

# THE VOYAGE OF A LIFETIME

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## CHAPTERS 1-5

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## CHAPTER ONE

This is an allegory about life as we have thought of it, and equally, a parable about the passing from an incomplete understanding into the conscious state of awareness just beyond the sense world, while never actually “going anywhere.” This is my experience in allegorical form, and yet, even as I was writing it, I had no idea what the next word would be. From the start I had no idea beyond the first sentence what I was writing. It was being revealed to me as I wrote. Every word came as much a surprise to me as it will be to you. I had no idea where each paragraph was leading or how the story would go or where it would end. Therefore, I read it for the first time as I was writing. It was an incredible journey. I hope you enjoy reading it as much as I have enjoyed writing it. However you view it, you will get the most from it, and enjoy it as it is meant to be enjoyed, if you do not try to figure it out! Simply relax, read, and let it be.

When I first recognized consciousness I found myself in a strange, though beautiful place. The heat of the sun seemed to be pinpointing my body lying there on the beach, as though I were lying under a magnifying glass. Except for the rippling waves against the shore, and the breeze in the palms, there was no sound. Quiet, total quiet. Peace. Ah, but the sun... the sun was relentless and I had no choice but to head for the shade of the palms.

At first I simply could not stand. I wanted to, but the body was weak, and I was unprepared for solid ground beneath my feet. I began to slide myself along in the sand towards the comfort awaiting me from behind. It wasn't that far, but it seemed forever. I had to stop and rest my head on my arms between my knees for a spell.

Sitting there with the sun roasting the back of my neck I began to lapse into what now seems like a dream.

When I had first boarded the ship for my great voyage, the “voyage of a lifetime,” I had been so filled with anticipation. There was such a festive atmosphere on board. All those who had loved ones watching their departure from the dock waved back to them, while laughing with the excitement and anticipation of the great adventure before them.

This was to be no ordinary voyage. It had been hailed “The Greatest Adventure on Land and Sea.” What made it so extraordinary was that it was to sail into every port everywhere possible. It offered a venture that would last until either one grew tired of traveling or died, whichever came first. All expenses were paid, but paid by whom, no one seemed to know. The Financier had offered this extraordinary expedition for “whosoever will.” The “whosoever will,” however, had to be willing to leave everything he had known up to the voyage, with no promise of return.

The one who accepted the offer knew that there was no turning back once on board, but it was such an opportunity! Though the loved ones on the shore seemed somewhat reluctant in some cases to let them go, it seemed that the ones on shore realized the great opportunity too, and knew that they simply could not refuse these seekers of destiny to go out into this great unknown experience. They knew that the ones who answered the call to go would see things that they otherwise could not. They all also knew that this excursion would leave no one who took up the challenge the same, but all would be all the better for the voyage no matter what happened, so they could only wish them the absolute best and send them sailing.

"Bye. Good bye." The calls of farewell over the side and from the dock became more and more faint as the great vessel hauled anchor and began to pull from the shoreline. The great horn of the ship sounded and the people jumped, as much from the abrupt sound, as from the sudden realization that they had begun something that they could not stop.

Some tears began to flow as hands waved. I'll never forget the first time I looked up and saw my mother's eyes and thought that if she were there all would be well, and so threw my little hand upwards to wave as well.

There were many families and children on board, but the whole ship seemed to be teaming with a variety of all types of travelers. I made friends with a few children right away, and began to settle into life aboard this magnificent rolling world of sky and sea.

What seemed like years passed and I came to know many of the people on board. There was the old woman who told me that she wished only to die there, because she considered her life to be behind her. With nothing more to live for, she reasoned, "why not take this trip into the sunset of life."

There was the physician who had come along for one purpose, to attend to the bodies of the travelers on board. He had made his fortune on land and now could see no better way to live out his life than to make his services available to the floating residents on an adventure.

There were several preachers on board who held services on their appointed religious days and each had followers who held to their various beliefs. I went from one to the other for a while, listening and wondering why they didn't just all pick one day and talk about what they believed, so that they could see how much alike they were, after all, we were all on the same big boat. But for some reason, although they all talked about God - although using different names for Him - and they all spoke of caring for their fellow travelers, they preferred to have separate areas of "worship." They all seemed to prefer the opportunity to be heard without interruption, each having his own set of beliefs. So they chose their own spot on the ship to preach and teach what they believed and seemed to be content with that setup.

I didn't much care which was which. I found all of them had something about them I could enjoy and loved each one.

There were Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims, Catholics and Jews. Some said they were Christians, some said they were not, but as the ship passed over the waters, they all passed over the same. Their designated beliefs and religious rituals went on, on the same deck as the same waters lifted and swelled, rose and dropped, under us all daily.

There were very rich aboard the ship, and though they seemed to stay in a huddle, I came to know one very wealthy man very well. I asked him one day why the rich moved about on the ship as though they were a flock of geese, and he laughed. He said that they were afraid. I thought that very odd. Why would very wealthy people be afraid? They seemed to have it all, but my friend confided in me that that was the very reason for their fear. He said that the more one has to lose the more afraid they are.

My friend would often sit with me and hold my hand and talk to me of places he had been, things he had seen while in what he called, "the land of the living." He told me of grand palaces and days that did not end and flowers that never lost a petal. He said that you would simply have to go there to understand. I dreamed of going there and seeing those things, and asked him where the land of the living was, but he always grew very quiet when I asked him that question, so I did not pursue the answer once he grew quiet.

Years seemed to pass by and although the original promise was kept to all the passengers, it was not as they had thought it would be. Although the ship did indeed sail into every port, the passengers could only look over the side and were never allowed to leave the gangway. They could view from their windows on the lower decks or crowd the upper deck and look at the world before them in each port, but it was all just that - a picture passing before them.

At first there was quite an uproar which took place among the voyagers, because life aboard ship was not all they had hoped it would be. Their fascination with the adventure had been extended into the world they imagined they would see. Their disappointment with life, as they came to know it, could only be pacified with trying to make the best of their situation. Some called it their doom, while others simply shrugged and said, "Life is what you make it," and so tried to make it all they could with the limited resources that seemed to be available to them on board.

What at first seemed like a tremendous vessel seemed to diminish in size over a period time. In fact, this ship had been advertised to "shrink the Titanic," to overwhelm "The Ship of the World," to out stand, out float, out last any ship anywhere, anytime. This vessel was so large that it could only come close to many ports and never actually enter. There were so many people on board that actual count was finally given up, as it seemed irrelevant. At one point it was spread abroad that every nationality in the world, known to man, was present on board. Babies were born here and people passed away and were given a burial at sea. Life went on.

I grew up thinking that life on board ship was all there was. I had accepted my world and it mattered not to me that there was another world out there called "land." But what always did hold me in awe was the glint in the rich man's eyes when he would tell me of the "land of the living." That seemed altogether different than the world out there beyond the ship.

At every opportunity as I was growing up I would sit at the knee of my friend and inquire of this land that caused his eyes to glisten. I asked him if it were heaven and he would simply smile down at me and say, "Yes, my child, and it is earth." I asked him about dying, about those whose bodies were cast overboard into the seas below. I told him that I had heard all the various preachers on board, how one had said that this was the way to get to heaven and how another would give an entirely different explanation of the way there.

The ship rolled on, as did the days.

One night there was a storm at sea that none of us will ever forget so long as the things of the ship mean anything to us.

We had just finished dinner and I was strolling on the upper deck with some friends. We had had a little wine and were a little giddy with the lovely evening. The stars were twinkling so brilliantly that we could have thought we were under a tent with lights hanging close above our heads. The wind, while at first a gentle breeze, soon began to blow with some intensity and rain began to splash against the boards beneath our feet as we noted the stars disappearing into the darkness of the stormy sky.

We huddled against a side wall under a tarp for a while, but soon found that the winds and rain seemed to have turned on side and were finding us under the tarp. We ran laughing for cover into one of the dining areas and had another glass of wine. We began to sing and dance and the ship began to skip and roll. We lifted our hearts in song even louder and danced even more, but soon the tables were sliding across the floor and we could no longer stand. The dancing and the shouting were over when someone fell and received a fairly severe wound.

The physician was called and one of the preachers came and the one who was wounded was taken away to be cared for, while the rest of us scattered to the safety and quieter atmosphere of our individual cabins.

Long after the singing and dancing I hugged the side of my bed, simply trying to stay steady while lying flat out. This great ship that we believed so much in, was rocking like a cradle in a hurricane. This was not the first storm we had experienced on board by any means, but it was certainly the worst. It seemed as though there would be no tomorrow.

I held on as tightly as I possibly could, but even with that I found myself on the floor several times. I began to cry out to the God that the preachers talked about. I wasn't sure whether to call Him God, or Father, or Jesus, or Mohammed, or Buddha, or Krishna, or even Him. I wasn't sure if the name mattered. I did, however, know

that this great ship that I staked my life on, was rocking with all the fury of a life and death experience. I seemed to have no choice but to become a believer in something, or someone, beyond where I seemed to be, very quickly!

The creaks and cracks of the ship's groaning against the storm, pummeled my hearing, frightening me to the point that I heard my self begging for help from someone beyond this little fragile person I thought of as my self. I tried to remember all the fantastic advertisements about the ship. I said to my self over and over, "the greatest ship in the world, the largest, the sturdiest, the most costly to build, the most advanced technology known to man." Over and over I repeated these claims, thinking that if I just focused on these facts, I would feel better about the condition I now seemed to be in.

The sea heaved and relaxed beneath the ship time and again and I wondered whether the ship would indeed hold as all the advertisements had claimed. The Titanic sunk didn't it? The unsinkable had sunk, why not the world I called home? Could it not go down into the murky dark waters the same as the Titanic?

Finally, and it seemed like days instead of hours, the swells began to diminish and the darkness gave way to the dawning of the new day. I picked my self up from the floor after having given up sleeping on the bunk, and looked out the porthole into a rising sun. Little lapping waves seemed to laugh at me from far below my window as though nothing had even happened during the night. All seemed to be well with the world, as though we had all dreamed the storm. Had we all only dreamed it?

I made my way to the dining room and found that breakfast was being served as usual. Some people were laughing and talking about the storm in the morning light, as though it had only been a great hoax, "Nothing to it," "No big deal." Yet others, like my self, still showed the after effects of a sleepless night. There was noised about that a couple of passengers had washed over board, but that was way down on the other end of the ship, and after all, there was nothing anyone could do about it, so it shouldn't ruin our day.

I found my friend and asked him how he had fared the storm. He said, "What storm?" - lifted an eyebrow, leaned back and smiled down at me. He was quite the image of a man; larger than most, taller and broader in the shoulders. He was quite a handsome figure, and of course, due to my great admiration of him, I thought of him as larger than life.

"What storm?" I almost shrieked, but he laughed.

"I have to admit that last night I was wondering which one of those preachers was right." I told him sheepishly, to which he simply replied, "There is only One that is right," but I did not ask him which and I do not to this day know why I didn't. I did, however, ask him several other questions.

"In 'the land of the living', as you refer to it, would there be storms there, or would I find security there from all storms? Are people ever swept overboard there? Can you get off the ship at that port? Is there solid ground there? What exactly would I find there?"

"Do you really want to know?" He asked. "I mean, really? Are you ready to know the answer to all questions? Or are you simply still shaken by a passing storm?" I started to answer, but he put his finger over his lips. I waited. We both sat there with our blankets over our laps looking out to the now passive sea.

After what seemed like a half hour of silence, I turned to him again. I really did want to know. Sure, the storm had been very frightening, and it had truly shaken me, but if its occurrence was to bring me to the point of asking, then so be it, and therefore I had to ask one more time. "What..." I turned to him and asked gently, almost in a whisper, "What would I find in the land of the living?"

He snored and I realized that he had fallen asleep as I sat pondering the question of a lifetime. He snored! How could he fall asleep as I was still tossing and turning with the storm of last night still raging in my heart?

I rose from my chair and went to the railing to stand and watch the sun rising over the calm waters below. Where was what had seemed to be "the storm of the century" or, at least to me, "a storm of the century"?

Where was that tremendous wind that had blown in out of nowhere and turned my world almost on end? Where were those waves that mounted up as monsters in the night clawing and punching that great ship? How could it all appear now only as a dream? How could it pass as another ship in the night and be so completely gone in the morning light?

And what of my friend, who smiled at the passing rage, and silenced my questioning heart? What kind of friend would go to sleep in the middle of what I thought of as a life crisis? And had not he heard that someone was injured last night in the dining room, seriously injured so much so that the physician and the preacher were summoned? How could he be so nonchalant about a storm that seemed to shake the world for the rest of us? This was a pretty amazing storm - and had not he heard that a couple of lives were lost on the other end of the ship? How could he just snore and ignore? Was he in some kind of denial?

A lot of people seem to be you know, in denial that is. They do not seem to understand how they came to be on this ship and they think they have to die to get off, so they don't ask questions, hoping that in "leaving well enough alone," they will pass through in a flurry of activity, and not have to consider what might have been, or even what could be. I assumed that either my friend was indeed in denial, or perhaps he understood something that I did not at this time. Whatever the case, he was unshaken, and I had to admit that, although initially it made me angry, I actually admired his ability to be so calm and undisturbed.

And so, I observed the passing waters below and the rising sun, and I too put aside, for the moment, the great questions of the ages, and the great shaking of the previous night which had caused me to ask them.

I went on about life as usual on the ship for some time. Life seemed as usual. The seasons changed and we moved southward. The southern breezes warmed my soul. The gentle surf below turned from deep ultramarine blue to cerulean and I enjoyed watching playful porpoises jump in the air, racing with the great ship.

These days were easy and quiet. In these days of ease, blue skies and fair weather, I did not wonder so much about "the land of the living." In these times I just simply did whatever the day called for and assumed that this was the way things were. Perhaps I was foolish to think that I could understand things beyond what my eyes could see from the ship. Perhaps I was just a silly girl. Perhaps I was out of my element to venture into such questions anyway. Perhaps I should just be content with life on board ship, and not wonder about life before, after, or beyond the ship. After all, did it not seem that all the others on board were content without knowing more than what they saw about them? They did not seem to be concerned any longer with a land beyond the ship, with what was going on in the passing world portside. They had even discontinued long ago going to the rail to watch that world pass by. They had lost interest in what might be there that they had never seen. The stories told had almost come to be thought of as fairy tales, but nothing they could hope to venture into ever again, except through death – as they saw it.

For quite a long time after the voyage began, especially the older voyagers, had told the children tales of the land beyond the ship, how life had been there, but as they died off, so did their stories. Books were written on board of the land where people lived, where trees grew as tall as three levels of the ship, where birds nested in the upper branches, far above what those below could even see.

I told an older woman one time about how my friend had told me about a place where the petals did not fall from the flower and she said, "Well, I don't remember it that way. I never saw one like that." I felt a little confused and hurt for my friend for a moment, because I admired him so that I was protective of all he said. I just knew that he wouldn't lie to me. He may have been mistaken, but he wouldn't lie.

Anyway, after many years the land stories were simply that, stories, and the telling of them was less and less as time went by. If they were told, they were told more from the perspective of the ship being all there was - with land being like an imaginary place, where no one could actually live.

My friend, who I had thought of as being old when I came to know him, seemed to stay the same as we traveled on. I seemed to age, but he stayed the same to me, and his presence continued to be a great comfort to me. I loved him dearly and learned simply to enjoy being with him.

One day while observing a great flock of birds headed south for winter he turned to me and said, "Your Self." I looked at him to ask what in the world he was talking about, but he had turned his back to me and was walking away. I started after him with my fingers held up to reach out for him, with the "What?" still poised unsaid on my tongue.

I never mentioned that moment to him again, but as I turned back to the flock of terns flying overhead I knew that he had answered my long ago question. He did not need to say more about that. Somehow I knew that he could tell me nothing about my Self. I would have to find those answers.

The old woman who had come aboard simply to die, had. The children I ran the decks with, playing hide and seek, had turned into dull bores, always talking about the weather, the passing seasons, the same old deck games and their competitions in and among themselves. The physician himself had passed away, but not before training someone else to do what he had done so that the people would have someone to bind their wounds.

The preachers too had trained their disciples and as one passed into the sea another rose to take his place. I still went about to their various meetings, but after listening to the same message time and time again it seemed to have no life in it for me anymore. The people seemed to wax and wane with their messages as well. One group would grow in number, while another would drop off, only to have its numbers swell, while the numbers in the first group dropped off, and so it went. While each group claimed to be gaining strength, and each group claimed to have the truth, I found the Buddhists seemed every bit as kind to me as the Christians, and the Jesuit Priests as deeply involved in their belief as the Jews. Who was right, I wondered, but then I remembered my friend telling me that there was only One that was right. And, I still was not sure which One this was.

I was especially fond of a little group of people who said that they just loved to get together and talk about what they heard God saying. I thought that was pretty interesting as none of the other groups claimed to "hear God" saying anything presently, only what God "had said" in the past, or what someone said that they had read that God said. I wondered exactly when it was that God had stopped speaking, what we could have done after the spectacular event of the ascension of Christ that had caused God to cease speaking to men. It seemed that most of the groups talked to God a lot, but there was very little listening. Perhaps God just couldn't get a word in edgewise. Who knows, but the group who said they got together to share what God was saying seemed to be the liveliest group of them all, so I suppose it was this particular group that influenced me to start "listening." It wasn't long before I started not only listening, but occasionally even ventured to "ask" a question or two here and there, like what was I doing on this great vessel and where exactly I had come from, and what was life like back on land. I had really forgotten pretty much anything about that since I was so very young when I came on board.

I ventured to ask my parents one time what life was like before I was born, but they just went on and on about the birth itself, as if there was no life before I was born. They had a certificate to authenticate my birth, however, so I suppose I was born. But life before birth, now that would just have to wait until another time, but the question never passed my lips again.

There came a time when I felt that the part of the ship I had come to know so well was beginning to lack interest to me. I made a major decision to change my cabin to another deck on a higher level than my original location. It meant leaving some of my family and friends on the lower deck, but they lovingly assured me that I could return home anytime - or even for just a visit. We hugged and shed a few tears and then laughed at ourselves because we all knew I couldn't really "go" anywhere. They reminded me that they "were only a heartbeat away" – or, one flight, however we might think of it.

I moved on a lovely spring day and even though I was only one flight up and a little more towards the bow, the air seemed refreshingly new. It was just being in a new place I knew, but sometimes just a different perspective is all we need.

The move brought me in contact with new travelers and I began to develop new relationships with some very interesting folks. There was the man who told me that he came on board with his twin brother. His brother had

been an artist and he still had a cabin with its walls covered in his brother's paintings. His twin had fallen ill not long after boarding and had since passed from the ship into the waters that carried us from port to port.

He said that they were so exuberant about this trip, his brother more so than he. But they had both come aboard with great hopes for a future together, only to find that what they had left behind was actually more exciting and wonderful than the world they had come to know on board. His brother's anticipation and further disappointment is what he believed had taken his life eventually. "Depression" he said sadly one day, "Depression finally got the best of him."

"Did you ever seek any help for him? There are some fine counselors on board and what about the preachers or the doctors? Could no one do anything for him?"

"No. No, sad to say. They all were very kind and willing to help, but they simply were at their wits end as to how to cheer someone who so deeply wished to return to land, a place that time on board has caused us to forget more and more with every passing day. The doctors gave him some pills and the preachers came and were willing to pray with him, but he sank deeper and deeper into despair. He just kept saying, 'But all my family, other than you my dear brother, are there. All our loved ones are there and I miss them so. I wish we had never signed up for this voyage. I love you, and I don't mean to say I don't appreciate life as we have come to know it, but its hard living on board this ship day in and day out. I miss the colors of flowers and trees. I miss the sights and sounds of the city. I miss birds singing at my window, and flowers rising at my feet on our little path in the garden. Life here is fine and there is very little really to complain about, but here seems so far from there, brother, so far from there.'"

"So, we buried him two and a half years after coming on board, and not a day goes by that I don't think of him."

"Question. What if you could go back to before this voyage would you? Would you miss this experience if you had the choice?"

"Hummmmmmm, that's a hard one. It's like I had no choice really. It just seemed to happen, being here that is. I thought about it a great deal when my brother mentioned the voyage, but then it all seemed to just happen from there. I don't remember saying yes or no, but somehow we ended up just doing it. If I had a choice, hummmm, well, really I'm not sure anyone had a choice to come on board, but here we are and so we make the most of it for the time being."

"You don't think anyone had a choice to be here?"

"Well, it doesn't appear that they did, but if they did they obviously chose to be here."

"You don't think we could just be here by chance then?"

"I don't think anything is by chance, my dear. I think that things just happen and then we have to go through whatever it is we are going through."

"Well, I like to think that I had the choice and made the choice of a lifetime, even though it appears that my parents are responsible for my being here. Somehow I think that where I am right now is where I am meant to be for a time, and that those who are still on land are missing something by not coming here."

"I have heard that there have actually been many voyagers who have actually returned to land over time. What do you think about that? Have you ever heard that?"

"Well, I have a friend who knows about such things. He may know. Perhaps I'll ask him." I never did ask him, but somehow I knew that this was true.

Another couple I came to know were newly weds when they came on board. They had never had any children, but they were extremely devoted to one another and very happily married. They did not seem ill content to be aboard at all, in fact it seemed to be a floating paradise to them. I asked them one evening at dinner what was

the secret of their contentment with their life aboard ship and they never hesitated, but both answered at once: "Love." He went on to tell me that, "Love is the answer to everything for us. You see, both of us were products of broken homes and there was a lot of fighting that took place there - with a number of problems contributing. Before we met we had both decided that when we did marry it would be for a lifetime and that we would weather any storm and stand by our partner no matter what."

"Wow, that's lovely. Coming on board ship is an interesting place to weather out storms." I suggested, but they just looked into one another's eyes and smiled as though they possessed a secret that no one else knew.

I started to ask them if they remembered "the storm of the century," but before I could manage to even finish the question they both answered, "No." How could they not remember that storm? I could only suppose that when you are that much in love there are some things that you just don't notice. But that was "the" storm of this voyage so far, so it was difficult for me to believe that even "Love" could have caused them not to take notice.

"You don't remember that storm?" I asked. "I won't soon forget it. It threw me for a loop, literally!"

"No, honestly sometimes we just don't pay any attention to the things that happen on board. We figure we are here for the duration. And if anything should happen to one of us then the other is still here for the duration, so we will enjoy the ride for however long it lasts and see what happens as we go along."

"So you weren't afraid the night of that tremendous storm?"

"Love just conquers all, I suppose," she said, "and perfect love casts out all fear." And we let it go at that.

Another new friend I met was a really unusual character. She was 92 years old and she was as feisty as a cat. She was blind and had been blind all her 92 years.

One afternoon I was on the main deck and she was seated with a lovely crocheted afghan over her lap. I asked her about it and she said that she had made it herself. "What? You did it?"

"Why? You don't think an old lady can crochet?"

"Well, yes, but you are..." and I stammered, biting my tongue, wishing I had not let myself get into this conversation fearing I would hurt her feelings.

"Blind," she said, "blind. You can say it! I'm 92 years old, I've heard it before. I'm actually pretty used to it, my dear. Its okay. You didn't embarrass me or hurt my feelings, so don't you be embarrassed."

"Thank you. Its just that the afghan is so lovely and the colors so balanced throughout. I'm not sure I could do that well and I have my sight."

"Well, I'm glad you like it. You see I have a secret. Would you like to know my secret?"

"Well, sure."

"I can see, but not with my eyes."

"Not with your eyes?"

"No. You don't see with your eyes either, my dear. You only think you do. No one sees with their eyes. You don't really hear with your ears either." And she laughed so I thought it was a joke at first, but then she grew very still and placed her hand over on mine as though she knew it was right there on the arm of the deck chair, as though she had seen it there. She drew up close to my face and though her eyes were the color of the South Seas and showed no sign of sight, they seemed to sparkle around the edges. And she almost whispered to me, "I can see you."

For a moment I thought she wasn't actually blind, but one look at her pupils and the iris the color of seaweed, all clouded over like the early morning mist, lifeless and transfixed, told me that she was most certainly blind.

"You can see me?" I asked. "How?"

"Well, I already did." And she sat back against her chair again smiling. She sat there as if she staring out at the sea for a moment. I was speechless.

I finally ventured a little further into her seemingly sightless world.

"May I ask you a question?"

"Certainly," and the sparkle was back around the edges of her eyes as her laugh lines spread deeply across her temples.

"When you see me, what do you see?"

Quiet, for a while, just quietly she sat there. I almost thought she had not heard the question. I was about to pose the question again when she reached again for my hand on the arm of the chair and squeezed it gently, turning again in my direction as if to look at me.

"I see a beautiful life. I see a perfectly beautiful form which appears somewhat like a child, somewhat like a young woman, and even somewhat like a young man. Oh, I know you are a young lady, don't think I'm crazy, but to me when you have never actually seen a feminine form, whether it is male or female matters not. It is the life itself that is beautiful. What difference is it to me if it be called male or female! They are both the same to the one who has never seen either."

"Oh, then you do not actually see me?"

"Oh, but I do! What are you - but the life you are? Yes, I feel your hand and I know you have a body, but whether it is old or young, freckled or fair, red headed or black, yellow, brown, white or red, I wouldn't know the difference. And what difference would it make? That appearance you most likely approve of before the mirror is nothing. It is like a mask you wear. The body I see is like a light glowing and pulsating - a moving light, like the fireflies we used to see in the late summer evenings on land. To me you are just like that little firefly moving about in a sea of darkness. All bodies are like that to me. And just like that little firefly you can see where you are, but the world around you is all dark to the onlooker, the one trying to catch them in the dark. We used to catch those little things in jars on land. That always bothered me. I always felt like they must have felt trapped, afraid, thinking they were certainly going to die trapped in those little jars. I always set them free when the children who caught them weren't looking."

"But, but how did you see the fireflies? And you say when the other children weren't looking? I don't understand, I'm sorry."

"You see when you don't have sight as you think you have it, you learn to use the other senses to a greater degree. I saw those little fireflies even without eyes. We have eyes in our heart, my dear. We see more than most. All of us can come to see beyond what we have only thought we could see, if we so desire. We have inner ears as well, that hear, and we are more sensitive to what is going on around us because of that. I would hear when the children placed the jar upon the step. And when they ran off to play I knew exactly where that jar was and would just reach right down and pick it up and set those little lights free. I'm still setting lights free, my dear. I'm still opening jars and setting the lights free."

I hugged her and she hugged me back with more strength than I was aware a 92-year-old woman could possess. Suddenly I saw her body differently as well.

And with my eyes closed and my arms around her frail body, I suddenly saw a light as well, no, I felt a light, hummmm, I don't know what it was, but there was a light with my eyes closed that I had not seen with my eyes open. And there we were, the two of us huddled in a little pool of light, her with her blind eyes, and I, with my eyes blind to the inner world which I had known nothing about until that moment.

When finally we pulled back from one another I saw her in a whole new light and I knew she and I had crossed some sort of barrier into another place, just beyond what eyes could see.

When I left her sitting there under her lovely little afghan my heart yearned for her. I did not want to leave her as she seemed so small now when I looked back at her from the eyes I had been accustomed to seeing with, but she had given me something that afternoon that would change my perspective of everything forever.

"Go on now," she said, sort of shooing me away as if I were a little dog which had come sniffing too closely. But she smiled and she looked at me, no, she looked into me, and somehow I knew that I could never leave her and she would never leave me, no matter what.

I also met a little boy, a wonderful little boy that had been born on ship. Of course this ship had set sail long ago and he was just appearing on board, so knew nothing of "land." He was just 4, but he would tell you he was "old for his age."

He won my heart immediately. I would sit for hours and listen to his imaginary stories and wonder where he came up with some of the things he told.

In one of his stories he said that he had come from a place where all of us on the ship all really lived. He said that he had known all of us already in this place from which he had come. He had seen us there before he was born, he said. He went around to those of us sitting on deck listening to his little story and pointed to us and said, "I know you. I saw you there. You didn't look quite the same there."

"I hope I looked younger," one hearer laughed and said.

"Was I a real blonde there?" Another joked and we all laughed with her.

"No, you didn't look younger, but you looked like you had never been any other way than how you looked, not younger, not older. You were just being."

"Being what?"

"Just being." He said a little exasperated that we "adults" could not understand the story of a child.

"Okay, honey," another spoke up trying to keep the little fellow from becoming angry with us for being so stupid as not to understand. "Tell me this...was I married there? I have always wanted to be married, but never found the right man. Maybe the right man is in this place where you met me before."

"Nobody is married there, but its okay. Babies are not born there either, so you don't need mommies and daddies."

"What was I doing there? I know, "just being," but was there anything special I was doing when you saw me?"

"You were shining."

"Shining? Like shining shoes or shining silver?"

"No, just shining. I do remember you told me something. You said, "You are going to be a beautiful boy." Do you think I'm a beautiful boy like you said?"

"Yes, darling, you are a beautiful boy, a beautiful, beautiful boy."

"My mommy sings a song to me like that sometimes."

"Oh, I know I've heard that song before. Someone made a lot of money off that song one time."

"I taught it to my mommy."

"YOU taught it to your mommy! You mean your mommy taught it to you!"

"No, I taught it to my mommy."

"You must have heard someone singing it on board. It is a lovely song."

"No. I heard someone sing it before I came to the ship. I heard someone sing it before I came to the ship."

"But honey, you were born on the ship!"

"Was I?"

He asked, but no one answered. Not even his Mommy.

One lovely sunny fall morning, when the air was crisp and sweaters were adorned to walk the decks, what appeared to be a dreadful thing broke in upon the quietness of the morning.

Our lovely little 4-year-old climbed, as 4-year-olds will do, up a pole onto a railing and on upwards to a mast. His beautiful blonde hair blowing in the crisp autumn air, with his hand held out to wave, he called to his unsuspecting mother below. "Mommy, look I'm flying!"

All of us on the deck that morning turned to see the little fellow holding with one hand while both legs wrapped the pole. Way above our head he had shinnied, up perhaps 2 flights and hung there as if the pole were his kite string and he the kite. Laughing and waving we watched as it all unraveled before us. Not a second to spare, not a moment for Mother to even call his name and he was falling, falling with a look on his little face that would be etched in our thoughts for some time to come. We all stood, frozen to the spot, unable to move a muscle, unable to be there for the landing. Onto his little golden head he fell and the entire crowd stopped in time to see that golden head lying still and lifeless.

None of us could move, until almost without a sound someone stepped from the crowd and knelt beside the lifeless figure of a child, a beautiful, beautiful boy.

Stiffened old fingers reached out for the floor so that the little lady of 92 could brace herself to come down on a feeble bended knee. "Child," she called, "Child." The child was still, no breathing, no pulse, nothing. "Child, come here!" She commanded and waited. "Child, come back here. Come on now, come back." Tears engulfed the silent crowd. We all wished for "our child" to return, to come to life again! Except for a preacher praying softly out loud and others whose lips seemed to be silently praying, there was no movement from those gathered around. The mother knelt on the deck behind the old lady silently sobbing, her hands white-knuckled at her mouth. Someone knelt beside the little fellow and checked his neck for a pulse, no pulse. Someone else checked his wrist, no pulse.

The little old lady of 92 put her hands on his stomach and said as though she were calling him into the house from out of a backyard play. "Sonny, you come in here right now, you here me!" You know that call, the way you have heard your grandmother call you after coming to the backdoor several times to call you in, and you just ignored her, but this time she means business!!!

Suddenly the little stomach sunk inward, the lungs seemed to fill from the inside. Out from his little mouth came a mumble and a deep breath. She whispered his name and he opened his crystal blue eyes to her

lifeless, cloudy, blue ones and they both smiled. She saw and she knew that he saw too, that they were one in life. For just a moment the mask that they both seemed to wear was transparent for all who had eyes to see. And they both seemed to be pooled in that same white light that she and I had both enjoyed just a short while ago.

This was no near-death experience. This was an “in-life” experience and yet it was to be interpreted many different ways, depending upon where everyone who had witnessed it was standing.

For just a moment time had ceased to be. It seemed that two very different sets of eyes witnessed that incident that morning. Depending on your point of view there were the eyes of the on-lookers, and the inner eyes that I had been shown, the eyes of the heart. Both had their own perspective of what had occurred. The ones who did not know they had inner eyes went away speaking in quiet tones to one another that the child had only been unconscious, had not really been dead. Others, of like vision, said that he had indeed died, but had “sort of self-resuscitated.” Others said the woman pressed on the little stomach and that acted as some kind of CPR, but some of us knew. Some of us knew that whether you call it Life or you call it God, the One that knew what was right, had made an appearance in the form of an old woman and a beautiful, beautiful boy of four. The Truth was there for anyone to see who was able to see it.

Time seemed to pass slower on the vessel than it had on land. Perhaps it was because the seasons did not change in the same way. We marked the seasons by the temperature, by the currents, by the stars, by the rising and setting sun, by the birds which called to us from overhead telling us they were making their seasonal trek to the warmer or cooler climes.

I often sat with my friend who remained always the same, and we talked little. I simply enjoyed his presence. But he was particularly talkative one evening as we sat huddled under several layers of winter blankets out on the upper deck under a brilliant winter night’s sky.

His pipe smelled of a roasted blend that reminded me of a home I had never known on board. How was that possible? I do not know. I did not care, but it spoke to me of a land I was not familiar with, where home fires burned, snow fell on rooftops, and soup simmered on a stove. How could a smell do all that? Was this not the senses being taken into another place as the little old lady talked about? Was this not broadening the senses so that what you heard caused you to see, and what you saw caused you to hear and what you tasted was something in the air and what you smelled took you home?

My friend sat this evening puffing on his pipe. I never asked where his tobacco came from after so many years on board a ship that never docked, just as none of us asked where the continual food supply came from, or the unlimited heat supply, or water supply, or supply supply! It always just seemed to be there, whatever we needed and pretty much whatever we wanted. Oh, some claimed that they earned their way by working on board, but regardless, where these things came from to a ship that never made port anywhere, we could not begin to imagine.

“You have pretty much stopped asking questions, little girl.” He called me this although I was way past being a little girl. “Why do you no longer ask questions? Have you figured everything out?”

“Oh my, no.” I answered. “I guess I’ve just felt comfortable with things the way they are. Why question what you cannot begin to understand?”

“Who said you could not understand anything? You can understand whatever you wish to understand.”

“Oh yeah, well, I would like to understand what the heck I am doing on this ship, and why I can never know the pleasure of setting my feet on land, where I was before I was born and came to live on this ship, why I have to die to leave and why I can never know the things of there as well as the things of here!”

“Whoa. Okay, thought you didn’t have any more questions. Thought you were ‘comfortable.’”

"Well, to tell you the truth, I thought I was, and I don't know where those questions came from. I don't know why I said all that, except I suppose in my heart I do want to know, but have supposed I would never be able to understand even if I did ask."

"Hummmm," taking another long puff on the pipe and holding it between his teeth he began to simply breathe deeply.

I thought, "Don't you go to sleep on me again. Don't you pull me out here where I bear my heart, get me all stirred up - and start snoring!" I then smiled softly to myself.

Almost as though he could hear my thoughts he started softly laughing.

"What? What are you laughing at? You asked me if I had any questions and I told you. Now, what are you laughing at? Oh well, I'd rather have you laughing than snoring. You did that on me one time, you know."

"Yes, but I did answer your question – you know." He said mocking me and laughing softly to himself.

I knew him well enough now to know that we were playing a game of sorts. He would never do anything to hurt me or my feelings. We had an unspoken secret between us, a pact, an understanding, a covenant. I would never hurt him because I loved him deeply, and he would never hurt me for the very same reason.

I was saying to him, "Yes, I know you answered my question, but you sure took long enough to tell me what I wanted to know."

"No, you just took a long time to listen and then what seemed like a longer time to hear."

A lady walked past us at that moment that I felt like I recognized. Her face sure was familiar, but I, for the life of me, could not recall where I might have known her.

"You knew her on the lower deck when you lived down there."

"How did you know I was thinking that?"

"I saw you watch her and saw the expression on your face and I remember when you met her. That night of the 'great storm'," he jeered and laughed a little, poking a little fun at me while taking another puff on the pipe, "you left the dining room with a little too much wine in you and the ship was shifting pretty good. Between the wine and the rocking and rolling you were having a hard time getting down the stairs. That kind lady helped you get to your room that night. I don't suppose you remember that, do you?"

"Well, now that you mention it, I do seem to remember something about it, but that seems like another lifetime. So much has come and gone since then, and so many have come and gone. Friends, family, all have changed, even my living arrangements. And not living on that level now I don't remember a lot of the people I knew down there. Anyway, it all seems like a dream now."

"Well, and so it is." He puffed on his pipe again, and shifted the blankets, which he snuggled up to his chin.

"So what about my questions? You asked me if I had any questions."

"Wait a minute, that lady didn't live down on the level you did. She lived and still lives up on first deck. She was merely helping you get back to where you needed to be, back to the safety of your own deck and cabin that night."

"Okay, what difference does that make?"

"We sometimes fail to see the distance some go for us, little girl. This was a very unsteady boat that night. It matters not which deck she lived on, or which deck you lived on, but rather that she was willing to risk her own safety to see you home that night."

"Well, gee, you are making me feel guilty. I feel like I must go apologize to that lady for having never thanked her for something that seems to be ages ago."

"Well, it was ages ago and I'm sure you are forgiven and that it is forgotten as far as she is concerned. She would most likely remember you, but I doubt if it's kept her awake."

"Well, then why did you make me feel guilty?"

"No one can make you feel guilty. You only can do that to your own little self! Relax, I just wanted you to be more aware."

"Sheeeeeeeee, I don't understand you sometimes."

"And you won't until you understand your first question, and the answer to it."

"What first question, you mean, let's see what did I ask you first? Oh yeah, what the heck am I doing on this ship anyway? I don't recall asking to be here or even to have had a choice in the matter."

"You were chosen alright. You may not have had a choice, but you were chosen."

"Wait a minute. I was chosen? For what? To sail this ship of fools? To take a venture that day in and day out seems more like a dream than reality? How was I chosen?"

"Okay, little girl, hear this and hear it well, but don't speak of it again tonight. Just let it be and we will speak of this again in the morning light."

"Alright," I almost whispered leaning over towards him now. I knew he was getting ready to reveal something to me that I had been waiting what seemed like forever to hear.

"Before you ever came on board this vessel, before your earliest recollections, before you ever even thought you had parents, you were chosen to have the adventure of a lifetime, and all is not exactly as it appears to you. You are not on a ship of fools. No. Never let me hear you say that again! You are here because all of us were chosen in the exact same way you were, not because you were not special, but because you are! And all of these people are on the same boat you are, and you could say, "in the same boat" you are, but not all of them ask the questions you do, and so they cannot begin at this point in time to realize how special they are and why they are here."

"Well, that still does not answer why I am here."

"You are here because you were to experience many things that you could not experience otherwise. For you to know all that you can know you would have to have had this experience as well. Now don't ask any more about that question tonight. As I said, we will address this again in the morning. Go to your cabin tonight and be still. Lie still on your bunk and listen to your heart. It will reveal more about this than I could ever tell you."

"Alright, I will, but may I ask the second question again, because I really want to know the answer to that one."

"Okay, go ahead, but I will tell you that you will understand more if you will not try to get ahead of your self. If you will let these things come to you gradually, although it may appear to take time, the answers will come."

Okay, go ahead, shoot."

"Will I never be able to set foot on dry land? Am I going to always have to wonder what that would be like? I know I have been there before, but I was so small, so small that I cannot now remember what life before this ship was like, what the ground feels like underfoot or anything. Will I have to live and die on this ship?"

"Oh my child, I hear your heart's cry. I really do, and I can only tell you what I know. If this is truly a desire of your heart, you will have it. Do you know why?"

"Because I want it so badly?"

"Well, yes, but you want it so badly because you already have it."

"What? That makes absolutely no sense to me."

"I know. I know."

He sat puffing for what seemed like a very long time, but was probably only a moment.

"The reason anyone wants anything is because it is already there for them. If it was not already there they would not even have it come to mind. If it were not already there it could not be. If it were not already right here, we would never think to ask for it. There are many things you never ask for, why? Because they are not here for you or they would begin to press on your mind, and press on your mind, until you would ask for them.

"Well, if that's the case, and knowing that, why don't you ask to get off the ship yourself?"

Silence again, long, dreadfully long, silence.

"Because, I am not on the ship, little girl. I am not on the boat. I have never been on the boat, so I have nothing to 'get off of.'"

"What? You're not on the ship! Right. So, then I'm not on the ship either! Because I'm sitting right here on this deck, shivering under the blankets up to our chins, under these stars and a full moon that lights everything like a spotlight with you, and you say you are not on this ship! Oh, wow, I thought you were going to tell me something. I wanted so much to believe you when you said I would understand, and even more when you said I would be able to 'have my heart's desire' and get off the ship, and now you say you are not even on the ship! So, I'm talking with a crazy man. I must be crazy to be talking to someone who is not even here!"

And I sat back against the chair with hot tears running down my cheeks, not knowing what to believe. I had trusted this friend for many moons! I had sat with him and listened to his wisdom for years. I had believed that he was indeed a sane man, with a good heart that would never hurt me. How could he say he was not on the ship! When he sat right here beside me.

He sat up on the edge of the deckchair and looked straight into my eyes. His eyes too had filled with tears. Why? Now mine heart began to soften towards him. What was I missing?

"Little girl. All that we see is not as it seems. We appear to be here, and we think that there is another place over there or out there, some call it land, some call it heaven. To believe we are 'here', and it is 'there' is a false assumption. And so we dream. And we plan - and we work our little selves into a frazzle trying to figure something out that cannot be figured out.

Go on to bed now, but remember this, what you cannot figure out you will understand when you stop trying to figure it out.

Remember the day that our precious little fellow fell from the mast? Remember Grand, how she stooped and spoke to him? You knew he was gone didn't you? Sure you did. You knew that no matter what anyone thought that day he had passed from this ship into the great unknown. You knew that didn't you? Okay, but you saw something that day that although you didn't understand it, and knew you could never figure it out, you would always have that point of reference where you would know that figuring it out was not important. Realizing it as having taken place was all that was needed. Seeing life being again, as our little lad, was all that was important.

Faith, little girl. Faith. We say we have it, and we shout "Amen!" when the preachers preach about it. But when we have to have it in order to be able to understand the really important answers, as well as what questions to ask, we make up all kinds of reasons for things rather than using our faith, going to the Source and waiting for the answer. We prefer to jump in there and do it the way we've always done it, rather than waiting for an answer that can only come to us by being still and waiting.

When something happens that we don't understand we prefer to turn back over and pull the covers higher up over our head, to say our prayers that we have said night after night, begging, pleading, crying - and dying without knowing the truth. By never questioning, and never being still long enough to hear the still small voice within, we fail not only to hear the answer to our questions, but to see what is right here for us to see, if we would only open our eyes, our inner eyes, the eyes of the heart. If we do begin to receive an answer that in no way sounds feasible to us, then we balk and run and hide, and say, "That couldn't possibly be possible." Well, just because you have never seen it that way before, doesn't mean it is impossible. Our little golden headed child fell farther than some men have fallen and died. His soft little head all but broke open upon hitting that well-polished deck that day, but some of us brushed it off. Some of us made excuses for what happened. Some of us went home that night and thanked God. Some of us laughed at Grand for thinking she could 'raise the dead.' Some of us sloughed it off as though it had never happened rather than stopping to consider what we had been witness to.

The fact of the matter is, we have all seen Life and brushed it aside due to our inability to figure it out. Because we think we can never understand we choose not to think about it. Well, thinking and figuring will do no good, little girl, but if you will close your eyes to the world which appears to be around you, you will find that which is ain't necessarily as it appears! Now go to bed and let this all seep into you as water into a sponge. And don't worry about it. You can do no wrong. You have not offended me in anyway and I trust I have not offended you. You have a desire in your heart and questions that will be answered, all of them, but you will have to let the truth come to you. Don't try breaking down that door. It will open if you knock ever so gently, and listen. The voice that will answer your knock and invite you in will seem more familiar to you than you can imagine. Just like the lady on the deck which you knew you had met somewhere before, the voice that answers you will sound as familiar as your own."

There was a brief moment of quiet stillness when he finished speaking to me. I knew he had said much more than I could grasp at that moment. I leaned over and kissed him lightly on the cheek and for the first time I told him that I loved him. He told me that he loved me too, and said, "I always have, always will."

I held his hand for another brief moment and then left the deck quietly. I entered my cabin quietly, barely slipping out of my clothes and slid softly under the sheet. I lay there a very long time on my back, listening. Listening, listening. What exactly I hoped to hear I did not know, but I listened anyway.

I never really knew when I fell off to sleep. The morning light came through the porthole and awakened me. I got up and pulled the curtain and lay back down. Again I lay on my back and listened. What am I listening for? I thought, and then I knew that what I was listening for was the voice of God, the one the preachers talked about and called by their various names, Allah, Krishna, Buddha, Christ, Jesus, Jesus Christ, Almighty God, Father, Yah, Jehovah - names I had heard them repeatedly use in their religious ceremonies. This One was what I was listening for. Somehow I knew that when I found this One I would find my Self.

As I lay there in the softness of the morning, with the light causing my deep blue curtains to appear pale blue, I began to see the light myself. "Things are not always as they seem, not always as they appear to be," I thought. Deep blue appears light blue in the sunlight. It appears to be sun 'up', but the sun never really goes 'down.' It appears that the moon has disappeared. It appears to be another day. It appears that I am on a ship. It appears that the ship will go over the horizon, while it never does go over anything. And it appears that I am the one he calls little girl lying here on a cabin bunk in the middle of the deep blue sea, somewhere in time. But whether I am on a ship or not, whether I am a woman or the young man Grand saw, or whether our little guy knew me in another place, there is at least one thing I do know for certain: I AM. I am and I will be, because what else could I ever be other than I am, no matter where I appear to be.

Is this what a night of listening produces? I dressed thinking of this very thing and it seemed as though I had begun a new voyage, a new venture, that of listening, listening, listening. And I felt like the voyage had just left dry dock.

That morning I found my friend leaning on the railing on portside. He smiled down to me as though we had not passed a night, but rather had been standing together right here all night long.

"You know, I was just thinking," he said, "when the light comes through the window it is diffused light. When you stand in it, it engulfs you. You become one with it. You then diffuse the light. Is this not a glorious morning?" He turned and leaned his back against the rail, took his pipe from his pocket and lit it, looking up into the cobalt sky above us.

"Did you sleep well?" He asked.

"I did, and I listened."

"You did? Good for you. It will become a passion for you. And in listening you will come to know what questions to ask. Did you hear?"

I nodded.

"And what did you hear?"

"That I am here no matter what, with or without a ship, with or without anything that appears to be, I am."

"Wonderful night, wasn't it? The ship sailed through some deep waters last night. We should be seeing some of the light blues of the Caribbean soon."

Silence. I was not quite so prone to speak abruptly this morning. Perhaps it was a mood I was in, or perhaps it was that I knew there were more important things to listen to than to say now.

## CHAPTER TWO

We did indeed pass into the lovely cerulean seas of the Caribbean in the next few days. Temperatures rose and the lighter air, warmer winds seemed to buoy us all into a lighter mood. Deck chairs were naked again as their winter blankets were stored.

The sound of the big band from the ballroom wafted across the evening air as the deck hands propped the doors open to the fresh and fragrant currents of the islands. People came from below simply to drink in the warm evening. They stood along the railings, breathing deeply with their heads tilted upwards towards the brilliant canopy above them. There was a magic sense in the air as if something grand were going to happen, something that one would otherwise not be able to experience were it not for this southern port-of-call.

We had pulled in fairly close during the night to a port that we actually could lean over the railings and see fairly well. The magic in the air seemed to have enlivened the people on land as well, as we heard music coming from below and beyond the ship. For once some of the voyagers came to observe this port, to attempt to mingle in their mind with the land rovers. Music and laughter ascended from the shore and we all became pretty caught up in this festive atmosphere. Voyagers began to dance on the deck. Everyone was dancing. Our little fellow who had showed us the magic of Life's great mystery came and asked me to dance with him. He had turned a birthday in the last few days and wanted to tell me about it.

"We had a party." He said.

"Oh yeah, what did you do?"

"Mommy had the chef make me a cake! You should have been there. Everybody in the kitchen came out and sang happy birthday. They put me up on the piano and sang to me. It was such fun."

"I would have been there had I known. But I'm glad you had such a fine time. We are just so glad you are still here, little man. You gave us all quite a scare that day when you fell."

"Of course I'm here! Where else could I be?"

I was silenced by his remark. Of course he was here, was that not what I had heard last evening? Of course he was HERE, are not we all HERE that is? And where else, as he said, could we possibly be?

He danced with me and I finally picked him up and swirled him around in the air as he threw that golden head back and laughed with the belly laugh only a child can make.

I stood him on a chair and we looked at the moon and the stars for a long time. We looked overboard to the festive streets below with their street lights causing there to be little puddles of light on the cobblestone below. We heard a woman laugh and looked at each other and laughed too, feeling as if those there and those here were somehow joined at the hip of the ship. Perhaps they were, perhaps we were all joined, and perhaps it was actually a joining at the heart.

I held his little hand in mine and we watched one moment the happenings on board, the next the happenings in another world, the world we called "land."

"Do you ever wish to go there?" I asked him.

"Go where?" he asked, looking at me as if I had asked him if he wished to go to the moon.

"There! Down there to the shore. Do you ever wish to leave the boat and go on land?"

"Why?"

"Oh I don't know, maybe because you have never been there, maybe because it would be different from just being on this old ship all the time."

"No."

"You wouldn't like to visit land sometime?"

"No. I like it here with you."

"But what if I were there?"

"How could you be there? If you were there you would call it here, wouldn't you?"

"Yes, I suppose you have a point. Then you see no difference in being up here on this big floating vessel than being down there on land, or out there somewhere in the vast expanse of the world?"

"All I know is here and I like it here."

"Okay. Wanna go get something to drink, and maybe some nice warm fresh baked bread?"

"Sure." So we went into the kitchen where our friend who baked this wonderful bread fresh every evening served us big slices with butter and jam. We sat on a bar stool with butter dripping down our chins and laughed and talked and forgot about the world "out there" or "over there." All that mattered was here, just as he said. What more could we want than to be right where we are, enjoying tea and warm bread with butter and jam?

The night held its air of excitement right up until I carried our little friend down to his stateroom with his sleepy head against my shoulder. His mother met me at the door and thanked me for bringing him “home.”

“Home,” I said to myself as I left her cabin. “Home truly is where the heart is.” And to him and to me it was a cabin on the starboard side of the same ship. All of us on this ship were lifted and carried wherever we went by the means of a power we could not fully comprehend. All of us, no matter what our beliefs, no matter what our so-called nationality, no matter how we saw God, no matter where we thought our ancestors came from, or where we thought we were headed, were all being buoyed over open waters by a power that moved day and night non stop. This mighty power met our needs, and saw that everything that any passenger made request for was met, sometimes sooner than later, but never too late. We ate, slept, and went our separate ways every morning, but we were all carried about by the same power on the same vessel. And we depended upon this great vessel to keep us afloat when the storms came as well as when we drifted in the gentle southern currents.

“Home. Next question I suppose. Why do I always think I have to ‘go’ somewhere? Why cannot I just be satisfied with where I am?”

I went to sleep listening again and awoke listening in the morning. What I heard I wasn’t sure right away. In fact, I wasn’t sure I had heard anything at all, but I was doing what I had been told to do and hey, it made going to sleep easier, so why not?

As I entered the dining room for breakfast the festive mood of the night before had sunk into a heaviness with which I was unfamiliar. Except for the clinking sound of dishes being stacked, forks tinkling against the china, or ice machines dropping ice into glasses, there was no sound. No one was speaking except in a whispered tone to pass something.

I said good morning to the wait person who came to my table and he barely returned with a nod. His eyes fell immediately to the water glass he poured full and he backed away.

“What in the world?” - I thought.

As my breakfast was being set before me my friend entered the great doors of the dining room and headed my way. His form was so large that he nearly blocked out the sun when he came through the doors. I could see nothing at first but the darkened figure of a man I knew could only be him.

He came immediately to my table and pulled out a chair.

“What’s going on around here this morning?” - I asked. “Its like someone has died.” Then I caught myself. Had someone died? Oh my gosh, I waited expectantly watching his eyes, waiting for him to look up at me.

“Grand.”

“Grand what?”

“Grand passed over the side last night.”

“What! Grand died?”

“Well, I wouldn’t say that.”

“Well, then what do you mean?”

“We were out on the deck when you were dancing with our little friend. I saw you two. You were having a great time, weren’t you?”

“Yes, but...”

“Grand came up on deck with her little blue shawl over her shoulders, came right up to me and said, ‘Care to take an old lady for a spin’? I thought she meant a walk around the deck, so I said sure. She meant ‘a spin.’ She wanted to dance! Can you believe it! She lifted her hand to mine and we danced and danced until she was fairly given out. I didn’t even know she could. Finally when I looked over and saw you lift that little fellow off his feet, I lifted Grand off her feet and we danced some more. We must have been quite a sight, me, this burly old form that I am hugging this little old grandma to my chest with her little blue slippers dangling from her tiny heels, and a blue shawl hanging over her shoulders, spinning around laughing.

When I sat her down finally she let out a ‘Whew’ and a giggle like a school girl. ‘Why Grand’, I said, ‘I didn’t know you had it in ya!’ That was great fun. Thanks for getting this mountain to move!”

“We have only to speak to it!” She laughed and said.

“We sat almost to 10:30, and you know that’s late for Grand, right there in those two deck chairs just out side the door there. She laughed and talked like we were young folks without a care in the world. Finally, I walked her to her stateroom to say good evening. Right before she closed the door, she reached out and held my arm for a moment. Her hand shook just a little, but she had a firm grip.

She said to me in a moment of sudden seriousness, ‘Thank you for taking an old lady dancin.’ I haven’t had so much fun in many years. One thing before you go. We are the same, you and I. When you picked me up and we danced across that deck, didn’t you feel it? Didn’t you sense the oneness of us, only two feet dancing, but what appeared to be two people moving all about that deck? Two people laughing, but we moved as one. Remember this. Though we all appear as being very different, one old lady, one big barrel of a guy, one little boy, one young woman, one here, one there - we are all dancing on the same two feet, on the same boat sailing over the same waters. Remember that, just remember that.”

His eyes brimmed with tears as he looked into mine with a cup of coffee, untouched in a circle of both hands.

“So what happened?”

“Sometime after I left her she must have slipped out of her bunk and headed back to the top deck. I understand that only a few passengers remained out that late milling about. No one paid her much attention. Wasn’t it amazing how she knew this ship so well that she could move about on it without hardly any aid whatsoever?

Anyway, well, she made it to the bow before anyone noticed and somehow, I can’t imagine, managed to lift herself up and over the railing and with one swift push she was gone, disappearing into the waves below.”

“Why, but why? There was nothing wrong with her, and she said she had just had the best time in years, why?” My hands now were trembling and tears filled my eyes as I fought them and a sob back, only so that I could ask my questions. “Why would she want to die?”

“What makes you think she died?” He asked.

“What makes me think she died? Well, first of all that’s quite a fall, jump, whatever... and secondly into the depths below, not to be seen again! What do you think? How could anyone survive all that, and especially someone of her age and fragile state? And if you don’t think she died then why do I see tears in your eyes?”

“For you to think she died you would have to think that Life is not always present everywhere, little one. You would have to believe that there is life and there is death. You say you believe in God, what do you think God is? God IS Life, little one. God is life. Your life did not begin when you came on board and it will not end when you disembark. So, as for Grand, she is as much alive right now as you and I, only she may be a little more aware of it than you and I.

And, why my tears? Because I enjoyed her presence. I enjoyed her appearing here with us in form. She was the very essence of life, was she not? But so are you, and so am I, so where could she go? The essence of life we are - goes nowhere. It is always here. It is here now, always present. We just get used to a form and because we can pinpoint life in a form we think they are living in that form, and thus that is all there is of them. And, because of this we seem to want to hold onto that form, thinking when it disappears the life is gone. It is not, little one. It is not. Life is never 'gone.' Life is here in everything and everyone all the time. Life is being you and me always. Life is without beginning or end."

"Then why this somber atmosphere this morning? Why is everyone here on the brink of tears? Why grieve if there is no death?"

"Because most of those around you have no idea of the things we speak. They think that Grand died, and that is all they know. They don't know that the Life living Grand still is, and is the same Life that is living them. They are fooled by our seemingly different appearances. They don't realize that the masks we wear and the personalities we adopt are things of drama, not the real. They believe themselves to be different, and on the surface we do seem to be. But the Life we are is here whether we recognize the form it is taking or not.

Remember when you saw the lady who helped you down the stairs and you failed to recall how you knew her? She was Life moving about, watching over you, caring for you, because the same Life that was caring for you, IS you."

"She was like an angel?"

"She appears as one form, you appear as another, but it is the same Life living both of you. What we do to what we 'think' is another is what we actually do to our self."

"Do unto others..." I said softly.

He reached across the table and took my hand, which had stopped trembling. I realized that I had no tears now, because although I would miss Grand or the form I had come to know as Grand, I was realizing that the Life which lived as Grand was, is, still here. It is only when this Life takes form and we deify the form rather than the Life of the form, that we think there is something to grieve, or something to lose. Although I was unable to recognize her in form at present the Life that lived that form could go nowhere. So why cry? Why grieve if we but realize that Life goes on, right on.

And the great ship rolled on over the waters and sailed away from the place where Grand disappeared. We would never know exactly why she chose to jump into the night without a word. We would never know why she failed to tell us good-bye or somehow give us a hint of her intended departure, but we all knew that she had left her mark on all of us. We had seen a frail hand gently laid on the body of a little boy and watched as life had appeared in that little form again. Although the excuses and explanations for what had occurred still remained, the experience itself left us all changed in some way, even if we failed to admit it.

And as for Grand, at first we said that she had just danced off into the night, until we each had to agree that no, Grand had danced right into the Light. Did she regain her sight? No, she had never truly lost it. She saw more than the rest of us, and never failed to bring sight to the eyes of others by showing them things beyond what they seemed able to see. Who the blind were here, I think we all knew. Eyes were for the 'seeing,' but 'seeing' has nothing to with eyes.

### **CHAPTER THREE**

I spent more and more time listening. I found as I listened more and more that the old desires to go to land dropped away. I had new desires, to hear the sounds of silence, to reach up and touch the stars, to see with the inner eyes Grand always spoke about, to know my Self. The things that had once seemed to matter so much did not seem to matter at all now.

One morning at breakfast those at my table began to talk about an incident that apparently happened the night before.

"What are you talking about?" I inquired only to have them raise their eyebrows and look at one another in a quizzical manner.

"What do you mean, what are we talking about? You were right there! Don't tell us you were not aware of all that last night?"

"Well, refresh my memory."

"There was a fight, a brawl in the dining room. Two guys had just a little too much of the spirits!" They all laughed. "It was quite a show until one of the wait staff came over to the table and picked one of them up like he was a child and threw him right out onto the deck behind you! He grabbed the other one and heaved him through the doors onto the deck as well! Where were you, girl? How could you not have seen all that? They fought it out on the deck until both of them were passed out cold. A crowd gathered and jeered it on for a while, but then I think even some passengers became afraid for the lives of those two."

"Hummmmm..." was all I could say, because really I had no recollection of any such occurrence.

"You can't tell us you were unaware of all that was going on out there right under your nose?!"

"Well, I must have been somewhere else in mind, because honestly I didn't pay it any attention." I knew in my heart that I had been somewhere else indeed, but I was here, as I am always here. Yet, ever since I had begun listening I had found myself more and more aware of the wonderful thoughts that came as a result of listening, and less and less aware of what people said was going on, on board ship. What was a fight between two drunks to me? It didn't happen as far as I was concerned. Regardless anyway, it would all have been like a movie or play to me, because I was beginning to recognize the true state of things. I knew that the Life that was living those two had nothing to do with what appeared to have happened on the deck, that though there appeared to be two men fighting, they were in reality only the ONE dancing!

I must have truly been caught up in thought, even standing right there on the deck where it had appeared to be taking place. To me the night had been lovely and peaceful and quiet. To me the seas were calm, the air was warm and the atmosphere was full of lovers. I had noticed the couple who lived two cabins down from me, strolling hand in hand and thought about the fact that I no longer felt a need or desire to be married. I had left that dream behind and was content just enjoying watching life as on a screen before me. I felt love. I was beginning to realize my Oneness in a state of love, love for all that I saw, all that I was, with no regard for anything that seemed to take place, but could not truly be if it was not Love.

I had come to see, as I listened, that whether we call it Love, God, or Life, It is all One and the same and, It is everywhere always - being. Thus anything that appears contrary to one of these descriptive words, is an imagined state of affairs, therefore why give heed to it.

I had stopped visiting the various religious meetings. They were fine for those who felt the need to be involved in a formal setting at an appointed time, but my God seemed to be appearing as everyone everywhere all the time, and there was no place I could go that God was not there. Life had strapped me in and said, "Hold on tight!," winked at me and laughed a reassuring laugh, giving me a nod that I was going to eternally enjoy the ride from here.

Renewed strength, faith, assurance, freedom, exuberance, all came as I watched the world of life on board ship from a new perspective.

I even decided to move again. I decided that I would head for a higher deck where the view was a little more spectacular. I had, on the level I had lived for some time, only been able to see a little of the sky from my bunk, but this new cabin gave me almost a full sky view with only a little ocean at the bottom. I liked still being able to see a little of the water from bed, but looked forward to each new morning on the horizon.

This euphoria lasted for some time and then it seemed I fell off the end of the world! Just when I had given up all thought of ever being “in love” or married, a man came into my life.

He just appeared on deck one evening as I sat reading in the fading light of a summer night.  
“Excuse me, may I sit here?”

“Sure,” I answered a little reluctantly, as I had hoped my friend would show up this evening to talk to and listen to for a while. He and I had been missing each other lately, evidently following different schedules. In hopes that he would happen along on this fine night I had drawn a deck chair close.

“What you reading?” I wasn’t in the mood for small talk. I wanted the “deeper things” of which my friend always spoke. I wasn’t in the mood for trivia.

“Oh - its just something I picked up in the bookstore. Nothing really.

“Are you a reader? Do you read a lot?”

“Some, yes, when I can find something worth reading.”

“I understand that. I prefer non-fiction, but sometimes a light read is fun.” He told me his name, reaching over to shake my hand while inquiring as to mine. I didn’t really want this, this evening, but as I looked around I did not see my friend anywhere, so hey, why not? So I laid my book in my lap and leaned back and inhaled the soft sea air.

“Where are you from?” He asked. Well, no one had ever asked that before. What do you mean where am I from, I thought. Brother, we are both on this same ship and since we haven’t docked in many years I suppose you didn’t just get on this boat yesterday!

“Where am I from?” I asked.

“Yes, what part of the ship?”

“Oh, I thought you meant ‘pre-ship.’ I live on the 3rd level at present. I moved recently, only up one flight, but it offers a better view.” Why was I telling him this?

“Oh, I recently moved myself. I’m on the 2nd level right now, but who knows. I like to move, don’t you? It gives you a whole new perspective, I think.”

Do I care what you think, I thought, then I recalled that this was God, or Life, however you wish to say it, coming to me in an unfamiliar form.

“Yes.” And I set in to “listen” and not judge.

“Your thinking that I wondered where you came from before this voyage is interesting. I haven’t considered anything but this ship and this voyage for such a long time that I would not have even thought of asking where you came from prior.”

“Well, for a while ‘land’ was an obsession with me. I wanted to get back to land, but I’ve become pretty satisfied that where I am now is what matters. Land is no longer a place ‘over the rainbow’ to me. Land is here, now - just beyond what I am able to see with these two eyes. This may sound really strange, but I am beginning to experience land even while on board, in my mind.”

“That’s an interesting statement. Is your family on board?” He seemed to change the subject. I suppose that was a little deep for a first encounter.

"Yes, most of them, and we visit often, but they have their lives and I have mine. They are wonderful, and I love them all dearly, but you know how life on board can be, well, I suppose life anywhere can be. We have our own things we must attend to, responsibilities and the like." I was making small talk, the thing I hated the most, but I did not really know this man and so that's how it begins.

"Do you have family on board?"

"Not anymore. My folks were here when we boarded for a few short years then they were gone."

"You mean they died."

"No, just gone."

Now that peaked my interest. Did he believe in life eternal - without beginning or end? Perhaps I wasn't in strange waters with him after all.

"What happened?"

"My mother always spoke of home. She never could get over her past life. She was always dreaming of the past. She never got over life on land and longed to be back there so much that she could not seem to focus on the here and now. She talked about things as though they were still happening and became so caught up in it that one day she just simply disappeared. We don't know what happened to her. We searched the ship for days, but the Captain finally came to us and told us that they were calling off the search, apologized and gave us his condolences. A rumor went around for a while that she had fallen overboard, but there was no way to ever substantiate it. No one had seen a thing. That was very hard to believe anyway because the seas had been so quiet at that time, and we refused to believe that she had taken her life, but there was no evidence of foul play, so we just never knew."

"And your dad? What happened to him?"

"Well, he grieved at first for mother, but then he seemed to rally, and rally he did. He began to have ladies on board, who had either lost their husbands or had come on board single, swarm over him like bees at a hive. I was pretty young and so I didn't mind too much all the attention I received as a result. They started having the chef fix cakes and pies for us and I put on a few pounds right as I entered puberty that took me a while to shed. At thirteen I had a 'spare tire', if you know what I mean."

Well, you certainly don't have one now, I observed. He was lean, not muscular, but had a nice form. What was I doing? I was looking at this man as a man! Hello, where are you? Get a grip!

"So your dad remarried?"

"No. He went through a few years of walking various ladies around the deck and even had a few marriage proposals come his way, but he seemed to come to the end of all of that at a certain point. I saw him begin to sit quietly as if he were studying something out there over the ocean. He began to read his Bible all the time. I noticed he began to attend one religious service after the other. He didn't care what they believed, he just wanted to know the truth, he said."

"Did he come to know the truth?" - I asked.

"Well, I don't know what he came to know, but I will tell you this, at the time that he entered this phase of his life, and dismissed all the ladies from his life, he became very mellow. He was the sweetest, softest man you ever knew. He would be laughing with you one minute and take you by the hand the next and say things like, 'You, my son, have always been, and you cannot ever not be.'"

Now I sat up on my chair, and faced him. Now I was interested. Now I knew that this was no chance meeting. This one had come to sit here next to me for a reason, and I wanted to hear everything he had to say.

“What else did he say?”

“He told me that mother did not die, that she just faded into Life. How he knew that I don’t know. He said for me not to ever concern myself with how she died again, or even that she had died, for she had not. ‘No one ever dies’, he said. He said that we all come to be on this ship at sometime so that we can more fully understand ourselves. He said that either we realize that there is no past or we will fall right back into it and repeat the cycle again. He had tried to tell mother to get on with her life, to enjoy it, to get accustomed to life on board so that they could be together on this incredible journey, but she mourned for a past that would forever be only in her mind. She said that those were the best years of her life and so she failed to enter into life in the here and now. She never really adjusted to life aboard ship, yearning constantly for this past that became more and more wonderful in her mind as she told of it. Her stories became more grand with every telling, more wonderful than they had ever truly been. She lost all touch with the moment in which she lived due to her constant looking back to a place she could only imagine in the end. Life for her had stopped when she came on board. That was death to her.

So Dad was right, she didn’t die, she was already dead, a dead woman walking about, right here among us. We thought she was alive simply because we saw this form of a woman and called it life, but this was death to her. “Life” to her was in a land back there somewhere in memory.

Sorry, you may not have bargained for all of this from a stranger.”

“No, I find it very interesting,” and went on to tell him about Grand and the golden haired child and many of the things I had seen since coming on board and how my perspective on life had changed drastically in only the last little while.

“But your dad, what did happen to him?”

“Well, I wasn’t there, but I have been told something about it. A few years later, I was about 18 at the time, he had been having dinner with some friends. They had had a spirited evening, laughing and enjoying one of those cozy winter nights on board where the guests stay late and speak of old times. The dining room had cleared except for this large table of friends who hung around until the rest of the room was cleaned and prepared for the next morning. Theirs was the only table, and because they had slipped the staff a few extra dollars they were allowed to finish out the night until they pleased to leave. All the lights in the dining room had been cut off except for the one behind their table and the one at the entrance.

These had never known one another before the voyage, but now had been together for quite sometime and were well acquainted. They had sort of watched over one another in their latter years, giving support, comfort and joy to each other through their various life experiences.

As everyone began to say good night, one at a time around the table, my dad was left sitting there in the glow of one wall lamp, alone. A member of the dining room staff came out of the kitchen and said to him, “Oh, I thought everyone was gone. Are you about ready...”

“Yes, I’m turnin’ in. Its been a pleasant evening. Thanks for letting us stay so long. What a way to end a beautiful day and wonderful night. Good night,” he called over his shoulder as he picked up his coat and headed out the door.

There was one deckhand left on the quarter deck, leaning against the railing smoking. He turned when he saw my dad coming along the port side. “Evenin’” he said to dad, but dad never returned his greeting. That was unusual for him as he was always a very friendly man. The deckhand said he was a man walking with a purpose - not strolling, so he didn’t think too much of his non-reply.

Now this is what that deck hand told me face to face, and although it still makes no sense to me, I saw no hint of deception in his eyes.

"Sir, I took a second glance in his direction just in time to see something that you are probably not going to believe. I'm still not sure I believe it, but I know what I saw. Your dad walked to the railing and through the railing. He kept right on going."

"You mean he jumped overboard?"

"No I mean he walked right out into the night air without stopping. He did not jump or fall. He walked right out there as if there was a gangplank below his feet. I watched until I dropped hot ashes on my hand and jumped at the burn. I glanced down only long enough to swear and brush ashes from my arm, shirt and pants. When I looked up again he had completely disappeared. I know it sounds strange, but Sir though I smoke like a fiend, I do not drink. I have never been a drinking man. I work late shift in the boiler room and am very used to being awake when everyone else is sleeping. I have always been a night person so I was not dreamin.' All I can tell you is what I saw."

And that was his account of my dad's demise or disappearance, and I have never doubted that this is what he thought he saw."

"So that is why you say your parents are 'gone', one off one end of this thing we call 'our world' on board and one off the other. How do you view what the deckhand told you about your dad? What do you make of it?"

"Well, I've spent nights lying in bed thinking about it. My dad was a wonderful man. I loved him dearly, thought the sun rose and set in him as a boy. He loved my mother more than any man I had ever seen love his wife. He wanted so much to give her this wonderful adventure, but what was a dream to him turned into a nightmare for her. In those last years he told me many times, "God is all, my son. God is all." I didn't really understand what he meant by that until recently, but I believe I am beginning to.

What do I make of it? Well, I was reading dad's bible one night and found the passage that said that 'Enoch walked with God and was no more.' I think that was dad. I think he became so at one with his God that the man I knew just disappeared into his True Self."

We both sat quietly for a short while, as if taking that thought in. Evidently he had come to terms with that in a way, but I was still meditating on what he had said and knew I would continue to consider it.

"You know when I was a boy we were walking along the deck one morning and there was a caterpillar on the railing. Now, how it got there I do not know. We were in a port shortly before that, so somehow it must have inched its way on board and all the way up to the top deck. Can you imagine? Have you ever seen a caterpillar?"

"I seem to recall having seen one before we ever came on board. I have seen them in books since, of course."

"Well, I was so fascinated with that creature that we took it back to our cabin and put it in a shoebox and I kept it like a pet for a while. I named it and every morning I looked to be sure it was still there. One day it did what caterpillars all eventually do, if they are healthy. There was a cocoon hanging from the top of the box one morning and I was amazed looking at it how intricate it was. How had my little friend gotten in there, I asked. Dad laughed and told me that caterpillars go through this phase where they seem to shut themselves away from the world for a while, before they make a grand entrance in a whole new form!

At first I was sad that my little friend had disappeared, but then I began to anxiously await this 'grand entrance' with great anticipation. Every morning I would check just to see what was going on under there, but still it hung attached to the top, suspended in space, for what seemed like a very long time to a little boy.

One morning I got up as usual and to my great surprise found nothing of my little friend at all. He was gone! Just as I started to cry my dad said, 'Look up!'

There on the edge of the curtain with the sun coming through its wings was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen, a gorgeous butterfly!

'Look at his wings. They're glowing!' And certainly with the sun coming through those gossamer appendages they did seem to glow. I was awe struck. He flitted about the cabin as I ran giggling and shrieking behind. That was the most fantastic thing I had ever seen. Where had the caterpillar gone? I didn't know, but when I saw the wonderful transformation before my eyes, I was amazed. The form of a caterpillar had been swallowed up somehow in this magnificent creature. It had not died. No. It had become what it was always intended to be, a thing of beauty. It didn't matter to me what happened to the caterpillar after a while, although I do think about it and wonder even now what causes that incredible transformation. My dad suggested that we open the porthole and set our friend free. At first I did not want to do that, but he explained to my 7-year-old self that the butterfly would never be happy where he could only see the world through a porthole. He had to be set free to fly and go places he could never go in the limitation of our stateroom.

It was hard for a little guy to do, but we opened the porthole and watched him flitter about the room one more time before finding his way to the open air to drift out the window. I leaned out and watched him until it seemed he disappeared into thin air.

That is the way I see what happened with my dad. A transformation took place. One day he was in one form and the next another. Between the two I think a cocoon of sorts took place, but I simply did not see it coming. Does all that sound ridiculous to you?"

"No. Actually it explains a lot. Grand perhaps. Maybe she didn't jump either or fall into the sea. Or maybe what appeared to be a body did, while she walked... or flew right off, out, whatever, into 'thin air.' That is a beautiful story. Thanks for sharing with me."

"Well, it blesses me every time I repeat it myself. You know, sometimes I think that we are simply being fooled by these bodies, that maybe they are already transparent, but to us they seem solid, material, whatever. Did not Jesus walk through walls and locked doors? We read that and don't seem to flinch. Why is it that we are so fond of the caterpillar? A caterpillar is not particularly pretty, you know. I mean they are cute to a child, but they are not really much to look at. Certainly not like the butterfly. Are not both creatures one and the same actually? They only appear to have different forms at different times? One form appears to die, but for the life of me, and I cannot understand how it happens, he doesn't really die. He is just transformed sure, but its as though he just goes right on without any recollection of the life he led before."

"And he doesn't leave the world to do it either." I added.

"No. So, and I've thought about this quite a bit after what I was told about my dad, is not he still here with us right now?"

"Sure. I believe that. That is how I think of Grand. If each of us is God living as whoever we think we are, and God cannot go anywhere, then no one goes anywhere. There is simply no where to go. And, as your dad said, God is all."

"Okay, then why can we not see them, do you think?"

"Well, I used to think it was because they were spirit and we were not, but I have come see that there is nothing that is not spirit. Spirit is God, you know. God is Spirit. There is nothing that is not spirit. We designate things and call them matter, or physical, but all is spirit really, because, as your dad told you, God is all, so then Spirit is all."

"That's difficult to grasp."

"Yes it is, but I think that it is no more difficult than a caterpillar becoming a butterfly right before our eyes. The thing that couldn't get off the ground yesterday soars above a little boy's head today, and right out the window. Amazing, isn't it?"

"Let's say for a minute that we are the caterpillar. We go 'within' so to speak, into a cocoon of meditative thought. Let's just say this to see where it goes. We begin to listen in the quiet coolness of a cocoon, what do you think we would hear? Would we hear anything?"

I smiled. "Oh yes. I have begun this practice of going to sleep doing that very thing. I wake up doing it and sometimes during the night when I just happen to wake up I do it."

"What? Listen like that?"

"Yes. I have some wonderful friends who suggested that I begin doing it and it prevents sleepless night from having any affect on me anymore. I get the rest I need and I hear things that I would not have heard otherwise."

"What do you hear? Do you hear a voice?"

"No. Well, sometimes I have heard what was like my own voice speaking things to me, but mostly I hear the sounds of the night and have learned to enjoy the stillness."

"And you ask yourself questions, or what? Do you pray? Do you ask God for things? Or about things?"

"Well, I have found out, through listening, Who I really am."

"Well, who are you?"

"You must find that for your self. I could tell you, but if you will just get quiet tonight when you go to bed without trying to go to sleep, and listen, you will come to know the answer to that. Ask your self who you are."

"You mean ask God?"

"Ask, just ask, call it God if you like, or think of it as asking your self, but ask! There is a scripture that says, 'Be still and know that I am God.' If you will be still you will know and you will begin to understand things I cannot really tell you."

"Hummmmm. It has been very interesting talking to you. Very enlightening. Thanks for letting me share your evening."

"I have enjoyed talking to you too and will look forward to seeing you again. I would like to know what you are 'hearing.'" We smiled at one another, now in a relative degree of comfort with each other. We had shared some pretty deep things. At least it wasn't one of those evenings where we sat around and talked weather.

When I slipped beneath the sheets that night I lay there thinking he was perhaps lying in his bed listening, and we would both be listening to the same Spirit as the same Spirit spoke to us in an individual way. The same Life that lived him, lived me, though we were called by different names and appeared to live in different worlds. How we could even think like that was becoming harder for me to comprehend as we shared the same ship, walked the same decks, breathed the same air, and had the same needs.

In the dark we were all the same. In the light were we not also?

I could not see my body in the dark cabin. The moon was in its new phase and the room was as black as pitch. I was so snug and comfortable that it was as though I had no body, because I could not feel it anywhere. I was aware of something beneath me and something lying gently over me, but I wasn't visible or sensitive to a body at all. In that state it came to me that in a body or out of a body I would be equally aware. I would be conscious and aware of just being Life or Life just being. This was not like life as I had always thought of it. This was Life as I had thought of God.

“Know thy Self.” I thought. To know my Self, the one with or without a body, is to know God. Yet, I somehow knew that I did have a body, and that I would always have a form, of one kind or another, like the caterpillar who appeared as a butterfly, or was it a butterfly that first appeared as a caterpillar? I knew that I could not be formless, that God would have to have a form to live and move through. It was a little vague to me, but I was gaining in my understanding as I listened. I knew that I was not listening for someone outside myself. I knew that I was not anticipating any particular response, but I knew that there would be a response and that in and of my Self I would find the answer to every question.

Before I knew it I had fallen asleep and awakened to a bright and beautiful new day. And the first thought that came to me was like the wonderment that a child experiences regularly, “What will this day hold?”

“You are the Light of the world.” A scripture just came to me. I knew that I was the light to my world, the world which consisted of those on board that I knew. And I knew that my friend was the light to the world he knew and that the man I met last night was the light to the world he knew, but that there was actually only One Light shining as each of us. That is what we refer to as Christ, I thought. The Light each of us has is shining out to those around us. If that light is very dim it gives off little light. If Christ is our life, we glow! My friend glows - that’s for sure. He simply gives off life everywhere he goes.

I thought about what he had once said to me, how he was not really on this ship. We had never talked about that again and I wanted very much to get back with him on that thought. I no longer wondered how he could say it, but I wondered how he knew it.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

In the morning light I found myself feeling very good about meeting a new friend last night, very glad that I had met him.

I had breakfast with some friends and then went to my cabin to work on some needlework I had just recently learned how to do. Sitting there with the salt sea air drifting in the porthole I realized how the ship, although it was enormous in size, swayed ever so slightly, like a huge cradle in which we all swung. I was enjoying the peace and quiet when all of a sudden the ship’s horn sounded a loud blast and there seemed to be a shift in movement, a sudden shift.

Were we in port? I had not heard that we were coming to a port. I looked out the window but saw only open ocean. I heard running in the hall and opened the cabin door beginning to feel a little anxious.

I left the cabin to head for the upper deck and met a flurry of others who were interested at least, if not anxious to see what in the world had caused this disruption on this quiet and otherwise perfect spring day.

Once on deck we saw a great crowd gathering at the bow, but I could not imagine what would bring this floating world to a halt.

“What happened?” I asked as people came back in my direction. “What happened? Why have we stopped?”

“Collision. There was a collision with a rather large tanker. Some appear to have been killed. There are men in the water.”

I decided right then and there that I did not want to go to the bow and see this tragedy. It would do no good for me to be there and I knew that my mind would be kept in peace if I did not focus on things that I could do nothing about, things that would only leave etched in my thinking an unpleasant scene.

Just then the man I had met on the previous night came up to me and said, “Look. Look up there,” while pointing towards the eastern sky above the masts, beyond the ship’s many towering structures which seemed to strain to touch the sky. I looked up and saw sea gulls soaring in the sun, diving and lifting again on the sea

breezes. They were so beautiful. They were like pure white visions swirling, sinking, circling, rising, cooing and calling to one another. They dove and soared upward again, over and over. There were more than I had ever seen at one time. They were a visual symphony. Tears rolled down my cheeks as I became so enthralled in the beauty of their flight. The sun behind them caused them to glisten and radiate light. Down they plunged, circling the masts, and up they rose again, as if being led by an invisible baton of the Maestro of a silent orchestra. Their voices sounded like babies calling one another, little baby bird voices. I not only saw them, I heard the music behind their flight. I heard what they heard. What might appear to someone else as simply birds in flight, was before my eyes a grand orchestration, music to my eyes. What a strange and wonderful thought. Music to my eyes.

“Set your mind on things above,” I heard my new friend say.

I smiled at him and thanked him for taking me upward away from the tragedies of the world below, upwards to the music of the spheres, upwards the symphony of light and life.

We just stood there for about a half hour watching the gulls without saying very much at all really. We just took in this beauty of birds in flight, speaking to one another in baby bird song, unaware of anything but the pure joy of being. I saw so much more than birds. I saw Life flowing, rising, swirling, singing, cooing, laughing, dipping, soaring and rising again! How wonderful. How beautiful! I would not have missed it for the world!

What appears to be happening sometimes is only that, an appearance. If we set our affections on things above, things that are lovely, we can be swept away into another place and enjoy the moment, a magical moment, the only one of its kind, and maybe just be the only one to witness something very special. What we focus on we become and I became so swept up in the sea gulls dancing over head that I went back to my cabin later on that morning with my heart soaring as well.

Mid summer found us in sweltering seas. Normally we went north for the summers, but for some reason we were much further south than we had been at that time of the year.

Rumors began to drift about that the Captain was ill and that there was a change of command coming on board. Perhaps decisions were being put on hold and that was why we were drifting in such arid seas, but again, perhaps it was only shipboard rumor.

I sat with my old friend who never grew older and always spoke to me of the deeper things that fed my hungry heart.

“You told me once that you were not on this ship, yet you have been here and are here still today. I do not question you anymore in regards to what you say, but I am still trying to comprehend how you can be here and not be here. Can you explain that to me now?”

“I’m surprised you have not realized it yourself, little lady.” I had graduated from “little girl” to “little lady” now.

“Realized what?”

“We all think we are on this ship, you see. And so long as we believe whatever it is we say we believe that is reality to us. It may not be the Truth, but it seems to be reality to us at the present.”

“What is Truth in your definition?”

“You. You are truth. Without you nothing would be true. But not you, this one I call by a name, and not you, this one who thinks she was born, and thinks she can fall ill, or even this one who thinks she can die. That is not who you truly are, you know. That is who you think you are.

You see, this ship is like a huge stage play. We are all actors on it, but there comes a time when we take off the masks, drop the costumes and realize the real One we are underneath. So long as the drama seems to be

the real for us we will play it out under the guise of a character rather than to get real with our Self and drop the phony personality that we have assumed.”

“Do you think I am a phony?” I asked, because I had always thought of myself as sincere. I didn’t like to think I was phony, plastic, hypocritical.

“Not phony in the way you may be thinking. We are all deceivers in a way. As the character we seem to portray to others, we are a deception. We never can truly fool anyone though, especially ourselves. You know the man who always shows up in the dining room as the life of the party. He talks way too loudly. I have noticed passengers shying away from him. None of us like to be seated at his table because he embarrasses us. He smokes too much, drinks entirely too much, laughs too loudly, as I said - is the life of the party, but the party wishes to avoid him at every opportunity.

He has a joke for every occasion and tells them repeatedly. You know the fellow.”

I knew him, and everything my friend said about him pretty much described him.

“One evening I came on board very late, one of those nights when sleep evades you. That old gentleman was standing at the bow, the only one on deck that night. I sort of angled up to him and said good evening. He didn’t answer at first, and I thought he didn’t hear me, so I moved closer and spoke to him again. I wasn’t even sure I wanted to begin a conversation with him, but we were the only ones on deck, so why not.

When I caught a glimpse of his face in the moonlight I saw that it was wet with tears. I was a little embarrassed that I had obviously caught him in a very private moment and said I didn’t mean to intrude.

‘No’, he said, flicking his cigarette. ‘I’m just being me.’ ‘Excuse me?’ I said back to him. ‘Sometimes I come up here after everyone is gone to bed and think. I miss my wife terribly. I miss my family. I miss land. I miss the house I loved on shore.’ Suddenly he gulped a sob and I really felt as though I had intruded into something that perhaps I should have avoided. Was he drunk? I didn’t get the impression that he had even had a drink that night. He was as sober as I had ever seen him.

He proceeded before I could speak, ‘I miss life as I once knew it. I miss the self I once knew my self to be. I’m not who you think I am, you know.’

‘Who are you then, my friend?’

‘I don’t know anymore. I seemed to have lost my self somewhere along the way.’

‘No one is as they appear, my friend.’

‘Well, I know this, I’m tired of living the way I am living. I’m very weary tonight.’

I suggested we sit for a while and talk and to my surprise he was willing. None of the loud talk he was known for. None of the inappropriately loud laughter. He was simply being real with me.

I told him how everyone puts on this ‘face’ for what they consider to be ‘others.’ I told him that even who he was right now, sobbing on the deck was not who he truly is. I told him that God is not even life as we seem to know life. He listened, and he became very thoughtful. He didn’t argue or question, he just listened.

I told him that the consciousness, not a conscience, but his Conscious Self was his true self. The Self he knows in his heart to be the True. I told him that this is what we refer to as the Christ. He was pretty amazed at that having never considered Christ to be anyone but the figure known as Jesus Christ. He never considered that Christ was his True Self.

You know we sat there until dawn and finally as the light broke the eastern sky he turned to me and said, ‘I believe I see what you are saying. I believe I understand the True Me, the one I am in reality, the one I am - say - “inside.”

He and I actually parted that morning with an embrace. We have become very good friends actually. Have you seen him lately?"

"You know that's funny, because I have seen him, not long ago at a table with a lady, and they were speaking almost in whispers. I had never seen him with just one person at the table before. She seemed to be enjoying him. I suppose I hadn't thought about him really in a while, because that loud, over-powering personality has seemed to disappear."

"The more we realize who we really are in Consciousness, the more the fictitious character we have been trying to play dissolves.

And yes, I saw him with that lady recently too. They seemed to be very close. In fact, I passed him one night as they walked on deck and he winked at me. Then another time when I saw him and remarked about his new relationship he said, 'I'm in heaven', and I knew he had found something very special."

Again my old friend had amazed me with his kind heart, his willingness to listen to someone who the rest of us wanted to avoid as much as possible. I had walked all the way around a bulkhead one day to avoid talking to him. Well, there was the phony "me." I had to recognize it. I had to face it, but I knew that I didn't have to feel badly about it, only to see it for what it is and go on. Perhaps now that I knew that the True "ME" is Christ I would not be so prone to put on the mask and costume. Being exposed is life changing. When I began to see myself in the right light I realized that that Light was living as me and I bowed myself in it, to it, as it, or It rather, AS me. I had to smile. How wonderful Life is!

I made an assessment of all that Life had shown me recently, how God is Life living me, and this is the expression of God we call Christ. How no one really dies, but simply changes form and goes right on. That the whole concept of "death" then is erroneous and not the big finale I had thought of it as being. In fact, it is nothing at all to the one who understands. I saw that there was nothing to feel badly about, since all that I had ever done or said is the "stage character" I had only assumed to be reality, and it is nothing in reality. I saw how there was nothing to dread without the fear of dying. I saw how there was nothing to look back to as that stage character had only been living out a drama which is now like a dream to me. I am not who I had thought I was. Life as I have appears as a stage play being acted out before me now. I step on stage and play my part, but Me, the True Me is watching it all from a higher vantage point. I am moving again, but it is into the True Character of my True Self. I'm dropping the stage name and taking my True Identity and I feel as free as those wonderful gulls who soared into the heavenlies over head that incredible morning.

During this time of Self Awareness my little 5-year-old buddy came to me one afternoon while the ship was pulled close to a little port in the islands. Due to shallow waters we could not actually make port, but that didn't matter to us anymore as we never thought of leaving the ship anyway. Being close in, however, some of the local fishermen were floating very close to us in their small fishing boats, some fishing, some diving, some just floating in the clear waters.

My little friend and I watched them from above for quite a while and then decided to go down to a friend's cabin on the lowest deck so that we could see them better. From that porthole we felt like we were almost on the water with them. It was wonderful. This is as close as I had come in a very long time to being part of the world just beyond the world I was so accustomed to seeing all the time.

My little friend was absolutely fascinated with the islanders, the island, the fishermen.

"Oh look," he shrieked. "That man caught a fish! A big fish! Wow. What kind of fish do you think that is?"

"Oh I don't really know one fish from another. But you're right, it's a big one. I wonder if he is going to be able to pull it in."

We watched as he wrestled with it for a while, the fish jumping and fighting, resisting coming into a world where he would become either dinner or bait. The fisherman struggled and pulled, released and pulled again. We

knew he must be getting tired himself wrestling with such a large creature. We were close enough to him to see the muscles appear to strain in his legs, back and arms, as he held his ground and pulled and released time and again. He would let out his line, and reel it in again. He would lift the rod into the air and brace himself against something in the boat, then he would be pulled to the railing and would have to pull and heave, back up once again, only to be thrust forward by the strength on the other end as the creature fought for its life. The fish put up quite a fight, but the moment came when it was obvious that the man on board was to be the winner. He pulled his catch into his boat and the other fishermen on board came to stand over it just to look at it. They held it up and weighed it, laughing and talking, while slapping the winner on the back.

He then reached down and worked the hook free from the jaw of the fish and hoisted it overboard back into the sea. These were not sports fishermen. These men fished for their food, but obviously this man had seen something about this fish that would not permit him to make it his evening meal. The two had fought so long and so hard together, but he knew he was the winner. He had nothing more to prove with this one, and it was time to let the creature go.

My little friend and I talked at the porthole about what we had seen and our conversation carried over throughout the day.

We talked about fishes and how the ocean flowed through them as they flowed through the ocean. "Like us in God," he said. "Yes, like us in God and God in us," I thought to add.

"Without the ocean we would not be here.," he observed.

"We are just floating through this world too aren't we? Do you really think that there is a world out there and another one in here?" I asked him, "Or is the within and the without both the same, only appearing differently?"

"I think its both the same." He said and I agreed as we closed the porthole window and headed up to the top deck again to see things from a higher perspective.

## CHAPTER FIVE

The air was so heavy that we all were suffering in the humidity and most passengers by evening were either in the dining areas or in their cabins in the air conditioning trying to keep cool.

There was talk of a hurricane coming off the coast of Africa, so we assumed we would begin to move north. However, we seemed to be staying put.

It seemed that by 10:30, though still a little muggy, we were able to come out into the night air without the sweltering heat and at least be outside for a while. A group of us that had begun to gather regularly met on one of these evenings around a table under the stars to share a bottle of wine. With chairs pushed back, we sat talking, leisurely taking in the gentle breezes under the stars.

The new man in my life was becoming a pleasant habit and I had decided to just let it go where it would. I had decided that if there was anything to come of it, the ball was in his court, as I was open and willing. He seemed to be "courting" me and I had certainly begun to warm to that idea.

Occasionally now he would put an arm around my chair, or hold my hand for a minute here or there. There were subtle glances between us and I knew that if I didn't try to make anything happen, but rather would just let it happen, there were great possibilities in the air.

There was some talk about the hurricane, some said that were concerned that we were staying too far south with such a forecast, while others said, "Hey, we're on a ship, we can go in any direction," and dismissed the subject, albeit a little nervously. The Captain had recovered from his brief illness, evidently not as severe as gossip would have had us to believe, and as word of his recovery passed around the ship, it was expected that we would simply up anchor and move on.

I turned to my old friend who had on so many occasions left us all standing in our speculations with a simple word of wisdom.

“What’d ya think? Should we be moving out of hurricane alley?”

He reached over and filled my glass of wine again, sat back, corked the bottle, and lifted his own glass and held it up without taking a sip.

“What have we talked about before?” He then turned to the new man in my life and asked him to recall what his dad had told him about the fact that: “God is all.”

He looked at me again, holding his glass in midair, and said in his cool, calm manner - as every ear bent in his direction - “Same bottle of wine, my dear, but we each have our individual glasses.”

We remained quiet. “God or Spirit, or Life, or The Great Mind we call God, however you wish to say it, IT, fills us all the same, just as the same wine fills our individual glasses. Doesn’t matter what the glasses look like. The outside appearance isn’t the important thing, the Life which fills us all is the ONLY important thing, for It is all there is in reality. And - that Life IS you, little lady, and you sir, and you my friend, and you, and you. You are fooled because you are drinking wine from your tea glass. And you (as he turned to the one sitting next to him), I noticed when you finished your coffee you wiped your cup out with your napkin and are now using your coffee cup for a wine glass. What difference does it make the outside appearance. It is the sweet wine filling all AS all. The same Spirit filling all AS all. It is the wine that is of significance, not the apparent vessel. That which is is that which will always be. No storm, no disaster, no thing, will have any effect on the wine, or Life, which flows eternally, regardless the form it seems to take the shape of. There is nothing, therefore, to run from, fear or worry about.”

We remained quiet for a few moments.

I finally ventured out into the open moment to say, “So, then, are you saying that regardless what appears to happen with a hurricane we would all be fine, because it is God living us? Or perhaps I should say it is God living as us? And if it is God living as us, then it is God living and that is it?”

“That is it, little lady. But not only was I saying that you would still be no matter what happens, I am saying that this Life that is living you is the only Life there is, in fact is the only Truth there is. I can also assure you that IT is the only Power there is.”

“But the hurricane has a power does it not?”

He smiled gently, not putting me down, not condescending to me in anyway, I did not feel that. But he smiled and ran his finger around the rim of his wine glass. “If God is all,” he said and paused looking up at me, “and God is everywhere all the time, because little lady, there can be no where that God is not there - and God is the only power, then I ask you, how can there be any other power? Where is it? God is THE only power. Keep that thought in mind. God is the only power, Omnipotence, therefore how could there be any other?”

I could answer nothing but the obvious that there could be no other power. Even as I answered it, the realization of what I was saying would only point to one thing, there could not, in reality, be such a thing as a hurricane, for that would constitute another power. But what then of the reports about a hurricane? I was stretching, trying to reason it all out.

“Do you recall when Jesus said to ‘resist not evil’? Why? Because what we resist we give power to as though it were something. So long as we believe in something as being real, call it bad, call it evil, we are accepting it as being a power other than God. And, that, my little lady, is impossible. And, by the way, ‘reason’ is what is tripping you up here. You cannot reason it out. This comes by revelation.” Again he had read my mind.

“So I am assuming then that you think we should just sit right here in the water and do nothing, go nowhere?”

“Where would you go? Are you not ‘God-being’? Remember the old hymn ‘Where could I go but to the Lord?’ Where can you go that God is not there? Scripture says, ‘If I make my bed in hell, thou art there.’ Where are you going to go? If God is everywhere, and God IS, and God is all there is, then why run? God, or Life is everywhere constantly, continually, without end of being, therefore you will not be better off in one spot than another, because there is no more of God in one place than in another. Thus, what have you to fear?”

“Well, what about the fear of losing our life?” Someone spoke up.

“Did not Jesus also say that if we try to hold on to our life we will lose it? If we let it go we will gain it? And did he not also say that by taking thought about it we cannot add one cubit to our stature? In other words, you cannot protect your little self! Safety comes in understanding Who and What you are, nothing else.”

“Well, I don’t see sitting here like sitting ducks!” Someone else remarked.

“Okay, consider what I have just said, and consider this. Let’s say we turn this ship around and head north, and in a matter of hours the storm you are concerned about takes a north turn, are we not going to play a guessing game as to where to go next? And what if we do avert the storm for a while and a guy down on level 2 slips in the bathroom, hits his head and dies right there. Storm averted, did it matter to him?

He could not add one cubit to his stature, or one minute to his life by the ship’s being turned one way or another. And what was his life anyway, but a vapor – also according to scripture.”

“Are you saying then, that life doesn’t matter? Then why don’t we just all commit suicide if things get too bad for us? Or are you concerned then about going to hell?”

Quietly he sat there again, with the candles on the table reflecting this warm glow over his face. “My friend, life as you think of it is not Life as Life is. God is Life. When it appears that the light goes out in a body, it is not as it seems. God is Life which can go nowhere. God is the Light, the eternal flame, always present everywhere, in all things, at all times. Even the one who seems to have committed a suicide has done nothing. He could not end life. It is as if the dream he called ‘his life’ appears to have been interrupted, just as when you awake during the night, turn over, continue sleeping, and begin to dream again. He may find his self in another dream. You must understand that the world as you know it is an illusion. But, because he had believed so much in his concept of life, or the illusion before him – his ‘dream’ turned into a nightmare for him. So long as the ‘dream’ you seem to be in is pleasant you wish to continue in it. It is only when it begins to lose its flavor and goes sour that you want out of it. This can be the moment of awakening.

Have you never had a dream that seemed so real, too real, so much so that you knew you had to awaken from it, thus you brought yourself to, at least enough to end that dream. There will come a time when the day dream you seem to be experiencing will become a nightmare as well. This is not a bad thing. It is your time to be awakened to your true identity, to ‘come to’, to have your eyes opened to the Truth. Just as the nightmare becomes so intensely unbearable, or unpleasant that the need to awaken from it becomes the driving force for you to regain consciousness, so the day-mare eventually drives you to absolutely have to understand Life beyond ‘life’ as you have thought it to be. This happens when you no longer wish to live in the seeming circumstances of life as it has appeared to you, when you have had enough of life as you have known it, when it is an utter disappointment! Then you will begin to scratch and claw your way out of it, if necessary, to awaken into reality.

As for hell, have you never been there before? Hell is a state of mind? So long as you see life as being this 24/7 experience that you think began with a birth and according to your perception, must end with a death, you are susceptible to going through hell. The thinking that you are a human being - is the walk through the valley of the shadow of death. Thinking that way is death; to think you are living ‘in a physical body in a physical world’ is death, and in that death like state, you can also think you are going through hell. Hell is not something

that happens after what you consider to be 'life.' Hell can be experienced in many different ways, and what is hell to one may not be hell to another.

Whatever appears to be the catalyst that propels you into the pursuit of truth is worth it, for it is insignificant in comparison to the reward.

Think on these things, for they are Spirit and they are Life. I'm not really saying anything you don't already know. You most likely have just never sat down and listened to your own heart in regards to such things."

We were all quiet again for a while considering all that he had said.

Finally someone broke the seriousness of the moment, and the tension that had seemed to rise due to our inability to understand all that was being said to us with a comment that they would go to their cabin and sleep on it and "hope that it was right," because if not we were all going to be blown away in a few days and we would find out about it all then for sure. My old friend just smiled, looked straight into my eyes and we knew, I knew, that he knew what he was talking about, and would simply have to let the others do with it what they wanted.

The days passed and no storm. We didn't move, we simply sat and talked about the sweltering heat and fanned ourselves on the deck and retreated more and more to the comfort of the cabins.

Two weeks passed and we set sail for the Lesser Antilles. When we came close to the Leeward Islands it was rumored that there was debris in the water from a hurricane that had recently passed that way.

Upon seeing my old friend I asked him if that was the storm that was supposed to have hit us. He said, he knew of no storm that was supposed to hit us. I told him about the rumored stories of a storm that had apparently hit these islands we were now passing. He said, "For those who believe that there is another power there certainly seems to be a reality to what they believe. For them it happened. For them it was as real as anything. To the One who will only accept that there is but ONE Power, to that One - though the winds may appear to blow, nothing will come near his house, and nothing will hurt him by any means."

I was beginning to see what he was saying, and I was beginning to sense the inner transformation of caterpillar to butterfly. I couldn't speak much about it. Every time I tried the words complicated what I really wanted to say. I felt much like being in a cocoon. My old friend seemed to sense what I was going through, but only smiled at me more and we passed nods and unspoken understandings between us.

The new man in my life seemed to understand as well. He told me he was moving to the 3rd level, the same level I still occupied. It seemed that we were seeing more alike everyday.

None of us ever spoke of the hurricane again. Either we did not understand what my old friend had told us, or we spoke privately about our misconceptions behind closed doors. I didn't know, didn't care, because I was beginning to accept and realize a difference in my perspective of everything.

Though we had finally turned north for a spell after the Antilles, summer passed into an early autumn, thus we retraced some steps and headed south again. We were headed around Cape Horn and would come to skirt the outer islands of South America taking one port after another wherever possible. But no one seemed to care anymore regarding the ports as they all seemed beyond our reach anyway, so why tempt ourselves with the idea of ever stepping foot onto one of them. And besides, we were all so involved in our own lives on board that we hardly seemed to have time for a world beyond our own.

Accepting life as they knew it, my fellow passengers, for the most part, just enjoyed life on board ship in whatever they found possible, and continued to believe that they would have to die to depart this ship.

The new man in my life was not so new anymore, but was now instead the most important man in my life. He and I spent more and more time together. It got so that I could think of nothing but him. I wanted to be in his presence every waking moment and soon we began to talk of consolidating our living arrangements on the 3rd level. Word got around that there were marriage plans in the making and we just laughed and teased the

speculators with “I don’t know”s and “maybe”s. We knew that what we had was pretty special though and knew that the two of us were fast becoming one.

As we headed north after passing Cape Horn we realized that our days together were so intertwined with our nights together that we were becoming less aware of others we had seemed to be so close to on board. The one friend we both stayed very close to, however, was my old friend who would forever be young to me.

I didn’t see him as often these days, but I kept him close in heart and whenever we did run into him we would sit with him for hours, as though drinking in all we could of the marvelous things he had to say to hold us over until our next chance meeting.

We began to plan our wedding as it inevitably was to be, and I realized that although marriage had one time been a desire of my heart, it came when I more or less forgot all about it, and had pretty much accepted that I was fine with or without it. Having come to a place of contentment within myself the inevitable happened, my wish was granted and my desire fulfilled, all in this one new man.

Now, what has become “our” old friend, invited us to dinner one evening shortly before we were married. He sat across from us, holding at once both our hands, looking as a father into our faces, extending to us his blessings.

“You are very special to me,” he told us. “God gives us the desires of our heart. Both of you have desired to find a mate, and thus you have. If you will love each other exclusively, that in and of itself will be its own reward, and will be the uniqueness of your relationship. There may be some rough seas ahead, but if you will determine that - no matter what -this union of two hearts beating as one will take you places you can not imagine at this present time.”

We smiled first at him and then at each other. There was such a bond of love between the three of us that night.

“I have a gift for you. I have purchased a large and prominent stateroom for you to live in, as your new residence, just below top deck, toward the bow, on the starboard side. I think you will find it suitable to your needs and will find the view remarkable. I hope you don’t mind my taking the liberty to move you up in the world!” He laughed that little knowing laugh. We were speechless. He was moving us into a grand place, a place we could not have managed ourselves. How could we ever thank him? His only request was that we keep him in our hearts always and never forget him, a request that was entirely unnecessary as we both loved him dearly.

“It will be ready for you immediately upon your saying, ‘I do.’ It is being painted and prepared for you at the moment.”

We both rose to hug his sweet neck and we all stood in an embrace as one for a few short moments. He seemed reluctant to let us go, but he did say to us, that no matter what, we would always be together, as the same Life lived us all.

When we parted company that night, we somehow knew we were moving into a new place inwardly as well as outwardly. Although it appeared we were making a move upwardly in a physical sense, we both recognized that what appears to be happening in a physical sense is simply a shadow or reflection of that which is truly happening within. We saw our move as a parallel experience in spirit. Thus this was a spiritual move, a change of perspective, a new state of mind.

The day of our wedding was perhaps the most beautiful day I had ever imagined. There was a storm the night before which cleared the air for us in the morning. The sky was the bluest of cobalt without a cloud in the sky. The wedding was set for mid-afternoon on top deck with the Captain hearing our vows. We had not chosen a preacher because we had many friends among the clergy on board and did not want anyone to feel left out or thought of as being any more special than anyone else.

Chairs were placed on deck in rows and flowers seemed to come from somewhere beyond my ability to understand. We had been docked recently in lovely tropical area. Perhaps my friends had somehow managed to have some of the orchids and bougainvilleas brought on board by plane, who knows. I was just given notice that I was not to worry about the setting for the wedding. All had already been prepared and taken care of.

Everything went off without a hitch and when we came to the pronouncement that we were indeed now man and wife, the Captain instead said, "This is a picture of Spirit and Soul united." Thus we were One in Spirit and that is indeed the union that man cannot put asunder. We danced and ate and enjoyed all the things that a wedding should be before slipping away to our new stateroom sometime before midnight.

As the joining of soul and Spirit came together in a consummation of love, my heart was lifted into a new place. There had been no one else for either of us ever before, therefore this union was very special. Neither of us had realized a human relationship as being anything, thus his kisses were my first and mine his. We had spoken previously about the fact that anything that appears to be "human," "physical," "material," "mortal," is simply nothing at all. Only that which is realized to be joined in Spirit is anything. All else is simply as said, nothing. Thus, there is none else. This moment was our first, without past, without future. This moment was our eternal moment. This moment of divine unity, coming together in Oneness is like awakening from a dream to find one's self in a new awareness. It is a sense that I always knew it could be like this, and yet I am in a strange new world, waking as it were as a newborn, squinting into the light.

Our love making lasted all night into the morning. We slept little, talked some, and held each other non-stop. The morning sun found the two of us dozing off and on, but eager to begin this new life as One.

The stateroom our old friend had given us as a gift was more than we ever could have imagined. It was completely furnished with anything our heart could desire, plus a kingsize bed with overstuffed pillows, and windows that stretched across the room, corner to corner. No more portholes. We could see all that we had a desire to see, as far as our vision would carry us. Fruit was supplied to our room morning, noon and night during the honeymoon and meals were served at our request, cooked to our liking, with never a bill to boot.

When we finally emerged from our cocoon after a week, we seemed to be walking above the decks instead of on them. Everyone who greeted us acted as though we were the same, only married, but we knew we were not.

We knew that something had taken place within our hearts that this world knew nothing about. We knew that there were shared secrets that we could not share if we tried. We knew that though on the outside we appeared to be the same people, within us a stirring was taking place that had awakened a whole new life for us.

We held hands everywhere we went. We parted only when we had to, and then we sneaked glances at each other across a room, and without words we spoke volumes to each other.

"This is no ordinary marriage of two people," I thought. "This is something beyond a wedding, not simply a ceremonial exercise. This is two hearts realizing that they beat as one - only two feet dancing - while both of us whirl about in time."

The honeymoon formerly ended, but we knew that the honeymoon in reality was just beginning.

About a month after the wedding we again met with our old friend. He again invited us to dinner to share some confidential information he had received. When he began to share these things with us, at first, I found it disturbing.

He told us that some new arrangements had been made for some of the passengers on board. He said that it had come to him from the "higher ups" that some of the passengers were going to be able to leave ship, but that it would be only those who had been on board for so many years and had come on board as adults.

The disturbing part was that it was very selective and that our old friend was one of the ones who had been chosen to leave the ship. "Do you want to leave?" I asked. Funny question from one who at one time thought that all she wanted was to have the opportunity herself.

"Yes. I've given it considerable thought and feel that it is time. Somehow I always felt that this opportunity would arise. I felt that sooner or later the population on board would warrant it. There are things that I know I will seem to miss for awhile, but they are only things and things are there for the wishing everywhere all the time. There is not going to be anything new where I go, because truly, there is nothing new under the sun, but it will appear as new to me. It will be a whole new life."

"You will miss things?" This was so out of character for him. I had expected him to say he would miss me!, for goodness sakes! I would surely miss him.

"Yes, I will miss a few things, like sunrises on deck, and nights like this one under the stars, while hearing the waves far below us lapping against the sides of the ship. I will miss all the things of "this life" aboard ship as we have known it, but I know that what I will experience will be every bit as wonderful as this has been. I actually anticipate this experience to pale in the light of it, although that may be hard to imagine right now."

"Well, my friend, I am a little hurt that you have not said you will miss me, us! I know I will miss you terribly."

"Oh, little lady, you have this wonderful One in your life now. The oneness you share is only going to be experienced in greater ways as the days seem to pass by. There is, after all, only one moment you know, one long eternal moment, for you to enjoy forever in the bonds of this new love you are just beginning to realize."

I reached across the table and held his hand. No one had opened my eyes the way this friend had, and I so appreciated him. I was unable to speak for sometime, but my Sweetheart began to speak for the both of us.

"You will always be in our heart. We will never forget you! We can never thank you enough for all you have done for us. You have given us everything we could think to want. You have been both a father and a friend to us, and we are privileged to have come into your company and have you in our lives.

You have introduced so much to us that we would not have known without your wisdom. You have enriched our lives more than words can say. You have given your Self to us, and now we will live as if you are here always living with us."

Our friend smiled, looked down at the glass of wine he held with both hands circling it on the table. "I will continue to be here with you. Really, in my heart I will be here even as you." He lifted his glass and said, "The same sweet wine."

We lifted our glasses to his and as the tinkling sounded I gulped back the tears. I wanted to hold on to him, to beg him to change his mind. He didn't have to depart the ship. Sure, he had been chosen to do so if he so wished, but he didn't have to! How could he leave us?

"This body is just a form, little lady. Don't let it fool you. I will never leave, you will only think I have. I told you once that I wasn't really on this ship anyway, remember? I've never been here as you think of 'here.' Oh, I'm here, but I'm not here in the same way you speak of here. Here and now is all there is little lady. There is no past, not really. That is only in our thinking that there appears to be such a thing. There is likewise no future. We only assume so long as we believe in time that there is a future. God is all, remember?"

"I remember. I know, but I am so used to your being around."

"No. You are used to a form you call me. I have a form that you cannot see. It is my true inner self. It never leaves, for it never came. It is - with or without this body you call your old friend."

The tears had ceased for now. I knew there would be a few more before he left us, but for now I was simply going to enjoy his presence for as long as possible, and I told him so.

"My presence? You still do not understand, my presence will always be here, it is this particular form that you assume is me that will seem to not be here. That is all. My presence is the Presence you call God, and it cannot leave! You are confused between a personality and The True Self, The Presence of God presented in a form you have associated with a name. This personality is not the true Life which I am. You need not hold onto a form. You will always have a form! But the one that appears to be right now, is not the true.

Do you remember the night they tried to reproduce the atmosphere of a fair to entertain the passengers? Do you remember the mirrors they brought on board that gave a distorted image of your body?"

"Sure do. I went from mirror to mirror laughing because my knees appeared to be at my ankles in one and in one my waist was right under my arms. It was a hoot."

"Well, my dear the way you see me and even the way you see yourself is as distorted an image of the real you, the real me, as can possibly be. We are Spirit being! Being you, being me, right now. Just being!"

"Just being..." I said, and remembered our golden haired little boy, how he had told us one time of a place he had been before he was born, as he put it. He said that we were all there and we were "just being."

"Where are you going?" I asked him. "I mean have they told you where you are going to be 'put off'?" He laughed.

"Well, I don't like to think of it that way. I'm not being 'put off.'" He laughed again. "I am being given another opportunity. I was chosen and now I chose to accept my choosing, that's all. Everyone will eventually be given the opportunity, because all of us are chosen, really. Many have been invited to make this transition, but few there are who accept the invitation at any given time. I consider it the greatest of all invitations and willingly accept, although I do not know exactly where I am going. But that is the thrill of it!

Just as we were chosen for this voyage, we are equally chosen to move on, each of us at an appointed time. And 'time' is a poor choice of words, knowing that there is only the one moment! Although it appears we will disembark at different times, we are all actually already disembarked, already observing this entire play taking place on the stage we call life. We are, after all, simply passing through these waters briefly. Don't let the ship become your security blanket. Be willing to go with the flow. Be open and willing at every opportunity to let go whatever you have become comfortable with, otherwise the dream will consume you. If any thing, or anyone has such a hold on you that you close yourself up to that one person or that one thing, it or they will squeeze the life out of you. To be free, you must remain open."

"Well, I hardly know how to ask questions then. I would have said, 'When will this take place', but since you say there is no time, then 'when' doesn't matter much, does it?"

"No. Time doesn't really matter at all, and when we need to know, we will, and where, if that matters then, I will know that too when I need to know it. For now, I just wanted you to be aware, and I ask you to keep all this under your hat. It's privileged information. It is a secret mission in a way, as only those who accept can ever know the whole of it.

When I know more, you will know. Is that good?"

"Yes, that's good."

"You know everything is, really. Good, that is."

We smiled and clutched hands, the three of us across the table. I knew he would never leave me, even if it did appear that he leaves the ship. He was just one of those that you feel you have always known and always would. He would never forsake my love for him, no matter what I did, or how much distance appeared to be between us. And I knew that if I ever needed him, he would find a way to be there for me! I just knew it and rested in that knowing.

That night my Sweetheart and I lay in bed in silence for a while, though my head rested on his shoulder, and I knew he was not asleep.

“Are you surprised?” - he asked.

“Surprised? Oh my yes. I suppose I never really thought any of us would ever be allowed to leave the ship. The thought of stepping from this vessel into a world that now seems strange to me, well, I don’t know. I don’t know if I want to anymore. Would you want us to leave the ship?”

“Not right now, but I don’t know how I might see it at another time.”

“Time. Could you see it at another ‘time’?”

“Well, I suppose not, actually, but I know this, I am seeing a lot of things differently it seems from moment to moment, so how can I say what I would do, or ‘we’, thinking in terms of ‘we’ now too, you and I, not just what I would do anymore.”

“Soul and Spirit united,” I said, reverberating what the Captain had said at our wedding.

“Once the soul and the Spirit are One there is no separating anymore, is there?”

“Were we ever really separated in the first place? I don’t think so. We have always been one. If you heard what he said tonight you’ve got to know that the so-called people we appear to be outwardly to a world that judges all that it sees by the appearance of it, is not who we are. Who we really are is our True Self, so in truth there is really only one of us, still a hard concept to comprehend.”

“Its not something we can “try” to understand. It must come by revelation.”

We lay there quietly for a while, breathing the same air, my heart beating next to his, until the beat became the same rhythm, and we rested. The same air, the same rhythm, the same Life living - as him, and as me. How wonderful.

I heard his soft slumbering snores and realized that he had drifted off. How wonderful to know that time is no more. That what appears to be 8 hours of sleep before us is really a back to back experience. We close our eyes to this world, only to open them and claim that we slept so many hours. We claim all kinds of things, while in Truth there is only ONE of us, one heart beating, one breath blowing, and it is the wind of God passing in, through, and about us, in us, as us. It is all too wonderful for words. It is the wind of Spirit, the very air being our breath, the very breath of God.

I was just thinking how grateful I was to have found my soul-mate, the one who would continue to wake with me in the mornings until we are so awake that we no longer sleep at all, or even think we do.

In the morning I awakened to the smell of coffee and the sound of seagulls laughing as they passed our open stateroom window. The senses were wonderful and to be enjoyed, but I knew immediately upon recognition of these senses, that even my very senses were being stretched into infinity. With a sixth sense I now saw things that I knew I could not have understood just a short while ago. I was tasting life from a new perspective, and I smelled an aroma of good things to come! My vision had begun to be lifted from the fascination with the petty fragmentations of life as I had thought of it, to Life eternal, infinite, in fullness, wholeness. I found it remarkable that my senses were being intensified, and thus even my everyday experience was appearing to me differently. It is as though the senses, as I had known them, were a mere sample of what the senses truly are. They are being released into expression, as am I. I laughed. How amazing, things were not as they seemed, and even what seemed to be was taking on a whole new appearance to me. My world was changing before my eyes.

We headed north towards the Hawaiian Islands as winter turned to summer in the northern hemisphere. Somehow when I thought of that occurrence taking place, I realized that it was not truly taking place, that that was simply a way that we were taught to think and thus had accepted it as being a true happening.

One evening our old friend came to us to give us the news we had been expecting ever since we had talked that night. He was leaving on Saturday morning. We would actually dock and let down the walks for passengers to leave the ship that no one ever truly expected to leave!

We spent as much time with him as possible in the next few days and finally on Friday night we ordered a special dinner in our new home and invited him for a private party, just the three of us, to be followed by a larger surprise going away affair up on deck.

Of course we were selfishly wanting to keep him all to ourselves for the evening, but he had quite a following, a group that loved to hear him speak, and enjoyed his company as much as we did. Thus, we had to accept our private dinner party as our last opportunity to speak with him before his departure.

"Thank you, again my old friend, for everything, and I do mean everything!" I said to him as we finished eating, while he poured the wine.

"Oh, my dear One, we have only begun. You speak as if we are ending something here. Not so. You have no idea. Truly, you have seen nothing yet as you are going to see!"

"Sometimes I feel like I could touch the sky." I said and leaned back with my wine glass in hand.

"You can." He said. I smiled at him, but did not understand what he had said.

"Close your eyes," he said, and I did as he suggested. "Now with your eyes closed, in your mind, lift your hand up and touch the stars. Can you do that?"

"Yes." I said as I reached in my mind. "Its like a canopy! A twinkling canopy. Like a tent with stars hanging right there – here! I can touch it, and I can even make it bounce!"

"Now with your eyes closed, poke the moon. Now spin the globe you call earth, and hold the sun in your hand. In your mind's eye you can do these very things, can you not? It is all within you."

"Yes, in my mind I can."

"Well, my dear, while you think you are in the world, the truth is, the world is in you! Do not you recall the words, 'the kingdom of God is within you'? All is within you! You have had the ability all along to name the things in your world. Rather than to call all good, or all God, or all life, in your darkness you have labeled them either good or evil. Come close. Bring the world, your world, close and begin again to recognize all as very good, all as God, and watch your world change."

"Sure, but..."

"And remember this, 'the kingdom' is actually consciousness; therefore, seek ye first the Consciousness of God – the consciousness of good, wholeness, perfection! All that appears to be is in that Consciousness, thus all that appears to be is in you. Can you accept that?"

"I can. I can." And I did. Of course, I knew that many things he said were things that I could only right now know in my knower, and were not as real to me as they apparently were to him. He assured me that if I would continue to listen, to separate myself and be still, I would come to know these things, not just think them to be true. He told me once that it was a small price to pay to be alone, to be willing to turn off and away from all voices in order to hear the Voice of Infinity. He said that all those who seek truth will find it if they seek for it in the quietness, in aloneness.

He told the both of us that night of the unlimited possibilities awaiting us if we would but surrender our own silly little selves as we have thought of ourselves, and the thinking that we are only so-called human beings subject

to a three dimensional world. He also said to surrender the world as we have thought it to be, with all of its history. Surrender to something bigger than the nightly news, Life! The big picture goes way beyond man's conceptual world. This is our inheritance, to walk beyond the confines of the physical and mental realm of thought. He said that no matter what we have thought to be important, it would wax and wane until it absolutely fades from view if we can but realize our Identity. The Voice, Life, God - is speaking, inspiring, lifting and being. He explained that if we would give our self to listening, rather than to thinking, we could begin to live by revelation, and begin to know intuitively all that we would ever need to know. What could be more important than that? He told us to consider that if we should so desire we would see things that those around us could not see, hear things they could not hear, know things they did not know. He said that if we so desired we would join a great company of those who have gone before us who came to recognize their immortality, and to realize Life.

He told me to get my nose out of the dirt, to stop poking it into the dust of time. To put the newspaper aside, and realize that it is old news by the time it reaches me anyway, and since it is man's picture of what is happening, it is nothing of any real consequence. He said to let man's world go! He invited me to step up and slip in along side him onto the circle of the earth, to see its inhabitants as grasshoppers and the so-called goings on there from a different perspective. He said to lift my head, my thinking, into the freshness of LIFE beyond the seeming world of opposition, into the real world of wonder and ecstasy! He said we were missing it! Missing life - by being consumed with an illusion. He said to set to set our attention on things above!

So much to consider, and so inspiring! And, he said that being attuned to the true world - the one without end - rather than focusing on the dream world which is a temporary state of mind at most, we would realize all that we could ever desire here, now, immediately and eternally, awaiting our discovery, not down an imaginary road somewhere off in a distant never-land. We have only to give our attention to it. "Hey! You! Look up! You're focusing on a past and dreaming of a future while Life stands right here before you awaiting your recognition. You must be willing to forsake all that you have believed until this moment; to be willing to fly, soar, like the seagulls that beautiful mystical morning." He suggested that there is available right now a world of wonder beyond our wildest imagination, if we are willing to throw our leg over the side of the boat. There have been many sermons preached about Peter's courageous feat - walking on water - but few there be who are willing to step out into the great unknown without looking back. It means turning, he said, from reason to follow the intuitive guide of the Soul.

"A door is open to you, but you must be willing to walk through it. Heaven and earth as you have thought of it will pass away. Your eyes will be opened and you will begin seeing everything as it truly is. There are many names which stand out to you from the ages, names such as Moses, Abraham, Isaiah, Solomon, David, the Apostle Paul, John the Revelator, of course, among the many Biblical writers, but there are more. There is St. Francis of Assisi, Walt Whitman, John Bunyan, Jacob Boehme, Teresa of Avila, C.S. Lewis, Meister Eckhart, Albert Einstein, Brother Lawrence, Lao-Tze, Gautama, the Buddha, Plato, Shakespeare, Lord Tennyson, to name only a few. Some of the names we know, others - many others - we do not, but names are of little importance; composers, artists, writers and others who made a distinct mark as they passed through the consciousness of this world. These names represent a passionate desire which stretched forth into the infinite. They speak of enlightenment, beyond the common, ordinary, reasonable plane of thought.

What I am talking with you about is not religion, unless we use the word in its purest form. This is the realization of life without beginning or end. It is eternal. You did not begin with a birth and you will not end with a death. The life which is endless has brought you here, to this moment. You will continue to be, without conclusion, no matter the apparent evidence to the contrary. Do you want to know if this is so? How willing are you to remain in a world of confusion, where all appears imperfect, hopeless and painfully difficult? Would you not rather know the kingdom which is 'at hand'? Yes, I believe you would or I would not be here telling you these things.

What is the open door I speak of? It is the door Jesus was speaking of when he said, 'I am the door.' You too are the doors! Is your door closed or open? You are the door, the point, fixed between time and eternity. You seem to be walking in one world, while in reality you are seated in the other, watching your little self struggle through a maze of thoughts. Yet there are not two places. There only appears to be. The world you think you

are walking through is in your thinking only. It is a dream. Awake! Wake up, and smell the Truth. Take in the aroma of Life; that which Jesus referred to as “the kingdom.” It is percolating here all about us. You are in it even when you think you are in the world of circumstances! The dream world is in you! You only appear to be in it. But when it dawns on you that Reality is your true consciousness, the Consciousness of Life - beyond what ‘seems to be’, you will realize that you are not only in It, but you are ONE with It. It is here, ‘at hand’, awaiting our willingness to open the door!

The names I mentioned to you, as well as many others, are still receiving of life – as life, far beyond the ground level. They have not died. No, they could not die, rather they just walked off the ship, right out into what they were seeing beyond the limitation of so-called physical railings! They are living still, though the name and the form they were presented to us as is not visible to us now. They are very much alive, living LIFE, one with It, because they saw It before their feet even left the deck. They are Conscious, no longer dreaming, no longer confused by the maze of “this world.” They did not ‘go’ anywhere, for there is nowhere to go, even though they seem to have left us. Actually it is us who left reality, the reality they have returned to. They simply transcended the preoccupation with the consciousness of this world, and joined, in mind, with that which they had known before the world of illusion began for them. They realized though their heart’s search What and Who they truly are. Their realization moved them back into the Oneness of the world of Reality. At some point they heard the Voice, the Voice of Recognition, of Revelation, and they opened their door to It. Truth stands knocking on your door. Will you open to It? These did. Thus while still present in ‘this world’ in a form you would recognize, they lived above and beyond the ordinary, above and beyond the hum-drum of a mere existence. Because of this they realized the power to live life-extraordinaire.

Once the door is open you begin to merge with the Light coming through, until you are sucked out of the dream, back through the black hole, into the Light of the Eternal.

And Life - sweet hearts - is no respecter of persons, thus Life is calling you as well. Calling you to what? To turn from the crowds, to listen for the sounds of silence, to begin to walk in a different direction, to swim upstream past the bars and the cars and the wars, to walk right through the scene playing on the screen before you. The crowd will press you to the brow of the hill, but if you can hear the Voice of Emancipation, the Voice of God, you will pass straight through them. Do not be content with the status quo. Do not accept the impotent low life you call human as being a reality. That is an illusion. Rise above it. And the way you do this is to take no thought about it, rather take every thought captive, holding up each thought or emotion for consideration. Ask your self, ‘Is this a God thought?’ If not, it is nothing. You’ll never miss it. Toss it.

Do not try to figure anything out, but LISTEN! Do not try to make anything happen, just be. Be still and listen for this one you call God to speak to you! Let your Intelligent SELF take over! Be willing to hear something beyond what you think you know, but remain content in the knowledge that what you are is presently in metamorphosis, and what will be - already is! Be content right where you are, because you are going nowhere, though the view before you will appear to change. You will gain no ground by wrestling against the Truth. You are fighting against your Self, and cannot hope to win that battle. You will find your Self, the Winner, when you give up and give in to the truth that God is the only Being.

I wish you to know this. I wish you to know your “I”-identity that you might truly begin to live. Desire truth until the questions of life begin to be answered for you. Life is a mystery, which will always be being further revealed. Hunger and thirst for the Consciousness of God, and at the same time, rest in the truth that you are what you seek. What you want to know you know, you simply do not know that you know. It sounds like a riddle, but it is the mystery of life, which is being revealed to you.

You have been drawn to me and I to you, because you are not content to live life in a fog, working yourself into a sweat of confusion, but rather you are hearing the inner call of your own desire, beckoning you. When you are through with this world, you do not have to die to leave it! It will disappear behind you as you walk through the door, or the railing, as the case may be. It is an illusion, which you are passing through.

It doesn’t matter what you’ve done, or what you are doing, the only truly important thing is that you realize your helplessness to do anything in and of your own little self, or the person you have thought yourself to be. Be still

and know! Life will take you up and take you out of circumstances, because circumstances are dream stuff. No matter how grave they appear, they are a mist on which the shadow is being cast, just like a film is cast onto a screen. You will begin to receive insight into a world beyond the one you think you are 'in' right now. What I am suggesting to you will deliver you from your own thinking, your own beliefs, your own knowledge, your own ability, your own personality, because in truth you have nothing of your 'own' and are nothing 'on your own.' The 'human' you have thought of yourself as being is absolutely nothing, thus it deserves no regard, no pity, no attention. Let it go. It is the mere shadow of Who you truly are.

There is nothing to be fixed, to be changed, to heal, to treat, to be made better, to improve, to grow, to evolve, for what appears to be - is not the true One you are at all. You do not moan and groan when you leave a movie theater. The movie is over, that's all. Do you wish your dream world to be an endless movie? Or would you not rather step into the crystal clearness of Light and Life? Just stop, right now and turn from who you have thought your self to be and surrender to the Allness of God, Life, for, in truth, that is all there is. Realize your little personality self, with its weaknesses, frailties, and your sad predicament which seems to have you encapsulated in a world you cannot control, is nothing more than an actor giving a performance on stage. God is all there is. You will eventually wear yourself out trying to stay in character anyway, but if you will give up, be still, get quiet and give your whole attention to it, the Truth will reveal Its Self to you.

All who seek will find. But you have to be seeking to find. If you think you already have it all figured out, then you will continue to go around in circles until the life you have believed in will be drained out of you. It is only when you are ready and willing to leave the dream world that you will come to realize the Power and Majesty of the One you call I, or Me. The same one that said, 'Come unto me', is your true Self. You are this Me, but not you, Mr. Personality – yes, you, there with the mask on, pretending to be a human being. No, no, no. It is only if you are willing to remove the mask, to become transparent, to drop the con job you have been trying to hold together on the stage-play you have called 'your life.' It is only then - when you are ready to give up your life, your will, your way, that you will realize a release from 'this world.' What you have been holding onto is thin air. You have been trying to juggle all the circumstances of your world so as to keep it in perfect balance, but you can only do this so long before you lose it. This is not fun and games, my friends, this is a matter of life! It is not easy, because it requires a total surrender in faith, but it is the most exciting thing you will ever know, because It ushers you into Infinity, Immortality, Reality - HERE, NOW."

"So, in light of what you are saying, may I ask, 'If God is all', then who am I?"

"That, and all the other things that I have told you, are for you to ponder in your heart. The answer will dawn upon you. I have told you, but you must hear it for yourself. And what you hear you will not be able to share with many, simply because there are not many yet who wish to hear. But, in truth, there are not 'many' anyway, only the One of us, but this One will respond in what seems like 'many' as deep calls to deep. God, or Intelligence is recognizing Himself in you, and you are recognizing yourself in God.

I tell you this because I love you and I carry you with me, and you will never be apart from me. I have said a lot to you, but you will begin to hear so much more than what I have said in your own awakening. The Presence of Life will speak volumes to you every moment you are willing to be still and listen. We are One, and no man can separate what God joins together. We are just beginning to realize What we truly are!"

"I've never considered myself an intellectual." I said, but he seemed to overlook my ignorance.

"It is Intelligence which is the stream you are flowing into, and will shortly realize the flow with, not intellect. Intellect is something man thinks he 'has.' Intelligence is what you truly are. You will see."

We rose from the table, hugged one another, and went to the party that was being given on the upper deck and enjoyed the festive mood. We could not be sad as though we were parting, because we were closer now than ever.

Since tomorrow is not truly tomorrow, although we appeared to pass another night, in truth it was as though we blinked and were standing on the upper deck once again, this time in the morning light. In the brightness of the

morning light we again embraced, but our hands slid slowly apart and he turned and walked down the walkway into the light.

"To the land of the living," I smiled.

"To where?" - my sweetheart inquired.

"I'll tell you later." We waved, but he never looked back, but then, he wouldn't, for there was nothing ever to look back to.

The days ahead held many wonderful things for us as we were getting to know each other intimately.

We often spoke of our old friend and especially the things he said to us in that final dinner that evening. We never opened a bottle of wine that we did not think of him, recalling that it is same sweet wine filling us all. But more and more we realized that each has to drink his own cup. It is the same wine flowing, yes, but I cannot drink your cup for you. You cannot drink my cup for me. I cannot walk through your door. You alone must do it. Neither can the cup be shared. Jesus Christ asked us, "Are you able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of?" and then told us that we would indeed. He could equally have said, "Are you willing to open your door and walk through?"

What was he speaking of? Crucifixion? No. But death to 'life' as we have thought of it, yes. He said we would know we are ready when 'this world' no longer fascinates us, when we are tired of the rat race, the disappointments and frustration of trying to do good, be good, think right, only to find that bad things happen to good people no matter how hard they try, or how good they are. When we tire of praying and getting no answers, when we do all we know to do and end up lonely, depressed, miserable, sick and our world is falling apart, or when we simply become bored with the monotonous daily rounds. When we begin to want to know what's behind the door more than we want anything, when we are ready to touch the sky, to join the One who is already seated in heavenly places, on the circle of the earth, to begin to experience LIFE for real, to drop all our security blankets to step into the great unknown - then we are ready.

So, I lift my cup and realize that in so doing I surrender all. But then that which is surrendered is nothing and what I receive in return is my own immortality, eternal life, my True I-identity, and my cup is filled and running over.

We realized too, as the days seemed to roll into years the necessity for each of us to be alone often, to spend time in quietness and stillness. This is not a group effort. This can only be done alone. The one who is willing to turn aside and walk alone through the door will find the Truth on the other side, as he walks. So long as he is dependent on an accompaniment, although he may talk about it, and know a lot about it, he will not BE IT. Oneness with reality begins in solitude. This is an individual experience. Not separate – but individual! This is not separate in the way we have thought of each of us as being separate, but it is only through a separation from the thinking of the world that we find our completeness, wholeness, and Oneness. There will never be a church or group which will ascend together. This is accomplished in the 'closet' or the solitary experience of Life. This is not even in a couple's ability to conquer together. This is a One on One experience. This is a One AS One experience. This is Life. And in reality, it is not actually an experience. When we open the door and step into Life we find it is the on-going, the eternal, never ending, always has been, always will be, Presence of my Living Self, and no one can experience that for "Me." It takes courage to walk through the door, but the Life that is there to greet you will make you feel right at home.

Waiting for proof before you step out is futile. The one who looks for a sign will never receive the sign. Life Itself is the proof. This is a walk of faith through dense jungles, deep waters, darkened passageways, shifting sands, and tight corridors, before you come to the clearing, where you find that truly what you have ventured into is more than you could have expected. Suddenly the water you stepped out onto becomes a solid rock. The crooked way becomes straight. The tight places expand into infinity. The way is lighted before you. And those who are there cheering you on are more than those you have left behind. You find that greater is the One that is in you, the hidden man of the heart, the inner Self, than the one you thought you were in the world.

The more we closed ourselves away from the world the more One we became. We still enjoyed the company of friends and family, of course. The world does not stop, rather it is revealed for what it is, and the

transformation begins. We did not become reclusive, but we did covet alone times. The more we heard the more we understood without words. The more we saw, the more we agreed, until there was peace on earth and good will towards all men as a way of life. We realized that petty differences are due to misunderstanding Who we are, and What we are. When we realize our sole desire to know God, to come out of all our confusion, to Live, really Live, then all differences dissolve, peace reigns and harmony is the order of the day. Beginning to understand my self in a new light, I no longer questioned the intentions, reasons, whereabouts or desires of another. It was as if there had been static on the lines of communication between us, but now that I was getting a clearer signal, I could understand what perhaps they could not on their end just yet. Until we desire Life, Abundant Life, Eternal Life, the Only Life, what appears to be a great gulf seems to be fixed between us. Remember the gulf is not real. It is only in thought, therefore, take no thought.

That which you have been seeking is your true Self, I told my self. That which even a husband or wife cannot complete is complete in Him, Christ, the Expression of God that I am.

In the days ahead many things seemed to be changing, but it was only the way we were seeing things that was changing really. We began to read, and we read the works of many who had seen and heard. But we remembered what our friend had told us and thus held onto no one writer, no one book as having the only revelation. It was not our desire to worship a person or personality. We knew that there is only One Writer, One Author, writing all. The many ways of saying the same thing simply helps to steady us and bring balance to our walk. We did not read to learn, but to confirm that which we already apparently know, but did not know that we knew. We equally knew that all the books in the world dim in the light of intuitive revelation which comes only in our own quiet times.

We also began to realize that we are the books, ourselves. I am the revelation. God, or the I that I am, has opened my book, and I am now reading my story moment by moment. It is the never-ending story of Life.

For me, a great satisfaction had set in. I was at peace with my Self. I struggled less and less with things that had once worried me. I left the other fellow to himself in a realization that there really is no "other," God being all. Since God is all, anything that appears to be otherwise is part of the stage-play, act, or illusion. Sounds hard, sounds cruel, until you know. Knowing is loving, because Love refuses to give place to anything that is not Its Self. Love refuses to scrape and bow to an unknown God. Love is Love being what It is. The desire for wisdom is answered and the way up is down. Humility is not weakness, but rather it is the willingness to accept thoughts which come to you by revelation, letting go of all that you have believed - to welcome Life anew. Thoughts will come to you that you could not think if you tried. Thoughts will simply appear to you as drops of light filling your soul! Truth speaks and Love responds.

The world as we have known it is fictitious. There is no such thing as human love, human life, human beings. There is only God. To believe otherwise is to rob God the glory. God will not share his glory with another. Whether you call It Life, Intelligence, Light, Universe, Oneness, It is: God being All. And God is Love, Love is God, thus Love is all there is.

It is a paradox. What the world considers true is the fantasy. What the world considers fantasy is the true. It is interesting that we have accepted this man called Jesus who did such fantastic things and then turned to us and told us we would do the same, and even greater things than he did would we do, then we relegated it all to a morning worship service and put the possibility of it off into a future event, somewhere 'out there.' This incredible God-man Jesus has been revered as being something other than we are. He came to show us Life as IT truly is! He even said, "I am the way. I am the truth. I am the life." But his message was misinterpreted to mean that he was it. He was saying that It is the I – the I that I AM which is It. What I AM is It. And What I AM is all! He was pointing us to the "I" that I Am, the light, the way, the door. It is only in being still and quiet that I can come to know The I - I am.

My sweetheart and I spent many hours sitting on the deck, watching the sunrises and sunsets. We sometimes did not speak during those hours, but rather let our own heart speak to us. In other words, we each drank from his own cup the same sweet wine.

We never heard from our old friend again. Yet, we felt his Presence often. We knew that he had not left us. He had simply left his mask and costume at the end of that walkway, where we saw him disappear into the light that beautiful morning. His words were still very much with us, showing us the way.

All those who appear to have left the ship had each left a part of themselves with us, and these parts make up the whole of who we are. Their image had been swallowed up in the light from which their reflection had come in the beginning of their visible presentation. Though they had returned Home - which is God, they are still with us now - not in personality, no, for that was never anything anyway. They are here, now in the magnificence of Spirit, God as all – everyone, everywhere all the time, evenly present, being revealed still in us.

Our golden haired boy became a member of the ship's crew. Many a night we saw him on watch, and admired the discipline that had been achieved in his young life. He had been trained well and thus was able to stand in places of responsibility that he would not have otherwise.

But there were some rough young people aboard ship as well. They simply did not know who they were. There was no discipline in their lives, thus they acted the part of the young villains that they assumed themselves to be, actors in the play they called their life.

They were spoiled by a life of leisure having had every extravagance afforded them on board. We realized that they were simply confused by a world that spoke to them of great material wealth, with things to be had, money to be made, possibilities to be realized, and yet doors appeared to be closed and locked in every direction. Their rebellion against society was manifest in hyperactivity, wild untamed behavior, and stubborn willfulness. They were simply confused and lost in a world which made no sense to them.

We had to concede that we could hardly blame them. While on one hand it appeared that there was a world of things being dangled before them, on the other they were told that God sat in the heavens allowing or refusing what they wanted, dependent on their behavior. They were taught that they were not to judge, however, they were told that God himself judged every single thing they did, and stayed ever on watch for any indiscretion to hold against them. They were taught that they might be able to wrench from the hand of this God of Love the bare necessities of life, if they were good, but if they messed up at all, even one little mistake, they might not only receive nothing, but could end up in a hell of a mess for eternity. They heard God called Father, but for some of them, their only example of a "father" left a bitter taste in their mouth.

To most of them Jesus Christ was an enigma and God was a being too far fetched to take seriously, except when he was given credit for natural disasters. The false image of God offered them no real answers. They never felt they could be good enough to appease the God they had heard about, so why try? Blind men who professed to have the truth on every corner disagreed among themselves as to what was true, what was right, what was acceptable, and what was not.

These young men were taught to trust no one, grab all the gusto they could get, that revenge was the name of the game, and that no one played fair. Even the good guys, the ones who talked about God, love and peace, struck back rather than turn the other cheek. It all made no sense to them.

And the cross, what was that all about? They were told they had to beg for mercy and ask God to heal sick people, but excuse him when he denied mercy, and failed to heal the sick. They were told that though their sins were forgiven, they had to continually ask forgiveness for any indiscretion. They were taught that they could ask for things in prayer, but only for certain things, and even those wishes may or may not be granted. They were told that God met needs – sometimes, but wants had no guarantee. How confusing can the world be? And they were sold into this bondage of confusion by those who had the wealth, the power, and the world on a string, or so it appeared to them.

We watched the young ones wander into and out of the various religious groups and watched as their enthusiasm dissolved into disillusionment. Some assumed that religion offered the answers they sought, but either realized after a while that 'church' was not much different than the world outside those doors, or gave up and settled for whatever crumbs fell from the table within those doors. We saw some of them attempt to conform to one group or another, religious or otherwise, and at times we grieved for them as we saw them

become satisfied with conformity as their refuge. We knew that until they came to the end of it all, their play would go on and they would continue to stumble around on a dark stage in full costume. But this is the way of the world, until the disillusionment becomes too overwhelming and unbelievable - the players play their part to the full. When hypocrisy comes to a full end the play is over.

It was a group of these very confused young men who met my husband coming home late one evening. He had met with some friends to discuss an upcoming event which was being planned for the passengers and the discussion had lasted until nearly midnight.

As he said goodnight to his friends and rounded a section of the ship that we used as a shortcut to our stairwell, these young villains stood waiting in the darkness for any unsuspecting voyager who might happen along.

It has been said that my beloved attempted to have a civil conversation with them, but they were so lost in their world of confusion that his feeble attempts at normalcy were but a game to them. He suggested to them that they would all be better off to let him pass, but they were young and foolish and very caught up in the drama of life and so refused his advice.

It never was discovered exactly what transpired that evening. All I knew was that my husband would not be coming home to me as usual. His tragic disappearance, while taking me off guard, was the beginning of the end of the illusion for me. It was in this moment of great loss that I first fell on my face crying out to know what truly was true. Though my friend had left us with words of wisdom, I had to know for myself. All that he had shared with us was 'his' revelation, not my own. I needed to know God for myself. I did not care any longer what man had to say about it.

I had accepted what our friend had told us as being the Truth, but it had to become Truth to me. I had to experience Truth my self! In my grief and pain I died. I did not die in the usual sense thought of as death, but I died to my own thinking, and that is what must happen to know Truth, because the Mind of God is way above all that we have been taught. The caterpillar dies, in a way, when he enters the cocoon, so that the Beautiful Life hidden within can be revealed. In the tragedy of losing the one I thought of as my life, my security, my companion, the world I had known went into a tailspin.

Sometime after his disappearance I met one of the young men who were being questioned about that night. He was wild and rude. He swore constantly as though he had forgotten the words which would normally fit in those spaces. He was not really dirty, but very unkempt. He hated with a hate that I had never encountered prior.

I met him entirely by accident. I was exiting the dining room one afternoon and he was rushing in as I came out. I was rather surprised to see him in the daylight as usually he and the gang he ran with seemed to emerge only after dark. There had been much talk on board of exactly what should be done about the situation. There was a prison on board, but catching the perpetrator, or perpetrators, or in our case, murderer, was difficult.

Our eyes met and he seemed to know immediately who I was. "Hey," I reached out and grabbed the sleeve of his jacket as he tried to wrestle it away from me. "Wait a minute. I only want to talk to you."

His eyes were dark and lifeless, though I thought I noted a glint of fear in them.

He jerked his jacket free and said, "Yeah, so what?"

"I know you know about my husband."

"I don't know nothin'," and he swore and jumped back as if I were going to hit him.

"Wait, please. I know you know something and I only want to talk to you. I won't even ask you to reveal names, but I would like to know what happened."

He hesitated and I thought for a moment he was going to say more, but instead he simply swore, turned from me and ran through the dining room and out through the kitchen door.

I went to the kitchen, but he had escaped through a side entrance and everyone in the kitchen seemed to be looking as confused as I.

Two weeks later I met him again, but this time I felt it was not so much by chance. I was walking on the deck late in the evening. I was no more afraid than my husband had been, for I realized nothing of the world could hurt me further. We had spoken often about what eternal life really mean: life with no beginning and no end. I was really beginning to understand this life was being played out before me as if on a screen, and that it was truly an illusion; that it was the inner self that was the true, not the visible outer expression that the world called by name.

He came down the well-shined boardwalk and stopped, standing some fifty feet from me to light a cigarette as he leaned against the railing. I hesitated to approach him at first for fear he would turn and bolt.

He turned his back to me, and I knew by the body language to hold my position and wait. Shortly he turned to face me. I would almost describe the look on his face as one of pity or regret when he looked at me, but he quickly retreated into a stern and uncaring demeanor when I took a step in his direction. I waited and again turned to the railing.

Finally I retreated to a deck chair. I sat down and pulled a blanket over my feet. He would just have to come to me, I thought. He had not appeared here by accident this evening. He must have been watching me and so it was my turn to let him approach me.

He came and stood with one foot up against the wall behind him almost behind my chair to the side in the shadows. I let him take the lead as I quietly waited.

"I don't know nothing 'bout your husband."

"Weren't you there that night?"

"I was there when he come around the corner. There was a bunch of us there, but I didn't stick around."

"Do you know what happened?"

Silence. He threw the cigarette to the deck and put it out with the heel of his boot, then replaced the boot against the wall again. I waited.

"Sh..." one swear word followed another, and I thought that was the end of the conversation, but then he actually formed a sentence, "Look I don't know what happened. I left. They were messing with your husband. I didn't feel like getting into nothing that night, so I left. That's all."

"And you haven't heard anything about it?" I questioned.

"Yeah, I've heard some stuff, but who knows." He lit another cigarette.

"Well, I appreciate your coming back to talk to me."

"Hey, I didn't come back to talk to nobody. I was just here that's all."

"Okay, but I'm glad you are here."

Silence - as he drew another long drag off his cigarette.

"Would you like to join me for something to eat?" I got up, picked up my sweater, and looked straight at him.

He laughed. He looked at the floor and then back at me. "You gotta be..." swearing again.  
"I have invited you to dinner with me, if you wish."

"Why..." he hesitated, then followed, with "Naw, that's okay. You don't want me..." he trailed off putting this cigarette out under his boot again while smiling at the floor and shaking his head.

I bade him good evening then, and walked into the dining room.

I sat at a table where I could see him for a while. He went to the railing and leaned on it for some time, lighting one cigarette after another. He finally just walked on off into the darkness, never looking in my direction again.

I thought about him quite a bit in the next few days. I wondered how a mother's son gets in such a sad shape. I wondered how one little boy comes into the world a golden haired child, while another ends up disheveled, confused, afraid, and alone.

I acknowledged a sense of emptiness. I needed something to fill the void. He and I had had more than most couples ever realize and we knew Life in such a way as to not accept its passing as anything other than the fading of a form, but I had to admit that it was partially the form I missed. I missed having someone to love and talk with about things that only we could understand. I also knew that it would take what seemed like some time for his personality to fade to the vanishing point. In the end, however, the personality is not the true anyway. The Life that had lived him is God and that does not, cannot, fade.

Two months later in the dead of winter the young man came to me again. He stood at my doorway, much to my surprise, one morning when I answered a knock.

"Yes?" I asked as I opened the door.

"I heard something."

"About my husband?"

"I heard he was thrown over." His eyes met mine for just a second. He quickly darted away from direct contact as though to look at me straight on would somehow make me real to him.

"Well, I had heard that too. That's not really news, although I suppose your saying so further confirms what I had been told."

"Well, there's something else." He hesitated, leaning against the doorway, looking at the floor while rubbing the side of his boot on the carpet.

"What else?"

"They robbed him. One of them has his watch and wallet. They have his identification and what money he had. That's all I know."

"Do you know who has these things?"

"I've told you all I know."

"You must know who has these things."

He looked down the hall, first one way, then the other.

"I'll let you know when I know for sure, if I find out for sure."

"Okay. That would be very kind of you."

"What ya gonna do?"

"About what?"

"When I tell you, what ya gonna do?"

"I don't know that I will do anything."

"Will you turn him in?"

"I don't know right now. May I ask you something?"

"What?"

"Do you believe in God?"

He stepped back like I had slapped him, raised his eyebrows and grinned, but he didn't answer. I waited. He reeled away from the doorway and stepped backwards as though he were going to walk away from me backwards.

"Do you?"

"I don't think there is no God. Look, lady, I just came to tell you what I heard. Don't go messin' with me."

I stood looking at him without saying a word. I too looked at the floor now, then down the hall, then the ceiling, then back at him.

"I just don't want you to be afraid. Its not my intention to do anything, to turn anyone in. Whoever he is, he is forgiven no matter what he has done. He simply doesn't know what he is doing. What we do to another we are really doing to our self, because we are really all One."

"One what?"

"One, simply One."

"Hey, I gotta go," and he turned around and headed down the hall. He looked back once as he put his cigarette to his lips and grinned at me over his shoulder, not a smile, but a grin, as though he were laughing at me, but I didn't care. The one I saw walking away from me was simply the costume and mask, playing a part. The One he truly was, was the same One I am. The same sweet wine, individual glasses. His glass might be a little foggy right now, but the same Life lives us both, so I knew that his true self knew.

I turned and went into my cabin and sat for quite a while in stillness and quietness, because there is where I find my strength. I thought of this young man also, not as he appeared to be, but as he truly is. I knew that he simply did not know his true identity. I thought about him saying that they had my husband's wallet and ID. I thought, "No, they have a fake ID. His true identity is hid with Christ in God."

In the next few days some of the official investigators came to my door as well. They inquired as to the young man who had visited me and what he had to say. I told them he said that my husband's wallet had been taken according to a rumor with his ID and some money in it, but he wasn't sure who had it. They said they would question him. They asked me if I was going to press any charges once they nailed it down. I told them that if it got that far we would discuss it then. They reminded me that this was murder we were talking about and that something should be done. I said thank you and closed the door.

One night there was a tent revival taking place on deck. I was leaning on a railing not far from it. I could hear some of the preaching and realized they were preaching about the recent “murder” on board. The preacher was stating that the one responsible needed to be brought to justice, that he was simply a sinner that needed to be brought to his knees. I listened for a while and then walked away.

A fellow passenger came to me and asked, “You know they are preaching about what happened to your husband down there, right?”

“I heard some of it.”

“They need to round up all those young hoodlums and put them away! They’re a nuisance, a menace.”

“We don’t know what happened that night. It could have been an accident.”

“An accident? I doubt it.”

“Well, I’m not in favor of convicting and then finding out.”

As I walked back to my cabin, I heard the preaching again over the loud speaker! “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Sin is the issue here. The sins of the fathers are visited upon this generation. We need to...” was all I heard as I turned to descend the stairs.

“Sin is the issue,” reverberated in my thinking, but I thought. “Well, what is sin, but simply not knowing who we are? All have sinned. All have denied that God is ALL. But then, if God is all – who is there to convict?”

In my cabin I sat in the silence for a while without even turning on a light. I listened within my heart for the spirit of truth. I knew the people on board were afraid, afraid for their loved ones, afraid for their lives. They did not understand that their life was Christ, that they had no life of their own. They did not understand that God is all and thus there is no power apart from God. If they had known that, really known that, they would have known that nothing had taken place, no one had truly died, no life had been taken. Life, which is God, cannot be taken. Had not the resurrection and ascension proven the powerlessness of the thing called death? I was beginning to understand that the belief in a life lived on planet earth as a human being is simply a fine dream we appear to be having, thus a fantasy, but we can only know that when we are ready to know it.

I realized that the tent revival on deck was equally a fantasy. While those who attended were indeed looking for truth, the one they were listening to was as caught up in the dream as they. This whole world of thought is a fantasy and all the beliefs that go with it. There is only one mind and that is the Mind of Christ, the Mind of Light, and that is My True Mind; that is Your True Mind. It is the Only Mind, in fact. Not by listening to an outer voice can anyone ever come to know Truth. Only when we be still and quiet enough to hear the still small voice within can we know. But I was not condemning anyone, and knew that we all do what we believe is right at the moment. When the time comes the Truth comes to us as well and we are set free from the delusional world.

So the nations rage, and imagine a vain thing. I and my beloved are one, and nothing can separate us - not death, nor life, nor any power that appears to be.

As for the “sins of the fathers,” there are no fathers. Jesus said to call no man on earth your father. Why? Because he knew that there is only one Father – Which is one Consciousness - and any other so-called consciousness is an illusional state of mind or thought. It is an erroneous assumption that there is God and something or someone else. Somehow I knew that if we could simply “I”-dentify with Truth, we would see each other as God being – God being you, God being me. “Our Father which art in heaven,” is our Consciousness in the Awareness of Life as Truth. God, our Father-consciousness is our Life, in fact, the Only Life - living as all of us.

When I considered the totality of Universe and all the heavenly bodies which make up the Universe, and then what appears to be many living beings within that Universe and many cells which appear to make up those beings, and many atoms which appear to make up those cells, I could see God and all that appears to be therein! It is just that the true is not exactly as we have imagined it to be. We have distorted the image and called it "true." We have accepted it blindly and called it "the way it is." In doing so we have denied that God is all. We have accepted those things that men say as being so, and thus believe that there are men whose words carry more validity than Truth. In this acceptance we have believed that there are "bad men," an enemy outside our self, and thus we fear, until we know.

So now, considering this, what about the hoodlums? If God is all, is God the "hoodlums" as well? No. Since God is all, I had no choice but to realize that there are no "hoodlums." That is the illusion. I was beginning to realize how caught up I was in the illusion, and was beginning to want to know the Truth, that I might know the Truth as my experience, not the delusional world that believes in "bad men." If you can see that what God is IS, and what is not God is NOT, then you will realize that if it is not Good, Lovely, Perfect, Joyous, Life, Whole, Complete - it is the illusion we have only been calling real. And thus there is nothing to fear.

There is Only One sweet wine flowing from a central eternal fountain filling what appears as individual glasses. In this realization, that which has appeared to be broken, sick, aging, diseased, wrong, bad, frightening, separated, divided - becomes one clear, beautiful, whole picture. Once the glasses realize what they are, they become transparent so that what is within is revealed without, and what is without is at one with what is within, so that there is no without and within anymore. All is God, and God is All. The vessel, or glass, being clear as crystal, reveals the inner flow, and the inner and the outer are seen as one. One blood. One body. As blood is symbolic of Life, so is wine symbolic of the Joyous flow of Life through the Vine into all its branches: One Vine, many branches, One body, many limbs, One living, moving, being, One Life living all. One Life living all.

I slept well and awoke refreshed.

By afternoon I wanted to walk, just to be in sunlight, to smell the salt sea air, just to let fresh breezes blow through me. I was beginning to appreciate being alone. I missed the companionship of my husband in the sense that I had known him, but I realized that his Life was the same Life as that of my old friend, and Grand, and the golden boy, and as I - standing here on the deck.

Many friends and family had passed from my world. I thought of their passing like water which has run its course; like the river running its course until it finds its way back to the Great Ocean, its original, authentic Source.

No, I'm not talking about evolution. That theory is merely a fantasy within a fantasy. Understanding that all that we imagine we see before us is a reflection of the true, as I stand on deck and see the ocean stretched out before me, and know that just as the color of the ocean is a reflection of the sky, the ocean is itself the reflection, of the Universe, or the God – I Am. Think of it. The ocean goes on and on as far as the eye can see in every direction when you are standing in the middle of it. Just below its surface, just beyond what is visible where you stand, are the most beautiful colors, shapes, sizes, and designs of marine life, coral reefs, flora and fauna. The ocean is teeming with life of every sort. And no man can reach to the very depths of it. IT is past finding out. It flows through the creatures it sustains, as the creatures flow through it. It lifts and moves, swells and subsides, and no one and no thing can capture it, direct it or contain it. It is a living, breathing world all its own. Although its incredible animal and plant life are hidden, except to the one who dares to venture into the world beyond the surface, they seem to be there nevertheless - just being, and just being beautiful. When we venture below the surface we find the colors are magnificent, the details extraordinary. Nothing is left out. The fishes do not know lack. All is provided. Their world meets their need, and they come and go into visible expression before us - just as we expect.

The sun draws the ocean water upwards until it forms clouds of water droplets, each drop complete in itself. These droplets move together, drawn by the sun, blown by the wind, until the atmospheric conditions are just right for them to drop somewhere as rain, which forms puddles, which form streams, which forms rivers, which flow back into the mighty Ocean, their original state. And thus it is with us. We rise from the depths of our

being to see and be seen. We are drawn upwards by the light, until we form a great cloud of witnesses. Scripture tells us that Christ comes in the clouds we are. We are one great cloud, with many individual drops, each droplet complete in itself. But I, as a drop, cannot carry this great ship I stand upon looking into the water below. It is the whole of us that is the All of God, or the God of All. We live, move and have our being through the Father (ocean), and the Father, (ocean) lives, moves and has being through us, AS us. Our form changes time and again as our thought about it changes; thus the droplet is seen in many forms, but it is ever the ocean moving through the various tributaries until once again it realizes a merge with the Great Ocean.

I bent over the side looking into the sea below, mesmerizing as I watched the waves rise and fall into the horizon no matter where I looked. One great ocean, teeming with life, just below the surface, just beyond what my eyes could see at the moment. How wonderful. Thus God.

The authorities approached me again to inform me that they had taken a young man into custody. They assumed I would be glad to hear it. They were not sure he was the culprit, but hoped to obtain a confession from him soon. What this meant, I wasn't sure.

A committee was formed to round up the other young men breaking up the gang to protect the other passengers. They hoped to pin other charges and have the majority of them locked away. They greeted me as well, while standing at my doorway, expecting my approval and perhaps a round of applause. I could barely manage to close the door without saying a word. I suppose I left them stunned on the other side.

The group from the tent revival came to me and heartily cheered the capture of the young man and the committee to overthrow these trouble makers. They described him as an "unbeliever," "an infidel," "trash, just trash," and told me how very sorry they were for me that I had lost a husband in all of this. I told them I had no regrets, we had had a wonderful life in the time we had had.

When at last I laid down to rest, I wondered where the mercy was, where the love was, where forgiveness was, where their God was. But I knew. I knew there was no one to forgive, no one who needed mercy, even no one to love, because Love is after all, all there is. Love is all there is being. So I turned from the thoughts of events, and tragedies, and things which "appear" to be, to the Truth and there I stayed and rested quietly and at peace through the night.

Time seemed to pass quickly. I continued to keep my mind on things that our friend had told us, yet my heart yearned for something more, a life beyond what seemed to be the everyday onboard experience. I knew that there was much that my friend had said that I did not yet have as my personal experience. There was a dissatisfaction with life as it appeared to be, but a greater sense of peace on a deeper inward level that kept me content with being where I was, while at the same time, reaching for more.

Just before the trial began I was on deck one morning standing as I had become accustomed to doing, watching the rise and fall of the waves below, when an old man stepped up beside me.

"Good morning, Miss. Top of the mornin' to ya."

"I haven't heard that in a while." I said to him. "I don't believe I know you, do I?"

"No. Don't believe we've been formally introduced, but we have had something in common. Your old friend, the one who disembarked a while back, he was a very good friend of mine."

"No! Really? I miss him. How did you know him?"

"Oh we go – went - way back." He corrected himself.

"Well, wonderful. I'm so glad to meet you. Its funny that I have never seen you before, but then this is a pretty big world on board this ship!"

“Yes. Look. Out there. See the whales.”

I squinted into the sun. “Oh yes, I see them. Majestic aren’t they?”  
We watched for a while, moving down the railing as they came closer in view.

“Our friend sent me to get you.” He said to me in a serious tone as we were watching the whales.

I turned and looked at him. “To get me? Where are we going?”

“Why – right over here. Come with me. Come on. I have something to show you.” He took my arm and we crossed to the other side. Almost without warning the ship seemed to have stopped and a walk was let down towards a dock below. I turned and looked into the eyes of this stranger and saw a twinkle as if there was a well kept secret brewing.

He took my arm gently, smiled and beckoned me to follow on with him. We headed toward the long walk extending out from the side of the ship, like a tongue stuck out in the air.

“But, I...” and I started to turn, perhaps a little unsure, or perhaps to consider taking something with me, but what would I take? How long would I be gone? Where were we going?

“Something you should know, Miss, there is going to be quite a scene on board here shortly over the apparent death of your husband. The trial is going to go on for quite some time. You could be caught up in the fray and be more involved than you would want to be. You best come with me now.”

“How do you know all that? Who are you and where are you taking me? I can’t just leave the ship without telling anyone. How long will we be gone?” I stopped stubbornly still and he turned to face me.

“Trust me. Don’t be afraid.” He smiled at me as he looked straight into my eyes. Not knowing where I was headed, or exactly why, I did feel somewhat uneasy. The ship had been my home for so long. It represented security to me simply because it was familiar territory. How ironic. I used to want to leave the ship, but now at the prospect of actually doing so I was hesitant. I was feeling unsure about the dock below and what might lie ahead. I needed a moment to get my bearings. What was I getting myself into, leaving the only security I could remember, and going where? Walking out into something beyond the ship, headed into what was for me, uncharted waters, and with a stranger leading the way – a very old man at that. A very old man, whose arm, which when he extended it my way to lean upon, seemed pretty shaky.

“Where are you taking me? How do I know you are not going to harm me?” I asked as he led me across the ship to an open gateway out onto a boardwalk down a narrow stretch of white plank with white ropes pointing the way into oblivion, for I could not see what was lying at the other end. I could actually see no further than where I placed each foot. Would I dare take this opportunity to leave the ship and walk into the great unknown before me?

What was I saying? What was I worried about? Had I not said that a life could not be taken? Did I trust God? Had I not begun to realize that God is all, that there is nothing to fear? Would God do anything to me that I would not do to myself? I would certainly not put more on myself than I could bear. Did I not want all of God, all the Life I could have? And what of ‘being born again’, was that simply a religious experience that could be accomplished by reciting a few words and being baptized in water? Or did I actually have to be reborn? And what would being reborn mean? Entering again into my mother’s womb? No, but I had died in a way when I came on board, and thus to give myself up to Life completely may just mean I had to indeed experience something as dramatic as that to be born again! Was I willing to follow after what my heart desired, to leave the ship? Saying it, having it in mind is one thing, walking it out down that long walkway into the unknown is a different matter.

“At least tell me where I am headed.” I looked at him in earnest and his reply was all that I needed to set me straight.

“The land of the living.”

I knew then that my old friend had indeed sent him, that I was safe to go with him, and that all was well.

As I took his arm, it seemed to suddenly be as strong as a man one third his age. As we started down the gangway he said to me, “Miss, I’m an old soldier. I’ve seen some mighty battles in my time. As valiant as it is to die in battle, it is much more so to live in peace. You will not need to be here for the trial. You have no business there. As you walk down these planks, consider not the trial left behind. It is of no consequence to you. It means nothing. All trials are behind you now.”

I thought that was a strange thing for him to say and he kept on talking.

“I will stay with you, don’t worry. Your friend has gone ahead and made all the arrangements for you.”

“Arrangements for what?” I said, and started to look back up at the ship, but then almost lost my footing on the white heavily painted boards beneath my feet, which seemed to be slick as though wet, so I kept my focus, gingerly putting one foot ahead of the other as I held onto the arm of the old soldier.

“You haven’t a thing to worry about. Everything is taken care of.”

“Everything is taken care of where?”

It was as if there were no answers to my questions, they just faded away into thin air as I asked them.

“You’re not going to fall, don’t worry. You will never have anything to worry about again, as a matter of fact. You are going to...” and I continued to listen as he reassured me that all was well, that I had nothing to fear, when suddenly I looked up into a great fog ahead. I could not see the dock at all. I turned to look up at the great ship, and the deck we had just left a moment ago, which should be high above me now, but the fog had simply enclosed upon us.

I gripped his arm with both hands. It suddenly seemed as though we had entered the water, but I did not feel wet. I looked at my friend, still walking and still talking as though nothing unusual was taking place. He was speaking to me in a strange language now. I was not able to pick up everything that was being said, but held onto him with all my strength. He was saying things like, “You will never walk this way again, but you have walked this way before. You will be eternally grateful for leaving the ship behind, and you will forget all about it as you continue walking in the direction you are headed.”

I wanted to ask him where were we headed, and did he not have the sensation of water passing through him and us passing through water? I felt like I had been engulfed in the very ocean itself and half expected to see fish around me. I knew I was certainly in a different atmosphere, but the fog continued to surround our every step, preventing my seeing anything other than the whiteness of the fogbank.

Suddenly I jumped at the low eerie sound of a whale’s song nearby, very nearby. Scriptures suddenly came to mind, “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you, and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you...For I am the Lord thy God...your Savior. Fear not, for I am with you. Be not dismayed for I am thy God. I will strengthen you. I will uphold you with my right hand of righteousness.”

The old soldier kept right on talking as if we were still in the bright sunlight on board ship. “You have left nothing behind. There is nothing to be left behind. There is no behind. Right here, right now is all there is. You will never truly arrive anywhere, but you will recognize the land of the living. You will realize things are not what you have thought them to be. Nothing is what you have thought it was. Time is no more. Now is all there is. We are here when we realize it. God is being and doing. That is all you need to understand right now. And one thing you can be sure of, what ever God does, it shall be forever. If something appears to be changeable, if it is not forever, it’s a figment of your imagination. Nothing can be added to anything God does, but then nothing

can be taken away either. That which has been is now; and that which is to be has already been. Don't worry about what you may consider to be 'the past' now, God requires that of you. The thing that has been is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done."

I did not understand much that he was saying, but was glad for him to keep on talking, because his words were a great comfort to me. They kept me going through this fog. The planks had disappeared. I could not even see my feet, but I kept walking. I had no idea what we were walking through or what was just beyond the fog, but I kept walking. Was this air I was breathing? Did I now have gills? Or was this air breathing me? That seemed more the case. Yet I felt as though I were within as well as without Something much greater than my own little self. I felt as if I were swallowed up in something wonderful.

The fog seemed to be lifting as I could see light ahead, or what seemed to be ahead. At least it was in front of us and we were walking into it.

"Am I alive?" I asked the old soldier.

"Oh my, yes. You have never been more so. You are just becoming aware."

"Aware of what?"

"Aware of being."

A memory seemed to float past in a bubble of a little golden headed boy saying something to that effect. But then the bubble was gone, burst and gone forever.

The old soldier talked right on as though he had not seen the bubble. He reached over and patted my hands which were holding tightly to his left arm. He spoke as though we were walking through a beautiful garden where birds were singing and flowers bloomed, where the sun played on the path in dapples of light. He spoke as though there was no fog and there was nothing usual about this incredible journey.

What could I fear though? He was here, as happy as a clam, talking with all the gaiety as though we were attending a festive affair. Whatever was just beyond the fog did not seem to be of concern to him. Although this was no where I remembered ever being before, as we walked on it began to feel familiar.

I suddenly heard some voices and thought I heard laughter. Was this a dream? Which direction it came from I did not know. I seemed to see visions of ladies in white dresses with large white brimmed hats and men in white tuxedos talking together on a lawn in the sunshine. I saw little girls with lovely ribbons in their hair and boys in white bucks and socks to their dimpled little knees. All this and yet the sensation of walking through water, water that was over our heads, enshrouded in a mist, the fog still thick, acting as a veil between myself and what I thought I saw.

I heard someone to the left of me say, "The picture was always there. I just couldn't seem to make it work. I could see it, but I couldn't put it on canvas." I turned to see an artist sitting on a three legged stool, under a slouched hat wearing a smock. He held a brush in his hand and sat perched before a canvas bursting with color. He was smiling at me as though we had been having this conversation for sometime. I know I looked puzzled, because I was.

"The painting is always there, you know, before the artist paints it. I was trying to put something on canvas that was perfect before I started trying to reproduce it. Had I let it come - instead of trying to force it, it would have been perfect, a master piece! Only when it comes by inspiration can it ever be what it is meant to be. I know now that it was my interpretation which produced the distorted the image before. How do you like it now?"

"It's beautiful." I said, and meant it. It was an incredible piece of work.

"It happens when you realize you are one with it, and it is one with you - it is you." He said and turned back to the canvas and began painting again. He seemed to move away from me into the fog, and I was moving away from him, but I was not walking now.

I turned to the old soldier and started to ask him about the artist and what I had just seen when suddenly we came to a standstill, as though we were waiting in line for something.

I wanted to speak, to ask questions, but I felt like that to speak right this moment would be out of order, inappropriate, and so I stood there still, quiet, waiting, but for what I had no idea. We stood there for some time, or so it seemed, but since time is no more, who knows how long we stood still and quiet in that foggy mist.

“Listen.” He finally spoke this command almost in a whisper.

I was familiar with listening. I seemed to be doing a great deal of that now.

We stood and we waited and we listened. Listening seemed to be the key. The Silence was directing us, guiding us, yet we stood perfectly still. I heard the sound of music, beautiful music somewhere, but then it faded. I heard hammering and sawing, as though something were being built. I heard what seemed like a gate opening and the great donging of a bell in the distance. What all these sounds were I do not know, but the sounds came and went as we stood still, waiting. We continued to stand and yet it seemed we were moving. A conveyor belt? I wondered. I was aware of moving, while standing perfectly still.

I heard the sounds of seagulls overhead, and water lapping against a shoreline. Suddenly the sun broke through the fog. I let go the old soldier’s arm to bring my hands up over my eyes. The sudden light was blinding. I waited, hands over my eyes for a moment and then opened them just enough to see if I could see. The sun was shining brightly, and I seemed to be standing up to my waist in ocean water. I turned to my friend, but he was not there. Gone, completely disappeared. A wave came up behind me and pushed me forward. I almost fell, but stumbled to stay upright and took a step forward. The island before me consisted of a white beach and palm trees as far as I could see in either direction, and yet the view faded on both sides as though a mirage. Perhaps I was just seeing things in a new way.

I stumbled through the oncoming waves making my way towards shore. Water, sea water, salt sea water. I did not recall ever feeling it or tasting it before. Splashing towards shore my legs felt like hundred pound weights beneath me. I swayed and staggered as though I were drunk through the waves as they came now up to my knees, then to my ankles and then I more or less fell forward toward the sandy white beach.

It seems that I was unconscious for a while, because when I realized consciousness I turned over onto my back and looked up. I found myself in a strange and beautiful place. When I attempted to stand my legs gave way beneath me. I fell back on the sand, closed my eyes and listened to the sound of the rippling waves on the shore at my feet. “Where am I?” - was all that came to mind. I sat up, and leaned back on my hands, but soon found the sun to be unbearable. I looked at my hands and feet which were shriveled as though they had been in water a little too long.

I began to slide my body backward up the beach toward the palms. I simply had to get under the shade of the trees behind me.

Once there I sat with my knees under my chin for a while simply considering where I was and what was taking place. I recalled thinking that I needed a revelation of my own. Another’s revelation would not be reality for me, no matter how delightful it might sound. I looked about and realized that I was certainly in a strange new world. I dug my fingers into the sand, something I could not recall feeling before. I lifted the sand and let it drift through my fingers and smiled with fascination. Well, I was still on earth, but how I came to be where I found my self I cannot exactly say.

I began to look around me at trees, palms, flowers, and the sunlight sprinkled around me on all of them, and considered that I had never seen life like this before. The colors were surreal, the intensity of corals and reds in the flowers and the deep greens of foliage, with lemon yellow splatters of light on the palms and lavenders and pinks in the sand. So this was land. And it certainly was living! Living color.

The trees seemed to peer back down on me. The flowers seemed to wave a welcome. The birds seemed to sing for me, swooping down from above out of nowhere. Everything seemed to be present simply for my pleasure. I could not have asked for a more wonderful transition from the ship to the shore. It was all simply glorious!

For a brief moment I thought about the ship. Although it has been my home for as long as I could remember, what I was seeing before me was so much more, that I could not fathom wanting to leave this state of mind for that one.

I wanted to stand, but I did not have my land legs yet. I lay back against a palm and rested. I felt no fear. I almost felt excited, but that emotion seemed almost inappropriate. It was more like joyous abandon, freedom. I continued to rest and listen within my self. I began to ask for wisdom, knowing it would come for the asking. I was talking to my Self. I knew that whatever had just taken place, I would never be the same. Nothing would ever be the same. And I knew as well, that there was no going back. I considered that one can never go back anywhere anytime anyway. To be in the moment is the most we can be, and to be in the present is all there is. NOW is all there is. I fell asleep there on the sand under the palm trees as I listened.

When I awoke it must have been mid-afternoon. The sun was warm, the sky perfectly blue and the white puffy clouds seemed just at arms length. I held up one hand and pointed my finger towards them. "This is the world in me," I thought. "I am in it, but I am not of this world. It is in me." I knew it was in mind, not mind as in human mind, because I knew there was no such thing, but in The Mind, which is God, the Only Mind there is. This was the world in God, in Mind, seen from the perspective of Mind.

I lay there for an unspecified length of time before I attempted to stand, and I attempted several times before finally I made it to my feet. I knew intuitively that it takes a while to stand in this new world, and still a little longer, or so it seems, to be able to stand steady; longer still to be strong on these new legs, and still longer to be able to walk in this strange new land, the land of the living.

Realizing there was no where to hurry to, I remained there until I began to feel hungry. Hunger had not been present since leaving the ship this morning, or whenever that was that I left. Time meant nothing. Was that this morning, yesterday, or a thousand years ago? Who cares? But I was suddenly hungry. I looked around and saw something that had not been there before, or perhaps the light had just not been right for me to see it until now, fruit - hanging in abundance on the limbs just down the pathway.

As I stood, still a little wobbly, I slowly made my way, one step at a time. And with each step I was seeing things I had not seen earlier. When I reached the fruit I pulled one lovely piece from the tree and held it in my hand. Immediately in its place was another piece equally as beautiful and full as the first. I had never picked fruit from a tree before. Sure, I had eaten fruit, but not like this. This was an entirely new experience. I lifted it to my mouth and felt that I was tasting it before I ever tasted it. The juice ran down my chin. I laughed. I felt like a child again. This was nothing new, eating fruit, but all seemed new to me. It seemed as though I was not only taking it in, but it was taking in me.

I ate until I was filled and walked slowly back to the beach. I seemed to want to sleep a lot, as though I had traveled far, and yet with each little nap I felt more awake than before. As the day drifted into evening I began to really notice the quietness of the place in which I was resting, quietness as I had never known before. The sounds of the world were far, far away. The only sounds were the birds singing in the trees above, or the occasional laughter of a seagull passing, and the soft little lapping sounds of the surf against the shore. How peaceful. How wonderfully peaceful! Words were not needed here. In fact, it seemed as though I would somehow spoil this pristine loveliness to speak out loud, even to speak of the things I was seeing, realizing, beholding. There was no one to speak to anyway. I was alone, but I did not feel lonely. I felt warm, awake, aware, alive!

The stars seemed to be focused in my direction from within the rim of a big black ball, shining simply for me, winking back at me as if we shared a great secret. The moon appeared to rise over the ocean just for me. It

cast its silvery rays across the water straight into my lap. "God is in his heaven and all is right with this world," I whispered. I am. And where I am all is right, and peaceful and beautiful.

During the night I awoke to note a passing storm out over the ocean. Though it was lightening and thundering in the distance, it was far from me and I lay back down and went back to sleep listening.

With morning the jungle awoke before me. The sounds of the birds and the little animals that scurried about in the bushes seemed to be there for one reason, to cause me to be aware of the reality of my being. This was no dream.

I was able to stand much quicker this morning. I was gaining strength and decided to explore just a little. I was thirsty and so headed back down the pathway I had begun yesterday. I again picked fruit and carried some with me as I continued down the path.

I came to a small waterfall and a lovely little lagoon and dipped my hands into the cold water. I drank long and deep until my thirst was completely satisfied. The sparkles on the water appeared to me as stars having been cast onto its surface. Stars came tumbling over the waterfall down into a pool of stars below. The birds chirped in the trees all around me. Their presence was comforting to me. Their songs spoke to me of life, life which was here before I came to be aware of it, and life that will go on forever in this one eternal moment in one form or another always without end.

As I sat observing stars sliding down a waterfall, jumping and bouncing on the surface of the pool below all I could say to myself was, "Where have I been? This world has always been here, just beyond what I was able to see before. How amazing!"

The hill that encircled the small lagoon was covered with bougainvilleas, lilies, orchids and ferns, under a canopy of banana trees, orange trees, and palms. There were some large live oaks and lush vines which swung from limbs dripping with moss and orchids. I lifted my vision to the hill, and sensed I was to begin climbing. The climb was not steep, but rather sloped and easy, although there were some places where I had to watch my footing. As I headed upward I felt strength returning to my legs and knew that the climb itself was increasing my strength. I had to pull my way up a couple of times by grabbing onto well secured vines, but this only further strengthened me. By the time I reached a grassy knoll I was invigorated.

At the knoll I could see out over the beach where I had spent the night. From this lofty perspective I could see out over the ocean that seemed to go on endlessly. For a brief moment I thought I caught a glimpse of the ship on the horizon, but the image quickly disappeared from view.

The old soldier - I thought of the old soldier, who had come to take me off the ship, how his old weakened arm had strengthened when I needed it. What had happened to him I had no idea, but I knew that he was there in that moment for a reason, to guide me through the waters, or thoughts, whichever they were, into this new land. He had been my angel. He was the thought that had come to me, that had led me from the place I thought of as home, into this strange new world. The world of the ship now seemed absolutely foreign. Where I am is all there is, I thought. I am not on the ship now, yet the ship still seems to be there for me to see in passing.

As I sat on the knoll among the wildflowers a beautiful yellow winged butterfly came and lit on a blossom just next to me. I observed how his wings opened and shut time and again, I supposed to keep his balance on the petal. Life is, it just is, I thought, everywhere, all the time, happening, being, and being so very beautiful. The butterfly lifted and landed on another blossom. Another came to join it and they began a swirling dance up and around each blossom, lighting ever so softly on the blossoms for a brief pause - only to rise and swirl again. I began to hear it, the music they were swirling to, the melody of butterflies. I could hear the song, at first an instrumental and then a voice, a beautiful voice humming and simply floating on the air. I watched them rise and flow with the cadence as they followed the high notes upwards, then dipped to the low. Never before had I realized that they were hearing something we cannot ordinarily hear. I watched as they made their short flights between blossoms and considered that is how life is, one moment here on this blossom, then the next, over

here on this blossom, while being led by the sound of music imperceptible to the common ear. Only when in tune with the Universe will we begin to flow in harmony with Life.

The butterflies were not taking thought as to how to get to the next blossom, nor what to do when they got there. Theirs was a musical journey, moved about on the eddies of song. They were just being. Just being. There it was again, "just being."

So here God was just being as a yellow butterfly. With total freedom, without a care in the world, the butterflies encircled me one more time and then lifted into the sunlight.

When finally they dropped over the brow of the hill out of my range of vision, I lay back in the grass and began to consider the blossoms blowing in the breeze just above my face. Unmoved by world events, with no worry as to how their supply of sunshine and nourishment would be provided, they simply swayed in the breeze. They cared for nothing, but to lift their small faces to the light, to breathe in and breathe out life here on this far away hill, where no one may have ever seen them before me. They had no concern for their well-being, because anything other than perfection was unknown to them.

A ladybug rose and dropped on the fragile stem holding the uplifted face of a blossom in its hands. The fragile stem on which she rode, rose and dropped, while the grasses round about rose and dropped, in a synchronized performance, that again brought to mind the rhythmic song and dance of the butterflies. Suddenly it came to me that all that I am seeing is moving in perfect harmony. All is moving to the silent sounds of the music of the spheres.

A bubble floated by with the lovely reflection of seagulls swirling in the same fashion around the masts of a ship. It brought something to mind that I had seen before and I observed it, but the bubble dropped out of sight and I returned to the moment.

The trees were swaying, their branches swirling, their moss dripping, the grasses bending. Butterflies twirled through the air, blossoms nodded, and the lady bug continued dipping and bouncing on the fragile stem. What was I seeing? An orchestra! The baton is lifted by the hand of the Great Live Oak as its branch is raised and the music begins! The symphony of the ages, all keeping perfect beat, and I am one with it.

Time was truly no more. I didn't care what day it was, what month, what year. Nothing mattered, and yet, everything mattered in the moment, because I was discovering Life, the rhythm of it, the unsung now being sung, the un-composed now being played, the unpainted now being splashed upon the screen of Life, vibrantly, magically, beautifully, amazingly, incredibly, wonderfully. I continued to ascend the rising slopes, occasionally finding a resting place, a place where I could sit and enjoy the scene before me. The sloping hills rose and drifted into the beautiful meadows which gave way to the views from various plateaus where the ocean stretched before and below forever. Occasionally I actually caught glimpses of the floating world I had once known as it evidently circled the island many times on its voyage. Perhaps they were searching for me, but I had no desire to be found. As far as I was concerned, I was no longer lost. It was a mere passing fancy to see that world go by. I wondered less and less about what was taking place there. IT was the unreal to me now. One thing I did begin to wish for, however, was someone to share this with.

And so it happened. I was sitting on a rock watching the birds one afternoon when I heard a sound like someone walking through the bush. As I sat focused on the area from which the sounds came, out of an entirely different direction stepped a young woman. She was dressed in a long white dress with a braided belt at her waist. Her hair was long, pulled back with a flower over her ear.

"Uhhhhh..." I drew a deep breath, unable to speak. She sat down on a rock on the opposite side of the little pond. She dipped her hands into the water and drank from them.

The birds sang and chirped in the trees around us, but other than that there was only the sound of the trickling water over and between the rocks. She lifted her eyes from drinking and looked straight at me, as though she expected me to be there. She smiled and dipped her hands again. I smiled back and waited. I was frozen in anticipation. Where had she come from? Were there others here? Would she speak my language?

She stood and headed towards me. I simply waited to see what she would do.

She came and stood before me, the vision of loveliness, flower in hair, and bare feet. She extended her hand to me, "Hello, I'm Joy."

"Hello." I replied and extended my hand to her. She did not shake my hand, but took my hand in hers and held it as you would an old friend.

"You were wanting a friend." She spoke these words as though she knew my mind, but then I realized that perhaps here in this place, there would only be the One Mind, appearing as both of us.

"Yes. Yes, I was."

She sat down beside me watching the birds and we listened quietly to the sounds around us, without saying a word for a very long time. Every question that came to mind drifted away even as I began to ask it, because somehow I knew the answer to every question before I asked.

Just her presence was wonderful. Just her being here, even without words spoken between us, was enough to satisfy the longing I had begun to have for companionship.

"Come." She stood and reached for my hand. "Come with me."

I did not feel any need to ask where we were going. I sensed that it only appeared that we were "going" somewhere, that all was already here the moment we thought of it. I followed her up the pathway along a ridge and through a meadow over another incline, without ever a word being said by either of us.

When finally we reached a lovely wooded area with a pine needle floor I heard someone speaking ahead of us. When we came to a clearing there was a child standing in the light, a child who seemed somehow familiar to me. "Hi." He said with the happiest little voice. "Hi." I replied and looked with Joy at him as he turned, looking back to point a finger at us as if to say, "Wait." He had an impish little mischievous smile on his face, as though he were keeping a secret he was about to burst to tell.

In a moment I saw the form of a woman coming through the haze of sunlight. She walked right up to me as though she knew me and hugged me. I hugged back, but did not know who she was. She held me back and looked at me as though she wanted to see how I had changed since last seeing me, but I did not recognize her. She smiled at Joy and said, "I'm so happy you brought her to me first." I looked at Joy myself, wondering how they knew I was here on the island.

"You don't recognize me, do you?" She said to me still holding me at arms length as though she were going to hug me again.

"I'm sorry..." I could only reply.

"Grand." She said. Suddenly I saw her. I knew her. I knew her, but I didn't know her in this form.

"But how...?" And I could not even finish my sentence before she was saying, "I've always been here. You simply thought I was there, but I couldn't be there really, because I have always been here."

"Grand!" I exclaimed as a tear ran down my cheek. She was seeing me with new eyes. Or was it mine that were new?

"Now, now, we'll have none of that here." She said smiling and wiped my tear away, and began to hug me even closer now.

"But the ship... so far away, and you..." I hardly had words to express what I was seeing.

"The ship is not far away, my dear. You only thought it was. You have only thought many things. Don't try to figure it out. Just accept and enjoy!"

"Come with us now, we have some things to show you." And we walked, the four of us, through the woods together. The child came to me and crooked his little finger to bow down closer where he could whisper something to me. "Make a wish!"

"Okay. Let's see what would I wish for? Something wonderful. I wish for something wonderful to happen."

He giggled, looked at Grand and they giggled together. Joy took me by the hand and led me almost at a run down the path until we came to another clearing. Out from the trees stepped another figure. This time I had my back turned and did not see the one who spoke, until I heard his words. "Welcome to the land of the living." I turned and yes, it was my old friend. He was there appearing as ageless as he ever had. He lifted me off my feet as I ran into his outstretched arms. He kissed my neck in the lovin'est hug I had ever experienced, and we laughed and we spun round, round in the sunlight as we held one another.

Then we all sat down and began to laugh and talk about the birds and the flowers and the wonderful things that were visible all about us. What a beautiful place, and with all those I loved right here visibly present with me. This was heaven! And this was earth.

"Whatever you need is here, Precious," he said to me. "Whatever you need. All has always been here. You were simply entranced in a world of belief before and were unable to see the abundance, the life, the joy that was awaiting you, right here, under your nose all along. Whatever your heart desires is right here where you are. If you don't need it, it will not be here. If you don't want it, you will not find it here. This is the place of fulfillment. Come with me. We have a feast prepared, a table waiting, with wine flowing and songs to be sung, and music to be heard."

I wanted to tell him that I was already hearing the music, but it simply wasn't necessary. Everything that seemed to be important even a moment ago, pales in the light of what is - in this moment.

At dinner I was introduced to a young man who played beautiful music while we ate. He played, we ate and we lounged in the light of a fire while the strings sang to us songs that were new to my ears.

I was also introduced to a young woman named "Peace," and we all laughed when I said that it certainly was wonderful to be in the company of Peace and Joy. "We have Faith here too!" Joy said and we all laughed again.

Surely there was a meal which had been prepared for us and we sat and savored the taste of things we had not cooked, reaping where we had not sown, drinking wine that flowed from a rock in the wall, before an eternal flame. We did not talk of 'old times' because we all just knew that there were none. What we did speak of was the joy of being, the peace in our hearts, the Life we were coming to know. We spoke of what we could see and hear all about us in this moment and as the moment stretched into evening, I realized that I had never lived before. I had never seen with the eyes of understanding I was now enjoying. I had never heard such strange speech as was being spoken here. There were great pauses between words where all sat together in silence "just being." This was a place where words were not necessarily necessary.

The mystical world of the unseen was coming alive for me, to me, as me, while the world of ship was passing away. I observed it as it passed before me on the horizon, but I was no longer of that world. To those still on board it was still a very real world, but to me now it was a curiosity, and that was all. My eyes were being opened to the "kingdom" which was always here - waiting to be seen as time passed.

With the morning sun we rose and moved a little further upward. I do not wish to suggest that these moves upward indicate levels or degrees of consciousness, only that once we awake in the land of the living, once we identify our Self correctly, we see all things from a different perspective as all increasingly becomes clearer to us.

It is as though I had been sitting across a dark room looking through a dirty window. Now I had not only crossed the room, and rubbed my elbow against the glass, but the window had flung open and I had flown through.

As we moved forward or upward, not in distance, but in realization, we came to a place of green pastureland and still, deep waters. We sat and waited - for what - it did not matter. We simply listened for that still small voice within each of us, the same voice speaking, the same life living us all. The voice was my voice, and my voice was every voice and every voice was my own. I fell asleep under a banyon tree and awoke to someone whispering in my ear. "Awake my love, the sun is up. The day has broken. The shadows have all gone. We've much to see!" I immediately knew, though it sounded like my own voice, that it was the voice of my Beloved. I opened my eyes to him. Words cannot express the joy of being with my Beloved here in this beautiful place.

"Welcome to the garden, my love. It is the secret garden, the garden from which you came! The garden of Life. It is the garden which has seemed to you to be covered over with vines and dead leaves, to be dull and gray, lifeless and untended. You have seen life to be that way, and believed what you saw, but it was only a dream, my love, only a dream. This beautiful place has been here all the while, awaiting your recognition. You had only to want to come to, to become conscious of it, for it to be revealed to you. Here we live. Our bed is here among the spices. Winter is over. Eternal spring is at hand. The table is set. The feast is prepared. It is the bounty of all good things. The fields are white. The time is now, and I am here."

"Come, go with me," I heard Joy calling. "Let's gather lilies for our table." For one moment I hesitated. I was so overwhelmed to be in the presence of my Beloved, to see him again as though for the first time. But then, lying there on my back, I realized that he was no more beautiful to me now than Joy calling my name, or Grand sitting at my feet next to the little child, or my new friend who played on the strings for us, or Peace attending my side, or my old friend smiling down at me from overhead. There were many faces surrounding me as I looked up at all of them. I realized that they were all the various characteristics of my own Self. One was Joy. One was Grand. One was Peace. One was Faith. One was the new song in my heart. One was Ageless. One was the child of Me, and One was Love.

Here I witnessed the various faces of my True Self and knew that to love them was to love my Self. I was seeing my Self face to face.

I knew that this moment was the only moment, eternal - in heaven and in earth, and I was the Blessed. The Light that encircled us, the Life that enlivened us, the God that was living us, as us, was us being.

There was no where to go from here, and yet I knew that in this eternal moment, I was standing on the precipice of Life, while ONE with It.

Home is where the heart is, and the heart is finally at home when it rests. No more wondering, all will simply come to me. No more wandering. All roads have led me here. In this Moment I am, I see, I know, I be, and that which I Am is the Substance of all things.

Awake. The sun is shining. You are Who you are and you will never be otherwise. Know thyself. All that I Am - you are - for we are One. I write this to you little children. Hear what you can now. Listen within your self, your heart, and you will come to know your True Self. You will come to remember what time has made you forget. I write this to you young men, as I know you are trying to understand. If the way seems a little difficult at the present, know this, as you seek the Consciousness of God, you will obtain that which you seek, and find it to be right where you are. And I write this to you Fathers, you who are realizing the Oneness, the Isness and Aloneness. "I" will never leave nor forsake you. Know this. We are complete in Him. It is finished and it is very good!

Though the ship sails on, it will appear to fade from view. We will hardly realize its passing after a while. The here and now is all there is. This moment. Life never fails, nor stops, nor hesitates. As we give in, give up, surrender, and let Life, It will reveal Itself to us, as us. Lie still on your bed and listen. Sit still in your chair and listen. Walk quietly and listen. Listen until you hear your own voice revealing the Truth to you. Desire one thing: to be consciously aware of Life, for this is to seek first the kingdom of God, and all else will be added if

this is the desire first and foremost in our heart. To know Eternal Life is to know thy Self. To know thy Self is to know God. To know God is Eternal Life.

**jane woodward**

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