into solitude, and a 15-minute one that opened the window a little, but most have lasted 4 to 8 minutes - just a tickle. Pre-interview preparations require a lot of time and energy, and short clips are like *communicatus interruptus*. They feel sort of like one night stands: a lot of preparation and foreplay and not much fulfillment. It is also frustrating to talk with an interviewer for an hour and then have the conversation edited to only a few minutes on the air. I know it is the way of the media, but still it is frustrating.

It is important for me to acknowledge what others, especially committee members, say about my work. I tend to minimize the value of what I'm doing, but in opening myself to support and appreciation, and to other people's interest and hunger, I'm coming to accept my responsibility to share my work. It doesn't really matter if it feels good to me on the surface, this is just what I need to do. At the same time I must be careful not to fall into the trap of believing I'm doing *important work*. That would be tedious for all concerned. Daily, I pause to soften my heart and mind and ask for guidance from Spirit or whatever I call that Sacred Presence.

One of the most pervasive experiences of these last months is the feeling of avoiding my dissertation. No matter how much time I spend with the media, responding to people who email me, giving presentations, or working on my website, I often feel guilty that I'm not getting down to the real work of writing my dissertation - of telling the deeper more intricate story. Time is passing and I can no longer put off facing the serious writing.

Actually, I have a great deal already written as journal entries, and now I need to sculpt the rough material and then contextualize it with links to other people's experiences. I continue to question what will transform my story from an adventure tale into an academic thesis. A traditionally structured dissertation won't work for me. I need to be directly honest, not only to my own experience but to my own intuitive way of writing.

9/3/03: I've begun to visit a psychiatrist. I've contemplated therapy for a number of years, but have never gotten around to it. I'm glad to be going even though there is a sense of failure that I cannot deal with my distress alone. I'm troubled by my lack of intimate sexual relationship and also concerned by my lack of productivity in writing the dissertation. I worry about where I'll go and what I will or won't do once I graduate next year. On a deeper level I feel despair in my

continuing unhappiness and sorrow even after so many years of inner work and exploration. Perhaps another person, one formally trained in the workings of the mind, will be able to help me see what I cannot see and accept on my own.

I long to feel I am making a contribution to the world by sharing something of value. I'm not a scuba instructor or a carpenter any longer, but I still need to contribute something. I believe, and others tell me, I have something to share, but fear of hypocrisy plagues me. What right do I have to say anything if I, myself, am not happy in my own life. From here in my office this September night, southern Chile seems far away both physically and psychologically.

11/5/03: Editing May in the journal. It is so repetitive, especially the whining about pain and feeling glum about myself. I don't like this person, and can't imagine a reader liking him either. I could easily edit out this ongoing inner maundering, and there is a temptation to do so, but painting a heroic and happier portrait would be dishonest and a disservice to the reader. I need to find a balance so I don't lose the reader and myself in the slog of it all.

4/10/05: Another year and a half gone. As I read back through these scattered post-solitude entries, I am reminded how depressed I've sometimes felt since I returned to Vancouver. I am sometimes asked after a slideshow if coming back was difficult. I usually reply that it has not been so hard this time as it was after previous retreats since I am more familiar with the process. Nonetheless it has been difficult at times. I continue to work with a therapist, and although I still haven't found any *Answers* and sometimes feel grief at that failure, more often I remember to not take my questions so seriously. The gloom of depression has, for now, lightened, and in the movements of my heart and mind there is a gentler sense of quiet spaciousness than I have felt before.

There have been many joyful times since I returned from Chile. My nephews have generously helped me create a website that receives many visits, especially following newspaper articles and radio or television interviews. It is wonderful to receive email from people I don't know thanking me for sharing my experience with them. Giving slideshow presentations is rewarding and exhausting because I bring myself fully into the encounter with the audience and invite people to ask questions for as long as they wish. At times the whole engagement lasts more than three hours. I wrote an article for *Canadian Geographic* that was nominated for a National Magazine Award. While I'm still not in an intimate physical relationship, my friendships have deepened and Patti and I remain closely bonded. I continue to rent and live in a tiny trailer which is parked in a backyard garden not far from UBC. I often work late into the night and still spend much of my time alone. My life is quiet and peaceful.

I've been working steadily on my dissertation for well over a year. It has sometimes been intense and exciting and at other times a boring slog. I often sit for hours in front of the computer before my heart and mind settle down to work. Editing the journal was a huge amount of work and I don't know if I could have done it without Patti's help. Now after working independently for so long, it is time to show the work to my supervisory committee. What if they feel the format I have chosen, or that has chosen me, does not work. I am deeply weary and don't think I have the energy to begin again.

There is much more I could write here, but I've already said most of what I've discovered along the way, and also many things I've already forgotten. Even after all this time and with the bulk of the work behind me, I find it difficult to begin a concluding section for the dissertation. What, after all, can I conclude when I'm still deep in the process of exploration?

**7/15/05: The dissertation is done! At least for now. What a long and fascinating journey it's been.**

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<sup>158</sup> I received this email via my website after a story, that was in part about my year long retreat into solitude, appeared in the Globe and Mail newspaper. It is the only “negative” message I’ve received, but it seems so incisive that I find it very amusing and I can’t resist including it here. I wrote back to thank him for his note.

<sup>159</sup> I’m not a political expert, but since I’ve been asked repeatedly, here are some observations I wrote during the time I stayed in Puerto Natales. I include them here because I believe spending a year in solitude effected my perceptions in a positive way and because I recognize in the collective projections of the various cultures involved in 9/11 the process by which I projected my own shadow onto the wind and so experienced it as malevolent.

1. Everyone dies. There always has been and, as far as I can tell, always will be suffering in our lives. Life (and death) has continued and will continue on and on and on. Perhaps not just the way we would like it to be, but on and on nonetheless.
2. It is always a tragedy when people are murdered. Killing other people except in self-defence is probably never justified.
3. Many more than 3000 people die in the world each day from unnecessary starvation and preventable disease. Many more people die in the United States each month from auto crashes, gunshots, drug abuse, lack of affordable medical care, etc. Most of these deaths go un-remarked and usually seem as unreal to most people as 9/11 seems to me.
4. In conversation with middleclass educated people from both sides of the political spectrum here in Chile the general opinion I hear is that while acts of terrorism are abhorrent, the U.S. is not blameless. The U.S. has interfered for many years with the internal politics of sovereign nations throughout the Third World in the service of its own economic interests - sometimes benevolently but more often by supporting murderous dictators or directly bombing civilian populations. Countries without the military power to confront the U.S. directly have no choice but to resort to terrorism.
5. The news media is largely responsible for whipping up public alarm. It is their livelihood, and there is also some question as to the motives of the wealthy owners.
6. It has been suggested that we’ve now lost our innocence. But how could we have remained innocent after: Vietnam, learning of repeated CIA involvement in Central and South America, the revelations of the First Nations Peoples in Canada and the Blacks in the U.S., the Gulf War, the U.S.’s development and use of nuclear weapons. Any innocence we still had came at the cost of burying our heads in the sand.
7. It is disturbing that all but one of the Members of Congress voted to give George W. Bush sweeping power to use at his own discretion in dealing with Afghanistan. To me, this kind of panic seems a more serious threat to our freedom and way of life than the actual events of September 11<sup>th</sup>.

I could not understand why there was so much apparent panic around the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> until I realized that at the time of the attack no one knew what was happening or to where it might lead: e.g. nuclear holocaust. This makes sense only until you ask, “If whoever was responsible for the attack had the nuclear capability to

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bomb the U.S., why didn't they use it on 9/11?" Looked at more calmly, the actual physical threat fades.

Perhaps a deeper source of the fear and panic was the exposure of our false belief that our social structure is more real than the endlessly changing and uncertain flow of life ... and death. This belief and our craving for security lead to an *us* and *them* mentality and the projection of our own fear, insecurity, hatred, and cruelty onto those Evil Others. We project our shadow onto them, and they do the same to us. For many people in the world the United States is the Evil Doer.

8. We could respond to such an attack not only by protecting ourselves, but also by trying to understand and acknowledge our part in the escalating violence of the world; we could attempt to build bridges of understanding. We might pause and take as large a step back as we can and attempt to dis-identify with our own side in the conflict and actively try to imagine how it would seem to us if our positions were reversed and we were the Saudi or Afghan people and they were us. We could try to remember that we are all, in spite of everything, in the soup of life together and that each of us is a manifestation of the underlying All. But sadly, and possibly suicidally, it seems we are choosing a different path.

9. Life in southern Chile seems much the same as it did. If I hadn't been told about 9/11, I doubt that I would notice any difference between the world as it is now and as it was before I went into solitude.

<sup>160</sup> The article turned out to be the deepest, most comprehensive, and accurate of all the articles that have been written. In part this is because I reached an agreement with the journalist that she would write the article and then send it to me for proofing. I requested some fairly extensive changes and since I still had the photos they wanted to use, it all worked out.

<sup>161</sup> I suggested to the host that from my perspective a better name might be *The Beauty of not Thinking*.

<sup>162</sup> Now two years later, the bubble has not yet burst. It has floated away for long periods, but drifts back briefly from time to time. The media attention hasn't changed my private life or my relationships with people. How odd that our culture so highly values public recognition when it seems to make so little difference to lived experience - except during the usually very brief times of public performance.

## Concluding Section

**Penetrating so many secrets, we cease to believe in the unknowable.  
But there it sits nevertheless, calmly licking its chops.  
(Mencken, 1956)**

In the introduction, I referred to various elements in my Ph.D. work: a description of my lived experience research into the physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual effects of deep wilderness solitude; an exploration of transformations in consciousness and the resulting experience of belonging to the non-human world; a dissertation that is an exemplar of how personal spiritual practice can be integrated with academics.

In this concluding section I glance again at the process and at some of the insights that have been and continue to be valuable to me. I also gently generalize a few of those insights that I believe warrant the risk. However, as I acknowledged in the introduction, I recognize that just because an insight seems universally valid to me does not mean it will to others. So I hope that you might also glance back to the insights you have had as you read these pages. From my perspective, truly valuable insights are those that illuminate each of us directly and enrich our experience of living.

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The journey of this dissertation began many years ago in wilderness solitude, eventually led me to the academic world, then back into the wilderness, and now into academia once again. In my writing I have intended to bring the *there* of solitude to the *here* of the university so I might remember, and perhaps share the awareness, that here and there are not separate realities. While the *journey* from mind to heart and small mind to Big Mind can be long and arduous, the *journey* from heart to mind and Big Mind to small mind does not exist. From the broader perspective there is no separation.

Using the metaphor of a journey is risky because it can point away from immediate experience, as if there were somewhere else to go. So I've used the terms prelude, interlude, and postlude to create a musical metaphor, which counterpoints that of a



journey and suggests that the meaning and value of this dissertation emerges during the moment by moment experience of reading it. In weaving together the sometimes prosaic, sometimes introspective, and sometime lyrical journal entries with the interlude essays, I portray my own experience of examining and relaxing my mental and emotional grip on the world and shifting from small mind to Big Mind. My hope is that you have joined me on the journey, felt moved in your heart and mind, and sensed the power of deep wilderness solitude to catalyze inner transformation.

My intention in writing much of this dissertation as a personal narrative has been to evoke an experience of deep wilderness solitude by engaging the reader physically, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually. I have shared my experience of living alone in the wilderness through the journal, which tells a story of spiritual exploration as well as physical adventure. It is not a heroic tale, but one that in some ways might be common to us all. I have offered my own reflections as an invitation to others to also reflect on how our culture experiences the non-human world, on how we experience ourselves and each other, and on the process of transforming intellectual knowledge to heart knowledge: from knowing *about* to knowing *that*.

Rather than writing about solitude with a single voice embedded in academia, I have allowed many voices from solitude to speak directly through the words that flowed into my journal. But I also acknowledge that in some sense those solitary voices must always remain silent. When words are written on a page the writer is no longer truly alone, but with some imagined reader - even if that reader is only his or her future self.

I use the alternation of journal entries and interludes to model how I have integrated my personal spiritual quest with my academic work. Exploring solitude and the inner world are unusual topics for academic research, particularly from the perspective of personal lived experience, but this is what I've felt called to do. I am deeply grateful to my supervisory committee and to the Individual Interdisciplinary Studies Graduate Program at UBC for the opportunity, encouragement, and guidance. Not everyone wants to wander a pathless land as I have done, but I hope there will always be the opportunity for those who do.

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I've already confessed that I have reached no solid conclusions. To the contrary, living alone for a year in the wilderness and writing about the experience brought the realization that more and more, I know less and less. Given that, summarizing the conclusions I've drawn from my research would be a suspicious manoeuvre: there are only questions, things I wonder about, and likely stories I tell myself. Having reached no solid conclusions, I sometimes feel bereft, as though I've failed. When caught in such doubt, I long for answers and question why others have found certainty when I have not. But when I relax into trust, I remember that certainty is a conceptual illusion.

I must, however, be careful not to deny my actual experience for the sake of ideology. Although in the introduction I claimed that I didn't find the Answer I went to seek, and in the journal I cursed and celebrated my deepening sense that, finally, All is Mystery, I did have many insights and found some tentative, partial, and probably transient answers. Some of those answers cannot be put into words, but I hope they have come drifting up between the lines of the journal. They are unexpected answers of the heart that emerged slowly and sometimes unnoticed through daily living.

One day the Mullah Nasrudin rode his donkey up to the border carrying a sack over his shoulder. The border guard stopped him and asked what was in the sack. "Sand," said the Mullah. "Right," said the guard, "dump it out." So Nasrudin did and there was only sand in the sack. This went on for months, and each day the guard demanded he dump his sack and each day it contained only sand. Years later their paths happened to cross again and the guard said, "I'm no longer a border guard and can cause you no trouble. I'm sure you were smuggling something and not knowing what it was has bothered me ever since. Please tell me." "Donkeys," answered the Mullah.

(My own version of a traditional Sufi teaching story based on other variations)

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My current notion is that answers and no-Answers pertain to different domains: small mind and Big Mind; conceptual and non-conceptual; time-structured and eternal now. Small mind seems to be a subset of Big Mind and appears as a sort of conceptual overlay. It is the domain of laws, or descriptions of regularities, depending on point of view. In the flowing present of Big Mind, all is Sacred Mystery spontaneously arising in the moment. It is the domain of direct unmediated experience in which no conceptual

explanation is possible or desired. There is no meaning to be sought beyond the actual experience of living in a Living universe.

It is not that the conceptual structuring of small mind is wrong or unnatural - I wouldn't have survived in solitude without the knowledge I've gained during my life - but if I live only in small mind I lose the joy, wonder, sense of Aliveness, and peace my spirit yearns for. Also, it is only from the perspective of Big Mind that the paradoxical need for personal responsibility as well as complete surrender, action as well as non-action, knowledge as well as Mystery, makes sense to me.

As I question why I cursed and celebrated the unpredictability of the world in solitude, I realize it was because I often felt my survival and happiness hinged on *understanding* how the world and I work. But there was another reason too: against much evidence to the contrary, I *expected* the world and myself to behave sensibly (by my standards), and it troubled and frustrated me when we did not. It was frightening and also liberating to relax my expectations and treat both my belief system and my standards as useful but not absolute. Once I began to embrace Mystery, I leaned pretty far at times toward a non-mechanistic view of the world, but there were always the pragmatics of daily life to keep me grounded in the regularities of the physical environment.

Without the ability to predict, I would not have known the sun would return after the winter solstice, after each night, after each storm. I would not have known that wood burns, how to build a fire, or where to find the driftwood I had seen on a distant beach. I could not have caught red snapper. Although I was troubled by my inability to predict the wind, Patti says that when she was on the island she felt that I had become quite good at recognizing weather patterns.

Even though I remain a mystery to myself, I do have a sense of my inner rhythms, and, perhaps in contradiction to my deepest felt awareness, I continue to explore with the hope of understanding. While I failed to learn how to wilfully control the shift of consciousness from small to Big Mind,<sup>163</sup> I did gain some insight into why this is so: the small mind entity that desires freedom actually clings more tightly to itself in its efforts to force the shift. I learned that by slowing down and accepting the need for surrender I

opened myself for the transformation to take place. I learned to experience joy, peace, and wonder as gifts rather than earned rewards.

Is either small mind or Big Mind primary? In stating above that small mind is a subset of Big Mind, I seem to think so, but I'm not sure. Perhaps it's just that I'm used to seeing myself as an individual and have largely lost the experience of being one-with the flowing universe, so that shift in perception carries a sense of profound portent. Is the intellectual thrill of understanding and prediction less joyful than living in the flow of spontaneous Mystery? Is either activity or surrender more fundamental? At the moment I think they are, like dark and light, equally vital to my life. Yet still I know - from the perspective of Big Mind - that small mind is a subset of Big Mind even though they are not separate or different.

If small mind is a subset of Big Mind, then we must always be in Big Mind even when we experience ourselves to be in small mind. This conclusion coincides with Wilber's (1995) claim and my own experience that enlightenment is not something we can attain. We are always already enlightened (in Big Mind) but usually fail to notice. Thus enlightenment, or the shift to Big Mind, is simply waking up to what always already is. But there is an experiential difference between small and Big Mind, and while the difference can be conceptually deconstructed, it is nevertheless something I still live.

In Wilderness Solitude I imagined I could somehow live continuously in Big Mind, but (experientially) it didn't happen. I don't know whether it's possible for some mystics or even for me in the future, but the actuality was and is that there seem to be cycles in me that ebb and flow like the tides. Sometimes in some things I strive to maintain control; sometimes in some things I surrender. And, like the yin/yang symbol, there is always the seed of one in the other.

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Solitude has been recognized in many cultures as an opportunity to journey inward, but in our current cultural climate, seeking solitude is often considered unhealthy. Object Relations psychologists say we are social beings and claim that meaning is found only through relationship with other people. For me, this is only partially true. We are also

spiritual beings, and to be fully human we need relationship not only with other people, but with the non-human world, our own inner depths, and with Something greater.

The preparation required to spend a year alone in the wilderness in such an extreme climate was extensive. The logistics of assembling and shipping equipment and supplies were complex. Living alone in the wilderness demanded the ability to survive physically, emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually with minimal external support. Such independence was sometimes frightening, but trusting and relying on myself was also deeply rewarding. I needed nearly all the skills I've developed during a life of varied activity.

A sense of spaciousness developed during the year. In the absence of other people, time changed and expanded. Without the interruptions of a social schedule to break the flow of inner rhythms, there was often a feel of continuity through the days and weeks. While clock time sometimes seemed to fly, the experiential present often opened into timelessness. Sitting meditation was an important part of my daily routine and the simple tasks of splitting wood, cooking, and fishing, became moving meditations. The absence of noise from internal combustion engines was profoundly relaxing.<sup>164</sup> We have become so inundated by noise in our culture we no longer know what it is to live without the racket of machinery. It is glorious.

For me, one powerful aspect of solitude is that there are few easy escapes from difficult experiences. There is opportunity and necessity to face inner darkness. Emotional cycles - both highs and lows - usually modulated by social engagement, can become extreme. During the year I experienced the full range of emotions from feeling painfully isolated to feeling joyfully woven into my physical surroundings and into the fabric of relationships with people who were not physically present.

I had an opportunity to investigate the sense of alienation many of us experience in our culture and to realize that being alone is not identical with feeling isolated and lonely. The core of my loneliness, when I felt lonely, was not separation from other people, but feeling disconnected from my self and from Spirit. In the absence of external judgments, I could see more clearly how often I demean myself, and I began to develop a sense of intrinsic self-worth.

We each, have a social identity, a persona held in place by our interactions with other people (Wilber, 1979). In solitude, without others to mirror this persona, it began to lose solidity and dissolve, and the process was sometimes terrifying. I used various strategies to prop up the conceptual image of who I thought I was: I stayed busy with physical activity; I read; I escaped into food; I sometimes left solitude and returned to the social matrix via email. But finally I allowed myself to experience dissolution. When I faced the fear and surrendered to the process, I discover that I was not identical with the conception I had of myself as an isolated individual. I am more fluid and profound, and I belong to and am part of the flowing whole. As I surrendered my individual self in life, fear of death lost its power.

There was an intensity of experience in solitude that is often absent when I'm involved in social activity. My awareness of the physical world, for example, was more immediate. Recently, here in the city, I realized that spring equinox had passed - almost without my noticing - even though it was winter solstice just a while ago. In solitude, when the activities of each day were directly linked to the weather, my experience of the three months between winter solstice and spring equinox was very different.

My senses became more acute and my perception of beauty more achingly immediate in solitude. Sometimes the world and I came vibrantly Alive. With the freedom to slow down and return over and over to the here and now, my mind settled and opened to perceive a mysterious Presence which I could experience but not define. I, and all else, belong to and am that Presence. In the silence of solitude I remembered that the world is and always has been Sacred. Although my original intention was to write this dissertation using only secular language, as my sense of that Presence became more immediate and profound, I could no longer honestly describe in my journal what was happening to me without reference to the Sacred.

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My wilderness journal is a record of daily life that was an integrated flow, yet I have identified a number of themes that weave through the weeks and months. They emerge, develop, sometimes disappear, and sometimes re-emerge. These themes are not distinct from each other, but they have been useful in organizing and editing the journal.

Anxiety  
Big Mind  
Books  
Cat  
Ducks, Limpets, Science  
Escape  
No Answer  
Pain  
Physical Descriptions

All these themes point to different aspects of relationship: with the non-human world, with other people, with myself, with ideas, with Spirit. The quality of my relationships was an outward manifestation of my inner attitude and orientation. Over and over I interacted with the world and with myself from a position of power and control. I was intent on exerting my will and having things be the way I wanted them to be. Slowly I came to see the enormous pain this attitude caused and at times continues to cause me. I began to relax my demands and to accept the world, and myself, as we actually are. I began to see through the strange delusion that we are separate from - and so can somehow own - the world and ourselves. What a relief.

Learning to trust the process and to open myself to the Mysterious Presence I am always already part of, was as important to inner peace as accepting the world as it is. I slowly began to accept that (small mind) I could not autonomously do what needed to be done. The movement from control to trust and surrender was and is at the center of my spiritual journey. But behavioural competence is still important because the process I surrender to includes my own activity.

This shift involved working with aversion and desire. Relaxing my effort to control the world could happen only when I was willing to experience those aspects of my life I felt aversion toward and willing to not experience those things I desired. This doesn't mean I need to seek out what I dislike (although this can be a useful practice at times) or avoid what I enjoy. But I so habitually avoid what I don't like and actively seek what I do like that to gently decondition this automatic behaviour and simply be with whatever comes into my field of experience allows a sense of peace and spaciousness to grow in my life.

In solitude my relationships with the non-human world paralleled my habitual relationships with other people. Usually we believe that going into Nature is a peaceful respite from the hurly burly of our social lives, but this is because we seldom stay long enough for our inner conflict to catch up with us. Once it does, all the stuff we had to deal with in society manifests itself in relation to the non-human world: we take ourselves into solitude with us. This became especially clear in my relationship with Cat. Had there been another person with me, much of what I projected onto Cat would have landed on my partner. If I had not taken a cat, some other aspect of the world would have triggered my frustration, rage, and guilt.

Koch (1994) discusses the tendency of solitaries to personalize the non-human world around them and I found this to be so for me. But there was self-reflection in the process. Even when I viscerally experienced the world to be Alive with Consciousness, I continued to be aware that from the point of view of mainstream Western psychology, this experience was the result of projection. As time passed, I became less concerned with such explanations and more immersed in the richness of my actual experience.

My relationship with the wind and rain changed during the year. In the beginning I felt the wind as a threat and an adversary that often prevented me from doing what I wanted to do. Sometimes there was a sense of active malevolence, rather than simple implacability, and fear filled my solitary mind. When I began to dis-identify with my desires and fears, I began to engage more openly with the wind and to allow it to shape me. I spent time each day out on the exposed point opening myself to whatever experiences would arise. Slowly the wind became a teacher, and instead of cursing it I bowed in respect. It is sometimes said that when the student is ready the teacher appears. It is more likely that we are always in the presence of teachers and at different stages in our development we become open to their teachings.

Eventually I built a kite that flew even in fierce wind. It was joyful to tie it to the line on my fishing rod and dance with the turbulent gusts, playing the kite to keep it from plunging into the sea. But the deeper joy was to stop seeing the wind as malevolent. Finally, the wind was just wind again.



The wind taught me to surrender, but the rain taught me to love. In the beginning the rain was an annoyance, but over the months I spent hundreds of hours listening to it patter on the porch roof. That and other water sounds became a mantra that deepened my concentration and carried me inward. There was often bliss as I simply sat and listened. I learned that love is as fundamental as awareness, an open heart as vital as an open mind. I learned that relationship is always possible in any circumstance and is never possible to avoid. I can change the quality of my relationships, but without interaction I cease to exist.

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This research project and dissertation are intensely personal in subject and style, but I believe some of the insights from my time in solitude are generally relevant to my culture. In this final section I offer several of these insights into our communal conversation, not as a diatribe of certainty but as a view from far away.

I am sometimes asked if I recommend deep wilderness solitude to others. I do not. It is painful, difficult, and can be dangerous. A person needs to be called to it from deep within, and if someone requires external encouragement, he or she is not ready. But I think many of us could benefit from stepping out of our hectic daily activities to spend some time alone. Often when I ask someone how they are doing, they reply, "Busy." This seems to refer to an on-going state of psychological stress as well as to constant physical activity. I wonder if this is pervasive in our culture, and if so, how long we have lived with the sense that we don't have enough time to do what we believe we must do?

Our culture often seems to value productivity above all else. But like all beings we need to rest and recuperate. Feeling the need to remain constantly busy - mentally or physically - in socially productive activity can prevent us from turning inward to simply be with ourselves. Such inward turning requires time and might lower productivity, and thus our social standing and possibly our sense of self-worth. Perhaps the widespread occurrence of depression in our culture is linked to our refusal to allow ourselves quiet-time. Paradoxically, choosing to spend time alone can help heal our sense of alienation from others.

It is not that activity is bad, but that many of us are far out of balance and our activity often does not come from a place of stillness and wisdom. If we slow down and reduce our demands, perhaps we can find meaning in non-material terms and learn that what we seek we always already have. In our culture this is difficult because non-action is often considered suspect and socially unacceptable.

Our culture is so focused on progress that many of us frequently don't experience our own lives just as they are here and now. But the world will always be exactly as it is in each moment. This does not imply passivity. Our dreams and ideals are also of this moment. Everything changes, no matter how slowly, and we can act to alleviate suffering. Yet if desires and plans for the future are not balanced with acceptance and joy in this moment, just as it is, our lives go un-lived and are wasted. The challenge is to work with our lives as they are rather than imagining things to be different. If we can learn to soften our desires and aversions, our lives might become less frantic and more spacious. We might experience for ourselves that all is Sacred and Alive.

Much of our activity seems ecologically destructive. We have caused serious problems and we disagree about what should be done to fix them. Many of us think our own plans of action are the solution, but it seems possible that excessive human activity - in and of itself - is the primary ecological problem. The earth needs to heal and we cannot make it happen; many of our efforts only deepen the wounds. We can only relax our demands for material goods, reduce our rate of reproduction, and allow the earth to heal itself.

I believe a fundamental difficulty is that we do not directly perceive ourselves to be biological beings in a living world. The non-human world has become a sort of inanimate backdrop to our human affairs. Theoretically, we know we depend on the physical systems of earth, but experientially we are alienated from those systems. We experience the earth as a stranger we know we *should* protect for pragmatic or ethical reasons, but until we individually transform our consciousness and come to experience non-human beings as family and the earth as our home, we are unlikely to relax our demands for comfort and security and make the changes necessary for our survival, joy, and sense of belonging. We need spiritual transformation as well as economic and legislative solutions.

~ ~ ~

For me the process of inner transformation continues. Although I claim All is Sacred and Alive, and I know Spirit abides here in the city - is the city, I still go to great lengths to find wilderness solitude. I see trees as more alive than concrete buildings, and I hear birdsong as more beautiful than electronic beeping. I continue to work to soften my mind and relax my opinions, to open my heart and trust the process, to surrender my defences and expectations with other people - to accept life as it is and not as I would like it to be. It is enough.

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<sup>163</sup> Recently, due to some “objective” feedback, I have reassessed my belief that I did not learn to control shifts of consciousness. The therapist I’m working with has purchased *HeartMath* software. It is designed to measure the coherence of heart energy via a sensor attached to one’s finger. The electronic readout accurately portrays my inner experience, even though I do not necessarily accept as literal the *HeartMath* explanation of why this is so. (If you wish to learn more about *HeartMath*, please see <[www.HeartMath.org](http://www.HeartMath.org)>). In experimenting with this new tool I’m beginning to realize that I have developed skill in working with inner states. This has been useful to me in broadening my perspective. In my explorations I am often so focused on what I do not understand (and at times caught in perfectionism) that I forget to acknowledge and appreciate what I do - at least tentatively - understand. While in the deeper sense all is Mystery, in the relative sense, pragmatic knowledge and skills can obviously be developed. Care, humility, and patience are vital: inner work is learning to dance with myself rather than ordering myself to march in a preconceived formation.

<sup>164</sup> Machine noise is often physically painful to me: it is not merely unpleasant, it hurts. However, this seems to be so only when I’m not the one running the machine. In solitude I found the noise of the chainsaw intense but not unpleasant. The same was so for the outboard motor. However, if another person had been running a saw or an outboard within my hearing, I would have experienced it as extremely disturbing. At times I also felt wild joy standing in the front of the boat, flying across the glassy sea driven by the throbbing motor behind me. Even so, I was aware that machine noise did disturb my tranquility, and during the last months on the island I rarely used the chainsaw or outboard motor. The dolphins on the other hand seemed to be attracted to the sound or vibration of the outboard. They never came to play when I was paddling the kayak, but often came around the motor-driven boat. The noise of the wind generator was very intrusive and I used it only rarely when the storage batteries became quite low. Instead, I minimized my use of electricity and put up with the hiss of the propane lantern. I felt much more comfortable with the solar panels that passively gathered and converted sunlight than I did with the wind generator and its often wild activity.

Low tide rock sitting listening for the voice of God.  
Then the soft subtle shift: my whole being relaxed,  
and I was listening (and am and always have been)  
to the voice of God ... in every sound.

Such a small difference: from FOR to TO.  
And yet, massive.

In one there is straining for what isn't;  
in the other there is joy and peace and stillness  
in the wonder of what is.

Listening for the voice of God implies duality,  
as though whatever I'm experiencing is somehow  
not the voice of God.

I spend so much time and energy listening for  
the voice of God with my mind,  
but I listen to the voice of God with my heart.  
My mind has definite ideas about  
what it wants God's voice to say.  
It wants Answers, certainty, conceptual understanding.

My heart hears God's voice saying, "I am"  
and it is quiet and content.

## Postlude

**Please view DVD I**

**It contains the 24 minute video movie**

***A Year in Wilderness Solitude***

NB: If you have only Windows Media Player or Real Player, the movie will play with higher quality if you download a free trial version of Power DVD at:

[http://www.gocyberlink.com/multi/download/dl\\_file\\_new.jsp?ProdId=1&lang=ENU](http://www.gocyberlink.com/multi/download/dl_file_new.jsp?ProdId=1&lang=ENU)

If you are using Linux and need DVD playing software, here are two relevant websites. The first just describes different applications for use; the second gives more specifics on the details of administrative points as well.

<http://www.linuxjournal.com/article/5644>

[http://www.ibiblio.org/pub/Linux/docs/HOWTO/other-formats/html\\_single/DVD-Playback-HOWTO.html](http://www.ibiblio.org/pub/Linux/docs/HOWTO/other-formats/html_single/DVD-Playback-HOWTO.html)

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## Appendix 1

### Please view DVD II

**It contains a video recording of a slideshow presentation about the year I lived in wilderness solitude. The slideshow brings an audio visual layer to the dissertation, and the post slideshow discussion adds an interactive element.**

**Included on both DVDs is a gallery of photographs used in the slideshow in case you wish to view the images at your own pace.**

NB: If you have only Windows Media Player or Real Player, the movie will play with higher quality if you download a free trial version of Power DVD at:

[http://www.gocyberlink.com/multi/download/dl\\_file\\_new.jsp?ProdId=1&lang=ENU](http://www.gocyberlink.com/multi/download/dl_file_new.jsp?ProdId=1&lang=ENU)

If you are using Linux and need DVD playing software, here are two relevant websites. The first just describes different applications for use; the second gives more specifics on the details of administrative points as well.

<http://www.linuxjournal.com/article/5644>

[http://www.ibiblio.org/pub/Linux/docs/HOWTO/other-formats/html\\_single/DVD-Playback-HOWTO.html](http://www.ibiblio.org/pub/Linux/docs/HOWTO/other-formats/html_single/DVD-Playback-HOWTO.html)

## **Appendix 2**

### **Equipment, Materials and Supplies**

**Email Use**

**Expenses**

**Tools**

Hammer, saw, chisels, large square, combination square, pencils, Exacto knives, snap-line, plum-bob, Surform pocket plane, brace & bits, hand-drill, socket set, crescent wrenches, box-end wrenches, Vise-grips, pliers, sheet-metal shears, side-cutters, tape measure, hacksaw & spare blades, screw drivers, Swede saws & spare blade, machete, axe & spare handle, hatchet, level, Wonder bar, pry bar, knife, flat file, putty knives

Sand paper

Come-along & pulleys

Chainsaw, extra chain, 2 chain files, spare plugs, chain oil, gas & 2-cycle oil

Pick, shovel, trowel

Slingshot & ball bearings

Staple gun

**Construction Materials**

5 rolls duct tape, 1 roll Teflon tape, 1 roll masking tape, 6 tubes caulking, 4 tubes Shoe Goo/Marine Goop, Crazy Glue, rubber cement, carpenter's glue, 5-Minute Epoxy, paint thinner, acetone, WD-40

20' reinforcing rod each: 1/2" and 1/4"

White heavy-duty woven polyethylene tarps for roof and walls

Clear plastic: 6 mil x 10' x 100' for extra layer on roof, outhouse, over woodpiles, over tent, etc., 4 mil x 10' x 50' to line inside of cabin

Plenty of nails of all sizes: 1" to 4", 2000 staples: 1/4" & 3/8" length

Hard plastic strips for backing nails

Various gauges of steel wire, snare wire

4' x 4' Clear Plexiglas for windows

3' x 3' fine mesh screen

4 sheets 5' x 8' x 5/8" plywood (floor)

1 sheet 5' x 8' x 3/8" plywood (shelves, table, bed), use shipping crates for more shelf material

4 sheets 5' x 8' x 1/4" pressboard (roof, door)

12 - 1" x 2" x 8' (shelf & table framing, etc.)

16 - 1" x 3" x 8' (general use)

50 - 2" x 2" x 12' (rafters, studs, framing)

6 - 2" x 4" x 8' (corner posts)

20 - 2" x 4" x 10' (stringers & floor joists)

6 - 2" x 4" x 12' (misc.)

5' heavy canvas to make reclining chair



### Cabin Supplies

Air-tight wood stove, 12' chimney, two elbows, damper, chimney cap, stove cement

Propane cook-stove, propane light, hose & fittings, 3 - 100 pound tanks of propane, regulator, spare mantles, grill

6 cigarette lighters, candles, newspaper

2 fry pans, 2 small pots, 1 large pot, lids

Dish pan, tub for bathing & washing clothes, 2 plastic buckets, 40 gal. plastic drum for rain water, plastic tubing, collapsible water containers

Tupperware for storing food

2 forks, knives, table and tea spoons, spatula, large spoon, can opener, sharp knife

2 plates, bowls, cups (thermal), thermos

Soap for dishes & clothes, 4 green scrubbies, metal scrubby, dish rag, towels & rags

Lots of: plastic food bags, Ziploc baggies, garbage bags, woven plastic produce sacks, aluminium foil

40 rolls toilet paper, 6 rolls paper towels

Water filter and water purification additive

Chair, broom

Toilet kit: razors, lather, soap & shampoo, tooth paste, mirror, nail clippers, toothbrushes, dental floss

Writing paper, 6 notebooks, 12 pens, write in the rain notebooks, ruler, magic markers, playing cards, scissors

Alarm clock, extra watch, Velcro band, thermometer, barometer, rain gauge

Sewing kit: needles, thread, nylon thread, buttons, zippers, elastic, patch material, leather, rubber

Lots of nylon cord, plastic twine, string

### Medical Supplies

First aid books

Prosthetic leg repair kit: fiberglass cloth & resin, spare foot, spare socket liner, leather, contact cement, spare straps, rivets, Allen wrench

Topical: Alcohol, iodine, antibiotic cream, cortisone cream, hydrogen peroxide, sodium chloride eye wash, anti fungal cream, anti fungal mouthwash, Zovirax cream, artificial tears, Vaseline, Vicks VapoRub, sun cream, insect repellent, almond oil, oil-drillers hand cream, bag balm, liniment, capsaicin cream, arthritis cream

Pain relief: 1200 Ibuprofen, 400 Tylenol, 100 Tylenol 3, injectable local anesthetic, injectable morphine, Orajel

Antacids, laxative, Imodium, Benadryl, Claritin, motion sickness pills, potassium tablets

Oral antibiotics: for cuts, for intestinal tract, for ears and throat

Wounds: Second skin, butterfly strips, sterile pads of various sizes and cotton balls, Band-Aids, adhesive tape, sterile eye pads, scalpel & blades, suture kit, tweezers, magnifying glass, surgeon's gloves, tensor bandages, pre-made splint

One-a-day vitamins, vitamin C, calcium, iron, potassium, zinc, magnesium, Synthroid tablets

Various homeopathic remedies.

Rubber balls for massaging back, pulleys for exercising, hot water bottle

**Ocean and Outdoor Gear****Clothing and Bedding**

<p>Compass, 2 GPS units</p> <p>Marine charts &amp; topographical maps, map-tube</p> <p>Boat, patch material, glue</p> <p>Transom wheels, rollers for under boat</p> <p>Two outboard motors, gas can with hose, mounting bracket, extension handle</p> <p>Replacement parts (plugs, starter rope, prop, shear pins, electronic brain, coil, fuel pump, gear-puller, starter rope)</p> <p>Siphon hose, funnel</p> <p>2 55-gallon drums, 6 5-gallon containers</p> <p>140 gallons gasoline, 3 gallons 2-cycle oil.</p> <p>2 foot pumps with adaptors</p> <p>2 anchors, chain, lots of rope, pulleys</p> <p>Kayak, 2 paddles, seat, patch material</p> <p>3 life vests</p> <p>Diving mask, fins, snorkel, wetsuit &amp; extra material, gloves, spear gun, goodie bag</p> <p>Fishing gear: 2 heavy rods and reels, 1 lightweight trout rod and reel, lots of hooks &amp; weights of all sizes, lures &amp; jigs, extra 20 lb test line, net, gaff, filet knife, needle-nose pliers, hand scale, reel oil, tools, spare rod-guides</p> <p>Fishing license</p> <p>Chest waders</p> <p>Waterproof gear-bags</p> <p>Materials for making crab traps</p> <p>Tent</p>	<p>6 pairs sturdy pants, 5 long sleeve flannel shirts, 6 T-shirts</p> <p>6 pairs wool socks, 6 pairs cotton socks, 2 pairs felt liners, one down bootie</p> <p>1 good shirt &amp; pair of pants for polite company</p> <p>2 sweaters, 2 warm shirts, sweatshirt with hood, 2 pairs long underwear</p> <p>Hollow -fill coat, down parka, thermal snowsuit, hollow-fill vest</p> <p>2 neck scarves, neck warmer, 3 pairs mittens, 2 pairs rubber gloves, 2 pairs cotton work gloves</p> <p>Broad-brimmed hat, 2 baseball caps, 2 wool toques, rain hood.</p> <p>Cheap tennis shoes, 2 pairs light weight hiking boots, 1 pair light-weight rubber boots, 1 pair jungle boots</p> <p>Heavy duty Farmer John raingear, Gortex light rain gear, water-proof spray</p> <p>6 wool stump socks, 6 cotton stump socks, 4 gel liners</p> <p>2 Thermarest pads, down sleeping bag, 2 sheets, 2 blankets, 2 pillows, towels</p>
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**Electronics and Electrical****Books**

Satellite telephone with antenna wire,  
(36 minutes pre-paid air time)

2-laptops: one for sending email, one  
for journaling (replace the batteries)

2 solar panels approx 50 watts each,  
wind generator, 20' x 2" steel pipe for  
antenna, guy wire, turnbuckles

Voltage regulator, 2 - 12V to 110 V  
inverters, 2 - 12V deep cycle  
batteries, 12 AA rechargeable  
batteries, charger

Insulated multi-strand electric wire:  
12 gauge, 14 gauge, 16 gauge

Fuses, alligator clips, battery-lead  
connectors, wire connectors, etc.

Small 12V fluorescent light & 2 extra  
tubes, 2 - 12V incandescent lights  
(used in trailers) & extra bulbs

Electric hair clippers

Flashing bicycle lights (to mark camp  
for nighttime on the water)

Tape recorder & tapes

2 head lamps & spare bulbs

**Photography and Optics**

Camera, various lenses, lens  
cleaning solution & tissue, lens hood,  
cable release, strobes, spare light  
meter, tripod, spare batteries

40 or so rolls of colour slide and print  
film (100 & 200 ASA)

2 pairs binoculars (one waterproof  
10x, one compact 8x)

Spare glasses, reading glasses

Apropos of Dolores

H.G Wells

At Home in the Universe

Stuart Kauffman

Care of the Soul

Thomas Moore

Basic Writings

Chuang Tsu

Commentaries on Living

Krishnamurti

Desert Solitaire

Edward Abbey

Entre el Cielo y el Silencio

Nicolas Mihovilovic

Essential Rumi

Coleman Barks

Eye of the Spirit

Ken Wilber

Family Moskat

Isaac Singer

Flow

Mihaly  
Csikszentmihalyi

Gaia

William Thompson

Hermits

Peter France

How Right You Are,  
Jeeves

P.G. Wodehouse

I Ching

Richard Wilhelm

Johnson Service Manual

OMC

Nature, Man and Woman

Allan Watts

New Science of Life

Rupert Sheldrake

No Boundary

Ken Wilber

Perfect Storm

Sebastian Junger

Right Ho, Jeeves

P.G. Wodehouse

Seeking the Heart of  
Wisdom

Goldstein & Kornfield

Sex, Ecology, Spirituality

Ken Wilber

Solitude: a return to the  
self

Anthony Storr

St. John's Ambulance  
Wilderness 1<sup>st</sup> Aid Manual

Wayne Merry

The Experience of Insight

Goldstein

Thoughts without a  
Thinker

Mark Epstein

Where there is no Doctor

David Werner

### Food Supplies

Rice	100 kg	Semisweet chocolate	14 kg
Oatmeal	30	Cocoa powder	1.5
Lentils	10	Chocolate pudding mix	2
Peas	10	Olives, pickles, sauerkraut	1 each
Pinto beans	10	Potatoes	20
Black beans	28	Onions	10
Pasta	20	Bacon	7
Flour	20	Smoked meat	5
Baking powder	1	Cheese	8
Sugar	20	Garlic	2
Salt	7	Instant coffee	1
Pepper (and other spices)	1	Ground coffee	4
Pop corn	5	Tea	100 bags
Dried fruit: raisins, apricots, figs, apples, peaches, prunes	20	Herbal tea	120 bags
Honey	6	Dehydrated soup	30 pkgs.
Lard	7	Bouillon cubes	12 boxes
Peanut butter	7	Cooking oil	11 liters
Powdered whole milk	13	Vinegar	3
Jam	2	Lemon juice	5
Ketchup	1	Soya sauce	4
Hot sauce	2	Liquor	3
Tomato paste	5		

**Email Sent**

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Number</b>
Monthly Check-in	15
Sending Reports	5
Technical assistance	25
Health Consultation	6
Request for Supplies (aborted)	24
Short Personal Message	15

Email messages were sent on 47 separate days.  
April and July had the heaviest traffic with  
messages coming and going on nine days each.  
During six months I sent only the check-in message.

**Total Expenses (Fairly Close Estimate from Receipts) = \$34,637**

**All amounts in Canadian dollars**

**Punta Arenas (P.A.)  
Puerto Natales (P.N.)**

**Hardware, Electrical, Fuel**

**Canada**

Home Depot: general stuff	\$212.00
Canadian Tire: general stuff	\$180.00
Other hardware	\$188.00

**Sub total** **\$580.00**

**Chile**

General hardware & electrical odds and ends	\$948.91
Batteries	\$233.51
Anchor	\$29.73
Lumber	\$575.00
Gasoline	\$671.62
Oil	\$55.53
Propane	\$200.00

**Sub total** **\$2,714.30**

**Total** **\$3,294.30**

**Equipment**

**Canada**

Boat & parts	\$3,150.00
Outboards & parts	\$1,900.00
Outboard repair (Chile)	\$400.00
Kayak	\$125.00
Chainsaw	\$125.00
Binoculars	\$383.00
Glasses	\$340.00
Dive mask	\$124.00
Compass	\$68.00
GPS	\$240.00
Satellite telephone	\$3,466.00
Satphone air time	\$300.00
Solar panels	\$817.00
Wind generator	\$800.00
Electrical	\$290.00
Swede saw	\$31.00
Axe, etc.	\$33.00
Wood stove & chimney	\$190.00
Tarps	\$93.00
Used camping gear: (rain gear, tent, parka, Thermarest, sleeping bag waterproof bags)	\$772.00
Pants, shirts, etc.	\$174.00
Rain boots	\$45.00
Chest waders	\$87.00
Cook stoves	\$44.00

**Total** **\$13,997.00**

**Groceries****Chile**

Cheese	\$43.65
Flour	\$9.19
Sugar	\$14.32
Rice	\$62.16
Oil	\$9.30
Dried fruit	\$109.59
Cat food	\$6.96
Peanut butter & chocolate	\$86.95
Oatmeal	\$45.27
Beans & lentils	\$77.55
Honey	\$24.32
Cocoa	\$4.42
Lemon juice	\$8.32
Ketchup	\$2.80
Spices, etc.	\$25.56
Dried soup	\$32.43
Lard	\$12.73
Coffee	\$46.69
Powdered milk	\$77.34
Toilet paper	\$23.11
Chocolate pudding	\$14.00
Pasta	\$26.22
Oil & vinegar	\$21.62
Liquor	\$81.08
Smoked meat	\$178.38
Potatoes, onions, garlic	\$30.41
Other	\$156.32

**Total** **\$1,230.69**

**Travel Costs****Route/Destination**

Vancouver - Santiago	\$1,792.00
Santiago - P.A. & return	\$165.00
P.A. - P.N. 3 round trips	\$53.00
Navy Ship	\$92.00
NAVIMAG ferry	\$41.00
Santiago - Miami	\$650.00
Miami - Vancouver	\$700.00
Chile visa & entry tax	\$620.00
Dominican Republic visit	\$400.00

**Shipping and Customs**

Vancouver - P.A.	\$1,305.00
P.A. - Vancouver	\$1,823.00
P.A. - P.N.	\$215.00

**Total** **\$7,856.00**

**Medical****Canada**

Accident insurance	\$365.00
Shots	\$105.00
First aid book	\$35.00
Water treatment	\$21.00
Pharmacy/vitamins	\$556.00

**Sub total** **\$1,082.00**

**Chile**

Pharmacy/vitamins	\$33.97
Toiletries	\$35.14
Physiotherapy	\$37.84
Dentist	\$262.16
Cat	\$19.32

**Sub Total** **\$388.43**

**Total** **\$1,470.43**

**Food and Lodging**

<b>Location</b>	<b>Rough Cost</b>
Room & board: P.A.	\$16/dayx40 = \$640.00
Room: P.N.	\$7/dayx40 = \$280.00
Room: Santiago	\$16/dayx50 = \$800.00
Food/meals: P.N.	\$7/dayx40 = \$240.00
Food/meals: Santiago	\$10/dayx50 = \$400.00
10% for error	\$236.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$2,596.00</b>

**Email & Telephone**

<b>Chile</b>	
Email: P.A.	\$222.30
Telephone calls: P.A.	\$271.89
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$494.19</b>

**Miscellaneous**

Travel gift to Patti	\$1,000.00
Gift for Alejandra	\$48.65
Notary	\$2.70
2 fishing licenses	\$19.95
4 haircuts	\$32.43
Fishing gear	\$10.41
Marine charts	\$97.30
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$1,211.43</b>

**Audio-Visual**

Camera repair	\$80.00
Tripod	\$35.00
Video camera	\$450.00
Video tape	\$130.00
Television	\$180.00
Tape recorder	\$84.00
Audio tapes	\$30.00
Photographic film	\$700.00
Photo processing	\$800.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$2,489.00</b>



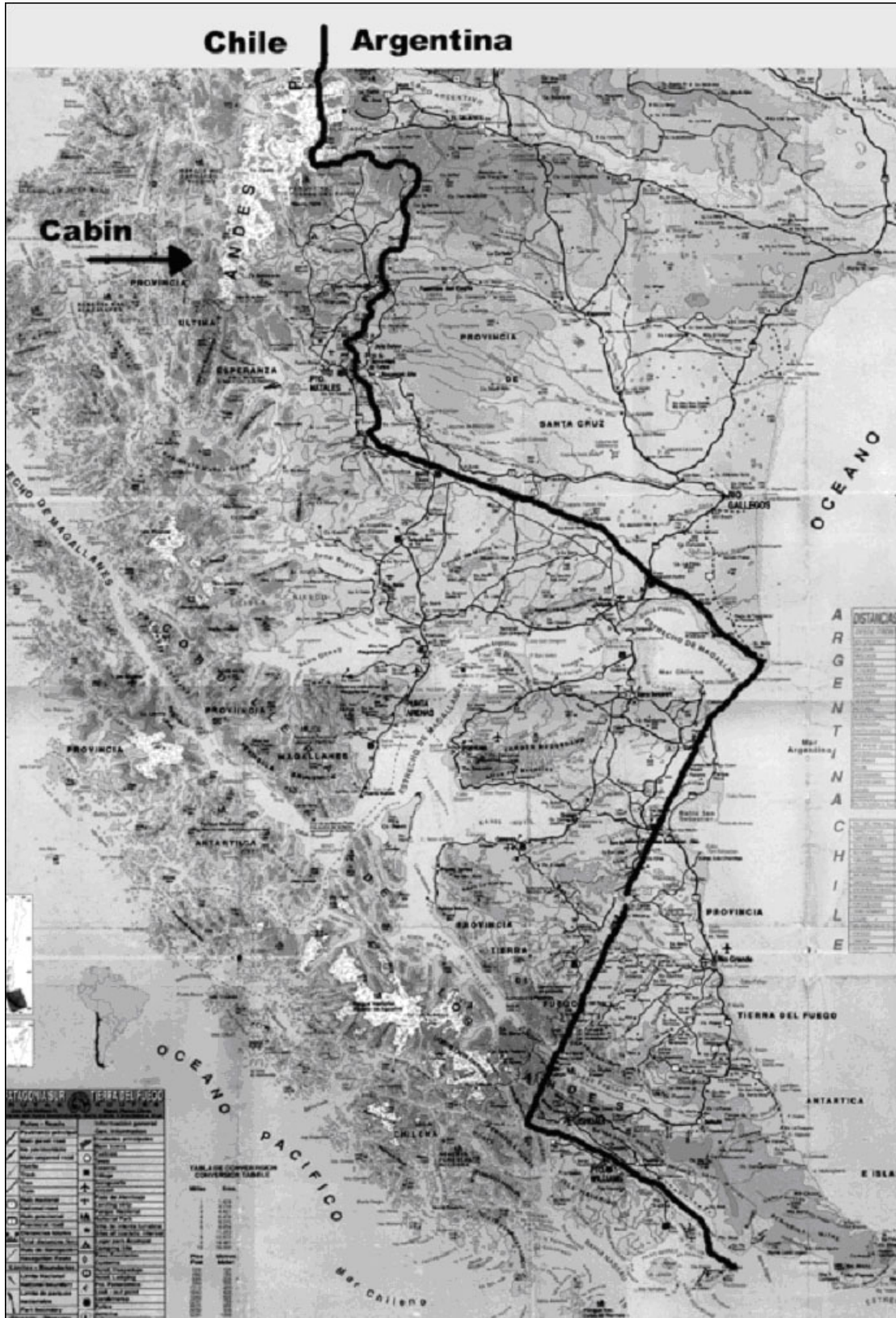
## **Appendix 3**

### **Maps**

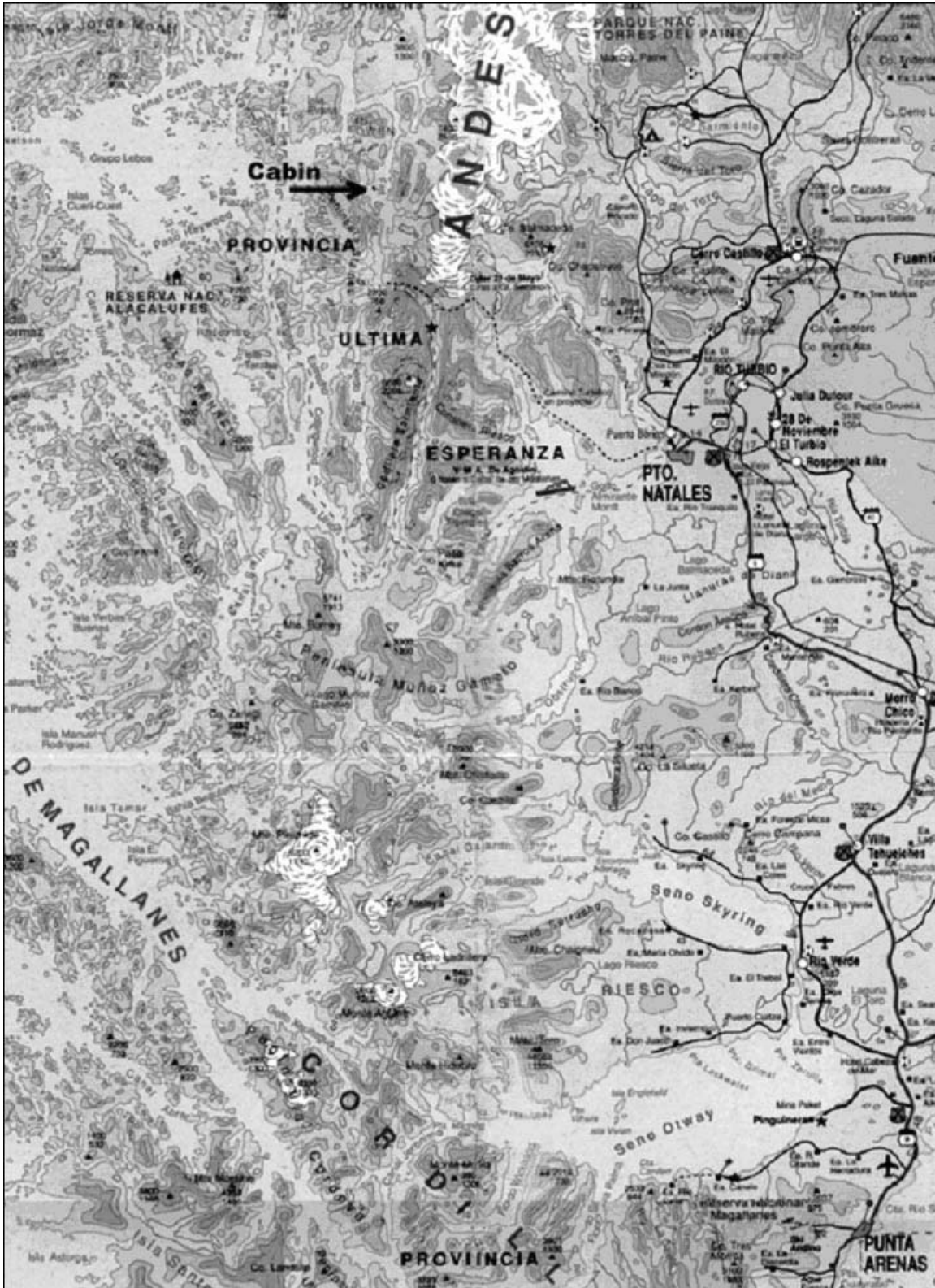
### The Americas



### Tip of South America



Punta Arenas → Puerto Natales → Retreat Site



### Detail of Navigation Route to Retreat Site



## Appendix 4

**As part of my work I have created a website  
to share my journey into solitude with other people.**

**[www.bobkull.org](http://www.bobkull.org)**

**Thank you to Greg Callahan and Kevin Callahan  
for their invaluable support and assistance  
in creating and maintaining the website.**