

NOTES ON THE THIRD AGE JOURNEY

From the Travel Journals of Father William

Journey Introduction, Part 1: "Sixties Hippie Horseshit"

Journey Introduction, Part 2: "Who's Walling In & Out?"

Journey Introduction, Part 3: "Direction Shift: Outer to Inner"

Journey Introduction, Part 4: "The Discerning-Judging Paradox"

Journey Introduction, Part 5: "Back to the Garden"

JOURNEY INTRODUCTION, PART 1

"Sixties Hippie Horseshit"

There's No Place to Go,
There's No Thing to Do,
Be Here Now,
It's All Here for You...

Oh, Jesus, more New Age clap-trap! Actually it's older than New Age - it's sixties hippie clap-trap! It was horseshit then and it's horseshit now...

Still, what if there really were "no place to go" and "no thing to do"?

I don't mean giving up those glorious adventures Dr. Seuss describes in *Oh, the Places You'll Go*. I'm talking about that draining, deadening stuff we let take over our lives and leave us no room for Seuss's joy and delight. How does this happen? We never intended to have all our striving and achievement leave us in such grayness...

We let it happen like the frog lets himself get boiled. You know the old story. If you try to put a frog in a pan of boiling water, he will jump for his life. But if you put that same frog in a pan of cool water and very slowly raise the temperature degree by degree until it reaches the boiling point, he won't notice the change and will stay put until he's kaput. If we're not very aware (and willing to be seen as peculiar by colleagues), we let the detritus of life accumulate around us until we feel trapped and smothered. We didn't mean to. We just aren't any better than the frog in registering very slow, incremental change over long periods of time.

So what will get us to jump?

The first step is turning on feeling again - and this means experiencing the pain of discovering we've got ourselves in some very hot water. We all resist doing this, especially when it can hurt as much as it may. Feeling dead can seem preferable to lancing the scab covering a festering relationship or acknowledging three decades have been invested in a career we don't want any more. And feeling dead might be preferable if the only alternative were feeling worse. But it's not.

There is a recognizable structure to the journey of life, and, when we understand this structure, we know joy and delight are always available. More importantly, we'll know which routes will take us where we want to go and what we'll need to travel them comfortably, especially the difficult parts. "Difficult" doesn't have to mean painful; in fact, some of my most "difficult" times have been incredibly fun when I knew how to enjoy them. (If this sounds strange, just check out how much people pay to put themselves through the "difficulty" of Outward Bound courses.) So enjoying life doesn't depend on what you've got or what you're doing. Enjoying life depends on knowing how to delight in whatever's going on right here, right now. (If you want to yell "horseshit" again here, this may not be the book for you. On the other hand, it may be just the book for you.)

I got my first glimmer of the "Be Here Now" message sometime in the 60's. I don't remember exactly when. A good bet is 1967 when a former student of mine took me to his apartment in Greenwich Village and made me listen to *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* for the first time. I was still a very straight high school teacher and more than a little leery of what Paul had become (long hair, beads and bell bottoms) in two years in New York. I didn't get nearly what he got out of the music (his eyes were glassy, too), but that experience changed something in me. For whatever happened, I'm grateful still. On that gray April day the journey I've been on ever since got kicked into gear.

By 1969 Ram Dass' brown paper *Be Here Now* was prominent on my bookshelf and I'd read it at least a couple of times. It's still on my shelf, and I've read it many more times since. The astounding thing is it's taken me another thirty-five years to realize how much of that simple message I never understood back in those days. There's maturity and humility in that realization, and something new seems possible, even likely. At 65 I'm "busy bein' born" again (ala Dylan, not the Tammy-Jimmy-Jerry crowd). It's a good feeling, and it's why I'm writing this all down.

This will be a funny book: irreverent, profane and down home. It will use the foibles of my 65 years on this earth to illustrate the structure of life's journey in profoundly real and delightfully humorous ways. There'll be no "teacher" here, just another stumbling learner who's spent a whole lot of time on the road and has stories to tell about it. (Actually, I'm not a writer but a talker. Talking is by far my easiest and most natural medium.) I've told these stories orally for forty-plus years in workshops, seminars, retreats and almost any other format you can think of. Dear and long-time friends have been after me to put them in written form, and I've finally succumbed. Don't look for exquisite prose or literary prowess here. We're going to be earthy, occasionally raunchy (reality often is) and lighthearted. We're here to make our lives delightful and amplify that joy to the world. If you're looking for a serious, put-your-nose-to-the-grindstone-and-shape-up-your-life-self-help book, this is definitely not the one for you.

But I can make no promises. I'm in the middle of this discovery, not looking back on it. That's what's motivating this writing. I can only teach what I'm trying to learn; after I've learned it (or think I have), I move on to something else. What I'm learning now is that there are amazing possibilities in full maturity that my culture seems to know nothing about. There is a beauty, simplicity and ease to this life that marketing and materialism miss entirely, *and it's always been available to those with the maturity and humility to see it.* Robert Browning saw it:

**Come grow old along with me,
The best is yet to be,
The last of life
For which the first was made.**

Carl Jung put it less gently, but just as accurately:

**"We cannot live the afternoon of life
according to the program of life's morning;
for what in the morning was true
will in evening become a lie."**

It's not just true that life's beauty, simplicity and ease have always been available; more amazing is that a clear map laying out the journey has also been around since the beginning of recorded history! In my case (and for most others, I would guess), we've looked at this map hundreds of times without seeing what it was and how it could help us. It has that mystical quality of not being visible to those who aren't ready for it. At 65 I'm finally ready, and what a delight it is to find!

And I approach this work with some trepidation. Like yourself, I've felt close to this simplicity before only to find what I thought was the last ridge just hid a higher peak. But that's when I still thought the point of the journey was to get somewhere. Now I know it's not. When we've completed this journey, we may be right back where we started in space - and much further along in maturity. As T.S. Elliot wrote:

**The point of the entire journey
is to return to the place where we started
and recognize it for the first time.**

This may sound strange, but it's only when there's "nowhere to go" we can really be "now-here." When we think there's somewhere to go, we focus on leaving Now-Here to get There-Then.

"Nowhere" also means "Now-Here"

This is what Dorothy's journey in *The Wizard of Oz* was all about. She had to ride a tornado out of Kansas, make that incredible trip to Oz with Lion, Scarecrow and Tin Man (disposing of two wicked witches along the way) and return to Kansas - all for what? So she could "recognize the place where she started for the first time," and, in her case, embrace it as the "now-here" she chose to live in.

We all go on many such journeys in our lives. Some, like Dorothy's, help us recognize what we've always had and overlooked. Others, like addictions to alcohol, drugs, and one-night stands, expose the seductive entrances to paths we don't want to travel again. More conventional versions of these negative journeys are sacrificing self for uncaring corporations, for misplaced patriotism and even for other family members. These forms of self-destruction can be much harder to recognize and reject because, unlike the outlaw addictions, they're encouraged and rewarded by the surrounding culture.

So welcome to "The Journey to Nowhere and Now-Here"! If, after all this "Sixties Hippie Horseshit," you're still with me, come meet **WHO'S WALLING IN & OUT...**



Love, Father William