

1

MY WORST FEAR

“Hey, you lost your wallet!”

I was pedaling at a ponderously slow pace up a long grade on my fully loaded touring bicycle. My thirty pounds of gear felt more like thirty baby elephants. I had just passed a man standing by an old beige pickup truck parked at the side of this quiet, rural road. His dark hair scrambled around unshaven, fleshy cheeks and sloppy mustache; his belly bulged over his pants. I’d caught a waft of beer as I passed.

“Hey...your wallet!” he called out again.

Shit! My heart lurched and I felt suddenly chilled on this warm day. It was May 7, 1984, my first day on the road. I was not even fifty miles into the 1,500-mile solo bike trip I was taking from my home in the San Francisco Bay Area to the home of my heart, the Grand Teton Mountains in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. It had already been an awful morning. I’d said a wrenching and tearful goodbye to my beloved Paul when he dropped me off on a country road a few miles north of Davis, California.



Setting out for the Tetons

“I’ll see you in Wyoming, Love,” he’d called after me as I turned over the first pedal strokes of my journey. Paul and I had agreed he would drive my camper truck, Sparky, to Wyoming to meet me, and we would drive back to the Bay Area together. I’d taken a quick last look as I rolled away. Paul was standing next to Sparky. His maroon sweater blended beautifully with the truck’s new paint job—a royal blue body with yellow and orange stripes wrapped around it. The black shape of an eagle was painted on the hood—the shadow of that great bird I imagined flying over the truck for guidance and protection. A hot air balloon was painted on the driver’s door. What adventures would I have before I would see those special parts of my life again?

Maybe that lingering image of what I was leaving behind had been slowing me down. I probably hadn’t exceeded ten miles per hour all morning—I wanted to be doing at least twelve—and on this grade it was more like five. I’d put in enough miles on long bike journeys to know that bike touring could be hard, even with a congenial companion. But this time I was traveling on my own, already feeling lonely and miserable. And now had I managed to lose the one absolutely crucial possession, other than my bike, that I needed to complete my journey?

...lost your wallet. The guy’s voice echoed in my head. By some odd circumstance the purse must have slipped out of my handlebar pack and fallen on the road. I couldn’t go on without it. I turned my cumbersome load slowly around and headed back downhill. I was fifty feet away from the pickup, closing the gap quickly, when I thought to look in my pack. Squeezing the brake lever to slow my descent and steering unsteadily with my right hand, I fumbled with the zipper on the handlebar bag. As I glided steadily closer and closer, I suddenly saw with relief, and horror, that my purse was still snug inside. I’d been tricked. How could I have been so naïve, so stupid? I could now see that the guy’s fly was open, his intent frighteningly obvious. How could I get my bike turned around and up the grade fast enough to avoid being grabbed? I felt like I was rolling towards an inevitable fate.

All my life, whenever a situation had seemed hopeless to me, or a challenge insurmountable, I’d been more inclined to respond as a wimp than a warrior, to give up rather than rear up like a stallion and fight. I suspect this came more from being an unwell child—or at least being treated like one—than from any specific incident in which I might have decided that losing was easier than trying to win. I had been told that at birth my right hand looked more like a chicken claw than a hand, and even with exercises my right side was still considerably shorter than my left. A serious illness in infancy had left me with some other significant physical problems; poor circulation and nerve damage to my right side had numbed certain areas of my body, especially part of my right hand, and my eyesight was compromised by a retinal scar. From the age of five I’d been

frequently shepherded by my mother from Los Angeles to New York to see pediatricians as well as her own doctors, the finest specialists in the medical profession: neurologists, internists, psychologists, optometrists, orthopedists. I was tested and poked and peered at and hovered over by men in white coats as my mother stood somberly at my bedside. At home I did special exercises, went to more doctors, and had to take naps everyday. Even at nine years old when I went off to camp, I was confined to the infirmary at rest hour to ensure complete quiet.

Even though I felt pretty normal, all the doctors and fuss convinced me that something was seriously wrong with me. Added to that, I could see that my mother was always looking at me, scrutinizing me as though trying to decide if I would make it as an acceptable member of the family. I became more and more self-conscious and unsure of myself. I fell down often, bruising and bloodying my knees. In grade school I was in a constant state of humiliation in gym class. No way could this klutz vault over the “horse” or do graceful somersaults. I twisted and sprained my ankles regularly. When I was a college freshman, I sprained both ankles on the same day and had to be driven to the infirmary in an ambulance because I couldn’t walk. The only physical activity I could do with ease and confidence was ride my horse, which I did with wild abandon, much to my mother’s consternation.

Convinced that I was weak and incapable, I retreated into my own world. I kept my mouth shut instead of saying what I thought or felt, and dutifully went along with my mother’s plans for me, whatever they were. I was too scared to confront her. I couldn’t imagine saying, “Mother, I feel fine. I’m not tired. I don’t want to take a nap! I won’t! You can’t make me!” I always admired my older sister, Tory. She was athletic, strong and strong-minded. She stood up for herself to my parents and wasn’t afraid to express an unpopular opinion to them.

I remember one time when she blew up at my mother during dinner. I was about seventeen, my sister twenty. She and her boyfriend had arrived the night before, after an exhausting car trip from the Midwest. They had brought with them their beloved dog, Dum Dum, a cute collie-beagle mix. He was as much a part of their family as any child could be.

Dum Dum had an accident in the house because someone had forgotten to let him outside to pee, so he was relegated to the backyard, which was right outside the dining room. Neither Tory nor Dum Dum were used to this kind of separation. When we congregated for dinner that night, the dog immediately took up whining and barking and complaining about being away from his parents in a strange place. During one of Dum Dum’s loudest bouts of crying, my mother said, “Poor Dum Dum.” Maybe she had a tone of sarcasm in her voice, but whether the comment was genuine or feigned sympathy, it smacked Tory square in the heart.

She exploded not only with protest about Dum Dum's exile but also with her "furious truth" about how she felt about my mother in general.

My mother sat at one end of the Queen Anne mahogany table in stony silence; my father at the other end. The volume of my sister's rage increased. Tory tells me that at one point she looked across the table at me and could see only the top of my head, because I was sliding out of my chair and disappearing under the table. It didn't occur to me to enter the fray and say, "But Mother, she's right. It wasn't his fault that he peed in the house. And he's lonely out there."

In spite of my low self-confidence, as I moved into my adult life, I kept finding that I was capable and competent in a variety of projects and jobs. At eighteen I was the head receptionist in a Washington congressional office, and later the head of my local Congressman's district office. I played a leadership role in several political campaigns. I co-founded an early childhood education center. By the time I was thirty-two I'd served on several community boards, and met the substantial challenge of starting a successful restaurant, and bicycled more than 3,000 miles from one side of the United States to the other.

But now here I was, on a deserted California road, evidently about to become a victim of rape. Being sexually molested had been my worst fear for this solo trip, and now on my very first day, that and maybe worse seemed dead ahead. As I braked harder I could feel the monumental struggle within me between the child convinced she was incapable and the young woman who had proven again and again that she could accomplish whatever she set out to do. When I was no more than thirty feet away, I heard him say, "Do you want some pussy?" That very word and his lustful sneer turned my stomach with overwhelming fear and revulsion.

At that moment something rose up inside me. Instead of feeling paralyzed and surrendering to my fate, a great determination kicked in. I began a gradual left turn. I was going so slowly I was afraid I didn't have enough momentum to keep the bike upright. I pushed hard on the pedals and headed my unwieldy bike back uphill. My abdomen tightened as I pulled hard on the handlebars. My thigh muscles burned with each downward thrust. Would he come after me? "Turn around," he called out, "before I have to catch you." Oh, God. I pedaled on with all the strength I could muster, expecting at any moment to feel huge, hairy arms and beer-breath on my neck. It took me an eternity of three minutes to reach the top of the grade. He must have been too fat and too drunk to handle the exertion of running after me or getting into his truck and catching up.

Heart beating frantically, I accelerated hard on the downhill side. A defiant little voice inside me jeered, *You couldn't catch me if you tried, creep*. As the distance between us grew and still no beige pickup appeared in

my rearview mirror, I fervently thanked God—the God who had called me on this journey in the first place.

I was thirty-five years old and had recently come to the heartbreaking end of a marriage and divorce. I was in the midst of a frustrating love relationship, and I'd just finished a two-year, spirit-crushing stint as manager of my own restaurant. I was at a turning point, and I didn't know where I was headed. I'd seen many things in my life ending but no beginnings. Yet more puzzling and disconcerting than any of these uncertainties was the fact that I had become utterly obsessed with the desire to *find God*. In fact, I had been on the quest to find God for the previous five years. I thought I'd found Him in Paul, the man I'd fallen deeply in love with and who'd played a major part in setting me on this spiritual journey. When it became clear that the relationship was only a step on that path, I had really no idea where to go or even what exactly I was looking for. I read spiritual books hoping for clues or step-by-step instructions for finding God. Sometimes during those years I was so preoccupied with life's demands I forgot about this yearning, but mostly this longing for God had been driving me all my waking hours like a lead foot on an interior throttle. And now here I was out in the middle of nowhere with little but my bike and the sense that this solo trip to the Grand Tetons was something I was supposed to do, and that it was related to my search for God.

Before this odd calling, God had not been much a part of my adult life, and precious little of my young life. But I do clearly recall having a sense of God when I was about six years old. Sometimes when I was supposedly taking my afternoon nap, I'd lie there looking at the ceiling where I could distinctly see a figure, an elegant, grandfatherly man. Somehow I knew that was God above me. He always wore a freshly pressed, white tuxedo, and I remember thinking, "How can He always look so neat when He must be so busy?" He had shoulder-length white hair and a long Rip Van Winklish beard. He was impressive but not in the least unapproachable. While He never looked at me directly, I could feel His kindness, and I always felt welcomed and loved. Of course I never told anyone about these naptime visions.

My family had little use for God or religion. My father proudly declared that he was an atheist, and my three brothers echoed his proclamation. Whenever they got together on this subject, they were like a gang of schoolboys, reveling in jokes about God and anyone who believed in Him. God—if He existed—was, of course, male. My mother, not surprisingly, kept quiet on the subject because it was not her place to be anything but supportive to the male family members. I don't know what she believed in her heart, but every year she did go to the Christmas Eve service at St. James Episcopal Church, "for the music," as she put it, and Tory and I always went with her.

Despite God's insignificant position in the family, Tory and I were enrolled in Sunday school, which

we attended sporadically, and we were confirmed in the Episcopal Church. I assumed that was what children of a certain age were supposed to do. At the boarding school we were sent to for high school, all students were expected to attend a church of their choice every Sunday. I switched off between “Congo” (Congregational) and “Pisco” (Episcopalian), learning the liturgies of each, following the program as solemnly as any, politely dissolving the wafers or Wonder bread in my mouth without chewing, demurely sipping wine or grape juice. I don’t know how much personal prayer—if any—I engaged in, but I could recite the Nicene Creed, and I knew many prayers, ritual responses, and psalms by heart. Every Sunday evening the whole school gathered in the front rooms of the main building to sing hymns, accompanied by old Miss S. on the upright. Over my four years there, I grew to love that ritual. The words and music were comforting and nourishing.

But once I was out of high school, I didn’t give a thought to God or to my own spiritual life. It wasn’t that I was *anti*-God; He just had no place or purpose or function in my life. Not until I found myself in crisis did my life radically change in relation to God, and I was set on this mysterious path I felt compelled—driven—to follow.

It started with scrambled eggs. I was visiting my mother’s house with my husband, the man I married after my first year in college. It was March 15, 1976, and we were having breakfast at that same deeply polished mahogany Queen Anne dining table. It was neatly laid with pretty white linen placemats, matching napkins, and sparkling silverware. A crystal glass of fresh orange juice sat in the upper right corner of my placement. Lipton tea brewed in my favorite silver teapot sat next to the silver salt and peppershakers at the head of my place setting. Breakfast included thin white buttered toast, strips of crispy bacon, and pale yellow, runny scrambled eggs. I wolfed down everything on my plate and said, “Yes, please,” when offered a second helping of eggs, then quickly downed those as well. For me this was very weird behavior.

For the past year, since reading Frances Moore Lappé’s *Diet for a Small Planet* and countless other books about diet and nutrition, I had become a “health nut.” My bookshelves were lined with vegan, macrobiotic and vegetarian cookbooks. I was extraordinarily healthy and aware of my body. I was quite thin for the first time in my life. My husband and I had determined a year earlier to lose some weight. I started out weighing 140 lbs. at 5 feet, 7 inches. I counted calories with meticulous accuracy—900 calories a day. I gradually—sensibly—lost a few pounds. I’d started to exercise—running every day in the hills behind our house. By the time I hit 115 pounds, I felt more than accomplished and pleased with my new look. I loved to feel my bones, even my organs, as they throbbed and hummed within me. I became so intrigued with my skeletal structure, which I’d never seen before, that I wanted to see more of it. The game went from eating my allotted 900 calories to seeing if I could eat only 850...800...maybe even 750.

I always ate in a very methodical, ritualistic manner. I had a small portion of muesli with apple juice in the morning (no dairy, thanks), an undressed salad for lunch, and some sort of whole grain dish for dinner like brown rice and veggies or a barley mushroom casserole. I used carob instead of chocolate, picked only whole grains and natural sweeteners, and tested numerous seaweed varieties. I always measured carefully and ate slowly with utmost care and awareness.

When I weighed 105, it appeared to others that I was ill or anorexic, but I felt more alive and vibrant than I ever had. I had absolute control over my eating, my body, and my habits. Everything that related to food—shopping, preparing, serving, feeding myself—had the quality of a sacred ritual. Then came those scrambled eggs.

“Well,” I thought, “I *am* a little underweight, and I am pretty excited about the upcoming political fundraising dinner my husband and I are hosting, so it’s understandable.” I told myself, “I can afford a little slip-up.” But my odd behavior over mediocre scrambled eggs remained a disturbing presence, like a little toothache that wouldn’t go away.

A few days later I had another “little slip-up” as I browsed upon the tasty hors d’oeuvres I’d made for our dinner guests, and I had no problem at all snacking randomly on the leftovers either. From then on my precise eating habits seemed to drift away from me like fall leaves from a tree. Except for dinnertime with my husband, my regular mealtimes fell by the wayside too. Instead of my precisely regulated eating habits, I’d buy a cookie while shopping and eat it on the way home, or slice off a 500-calorie chunk of cheese for myself while making dinner, or grab a handful of raisins when I walked by the pantry, or maybe I’d help myself to seconds from the dinner casserole, or drop an overly generous scoop of ice cream over the dessert strawberries.

My “little slip-ups” became habitual and the sense of urgency to eat escalated as though I were caught on some kind of amusement park ride that kept going faster and faster while I tried to hold on. Before long I found I *had* to have something in my mouth, to taste the flavors, to chew on something, to swallow. At first I limited my bingeing to “good” food—whole wheat bread, cheese, nuts, natural sweets, honey ice cream. But within a few months, the power of my craving to have food in my mouth burst through those natural limits, and I was onto whatever was handy. I couldn’t pass the refrigerator without opening it and putting *something* in my mouth: whole loaves of zucchini bread (sometimes straight from the freezer), several scoops of ice cream (if not the whole pint), bags of chips, jumbo sandwiches. Afterwards I would lie on the kitchen couch with my stomach so stuffed and hurting it felt like I’d swallowed a basketball. Then I would eagerly anticipate dinner when I could legitimately begin the process all over again.

My mantra changed from *Eat to Live* to *Live to Eat*. To make matters worse, since I was cooking for the

local daycare center I had co-founded, I was around food all day long. Cheese toasts, veggie burgers, peanut butter/apple butter sandwiches, zucchini bread with cream cheese, juice. I tasted and re-tasted everything I made for those little kiddies, and cleaned their plates of leftovers directly into my mouth when they came back to me for washing. No need for a compost bucket while I was there!

The final addition to this excruciating condition was that I was constantly creating and cooking elaborate gourmet dishes for fundraising events I was catering, and for trial menu items for the restaurant my husband and I were opening. So from morning to night I wallowed in food. For a foodaholic, I was truly in hog heaven. Only it was a living hell.

For over a year I carried in secret the terror and panic, the guilt and shame of being so totally out of control. Occasionally, when I was particularly terrified, I'd casually say something to my husband like, "Oh, gee, I wish I hadn't eaten so much. Lately I haven't had very good eating habits." And he'd say something like, "Oh, I know what you mean, I do that too sometimes." I didn't scream at the top of my lungs what my inner self was crying out: *Help! Help! I can't stop eating and I am sooo scared! What's happening to me?*

I went on in silence, not even a word to my journal. I couldn't bear to have an empty stomach, yet I always felt unbearably empty inside no matter how stuffed I was. I was terrified of gaining weight. Every new morning, I'd vow that today it was going to be different; maybe something had changed overnight in a dream, in a vision, and I'd be back to normal. This never happened. I gained weight. By summer I was an alarming—to me—112 pounds. I decided the only remedy was to fast, not just short, three-day cleansers, but big-time, ten-day fasts. I did this twice during that same year, hoping desperately that this would break the habit that was now firmly entrenched within me. It didn't. And as if to make up for the food I'd missed, I'd consume ever-greater quantities of food after the fast was over, so that I'd soon surpass the weight I'd been at the start of the fast. By the spring of 1977, a year after I'd gulped down my mother's scrambled eggs, I weighed 123 pounds, but over the year of feasting and fasting and frantically running and biking off calories, I'd probably gained closer to fifty pounds.

My fear of being fat was all-consuming. It was the only thing I thought about in my waking hours. If I were fat, my husband would leave me, men wouldn't look at me, people would scorn or ignore me. It was an unbelievable nightmare. One day as I was biking home, I became aware that I was mentally, emotionally, and physically numb. I was so burdened by the food inside me that I couldn't tell if I were there or not. I felt devoid of energy. I don't know how I even managed to pedal; I felt nothing, like a zombie. Something had to change.

I resolved to do *something*. Maybe, I thought hopefully, bingeing was my body's way of dealing with

the absence of some vital, missing vitamin or mineral. I went to a holistic health center, and after a lengthy and intricate examination, I received an impressive computer printout detailing the subtleties of my burdened body. Alas, there was no missing vitamin. (How could there be with all the food I was eating?) What the consultants were most interested in, however, was not all the numbers and percentages, but that I had not had a menstrual period for nearly six years. It troubled them considerably more than it did me. For a couple of years after I'd married, I'd taken a particular birth control pill that inhibited my menstrual flow until I changed to non-drug contraceptive options. I'd been off that flow-inhibiting drug for several years, but never returned to a normal monthly cycle. They gave me a referral to someone whom I assumed would prescribe a nifty drug to start my flow again, and I made an appointment.

Several days later I took the BART train to Berkeley for my appointment. Expecting an RN in whites, I was caught completely off-guard when the "doctor" opened the door to her house. "Hi. I'm Linne." She smiled warmly at me. "Come on in." She wore maroon cords and sneakers. Her long, straight, dark brown hair lay over the back of her white sweatshirt. She led me into her small bedroom and asked me to go ahead and sit on a large pillow on the floor so we could begin our first session. After a full year of uncontrollable bingeing, I was too stunned and desperate to resist the fact that I was now in therapy.

I never had the courage to tell Linne I was completely in the grip of food. I told her the reason for my being there was to restart my menstrual cycle. But it didn't matter to her what we talked about, because in her view all roads led to the core of any problem, and we would eventually track down the root cause of whatever was my dysfunction.

Our sessions were like descending into the bowels of a cavern with only a tiny flashlight in hand. I never knew if I could retrace my steps or find another exit. With Linne's gentle but firm prodding, I would shine the light on parts of myself I'd never known—like intense feelings. I told her that as a child my mother was always saying, "Keep your voice down, dear." What she really meant was, "Stuff every strong emotion that comes from your heart or belly or you'll be sorry. It's not ladylike." Prior to therapy my range on the keyboard of emotions hovered around a quiet middle C. As I cracked open my unconscious past, it was shocking and scary to discover feelings of uncertainty, confusion, resentment, frustration, loneliness, and anger. Of all the emotions I was unearthing, anger was the most frightening to me. No one in my childhood family or my marriage ever expressed anger. It either wasn't felt or wasn't allowed. I was afraid to feel angry or to act on that anger by raising my voice or using strong language. I was especially reluctant to express anger toward my husband, fearing he would either hit me or leave me. I had no reason to believe

either would happen, but we both avoided conflict; not a harsh word had passed between us in the eight years of our marriage.

Once I started therapy I was depressed a good deal of the time. I cried regularly. One evening when my husband came home from work, he found me huddled between the stereo speakers with the music at full volume, dissolved in tears. “Do you really think you’re getting better?” he wondered aloud. Of course, it was the agonizing question I asked myself too, but there seemed only one way to any answer, if there was one, and that was to go on with investigating my scary interior life.

Once I began to connect with and express my inner feelings and emotions, my married life got very messy. Some shit necessarily hit the fan, and it didn’t hit just once but many times over several years as we muddled and crashed our way into a new world of honestly expressing the feelings we knew so little about and had so little practice in conveying. My husband hadn’t wanted me to “rock the boat” by expressing difficult feelings that might threaten the stability of our marriage. But it was too late for me to turn back, to shut the door I had opened, even if only a crack. I wanted to be able to know what I felt, and what he felt. I wanted us to *express* what we felt, even if it wasn’t pleasant or harmonious.

During the two years I worked with Linne—sitting on the large burgundy pillow in her tiny bedroom—I gradually learned to trust the process of deep inner investigation. Uncovering and exploring repressed memories and emotions left a pile of soggy Kleenex on the floor at the end of every hour. Somehow I always emerged from the cavern with a sense of healing and some insights. I could see that I was so shy and reluctant to speak up because growing up I never felt like my opinions or ideas or feelings were heard or that they mattered. I could see why I loved the animals in my life so much because they not only gave me much needed love, but they could also *receive* the love I had to give. I could see that I’d developed a strong sense of self-sufficiency and independence because there were very few people I could trust to genuinely respond to me. The quaint motto, “Children should be seen and not heard” fit perfectly—except for me I’d felt neither seen nor heard.

I began to understand why I had developed certain strategies during childhood to take care of my needs for security, acceptance and love. I began to take incremental steps toward being more trusting, more open, more willing to express my mind and heart to others. I learned that this process of inner investigation—often torturous and frightening—is a process of purification common to all spiritual traditions, requiring considerable courage and faith. The work with Linne opened a door into my inner world and set me on the path that would not only eventually heal the challenges that sent me to her but would change my life.

Several years later I would read some of the writing of Carl Jung and his followers to understand more

of my psychological processes. Marion Woodman, in *The Pregnant Virgin*, would explain that my very precise food rituals had to do with the urge to leave girlhood behind and enter into independent, adult womanhood. She would also perfectly describe what would eventually happen to me. In writing about addiction—and in particular food addicts—she wrote: “Truth is what they search for, and painful and perverse as the way may be, the addiction is their way to truth. It is the opening to themselves. Profoundly committed to becoming conscious, they will not, cannot, give up until they know what it means. In the addiction is hidden the treasure—the knowledge of themselves—and they can take no other path toward it. It is their particular sacred journey, their Tao, their Way.”

If I’d known during those years of therapy that addiction, according to Woodman, could be the holy road to God, it would hardly have mattered to me. God was the furthest thing from my mind as I secretly tore into another loaf of zucchini bread spread thickly with cream cheese. I didn’t care about God or my menstrual flow. I just wanted out of the hell I was in.

Then, one day, two years into therapy, I arrived for my appointment eager to tell Linne about a special dream I’d had the night before. I was in unusually good spirits as I walked from the BART station to her house, because for once this dream was not some variation on the themes of collapsing houses, beached whales, being chased by menacing “bad guys,” dark, murky pools, or drowning. I took my customary place on the burgundy cushion, lowered my eyes in reverie, and began to recount the dream.

I am at a mountain lodge resort, standing in the spacious outdoor entry hall. A man enters with an old and dear friend I haven’t seen since college. I am delighted to see her and am struck by the elegant older man she is with. The man’s thick white hair is neatly styled and trimmed, and he has a fine full mustache. He wears a handsomely tailored three-piece suit, soft and cream-colored. He reminds me of Hal Holbrook.

I paused to explain to Linne that Hal Holbrook is the actor whose fame for impersonating Mark Twain is worldwide. He had once performed at my boarding school, and I’d found him exquisitely and memorably handsome. Then I went on.

For a short silent time, the three of us stand and gaze out over the mountains, my college friend in the middle. Then, as if on cue, I turn to look at the man, and he at me. I know instantly I am in love with him, and that he loves me. My friend is forgotten as we come together, embracing with intense passion and fervor. I am startled to realize I am falling, and that I long to fall, to surrender myself to this stranger. Nothing else matters to me but my desire to merge completely with this man. I fall backward, float downward, reveling in waves of orgasm, although I feel no physical penetration. When it begins to rain, an umbrella is immediately raised over us.

Later, I carry my sleeping bag to the dormitory where I am to spend the night. All the bunks are taken. Then,

from a bed in the corner, cast in shadows, a man calls to me: “Here, you can sleep with me.” I see that it is “Hal Holbrook.” I go directly to his bed, without pause, without fear.

Next morning we drive down the mountain together in my sports car. He tells me all the things he has to do. I am oddly relaxed and at peace, even though I sense I won’t again see this man whom I love so mightily. I let him out at the chosen street corner, and we say goodbye as though we are old friends.

As I brought back the scene at the mountain lodge, I was immediately engulfed in the same intensity and passion and love of the previous night, yet I had no more understanding of its significance than when I had dreamed it. As I emerged from the semi-hypnotic state in which I’d been reliving the dream, Linne asked, “Who do you think that man was?” Something in her tone, and in the penetrating way she looked at me, gave me the impression that *she* knew, even if I didn’t.

I hesitated, still puzzling over the identity of this man. Then, that very distant childhood image began to emerge, and I began, “He reminds me a little of what God looked like to me when I was six....” As the words left my mouth and the sentence trailed off into silence, I knew with absolute certainty that the man was God and that I had met, embraced and loved God. Even more unbelievable, He had embraced and loved *me*.

I was stunned. God. Suddenly God. Not an *idea* of God but God coming into me, filling up my entire being. God beckoning to me. God loving me. Me loving God. Me surrendering to my own passion and love for God. It was way beyond anything I could even remotely comprehend. It was astonishing how the unexpected and bizarre wolfing down of a plate of scrambled eggs had led to my inner searching for the cause of my terrible food addiction, and that that search had led me, through a dream, to contact with God.

The profound manifestation of God in my dream sparked in me the resolute and fervent desire to find God in my waking life. My sacred journey, as I would later call it, had seemed to be about finding myself, and now it was also about finding God. At the time they seemed to be two different tasks. It would be many years before I would pick up a copy of Thomas Merton’s *New Seeds of Contemplation* and read the description of the path I’d found myself on. He writes: “Ultimately the only way I can be myself is to become identified with Him in Whom is hidden the reason and fulfillment of my existence. Therefore, there is only one problem on which all my existence, my peace and my happiness depend: to discover myself in discovering God. If I find Him, I will find myself, and if I find my true self I will find Him.”

It would be ten years after that plate of scrambled eggs—a journey that would be puzzling, agonizing, and ecstatic—before I would find what Thomas Merton had so well defined. If I had known what it would take, maybe I would have just chosen to be an anorexic bicyclist until I met my end. But once I set foot on

the path of discovering myself and God, there was no turning back. I would do whatever I had to do, and face whatever I had to face.

Out there on a California road, that meant continuing on a 1,500-mile solo bike trip and finding the courage to go on despite beer-bellied rapists at the side of the road. At the end of that first day, I pulled down an unpaved side street into a seedy trailer park outside Williams to camp for the night. I put up my bright blue tent on barren ground and hauled in all my packs. If I could have fit Sunny inside I would have. I'd named my custom-made bike "Sunny" because his frame was painted a cheerful light yellow, like a sunny day. His handlebars were wrapped in bright blue cloth tape. We'd ridden together for a couple of years, and he was a true companion. I lay him down on his side directly in front of the tent and gave him a pat of gratitude.

I zipped up the tent flap and lay back, holding close my other companion, a little stuffed dog named Puppy Jr. His predecessor, Puppy Sr., was at home on my bed. Having been with me since I was a baby, he was no longer in shape for the adventure that lay before us. Puppy Jr. was the size of a small eggplant, blonde fur, dark brown ears, a wry smile on his face. His "home" for the journey was my front pack, and I hugged him gratefully. Clearly he had been responsible for keeping my purse from falling out on the road!

As I lay on my sleeping bag, recuperating and reflecting on the day, a barely audible male voice broke into my reverie: "Lady want some pussy?" *Oh my God.* My body seized up again with disgust and fear. For a few long moments I lay there paralyzed. Not until that morning had I ever encountered this kind of ugly aggression. I'd made it through one encounter, but now what? I had to do something. Putting on a very bored tone of voice, I said, "I'm not interested." Then, after a few minutes of not hearing a sound outside, I crawled out of the tent and went to the manager's office to complain. Not a word after that.

It took me a long while to fall asleep. I had met what Jungian psychologists call "Threshold Guardians"—that which challenges us as we set forth on a quest—and my fledgling warrior had risen to the occasion. I'd known I would have to face many challenges on the trip, but I was not expecting to confront my worst fear *twice* on the first day! It was a test, and I was coming to quick and sobering terms with the nature of my journey. The questions on the test were: *Can you handle what lies ahead? How badly do you want to bike to the Tetons? And how badly do you want to find God?* I had passed one test. And I knew I really wanted to ride to the Tetons. And I wanted very very very badly to find God.